

A precious encouragement for embattled believers in an evil world is taken from 1 Peter 1:1-9 which bless God for His regenerating power and His keeping our spiritual inheritance certain and secure in heaven. These verses of praise begin with this greeting:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

This week we begin with verse 1 that describes Peter's readers as "exiles." May God comfort and encourage us with the fact that we *can live for His glory* even in a fallen, rebellious world that neither reverences our God nor respects our faith. Though aliens and pilgrims, we have a Savior who travels with us!

Monday: Read 1 Peter 1:1-5

Pilgrimage in a Hostile World

Scholars hold different views as to Peter's exact audience in his letters. Some say it was predominantly a letter to Jewish believers after their being scattered away from Jerusalem by the persecution of Acts 8:1. Alternatively, it could be a letter to Gentile converts for whom Peter was gravely concerned as the first widespread Roman persecution loomed on the horizon. Either way, Peter's letters are full of encouragement for believers, Jew or Gentile, who face increasing alienation from cultural or national pressures, living in nations that turn away from the living God.

Peter understands the life for *every follower of Christ* to be a life of pilgrimage through a world that opposes Christ's lordship and rule. All believers who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will, in fact, suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the life of Christian pilgrimage using John Bunyan's hymn in our Red Trinity hymn book:

1 He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
let him in constancy follow the Master.
There's no discouragement
shall make him once relent
his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

2 Who so beset him round with dismal stories,
do but themselves confound—
his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might;
though he with giants fight,
he will make good his right to be a pilgrim.

3 Since, Lord, thou dost defend us with thy Spirit,
we know we at the end shall life inherit.
Then, fancies, flee away!
I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labor night and day to be a pilgrim.

Tues/Weds: Read 1 Peter 1:1-5 and 2 Peter 1:1-3**Chosen by God's Lot**

Peter reassures us of the precious gift of faith given to each believer. He reassures us that God's divine power is sufficient for every need we have in living a life of godliness. Yet, he traces back our fundamental security back *even further*. We who believe in Christ are God's "elect" (1 Peter 1:1), chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Before we celebrate the fruits of Christ's resurrection at Easter, we must trace God's resurrecting power in our lives back to its source in His electing love shown to us in Christ. Notice how Peter returns to this fundamental assurance of election in 2 Peter 1:1, although we might not see this doctrine there until we look at some further translations.

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have **obtained** like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. **(KJV)**

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have *been chosen by God's lot for a* like precious faith with us ... **(My translation).**

A.W. Pink (in his book "A Guide to Fervent Prayer") points out the significance of this word as follows:

The Apostle Peter addresses his Second Epistle "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of our God and our Savior Jesus Christ"...

The expression "have obtained" (*lagchano, no. 2975 in Strong's Concordance*) is the same Greek word found in Luke 1:9: his *lot* was to burn incense." It appears again in John 19:14 where the Roman soldiers discuss who should take possession of the dying Christ's valuable robe. They decide to cast lots for it: "Let us not rend it, but *cast lots* for it."

Thus Peter's readers were reminded that they owed their saving faith not to any superior wisdom of theirs, but solely to the allotments of grace ... In the dispensing of God's favors a blessed portion had fallen to them, even "the faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1).

Meditate and Pray: Sing about God's electing grace, which ensured that Christ would die and rise again from the dead for our sakes, using hymn # 471:

1 'Tis not that I did choose thee,
for, Lord, that could not be;
this heart would still refuse thee,
hadst thou not chosen me.
Thou from the sin that stained me
hast cleansed and set me free;
of old thou hast ordained me,
that I should live to thee.

2 'Twas sov'reign mercy called me
and taught my op'ning mind;
the world had else enthralled me,
to heav'nly glories blind.
My heart owns none before thee,
for thy rich grace I thirst;
this knowing, if I love thee,
thou must have loved me first.

Thursday: Read 1 Peter 1:1-5**Christ Reborn for Us**

Election is not the only way God expresses His sovereignty in our salvation. In 1 Peter 1:3 note the fundamental hope of being “begotten” to a living hope. Jesus’ resurrection to a new and higher life is a prototype of their new birth into the eternal, redeemed family of God. These believers, though scattered as aliens, enduring in a hostile world (1 Peter 1:1) were now heirs of the promises of God. These promises have granted communion with God in their union with the resurrected Christ by faith (2 Peter 1:4).

Meditate and Pray: Lord, may we grasp onto the potent, living hope which is ours through Christ’s resurrection from the dead (1 Peter 1:3) Please encourage us with our Lord’s experience of being permanently reborn as eternal God and man and teach us to walk in faith in our new lives.

Friday: Read 1 Peter 1:1 and 2 Kings 8:1-6**Continually Making Tracks**

We conclude this week by focusing on the painful but urgent question for believers in every age: “How can we live for God’s glory in the midst of pagans and apostates?” This was the exact question facing the readers of 1 & 2 Kings, the people of God in Babylon who wondered how they could keep faith in the Lord during exile. Their situation was much the same as the exiles to whom Peter wrote. In Elisha’s day, there were God’s elect who had not bowed the knee to Baal, who depended on the Lord for their spiritual and physical survival. God’s preserving His own in wicked Israel formed a great encouragement for God’s people in Babylon hundreds of years later.

