MORE THAN GOLD
1 & 2 Peter

More than Gold

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In 1851, Australia’s recorded population was approximately 77,000 people. In the two years that followed, that population swelled remarkably to over 540,000. What led to such a dramatic increase in our land Down Under?

On 12th February 1851, a young Englishman by the name of Edward Hammond Hargraves made a discovery in the New South Wales city of Bathurst. He found the hottest of all commodities—he struck gold!

Gold was and still is the most precious and sought after metal, and Hargraves found it in abundance. His discovery ignited the Australian ‘Gold Rush’. Incredibly, Victoria alone produced more than one third of the world’s gold in the 1850's. By 1871, the population of Australia had increased from 540,000 to a whopping 1.7 million.

In Peter’s epistle to the early church, he makes a bold and audacious claim—he says that your faith is worth “more than gold.” It is a multifaceted analogy that speaks of the Christian life with God and in the world.

Like gold, Christians will come under fire. The early church, much like today’s, was constantly under trial. The political, social, spiritual and personal pressures associated with Christlike discipleship were like fire that sought to destroy their faith and trust.

Yet, like fire to gold, these trials have a refining effect. Fire exposes inferior and false elements, while drawing out purity, true beauty and enduring worth. In seasons of suffering, trial and persecution, we can find strength in the knowledge that the Lord our God is in control and has not abandoned His people. He remains sovereign on the smooth and rocky road, ultimately working and redeeming all things in accordance with His good and pleasing will.

And while gold is a valuable currency, it will eventually fade and one day perish. In contrast, the gospel of Jesus promises life, faith and joy that will never run out, but grow and deepen into all eternity. We who are united in Christ’s sufferings will share in His glory to come.

In ‘More than Gold’, City on a Hill will unpack the 166 verses that make up Peter’s exquisite letters to some of the very first Christians. Exploring the wonder of God’s sovereign grace and our true identity in Him, we will discover how to shine in an age of ever increasing challenge, opposition and trial. In God’s strength, we will be all we were made for. We will be more than gold.
Peter was originally named Simon until his first encounter with Jesus (John 1:42), where he was given his new name ‘Cephas’, which means ‘rock’ in Aramaic and is translated as ‘Petros’ in Greek. He was married (Mark 1:30; 1 Corinthians 9:5), spoke Aramaic with a strong northern accent (Mark 14:70), worked as a fisherman with his brother Andrew, and was in business with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10). He would have been very much influenced by his brother Andrew, who was a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:41), which may explain his immediate response to Jesus’ call to “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19).

The gospels provide us with a candid portrait of Peter. He is clearly the leader of the disciples as his name always occurs first in lists, and he is frequently the spokesperson for the group. He was also one of Jesus’ three closest friends, along with James and John, having special insights into Jesus’ full identity (Mark 8:29). It was these three who were privy to special divine experiences such as the healing of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:37) and the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1).

Yet, Peter has shown himself to be quite impetuous, with his failures and inconsistencies on display for all to see. He walks on water only to sink (Matthew 14:28–31). He’s presumptuous (John 13:8; 18:10) and at times quite senseless (Luke 9:33).

He tries to divert Jesus from His mission, and in the process earns possibly the harshest rebuke a disciple could receive (Matthew 16:23). He even cuts off a man’s ear in defence of Jesus, only to have Jesus reattach it. His greatest failure, however, follows his confession in Matthew 16:16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and his bold declaration of allegiance (Matthew 26:33)—under the questioning of a teenage girl (Matthew 26:69–75) he vehemently denied even knowing Jesus whom only hours earlier, he had declared he would die for.

Following the resurrection, Peter became a different man. He boldly preaches at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–41), is the first to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10), informs Ananias and Sapphira of their impending death (Acts 5:1–11), performs miracles (Acts 9:36–43), and willingly and joyfully suffers persecution, beatings and imprisonment. Here, he writes to the churches of Asia Minor to encourage them to stand firm in their faith despite suffering and persecution, and to remain faithful and trust in the Lord. The once arrogant and impulsive Peter is now a courageous and humble servant of Jesus, even to a martyr’s death.
Peter addresses his letter to the ‘elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia’ (1 Peter 1:1). We can place the destination of this letter as Asia Minor, on the site of modern-day Turkey. Originally this part of the world was known as Anatolia, which was derived from a Greek word meaning ‘the East’, or ‘sunrise’, and as Europeans pushed further east of the Mediterranean it came to be known as ‘lesser Asia’, or ‘Asia Minor’.

