

Bible Studies about Peter

Study 13: An Introduction to 1 Peter

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Background

This first epistle of Peter was clearly authored by the apostle Peter (1 Peter 1:1), although the context of the epistle later on (1 Peter 5:12) suggests that Silvanus also played some role – possibly as a scribe making a record of what Peter dictated, or a secretary who drew together Peter’s thoughts on his behalf.

Silvanus is a Greek variant of Silas, and this Silas is almost certainly the Silas we read of in Acts (Acts 15:22) who was a leader in the Jerusalem church, a prophet (Acts 15:32) and a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37).

The epistle touches upon various doctrines and tells us much about Christian life and duties. It has been characterised as a letter of:

- Separation
- Suffering and persecution
- Suffering and glory
- Hope
- Pilgrimage
- Courage

It is also a letter dealing with the true grace of God.

In this series of studies on 1 Peter, we will begin to explore these issues, beginning in this study with hope, salvation and holiness and focusing on 1 Peter 1 - 1 Peter 2:3.

The Message

Hope

We have covered the concept of hope in a separate study, in which we reference 1 Peter 1:3, 21. Despite the frequent suffering and persecution that this letter covers, Peter introduces this “*living hope*”¹ into which we as believers through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ have been born into. He then continues by presenting the fruit of the hope that we have in Jesus – “*an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.*”² This is the antithesis of our experience in this broken world, in which people are robbed of hope or who have false hopes and hopes that fail to stand the test. The hope that we have in Jesus should withstand all “*various trials*”³.

We see how faith and hope are so closely intertwined, as we enter into the refiner’s fire (1 Peter 1:7). I wonder what our expectation was when we became a Christian. Was it that we would have an easy life, never encountering trials and tribulations? What sort of message would we give to people interested in our faith? Peter indicates that the

¹ 1 Peter 1:3

² 1 Peter 1:4

³ 1 Peter 1:6

trial of faith is also valuable, and I think from personal experience that sometimes the greatest witness we can bring is when we are suffering from the greatest hardship, when perhaps there is more of Jesus and less of us.

Sometimes we may feel despondent, and the constant erosion we may experience in our day to day encounters in this world represents the battle – for all that God has blessed us with, Satan seeks to corrupt or destroy. We only need to read the account of Job to understand that. To counter this and to realise the liberation that faith and hope in Jesus brings, we may take a number of practical steps:

- Memorise a particular Bible verse that inspires you and fills you with hope. During the day take a moment and meditate briefly on this verse. Allow its truth to become etched into your heart
- Study God’s promises that are written in the Bible and read them to yourself (an example of one such promise is Isaiah 12:2). You may also find it helpful to personalise the promise – look at Isaiah 40:31 – which would be personalised as follows “If I wait for the LORD I shall renew my strength; I shall mount up with wings like eagles; I shall run and not be weary; I shall walk and not faint”
- Be honest with God (and yourself) in prayer. God wants all of us – not just a part of us that we think is ‘good enough’ to present to Him. He knows our inmost being, and He knows how we feel
- Maintain fellowship with other Christians
- “...prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.”⁴

Salvation

These verses also speak of salvation. Verse 5 refers to “a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” This is something that we can read much about elsewhere in Scripture, but it is important to recognise some truths regarding salvation:

- Salvation is ultimately by grace alone, and is not based on human effort – but on God’s saving plan and the gracious gift of His Son (Romans 3:28, Ephesians 2: 8-9, Titus 3:5)
- Salvation is spoken of in the Bible as:
 - **Past** – when a person first started to believe (Titus 3:5)
 - **Present** – the continuing process of salvation, or sanctification (1 Peter 1:9, 1 Corinthians 1:18)
 - **Future** – when Christ returns and salvation, or sanctification, is completed through glorification (Romans 8:23, 30, Romans 13:11).

This gives us the very clear sense of how we are redeemed (past), are being redeemed (present) and will be redeemed (future).

Verse 9 tells us that through this hope we “are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.” The context of the goal of our faith is the conclusion or culmination, and as we know Jesus is the “*pioneer and perfecter of our faith*.”⁵ Our hope and therefore our salvation are both in Jesus.

Holiness

We have also covered the concept of holiness in a separate study. The verses 1 Peter 1:13-25 are entitled ‘A Call to Holy Living’ in the NRSV. In these verses we read:

⁴ 1 Peter 1:13

⁵ Hebrews 12:2

*“Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*⁶

and

*“Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.”*⁷

Later in 1 Peter, we understand that the purpose of this letter is to give us encouragement and to testify regarding the true grace of God (1 Peter 5:12). Here we are instructed to set out hope fully (perfectly hope) on the grace brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, and in that to be holy. We are also purified by obeying the truth and born again through the living and enduring word of God. The word of the Lord stands for ever.

Questions

1. We can often be worn down by being in the world, even though we are not of the world (John 15:19). We have mentioned some practical steps to restore our sense of hope. Spend a few moments in silent meditation and after a while pray that God would bless you with a fresh revelation of Jesus Christ, ask Him to open up your heart to receive His grace and forgiveness, and ask Him to help you to live in His holiness.

⁶ 1 Peter 1:13-16

⁷ 1 Peter 1:22