In the same way, we face exile in our day as our spiritual heritage plummets. As more and more Westerners forsake any semblance of commitment to the Christian faith of our fathers, how can we as bible believing Christians preserve our confession and live lives of Christian integrity?

In 2 Kings 8:1-6, the wealthy Shunammite survived for seven years of famine. Keep in mind that this famine was caused by the wickedness of Israel’s rulers and people, who forsook the Lord in the days of Jehoram (2 Kings 3:1-2) just as they turned away from the Lord in the days of his father Ahab. What was the guidance that Elisha the prophet gave to this woman? He told her to leave her home and her significant inheritance in Israel and go to where there was food in the land of the Philistines! Thus faith always has the courage and wisdom (from God) to “migrate” when needed in order to keep body and soul together.

And so sure enough, she and her family survived the famine, only to return home to find squatters on their land! What was the Lord going to do for this widow (whose husband, having died, was not able to appear on her behalf before the king? (2 Kings 8:5)

God orchestrated all events perfectly so that the Shunammite woman’s plea for justice came before the king of Israel at just the right time. Gehazi the servant of Elisha had just been relating to the king the many wonders of God’s power which Elisha was able to perform – including reviving from the dead the Shunammite’s son of promise! Then – behold! – there was the woman before the king!

Thus the Lord works events so that the king assigns someone to return her land to the Shunammite. The pleas of the woman were heard! On a deeper level, there would be no happy if the Shunammite woman had never returned to the Promised Land. It is only in the comparatively restrictive boundaries of the Promised Land that there was safety for believers in her times. In Christ, the Church does not tie our spiritual welfare to any peace of ground. But outside of Christ how vulnerable we are, in danger of losing our spiritual inheritance. No wonder the New Testament puts such an emphasis on “returning to the Shepherd of our Souls” as it describes the Christian life as continually “making tracks” back to Christ. The Apostle Peter knew much about a life of continual repentance (1 Peter 2:15.)

Meditate and Pray: Sing about how God can work out His purposes perfectly in the lives of His people, singing hymn #

1 God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year:
God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near;
nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

2 From utmost east to utmost west, where human feet have trod,
by the mouth of many messengers goes forth the voice of God:
"Give ear to me, you continents, ye isles, give ear to me,"
that the earth may be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

4 All we can do is nothing worth unless God blesses the deed;
vainly we hope for the harvest-tide till God gives life to the seed;
yet nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

Saturday: Read 1 Peter 1:1 and 2 Kings 8:7-9

Jesus is Reigning Through All

We conclude this week by focusing on the painful but urgent question for believers in every age: “How can we live for God’s glory in the midst of pagans and apostates?” Peter knew it was going to be hard for believers in his day to live for God’s glory in the face of the Roman empire, just as the writer of 1-2 Kings knew he needed to encourage God’s people in exile in Babylon. Stop and list how many of the books in Holy Scripture were written to encourage us when we feel marginalized and powerless in a world that views our faith as irrelevant at best and a dangerous threat to society at worst.

Let us reflect further on our pilgrim status. Look at Elisha’s being sent to the capital of Israel’s enemy Syria in 2 Kings 8:7. Why would God send His prophet to this pagan land, when the Syrians are those who have afflicted God’s people all through the reigns of several kings of Syria? And why would the current king of Syrian, Ben-Hadad, believe he needed to inquire of God’s prophet to find out if he was to survive his illness in 2 Kings 8:8?

In this passage we can observe God's far-reaching control of all men and nations. God has worked a fear and an awe into pagan Ben-Hadad so that he acknowledges the healing power of the Lord through the man of God Elisha. He even calls Elisha "Man of God" as a means of confessing that He recognizes the power of the living God to reside with the prophet!

Perhaps he learned from Naaman's conversion (especially the Syrian general's confession in 2 Kings 5:15 that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel) that there was true healing power in the Lord as he saw Naaman healed of leprosy. Perhaps the recent ignominious defeat at the hands of the God of Israel (2 Kings 7:10-16), where the whole army of Syria fled for fear of Jehovah, humbled Ben-Hadad enough for him to seek help from the God of Israel. What an amazing sight it must have been to see forty camels loaded down with gifts sent to the prophet Elisha!

Meditate and Pray: Scripture promises that the kings of the world will one day bow before king Jesus. It was the Spirit of Christ that worked through Elisha so that even pagan kings confessed the power of God. Whether or not this world's powers acknowledge God rule, God is ruling all things through and in spite of these small, temporary rulers. Sing about Christ's world-wide rule with hymn # 441:

1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does his successive journeys run;
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

2 To him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head;
his name, like sweet perfume, shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.

3 People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song;
and infant voices shall proclaim

their early blessings on his name.

4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns;
the pris'ner leaps to lose his chains,
the weary find eternal rest,
and all the sons of want are blest.

5 Let every creature rise and bring
peculiar honors to our King,
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen!