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### ELECT SOJOURNERS OF THE DISPERSION: THE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN 1 PETER 1:1-2

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**HARDING**  
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ELECT SOJOURNERS OF THE DISPERSION:  
THE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN 1 PETER 1:1-2

Term Paper

Presented to Professor Allen Black

Harding School of Theology

Memphis, Tennessee

As a Requirement in

BNEW 5321 Advanced New Testament Exegesis

By

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30 April 2020

- A. *Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ,*
- B. *to the elect sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*
  - B1. *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,*
  - B2. *by the sanctification of the Spirit,*
  - B3. *for obedience to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of his blood:*
- C. *may grace and peace be multiplied to you.*<sup>1</sup>

The first two verses under study comprise the opening salutation of the first epistle of Peter, and in it, the author refers to his audience using terms that pave the way for the key themes centered around the Christians' relationship with the world around them and their eternal hope in Christ.<sup>2</sup> The objective of this paper is to expose the distinctive way in which the key themes of the epistle is communicated in the Christian identity found in the opening remarks of 1 Peter.

The first epistle of Peter employs the standard three-point opening commonplace in first-century Greek letters: writer, reader, and greeting.<sup>3</sup> This paper employs the formula "A to B: C"

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<sup>1</sup> Largely adapted from Eugene M. Boring, 1 Peter, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, 1 Peter, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 80.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. David G. Horrell, 1 Peter. New Testament Guides, Kindle edition (New York: T & T Clark Ltd, 2008): loc. 136-141; D. Edmond Hiebert, "Designation of the Readers in 1 Peter 1:1-2". Bibliotheca Sacra 137, no. 545 (March 1980): 64; Allen Black and Mark Black, 1 & 2 Peter. The College Press

in order to facilitate our study, where A = author, B = readers, and C = greeting.<sup>4</sup> In antiquity, these parts were typically expanded by the author as they deemed fit for purpose, as is the case in 1 Peter.<sup>5</sup> Peter expands each part of his introductory remark,<sup>6</sup> with the greatest attention being paid to the readers as he sets up the theme of his letter in his initial address.

#### A. *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ*

As recorded in 1 Peter 1:1, the author identifies himself as Peter. There is little doubt that this Peter is none other than Simon bar-Jonah, whom Jesus renamed Cephas (Πέτρος) who was a prominent figure in the Lord's church.<sup>7</sup> However, there have been various reasons and possibilities put forward that argue against Petrine authorship, with the most widely held view championed by Elliott, positing that 1 Peter was written by a Petrine circle after Peter's death between 70-95 CE.<sup>8</sup> While the

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NIV Commentary. (Joplin: College Press, 1998): 27; and Reinhard Feldmeier, The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text, trans. Peter H. Davids (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008): 49.

<sup>4</sup> Martin H. Scharlemann, "An Apostolic Salutation: An Exegetical Study of 1 Peter 1:1-2." Concordia Journal 1, no. 3 (3 June 1975): 110. Scharlemann used the formula "A to B: greetings!"

<sup>5</sup> Hiebert, 64.

<sup>6</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, A Commentary on I Peter, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993): 62.

<sup>7</sup> Mt 16:18; Jn 21:15-17; 1 Cor 15:5.

<sup>8</sup> John Hall Elliott, ed. 1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Bible, vol. 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 124-

question of authorship cannot be decisively determined, the important point to note is that the epistle expressly states the apostolic authority by which the letter has been written and sent, coming from "an authorized representative or messenger" of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

*B. to the elect sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*

At the outset, Peter deliberately employs Old Testament terms such as "election," "sojourners," and "diaspora," which were originally used to depict the people of Israel to address his Christian audience.<sup>10</sup> Peter uses this distinct motif in consideration of his readers' current situation, insofar as to establish the purpose for the rest of the epistle of encouraging his readers who were suffering as foreigners living in an alien,

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5. Horrell summarizes the arguments against Petrine authorship in Horrell 2008, loc. 374-407. Horrell argues against the perspective, writing that "There is no evidence from outside the epistle for the existence of such a circle, nor does the epistle itself lend any substantial support to the thesis, either from its content or from the names mentioned in it" (David G. Horrell, "The Product of a Petrine Circle? A Reassessment of the Origin and Character of 1 Peter." Journal for the Study of the New Testament 24, no. 4 [June 2002]: 60).

<sup>9</sup> C. David Abernathy, An Exegetical Summary of I Peter (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998), 9. Since the opening remarks of the epistle expressly state it is from Peter, Jobes suggests that it "should therefore be read as such." Karen H. Jobes, 1 Peter. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005): 59.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars point out Peter's dependence on the Old Testament in addressing and encouraging his readers, e.g. Marshall, 30 and Jobes, 58.

Gentile society on account of their faith in Christ.<sup>11</sup> Goppelt recognizes the distinctive manner in which Peter addresses his readers that is fundamentally different from Paul: in terms of his readers' horizontal and vertical relationships.<sup>12</sup> Paul refers to his readers through their vertical relationship with God (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:2), while Peter refers to his readers through their horizontal relationship with the world around them as a result of their election.

Elect. Peter addresses Christians as ἐκλεκτοῖς in the greeting and at the close of the letter (συνεκλεκτή), creating an inclusio for a very important theme.<sup>13</sup> Peter eventually expounds on this key theme in 1 Pet. 1:3 and 2:4-10. The idea of election has its roots in Deut. 7:6-8, borrowing from the OT to convey to Christians their exceptional identity in God in a special way. Just as the house of Jacob was chosen by God, so too were Peter's readers chosen by God because God has called

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<sup>11</sup> In David G. Horrell, "The Themes of 1 Peter: Insights from the Earliest Manuscripts (the Crosby-Shøyen Codex ms 193 and the Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex containing P<sup>72</sup>)."  
*New Testament Studies* 55, no. 4 (October 2009): 522, Horrell examines the two (probably) earliest manuscripts of 1 Peter, focusing on their manuscript contexts instead of their variant readings, identifying "the suffering and hope of [God's] faithful people in a hostile world" as the key theme that its original readers might have assessed, which "concur with modern commentators."

<sup>12</sup> Goppelt, 64.

<sup>13</sup> Elliott, 315.

them and they have responded. Election is the Christians' divine identity, depicting their special relationship with God.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars have debated the question as to whether ἐκλεκτοῖς and παρεπιδήμοις is adjectival or nominative. Are Christians chosen sojourners (παρεπιδήμοις as substantive) or are they chosen people who happen to be sojourning (ἐκλεκτοῖς as substantive)?<sup>15</sup> Jobes puts forward a convincing argument for both terms being two substantives in apposition, affirming the Christian's heavenly (ἐκλεκτοῖς) and earthly (παρεπιδήμοις) characters: "to the chosen, the foreigners of the Diaspora."<sup>16</sup>

Sojourners. Peter applies the term παρεπίδημοι (visiting stranger) to his readers. While election is the Christian's divine identity, sojourner is the Christian's social identity.<sup>17</sup> This term was used in the first century to refer to foreigners who did not hold citizenship in the place in which they resided.<sup>18</sup> This term was inextricably linked to the Christians' precarious social status. As foreigners, they were not afforded

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<sup>14</sup> Hiebert refers to the "double character" of Christians: the heavenly character (elect) and an earthly character (sojourners) [Hiebert, 65]. Feldmeier refers to this "double expression" as "God's election and society's rejection" (Feldmeier, 53).

<sup>15</sup> Michaels argues in the minority, with *eklektois* in the substantive (J. Ramsey Michaels, 1 Peter. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49. [Waco: Word Books, 2004], 7).

<sup>16</sup> Jobes, 75, with Achtemeier, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Hiebert, 65 and Feldmeier, 53.

<sup>18</sup> Jobes, 61.

the rights and privileges reserved only for citizens. Moreover, they were viewed as threats to the established social order because of their foreign ancestry, traditions, and way of life. In this manner, Christians were despised and afflicted in varying degrees. This kind of suffering was inherent in the Christian's pilgrim identity: they did not belong because of their faith, and the first century church faced persecution from both society and government.<sup>19</sup> Later in his epistle, Peter confirms to his readers that they can also end up suffering for doing what is right, and then encourages them by telling them that they are blessed for doing so (1 Pet. 3:14). To this theme of suffering, Peter later intimates that it is a source of joy planned by God before creation as they shared in the suffering of Christ (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Because *παρεπίδημος* is a term synonymous with Jewish heritage, some interpreters believe that Peter's audience were Jewish converts living in Asia Minor.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, they would have related well to Peter referring to them as sojourners because of their Jewish heritage. They would have been reminded

