

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Chosen of God 1 Peter 1:1-2 Part One**

Well, as you know, an earthquake took place, and of course, there's been a terrific toll on Southern California with over sixty dead, and twelve thousand injured, and over twenty thousand homeless. The last thing I heard was that there is over thirty billion dollars in property damage, which would make it the single most costly disaster in US history. All these statistics are very overwhelming and they are hard to even take in except when we start to look behind those statistics at the people that those statistics represent and we begin to think about the suffering that these individuals had to undergo.

I think of one particular news broadcast that I was watching and there was a young single man who had come out to California for the good life, and when he had got here, he had a dog with four legs and the first thing that happened was the only companion he had in life was hit by a car and ended up with his leg being amputated. That was just his initiation into the state of California. Well, shortly after that, he established a business that began to prosper and things were going well, and then the LA riots took place. His business was destroyed in the midst of those riots. But you know he was young, he could recover. He had bought a house about that time and the fires came and burned his house down. But he was young, so he started another business. Guess where he started it? The San Fernando Valley. The earthquake destroyed it. This is just one story of all of the individuals that were caught up in this event. A lot of pain, a lot of suffering lies behind each of these statistics.

Now as people go through these experiences and as they go through the pain and sufferings of all these various tragedies, they have to cope with it. There is a group of people that cope very well with it and there is a group of people that will not cope very well with it. But I am convinced that the group that is going to cope with human tragedy, with the experience of pain and suffering, far better than anyone else will be the group that we call Christians, particularly those Christians who understand the truths that are contained in **1 Peter**, which is the book that we are now studying.

Hopefully, you will remember that the very first phrase of the epistle begins with “**Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.**” As we began to examine the very first phrase, we stopped at the very first word “Peter,” and we spent months talking about the life of Peter, hopefully in preparation of the study of this epistle. As we considered the work that the Lord was doing on this particular servant, the molding, shaping, and sculpting of him, we saw that the Lord's primary tool was pain, suffering, difficulty. Peter, through those experiences that the Lord brought him through, was a transformed man. He moved from an individual that was very impulsive, and volatile, and sometimes cowardly, to truly being a rock. Peter had come to appreciate the importance of adversity in the lives of God's chosen. He had come to understand that it is only through the fire that we can really be shaped, molded, and conformed to the very image of Christ. As he was led by the Spirit of God to write this epistle, he wrote a book whose theme is “A Proper Response to Suffering.”

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

Is Peter, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, addressing this particular message to a select group of people, or is he addressing it to all of mankind? Is he trying to communicate what a proper response to suffering would be to everybody that he would see, or only to a smaller group? It's obvious that he is addressing it only to a smaller group, a select group, and that group is identified for us in **1 Peter 1:1-2**. I'll be reading from the New American Standard and these are the verses that we will be looking at this morning. **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen (2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.”**

We've spent months considering who Peter was, now we are going to spend only weeks considering who those people were to whom Peter was writing. We're going to be on this particular topic, identifying who the recipients were, for about three weeks. These two verses define the recipients of this letter, first of all, by their relationship to the world, and then by their relationship to the Lord. It defines their relationship to the world in **verse 1** and their relationship to the Lord in **verse 2**. Understanding who these particular individuals are will very much help us to benefit from the study of this epistle, just as it benefits us to know the author.

First of all, let's consider their relationship to the world. What was the relationship of these recipients, the recipients of this letter, to the world? Looking at **verse 1**, we see Peter addressing these recipients as aliens. **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen.”** So, we learn, first of all, that the people that he is addressing here are aliens. Now, who is an alien? An alien is defined as one who is born in or belonging to another country and has not acquired citizenship by naturalization and is not entitled to the privileges of a citizen. In southern California, particularly, we have a lot of aliens, people who are here, legally or illegally, who have their citizenship in another country, but who are living here. But though they live here and belong here, in a sense, they are not fully citizens, and they do not enjoy all the rights and privileges of citizens. Peter is addressing such a group here in **1 Peter**.

This particular group that he is addressing is living in five different areas: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Now, if I asked you if you have visited these places you would say, “I don't know.” You have never heard of them, but if I told you that these provinces are modern day Turkey then you would probably understand the question a little bit better. Have you ever visited Turkey? Probably, most of you haven't, but this is the group of people that Peter is addressing. He is addressing a group of people called aliens in this area of the world that we call Turkey.

