

Exegetical Treatment of I Peter 1:1-9

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Author

We will not spend much time on the question of authorship since both internal and external evidence point to Peter as the inspired writer. Verse one attributes this Epistle to “Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ.” The early church fathers, Polycarp, Ireneas, Eusebius accepted I Peter as canonical and Peter as the inspired author. No one has substantiated any proof that this might be a forgery.

To Whom Addressed

In regard to the question as to whom was this Epistle addressed there seems to be a problem. Who were these “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia?” Is he writing to all the Christians in these provinces or to just Jewish believers only?

The word *διασπορά*, “Dispersions,” is the technical word for Jews who lived outside the limits of Palestine. It would appear that Peter is addressing members of the Diaspora, Jewish Christians living outside of Palestine. We find this hard to accept. Why would Peter want to exclude the Gentile Christians, especially when we remember the lesson taught in Acts 10, where the Lord directs Peter to the Gentiles as well as the Jews? I Peter 4:3 also has a definite reference to the Gentiles and their sins.

Since the word *παραπίδημοι*, “sojourners” is used metaphorically in 2:11 for Christians generally, it is probable that in 1:1, St. Peter was adapting Jewish words to Christian thought, as he often does and meant by the *παρεπίδημοις διασπορᾶς* the citizens of heaven both Jew and Gentile who were dispersed among unbelievers. Since there is no trace of a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in the churches of Asia Minor and for the above mentioned reasons, we conclude that this Epistle was addressed to the Jewish and Gentile Christians living in Asia Minor.

Date of Writing

A discussion in regard to the date of the writing of this Epistle is necessary so we can more aptly appreciate the time and circumstance under which these Asia Minor Christians were living.

This Epistle does indicate these Christians were suffering and needed the comforting message of I Peter. They were suffering, or soon would be, as a result of the Neronian persecutions which were spreading into Asia Minor. Therefore we may surmise that this Epistle was written sometime during and shortly after 64 A.D., the year in which the persecutions began.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that God called on Peter, the Apostle of hope, to remind these “scattered sojourners” what blessings are theirs and which no persecutor of the flesh could take away. They could have a living hope even in suffering for theirs was an “inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them.”

If the word *faith* describes the writings of St. Paul and *love*, the writings of St. John, then the word *hope* is a fitting description of St. Peter’s writings. It was this hope which was to fortify them during the impending persecutions.

The Salutation, Verses 1-2

Translation

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the called exiles of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, into sanctification by the Spirit for obedience and sprinkling by the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied unto you.

Word Study and Exposition

Πέτρος: Peter uses his Greek name given him by Christ. This would also indicate that he is not writing just to Jewish readers.

ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ: “An apostle of Jesus Christ,” genitive of possession. Shows by what authority Peter is writing. He belongs to Christ and writing as *His* Apostle.

ἐκλεκτοῖς (dat. pl. masc. of ἐκλεκτός, meaning called, chosen or elected): I translated the word “called” in order to eliminate any thought of merit on man’s part. The words “chosen” or “elected” can indicate merit on the part of the individual which does not fit here.

παρεπιδήμοις (dat. pl. masc. of παρεπίδημος, meaning “exile” or “alien”): The word suggests both temporary residence and alien nationality. It is intended to express the same the same thought as that in Hebrews 11:8-16, relative to Abraham and his descendants during their dwell in the land of Canaan. This was merely a transitory existence since Abraham looked for the eternal city which God had prepared for him. They were to consider themselves strangers and exiles (Hebrews 11:13). Peter wishes to convey the same thought so we prefer the word “exile.” These scattered Christians are exiles from their true fatherland, Heaven, and are now living in an hostile world.

Διασπορά, meaning “dispersion”: As previously mentioned, this word is a technical name for the Jews scattered in the exile. The real Diaspora is not the Jewish nation but the Christian Church. Hebrews 13:14, “for we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” Since the Jews rejected the Messiah, these Christians form a Diaspora from the heavenly Jerusalem.

κατά...ἐν...εἰς modifies ἐκλεκτοῖς, not ἀποστολόσ: In this verse Peter is reminding these Christians how their “being called” is possible and gives them the function of the Trinity in their heavenly calling.

