

READING PETER'S FIRST LETTER

A VERSE-BY-VERSE
GUIDED SELF-STUDY

SOME THOUGHTS ON HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This guide is created on the premise that one of the best things you can do is to learn the tools necessary to read the bible for *yourself*, without (any, or at least too much reliance on) outside helps. Other books *about* the bible are great, and have their place, but they are no substitute for the life-skill of knowing how to dig and pray and find meaning (and God's voice) for yourself in the pages of Holy Scripture.

This explains nature of many of the questions contained in this study. You will be asked to look for lists, create summaries, and think about implications of the things Peter is saying. Many of the questions ask you to think about the relationship between two verses or ideas, or the reason why Peter would have written something *after* some other thing he wrote. Learning to look for and notice these types of things in any text of the bible is a key to being able to find God's meaning for yourself.

Also, please use the prayer prompts throughout the guide. In studying the scriptures, nothing is more essential than for us to learn to do it *with* the Holy Spirit--relying on Him for understanding, seeking Him for the revelation of Jesus to us in these words, asking Him our questions, and praying for His empowering to live out the things we read. Start and end every time of study with prayer, and pray and worship your way through every verse. Stop often to speak to God. Praise Him for what you see. There's no greater study companion. Few things will bring you more lasting joy than reading the Bible in the presence of the Author.

This particular booklet was originally created for a weekend with our young adults fellowship where we studied the entire letter of 1 Peter. The weekend was divided up into 6 sessions, which explains the format of this booklet. This also explains why you will find references to "discussing" things--the questions were originally meant as prompts for small group discussions, rather than individual food for thought. The one exception is the section on 2:11-3:7, which was written for individual study time. The prayer prompts were also meant for groups, but obviously work fine for individual prayer over each section.

You may not have enough space in between questions in the actual booklet. Probably you will get the most out of this study if you write your answers in a separate notebook where you can use all the space you need.

A note on formatting: Typically, if a question is indented, it is because it refers to an answer from a previous question. (Probably) needless to say, this booklet also works for small group studies, since that was its original purpose.

THOUGHTS ON READING THE NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

UNDERSTANDING HOW THINGS WRITTEN “BACK THEN” RELATE TO “MY LIFE TODAY”

This weekend we'll be reading 1 Peter, which is one of the New Testament letters. The letters of the New Testament make up all the material between the books of Acts and Revelation. They are documents written by Apostles and others within what is known as “the Apostolic Circle” (those in the leadership of the early church who were in close association with the Apostles). It is crucial to understand how to read them in order to understand a large percentage of God's word recorded in the New testament.

Here are some key things to remember:

1. These are, first of all, letters. They are personal communications, written from one person to another individual or (more often) to a group of people, like a church in a specific city or a group of churches throughout a certain region.
2. Because they're letters, they contain all kinds of personal interaction, along with references to specific situations, times and places.
3. They also bear the marks of the personalities of their authors, just like you'd expect two letters by two different friends to sound different.
- 4 This means that when we're reading them, we have to always check to see who is being spoken to, and what is being referred to, so we can understand the point of the letter when it was written. A

helpful question to ask is, what did the first people who read or heard this letter think when *they* heard this? What did it mean to *them*?

5. Some of the things in the letters do not apply to us much at all, at least not directly. For instance, In 2 Corinthians 1:15-16 Paul discusses some travel plans and his intention to visit the church. Clearly we are not to think that he will come visit us since we just read it in the bible.

6. But many of the things in the letters do apply directly to us. And many of the things (even Paul's travel plans!) which don't *directly* apply to us *do* have all kinds of things to teach us if we're willing to really search God's word for truth.

7. The early Christians saved these letters, it seems, because they recognized that the letters were *inspired*: They were God's words, written in a letter. This means that even though they were written to a specific people in a specific time and place, they have many things to say to us today. (For a discussion of how the words of the Bible could be both written by *humans* and at the same time be *God's* words, see material in the back of the booklet.)

