

1 Peter 1:1-2 (Part I)

I. 1 Peter 1:1a — Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...

Peter starts his letter by identifying himself, and he identifies himself not as Simon or Simeon – the name given to him by his parents, but rather by the name *Peter* – the name that we know was given to him by Jesus. Look at those words again: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...” There’s no hint of boasting, here. Peter knows that he’s *Peter* only by God’s grace. He knows that even his understanding that Jesus is the Messiah is not the result of his own wisdom and insight (not revealed to him by flesh and blood), but something graciously revealed to him by “the Father in heaven.” (Mat. 16:17) So, on the one hand, for Peter to identify himself as Peter must have always been a *humbling* thing. And yet, on the other hand, this name is also a symbol of Peter’s *authority* to speak and to act officially as a representative of Jesus Himself. It’s an amazing paradox that can’t exist anywhere else in the world – that the deepest kind of humility should be so intimately connected with this unparalleled kind of authority. Jesus said:

- Matthew 16:18–19 — “I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Peter knows that he is Peter only by the grace of God, and yet for us, the fact that he is Peter is a reminder to us that he speaks as an authoritative messenger of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

What Jesus said to Peter is ultimately, by extension true of all the Apostles (cf. Eph. 2:19-22), and so even more important than his name is what Peter goes on to say after his name: “Peter, *an apostle of Jesus Christ*...” Notice that Peter isn’t simply an apostle, but an apostle *of Jesus Christ*. On the one hand, here again is a reason for the deepest humility, because Peter’s authority is not his own, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with serving his own interests. On the other hand, here *is* an authority that is nothing less than the authority and word of Jesus Himself. We read in Mark’s Gospel:

- Mark 3:13–16 — And [Jesus] went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter)...

And then listen to what Jesus said to “the twelve” in the upper room before He suffered in our place:

- John 14:25–26 — “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”
- John 15:26 — “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

- John 16:12–15 — “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

So, it’s in light of all these things that we need to read these first words of Peter’s letter: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...” Why does Peter so “unselfconsciously” (Davids) identify himself in this way? — Not to exalt himself, no, but rather to exalt the word and the authority of the risen and reigning Christ with which *he* is writing, for the joy and true wellbeing of all those to whom he writes – including, ultimately, us. “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...” Only this introduction can explain or justify what Peter writes at the end of his letter:

- 1 Peter 5:12 — By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that **this is the true grace of God**. Stand firm in it.

Brothers and sisters, when we come to the apostolic writings of the New Testament, we come to those who are writing as commissioned representatives of our Lord and our King, Jesus Christ. One commentator very helpfully writes:

“The church is apostolic today to the extent that it remains upon the doctrinal foundation established by the apostles. No-one today can claim the authority of an apostle, either by virtue of [church] office or charismatic [gifting]. The work and calling of the apostle are finished in witnessing to the final [completed] revelation of God in Jesus Christ... Peter writes to bear authoritative witness to him [and for him].” (Clowney)

So, why are we drawn to this letter? Are we drawn to this letter ultimately because what the Apostle Peter writes is God’s word to us? (cf. Clowney) If you want to study more about the office of the New Testament Apostles you can listen to, or read the sermon on Ephesians 1:1a which is on our website. But for right now, I only want to ask: When we come to this letter that Peter writes, are we coming ready to gladly submit ourselves to the word and the authority of our **King, Jesus Christ?**

II. 1 Peter 1:1b — Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, **To the chosen...**

After first identifying himself, notice how very purposeful and how very careful Peter is in identifying his readers. Right from the very “get go” we begin to see something of Peter’s “agenda” and of his reason for writing this letter.

He first calls his readers “the chosen,” or, “those who are chosen.” He doesn’t actually say, yet, *by whom* they were chosen, but there couldn’t have been any doubt in anyone’s mind as to what Peter means. In the Old Testament, the chosen are those whom God Himself has chosen to be His people.

- Deuteronomy 7:6 (cf. Deut. 10:15) — You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has **chosen** you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
- Psalms 33:12 (cf. Ps. 135:3-4) — Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has **chosen** as his heritage!
- Isaiah 44:1-2 (cf. Isa. 41:8-9) — But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have **chosen**! Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have **chosen**.

