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You Talkin' to Me? 1 Peter 2:4–10 and a Theology of Israel

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W.A. Criswell, well-known Baptist pastor and leader, once said, "The correct identification of Israel is a key to the true interpretation of the whole Bible. If Israel means God's ancient people, the Bible becomes as clear as truth itself. If Israel means the New Testament church, the teaching of the Bible becomes obscure."[1] Yet supersessionism, the view that the church has superseded or replaced Israel, seems to be increasingly popular. In spite of serious theological implications and weak exegetical foundations, it is the majority position in contemporary evangelicalism.[2] This can be explained only on spiritual and pastoral bases. Paul warned against a Gentile pride regarding the people of Israel (Rom 11:13–32), and a failure to heed his warning leads to supersessionism and, in addition, may lead to anti-Semitism.

One of the arguments often used to support a supersessionist reading of Scripture is that Old Testament terminology is applied to the church, usually citing 1 Peter 2:9–10. Scott McKnight claims, "There is no passage in the New Testament that more explicitly associates the Old Testament terms for Israel with the New Testament Church than this one."[3] John S. Feinberg charges dispensationalists with inconsistency in the interpretation of scriptural terms that originally applied to Israel. He asks rhetorically, "What dispensationalist thinks the references to a 'holy nation,' 'chosen people,' and

[1]W.A. Criswell, *Israel in the Remembrance of God* (Dallas: Pasche Press, 2006), 4.

[2]Supersessionism is often popularly referred to as replacement theology. Some authors deny they espouse supersessionism, yet redefine Israel in such a way that the church ends up as the "new Israel." Others claim that Jesus fulfilled all that Israel was to be; therefore, all who are in Him constitute the "true Israel." All such maneuvers in which Israel becomes the church are included under the term "supersessionism." For more on supersessionism see Darrell L. Bock, "Replacement Theology with Implications for Messianic Jewish Relations," in *Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People: The Uniqueness of Jesus and Jewish Evangelism*, ed. David Parker (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), 235–47; Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2000); Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress Press, 1996); and Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

[3]Scott McKnight, *1 Peter*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 109–10.

'royal priesthood' in 1 Peter 2:9 are not references to the church?"[4] For him the matter is settled, but is it really? Everything depends upon the identity of the original recipients. First Peter 2:4–10 reads as follows:

> And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.[5]

This passage and its interpretation affect a number of issues. These would include the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer and, most significantly, the relationship between the church and Israel. Again, a great deal depends upon the identity of the recipients. The current academic consensus holds that 1 Peter was written to the church. Can this claim be validated? If not, then to whom is Peter speaking? For a Gentile believer in Jesus, Robert De Niro's question, "You talkin' to me?" begs for an answer.

To Whom Is Peter Writing?

The History of Interpretation

A straightforward reading of the text indicates that the recipients were Jewish Christians. Karen H. Jobes maintains that "in contrast to modern interpreters, most ancient exegetes . . . understood the recipients of the letter to be converts from Judaism."[6] Ramsey Michaels admits that the readers

[4]John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity; Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, edited by John S. Feinberg (Westchester: Crossway, 1988), 72.

[5]Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.

[6]Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 23.

"are addressed here as Jews."[7] He insists, "No NT letter is so consistently addressed, directly or indirectly, to 'Israel,' that is (on the face of it) to Jews."[8] He nevertheless concludes that "1 Peter was written primarily to Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, but that the author, for his own reasons, has chosen to address them as if they were Jews."[9] He adds, "So successful was the author of 1 Peter in appearing to write to Jews that the Christian historian Eusebius in the fourth century AD took him at his word."[10]

Indeed, there is a long line of commentators who have also taken Peter at his word. Edward Gordon Selwyn says, "In the patristic age Origen, Eusebius, and the Greek Fathers generally maintained that they [i.e., the recipients] had been Jews, while Augustine, Jerome, and other Latin writers held the opposite view."[11] He continues to suggest that due to the weight of Erasmus, Calvin, Bengel, and Grotius, it might not be improper to say that for centuries the consensus view was that the epistle was written to Jewish Christians.[12]

John Calvin, writing in the 1550s claimed that the recipients were Jewish Christians.[13] Robert Leighton, writing in the 1650s believed that they were Jewish Christians.[14] John Lightfoot, writing in 1679 agreed that the recipients were Jewish Christians. In fact, he found it incredible that anyone would deny that 1 Peter was addressed to Jewish believers. He asked rhetorically, "who indeed doth deny it?"[15] In 1748, John Gill, although he allowed that there may have been some Gentile Christians included, nevertheless argued that the recipients were primarily Jewish Christians.[16] John Peter Lange, in 1865, claimed that the recipients were Jewish Christians. In this, he was convinced by Bernhard Weiss, for he quotes from him and lists his reasons for this conclusion.[17] More recently, Richard Longenecker refers to the epistles of Peter, as well as to all of the General Epistles, as

[7]J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, vol. 49, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1988), xlviii.

