

Chapter 1: Temporary Suffering and Eternal Glory

1 Peter 1:1–12

The Apostle Peter was a man who knew suffering well. He knew the bitterness of sorrow of denying his Master, as well as the pain of seeing Jesus mistreated, falsely accused, condemned to death, and crucified. More than this, Peter suffered extensively in his apostolic ministry, being imprisoned and beaten for the sake of Jesus (e.g., Acts 5:40). Yet, through all of this, Peter learned that to obey Christ was worth every bit of suffering that he had to endure along the way. In this letter, Peter confronts our temporary, worldly orientation by lifting our eyes to eternity and to heaven, so that we might become bold to follow Jesus into sufferings today, in order that we might one day share in the glory of his kingdom. In the first installment of this message, Peter begins building this case that *our temporary suffering purifies us for eternal glory*.

Elect Exiles (1 Pet. 1:1–2)

In the opening to Peter's letter, he begins by identifying himself as the author of the letter, a custom of ancient letter writers, but different from our custom of signing a letter at the end. Very briefly, he identifies both his name and his office: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:1a). In contrast to Paul, "who constantly had to defend his apostolic status..., Peter evidences no defensiveness in his use of the term for his office here..., for Peter's authority was never challenged."¹ Instead, Peter gives much more emphasis to characterizing the recipients of his letter: "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" (1 Pet. 1:b–2a). This is a significant statement, so we will break down the various elements individually.

First, Peter identifies his readers as *elect*. Peter does not mean to say that anyone and everyone who reads his letter is elect in the full sense of biblical predestination. Rather, he speaks of these dear brothers and sisters on the basis of their professions of faith with an acknowledgement that we do not have the ability to peer into God's eternal decrees regarding individuals. Instead, as John Calvin writes, Peter addresses the recipients of his letter by this term with "the judgment of charity and not of faith, when we deem all those elect in whom appears the mark of God's adoption."²

Second, Peter characterizes his readers as *exiles*, or "persons who belong to some other land and people, who are temporarily residing with a people to whom they do not belong. They are for the

¹ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 46.

² John Calvin, "Commentaries on the First Epistle of Peter," in *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (1551; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 24.

time being aliens, foreigners, strangers and not natives. They never expect to become the latter.”³ As we will see in our study of this letter, Peter is working to instill the view that this world is not our home, but only our place of temporary residence. The massive difference this change of perspective would make in the way that we live our lives is Peter’s primary goal in this letter, as Calvin summarizes:

The design of Peter in this Epistle is to exhort the faithful to a denial of the world and a contempt of it, so that being freed from carnal affections and all earthly hindrances, they might with their whole soul aspire after the celestial kingdom of Christ, that being elevated by hope, supported by patience, and fortified by courage and perseverance, they might overcome all kinds of temptations, and pursue this course and practice throughout life.⁴

What we should pay particular attention to here is Calvin’s note about “carnal affections” and the aspirations of the soul. A desire for a permanent home is wrapped up in our views of identity, belonging, and place, since “home is where the heart is.” If we view this world as our home, we desire what this world offers to us. If, however, we see our imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance in heaven as our home (v. 3), then our affections will be set there. This is the only place in the Bible where the terms for “elect” and “exile” appear together, but the terms are not mutually exclusive: “The addressees are ‘strangers’ because of (not despite) being chosen. Their divine election is a sociological as well as theological fact, for it has sundered them from their social world and made them like strangers or temporary residents in their respective cities and provinces.”⁵

Third, Peter states that these elect exiles are from the “Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” The word for “dispersion” appears twelve times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament “to refer to the scattering of the Israelites among the Gentile nations as divine judgment.”⁶ Thus, many commentators (especially ancient and Reformation commentators) have understood this to be a reference to ethnic Jews living in Asia Minor.⁷ While this is possible, Karen Jobes notes how framing this introduction to the letter with language that appeals to readers as Israel functions “as a way of identifying his readers as God’s chosen people.”⁸ It is possible that these “provinces are named in the order in which a messenger might visit them.”⁹

In v. 2, Peter expands upon the reason that his readers are exiles as well as the sense in which they are elect. To begin, Peter states that their status depends upon “the foreknowledge of God the Father” (v. 2a). The language of foreknowledge is covenantal: “the foreknown are those upon whom

³ R. C. H. Lenski, “The First Epistle of St. Peter,” in *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (1945; repr., Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 21.

