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EDMUND CLOWNEY

The Message of

1 Peter

THE NEW TESTAMENT SERIES EDITOR: JOHN R. W. STOTT

The Message of 1 Peter

The way of the cross

Edmund Clowney

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General preface

THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY describes three series of expositions, based on the books of the Old and New Testaments, and on Bible themes that run through the whole of Scripture. Each series is characterized by a threefold ideal:

- to expound the biblical text with accuracy
- to relate it to contemporary life, and
- to be readable.

These books are, therefore, not ‘commentaries’, for the commentary seeks rather to elucidate the text than to apply it, and tends to be a work rather of reference than of literature. Nor, on the other hand, do they contain the kinds of ‘sermons’ that attempt to be contemporary and readable without taking Scripture seriously enough. The contributors to *The Bible Speaks Today* series are all united in their convictions that God still speaks through what he has spoken, and that nothing is more necessary for the life, health and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient—yet ever modern—Word.

ALEC MOTYER
JOHN STOTT
DEREK TIDBALL
Series editors

Author's preface

This exposition has been written in the hope that it will be *read* and not just consulted. Writing it has brought new awe and joy before the miracle of God's word written and before the Lord of that word.

I have sought to bring five perspectives into relation:

1. Peter's testimony against the background of his own experience as Christ's disciple.
2. The Old Testament promises with which the letter is saturated.
3. The apostolic faith that Peter shared with Paul and other authors of the New Testament.
4. The Hellenistic world in which his hearers lived.
5. Our world and the significance of the letter for us.

Writing this exposition has deepened my admiration and gratitude for the devoted scholarship of Peter's interpreters through the years. There is surely no lack of excellent commentaries on 1 Peter, and some are eminently readable. The long commentary by Archbishop Robert Leighton, written in the seventeenth century, is a devotional classic. Wayne Grudem graciously provided me with a manuscript of his recent commentary; I regret that most of my work was finished before I had this scholarly (and readable!) study to consult. I would express particular appreciation to Samuel Bénétreau of the Free Faculty of Evangelical Theology at Vaux-sur-Seine, France. I trust that his commentary may yet appear in English translation.

My thanks are due to the Rev. John Stott for proposing this project and for his wise and patient guidance; to the Rev. Joseph F. Ryan and the elders and staff of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Charlottesville, Virginia, for their prayers and support; to Mrs Del Jones for typing the footnotes; and to our son-in-law and daughter, Jay and Deborah Weinger, whose generous gift first brought Trinity Church into the computer age.

My wife Jean has found many ways to bring loving assistance to this as to all the projects of our life together.

EDMUND P. CLOWNEY

Chief abbreviations

General

- AF* The Apostolic Fathers, edited by J. B. Lightfoot (1869, 1885; Baker Book House, 1962).
- ANET* *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by J. B. Pritchard (Princeton University Press, 2 1955).
- ASV* The American Standard Version of the Bible (1901).
- AV* The Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible (1611).
- BAGD* *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated and adapted by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, second edition revised and augmented by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (University of Chicago Press, 1979).
- BDF* *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and edited by R. W. Funk (University of Chicago Press, 1961).
- DSS* *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, edited by G. Vermes (Penguin, 2 1970).
- Eusebius Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* (c. AD 325).
- GNT* *The Greek New Testament*, edited by K. Aland, M. Black, *et al.* (United Bible Societies, 3 1975).
- KB* *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, edited by L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner (Brill, 1953).
- LXX* The Septuagint (Greek Version of the Old Testament, 3rd century BC).
- mg margin.
- NIV* The New International Version of the Bible (1973, 1978, 1984).
- NTS* *New Testament Studies*.
- ODCC* *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford University Press, 3 1974).
- OTS* Oudtestamentische Studien, Leiden.
- RSV* The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NT 1946, 2 1971, OT 1952).
- TDNT* *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964–1976).
- ThZ* Theologische Zeitschrift.
- WTJ* *Westminster Theological Journal*.

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Introduction

‘The First Epistle of Saint Peter—the most condensed New Testament résumé of the Christian faith and of the conduct that it inspires—is a model of a “pastoral letter”.’ Ceslas Spicq begins his rewarding commentary on 1 Peter with this apt description.^[1]

Pastoral—Peter’s letter is surely that. The apostle seeks to encourage and reassure Christian churches in Asia Minor as stormy seasons of persecution begin. Those storms rage on today—in India where a Hindu mob destroys a Christian church built at great sacrifice in the poorest slum of Bombay; in many Communist lands where to confess Christ brings the loss of educational privilege and job opportunities, and often results in imprisonment. In much of the English-speaking world such threats may seem distant; perhaps we fail to read the signs of the times. No Christian avoids suffering, however, and no true Christian escapes a measure of suffering for Christ’s sake. Peter speaks to us all when he tells of suffering now and glory to come.

Peter’s pastoral letter encourages us by instructing us. Our deepest needs drive us to our deepest beliefs. What hope do we have? Peter proclaims Jesus Christ, our sure hope now and for ever. Throughout his letter he grounds our hope in the reality of what God has done and will yet do for us through Christ. The apostle is a witness, not just to what Jesus did and said while he was in his fishing-boat or in his house, but to the meaning of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Peter’s testimony about the life of Jesus is reflected in Mark’s Gospel.^[2] In this letter he shows us what that story means for us as Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him.

1. To whom is the letter written?

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia are the provinces or areas where the Christians lived to whom the letter is addressed. If the terms are used to name Roman provinces, the area covers the whole of Asia Minor north of the Taurus mountain chain that skirts the southern coast. Most of modern Turkey would be included. It is possible, however, that the terms describe regions rather than official provinces.^[3] If so, the area is smaller, since both Galatia and Asia, thought of as regions, were more restricted. The possible significance of the smaller area would be that some of the regions of Paul’s intensive missionary work would not be included (*e.g.* Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe). Paul was restrained by the Spirit from entering Bithynia; was that region reserved for others? The early church historian Eusebius suggests that Peter himself may have had a part in the evangelization of the areas he names.^[4] Obviously, Peter had some reason for addressing Christians in these provinces or regions and not in others. (He does not include Lycia and Pamphylia, or Cilicia, provinces south of the Taurus Mountains.) It is attractive to suppose that he has in view areas of Asia Minor that had been more directly related to his own ministry than to Paul’s.

Pontus and Bithynia, on the shore of the Black Sea, are named separately although they had been joined into one Roman province. It has been suggested that Peter begins with Pontus and ends with Bithynia because he is thinking of the route that Silas or another messenger might take in delivering the letter; a traveller could start from Amisus at the eastern end of Pontus on the Black Sea and finish at Chalcedon in Bithynia. From there he could cross to Byzantium where ship passage could be found for Rome.^[5]

The geographical areas addressed include a ‘fantastic conglomeration of territories’—coastal regions, mountain ranges, plateaux, lakes and river systems. The inhabitants were even more diverse. They had ‘different origins, ethnic roots, languages, customs, religions, and political histories’.^[6] Galatia was so named after Gauls who had settled there; Gallic was still spoken there in the fourth century.^[7] Luke refers to the language of Lycaonia spoken by the people of Lystra.^[8] There was a substantial Jewish population in Asia Minor.^[9] Jews from Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia were present in Jerusalem at Pentecost, and heard Peter’s sermon.^[10] Converts returning to those provinces may well have planted the gospel there.

If the spread of the Christian faith in these regions followed the pattern of Paul’s missionary strategy, we may suppose that churches were first established in urban centres, and that Jewish believers along with Gentile adherents to Judaism (‘God-fearers’) formed the original nucleus of many house churches and congregations. Much of the population was rural, however; the interior was dotted with tribal villages where Roman culture had made little impact.^[11] The power of the Christian gospel among tribal peoples may first have become evident in Asia Minor. The experience of Paul and Barnabas at Lystra indicates the dramatic impact of the gospel in a region that was only partly Hellenized.^[12]

While we do not know just what ‘people-groups’ or strata of society were included among the Christians of Asia Minor, we are struck by the unity that the gospel produces. Diverse as the backgrounds of these people were, they had become the new people of God, the brotherhood, the chosen people scattered in the world (2:9–10, 17; 5:9; 1:1).

The inclusive language in which this letter speaks of the church makes it clear that Peter is addressing the whole church—not just one segment of the Christian community. He writes not only to those who are ‘alien residents’ in the literal sense,^[13] nor only to Jewish believers. This last issue has been long debated. If Peter were writing to Jewish converts, they certainly must have been lapsed Jews, for Peter speaks of ‘the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers’ (1:18). He describes that wicked lifestyle: ‘doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry’ (4:3). Jews would be lapsed indeed who could be so described! But even if their lives were fully pagan, Peter would hardly say that such a way of life had been handed down from their

fathers.¹⁴ Neither could we understand pagan neighbours being surprised if such apostate Jews returned to the moral lifestyle of Judaism.¹⁵ It seems clear, therefore, that Peter thinks of the churches to which he writes as predominantly Gentile. The extensive use that Peter makes of the Old Testament reveals his own Jewish training, but we need not assume the same background for his hearers. Paul's letters to predominantly Gentile churches are also steeped in the Old Testament.