In what sense are these people aliens? There are two possible ways that we can understand it. This group of people that Peter is writing to is alien in possibly a literal sense. That means that they are living in an area within the borders of a country where they do not enjoy citizenship. Their citizenship is in another country. In the context of the book it would be most likely that. If we were going to make that conclusion, that these aliens are in the literal sense, then we would have to conclude that these individuals are most likely Jews, Christian Jews, that are living outside of the borders of Israel in this area that we call modern Turkey.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

They belong to the country in one sense, but they don't enjoy the full rights of that country. Or it could be that these aliens are not aliens in the sense of national borders, but more in a spiritual sense. They are aliens in a sense that their home is in heaven, but they are dwelling on the earth. So, we call that a metaphorical. It is either or.

So, in what sense are these people aliens? Is this book written to Jewish Christians who are living outside of Palestine, or is this book written to all Christians but more specifically to that group of Christians living in modern day Turkey, who may be either Jews or not, but whose citizenship is in heaven, but are residing here on earth? Who is this book written to? That's the question. It will be very important for us to understand the answer to that question for our own personal application.

First of all, looking at the literal sense, is it that these individuals are Jewish Christians living outside the borders of Palestine? There are people that say that this is, in fact, who this letter is written to, and they look to the immediate context in support of that. So, if you look at **1 Peter 1:1** it says, **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen.”** Scattered is a keyword. The Greek word is “diasphora.” In the English it is translated “dispersion.” But in the time period that Peter was writing, there was a technical term that was used for Jews who had been scattered into the nations of the world, and they were called “The Dispersion,” from “diasphora.” In fact, if you go to **John 7:35**, you'll see it used exactly that way. Jesus is in a conversation with the Jews and it says in **verse 35**, **“The Jews therefore said to one another, 'Where does this man intend to go that we shall not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, is He?’”** They had thought, from the words of Jesus, that somehow He was going to be going to the Jews outside of Palestine among the Gentile nations, going to those Jews that had been scattered among the nations of the world from the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. That was the technical use of the term “dispersion.” So, when people are considering whether or not the epistle of **1 Peter** was written to Jews outside their homeland, if we are going to understand aliens in a literal sense, the people that support that position immediately go to this word “diasphora,” the word translated “scattered” here and say, “See, this is The Dispersion,” which was the technical term being used at that time.

There's a problem with that. The reason why there is a problem is that the technical term to refer to the Jews outside of their national boundaries who had been scattered among the nations of the Assyrian-Babylonian captivities was “The Dispersion.” When you come here to **1 Peter 1:1**, it is not what you see here. It doesn't read “The Dispersion.” The definite article is removed. **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen.”** The verse is not speaking of “The Dispersion.” It is not speaking of “The Dispersion” as aliens, rather it is speaking as aliens who have been dispersed, and there is a very significant difference between the two.

This leads us, therefore, to consider the possibility of a metaphorical sense, that it is not talking about literal national boundaries, but rather speaking about aliens in a spiritual sense, heaven versus earth. For those individuals that look at this position and believe that this is the correct understanding to have concerning the recipients, they will look at the general context of the epistle itself.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

So, in **1 Peter 4:3**, we look at the life styles of those who were receiving this epistle, and it says, **“For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.”** It is clear from **1 Peter 4:3** that the people that received this letter were people that had lived formerly, before their faith in Christ, like Gentiles. You could say, “Well, they could still be Jews,” and that's true, but what's important here is to recognize that the people he's addressing in **1 Peter 4:3** clearly lived as Gentiles. Whether they were, or not, cannot be dogmatically stated here, but they were living like Gentiles, which leaves the possibility that they were Gentiles. But to nail it down, we go to **1 Peter 1:14-19** and we'll see clearly who this group of people is. It says, **“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, [“In your ignorance,” hear those words?] (15) but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; (16) because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.' (17) And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon the earth; (18) knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, (19) but with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”**