⁴ Calvin, “The First Epistle of Peter,” 21.

⁵ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC 49 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 6.

⁶ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 8.

⁷ Notably, this excluded Augustine and Jerome. For more information, see discussion in Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 68.

⁸ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 69.

⁹ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 8.

God has bestowed his covenantal favor and affection.”¹⁰ Importantly, “The expression *foreknowledge* does not mean that God had information in advance about Christ, or about his elect. Rather it means that both Christ and his people were the objects of God’s loving concern from all eternity.”¹¹ In other words, the “knowledge” that God the Father has “beforehand” acknowledge in the term *foreknowledge* is not a knowledge of facts (i.e., a mere list of the identities of *who* will one day be saved), but a knowledge of intimacy and affection (e.g., Jer. 1:5). As a pale illustration of the robustness of God’s foreknowledge, we might think of the way that young people imagine their future families: future spouses whom they may not have even met yet, future children who have yet to be conceived, and perhaps even future grandchildren who can scarcely be imagined. What exists only as a series of shadowy hopes for a family yet to come, exist in the mind of God as a solid, unchangeable image. What we aspire to, by God’s grace, God is actively bringing about, by his redemptive power. Through this covenantally affectionate foreknowledge of God the Father, we have been set as elect exiles in the world as we await our eternal inheritance.

Next, Peter establishes our status “in the sanctification of the Spirit” (v. 2b). This work of the Spirit is distinct, but perfectly related to the Father’s foreknowledge: “when the Father chose to relate to them he effected this relationship in their lives by means of the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying power (the instrumental “by means of” is sometimes translated “in,” a less clear term).”¹² Last, Peter completes the Trinitarian aspect of his greeting: “for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood” (v. 2c). Once again, we have covenantal language of “obedience” brought about by sprinkled blood (e.g., Ex. 24:6–8). Jobes draws an interesting parallel between this phrase and the new covenant language found in Ezekiel 36:24–28, where a people in a scattered diaspora are cleansed by sprinkled water and given the Spirit so that they might have God’s law written on their hearts for obedience.¹³ For those whom the Father foreknew, he is now sanctifying the the Holy Spirit through the sprinkled blood of Jesus Christ, in order to bring about their obedience. Here, we see the classic Trinitarian maxim in full effect: *The external works of the Trinity are indivisible*. What the *one* God does, he does as three *distinct* persons. Distinct persons accomplish distinct actions; however, those distinct actions cannot be separated from the others, but are accomplished in perfect unity, from before all time until the present day.

To this people, Peter writes, “May grace and peace be multiplied to you” (v. 2d). Clowney argues that this greeting “gives in miniature the whole message of his letter. He writes to those who already feel the scorn and malice of an unbelieving world....Can he really pronounce peace in abundance to those who are only beginning to discover the suffering to which Christians are called? Peter writes for that very purpose.”¹⁴ Indeed, the great challenge that Peter tackles in his letter is to explain how a Christian might possibly experience grace and peace *multiplied* in the midst of great

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, “1 Peter,” in *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC 37 (Brentwood, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 49.

¹¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, rev. ed., The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 17.

¹² Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 48.

¹³ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 77.

¹⁴ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, rev. ed., The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 12.

sufferings, including persecution. To begin, Peter grounds our confidence in a hope that cannot be found within this world.