[8]Ibid., xlv.

[9]Ibid., xlvi.

[10]Ibid. Apparently Erasmus and Calvin, in the sixteenth century, take him at his word. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Thornapple Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 4.

[11]Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 2nd ed, Thornapple Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 42.

[12]Ibid.

[13]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 25.

[14]Robert Leighton, *A Practical Commentary upon the First Epistle General of Saint Peter*, edited by P. Doddridge, vol. 1 (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.), 20–21.

[15]John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, vol 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 159.

[16]John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament in which the Sense of the Sacred Text is Taken, [etc.]*, vol. 2 (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1853), 804.

[17]John Peter Lange, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, Lange Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, translated by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1867), 7–8.

"Jewish Christian tractates."[18] With reference to 1 Peter, he specifically draws attention to parallels with the Qumran community, the use of the Old Testament, and the "pesher interpretations" prominent in 1 Peter.[19] Ben Witherington III has made one of the most spirited and serious recent attempts to defend the view that 1 Peter was written to Jewish believers.[20] Nevertheless, today, the thought that Peter was writing to Jewish Christians is held only by a very small number of commentators. In a recent work, Craig A. Evans, claims that 1 Peter was written to an audience "most of whom we should assume were Jewish."[21]

Among those who favor a Gentile readership, there is a variety of views. John H. Elliott claims that the terms used in the text (παρεπιδήμοις, "exiles," 1:1; παροικίας, "exile," 1:17, cf. 2:11; and παροίκους καὶ παρεπιδήμους, "aliens and exiles" 2:11) refer to the readers' social status prior to conversion.[22] So, for him, the readers were not aliens because of their faith, but by virtue of their actual social and political status. Moses Chin and Steven Richard Bechtler have responded to most of Elliott's claims, and his hypothesis has been judged to be "improbable" by Thomas Schreiner.[23] Nevertheless, Elliott shifted much of the discussion on the recipients of 1 Peter, and his massive commentary has certainly strengthened his claim that the terms used of the recipients should not be overly spiritualized.[24]

McKnight believes they were "Gentiles who had probably previously become attached to Judaism through local synagogues and other forms of Judaism."[25] Some were likely proselytes and others may have been God-fearers. He does allow that some were Jewish: "It is also likely that some of the

[18]Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 186–204. See also Louis Barbieri, "1 Peter," in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, edited by Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 1961.

[19]Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 200–04. Other, more recent scholars have also noted the Jewish exegetical methods used in 1 Peter. See especially Kelly D. Liebengood, *The Eschatology of 1 Peter: Considering the Influence of Zechariah 9–14* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 88–96.

[20]Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians,* vol. 2*, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1–2 Peter* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007). He ultimately abandons the position, however, as noted below.

[21]Craig A. Evans, *From Jesus to the Church: The First Christian Generation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2014), 23.

[22]John Hall Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1981), 37–49, 129–32.

[23]Moses Chin, "A Heavenly Home for the Homeless: Aliens and Strangers in 1 Peter" *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991): 96–112; Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 162 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998); and Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 40.

[24]John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

[25]McKnight, *1 Peter*, 23.

Christian converts were formerly Jewish in race and heritage."[26] He clearly espouses a supersessionist view, and this informs his entire commentary.[27] If the majority of the readers, however, had been proselytes and God-fearers, it is curious that in the letter there is no mention of circumcision, a discussion of the Law, or any of its requirements, the issue of food offered to idols, nor anything about the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Messiah. In Romans 11:13–32, Paul specifically addresses Gentiles, but here, the major issue is Gentile arrogance regarding the majority of the Jewish people who are yet in unbelief. Nothing like this is found in 1 Peter. Of course, nothing can be proven from Peter's silence on these topics, but it should be noted nonetheless. Most of these identifications of the original recipients are based upon the highly questionable assumption that language that is reserved uniquely for Israel throughout the Hebrew Scriptures must necessarily refer to all Christians when it is employed in the New Testament.