8. There are several ways God uses these personal letters *to other people* as his word to *us*. First, some of the things were written in these letters because they're just true for all Christians, everywhere, at all times. 1 Peter 2:5 is one of these verses. It applies to us because it applies to every Christian. Second, many of the things written apply first of all to the original recipients of the letter, but they are applications (to their situation) of eternal truths. So what we have is like a “case study”--here's how God applied his truth to the situation in this church. We see the application to us by discerning the truth that is being applied, and to seeing how our situation is like or unlike the situation the truth is being applied to. This is often how the letters work.

9. It should encourage us that God is able to inspire people who write his word while keeping such personal, specific characteristics in their writings. It means that God is pleased to use very ordinary, human means to get his ideas across. It means that His word applies even more to our ordinary, human lives.

1 Peter 1:1-12

Introduction

What is 1 Peter?

1 Peter is a letter (the “first” of two) written by the Apostle Peter, to Christians (several churches) in the area of the ancient Roman Empire now known as Asia Minor (where the nation of Turkey is—see map in back). Peter was one of the early followers of Jesus, part of his chosen group of 12 disciples (later known as “Apostles”). After the ascension of Jesus, he became a primary leader of the Apostles and the early church (see Acts 1 – 12). 1 Peter seems to have been written within the first few decades after Jesus rose from the dead.

What were the New Testament Letters?

After Jesus ascended into heaven and left His followers to do His work, the Holy Spirit filled them and also empowered them to remember, understand, and proclaim what Jesus said, did and meant. Eventually they wrote down what they taught. They wrote letters to the new communities of Christians that were forming wherever the message was proclaimed. These letters explain who Jesus is and what He did, and tell Jesus' followers how to live as followers of Christ when He is not on earth to be seen.

Why did Peter write this letter?

1. He has heard that the Christians in this area were suffering persecution for their faith, or that they expect some kind of suffering to be coming soon. (1:6-7)
2. He knows they exist largely as social outsiders, and wants to encourage them in the identity in Christ. (1:2)
3. He knows that temptation is always present in trying times. He writes to warn them and strengthen them in the battle against it. (2:11)
4. He wants to give instructions for daily living. (2:13-3:9)

DISCUSSION

How does Peter describe the people he’s writing to in verse 2?

Why do you think he does this, and what strikes you about the description he uses?

How do you think it made the first recipients of this letter feel to read verses 3-5?

How should it make us feel?

Is the way Peter talks about trials in 1:6-9 different than how you tend to think about trials? If so, how?

After acknowledging the trials that are happening or may come in verse 6, what does Peter do for the believers he writes to in verses 7-12?

What effect do you think he wanted these verses to have on the hearers?

What already seems to be their emotional state? Why? How does this encourage or challenge you?

In what ways does Peter seek to strengthen the believers in verses 7-12? (Make a list...)

What does he tell them? What do these things mean?

How does knowing these things strengthen us?

What types of things must someone care about in order to find verses 7-12 to be of any comfort in a difficult world?

Prayer: For understanding and ownership of the description in 1:2. / For this to form our identity and not other things. / For the joy Peter speaks on in 1:6-9. / For an understanding mind and a heart ready to obey the rest of the things we'll be reading this weekend.

1 PETER 1:13-2:10

Passage Overview

Notice the first word in this section (verse 13). What does it tell you about how this section relates to last night's section?

Describe the Christian life in a couple sentences, using only 1:13-2:10.

Describe what it feels like to be a Christian, using only 1:13-2:10.

One way to read this passage is just to note all the things Peter tells us to do in response to the awesome truths he gave us in 1:1-12. (If you choose to do that, how many things do you come up with? and what are they?)

Notice all the different ways Peter talks about holiness in this passage. What are they?

What does this tell us about true Christianity?

How does this talk of holiness relate to 1:2?

Another big idea in this passage is “value,” or “preciousness.” What is Peter trying to communicate here?

Who is Jesus in this passage?

Details

What kind of mentality is Peter describing in 1:13-16?

What kind of life is he describing?

If 1:1-12 is true about you, why would it make sense that you’d be a 1:13-22 kind of person?

How does knowing 1:18-19 help us do 1:17?

How does doing the first part of 1:22 help us keep the command he gives in the second part of 1:22, and why is 1:23 also essential to being able to keep the command?

What is Peter talking about in 2:2? (Read in ESV as well as other translations)

What is this “milk”?