πρόγνωσιν, meaning “foreknowledge”: I will sidestep the issue of predestination, believing an exegetical study of other parts of Scripture more suitable to such a discussion. Peter simply states three facts (1) chosen by the foreknowledge of God. (2) “into sanctification by the Spirit”; the Holy Spirit (through Word and Sacrament) sanctifies us. (3) We are set apart for a purpose: A. for “obedience,” that is the faithful service of a Christian, and B. for “sprinkling by the blood of Jesus Christ.” The word ῥαντισμός, “sprinkling,” occurs also in Hebrews 12:24. In both places there is an evident reference to the events related in Exodus 24:8, where we read that “Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you.” We observe that in this place also ceremonial sanctification (Exodus 19:10) and the promise of obedience (Exodus 24:3) preceded the sprinkling of blood. Moses sprinkled the blood of the old covenant once upon the people; the blood of the new covenant was shed once for all upon the cross. So may we conclude: those who are called unto obedience are also called unto the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ and cleansed by Him. Thus we have in this verse the work of the Triune God in the scheme of salvation, called by the Father, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and redeemed by the blood of the Son, Jesus Christ.

πληθυνθεῖν (3rd per. sing. aor. opt. pass. of πληθύνω, meaning “to multiply”): The salutation ends with the prayer that grace (God’s unmerited love) and peace (between God and man) may be multiplied. The thought is, we can never have too much grace and peace.

As these Asiatic Christians read this greeting they were probably wondering what advantage there was in being called by God. Before their calling they were good friends with the unbelieving world but now things were changing and seemingly getting from bad to worse. They were being treated with suspicion. Persecutions were beginning. The world about them was becoming more and more hostile. Their calling by God had made them “scattered exiles.”

Their fears are immediately removed in the doxology as Peter reminds them that they have gained much more than they had lost. They have living hope, an heavenly inheritance which the unbelieving world does not have and therefore they are to “greatly rejoice.”

Since in Peter’s own life the resurrection of Jesus had turned tragedy into triumph and hopelessness into an ever living hope, it is not surprising to read the words found in the doxology. Like Peter, so also these Christians in Asia Minor are to bless God because they too, even in the face of persecution, may possess an undying hope based on God’s mercy and centered in Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead.

Verses 3-9

Translation

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His abundant mercy has born us anew into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance, imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven for you who by God’s power are guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this rejoice though now for a little while, if need be, you are sorrowful in many trials, that the genuineness of your faith (much more precious than gold that perishes) being proven by fire, might be found to praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ whom, having not seen you love, on whom you are not now looking, but believing you rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Word Study and Exposition

In these verses these Asiatic Christians are called upon to bless God for His mercy which has greatly changed and enriched their lives.

ἀναγεννήσας (nom. sg. aor. masc. part. act. of ἀναγεννάω, ἀνα- γεννάω, meaning “to beget, bring forth anew or regenerate”): They have been “born anew.” This word is purely a Christian term. The unbelieving world knows nothing of a rebirth. They try correcting or straightening the old branch but know nothing of a new birth.

ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν, meaning “living hope”: The Christian has a living hope because he has been born again by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This living hope is the main theme of the doxology. Someone has said, “without hope both faith and love ride on broken wings.” This wonderful hope is possible not according to man’s merits but according to God’s abundant mercy.

Since the word “hope” points to the future, Peter shows the direction of a Christian’s hope.

κληρονομίαν (acc. sg. of κληρονομία, meaning “inheritance”): This word was familiar to and understood by both the Jewish and Greek mind. The Jewish mind no doubt thought of the land of Canaan promised to Abraham. Through Jesus and the resurrection they could now hope for a new Canaan, an heavenly Canaan so beautifully described with the three adjectives modifying the word “inheritance.”