In what initially appears to be a major departure, Witherington begins his commentary by stating, "We will be arguing that the early church fathers were right that 1 Peter is written to Jewish Christians. . . . We have done a disservice to Jewish Christianity if we think that it quickly disappeared due to the rising tide of Pauline and Gentile Christianity even as early as the first century AD This is simply not so."[28] In making this assertion about Jewish Christians, he may have had the position of Wayne Grudem in mind, "By this time [the time of the writing of 1 Peter], over thirty years after Pentecost, the rapid growth of the church would have meant that there were both Jewish and Gentile Christians in all of these churches."[29] But Witherington argues persuasively that the recipients were Hellenized Jewish Christians. Perhaps it is also worth pointing out that Peter did not address his epistle to churches, but to individuals who had been "scattered abroad" (1 Pet 1:1). In spite of Witherington's strong arguments in favor of a Jewish Christian audience, he nevertheless adopts a supersessionist reading, in which the letter is ultimately addressing Gentile Christians.[30] In contrast, one of the most consistent expositions, from the perspective that the original audience was composed of Jewish Christians, is that of Arnold Fruchtenbaum.[31]

When 1 Peter 1:1 claims Peter as the author, evangelicals are prepared to accept the claim at face value. But when the book claims to have been written to Jewish believers in Jesus, the claim is all too often dismissed out of

[26]Ibid., 24. Apparently, he believes a Jewish person ceases to be Jewish upon acceptance of Israel's Messiah.

[27]Ibid. See also 31, 87–88, 109–11, etc.

[28]Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 17.

[29]Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IV, 1988), 39.

[30]Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 31. He is largely persuaded on the basis of other New Testament texts that seem to support supersessionism, as well as 2:5, which speaks of the believers being "built up as a spiritual house."

[31]Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, Jude*, Ariel's Bible Commentary (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 315–85.

hand. Those who are otherwise committed to a literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic show a surprising, though disappointing, willingness to abandon it when they come to 1 Peter.

The Textual Evidence

The available textual data most often cited that bears on the nature of the recipients are found in 1:1, 14, 18; 2:10; and 4:3–5. Most commentators who decide that the audience must have been Gentile base this decision on 1:14 and 18, and then fit the remaining evidence into this schema. Therefore, primary attention then must be given to these verses.

The Description of a Former Life (1:14, 18). In 1:14 and 18, Peter refers to his readers' former lives with the following phrases: "the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance" and "your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers." Selwyn is representative of the consensus when he says, "While, for example, the 'vain conversation' of the readers' life before conversion admits of the view that they had been lapsed Jews, the description of it as 'handed down by tradition from your fathers' could hardly have been used of any but Gentiles."[32] So "lapsed Jews" might be described as "ignorant" or as having had a "futile way of life," but it is the comment that this way of life was handed down "by tradition" from their fathers that makes it completely inapplicable to a Jewish audience. Jobes expresses the argument like this:

> It is argued that Diaspora Jews of the first century could never have been described in such spiritually bankrupt terms and that the ways of Judaism would never have been described as a "useless way of life." Therefore, most interpreters today conclude that the original recipients must have been Gentile converts.[33]

How are we to evaluate this conclusion in light of Scripture? To begin with, in 1:14, Peter speaks of their "lusts" (ἐπιθυμίαις). Paul, in Ephesians 2:3, says of his life before conversion, "Among them [i.e., trespasses and sins] we too all formerly lived in the lusts (ἐπιθυμίαις) of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

Peter also speaks of their "ignorance" (ἀγνοίᾳ), and when he does, the theme of spiritual insensitivity, found throughout the book of Isaiah, must certainly come to mind. In Isaiah 1:3, God says, "An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand." In Isaiah 44:18, the prophet says, "They [i.e., the majority of Israel] do not know, nor do they understand, for He [i.e., God] has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they

[32]Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 43. In the same context, he also envisions them as "outside the pale of practicing Judaism."

[33]Jobes, *1 Peter*, 23.

cannot comprehend." In the New Testament, Paul affirms the same truth about Jewish unbelievers when he says, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom 10:2–3). Of his own life before he met the Messiah, he says, "I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly (ἀγνοῶν) in unbelief" (1 Tim 1:13). This is the testimony of Paul, but what of Peter?