How does the reference to Psalm 34:8 in 2:3 help us understand 2:2?

How is doing 2:1 necessary for us to be able to experience 2:2?

And why is it necessary?

Why is 2:3 necessary to do 2:2?

How does Peter want Christians to view life in this world, based on 2:4-8? How does a true relationship to Jesus (2:4), change the way I see the purpose of life? ...other Christians? ...people who oppose Christ?

What sense of calling are we supposed to have based on 2:4-5?

If these verses seem difficult or hard to apply to our personal lives, why do you think that is?

How does 2:5 relate to 2:9? How does 2:9 help you understand 2:5?

How does 2:9-10 expand your understanding of 1:2?

What kind of identity is described in 2:9-10?

Prayer

For a sense of life and purpose that matches what Peter writes about in these verses. For help with an issue that keeps us from seeing things this way. / For God to stir up what Peter calls for in these verses: love, holiness, spiritual sobriety, etc...

1 Peter 2:11 - 3:7

Directions for this time alone with God's word:

For your solo time with this section of Peter's letter, I suggest you recap where we've come so far, so you can remember this section in its context. It's significant that Peter didn't write 1:1-2, and then immediately write verse 2:11. Instead, before he got to these very practical instructions, he took his time going through the amazing things, and basic encouragements, of 1:1-2:10.

Here's a quick overview of this morning's passage: So far, Peter has used his letter to encourage the Christians he wrote to by reminding them of their new identity in Christ, and encouraging them to press on even when trials are coming. Beginning with 2:11, Peter turns to explain some specific directions for people in several different walks of life. One commentator writes: "First Peter 2:11 marks Peter's transition to the heart of his argument and introduces Peter's main concern: that Christians live rightly among the Gentiles [i.e. - people who don't know God]. Regardless of where Peter's readers find themselves scattered, they are to live as faithful witnesses to the truth of Christ's gospel in a way that does not necessarily offend the expectations of their society. Peter conceptualizes the relationship of Christians to society as that of visiting strangers or resident aliens, those who appreciate, respect and value their host land but nevertheless maintain their own distinct identity within it."

Maybe you should **begin this way: read the entire section** of 2:11-3:7 through in one shot. **Now ask yourself:**

- Why did Peter (and the Holy Spirit) want me to read 1:1-2:10 before I read 2:11-3:7?
- How does knowing what Peter tells me in 1:1-2:10 help me be able to live out the instruction in 2:11-3:7?
- How will the basic encouragements to alertness, endurance, and holiness in 1:1-2:10 help me, if I obey them, to live out the specific instructions in 2:11-3:7?

- What kind of person is described in 2:11-3:7?
- What kind of life will I have if I live out all these commands over the course of my whole life?
- How will living out these commands help me do what Christians are called to in 2:9?

Getting Into the Details

2:11-12

How does the identity of the Christian (sojourners, pilgrims) affect the lifestyle, including how we handle desires inwardly and how we handle ourselves publicly?

What does Peter say should characterize our public lives in 2:12? What is the point of that kind of living?

Even though we live this “honorable” way? What does Peter assume will happen anyway with the public perception of Christians? Why do you think this is? Do you find this happening in your own life?

What are these “fleshly lusts” in 2:11? Why does God tell us they “war against our soul”? How is that true?

Prayer: For my identity to shape my thinking. For God’s wisdom in how to live “honorably” (2:12) at work, in my family, at school. For wisdom and power for good works, and for endurance when I’m misunderstood.

2:13-17

A big part of this honorable life is how we relate to our government. How would you sum up Peter’s instructions in these verses?

Peter assumes Christians will be doing something in 2:12, 2:15, and 2:20. What is it? What do you think this means and why is it so important?

Does 2:16 hit you personally at all? How or why?

Prayer: For practical wisdom in how to think and act this way toward government. For leading and empowering to live out 2:15-16.

2:18-25

Slaves made up a large part of the population in the Greco-Roman culture under the Roman Empire (the authority in Peter’s day). This instruction tells them how to live when they can’t change their situation (but see 1 Corinthians 7:21-23 for Paul’s instructions to slaves who can figure out how to get free). Peter totally breaks custom to address slaves (who had become Christians and were now members of the churches) directly—in this way he accords them equal status with other believers. (In ancient Greco-Roman writings, slaves would never have been addressed directly, only owners would have been addressed.)