2. Who wrote the letter?

The address of the letter claims the apostle Peter as the author, a claim that should not be discounted. It is not true that the church would regard such a claim as a 'harmless literary device'.¹⁶ A number of other works claiming to be written by Peter were rejected as not apostolic. Since the apostles were rightly regarded as invested with Christ's authority for the establishment of the church, a false claim to that authority could not be taken lightly. We need only recall Paul's defence of his apostolic office to see the importance that the church attached to apostolic authority.

The attestation of the letter in other writings is early and strong.¹⁷ The earliest is the reference in 2 Peter 3:1. Clement of Rome (before the end of the first century) quotes from the letter, although he does not identify his quotation. Quotations continue to appear in other early Christian writers. Irenaeus, in the second century, expressly attributes his quotations to the epistle.

Those who hold that Peter was not the author of the letter advance four principal arguments.¹⁸ First they maintain that the Greek style is too polished for a Galilean fisherman (a reference in Papias to John Mark as Peter's 'interpreter' is taken by some to mean that Peter needed an interpreter because he was not fluent in Greek).¹⁹ Secondly, it is urged that the persecutions alluded to in the letter did not occur till after Peter's death. Thirdly, the letter is said to be too much like Paul's writings to have come from Peter. Fourthly, many who recognize significant differences from Paul's writings maintain, nevertheless, that 1 Peter contains traditional teaching materials from the early church and is not the kind of letter that one of the first disciples of Jesus would have written.

The last objection is met by recognizing the purpose of the letter. Peter's eye-witness to the words and deeds of Jesus had already been given. John Mark's 'interpreting' of Peter's message involved his recording of Peter's witness in the Gospel of Mark. In the epistle, knowledge of the story of Jesus is assumed, and Peter is concerned to instruct the church in the apostolic interpretation of the gospel. This apostolic teaching is found also in Paul's letters. The objection that 1 Peter is too Pauline is met by recognizing that Paul as well as Peter conformed his teaching to the apostolic 'pattern of sound teaching'.²⁰ On the other hand, Peter's teaching has distinctive elements. For example, Paul does not employ the 'servant of the Lord' description of Christ's work as Peter does.²¹

It is true that the traditional date for the death of Peter under Nero precedes the major periods of Roman persecution. The letter, however, does not reflect a situation of official and general oppression. Rather, it is a time of local harassment and sporadic persecution, a time in which Christians are warned to prepare for greater suffering for Christ's sake in the future.²²

The issue of Peter's proficiency in Greek has been made the key objection to his authorship. Some commentators who hold that the letter does come from Peter think that he must have had help, and that his mention of Silas (5:12) indicates who his helper was. This argument, too, has been challenged. For one thing, the Greek of 1 Peter is not as polished in style as has sometimes been suggested.²³ Further, the charge that Peter's Greek must have been minimal or lacking fails to take account of the bilingual culture of Bethsaida in Galilee. An imaginative grammarian of the Greek language has said that Galilee could be compared to a bilingual region like Wales and that Peter's Greek was probably as good as a Welshman's English.²⁴ Ceslas Spicq reminds us that Peter did, after all, receive the gift of tongues at Pentecost!²⁵

The greatest assurance of the authenticity of 1 Peter comes from the letter itself.²⁶ Its message is closely linked to the speeches of Peter reported in the book of Acts. Spicq points to 1 Peter 1:10–12, a section unique in the New Testament letters: it speaks of the searching inquiries of the Old Testament prophets as they looked forward to the day of Christ. This, he says, is only to be expected from the pen of the apostle 'who founded the first Christian apologetic in referring to their testimony (Acts 2:25–31; 3:18–25; 10:43)'.²⁷ So, too, the references in the letter to the sufferings of Christ reflect Peter's understanding of the calling of Jesus as the Servant of the Lord: an understanding that was drawn from Christ's own teaching and example. As Selwyn says, 'This impression of eyewitness runs through the Epistle, and gives it a distinctive character.'²⁸ Peter marvels at the love of those who have never seen Christ (1:8); his message of the living hope in Christ has its background in his despair at the crucifixion, and his joy in fellowship with the risen Christ. His emphasis on humility has poignant meaning after the boasting that preceded his fall. The Lord had charged him to tend his flock, and he passes that admonition on to other under-shepherds.

On the role of Silas ('Silvanus' in some versions), see the comments on 5:12. Silas was Paul's fellow-missionary in Asia Minor and in Greece, and is associated with Paul in the address of the letters to the Thessalonians. He was also a representative of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, and is named as a prophet.²⁹ If he did serve as an editor or co-author with Peter, he did so as an inspired man. Peter's phrase describing the service of Silas is used of the bearer of a letter, who was regarded as a representative of the sender. This was the function of Silas in relation to the letter sent from Jerusalem as described in Acts 15. If Silas were the bearer in such a role, he was much more than a letter-carrier. He had

a voice in the Jerusalem Council that prepared the letter he carried for that body. So, too, he may have conferred with Peter in the preparation of the letter, or may have drafted it under Peter's direction.

3. What kind of letter is it?

In Peter's brief letter there is great variety in both form and content. Quotations and allusions from the Old Testament abound.^[30] Psalm 34, for example, is directly cited twice (2:3; 3:10–12), and its themes of hope for the persecuted exile echo through the letter.^[31] While there is no direct quotation of the words of Jesus, 1 Peter, like James, continually reflects the sayings of the Master.^[32]

Some would claim that 1 Peter is not a letter, but a sermon or catechetical instruction to accompany the sacrament of baptism.^[33] It has even been represented as a liturgy for a baptismal service.^[34] (The baptism is supposed to take place after 2:21.) As Wayne Grudem points out, however, the only explicit reference to baptism in the letter is in 3:21, and 'mention of the beginning of the Christian life does not in itself imply a reference to baptism'.^[35] Another form that has been detected in the letter is that of early Christian hymns or credal statements.^[36] The possibility cannot be excluded, but the rhythmic expression that suggests a hymn or creed may be simply the eloquence of preaching and teaching.

The best account of the form of 1 Peter remains the summary at the end of the letter: 'I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it' (or, 'in which you stand fast'; 5:12b). The letter is full of encouragement and witness common to the apostolic teaching; we may assume that this is not the first time that Peter has taught these things. But the letter is freely written; Peter does not piece together material drawn from others. He speaks with deep understanding and feeling out of his own knowledge as an apostle of Christ.

4. Where and when was it written?

The 'Babylon' from which Peter sends his greetings (5:13) can scarcely have been the desolate and ruined city in Mesopotamia. Rome is called 'Babylon' in the book of Revelation (16:19; 17:5; 18:2), and it is understandable that Peter would use the name in a symbolic way. He thinks of the Christian church as the people of God in exile and dispersion (1:1, 17; 2:9–11). Babylon was the great city of world empire for the Old Testament prophets; it was also the city of exile, where Israel lived as resident aliens. Peter's use of the name 'Babylon' reminds his hearers that he, too, shares their status as a 'displaced person'.

Further, the early church fathers understood that both Peter and Paul had been martyred in Rome. Eusebius, the historian of the early church, quotes from both Papias and Origen to support this.^[37] (Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, died about AD 130.) John Mark, who is mentioned by Peter (5:13), is also mentioned by Paul, writing from Rome.^[38]

Since Peter's letter mentions Mark but not Paul, it seems unlikely that Paul was in Rome at the time it was written. By the same token, Paul does not mention Peter in his letters, even when he seems to be naming the 'men of the circumcision' who remained his faithful comrades.^[39] According to tradition, Peter was at Rome only at the end of his life.^[40] It would seem, therefore, that Peter wrote from Rome after Paul had left, released from his first imprisonment in AD 62.^[41]

It does seem unlikely that Nero's fierce assault on the Christians in Rome could have begun. One would suppose that Peter would have made some reference to it in describing the loyalty due to the king (2:13–17). The date AD 63, after Paul's departure and before Nero's persecution, has a high degree of probability.

5. What is its message?

Facing impending assaults on the gospel, Peter witnesses to the grace of God, the overwhelming reality of what God has done in Jesus Christ. The apostle knows that Jesus rose from the dead; he saw him ascend to heaven. He knows, too, why Jesus died, and what his death accomplished: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed' (2:24). The reality of what Christ has done makes sure the hope of the Christian 'brotherhood'. Christians can not only endure suffering for Christ's sake; they can rejoice, for in their agony they are joined to Jesus who suffered for them. Their very sufferings become a sign of hope, for, as Christ suffered and entered into his glory, so will they. The Spirit of glory and of God rests on them (4:14).

Whether their neighbours attack or respect them, they can bear witness to the grace of God by their Christian lifestyle. Quietly and humbly they can live holy lives, not seeking to claim their own rights, but honouring others. Such humble living is in no way servile or demeaning, for Christians know themselves to be the royal people of God's own possession, the chosen heirs of the new creation. They need not avenge themselves, nor need they claim for themselves what is their due; their trust is in the judgment of God. Christians are 'resident aliens' in Babylon, but they are members of God's own household.

The gift of God's love, the blood of Jesus Christ, has redeemed Christians from the corrupt and empty lifestyle of their pagan past; that grace now unites them in fervent love for one another. They serve and help one another, using the rich spiritual gifts with which God's grace equips them. Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the flock of God, watches over his people. He calls undershepherds to serve him in guarding his sheep. The victory of Jesus Christ over all the powers of darkness frees his people from the power of Satan. They can repulse the roaring lion; in the fires of trial their faith will not be destroyed but purified like gold in the furnace. They may cast all their cares on God, knowing that he cares for them.