Where did these people who lived like Gentiles get their disposition to live like Gentiles? They got their disposition from their forefathers, from those who had preceded them. Who had preceded these Jews that he was writing to here? Their forefathers, if they, in fact, were Jews, would have been Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. Now, this is not possible. They did not inherit their futile way of life from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. They inherited it from their forefathers, their Gentile forefathers who lived in ignorance. So, the people that are being addressed here are not Jews. They are Christians, primarily Gentile Christians. So, we believe that we would have to reasonably conclude that this epistle is not addressed to Jewish believers living outside of the national boundaries of Israel itself, but rather to all believers whether Jew or Gentile, but more specifically to all believers who were living in the areas that were described that is now modern-day Turkey. So, to answer the question, in what sense were they aliens? They were aliens in a metaphorical sense.

When we become Christians, when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, when we place our faith in Jesus Christ alone, we become at that very moment not only children of God, we become citizens of heaven. In **Philippians 3:20** it says, **“For our citizenship [this is Paul addressing the Philippian Church, addressing Christians] is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”** So, all of those who have placed their faith in Jesus, as their Savior, and have passed from death to life, become citizens of heaven. Now, does this mean that we have joint citizenship? Are we citizens of heaven and also citizens of earth? You've heard of dual citizenship, right? I've heard you can be a citizen of one country and a citizen of another country. Maybe we could be that, but the answer to that is no. It is absolutely impossible to conclude this. We have already observed from **1 Peter 1:1** that the aliens that Peter is addressing are Christians. They are aliens, not in a sense that they are across some national boundary, but they are across some spiritual boundary.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

When we become Christians, we become citizens of heaven and aliens upon the earth. We don't share dual citizenship, and we shouldn't act as if we have dual citizenship. There's a chorus that some of us have sung in the past, which is very simple but very true. It starts with the words, "This world is not my home. I'm just passing through." That is the truth. When we become Christians, we become citizens of heaven, and heaven becomes our home, and the earth just becomes a passing through point. And that's the truth. When we become Christians, we become citizens of heaven and aliens upon the earth.

Now, if we become citizens of heaven and aliens upon the earth, then where is our home? It is heaven. Okay, now, all of you have taken trips, hopefully, because you won't appreciate this illustration unless you've taken trips. You know, you go off and you travel for awhile and you travel for a day, or two, or three, or four and you really look forward to this trip, but at some point in time, it may come sooner for some and come later for others, but at some point along this trip what do you want to do? Go home. Oh, let us go home! We want to go home! The same thing is true within the Christian life. We're on a pilgrimage. There are some individuals here that are still enjoying the trip, but the Lord in His mercy and His grace, possibly through adversity and through suffering, will bring us to the point where we will want to go home. I just want to go home, Lord. It's exciting! That's hopefully where all of us will be. That's extremely important within our Christian growth.

Why is it so important to move through this transition? If our focus remains on our trip, just the enjoyment of the process, we will not focus on home. But once we move our focus to home, then it will impact what we do on our trip. Hopefully, when we come to the point where we not only recognize that heaven really is our home, but we want to be home, our focus will, therefore, change from where we are to where we are going. Our focus will change from where we are, to where we are going. This is absolutely critical for people who are suffering. Those who desire to live righteously, in fact, will indeed suffer persecution. But it is extremely important for us, at some point along this trip, to come to the point where our affections are no longer upon the earth, but on things above, and that our focus is to no longer enjoy here, but is to get home. In **Hebrews 13:14** it says, "**For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.**"

Hopefully, that is the testimony of our lives, that we are seeking the city, which is to come. And how is that city described? Why would we want to go home anyways? There are all kinds of places we could turn to, but there is probably no better place than **Revelation 21:1-4**. "**And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, [home, that's our home, that's heaven] coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, (4) and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.'** (5) And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.'"

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

Why wouldn't we want to go home? No more pain, no more sorrow, no more tears, no more death, to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. May God give us the grace to appreciate this. I think I'm looking forward to heaven, not only for the lack of grief in respect to the outward circumstances of my life, but for the inward deliverance, and to know that I no longer struggle with the flesh, to be set free in a perfect world in the glorious heaven. Why do I want to go home? Why would you want to go home? Why would we seek for the city above? Because everything is going to be beautiful, not only on the outside, but on the inside, because that is the day when we will see Jesus, and we shall be like Him. When we come to this understanding that we are aliens, that our home is in heaven, our focus will, therefore, change from where we are, to where we are going, and that is the secret for going through. If we cannot do this, if we cannot keep our focus on the glory of heaven and upon the Christ that sits on the throne, and our focus is diverted to this world and the things of this world, then we will not suffer well. We will not persevere well. We will not endure well. We will not.

