

WHY 'CHOSEN'?

1 Peter is a great book to be studying together. It is a book that will encourage you and spur you on in your Christian walk. What follows is a basic introduction to 1 Peter. We hope that you find this information useful and set aside some time to read through it.

This world calls us to be so many things: successful, honest, good, busy and independent just to name a few. God, however, calls us to be something very different. He calls us to be his chosen people, set apart from the world to live according to God's plans and purposes (1 Peter 4:2). In the book of 1 Peter, we are reminded of who we are *in Christ*.

We are his *chosen* people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). God has *chosen* us to be saved from our sin and to receive his amazing grace and undeserved mercy. We are *chosen* by God and precious to him (1 Peter 2:4). God has not simply told us to be someone but has made it possible by our union with Christ by faith.

So, why 'chosen'? We cannot make ourselves chosen; there is nothing we can do to make ourselves more or less attractive to God. And in no way does 1 Peter does instruct us to earn God's favour. To be *chosen* is to live out the life that God has handpicked us for. It is to conduct ourselves in light of our new birth as the people that God has redeemed us to be - by his Spirit and through the death and resurrection of his son (1 Peter 1:18-19, 2:24).

God has already *chosen* us in Christ. We now have a great privilege to live out who we are *in Christ*; to show this world who God is and what he has done for us, in order that God would be glorified in all his majesty.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

WHO IS PETER?

Peter describes himself as ‘an apostle of Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet 1:1). There is detail about him in every account of the life of Jesus (see Matthew, Mark, Luke or John). In these gospels we see that Peter was the leader of the group of 12 apostles. He was one of the first disciples to be called from his life of fishing for fish to fishing for disciples of Christ (Matt 4:18-22). He is the one that speaks on behalf of the apostles (Mark 8:27-30). He is bold and brash and often is seen to make mistakes. Yes, he even took Jesus aside and rebuked him for his words! When it came time for the crucifixion of Jesus Peter is tragically seen to desert Jesus and then deny knowing him three times (John 1:15-18; 25-27). And yet he is the one whom Jesus asks three times (a sign of Peter’s reinstatement?) to feed his sheep.

Jesus tells Peter that he will be the rock on which Jesus will build his church (Matt 16 13-20). There is obviously some dispute between Protestants and Roman Catholics over what this passage is saying. Whilst Peter’s confession of Jesus being the Christ is certainly how the church is being built up today it is also clear from this passage that Peter is a significant figure and leader in the early Christian church.

After the ascension of Jesus Peter is the one who stands and addresses those gathered on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1, 14-41). He is seen to faithfully continue the ministry of Jesus in teaching and healing. But we continue to see him grapple with all that Jesus death means in Acts 10 at the house of Cornelius in relation to eating unclean food (maybe he had already forgotten Mark 7:1-23?). But Peter has no doubt of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the gracious promises of God and instructs the Jerusalem council on these matters (Acts 15:7-11).

Peter is indeed a great figure of faith and we are privileged to have two of his letters so that we can continue even today to learn from his great wisdom as one of the few people who witnessed (in fact he was one of the three he witnessed the transfiguration) the life and death of our saviour and LORD Jesus Christ.

WHO ARE THE ORIGINAL READERS?

The original readers are described in 1 Peter 1:1 as:

To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asian and Bithynia

These places are often referred to as Asia Minor or in today's geography it is roughly where Turkey is located.



But what can we piece together about who these people were?

In the introduction to any commentary on 1 Peter of any level you will find scholars trying to answer this very question and there are various theories. But rather than go through each of them I will just give you the common consensus of the vast majority of commentaries (as well as the one that makes most sense in my opinion!). The original audience is Gentile Christians who having been converted are now struggling to forge their identity as followers of Jesus in a non-Christian environment. They have left behind their previous 'empty way of life' (1 Pet 1:18), worshipping pagan idols (1 Pet 4:4) and the pagan lifestyle. They are most likely under the threat of some type of persecution, although if this is physical or not is hard to be certain. We can be sure part of the persecution was one of 'words or ridicule, slander and sometimes formal accusations'.

And so we begin to see the main tension that runs behind 1 Peter: how much do they conform to the culture and dominant values of the day. As well as, what are the boundaries of maintaining a Christian distinctive in a hostile society. It is fair to say that the tension of these original hearers is our tension too. Our Australian society is not one where we easily accept the uniqueness of Christian characteristics but we are all for conforming to the Australian culture. Who wants to be branded un-Australian? It is into this type of melee that 1 Peter is written and has much to say to us even today.

WHAT ARE SOME OF 1 PETER'S MAIN THEMES?

There are 4 main themes in the book of 1 Peter.

1. Jesus Christ

The message of 1 Peter centres firmly on the Jesus Christ. And there are 3 elements in particular that flow out of this: revelation, salvation and the ethical commands.

Revelation: Christ as we know him today is invisible (1 Pet 1:8) and we await the time when he will be fully revealed to us (see 1 Pet 1:7, 13, 21; 2:12; 4:13; 5:4, 10). The revealing of Christ will be an appearing of someone who is already present. It is like when the curtain is drawn to reveal the beginning of the play. We sit in the audience with our popcorn and drinks waiting for this revelation. 1 Peter reveals to us that 'Jesus suffered and died, rose from the dead, and went to heaven' and it is these three affirmations that 1 Peter develops.

