

1 & 2 Peter

Study Workbook “Pillar of Truth” Series

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1 & 2 PETER
By Chad Sychtysz

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Introduction to The First Epistle of Peter (1 Peter)

The First Epistle of Peter is a favorite study of many Bible students. While it lacks the doctrinal content of, say, Romans or Ephesians, 1 Peter is an excellent handbook for ideal Christian behavior, and for submission to various people and authorities. “To this day *First Peter* is one of the easiest letters in the New Testament to read, for it has never lost its winsome appeal to the human heart.”¹ It is intensely practical in nature. “The chief value of First Peter is that it shows Christians how to live a redeemed life in the midst of a world contrary and hostile to them.”² Peter shows us what it means to take up our cross and follow Him (cf. Mat. 16:24). “He speaks with the authority of an apostle, but with the gentleness of one who knew the power of temptation and the difficulty of steadfastness, with the humility of one who well remembered how he himself had fallen.”³

The Epistle of 1 Peter falls into the category of “general epistles”—letters written to no particular person or church, but to Christians who are “scattered throughout” the Anatolian Peninsula (modern-day Turkey) (1:1). General epistles are no less valuable to us than personal ones, and Peter’s epistle carries all the same apostolic authority of Paul’s epistles. Peter refers to his reading audience as “aliens” (or, “strangers”)—in essence, spiritual pilgrims who are dwelling *in* the world, but through their allegiance to Christ, are no longer *of* the world. While he names specific places where such believers reside, it is clear that his instruction and ultimate intention is for all believers in every place and every age. Just as those in ancient Anatolia were “chosen” (1:1), so all Christians have been called and chosen through their having responded to Christ’s gospel in obedience. The phrase “scattered throughout” (1:1) is derived from a single Greek word (*diaspora*) which, when capitalized, refers to the historical scattering of Jews beyond the region of Palestine and into the Roman Empire and beyond (see John 7:35 and Jas. 1:1).⁴ Thus, some think that Peter wrote only to Jewish Christians, yet the full content of his letter does not support this (consider 2:10 and 4:3, for example). By implication, *all* Christians become spiritual Jews inasmuch as they are all part of “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) and the “New Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22).

Purpose and Theme: Peter’s purpose in writing to Christians abroad is not merely to send greetings or offer a few words of encouragement. There is little mention of false teachers, false teaching, or false brethren—subjects which occupy a great deal of attention in Paul’s writings—but an intense focus on the Christian’s spiritual perspective of himself (or herself) in an ungodly world. Peter states his own purpose for writing in 5:12: to exhort and testify of the true grace of God, especially to those suffering severe trials for their faith.

1 William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 164.

2 Roy E. Cogdill, *The New Testament: Book by Book* (Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation, 1975), 156.

3 B. C. Caffin, “1 Peter,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 22 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, no date), iv.

4 Such dispersion was sometimes voluntary, as Jews moved to foreign nations to seek better (and sometimes safer) opportunities, but the primary reason was due to captivity, exile, and forced resettlement by secular authorities.

[Peter's] object seems to be, by the prospect of their heavenly portion and by Christ's example, to afford consolation to the persecuted, and prepare them for a greater approaching ordeal, and to exhort all, husbands, wives, servants, presbyters [elders], and people, to a due discharge of relative duties, so as to give no handle to the enemy to reproach Christianity, but rather to win them to it, and so to establish them in "the true grace of God wherein they stand" (1 Peter 5:12).⁵

The content of Peter's sermons in Acts (chapters 2 – 5 and 10) and that of his epistle outlines the basic belief system of what has come to be known as Christianity. This theology has five basic parts, which comprise one grand message:

- **First:** the age of fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies has come, and the reign of the Messiah (Christ) has begun. The proclamation of this is God's final revelation to the world; a new order has begun, and people are invited to join the new community of believers.
- **Second:** This new age has come through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled all of the prophecies concerning Him in the Old Testament. Thus, He and His reign are the result of God's eternal plan and divine foreknowledge.
- **Third:** By virtue of Christ's life and resurrection, He has been exalted to the right hand of God as the holy King of the new and spiritual Israel, the church.
- **Fourth:** The Messianic reign will reach its consummation in Christ's return to bring His saints to glory, and to usher in the great day of the Lord in which all of the living and dead will be judged.
- **Fifth:** All of these facts provide the basis for an appeal to all people to repent, and for God to offer forgiveness through the blood of His Son, and to give His Holy Spirit to those who have been born again into a new fellowship with God.⁶

The moral purity of the believer is necessary for one's participation in this grand scheme of salvation (1:13-16, 2:1-2, 2:11-12, et al). Peter sympathizes with those who are going through difficult times, but he never gives anyone permission to be anything different than what is required of all believers. Collectively, he refers to these people as the "chosen race," "royal priesthood," "holy nation," and "a people for God's own possession" (2:9).

Submission—the voluntary yielding of oneself to another for a higher purpose than one's self-interest—is a major theme of 1 Peter. While Christians remain in ultimate submission to Christ, this does not nullify or render unnecessary their submission to various people, relationships, or authorities. As citizens, we are to submit to governing authorities (2:13); as slaves, to masters (2:18); as wives, to our husbands (3:1); as husbands, to our wives' femininity (3:7); as believers, to one another (3:8-9, et al); as teachers, to those who need to be taught (3:15); as members of a given congregation, to our elders (5:1-4); as elders, to our "flock" and to Christ, the "Chief Shepherd"

⁵ Robert Jamieson, Andrew Fausset, and David Brown, *New Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Testament Volume*, electronic edition (database © 2004 WORDsearch Corp.), "Introduction"; bracketed words are mine.

⁶ Adapted from C. H. Dodd, as quoted in Barclay, *Letters*, 167-168.

(5:4); and as “younger men,” to older men (5:5). The purpose of all such submission is to maintain a proper attitude and an excellent behavior (2:12, 3:1-2, 3:16, et al) in the midst of a crooked world filled with “unreasonable” or crooked people (2:18).

