

# The Goal of Our Faith (1 Peter 1:1-9)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

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## I. Why We're Studying This Letter Now

- a. We just finished a 40-lesson expository series on **Exodus**, so now we want to switch back to studying something from the New Testament. Since we did a full gospel (**John**) shortly before that, this may be a good time to hit one or more of the New Testament letters.
- b. Many New Testament letters address problems that were significant issues *at the time they were written*, problems that we rarely face in the modern Western church. Examples of questions they wrestled with:
  - i. Is it necessary for Christians to follow the Jewish law and circumcision? (**Colossians**, **Galatians**, etc.)
  - ii. How do you reconcile the Jews (previously God's chosen people) and the Gentiles? What happened to the Jews? (**Romans**)
  - iii. What do we do with various forms of *Gnosticism*, involving a belief that the flesh is corrupted to the point that the Son of God could not have come *in the flesh*? (parts of **1 John** and **2 John**)
- c. **First Peter** is very practical, addressed to the Christians who were struggling and facing tough challenges in their lives. It calls them to continue their struggle in the face of suffering and to be a submissive (not rebellious) people, including submitting to the governing authorities.
  - i. In view of recent political uncertainties and the potential instability and suffering that may be ahead of Christians here in the US and in the West, these things might be very timely for us to review.
  - ii. In this short letter Peter also discusses:
    - 1. Living holy lives
    - 2. Fear of the Lord
    - 3. Satan and temptation
    - 4. Persevering in the face of trials
    - 5. The Holy Spirit
    - 6. The church

7. Husband/wife relationships
  8. Effective prayer
  9. Baptism
  10. Unity
  11. How we speak to others
  12. Directions to elders who lead churches (and to those younger in the congregation, who are led by them)
  13. Truly loving one another
  14. Humility
  15. Our ultimate goal: salvation
- d. We will see that Peter quotes from and alludes to the Old Testament extensively in his writings. With our good foundation in the Old Testament, we can build on what we have been studying over the past few years to appreciate the points he is making.
- i. In this letter Peter provides wonderful examples of how Christians can use the Hebrew Scriptures in practical ways when we are facing various trials and temptations.

## II. Peter Identifies Himself and Those He is Addressing

- a. Read **1 Peter 1:1-2**.
- b. How Peter describes himself.
  - i. He identifies himself here as “an apostle of Jesus Christ”.
  - ii. In **1 Peter 5:1** he addressed the elders as “a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ”.
- c. The people he is writing to are from areas within what is today Turkey. This is in Asia Minor, at the western end of the continent of Asia. Actually, these areas are generally on the central and northern side of Turkey, including along the Black Sea.
  - i. The gospel had spread north and westward from Antioch in Syria (where both Peter and Paul had been) into these areas.
- d. **Unusual Question:** Can you think of any prophecy or foreshadowing of *the apostle Peter* in the Old Testament? Is there one (or more)?

- i. Keep in mind that some other important people in the New Testament are prophesied or foreshadowed in the Old Testament, for example:
  1. Jesus
    - a. Of course, there are dozens of prophecies (perhaps even a few hundred) in the Old Testament that point to Jesus.
  2. Mary, the mother of Jesus (**Matthew 1:23**)
    - a. "Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (**Isaiah 7:14**, NKJV)
  3. John the Baptist (**Matthew 3:1-6**, **Matthew 11:7-15**, **Mark 1:1-3** and **Luke 1:17**)
    - a. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.'" (**Isaiah 40:3**, NKJV)
    - b. "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will observe the way before my face. And immediately, the Lord, whom you seek, will come into his own temple. And the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold, he comes," says the Lord Almighty." (**Malachi 3:1**, LES)
    - c. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (**Malachi 4:5-6**, NKJV)
  4. King Herod (the one who murdered all the Jewish baby boys at the time of Jesus' infancy, in **Matthew 2:13-18**).
    - a. This was foreshadowed by the pharaoh in Egypt, who sentenced all the baby Hebrew boys to death at the time of Moses' infancy (**Exodus 1:15-22**).
    - b. The life of Jesus, even from his infancy, runs remarkably parallel to that of Moses. Keep in mind that the promised future prophet that God would raise up would be one who was "*like Moses*" (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**).
  5. What about the apostle Peter?