Likewise, this passage helps us understand how God calls us to live and think when we find ourselves in situations we don’t like but can’t change.

How would you sum up Peter’s instructions?

Do you have any areas of your life you could apply this to?

Did you notice how Peter does a pretty amazing thing in 2:21-25—he takes the situation of the slave and shows how it mirrors Jesus’ situation? Did you notice how in these verses it almost seems like Peter isn’t talking to slaves anymore, but to all Christians? And yet, this is part of the instructions to slaves—so what does this tell us about their situation, and how it relates to all Christians’ callings, and therefore, to ours?

Prayer: For the example of Christ to become my pattern. For the Spirit of Christ to shape my life and how we relate to unjust treatment. For God to equip me and get me ready for any situation where I’ll need to live out 2:20.

3:1-7

How would you describe the kind of marriage pictured in 3:1-7?

What kind of wife do they describe?

(What was the special position of some of the wives in Peter’s audience based on 3:1)?

How is 3:3-4 actually helpful for all believers to ponder?

What kind of husband does 3:7 describe?

If you’re not married—are you ready to think and live this way when you do get married? If not, there’s some food for thought...

Prayer: For a mindset shaped by God’s word, and not by our culture, in these things. For a focus on cultivating inward “beauty” instead of outward image. For growth in order to be able to fulfill these roles when / if God calls me to it.

1 Peter 3:8 - 4:6

Passage Overview

How does this section sum up 2:11-3:7?

How would you describe the kind of life Peter is urging us to in this passage?

How is Peter encouraging us here?

Who is Jesus in this passage?

Details

3:8-3:17

What is Peter’s basic instruction to us here?

Consider 3:8-9. How do the two verses relate to each other? Why is 3:9 necessary for us to do 3:8?

What’s the point of the Psalm 34 quote in 3:10-12? (Notice how the “for” in 3:12 picks up where the “for” in 3:10 left off.)

How is 3:13-14 realistic and helpful?

How does doing 3:15 help you do 3:14?

How living out 3:16 also essential to being able to do 3:14?

How does 4:1 help us when 4:3-4 happens to us?

Talk about the kind of Christian described in 3:14.

How does remembering 4:5-6 help us when 4:3-4 happen to us?

Here's a quote: "It is better to suffer than to sin." What do you think about that? How does it relate to 3:17? How does Matthew 18:8 relate to this?

Discussion for Prayer:

Talk about how we should pray through this passage. What are some directions for our praying we find here?

3:18-4:2

The basic instruction in this passage is found in 3:18 and 4:2. What is Peter saying there?

The long parenthesis in 3:19-22 can be confusing. Why is Peter saying these things here? While there are lots of things you might find in this passage, we can say a couple basic things: Peter is still comforting and encouraging those who are suffering or are about to suffer. So he tells them about another time when it was bad for believers—the time of Noah. God knew how to preserve the faithful then. And Jesus is so powerful that he's already vanquished the evil spiritual powers which were behind the evil in Noah's day. Our baptism is the sign that we're connected to his victory—we've escaped the flood of judgment Noah's flood symbolized, and now we're saved (like Noah in the ark). Our baptism is the sign of this deliverance. Hope that helps...

4:2-6

What is one good thing suffering does for us based on 4:1-2?

How does 4:3-4 apply to you personally?

1 Peter 4:7-4:19

Notice the first verse of this passage. It begins a mini-section that stretches to the “amen” in 4:11. Peter makes an amazing claim that “the end of all things is at hand.” Then he gives us a list of four things we should be doing since that statement is true.

What are the four things?

Are these things primarily “outreach” to non-believers...or not? Why, do you think?

Why is it important for Christians to do these things, do you think?

Since 4:12 seems like another theme (persecution coming), why would that make it even more essential for Christians to be doing thing things in Peter’s list?

Discuss each list item, how you personally experience it, would I like to grow in it, need to learn about it, or have found it to be a blessing in your life.

In 4:12-4:19 Peter gives us further teaching and encouragement for going through suffering for our faith in Christ. What two major reasons does he give us to “rejoice” in 4:13-14?