It's against this backdrop that Peter now writes to the churches all across northern Asia Minor: "To the chosen...", "To those who are chosen..." We'll see why in a moment, but it's *so very* important to Peter that all the Christians to whom he's writing understand that they are the continuation of this **chosen** people that they read about in the Old Testament Scriptures. *We* are the continuation of this **chosen** people. In chapter two and verse nine, Peter will quote Exodus 19:5-6 and apply these words first spoken to Israel now to the church in which Jews and Gentiles are joined together as the true Israel of God. Peter writes:

- 1 Peter 2:9 — You are a **chosen** race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Earlier, in chapter two verse four, Peter explains how this seemingly impossible thing can actually be a reality:

- 1 Peter 2:4-5 — As you come to him [Christ], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God **chosen** and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is ultimately God's chosen one. Jesus is the true offspring of Abraham; He is God's faithful servant, Israel. And so as we "come to Jesus," by faith, we learn that we also are "the chosen" – the continuation of God's chosen people from the days of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. Peter not only begins his letter with this glorious theme of our "chosenness," but he also ends it with this same glorious theme:

- 1 Peter 5:13 — She who is at Babylon, who is *likewise* **chosen**, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.

Just stop and ask yourself this: Isn't it a wonderful thing to be chosen? Isn't it an **astonishing** and **awesome** thing to be chosen – to be God's **chosen** people? In the end, every spiritual blessing you've ever received and all the infinite riches of your salvation can only be traced back to this one ultimate blessing – God **chose** us. (cf. Eph. 1)

Peter will come back to this theme in verse two (and we'll come back to verse 2 next week), but first he's going to further identify his readers by another *very different* word—a word that might *seem* completely unexpected, but is really the most natural thing in the world.

III. 1 Peter 1:1c — Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the chosen, [**who are**] **foreigners**...

The first word is so full of joy and good news. And yet the second word might seem to be the very opposite. “Foreigners,” here, refers to people “permanently” living and residing in a place and culture that is “foreign” to them. We could actually translate the Greek word, “**resident foreigners**.” So the point of this word is **not** our separation from our true home that we love and long for (contra, “exile”). The point of this word is rather to emphasize our **separation** and our **estrangement** from the place and culture in which we find ourselves living – a place and culture that is “foreign” to us and a place in which we cannot help but to be seen and treated as “foreigners.” *By itself*, this isn’t a very pleasant thought – not a very pleasant thought **at all**. At the very best, it’s just perpetually awkward, and it always tends toward being disdained, and mocked, and mistreated and abused by the culture in which we find ourselves residing as foreigners. One commentator writes:

“Foreigners... were not necessarily expected to hold the values and practice the customs of their host culture. Because of such differences, foreigners were often looked upon suspiciously as potentially subversive to the established social order.” (Jobes)

Last week, we suggested the possibility that the Christians to whom Peter writes had been deported from Rome, and sent to populate Roman colonies in the remote and far-off provinces of northern Asia Minor. Maybe this explains why Peter is the only writer in the New Testament to ever address his Christian readers as “foreigners.” Maybe it was their experience of being deported to live as foreigners in Asia Minor that suggested to Peter this analogy with the true foreignness of all of us as Christians living in this world. (cf. Jobes)

Not only is Peter the only one to ever describe his readers as “foreigners,” but he actually makes this reality a central theme of his letter – **hand in hand with the theme of our being chosen by God!** Later in this chapter Peter writes:

- 1 Peter 1:17–18 (cf. 4:3-4) — 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 **foreign residence**, knowing that **you were ransomed** from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers...

In chapter two, *right after* identifying his readers as a “chosen race,” (2:9) Peter goes on to say:

- 1 Peter 2:11 — Beloved, I urge you as **sojourners and foreigners** to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

And finally, just as Peter begins with the twin themes of being both the chosen *and* foreigners, so Peter is going to end his letter in the same way:

- 1 Peter 5:13 — She who is **at Babylon**, who is likewise **chosen**, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.

In the Old Testament, Babylon was the place where God's people lived and resided as foreigners. And so this seems to be Peter's way of closing his letter just as he began. Not only are his readers in far-off Asia Minor both "**chosen**" and "**foreigners**," but so also is the church in the place from which Peter is writing both "**chosen**" by God and also "**foreigners**" – living—residing—in "Babylon."