- ii. In the recent series we did from the book of **Exodus** on the tabernacle, in the lesson on **Exodus 28**, 'Twelve Precious Stones', we discussed how Tertullian saw the twelve apostles of Jesus foreshadowed in Old Testament.
  - 1. Tertullian, an early Christian writer from Carthage, in North Africa, touched on this in his dispute with Marcion, writing c. 207 AD:
    - a. "But why was it that He chose *twelve* apostles, and not some other number? In truth, I might from this very point conclude of my Christ, that He was foretold not only by the words of prophets, but by the indications of facts.
    - b. "For of this number I find figurative hints up and down the Creator's dispensation in the twelve springs of Elim (**Exodus 15:27**); in the twelve gems of Aaron's priestly vestment (**Exodus 28**); and in the twelve stones appointed by Joshua to be taken out of the Jordan, and set up for the ark of the covenant (**Joshua 4**). Now, the same number of apostles was thus portended, as if they were to be fountains and rivers which should water the Gentile world, which was formerly dry and destitute of knowledge (as He says by Isaiah: 'I will put streams in the unwatered ground' [*presumably referring to Isaiah 44:3*]); as if they were to be gems to shed luster upon the church's sacred robe, which Christ, the High Priest of the Father, puts on; as if, also, they were to be stones massive in their faith, which the true Joshua [= *Jesus*, in the LXX Greek] took out of the layer of the Jordan, and placed in the sanctuary of His covenant."
      - i. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 4, chapter 13; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 364–365)
      - ii. Note that each of the twelve gemstones of the breastplate was different, and each stone had a different name engraved on it.
  - 2. Later in the same discussion, related to this, Tertullian notes that the apostle Peter's original name (Simon) was changed by Jesus to *Peter* (= *a rock or stone*) for an important reason. The Christ is foreshadowed throughout the Old Testament as a rock, as attested to by many prophecies; however, *His twelve apostles were to be stones as well*; just as He was.

- a. “Stones are they, even foundation stones, upon which we are ourselves edified – ‘built,’ as St. Paul says, ‘upon the foundation of the apostles,’ (**Ephesians 2:20**) who, like ‘consecrated stones,’ were rolled up and down exposed to the attack of all men.”
      - i. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 4, chapter 39; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 415)
- 3. Regarding this idea of the twelve stones foreshadowing the twelve apostles, also consider the reference in **Revelation 21**. There it speaks of the walls of the city (the New Jerusalem) have twelve foundations, each one a *different gemstone*, and each bearing *the name of one of the twelve apostles*.
  - a. “Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (**Revelation 21:14**, NKJV)
  - b. “The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.” (**Revelation 21:19–20**, NKJV)
- iii. Conclusion: Yes, if Tertullian is correct, Peter actually *was* prophesied in the Old Testament, as *one of the twelve stones*!
- e. *All twelve* of the apostles were “stones” or “rocks”, not just Peter.
  - i. In the Roman Catholic Church, there is an enormous emphasis on the authority of the apostle Peter.
    - 1. The only Scripture I knew by heart as a young boy, growing up in the Roman Catholic Church, was **Matthew 16:18-19**.
      - a. “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (**Matthew 16:18–19**, NKJV)