The case in point is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our example. **Hebrews 12:1-2** says, **“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (2) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy [that was behind Him, the joy that was around Him, for the joy what? Before Him.] set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** This is the key to enduring. This is the key to persevering, that our focus would not be on the things of this world, but on the things of glory. If you and I can only grasp this, we will be able to move through this world okay. I look at my experiences, and I know that you are going through experiences also that are just simply tough, but this is not our final resting place. I don't consider myself to be the perfect husband, the perfect father, or the perfect minister. I'm not the perfect anything. All I know is my weakness and my failure. And what is around me is not perfect either. Can you say amen in your situation? But guess what? We're going home! My failures here will be behind me. My weakness and all of my shortcomings will be behind me. All those things that I grieve over will be behind me. It will be behind you, and we'll be home. This is how we can move through very difficult circumstances in this world righteously. This is how we can do it. Just as it is extremely important for us to understand it, it is really important for these readers here to understand it.

This epistle was written about 64 A.D. What we discover from history is that Nero was the emperor of the Roman Empire at this time. And in 64 A.D., more specifically July 19, 64 A.D., it appears that Nero himself set Rome on fire. There were very narrow streets and a lot of people living within Rome and they were in the way of a very grandiose building project. The way that apparently history details it out for us is that he wanted these people moved, so he did it with fire. He set Rome on fire and, of course, a lot of destruction and a lot of deaths. The people suspected Nero; Nero needed a scapegoat. Guess who became the scapegoat? Christians. At the very time that Peter was writing his letter, a persecution was being devised by Nero against Christians. From this point on, those individuals to whom Peter was writing would be suffering incredibly under this persecution. They were going to be beheaded, they were going to be rolled in pitch and set on fire like torches, they would be crucified, they'd be thrown to wild beasts in the coliseum.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

All of these things were taking place and it was taking place in the lives of these people that Peter was writing. He needed to prepare them to go through difficult times to know how to respond to suffering. And in order to help them to understand what they had to understand, he needed to communicate to them that they were aliens. They were aliens and that heaven really was their home. They needed to understand that. If they understood that, then they could go through.

History tells us that Peter was caught up in this persecution. Three years later, Peter would die under this persecution that was being directed by the hands of Nero. History tells us that he was crucified, and tradition tells us that when it came his turn to be crucified, he refused to be crucified in the traditional manner, head up, feet down. Rather, after having watched his wife being crucified-see, sometimes our families go through it with us-when it came his turn, he requested that he would be crucified upside down because he was unworthy to be crucified as to the same form and manner as Christ.

See the transformation that has taken place in Peter? He's become a rock. He's become a rock because of the chiseling process that Christ put him through. He became able to handle this because now he understands, "I'm an alien. I'm just passing through and heaven is my home." I really believe he faced that cross with a sense of joyous expectation, because he saw his cross as the door to his home. "No more pain, no more suffering, no more tears, no more death, no more struggles in this life. I will finally be what I want to be; I will be like Jesus." That's what we want. That's where we want to go. In **Colossians 3:1-4** it says, **"If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (3) For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."** The things of this world, the circumstances of this world do not matter. The only thing that matters is that we move through these circumstances righteously, waiting eagerly for the appearance of Jesus who will take us. Great life isn't it. We have a great faith. The Lord has blessed us.

Let's pray. Father, we just thank you so much for Your love. Thank you for Your Word. Father, I'm thankful that we have been clearly told that we have a home in heaven and that we are aliens upon this earth. Help us, Lord, not to focus on the things of this earth, but rather that we might have a focus on the things that are in heaven, and in this that You might minister grace to us that we might go through, that we would be able just to endure and to persevere righteously, drawing upon Your grace with every step, waiting anxiously and eagerly for that day when we will see You face to face. And we pray these things in the name of Jesus, Amen.