

TGC

RESURRECTION LIFE

IN A WORLD

OF SUFFERING

1 PETER

EDITED BY D. A. CARSON & KATHLEEN NIELSON

And after you have suffered a little while,
the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal
glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm,
strengthen, and establish you. To him be
the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

—1 Peter 5:10–11

Resurrection Life in a World of Suffering

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Resurrection Life in a World of Suffering

1 Peter

D. A. CARSON
AND
KATHLEEN B. NIELSON,
EDITORS

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Resurrection Life in a World of Suffering: 1 Peter

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Preface

In June 2016, the Gospel Coalition held its third national women’s conference—another conference for women but not all about women! We gathered around the Word of God, with plenary sessions of expositional teaching that took us right through the epistle of 1 Peter in three days. It was a rich feast, as we together received the apostle Peter’s message of resurrection life in a world of suffering.

This book represents the fruit of that conference, combining the voices of women and men who taught the Word and lifted up the Lord Jesus among us. We delight in this combination of speakers, and we rejoice especially to see women encouraged to study and share the Scriptures together—not just at conferences but even more in and through their local church bodies.

In order to help equip readers to study and share the book of 1 Peter among those to whom they minister, we’ve included in this volume more than just a transcription of the conference talks. First, we’re delighted that Rev. Juan Sanchez, pastor and TGC Council member, was willing to write an introduction that lets us get to know “Peter the expositor.” Pastor Sanchez beautifully shows how Peter expounds the Old Testament Scriptures even as he writes the New, setting forth Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s eternal purposes. Many of the following chapters refer rather quickly to Old Testament passages quoted or referenced by

Peter, but the introduction carefully demonstrates how the Old Testament context lights up this whole epistle.

Each chapter is followed by reflection questions and by a short section called “Think Like an Expositor,” in which we explore some of the process of expositional study and preparation, using comments from the speakers/authors themselves. Finally, the book’s conclusion consists of a lively and instructive transcript of a workshop interview from TGCW16, on the subject of studying and teaching 1 Peter.

The epistle of 1 Peter speaks to our time in a piercing way. The believers to whom Peter wrote were a scattered and often scorned minority within an empire where Christians were increasingly unwelcome; direct persecution was on the horizon. Believers today can identify—certainly in parts of the world where persecution of Christians occurs regularly, and also in places where Christians increasingly suffer ridicule and intolerance. Peter’s message is one of gospel hope and strengthening grace, all centered in the resurrected Lord Jesus through whom we are born again to a living hope.

May this volume help spread gospel hope—the hope of resurrection life in a world of suffering.

Kathleen Nielson

Introduction

Peter the Expositor: The Apostle's
Use of Scripture in 1 Peter

Juan Sanchez

You've likely never heard of the Mystics or the Jays, but they were two musical bands made up of students from the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Like most college bands, they didn't last—at least not as the Mystics and the Jays. In 1968 these two groups decided to come together.¹ But, as the story goes, “the members nearly went stir-crazy trying to pick a name for the group, but with no success.”² Out of frustration, the drummer gave the trumpet player a dictionary and said, “Pick a name.”³ You might more readily know this band as The Commodores, Lionel Richie being its most famous member. Can you imagine making such an important decision as a band's name simply by opening a dictionary, pointing to a page, and choosing the first word that you see? What if the trumpet player had pointed to *commode* instead? “Ladies

¹“Biography,” Commodores website, accessed January 18, 2017, <http://www.commodoreslive.com/>.

²“Commodores,” Billboard website, accessed January 18, 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/299566/commodores/biography>.

³Ibid.

and gentlemen, put your hands together for The Commodores!” No. That wouldn’t work, would it?

Ironically, too many times we approach the Bible in the same way. We may not close our eyes and point to a text, but we might as well. Consider how we “use” the Bible when we take a specific text and directly apply it to ourselves or our situation without any regard for what it meant to the original audience. Because you’re reading this book, I believe you want to be a faithful reader, student, and/or teacher of the Bible. But if we are to be faithful in handling God’s Word, not only will we need to submit ourselves to its authority; we will also need to understand what a particular passage meant to its original hearers and reflect on how the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ shed light on our text. Only after following this course should we apply a biblical text to ourselves or our audience.

Knowing that we come to the Bible with various assumptions (gender-related, ethnic, denominational, generational, cultural, etc.), we should aim to allow the Scriptures to speak so that we hear only what the Scriptures say—nothing more, nothing less. In fact, as we read and study God’s Word, we should allow Scripture to correct our prejudices and reshape our assumptions whenever necessary. And when we share God’s Word with others, whether in a one-on-one situation, a classroom, or a large group, our conviction should simply be to expose what the Bible says. Our word *expositional* or *expository* comes from this conviction. In an expositional or expository message, the point of the text becomes the point of our message, faithfully applied to our hearers.⁴

As we’ll see, the apostle Peter shares this same conviction regarding Scripture. Consequently, Peter serves as an excellent guide for how to read our Bibles; he exposes how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus and how it applies to believers under the new covenant in first-century Asia Minor. To understand and learn from

⁴I credit Mark Dever with this definition. Dever is the pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.

how Peter, the expositor, handles Scripture, we will seek to answer four questions: (1) What was Peter's view of Scripture? (2) What did Peter know concerning Scripture? (3) What was Peter's message in 1 Peter? And (4) how did Peter use Scripture in 1 Peter?

Peter's View of Scripture

What we call the Old Testament, Peter, along with Jesus, the other apostles, and the early Christians considered their Scriptures: the Law (the first five books of Moses), the Prophets, and the Writings (sometimes "the Psalms" was used to summarize the Writings). The New Testament identifies the Hebrew Scriptures with a variety of combinations of these three descriptions. For example, Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish *the Law or the Prophets*; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). He also said that the whole *Law and the Prophets* depend on the greatest and second greatest commandments: to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:40). In fact, Jesus understood his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation as a fulfillment of *the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms* (Luke 24:44). For this reason, Luke writes that "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to [the two disciples on the road to Emmaus] *in all the Scriptures* the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

As for Peter, even though he walked with Jesus, sat under his teaching, witnessed him heal the sick, and even experienced the display of his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16–18), he never dismisses God's written Word. Instead, he argues that what he witnessed with his own eyes and heard with his own ears only confirmed what had already been written in Scripture—the prophetic Word (2 Pet. 1:19). That's why Peter encourages his readers to "pay attention" to this prophetic Word, because "no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). Here is Peter's view of divine inspiration:

God spoke through individuals as they were “carried along” by the Holy Spirit.

To be sure, divine inspiration did not end when the Old Testament was completed. Peter and the other New Testament writers were conscious that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they too were writing Scripture. For example, Peter acknowledges that, though some of the apostle Paul’s writings were hard to understand, they were Scripture nonetheless (2 Pet. 3:16). So, then, not only did Peter view what we call the “Old Testament” as divinely inspired and authoritative; in writing his first letter to the Christians in Asia Minor, he too was under divine inspiration. What Peter says in 1 Peter, God says. But just what did Peter know concerning his Bible?

Peter’s Knowledge of Scripture

It should not be surprising that in light of Peter’s view of Scripture, he knew his Bible well. But not only did Peter have a thorough understanding of the content of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings; he understood that it all pointed to a greater reality that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. For Peter, then, the story of Israel does not merely serve as a source for quotations and illustrations. It is the backdrop against which he presents his message to the Christians in Asia Minor.

Peter knew that God created humanity as his image with the express purpose of reflecting his glory and representing his rule on the earth (Genesis 1–2). But Adam and Eve rebelled against God’s rule. And because God is holy and just, he punished them by removing them from his presence. Apart from God, they began to experience increasing sin, rebellion, chaos, and eventual death (Genesis 3). As human sinfulness increased (Genesis 4–5), so did God’s judgment, but so also did God’s grace (Genesis 6–11).

Peter also knew that, despite Adam’s rebellion, God raised up Israel to reflect his glory and represent his rule over the earth. The story of Israel as a nation began with Abraham. Through this man

God would bless the world (Gen. 12:1–3). Abraham’s name would be great, and he would become a great nation. Nationhood indicates many descendants, and this many people required a land to dwell in. God promised to provide all these to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–2). The rest of the world would find either blessing or curse based on how they responded to God’s chosen one (Gen. 12:3).

By the end of Genesis, God’s promise of descendants was fulfilled (Ex. 1:1–7); however, a king ascended to the Egyptian throne who did not know Abraham’s descendants. Because he feared their numbers, the new king enslaved them and tried to put an end to their strength. Israel was far from the land God had promised them, and they were in no position to do anything about it. To address the obstacle to obtaining the land, God rescued Israel by his mighty hand (Ex. 12:29–42), and he brought them to himself at Mount Sinai in order to establish the foundation of his relationship with them in a covenant (Exodus 19–24). God reminded Israel that, though the entire world belongs to him, he chose them out of all the nations of the world as his special treasure, his treasured possession (Ex. 19:5). Exodus 19:6 explains what it means to be God’s special treasure: Israel was to be a royal priesthood (kingdom of priests) and a holy nation.

As a royal priesthood, Israel had special access to God’s presence, and they were to serve as mediators to the surrounding nations, showing them what it was like to live under God’s rule. As a holy nation, they were to dedicate themselves solely to God; and this dedication to God would result in a separation from the world. By their holiness, they would provide a witness to the surrounding nations that God alone was their king and that they alone were citizens of his kingdom rule. They were to be distinct from the world in their worship, their dress, their diet, their morality, their sexual practices, their work—everything. By these distinctions, they would show how different was their God from the gods of the surrounding nations and what it was like to live under his gracious rule and care. As they displayed God’s morality

and concern for one another, particularly the least among them, they would display to the world the compassion of their God and his kingdom citizens.