Its geographical location places modern-day Turkey at the nexus of Europe and Asia, lending its culture great colour and complexity; this has been the story of the region throughout its history. First known as the ‘Land of the Hatti’, this small peninsula has been possessed by a whole range of tribes and people, including Persians, Greeks, Assyrians, Scythians, Armenians, Romanians and Kurds. It became known as the ‘Land of the Turks’ in the medieval age. It was then passed over to the Roman Empire in the 1st and 2nd centuries BC. This occurred when Antiochus III, the king of the great city of Pergamum (one of the seven churches in Revelation), bequeathed his kingdom to Rome, after which it became an official Roman colony in 133 BC.

This diverse history makes it a favourite hunting ground for archaeologists; indeed, two of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World reside in this area: the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus.

When Peter wrote his letter midway through the first century, the region was a complex mix of cultures, passions and religions. The Greeks had conquered the land in 334 BC, and though power had been transferred to the Romans, Hellenistic culture remained dominant, particularly in the cities. Temples to Greek gods such as Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo were dominant in Greco-Roman cities. Alongside this were the surviving elements of indigenous cultures away from the cities. These rural areas functioned as theocracies, seeing themselves as under the authority of a local god who was helper and judge, ruler and healer. The temple was at the centre of their communities, and the priests, as servants of the god, wielded absolute authority over the people, presiding over religious rites that often included temple prostitution. When Roman emperors came onto the scene, they took the position of the gods, and were worshipped accordingly.
The Roman Empire was one of the largest empires, geographically, in world history. Its borders stretched all the way from Spain to Armenia, covering the northern territories of Africa. When new territories, such as Asia Minor, came under their control, the Romans were faced with the challenge of bringing it under Roman law and supremacy. This was achieved through colonising policies that targeted groups of Romans to infiltrate the newly acquired colonies. This way, the Roman Empire brought unity to the Mediterranean basin, providing safety to its citizens.

The majority of the population at that time lived in cities. These cities were male-dominated as the Romans generally had a low view of women and children. In comparison to today, Roman households were incredibly large with dozens of rooms containing approximately 150 people. These houses were multi-generational and led by the father or patriarch of the family. Like the cities we know today, those in the Roman Empire were full of diversity, containing a scale of social classes.

The Romans were well-known for their ingenuity and innovation. They created roads, stadiums, 3-storey brick apartments, sewerage systems, public toilets, baths, and so became the most civilised society the world had then known. Trade flourished and their influence spread rapidly.

In order to achieve religious uniformity, the Romans promoted syncretism and Emperor worship. The imperial cult (Emperor worship) was widely prevalent and somewhat enforced as Roman citizens could worship whom they wanted but had to declare the Emperor as Lord and offer burnt incense before his image. Many cities had temples dedicated to Emperors such as Augustus, Tiberius, Roma and later Hadrian and Trajan.
The gospel spread to Asia Minor very early in the history of the church. When Peter preached his first sermon in Jerusalem at Pentecost, there were devout Jews from all the regions of Asia Minor in attendance (Acts 2:9–11). Three thousand of those Jews were converted that day and it is reasonable to assume that some of these were residents of Asia Minor who later returned home taking the good news of the gospel with them.

These first Christians were all either Jews or Gentile adherents to Judaism. They would have originated from major urban centres in the province that were large enough to sustain a Jewish community. When they returned home with the news of the Messiah, they would have met in homes and synagogues, which are distinct from but not separated to the Jewish communities in these locations. Gentile converts would have gradually increased and by the time of Peter’s letter, they would have comprised a significant proportion and may even make up the majority of most churches (1 Peter 1:14, 18; 4:3–4).

Initially these new churches were considered a sect of Judaism (which enjoyed state sanctioned protection), and hardly noticed in a vast cosmopolitan empire where new sects were a dime a dozen. In fact one of the greatest trials of these first Christians must have come not from the state but from their Jewish families and friends, some of whom surely considered that their loved ones had been misled by a cult, and reacted with hostility to the new church as a whole. The Roman Empire itself did not appear to have initiated organised persecution of these new believers at that time. It was certainly not yet illegal to be a Christian. Persecutions did occur (there are four passages referring to persecution in 1 Peter), but they were sporadic and not Empire– or even province– wide. However, the fact that it was localised and intermittent does not lessen its intensity for those who were experiencing it. Persecution of some kind was never far away for a first century Christian.

