

# Spiritual Exiles

## 1 Peter 1:1-2

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It's always exciting to start a new series, especially a book series. Studying through books of the Bible has been our bread and butter for a long time. So today we launch our series on 1 Peter. Why 1 Peter? All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable (1 Timothy 3:16) so it wouldn't matter what portion of Scripture we studied; God could and would use it.

1 Peter is particularly helpful because it is so applicable to life in the increasingly secular culture we live in. I read something recently that said the more irrelevant Christianity is in a culture the more relevant 1 Peter becomes. It is a letter written by an apostle for the church in exile. The minority church. The persecuted church. Even the hated church.

The title for our series comes from the first words of the letter. Peter addresses his letter "to those who are elect exiles." (1 Peter 1:1 ESV) Exiles from where and why does that matter? We will get into that.

In the grand scheme, this letter will likely end up in the running for your favorite in the whole Bible. Luther called it "one of the noblest books in the New Testament" and put it on par with Romans and the gospel of John, and that's saying something.

We will work through it in a style of teaching known as expository preaching. This means we will begin with explaining the text, seek to learn what Peter and the Holy Spirit meant when they wrote it, then apply it to our lives today. I encourage you to come each week as each week will be new ground and fresh truth.

### Background on 1 Peter

As we always do when we begin a book study, we spend some time learning the background and understanding the purpose behind it. Why is this important? Imagine you found a random letter blowing in the wind. You could understand some of it by reading it. But if you knew who wrote it and to whom it was written and why it was written, then you'd understand it much more fully.

### Who wrote it?

The letter begins, "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.*" (1 Peter 1:1) Just because it says "Peter" isn't undeniable proof that Peter wrote it. Scholars are inherently skeptical and ply their trade by stirring up controversy. There are some who deny Peter as the author but there's little reason. He says in 5:1 that he was an eyewitness to the sufferings of Christ. The early church leaders attributed Peter as the author of the letter. External and internal evidence points to Peter.

This is the Peter of the gospels. His name was Simon. He was a fisherman by trade. His brother Andrew brought him to Jesus. Jesus chose him as a disciple and changed his name from Simon to Peter, which means "rock." At points in the story this seems like a cruel joke because he was famously fragile. But in the end he lived up to his name. He became the leader of the church and all the apostles. History tells us that he died as a martyr in Rome

under the emperor Nero, insisting that he be crucified upside down as he was not worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

Part of 1 Peter's importance is that for his stature, Peter wrote very little of the New Testament, when compared to John, Paul, and Luke. The small number of his writings increases the value of 1 and 2 Peter as it is all we have of Peter's written teaching.

### **To whom did Peter write and why?**

*"To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."* (1 Peter 1:1)

This kind of verse is so easy to skip on your way to the more meaty sections. It is actually key to understanding the entire letter. *Pastor Steve, aren't you kind of overstating that? How can ancient geography matter to anything?* Let's go back, "to those who are elect exiles (more on this to come) of the Dispersion." What's that?

We go back in history to the time when Rome was the world power. Rome ruled most of the world for 500 years. This accomplishment wasn't dumb luck. Rome was smart. They had certain policies and practices that allowed it to maintain power and dominance for such an extraordinary amount of time. One of those policies is what Peter is describing here known as colonization. When Rome took over a region or country, they would send a group of colonists to populate it. These were sometimes political friends, sometimes enemies they wanted out of the city of Rome, or maybe people who wanted to live in the new colony. Sometimes they went there because of an expulsion from Rome—a "dispersion." They were generally Romans who went into these new lands and established Roman customs and businesses which would integrate into the culture. Colonization was deportation for the purpose of domination.

These people lived in the new land as foreigners. Exiles from Rome. Citizens of another place living in a land not their homeland and among people not their own. They were not only foreign to the geography, they were foreigners to the indigenous people. Do you ever hear someone with a strong accent, maybe a Southern accent? What is often said to the Dixieland foreigner? "You're not from here, are you?"

These Roman colonists heard that all the time. Moreover, they felt it all the time. They represented imperial Rome. They represented the ideology of the conquering army. They were foreigners in a foreign land. They didn't belong.

Peter is writing from Rome to colonists of Rome who are living as foreigners in colonies of Rome. These regions are in modern day Turkey (see below).



MAP 5 The geography of Peter's communities (adapted by Bruce Dale)

It was known as Asia Minor then. *What Peter does is he uses their political and geographical reality and draws social and spiritual application.* That is what is behind that little phrase in verse 1, “*who are elect exiles.*” They were chosen exiles. Rome chose who went to the foreign land. Who is doing the choosing spiritually? He answers it in verse 2, their election as exiles is according to the foreknowledge of God.