Peter knew that God confirmed this special relationship with Israel in a covenant, because this was the covenant that, as a faithful Jew, he had been taught to obey. Exodus 20–24, the Book of the Covenant, explains the obligations of both God and Israel in this relationship. Such covenants also indicated that if either party breached the agreement, the penalty was death. For this reason, blood was often a part of covenant ceremonies. This is precisely what takes place in Exodus 24:7–8. Moses read the Book of the Covenant in the hearing of the people; the people agreed to obey; Moses sprinkled blood on the people, thus consecrating or separating them out of the world for God; and, finally, Moses declared, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Ex. 24:8).

Unfortunately, Peter also knew that the story of Israel was littered with repeated violations of this covenant. Israel entered the land promised by God under Joshua’s leadership (book of Joshua), but it was not until they came under the leadership of King David that they were truly established in the land (1–2 Samuel). Unfortunately, with the exception of a few kings, David’s sons did not live up to David’s name. As a result, the kingdom was torn in two (930 BC). Ten tribes traveled north and established a capital in Samaria, while two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, remained in the south. Because of repeated covenant violations, the two kingdoms began a downward spiral toward destruction (1–2 Kings; 1–2 Chronicles). Though God was slow to anger, in 722 BC God put an end to the northern kingdom by the hands of the Assyrians. And finally, in 587/586 BC, God sent the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem. In both instances, the people of God were exiled to a foreign land.

Because of the prophetic writings, though, Peter, along with every other Jew, held out hope for the restoration of Israel. Even

before the exiles, the prophets announced that God would do something new, something never seen before. God himself would shepherd his people by raising up a faithful shepherd from King David's line (Jer. 23:1–6; Ezek. 34:1–24; 37:15–28). And God would lead them in a second exodus that would make them forget that the first one had ever happened (Isa. 43:1–19; see also Jer. 23:7–8). All this God would accomplish on the basis of a new covenant, a new relationship (Isaiah 54–56), established on the substitutionary death of the Lord's faithful, suffering servant (Isa. 52:13–53:12). This new covenant would grant God's people a new heart, God's Spirit, and forgiveness of sins; in other words, they would be empowered to obey God (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:22–27). The blessings of this covenant would result in a special relationship with God and abundant blessing in his presence (Ezek. 36:28–38).

God promised to return Israel to their land after the exile (Jer. 29:10). But during their exile, Israel was to be a blessing while living in Babylon, seeking the welfare of the city by praying for it, because “in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7). While in Babylon, Israel was to “build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce” (Jer. 29:5). God also commanded them: “Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease” (Jer. 29:6). At the end of seventy years, God raised up Cyrus, king of Persia, to release Israel to return to the land, beginning in 539 BC (2 Chron. 36:22). The Jews rebuilt the temple (book of Ezra) and the city wall (book of Nehemiah), but it became clear that this was not the promised restoration that they had hoped for (Ezra 3:12–13). Something else, some greater restoration was sure to come (Hag. 2:6–9).

By grouping Jesus's genealogy from Abraham to David (Matt. 1:2–6a), from David to the Babylonian exile (Matt. 1:6b–11), and from the Babylonian exile to Jesus's birth (Matt. 1:12–16), our

New Testament opens by presenting Jesus as the answer to the Babylonian exile: fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations “from David to the deportation to Babylon,” and fourteen generations from “the deportation to Babylon to the Christ” (Matt. 1:17). There is a sense, then, that while Jesus has come to rescue his people from the exile once and for all, they are still in exile on this earth until Jesus consummates the kingdom. Peter knew this and picks up on this idea when he calls the Christians in Asia Minor “elect exiles of the Dispersion” (1 Pet. 1:1) and ends his letter with greetings from “She [the church] who is at Babylon” (1 Pet. 5:13). For Peter, then, the Christians in Asia Minor, along with all Christians everywhere, are the people of God in exile awaiting the final restoration of all things.

Peter’s Message in 1 Peter

If we’re to understand 1 Peter, we need to understand something about the world of the Christians in Asia Minor in the first century, Peter’s original audience.⁵ There is no evidence that Peter wrote his first letter during a time of empire-wide persecution, but it is clear that these Christian brothers and sisters were suffering for what they believed. In this sense, we can say that the experience of the Christians in 1 Peter is much like that of Christians in the West today. Unlike some of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who face persecution in the form of war, violence, displacement, torture, and even death, we face cultural discrimination, social pressures, and the potential loss of rights and privileges simply for identifying with Christ. Peter’s readers faced similar pressures, and he writes to encourage them to endure faithfully under these circumstances because “after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (5:10).

⁵You may gain much of this information in a good commentary, Bible dictionary, or Bible encyclopedia.

We can summarize Peter's message in 1 Peter in four words: *salvation, holiness, suffering, and perseverance*. Peter encourages the Christians in Asia Minor to endure suffering faithfully by looking back at the great salvation God has accomplished for them in Christ and looking forward to the future inheritance that awaits them (1:1–12). While on this earth, though, they are sojourners and exiles called to live holy lives in order to provide a faithful witness to the unbelieving world around them (1:13–3:7). And like Christ, they too will suffer. But with Christ, if they endure faithfully, they will share in his victory, vindication, and glory (3:8–4:19). Until then, Peter's readers are to persevere together under the faithful leadership of elders (5:1–5), as they humble themselves, cast their anxieties upon Jesus, remain in sober watchfulness, and resist the Devil (5:6–11).

Peter's Use of Scripture in 1 Peter

We don't have space to identify every time Peter uses the Old Testament in 1 Peter, but we can identify and explain enough references to understand how Peter uses Scripture to encourage his readers to endure faithfully. To be sure, the New Testament authors' use of the Old Testament raises several questions,⁶ but for our purposes, let's keep it simple. It will be easiest to identify Peter's use of the Old Testament in 1 Peter when he directly quotes the Old Testament. When he does, he cites either a Hebrew text or a Greek translation (the Septuagint, LXX). In many of our English translations, these Old Testament citations are italicized or set apart in a way that we may recognize them easily enough (see 1:24–25; 2:6–8; 3:10–12; 4:18). In at least one

⁶Some questions are: How do we know when they reference an Old Testament passage if it's not a direct quotation? When they paraphrase an Old Testament text that is used often in the Old Testament, which one are they referencing? Or, when they use Old Testament language, how can we be certain they are in fact referencing an Old Testament text? If you're interested in exploring these questions in general, I recommend G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012). If you're interested in how each New Testament author is using the Old Testament Scriptures, then I recommend *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007).

instance Peter identifies the citation as Scripture: “For it stands in Scripture . . .” (2:6).

At other times Peter simply alludes to an Old Testament text. Undoubtedly, an allusion is not as easy to identify as a quotation because it is not a direct citation. But often, an allusion sufficiently resembles an Old Testament text or passage to enable us to identify what Old Testament passage it is referring to.⁷ For example, the language in chapter 2, verse 9, of “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” is so similar to what the Old Testament says of Israel in Exodus 19:6 that there is no question, in my mind, that Peter uses the same language and applies it to his readers. So, with these explanations in mind, and using the four words mentioned above (*salvation, holiness, suffering, and perseverance*), let’s work through 1 Peter to see how the apostle uses the story of Israel to encourage the Christians in Asia Minor.

Exile: The Context for 1 Peter

Peter begins his first letter by addressing his readers as the “elect exiles of the Dispersion” (1:1). This language reminds us of Israel under exile. In the closing of the letter, Peter sends greetings from “She who is at Babylon” (5:13). Peter is likely in Rome, the center of power and government in his day, just as Babylon was the center of power and government at the time of the exile of Israel’s southern kingdom. The entire context of 1 Peter, then, is one of exile, particularly, the Babylonian exile. Peter wants his readers to understand that because they have identified with Christ, they too are “sojourners and exiles” on this earth (2:11), just as those exiled to Babylon under the power and government of King Nebuchadnezzar in the early 500s BC.

Since they don’t belong to this world, the Christians in Asia Minor are likely to face discrimination and persecution at a number of levels. Their own government may take away their rights

⁷Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 31.

and privileges (2:13–17). Those under authority could potentially be taken advantage of by those in authority over them (2:18–25). Even Christian wives might face discrimination in their own homes from their unbelieving husbands (3:1–6), while Christian husbands may be tempted not to live with their unbelieving wives in a considerate manner (3:7).

Salvation

1 Peter 1:1–2. During their suffering, Peter encourages his readers to look back at the great salvation the triune God has accomplished for them in Christ and to look forward to the time when this salvation will finally be revealed at the return of Christ. Echoing the covenant ceremony in Exodus 24:3–8, where God defined his relationship with Israel under the old covenant, Peter reminds his readers that they are the people of God with whom God established the promised new covenant. They are not merely exiles; they are “elect” exiles. In other words, they are God’s chosen people. God the Father chose them according to his foreknowledge, his prior love before they even existed (1:2a). Now, this is love! It’s not based on anything in them; it’s based on God’s free choice. And the Holy Spirit applied this salvation to them when he set them apart “in . . . sanctification” (1:2b). Just like Israel of old was consecrated or set apart to God at Sinai in Exodus 24, so too Peter’s readers were set apart by the Holy Spirit.

But notice that they were set apart to God for a purpose, “for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood” (1:2c). Again, just like that covenant ceremony in Exodus 24 when Moses sprinkled Israel with the blood of the covenant, so too the new-covenant people of God were sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, the blood of the new and better covenant. Throughout 1 Peter, I understand him to use the language of “obedience” primarily for that initial obedience of faith to the gospel. This is saving faith. Of course, as we’ll see below, initial obedience leads to ongoing obedience.

So, Peter begins his first letter by establishing his readers' identity as the new-covenant people of God, saved and secured by the triune God. The Father chose them; the Son accomplished their salvation by his blood; and the Spirit applied this salvation to all who believed the gospel. As Peter's readers persevered in hope of this salvation, they were sojourning toward an inheritance that is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:4–5). Suffering Christians everywhere, then, are encouraged to endure faithfully now by looking back to this great salvation accomplished for us by the triune God and by looking forward with hope to the time when we will receive our eternal inheritance at Christ's return.

1 Peter 1:10–12. Peter also used the Prophets in a general way to remind his readers that, though they may lose rights and privileges as exiles on this earth, they are a privileged people because they live in a privileged time and experience a privileged salvation (1:10–12). Peter tells his readers that the Old Testament prophets "prophesied about the grace that was to be [theirs]" and that they "searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1:10–11). In other words, the prophets were looking for Christ, and they were longing for the time when he would appear, because they understood that his sufferings would lead to his people's salvation and glory. It was through this promised Christ that the restoration of Israel would come.

Though Peter doesn't cite a specific prophecy, consider just one: Isaiah 53. There is no clearer gospel declaration in the entire Old Testament. Peter reminds his readers that though they may wish to escape suffering and live in a different time, the Old Testament prophets understood that they were serving not themselves, but them: the Christians in Asia Minor and all other Christians under the new covenant (1:12).

We too may wish to live in a different time, an easier time, but Peter reminds us that we are living in a privileged time, and we have experienced a privileged salvation—a salvation the prophets longed for, a salvation that angels marvel over (1:12). Because we are God’s chosen new-covenant exiles sojourning on this earth, we endure Christian suffering now by setting our “hope fully on the grace that will be brought to [us] at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13). But what does waiting faithfully for the revelation of Jesus Christ look like for the Christian?

Holiness

1 Peter 1:16. Having been set apart by the Holy Spirit for initial obedience to the gospel, Peter reminds his readers that they are also set apart for ongoing obedience. Once again, Peter uses the story of Israel as a backdrop for the Christian story. Just as Israel was to be holy because God is holy, so too Peter’s readers are to be holy because “he who called you is holy” (1:15). Peter grounds his command to be holy in the Levitical command, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1:16). Although this command is found in various forms in Leviticus (11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26), D. A. Carson suggests that Peter cites Leviticus 19:2 exactly from a Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX, Septuagint).⁸ This citation, then, comes from the Holiness Code (Leviticus 11–26) that contains the laws which taught Israel how to maintain distinction from the surrounding nations in relation to various issues: diet (chap. 11), leprosy (chaps. 13–14), sexual morality (chap. 18), loving your neighbor (chap. 19), regulating worship (chaps. 17, 20–22), and celebrating special feast days (chaps. 23–26). The Holiness Code also contained the promise of forgiveness of sin based on an atoning, substitute sacrifice (Leviticus 16).

So, in this brief citation of Leviticus 19:2 in 1:16, Peter brings this entire Levitical code to mind as a background for the holiness

⁸D. A. Carson, “1 Peter,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1017.

of his readers. Just as Israel was to be different from the surrounding nations to provide a witness to the holiness of their God and the joy of living under his rule, so too Peter's readers worship the same God. He is still holy. And like Israel of old, they are to be holy because God is holy.

To be sure, Peter does not simply place new-covenant Christians under the old-covenant Holiness Code. That would be to put old wine into new wineskins. Still, the foundation of the Levitical code remains the same—love God and love your neighbor as yourself. So, just as the Holiness Code instructed Israel how to be different from their pagan neighbors to witness to the holiness of their God, so too Peter's readers are to be different from their world to witness to the holiness of their God, the same God as Israel's. That's why Peter urges them "as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:11–12). The Christian's "holiness code" is tied to the new covenant and is revealed in our New Testament. We are to obey all that Jesus has commanded us (Matt. 28:20). For the Christians in Asia Minor, this included submission of citizens to the governing authorities (2:13–17), of slaves to masters (2:18–25), and of believing wives to unbelieving husbands (3:1–6), among other things.

1 Peter 1:19. Not only were Peter's readers to be holy because God is holy; they were to be holy because God had delivered them from their slavery to former sinful ways (1:18a). God purchased their freedom, "not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1:18b–19). The inheritance of sin from their forefathers points back, ultimately, to our forefather Adam (Genesis 3). Redemption from slavery by the blood of an unblemished lamb reminds us of Israel's bondage in Egypt (Ex. 12:5–7; Deut. 7:8),

but it also points to Old Testament language of deliverance from exile (Isa. 52:3).

Before the initial obedience of faith to the gospel, all are enslaved to sin. Peter reminds his readers that at that time, they walked in futile ways, “living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry” (4:3). But because they were purchased with the precious blood of Christ (1:19), they are now to “live as people who are free, not using [their] freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants [or better yet, *slaves*] of God” (2:16). Having been freed from sin’s slavery, Christians are now free to obey God and pursue holiness.

1 Peter 1:24–25. Not only are Peter’s readers freed to pursue holiness because of God’s deliverance; they are also empowered to obey God, pursue holiness, and love one another because they have been born again by the imperishable seed, “through the living and abiding word of God” (1:23). To emphasize the enduring nature of the word of God as the foundation for the new birth, Peter quotes verses 6 and 8 of Isaiah 40 (1:24–25).

In order to understand how Peter uses Isaiah 40:6 in 1:24–25, we need to understand the context of these words in Isaiah 40. In Isaiah 39, God announces the coming Babylonian invasion and the consequent exile of the Jews. Immediately after his word of judgment, God calls on three voices to announce words of comfort to his people in Jerusalem (Isa. 40:1–2).⁹ The first voice calls for the Lord’s way to be prepared, because he would come and rescue his people from exile, revealing his glory for all to see (Isa. 40:3–5). The second voice announces that while human life is transient (Isa. 40:6–7), “the word of our God will stand forever” (Isa. 40:8). Finally, the last voice announces that the Lord would come in might, and he would shepherd his people, gathering them in his arms, carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading those who are with young (Isa. 40:9–11). After the announcement of exile, then, God

⁹For a helpful explanation of Isa. 40:1–12, see J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 298–302.

comforts his people by reminding them that he himself is coming to rescue them and shepherd them.

What is stunning is that by quoting Isaiah 40, verses 6 and 8, Peter declares that the words meant to comfort the exiles in Isaiah 40 are the words of the gospel that was preached to his readers (1 Pet. 1:25). In other words, the gospel is the announcement of God's coming to rescue his people from exile and shepherd them as a faithful, caring shepherd. We shouldn't be surprised by this application, because the Gospels apply Isaiah 40:3–5 to John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Lord's promised coming in Jesus (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). For now, the Christians in Asia Minor are in exile, as are we, but we have experienced the promised new birth. So, as we Christians await the return of Christ in order to obtain our eternal inheritance, we are empowered to obey God's commands—to "love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (1:22) because God's enduring word was preached to us, and we have experienced the new birth that comes by this enduring word.

1 Peter 2:3. Of course, those who receive the gospel and its promises are to continue to grow in salvation by craving both the enduring word and the Lord himself (2:2), precisely because we have already "tasted that the Lord is good" (2:3). In 2:3 Peter references Psalm 34:8. Psalm 34 is David's response to God's deliverance when he acted as a madman to escape Achish, king of Gath (1 Sam. 21:10–15).¹⁰ The psalm is in two parts. In part 1, verses 1–10, David calls others to join him in praising God for his deliverance. Because David experienced God's deliverance personally (vv. 6–7), he invites all who would believe to experience God's goodness for themselves: "taste and see that the LORD is good" (v. 8a). And, of course, all who "take refuge in him" are blessed (v. 8b).

Peter uses this verse, but he states it in the past tense: "if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Pet. 2:3). In other words,

¹⁰The title of the psalm names Abimelech instead of Achish, but Abimelech simply means "my father is king," so the different name does not necessarily pose a discrepancy.

the Christians in Asia Minor, as the new-covenant people of God set apart by the Holy Spirit for salvation, have indeed experienced God's deliverance. As a result, they are to put away "all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander" (2:1) by growing in their experience of both the enduring word (1:22–25) and the Lord himself. By longing for Jesus, they would continue to "grow up into salvation" (2:2).

1 Peter 2:6–10. One of the harsh realities Christians will face as exiles in this evil world is the rejection of the world—rejection even from those who are closest to us. This is especially the case for those who come to faith in Christ out of another faith background. Regardless, any rejection is hard to stomach. As Christians weigh the temptation to deny Christ in order to gain the approval of the world, we need to hear Peter's argument in 2:6–10. Peter begins by reminding his readers that when they came to Christ, they came to a Savior who was rejected by his own people (2:4a). And yet he was precious in God's sight (2:4b). To confirm God's choice of this Savior rejected by men, Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16. The context of Isaiah 28 is one of judgment against Ephraim (the northern kingdom) and Jerusalem (the southern kingdom). In arrogance, Israel rejected God's simple teaching (Isa. 28:9–10). Consequently, Israel would experience God's judgment when they heard complicated sounds coming from a "people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue" (Isa. 28:11). This judgment points to the coming invasion of foreigners that would result not only in Israel's destruction but in the exile of its people.