The occasion of suffering—not merely the prospect of it, but the full expectation and reality of it—also permeates Peter’s writing.⁷ The fact that we are distinctly different *from* the world invites the general hostility of the world. Christians will, then, be faced with “various trials” of faith (1:6)—not merely trials of different kinds, but also those of differing degrees of severity—just as Jesus warned would happen (John 15:18-20).⁸ Instead of being spared from such open hostility, Christians are to prepare for and willingly accept it when it comes. Very similar to Paul’s and James’ admonitions (see Rom. 8:16-17 and Jas. 1:2-4, respectively), Peter encourages a big-picture perspective toward suffering that looks well beyond the actual suffering itself (4:12-14):

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Not only should the believer expect to suffer for the name of Christ, Peter says that he (or she) has been “called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (2:21). As Christ entrusted Himself to God’s vindication of His integrity (2:23), faithful Christians who suffer injustices for the name of Christ should know that they will be compensated by a righteous God (4:19). This requires a strong faith in this future vindication, for it likely will not happen in this life.

To clarify: Peter is *not* talking about *all* suffering, or what is broadly referred to as “human suffering.” Thus, he is *not* saying, “Whoever suffers in this life for any reason, or whoever is the victim of any injustice, will be rewarded with eternal life in the world to come,” as is popularly believed among many today. Rather, the context is very specific: he speaks of the suffering of

⁷ Peter’s authorship of 1 Peter has been questioned by some simply because he is not *specific* as to the suffering to which he alludes. There are those who would expect Peter to say something about the brief but potent persecution that Emperor Nero unleashed upon Christians in Rome and elsewhere, since this happened in his lifetime; since he did not, therefore the author must not be Peter at all, but someone writing later (even considerably later) under Peter’s name. But it is wearying to hear Bible critics citing all the things that they expected the Bible authors to say, and then to judge them (or dismiss them altogether) based simply upon such expectations. “If the necessary facts to establish a point in history are absent, scholars do well to avoid making dogmatic statements” (Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987], 7). This is as true for Bible students as it is for Bible scholars—and Christians in general.

⁸ Peter refers to various forms of persecutions four times: 1 Pet. 1:6-7, 3:13-17, 4:12-19, and 5:9. Not all of these necessarily refer to the same historical occasion(s). Peter looks back on what has happened, looks forward to what lies ahead, and also takes into account what is happening presently (at the time of his writing). It is also not clear as to whether these persecutions are initiated by Jews, or the Roman government, or both. In any case, Christians are called to endure these ordeals, and will be rewarded for doing so.

Christians while honoring God with their obedient faith (3:13-14 and 4:14; cf. Mat. 5:10-12, in principle). In fact, Peter pointedly dismisses any suffering that is the result of one's own refusal to be submissive (2:20) or his ungodly behavior (4:15). Such suffering is well deserved; there is nothing honorable in it. In contrast, "if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name" (4:16).

Such language impresses upon the believer the strong realization that this world is not his home, and therefore whatever happens *to* him (or her) is not as important as where he is going. The idea of Christians being "aliens" or "strangers" to the world reverberates throughout Peter's epistle. While the term is used only a few times (1:1 and 2:11), the *idea* is used repeatedly. Peter's message is, essentially, "You (Christians) do not belong to this world, but you still reside here. And while you *are* here, you are morally obligated to conduct yourselves in such a way that does not compromise your faith or bring reproach upon your Savior." Moral purity is a necessary virtue for one's submission to God (1:13-16, 2:1-2, 2:11-12, et al). The Christian's inheritance has nothing to do with the material world or the realm of men, but lies with God in His world (1:4; cf. Eph. 2:19 and Heb. 11:13). Yet, until that inheritance is fully realized, Peter instructs Christians to "conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth" (1:17). The epistles of 1 Peter and James both converge on the need to do what is right, even to one's own harm (or, suffering), as summed up in 1 Pet. 3:13-17 and Jas. 1:2-12, respectively.

This perspective requires more than just waiting until that inheritance is given; it demands that believers "live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God" (4:2). With allegiance comes spiritual responsibility; such responsibility brings suffering and submission; endurance of these things brings transformation; and through such transformation we are made ready to live forever with God. Thus, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you" (5:10). Peter speaks repeatedly about Christ's Second Coming, always keeping it in the forefront of his thoughts; "It [Christ's return] is the motive for steadfastness in the faith, for the loyal living of the Christian life, and for gallant endurance amidst the sufferings, which have come, and which will come upon them [believers]."⁹

Author and Date: Simon Peter, also known as Cephas, is almost unanimously understood to be the author of the First Epistle of Peter. Numerous early church "fathers" quoted from this epistle and attributed those quotes to Peter: Polycarp, Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian, as well as the early church historian Eusebius.¹⁰ Internal evidence also points to Peter,

⁹ Barclay, *Letters*, 165; bracketed words are mine.

¹⁰ JFB, *Commentary*, "Introduction." "Eusebius [ca. AD 260-339] states it as the opinion of those before him that this was among the universally acknowledged Epistles" (*ibid.*; bracketed words are mine). "[W]e find abundant evidence of its [1 Peter's] influence on the thought and expression of early Christians, much of its wide reception and general recognition as Peter's, and none whatever that it was ever attributed to anyone else" (Alan M. Stibbs, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: The First General Epistle of Peter* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983], 18). Specific references of early church writers and "fathers" are listed in detail in J. Ramsey Michaels, *Word*

especially in referring to himself as an apostle (1:1), a witness of Christ's sufferings (5:1), and the style of writing that is consistent with Peter's sermons and statements in Acts. The external evidence "is seen in the fact that it [this letter] was universally recognized as written by him. No book has earlier or stronger evidence than 1 Peter."¹¹ Michaels agrees: "Aside from the four Gospels and the letters of Paul, the external attestation for 1 Peter is as strong, or stronger, than that for any NT book. There is no evidence anywhere of controversy over its authorship or authority."¹²

Peter himself was a native of Bethsaida, a small town on the Sea of Galilee, in a region in which Jesus personally ministered. His father was John (or Jonah) (Mat. 16:17, John 1:42), and his brother was Andrew (Mat. 10:2, John 1:40). Both Peter and Andrew were fishermen by trade, and worked in conjunction with the brothers James and John, who were also fishermen (Mat. 4:18-21; cf. Luke 5:1-10). Upon meeting Peter for the first time, Jesus changed his name from Simon to "Peter" (in Aramaic, "Cephas," meaning "a small stone").¹³ All the NT writers use "Peter" to identify him, except for Paul (1 Cor. 1:12, Gal. 2:9, et al). Jesus named Peter as one of His twelve apostles, and Peter often served—often, it appears, on his own initiative—as a spokesman for the other eleven. He was married (1 Cor. 9:5), but we do not know his wife's name; according to tradition, she, like her husband, also faced martyrdom.¹⁴