Temporary Trials (1 Pet. 1:3–9)

As Peter begins to reflect on our imperishable inheritance, he frames everything he says in praise toward God “in order to sweep the hearts of his readers upward to the same joy and praise.”¹⁵ He writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead....” (1 Pet. 1:3). It is important for Peter to demonstrate the connection between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, since, as Calvin argues, “they who form their ideas of God in his naked majesty apart from Christ, have an idol instead of the true God.”¹⁶ Then, Peter sets our hearts on a *living hope*, or, better, a living “expectation.”¹⁷ That is, “This hope is not a desperate holding-on to a faded dream, a dead hope, but a living one, founded on reality, for it is grounded in ‘the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.’”¹⁸

Specifically, our living expectation rests in “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (v. 4). The language of “inheritance” is a loaded term to an audience of Jews living in exile. In the Old Testament, the “inheritance” of the Israelites was the land of Canaan; however, as much of a blessing as Canaan was, the fact that they were living in exile meant that they did not acquire permanent possession of it. Here, Peter is not tantalizing them with a promise of a return to reclaim real estate. Rather, he is using the land of Canaan as a contrast with the much better inheritance promised to us in Christ: “Israel received the earthly foreshadowing; we receive the heavenly fulfilment.”¹⁹

Beyond Canaan, in a world where even our most valuable treasures are perishable and passing away, our heavenly inheritance is “imperishable” (v. 4a), so that it “will not rot or decay (1 Cor. 9:25; 15:52). It is permanent.”²⁰ Moreover, where men of this world pollute themselves in endless ways in order to acquire and store up for themselves the treasures of this world, the inheritance we have is “undefiled” (v. 4b), “which indicates that it is morally and religiously pure (Heb. 7:26; 13:4; Jas. 1:27). One can possess it without moral or religious compromise, which might be needed to retain an earthly inheritance.”²¹ Then, whereas even the costliest treasures of this world soon become “strangely dim” (in the words of a great hymn), our heavenly inheritance is “unfading” (v. 4c). Davids explains that this “term that is unique to 1 Peter (cf. the related term found only in 1 Pet. 5:4), indicating that unlike flowers that wither and have to be tossed away (cited later in 1 Pet. 1:24) this inheritance is eternal and will never wither or become old. Thus it is better than any earthly reward.”²²

¹⁵ Lenski, “The First Epistle of St. Peter,” 29.

¹⁶ Calvin, “The First Epistle of Peter,” 28.

¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 65.

¹⁸ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 52.

¹⁹ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 32.

²⁰ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 53.

²¹ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 53.

²² Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 53.

These extraordinary promises would make no sense if applied to anything in this world, since “it might be exposed to endless dangers,” leaving us without knowledge of how we could “regard it as safe amidst so many changes”; however, Peter clarifies that these promises are kept safe in heaven for use (v. 4d), so that, “as faith penetrates into the heavens, so also it appropriates to us the blessings which are in heaven.”²³ Not only that, but God himself stands as the guarantor of those promises, since we, “by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (v. 5). Such a salvation does not depend upon our righteousness to achieve or earn something from God, but completely on the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Therefore, “How weak soever we may then be, yet our salvation is not uncertain, because it is sustained by God’s power.”²⁴

Peter could simply conclude his reflections on our eternal inheritance here; however, Peter has a very practical application to draw from these praise-infused meditations: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (vv. 6–7). He opens this line with an appeal to the great, eternal inheritance as the reason for our rejoicing: “In *this* you rejoice” (v. 6a). Then, he identifies the many trials that would, if considered on their own apart from that inheritance, be reasons that would squelch our joy: “though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials” (v. 6b).