Salvation: Peter lets us know as readers early in his letter the importance of salvation; 'for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls' (1 Peter 1:9). The basis of this salvation is grace, but this grace and glory only comes through the sufferings of Christ. Peter emphasis the sufferings of the Christ and that all disciples of Christ will walk the same path as their Messiah. But importantly it is not just his sufferings but his glory as well! Christ is also a stumbling block (1 Peter 2:7-8) and so we see that people's relationship to Christ will determine their eternal destiny. This salvation won by the 'precious blood of Christ' is what propels into the new birth and all the implications that flow out of being born again.

Ethical commands: It is only after we have fully grasped the above two points that any of the commands (1 Pet 1:13-16; 2:1-3, 11, 13, 18; 3:1, 8 4:1) that Peter says to us make any sense at all or even hold any weight. The common misconception of non Christians is that we do good to get to heaven whereas we do 'good' as Christians because we are already in heaven thanks to the work of Christ.

2. Christian conduct

As we have seen from above Peter has a strong emphasis on Christian conduct. This comes out in a number of phrases, the most common of them being 'good'. He uses the term no less than 13 times throughout the letter. Good Christian conduct will ultimately lead to being a witness to their surrounding culture for how else could 'they see your good deeds and glorify God and the day he visits us' or 'they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives'. To live as 'chosen people' is to live as exiles and strangers.

3. Trials

Our heavenly home is a great reason to give praise to God. But Peter reminds us; 'In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials'. Peter goes to great length to show these Christians that part of forging their identity in the world will be to undergo trials and go through sufferings. He wants his readers to know that they are walking the path that Christ walked. Jesus was someone who suffered unjustly and as Christians we are to follow his example although Peter does add, 'who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?' (1 Pet 3:13)

4. Hope

Christians are optimists. But we do not think this from an irrational basis. But instead we have a 'living hope' and have our 'hope in God'. We have sure and certain basis on which we rest our hope, the return of Jesus Christ. His revelation will not only be a time when justice is done but a time when we will be glorified through Christ. 1 Peter commands us to 'set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed'. It is this that makes us aliens and strangers in the world. We know where our true home is and having been born again we begin walking home. 1 Peter could be described as a book to inspire hope; to encourage us to look towards the future and see the great comfort that comes from knowing and being known by God. It is this hope that enables us to suffer unjustly now, to undergo various trials and persecution.

THE SCHEDULE

	All congregations	Kids Church	Youth Group	Small Groups (talk then study)
1 st Feb	1 Peter 1:1-12	No kids church	Friday 6 th Feb 1 Peter 1:1-12	1 Peter 1:1-12
8 th Feb	1 Peter 1:13-2:3	1 Peter 1:1-12	Friday 13 th Feb 1 Peter 1:13-25	1 Peter 1:13-2:3
15 th Feb	BIG DAY IN	1 Peter 1:13-2:3	Friday 20 th Feb 1 Peter 2:1-12	Connect 09 Prayer Night
22 nd Feb	1 Peter 2:4-12	1 Peter 4:2-12	Friday 27 th Feb 1 Peter 2:13-25	1 Peter 2:4-12
1 st March	1 Peter 2:13-3:7	1 Peter 2:13-3:7	Friday 6 th Mar Small Group Night	1 Peter 2:13-3:7
8 th March	1 Peter 3:8-22	1 Peter 3:8-22	Friday 13 th Mar 1 Peter 3:8-22	1 Peter 3:8-22
15 th March	1 Peter 4:1-22	1 Peter 4:1-	Friday 20 th Mar 1 Peter 4:1-11	1 Peter 4:1-22
22 nd March	1 Peter 5:1-14	1 Peter 5:1-14	Friday 27 th Mar 1 Peter 4:12-19	1 Peter 5:1-14
			Friday 3 rd April 1 Peter 5:1-14	

Above is the schedule for Term 1 2009. Here are some notes

1. Small groups will study the passage after hearing the talk on the previous Sunday.
2. Kids church starts on the 8th Feb as all leaders are away on a retreat from the 30 Jan to the 1 Feb
3. The Connect 09 Prayer Night is about spending time as a group praying for people you know to connect with Christ. Prayer – connect – expect are the three parts of the Connect 09 initiative.
4. The BIG DAY IN will be a replay of a live broadcast from the 8th Feb and will feature Archbishop Jensen speaking and a variety of music including Colin Buchanan.

WHAT ELSE CAN I READ?

There are lots of great things to read on 1 Peter. Below is a list of books which we have graded on a reading level from **(A)** Academic **(I)** Intermediate **(B)** Basic.

Achtemeier, P. J. *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, 1996) **(A)**

Barnett, P. *1 Peter: Living Hope*, Reading the Bible Today series (Aquila Press, 2007) **(B)**

Clowney, E. P. *1 Peter*, Bible Speaks Today (Intervarsity Press, 1994) **(B)**

Davids, P. H. *1 Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1990) **(A)**

Green, G. L. 1 Peter in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. by B. Rosner & T. Alexander. **(I)**

Grudem, W. *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Intervarsity Press, 1998)

Helm, D. *1 & 2 Peter, Jude: Sharing Christ's Sufferings*, Preaching the Word Commentary Series (Crossway, 2008) **(I)**

Michaels, J. R. *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary **(A)**

Michaels, J.R. 1 Peter in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Development* **(I)**

Marshall, I. H. *1 Peter*, IVP New Testament Commentaries (Intervarsity Press, 1991) **(I)**

You might also like to grab a copy of the family devotions on 1 Peter that Mark Driscoll has written. They are excellent and even better; they are free to download at www.marshall.org

We hope that you enjoy getting stuck into 1 Peter and look forward to many great conversations and discussions about the book over the coming months.

In Christ,

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Dave Keun
Luke Thomson