The grace that already fills Christians with joy will be brought to them fully at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The Lord, whom they love but have not seen, they will see and adore. Knowing well the doom and darkness from which they were delivered, the new people of God sing forth his praises. Their hallelujahs ring from their assemblies, their homes, even from the prison cells where their fear of God has set them free from the fear of man. Their witness is a witness of praise. Nourished by the unfailing Word of God, they taste already the goodness of their Saviour. The true grace of God has called them to his glory: everything, even their sufferings, will serve his purpose who redeemed them at such a price.

Some may scorn the comfort and triumph of Peter's letter as unpractical theology. His answers are answers of faith. But Peter knows that his witness is true, that Jesus Christ is real. He has tasted that the Lord is good, and that his goodness will not fail. 'This is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it' (5:12).

Armando Valladares closes his account of twenty-two years in Castro's prisons in Cuba with these words, recalling his thoughts as he was released:

And in the midst of that apocalyptic vision of the most dreadful and horrifying moments of my life, in the midst of the gray, ashy dust and the orgy of beatings and blood, prisoners beaten to the ground, a man emerged, the skeletal figure of a man wasted by hunger, with white hair, blazing blue eyes, and a heart overflowing with love, raising his arms to the invisible heaven and pleading for mercy for his executioners.

'Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.' And a burst of machine-gun fire ripping open his breast. 42

1. The apostle to the Jews blesses God's true people (1:1–2)

1. He greets them with blessing

Greetings cards are big business in the United States and Britain. Misty photographs of lovers, paintings of little gamins, grotesque cartoons: they crowd long display racks. But for all their variety, the cards still repeat standard formulas of greeting. There are only a limited number of ways to say 'Get well soon' or 'Happy birthday'.

But Christians, and especially Christian apostles, may think of greetings as more than formalities. Early Christians did use the common greeting 'Wish you joy!' ¹ But Peter, Paul and John salute the church with greetings that become blessings; a wish for joy becomes an apostolic pronouncement of grace. ² The Old Testament form of this blessing is on the lips of David: 'May the Lord now show you kindness and faithfulness.' ³ The New Testament heightens the meaning of God's mercy and grace. Grace 'signifies God's love in action in Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners.' ⁴

What makes a greeting a blessing? Peter gives the answer in the words that precede his blessing. It is the work of the Spirit. When a minister of God's word pronounces a blessing at the end of a service of worship, it is the action of God's Spirit that gives power to his words. *Grace* is a gift; God is the giver. Our words of blessing are not magic; they do not communicate grace by their own power, or because we speak them. But when they are spoken in faith to the people of God, God honours them. They are much more than wishes; more, even, than prayers. They declare God's own favour toward those who are in Christ.

Coupled with grace in apostolic greetings is *peace*. *Grace* transforms the greeting of the Greeks; *peace* gives new meaning to *shalom*, the salutation of the Hebrews. The priests of the Old Testament pronounced God's blessing of peace upon the people: 'The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.' ⁵ Sinful Israel forfeited that blessing and brought upon itself the judgment of captivity. But the prophets foresaw a day when God would deliver his people, not only from their oppressors, but from their sins. ⁶ God himself would be their Saviour: 'O Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us, thou hast wrought for us all our works.' ⁷

Simon Peter, the Galilean fisherman, knew the Prince of Peace of whom Isaiah spoke. In the upper room at the last supper, and again after the resurrection, Jesus had blessed the disciples with his peace. ⁸ That peace was not the political peace that the people expected the Messiah to bring. The world, Jesus said, could not give it or take it away. The Messiah's peace was given in the shadow of the cross. Jesus gave his peace not only in spite of the cross, but because of the cross. By his death he bore the judgment of God's just wrath and made peace not only between Jew and Gentile, but between God and man.

Peter's brief greeting, *Grace and peace be yours in abundance*, gives in miniature the whole message of his letter. He writes to those who already feel the scorn and malice of an unbelieving world. Writing from Rome under the emperor Nero, Peter knows that they will experience much worse. Can he really pronounce peace in abundance to those who are only beginning to discover the suffering to which Christians are called? Peter writes for that very purpose. Once he had fought to defend the *shalom* of the Messiah. Under the olive trees of Gethsemane, he drew his sword to resist those who came to arrest Jesus. But Jesus had made him sheath his weapon after one misdirected stroke. Peter wanted to fight because he feared that the death of Jesus would end all hope of victory, all hope of the Messiah's peace. But the death of Jesus had done the opposite. It had accomplished the salvation of God's Anointed. Now Peter, the apostle of the risen Lord, can pronounce peace; the peace that comes, not by the sword, but by the cross. His letter expands on the blessing that is distilled in his greeting.

Peter prepares for his letter by identifying himself and his readers. We are struck by a contrast; he says so much about them and so little about himself. Peter is simply *an apostle of Jesus Christ*. He makes no claim to be a prince among the apostles, but neither does he feel any need to justify or defend his apostolic office, as Paul had occasion to do. Peter's calling as an apostle would be well known wherever the gospel had been preached. Peter was one of the twelve chosen by Jesus to be with him. ⁹ He was the first to confess, in the name of all, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son the living God. To him Jesus replied, 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.' ¹⁰

To be sure, Peter is not the foundation rock apart from his confession. Christ's words are addressed to the Peter who has received revelation from the Father in heaven. ¹¹ When Peter a little later rebukes Jesus for speaking of the cross, Jesus does not call him Peter, but rather Satan. He has become the rock in a different sense; not the rock of foundation, but a rock to stumble over. ¹²

Neither may Peter be isolated from the eleven. Jesus grants to them all the power of the keys of the kingdom that he gave to Peter. The church is not built on Peter as an isolated stone, but upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, those who like Peter have received the revelation of Christ. ¹³

At the same time, neither may we separate Peter's confession from Peter. Jesus does not build his church on a confession in the abstract, but on the confessing apostle. To Peter's word 'You are the Christ,' Jesus replies, 'You are Peter.' Peter had recognized Jesus, the Christ; Jesus will recognize Peter, the rock. To Peter is given the calling to open the gates of the kingdom to Jewish and Gentile believers. He does so at Jerusalem in the midst of the eleven, and at Caesarea as one of the eye-witnesses of the resurrection. ¹⁴ Peter has a prominent role to fulfil as an apostle and an eye-

witness, but he is not given a higher authority than that of other apostles. It is enough for Peter, in this letter, to identify himself as an apostle; he bears witness not to himself, but to Christ as the chief cornerstone of God's spiritual temple (2:5-8).

Peter's witness is strong. He knows what he has seen and heard; he knows, too, his appointment by Jesus, and the revelation from the Father that has equipped him to serve. Simon Peter the fisherman can put the rabbis to shame; he can stand before rulers to give a reason for the hope that he has.^[15] He does so as Christ's apostle, rejoicing in the faith of those who have not seen and yet have believed (1:8).

Peter is Christ's apostle, too, in giving inspired and authoritative teaching to the church. When we think of Peter as the author of this letter, we may at first be disappointed. Why did not Peter report to us more of the words of Jesus, more of his miracles? What scenes from the life of Jesus Peter could have painted! Every Bible student notices how similar Peter's first letter is to the letters of Paul. But Paul was never with Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, or in a fishing-boat on the lake, or in the upper room at Jerusalem. How can Peter fail to draw on his days with Jesus as he writes to people who have never seen the Lord?

As we saw in the Introduction, the absence of such personal references has led some scholars to conclude that Peter could not have written the letter.^[16] Yet it is presumptuous, to say the least, for us to imagine that we know what the apostle must have written. More than that, it shows a misunderstanding of Peter's witness as an apostle and of his particular purpose in writing.

As an apostle, Peter shared with others in teaching the faith.^[17] He did not desire to attract a personal following of those who would relish his distinctive insights or experiences. He was one of a company charged by the risen Christ to testify that 'he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.'^[18] The teaching of Jesus during his ministry, and especially in the forty days between his resurrection and ascension, moulded the apostolic tradition. The gospel that Paul received^[19] was the apostolic deposit, the pattern of sound teaching that proclaimed the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises in Christ. The apostolic message was not a *melange* of individual testimonies prepared as the twelve spoke for five minutes each on 'what the resurrection means to me'. Rather, it was the Lord's interpretation of his own work in the light of his own word; he must 'suffer these things and enter into his glory.'^[20] Peter preached the apostolic message at Pentecost; the church was established in the tradition of apostolic teaching.^[21] Peter continues to teach this in his letter. It is a message saturated with the Old Testament, a message that proclaims the fulfilment in Christ of all that the prophets promised.^[22]

Peter's purpose in writing this letter is not to give a first announcement about the words and works of Jesus. Peter's preaching on that subject is reflected in the Gospel of Mark.^[23] Neither does Peter address one local church in order to deal with its particular problems (as Paul often does). Rather, his purpose is to deepen the understanding of the whole Christian church in Asia Minor so that believers may face the testings that await them with strong hope in Christ. His letter may reflect the teaching he and others would give to prepare new converts for baptism. Some passages may echo hymns or credal statements from the apostolic period. What is clear throughout is that Peter teaches the common doctrine of the apostolic testimony.

