

First Peter: Elect Exiles

1 Peter 1:1-2

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

This is the first lesson in our series on the book of 1 Peter. Which has been called a “condensed resume of the faith.” *The book is a model of pastoral instruction (for those who live, as we say, in between the times)*. In the tension of a salvation already accomplished, and not yet consummated. And in the face of serious cultural hostility. Which makes it a book uniquely relevant, I think, to our current moment.

The author, of course, is Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ and thus authorized by Christ himself, to instruct and to comfort the church. He writes somewhere around 63 AD from the city of Rome, where he was, according to tradition, martyred just a few years later. Rome is symbolically called Babylon, at the end of the letter. Just as it is called Babylon throughout the Book of Revelation. So, it is from Rome, Babylon, the capital of the Empire, to a people living under the dominion of the Roman Beast, that Peter writes. In these opening verses we will make two points. Exiles and Election.

I. Exiles

First, then, exiles. After identifying himself, Peter begins: To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. Notice first, that whether these are Roman provinces, or just regions, the letter is a general, widely distributed, letter – what we call today a catholic epistle. Peter writes not to merely one church, but to a wide geographical swath of believers, across what today is – a swath of Turkey.

This gives the book a kind of universal feel. It’s not bogged down in the local issues of any one congregation. And the Christians to whom he writes are, note, SCATTERED, throughout these provinces. The word for “scattered” is the word we get “Diaspora” from – a term used of the Jews in exile, scattered from their homeland.

But, while there is some debate here, Peter is most likely using the term metaphorically, and writing to a predominantly Gentile audience. These are people, we know from the rest of the book, who inherited a futile way of life from

their forefathers – something unlikely to be said of his Jewish heritage. They previously indulged in pagan sensuality, drunkenness, orgies, and general debauchery, which Jews would have found abhorrent. These are a people whose neighbors are shocked, when they cease to live a life of immoral dissipation. Which would be true of Gentiles, but perhaps not of Jews.

Finally, were told in chapter 2, that these are a people who were not the people God, and now are the people of God, they had not received mercy, but now they have received mercy. This is an allusion to Hosea chapters 1 and 2, and originally speaks of the restoration of rebellious Israel.

But Paul, in Romans 9, extends the Hosea text to the calling of the Gentiles, and it would appear Peter is doing the same thing here. Thus, on balance, the evidence is that Peter is writing to predominantly (not exclusively) Gentile Christians. And Peter, as the NT does everywhere, appropriates the language that the OT applies to Israel, to the church.

For she is the renewal of Israel. She is the Israel of God.

So, “Diaspora” refers to the scattered church, scattered away from her true homeland. And it is qualified, and interpreted, by the word “exiles.” Exiles...scattered.

Exile is a key theme in the epistle, and a key motif in Christian existence. The word for exiles here means transients (foreigners). Peter will use another word later that means resident aliens. But this word here, exiles, is lighter and more vaporous. It means people passing through: vagabonds, visiting foreigners. Transients of the scattering, transients of the diaspora, that is how Peter designates the church. Resident alien stresses that we are living away from our true home, transient stresses that we are wayfarers, sojourners on the way to our true home. Clearly the ideas are closely related.

Let’s unpack this a little. There are two – related – reasons for this exile sentiment, found here, and throughout Scripture.

First, the brevity, the vaporizing, shortness of life. The whole book of Ecclesiastes is taken up with it – but let’s use Psalm 39 as an example:

Show me, Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. ⁵ *You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath,* ⁶ Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom.

Then, the Psalmist says: for I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger – now get this, listen – I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, AS ALL MY FATHERS WERE. All Israel dwells with God as strangers. Because, like all human beings,

they are vaporizing puffs of smoke. We are not home until we are in immortal, deathless, glory. In 1 Chronicles 29, David, the king, in the land now, prays for the gifts given to build the temple, and says: We are aliens in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow. Thus everyone – David affirms, ALL our fathers – everyone is a stranger, a pilgrim, a wayfarer.

A second biblical reason for this sentiment – and this brings us closer to what Peter is getting at, can be seen from Leviticus 25, we read this:

“The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is *mine*, and you reside in *my* land as foreigners and strangers.”

The land is the Lord's. Israel exists in it as tenants. As foreigners and strangers. Thus, the Psalmists could say to God: You are my PORTION, my inheritance, Lord. Now, this language of “portion” reflects the state of the Levites in Israel. They did not get a land inheritance. The Lord said to them: I am your share. But – and this is important – the Levites dramatized the reality of all Israelites. They were all but temporary tenants in the land. Strangers before the Lord, even in Canaan. In Psalm 119, the Psalmist, who is not in exile, or in Egypt, but who is in the promised land, says: I am a stranger/sojourner ON EARTH.

Let's put it this way: As Israel was strangers, transients in the land, so the church, scattered, is a body of transients in the earth. So, we are exiles, because we are exiled from, and sojourners on the way to, our true homeland. Which is heaven (Triune God in heaven). Israel's inheritance was the land. Peter will say in v.4 that our inheritance (land term) is in heaven.

Here's the key thing to see: the land is a type, an OT picture of heaven (and thus of the eschaton). This is the reason for so much hymnody in the church, about crossing the Jordan, crossing over into Canaan, being associated with dying. The Scriptural reasons for this kind of hymnody, the instincts behind it, are profound and solid. Consider the following: The OT land, was Israel's country, their nation. Hebrews 11 tells us, that the saints then, and Christians now, desire a BETTER country, that is a heavenly one. Our country, our land, is heavenly.

