



OPENING THE SCRIPTURES

Confident in a Sure Salvation

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πάσχω (*paschō*, to suffer) — 12 times: 1 Peter 2.19–21, 23; 3.14, 17–18; 4.1, 15, 19; 5.10

πάθημα (*pathēma*, suffering) — 4 times: 1 Peter 1.11; 4.13; 5.1, 9

We have previously observed that, in addition to the general challenges of faithful living, the Christians addressed in 1 Peter were facing, whether in actuality, prospect, or both, the difficulties of ostracism and persecution ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#)). Peter uses the cognate verb and noun for *suffering* more than any other New Testament book (see above). He also mentions twice that they were experiencing trials (πειρασμός, *peirasmos*; 1 Pet 1.6; 4.12). His letter is, therefore, an invaluable resource for learning how to cope with similar difficulties now.

But before considering the specifics of Peter's counsel, we should take note of how he presents it. With the exception of *peirasmos* in 1.6 and πάθημα (*pathēma*) in 1.11, he does not mention suffering before 2.19, and the words mostly appear in chapters 3–5. Rather than immediately begin to comfort and advise his readers regarding suffering, he first reminds them of their status as God's people (1.3–2.10), beginning with their standing (1.3–12).¹ In this installment, we will begin an examination of the big ideas he introduces in 1.3–12.

¹ I am organizing the discussion of 1 Peter according to the outline of the book in Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles 2009, 738.

The Joy of Salvation

Our freedom-of-religion context makes it hard, if not practically impossible, to grasp the difficulties faced by adherents of a new religion seeking acceptance in the Roman world. Legally, it had to have official sanction in order to expect legal protection, a formidable hurdle for the Christians, as the early second century letter to the Emperor Trajan from Pliny the Younger, the governor of Bithynia (cf. 1 Pet 1.1), shows. But legal standing was not the only barrier to acceptance. Culturally, “ancient religions were respected by virtue of their age,” a reality that meant new religions were automatically viewed with suspicion (Keener 2014, 315).

In light of this background, it is significant that early in his letter, Peter reminded his readers that the faith they had embraced was not just another new religion, but was in fact the completion of God's eternal plan, worked out over thousands of years.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied about the grace that would come to you, searched and carefully investigated. They inquired into what time or what circumstances the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he testified in advance to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you. These things have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—angels long to catch a glimpse of these things (1 Pet 1.10–12).

Think about what it means that the people who participated in earlier stages of God's salvation plan are thrilled to see the outcome experienced by the Christians.

First, in spite of all the obstacles raised by the people of Israel throughout their history, God had diligently pursued the completion of his plan. Is it not reasonable, then, to expect him to continue to practice covenant loyalty to his people in the present age, no matter what obstacles they face?

Second, if the things Christians experience are so fascinating that some of the great people of faith, not to mention the angels, want to look at them, it is evident that the we who have received the blessings are exceedingly valuable in God's sight. Indeed, we are so esteemed that the great people of faith are serving us (v. 12)!

Reflecting on these realities, Peter is confident that the things the “angels long to catch a glimpse of” are the basis of the new hope that replaces despair and continues to sustain God's people. We turn now to an examination of what makes them special.

The Substance and Security of Salvation

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1.3–5).

Peter begins the body of the letter with praise (“Blessed”; Εὐλογητὸς, *Eulogētos*) to “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3). He praises because God acted in accordance with his great mercy to give the Christians “new birth” (ἀναγεννάω, *anagennaō*) that led them “into a

living hope” (εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν, *eis elpida zōsan*). This transformation is accomplished “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

But, as verses 4–5 show, it is not merely the fact of a living leader and prospect of overcoming death that motivated Peter to endure the trials that Christians experience (cf. v. 6). He is confident in the outcome, in the security of salvation, which he calls “an inheritance that is ... kept in heaven for you” (v. 4). The word “inheritance” (κληρονομία, *klēronomia*) may have been suggested, as it was in Paul, by the previous reference to new birth (cf. Gal 4.7; Rom 8.17), but the background for both apostles is the Old Testament. The word is used several times in the LXX to refer to the promise originally given to Abraham in Genesis 12.7 that his descendants would receive the land of Canaan as their inheritance. As Davids observes, whether or not the word “inheritance” was explicitly used,

The promise became fundamental in OT theology (Gen. 50:24; Deut. 34:4; Josh. 1:2; 6; cf. Jer. 7:1–7). Later this inheritance was seen in some parts of the OT and in Judaism as not so much the physical land as the reward of the godly (or ungodly) on the judgment day (Isa. 57:6; Dan. 12:13; Ps. Sol. 14:17; 1QS 11:7–8), and it was this interpretation of inheritance which the NT picked up (Mark 10:17; 1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:24). 1 Peter refers to this heavenly reward twice, here and in 1 Pet. 3:9, although it does not develop the idea as fully as Hebrews (Davids 1990, 52). (For examples of the LXX use of *klēronomia*, see Josh 1.5; 1 Kings 8.36, 51, 53; Ps 94.5, 14; Isa 49.8; 58.14; Joel 2.17; 3.2. DA)

To underscore the preciousness of the Christians' inheritance, Peter describes it with three alliterative (in the Greek) terms. First, it is “imperishable” (ἄφθαρτος, *aphthartos*). The word “pertain[ed] to not being subject to decay and death” (Louw and Nida 1989 268). But it was also used in Greek literature to refer to “the ravaging of a land by a hostile army,” a meaning Hort contends Peter “had probably chiefly in mind” (Hort 2006, ¶ 1287). Second, it is “undefiled” (ἀμίαντος, *amiantos*), literally “free from contamination” (Danker 2009, 20). Third, it is “unfading” (ἀμόραντος, *amarantos*), “pertaining to not losing the wonderful, pristine character of something—‘unfading, not losing brightness, retaining its wonderful character’” (Louw and Nida 1989. 696).

Peter can so confidently describe the Christian's inheritance because God guarantees it. Using a perfect tense participle, he says it has been and is being “kept [(τετηρημένην, *tetērēmenēn*)] in heaven for you” who “are being protected by God's power through faith” (v. 5).

Conclusion

Taken together, Peter's concise review of the wonder of salvation and confidence that it is now and will be the possession of those who follow God through Jesus are the perfect preparation for his assurance that his readers can “rejoice ... even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials” (v. 6). We have a glorious salvation and God is keeping it secure. There can be no better motivation to persevere.

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An Additional Thought

“It is clear that the core category in 1 Peter is God, for all of the teaching in the letter is related to God in one way or another. In fact, the core problem of the letter—that is, the suffering of the followers of Jesus—is due to their perceived obedience to God in Jesus.”

~ Peter H. Davids. 2014. *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude: Living in the Light of the Coming King*. Zondervan, 157

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