We do well to remember the authority of Peter as an apostle. Jesus taught with unique authority as the Son of God, but he also commissioned his apostles to teach in his name. He promised his Spirit to bring his words to their memory and to teach them other things after his resurrection.^[24] The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets because they received the revelation of Christ.^[25] The office of the apostle does not and cannot continue, for the apostles were eye-witnesses of Christ's resurrection.^[26] Peter, as an apostle, together with Silas, a prophet, laboured with other apostles and prophets to lay the foundation of the church. Together they taught the doctrine that Jesus committed to them in the Spirit. The church is apostolic today to the extent that it remains upon the doctrinal foundation established by the apostles. No-one today can claim the authority of an apostle, either by virtue of ecclesiastical office or charismatic endowment. The work and calling of the apostle are finished in witnessing to the final revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He is the final Prophet, just as he is the final Priest, and Peter writes to bear authoritative witness to him.

Why are we drawn to Peter's letter? Certainly it is fascinating to read a genuine document written by one who knew Jesus so well. Today, as in Peter's time, there are storms of persecution rising against the church. Never was it more important to understand how the church is to be related to the world. But we are drawn to Peter's letter by a more fundamental reason. Peter is an inspired apostle, and what he writes is the word of God. We come to a letter that is addressed to the Christians of Asia by Peter, but to the church of all ages by the Spirit of Christ.

2. He greets them as the true people of God

After briefly identifying himself, Peter addresses those to whom he writes as the people of God. They are the new Diaspora, *scattered* in the world, but *chosen by the Father*, sanctified by *the Spirit* and cleansed by the *sprinkling of Christ's blood*.

Feel the drama in that description. Peter is writing primarily to Gentiles, to those who had no part in the people of God, but who followed the 'empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers' (1:18). They had lived to the full the Gentile life of 'debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry' (4:3). Peter, a pious Jew, would regard pagan Gentiles with scorn and loathing. Indeed, even as an apostle, Peter had been called to minister particularly

to Jewish Christians. He was sent to the 'circumcision.'²⁷ Peter was shocked when God, in a vision, commanded him to eat food that was not kosher.²⁸ Only after God's rooftop session of reorientation was Peter ready to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile army officer. There he explained that God's revelation had overcome his conviction 'that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.'²⁹

This is the apostle who writes to Gentiles living in Asia Minor (now Turkey) and greets them as God's chosen and holy people! What could cause such an about-face on the part of this very Jewish fisherman? The answer, of course, is Jesus. Peter came to a new understanding of what it meant to belong to the people of God: it meant to belong to the Messiah, the Son of God.

Nothing is more astonishing than that he should call these Gentiles the *chosen of God the Father* (1:2). Israel was God's chosen people. Theirs was 'the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants ...'³⁰ God 'set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people.'³¹ How could Gentiles be called God's chosen, his elect?

Think of the answer Peter might have given. He could not deny that Cornelius and his family had been added to the people of God. They had received the same Holy Spirit who had come upon the Jewish believers at Pentecost. But Peter might have felt that these Gentiles were second-class citizens. They had been added, he might have suspected, as a divine afterthought. When many of the Jews did not believe, the Lord decided to admit a few Gentiles on a provisional basis.³²

Peter's answer is entirely different. These Christian Gentiles are God's chosen people because he has known them from all eternity. Jesus Christ was foreknown by the Father before the world was created.³³ The chosen people of Christ are also foreknown by the Father. Their inclusion in the people of God is no accident, no afterthought, but God's purpose from the beginning. Those who are foreknown by God are foreknown in and with Christ. The expression *foreknowledge* does not mean that God had information in advance about Christ, or about his elect. Rather it means that both Christ and his people were the objects of God's loving concern from all eternity.

Paul speaks of God's foreknowledge in the same way. As a Pharisee he could not conceive that Israel might reject the Messiah and be themselves rejected. After Jesus met him on the road to Damascus he preached the message he had sought to silence. Yet, in a new form, the problem remained. His former friends now rejected *his* message. 'Did God reject his people?' Paul asks.³⁴ It might seem so. But Paul answers, 'By no means! I am an Israelite myself ... God did not reject his people, *whom he foreknew*.'³⁵

God's foreknowledge is of crucial importance for Paul, as for Peter. Paul has reflected on the Old Testament teaching about the 'remnant'. God has not cast off *all* Israel. A remainder is left. Paul is a case in point. What then distinguishes at last those who were cast off from those who remained? Certainly nothing in them. Paul was not wiser, more responsive, less stubborn or less self-righteous than his Pharisaical colleagues who continued to hate the name of Jesus. No, Paul is distinguished from them only by God's choosing, God's electing grace. Christ met Saul the persecutor; the Spirit of God gave him new birth. He was chosen by God in Christ before the foundation of the world.³⁶ God does not cast off those, like Paul, whom he foreknew. There is therefore a choosing within the choosing of Israel, 'a remnant according to the election of grace'.³⁷ They are not all Israel that are of Israel, nor are all of Abraham's descendants true children of God.³⁸

Since it is God's choosing, not physical descent, that establishes the true people of God, God is surely free to choose others outside of Israel. Paul makes this clear: if in royal grace God determines to call a renewed Israel 'Ammi', 'my people', when they had been 'Lo-ammi', 'no people', then he may say the same to Gentiles.³⁹ This, indeed, has been promised by the prophets. God will gather a remnant from the nations along with the remnant of Israel to assemble his new people.⁴⁰

What mighty assurance Peter gives to these Gentiles! As Christians they are the people of God, not just as Israel was, but in the ultimate spiritual sense. Chosen in Christ, those who were no people are now the objects of God's free grace and choosing love. God is their Father, not simply as God was a Father to Israel his beloved son,⁴¹ but as God is the Father of Jesus Christ, the eternal Beloved (1:3).

Whether we are descended from Abraham as Peter was, or are Gentiles, as were most of those addressed by Peter, we share together the wonder of God's amazing grace in Christ. The mystery of God's choosing will always offend those who stand before God in pride. Forgetting their rebellion and guilt before God, they are ready to accuse him of favouritism. But those whom God's love has drawn to Christ will always confess the wonder of his initiative in grace:

I find, I walk, I love, but, O
The whole of love is but my answer, Lord, to thee;
For thou wert long beforehand with my soul,
Always thou lovedst me.⁴²

God's choosing is the final reason that polluted Gentiles can be called his people. But God's choosing also means that he will act to make these Gentiles his own. To belong to God they must be redeemed from their sin and washed from its stain. They must be made holy as God is holy (1:16).

To describe what God has done to bring about his great design, Peter refers to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ. God's choosing of his people is applied to them *through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and*

sprinkling by his blood (1:2). It is by the Spirit that God 'has given us new birth' (1:3), and it is by Christ's blood that we are cleansed and redeemed (1:18–19). The triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, accomplishes our salvation.

The obedience of which Peter speaks seems to refer, not to our whole life of obedience, but to our initial submission to Christ as Lord. He again speaks of this obedience as obedience to the truth in verse 22. Paul, too, speaks of the obedience of faith in this sense.^[43] Of course, the Holy Spirit who makes us holy initially through the blood of Jesus Christ continues to work in us as 'obedient children', making us holy in our new lifestyle (1:14–16). Peter may have in view this ongoing work of the Spirit. On the other hand, he is emphasizing the new position of Gentiles as those given a new birth by God into a living hope (1:3). That suggests that the *sanctifying work of the Spirit* refers to our initial cleansing (symbolized in baptism) rather than to the continuing work of the Spirit.

The cleansing of God's chosen people requires not only washing by the water of the Spirit, but also *sprinkling by the blood of Christ*. In this phrase Peter takes us back to the dramatic scene at Mount Sinai after the exodus from Egypt. While the mountain shook at the presence of the Lord, the people were assembled to enter into covenant with God. At an altar with twelve pillars, sacrifice was offered. Half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar. Moses read again the words of God's covenant, and the people vowed their obedience. Moses then sprinkled the people with the rest of the sacrificial blood, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'^[44]

At Sinai Israel was made the people of God; they were joined to him in his covenant. Now Peter speaks of Gentiles becoming obedient to Christ through the new covenant in his blood. We are sprinkled, not with the blood of oxen, but with the blood of Christ. The altar that is sprinkled with his blood does not stand before Sinai, but in heaven; it is the very throne of God.^[45] The symbolism powerfully declares that Christ's death satisfies God's justice and makes atonement for our sins. The blood of Christ sprinkled on us marks God's acceptance of us because the penalty of sin has been paid. It also symbolizes God's claim on us. As Peter says, we were bought, not with silver or gold, but 'with the precious blood of Christ' (2:18–19).

Peter had once urged Jesus not to go to his death on the cross: 'Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!'^[46] But now Peter understands the necessity of the death of Christ, and the meaning of his resurrection. Jesus himself 'bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness' (2:24).

In Christ Peter found the reality foreshadowed at Sinai. Israel miserably failed to keep their covenant oath. The yoke of the law, Peter himself said, was one that 'neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear'.^[47] But now Peter can rejoice in the new covenant. God cleanses the hearts of Jew and Gentile by faith in the sacrifice of Christ.^[48] The reality to which the prophets testified, and to which all the ceremonies pointed, had come at last.

