

1 Peter 1:1-21: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 1 to 21 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, 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, may grace and peace be multiplied to you.

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, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him, and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours, searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating, when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

[1 : 3 8] 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.

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. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.

But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy. And if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot, he was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

1 Peter is the first letter of the leading apostle in the New Testament. Some have doubted that such a letter could have been written by a man of Peter's education and background, on account of such things as its strong Greek style.

Others have observed many similarities to Paul. Perhaps it is written with the help of Silvanus, who was associated with Paul. He is mentioned in chapter 5 verse 12. The notions that we have of authorship may be rather narrower than those that should apply to a letter such as this.

[3 : 2 2] While there is no compelling reason to doubt that it was sent by Peter, in his name and with his authority, and in accordance with his teaching, this need not mean that he composed every single word himself.

Nor needs such a position question that this book was inspired by the Spirit in its entirety. Some have suggested that the book is primarily a catechetical or liturgical document that has been formed into a letter, with a lot of fundamental teaching covering the basics for those who have just been baptised, for instance.

While no conclusive case has been proved on this front, it is a tantalising possibility. One of the things that it does, for instance, is suggest that things such as household codes were standard elements of early Christian catechesis.

Peter introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He is one sent as an emissary of the Messiah, one who represents his master. It is sent to elect exiles of the dispersion.

These people are objects of God's choice. They are elect, even though they may be in exile. In a condition of exile, it may seem that God has cut them off, but in fact they have been chosen by him, and while scattered abroad in the world, are gathered to him by his Spirit.

[4 : 35] The language of the dispersion was often used by the Jews. Peter Davids has observed that 2-4 million Jews lived outside of Palestine, and only about a million within it.

Much of the Jewish nation, then, was living in various parts of the Roman Empire. In this letter, Peter does not seem to be writing wholly to Jews, or even primarily to Jews. There are a number of statements about their former lives that suggest that the recipients were Gentiles.

This, of course, is noteworthy, because the Church is taking on aspects of Israel's identity. These Christians live in a large area of Asia Minor, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

This region was highly Hellenised, it was cultured and wealthy in its cities, and was a context with various mystery cults and traditional Greek religion, in addition to the imperial cult.

The early Christians, to whom Peter is writing, were living in that sort of world. They have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of the Father. This is God's eternal purpose, his choice and his providence.

[5 : 38] The Church's existence, and its existence in its scattered form, is according to God's intent and providence. It's not an accident. It is not something that we have stumbled into, or grasped for ourselves.

Behind all of this lies God's settled and effective purpose. We are elect in the sanctification of the Spirit, in addition to the foreknowledge of God the Father. We have been set apart as holy, marked out by the Spirit of Christ.

We are marked out for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. We are elect for the sake of obedience, chosen to be conformed to his image and to act faithfully in his name.

We are elect in order that we might live a new form of life and live to God's glory. We are sprinkled with Christ's blood. This is the blood of a new covenant, a blood that leads to cleansing and forgiveness of sins, and access to God.

If we have been paying attention, we will have noticed that this is a Trinitarian opening. The foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ.

[6 : 42] As in the rest of the New Testament, there is an implicit Trinitarian structure to the Gospel. Peter opens up with a blessing. It is a blessing addressed to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is framed and known in the light of Jesus Christ. If we want to get access to God, it is through Christ. If we want to know who God is, we see who God is in the light of Christ.

Through God's mercy, we have been begotten again. We have a radical new beginning. A new beginning that has occurred through the resurrection. This was the decisive event of new birth.

Jesus became the firstborn of the dead. And we enter into the new birth when we are united to Christ. The new birth is not primarily a fact about individuals.

It is a fact about a new humanity that is being formed in Christ. The new birth is an event that primarily happened to Christ. And we are being joined into it. And all of this has set us apart for a heavenly inheritance that has been preserved for us.

[7 : 41] It is protected from all sorts of corruption or destruction, from any sort of defilement. And we are preserved for it. God guards us through faith for the full measure of the salvation that he has in store for us.

A salvation that will be revealed finally on the last day. And recognising the contours of the situation that Peter has described, we can rejoice, even in the midst of trials.