When we are first introduced to Peter, he appears to be an assertive, impetuous, and zealous man. Yet, he was also very conscious of his own sins and failings (Luke 5:1-11) and remained, except for the time of Jesus' trials, devoted to his Lord and Master (John 6:66-69). He was vocal and straightforward, but did not always show discretion in what he said. He personally rebuked Jesus—the only person in Scripture to do so!—for what He said regarding what would happen to Him in Jerusalem, and Jesus soundly rebuked him in return (Mat. 16:21-23). (Jesus had many names for the Pharisees, but he never called them "Satan"; yet this is what he called Peter!) God Himself rebuked Peter for suggesting that three equal "tabernacles" be built for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Mat. 17:1-5). Later, Peter proudly declared that he would stand by Jesus till the end and even die with Him (Luke 22:33); yet, when given opportunity to do so only hours later, three times

Biblical Commentary, vol. 49: 1 Peter (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), xxi-xxxiii.

11 Cogdill, *Book by Book*, 153; bracketed words are mine.

12 Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary*, xxxiv.

13 While "Cephas" means simply "rock," "Peter" [*petros*] means "a small stone." In Mat. 16:18, Jesus uses two different words that are related but not interchangeable. *Petros* (a small stone) is Peter's name; *petra* ("upon this rock") refers not to a small stone but to a large rock mass. Peter was the confessor of Jesus' true role ("the Christ") and nature ("the Son of the living God"); it was not Peter upon whom Jesus built His church, but the truth of this confession. While many will say that "Cephas" has no distinction as to size or mass, still it is Matthew—an apostle and divinely-inspired author—who wrote his gospel in Greek and made the differentiation between the two. This point alone ought to end all controversy on the matter, but sadly many (including the entire Catholic religion) have turned to this passage to support Peter as being the man upon which Christ founded His entire church—a man who would later vehemently deny Him three times (!). Scripture is emphatically clear that Jesus is the "chief cornerstone" upon which His church is built, not Peter (1 Pet. 2:4-7).

14 JFB, *Commentary*, "Introduction"; apparently this is sourced from Clement of Alexandria.

he denied even knowing Jesus (Luke 22:54-62). Unfortunately, Peter's boldness and courage were easily overcome by fear (Mat. 14:30) and the opinions of others (Gal. 2:11-14).

Yet, Peter continued to grow in his faith and mature in his resolve, and he served as a spokesman for the apostles and the early church from Acts 1 forward. After His resurrection and before He was received into heaven, Jesus restored Peter's place, so to speak, as the leader of the twelve (John 21:15-17). As a first order of business, Peter headed the appointment of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot, who had committed suicide (Acts 1:15-26). He also preached the first and second recorded gospel sermons to the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2, 3). Peter and John were the first Christians to be arrested in Jerusalem for preaching Christ (Acts 4); later, all the apostles were arrested, but Peter remained their chief spokesman (Acts 5:17-32).¹⁵ After the great dispersion of Christians from Jerusalem following Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 8:1-4), Peter assumed a more independent ministry, traveling outside of the city and eventually outside of Judea (Acts 9:31-43). Even so, under Peter's watch and through his preaching, the Gentiles were accepted into the church (Acts 10), fulfilling his role as the one with "the keys of the kingdom" (Mat. 16:19). Herod Agrippa I, in order to please the Jews, had the apostle James arrested and then executed. He then arrested Peter with full intention to execute him as well, but God intervened and rescued him from prison (Acts 12:1-19)—the second time He had done so (see Acts 5:17-20).

Peter was one of the primary speakers in resolving the debate with certain Pharisees in the so-called council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:7-11). Yet, this is the last time we hear of him in Acts, as the narrative focuses instead upon Paul from that point forward. We do hear of him incidentally thereafter (1 Cor. 1:12, 9:5, 15:5, and Gal. 2:11-14), but it is not until the writing of 1 Peter do we hear from him directly.¹⁶ Some early church traditions claim that Peter went to Rome and established a church there, but this cannot be substantiated, and often the dates and details put forward are in serious conflict with historical facts. Jesus prophesied that Peter would face martyrdom (John 21:18-

15 "The Greek of the Epistle [of 1 Peter] is formally good, rhythmic, polished and elegant... Now the Peter of the Gospels is a Galilean fisherman, who normally speaks Aramaic with an unmistakable north-country accent. He is explicitly described in Acts 4:13 as 'unlearned and ignorant.' Even allowing for some improvement in Greek which missionary work in Gentile areas—commenced, incidentally, rather late in life—would bring, could he be responsible for such delicate balance of phrase and felicitous choice of words?" (Stibbs, *TNTC*, 23). Stibbs offers this rhetorically, since he does not believe the critique to hold weight. The Jews' reference to Peter (and John) being unlearned likely refers to their lack of formal rabbinic training, not illiteracy. A plausible theory, too, is that Silvanus (Silas) is the actual secretary of this letter (see comments on 5:12), in which case Peter dictated it to him and he framed Peter's words in the polished style that we now read (*ibid.*, 26-27). We must not dismiss, either, whatever provision God made for Peter to be able to write a letter such as this. If God can make men speak in tongues they had never learned (Acts 2:1-12), certainly He can make men write in ways that exceeded their natural ability.

16 Common topics in Peter's speeches in Acts (chapters 2 – 5) resurface in 1 Peter, namely: Christ's fulfillment of the OT Scriptures (1 Pet. 1:10-12); the resurrection and exaltation of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3, 21); the call to repentance (or, holy living) (1 Pet. 1:13-16); the importance of baptism (1 Pet. 3:21-22); and the certainty of Christ's judgment of humankind (1 Pet. 4:4-5).

19), and tradition says that he did so, in Rome (ca. AD 68), as a result of Nero's brief but fiery persecution against the church.¹⁷

First Peter is thought to have been written late in Peter's life, likely during some intense persecution in the Anatolian Peninsula (based on 1:6-9 and 4:12), but it is not clear whether this persecution is from the Jews or the Roman government.¹⁸ The fact that he refers to himself as "a fellow elder" among the other church elders (5:1) indicates a man who is in the later season of his life. Most conservative scholarship places the date around AD 63-64, which seems to be a very reasonable conclusion.