Can you see, now, how Peter is trying to show us that these two themes always go together hand in hand? And are you already beginning to see *why* they always go together hand in hand? If the theme of being "chosen" describes our relationship with **God**, then the theme of being "foreigners" is a description of our relationship with the **world**. And what Peter very much wants us to understand is that it's the very fact of our being **chosen** by God that has actually *created* this situation where we are now **foreigners**, living **estranged** from the world. What Peter wants us to know is that it's precisely our "**chosenness**" that has *created* this situation where the world looks upon us as foreigners and where we feel the world to be utterly foreign to us. So now we can understand better why Peter begins his letter: "To the **chosen**, [who are] **foreigners**..."

We asked a minute ago, "Isn't it a **wonderful** thing to be chosen? Isn't it an **astonishing** and **awesome** thing to be chosen?" But now how do we answer that question when we know that to be chosen by God *from out of* this world is to suddenly become "foreigners" still residing *in* this world? Are we still able to rejoice because we see that it's our foreignness in this world, no matter how uncomfortable, and difficult it might be, that actually reassures us of our "chosenness"—that we have been chosen—by God? But now Peter reinforces the word "foreigners" with another very powerful word:

IV. 1 Peter 1:1d — Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the chosen, [who are] foreigners **of the Dispersion of Pontus, of Galatia, of Cappadocia, of Asia, and of Bithynia...**

Do you see how the word "Dispersion" is capitalized? That's because "Dispersion" (Gr. *diaspora*) was a technical term used by the Jews *only after* the exile and *only* to refer to *all* the Jews who were living *outside* of their homeland after the Babylonian exile.

➤ John 7:35 — The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?"

But, now, do you see how Peter is mixing things up? "The Dispersion" has always included *all* of the Jews living outside of Palestine, but Peter is using this same title in such a way that suddenly "the Dispersion" now includes who?—*Only* the **believing** Jews, and along *with* these believing Jews, even the believing **Gentiles**! Are *we* seeing what *Peter* sees? "The Dispersion," which used to be *all Israel* living outside of Palestine, is now the Church *wherever it is in the world*—even in Palestine. How can Peter say this? Only because, as we've already seen, the Church is the continuation of God's **chosen** people from the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and only because we also know that the true homeland of all God's chosen people is now the Jerusalem which is "above." (cf. Gal. 4:25-27) So, simply put, what we're to understand is that **AS** "the **chosen**," the church is now also, by default, "the **Dispersion**."

Now, in the Old Testament, the Dispersion was connected with God's judgment on the wickedness of His people, but in the New Testament all of God's judgement on His people has been completely exhausted in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Jobes; Goppelt) So, then, what's the point of referring to God's people any longer as "the Dispersion"? The only remaining significance of the Dispersion is that we're still waiting to be finally "regathered" into our true homeland – which is the Jerusalem that "comes down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:1-2); **Therefore, we're still living as resident foreigners of the Dispersion.**

So, **practically**, what do you think should happen when we begin to consciously and purposefully see ourselves and think of ourselves as "the Dispersion" – or even more specifically as "foreigners of the Dispersion"? That's a really heavy and loaded phrase isn't it? Peter's emphasis in this letter isn't so much that we're on a pilgrimage to a heavenly city, or that "this world is not my home, I'm just a passing through." As true as that may be, it's not the point. In fact, it's really the exact opposite. Peter's concern in writing this letter is that we're actually **living** and **staying** here **AS "permanent" (resident) foreigners of the Dispersion.** This is the reality of our very existence from day to day, and it's a reality that will be true for us until either we die or *Jesus* comes again.

In the Old Testament, the one all-consuming concern of the *faithful* Jews among the Dispersion was this: How do we go on living "**permanently**" in this **foreign place** surrounded by "foreign" thinking, and "foreign" values, and "foreign" speech, and "foreign" practices without ever compromising or conforming or assimilating into this foreign culture? This is the concern that we see in the examples of Daniel and his three friends living in the capital of the Babylonian and then the Persian Empire. (Not eating the king's food, not bowing to the king's statue, praying towards Jerusalem, etc.; Dan. 1-6; cf. Jer. 29:1-9) And it was also this concern of how to maintain their true distinctiveness as foreigners living in a foreign land that resulted in the "synagogues." The synagogue meetings were a way for God's people to come together, **out of** the culture in which they were living, in order to safeguard and maintain their **foreignness**, so that they would be protected from the constant danger of being absorbed into the pagan culture that was all around them. It was on this model of the synagogue that the first meetings of the **church** were based. And now, of course, Peter is teaching us that it's on the model of the Dispersion itself that the very existence of the church today is to be understood. What's so heartbreaking, today, is to see how the meetings of the church have become the means not of safeguarding and preserving our **foreignness**—and therefore our **true** testimony—in this world, but rather becoming as acceptable and as palatable and as much "like" this world as we can possibly get away with. But one thing we learn from Peter is that our philosophy of church is ultimately *not* just a matter of preference, but a black and white matter of right and wrong – of truth and falsehood.

