



## **1 Peter 1:1-2** *Pilgrims*

NKJ 1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

***What do you think of when you hear the word “Pilgrims?”*** For most Americans, the term Pilgrims is inextricably associated with the Thanksgiving Holiday we just celebrated, you say Pilgrim and most people think of the group of English Puritan Christians who left England on the Mayflower to found the Plymouth colony. Very few American Christians even would associate the term with themselves, so if I were to go about declaring, “I am a Pilgrim” people would probably ask me where my funny hat, stockings and Turkey are.

But over a millennia and a half before the Mayflower set sail, the Apostle Peter addressed the Christians of Northern Asia Minor as Pilgrims, because that is exactly what every true Christian is.

A Pilgrim is an alien, he sojourns in a country that is not his native land, and is on his way to another country, a better country. The Pilgrims who set sail on the Mayflower were looking for a better country, in two different senses.

First, they wanted to find an earthly dwelling place where they could establish a church and a society founded entirely on biblical principles. They had given up waiting for England and the English church to Reform itself so they set sail for a new land where they could practice Reformed Christianity without fear of persecution from the state. But secondly, those Pilgrims knew that even in Plymouth they still wouldn't really be home, because they knew that their real home was not here on earth, their real dwelling place was in the mansions that Jesus had gone ahead to prepare for them. They knew they would always be Pilgrims until they reached the heavenly country.

Peter himself was also a Pilgrim, he hadn't always been one, in fact he hadn't always been called Peter. At one time he had been a simple fisherman content to live on the shore of Galilee, until one fateful day when Jesus came walking by as he and his brother Andrew were fishing and said to them *"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."* That was the beginning of Peter's pilgrimage. Jesus had changed his name from Simon to Peter, meaning rock, and had made him one of His 12 Apostles, or messengers whom he commissioned to preach the gospel and to build His church.

And so it is for the building up of that Church that was established on the foundation of the Gospel, that Peter wrote this letter. He wrote it to Christians living in the regions of Asia minor, that is modern day Turkey, north of the Taurus mountains. It is possible that these were regions that Peter had himself

either visited or even established churches in. It is interesting to note that Peter addresses the church in Bithynia, which was a region that we read in Acts 16:7 that Paul tried to go into an evangelize but was not permitted by the spirit. Is it possible that Paul wasn't permitted by God to go there, because he had determined that Peter was going to establish the church there? I'd like to think so.

In any event, Peter writes, or actually Silvanus acting as Peter's scribe, just as he had acted as a scribe before for Paul, writes this letter to a much wider audience than any other letter in the bible that I can think of, because he is writing specifically to prepare the Christians throughout Asia Minor for a time of persecution. Christians had already been persecuted before then of course, we remember that James and Stephen had already been martyred, Saul had thrown many Christians in jail, and Herod had even attempted to kill Peter, but the persecutions that were to come were to be terrible and systematic. Beginning with the Neronic persecution of 63 AD, the church was to pass through 250 years of cycles of official persecution throughout the lands of the Roman Empire.

But of course those persecutions, have never really ended, as we see week after week as we pray for the persecuted church. "*In the world you will have tribulation*" That is one of the precious promises that Jesus gave to the church that we often rather not have had. So part of the ground of Peter's message is "cheer-up, this world where you will have tribulation, isn't your home" and what a great reassurance that is.

I daresay what has gotten a lot of soldiers through tours in truly awful places is the contemplation that they don't have to stay there, 9 more months of this and I can go home, 8 more months and I can go home, and so on... Guys, if you are ever discouraged, just remember the Taliban have to live in that awful place. They only have one method of escape, and that is to the only place worse than Afghanistan.

So Peter is going to be reminding them and you of the fact that this world is not your home again and again. For instance, a lot of people think that because he used the term Dispersion he was writing to Jewish Christians. The Dispersion or diaspora was the term used since the exile to Babylon, to describe the scattering of the Jews throughout the Gentile world. But Peter is using it to drive home the point that just like the Jews in exile in Babylon or Syria, you are people living outside of your native land. You aren't home yet. That is proven later in the letter when he talks about their history in ways that couldn't apply to Jews.

But what Peter is going to be telling them as well, is although Christian pilgrims may be rejected by the world, they are beloved of God. In fact, they are Pilgrims precisely because they were chosen by God, elected by him unto salvation. In that way they are a lot like the people of Israel whom God selected from amongst all the peoples of the world to lead into the promised land. God did not wait for them to pick Him to be their God, he did the choosing, *'I will take you as My people, and I will be your God'* And in Deuteronomy 7 he reminds them I didn't pick you because you were greater than any other people, I picked you because I loved you.