3. He greets them as the people of God in the world

What difference does it make that Gentiles can be called the people of God, chosen of the Father, made holy in the Spirit, sprinkled with the blood of the new covenant? To mark the difference, Peter uses two words that turn the world upside down for those inhabitants of Asia Minor, and for us. He calls them the *scattered* people, and says that they are *strangers*, aliens who are transients, temporary residents, travellers headed for their native land.

These terms give us the key to Peter's whole letter. Peter is writing a travellers' guide for Christian pilgrims. He reminds them that their hope is anchored in their homeland. They are called to endure alienation as strangers, but they have a heavenly citizenship and destiny.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* gave classical expression to the theme of following Christ as a journey. Today, however, Bunyan's traveller, Christian, seems to have more critics than followers. In his earnest haste to reach the Celestial City, Christian did not take much account of the world he was passing through. He tried to speak a good word to his companions, but he did not set up an evangelistic booth at Vanity Fair, nor did he seek funding for a project to drain the Slough of Despond. In Bunyan's defence, it might be said that his own life was better than his allegory. But how are we to understand the Christian pilgrimage? Does the Christian flee from the world, fight it, conform to it, change it—or is there a deeper meaning to the call to pilgrimage?

Certainly the questions are not new. Those who received Peter's letter faced them, too. What does it mean that they—and we—are the scattered people, transient aliens in a land that is not our homeland?

The 'Diaspora' (the dispersed) was the common term for the Jews scattered through the world after the exile of 587 BC.^[49] Although the scattering of the Jews began with their forced deportation by the Assyrians and Babylonians, it was greatly increased by voluntary emigration. The Gentiles to whom Peter wrote may have been familiar with the term as it described dispersed Jews. Indeed, they may have resented the Jewish Diaspora among them. Anti-Semitism was strong in the Roman empire. But Peter includes *Gentile* readers in the Diaspora. In what sense are they the 'dispersed'? To be sure, many of their forefathers had come from other regions, but they were now settled residents, living where they had always lived, in their own lands, cities and home towns.^[50]

They must not take offence, however, but rather rejoice in a title of honour. They are the Diaspora, because they are the people of God, scattered in the world. Jesus had looked with compassion on 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel', because they were 'harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd'.^[51] He had come to gather his 'little flock', including other sheep that were not of the sheepfold of Israel.^[52] Peter writes in the joyful assurance that the Gentiles in Asia Minor are part of the Lord's flock. Once they were without God and without hope in the world, following the 'empty way of life' handed down from their fathers, but now they are 'returned to the Shepherd and Overseer' of their souls

(1:18; 2:25).

The fact that these Gentiles are included in God's Diaspora accounts for the other term that Peter uses. Since they are citizens of heaven, and have another country to which they are going, they are *strangers*, transients in the world in which they live.^[53] In relation to their homeland, they are the Diaspora; in relation to their place of residence, they are aliens. They carry another passport; they are on pilgrimage to the city of God.

God's people must be aliens in a world of rebels against God. That point is often made in the Old Testament. God called Abraham out of the city of Ur to a life of pilgrimage. He wandered in Canaan, the land of promise, as a stranger: 'I am an alien and a stranger among you,' he told the Hittite residents.^[54] Jacob, brought to Egypt by Joseph, confessed to Pharaoh that 'the years of my pilgrimage' were 'few and difficult'.^[55]

In Egypt the Pharaohs exploited Israel as a workforce of undesirable aliens, despised and feared. After God delivered them in the exodus, Israel became a pilgrim people, journeying through the wilderness to the land of promise. That wilderness experience became the model for understanding the life of God's people as a pilgrimage. God met with his people, taught and tested them, led them by day and night, fed them with bread from heaven and water from the rock, and placed his tent among them.^[56] His care watched over their journey till they reached their home, the place where God would dwell with them. The path through the wilderness is therefore the way of the Lord, the way that leads to life.

After the sin of Israel brought God's judgment, the prophets took up the exodus theme anew. In exile, God's people were again aliens in a strange land. The prophets promised that a remnant of the people would be spared and restored. God would deliver them from the graves of their captivity as he had delivered them from the graves of Egyptian bondage.^[57] The Lord would again march through the desert, leading his people out of exile and wandering. 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'^[58]

The Qumran community on the shore of the Dead Sea looked out across the water to the wilderness where God had marched with Israel. The community regulated its life to make ready in the wilderness for the coming of the Lord.^[59] John the Baptist went into the desert to preach the preparation of the way of the Lord, and announced Jesus as the One who was to come.^[60] Jesus led his disciples in the way and told them, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.'^[61]

The words of Jesus in John 14:1-6 reflect Moses' words in Deuteronomy 1:29-33. Jesus, like Moses, tells his disciples not to be afraid, but to believe. Moses says that God will go before them, overcome the enemy, lead them, and prepare a place for them. That promise Jesus will fulfil. He is the Way; he has overcome the world, and goes to prepare a place in his Father's house. Christians are people of 'the Way', following Jesus in the pilgrimage of their lives.^[62]

Peter recognizes that the Christians to whom he writes are not just transients, spending the night in the place of their sojourn. Like the exiles addressed by Jeremiah, they must be ready to live among the Gentiles for months and years.^[63] Peter is therefore concerned about their lifestyle as resident aliens, and about their witness to those among whom they live (2:11-12; 3:14-15). Peter does not call us as Christians to flee from the world. Neither does he write to isolated pilgrims pursuing a lonely way through the desert. Rather Peter writes to the scattered Christians as a community; they are the people of God in the world. Like the Diaspora of Israel, they, the true Israel, may be recognized in the world by a different lifestyle. Indeed, through the power of the Spirit, their lives are to be more radically different. Peter dedicates most of his letter to showing the motivation and pattern of the new lifestyle of the pilgrim people.

Christians, indeed, are not the real aliens in God's world. Ironically, these wandering pilgrims will inherit the earth, while those who think they can claim the world as their own will lose it in God's judgment. God makes Cain a wanderer, bearing the mark of his crime.^[64] The city that Cain builds cannot have enduring foundations.

Jean Brun has written vividly about 'the vagabonds of the West',^[65] picturing man as a wanderer, seeking escape from the prison of himself. He finds a picture of Western man in the myth of Tantalus, condemned to suffer eternal thirst under the boughs of ripe fruit that are for ever just beyond his reach. Frustrated by his desire, man in Western civilization vainly seeks to overcome the limits of space and time, devising technologies to extend his reach or to improve his grasp.

The pilgrimage of the East is differently conceived. Brun sees it in the figure of the Buddha, not reaching out, but with his hands folded. He would find escape by quenching his desires. The Eastern mystic does not grasp tools to build a tower to the heavens; he uses his hands in the stylized gestures of meditation and dance, the *mudra* motions that picture the changing forms of the world's illusion.^[66]

We may look back along the road of man's endless quest: Alexander the Great seeking new worlds to conquer; medieval pilgrims; Crusaders; Columbus seeking the lost earthly paradise with missionary vision; American pioneers; space-age cosmonauts. The object of the quest may be a religious symbol; the Holy Grail was sought as the cup of the Last Supper and the container for the blood of the Son of God. Legend, myth, and Christian tradition may be blended: Ponce de Leon was not the last to search for the fountain of youth in Florida!

Nor has the wandering quest ended. Modern mythology holds before a technological age the hope of extra-terrestrial intelligence to be contacted. 'There must be someone out there!' Or evolution, aided by genetic engineering, will produce superman, a new race of beings in tune with the cosmic 'Force'.^[67] Science fiction cheerfully imagines possibilities that gradually become the assumptions of young people raised on *Star Wars* and computerized space games.

Whatever wars man may imagine in the stars, fierce and bloody conflicts are being fought on earth in the quest for a secularized earthly paradise. Deep in our Western world-view is a humanistic version of the coming of the city of God.

Communism demands religious commitment, for it seeks not simply to transform social and economic situations, but to metamorphose humanity.^[68] For that reason Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist and atheistic apostle of liberty, did not hesitate to demand the death penalty for political dissent. Since a revolutionary regime must rid itself of those who threaten it, state execution is the only safe policy. The problem with the French revolution was not that it sent too many to the guillotine, but that it sent too few.^[69]

The theme of Christian pilgrimage stands over against the wandering of an unbelieving world. Christians are transients here, but they have an eternal home. They are aliens by faith, because by faith they are citizens of the city of God. Peter's letter eloquently presents the sure hope of the Christian pilgrim; hope in a salvation already sealed in Christ, a present as well as a future possession.

'For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come.'^[70] Peter writes from 'Babylon' (5:13), the city of human pride, where mad emperors raised monuments to their own deity in the Roman forum, and where frenzied mobs would scream for Christian blood in the spectacles of the Colosseum. But the Roman Babylon lies under the judgment of God's prophets.^[71] Babylon is not a city that will endure, for at last every wall shall fall.^[72] As the centre of man's pride, the city is also the centre of his sin. The Bible tells of the perversions of Sodom, the bloodlust of Nineveh, and the oppression of Babylon. We find all the pagan sins still flourishing in the cities of our civilization: the flagrant licentiousness of Times Square in New York, the atheistic idolatry of Red Square in Moscow, the cynical secularism of London or Paris.