But judgment is never the final word. God himself would lay a foundation stone in Zion, the restored city of God (Isa. 28:16). This stone is precious to God, and Peter clarifies that it is chosen by God (2:6). While Israel refused to believe God's simple message (Isa. 28:1–13) and to hear God's word (Isa. 28:14–15), those who do believe and hear his word "will not be in haste" (Isa. 28:16). Or as Peter clarifies, those who believe will not be put to shame (2:6). That is, they will not be ashamed when God comes in judgment.

Instead, those who believe receive honor (2:7a). But for those who do not believe, Jesus, the stone they rejected, has become the cornerstone (2:7b; see Ps. 118:22) and “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense” (2:8; see Isa. 8:14). Peter strings these Old Testament passages together to encourage his readers, reminding them that they have identified with a Savior who has also been rejected by his very people. Jesus is a stumbling block, a rock of offense to “both houses of Israel” (Isa. 8:14). But those who refuse to believe have rejected the very stone God has chosen as a cornerstone to build his new temple (Ps. 118:22).

In other words, though Jesus has been rejected by men, as the cornerstone of the new temple he is vindicated by God. Now, God is building his temple on Jesus, the living stone, by adding all who believe as living stones in this new temple (2:4–5). So, while Christians may be rejected by the world that also rejects Jesus Christ, when judgment comes it is those who refused to believe who will be put to shame, not those who believed. Those who believe will be vindicated just as he has been.

In 2:9–10 Peter explains, at least in part, the honor that his hearers have as “a people for [God’s] own possession” (2:9). Peter’s use of Isaiah 43:20–21 and Exodus 19:6 in 2:9 is interesting. Isaiah 43 highlights Israel’s salvation (return from exile) in the language of a new exodus: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you” (Isa. 43:2). God promised to gather his scattered people from the four corners of the earth (Isa. 43:5–7) and judge the Babylonians in similar fashion as he had the Egyptians (Isa. 43:16–17). In this new exodus, God would “make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” And God would “give water . . . to give drink to *my chosen people*” (Isa. 43:19–20). Those whom God promised to save are “the people whom I formed for myself *that they might declare my praise*” (Isa. 43:21). Peter then applies the language of Exodus 19:6 (“a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession”) to his readers and places it between verses 20 and 21 of Isaiah 43. By doing this, Peter identifies his readers as

the people of the second exodus, and like the people of the first exodus, God has saved them to represent him and his kingdom to the unbelieving world.

As a royal priesthood (priest-kings), Israel had a special relationship with God; only they had special access to God's presence. At first this was seen in the tabernacle, the tent where God lived in their midst as they journeyed to the Promised Land. Later, God manifested his presence in the temple in Jerusalem. As the new-covenant people of God, Peter's readers have the honor not only of special access to God's presence; through Christ, they are now the very temple of God—the place where God dwells (2:4–5).

In addition, as priests, Israel was to represent God and his rule/kingdom on the earth to the surrounding nations. To accomplish this representative role, God promised to place them in the center of their world and dwell with them in the land. There they were to serve as mediators to the world, offering a powerful witness to the holiness of their God and life under his rule. Essentially, they were inviting the rest of the world to enter God's kingdom by becoming worshipers of their God. So, then, one of the ways Israel was to relate to the nations was incorporation.¹¹ However, the prophets spoke of a time when Israel would relate to the rest of the world through an end-time gathering of the nations (Isaiah 56). By applying this language to his readers, Peter indicates that they are the new Israel, the Israel of the second exodus by whom God gathers the nations. However, new-covenant Israel is not located in only one geographic location with one central place of worship; it is located throughout the world, each church serving as an embassy of God's kingdom. As ambassadors, Christians are called "to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9). By this proclamation, we are participating in the end-time gathering of the nations to God.

¹¹ Charles H. H. Scobie, "Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2 (1992): 286.

To drive the point home that his readers are the new, restored Israel, Peter references Hosea 1:6, 9, 10. Though they were formerly not part of the people of God under the old covenant, through God's call out of darkness, Peter's readers, in fact all Christians, have now become the people of God (2:10). The world may ridicule and reject Christians, but God is building his house, his temple, on the foundation of Jesus Christ. All who respond to his call are built on this foundation. And we, gathered together as local churches, display the glory and holiness of our God by our life together as exiles. For this reason, Peter exhorts: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:12).

1 *Peter* 2:24–25; 3:6. As to the question of how the holiness of the new-covenant people of God is to be worked out and displayed in this present evil world, Peter points out several examples. First, Peter urges his readers that despite potential government discrimination or persecution, they are to submit to governing authorities (2:13–17).

Second, Peter reminds his readers that those among them who are servants are to submit to their masters, whether they are just or unjust (2:18–25). For a picture of submission to unjust masters, Peter turns to Christ's example from Isaiah 53 (2:22–25). Jesus was righteous, without sin, yet he suffered at the hands of those in authority over him (Isa. 53:9). When Jesus was mocked and ridiculed, he did not return evil for evil (Isa. 53:7). In fact, Jesus suffered faithfully unto death, bearing our sins (Isa. 53:4), being "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). As a result, we find healing, salvation by his wounds (Isa. 53:5). And, of course, we needed to be saved because we were like wandering sheep who had strayed from their master (Isa. 53:6). But, Peter tells his readers, they "have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of [their] souls" (2:25).

Finally, Peter reminds wives married to unbelieving husbands

that “as Sarah obeyed Abraham” (3:6), they too are to follow their husband’s leadership with a quiet humility (3:1–5). Peter’s reference to Sarah is from Genesis 18:12. Sarah has just heard the angel of the Lord tell Abraham that she would have a child; listening in, she laughs out loud because she thinks she is too old to bear children. The irony of the allusion is that Sarah shows respect to her husband by calling him “lord,” even while expressing unbelief and even while not in her husband’s presence. Women who follow Sarah’s example are her daughters, showing respect to their husbands. Such submission is beautiful before God (3:4) and may possibly even win an unbelieving husband to Christ (3:1).¹²

Suffering

1 Peter 3:10–12. Because we identify with Christ, we are sojourners and exiles in this world. And because we are different from this world, we will be persecuted. As Jesus said, “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own” (John 15:19). But the question Christians face is, when suffering comes because of our identity with Christ, how are we to suffer so that we maintain our faithful witness to King Jesus? First, Peter says, Christians are not to repay evil for evil (3:9); instead, we are to bless those who persecute us that we may obtain a blessing (3:10; see also Matt. 5:11–12).

Peter grounds his argument in Psalm 34:12–16. As we saw above, the setting of Psalm 34 is God’s deliverance of David before King Achish. While the first part of the psalm (vv. 1–10) is David’s invitation to experience God’s deliverance, part 2 (vv. 11–22) is David’s invitation to learn wisdom (the fear of the Lord) from him. Psalm 34:12–16 contains biblical wisdom—instruction on how to maintain covenant faithfulness. But verses 17–18 offer a promise:

¹²It is important to note that submission to any authority is not blind. I suspect that these issues will be addressed as each text is worked out through this book. We are to follow those in authority over us so long as they do not command us to do things contrary to God’s will. If the choice is between obeying God or man, it is better to obey God.

When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.

As Peter's readers faced suffering, they were to endure it, not by repaying evil for evil, but by repaying evil with good. The reason? Because God will hear their cries, and he will deliver them "out of them all" (Ps. 34:19). "None of those who take refuge in him will be condemned" (Ps. 34:22).

Of course, Peter does not mean that God protects his people from every instance of physical suffering, or in any instance, for that matter. God's salvation means that even in death, God will deliver his people to himself, where we will receive our eternal inheritance. As Peter says, it may be necessary for Christians to endure through various trials for the testing of their faith, but such endurance will "result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:7).

1 Peter 3:18–22. Admittedly, in 3:18–22 we come to the most difficult section of 1 Peter. However, if we focus on what we know, I think we can understand Peter's point. Notice the trajectory of Jesus's path. Christ, the righteous one, suffered, was put to death (in the body), and made alive (in the realm of the Spirit)—resurrection (3:18). That's clear enough! Then Jesus was exalted to the heavenly Father's right hand (3:22). So, this is Jesus's path: righteous suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation to glory. Peter encourages his readers by reminding them that in the midst of righteous suffering, this is their path as well.

The hard part is trying to discern what happened between Jesus's resurrection (3:19) and his exaltation (3:22). In 3:19–20, I understand Peter to be referring to Genesis 6, where "the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose" (Gen. 6:2). In 1 Peter 3:19 Jesus preaches to the imprisoned spirits after his resurrection. I

understand this passage to say that Jesus announced to these imprisoned spirits his victory over sin, death, the Devil, and even them.¹³ As we put all this together, then, it is clear that Peter encourages the suffering Christians in Asia Minor with the victory of Jesus Christ. Yes, we will share in his sufferings, but we will also share in his victory!