- b. Catholics point to Peter as the rock on which the church would be built. They then say that Peter became the first bishop of Rome, and that this authority was passed on to the subsequent bishops of Rome (the popes).
    - c. The “mother church” in the Catholic world is St. Peter’s church in Vatican City, Rome. It is physically the largest church building in the world, and there is a claim that it was built over the gravesite of the apostle Peter.
  - 2. While Catholics build their foundation on Peter, many Protestants who follow the teaching of the Protestant Reformers like Luther and Calvin tend to emphasize *Paul* above all the other apostles.
  - 3. However, the New Testament seems to point to the Twelve Apostles (*all twelve of them*) as foundations on which the church is built.
    - a. Consider the reference to the twelve foundations in **Revelation 21**.
    - b. Consider that after He spoke to Peter about having authority to “bind and loose” in **Matthew 16**, Jesus said the same to all of the apostles in **Matthew 18**:
      - i. “(addressing the apostles, Jesus said) Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (**Matthew 18:18**, NKJV)
    - c. “So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (**Matthew 19:28**, NKJV)
- f. Peter refers to the Christians he is writing to as “the elect”.
  - i. John Calvin taught “unconditional election”, a doctrine which holds that God picks/selects us arbitrarily (regardless of anything we do). Since Calvin also taught total depravity (all humans have been completely depraved since the Fall, described in **Genesis 3**), he taught that we are completely *incapable* of choosing to do anything good, anyway!
  - ii. However, God wants all men to be saved, as Paul explained:

1. "Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4, NKJV)
- iii. God really does want all men to be saved! Any theological system (like Calvinism) that teaches otherwise is therefore wrong. However, we have free will that God will not override. We need to *freely choose to be among* the elect. The door is open to all who will enter.
- iv. 'The elect' represents *a class of people*. We might think of it as similar to a boat about to leave the dock that people either choose to (or chose *not* to) embark on.
  1. That boat is destined to arrive in Liverpool, England. All those who choose to join and embark on that boat, provided they do not abandon ship, are predestined to arrive at the destination where the boat is going.
- v. Peter is not speaking about unconditional, individual election.
  1. Otherwise, Peter could have ended the letter right here! In that case, nothing that follows this would make any sense at all.
  2. The rest of Peter's letter is telling us what we Christians, who have embarked on this spiritual journey, must do in order to complete the journey successfully.
    - a. Peter warns that the journey ahead will involve trials and tests.
    - b. On this 'voyage' we will be passing through some storms and even pirate-infested waters!
  3. We have "foreknowledge" (at the beginning of the journey) that the end of the journey (for those who remain faithful and do not abandon the ship) will be the desired destination: our salvation.
- g. The opening of the letter discusses *the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* as all being involved in our salvation.
  - i. The foreknowledge of *God the Father*;
  - ii. In sanctification (being made holy) by the *Holy Spirit*;

- iii. For obedience and sprinkling of the blood of *Jesus Christ*.
- h. The phrase “sprinkling by the blood of Jesus” points back to the Old Testament imagery.
  - i. When the original covenant was confirmed by Moses, he read the words of the covenant and then sprinkled the people with blood.
    - 1. Read **Exodus 24:3-8**.
    - 2. They were called to obedience and sprinkling by blood, the same language and imagery used by Peter.
  - ii. On the Day of Atonement every year, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place (behind the veil, where the ark of the covenant was) with animal blood (**Leviticus 16**).
    - 1. He would wash in water before entering the Most Holy Place, then enter with incense and animal blood.
    - 2. He would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed animal on the “mercy seat” (solid gold cover) of the ark.
    - 3. He would thus make atonement for himself, his family and all the people.
  - iii. So when Peter is using this language about being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, I think he is communicating:
    - 1. We are the covenant people of God.
    - 2. Our sins have been atoned for.
  - iv. In **Hebrews** it explains how the washing in water and sprinkling of blood in the tabernacle ministry foreshadowed what would be done by Christ.
    - 1. Read **Hebrews 9:1-14**.
    - 2. Read **Hebrews 9:18-22**.
    - 3. Read **Hebrews 10:19-25**.
    - 4. Read **Hebrews 11:22-24**.

### III. Our Hope: Heaven

- a. Read **1 Peter 1:3-9**.



