

THE LIVING HOPE OF BELIEVERS

Summary and Historical Background

The Apostle Peter, one of three disciples in the "inner circle" which was closest to Christ while He walked the earth, wrote this letter out of the love of a pastor's heart to help Christians suffering the terrible persecution which erupted under Nero in A.D. 64. It is a warm, appealing letter, setting forth the Christian's hope in the midst of a hostile world. Peter encourages the believers to stand fast in unswerving loyalty to Christ. Even though the dire consequences for doing so will be real for a moment, the joyful blessings will last forever.

Peter's readers are addressed as strangers (1: 1), that is, aliens in a foreign land. Certainly this was true in two senses: they were aliens politically, as Jews away from Palestine, and they were aliens spiritually, for their citizenship was in heaven. Peter sought to encourage these scattered, suffering Christians by developing several themes, even in this first chapter. Note how the believer's salvation includes four basic elements: hope (1:3-4), faith (1:5-7), love (1:8-9), and a fulfillment of prophecy (1:10-12). Note also in this first chapter a special exhortation in view of the distressing circumstances: Christians were to live before God in confident hope (1:13), in holiness (1:14-16), and in reverence (1:17-21); and they were to live before the brethren in love (1:22-25).

The readers of Peter's letter were living in outlying Roman provinces in the area of present-day Turkey. Many were Jews of the dispersion (1:1), but a goodly number must have been Gentiles (2:10). Peter was writing to organized churches in these areas (5:1) and this letter was to be circulated among them.

Setting of the Book

A. Persecution had already erupted in Rome.

1. They were undergoing manifold trials (1:6).
2. They were suffering for righteousness' sake (3:1 4).
3. They were accused as evildoers (3:16).
4. Peter speaks of a fiery trial (4:12).
5. They were to submit themselves to God in their sufferings (4:19).
6. They were sharing in this suffering with other Christian brethren (5:9).

B. Persecution became worse under Nero.

Before Nero, Romans made no distinctions between Jews and Christians. Then in July, A.D. 64, Nero burned Rome. The Roman people were left homeless and bitter. The Christians were made his scapegoat. Why did the populace go along with this? Here are some reasons:

1. Christians were associated with Jews — Jesus and the disciples were Jews, and the Jews were disliked as troublemakers.
2. The people believed that the Lord's Supper, which the Christians kept, was a cannibalistic rite in which they ate flesh and drank blood.
3. Christianity was a religion which split families.
4. Christians preached that the world would be dissolved in fire (Acts 2:19, 20).

C. Christians were tortured and mocked as a result.

1. Many died by savage outbreaks. Some were rolled in pitch and lighted to be used as torches to light Nero's gardens.
2. Some were sewn into the skins of wild animals and wild dogs were turned loose on them.
3. These outbreaks kept recurring for over two centuries.

Object of the Book

1. To strengthen the faith of the believers.
2. To show Christ had victoriously suffered for believers.
3. To encourage believers to suffer for Christ.

I. Introduction — 1:1-2

1:1 — "Strangers" - They were temporary residents. They did not expect to become natives or citizens of the country they were in. They did not expect to be treated as natives. They knew they might be expelled from the country at any time (Heb 13:13, 14). They had a higher loyalty than to a human leader or to an earthly state. Even in the Old Testament believers prayed facing Jerusalem. Christians were to have their eyes on heaven, not on the earth (Phil 3:20).

"Scattered" — They were scattered by God, as seedlings planted by Him, to have a definite purpose in a definite place. This would be an encouragement in their difficult times.

"Elect" — Exalted above the natives. Aliens are often held in contempt, but these were to be held in honor because God had chosen them. As a result they had no desire to return to their old life. God's act of electing them also was to be a source of encouragement to these believers.