General Outline:

- Salutation (1:1-2)
- A Living Hope (1:3-12)
- A Holy People (1:13 – 2:3)
- A People for God's Own Possession (2:4-12)
- A General Call to Submission (2:13-25)
- Submission in Marriage (3:1-7)
- Living with a Good Conscience (3:8-22)
- Practical Application of Righteous Living (4:1-11)
- The Expectation of Suffering (4:12-19)
- Final Exhortations (5:1-10)
- Closing Remarks (5:11-14)

Abbreviations Used in This Study:

- NT: New Testament
- OT: Old Testament
- NAS(B): New American Standard (Bible), 1995 updated edition
- KJV: King James Version
- RV or RSV: Revised Standard Version
- ASV: American Standard Bible
- HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible

¹⁷ John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Roanoke, VA: Scripture Truth, no date), 12-13.

¹⁸ Barclay has extensive—and excellent—information on the Neronian persecution that began in Rome in AD 64 (*Letters*, 173-189). This persecution was in connection to the burning of Rome, for which Nero was actually responsible, though he blamed Christians. This long and involved historical detail goes beyond this study workbook, but is well worth reading for a better understanding of the real and dangerous trials the early church faced. On the other hand, there is nothing specific in 1 or 2 Peter that alludes directly to this particular persecution, or to the persecution of the church due to emperor worship (which did not surface until very late in the first century). Thus, it seems more reasonable to believe that Peter's audience in the Anatolian Peninsula faced a persecution that was either an extension of the Jewish persecution detailed in Acts, or something about which we know nothing else.

- JFB: Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible *Commentary*
- NTC: *New Testament Commentary*
- TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*
- WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*

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Salutation (1:1-2)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...” (1:1a)—the author immediately states his identity and authority. We have no good reason to believe that this is anyone other than Simon Peter (a.k.a. Cephas) who is well-known to us in the gospels and Acts (see “Introduction”). To speak as an apostle of Christ is, in essence, to have Him speaking. This does not mean that the apostles’ authority is on par with Christ’s, but that He has given them authority to speak in His name.

Peter’s original readers are “aliens” (or, “strangers,” “pilgrims,” “exiles,” or “sojourners”) who are scattered abroad.¹⁹ This alludes historically to what is known as the Jewish Diaspora—the dispersion of Israelites throughout the Roman Empire for various reasons over the several prior centuries. The implication, however, refers to *spiritual* “Israelites” who have become citizens of the kingdom of God through their conversion to Christ.²⁰ Peter has no reason to write to unconverted Jews; the content of the letter also prevents him from writing exclusively to Jewish Christians. Thus, the natural and necessarily implied reference here is to Christians—whether Jewish or Gentile—who reside throughout the geographical regions he is about to name.²¹ “Christians are thus challenged by Peter’s opening address to think of themselves as citizens of heaven, and only ‘strangers and pilgrims’ here.”²²

Some commentators see a travel itinerary implied in the order in which the five Roman provinces—Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia (Minor), and Bithynia—are listed. To some, this implies that Peter was writing from somewhere in the east (from actual Babylon?—see comments on 5:13) and wrote these in the order that he would see them on a map. Or, some suggest that Silvanus (Silas), the bearer of this letter (5:12), would travel this route on his way from the east as he crossed the Anatolian Peninsula and boarded a ship for Rome somewhere on the western shore of Asia Minor.²³ On the other hand, such conjectures are a lot to conclude from simply a list of provinces. It is also possible that Peter is simply reciting them from how he remembers them, tracing the provinces

19 In the Greek text, the word “elect” or “chosen” appears in front of “strangers”; thus, “to the elect strangers” (Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, electronic edition [database © 2014 by WORDsearch], on 1:1). But several translations, including the NASB (which is the primary citation for our present study), put “who are chosen” after the naming of the provinces in order to clarify *how* and *why* these “strangers” were chosen. This new placement in no way changes the original meaning, however, and is thus perfectly acceptable.

20 “Those exiled Jews were called the *Diaspora*, the dispersion. But now the real Diaspora is not the Jewish nation; the real Diaspora is the Christian Church scattered abroad throughout the provinces of the Roman Empire and the nations of the world. Once the people who had been different from other peoples was the Jews; now the people who are different are the Christians. They are the people whose King is God, and whose home is eternity, and who are strangers, sojourners, and exiles in the world” (Barclay, *Letters*, 196-197).

21 This is the same conclusion that one draws concerning the “bond-servants of God”—i.e., Christians, with no actual reference to ethnicity—who are nonetheless symbolically associated with Israelite tribes in Rev. 7:2-8.

22 Stibbs, *TNTC*, 72.

23 JFB, *Commentary* (electronic edition), on 1:1.

as one might trace in his mind a group of states or countries in our present time. Most of these provinces are also mentioned in Acts 2:9-11, and suggest that the gospel message that was preached by Peter on Pentecost was then carried back to those peoples' homelands and took root, possibly with churches being formed as a result. We also know that Paul may have established some of these churches in Galatia and Asia Minor, especially if one of these churches is in Ephesus (the capital of Asia Minor). What this means is: Paul and Peter are both ministering in their own way to the same territories.

These Christians are “aliens” to the unconverted world, but they are no strangers to God. In fact, they are “chosen” by Him through their obedient response to His gospel (1:1b-2). “Chosen” (or “elect”) here must be understood in the context of the entire NT as a distinct reference to Christian believers in general. Whenever “chosen” is used to describe Christians, it is always with respect to a group, never to an individual.²⁴ Thus, all these “strangers” are chosen *as a group*—that is, they are strangers with respect to where they live (in Pontus, etc.), but not as a unique people. *All* believers are “strangers and exiles on the earth” (Heb. 11:13), and as such, they *all* belong to the great multitude of believers worldwide. The “chosen,” then, are not pre-selected by God to be saved regardless of their will, as Calvinism teaches, but are “chosen” because of who they have become (Christians), who they are identified with (Christ), and whose fellowship they now enjoy (God’s). The following verses are consistent with this idea (emphases are all mine):

- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.” (Eph. 1:3-4)
- “So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...” (Col. 3:12)
- “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thess. 2:13-14)
- “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.” (2 Tim. 2:10)
- “Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness” (Titus 1:1)
- “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9)

²⁴ John’s reference to “the chosen [or, elect] lady” in 2 John 1:1 does not violate this point, since this “lady” most likely refers to a church, not a specific person. For a thorough explanation on this, I recommend my *1-2-3 John and Jude Study Workbook* (2018); go to www.spiritbuilding.com/chad.