It is interesting that Peter and John are described in Acts 4:13 as "uneducated and untrained" (ἀγράμματοί . . . καὶ ἰδιῶται). Darrell Bock claims that this has reference to "religious instruction."[34] Peter and John were laymen whose religious instruction had been outside of official channels, i.e., apart from Pharisaic tradition. Ironically, Peter refers to those who were schooled in these traditions as "ignorant." His words are most telling, as he addresses a crowd in the temple: "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance [κατὰ ἄγνοιαν], just as your rulers did also" (Acts 3:17). Here the very same Peter who later would write 1 Peter 1:14 is addressing, not Diaspora Jews or "lapsed Jews," but Jerusalem Jews who were in the very precincts of the temple, and he says they acted in ignorance, even as the leaders of the nation. This usage is exactly parallel with what he says in 1 Peter 1:14 and should remove any hesitancy about the applicability of this term to the Jewish people in this context.[35]

In 1:18, Peter also refers to their formerly "futile way of life inherited from [their] forefathers." The word used here, πατροπαραδότου (literally: father-traditions, or traditions of the fathers) is unique in the New Testament, but there are many similar references to the "traditions" of the Pharisees, of the elders, or simply of men.[36] This oral law of the Pharisees had been passed down for a number of generations, and both Jesus and Paul actively opposed it. For example, Jesus referred to "the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:3), and He claimed that these traditions caused the Pharisees and scribes to "transgress the commandment of God" (Matt 15:3) and "invalidate the word of God" (Matt 15:7). Paul also refers to "the ancestral traditions." He says of himself (Gal 1:14), "and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions" (τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων). Here is Saul, "a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees" (Acts 23:6), describing his formerly futile way of life by speaking of his zeal for the traditions of his ancestors. His testimony should count for something, as well. This terminology in 1:18 is perfectly consistent with a Jewish audience.

[34]Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 195.

[35]Witherington says, "This theme of ignorance, however, is found elsewhere in the New Testament applied quite specifically to Jews alone." Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 30.

[36]Matt 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13; Gal 1:14; and Col 2:8.

The Description of Outsiders (4:3–5). Nevertheless, many modern Gentile scholars simply refuse to believe that these things might have been applicable to a Jewish audience. Therefore, already having decided that terms formerly applied to Israel now apply to Gentiles, these scholars also decide that terms which ordinarily would apply to Gentiles (in 4:3–4), must apply to non-Christians.

> 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. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you.

Those outside of the circle to whom Peter is writing are referred to as "Gentiles" (ἐθνῶν). The pronouns are most significant: "You" are not a part of "them" and "they" are surprised that "you" do not run with "them," and therefore, "they" malign "you." It would hardly be possible to draw a sharper contrast between the Gentiles and Peter's audience. The clear implication is that his audience is comprised of Jewish believers. Since, however, it has been concluded that the audience, though Gentile, is being addressed as the "true Israel," then the word "Gentiles" is reinterpreted as "unbelievers," or non-Christians.[37] This interpretation, however, is found nowhere else in the New Testament, and, therefore, it amounts to nothing more than special pleading. Redefinition, like allegory, is limited only by the creativity of the interpreter.

An objection might be raised: If 1 Peter is addressed to Jewish believers, what does it mean that they were carrying out the desire of the Gentiles, with these drunken parties and "abominable idolatries"? Witherington, after citing other passages in the Pauline corpus which refer to the same sorts of activities (e.g., 1 Cor 8–10, Acts 15:20, 29; and Rev 2:14), suggests social situations in which these very types of activities might have involved Jews, especially in connection with business and with trade guilds.[38] To leave these activities behind, as his readers have, would have led to negative social consequences (e.g., as described in 1 Pet 4:4).

The Description of a Change in Status (2:10). Once again, taking a backward glance, Peter describes his readers' former status to contrast it with a change that has taken place. In 1 Peter 2:10, he says: "For you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." This certainly sounds as if it would apply to a Gentile readership, and indeed it might, but it is an allusion to Hosea 1–2, where it has reference to Israel. In the context of Hosea, God is speaking of the alienation of Israel from fellowship with Him. It is not that the

[37]Michaels, *1 Peter*, 230; Grudem, *1 Peter*, 49. See also Jobes, *1 Peter*, 267.

[38]Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 26, 30, 196–97, See also Elliott, 70.

covenantal relationship is broken, but that a functional relationship is not in place. The thought that this verse could refer to Gentile Christians is termed "very odd" by Witherington, "where Hosea is clearly speaking of and about *Jews*, and offering a prophetic critique of their behavior."[39] By the way, the Greek text states, οἳ ποτε οὐ λαὸς νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ ("who once were not a people, but now are a people of God"). The translators have supplied the definite article, so that it reads, "the people of God," but it is not in the original.[40]

