

1 PETER

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HOMeward BOUND



10 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

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Homeward Bound

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» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

Each study contains five main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- a set of numbered study questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what these passages mean for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

Previous editions of this Interactive Bible Study have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. So with this new edition of *Homeward Bound*, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

» STUDY 1

GOD'S REFUGEES

[1 PETER 1:1-2]

Peter: The man

THERE ARE FEW CHARACTERS more appealing in the New Testament than the Apostle Peter—if for no other reason than he so often makes a fool of himself. Who can forget his bumbling performance on the mount of transfiguration, where he tells Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah” (to which Luke adds the almost unnecessary comment, “not knowing what he said”—Luke 9:33)? Or who can forget his marvellous confession of Christ at Caesarea, Philippi, followed immediately by his upstart rebuke of this same Christ (Mark 8:27-33)? Or who can forget his misplaced bravado at the Last Supper, followed so soon by his snoozing at Gethsemane and his three-

fold denial of Jesus shortly after (Luke 22:33-62)? If someone is going to rush in boldly, seize the moment, and then make a mess of it, chances are it will be Peter—big-hearted, larger-than-life Peter.

It is one of the miracles of the gospel that through the power of the Spirit, this impulsive and unlearned man became the spokesman for the whole Christian movement—eloquently and effectively preaching the gospel of the Messiah in Acts 2, and defending his preaching with equal power before the rulers, elders and scribes of his people (in Acts 4). The contrast between the fearful Christ-denying Peter of Luke 22 and the bold, Christ-proclaiming Peter of Acts 1-5 could not be stronger.

Let us turn now to the first letter

that bears Peter's name. It is one of the gems of the New Testament—packed full of rich teaching and practical encouragement. Like so much of the Bible, rich doctrine and practical encouragement are inseparable in

1 Peter; it is not a letter of dry theory without application, but neither is it just practical tips for a better life. It is deeply theological and deeply practical at the same time.

Read 1 Peter 1:1–2.

1. What else do we learn here about:
 - a. the author?

 - b. the recipients?

Read 1 Peter 5:12–14.

2. What do these verses tell us about:
 - a. the source of the letter?

 - b. the purpose of the letter?

Read Galatians 2:6–10.

3. What was Peter's mission? To whom was he sent?

Peter: The letter

AS WITH MANY OF THE LETTERS of the New Testament, many of the details surrounding 1 Peter are uncertain. We aren't sure who the 'she' in Babylon is (1 Pet 5:13)—whether it was Peter's wife, perhaps, or a church, or whether 'Babylon' was a code name for Rome. But some things are more clear—namely that the letter is addressed from Peter, Jesus Christ's ambassador and apostle to the Jews, and that it is addressed to Christians in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. It seems that Peter was particularly writing to the Jewish Christians in these areas. The opening sentence says as much, although a number of modern translations (like the NIV) obscure this. Verse 1 reads, literally, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia," and so on.

The dispersion (or 'diaspora', as it is sometimes referred to) occurred when the northern kingdom of Israel was scattered among the nations of the ancient world following the victory of Assyria in the 8th century BC (see 2 Kings 17). This was God's judgement upon them for their apostasy, and despite the prophetic promises of a 'return' at some future point, by the first century AD, there were still four or five times more Jews living in the dispersion than in Israel. This is seen on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when Jews from all over the Middle East and Mediterranean converged on Jerusalem for the Jewish feast from places such as Pontus, Cappadocia and Asia (cf. 1 Pet 1:1).

This is the group that Peter evangelized with such success at Pentecost and the group that continued to be his mission field. It is to these Christian Jews, exiled in the dispersion but nevertheless chosen by God, that Peter writes.

We will, of course, need to bear this in mind as we study 1 Peter. It does not normally occur to the majority of Christians today (who are Gentiles) that we are the 'latecomers' to Christianity. Salvation is of the Jews. Gentile Christians are but the wild olive shoot that has

A note on Peter's recipients

Most modern commentators on 1 Peter do not take the view that the letter was written to Jewish Christians—chiefly on the grounds that although, on first glance, it does appear to be written to Jewish Christian exiles of the dispersion, verses like 1:18 and 4:2-3 are unlikely to be addressed to Jews. However, these verses only express the kind of disobedience that Israel was guilty of in the Old Testament. Indeed, the very problem with Israel was that they lived like the nations around them and taught their children to do likewise, rather than living as God's holy people. It was for this reason that they suffered God's judgement and became "exiles of the dispersion" in the first place. The overwhelming weight of evidence points to the recipients being Peter's 'mission field' of Jewish Christians.¹

been grafted in, as Paul puts it in Romans 11:17-24. In the gospel, the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile is broken down, and we enjoy membership of the same household of God. But the distinction is not obliterated. The Christian Jew remains a Jew, and the Christian Gentile remains a Gentile,

even if they are now both sons of Abraham by faith.

Keeping all this in mind will help us understand what Peter was actually saying to his readers, and this in turn will help us apply it rightly to ourselves, whether we are Jew or Gentile.

4. Let us now gain a quick overview of 1 Peter.

Like many of the letters of the New Testament, the rich teaching and doctrine of 1 Peter is more in the first half of the letter, followed by exhortations that focus on what it all means in practice. Quickly skim through the whole letter, and see if you can identify these sections and give them a summary title. (There is even a short 'hinge' or 'bridge' between them.)

