

Living in Hostile
Territory by the Grace
of God

Living in Hostile Territory by the Grace of God

1 Peter

This inductive Bible study is designed for individual, small group, or classroom use. A leader's guide with full lesson plans and the answers to the Bible study questions is available from Regular Baptist Press. Order RBP0031 online at www.regularbaptistpress.org, e-mail orders@rbpstore.org, call toll-free 1-800-727-4440, or contact your distributor.

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

LIVING IN HOSTILE TERRITORY BY THE GRACE OF GOD: 1 PETER

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Preface

Does your life seem like a battlefield? Do trials and suffering threaten to undo you? Do you feel like you are living in hostile territory? You are not alone. Trials and suffering are part of the Christian life. In fact, Peter wrote a letter to a group of believers telling them that they should not think of their trials, suffering, and persecution as strange. Peter's letter, 1 Peter, is the focus of this Bible study.

If you see your struggles as cause for despair and doubt, then you need a fresh outlook. First Peter will help you change your perspective on the difficulties of life. You will begin to see them as opportunities for growth and as avenues of God's blessings. You will learn that joy and satisfaction are possible in the midst of your struggles. And you will realize both God's power and comfort to help you through each day.

God doesn't offer an escape hatch from suffering. So if that is what you are looking for, then you won't be helped by this study. What God does offer by His grace is so much better than an escape hatch. Learn more about what is available to you as you study about *Living in Hostile Territory by the Grace of God*.

Lesson 1

Comeback

God desires that we come back from spiritual failure in our lives.

1 Peter 1:1, 2

“And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:18, 19).

He was a maverick—one of those independent individuals who do not go along with their commanders. When he found about forty of the enemy, he thought their village would be easy pickings. In the arrogant, impulsive manner that had served him well in past engagements, he did not bother to gather intelligence about the terrain or the number of enemy soldiers in the camp. He attacked, and after a two-day battle, he and his men were defeated in one of the most famous failures in American history. The battle that wiped out his regiment is known today as the Battle of the Little Bighorn or as Custer’s Last Stand. That summer, George Armstrong Custer was an epic failure in his strategy, his choices, and his behavior.

Getting Started

1. Describe a time when you miserably failed at a new venture.

2. How did you respond?

3. Did you eventually become successful in your venture? If so, what made the difference?

Peter was an epic failure spiritually, but Jesus did not let him give up. He challenged him and helped him to become an important part in God's ministry in the early church.

Searching the Scriptures

Just an 'Ignorant' Fisherman

Peter came from the town of Bethsaida (John 1:44). His father was Jona (or John; John 1:42), and he had at least one brother, Andrew (Matthew 4:18). Peter also had a wife (Matthew 8:14), although there is no record of her name or if they had children.

Peter was a fisherman by trade, a job he did with his brother (Matthew 4:18). Fishermen weren't known for their intelligence, though they knew how to work patiently and persistently.

4. Based on Peter's background, do you think you would have identified him as a person likely to succeed in ministry? Explain.

5. How would persistence and patience help Peter in ministry?

6. Read Acts 4:13. What made the ultimate difference for Peter as he ministered for the Lord?

Like a Rock

At the time of Peter's conversion, Christ gave him a new name. John 1:42 states, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." His name by birth was Simon, "God has heard." Then Christ gave him the Aramaic name Cephas, which means a small stone or rock. The Greek equivalent is *petros*, from which we derive the name Peter.

This new name would show something about Christ's goal for Peter's character, that Peter would be bold and strong like a rock.

7. Read Luke 22:31–34. What three words do you think Peter would use to describe himself at this point in his life?

8. Do you think he would use the words "bold" and "strong" to describe himself? Explain.

Tested and Failed

Peter's denial of Christ probably marked the lowest point of his life. When Christ announced that someone would betray Him, Peter fervently declared that he would never do that. In response, the Lord predicted that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster would crow in the morning.

Sadly, like all true prophecy, this came to pass. Peter denied Christ three times. He even swore that his lie was the truth. When all of this happened, Jesus simply looked at Peter. What a look that must have

been. Peter, remembering Jesus' words, wept bitterly in repentance.

9. Read Luke 22:54–62. What three words would you use to describe Peter at this point in his life?

10. Do you think he would use the words “bold” and “strong” to describe himself? Explain.

Recommissioned

Peter's first commission came with the Lord's call: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). He had been a fisher of fish, taking that which was alive from its natural habitat and bringing it into the realm of death. Christ called him to fish for people, taking those who were dead and bringing them into the realm of life in Christ. Jesus commissioned Peter to be a disciple or follower. He later would be chosen as an apostle.

Peter had a profitable three-year course under the Master Teacher, but at the end he experienced failure and finally went back to his fishing (John 21:3). It was at the seashore of Galilee that the Lord recommissioned him (vv. 15–22).

Before Peter could fulfill the Lord's design for his life, he needed restoration. For this reason the Lord probed his heart.

11. Read John 21:15. What heart-probing question did the Lord ask Peter?

Peter had once boasted that, in spite of the failures of others, he would never deny his Lord. After Peter's failure, the Lord knew that the old self-confidence was gone, and He encouraged Peter by entrusting to him an important ministry: “Feed my lambs.” Two more times the Lord

placed His finger on the tender spot in Peter's life, and two more times He expressed His confidence in Peter by commissioning him, "Feed my sheep." Peter still had to learn the lesson of complete obedience and singleness of purpose: "Follow thou me." He still needed to experience the enabling of Pentecost, but he was becoming a great apostle.