Babylon is not holy, but neither is Babylon as yet judged. Jesus would not bid the fire that consumed Sodom to fall on the village of Samaria that refused him.^[73] God withholds his final judgment for a purpose. He sent his Son not to judge the world, but that the world might be saved. His restraint of judgment calls people to repentance.^[74]

Peter is concerned, therefore, about the *witness* of the Christian church to the pagans of their cities and towns (2:11-12; 3:15-16). They are transients and aliens, but they are also ambassadors. They reject conformity to the city, but they accept responsibility, living as law-abiding citizens and honouring their rulers and their fellow residents (2:9-10, 13-17; 3:1).

Babylon is not an enduring city, but neither is Jerusalem. By becoming the people of God, these Gentiles are not called to the earthly Jerusalem. They join those who, like Peter, have gone forth 'to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore'.^[75]

There is no enduring city here; we must not live as though there were. Rather, we come to the heavenly Jerusalem in our worship.^[76] To yield the religious devotion demanded by the political gospels of our day is to be guilty of idolatry. The elect pilgrims of the Diaspora are children of the holy Father, purchased by the precious blood of Christ, washed by the Spirit. They must keep themselves from idols.^[77]

Peter will describe the political and social duties of the Christian pilgrim. But first the pilgrim must know his calling. It is not to pursue the mirage of humanistic hope. Neither is it to bow down to worship the imperial images of totalitarian power. It is to obey Jesus Christ until the day of his appearing.

2. Bless God for our hope in Christ (1:3–12)

1. God establishes our hope in Christ (1:3)

In his play *No Exit*, Jean-Paul Sartre gives his own vision of hell. Two women and a man, doomed to perdition, enter a room that seems to threaten no torment. But they are sentenced to remain together in that same room for ever—without sleep and without eyelids. All three enter with pretensions about their past. The man pretends that he was a hero of the revolution. In reality, he was killed in a train wreck when he tried to escape after betraying his comrades. The women have even more sordid lives. In the forced intimacy of the room their guilty secrets are all wrung out. Nothing can be hidden, and nothing can be changed. Sartre’s imagination has well prepared us for his famous line, ‘Hell is other people.’

But the moral of the play is the line of doom to which the drama moves: ‘You are—your life, and nothing else.’¹

Sartre rejected Christianity, but his play invites heart-searching. Who wants to say that he is what he has been rather than what he meant to be, or what he hopes to be? Sartre implies that hell begins when hope ends. Sartre’s image falls far short of the reality of hell, for God’s judgment exposes sinners not simply to the lidless eyes of other sinners, but to the all-seeing gaze of God himself. Yet Sartre reminds us of how desperately we need hope. While there is life, there is hope, we say. But if hope dies, what life can remain?

Peter writes a letter of *hope*. The hope he proclaims is not what we call a ‘fond hope’. We cherish fond hopes because they are so fragile. We ‘hope against hope’ because we do not really expect what we hope for. But Peter writes of a sure hope, a hope that holds the future in the present because it is anchored in the past. Peter hopes for God’s salvation, God’s deliverance from sin and death. His hope is sure, because God has already accomplished his salvation in *the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*.

The resurrection of Jesus was a life-changing reality for Peter. When Jesus died on the cross, it was the end of all Peter’s hopes. He knew only bitter sorrow for his own denials. The dawn could not bring hope; with the crowing of the cock he heard the echo of his curses.

But Jesus did not stay dead. On that Easter morning Peter learned from the women of the empty tomb and the message of the angels. He went running to the tomb and saw its evidence. He left in wonder, but Jesus remembered Peter and appeared to him even before he came to eat with the disciples in the upper room. Hope was reborn in Peter’s heart with the sight of his living Lord. Now Peter writes to praise God for that *living hope*. The resurrection did much more than restore his Master to him. The resurrection crowned the victory of Christ, his victory for Peter, and for those to whom he writes. The resurrection shows that God has made the Crucified both Lord and Christ.² At the right hand of the Father Jesus rules until the day that he will come to restore and renew all things.³ With the resurrection of Jesus and his entrance into glory, a new age has begun.⁴ Peter now waits for the day when Jesus will be revealed from heaven (1:7, 13). Peter’s living hope is Jesus.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Peter blesses God, rejoicing in what he has done. He uses a form of praise to God that was an important part of worship in the Old Testament.⁵ The eighteen ‘blessings’ that we know from the later synagogue service go back to early times, perhaps in some form even to Peter’s day. Those blessings look forward to the fulfilment of the promises of God, yearning for the time of realization:

Speedily cause the offspring of David, Thy servant, to flourish, and let his horn be exalted by thy salvation, because we wait for Thy salvation all the day. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who causeth the horn of salvation to flourish.⁶

How different from the plaintive longing of that benediction is the astonished joy of the apostle Peter! Peter can bless the God and Father of his Lord, Jesus Christ. He can exult in the Offspring of David, raised up in salvation to the throne. God’s promises have all come true in Christ. There is more to come, for Christ is to come, but our living hope is real in our living Lord.

Christ’s resurrection spells hope for us not just because he lives, but because, by God’s mercy, we live. *In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. By the resurrection of Christ, God has given life, not only to him, but to us. We are given new birth by God; he fathers us by the resurrection of his Son. In Christ’s triumph God makes all things new, beginning with us.

The resurrection carried Christ not only out of the grave but to his Father’s throne. The great day of the renewal of all things had already begun. Yet Peter preached that heaven must receive Christ until the time of renewal, a time still to come.⁷ The time of new birth for the universe will come when Christ comes again. But for those united to Christ in his death and resurrection, that new day has already dawned.

When we speak of the *new birth*, we think of the change that God’s grace works in us. We are brought from death to life. Peter speaks of our being born of imperishable seed through the living word of God that was preached to us (1:23–25). But if we think only of what happens to us, we may be puzzled by the statement that we are given *new birth* by the *resurrection of Jesus Christ*. The means of our new birth is not first the *message* of the resurrection; it is the *fact* of the resurrection. When Christ rose he secured our salvation. He entered that new day of which the prophets spoke, and he brought us with him. Peter is saying what Paul also declared: when Christ rose, we rose. In giving life to Christ, God gave life to all those who are united to Christ.⁸ God’s elect have a hope that is as sure as Christ’s resurrection. Christ has not just made their salvation possible; he has made it sure.

Like Paul, Peter also speaks of baptism as the sign of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection (3:21).⁹ Some

commentators would see this passage, or indeed the whole letter, as instruction given in a service for baptism. But Peter does not in the least focus on the sign, but on the spiritual reality of our new life in Christ. His teaching is beautifully appropriate for baptismal instruction, but gives no real evidence of being designed for this specific purpose, far less limited to it. ^[10]

The Father, who gives new birth to his children through the resurrection of Christ, also through Christ brings them to a living faith (1:5; 3:21). Our faith and hope are in God; his living word, the good news of the gospel, has brought life to us (1:23). The things to which believers in Old Testament times looked forward have now happened (1:12).

Yet we, too, look to the future. The salvation that was sealed by Christ's resurrection and planted in our hearts by the seed of the Word will be revealed completely when Christ comes again in glory. Our hope is anchored in the past: Jesus rose! Our hope remains in the present: Jesus lives! Our hope is completed in the future: Jesus is coming! (1:5, 7, 13).

The apostle leads us to praise God that our salvation is his work. We could not even begin to accomplish it, and we do not in any sense deserve it. Yet, as trophies of God's grace, we have the privilege of adoring the Father of our Lord Jesus as *our* Father. Peter's praise is not a mere formula; praise is the goal of God's gracious work, as Peter later reminds us (2:9).

2. God maintains our hope: our inheritance (1:4-5)

As those given birth by God, we also receive our *inheritance* from him. That inheritance is *kept* for us, and we are kept for it. We may sometimes envy those whose financial future seems secure because of their birth. Sons or daughters of a wealthy family, they are heirs of a fortune. Peter had heard Jesus teach about a better treasure stored in heaven; no moths are there to eat the robes of glory, no rust can corrode the crowns of gold, and no thieves can break into the city of God. ^[11]

Peter, however, is speaking not simply of our treasure, but of our *inheritance*. God gave the land to Israel as an inheritance, and in the land he gave every tribe and family an inheritance, with the lasting right of ownership. ^[12] While they wandered in the wilderness, they were sustained by the promise of their inheritance. Like Israel in the wilderness, the New Testament people of God are aliens and pilgrims. They make their way through a world that is becoming more hostile. Yet they are not wandering beggars, cast off from their possessions. They hold a sure title to the inheritance God has given them.

Our hope is sure, for nothing can happen to our inheritance. The words that Peter uses to describe our unchangeable inheritance all relate to the land that was the inheritance of Israel. First, our inheritance *can never perish* (*aphtharton*). The land of Israel was at times ravaged and destroyed by invading armies. The prophet Isaiah describes the utter destruction of the whole world in God's judgment:

The earth will be completely laid waste
and totally plundered.

The Lord has spoken this word.

The earth dries up and withers,
the world languishes and withers ... ^[13]

In the Septuagint version of Isaiah, the word-stem for 'laid waste' and 'wither' is the same that Peter uses. But Peter uses the word in a negative form. The world will be destroyed, but our inheritance is indestructible. ^[14]

Secondly, Peter says that our inheritance *can never ... spoil* (or is 'undefiled', RSV). Isaiah, just quoted, goes on to tell how people have defiled the earth by breaking God's law. In the prophecy of Jeremiah, too, God declares that he gave Israel a fertile land, 'But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.' ^[15] The land of Canaan, Israel's inheritance, was defiled first by heathen inhabitants, then by Israel's idolatry. In total contrast, the inheritance we have is undefiled and undefilable.