Peter writes to political exiles, but wants them to see they are really spiritual exiles. What does it mean to live as a Christian in a world where our beliefs and lifestyles make the people around us say, “You’re not from here are you? You’re not really one of us.”

Not anymore. Not in our hearts. Our faith in Jesus has made us citizens of a different world. A heavenly one. We live here with kingdom of God values and priorities. “What Christians had to fear was more in the nature of social ostracism, unfriendly acts by neighbors, pressure on Christian wives from pagan husbands, masters taking it out on Christian slaves and other actions of that kind.” (Marshall, *1 Peter*, p. 14)

The reason for Peter writing is to help these Christians remain faithful. Stand strong. Endure suffering. Live faithful and obediently even when the prevailing culture looks at them like we look at the Amish. Here is where 1 Peter is so helpful. The world we live in increasingly looks at us and thinks, *you’re not from here, are you? You’re not really one of us, are you?* They don’t think that about nominal Christians. Nominal Christians fit in just fine and are fully embraced. But genuine Christians who actually believe the gospel and live out their faith will stick out like sore thumbs. Those are the exiles to whom Peter writes.

### **Why are we “Exiles”? What is the Purpose for the Pain?**

*“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.” (1 Peter 1:1-2)*

A quick read here would easily miss that Peter is tipping his hand to the substance of what he is going to say in the whole letter. Verse 2 begins a series of purpose statements—the why. I’m told the day is coming when our daughter will discover the word “why.” *Why? Why Daddy? Why Mommy?* Now we just tell her what to do. She hasn’t discovered yet that there are purposes and reasons to explore that form the “why” for her bedtime or the requirement not to throw her food.

Peter begins by pointing out the obvious—they are foreigners, exiles. They don’t belong geographically and they don’t belong spiritually. But notice what kind of exiles they are: “*elect exiles.*”

There are exiles who are victims of circumstance. Think of the Jewish ghetto in Poland during World War II or the Syrian refugees in our current time. They are victims. Helpless. Their sufferings seem random and chaotic.

But these Asia Minor Christians are not victims of random violence; they are *chosen* exiles. Someone has determined that they would be experiencing their persecutions. The question is who?

The “who” is described broadly in verse 2 as God himself. In fact, Peter gives one of the clearest statements of the triune God to be found in Scripture. God the Father. God the Spirit. And God the Son named Jesus Christ. Each is named. Each has a role and purpose.

### **We are chosen by God to be spiritual exiles (Verse 1)**

One of the most miserable thoughts when we are suffering is that the suffering may have no purpose. If you listen, you will hear people search for meaning in it. Is this not what lies behind the cry of the human heart? *Why? Why did this happen? Why do I feel this pain? Why have I suffered this loss or feel this alienation?*

What a comforting truth Peter leads with. Spiritual exile has spiritual purpose. Spiritual exile is chosen for us by God himself.

We’re like the Israelites. Did they know a thing or two about exile? They spent 400 years in Egypt. They suffered terribly. They experienced 40 years of wilderness wanderings. Why did God take them to Egypt and Sinai and Kadesh-Barnea and through the Jordan River? Why were they exiles?

*“And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”*  
(Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

God used their physical exile for spiritual purposes and God chooses and uses our spiritual exile for good as well. He chooses to put us on the margins. He chooses to make our worldview and lifestyle countercultural. The sorrows of Christianity on the margins is comforted by the sure knowledge of God’s sovereign choice and promised blessing.

Would this not have been a wonderfully comforting thought if you were a displaced Christian living in Pontus? If your business is suffering because you are a Christian? Or maybe you are a Christian wife in Bithynia, but your husband is a pagan? How do you deal daily with Mr. Pagan husband and the very private frustrations that may entail?

God has a purpose in it. I am not in Cappadocia by accident. Nothing in the whole universe is random. I am chosen by a good God for this purpose.

That’s an encouragement for us as well. Nothing we experience as God’s chosen people is an accident and nothing is without divine purpose even when we can’t see it.

### **Our spiritual exile magnifies God’s glorious work in us (Verse 2)**

While separated in the text by Asia minor regions, verse 2 explains the purpose of God’s placing us in exile in verse 1. *“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.”* See the prepositions? “According to,” “in,” and “for.” These three Trinitarian roles have unique purposes.