- “These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.” (Rev. 19:14)

In every citation above, “chosen” refers to a group of people—either a geographical collection of Christians (as in 2 Thessalonians) or all Christians everywhere (as in 2 Timothy). Nowhere in the NT is it taught that God chooses people to be saved *apart from their own choice to obey Him*, or that He condemns people to be lost *regardless of their desire to be saved*. Both of these ideas are major points of Calvinism, but they are unbiblical and contradict the free will of every person either to accept God’s invitation of salvation or reject it.

There is no question, however, that God is the One who does the “choosing.” The point of controversy is not whether Christians *are* chosen by God, for they most certainly are, but whether they have any moral responsibility or personal decision on their part to become part of the chosen of God. “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father” does not mean, “God knows all of whom will be chosen” (although He is capable of knowing this as well), but that the *fact that the choice is offered* is predicated upon God’s divine grace. Foreknowledge is not the same as forcing the issue; to foreknow something does not mean you make it happen, but that you know ahead of time that it *will* happen, given the right conditions and opportunities (Acts 2:23). God knows (or foreknows) that He will call people to Himself through His gospel; He also foreknows that those who rightly respond to His call will become the “chosen” of God. But He does not force anyone to be saved (or chosen) any more than He denies anyone who calls upon His name for salvation (Acts 2:21, Rom. 10:11-13, et al).

To further underscore this idea, Peter identifies three necessary conditions to those who are “chosen”—though not in sequential order (1:2):

- “by the sanctifying work of the Spirit”—i.e., the act of consecrating and setting apart those who have been called by God and responded in faith. “Sanctify” means “to make holy”; those who are sanctified are known thereafter as “saints.” The sanctification process is what the Holy Spirit performs upon those who are “in Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Thess. 2:13), having been “washed” through the act of water baptism as an act of faith (1 Cor. 6:11, Titus 3:5, Heb. 10:22, et al).
- “to obey Jesus Christ”—because no one can become part of the “chosen” who will not obey Christ (John 15:12-14, 1 John 2:3-4, et al). Whatever Christ requires of us is what we are to obey; all forms of obedience to Him are considered acts of faith.
- “and be sprinkled with His blood”—the allusion here is to the Law of Moses, in which the high priest would sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant during the Day of Atonement observance (Lev. 16:11-16).²⁵ In that occurrence, animal blood was sprinkled for the purpose of making atonement—first, for the high priest; second, for the nation of Israel. But the

²⁵ There may also be an allusion here to the blood of the covenant which was sprinkled upon the book of the covenant itself, the altar upon which the blood sacrifice was made, and the people who swore allegiance to the covenant (Exod. 24:1-8; see also Heb. 9:18-22).

NT writers have applied this same language to the act of atonement through the blood of Christ (cf. Heb. 10:22 and 12:24). The “sprinkling” is now figurative, but the application of the blood to the guilty soul is quite real.²⁶

In a very brief but powerful manner, Peter has laid out the theological foundation for those who belong to Christ (the “chosen” or “elect”). Such people are called by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, and cleansed by the Son’s blood. The order is out of sequence—atonement *always* and *necessarily* precedes consecration—but it is not Peter’s point to make a sequential statement, only a truthful and descriptive one. “May grace and peace be yours...”—those who are chosen by God and stand in His favor are recipients of divine grace; it cannot be otherwise. And, those who are saved by grace are also at peace with God, since they are in His fellowship (Rom. 5:1-2). “Peter’s brief greeting, ‘Grace and peace be yours in abundance,’ gives in miniature the whole message of his letter.”²⁷

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²⁶ This does not mean that the application is happening in real time; it means that this *must be done* in order for that soul to be cleansed of its sins. “[A]ll things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22).

²⁷ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 27.

Lesson One: A Living Hope (1:3-12)

Peter formally and fittingly begins his epistle with what Lenski calls a “great doxology,”²⁸ or hymn of praise: “Blessed be the God and Father...” (1:3a). “Blessed” here means to speak good words toward (someone); it is recognition of someone who is (or is to be) well-spoken of.²⁹ Peter also says in clear and unmistakable language that God *is* Jesus’ Father, and therefore Jesus *is* the Son of God. In fact, whoever denies that Jesus is the Son of God is a liar and an “antichrist” (see 1 John 2:22-23). In divine mercy—“mercy” being that which spares us from what we actually deserve—God provided a way for sinners to regain their fellowship with Him. This refers to a spiritual rebirth (being “born again”) in which the soul dies to its allegiance to sin and is reborn into a new allegiance to Christ. (This was alluded to in John 3:3-5 and explained in Rom. 6:3-7.) Those who live according “to the course of this [sinful] world” are “dead” to God’s fellowship (Eph. 2:1-2). By dying to the world—and thus, to the condemnation that one’s law-breaking has brought upon him (Rom. 7:4)—a person is reborn into a new fellowship with God that is based upon different terms and conditions than the fellowship he once had prior to his ever having sinned against Him. Thus, one must die *to* the world, must die *with* Christ (Rom. 6:4, 2 Tim. 2:11), and then must be resurrected to a *new* life with God (Eph. 2:4-7).

This new relationship is determined by a covenant agreement between God and the one who calls upon His name for salvation. God offers the terms of that salvation in His gospel; the sinner either accepts those terms or rejects them. Being “born again” is not a mere spiritual concept, religious revival, or emotional experience; it is the real, historical, and life-changing point in time when a person renounces his self-will and his love for the world, and openly declares his loving allegiance to Christ. The *defining act* of this event is his baptism into Christ. One who refuses to be baptized into Christ also defies the very method by which a person becomes a Christ-follower (i.e., a Christian). The popular idea of “just ask Jesus into your heart to be your personal Savior” is unbiblical and hopeless. One cannot be “born of God” (John 1:12-13) without doing what *God* says is necessary for that rebirth.

Being “born again” provides something the sinner did not have before: *hope*. (Those who die outside of Christ—i.e., outside of a covenant relationship with God *through* Christ—have “no hope” or are “without hope”; see Eph. 2:12, 4:17-19, and 1 Thess. 4:13.) Peter goes one step further and calls this a “*living* hope” (emphasis added). This is because: it is based upon the perpetual, ever-living intercession of Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:23-28); it inspires life, love, and obedience in the believer (Rom. 5:1-5); and it anticipates eternal life with God (Rom. 8:24-25). While the believer’s hope looks forward to what lies ahead, it is predicated on the reality of what has been done to secure it—namely, “the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1:3b). If Christ had not

28 R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and Jude* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 28.