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<sup>19</sup> Williams argues for a "median" persecution, a combination of official (government) and unofficial (society) persecution faced by Christians at the time of 1 Peter. In Travis B. Williams, "Suffering from a Critical Oversight: The Persecutions of 1 Peter within Modern Scholarship." Currents in Biblical Research 10, no. 2 (February 2012): 275-92.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Boring, 56-7; Peter H. Davids, The First Epistle of Peter, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1998), 45; and Scharlemann, 109.



of the words of Abraham as he referred to himself as “a stranger and sojourner among you” (Gen. 23:4), and of the psalmist expressing, “For I am thy passing guest, a sojourner, like all my fathers” (Ps. 39:12). With this parallel, Peter communicates the Christians’ identity in relation to the world around them: they are in the world but are not of the world, just like their forefathers before them. This pilgrimage theme dominates the first part of the epistle (1 Pet. 1:17).<sup>21</sup>

Some, however, entertain the possibility that Peter’s original audience were not Jewish Christians.<sup>22</sup> For instance, Jobes proposes the idea that the addressees could have been Christians from Rome who were deported to Roman colonies in Asia Minor.<sup>23</sup> Regardless, *παρεπίδημος* still applies to them by virtue of their Christian conviction. Some interpreters view *παρεπίδημος* as a metaphorical (vice literal<sup>24</sup>) concept,<sup>25</sup> which enables us to apply the term even to readers who are Gentile

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<sup>21</sup> Goppelt, 67.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Beare, 74; J. N. D. Kelly, A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude. Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1969): 40; and Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude. The New American Commentary, v. 37 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 2003): 51.

<sup>23</sup> Jobes, 61.

<sup>24</sup> Elliott argues for the literal view, asserting the actual social, legal, and political condition of the addressees in Asia Minor. (Elliott, 313). Also Scot McKnight, 1 Peter: The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text...to Contemporary Life. The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1996): 48-50.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Black and Black, 31 and Achtemeier, 82.

Christians as they connect their spiritual status to the Israel of old. Regardless of ethnic background, Christians live as (metaphorical) pilgrims on earth until they reach their final destination in heaven, their Promised Land according to the new covenant in Jesus Christ. Because of this, Peter would later tell them in 1 Pet. 2:11 that as πάροικοι (resident aliens) and παρεπίδημοι, they are to “abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” This then, is the sociological implication to Christians of their identity as foreigners: to be non-conformists (1 Pet. 1:17) and counter-cultural (1 Pet. 4:4).<sup>26</sup> Peter’s use of παρεπίδημοι, Jobes adds, highlights the Christians’ need to distance themselves from the pagan world and to live holy lives.<sup>27</sup> Whether Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians, Peter’s readers understood their pilgrim identity in light of Israel’s history, giving them the religious backdrop for their social situation.

Diaspora. Peter continues to connect his readers’ experience with God’s ancient people of being scattered abroad outside of their Palestinian homeland since the Babylonian exile (Deut. 28:25, 64). An important aspect of this Christian identity is allegiance to the homeland.<sup>28</sup> The Jewish communities

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<sup>26</sup> Goppelt, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Jobes, 62.

<sup>28</sup> Beare, 75.

scattered abroad remained devoted to Jerusalem, regarding themselves as sojourners in the land where their families had lived for generations. In the same way, Christians did not view their earthly abodes as their permanent homes; they looked forward to their true home in heaven, as Peter encouraged them to do in 1 Pet. 1:13.

In the previous section, we established that Christians are foreigners in the world who must be careful not to be of this world. But through Peter's use of the term *διασπορά*, he reminds his readers that they also have been sent, and thus scattered, into the world for God's purpose (1 Pet. 2:12). His readers can look forward to God's promise to his ancient people of being gathered together again (Neh. 1:9 and Isa. 49:6), with its eventual fulfilment in their final salvation in heaven (1 Pet. 1:13).

