



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

---

**Volume 17 Issue 36**

**September 9, 2018**

### Encouragement for Exiled People, Part 2

David, after graduating from Naval flight school, attended what I like to call POW training, but is commonly called SERE (survival, evasion, resistance, escape) training. This training took place during the winter in Maine, which at that time of year commonly has -20F temperatures.

While this training only lasted a week, nevertheless during this time, David and his team, endured all kinds of torture at the hands of his “cruel” guards! He was deprived of food and

any and most every comfort. He was verbally berated and psychologically abused. And yes, he also was physically tortured. In fact, on account of what he endured physically, he experienced numbness in his legs six months after the ordeal!

However, when it was all finished, his tormenting guards became his instructors as the team was debriefed, evaluated, and educated by them as to what would be necessary if he were to survive being shot down in enemy territory. In fact, after this training, it became evident that his instructors/guards really were wonderful and caring people who did their best to prepare him for the unthinkable.<sup>1</sup>

Rarely do we think of God in these terms during a trial. Many tend to think of God as an Ant Bully who derives pleasure from our suffering. Yet, such could NOT be further from the truth!

1 Peter was written around 63/64 BC on the cusp of the Neronian persecution. Soon Christians everywhere in the Roman Empire would be threatened as their brethren were in Rome. Most of them would be attacked, persecuted, and subjected to a greater or lesser degree of ridicule, neglect, and shame. However, a significant portion would be arrested, tortured, and even killed! In fact, in the latter group would be the Apostle Paul as well as the Apostle Peter.

And yet before he was crucified upside down, Peter penned this epistle to encourage, comfort, and so equip God's people that they might endure the persecution that was coming upon them.

1 Peter opens with a statement that THE Being behind this epistle as well as the suffering of God's people is the servant Jesus, who reigns as the King and Lord over all the earth (that is the significance of the word order, "Jesus Christ"). The implication is that God's people were right where God wanted them to be!

Yet amazingly, this was NOT the meat of Peter's or our Lord's Encouragement to His people here. In fact, THE word of encouragement that God gave His people here as they faced the fire of affliction revolves around divine election. Look with me at v. 1b...

1 Peter 1:1d, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen."

The word for "chosen" in the Greek is ἐκλεκτός (*eklektos*) and is one and the same word as "election." Now as we saw last time, Peter here is utilizing Old Testament designations for the people of God and applying them to the body of Christ (as in "alien" and "stranger"). And so it is with this word -- which therefore makes the statement here profound. One of THE most important facets of Old Testament Judaism is that of all nations, peoples, or families, God chose Abraham and his children to be His people and so to be forever precious to the Lord!

Psalms 105:42-43, "For He remembered His holy word *with* Abraham His servant; and He brought forth His people with joy, His chosen ones with a joyful shout."

Moses picked up on this theme when he said this:

Deuteronomy 7:6, “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

In fact, that they were chosen was so important, it served as the basis God’s people’s worship in the Old Testament.

Psalms 135:1-4, “Praise the Lord! Praise the name of the Lord; praise *Him*, O servants of the Lord, you who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God! Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praises to His name, for it is lovely. [Why?] For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession.”

Clearly a major source of praise and delight on the part of the Old Testament people of God was that they were chosen by the Lord to be His people!<sup>2</sup>

Now because of this, everywhere God’s people went (even at the darkest hour of their history) they went with a sense of divine purpose that transcended life. Jeremiah describes it this way:

Jeremiah 29:11, “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’”

One of the things that sticks out redemptively as it relates to God’s people- whether it be during:

- Their time of slavery in Egypt.
- Their time of humiliation in exile.

Is that, on the whole, they never doubted their special status before the Lord or that in their Messiah they had a glorious future. Say what you will about the folly of their sin as well as what their sin cost them, through it all they did not doubt their special status before God! In fact, after God’s people suffered oppression and abuse by foreign nations for over 500 years, we read of Simeon:

Luke 2:25, “And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel [that is, THAT which only could be of comfort to God’s hurting and oppressed people... the Messiah (v. 26)!]; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”

From these verses we arrive at the doctrine of election: God for His purpose and glory selected a people out of the world to be the eternal recipients of privilege and blessing for His own

purpose and glory. Wayne Grudem put it this way:

The word in the New Testament (twenty-two times) always refers to persons chosen by God from a group of others who are not chosen, and chosen for inclusion among God's people, as recipients of great privilege and blessing (Matthew 20:16; 24:31; Rom. 8:33; etc.). (Grudem, 2009, p. 52)

This is exactly what God's people were in the Old Testament! And gloriously and quite amazingly, Peter teaches us here that this is what God's people continue to be in the New Testament as well! Though persecution was soon coming upon them in a major way, nevertheless they must know that, just as with their Old Testament brethren, God had hand selected them out of the world for an eternal purpose which on this side of the grave would include and so involve suffering<sup>3</sup>...