What else made the land, the land? Well, the city of Jerusalem. But the NT teaches us that our Jerusalem is the Jerusalem above, the heavenly city. Mount Zion was in the land, but now Mt. Zion is what we come to, when we are lifted up into Heaven (Heb. 12). The sanctuary, with its holy of holies, was the centerpiece of the land, but we know it was a copy, a shadow of a heavenly sanctuary... *And that Jesus has entered THAT very heavenly holy place, in the highest heavens before the face of God.* The land also was the place where the Davidic throne was, from which the king reigned. And Jesus has now assumed the Davidic throne in heaven.

So, the land, the city of Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the sanctuary, and the Davidic Throne are now all heavenly realities. And a people oriented to heaven, a people whose life, whose treasure, whose inheritance, whose affections, whose citizenship, whose Bridegroom and Lord, are in heaven – such a people are – in the nature of the case ---transients in the earth.

Now, this may seem too other-worldly, too wispy. I assure you it is not. What is required is a people who think of heaven as more solid, more real, more concrete, more enduring, more powerful, infinitely more lovely, than all the kingdoms of the world. For the immediate glory of the Triune God and his Christ are there. Yet, the world, dislodged from its claim to be the center of gravity of our affections, is NOT left behind here. Peter will call us to soberly witness in it, and live in it with gritty realism throughout the letter. And he expects for his scattered exiles to be vindicated. He knows that having our inheritance in heaven means, that when heaven descends, when the veil between this creation and heaven itself is torn, when Jesus appears in visible glory, with the burning angelic hosts... with the departed saints, when the heavenly city descends, when the new creation appears, it will heavenize this creation – it will transfigure this current order.

That will be the destruction of death, of all the satanic powers, the eradication of evil, the resurrection of the dead, the vindication of the martyrs, the rectifying and healing the whole cosmos. Then, the glory, the visible radiance of God, will flood the earth as the waters over the sea. *The whole groaning creation liberated, lit up, and escalated in splendor, by the light of God shining visibly in the face of JC.* Nothing short of this is the Christian hope. Nothing short of this is our inheritance

Heaven, it turns out, is the epicenter of the new creation. It is where our life is already hidden with Christ in God. And it is the place FROM WHICH, we shall be revealed (seen openly) in glory, when Christ's transfigured glory is revealed. The meek may, indeed they shall, inherit the earth. But until they do, they reside as strangers in it. In the gift of the Spirit, we have a foretaste, a down payment of our future inheritance, which remains reserved for us in heaven. Having the down payment, and yearning for the full inheritance, we live, Peter says, as scattered transients. EXILES.

II. Election

Our second point is election. We are exiles, nevertheless we are ELECT exiles. This is how Peter begins comforting and encouraging these harassed and suffering transients. With the doctrine of election. This – and no earthly consolation – is the root of our dignity, our security, and our hope. We have been CHOSEN according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

Being a member of God's people is not determined by blood or by physical descent. They are not all Israel who are from Israel. It is determined by God's electing mercy. Where is the church's anchor? In the being of the electing God. And foreknowledge here is not merely seeing in advance, it is not God's bare cognition (knowledge) of the future. To be known by God, is to be loved by God. Through Amos, God says to Israel: You only have I KNOWN, of all the nations of the earth. To be known is to be loved. To be foreknown, is to be loved from all eternity. It is virtually identical with the idea of election.

Later in this chapter, Peter will say that Christ himself was "foreknown before the foundation of the world." Which surely means he was loved and chosen by the Father for his Messianic mission from all eternity. Whom he foreknew, Paul says, these he predestined. Those who are foreknown, and those who are predestined, are an identical set. To be foreknown, then, is to be elect. And this election is made operative, it comes into being in your own life, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. 2 Thess 2 says much the same thing: God chose you to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

Election is unto holiness. Ephesians 1: he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. What is God doing in the earth, in history? He is creating, by the Spirit, a holy people, conformed to the glorious image of his Son, for fellowship with Himself, now by faith, and later in glory, face to face in a renewed creation.

So, our election originates in God the Father, it is made operative in us by the Spirit, and its goal, its object is, the text continues, obedience to Jesus Christ, and sprinkling with his blood. That is, incorporation into the reality of the NC in the blood of Christ. This is a beautiful, compact statement of the unified work of the Holy Trinity. The Father chooses, the Son redeems, the Spirit sanctifies.

Let us conclude. This is a basic identity statement by the apostle. Its fundamental to understanding his epistle, and it provides a fundamental orientation for Christian existence in the world. These communities are poor, powerless, harassed, and suffering. While massive Empire wide suffering has not yet been unleashed, they face all sorts of sporadic, but serious opposition. And to this people, Peter gives no cheap earthly solace. He insists at the outset on a displacement – an alienation. He insists on heavenly mindedness, on a heavenly identity. His opening designation is that they are chosen, scattered transients. Elect Exiles.

A mindset almost completely absent from American Christianity. Where the culture wars and secular politics, occupy much more energy, evoke much more passion, consume much more psychological bandwidth, fray more friendships, than any contemplation on our status as transients destined for heavenly glory. And for our malady Peter prescribes this: Eternal election unto holiness by the Triune God and its corresponding exilic status.

This – and not any earthly agenda or any socio-political outcomes -- this is the church's comfort and assurance and hope in the face of peril. It is upon such people – Christian pilgrims – that the apostle pronounces his rich benediction. A benediction which contains all the blessings of the gospel, all the teaching about to be unpacked in this letter, in miniature. Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).