12. How do you think Peter was affected when Jesus confidently commissioned him to "feed His sheep"?

Peter needed to be challenged and commissioned again by Jesus. But going to our Savior is not always our first reaction when we fail Him.

13. How do believers sometimes respond when they fail the Lord?

An Apostle

Christ chose twelve of His disciples to be specially "sent ones," or apostles. One of them was Peter, who identified himself as an apostle in the very first verse of his letters. Peter was part of that inner circle of disciples, along with James and John, who were privileged to be with Christ on special occasions.

The Gospel accounts end soon after Peter's dismal spiritual failure and Christ's restoration of him. The book of Acts shows Peter as an enthusiastic, energetic worker for God: Peter served as chairman at the election of a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15). He delivered the great sermon on the Day of Pentecost (2:14–40). He acted as the explainer (apologist) for the new faith (3:12–26; 4:8–12). He was the moderator in resolving the Ananias-Sapphira problem (5:1–11). He brought the message of salvation to Gentiles (10:34–48). He had the gospel to the circumcision (Jews) committed to him (Galatians 2:7). And, finally, he wrote the Biblical books that bear his name.

14. Based on Peter's life, how would you respond to the notion that God has no use for people who fail Him?

The First Letter

Peter wrote his first epistle from Babylon (1 Peter 5:13), but there is some question about the location of this "Babylon." Was this the literal city of Babylon, in the area now known as Iraq? Or was this a symbolic reference to Rome (as in Revelation 17)? Bible-believing, honest scholars stand on both sides of this question. The usual reading of this passage seems to indicate that he referred to the literal Babylon, since nothing hints that the name should be interpreted figuratively.

Peter probably wrote this epistle sometime around AD 63. This is determined from the fact that Nero's large-scale persecution of the church came in AD 64, and it seems that the people whom Peter was addressing were beginning to face, but had not fully encountered, that persecution for their faith.

Two persons are mentioned along with Peter in 1 Peter 5:12 and 13. Silvanus (Silas) was probably the messenger who carried the epistle and was perhaps the one who actually wrote down the words that Peter gave as directed by the Holy Spirit. Mark, probably the spiritual son of Peter, sent along his greetings as well, since he was near where Peter was living.

The Recipients

Peter spoke of his readers as "strangers scattered" throughout the five provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These areas today form most of Turkey.

"Strangers" indicates that they were aliens or temporary residents in the land. Peter was describing Jewish believers who had settled among non-Jewish people.

"Scattered" speaks of Jews living outside Palestine. They may have been in the five provinces by choice because of business opportunities,

or they may have been scattered by reason of the persecutions following Pentecost. Jews from some of the very provinces Peter listed had gathered at Jerusalem when Peter preached his sermon and three thousand received his word and were baptized (Acts 2:9–11).

Three Facets of Redemption

15. Read 1 Peter 1:2. What was the readers' spiritual position?

From the human perspective we are well aware that the unsaved must receive Christ and believe on Him to be saved. Peter discussed salvation from the divine perspective and listed three facets of personal redemption.

The first facet is the act of God the Father, Who in a deliberative judgment (foreknowledge) chooses us from before the foundation of the world. Our election of God is demonstrated when we come to Jesus Christ in simple faith, for "all that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

The second facet is the work of the Holy Spirit—"sanctification of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit takes the one chosen of God and sets him or her apart for conviction of unbelief, repentance toward God, and faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to bring us to faith in Christ.

The third facet is the justification and cleansing, which became ours through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Victory

16. Read 1 Peter 1:7. What is the purpose for Peter's letter, as found in this verse?

Woven throughout this book are several references to suffering and

persecution (1:6, 7; 2:19–25; 3:16, 17; 4:12–19). The believers to whom Peter was writing were beginning to face actual persecution for their faith. Their persecution came because they lived out their faith in a hostile, pagan society. The persecution included slander, violent riots, and social rejection. Peter wrote to help the believers correctly handle their persecution and trials.

17. What does the impure gold symbolize in the key verse, 1 Peter 1:7?

18. What does the fire symbolize?

19. To what does the pure gold refer?

Although many of us have not faced much—if any—actual physical persecution, we all still face trials, difficulties, and opposition. First Peter teaches us how to handle these trials, difficulties, and opposition by the grace of God. This is why this series is titled *Living in Hostile Territory by the Grace of God*.

Peter suffered a miserable spiritual failure, but he came back to have an effective ministry. He came out as pure gold and ready for God to use him.

We all have spiritual failures, but we, like Peter, do not need to remain in that condition. Christ will welcome us back from failure to serve the Lord effectively. We should make a new start each day of our lives by keeping current with our confession of sin and by telling the Lord each morning that we want to put our sins behind and make a fresh start for Him.

20. How will making a fresh start each day help us to handle the trials of life?

Making It Personal

21. If you have not done so yet today, make a fresh start with the Lord now. If you have not believed on Jesus, make a start with Him by trusting in Him as your personal Savior.

22. What are some steps you can take to come back from spiritual failure to effective ministry?

23. Which of these steps do you need to take right now?

24. Memorize Matthew 4:18 and 19.