Here, Peter emphasizes three aspects of these trials. First, they are *temporary*: “for a little while.” Second, they are *purposeful and meaningful* within the wisdom and power of God’s eternal decrees: “if necessary.” Third, while God indeed works all things *together* for good (Rom. 8:28), we may still say that these trials are *grievous and even evil*: “you have been grieve by various trials.” Rejoicing in the hope/expectation of our eternal inheritance does not mean that we rejoice in the evil of the trials themselves. We are neither masochists who seek pleasure from pain, nor stoics who seek to ignore pain by sheer willpower. Rather, we fully embrace the grievousness of our trials in this world, even as we rejoice in the comfort that those trials are not only temporary, but that God is using them to fit us for the everlasting enjoyment of our imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance which God is guarding in heaven for us.²⁵

Next, Peter uses the illustration of refining gold to reinforce the contrast between the temporal and the eternal that he has made so far in this chapter: “so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (v. 7). The processes of melting down gold to remove its impurities captures something of the way that temporary trials work to remove impurities from our eternal souls. Furthermore, the fact that gold will perish (with all other elements) at the recreation of the heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:7, 10) draws a further contrast between the temporary and the eternal: “*Fire* does not destroy gold; it only removes combustible impurities. Yet even gold will at last vanish with the whole of this created order. Faith is infinitely more precious and more enduring.”²⁶ The dividing line between the temporary and the eternal falls on the “*revelation of Jesus Christ*,” where the term for *revelation* derives from the same word that Peter used just earlier

²³ Calvin, “The First Epistle of Peter,” 29–30.

²⁴ Calvin, “The First Epistle of Peter,” 30.

²⁵ “Neither Peter nor Paul nor James knows of a ‘paradox’ of joy in suffering. Suffering produces sorrow, while joy is the result of vindication. In the present passage, suffering and sorrow belong to the present, while vindication and joy, although very near, belong to the future. Peter’s vision transcends the limitations of the present, yet he never denies the hard reality of present suffering or calls it something it is not.” (Michaels, *1 Peter*, 36–37.)

²⁶ Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 35.

when he talked about “a salvation ready to be *revealed* in the last time” (v. 5). Astonishingly, that revelation will not only result in the praise and glory and honor of Jesus Christ, but, Peter insists that the testing of our faith will result in our *sharing* in that praise, honor, and glory.²⁷

Peter’s transition in vv. 8–9 is crucial to the argument he is building: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” Although we are still awaiting “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” (v. 7), so that we have still not yet seen him, we nevertheless love him.²⁸ Indeed, it is not merely that the revelation of Jesus Christ is what divides the temporary from the eternal. More than that, the specific way that these (temporary) trials are preparing us for our (eternal) inheritance is by training us to love Jesus Christ now, before his revelation. Believers can rejoice in the most grievous trials because those trials redirect our hearts and attention to Christ, so that we may believe in him and *rejoice* (same word as in v. 6) with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, so that we obtain the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

Eternal Glory (1 Pet. 1:10–12)

Peter seems to have three motivations in appealing to the prophets’ anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ. First, he roots the life and ministry of Christ in prophecies spoken hundreds of years earlier. In this way, Peter connects the foreknowledge of God the Father (v. 2) and the coming revelation of Jesus Christ (v. 7) with the prophecies of history that foretold Christ’s coming. Second, Peter reminds us that we are not the only ones to live in the tension of the already and not yet. Just as we are awaiting the final revelation of Jesus Christ, so the prophets who lived before the coming of Christ uttered prophecies that were not, strictly speaking, *for* them. This is not to say that what they prophesied did not benefit them, since even believers in the old covenant were saved through faith in Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:3). Instead, this only means that they would not live to see the fulfillment of those prophecies.

So, those prophets “searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (vv. 10b–11). What was determined in eternity past in the eternal decrees of God, and what was revealed partially in the utterances of the prophets, has now been fulfilled in the conception, birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a plan moving from sufferings to subsequent glory. This is where we see the third motivation: Peter is connecting the path from temporary sufferings to eternal glory that we must undergo with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus did not merely demand that *we* go through these things;