These trials are not without purpose. They are there to purify and strengthen our faith, preparing our faith like gold for Christ's glory. Our faith will be a cause of glory and praise to him.

Much as the testing and the proving of Job's faith brought glory to God, and matured Job as a son, so the trials that we experience are preparing us for Christ's glory and for fellowship with him.

We already love and rejoice in Christ with great joy, even though we have neither seen him in the past, nor presently see him. In all of this, we are experiencing a foretaste of a gift of God without measure that we are waiting in the future.

[8 : 46] We are having a reality-filled promise of what is yet to come, a down payment of what we expect in the future. This salvation brought by Christ was foretold beforehand.

The Old Testament speaks of it and anticipates Christ in many different ways, sometimes through direct prophecy, sometimes through typological prefiguration, sometimes through such things as the words of the Psalms and the two different levels of reference that they can have.

All of these scriptures were revealed by the Spirit of God, and Peter speaks about the Spirit of Christ speaking in, through and to the prophets, and the way that the prophets were trying to discover what was being foretold, seeing shadows and silhouettes thrown back by a great light that awaited in the future, they were trying to understand what was going on, what this was all about.

They maybe saw the initial fulfilments of the prophecies that they foretold, but they could not see that greater fulfilment that was awaiting in the future. What they predicted was not just the glory of Christ, but also his sufferings, in places such as Isaiah 53, for instance, or in Psalm 22.

And in some way they realised that these prophecies were not ultimately for themselves. They were awaiting some later time, when their true meaning would be disclosed. And Peter says that that time has come, and that the early church is experiencing that.

[10 : 11] In the message of the gospel announced to them, these secrets that the prophets had been trying to figure out have now been disclosed. Indeed, angels themselves try to figure out these things and understand what is going on.

The prophets have tried to figure out these things in the past. In the revelation of the gospel, the angels are trying to figure it out, it's great mysteries. And then Peter challenges us to figure things out.

We must prepare our minds for action. He speaks of girding up loins, or perhaps we might think of rolling up sleeves, preparing for action, and being sober-minded, developing a seriousness and determination in the way that we approach these things.

The same energy that the prophets devoted to figuring out these things, and the angels devote to these issues, we should devote. We should think through these things, try to understand them, try to figure out what it means for us.

And as a result, to set our hope fully on the grace that we are awaiting at the future revelation of Jesus Christ. Charles Cranfield describes verses 14 to 23 as describing the warp and the woof of Christian life.

[11 : 21] The warp, the threads that run lengthwise, and the woof, the threads that run across. The warp is the nature of the Christian life, and the woof is its motives.

The warp is obedience to God, holiness, the fear of God, and the love of the brethren. And the woof is God's holiness, and our belonging to him, and the fact that we relate to the judge of all as father. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and we have been begotten again by the word of God. He begins by calling us to be obedient children. We're not to be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance.

Obedience involves struggling against our lusts and our passions, the things that once characterized our state, a state that is itself described in terms of ignorance and lack of knowledge, the same ignorance that we should be fighting against as we gird up the loins of our mind, and struggle to learn and understand more about God's truth.

Peter takes up an expression that is almost a refrain in the book of Leviticus. Be holy, as I am holy. We are children of God, and we must seek to conform ourselves to the character of our father.

[12 : 31] If we call upon God as father, he is the impartial judge of all, and we must have an appropriate sense of fear in calling such a one our father. We should not be presumptuous.

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Peter wants us to have a sense of the weightiness of what it is to approach God, and the grace, the sheer measure of the grace that we have received. When we approach God, we are approaching the impartial judge. We are approaching the one who is a consuming fire, and we must have an appropriate sense of how we stand before such a God. We must also consider the cost of our redemption. We were delivered at incalculable cost. Christ is our Passover lamb. He was the one who was sacrificed for us.

God did not redeem us at the cost of silver and gold, even vast quantities of silver and gold, but with the precious blood of his own son. No price could be greater than that.

[13 : 27] This advent and gift of Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world. This was always God's purpose and intention, and in his providence it came to pass. Our redemption finds its origin in God's purpose before the dawn of time, and now, in the last times, he has made this manifest for our sake.

It is out of this purpose that we are believers in God. A question to consider. What could the Old Testament prophets have known about Christ ahead of time?

What do you think they would have expected?