Some commentators not only ignore the continuing validity of the Abrahamic Covenant, but seem to be laboring under the idea that the Mosaic Covenant was dependent upon Israel's faithfulness, and thus conclude that Israel no longer had a valid covenant relationship with God.[41] The blessings of the Mosaic Covenant were linked to Israel's obedience, but not the covenant itself. The covenant was based upon God's faithfulness alone; it was not contingent on the behavior of mankind. In contrast to the Abrahamic Covenant, which was irrevocable (Rom 11:29), the Mosaic Covenant was revocable (Heb 7:11–19; 8:13), but only by God. In Galatians 4:4–5, Paul says, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Not only was the Law still in effect, Messiah had to have been born under the Law so that He could redeem us from the demands of the Law. It was necessary for Jesus to satisfy the demands of the Law so that He could suffer the curse of the Law on our behalf (Gal 3:13). In spite of the frequent lapses and continued rebellion of the nation against the Lord, the Mosaic Covenant remained intact until the establishment of the New Covenant. This is to say that the lifespan of the Mosaic Covenant was not determined by Israel's obedience or disobedience, but solely by God's purposes.

With this understanding, it becomes clear that Hosea is not presenting Israel as having broken the Mosaic Covenant, such that they were no longer the covenant people, but that although they were alienated from their God, He would overcome their rebellion, master their willfulness, and bring them to Himself (e.g., see Hos 1:10–11; 2:6–7, 14–23). This is the experience of Peter's recipients. As unsaved Jews, living a "futile way of life inherited from [their] fathers" (1:18), they have now been redeemed "with the precious blood as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1:19), to join the remnant of Israel. As such, they are the token and guarantee of the nation's future salvation (Rom 11:16, 26). The emphasis is on God's ability and resolve to restore the relationship and overcome Israel's defection.

[39]Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 28. Italics original.

[40]See Diprose, *Israel and the Church*, 54–55.

[41]E.g., see Jobes, *1 Peter*, 163; W. Edward Glenny, "The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, edited by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 170, 181.

Because of the change in status described in verse 10 ("now you are the people of God . . . now you have received mercy"), the descriptive phrases of verse 9 make perfect sense. Peter tells his original readers, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." W. Edward Glenny provides valuable information about each of these terms and their Old Testament significance.[42] In addition, it should be noted that the church is never referred to as a "race" or a "nation."[43] The church is to be composed of many ethnicities and many nations. These verses have reference to the remnant of Israel that has put its trust in Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. What has not yet been actualized in the nation God is doing in the remnant. He is making them all that Israel was to have been and therefore a foretaste of what the nation will be one day.

The Designation of the Recipients (1:1). Peter addresses his recipients in fairly clear terms: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen." The question is not what these terms mean but whether they should be taken literally or figuratively. Calvin writes regarding the word "aliens" in 1 Peter 1:1:

> They who think that all the godly are thus called, because they are strangers in the world, and are advancing towards the celestial country, are much mistaken, and this mistake is evident from the word *dispersion* which immediately follows; for this can apply only to the Jews, not only because they were banished from their own country and scattered here and there, but also because they had been driven out of that land which had been promised to them by the Lord as a perpetual inheritance.[44]

The readers are addressed more literally as "the chosen ones, exiles of the Diaspora."[45] The first of these words, "chosen ones" (ἐκλεκτοῖς), is used in Romans 11:5 and 7 of the remnant of Israel who believe in Jesus. Barry Horner says, "For the apostle, ["chosen ones"] focuses principally on Israel's

[42]Glenny, "The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2," 156–57.

[43]The translations of the NASB and the Holman Christian Standard Bible in such references as 1 Pet 2:9, "But you are a chosen *race* [etc.]" are questionable (cf. also Mark 7:26 and Acts 7:19). Γένος refers to the descendants of a common ancestor. When used with a small group, it means "family, relatives," and, with a large group, as here, it means "nation, people." See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd rev. ed., edited by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001), s.v. "γενος." The people of Israel are not a race, but an ethnic group. It should also be noted that many of the theological statements about the Jewish believers who are addressed (e.g., the fact that they have been chosen, 1:2) are also true of Gentile Christians (cf. Eph 1:4 and Col 3:12–14).

[44]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, translated by John Owen (Bellingham, WA, 2010), Logos Bible Software, 25. Italics Original.