John 16:33, "In the world you have tribulation..."

After being stoned and left for dead, Paul managed to raise himself up and eventually return to the city where he did the following:

Acts 14:22b, "strengthened the souls of the disciples" by teaching them, "...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

How important it was for the recipients of this epistle to understand that trial and hardship was NOT an indicator that God had turned His back on them. In fact, it was just the opposite! As of first importance (in fact, "chosen" is in the emphatic position; v. 1 literally reads, "Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ to THE chosen<sup>4</sup>..."), they must understand that they are no less part of God's eternal purpose as their Old Testament brethren! And that their acceptance as well as their use was NOT predicated upon them or their living! In this regard, what is trial? An opportunity to be used by the Lord! That most certainly is how Peter understood the suffering he encountered in his service of Christ.

After they were flogged on account of Christ (that means they received 39 lashes with a whip adorned with sharp metal, broken glass, and the like), we read of the disciples, of whom Peter was a part:

Acts 5:41, "So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name."

How we must rethink the "dirty jobs" to which God might call a man or a woman. We falsely think that if God loves us, He will ordain ease of days for us. When in reality — in almost any other walk of life — those who are most loved and most trusted are the ones selected for the

most difficult calling... like suffering! It is on account of this that Christ taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:11-12a, "Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad..."

Why? Because somehow and in some strange way God delights in having His people suffer? NO! Because until the final state, God's redemptive program will involve getting our hands dirty! Accordingly, if you are so called, it is NOT an indicator that God has ceased to care about you. RATHER it is that God has hand selected you for this noble calling. Recall the exchange God had with Isaiah who was chosen by God to minister for over 50 years amongst a people who would NOT listen, BUT who would in fact persecute the prophet:

Isaiah 6:8, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send [which we know would be a calling which in large part would involve suffering], and who will go for Us?' Then I said, [*I thought you loved me God, why would you call me to suffer? What have I done to deserve this?*] No! In fact we can't read the next words without having the sense of a most willing and yet humble gratitude on the part of Isaiah...] 'Here am I. Send me!'"

So, it must be amongst the New Testament people of God — whether Jew or Gentile! Yet how can they do this? Where would the strength come from that would enable them to rejoice in trial and suffering?! Gloriously that brings us to the basis of divine election.

Peter has told us that divine election is rooted in two things here:

1 Peter 1:2, "who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."

The word for "foreknowledge" in the Greek is NOT *foresight*. RATHER, it carries the connotation of being FORE-LOVED! In the Greek, "foreknow" (πρόγνωσις [*prognōsis*]) is a compound word made up of: πρό (*pro*), meaning "before"; and the root γινώσκω (*ginōskō*), meaning "to know." Accordingly, to understand what is meant by "foreknow" we need to understand what is meant by the root of this word, γινώσκω (*ginōskō*). In this regard, notice how this word is used throughout Scripture:

Genesis 4:17a, "Cain knew his wife, and she conceived..."

The word for "know" in the LXX is γινώσκω (*ginōskō*). There is no question that this word involves a deep and abiding knowledge... a relational knowledge!

Amos 3:2a, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth..." (NKJV)

This doesn't mean that God is limited when it comes to His knowledge of those on this earth-

He is Omniscient. Rather, it means that of all the peoples of the earth, only with Israel did God enter into a special, intimate relationship! Once again, that is γινώσκω (*ginōskō*)!

Matthew 7:23, “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you...’”

Here we read of Christ’s words to the reprobate on the last day. This can’t mean that Christ had never heard of these unbelievers. Rather, as in Amos 3, it means that Christ did not have an intimate relationship with them as their Savior and Lord!

So based on its use in the Bible, γινώσκω (*ginōskō*) / “knowing” references an intimate, love relationship with someone. Now adding to it the prefix, πρό (*pro*) once again meaning “before,” we conclude that to “Foreknow” is nothing less than “fore-love!” Peter Davids wrote this:

These scattered Christians were first chosen ‘in accordance with [God’s] foreknowledge,’ which is not to say that God simply predicted their conversion, but, as in Paul (Rom. 8:29-30; 11:2; cf. Eph. 1:11), that they experienced ‘a personal relationship with a group of people which originates in God himself.’ (Davids, 1990, pp. 47-48)

Accordingly, for Peter to root the choice of God for His people to suffer in His “foreknowledge” is to say that the trials and difficulties coming upon them were NOT because God didn’t care for them! In fact, it was just the opposite! It was because of His love that God hand selected His people for just such a calling.