But Peter is not done. He continues the theme of Noah (Genesis 6–9) to remind his readers that in the same way that God saved Noah and his family through the waters of judgment, so now baptism paints a picture of salvation through judgment. Just as in Noah’s day, God will bring us through the outpouring of his wrath on this sinful world at final judgment. Looking back at our baptism now reminds us that because we have been united with Christ in baptism, we are not only united to Christ in his suffering and death, but we are also united to Christ in his resurrection (3:21), exaltation, and glory. The pathway of suffering *is* the pathway to victory, vindication, and glory. But in order to share in Jesus’s victory, we must persevere until the end.

Perseverance

1 Peter 4:17–18. While suffering as exiles on this earth, we persevere by arming ourselves with the mind of Christ (4:1). We’re not to lose our heads when we face Christian suffering (4:7), nor should we be surprised when it happens (4:12). Instead, we are to endure suffering in the fear of God, knowing that judgment will begin with God’s people (4:17). The allusion is to Ezekiel 9:6, where God warns that he will begin judging the idolaters among his people, beginning at his sanctuary. To bolster his argument, in 4:18 Peter cites Proverbs 11:31: “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” Peter reminds his readers that one of the purposes of suffering, in God’s providence,

¹³ Again, I take this “preaching” to have occurred after Jesus’s resurrection. For my explanation of this passage, see Juan Sanchez, *1 Peter for You* (Purcellville, VA: Good Book Company, 2016), chap. 9, “The Pathway to Glory.”

is to purify his church by exposing false believers. For genuine Christians, the “fiery trial” (4:12) is meant to test the “genuineness of your faith” (1:7) and result “in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7). But this same “fiery trial” serves to separate the goats (unbelievers) from the sheep of God’s flock.

1 Peter 5:1–4. In God’s kindness, we don’t have to persevere alone. God promised Israel that after the exile he would search for his sheep, gather them to himself, and shepherd them through a faithful shepherd from David’s line on the basis of a new covenant (Isa. 40:9–11; Ezek. 34:11–31). As God’s new-covenant people, we are God’s sheep, he has gathered us, and Jesus is our shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). Jesus, the chief shepherd from David’s line, now guides his sheep through faithful human shepherds who are called to lead, protect, and provide for God’s flock among them (5:1–4). In turn, God’s sheep are to follow their leaders (5:5), humble themselves before God (5:6), and cast all their anxieties on him, because he cares for them (5:7). God has always cared for his people, and he will sustain us and guard us until he brings us all the way home from exile on this earth (1:5), and we obtain the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls (1:9).

Conclusion

When my wife, Jeanine, was pregnant with our fifth child, we took a trip to New York City. We hadn’t settled on a baby name yet. While in the city, we went into a bookstore, and I found a baby-name book. Instead of starting at the beginning, I thumbed to the back and started reading. I came upon the name Zoe, which is Greek for “life.” I loved it! Our Zoe was born on September 12, 2000. She is seventeen years old now, and she has more than lived up to her name. I often joke with her, saying that had I known how much she would grow to reflect her name, I would have named her Irene instead, because it is Greek for “peace.”

I once heard someone say that “words mean stuff.” Well, I would argue that words are usually pretty vague until they are in

a context. When we chose the name Zoe, it was just a pretty name with a “cool” meaning. Now, however, in the context of her life, we realize just what “Zoe” means. It’s the same with the words of the Bible. Isolated, they mean very little. It’s not until we understand the context in which those words are used that we can truly understand what they mean. In this chapter I have tried to show what Peter’s words mean by looking at the Old Testament context that Peter uses as a background for his message in 1 Peter. I have sought to keep the use of commentaries to a minimum to help you see that simply by working in God’s Word, both the Old and New Testaments, you too may gain a better understanding of the message of Scripture.¹⁴

So next time you read a New Testament book, think of those Old Testament references as hyperlinks—you know, those links that are usually highlighted as you’re reading an online blogpost or article.¹⁵ Those links are there to help you gain a better understanding of what you’re reading. Sometimes they only offer a simple definition, but at other times, they point you to a background article that helps you understand more about the topic you’re reading. As you read 1 Peter, or any other book in the New Testament, click on that Old Testament “hyperlink” and see what it’s all about. I promise that as you learn more about the context of the words you’re reading, the Holy Spirit will bring greater illumination to your study. So, come! Enjoy! Taste and see that the Lord is good!

¹⁴I could not get into the details on how to interpret the Bible in this brief chapter. For a helpful introduction to biblical interpretation for teaching/preaching, I recommend David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014). In addition, the Charles Simeon Trust (<http://simeontrust.org>) offers training workshops for women on how to read, study, and teach the Bible to other women.

¹⁵I am thankful to Steve Timmis for the illustration of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament as “hyperlinks.”

Born Again to a Living Hope

1 Peter 1:1–12

Kathleen Nielson

Let's start out by affirming that it is God's Word, God's breathed-out revelation of himself, we're dealing with in this volume. You'll hear a variety of voices in these chapters, but each is the voice of one who knows the truth of those words Peter quotes at the end of chapter 1:

All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
but the word of the Lord remains forever. (1 Pet. 1:24–25)

This is why we lean in to listen to the Scriptures: we are flowers that fall, and we need a word that doesn't. Like every human being, we

need this eternal Word breathed out to us by the Lord of the universe. This Word is the good news received by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who died, who rose from the dead, and who is coming again soon.

This is good news indeed—but the biblical book we’re expounding has rather a *sober* theme. The conference in which these talks were originally given was titled “Resurrection Life in a World of Suffering.” It’s clear to all of us these days that we must be sober about what kind of world we’re living in. It is a world full of suffering—and for Christians, even distinct kinds of suffering. If you are reading this and you are not in the midst of suffering personally right now, praise God! But you almost certainly will suffer, and so will the generations of believers coming after you. And of course we must think of the brothers and sisters with whom we share this world and who suffer right now in all sorts of ways.

We do well to look suffering in the face and learn how to talk about it biblically. We come to God’s Word not to forget about suffering for a little while; we come because we know that the good news we believe speaks right into the suffering, with the greatest hope. How does that happen? How is it that we believers can be at the same time the most unabashedly joyful and the most painfully sober people on the planet? The book of 1 Peter helps us with this question. Peter helps us grasp the hope of resurrection life in a world of suffering.

We begin with a big, weighty chunk of Scripture. In the first twelve verses that open his epistle Peter is purposefully doing something big. He’s giving a panoramic view of the landscape before zooming in more closely. Peter begins by setting forth a big perspective of gospel hope. He wastes no time; we are not led gently into his letter. He does not prepare us for this panoramic view. He just lays it out there for us—and it might take our breath away! Just in the first two lines we encounter election, dispersion, foreknowledge, and sanctification. This first section indeed sets forth *a big perspective of gospel hope*.

Seeing the shape of this passage helps us take in the bigness. The gospel hope Peter will unfold is based on two main truths for believers in Jesus Christ: first, who we are in God's eyes (vv. 1–2), and, second, where we are in God's story (vv. 3–12). These truths are like our spiritual name and address, our identification that we must carry with us at all times. We need these truths to identify ourselves and to find our way home. Without these truths we won't grasp the hope of resurrection life. The suffering might threaten to overwhelm us. But Peter opens his book by pulling us up to get this big perspective, with these two truths shining out—and shining their light over the whole rest of the book.

I. Who We Are in God's Eyes (1:1–2)

Identities in Biblical Context

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1:1–2)

To get identity straight feels natural at the start of an epistle, because that's what you do at the start of any letter: you identify who's writing, and to whom you're writing. It's actually lovely that we get to grapple with this sober subject of suffering through a personal letter. A letter is different and often more comforting than, for example, a theological treatise on suffering, which, if you're right in the thick of suffering, you might not be able to digest. But a personal voice from a brother in the faith right to you—that's different.

Of course this letter isn't from just any brother. Peter identifies himself right at the start, in verse 1: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." His identification is simple and straightforward and carries a weight of authority that the early church clearly understood. An

apostle was one who had been with Jesus and who had the authority to teach his truth. Peter was one of the disciples called out by Jesus, close to Jesus, loved by Jesus, severely rebuked by Jesus, and even failing miserably to follow Jesus—but finally forgiven, restored, and personally commissioned by Jesus, sent out to feed his sheep (cf. John 21:15–17).

In this epistle Peter is doing some substantive feeding of some really needy sheep. Most scholars believe Peter wrote this letter from Rome during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero, probably just a few years before the dramatic persecution of Christians that would take place under that same emperor. Peter himself would be martyred in those persecutions. But in this letter there's the sense of persecution *threatening*, arising on all sides, about to erupt.

What was the identity of those to whom Peter wrote? Verse 1 locates Peter's audience in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." These place names all refer to Roman provinces in Asia Minor, which is now modern-day Turkey; many think the provinces are listed in the order of places along the route the letter would have been delivered. Mentioning Turkey actually should make us stop and consider how many centuries Christians have lived in that part of the world *and* endured persecution in that part of the world.

Peter names these believers with three weighty words: "*elect exiles* of the *Dispersion*." Each of these words is bursting with Old Testament history. The noun *exiles* first makes us think back to Israel and Judah being conquered and carried away into exile, first by the Assyrians and finally by the Babylonians. God's people were dispersed or spread out in lands not their own. That was called the "Jewish *diaspora*"—and so here we have "exiles of the *Dispersion*." But this raises a question: Is Peter here referring literally to exiled and dispersed Jews? Is he addressing only Jewish people in this letter? Probably not.