[45]Translation is the author's.

national election in which Jewish Christians individually participated."[46] The next word, "exiles" (παρεπιδήμοις), is only found one other time outside of 1 Peter, in Hebrews 11:13, and refers to the faithful remnant in the Old Testament. The last word, "Diaspora" (διασπορᾶς), is a technical term that is used to refer to the scattering of Jewish people outside the land of Israel. Witherington comments:

> Twelve times in the LXX *diaspora* is the rendering of the Hebrew *gôlâ*, and notably there is an instance where *paroikia* is also translated *gôlâ*, (2 Esd 8:35). In light of the highly Jewish character of 1 Peter anyway, it seems logical to conclude that, since in all the above references it is *Jews* who are called resident aliens, we should surely conclude that this is likely in 1 Peter as well.[47]

Turning to the New Testament, the word is found here in 1 Peter, James 1:1, and in John 7:35, and in these other two instances it refers to the Diaspora of the Jewish people from the land of Israel. If the word means something different or is to be taken metaphorically in 1 Peter, it would be a departure from every other instance in the Bible. Witherington also points out that "especially since we have a list of actual locations in the Diaspora, it likely connotes both a physical place and a social condition."[48] He says, "It didn't mean being on earth as opposed to being in heaven. It meant being outside of Israel as opposed to dwelling in the Holy Land."[49] There are no good reasons for a refusal to take any of these terms in their ordinary sense.

When the same verse claims that the author is Peter, evangelical scholars accept the testimony of the letter that it was written by Peter. Should they not also accept the testimony of the letter that it was written to Jewish believers, who constitute the remnant of Israel and who were scattered outside the land of Israel?

It is sometimes argued that, in any case, congregations at this time would not have been entirely Jewish or Gentile, so he had to have been writing to mixed congregations. The problem with this claim, as has been mentioned earlier, is that the letter is not addressed to congregations but to Jewish believers.[50] Peter says he is writing to Jewish believers in Jesus who constitute a part of the Diaspora in the geographical regions he specifies.

Of the five specific geographic areas in which his readers dwell (1 Pet 1:1), three (Pontus, Cappadocia, and Asia) are also mentioned as the places of origin of the Jewish people who heard Peter's sermon on the Day of

[46]Horner, *Future Israel*, 287.

[47]Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 24. Italics Original

[48]Ibid., 65.

[49]Ibid.

[50]In passing, it should be noted that James addressed his epistle "to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad" (Jas 1:1). To identify the recipients of these epistles as congregations is to superimpose a Pauline pattern on James and Peter. This is also the most likely reason some claim a "mixed" audience—they are trying to fit the recipients into a congregational setting.

Pentecost (Acts 2:9). It is speculative, but not improbable, that they returned to establish churches in these areas and maintained a connection with Peter.[51]

Topical Evidence for a Jewish Audience

The subject matter of the letter also supports the thesis that they were Jewish Christians. Peter uses imagery and topics that betray not only his own background, but that of his readers as well. This is particularly evident when he discusses the Shepherd and the sheep and the Temple of Jerusalem.

The Shepherd of Israel. Peter tells his readers "For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (1 Pet 2:25), and he refers to "the Chief Shepherd" in 1 Peter 5:4. It is true that the Lord has "other sheep, which are not of this fold" (John 10:16), but He is preeminently the Shepherd of Israel. Messiah is called, "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel" (Gen 49:24). The psalmist says, "Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned *above* the cherubim, shine forth!" (Psa 80:1). Jeremiah says, "He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock" (Jer 31:10). Regarding the Messiah, who is to be born in Bethlehem, Micah says, "And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God" (Mic 5:4). Peter is speaking of the remnant of Israel in 1 Peter 2:25, when he says, "For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls." Regarding their former life, he makes allusion to Isaiah 53:6 (they had "gone astray"), but now they have returned to the Shepherd of Israel. Though the majority of the nation is still straying, the remnant has returned.

Temple Imagery. Peter also uses many references to Temple imagery. This begins with 1:2, where Peter tells his readers that they have been "sprinkled with His blood," portraying Jesus as the ultimate atoning sacrifice. In Leviticus, following a discussion of the sacrifices (Lev 1–10), Moses turns to purity (Lev 11–20), and Peter likely has this section in mind in 1:14–16, as he quotes from Leviticus 19:26 in verse 16: "You shall be holy, for I am holy." He speaks of his readers' "redemption" in 1:18 "with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Messiah" (1:19). This has reference to the Passover Lamb that would provide ultimate atonement for sin, in contrast to the bulls and goats, which provided only temporary atonement. This was also expressed in Isaiah 53:4–9, and in the announcement of John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The Lamb of God has provided purification not merely for the body, as with the ritual baths near the Temple, but purification for the soul (1:22). In 1 Peter 3:18, Peter pictures Messiah as presenting us before the Lord. This is reminiscent of a phrase that recurs fifty-eight times in Leviticus, alone: "before the LORD." Not only were sacrifices to be presented

[51]See Jobes, *1 Peter*, 27.

"before the Lord," but also the accused (Num 5). In 2:5, Peter says, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." All of this and more, in the very topics addressed, point to a Jewish Christian audience.

