

Peter introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, one who could make authoritative declarations in the Name of his Lord. He is seemingly unabashed at the unflattering stories of events recorded in the Gospels. Stories of more than three years as a disciple culminating in the denial of his Lord. The Shepherd restores souls who fail, then leads them on with Him in His service to shepherd others of His flock (John 21).

Peter addresses his letter to a multitude of believers. Believers who are Jewish by birth but are no longer residents of their homeland. To be sure many still returned to Jerusalem for the feasts of the Jews held on the days marked out in the Law of Moses. We read in the gospels that Jesus attended these events too although he was a resident of Galilee. Fifty days after the crucifixion on the Passover feast, ten days following the ascension of the Lord, He sent the Holy Spirit to earth to indwell the 120 believers assembled in Jerusalem. Many Jewish pilgrims were visiting the city for the feast of Pentecost. The nations they were from are named in Acts 2. Through the marvelous grace of God, just fifty days after they had crucified Jesus, they heard the gospel for the first time any heard it. These pilgrims heard it, along with their countrymen of Judea, from the lips of Peter. A man who days before had denied His Lord, who had hidden out with the other disciples for fear of the Jews, and who had given up his divine commission to be a fisher of men to return to fishing in Galilee. Peter, a mere fisherman from the hinterlands with no education or reputation, despised by the religious leaders of the day, swung open wide the doors to the Kingdom that morning. Over three thousand souls entered. And thousands more on subsequent days. When these returned to their homes scattered among the nations they carried the good news with them. So, years later, Peter writes to these believers, those who heard him in Jerusalem and those who heard the good news from them after they returned home.

Why were these scattered among the nations? They had been scattered by God's governmental judgment upon His chosen earthly people, Israel, who persisted in ignoring His Law, and His appeals to return to Him, all documented in the holy scriptures entrusted to them. (Witness the Old Testament prophets.) A succession of conquering nations had marched across their land and occupation forces remained a thorn in their side for over five hundred years. Many Jews had moved away and set up housekeeping in foreign lands. These were the scattered Peter writes to now. They hadn't yet been scattered by persecution as Christians but as Jews. They had continued to suffer as Jews (in the eyes of the nations) and are now beginning to experience suffering as a result of their Christian faith as well. This faith brings upon them a special brand of rejection and persecution from their Jewish neighbors, who view them as traitors and

apostates. They certainly need encouragement. And the Shepherd sees to it they get it. He moves Peter to deliver it. And His message carries the same grace to believers, Jew and Gentile, of every nationality enduring hardship, rejection and persecution down through the centuries and today.

Peter first acknowledges their plight, their scattered condition; but immediately focuses their attention to their election. They were chosen of God. They knew what election was for as Jews. They were the chosen people of God. A nation founded by an unsought promise to one man, Abraham, two thousand years before, and reaffirmed many times since.

*Deuteronomy 7:6* For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:

Lest they think God had forsaken his promise to Abraham, Peter declares first off, **they too are chosen by God**. Elect. Chosen, not at random or by some innate or acquired merit, but according to the foreknowledge of God. In His foreknowledge of each one personally, he has selected each one for a particular place and role in carrying out His Purposes. Some like to think God's foreknowledge was merely His knowing how we would respond to the gospel therefore choosing us to be saved because of our foreknown response. That is mere human reasoning and removes God's sovereignty from the picture, replacing it with man's will. It minimizes man's utter sinfulness and lost condition putting us in control of our destiny to the exclusion of God's supremacy, as if we could and would choose to do or undo when we well pleased. It reduces our election to God humbly honoring our reluctant willingness to trouble ourselves to listen to and accept his kind offer of a well deserved salvation to avoid His wrath. **No! No! No!** His foreknowledge does not mean he just foreknows we would want salvation and would repent if but given the opportunity. **No! He says none would repent!** None was even interested.