Peter of course had begun his own pilgrimage when Jesus chose Him and called Him to be His Apostle. Jesus told the disciple that in John 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

God is the one who sovereignly chooses or elects His people to salvation. Now some looking at this passage who aren't comfortable with the idea that God is in charge of everything, especially salvation, see the word "foreknowledge" there and immediately use it to try to prove that somehow election consists of God "looking down the corridors of time" and electing the people who would choose him. It's kind of like saying "*I'll vote for whoever wins the election.*"

That is not what *foreknowledge* means, it means the purpose or foreordination of God. You can see this in the way the same term is used by Peter in Acts 2:22-23 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know. Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" Now is there anyone who believes that the crucifixion wasn't part of God's purpose or plan? If so, you really need to read Genesis 3:15 or Isaiah 53 or listen to all the times Jesus told the disciples he was going up to Jerusalem specifically to be crucified.

You did not get saved because you chose God, any more than Peter became an Apostle because he chose Jesus and called him to be his teacher. Just so Pilgrims are called out of the world by God and set on the path to heaven. We come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, because he calls us to new life through his spirit. Peter says that this same Spirit that calls and regenerates Pilgrims also sanctifies them, setting them apart and making them holy. Changing you and conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ. A Christian who is not growing in holiness is as much of an oxymoron as a Pilgrim who isn't going anywhere. We are saved for good works, saved to be obedient to the will of God.

But one other theme of this letter is going to be that this salvation, this sanctification, this new obedience that we have is all by the blood of Jesus Christ. When God established his covenant with His people in Exodus 24, Moses took the blood of the sacrifice and symbolically sprinkled it on Israel. It was a reminder that the foundation of their relationship was the blood that cleanses them from sin. Israel's response was that they would obey the commandments of the Lord. Now Brothers and Sisters, we know that the Blood of Bulls and Goats could not take away sins, or renew a stony heart. The author of Hebrews tells us that only the blood of Christ shed for you on the Cross could do that. Here we see the literally in the sprinkling of Christ's blood over the gentiles the fulfillment of the promise of Isaiah 52:

***Isa. 52:13 Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.***

***14 Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men;***

***15 So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.***

And it is only if that has happened that you will truly have the *substance* of all the benedictions Grace and Peace with, the peace or Shalom that can only come when you have been reconciled to the Father.

Applications:

1) ***Being homesick can be a bad thing.*** For instance I remember going away to summer camp and there were all these wonderful activities, canoeing, manhunt, cookouts, bug juice. Even with the poison ivy and the mosquitos and big kids picking on you, it was almost impossible not to have fun. But

inevitably there were some kids who were so homesick they just couldn't have fun. Usually sometime in the first week their parents would show up to take them home.

***But for the Christian Pilgrim, homesickness is a good thing.*** Because this world is not our home. As the Christian grows he should feel a longing to be away from the city of destruction and to have arrived at the heavenly city to be with the Angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, and most importantly to come face to face with Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.

You may be here, but there should be many times in your life when you feel totally out of place. Times when you feel like an innocent man thrown in prison and surrounded by hardened criminals who cries out in his Spirit "I DON'T BELONG HERE, these aren't my people!" There should be that same longing to be released.

We should feel like Bunyan's Christian who when he was asked by Prudence why he wanted to go to the heavenly city answered. ***Why, there I hope to see Him alive that did hang dead on the cross; and there I hope to be rid of all those things that to this day are in me an annoyance to me; there, they say, there is no death; and there I shall dwell with such company as I like best (Isa. 25:8; Rev. 21:4). For, to tell you truth, I love Him, because I was by Him eased of my burden; and I am weary of my inward sickness. I would gladly be where I shall die no more, and with the company that shall continually cry, "Holy, holy, holy."***

Do you ever feel that way, or do you feel right at home in the world? Because its when you feel just fine living in what Bunyan called "the city of destruction" that we have a big problem.

You know where in this world the Christian should feel most at home? *In church on the Sabbath.* Because that is the closest we come to what we will be doing for all eternity. Unbelievers don't feel comfortable in church for a reason, its not their home. You know brothers and sisters, for 23 years I felt totally awkward and out of place in a church and the more biblical it was, the more weirded out I was. Because I wasn't a pilgrim, I was a worldling. The Saints weren't my people, Jesus wasn't my Lord and Savior, and the Lord's day was meaningless to me. But O friends, since I became a Christian, I can truly say this is my home, and you are my brothers and sisters.

If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, today, then you have an idea of what I mean. You've tasted and seen that the Lord is Good.

But if you don't know Him, then the idea of ever being really comfortable in church, not counting every moment till you can go home, not daydreaming from start to finish, not wondering how on earth people can be really interested in sermons, not hating to pray and sing hymns just seems impossible.

If that is the case, then you aren't a Pilgrim and this passing world that Peter warns will be burned up really is your home. And your death will not be the end of your pilgrimage followed by joy. It will be the end of every vain hope and dream and the beginning of an eternity of woe.

But it is not too late to begin that journey towards heaven and away from damnation, all you need do is call on the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sins and grant you that new heart. This pilgrimage begins with a simple prayer and ends in never ending praise.