Additional Evidence for a Jewish Audience

Although space does not permit a full examination of the evidence for Jewish Christian addressees, the major remaining points can be summarized as follows:

1. Witherington points out that the word "alien" in 2:11 "does not mean either 'exile' or 'pilgrim' and should not be so translated. It literally refers to someone who lives beside or outside the house. In other words, it refers to someone who is not part of the in-group in that particular social locale. The usage of *paroikos* to refer to an actual resident alien status of Jews in exile from Israel is prevalent in the LXX."[52] This language supports a Jewish Christian audience.
2. There is a greater concentration of Old Testament quotations and allusions in 1 Peter than in any other New Testament book. This is not proof that the recipients were Jewish, but it is evidence that should be considered. According to Lange, Weiss affirmed that "No portion of the New Testament is so thoroughly interwoven with quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. (It contains, in 105 verses, twenty-three quotations, while the epistle to the Ephesians has only seven, and that to the Galatians, only thirteen)."[53] Judging by the author's extensive use of the Old Testament, not only was his mind saturated with Scripture, but he expected his readers to be equally familiar with these texts. Michaels says, "Clearly the Jewish Scriptures are a major source for the author of 1 Peter, and an authority to which he appeals at decisive points."[54] The widespread use of Old Testament Scripture supports the thesis of a Jewish Christian audience.
3. Galatians 2:9 indicates that Peter's mission (along with those of James and John) was to the Jewish people. The recipients of the epistle of James are generally believed to have been Jewish Christians, so it would make sense that Peter's epistle would have been to Jewish Christians, as well.[55]

[52]Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 24.

[53]Lange, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, 8.

[54]Michaels, *1 Peter*, xli.

[55]E.g., see Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 28 and 63–

Peter was not trying to fool modern interpreters by writing as if he were writing to Jewish believers—he really was writing to Jewish believers.

Interpretive Implications for 1 Peter 2:4–10

Peter says that Jesus is the living stone (v. 4), the cornerstone (v. 6), the rejected stone (v. 7), and the stumbling stone (v. 8). The phrase, "living stone" (λίθον ζῶντα), is found in secular sources referring to unhewn stone in its natural state.[56] Perhaps Michaels is right when he suggests that "living" is being used by Peter to suggest that he is employing "stone" in a metaphorical sense. Nevertheless, it should be noted that according to Torah, the altar was to be built of unhewn, or "living," stones (Deut 27:5–6).[57] Here in 1 Peter 2, "house" is being used with special reference to the temple and altar. It is "for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (v. 5). This should be a clue that Peter is not using the "house" imagery in the same way Paul does in Ephesians 2:19–22 to signify the church of Gentiles and Jews who believe in Jesus.

So, what does Peter intend with this "house"? First it should be noted that "house" can, and often does, refer both to a building and to a family or household.[58] In 1 Samuel 7, David wanted to build a "house" for God in the sense of a temple. God promised instead to build a "house" for David in the sense of a dynasty. Witherington notes that "the image of house as temple certainly does not exclude the image of house as household or family."[59]

Second, it will be necessary to answer a prior question: Who has stumbled and who has rejected the salvation offered by the Rock of Israel? Peter ties together a number of Old Testament references that have to do with the stone of stumbling. Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 8:14, and Isaiah 28:16 are all used in 1 Peter 2:6–8. Each of these speaks directly of the Messiah of Israel, the Son of David. He is the direct fulfillment of these prophecies. Psalm 118:22, for example, is cited by Jesus (Matt 21:42–44; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17), alluded to by Paul (Rom 11:11), and quoted by Peter (Acts 4:11). Each of these are given in a context where the contrast is not between Jews and Gentiles, or between believers and pagans, but between the obdurate majority of Israel and the righteous remnant.

This is also seen in Isaiah 8. Following the inauguration of the judgment of spiritual blindness or obduracy on the majority of the nation in chapter 6, Isaiah encounters the king, who exemplifies the blindness he has just pronounced. He nevertheless calls forth the remnant and gives the object of hope and salvation in chapter 7, the virgin-born Immanuel. In chapter

64. The recipients of the Johaninne epistles are much more difficult to define.

[56]See Michaels, *1 Peter*, 98.

[57]Perhaps the stone of Dan 2:34, 45 is also relevant.

[58]For this latter usage, see Exod 16:31; 19:3 (of Jacob//sons of Israel); 40:38; Lev 10:6; 17:3, 8, 10; 22:18.

[59]Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 114–15.

