

1 Peter 1:1-12

A Song Of Rejoicing

(The Certainty and the Glory of the Covenant Riches for all Believers)

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS

In the verses one and two, the apostle introduces himself and greets the believers with a blessing. A true apostolic song of rejoicing about the treasures of salvation in which those who believe in Christ Jesus may partake through faith follows in verses 3-12. Peter portrays how firm and sure, how great and glorious this salvation is, and that true Christian hope must motivate them to bear affliction with gladness.

MAIN THOUGHTS

Note, in particular, the background of this letter as it is described under the heading "Why Were They Written" in the introductory outline. There is nothing new under the sun: in the mighty Roman Empire the masses regard believers as "breakers of unity" (as "ecumenical" Christendom looks upon us today). They do not participate in worshipping the Emperor, and so disturb "religious" unity; they stay aloof from the labour unions, thereby breaking "social" unity; and they profess Christ as Lord of the world instead of Caesar, thus violating "political" unity.

What does Peter do now? Does he lament the difficult life of believers? Does he severely criticize them? Does he drop the hammer of God's threats upon them? No; he demonstrates how rich they are because of the redemptive work of the Saviour. For that very reason a glorious future awaits them. The apostle rejoices in the finished work of the salvation which beckons to them. Therefore, they must live in the hope which alone can make sorrows bearable.

This section of 1 Peter is divided into three parts.

Verses 3-5: Peter explains how rich believers are on account of Christ's resurrection through which they partake of the inheritance which he has laid away for them.

Verses 6-9: Peter points out how their trials of faith are connected with becoming partakers in the complete salvation of the future.

Verses 10-12: The apostle shows how great their certainty can be in comparison with the prophets of the old dispensation who were also driven by the same Spirit from whom the believers received the message of salvation. He says that the angels long to understand the mystery of redemption.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Verse 1

He calls himself "Peter", not "Simon Peter" (2 Peter 1:1) - [see question 1](#).

"Apostle of Jesus Christ" indicates the official quality of the letter — [see question 2](#).

The RSV takes the word "chosen" as a substantive¹, and places it at the beginning of verse 2; it can also read: "to those who reside as aliens... who are chosen" as in the NASB (Dr. S.

¹ Ed. Note: a pronoun or other word or phrase functioning or inflected as a noun

Grejdanus and the author of these outlines consider this to be more logical). "Chosen" points to the gracious favour of God. An "alien", or a "stranger", is someone who lives among a certain people but who does not belong to them. The Hebrew has two words for "alien": one refers to a stranger travelling through a country; the other to a stranger who is permitted to live with a certain tribe or nation. The Greek word used here has the same connotation as the second word in Hebrew for "alien". In the ancient Eastern world, a stranger in the first sense of the word was shown hospitality, but a "sojourner" was considered an enemy of the people. They did not have to abide by the norms and laws of the tribe with a "sojourner". That, then, is the concept we find here — [see question 3](#).

"Dispersion" [RSV]; "Scattered" [NIV, NASB] (Greek: *diaspora*; see introductory outline) indicates that the readers of these epistles live outside their homeland, the heavenly one, the better one (cf. Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:15-16) — [see question 4](#). For the geographical location regarding the dwelling place of these "strangers", see the introductory outline under "To Whom Were They Written".

Verse 2

"Foreknowledge" in apostolic literature means not only "knowing something beforehand", but also "determining something beforehand" (cf. Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20).

The words "the Father" are added to "of God" giving a special meaning. God reveals himself with respect to those "chosen strangers" in his Fatherly compassion and guidance.

Peter undoubtedly means the Spirit of God, not that of believers, when he says "of the Spirit". The purpose of the sanctification, the sprinkling with his blood, is obedience to the Lord Jesus.

Verse 3

In this verse and the following ones, pay particular attention to their background (cf. Main Thoughts), and note the connotation of the concept "stranger" (see the note on v.1, and in connection with this, [questions 3 and 4](#)).

The adjective "blessed" [RSV] employed here is used in the New Testament only for God. In the Greek, no verb is added. It means both "praised" [NIV] and "to praise".

When Peter says "our", it is the only time in this letter that he includes himself. This shows us that Peter fixes his eyes on the risen Saviour who had completely changed his life. This is what he means by the words "new birth into a living hope". The resurrection of Jesus Christ had changed night into day in his life, and will do the same thing in the life of God's people. The "hope" mentioned here refers not to the good things they were hoping for (as in Colossians 1:5), but to the hope of the believers. The original text uses a word for "living" which clearly indicates that activity belongs to this hope which gives both life and a future prospect.

Verse 4

"Into..." (and what follows) depends on "new birth" and indicates the purpose of God's regeneration. He has made the believers heirs; they are included in his will. The inheritance means life in the better, heavenly country. This heritage is laid away, reserved, in the heavens so that it can never be lost (cf. John 2:10; 8:51; 17:11; Ephesians 4:3; 2 Timothy 4:7). Think of the concept "stranger".

The three descriptive expressions, "imperishable, undefiled", and "will not fade away" [RSV],

indicate that the inheritance is sure, and is lasting and glorious. It cannot be marred by outward corruption, pollution, or inward deterioration.

In this verse "you" receives the full emphasis.

Verse 5

The believers themselves are preserved for this inheritance according to the Greek verb form which means "continuously kept." This verb is derived from another one which means "to foresee", referring to God's watch over his heirs just like a sentry watches over a besieged city. His power surrounds them like a fiery wall (cf. Zechariah 2:5). The believers themselves are engaged in this preservation through their faith. The Greek preposition "through" used here implies "by means of", and not "because of". Faith is never deserving of anything — [see question 5](#).