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These places mark the location of the readers, signifying the encyclical nature of the epistle.<sup>29</sup> Some commentators have speculated that the order of these places as they appear in the letter was indicative of the route that Sylvanus, the purported

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<sup>29</sup> Hiebert, 68.

messenger of Peter, travelled.<sup>30</sup> Many scholars provide the reasoning behind the place names as Peter encouraging the Christians in the regions in which Paul or other apostles never evangelized.<sup>31</sup>

*B1. according to the foreknowledge  
of God the Father,*

How did our Christian identity come about and why? Peter provides the source, manner, and purpose for the Christian identity using three prepositional phrases, B1-B3, respectively.<sup>32</sup> The three-fold notion of God's divine initiative (B1), sanctification of the Spirit (B2), as well as obedience and Jesus' sacrificial work (B3) are further developed by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:3-12; 1:13-17; and 1:18-25, respectively.<sup>33</sup> Beare adds that these three phrases do not only relate to the believer's identity in Peter's opening salutation, but to all of

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<sup>30</sup> E.g. Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Essays. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: MacMillan & Co Ltd, 1955): 119-20: 119, and Jobes, 66.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Achtemeier, 83; Black and Black, 30; and Jobes, 66.

<sup>32</sup> Marshall, 31. Some maintain that the three prepositional phrases modify ἐκλεκτοῖς in 1 Pet. 1:1, e.g. Black and Black, 31; Mark Dubis, 1 Peter: A Handbook on the Greek Text. Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010): 3. Owing to a lack of verbs in 1 Pet. 1:1, Grudem suggests that it makes sense to allow B1 to modify verse 1 in its entirety, not just the word ἐκλεκτοῖς (Wayne A. Grudem, The First Epistle of Peter: An Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 17. [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990]: 50.

<sup>33</sup> Achtemeier, 80.

it. The apostleship of Peter, the Christian identity, and the blessings of grace and peace come by the foreknowledge of the Father through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of obedience to Jesus and the sprinkling of his blood.<sup>34</sup>

Starting with B1, Peter gives the origin of the Christian's identity: God the Father foreknew them. God has taken the initiative by choosing the church as a collective to be his people, knowing that prior to creation, the church will exist as his people on earth.<sup>35</sup> This should be a point of encouragement for Peter's readers, knowing that their suffering is part of God's intended plan for them, just like God intended for Jesus' suffering and eventual glorification (1 Pet 1:20). Davids underlines the importance of the inclusion of the word "Father," conveying God's loving concern for them.<sup>36</sup>

B2. *by the sanctification of the Spirit,*

Next, Peter gives the agency of the Christian identity in B2: through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. There are two interpretations to ἁγιασμός; it may mean consecration or

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<sup>34</sup> Beare, 75-6.

<sup>35</sup> Beare claims that "election is an entirely corporate matter in 1 Peter, which speaks of an elect people (2:9) but never of elect individuals." (Beare, 55).

<sup>36</sup> Davids, 48.

sanctification. On the one hand, consecration means Christians have been "set apart for a special purpose."<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, sanctification pertains to "transformation of character," which Jobes argues cannot be separated from consecration.<sup>38</sup> Peter confirms the inseparability of the two components of ἀγιασμός in the epistle, referring to the consecration of Christians as "a people for [God's] own possession" (1 Pet. 2:9) and urging them towards sanctification "to not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance" (1 Pet. 1:14).

*B3. for obedience to Jesus Christ  
and the sprinkling of his blood*

Peter now provides the purpose for the Christian identity in B3 that has been made possible by God's foreknowledge through the sanctification of the Spirit: for "obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." This is another part of the OT brought forward by Peter, with particular allusion to Exod. 24:3, "Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord.. the people answered with one voice, and said, 'All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do.'" Then Moses took the blood of some sacrificial animals and sprinkled half on the altar and half on the people, after they had responded with the

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<sup>37</sup> Beare, 55.

<sup>38</sup> Jobes, 70

words, "We will obey." By the action of sprinkling blood, the covenant between God and His people was sealed; it was validated and rendered operative.<sup>39</sup> With this, the OT story is related to Christians who also belong to a covenant that has been sealed by blood, that of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself says in Lk. 22:20, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood."<sup>40</sup> This new covenant is the salvation that God offers through Christ's death, which necessitates a corresponding life of obedience.<sup>41</sup> In light of the allusion to the Sinaitic covenant in Exod. 24, Christians are "children of obedience" (1 Pet. 1:14) who have purified themselves by obeying the truth (1 Pet. 1:22).<sup>42</sup> Obedience will be a key theme as treated by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:13-2:3.