"Foreknowledge" — Election is based on the foreknowledge of God (2 Thes 2:13; Rom 8:29). This includes the all-encompassing knowledge of God (Psalm 139), the all-embracing love of God (Deut 7:6-8) and the altogether righteous judgment of God (Rom 2:2, 3, 5). Since God desires all sinners to be saved (1 Tim 2:4) and is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9), and He is absolutely sovereign, why will the majority of people will perish in Hell? God has determined to let all people choose His way to be saved or theirs. Since God is holy and cannot tolerate sin, He has lovingly provided a way to remove their sin through His Son, Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16). He is the propitiation for the sins of every person by His death on the cross (1Jn 2:2). However, sinners must choose to receive His gift of salvation by faith as the only way to be saved and come into His holy presence. Every other way will fail and will suffer His righteous judgment. They cannot earn salvation by their good works, but must receive it by faith in Jesus' good works (Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8). God commands sinners to seek Him, while He may be found; and to call on Him, while He is near (Isa 55:6). Normally sinners do not seek Him, but they can seek Him and find Him when He is near. When God speaks to them about His free gift of salvation, they can call on Him and be saved from His righteous wrath (Rom 10:13; Jn 1:12; 3:36). How must they come to Him? They must repent of their sins (hate them) and receive His gift (love it with a grateful heart). So God's election of sinners is based on His foreknowledge of their faith in Him to save them from their sins. His foreknowledge of their sins and His love for sinners caused Him to foreordain the death of His Son before the foundation of the world to pay the penalty of for their sins (1:20).

"Unto obedience" — Believers are chosen to be obedient servants of God (Eph 2:10).

"Through sanctification of the Spirit" — The Holy Spirit sets them apart from the world.

"Sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" — It is through Christ's blood that believers are saved. Notice how all three Persons of the Trinity are active in this verse.

II. Salvation — 1:3-12

Being saved and knowing what that means is important for anyone, who is going through the hard times of testing, to possess.

A. We Are Saved to a Lively Hope — 1:3

1:3 — "A lively hope" - Because Christ has been raised, all believers will be raised, too. It would be better translated as "a living hope." Hope includes both desire and expectation.

B. We Are Saved to a Heavenly Inheritance — 1:4

1:4 — "Incorruptible" - A true believer's faith is indestructible and imperishable. It is a permanent inheritance.

"Undeified" — This inheritance is not polluted or impure in any way; no defect or flaw is in it.

"Fades not away" — It has a beauty that will never disappear or lose its freshness.

"Reserved in heaven" — It is secure. It is in a place where thieves cannot break through and steal it (Matt. 6:20). It is "reserved" (perfect tense) by God for His children.

C. We Are Saved with a Divine Security — 1:5

1:5 — "Kept" is a military term for guarding something vital. God was guarding them even while they were being persecuted. The inheritance was secure in heaven (1:4) and the inheritors were secure on earth (1:5). The perfect tense of a Greek verb indicates the action was done in the past, but the results continue into the future.

"Power" — God will guard us by His power until our salvation is completed (Phil 1:6).

D. We Are Saved by a Precious Faith — 1:5-9

1:5 — "Faith" - This is the faith by which we are saved (Eph 2:8). Faith is the believer's activity; guarding the believer is God's activity.

1:6 — "Wherein ye greatly rejoice"— We should anticipate and rejoice that someday our salvation will be complete. We can also rejoice in all that God has done for us and will do for us until that time.

"In heaviness" — The heaviness is caused by grief.

"Manifold temptations" — God allows many trials and various attacks from hostile men to test our faith in order to strengthen it (James 1:3, 4).

1:7 — "Gold" - When a refiner seeks to purify gold, the metal is heated until the dross floats to the top and it can be skimmed off. When all the dross is skimmed off and the refiner can see his own reflection in the gold, the fire is put out (cf. Mal. 3:3). The Lord works with us until His reflection can be seen in our lives. Our faith is more important than gold. Gold is temporal, but our faith is eternal.

"Praise and honor and glory" — We will share in the praise, honor and glory that will accompany the return of Jesus Christ.

1:8 — "Believing" - We are united to the Lord by faith. True faith produces a love for Christ, even though we have not seen Him. Faith also produces an inexpressible joy that is a little taste of the glory of heaven.

1:9 — "End of your faith" -This refers to the goal of faith. Even though they were not being delivered from the persecution of their physical bodies, they could look forward to the time

when their souls would be completely saved. Little faith will bring our souls to heaven. Great faith will bring heaven to our souls.