It is imperative that we understand this. The world in which we live is harsh and filled with love-less people. Accordingly, we are going to be hurt, and this by some of our closest friends: Recall the experience of David which if you live long enough on this earth will be your experience:

Psalms 55:12-14a, “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear *it*; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend. We who had sweet fellowship together...”

Yes! David was one who experienced betrayal of the most intimate kind. Yet — read the Psalms — all of this brought him to the realization that though the world might reject him, nevertheless God most certainly had not and would not! In this regard, I love the words of...

Hebrews 13:5b-6, (Speaking of God), “...He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,’ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?’”

This was the message Peter wanted the people of God to understand as they themselves soon would be sifted like wheat! It is a loving God that is behind the trials and difficulties of life!

In this regard, we ask, “Why would God in His love for us hand select us for suffering?” While the answer to that involves many things we most certainly won’t know until eternity, nevertheless Peter made one purpose clear:

1 Peter 1:2, “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit.”

The text literally reads “in [or ‘in accordance with’] the sanctifying work of the Spirit.” What does this mean? The word in the original is ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*) which comes from the primary word in the Bible for holy, ἅγιος (*hagios*). For those of you in my study hour section, last week we in fact defined this term. It speaks first and foremost NOT of moral purity, BUT of being set apart. For example:

2 Timothy 2:20, “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.”

What is meant by the last phrases, “some to honor” and “some to dishonor”? Some vessels are taken and used only for honorable use (as in fine china). Other vessels are taken and used for common use (as in daily ware).

This is the idea behind sanctification/holiness. And that is one of the purposes that lays behind suffering in the life of the child of God! It reinforces the end/telos that God has for our lives! Speaking of His rebellious people in love with this world and their sin, God said this:

Hosea 2:6-7, “Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!’”

There is a lot in this verse which I in the past have referenced. However, at its base we learn that the glory behind suffering is that it shows this world and the things of this world in its proper light. We see this even amongst the worldling. When a tragedy occurs, what frequently do we hear officials say? Go home and give your loved-ones a big hug!

Is such advice given so that we might get one more hug before they too perish? No! It is because when others lose their loved ones we are reminded of that which is most important in life, and it is NOT:

- Our bank account.
- Popularity.
- Power.
- Success.
- Our jobs.

- And the like.

In the words of the anonymous poem:

I never knew until one day by the grave how vain are the things we spend our lives to save!

Suffering has that effect in our lives. It reveals that which is most important to us! As a fire, it burns away the dross of life, leaving only that which is most important! And what in the context of God's Kingdom is most important? So says Hosea, "The Lord!"

That is "the Sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit!"

God ordains trial and difficulty for His children that they might come to see that they were NOT saved that they might live it up in the here and now. RATHER, on them rests a higher calling! They were saved that they might:

- Possess eternity!
- Walk with God!
- Serve the Lord in a world free of sin and its misery!
- Love the Lord and so enjoy His love!

We see it in Paul:

2 Timothy 2:3-4, "Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [Now to explain the purpose of the trial, Paul used a wonderful illustration...] No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."

Soldiers are marched, trained, and drilled that they might maintain their discipline less they involve themselves in the affairs of everyday life! For the Christian, that discipline comes through trial as the Spirit of God working by and with His word gives us a greater hunger and thirst for that which only is important in this life: God and His Kingdom!

And so, because of His love for us and so His unwillingness for us to remain as we are in our sin, God ordains trial and difficulty which the Holy Spirit uses to "sanctify us" and so demonstrate the high and holy calling God has placed on our lives!



## References

- Dauids, P. H. (1990). *The First Epistle of Peter (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Grudem, W. A. (2009). *1 Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (IVP Numbered))*. Chicago: IVP Academic.

## End Note(s)

- <sup>1</sup> In fact, everything was timed and scripted out almost to the minute. They even tracked how many times they struck a “prisoner” or slammed them against a wall!
- <sup>2</sup> It is ironic that many in the church today blush over this doctrine and some even deny it!! Such a far cry from the glory God’s people in the OT found in this doctrine!
- <sup>3</sup> If you are using the ESV or the NIV the text reads, “elect exiles” or “elect strangers” which is the correct translation. So not only were these NT Christians to understand that they too were the elect/chosen of God, they must understand that they were elect/chosen of God to be exiles!
- <sup>4</sup> Because the Greek word for “chosen” is anarthrous (without the article) which would have emphasized the special quality of being chosen, I have opted to translate it in the English with “THE.”