Thirdly, our inheritance is perennial. It will not *fade*, wither or dry up. Canaan was not only destroyed by invaders and polluted by its inhabitants; it was also parched with drought in God's judgment. ^[16] Isaiah reflects on the judgments of God that cause the land and its inhabitants to wither like grass or flowers: 'The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever.' ^[17] Peter quotes that passage at the end of this chapter, and in that context again uses *aphtharton*, the first word of this series (1:23).

Canaan as the inheritance of Israel is contrasted with our inheritance. Israel received the earthly foreshadowing; we receive the heavenly fulfilment. Because our inheritance is in heaven, nothing on earth can alter or destroy it. Peter must use negative terms to describe it ('imperishable', 'undefiled', 'unfading'; 1:4, RSV) because its reality surpasses our present comprehension. In John's vision it can be seen as the city of God, but the language is still symbolic. Our inheritance is not simply a land, a city, or even a new earth. It is all that God will give us; his *salvation*.

God has prepared his salvation for us (1:5). The term *ready* suggests that there need be no delay. Our inheritance will be revealed at the last day, but God has it ready for us now. It is finished. Nothing need be added to God's preparation. The salvation that God has got ready does not need a few final touches from us, nor are we called to serve as consultants in designing God's plan. God's salvation, finished, perfect, and unchangeable, is kept for us by God himself. Unlike our utopian dreams, or the fantasies of science fiction, God's plan for the future is already a reality. As pilgrims we travel to the city of God, but we know that the city to come is the city that comes to us with Jesus Christ. Indeed, our final inheritance is not merely kept by God; it actually is the Lord himself. God said to Aaron, 'You will have no inheritance in

their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.’¹⁸ God claims his people as his inheritance and gives himself as their inheritance.¹⁹

Not only is our inheritance kept for us; we are kept for our inheritance. It would be small comfort to know that nothing could destroy our heavenly inheritance if we could lose it at last. The wonder of our hope is that the same *power* of God that keeps our inheritance also keeps us. We *are shielded* until the great day when our salvation will be revealed. The word *shielded* means ‘kept under guard’. It is used of protective custody. God has put us under arrest, as it were, to keep us safe for his day.²⁰ Pilgrims we may be, but the cloud of God’s power that leads us in the way becomes a wall of fire about us.

Salvation is God’s work. He and he alone is the Saviour.²¹ He delivered Israel from Egypt in the Old Testament model of salvation. Hemmed in by the armies of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, the freed Israelites were told to stand firm and see the salvation of God.²² God’s salvation was more than his mighty acts of deliverance; he brought Israel out of Egypt to bring them to himself. Salvation meant that he would be their God and they his people. That promise became the ground of the prophetic message. Israel had sinned, but God would do a yet greater work of salvation in the future. He would deliver his people not only from their enemies, but from their sins.²³ God their Saviour would come and lead them as of old through the desert.²⁴ He would come with the coming of the Messiah.²⁵

Peter preaches the fulfilment of that promise. The salvation that the prophets anticipated is the grace that Christians have now received (1:10–11). Yet Christians still await the salvation to come. Complete as salvation is, ready as it is, even experienced as it is, it still has a glorious future. *In the last time* it will be *revealed* when Jesus Christ is revealed. Our salvation is our inheritance, the full glory of being with the Lord for ever.

We are kept, however, *through faith*. Peter has described God’s saving work for us. God keeps his finished salvation for us, and us for his salvation. But he does not keep us in a cage, or against our will. God who works for us also works in us. Our faith is his way of keeping us; it is his gift. Why does God use faith as the instrument of his keeping power? Because faith is not our achievement, but trust in God’s achievement; ‘your faith and hope are in God’ (1:21). Peter writes to those who have not seen the Lord, but who rejoice with him in what the Lord has done. They already begin to receive what will be theirs when Christ comes, the goal of their faith, the salvation of their souls (1:9).

3. Joy through trials in Christ our hope (1:6–9)

Reflection on what God has done for us fills us with exultant joy. *In this you greatly rejoice*. The text could also be translated, ‘... in *whom* you greatly rejoice’. Since Peter uses the same verb in verse 8 to describe our joy in Christ, it is possible that he is thinking, not just of all the blessings we have in Christ, but of Christ in whom we have the blessings.²⁶

Dramatically, Peter moves from ecstasy to agony. We who *rejoice* in Christ *suffer grief in all kinds of trials*. No doubt Peter thinks not only of suffering Christians, but of Christ himself. Peter well knew how Jesus had been put to grief (2:21–22). Yet because of his grief we have joy, even in suffering.

Peter is now dealing with the heart of his concern in writing this letter. He wants to assure Christians of their hope as they face trials. He now gives four reasons why we can not only endure trials, but rejoice in hope in the midst of trials. The first reason is that our hope in Christ points us beyond the trials. Our troubles last only for a little while; our hope in Christ is for ever. Peter returns to this theme when he writes the conclusion of the letter (5:10). Jesus himself endured the cross and despised the shame because of the joy that was set before him.²⁷

Not only does our joy point beyond grief. In the second place, it is actually strengthened through the very sufferings that we endure. Peter has declared that God keeps us for glory by faith. Our faith, then, must continue to the end of our life-long pilgrimage. If our faith is to endure, it must be purified and stress-tested. Like *gold* it must pass through the furnace (verse 7). Trials should not surprise us, or cause us to doubt God’s faithfulness. Rather, we should actually be glad for them. God sends trials to strengthen our trust in him so that our faith will not fail. Our trials keep us trusting; they burn away our self-confidence and drive us to our Saviour. The fires of affliction or persecution will not reduce our faith to ashes. *Fire* does not destroy gold; it only removes combustible impurities. Yet even gold will at last vanish with the whole of this created order. Faith is infinitely more precious and more enduring. Like a jeweller putting his most precious metal in the crucible, so God proves us in the furnace of trial and affliction. The genuineness of our faith shines from the fire to his praise.²⁸

A third reason joins joy to suffering. We know that when Jesus comes, he will bring far more than an end to suffering; he will bring his reward of blessing. Our trials are never forgotten by the Lord; he keeps our tears in his bottle.²⁹ Paul says that ‘our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all’.³⁰ Our present sufferings cannot be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.³¹ Peter, too, speaks of the crown of glory that does not fade away, that we will receive when Christ comes (5:4). Our faith will then be found to be precious, for by it we (and he) will receive *praise, glory and honour* (1:7).³² Peter saw the glory of the Lord when he was transfigured on the mountain; he heard the promise of his return as he ascended in the clouds.³³ He knows that the end of all things is near; judgment is already beginning for the people of God. The day of God when the universe will be remade is the day of the Lord Jesus, the day when he will be *revealed*.³⁴ That day brings terror to those who do not know the Lord, but joy beyond expression to those who love him.

In the fourth place, the supreme reason for joining joy to suffering comes into view. That reason goes beyond even the glory that we will receive from the hand of the Lord. For, of course, our tested faith does not *earn* the glory that will be given to us. We receive glory as we share in Christ's glory. Indeed, it is not even certain that Peter is speaking of the *praise, glory and honour* that we receive. He may be referring to the praise *God* receives from our proven faith.^[35] We seek in all things that God may be glorified (4:11). If we receive crowns of glory, it will be our joy to cast them at the feet of the Saviour.^[36]

When Jesus Christ is revealed, the gold of our faith will shine to his praise. The whole nature of suffering is changed for the Christian when he realizes that his anguish brings honour to Christ. The Museum of the Desert in the Cevennes mountains of southern France commemorates the sufferings of the Huguenot martyrs. When Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, Protestant public worship was made a crime. Men caught at secret worship services in the fields were sent to the galleys. Chained to a rowing bench, they slaved at the oars until they died. A replica of one of the great galley oars hangs in the museum today. Underneath is a model of a galley. Beside it are inscribed the words of a Reformed Christian galley slave: 'My chains are the chains of Christ's love.'

Peter reflects on the love that his readers have for Christ, love that makes them ready to suffer so that their proven faith can be his tribute. *Though you have not seen him, you love him.* Peter, of course, had seen the Lord. His love for Jesus could bring pictures to mind: Jesus in Capernaum, being served supper by Peter's mother-in-law, cured of her fever; Jesus on the sea, lifting Peter from the water—'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?'; Jesus in the hall of the high priest, looking at Peter after his denials; Jesus on the cross; Jesus, alive again, sitting by the coals of a fire on the shore of the Lake of Galilee—'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?'

Peter had seen Jesus, and loved him. Does it amaze him that distant and scattered Gentiles who have never seen Jesus also know and love him? Peter well knows that it is not his physical association with Jesus that joins him to his Saviour. He knows Jesus as the Son of God by the gift of the Father in heaven. He realizes that Gentiles, too, have received the Spirit.^[37] By faith we Gentiles who have never seen Jesus may share with Peter in loving him. It is not necessary for us to have been in Galilee with Jesus. Through the witness of Peter and the other apostles we learn about what Jesus said and did. They bear witness through the Holy Spirit, and by the witness of the Spirit we are brought to know and love the living Lord.