²⁷ “But whose is the praise, glory, and honor? The praise of God is well known in Scripture, so we could easily argue that here, too, it must belong to God. But in the final judgment God gives his ‘well done,’ a form of praise, to humans (Matt. 25:14–30; Rom. 2:29; 1 Cor. 4:5). Glory is never said to be the possession of humans except as we share God’s glory in the parousia (e.g., Rom. 8:17; Col. 3:4), although we contribute to this glory by our actions now (1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 1:12). Finally, honor belongs primarily to God (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:17), but he honors people in the final judgment for their righteousness in this age (Rom. 2:7, 10). Therefore the question becomes one of what the perspective of our author is. It appears from the context that Peter is looking at the final judgment, and thus he is using terms similar to those in Matt. 25:31–46, seeing Jesus Christ announcing the genuineness of their tested faith. Christ then praises his faithful ones, giving them honor and glory, an honor and glory that is his by right and that their lives have demonstrated, but that he is pleased to share with those who have been faithful to him.” (Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 58.)

²⁸ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 32.

rather, he is the trailblazing pioneer on this journey from suffering to glory. This is such an extraordinary plan that even the angels long to see these things fulfilled (v. 12).²⁹

The fourth motivation sets up a the topic that Peter will address in the next section: the distinction between *sufferings* and *passions*. The word that Peter uses to describe Christ’s “sufferings” (v. 11) is παθήματα [*pathēmata*], which appears throughout 1 Peter to describe the specific kinds of passions related to the sufferings of Christ and his people (1 Pet. 1:11; 4:13; 5:1, 9). It is different for the word for the word for “passions” (ἐπιθυμία; *epithumia*) that largely appears to describe concupiscent lusts (1 Pet. 1:14; 2:11; 4:2, 3). These passions are sufferings, but of a different sort. The *pathēmata* of Christ indicates a passive kind of suffering (whether of what Christ endured for his people, or what his people must endure for him). The *epithumia*, on the other hand, describes a more active kind of suffering that drives us to pursue some kind of good (i.e., a *pain* that pricks and prompts us to strive for some form of *gain*). Most of time, this word refers to the pursuit of worldly goods, and Peter will warn us against that throughout this letter, beginning in 1 Peter 1:14. On the other hand, 1 Pet. 1:12 uses the verb ἐπιθυμέω (*epithumeō*) to describe the desire of angels to look into the heavenly things preached through the Holy Spirit. The key difference, then, comes down to motivation and intent: are we suffering to gain the goods of this world, or are we suffering because we long to inherit the eternal inheritance God has stored for us in heaven?

Discussion Questions

1. Who is Peter? What do we know about him from the Gospels? What does it mean that Peter is “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (v. 1a)? What does it mean that we are “elect” (v. 1b)? What does it mean that we are “exiles” (v. 1c)? How do these two terms inform the meaning of each other by appearing here together? What is “the Dispersion” (v. 1d)? What is the foreknowledge of the Father (v. 2a)? How do the persons of the Trinity work inseparably for our redemption (v. 2b)?
2. Why does Peter begin the body of his letter with an expression of praise to God (v. 3a)? What is the “great mercy” of God’s causing us “to be born again” (v. 3b)? How does our inheritance connect with, but differ from, the inheritance of Canaan in the Old Testament (v. 4)? How does our inheritance give us reason to rejoice, even while grieved by various trials (v. 6)? Why does God introduce trials into our lives (v. 7)? How do these trials help us to love Jesus (v. 8–9)?
3. How did the ministry of the Old Testament prophets connect to the salvation that we enjoy today (v. 10)? Did Old Testament believers enjoy the same salvation that we do? If so, then how was their experience different from ours (vv. 10–12)? What did those prophets proclaim about the relationship between the sufferings of Jesus and his subsequent glory? How does Jesus’ pathway to glory through suffering inform what we are enduring in our lives today?
4. What are some trials that you are enduring right now? How might you both acknowledge the grievousness of those trials, while also rejoicing in the way that God is leading you through them to grow in your love for Jesus? How much motivation does the promise of praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus (v. 7b) hold for you? How does this opening passage of 1 Peter help to reorient your understanding of the significance of your suffering today?

²⁹ Calvin, “The First Epistle of Peter,” 42–43.