The context of the whole New Testament helps us here, with its various references to God's people as exiles. Hebrews 11, for example, sets up sort of an Old Testament "Hall of Faith" filled

with exiles: Abraham, for example, sent out from his own country not knowing where he was going; or Moses, wandering in the wilderness. All these, Hebrews 11:13 says, “died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and *exiles* on the earth.” They were looking for “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb. 11:16). God’s people were often physical exiles, far from their land, but the main point seems to be that they were *spiritual* exiles, longing for their true land in heaven.

The Bible shows exile as a continuing picture of the life of faith. Exile works as a metaphor, a picture of God’s people as citizens of heaven and not completely at home in the societies where we live. It makes sense, then, that Peter is writing not just to Jews but to Gentiles, or non-Jews, as well. He’s addressing all God’s people who lived in these Roman provinces but who had by faith become citizens of heaven. The churches in those areas actually included *many* Gentiles; he’s probably referring to these Gentiles later in this chapter (vv. 14, 18) when he talks about their “former ignorance” and “the futile ways inherited from [their] forefathers.” They hadn’t been raised knowing about the one true God.

But let’s not forget that adjective *elect* (“elect exiles of the Dispersion”)—because that word *elect* means “chosen,” and everybody knew that God’s “chosen people” were the Jews. But Peter is speaking now to people of all nations who follow Jesus, and they are all elected, or chosen by God from the beginning. How incredibly comforting and clarifying that must have been to the believers from different backgrounds who were coming to faith through the missionary efforts of those early disciples! They were now part of a stream of God’s chosen people, all sharing this experience of heading for a heavenly country and so not being fully at home in their earthly one.

Peter clinches this picture at the very end of the book, as he addresses these scattered believers: “She who is at Babylon, who

is likewise chosen, sends you greetings” (5:13). Writing probably from Rome, Peter pictures Rome here as Babylon—Babylon being the historical enemy of God’s people who took them into exile. In the New Testament, Babylon becomes a symbol of opposition to God’s people, all the way through to the book of Revelation. So “she who is at Babylon” is symbolic code for “the church in Rome,” who sends greetings to these other churches dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. And they’re *all* chosen by God. They’re all elect exiles.

Do you feel this letter from Peter reaching out to you? This picture language of believers as exiles stretches out to include *us*, now, as followers of Jesus; we are all elect exiles. We also join this centuries-long stream of God’s people scattered throughout the nations, carrying deep in us the longing for our true home. It feels like the deepest kind of homesickness. The world would tell us to snuff out this longing by making ourselves at home here. But Peter helps us *name* that longing—and actually see it as part of our identity. Do you think of being an exile as part of your identity?

So many of you readers could tell about this experience of exile, in your various contexts. Some of you are teachers or administrators; that’s a context where Christians sometimes feel a bit like foreigners these days. Educators who are Christ followers learn to tread with care and love and often great tension in order to live out their faith: managing curricula, dealing with rules and regulations, discerning when and how to give witness to the Lord Jesus. The needs are much deeper than dealing with mixed-gender bathrooms; we’re traveling a road far from home—where we’ll meet so many who are lost and who need help finding the way home.

Or there’s the experience of students. What about those who experience same-sex attraction and who have chosen to live celibate lifestyles because they believe that’s what Christ calls them to do? What about any young people who believe the Bible teaches God’s design of marriage to be for one man and one woman? They all know certain kinds of exile, especially on university campuses.

What about family contexts? I think of a young husband and wife who are called to take the gospel to another country but whose parents are up in arms against their children's throwing away all the time and money invested in a good education that should be getting them good jobs with salaries, right close to home. They're exiled at home.

How about contexts farther away? My husband and I regularly spend time in Indonesia; I'm thinking of a number of young Indonesian teachers at Christian schools in that country, and picturing their faces around dinner tables telling about their conversion or their families' conversion to Christianity. Some of them are cut off now from familiar contexts and homes, and some of them still hail from areas where Christians are not welcome. In one way or another many of them are exiles, and they are some of the most joyful exiles I've ever met. And we must keep looking farther, of course, to take in the growing numbers in our world who are exiles in every sense of the word—the hundreds of thousands of Christians who have fled Iraq and Syria, for example. Oh, how much we have to learn about exile, about suffering as aliens in one place while our true citizenship lies in another.

Identities Defined by God

But let's go on: this opening sentence is not finished! In verse 2 Peter adds three phrases that describe these elect exiles. We mustn't miss this, because it is so beautiful. Look at the three phrases in verse 2 and see there the three persons of the Godhead together defining what it means to be an elect exile. You don't get to define exile by yourself. We could all write our own descriptions of what it feels like to be an exile. But here's God's definition, in terms of himself. This is what an exile looks like from God's eyes. Oh, if we could see it this way—and see ourselves this way.

First, as believers we are elect exiles *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father* (v. 2). Peter is following up on “elect” here, explaining God's sovereign choice in terms of his “foreknowledge.”

This word “foreknowledge” expresses a kind of knowing that is so personal and powerful it can also be used for God’s foreknowing of Jesus, who was “foreknown before the foundation of the world” (v. 20). If you are a believer, God has known you that deeply forever. We do not have to create our own identity; we are known. Eternally known. Our placing in this world as we are is no random swirl of the universe. Your hearing the gospel is no accident. Peter is telling you as a believer that God sovereignly planned for you to be a citizen of heaven—and for you to long for heaven. He even planned for you to wander in whatever hard place you’re wandering and feeling like an exile for a little while; this is all according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Peter helps us experience our exile not as lost orphans but rather as chosen children heading home.

Second, continuing in verse 2, we are elect exiles *in the sanctification of the Spirit*. This means we’ve been set apart as God’s holy people through the work of his Holy Spirit. Again, we cannot make this happen ourselves. Now, sanctification often refers to the whole process of becoming holy and conformed to the image of Christ, but it can also refer to the initial setting apart as holy that happens when the Spirit brings new life to a dead soul—what Paul calls “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). It’s through this initial work of the Holy Spirit that we actually become exiles. Set apart for God, we have a new citizenship, and we’re given a new inheritance in heaven. Our whole relationship to this world is changed.

We have a *who*, a *how*, and a *why* here. *Who* determines that we’ll be elect exiles? God the Father. *How* do we become elect exiles? Through the Spirit. And, finally, *why* do we become elect exiles? The third phrase in verse 2 has two matching parts to it, and they’re both all about Jesus: “for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.” Why are we made exiles? To obey the Lord Jesus.

But what’s this “sprinkling with his blood”? Let’s put obedience together with the blood here. Peter is connecting again to the

Old Testament, most likely to a scene in Exodus 24:1–8, where, after the exodus from Egypt, all the Israelites gather at Mount Sinai. It’s an awesome scene. The mountain shakes. Moses builds a huge altar and offers sacrifices, and there are basins full of oxen blood. Half the blood is thrown against the altar and the other half on the people as Moses reads the words from the Lord and the people vow to obey. In that scene the Lord covenants with his people, and they are made the people of God.

But those to whom Peter writes had been made the people of God through a *new* covenant, the covenant in Christ’s blood. First Peter 1:18–19 tells us they were ransomed “not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” Their obedience to Jesus Christ is first and foremost the obedience of faith in that blood. Of course obedience is a lifelong call, but here’s the starting point: in the blood of Christ that redeems us. All the obedience Peter’s going to call for in this book is the obedience of those who *have been made holy* by the death of Christ on their behalf—sprinkled with his blood.

Let’s put this all together. What’s our identity as believers? It’s that of elect exiles—elect exiles sovereignly foreknown by the Father, elect exiles sanctified by the Spirit, elect exiles called to obey the Lord Jesus who shed his blood for us. Is this how you see yourself? Do you picture the Godhead all around you and at work for you and in you and through you—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Our identity as elect exiles doesn’t lose its pain and suffering, but our exile is lighted up with hope when we see it as God shows it to us here. From this big perspective, what do we see? We see *him*. This epistle will ask us to see our exile lighted up by God himself, as he leans down all around us to save us. What a picture of grace! With this identity we can find grace and peace multiplied, even as Peter prays for his readers there at the end of verse 2: “May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” (We’ll come back to that.)

Now, you’ve surely noticed that we’ve already spent half of this chapter on just two verses! We’ll accelerate. But those first couple

of verses are crucial; they set us up to take in the whole book from this big perspective of gospel hope as we see first this truth of who we are in God's eyes. Now we're ready to move on.

II. Where We Are in God's Story (1:3–12)

Looking to the Future

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1:3–5)

The whole second section (vv. 3–12) locates us in God's story—but let's notice that Peter does not take us through the story chronologically. He does not move from past to present to future. You might say he goes backward. He *starts* with the future. God can do that; he's the God who elects and foreknows. God can think future-first, and he's asking us here to think that way too.

Verses 3–5 burst out in praise to God for our future hope. The opening in verse 3 sounds a lot like the traditional Jewish prayers that would begin with words such as, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel.” Only here, Peter changes it: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” This prayer is focused on Christ, and specifically on the *resurrected* Christ, the source of all hope. It's God the Father of the Lord Jesus who is praised here, for mercifully and sovereignly causing us to be born again to a living hope. How? Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Isn't it interesting that Peter doesn't say “through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”—even though, of course, that is true. Peter is focusing on the far side of salvation here, on the resurrection that stretches the hope of our salvation eternally

into the future. We are alive now in the risen Christ, *and*, because Christ rose from the dead, so will we. That is our certain hope.

