

A Kingdom of Priests



SABBATH—APRIL 8

READ FORTHISWEEK’S LESSON: 1 Peter 2:1–3; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 2:4–8; Isaiah 28:16; Exodus 19:3–6.

MEMORY VERSE: “But God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are God’s special treasure. You are all these things so that you can give him praise. God brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NlrV).

PETER IS FULLY ABSORBED IN JEWISH CULTURE, religion, and history. And his writing shows it. For example, he calls “[God’s] people . . . a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9, NlrV). When he does this, he uses the words that the Old Testament uses to describe Israel in the long-ago past. But he uses these same words to describe the New Testament church.

And why not? After all, Gentile (non-Jewish) believers in Jesus have now been united or joined with Jewish believers. The Bible uses a special word to help us understand what it means to be united. It is *grafted*. To graft means to join or unite two plants together. So the new believers are “grafted” into God’s people, the Jews. Now the Gentile believers take part in the Old Testament promises meant for the Jews. (Read Romans 11:17, 18.)

Peter reminds his readers they are God’s chosen people. He points them to their high calling. They have been “grafted” into the olive tree. The new believers are to tell others about the great truth that Jesus saves us from sin. And He gives us eternal life.



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LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN (1 Peter 2:1–3)

First Peter 2:1 begins with the word *so* (NIV). The word *so* means that the words that follow result from what comes before. We saw that 1 Peter 1 is a powerful explanation of the things Christ has done for us. It teaches us how we should respond to the gift of salvation. In this next chapter, then, Peter takes this theme further.

Read 1 Peter 2:1–3. What does Peter tell us about how we should live?

Peter uses two separate word pictures, or images, to show that God asks two things of Christians. First, we must give up or let go of certain things. Second, Christians should try to do something positive for God with their lives.

In his first word-picture, Peter urges Christians to “throw out” or get rid of the desire to cause harm to others. Christians will not be false or lie to others, either. They will tell the truth. Christians will not envy those who have more than they do. Instead, they will be happy with their own lives. They will be successful where God has placed them. And Christians will not say things that damage another person’s good name.

The second word-picture, or image, that Peter uses is a baby hungry for milk (1 Peter 2:2). This image shows the positive side of Christian living. After all, Christian life is not just about giving up bad things. Such a life would be empty. No, the Christian life is about wanting to be fed spiritual food. And a Christian must want spiritual food with the same force that a hungry baby cries out for milk.

Peter points readers to the source of that spiritual food (read also Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 22:29; 2 Timothy 3:15–17). The Bible is that source. It is the Word of God. And feeding on the Word of God helps us to grow. It helps us to become more spiritual. It teaches us the difference between right and wrong.

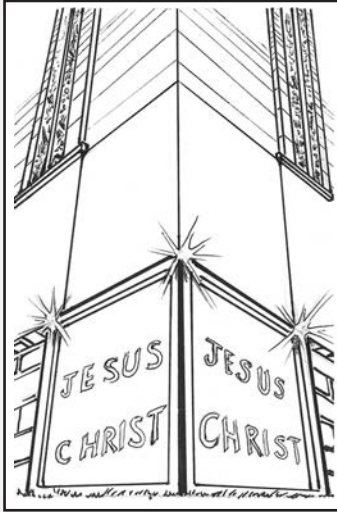
The Bible is the fullest and clearest picture we have of Jesus Christ. And Jesus is our greatest Example of who God is. In Jesus, we see the Holy God we are to love and serve.

We must “feed” on the Word of God. Why will doing that help us to “throw out” or stop doing the harmful things that Peter warns us about?



A Christian must want spiritual food with the same force that a hungry baby cries out for milk.

THE LIVING STONE (1 Peter 2:4–8)



Jesus is the “living Stone.” God chose Him to be the cornerstone of His spiritual house, the church. Christians are living stones built into this house.

Read 1 Peter 2:4–8 (read also Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14, 15). What important truth is Peter referring to in 1 Peter 2:4–8? What does he say to us about how we should respond to Jesus? How should we act?

Peter tells his readers to hunger for spiritual food. Then right away Peter turns their attention to Jesus Christ. Jesus is the “living Stone.” Peter’s use of the word “stone” is most likely a reference to the Jerusalem temple. In 1 Peter 2:4–8, Peter quotes three Old Testament verses. These verses talk about the importance of cornerstones. The cornerstone is a word-picture for the work that Jesus does in His church.