We did not see Jesus; we do not now see Jesus; but we shall see Jesus. Peter contrasts the past and the present with the future (1:8). The day is coming when Jesus will be revealed. In that day the goal of our faith will be realized. Our eyes will behold the One we have trusted and loved.

Peter's expressions march forward: *You have not seen Jesus, but you love him; you do not see Jesus, but you believe in him; you will see Jesus and rejoice in him.* But notice the change that Peter makes. He says that *you ... are* (present tense) *filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*^[38] Not only do we have faith in Jesus and love for Jesus now; we also know already the joy that we will experience when we see him. Such is the faith and hope of those who know Jesus. The salvation of our souls in the last day is the goal of our faith. We wait for the salvation that Christ will bring with him at his appearing. Yet we are already experiencing that salvation. This apparent paradox forms the warp and woof of New Testament hope. Because Jesus has already come, in the flesh and in the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God has already come. Our hope is realized: we know Jesus. But because Jesus is coming again, the kingdom of God is yet to come, and the goal of our faith is still future. Christians live in a future that is already present, not just in imagination or expectation, but in realization: the reality of Christ's presence in the Spirit.

4. God's promises of hope are fulfilled in Christ (1:10–12)

Sufferings now, *glories* to follow. Peter wants to encourage Christians who face the first to look for the second. He has pointed our hope to the glory of Christ, and to his return. Now he would have us remember that the Christ of glory is the Christ of the cross. The sequence of our lives follows the sequence of Christ's life. He suffered first, then entered into *his* glory. So must we. Jesus understood that order well. It was the pattern predicted for the Messiah in the Old Testament.^[39] After Peter's confession, Jesus had plainly predicted his betrayal, sufferings and death. Peter had protested violently, 'Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!'^[40] Jesus told Peter that his response was from Satan, but Peter had continued to resist the thought that Jesus must suffer. Peter could rejoice in the glory of Christ on the mount of transfiguration, but he had failed to understand why Moses and Elijah had there talked with Jesus about his death—the death he must accomplish before he entered the glory that was his. In the night arrest in Gethsemane, Peter had drawn his sword to rescue Jesus from suffering.

Peter's misunderstanding was shared by the other disciples. On the very day of Christ's resurrection, two disciples were returning to Emmaus confused and dismayed because Jesus had been crucified. On the road Jesus joined them; before he made himself known to them, he taught them from the whole Old Testament that the Messiah must first suffer and then enter his glory.^[41] It was from the risen Lord himself that the apostles learned how Christ's suffering and glory fulfilled the Scripture. They proclaimed that message in the apostolic gospel.^[42]

Glory is the goal of the Old Testament promises. From the first oracle in the garden of Eden, God promised victory over the serpent through the Son of the woman.^[43] Peter, preaching after Pentecost, declared that Christ would remain in heaven until his coming again when 'the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets'.^[44]

Even a casual reading of the Old Testament prophets reminds us of their vision of glory. That vision stands out against the history of Israel. God promised Abraham that his descendants would be blessed, and would be a blessing to the nations. God did redeem and bless Israel. Solomon could say, when the temple was dedicated, that all God's promises of blessing had been kept. He looked for the nations to be drawn to pray at God's temple, and asked God to hear those prayers.^[45] But the glory that filled Solomon's temple did not remain. Solomon himself turned his back on the house of God to dedicate a shrine to Chemosh on the Mount of Olives. Idolatry brought God's judgment: the glory departed from the house of the Lord. Where the glory cloud had rested, the smoke of destruction pillared upward. Israel in the north, then Judah in the south, went into captivity.

The message of the prophets pronounces God's judgment on the sin of his people, but it does not stop with judgment. The final vision of the Old Testament is not of dry bones in death valley.^[46] Rather, it is renewal beyond conceiving. The prophets picture the restoration of all that had been lost: the land, the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood.^[47] But the restoration does not look back to recover the past; it looks forward to God's final renewal. God's fulfilment will transform everything. Not only will the remnant of Judah and Israel be gathered, but the remnant of the Gentiles will be gathered with them.^[48] Not just Israel, but Egypt and Assyria will be called the people of God.^[49] Eden will be restored, and more: God will make a new creation where peace will be universal and darkness will be gone.^[50]

This incredible glory can come only because the God of glory will come. The Lord God will appear in order to save his people and renew creation.^[51] The coming of the Lord is joined to the coming of the Angel of the Lord, and to the coming of the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord.^[52] On the mount of transfiguration Peter saw the glory of the Lord shine from the face of Jesus, the Son and Servant of God. Now Peter looks for the return of Christ in glory to finish his fulfilment of the promise of the prophets.

The Old Testament also describes the sufferings of the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord. In the Psalms we hear the cry of the righteous servant as the reproaches directed against God fall on him.^[53] David's wanderings to escape Saul's jealous fury become a symbol of the innocent suffering of the Lord's anointed. The prophets themselves suffer for their faithful proclamation of the word of the Lord.^[54] The prophets show, too, that the animal sacrifices of the ceremonial law cannot make final atonement for sin. There must be a better sacrifice, a sacrifice God will provide; not the ram caught by its horns on Mount Moriah, but the willing offering of the Servant of the Lord, whose soul will be an offering for sin.^[55] Suffering precedes glory because the precious blood of the Lamb of God opens glory for believers.^[56]

The pattern of sufferings and glory has profound meaning for the church. Job's anguished accusations from the ashes have an astonishing answer. Our suffering is not a sign that Christ has betrayed us, or that he is no longer Lord; rather it is a sign of our fellowship with the risen Lord who first suffered for us. Suffering, indeed, becomes a sign of the glory that is to follow. But Peter is not announcing a general principle that those who look for reward must be prepared to pay in suffering. The prophets did not enunciate a principle: they predicted the sufferings and glory of the one who is himself the Lord. Christ is the end of prophecy, the goal of history. He is not one example of sufferings and glory among many; his is the suffering that brought salvation, his is the glory that brings the new creation. Jesus is therefore not simply the one of whom the prophets speak; he is the one who speaks through the prophets. The prophets spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.^[57] The Spirit of God who inspired them is the Spirit of Christ. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'^[58] Not only does prophecy bear witness to Jesus, but Jesus bears witness through prophecy. The incarnate Lord is the true witness; the eternal Logos is the source of the prophetic testimony.

Peter knows that his Lord is the Son of the living God; he understands that the Spirit that filled him at Pentecost was sent from the throne of glory. That Spirit of Christ illumined him, fisherman that he was, to preach what the rabbis had missed: the Old Testament witness to Christ's resurrection. Now his understanding sweeps back to the prophecies that the Spirit interpreted for him. They were prophecies given by the same Spirit, the Spirit of the Son of God. Peter opens our eyes to see Christ in the Old Testament not only as the promised Messiah, but as the Lord. The Spirit that was fire in the bones of the prophets was the Spirit of Christ, driving forward to the salvation he must bring. 'The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken—who can but prophesy?' The Lion of the tribe of Judah who opens the seals of the book of God's decrees is the Lion who thunders in the voice of the prophets.^[59]

The same Spirit of Christ, sent from his ascended glory, now fills the apostles who preach the prophecies come true.^[60] One Lord through the ages, one great plan of salvation, one revealed message, heralded by the prophets of old and now announced by the apostles of Christ—all is focused on the lordship of Jesus Christ. Peter's thrilling witness to one Lord and one scriptural gospel was attacked by Marcion in the second century. For Marcion the God of the Old Testament was a tyrant to be replaced by the God of love. Many since Marcion have missed what Peter teaches: both Testaments bear witness to Christ; both are the witness of Christ.

Peter presents one community of the people of God as well as one gospel. The Spirit of Christ did not inspire the prophets apart from their own involvement in the message. Their prophecies excited their own hopes; they yearned for fuller and clearer revelation. They sought to interpret the oracles they received, inquiring into the time when God's great salvation would come.^[61] But the full meaning of their prophecies could not appear until Christ appeared. Peter could well remember the marvellous conversation of Moses and Elijah with Jesus when they stood with him on the mountain.^[62] God's plan was amazing beyond comprehension. The prophets ministered mysteries still hidden from them and their own generation; they ministered those marvels to us, as they spoke of the things of Christ.

Peter is not saying that the prophets had no ministry to their own time, or that they spoke in inspired riddles that made no sense to them or to their hearers. The very diligence of their search for better understanding shows how the prophecies challenged and intrigued them. What Peter is eager to point out is that his hearers are the heirs of the full message of the prophets. The least disciple of Christ is in a better position to understand Old Testament revelation than the greatest prophet before Christ came.⁶³

Indeed, suffering Christians have the advantage not only over the prophets. The very angels of heaven peer into the mysteries of salvation that are revealed by the Spirit to those who are redeemed by Jesus Christ. The verb Peter uses well describes the action of straining to see: angels peering, as it were, over the battlements of heaven to behold what God has done in Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us that the apostles were set forth as a spectacle to angels as well as to humans.⁶⁴ The cosmic sweep of God's redemption is all centred in Christ, whom we know and love. The petty dreams of earth's little tyrants shrivel before the majesty of the kingdom of God, ministered by prophets and apostles, but now realized for those who know Jesus Christ.