How do you feel about those reasons to rejoice? Do they seem to be sufficient to you, when suffering comes? Why or why not?

The interesting thoughts in 4:17-19 work with this idea: God’s final judgment will effect the whole world (the “all things” from 4:7), even God’s people, which would feel the beginning of the judgment, not from God’s pouring out of his wrath, but from the persecution from non-believers. This has the effect of separating believers from non-believers who were among the Christians, and therefore is part of God’s judgment, which is his final act of separation of all evil out of his good creation.

Prayer:

For a true sense of the times we live in. / For strength to eliminate the things that make us spiritually asleep. / For the seriousness and alertness necessary to be faithful in prayer. / For discernment in how God has gifted us, and the Spirit’s help to use that gifting for other Christians’ benefit.

1 Peter 5:1-14

Passage Overview

Talk about these final exhortations Peter gives to the Christians he writes to. Based on everything we've read so far, why do you think he ends his letter this way?

Details

In 5:1-5, what are the qualities that church leaders ("elders") are supposed to have?

What encouragement does Peter give them?

Why are these things important for all Christians (not just the leaders themselves) to know?

5:6-11

Peter gives three final exhortations in 5:6-9. What are they?

How will you put each one of these into action today?

...this next week?

...this next year?

In 5:7, Peter gives us the way we can do what he tells us to do in 5:8. How does that work, do you think? (in other words, if you won't "cast your cares on him," are you "humbling yourselves" before him? Why or why not?)

Finally, how does knowing and trusting the last half of 5:8 help you do the first half, and therefore, be in the position he commands in 5:6?

If you had to describe the Christian life, just from 5:6-11, how would you describe it?

HOW DOES THE BIBLE WORK?

OR, HOW CAN IT BE THE WORDS OF A HUMAN AND GOD AT THE SAME TIME?

[Throughout this weekend we will be referring to 1 Peter as something Peter wrote. But as you'll notice, we'll also be assuming that the words of this letter are God's words. For some of us, that may be a familiar concept, but in case it's unclear to you how both of those things could be true, here's an edited excerpt from the booklet "What is the Bible?" which begins to give you the answer—which is found in the amazing Christian (and biblical) doctrine of inspiration.]

You are a totally unique kind of being in the universe. You are a human, and a human is that kind of creature who—by definition—can be in relationship to God. Of all the universe, we are the one part God talks to. (This idea was suggested to me in Robert Letham's book *The Holy Trinity*. He quotes an author named Alar Laats, who says this: "A human person is one who is in principle open to the Holy Spirit and who is able to respond to him. Or to put it in other words: a human person is the one who can in principle be in communion with God." How can we know this is true? Because of who Jesus is. Letham explains, "If it were not so and could not be so, then Jesus Christ—God and man—could not be one person, for the difference between Creator and creature would be so great that incarnation would not be possible.")

What does this have to do with the Bible? Well, we can take it one step further: a human is that kind of creature who can be indwelt with the Spirit of God. As Christians so often say: "We have a God-shaped void in our hearts." To put it another way, God created us to be so close to him that he could actually live in us, permeating our Spirits and uniting us to him. It's an elevation beyond our wildest dreams—to be in union with the One who made us. And the writers of the Bible say that it is exactly this reality that allowed them to be humans who wrote God's words.

In a special way through history, some people (first known as the Prophets and later Jesus' followers known as Apostles) were so in union with God that, at times, what they spoke or wrote were God's words, even while they were simultaneously their words. In the scriptures we learn that

it is God's Holy Spirit who is the key link between God and man. "We have received...the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God," wrote the Apostle Paul in a letter to a church in Corinth. This Spirit, Paul says, knows "the deep things of God." (That's in 1 Corinthians 2.) "Holy men of God spoke," the Apostle Peter wrote, "as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)

Here's where we may run into, and should solve, an old assumption about the way God and humans relate. Many people seem to have a way of seeing the God-Human connection as a kind of pie graph. The bigger God's slice gets, the smaller ours gets. When some people talk about the Bible, they seem to assume that the fact that humans were involved means that God wasn't involved. Or at least, if God was involved, the human part messed up his part. In other words, since people wrote the books of the Bible, it's not God's word. But how do we know that humans are, by nature, the kind of beings who cancel out God wherever they are? It might sound powerful to say "The Bible is man's word, not God's," but do you see the "either/or" thinking here? Why must it be either God or people? Why couldn't it be both? Maybe there are better ways for us to think about these things.