The Greek word for "revealed" indicates taking off a lid or veil. The inheritance is still hidden behind a veil, but soon the covering will be pulled away. Those who have persevered in the faith will see the inheritance. "In the last time" means in the great day of the appearance of Christ. The original word indicates a certain time.

Verse 6

Based on the original text, it is most natural to assume that "in this" refers to "the last time". The verb used here, however, is not to be understood as an imperative, but rather in this sense: you *may* already now rejoice in this. That day sheds light on the sorrows of the present life.

"Trials" refer to that which God sends to believers. He makes "trials" of the "temptations" of the devil and the world (cf. James 1:1ff.) — [see question 6](#).

Verse 7

"Your faith" means: "your tested faith". In the Greek papyri discovered in excavations the same word appears in connection with "refined gold". This connection points to the fact that in this instance it refers to faith which is refined (purified), like gold in the fire. The goal of the trials which God sends is the praise, glory, and honour of his Name, and this will be completely seen when Christ comes again breaking all "covering", revealing himself (see note on verse 5).

Verse 8

In this and the following verses, pay attention to the distinction which Peter makes. He speaks of love for Christ whom believers have not seen, of faith in the Christ whom they do not see, and of hope in the Christ whom they shall see. We can add here "as I have" to the phrase "have not seen" — [see question 7](#).

"Do not see... [yet] believe" (cf. John 20:29) — [see question 8](#).

Verse 9

The Greek verb for "obtaining" actually means "to gather in" as one gathers in fruit.

The "outcome" is the goal.

The "salvation of your souls" means the preservation of the soul. In this instance, "souls" does not exclude the body, but signifies man as a "living soul"; that is, his soul refers to his whole being

which is redeemed and looks forward to Jesus Christ at the feast of the eternal Sabbath.

Verse 10

Some exegetes think that New Testament prophets are meant here by "prophets", but the context disagrees with this. In this case the prophets of the old dispensation are meant. They struggled to understand the purpose and mystery of the great salvation of the Lord for his Church.

"The grace that was to come to you", or "the grace meant for you" is the same grace as "the salvation" of verse 9, but indicates that this is given according to God's good pleasure.

Verse 11

"Trying to find out" points to the work of a detective. The prophets of the Old Testament did not just mechanically relate what they had been told — [see question 9](#) — but struggled with their whole spirit in an attempt to understand the mystery of salvation in the coming of Christ, and especially to realize when and how the fulfilment of their prophecies would come. The heart of the prophecy lies in what the Spirit earnestly and emphatically announced would occur namely, the sufferings (the Greek word is also plural. This points to the distinctive elements and the depth of Jesus' suffering) and the glories (again, the original word is plural) that Christ would receive.

This glory "to follow" is the reward for suffering.

Take note of the word "predicted", which is of great significance especially in regard to Christ's suffering, for Israel found it hard to imagine a suffering Messiah-King (cf. Luke 24:25-26).

Verse 12

The beginning of this verse indicates that the prophets of the old knew that their work was Church work. "Serving...you" (Greek: *diakònein*, from which our word "deacon" is derived) means giving someone something for his use. What is meant by this is that the prophets were careful to record God's revelations so that his Word could be understood by future generations.

"You" is stated very concretely here — [see question 10](#).

"Now" contrasts with "before", in the time of the prophets. The same message of salvation through the same Holy Spirit who was at work in the old dispensation is now brought to you (it says: "which have evangelized you").

"Sent from heaven" alludes to the great event of the day of Pentecost (cf. John 14:16; 15:26; 16:8 ff.; Acts 2:33). Christ sent the Holy Spirit — [see question 11](#).

The form of the verb "to long" indicates a continuous longing.

The Greek verb for "to look into these things" actually means to bend over forward in order to see better. There is probably an illusion here to Exodus 25:20: the figures of the cherubim on the ark were somewhat stooped with their faces looking down on the mercy seat.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. By which names was the apostle Peter known (cf. Luke 4:38; John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12; Galatians 1:18)? By which name in particular did the believers of the early Church know him?

2. Is there any evidence in this letter which indicates that it was indeed written by Peter, the son of Jonah (cf. 1:8; 2:21-24; 5:1)?
3. Is the antithesis between "aliens" and "sojourners" indicated wherever these words are used in Scripture (cf. Genesis 23:4; Psalm 39:13; 119:19, 54; Hebrews 11:13)?
4. Did Israel, while living in Canaan have to consider themselves "strangers" and "sojourners", even though they had inherited Palestine (cf. Leviticus 25:23)?
5. The Remonstrants were in error when they said it was possible for the saints to become apostate. How do the Canons of Dort reject this (cf. Chapter 1, Article 9, and RE 5; Chapter III/IV, Article 14)?
6. What is the meaning of the sixth petition in the Lord's Prayer (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 52, Q & A 127; vv 6-7)?
7. Is it Scriptural to speak of "kneeling at the manger", "bowing at the foot of the cross" and "worshipping at the empty tomb"? Why or why not?
8. Are we spiritually poorer than Peter and his contemporaries, because the certainty of our faith must rest in hearing the Word, whereas they had seen Christ (cf. John 20:29)? Is this connected with the "coming of age" or the "maturing" of the Church after Pentecost (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:11-12; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Galatians 4:1-7)?
9. Is verse 11 of any importance in regard to the manner of the inspiration of Scripture?
10. Is verse 12 significant for demonstrating the unity of the Old and New Testaments?
11. What is the difference between the old and new dispensation in regard to the Holy Spirit and his work (cf. Psalm 51:13; Isaiah 64:10,14 and especially John 7:39)? Why is Pentecost a turning point?

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