Indeed, Asia Minor was a centre of Emperor worship, and the exclusive claims of Jesus on their affections meant that though Christians would honour the Emperor, they would not worship him. This would lead some officials to question these Christian’s loyalty to the Roman Empire. But persecution also arose from other sources varying from ill–disposed neighbours, private spite, offended religious sensibilities, frustrated commercial interests and biased legal outcomes. While the context is different, a Christian genuinely living and working for Jesus in Asia Minor in the first century would share many of our own experiences of living for Christ in the post–Christian West. It is true that the parallels differ from the present in degrees, but the promise that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12) rings as true now for us in Melbourne as it did nearly 2000 years ago to the first readers of 1 and 2 Peter.
Peter’s epistles provide a rich and comprehensive vision of God. Here are three attributes that are central in Peter’s understanding which shape his worship and response to the present trials.

God is first and foremost powerful. The throne of His reign stands supreme over all creation, powers, rulers, and time. He is the sovereign Lord who has elected us for salvation (1 Peter 1:1, 2:9–11), granted all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), guards our inheritance (1 Peter 1:4–5), and strengthens the faith of His children.

God’s power is revealed in His perfect plan which stretches from eternity past into eternity future. The Lord’s foreknowledge is evident by revelation to and through the prophets and in the provision of a saviour for the saints (1 Peter 1:20–21). It is His past reign and future promise that provide strength in the present trial.

Second, God’s work of salvation involves each member of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) working together in perfect harmony. Peter identifies God as ‘Father’, of His begotten Son Jesus who is appointed to accomplish His will with and by the Holy Spirit. Each member of the triune Godhead is equal, distinct and active in the life of His church. The Trinity, together, is involved in the salvation and sanctification of the elect (1 Peter 1:1b & 2). By extension, we, who are the adopted sons and daughters, are brought into covenant with the ‘Father’ through the blood of the true Son.

Third, our God and Father, who is sovereign in election and the perseverance of the saints, acts in accordance with His perfect grace and mercy. He does this for our joy and His glory (1 Peter 1:3–7).

The characteristics of God as revealed in Peter’s epistles strengthen our faith and inspire a life of trust, hope and worship.


Soteriology—God’s Salvation

“According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” (1 Peter 1:3b–4a)

The word ‘salvation’ (soteria in Greek) is used to express deliverance from physical danger, disease and sin. Remarkably, the same word is used to refer to the reward believers receive for standing firm in their faith until the end. In Christ, God’s children are saved from spiritual darkness, eternal death and despair. We are brought to His marvellous light and inheritance. Restoration to our Father stands as the supreme treasure in our salvation.

Central to Peter’s letter is the redeeming work of God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone of saving faith (1 Peter 2:7). Jesus is the one who suffered in the flesh that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

The gospel (literally good news) has a threefold implication for the believer. First, we are a new creation in Jesus Christ and can now live changed lives of true worship (1 Peter 2:10); second, we have a certain and unbreakable hope in our present sanctification and future glorification (1 Peter 1:3–4). This hope is alive and everlasting. Finally, we are guaranteed an inheritance that is far greater than any earthly offer or experience. His reward cannot be destroyed by death, sin or time.
Our identification with Christ's death and resurrection is the foundation for our new identity. We are who we are because of who Christ is and what Christ achieved on the cross and from the tomb.

Jesus is the living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious. In salvation, we are now made the living stones of God, who will be rejected by men, but accepted, honoured, chosen and precious in the sight of God.

Peter defines the believer's identity in a myriad of terms.

First, we are elected as God’s ‘chosen race’. Our identity as His people is not determined or dependent upon our age, gender, nationality, socio-economic standing or religious upbringing. We are rescued in accordance with His sovereign ‘call’. Through His adoption we are now descendants from a common lineage (Abraham and Sarah) brought into His promise and eternal purpose. As God’s people we receive a mandate to live and proclaim the excellencies of His manifold grace.