E. We Are Saved as a Fulfillment of Prophecy — 1:10-12

1:10-11 — "Searched" - This word is used of miners digging for precious metals in the earth. The prophets in the Old Testament searched their own prophecies concerning the grace of salvation. It was especially hard for them to grasp the grace of God in the salvation of Gentiles. It was also an enigma for them to figure out what the Spirit meant when He told them about the sufferings of Christ that should precede His glories. They wrote it down, but it baffled them.

1:12 — "Unto whom it was revealed" - The Holy Spirit revealed these prophecies of future events to the Old Testament prophets, but it was not for their benefit.

"Unto us they did minister" — The Old Testament prophecies were a ministry (a service) to the New Testament believers. They would be able to see the fulfillment of these prophecies once Christ had suffered and was glorified. This was the Gospel preached unto them that brought them salvation.

"The angels desire to look into" — The angels have an earnest desire to know the things of our salvation. This is something they never experienced, but they rejoice over the salvation of one lost sinner (Lk 15:10), and learn about it by observing the church (Eph 3:10; I Cor 4:9).

III. Sanctification — 1:13-21

Believers are to be sanctified by separating themselves from all known sin. This practice will please God and He will help them to endure the trials of persecution.

A. We Are Sanctified by the Revelation of Christ — 1:13

Living with the expectation of the coming of Christ at any time will sanctify our daily activities.

1:13 — "Wherefore" - This word refers the reader back to the previous verses on salvation. Salvation provides the necessary foundation for sanctification.

"Gird up the loins of your mind" — To "gird up the loins" was an expression used to get ready for work. The flowing robes of the people in that day would hinder them from work, so they would take the hem of their garment and tuck it under their belt. This would keep their legs free from becoming entangled in their robe. A similar expression today would be, "Roll up your sleeves and get to work." When applied to the mind, it meant that a believer was to free his mind from distracting worldly thoughts for some serious spiritual thoughts.

"Be sober" — Originally, this had reference to abstention from excessive use of wine, but it came to mean self-control or sound judgment.

"Hope to the end" — The "end" has reference to the time of Jesus Christ's revelation. Some take this to mean Christ's Second Coming to earth when all Old Testament, Church and Tribulation believers will reign with Christ. Others take this to mean the Rapture when Church believers will meet the Lord in the air and be taken to Heaven for His marriage to the Church. This view fits the context better since Peter is only addressing Church believers. The Church believers are to fix their hope, their confidence, on the Rapture when the grace of full salvation will be given to them (1 Jn 3:2-3).

B. We Are Sanctified by the Nature of God — 1:14-16

Believers are given the divine nature at salvation so they can sanctify their lives each day.

1:14 — "Obedient children" - Obedience should characterize the child of God. It not only describes his activity, but also his nature.

"Not fashioning" — This word is only found in one other place in the New Testament where it is translated, "Be not conformed" (Rom 12:2). The Christian is not to be conformed to the world about him or to let his former desires fashion or mold his life.

"Former lusts in your ignorance" — This refers to his former desires when he was yet ignorant of salvation.

1:15 — "He which has called you" - Refers to God's call by which He brings the sinner to salvation.

"Holy" — God is holy. He is separated from all evil. He is pure and has no moral defects in Him.

"Be holy" — The believer, as an obedient child of God (v 14), is commanded to be holy like his heavenly Father. He is to separate himself from the moral pollutions of the world.

"Conversation" — This refers to the believer's behavior.

1:16 — This is a quote from Leviticus (cf. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7).

C. We Are Sanctified by the Judgment of God — 1:17

When we fear the judgment of God, we will flee from sin and it will sanctify our daily lives.

1:17 — "And" - Connects the thought of this verse with 1:13-16.

"Call on the Father" — Those who are children of God (1:14) should speak to Him as their Father. It is their privilege.

"Without respect of persons" — God's children must realize, however, that He is impartial in judgment. He judges everyone on the basis of facts. Those who receive Jesus Christ will not be condemned with those who reject Jesus Christ. He judges everyone the same. Those who receive Jesus Christ as their Savior are saved, and those who do not receive Him are lost. He also judges believers impartially. Those who obey are blessed, and those who do not obey, forfeit His blessings.