B3 has generated some exegetical debates. First, some read εἰς as causal ("because of") instead of telic ("with the result that" or "for the purpose of") and Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as subjective genitive to translate B3 as "because of the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."<sup>43</sup> Page puts forward

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<sup>39</sup> Beare, 77; Davids, 49; Feldmeier, 58; and Marshall, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Page, 296-7.

<sup>41</sup> Feldmeier, 59.

<sup>42</sup> Paul E. Deterding, 'Exodus Motifs in First Peter'. Concordia Journal 7, no. 2 (2 March 1981): 60.

<sup>43</sup> Initially proposed by Francis H. Agnew, "1 Peter 1:2 - An Alternative Translation." The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 45, no. 1 (1983): 69-72. Endorsed by Elliott, 319, and Joel B. Green, 1 Peter. The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2007): 20-21.

solid arguments that counter these two views. Page argues that obedience in 1 Peter wholly refers to human obedience and never the divine, and that these two views fail to consider the overwhelming intertextual allusion to Exod. 24, noting that “this is what happens when a person comes to faith, not what happened when Jesus died on the cross.”<sup>44</sup> Another point of contention is the view that ῥαντισμός refers to baptism,<sup>45</sup> which also does not stand ground in light of Page’s arguments.<sup>46</sup>

The crux of the three prepositional phrases are also present in 2 Thes. 2:13b, “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” There is, first and foremost, the initiative of the Father, then the sanctification by the Spirit, and finally belief in action by the people.<sup>47</sup> Finally, we need to highlight the presence of the Triune God in B3 in that “God is the ultimate source, activated by the Spirit, for the express purpose of obedience [in Christ].”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Sydney H.T. Page, “Obedience and Blood-Sprinkling in 1 Peter 1:2.” The Westminster Theological Journal 72, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 293-8.

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Goppelt, 74-5; and E. G. Selwyn, 119-20.

<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Schreiner contends that ῥαντισμός cannot refer to baptism because baptism is never described as a bloody sprinkling (Schreiner, 57).

<sup>47</sup> Feldmeier, 58.

<sup>48</sup> Greg W. Forbes, 1 Peter. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014): 13.



C: *Grace and peace be multiplied to you*

Peter uses the same greeting that is also common to Paul's epistles, which includes the standard formula "grace to you and peace."<sup>49</sup> It is important to note here that because of this and other similar reasons, some believe that 1 Peter is dependent upon and directly influenced by the Pauline epistles.<sup>50</sup> However, there have been efforts to rehabilitate 1 Peter from such a second-class status in order to be recognized as a distinct New Testament voice in its own right.<sup>51</sup> In part C, Peter detaches from the standard Pauline greeting by using a common Jewish greeting (shalom, εἰρήνη) and a common Christian greeting (χάρις).<sup>52</sup> In so doing, Peter connects the old Mosaic covenant with the new covenant of Christ. In the words of Scharlemann:

This was Peter's way of indicating that the old aeon had passed and that his readers now enjoyed what kings and prophets of old had longed to see and hear but could not because they had only God's promises and did not experience their fulfilment.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> E.g. Achtemeier, 79 and Grudem, 54. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; and Phm. 3.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Francis Wright Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 3d ed., rev. And enl. (Oxford, England: B. Blackwell, 1970), 73.

<sup>51</sup> Elliott, John H. "The Rehabilitation of an Exegetical Step-Child: 1 Peter in Recent Research." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no. 2 (1976): 243-54.

<sup>52</sup> Kelly, 44-5.

<sup>53</sup> Scharlemann, 109.

## Conclusion

This paper has considered each part of 1 Peter's opening salutation, evaluating the text on how it appears to us today: an epistle. The epistolary nature of 1 Peter adds theological richness in that this genre provides a special personal touch to its original addressees, acknowledging their unique portion in God's history.<sup>54</sup> Peter could have conveyed his message in a general sense to his readers through history, a sermon, or any other genre, but instead he chose to do so in a more personal manner in order to relate the gospel to them in a unique and powerful way.

1 Peter is an important and distinct witness in the NT. The timeless encouragement previewed in the epistle's opening salutation is based on his readers' identity as God's elect sojourners in a hostile world who have been brought into a covenantal relationship with God through Jesus' blood.

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<sup>54</sup> Boring, 49.

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