29 Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, electronic edition (database © 2014 by WORDsearch), on 1:3. Paul uses the same phrase in 2 Cor. 1:3 and Eph. 1:3.

been raised from the dead, then this would indicate that God did not have the power to raise Him, He did not have the *desire* to raise Him, and/or Christ really was not who He said He was—the Son of God. The entirety of the Christian faith rests upon Christ’s resurrection. If He has not been raised, then: our conscience remains corrupted (1 Pet. 3:21-22); we are still in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17); our faith and our preaching is “in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14); we cannot walk in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4); we will not be raised (1 Cor. 6:14); etc. Likewise, we cannot have a “living hope” apart from Christ’s own irrepressible life: because He lives, therefore we can live, and, if we remain faithful to our covenant with God, will live *with* Him forever.

Peter then tells the “born again” believer what he has to look forward to (1:4): “an inheritance.” The reasons why Christians are called “sons of God”—emphasis being on the word *sons* here—is because of our being qualified for an inheritance (Gal. 3:26-27; cf. Col. 1:12). The NT language concerning our spiritual inheritance imitates that of the ancient world in which firstborn sons received a double inheritance and all other sons received whatever remained. (Daughters only received an inheritance if there were no sons; see Num. 27:1-11.) Christ has received the Father’s *full* inheritance, since He is the “only begotten Son” of God (John 1:14, 3:16, et al). We who are adopted sons of God receive not whatever is left over, since Christ has inherited *all* things (Heb. 1:2); rather, Christ promises to share *His* inheritance with us in the life to come. If we are not “born again,” then we cannot become sons of God; if we are not sons of God, then we have no inheritance to look forward to; and if we have no inheritance, then we have nothing to hope for in the life to come.

The Christian’s inheritance is a magnificent one (1:4). It is “imperishable”—it cannot die or be corrupted; “So many inheritances vanish away before they are obtained.”³⁰ It is “undefiled”—it has no flaw, defect, or blemish that would render it unfit to receive. It “will not fade away”—it will not be diminished by time, circumstances, the elements, or natural deterioration. This is because there is nothing natural about this inheritance; it is not of this world, just as Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Accordingly, it is “reserved in heaven”—far from the reach of anyone or anything that might corrupt it. Jesus instructed believers to “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal” (Mat. 6:20). And, this inheritance is “for you”—think of it: *for you!* This is not some promise made to someone else, or something that you strongly desire but are hopeless to receive. This is God’s promise to *all* who live faithful to Him and put their full confidence in His ability to perform (Rom. 4:21).

30 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, electronic edition (© 1960 by The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; database © 2007 by WORDsearch Corp.), on 1:4. Barclay says that “imperishable” here can have another meaning, namely, unravaged by any invading army. “Many and many a time the land of Palestine had been ravaged by the armies of the aliens; it had been fought over and blasted and destroyed; but the Christian possesses a peace, a joy, a safety, a serenity which no invading army can ravage and destroy” (*Letters*, 204-205).

Faithful Christians do not just believe in God; we are also protected by His divine power (1:5). We have needs, God provides fulfillment; we have enemies, God provides security; we have fears and doubts, God provides confidence and peace; we have human limitations, God provides divine strength to overcome them (2 Cor. 12:9-10). This providence is contingent, however, upon our continued faith in Him (“through faith”). Since we “are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26), therefore we are also promised an inheritance that God will guard until it is finally and fully received. This answers the unstated question, “What good is a heavenly inheritance if we cannot see it and do not even know all that it involves?” Peter’s answer is, in essence: “You do not have to worry about that. God has your future all under control, if you but trust His plans for you and believe in what He has promised you.” Our salvation has not yet been revealed, but there is a day coming—God Himself guarantees it—when it will be revealed (or, made fully visible) to us. For now, it is ours in promise and by faith; in due time, it will be ours in full and in fact. The only thing Peter adds to this revealing is that it will occur “in the last time”—undoubtedly, the day in which we stand before Christ and give an account of our life here on earth (2 Cor. 5:10, Rev. 20:11-15).

All of this is cause for rejoicing among those who are chosen by God to receive such a grand inheritance (1:6).³¹ And yet, Peter recognizes that just because Christians have an excellent future in the life to come does not make all the problems of this life evaporate. In many cases, being a faithful Christian actually increases life’s troubles, responsibilities, and strain. Specifically, Peter refers to the “various trials” of the believer’s faith in God, up to and including religious persecution (as does James in a parallel thought—Jas. 1:2-4). He does, however, contrast the limited scope of those troubles in comparison to the timeless and numerous blessings of one’s life with God in heaven (2 Cor. 4:16-18). These first things are “for a little while”; the latter things are forever. These first things will happen only “if necessary”; the latter things will happen *for certain*. It is God who controls both sides of the picture: He protects the believer on earth, but allows him (or her) to undergo what is necessary for his faith to grow larger and stronger; He also protects his future inheritance, so that when this relatively short life is over, the believer will be ushered into heavenly glory (cf. Rom. 8:18, Col. 3:1-4, and 1 Pet. 5:10).

Peter is not patronizing his readers (“What are you so worked up about? They’re just a few ‘trials,’ nothing more!”). Instead, he is being realistic. The trials are real—and distressing. The suffering is real—and upsetting. The temptation to sin (including the sin of unbelief; see Heb. 3:12 – 4:2) is real—and can be spiritually exhausting. The struggle to maintain a healthy faith here on earth is often met with pockets of doubt, uncertainty, anxiousness, and other forms of fear. Many Christians have privately wondered, “If God cares so much about me, why is He letting me be faced with such difficult trials?” Peter’s manifold response to all of this (1:7-9):

³¹ With reference to 1:3-9, Lenski says: “First, certainty; next, joy. First, living hope, an inheritance safely kept for us in heaven, and we ourselves kept for this inheritance; next, while we wait, joy despite trials, these trials only refining us like gold. The grand doxology simply moves forward...” (*Interpretation*, 37).