"Judges according to every man's work" — God's basis for judging His children is their works (cf. I Cor 3:12-15; II Cor 5:10).

"Fear" — The Christian is to live his life with a loving fear of displeasing God (2:17). He is to respect God and live accordingly.

D. We Are Sanctified by the Sacrifice of Christ — 1:18-21

When we appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins, we will sanctify our daily lives.

1:18 — "Redeemed" - This is the payment for setting a slave free. The believer was set free from slavery to sin by the redemption payment that Jesus Christ made for him (Mark 10:45).

"From your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers" — The believers had been redeemed from a vain, empty way of life taught to them by their fathers. This may refer to the pagan religions of the Gentiles or to the empty traditions of the Jewish elders (Mk 7:1-13).

1:19 — "Precious blood of Christ" - The blood of Christ has eternal value, while silver and gold only have temporal value (they are corruptible - v 18).

"As of a lamb without blemish and without spot" — This has reference to the sacrificial lambs of the Old Testament, especially the Passover Lamb (Ex 12:3-7). Jesus Christ was the true Lamb of God (Is 53:6, 7; John 1:29). His sacrifice was eternally effective for all men (Heb 9:12-15, 24-26).

1:20 — "Foreordained before the foundation of the world" - It was God's plan to have Jesus Christ die for sinful men even before He created Adam and Eve.

"Manifest in these last times for you" — The death of Christ was known to God before the worlds were made, but it was not clearly revealed to the believers until "the fullness of time was come" (Gal 4:4).

1:21 — "Who by Him do believe in God" - Faith in God comes by the sacrifice of Christ.

"Raised Him up from the dead" — The resurrection of Jesus Christ is coupled with His death to form the foundation of a believer's faith. This resurrection was accomplished by God the Father.

"Gave Him glory" — The glorification of Jesus Christ is the assurance of the believer's hope. This also was done by the Father.

"Faith and hope . . . in God" — Since God raised Jesus Christ and then glorified Him, our faith and hope are both fixed in God.

IV. Stimulation — 1:22-25

Being stimulated to love the brethren is the third element that is necessary for victory when the days of difficulty come.

A. We Are Stimulated by Being Purified — 1:22

1:22 — "You have purified your souls" - This is a perfect tense participle, which speaks of the results of salvation. The believer is made morally pure in his soul when he trusts Jesus Christ as his Savior and this purification continues forever.

"In obeying the truth" — This phrase is another way of saying he has accepted the Gospel.

"Unto unfeigned love of the brethren" — A purified soul enables a person to have sincere love for the brethren. It is a love without pretense or hypocrisy.

"Love one another with a pure heart" — The word for love is *agape*, that sacrificing love which neglects one's own self to take care of the needs of someone else. This love is given to a believer by the Spirit after his soul (heart) has been purified by the blood of Jesus Christ and he has surrendered himself to the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

"Fervently" — It means "to stretch out"; to have a large capacity for the love of others. Believers are to have a sincere love, a pure love, and a fervent love.

B. We Are Stimulated by Being Born Again — 1:23-25

1:23 — "Being born again" - This is another perfect participle (cf. 1:22), which speaks of the new life that is given to a believer when he receives the Gospel. He is a new person. He is born from above with a divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). His divine life will enable him to love his brethren sincerely, purely and fervently.

"By the Word of God" — A believer is born into God's family by the incorruptible seed of His Word. This Word is the Gospel message of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection (1 Cor 15:3, 4). Faith comes by hearing His Word (Rom 10:17).

"Which lives and abides forever" — God's Word is a living Word because it is the message of eternal life and provides a living hope (1:3). It abides forever because the One Who gave it abides forever. He never changes and what He says is truth forever.

1:24-25 — Man in his fleshly state is temporal and is short-lived, but the Lord's Word (His utterance) is eternal and endures forever. Those who put their trust in His Word (i.e., His promise), which is given in the Gospel, will also live forever. This transforming divine power will also enable Christians to love one another.