When we truly encounter the Bible, we have that kind of thinking challenged. God is not the kind of God who has to cancel out our humanity when he wants to do or say something. He doesn't push us aside to get his work done. The whole universe is a theater for God to work in, through, and with us. We are, by nature, the kind of beings who find our highest expression when we are united to, becoming like, and working with our God. And that's exactly what happened—in a totally unique and never-repeated way—when the Spirit of God indwelt and guided the writers of the Bible. What they wrote was completely their words, and completely God's words. That's why, in the Bible, different books and letters and poems by different authors sound different. Each author has a unique touch that shows individuality, exactly as we'd expect from a collection of books written by different people. And yet, all this humanity is no problem at all for God, who seems to like to speak his word in this way. He doesn't erase the individuality of the authors as they write—he actually seems to use their particular personalities.

As Bible scholar Vern Poythress puts it: "We can see that God manifests the infinity of his wisdom and his harmony with himself exactly when his speech resonates with the particularities of the personality of a particular

human being. For example, we can see in Paul's writings the person of Paul...What do we think about this presence of Paul as a person in his writings? Do we think that it harmonizes with inspiration? Is it strange? Some people may be tempted to conclude that such personal expressions, by showing a human side, contradict the divine side. But that sort of reasoning misunderstands human nature, inspiration, and the way in which God's presence can affirm and take account of human contexts. In fact, once we have come to understand in some measure who Paul is and how he speaks, these personal touches are in full harmony with who God is and how he expresses himself. He speaks in harmony with the person of Paul when Paul is the person through whom he speaks."

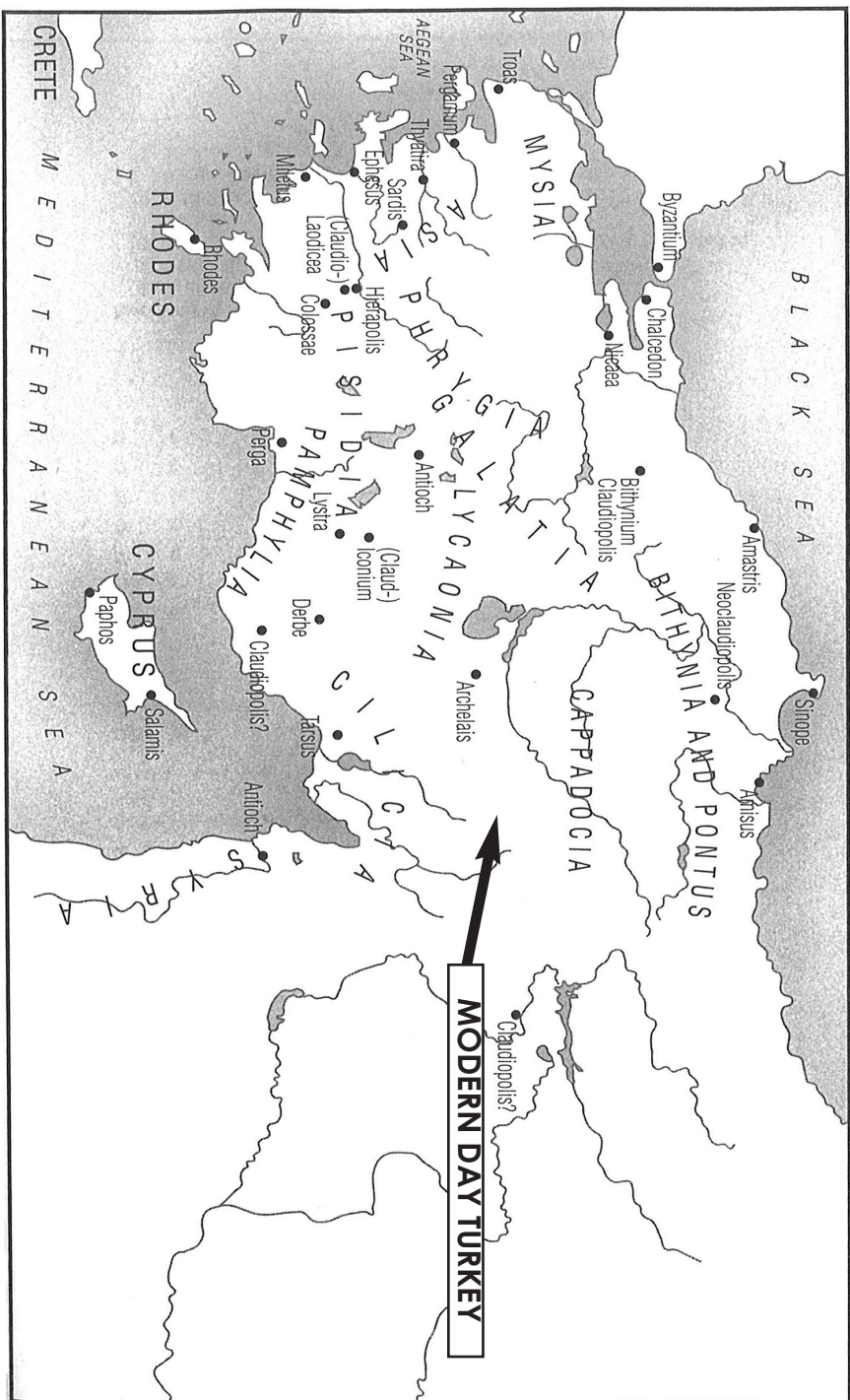
This is what Christians mean when they say the Bible is inspired. Or, as the Apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy: "Every word of scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16).

