

# PFRS Commentary

## I Peter 1:1-2

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*1 Peter 1:1-2 NKJV*

*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.*

*1 Peter 1:1-2 PFRS Translation*

*1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen refugees of the Diaspora in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*

*2 Grace to you, and may peace be multiplied according to the former knowing of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:*

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This text is often appealed to in the Calvinism vs. Arminianism debate, and deserves our careful scrutiny. There are several similarities between this passage and Romans 8:28-30 and Ephesians 1:3-12.

We believe this passage is poorly translated in most English versions, perhaps the result of Calvinistic bias, causing the reader to miss Peter's point entirely. Notice the dramatic difference in word order between the New King James translation and our translation. The NKJV rendering is typical of most English translations of this passage.

The key problem for the translator is determining the correct verb to which the prepositional phrase "according to..." should be attached. The word "εκλεκτοις" (rendered "elect" in the NKJV and "chosen" in our translation) appears in the Greek text in the position where we have it underlined in our translation above. The NKJV and many other translations have moved this word to the beginning of verse 2. (The NIV has it in both places).

## The Syntactical Problem

Below is Young's Literal Translation of this passage which precisely follows the Greek word order Peter used.

*1 Peter 1:1-2 YLT*

*1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the **choice** sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*

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

The Greek preposition "κατα" ("according to" in vs. 2) must modify another term, usually a verb. As it is worded, one would immediately ask, "What is 'according to the prior knowledge of God?'" Most English translators take the word "εκλεκτοις" ("chosen" or "elect") from verse 1 and placed it at the beginning of verse 2 in order to supply a term for this prepositional phrase to modify. However, this Greek word is an adjective modifying "refugees" ("pilgrims" NKJV, or "sojourners" YLT).

The English word "elect" can be a noun, adjective, or verb depending on usage. Moving this adjective to the beginning of verse 2, and rendering it as "elect" (which can be a verb in English), gives the false impression to the English reader that it is a verb in Greek. The sense appears to be that the act of "choosing" is "according to" the prior knowledge of God. Yet, "εκλεκτοις" is clearly an adjective in Greek, not a verb. It modifies "refugees." As you can see in Young's Literal translation, "choice" is an adjective modifying "sojourners" (or "refugees" in our translation). It is simply wrong to suppose that the prepositional phrase, "according to..." modifies this adjective, when in fact the adjective itself is modifying "sojourners / refugees." Furthermore, Peter used the "according to ..." prepositional phrase 12 other times in his two Epistles, and every time it modifies a verb. He never used this prepositional phrase to modify a substantive or an adjective.

If the adjective "elect" is modified by the prepositional phrase, "according to..." we must also include the substantive that it modifies. In other words, one would have to translate verse 2 as: "Chosen refugees according to the foreknowledge of God." Yet, this would not imply that Peter's readers were "chosen" by God (for salvation) based on His foreknowledge, but rather that their present situation, being refugees, living as aliens in a foreign land, was "according to the foreknowledge of God." This really puts a damper on the Calvinistic

interpretation, and demonstrates that the current reading in most English translations is simply highly suspect.

Our contention is that the word “εκλεκτοις” must remain where it is in verse 1, as an adjective modifying “refugees” (“pilgrims” NKJV or “sojourners” YLT). We take verse 2 as a complete sentence in itself. The independent clause containing the main verb is: “Grace to you and may peace ***be multiplied.***” The dependent clauses are the following prepositional phrases: “according to prior knowledge of God the Father”; and “in sanctification of the Spirit”; and “unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” It is not uncommon in Greek to place the independent clause containing the main verb at the end of the sentence and place dependent clauses (prepositional phrases) first in the sentence. (See 1 Cor. 3:10 for a nearly identical construction). However, in translation, placing the independent clause first is better English style. There is no difference between the two following translations, except the latter is better English style.

*“According to the former knowing of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you, and may peace be multiplied.”*

*“Grace to you, and may peace be multiplied according to the former knowing of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”*

While most English translations violate the syntax used by Peter, ours does not. We have not modified any of the clauses Peter used, or the relationship of words to other words. Our change to word order only places the independent clause first, and appends the dependent clauses to it, making it easier to understand in English.

We conclude that the word “εκλεκτοις” (“chosen” or “elect”) does not belong in the sentence in verse 2, but must be left where Peter put it in verse 1, modifying “refugees” (“pilgrims” or “sojourners”). Therefore, this passage does not say that Peter’s readers were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God,” as Calvinists would have it.

### **Who are “the Elect”?**

Peter’s use of the term “elect” or “chosen” in verse 1 refers to Israel’s having been the chosen nation of God. (See our commentary on Ephesians 1:3-12). This book was addressed to Jewish believers of “the Diaspora” who were refugees from

their homeland, Israel, because of persecution by their fellow Jews. Peter viewed them as the faithful remnant of Israel, the nation chosen by God and redeemed out of Egypt. In spite of their present circumstance of being refugees, their hope was in the fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs.

*Deut. 7:6-8*

*6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has **chosen** you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.*

*7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor **choose** you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;*

*8 but because the LORD loves you, and **because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers**, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

That this was Peter's meaning is shown in chapter 2, where he quoted Exodus 19:5-6, applying it to his readers.

*1 Peter 2:9*

*9 But you are a **chosen** generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

This "election" of Israel was a collective election, not an individual one. Many Jews were cut off from this chosen nation because of idolatry, and for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah (Rom. 11:13-32).

### **The "Foreknowledge" of God**

The Greek word "προγνωσιν" ("former knowing" or "foreknowledge" NKJV) simply means to "know previously." Paul used the participle form of this word in the following passage.

*Acts 26:4-5*

*4 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know.*

*5 They **knew me from the first**, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.*

“Προγνωσιν” is a compound of “προ” (before) and “γινωσκω” (know). The word “know” is the term used for an intimate relationship. Joseph “*did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son*” (Matt. 1:25). In Romans 8:29, the verb form is used in the clause, “*those whom He foreknew...*,” referring to the patriarchs with whom God had an intimate, covenant relationship. (See our commentary on Rom. 8:28-30).

In verse 2, Peter expressed his heart’s desire for his readers. “*Grace to you, and may peace be multiplied according to the former knowing of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*”

Peter longed for grace and peace to be multiplied to these “chosen refugees” in accordance with God’s “former knowing.” This refers to God’s previous intimate relationships with the patriarchs, in particular, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God made a covenant with Abraham, which He confirmed in person to Isaac, then Jacob. He swore an oath to Abraham to fulfill all the promises of this covenant. Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, prophesied of this covenant as follows:

*Luke 1:68-79*

*68 “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people,  
69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David,  
70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world  
began, 71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all  
who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to  
remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father  
Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our  
enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness  
before Him all the days of our life.*

*76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go  
before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 To give knowledge of salvation  
to His people By the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of our  
God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to  
those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the  
way of peace.”*

The covenant God made with Abraham, and the oath He swore, concerned His promise to multiply his seed as the stars of heaven, to bless all nations through one of his descendants, and to provide His people an eternal land inheritance, an eternal rest and peace.

In verse 2, Peter simply expressed the same kind of hope expressed by Zacharias. With the words *“Grace to you and peace be multiplied,”* Peter pointed to the promised outcome of God’s fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant *“according to the prior knowing”* of the patriarchs by God (God’s intimate relationship with these men); being brought to fruition through *“sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”* for the faithful remnant of Israel.