- The “proof [or, genuineness; authenticity] of your faith” (1:7) is necessary in order to demonstrate exactly where one’s loyalty lies. One who wishes to keep his own life will do everything in his power to avoid such authentication; one who has left this world behind and follows Christ with all of his heart will endure sufferings for His name’s sake (Mat. 5:10-12, 16:24-25). Faith that is never tested is not really “faith” at all, but only words and an empty cloud. It is not until one is forced to cling to his faith tenaciously—especially while incurring personal pain or loss—that his faith actually begins to take shape and solidify.
- Human faith in God is “more precious than gold” (1:7)—not only to God, but also to the one who possesses it. Gold is limited to this world; its value is determined by people, availability, and secular economics. Obedient faith, however, looks beyond this world; its value is determined by God Himself, regardless of earthly factors. Since ancient times, literal gold has been extracted from iron ore and other inferior materials through smelting. This process involves heating up the rock so that the gold liquifies and pours out of it, providing the smelter with pure gold. The same is true with Christians: various trials of faith, being faced with temptations, wrestling with fears and doubts, and actual persecution, heat up our lives, so to speak. As a result, our faith—if it is real and enduring—pours out of us and is given to God as a kind of offering (in essence, a “living and holy sacrifice”—Rom. 12:1) which, in God’s eyes, is *priceless* as much as it is *honorable* to Him. Gold is perishable, inasmuch as it can and will be destroyed; but faith is imperishable, in that it can endure trials, human assaults, spiritual warfare, and the test of time.
- Thus, while we are beset with “fire,” the excellent outcome serves to praise God (1:7). The message to Him is, “You, my God, are *worthy* of my going through the crucible in order to prove my loyalty and faith to You.” The praise that we give to God in this form will be returned to us in due time: we will be rewarded in the form of praise (words), glory (recognition), and honor (action) when finally presented before the Father and His Son in the Judgment. “The revelation of Jesus Christ” literally refers to the event in which Jesus is visibly revealed to us and the rest of the world (see Acts 1:9-11, 1 Thess. 2:19, 2 Thess. 1:6-8, 2:1, and Rev. 1:7).³² This revealing (or, revelation) will mark the end of time, human existence on earth, the physical system, and any further opportunity to repent or respond to the gospel.
- Christians do not need to see Jesus *now*, however, in order to believe in Him (1:8). In fact, “even though we [i.e., eyewitnesses of Jesus during His ministry—MY WORDS] have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer” (2 Cor. 5:16). Yet, Jesus Himself said to Thomas, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed” (John 20:29). Many say that “seeing is believing”; in the present case, “believing is seeing.” When we believe in Jesus because of what others have seen, preached, recorded, and even died for, He becomes alive to us—we “see” Him. This is what God expects of us, given that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).
- Having “seen” Christ through the eyes of faith, we also *love* Him (1:8). Our love for Christ

³² The use of [Greek] *apokalupsis*, ‘appearing’ (RV, ‘revelation’), suggests not the ‘coming’ of someone hitherto [or, up to this point] absent, but the visible unveiling or disclosure of someone who has been all the time spiritually and invisibly present” (Stibbs, *TNTC*, 78-79; bracketed words are mine).

is not dependent upon Him providing a visible confirmation of His existence; the physical creation (Rom. 1:18-20) and the Bible record are sufficient for this. “Millions, and hundreds of millions, have been led to love the Saviour, who have never seen him. They have seen—not with the bodily eye, but with the eye of faith—the inimitable beauty of his character, and have been brought to love him with an ardour of affection which they never had for any other one.”³³ “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9); likewise, our love for God is manifested in our willingness to endure various trials, hostilities, and injustices for His Son. This is not some theoretical idea; Peter is obviously writing to those whom he knows have endured the very things to which he refers. He knows what they are facing; his exhortation addresses real people going through real trials for a very real faith.

The result of overcoming such trials of faith successfully is rejoicing “with joy inexpressible and full of glory [or simply, glorified]” (1:8). Kistemaker says:

Joy is a gift that we receive from God [because of His salvation—MY WORDS], for Scripture shows that God is the giver of joy (see Ps. 16:11, John 16:24, and Rom. 15:13). This gift, then, comes to the believer who puts his complete trust in God. Joy is a gift that must be shared with others. The shepherd who finds his sheep and the woman who finds her coin share their joy with neighbors, while the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:4-10). In Scripture, joy is often related to God’s almighty acts of saving man. As a result, man expresses his joy by loving God and by obeying his commands. And last, joy is [a] fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).³⁴

One of the great paradoxes of Christianity is that joy comes through suffering: overcoming difficulties, triumphing in battle, and the satisfaction of doing what is right produce great joy in the one who sees past the trial itself and finds tremendous fulfillment in pleasing his God (as Jesus did—see Heb. 12:2-3).³⁵ The “outcome” of a faith that is willing to endure various trials and persecution is “the salvation of your souls” (1:9). This does not mean that all who suffer, or all who suffer for any kind of faith, are guaranteed salvation; the context and application are very clear. It is true that no one is saved by faith alone; it is also true that no one is saved who will not live by faith in God—a faith which needs to be validated by self-denial, sacrifice, and even suffering.

The Ancient Prophecies (1:10-12): In a kind of aside, Peter has something to say about this salvation (1:10-12). Clearly, the plan, means, and offering of salvation are not something for

³³ Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes* (electronic edition), on 1:8.

³⁴ Kistemaker, *NTC*, 51.

³⁵ This needs to be further emphasized: there is, certainly, no joy *in* suffering, but joy comes *through* suffering. “Suffering produces sorrow, while joy is the result of vindication. In the present passage [1:8], suffering and sorrow belong to the present, while vindication and joy, although very near, belong to the future” (Michaels, *WBC*, 37). Christians are not to be masochists—people who actually *enjoy* pain and suffering. Rather, we are to be those who see past the present difficulty and live—or even die—in joyful anticipation of being with our Savior.

which the believers themselves are responsible. God has been working on this plan for a long time—indeed, “for all eternity” (2 Tim. 1:9; cf. Eph. 3:11). God also unveiled this plan over a long period of time, gradually and methodically pulling back the curtain to reveal what ultimately would happen. But those to whom the gospel still remained a mystery yet to be revealed—i.e., the ancient prophets—“made careful searches and inquiries” into the exact time and manner in which God would usher the world’s Redeemer into view (1:10-11). Their prophecies were not their witness of Christ as much as His witness through them. They only received pieces and parts, not the whole picture; their view was dim and obscured, not bright and clear. This was especially true when God predicted the suffering that the Messiah would have to undergo, and His exaltation that would follow (1:11). (This no doubt refers to such passages as Isa. 50:4-7 and 52:13 – 53:12; cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47.) These men were prophets, to be sure, but they were seldom privileged to know precisely that of which they prophesied. Furthermore, they remained mere men, and thus had all the struggles, curiosities, and longings that all men have. Not only did they want to know *who* God was talking about, but *when* His plan would be fully revealed (see Dan. 12:8-9, for example). As Jesus told His disciples, “For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Mat. 13:17).