We're not talking here about the sort of hope we often speak of, as in, "I hope that person will like me," or, "I hope this pill works," or, "I hope we'll have enough money to pay our bills this month." We live with so many little and big hopes that are uncertain, and yet we keep hoping. So often our hopes are disappointed.

But in order to live we need hope, real hope, as much as we need food and rest. James Stockdale, the highest-ranked naval officer ever imprisoned in North Vietnam, famously explored the necessity of hope during his eight years of torture-filled captivity, from 1965 to 1973. He learned that sentimental or unfounded hope won't work. When asked later which prisoners didn't make it, Stockdale said:

Oh, that's easy. The optimists. They were the ones who said, "We're going to be out by Christmas." And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, "We're going to be out by Easter." And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart.¹

Stockdale lived out what's become known as the Stockdale Paradox: on the one hand, there must be a facing of brutal present reality (for him it was the reality of chains and torture that might last a long time), but, on the other hand, there must be strong, solid hope in a finally good end. People can't live without hope. Stockdale said, "I never doubted not only that I would get out but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."²

¹ In his best seller, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), Jim Collins reports on a personal interview with Admiral Jim Stockdale (pp. 83–37). Collins uses Stockdale's example to show that one huge factor in a company's success is the way in which its leaders respond to difficult challenges.

² *Ibid.*

Stockdale was on to something far beyond his own story, which thankfully unfolded to bring his release from prison. According to the Scriptures, in the end there's only one sure hope, because the life-and-death outcome of that hope has been proven. Jesus Christ died on that cross, bearing our sins, and he rose from the dead, sealing our salvation and our hope. Our living hope isn't some abstract feeling; our living hope is Jesus himself.

Are you a person of hope? On what is your hope based? These verses unfold the substance of this living hope by calling it "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (v. 4). "Inheritance" is another word ringing with Old Testament meaning, for the Jews were indeed given an inheritance by God: a land. The only problem was that that inheritance of land *did* become defiled. By drought, and enemies' devastation, and foreign domination. By sin, finally. In contrast, however, Peter is telling these elect exiles that in the living Christ they have an inheritance that won't ever tarnish or perish. It's nothing like treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. In fact, this isn't treasure you lay up, but rather inheritance that is given to you and "kept in heaven for you."

That phrase should make us take a deep breath. God is keeping this inheritance for us. We spend our lives trying to keep things. To keep things safe. To keep things from being spoiled. And not just things such as money and houses and clothes and food—all that is hard enough. But *people*: we try to keep children safe and sound, our elderly parents, our own bodies. Oh, how hard we work to keep our bodies from fading, from being defiled by people who would harm us, ultimately from perishing. We spend a lot of energy trying to keep many things. Ultimately, we can't. But here's the hope: this inheritance of life forever with Jesus is kept in heaven for us. And God is the perfect keeper. His inheritance to us in Christ will never perish or be defiled or fade.

Now, some of you might not be connecting meaningfully with this inheritance in heaven, because the reality of your earthly life

right now is pretty consuming and just downright hard. Peter knew you were going to feel like that! And so he does something wonderful with the next phrases in this sentence: he winds them right back around to you—you “who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (v. 5). So, not only is this inheritance kept for us, but God is keeping us for this inheritance! We’re under guard, verse 5 says, by God’s power first and foremost, *and* through faith, as we trust in that power.

What we’re being kept for is not far away; it’s imminent: “ready to be revealed in the last time.” It’s *ready*! It’s coming. We’re about to see it, and it’s right there. Or, more accurately, we’re about to see *him*, and he is right there—Jesus is right there, ready to appear! We’re seeing here why Peter starts with the future, as he tells where we are in God’s story. The story is in motion toward this inheritance, this living Lord Jesus, and so indeed we live as people born again to a living hope.

Rejoicing in the Present

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1:6–9)

As he positions us future-facing in God’s story, Peter doesn’t ignore the present. He’s showing what Stockdale’s Paradox gets at: we must confront the reality of *now*, even as we hope. When he says, “In this you rejoice,” the word “this” refers to the whole future hope he’s just laid out. But the word “rejoice” brings a very present reality. There’s a “now” focus to this section: “though *now* for a

little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials” (v. 6) and, “Though you do not *now* see him” (v. 8b). Verses 6–9 speak to right now, and they include the most amazing combination of joy and grief. That’s a deep word in verse 6: “grieved.” It’s not just a little sadness. It’s deep sorrow. By *various* trials, Peter says. It’s true that Peter will focus on the distinct trials suffered by believers who are scorned or persecuted, but here at the start there seems to be a compassionate wideness in Peter’s grasp of all our various trials during this little while.

How long do you think is “a little while”? What kind of time are we talking about? Probably God’s time, don’t you think? It’s most likely not just a few days or weeks. It’s probably not just a brief part of our exile; it’s more likely the whole thing—because this whole little while, in light of eternity, is just like a breath. A vapor.

And so for a little while we lose loved ones; we are lonely or deserted; we are sick; we are poor; we cry; we bleed; we are oppressed or mistreated by those around us. Some of you are right in the midst of it—and not one of us is free while some of us are suffering. That means the whole body of Christ is suffering for this little while, until he returns.

But what about the rejoicing? The wonder is that the rejoicing isn’t in the future; it’s in the present. Right now, for a little while, we rejoice and we grieve. How is that possible? I don’t know. But I’ve *seen* it; haven’t you? I’ve felt it; haven’t you? I felt it not long ago in the presence of my father as he went home to heaven. Heaven was obviously right there, and my father from his bed raised his arm like he’d been called on, took a few last breaths, and entered it. I so intensely wanted to see what he was seeing as he kind of leaned forward; it was right there. The Lord was right there. Just a few hours earlier I had read out loud to Dad these verses we’re studying. My father was a pastor, and he was always interested in whatever passage I was working on. So we had just heard these words about this living hope, this inheritance kept

in heaven for us—and Dad just went on and claimed it. And my mother and I grieved deeply. And we rejoiced deeply.

Upon the death of Helen Roseveare in 2016, I read again about this remarkable woman who served as a missionary doctor in the Congo in the mid-twentieth century. Just a few years ago I had the privilege of talking with Dr. Roseveare at a women’s conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland—and a stronger, more shining saint of an older woman you could never hope to meet. I was so moved to read again the story of how Helen came to know the Lord during her Cambridge University years. She excelled in medical school and then headed right off to Africa, where she labored for decades building hospitals and training medical workers and teaching the Bible. Through it all she struggled like we all do with her own longings and pride and stubborn self; she grew up in the Lord through every challenging experience he sent her way. She has spoken and written with great honesty about her life; Helen Roseveare is one of those women whose stories it is good for us to hear.

In 1964, during political uprisings in the Congo, Helen’s house was raided by rebels, and she and others were captured and eventually held prisoner for several months. When she tried at first to escape, she was brutally treated: she was beaten, her teeth were knocked out, and she was raped. Here’s a bit of what she said later about that horrific experience:

I wasn’t praying. I was beyond praying. Someone back home was praying earnestly for me. If I’d prayed any prayer it would have been, “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?” And suddenly, there was God. I didn’t see a vision, I didn’t hear a voice, I just knew with every ounce of my being that God was actually, vitally there. God in all his majesty and power. He stretched out his arms to me. He surrounded me with his love.³

³ Helen Roseveare’s story can be found through a number of sources, including YouTube live interviews. She authored an autobiography titled *Give Me This Mountain* (London: Inter-Varsity

As she recounted this story, Helen Roseveare clearly and simply turned her listeners to Jesus:

Fantastic, the privilege of being identified with our Savior. . . . One word became unbelievably clear, and that word was privilege. [God] didn't take away pain or cruelty or humiliation. No! It was all there, but now it was altogether different. It was with him, for him, in him. He was actually offering me the inestimable privilege of sharing in some little way the edge of the fellowship of his suffering.

It seems almost inconceivable to us to hear these words. And yet they ring true. Some even more contemporary stories of Christians who suffer with grace and joy can be found in Mindy Belz's *They Say We Are Infidels: On the Run from ISIS with Persecuted Christians in the Middle East*.⁴ How can we teach the next generation this strange, wonderful mix of joy and grief? We need to teach it, don't we? We all need to learn and to teach that this little while of sojourn on this earth is not for the purpose of ease and prosperity but that with the joy will come all kinds of trials, in which we can rejoice as those sustained by gospel hope.

What sustains us is further unfolded in verse 7: the prospect that the tested genuineness of our faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, when he comes again. Our faith that's gone through the fire is that “precious” to our Lord. Your faith is not just yours; it is God's gift to you, and he knows how much it cost. He *values* it. But to whom will the resulting honor be given? Certainly to our Savior. But perhaps to us as well—although the glory will all be his, shining in us.

Fellowship, 1966). The quotations here are taken from her address to the Urbana gathering of 1976, reported by Jack Voelkel on the urbana.com website in a blog titled “Helen Roseveare: Courageous Doctor in the Congo,” February 18, 2007, accessed April 19, 2017, <https://urbana.org/blog/helen-roseveare>. Noël Piper gives a good summary account of Roseveare's ministry in *Faithful Women and their Extraordinary God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005).

⁴ Mindy Belz, *They Say We Are Infidels: On the Run from ISIS with Persecuted Christians in the Middle East* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2016).

And so we begin to understand that little phrase “if necessary” there in verse 6. Why might it be necessary for us to be grieved by various trials?