Peter’s point is that God chose Jesus to become the cornerstone of God’s spiritual house. Christians also are living stones that are built into this house. The church is founded upon Jesus. But it is made up of those who follow Him.

Notice that becoming a Christian means that you become part of a Christian community or local church. The example of a brick can help us understand this idea. A brick is used to build a larger structure. In the same way, Christians are meant to be part of a larger community of believers. They are not called to be followers of Jesus apart from others. A Christian must worship and work with other Christians to build up the kingdom of God. A Christian who does not do these things really cannot be a true Christian. Why? Christians are baptized into Christ. And being baptized into Christ means that Christians are baptized into His church.

Peter also talks about the purpose of the church. It is to be made up of “holy priests” (1 Peter 2:5, NIV). And these holy priests offer “spiritual sacrifices” (NIV). In the Hebrew Bible, the priests serve as go-betweens. They serve between God and His people. Peter and others in the New Testament often use the words “temple” and “priests.” They use these words to show that the church is the living temple of God and that His people are its priests. Peter points back to the Old Testament system of worship. Through these Old Testament truths, he shows how Christians should live and act today.

Read 1 Peter 2:5 again. What does Peter mean when he says, “You will offer spiritual sacrifices”? (NIV). How do Christians do that?

THE PEOPLE OF THE PROMISE (Genesis 17:1–4)

Peter writes with the Old Testament very much in mind. One of the ideas important to the Old Testament is the covenant.¹

“Covenant” comes from the Hebrew word *berit*. It describes a legal agreement between two groups. A covenant also could be made between two individuals (Genesis 31:44) or between two kings. (For example, read 1 Kings 5:12. Here, *berit* is translated as “treaty” in the NIV.) Or a covenant could be made between a king and his people (2 Samuel 5:3).

But one covenant stands out from all the rest. It is the special covenant² relationship between God and His chosen people.

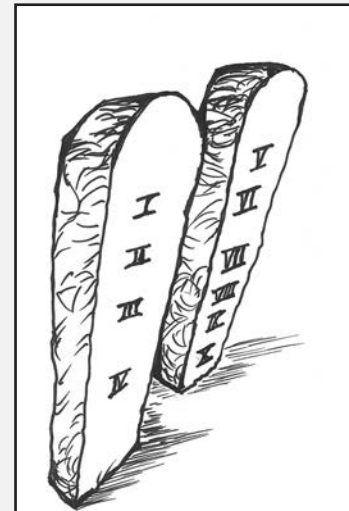
Read Genesis 17:1–4; Exodus 2:24; and Exodus 24:3–8. What do these verses tell us about the covenant God made with Israel?

The first book of the Bible tells how God made a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:9–21; Genesis 17:1–27). God “remembered” this covenant when He rescued His people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 2:24, NIV). God then renewed this covenant when He gave the Ten Commandments and other laws to the children of Israel (Exodus 19:1–24:8; especially Exodus 24:3–8).

But God’s covenant promises come with requirements. “The Lord made an agreement with His people. But they must be faithful in return. They must obey His requirements. Then He would bless their families and all that they owned. And He would bless all the work of their hands.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*³ for the Church, volume 2, page 574.

The covenant promised that God would bless His people. But God would bless them only if they kept His law. And the covenant also warned of destruction. But those warnings are meant only for people who disobey God’s covenant.

What does it mean to you to be in a covenant relationship with God? What special requirements does this relationship place on you?



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DEFINITIONS

1. covenant—a legal or serious agreement between two or more people.
2. special covenant—having to do with the agreement between God and His people.
3. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS (1 Peter 2:5, 9, 10)

The Lord speaks to Moses in Exodus 19:3–6. He says: “ ‘Here is what I want you to say to my people, who belong to Jacob’s family. Tell the Israelites, “You have seen for yourselves what I did to Egypt. You saw how I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to myself. Now obey me completely. Keep my covenant. If you do, then out of all the nations you will be my special treasure. The whole earth is mine. But you will be a kingdom of priests to serve me. You will be my holy nation.” This is what you must tell the Israelites’ ” (NirV).

Here is the gospel message. And it is shown thousands of years before the Cross. The message is: God saves. He saves His people from sin. He saves them from the slavery of sin. And then He commands them to love and obey Him. For they now are His special covenant people. They will be a witness for God before the world.



Through Christ, anyone can become His “royal priests.”