Second, we are ordained as a royal priesthood. In the Old Testament, the office of priesthood pertained to a select group of men who could enter the inner sanctum of God’s holy presence. In Christ, the temple curtain was torn, ushering a new era in which God’s people could approach the throne of His grace. Each member of the body now shares in Christ’s covenant, obedience and holiness.

Third, we are now a holy nation. As God’s people, we are in the world, yet separated for His affection and our sanctification. We are light in the midst of darkness.

Finally, we are a people for His own possession. The chief end of God’s work of salvation is that we may delight in an eternal union with Him. We now belong to our Father in His eternal household, for our good and His glory.
The early church in Asia Minor experienced trials and sufferings for their association with Christ. Peter helps the believers understand why they are suffering and how they are to respond. The present trials are inextricably linked to the past trials of Jesus himself. His suffering is and will be our suffering. As Christ was mocked, slandered, rejected, ostracised until death, so His body the church will also face persecution. These sufferings are not a consequence or a judgement for doing evil, but are a sign of rejection of the name we bear, Jesus Christ, the suffering servant (1 Peter 2:21).

We can rejoice in our present sufferings because of the glory to come. As Jesus rose in glory, so in Him we are now and will be glorified.

The suffering of Christ serves as a substitute for our sin, but also as an example. We are to embrace suffering in the manner in which Jesus embraced the cross. His humility and God-centred dependence are to be the marks of a believer under trial.
Peter addresses the early church Christians as aliens and strangers in this world, a world marked by pagan ideologies and practices. The world embraces pluralism and idol worship, which stand at odds and in opposition to the claims of Christ.

Throughout history, believers have sought a range of ways to engage or distance themselves from their surrounding and at times hostile culture. Broadly speaking, Christians have found themselves either withdrawing and opposing the world (separation) or becoming like the world in every regard (syncretism).

Throughout the epistle, we are called to a more complex but integrated relationship with the world. We don’t run from the world, nor seek to become like the world, but are purposed to live as ambassadors for Christ in this world. We are light in the midst of darkness.

Peter provides practical insights into how the gospel shapes our life and our interaction with the world. Through his letters, we see that some of the ideas and practices of the world need to be rejected, some to be received, and the others redeemed.

The goal of life is to live lives of worship that are holy and pleasing to the Lord. We make much of God when we love our world in the midst of rejection, grow in holiness in the midst of temptation, persevere in the midst of trial, and give witness to the saving work of God in the midst of ideological and theological attack. We can live lives of joy-filled worship no matter what we face, for we worship a sovereign Lord who has secured us to Himself and His living hope.

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12)
1 Peter is a book written to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. However, Peter’s letter is chock–full of allusions, quotations and references to the Old Testament Scriptures which tells us that he assumed his whole audience knew these Scriptures well. In this way, Peter reminds us today of the real value of knowing the Old Testament. Not only is the Old Testament rich in literary styles, events and revelations of God and His purposes, knowing it also provides a wonderful guide to the New Testament Scriptures.

Like many New Testament authors, Peter uses the Old Testament in a variety of ways, such as to illustrate a point, to add emphasis to his prose, and to remind his readers of how Jesus fulfils its blueprint.

In 1 Peter 1:1–2, we read the greeting: “To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.”

To most of us, sayings like ‘the foreknowledge of God the Father,’ the ‘sanctification of the Spirit,’ and ‘obedience to Jesus Christ,’ make good sense as long as we have a grasp of Bible jargon. But what about, ‘sprinkling with his blood’? How often have you greeted a friend by reminding them of the gospel using that phrase?