*Romans 3:10* As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

God in His infinite grace, however, does present opportunities to repent to every one, not just to those He chooses. Therefore those who reject the gospel or the witness of Creation are clearly without excuse and are solely responsible for their own fate. No room for complaining here. He is glorified by the fact the gospel goes out freely to all, even while knowing they would not repent. But He also is glorified that His kind offer of mercy to lost sinners is universally rejected. Why? Because He sent His only begotten Son! But He is

further glorified by His own gracious intervention to save by grace through faith through preaching, and to sanctify chosen persons (making them saints) by his Spirit. Through the work of the Spirit He brings chosen saints to a position of the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of a perfect One who was offered as a sacrifice for ours sins. No room for boasting here. Neither among the Jews scattered because of their unbelief, or the Gentile who never sought God to begin with. But what a resting place! What peace! What security! As His elect, our destiny, our peace and safety, presently and eternally, rests with God. Just as we initiated nothing to save ourselves we can do nothing to escape from His grip. Nothing! Praise God! Safe. What an encouragement for suffering, scattered saints.

Peter forthrightly blesses God. This isn't a mere formality used in the greeting of his letter. He blesses God the Father. The one who revealed to him years before that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God, Matthew 16:13-20. And he blesses his readers. Do we bless others with the words of our mouth spoken from the heart? Do we call down God's blessings on others? If something goes wrong or we are harmed or even just annoyed, curses may "naturally" rise to our minds from our fleshly hearts. If this happens repent immediately. We hear cursing all around us in this world, hopefully never from the mouth of a believer.

*Romans 12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.*

The Spirit in us will give rise to thoughts and words of blessing if we do not grieve Him.

*Ephesians 4:26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27 Neither give place to the devil.*

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*30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

So Peter reminds them of the living hope and inheritance awaiting us in heaven. They were especially conscious of the lost hope of Israel. They fervently had desired rescue from Roman oppression, restoration to their land, and the founding of the Messiah's earthly kingdom promised in the prophets. It was not to be, **yet**. But meanwhile God hasn't let them down. He has given these scattered saints a sure and living hope and an inheritance that cannot be corrupted and defiled, or taken from them as was the land of Israel. So Peter doesn't remove the consequences of the Jew's national faithlessness to Jehovah. These Jewish saints rightly valued the faith of their fathers in Jehovah, though most did not imitate it. But the earthly blessings now lost to them are far outclassed by those in heaven awaiting them. Us too. And we can't miss out as did Israel, for we who have been chosen by God are now kept by the power of God unto a future salvation to be revealed. Salvation not only from hell, but from the very presence of sin on this earth. Salvation into His very presence. When? It's ready

now but is awaiting the last soul to be included. When? In the last time. Maybe today, maybe not. Maybe ten thousand years from now. (I think rather sooner than later, but His longsuffering is very loooong.)

*2Peter 3:7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

*9 ¶ The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

How are we kept? Through faith, just as we were first saved. Only believe the promises Peter affirms, and trust the "Promiser." The Israelites failed through unbelief. God's preserving power toward the believer operates through faith, not by sight, self sufficiency, or personal assessment of surrounding conditions (Peter sank when he saw the waves and lost sight of Christ and His "Come.") Theirs was not a hope that faded away as had their hope in an earthly kingdom. Nor is ours.

The Jews then were about to lose any hope or rescue they might have had, as the temple in Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Romans. Peter had heard the Lord Himself forecast this, *Luke 19:43 and:*

*Matthew 24:2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

As he wrote this letter those prophecies were about to be fulfilled. The temple remains in ruins to this day. The Jews were about to suffer and be scattered from their land in a way far exceeding anything they had yet experienced or could then have imagined. The Jewish believers were in danger of this same suffering, scattering, and subsequent loss of all hope. But as Christians they had a hope that was not fading away. It was secure in the heavens. What a boost to their godly spirits in the midst of seeing all that they had valued that spoke of God on earth being removed and destroyed. They would see their religious world wrested from them. All they had depended upon would be gone. They were cast solely upon the promises of God. So Peter reassures them as they are about to suffer this.

Do we view ourselves as like them? Aliens scattered abroad on this earth? How much are we hanging our hopes on earthly things, earthly institutions and provisions we may have made for our comfort, convenience and future security while we remain here on earth. The unthinkable can happen, as it did to Judea, even here in the United States, but God doesn't change and isn't affected. Listen to Peter.