Read 1 Peter 2:5, 9, 10 and Exodus 19:6. What does Peter mean when he calls Christians “royal priests” and “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9, NirV)? What does this wording say to us as Seventh-day Adventist Christians about our responsibilities to God and to the whole world?

“Holy nation,” “royal priests,” and “God’s own people” are all terms of honor. The Bible uses these terms to describe the special relationship that God has with the offspring of Abraham. Now Peter uses these same terms when he talks about Jesus and the Cross. And he uses them to describe the members of the church.

The covenant promises made to Israel are made to the Jews who believe in Jesus. And they are made to the Gentile (non-Jewish) believers, as well. Yes, through Jesus, Gentiles also can claim to be children of Abraham. “You who belong to Christ are Abraham’s seed. So you will receive what God has promised” (Galatians 3:29, NirV). Through Christ, anyone can join His “royal priests.” In other words, they do not need to be Jews to join.

A holy nation? Royal priests? What should these terms say to us about the kind of lives we should live as individuals and as a church? How can we better live up to this high calling (holy request from God)?

PRAISING GOD (1 Peter 2:10)

The New Testament church is the same as the Old Testament church in many ways. For example, both churches received the truth of salvation. And both churches were called out and chosen by God. The question is, *Called out and chosen for what?* Peter quickly gives the answer.

Peter points out that this special relationship between God and the church is for a purpose. Christians are called to “give [God] praise. God brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). Israel of Old Testament times was called to do this work. God called them to be His witnesses to the world. This is because God’s purpose was to bless the whole world through Israel, His covenant people.

Read the following verses: Deuteronomy 4:6; Deuteronomy 26:18, 19; Isaiah 60:1–3; Zechariah 8:23. What same point do all these verses make?

The Israelites were God’s covenant people. It was their task to reach the world with the gospel. Christians have the same divine calling or work. They are called to share with others what God has done for the world through Christ.

Read 1 Peter 2:10. Why is this verse so central to the whole work and purpose of Christians?

The world is deep in sin, death, and coming destruction. But Jesus gave His life to save everyone from this ruin. The names or terms of honor that were given to Israel are given to Christians: we are royal priests, a holy nation. As with Israel of old, the terms of honor are also terms of responsibility. We are to bring others to Christ.

As 1 Peter 2:10 states, Christians now form their own people. They once were not a people. But now they have received mercy to become a *holy* people (read Hosea 1, 2). In the Bible, the word *holy* usually means set aside to worship God. So, as a “holy” nation, Christians are to be separated from the world to worship God. This separation will be shown in the kinds of lives that they live. They are also to be like a fire on a cold night. Such a fire will draw others to its warmth. In this way, God gives Christians the work of sharing with others the salvation that they have experienced for themselves.



Christians are called out of darkness into the light.



“Grace surrounds the soul of the believer. The Holy Spirit works upon mind and heart. And he or she becomes the ‘perfume of life’ [2 Corinthians 2:16, NIV].”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The church is very precious in God’s sight. He values it. But He does not value it because of its fame or wealth or power. Instead, He values its holiness. The holiness of the church sets it apart from the world. God bases its value on two things. First, He bases the church’s value on the growth of the members in the knowledge of Christ. And second, He bases the church’s value on how much they have grown in spiritual experiences.

“Christ longs to receive from His vineyard [the church] the fruit of holiness and unselfishness. He looks for its members to show love and goodness. The beauty of all art cannot come close to the beauty of kindness and goodness shown in those who are Christ’s representatives. Grace [mercy and forgiveness] surrounds the soul of the believer. The Holy Spirit works upon mind and heart. And he or she becomes the ‘perfume of life’ [2 Corinthians 2:16, NIV]. God works with us through His gifts of grace and the Holy Spirit. In this way, He is able to bless His work.”—Adapted from Ellen, G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 298.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What is it like to be brought out of darkness into “[God’s] wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV)? What does this verse mean? How would you explain this idea to someone who did not believe in Jesus? What is the darkness? What is the light? Now look at what Peter wrote. What do light and darkness mean in his writing? What is the difference between the two?
- ② Read Deuteronomy 4:5–8, NIV. What do these words say to us as Seventh-day Adventists? How do these verses help us understand what we have been called by God to do because of all that He has given us?
- ③ Read 1 Peter 2:3. What does Peter mean when he says, “now that you have tasted how good the Lord is” (NIV)? In what ways have you “tasted” how good the Lord is?
- ④ Think about your local church. What is it about your church that makes its members attractive to people who know nothing about Seventh-day Adventists or about what we believe?