Verses	Title
1:1-2	Opening greeting
_____	Mainly doctrinal section: _____
_____	Hinge or bridge
_____	Mainly practical section: _____
5:12-14	Closing greetings

5. If you are in a small group, discuss how you divided up the letter and why.

6. Come back to the opening greeting in 1:1-2. In verse 2, what three phrases describe these exiles?

-

-

-

7. Look up the following cross-references to help you understand what these phrases mean:

- Ephesians 1:3-5; Acts 2:23

- 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

- Romans 1:5, 16:26; Exodus 24:1-8; Matthew 26:27-28

God's refugees

AS WE READ FURTHER IN 1 PETER, we will discover that being exiles or refugees is never easy. In one sense, we need little reminder of that, given recent events in Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan. To be homeless and stateless—to be rejected and despised—to be uncertain of what form of unjust suffering will come next—these are the daily realities of the refugee.

Those to whom Peter wrote had been exiled from their beloved Israel for generations. They were a long way from home, and in earthly terms, had no hope of ever returning or seeing the golden days of David or Solomon again. Yet something new had come into their experience, which changed everything. We now read that they are *God's* refugees, chosen by him, set apart by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, in order that they might be obedient to Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood. Though they may continue to suffer, be despised, be rejected and be ill-treated in the world, they are *God's* and have a new and living hope in him.

Those of us who are Gentiles are not exiles or refugees in exactly the same sense as Peter's readers. We have never been Israelites, so how could we ever have been exiled from Israel? We have never had a homeland to long for. As for Israel, theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs is the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises; theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is descended the Christ (Rom 9:4-5). All

this is in tatters for Peter's readers; what was theirs now seems lost and gone. We Gentiles, however, never had it in the first place. We are those whom Paul elsewhere describes as "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12).

The glory of the gospel of Christ is a double glory, for it not only proclaims a new and living hope for Peter's exiles of the dispersion, but it also declares that the Gentiles can now have a share of it as well. God has made the two one through the blood of Christ, and consequently we are no longer foreigners, but fellow citizens with *God's* people Israel, and members of *God's* household (see Eph 2:11-22).

This means that what Peter offers to these Jewish Christians—the gospel he reminds them of, the doctrine he teaches them, the encouragement he gives them—these things belong to Gentile Christians as well. By virtue of being grafted into Israel, they too now know what it is to feel out of place, misunderstood and mistreated as *God's* people. They also are hated because the world hates Jesus. And through the gospel, they too can now receive all the strength and encouragement that comes from knowing that they are chosen by God, set apart by his Spirit for the special purpose of being obedient to Jesus, the Messiah—the one whose sprinkled blood makes us members of a new covenant.

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- How do the opening verses relate to the rest of the letter? Did any of the themes or ideas from the opening verses crop up again as you read through the whole letter?

- Look again at Exodus 24:1-8. What is the purpose of the blood? What do you think is the connection between obedience and blood? How do you think this relates to the new covenant, and to the blood of Jesus?

- In what sense are all Christians out of place in the world? Do you feel as if you belong in the world?

- What in this study prompts you to give thanks to God?

-
- In 1 Peter 1:2, the "sanctification of the Spirit" comes prior to the obedience and the sprinkling. In other words, it is talking about something different from our 'sanctification' as we would normally describe it (i.e. our progress in godliness). What do you think Peter is referring to?

 - In what sense is the doctrine of God's election (that he chooses us to be saved) a source of comfort?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for choosing you to be one of his children and sanctifying you by his Spirit. If you are a Gentile, thank God for grafting you into the commonwealth of Israel so that you now share in the covenants of promise.
- Ask him to help you to be obedient to Christ and to stand firm in the true grace of God.
- Ask God to help you put into practice the things you learn as you study 1 Peter.

Endnote

1. For more detailed notes on this question, visit:
www.matthiasmedia.com.au/briefing/library/2479/



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The talks are an ideal accompaniment to the *Homeward Bound* studies. Small group leaders will especially benefit from the extra insights and ideas.

TALK 1	Reborn to Inherit	1 Peter 1:1-5	43min
TALK 2	Reborn for Salvation	1 Peter 1:6-12	45min
TALK 3	Reborn to be Holy	1 Peter 1:13-21	31min
TALK 4	Reborn to Grow	1 Peter 1:22-2:3	48min
TALK 5	Reborn to God's Temple	1 Peter 2:4-10	35min
TALK 6	Living in Society	1 Peter 2:11-17	56min
TALK 7	Living with Injustice	1 Peter 2:18-25	47min
TALK 8	Living with Your Spouse	1 Peter 3:1-7	57min
TALK 9	Living with Persecution	1 Peter 3:8-17	60min
TALK 10	Christ's Present Victory	1 Peter 3:18-22	40min
TALK 11	Too Late to Party	1 Peter 4:1-6	51min
TALK 12	Too Early to Party	1 Peter 4:7-11	48min
TALK 13	Time for Judgement	1 Peter 4:12-19	26min
TALK 14	From Suffering to Glory	1 Peter 5:1-5	46min
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The first letter of Peter is one of the gems of the New Testament. It is packed with glorious doctrine and teaching about our salvation in Christ, about how we are strangers and exiles here on earth, and about our true home in heaven that is to be the focus of our lives. And yet it is equally full of stirring challenges and practical encouragement to live good lives among the unbelievers around us, even when that means suffering and heartache.

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