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; *I only design*
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.⁵

Let’s say it right out and wonder at it: suffering is actually part of God’s plan (and so necessary) to bring about the shining riches of praise and glory and honor. Glory is the shining forth of God’s very being. His glory is what he’s after, shining forth even in us! Gold can’t begin to picture it. Of course we cannot understand this glory without beginning at the cross, with the suffering of our Savior on our behalf. There was glory revealed. As we trust our Savior and then follow after him, what the apostle Paul says is true: our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18)—an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17).

What is it that makes us long for this glory? Do you long for it? What makes us go through the fire? I think the answer comes in that next marvelous verse 8. And the answer is Jesus himself. Not the idea of Jesus, or the truth about him, but the Lord Jesus himself. The risen one, there at the hand of God shining in glory—right now, right there. Don’t you long to see him? Peter got to see him on earth, looked into his face and heard his voice. Peter saw him die, saw him resurrected, saw him standing there, asking, “Peter, do you love me?” We cannot yet share that experience of looking into Jesus’s face—not yet. But right now by faith we can read these words and believe them: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not *now* see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy” (v. 8). Here’s the rejoicing that bookends

⁵ From the text of the hymn “How Firm a Foundation,” attributed to Robert Keen, ca. 1787; emphasis added.

this little section (cf. v. 6). It's a rejoicing filled with the glory of the Savior we love.

Did you hear what happened to glory in those verses? It jumped into the present. Peter is saying not only that glory will be the result of our testing, but also that our joy right now is filled with glory. That's because we know and love the glorified Lord Jesus. Right now. Even not yet seeing him. We begin to shine like him.

Trusting in What's Past

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1:10–12)

To clarify our present love for Jesus, Peter looks to the past, in verses 10–12. We need to get the whole story. For the whole story has always been pointing toward Jesus, specifically toward his *suffering* and his *glory*. Peter makes clear that the Spirit of Christ was leading the Old Testament prophets who searched and inquired so carefully—and they were inquiring specifically concerning the person and time of “the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (v. 11). There's the pattern—suffering and glory—laid down in the past in God's Word, and pointing to Jesus, who would come and fulfill this Word.

Peter is telling us that we can know Jesus by seeing him in all the Scriptures from the beginning. According to Peter's prophetic word, the Scriptures have always been inspired by the Spirit of Christ and have been revealing Christ—his suffering and his glory. Peter wants us to know how privileged we are to be given the full story of salvation now revealed in Christ, what he calls “the grace

that was to be yours” (v. 10). These truths of grace are so wonderful that angels long to look into them, and *we* actually have them delivered to us, preached to us with their meaning uncovered. What amazing grace! Just as Juan Sanchez makes clear in his introductory chapter, the way Peter teaches in this epistle is to refer constantly to Old Testament writings and to show how they reveal Jesus. Of course Peter learned this from the master—from Jesus himself.

If you’re just not quite sure yet what to do with all this stuff about suffering and testing by fire and aiming for glory, do this one thing: keep filling yourself with all of Scripture’s inspired words from God. They will show his Son to you. They will teach you about suffering and glory, because they will teach you about Jesus. If you don’t yet know Jesus personally, if you have not come to faith in him as the Lord who died for you and who lives for you, I pray you will be drawn to him by these words, as the Spirit draws you. I pray that all of us would be drawn by these opening words of Peter to read on—and to love and follow Jesus.

Now That We’ve Got the Big Picture

We’ve watched Peter in these opening verses lay out a big perspective of gospel hope by showing believers who we are in God’s eyes and where we are in God’s story. We’re *named* and we’re *placed* by God himself. This is revolutionary, to see our identity as God’s people from God’s eyes. This is a perspective of hope—living hope. Peter’s blessing is the best response: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” (v. 3).

Let’s ask one final question: What does Peter aim for us to do with these truths that he lays out here and that he will unfold through the rest of the book? Peter actually tells us what he’s after in this book. It doesn’t come until the end, and we’ll understand it better when we come to it, but it’s good to bear it in mind from the start. In the final chapter Peter says this: “I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in it” (5:12). There it is. Peter stands back at the end and says that what he’s really after is that these believers would stand firm in the grace of God. We heard grace at the beginning: “May grace and peace be multiplied to you” (1:2). From beginning to end this epistle points us to the grace of God in causing us to be born again to a living hope, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is what Peter wants us to stand firm *in*: God’s grace to us in Christ. Even in a world of suffering, we can sing: *When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply.* The very next passage will tell us what kind of action grows from this grace. But first we had to get the big picture clear, this picture framed in grace. It’s grace that we get to know our spiritual name and address—and we need to carry this identification with us always, because with this identification we can get home. As followers of Jesus, we’re far from our true country where we long to be. But Peter sets forth this big perspective of gospel hope that lights up the landscape all around us so that we can see ourselves as elect exiles born again to a living hope—and heading home.

Reflect and Pray

Reflect on each question and then take a moment to speak or write the prayers that grow from those reflections.

1. Read again through the first couple verses of 1 Peter and think about that description of believers as “elect exiles.” How do these verses help us understand what this description means? In what ways do you as a Christian identify personally with this description?
2. This chapter pointed out the centrality of *future hope* in the biblical text. What several phrases from 1 Peter 1:1–12 stand out to you as defining our future hope? How should this hope affect our prayers for ourselves and for those around us in our families, our churches, and our world?

3. What various truths about *suffering* do we find in this introductory passage to 1 Peter? How do these verses set suffering in a certain perspective? What tends to be your perspective on suffering, and how do you think 1 Peter might affect that perspective?

Think Like an Expositor: Comments from Kathleen Nielson

1. On the process of preparing to teach 1 Peter 1:1–12:

It was great to have over a year of knowing that this passage was coming up. I had never taught these verses specifically before, although I had studied the book in a Bible study—so I read and reread the whole book, praying through it, and marking repeated words and themes. I memorized verses 3–9 so that I could think on them freely, and printed out my passage to mark up and muse over. I came to love it and to love worshiping through it, but I also became a little intimidated by its density—when you’re faced with election, foreknowledge, sanctification, obedience, and blood sprinkling in the first two verses, you know you’re facing something much bigger than you.

And that turned out to be the wonderful point: this is a big introduction that establishes a big perspective of gospel hope that shines through this whole letter of encouragement to those who are suffering and need this hope. My main concern was to find a way to talk about this big gospel hope in a manner that would be clear and faithful to the text.

2. On the challenge of teaching an opening passage to a book:

You want to do so much when you’re teaching the first verses of a book. You want to set up the historical context, and you want to get at the main theme, and so forth. But God’s Word always does the work for us: in digging into verse 1, for example, we’re led naturally to bring in the writer and audience and historical context of this letter. The most helpful process

for me was simply to try to be obedient to the structure of the passage. There's a greeting (vv. 1–2) in which Peter defines not just historically but also theologically the identity of these believers to whom he's writing. And then there's a praise-filled section (vv. 3–12) that glories in our future hope through the resurrected Christ; our present rejoicing in Christ even through trials; and the past witness to Christ through the prophetic writings. It seemed faithful to the text to summarize this structure as presenting “who we are in God's eyes” (vv. 1–2) and “where we are in God's story” (vv. 3–12).

I loved beginning to uncover this structure. I was helped in the process by participating in a workshop on biblical exposition where we studied 1 Peter, and where in one small-group session we worked through this passage together and clarified especially the future/present/past flow of verses 3–12. And in God's providence, our church did a series on 1 Peter in the months before the conference, and I got to hear a sermon in my home congregation on my passage—what a gift. After individual and prayerful wrestling with the text, I'm always so grateful for the wisdom of the believers around me. What a joy to receive this Word as a part of God's people.

3. On one aspect of this text that especially moved and challenged you:

The real, true hope of this passage really seeped into my soul. The reality of the risen Christ and this inheritance that is kept in heaven for us seems like such a present reality to Peter as he writes, and it became a more present reality to me through studying these verses. What amazing words: “Though you have not seen him, you love him.” I believe that our study should be worship, but of course at times it feels more grueling and less worshipful than at others! This passage was an easy and a marvelous one to worship through, and I'm thankful for that.

*“He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through
the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*

1 PETER 1:3

The book of 1 Peter offers a gospel perspective on our short lives. Originally written to Christians facing intense suffering, Peter’s message is one of hope and grace—all centered on the resurrected Christ. Featuring contributions from six popular Bible teachers, this volume will help you better understand the hope-filled message of the book of 1 Peter and experience the resurrection life Jesus offers us today.

CHAPTERS INCLUDE:

KATHLEEN NIELSON - Born Again to a Living Hope (1 Peter 1:1–12)

JEN WILKIN - Living Resurrection Life (1 Peter 1:13–2:3)

CARRIE SANDOM - Remember Who You Are! (1 Peter 2:4–10)

MARY WILLSON - Following Jesus Far from Home (1 Peter 2:11–3:12)

D. A. CARSON - Sharing Christ’s Sufferings, Showing His Glory (1 Peter 3:13–4:19)

JOHN PIPER - A Shepherd and a Lion (1 Peter 5:1–14)

D. A. CARSON (PhD, Cambridge University) is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He is president of the Gospel Coalition and has written or edited nearly sixty books, including *Scandalous*, *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor*, and *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*.

KATHLEEN NIELSON (PhD, Vanderbilt University) is an author and speaker who loves working with women in studying the Scriptures. After directing the Gospel Coalition’s women’s initiatives from 2010–2017, she now serves as senior adviser and book editor for TGC.

BIBLE STUDY