Conclusion

Peter is the only one who teaches explicitly about our identity as foreigners of the Dispersion, but we certainly see that basic theme throughout the rest of the Bible. So it shouldn't be surprising to see how the very first churches almost always addressed each other:

“The church of God that resides as foreigners in Rome to the church of God that resides as foreigners in Corinth” (1 Clement); “Polycarp and the elders with him to the church of God that resides as foreigners in Philippi”; “The church of God that resides as foreigners in Smyrna to the church of God that resides as foreigners in Philomelium” (Martyrdom of Polycarp); The epistles of Dionysius of Corinth “to the church that resides as foreigners in Gortyna... [and] to the church that resides as foreigners in Amastris”; and the epistle from “the servants of Christ residing as foreigners in Vienne and Lyons in Gaul to the brothers and sisters in Asia and Phrygia.” (Michaels; cf. Goppelt, 65 n. 19)

Does all this talk about foreignness feel in any way “foreign” to us? How natural—or unnatural—would it be for us to address other churches, or even other Christians, like this? How natural—or unnatural—would it be for us to *think* of ourselves in this way – to see this phrase “resident foreigners of the Dispersion” as *the* defining reality of our very existence in our neighborhoods, in our communities, in this world, and often even in our own families?

Peter is going to spend the rest of this letter helping us to see what it will require of us to live faithfully as resident foreigners of the Dispersion. Among other things, this will mean being prepared to be ostracized and mistreated and persecuted (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12-19); it will mean being prepared to make a defense to anyone who demands a reason for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15); it will mean keeping our conduct among the Gentiles honorable and living a life that is always above reproach (cf. 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:16-17); it will mean living in submission to God-ordained authorities (cf. 1 Pet. 2:13-3:6); it will mean abstaining from the passions of the flesh and from the things that the Gentiles want to do (cf. 1 Pet. 2:11; 4:1-5), and it will mean being committed to living in fellowship with the rest of God’s chosen people who are living in this world with us as foreigners of the Dispersion. (cf. 1 Pet. 4:8-11)

But in the midst of all this, Peter will *never*—not for a single moment—let us lose sight of exactly what it is that has *caused* us to be separated and estranged from our society. If Peter is going to spend the rest of this letter showing us how to keep our foreignness while still living and residing in our families, and workplaces, and communities, then he will also be constantly rooting this foreignness in our “**chosenness.**” One person comments on this passage:

“Christians are foreigners among their fellow human beings, even among relatives and acquaintances, **BECAUSE**[!!!] their existence has been established on a totally new basis. They are ‘[chosen]’ or – as is said [right after this] in [verse] 3 – ‘born anew to a living hope through Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead.’” (Goppelt)

What we need to see is that even when Peter appeals to us as foreigners and strangers to this world (1 Pet. 2:11), what he’s actually, *really* appealing to is our “chosenness” by God. (cf. Michaels) These two realities will always go together hand in hand. So, to paraphrase another commentator:

It is only those who understand themselves as God’s chosen who have the *strength to resist* the values and culture of the society they live in. Divine “chosenness” reminds us that though we are foreigners we nevertheless have “status,” not because we are so worthy or noble but because God has poured out his grace upon us. Therefore, it is

because of our “chosenness” that we have the energy and the will to counter accepted cultural values and norms and to live in accord with God’s purpose for us. (cf. Schreiner)

How are we to live in this world – where we are viewed as foreigners, and where—as God’s chosen people—we feel the world to be utterly foreign to us?

Now we can understand better why Peter begins his letter: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the **chosen**, [who are] **foreigners of the Dispersion**...” We asked at the beginning: “Isn’t it a **wonderful** thing to be chosen?” But how will we answer this question when we know that to be chosen by God **from out of** this world is to suddenly become “foreigners” still residing **in** this world? Are we still able to rejoice and be glad because we see that it’s our foreignness in this world, no matter how uncomfortable, and difficult it might be, that actually **reassures us** of our “chosenness”—that we have indeed been chosen—by God?