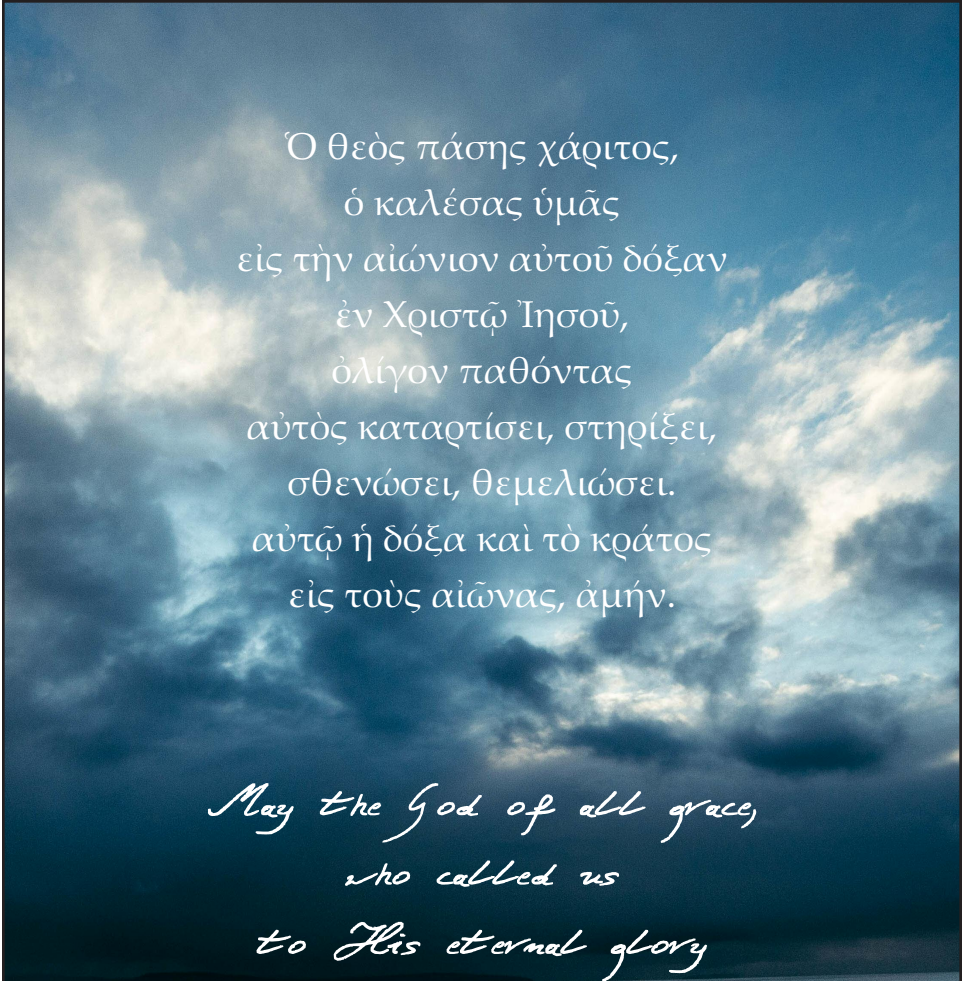
In seeking to explain how this works when it comes to writing, theologian John Frame explains that inspiration is "a divine act that creates an identity [that is, an exact match] between a divine word and a human word." If you've moved in Christian circles for a while, you might be seeing that this way of thinking about what the Bible is can help address some issues Christians sometimes disagree on—like the extent to which the Bible does or does not contain mistakes. Even in the Christian camp, some people may assume things about God and humanity that make it hard for them to see how God could have given us a clear, error-free book that is at once totally human and completely, perfectly, divine in origin. And yet, once we allow ourselves to be open to a biblical way of thinking about both God and humanity, we see that we don't have to play the human and divine off against each other. They exist together in perfect harmony.