To the Old Testament reader, ‘sprinkling with his blood’ immediately links two events: the crucifixion of Jesus (shedding blood), and the Passover of the Israelites. Early on in the Bible, we find God’s chosen people, Israel, enslaved under Pharaoh in Egypt. God hears His people’s cries and brings 10 plagues on Egypt, with Israel’s leader, Moses repeating God’s request to Pharaoh, ‘Let my people go!’ (Exodus 5:1, 7:26, 8:1). The last plague involved the Spirit of God going through the land and killing every firstborn animal and child—a terrible tragedy. However, the Israelites were to put the blood of an unblemished lamb on their doorpost, so that the Spirit of God would pass over and not bring death to that house (Exodus 12:13). The lamb, through the loss of its life and blood, stands in the place of the judgement. The New Testament authors link the Passover with Jesus. Most famously, John the Baptist welcomes Jesus for the first time with, ‘Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!’ (John 1:29). Peter also makes this link directly later in 1 Peter 1:19.
Moreover, this ‘sprinkling with blood’ was a key part of purifying the place of meeting between God and man in the Old Testament. The blood was to be ‘sprinkled’ on various parts of the ritual elements (e.g. Leviticus 16). God is holy and His holiness cannot mix with defilement. Peter even brings to mind the refrain of the Old Testament Law ‘You shall be holy for I am holy’ (e.g. Leviticus 11). And finally, in the great suffering servant song section of Isaiah (Isaiah 53), God’s ‘servant’ who will be ‘marred beyond human resemblance’ will also be the one to ‘sprinkle many nations.’ Jesus’ blood will be a perfect purifying blood, taking away the sins not only of Jewish believers, but believers from every tribe and nation!

So, Peter wants us to remember that Jesus’ death saves the believer from judgement (as in Exodus), purifies the believer from their sin (as in Leviticus), and offers this salvation to the world by faith (as in Isaiah). What an opener!

There are plenty of Old Testament references to be found in 1 Peter. Enjoy the detective work!
This Bible Reading Plan is to help you make the most out of the ‘More Than Gold’ series. We recommend that you read the text twice before Sunday, and the whole text of the series so far after each Sunday sermon so that you will be familiar with the text before the Sunday message, and then read it with new insight after you have heard the related sermon.

### [1 Peter Readings]

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### [2 Peter Readings]

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Here are five sets of verses from Peter that we encourage you to commit to memory. Having the Bible on your mind builds faith (Romans 10:17), keeps us from sin (Psalms 119:11) and revives our soul (Psalms 19:7).

**Week 1:** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” – 1 Peter 1:3

**Week 2:** “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.” – 1 Peter 1:12

**Week 3:** “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” – 1 Peter 1:13

**Week 4:** “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” – 1 Peter 2:9

**Week 5:** “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.” – 1 Peter 2:16

**Week 6:** “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” – 1 Peter 2:24

**Week 7:** “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.” – 1 Peter 3:1–2

**Week 8:** “but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.” – 1 Peter 3:4

**Week 9:** “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” – 1 Peter 3:7

**Week 10:** “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” – 1 Peter 3:15
Tips for memorising: Read through 10 times. Repeat 10 times aloud. Repeat every day for at least a week. Keep the verse close (written down or in your phone) so you can peek at it during the day. Refresh your memory once a week thereafter.

Week 11: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” – 1 Peter 3:18

Week 12: “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” – 1 Peter 4:1

Week 13: “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” – 1 Peter 4:8

Week 14: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” – 1 Peter 4:12

Week 15: “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” – 1 Peter 5:4

Week 16: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.” – 1 Peter 5:6

Week 17: “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” – 1 Peter 5:10

Week 18: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.” – 2 Peter 1:3

Week 19: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” – 2 Peter 1:16

Week 20: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” – 2 Peter 2:1

Week 21: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” – 2 Peter 3:9
[COMMENTARIES]
- Achtemeier, P., 1 Peter (1996)
- Calvin J., 1 and 2 Peter (translated 1855)
- Clowney, E., The Message of 1 Peter (1994)
- Green J., 1 Peter (2007)
- Grudem, W., 1 Peter (1988)
- Jobes, K., 1 Peter (2005)
- Marshall, H., 1 Peter (1991)
- Schreiner, T., 1, 2 Peter, Jude (2003)
- Sproul R. C, 1 Peter (2011)

[ABOUT CITY ON A HILL]
City on a Hill began at the end of 2007 with a small team and a big vision to see Melbourne renewed with the great news of Jesus. Since then, God has gathered men and women of all ages with a passion to know Jesus and make Him known.

As a community we meet every Sunday for our main services at 9am, 10.30am and 6pm (Hoyts Melbourne Central) where we hear relevant and practical messages from the Bible about God, life and the world we live in. We pray, we sing, we hang out, and then through the week we commit ourselves to being people of light and love in our city.

To find out more about what God is doing in and through this community and how you can partner with us visit cityonahill.com.au