

# Homeward Bound

**1 Peter**



**10 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

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**1 Peter**

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&  
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# *How to make the most of these studies*

## **1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?**

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you through 1 Peter, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot 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 sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read. Interspersed throughout the text are three types of ‘interaction’, each with their own symbol:



### **For starters**

Questions to break the ice and get you thinking.



### **Investigate**

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



### **Think it through**

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

## **3. Suggestions for Individual Study**

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in 1 Peter and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

## 4. Suggestions for Group Study

- 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 threesomes. Get together with a friend/s 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.
- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—*Investigate* and *Think it Through*. Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- 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 important sections of text to emphasize, 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.
- 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 1 Peter 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.

**For more input**

There is a series of audio cassettes available which expound the relevant passages (see page 95 for details).

**Before you begin**

We recommend that before you start on Study 1, you take the time to read right through 1 Peter in one sitting. This will give you a feel for the direction and purpose of the whole book and help you greatly in looking at each passage in its context.

# *God's refugees*

## **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 (“Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”, to which Luke adds the almost unnecessary comment “He did not know what he was saying”)? Or his marvellous confession of Christ at Caesarea Philippi, followed immediately by his upstart rebuke of this same Christ (in Mk 8)? Or his misplaced bravado at the Last Supper followed so soon by his snoozing at Gethsemane and his three-fold denial of Jesus shortly after?

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 should become the spokesman for the whole Christian movement; that he should so eloquently and effectively preach the gospel of the Messiah in Acts 2; and that he should defend 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, the 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.



### **Investigate**

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—whether it was Peter's wife perhaps, or a church—or indeed whether Babylon was a code name for Rome.

Some things are more clear, namely that the letter is addressed from Peter, Jesus Christ's ambassador or 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 etc."

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 at the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, where Jews from all over the Middle-East and Mediterranean converged on Jerusalem for the Jewish feast, from places such as Pontus, Cappadocia and Asia (mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1).

This is the group Peter evangelized with such success at Pentecost, and which continued to be his mission field. It is to these Christian Jews, exiled in the Dispersion, but nevertheless chosen by God, that Peter writes.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Most modern commentators on 1 Peter do not take this view, 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 of which Israel was guilty 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. For more detailed notes on this question, visit our website at [www.matthiasmedia.com.au/IBS\\_notes/HomewardBound.html](http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/IBS_notes/HomewardBound.html)

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 been grafted on, as Paul puts it in Romans 11. 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 to understand what Peter was actually saying to his readers, and this in turn will help us to apply it rightly to ourselves, whether we are Jew or Gentile.



### **Investigate**

1. 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 given them a summary title. (There is even a short 'hinge' or 'bridge' between them.)

<b>Verses</b>	<b>Title</b>
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1:1-2	Opening greeting
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_____	Mainly doctrinal section: _____
-------	---------------------------------

_____	Hinge or bridge
-------	-----------------

_____	Mainly practical section: _____
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5:12-14	Closing greetings
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2. If you are in a small group, discuss how you divided up the letter and why.
  
3. Come back to the opening greeting in 1:1-2. In verse 2, what three phrases describe these exiles:
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
4. Look up the following cross-references to help understand what these phrases mean:
  - a. Ephesians 1:3-5; Acts 2:23
  
  - b. 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14
  
  - c. 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 Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor. 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 ever 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 and be despised, to be rejected and ill-treated in the world, yet 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 in order to be exiled. We have never had a homeland to long for. As for Israel, theirs is the adoption as sons, theirs 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 "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without 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—belongs to Gentile Christians as well. By virtue of being grafted in to 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.



## Think it through

1. 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?

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

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

4. What in this study prompts you to give thanks to God?

5. In 1 Peter 1:2, the “sanctifying work 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?

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