In other words, the Bible shows us a supreme example of these horizon-opening truths: God exists. He speaks. We can hear and understand. We can know him. He can live inside us. And, even though we won't be writing scripture (those days are over), when we allow him to rule in our lives, it won't mean the end of our individuality or personality, but rather the fullest, truest expression of who we are.

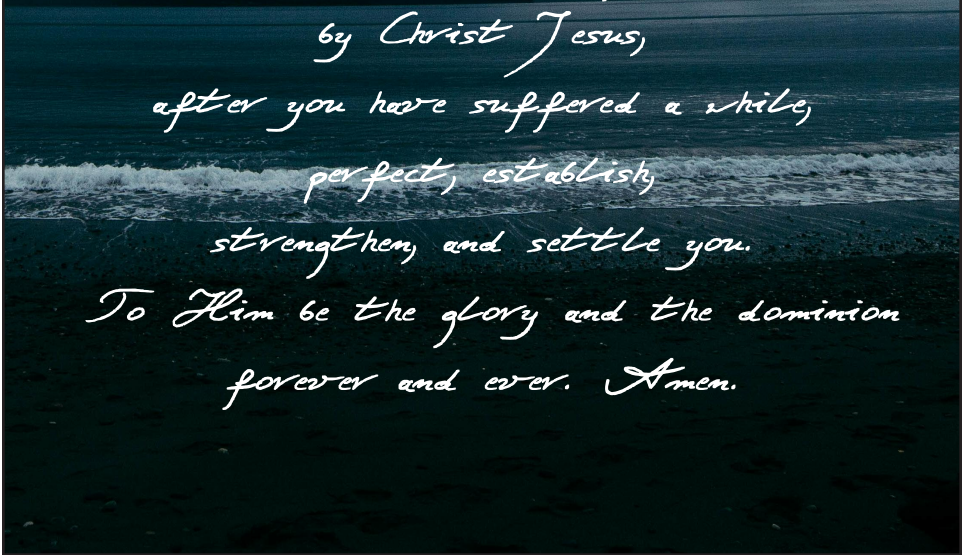
(If you would like to read the booklet this was taken from, visit www.truthoncampus.com)

THIS IS WHERE THE PEOPLE LIVED WHO PETER WROTE TO:





Ὁ θεὸς πάσης χάριτος,
ὁ καλέσας ὑμᾶς
εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον αὐτοῦ δόξαν
ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,
ὀλίγον παθόντας
αὐτὸς καταρτίσει, στηρίξει,
σθενώσκει, θεμελιώσκει.
αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος
εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.



*May the God of all grace,
who called us
to His eternal glory
by Christ Jesus,
after you have suffered a while,
perfect, establish,
strengthen, and settle you.
To Him be the glory and the dominion
forever and ever. Amen.*