- b. The hope we have is not in this life; it is *in heaven*. That is why we are able to persevere through the trials of this life.
  - i. This major theme of Peter, that we must persevere through trials, is to me reminiscent of much of the book of **Hebrews**, where the same point is developed.
  - ii. This destroys any form of the phony modern 'prosperity gospel' (= become a Christian so that you can enjoy a *better life here* on earth).
    - 1. While our lives may get better because we have repented of significant sin that was causing destruction, Peter is clear that following Jesus likely will lead to great hardship and suffering! This characterizes the lives led by Jesus and Peter.
    - 2. The prosperity gospel never made any sense to me. Growing up Roman Catholic, the image of Jesus suffering on the cross was deeply impressed on my mind.
    - 3. That was reinforced by gruesome images of Jesus nailed to the cross: bleeding, pierced, suffering, and wearing a crown of thorns.
      - a. Roman Catholics historically have tended to focus much on the *suffering* of Jesus. In contrast, Eastern Orthodox have focused heavily on the *resurrection* of Jesus.
    - 4. It seemed to me growing up that Jesus suffered for me. If that was how Jesus and the apostles were treated, and I was going to follow Jesus, *how in the world could I expect an easy, comfortable life?*
    - 5. Let us never try to persuade others to become Christians with a false lure of promising that their lives here will become better. For many, it will get worse!
  - iii. We are looking for our inheritance, reserved in heaven.
    - 1. Consider the bad example of Esau, called "godless" in the New Testament because he traded in his inheritance for a little short-term, immediate pleasure of the flesh. He lost his inheritance, and serves as *a warning for us*.
    - 2. Read **Hebrews 12:14-17**.
    - 3. Esau was the 'poster child' for someone living for the pleasures of the flesh.

- a. In his case it was for food; but the **Hebrews** writer uses it as an illustration of those who are drawn away to other pleasures of the flesh, including fornication (sexual sin).
- iv. Like Paul, Peter saw our entire faith hanging on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus.

1. Read **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**.

- a. The faith is: Jesus died and was resurrected in fulfillment of the prophecies and attested to by many eyewitnesses.
- b. This is the foundation of the Christian faith.
- c. It has nothing to do with our feelings; either it happened historically, or it did not.
- d. This has nothing to do with finding a way to have a more enjoyable life in this world either, as Paul then goes on to explain.

2. Read **1 Corinthians 15:14-19**.

- a. If Christ is not risen (if it did not happen), then those who died in Christ are lost, and Paul is a false witness (liar) about God.
    - i. I have heard people say, "Well, even if the Christian faith turns out to be not true, this is the best way to live life". Paul certainly didn't feel that way *at all*!
  - b. Paul said, "If only for this life we have hope, we are of all men the most pitiable." (**1 Corinthians 15:19**)
- c. If we have our hope in heaven, we will be able to handle the trials we face here and now.
  - i. Many who have been brought to faith through hearing some form of the prosperity gospel end up undergoing a major crisis of faith or lose their faith entirely when things go badly in life.
    - 1. They were told things like the Lord saying, "I have plans to prosper you and not to harm you" (taking **Jeremiah 29:11** completely out of context, not mentioning that this would be after 70 years of captivity in Babylon).

2. When they don't receive the prosperity that they were told God had promised them, they then doubt whether God even exists and if the Bible is true.
- ii. **Question:** Do you *rejoice* when you are facing trials and suffering?
  1. Peter said we should rejoice in trials, because they will refine our faith, like gold being refined by fire.
- iii. When I am getting challenging advice, I always want to consider the source: the life of the person who is giving that advice.
  1. Recently the President of the United States appointed a certain controversial retired army colonel to a very senior position advising the acting Secretary of Defense. In that role, this person will be advising on strategic military issues.
    - a. The colonel had been involved in direct combat in the first Iraq War. He has a reputation for being an independent thinker who has a great dislike for getting the US military involved in wars.
    - b. His appointment to this role was very controversial. Some commenters were very positive, with others very critical of this appointment.
    - c. I read an interesting analysis by someone who thought favorably of the candidate. The commentator remarked that unlike many generals in the Pentagon who spent their careers sitting behind desks, here was a man who had been in actual combat, risking his life and observing first-hand the horrors of war.
      - i. As a result of his own direct personal experience, he was very reluctant to get the US entangled in more wars.
      - ii. The positive reviewer commented that this was often the case, where men who had been in actual combat (for example: General Eisenhower, who served in WWII and later became a US president) were *much more reluctant to go to war* than men who never personally experienced it.
    - d. In this case, the person appointed was a retired colonel in the military.