## The Foreknowledge of the Father

*According to* this foreknowledge. Their exile was sovereignly known and purposed in eternity past by God the Father. The same word is used in verse 20 for Christ being foreknown. In eternity past, the Father knew the Son and in eternity past the Father knew that these Roman exiles would be geographical and spiritual exiles. No surprises here.

## The Sanctifying Work of the Spirit

Sanctification is the biblical word for growth into holiness of life. Note we are “in” the sanctification of the Spirit. Verse 1 says they are *in* Asia Minor. But spiritually they are *in* sanctification. They want to define themselves geographically, but Peter defines their true location spiritually. Your identity is not as a resident of Pontus or Galatia. You are a citizen of the land of the Spirit—not a land of pagan worship and immorality—but of holiness and purity.

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”* (Ephesians 2:19)

## The life-changing work of Jesus in us

*“...for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.”* (1 Peter 1:2)

We see here that God’s election is never without its effect. God’s election and foreknowledge and the sanctification of the Spirit are intended to produce in us obedience to Jesus.

*“The sprinkling with his blood.”* I don’t know for sure what that means. The commentators are all over on it. The safest interpretation is that these are all descriptions of the same event and the same effect. God chose to place us in the land of salvation. The Father foreknew us. The Spirit sanctifies us. The Son atoned for us and frees us to live freely as citizens, not exiles, in the land of salvation. All of it is by God and for God. Even our obedience to God magnifies God’s work in us. We are exiles in the world by the choice of man, but we are heavenly citizens by the choice of God.

I have one application point before our time is done.

## **When we are in Exile, we Want to Change *Where* we are. God Wants to Change *Who* we Are**

An exile’s solution to a problem is to be somewhere else. Home. This week I am a climate exile. Friday night about 11:00 here, my car wouldn’t start. Jennifer and I spent about 45 minutes with cables trying to jump start it. I was so cold. This was a bitterly cold and nasty week. From my perspective, I am a climate exile. I am supposed to live somewhere warm.

Talk to climate exiles and their focus is on geography; where they would rather be—the wonderfulness of a different climate; the punishment of this one this time of year.

Exiles think the solution is a change of location. If your marriage feels like exile or your job feels like exile or your sick body feels like exile, the solution is a different marriage, different job, different body. We want to change *where* we are.

Then we read *elect exiles foreknown by God*. Peter doesn't encourage them to get out of Galatia or Cappadocia and to come back to Rome. He doesn't encourage them to flee their sufferings and problems. Why? God's first priority is not changing *where* we are but *who* we are.

I think about trials that I have walked through in my life. A few of them made me want to run away. When you are in distress, anywhere seems better than where you are.

The answer we see here in this passage: God's first priority is changing us within; changing who we are; changing how we see ourselves and the world around us. He changes us by putting us in Cappadocia, the last place we want to be. There, in our exile, real growth and change can take place.

Might you be living in Cappadocia? Are you looking to book a ticket out ASAP? Hear the old apostle's wise words and embrace the change within. Can you dare to pray, *God, I want out and I want gone, but more than that, I want what you want. Use this exile and this trial to change me into the person you would have me be*. Don't you think God will answer that prayer? And maybe the reason he has you in Galatia is to get you to the point of surrender and trust and faith?

If there was ever an exile from home, it was Jesus, who left his heavenly homeland to live here among us and to learn obedience by the things he suffered. "*Let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*" (Matthew 26:39) May his example help us realize that God is behind of all of it and through all of it is working all things together for good.

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## **NOTES:**

The work of God is never without effect.

All the major centers of Christian influence would be reached.

Foreknowledge used in 1:20 for Christ chosen before the creation of the world.

Sprinkled with his blood – our obedience is always incomplete...

According to the foreknowledge – their distress is ALSO according to the foreknowledge of God.

Sanctification is not in past tense. Lit. sanctification in the Spirit

### **Election Means Alienation**

Another thing we can say is that Peter mentions election in direct connection with our alien status in the world. This probably tells us the main reason Peter begins with election. **He wants to emphasize that we are aliens not mainly because men have rejected us, but because God has chosen us.**

The main meaning of your exile is that God chose you out of the world. Not man's rejection, but God's election is the main meaning of your life.

### **Application**

#### **Quotes**

Peter uses the sociohistorical situation of his readers to explain their sociospiritual situation....Because they are citizens of the kingdom of God, they are to understand themselves as resident aliens and foreigners wherever they may be residing. –Jobes, p. 38.

#### **Ideas**