

Address and Greeting

1 Peter 1:1–2

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen sojourners of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²in the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification by the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ: may grace and peace be yours in abundance.

OT: Exod 24:3–8

NT: Acts 2:9; Eph 1:3–20; Phil 3:20; Heb 9:13–14

Catechism: apostles, 2–3, 858–62

¹ In the opening sentence the author identifies himself simply as **Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ** (see the introduction for a discussion of the authorship of the letter). At the close of the letter, Peter will describe himself as “a fellow [†]presbyter” and “a witness to the sufferings of Christ” (5:1), but here at the start he simply calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. “Apostle” means “one who is sent,” and by claiming this title without adornment, Peter humbly but directly claims authority as one sent by Christ to announce the good news.

Peter addresses his audience as **chosen sojourners of the dispersion**. Each term indicates something important about the theme of the letter. “Chosen,” or “elect,” immediately links the audience to the call and destiny of the people of Israel (see Ps 105:6; Isa 45:4). To be chosen is to be favored by God and under his blessing. Peter will use this term again to denote Christ himself as the “chosen” one of God (2:4, 6), and the Christian people as “a chosen race” (2:9). “Sojourner” means “resident alien,” one who lives in a land far from home.



Fig. 1. Map of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia.

Peter is already signaling a theme he will return to in 2:11—that the Christian people are strangers and exiles in this world. Finally, “†dispersion,” literally, *diaspora*, was used as a technical term for the people of Israel living outside of the Holy Land. Like Israel in exile, the Christian people are a set of scattered communities, living away from their true homeland, which is heaven (see Phil 3:20). The phrase, “chosen sojourners of the dispersion,” taken together, identifies the audience vividly with the elect people of God now living outside their true home, waiting for their full redemption, in continuity with the people of Israel described in the Old Testament.

The letter is addressed to those living in **Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia**, five provinces of ancient Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). In Acts 2:9, we are told that residents from three of these provinces (Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia) witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit and heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost. It is at least possible that churches in these regions were founded by those who heard Peter preach in Jerusalem. Galatia was a site of Paul’s early mission and the destination of one of his earliest letters (see Acts 14:1–20; Gal 1:2). Bithynia is mentioned as a place Paul sought to evangelize but was prevented from doing so (Acts 16:7). Evidently, Bithynia too was evangelized in the end.

Why are these five provinces linked together as the common audience for Peter’s letter? We cannot be certain, but it is possible that they define a travel

Diaspora

The *Diaspora*, from Greek “to scatter,” began with the exile of Israel to Babylon in the early sixth century BC. This devastating event, which included the destruction of both the city of Jerusalem and Solomon’s temple, marked the beginning of the ongoing existence of Israel as a nation outside of the Holy Land. From this point onwards, a majority of the people of Israel had to practice a way of life faithful to the †covenant of the God of Israel in the midst of foreign nations and strange gods. In the Greek Old Testament (the †Septuagint), the term “Diaspora” is used frequently to identify Israel in exile, waiting to return (see Deut 30:4; Neh 1:9; Ps 147:2; Isa 49:6). Peter makes use of this powerfully evocative term to describe the Christian people called to live a way of life faithful to the †Messiah away from their true and eternal home.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND



route taken by the bearer of the letter (probably Silvanus; see 5:12) who set out from Rome by ship, landed in Pontus, went by land through the adjoining provinces visiting all the churches and delivering a copy of the letter, and then sailed back from Bithynia to Rome. In any case, we have in 1 Peter a true “encyclical” or circular letter, sent by Peter to the various churches in Asia Minor to testify to them about the true †grace of God (5:12).

- 2 Peter could easily have stopped here, concluded his greeting to the churches, and moved on with the body of the letter. But he adds three short phrases that tie his message directly to the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In short, Peter gives a Trinitarian description of how the Christian people are called and redeemed.

First, they have been chosen **in the foreknowledge of God the Father**. The Father stands at the beginning as the source. All that has happened in Christ is according to the Father’s eternal plan (see Peter’s speech in Acts 2:23). It is not an accident that they have been chosen, but fully according to God’s foreknowledge and purpose (Eph 1:3–10).

Second, their calling takes place **through sanctification by the Spirit**. To be †sanctified is to be made holy or set apart for God. Shortly Peter will call them to live a holy way of life, imitating God who is holy (1:15), but he begins here by grounding this call to holiness in the sanctification that they have *already* received through the Spirit.

Third, they are called to **obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ**. The call to obedience marks the whole letter (1:14, 22; 3:6). But to

what does “sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ” refer? One clue comes from Heb 9:13–14, which speaks of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus in the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins. But the essential background for the phrase “sprinkling with blood” is found in the [†]covenant ritual described in Exod 24:1–8. There Moses “took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the [†]LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words of his’” (Exod 24:8). Just as in the Old Covenant the people of Israel professed their obedience to God’s Word (Exod 24:3, 7) and then were sprinkled with the blood that sealed the first covenant (Exod 24:8), we too in the New Covenant are sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to the Word of God as we submit to “sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ” for the forgiveness of our sins. Peter may be recalling their baptism when they confessed their faith and obedience to Christ in the context of being cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ through the waters of baptism. “Thus the end point of election includes both obedience to the gospel and membership in the new covenant people.”¹

In these three brief clauses, Peter locates our call firmly in the united work of the three Persons: the Father, the Spirit, and the Son.

Peter concludes his greeting with a prayer: **may grace and peace be yours in abundance**. In the Greek culture of the day it was conventional to offer “grace” (*charis*) as a form of greeting. But in the New Covenant the term “grace” takes on a much more significant meaning because of the work of Christ, and Peter will make grace a key theme of the letter.² The offer of peace was more typical of Jewish greetings. Together “grace and peace” sum up the early Christian expression of blessing.³

1. Donald P. Senior, *1 Peter*, SP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 27.

2. For “grace” in 1 Peter, see 1:10, 13; 2:19, 20; 3:7 (translated “gift” in the NAB); 4:10; 5:5 (translated “favor” in the NAB), 10, 12.

3. The combination of “grace” and “peace” also occurs frequently in Paul’s letters; for example, Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2.