2. In a similar way, the fact that Peter experienced so much suffering over his life in following Jesus, it seems to me that in some ways, his testimony and advice carry even more weight!

iv. Consider Peter's own life.

1. "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, *Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat*. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.'" (**Luke 22:31-32**, NKJV)

- a. Peter was indeed "sifted like wheat" when Jesus was captured and tried. When put to the test, he failed and denied Jesus three times.

2. Read **John 21:15-19**.

- a. After being restored by Jesus, Peter is called to:

- i. Feed Jesus' lambs
- ii. Tend Jesus' sheep (be a good shepherd); and
- iii. Follow Jesus (who had just recently been tortured and crucified).

1. Jesus specifically referred to how Peter's life would end.

- b. Jesus indicates how Peter will die: as an old man, with his hands stretched out, led by someone else to a place where he did not want to go.

- i. While we do not have an account in Scripture of how Peter died, Jesus prophesied here how it would happen.

3. Soon after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, Peter was jailed, threatened and beaten (**Acts 5:27-33, 5:40-42**)

4. Historical records tell us that Peter's life ended by being crucified in Rome. From History of the Church (Ecclesiastical History, by Eusebius (c. 260-340 AD; bishop of the church in Caesarea):

- a. (After citing Tertullian) "Thus, Nero publicly announcing himself as the chief enemy of God, was led on in his fury to slaughter the apostles. Paul is therefore said to have been beheaded in Rome, and Peter to have

been crucified under him. And this account is confirmed by the fact, that the names of Peter and Paul still remain in the cemeteries of that city even to this day.”

- b. “...Peter appears to have preached through Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia and Asia, to the Jews that were scattered abroad; who also, finally coming to Rome, was crucified with his head downward, having requested of himself to suffer in this way.”
  - c. (Source: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 2, chapter 25; and book 3, chapter 1)
- 5. Based on both Scripture and church history, we can see that Peter led a life involving much suffering for his faith. When he speaks to us about the importance of having our faith refined through suffering, let us keep in mind that he *is speaking from a position of authority*, based on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as well as the example of his own life.
- v. God will refine His people through the trials of fire (suffering). It has always been that way; we see this lesson throughout the Scriptures.
  - 1. Read **Zechariah 13:7-9**.
    - a. Those who make it will be refined by fire, as silver and gold are refined.
    - b. Those (the ones refined by this fire) are the ones God will recognize as “My people”.
  - 2. Jesus Himself had to be made perfect (complete) through suffering.
    - a. “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (**Hebrews 2:10**, NKJV)
    - b. Although the Son of God, who existed before all ages, was without sin (**Hebrews 4:15**), nevertheless, He had to be made perfect (= complete) through suffering.
    - c. **Question:** If He had to be made complete through suffering, what *should we expect to undergo*, in order for us to be made complete?

- i. **Answer:** Obviously, we should expect to be made complete in our faith through suffering, as well. That is the very point being made throughout much of the rest of **Hebrews**.
  - ii. Read **Hebrews 10:35-39** and **12:10-13**.
- 3. We should expect to be tested. The fire of the trials will burn out some (to their destruction); but purify others (for their ultimate salvation). This is the same path that both Jesus and Peter went traversed, showing us the way and telling us to expect the same!
  - a. While Satan wants to sift us out, God uses these trials to make us complete through suffering; to purify us.