What God *did* reveal to His prophets was that they were not speaking of things pertaining to themselves (i.e., things that would have an immediate application in their lifetime, or anytime soon) (1:12). This is in specific reference to what are called the messianic prophecies—those pertaining to the time of the Messiah—not to every prophecy.

Peter is not saying that the prophets had no ministry to their own time, or that they spoke in inspired riddles that made no sense to them or to their hearers. The very diligence of their search for better understanding shows how the prophecies challenged and intrigued them. What Peter is eager to point out is that his hearers are the heirs of the full message of the prophets.³⁶

Thus, it is *Christians* who are the recipients of the full extent of all such prophecies: they are, in a sense, on the other side of the cross, and thus able to see in hindsight the full plan of God unfolded (Heb. 11:39-40). Furthermore, Christians have not mere prophets but hand-picked spokesmen (the apostles) to disclose the so-called “mystery of Christ” in the gospel message (Eph. 3:3-7). Many of the OT prophetic oracles concerning the restoration or regathering of Israel are actually fulfilled in the church age, yet are purposely cloaked in mystery, obscurity, and (often) poetic language. “The whole New Testament gospel rests on the Spirit’s Old Testament testimony that was made through the Old Testament prophets. Cancel that testimony, and you remove the basis of the gospel of Christ.”³⁷ But now, “these things...have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you” (1:12). The Holy Spirit is directly responsible for this preaching, not only in preparing those who would preach, but also the content of the preaching, and even the miracles

³⁶ Clowney, *Message*, 59.

³⁷ Lenski, *Interpretation*, 49.

that authenticate this preaching as being indeed of God (Heb. 2:3-4). He (the Spirit) was “sent from heaven” for this purpose—that is, He was given to the church by the Father at the Son’s request, once He [Christ] had ascended to receive His throne (Acts 2:33).

Two things are especially striking in this passage (1:10-12). First, “the Spirit of Christ” and “the Holy Spirit” are used interchangeably, making it appear (at first glance) that Christ *is* the Holy Spirit. This cannot be true, since the Spirit is often mentioned in the NT as a third member of the Godhead with an individual name, personality, and role (as in 1:2; cf. 2 Cor. 13:14). But it *can* be true that the pre-incarnate Son of God and the Holy Spirit of God worked in seamless cooperation in providing the necessary (albeit cloaked) details to the prophets as to what would happen in their distant future. This seems the most natural, logical, and biblical explanation. It is also consistent with Rom. 8:9, where this same interchangeableness occurs. In that passage (read the full context: Rom. 8:6-11), it is unmistakable that “the Spirit of Christ” and “the Holy Spirit” are two distinctly different, yet fully cooperative, entities.

Second, the OT prophecies provoked the wonder and curiosity not only of human prophets, but also heavenly angels (“things into which angels long to look”—1:12).³⁸ We often assume that angels know everything God knows, that they are omniscient beings simply because they are in heaven where God is. But there is nothing in Scripture to confirm this, and Scripture is the *only* authentic source of otherworldly information available to humankind. Nothing *factual* about the spiritual realm can be known except for what God has revealed to us. Thus, while angels always seem to know far more than we do, this does not mean they know all things, or that God told them everything that He did not tell the ancient prophets. (The same, by the way, can be said of *fallen* angels, and Satan in particular. We may assume that Satan knows everything, or fully knew of God’s plan to offer His Son on the cross to defeat him, but there is nothing in Scripture that proves this. If anything, the implications take us in the opposite direction.)

While there are many things we do not know about the world of angels, there are also many things angels do not understand about what it means to be human. Furthermore, while angels are dispatched to carry out God’s work as “ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit eternal salvation” (Heb. 1:14), this does not mean they are privileged to know the full details of God’s work or the recipients of His work (i.e., Christians).

It is not unreasonable to suppose that there are many things in relation to the Divine character and plans, which they do not yet understand. They know, undoubtedly, much more than we do; but there are plans and purposes of God which are yet made known to none of his creatures. No one can doubt that these plans and purposes must be the object of the attentive study of all holy created minds.... [Furthermore,] there are great and difficult

³⁸ The word simply translated “look” comes from a Greek word (*parakupto*) which means, “to bend beside; to lean over (so as to peer within); to stoop down,” so as to gain a better or clearer view (James Strong, *Strong’s Talking Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*, electronic edition [WORDsearch Corp.], #G3879). The same word is used to describe Peter’s “stooping down” to get a better look into Jesus’ empty tomb (Luke 24:12). Similarly, angels long(ed) to “stoop down” to gain a better understanding of the human world, and the dynamics of God’s interaction with human beings.

questions about the whole subject of forgiveness, which an angel could easily see, but which he could not so easily solve. How could it be done consistently with the justice and truth of God? How could he forgive, and yet maintain the honour of his own law, and the stability of his own throne?³⁹

There are many things we can speculate concerning angels and the angelic realm, to be sure. But we only know of their world what God has revealed to us, and they only know of our world what God has revealed to them. The One who knows *both* worlds perfectly, absolutely, and at any given moment, is God Himself. We would do well not to forget this.

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³⁹ Barnes, *Barnes' Notes* (electronic edition), on 1:12; bracketed word is mine.

Questions

- 1.) In order to be “born again” (1:3), one must first *die*, and then be *re-born* as something different than he was previously. What does all this mean?
 - a. How is this accomplished?
 - b. What is our part of this process?
 - c. What is God’s part?
- 2.) Peter says that we *have* an “inheritance” (1:4), but he does not really define what it is. What do you understand this inheritance to be, besides simply “heaven” itself? (Consider Jesus’ promises to those who “overcome” in Rev. 2 – 3 in your answer.)
- 3.) Is the purification (or crucible) of one’s faith really necessary (1:6-7)? Why or why not?