1. ἄφθαρτον (acc. sing. fem. of ἄφθαρτος, meaning “incorruptible”): Cf. Romans 1:23, I Corinthians 9:25; 15:52. Since we have no positive words in the English language to describe heaven, we note that all three of these modifying adjectives are negative. With the word “incorruptible,” we are reminded that there is no destructive force that can destroy it or take it away. The seeds of decay are not there.
2. ἀμίαντον (acc. sing. fem. of ἀμίαντος, meaning “undefiled”): Cf. Hebrews 13:4. There will be no taint of sin and its polluting effect in heaven.
3. ἀμόραντον (acc. sing. fem. of ἀμόραντος, meaning “enduring, unfading”): The thought is that our inheritance in heaven will not be affected by time. It shall endure forever.

To make their hope even more certain, Peter continues by reminding these Christians that this inheritance is ready and, through faith, they are being guarded by none other than God Himself.

φρουρουμένους (acc. pl. part. pres. pass. of φρουρέω, meaning “guard or keep secure”): This word must not be taken lightly. To guard was a very serious matter. Remember the Jailer at Philippi, who was ready to

commit suicide because he thought he had not “guarded” properly. How comforting it must have been for these suffering Christians to know that God was guarding them in the interest of their eternal inheritance. The perfect participle also implies continuous action.

διὰ πίστεως, meaning “through faith”: We ought to heed Lenski’s warning: “It is a serious misunderstanding to think God’s omnipotence as filling our faith with power and making it able to overcome all our foes. It is still more serious to suppose that grace and omnipotence produces faith in us. Nowhere do the Scriptures confuse grace and omnipotence. Faith is kindled and is preserved and made strong by grace alone; and this grace always uses the Word and the Sacraments as its means. Omnipotence has a different function; it does not operate in or upon our faith but above, over, around us, upon our enemies. It kept Daniel in the lions’ den, the three men in the fiery furnace... etc.”

τετηρημένην, meaning “reserved,” and ἐτοίμην, meaning “guarded, ready”: With such words, how could these Christians have anything but a living hope. Therefore Peter continues:

ἐν ᾧ, meaning “in which”: A better translation might be “This being the situation...”

ἀγαλλιᾶσθε (2nd per. pl. pres. imp. [ind.] mid., meaning “Rejoice!”): Lenski does not believe this is an imperative but says it is a durative indicative. I tend to agree with St. Augustine, who maintained this form to be an imperative. I believe the mercy of God has been mushroomed to such a proportion by the words of Peter that he could even command these people to “rejoice.” They can rejoice because of what already has been said and they can rejoice even in suffering because God also has a beneficial purpose:

δοκίμιον, meaning “trial, genuineness”: Through suffering the genuineness of their faith is revealed. This word is better translated “genuineness” than “trial.” The thought is, if gold is worth the effort of refining by fire to make it genuine, how much more so is faith. They were to have this confidence that their genuine faith would be found praising, honoring, and glorying when Christ revealed Himself to them and they received the τέλος (end) of their faith, the salvation of their souls.

ἀποκαλύψει (dat. sing. of ἀποκαλύψις, meaning “revelation”): Instead of παρουσία (appearing) Peter uses the word meaning reveal or unveil. He does this no doubt to connect this thought with verse 8. They haven’t seen Christ yet but the day will come when this revealing will take place. The eyes of faith is the means by which Christ is seen. A few saw Him personally on earth. A few had special revelations (Paul). Most are to share Jesus’ promise: “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed,” John 20:29. With the eyes of faith they could continue to have hope and joy even in the face of severe trials.

Conclusion

To what extent can we, of this Conference, feel akin to these Asiatic Christians? Certainly we have not felt the severity of the persecutions these early Christians did. Yet, as we of Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod continue to be faithful in our calling, the word “exile” should strike a responsive note. In the light of what the world is doing and the direction of most of the liberal churches, we are “exiles.” Since we don’t involve ourselves officially in the social-political action of our day, we are to a large extent ignored by them. They consider us “out of it.” “WELS doesn’t have a piece of the action,” they say. This should not trouble us. In fact, I would say that if we don’t feel like an exile something is wrong. We have gotten too far into the world. We have lost our distinctive Christian nationality which should make us an exile.

Like Peter may we continue to reach out beyond the stars and bring to the world a message of hope and joy centered in Jesus Christ and His resurrection pointing out to all not just the negative aspect of salvation, namely, freedom from sin, but also the positive side that all true believers have an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven for them.