8, the Lord provides instructions for Isaiah and his disciples who constitute the remnant of Israel. It is in this context that he speaks of the stone of stumbling, for the Lord will be a sanctuary for the remnant, but to the rest, He will become a "a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap" (v. 14, Isa 8:14).

Paul picks this up in Romans 11 and asks concerning the majority of the nation, "I say then they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous" (Rom 11:11). In verse 15, Paul refers to their "rejection" (ἀποβολὴ) of this "salvation [which] has come to the Gentiles" (v. 11).[60] Part of the nation has stumbled over Messiah, to be sure, but there is yet the certainty that God is still dealing with them, even in their unbelief. Paul says it is the "rest" of Israel, who were "hardened" (Rom 11:7). These are they who are used in opposition to the "remnant" of Israel (Rom 11:5). Here we have the only references in the New Testament where "stumble" and "rejection" are used together, outside of 1 Peter 2.[61]

In this pericope of 1 Peter, as in Psalm 118:22, it is clear that the contrast is not between Jews and Gentiles nor Christians and pagans, but it is between Jews who believe in Jesus and Jews who do not. This being the case, the "house" of verse five must refer to Jewish believers in Jesus. Fruchtenbaum says, "The 'house' is the Israel of God (Gal 6:16). The Israel of God is not comprised of the Church but of the Jewish believers. The term Israel of God is equivalent to the term the Remnant of Israel."[62] He adds, "In the New Testament, the Greek word for priesthood is found only twice: in this verse [v. 5] and again in verse 9. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the word for priesthood is also found only twice: Exodus 19:6 and 23:22, where it is used to describe Israel as a royal priesthood."[63] The conclusion, then, is that the "house" of 1 Peter 2:5 is not the same as the "temple" in Ephesians 2:19–22. Instead, it is speaking of the Jewish believers in Asia Minor who have joined the remnant of Israel that will be preserved in an unbroken chain until the redemption of the nation.

If 1 Peter, like the other General Epistles, was addressed to Jewish Christians, then in 2:9–10, Peter is saying that the remnant of Israel (i.e., Jewish Christians) have entered into the role God announced for the nation in Exodus 19:5–6. The nation was not able to assume this role following the Exodus from Egypt, but Paul reveals that it will in the future when the

[60]For more on the interpretation of Rom 11:15, see Jim R. Sibley, "Has the Church Put Israel on the Shelf? The Evidence from Romans 11:15" in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, (215), 577-81.

[61]See Rom 11:1, 11, and 15. The vocabulary is not the same in Romans 11 (ἀπώσατο, ἀποβολὴ/ἔπταισαν) and in 1 Peter 2:7–8 (ἀπεδοκίμασαν/προσκόμματος). The first set of words is not used together outside of Romans 11, neither is the second set of words used together outside of 1 Peter 2. Nevertheless, the concepts that they express are only used together in these two places.

[62]Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles*, 340.

[63]Ibid.

nation is reborn (Rom 11:11–27). In the meantime, the remnant of Israel is fulfilling this role through the redemption which is theirs "with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Pet 1:19). This is Israel's calling, and Paul insists that, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). Israel's calling and mission did not end with the coming of the Messiah, otherwise Paul would have used the past tense. Of course, Gentile Christians now partake of this salvation as engrafted branches (Rom 11:17–24), and enjoy the same spiritual blessings, but these realities do not justify a supersessionist reading of this text in 1 Peter.[64]

Some Theological Implications

Priesthood of the Believer

Some may believe that the significant doctrine of the priesthood of the believer is threatened by the interpretation of 1 Peter 2:4–10 given above. The priesthood of the believer is actually a phrase that suggests a cluster of related doctrinal truths, including the perspicuity of Scripture, soul competence, the essential equality of believers in the church, and the effectual prayer of the believer. Each of these can be fully justified on the basis of other texts. Certainly, these truths are not dependent upon 1 Peter 2:9–10. But what is lost when the priesthood of the believer is based upon this passage is its original significance regarding the remnant of Israel.

Supersessionism

Mountains of books and commentaries and file folders full of papers and articles, all reflecting erudite scholarship and prodigious effort are based upon the presumption that 1 Peter was addressed to Gentile Christians or to congregations of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Several authors have suggested that the letter should be interpreted in light of a controlling metaphor.[65] In fact, several different "controlling metaphors" have been suggested. Others believe the book is to be interpreted typologically. But if 1 Peter was written to the remnant of Israel, all of this is swept away.

In today's world, God's dealings with the Jewish people on the stage of current events, drawing them back from the four corners of the earth to the Land of Israel and to their own state, and the rapidly growing numbers of Jewish believers in Yeshua (Jesus) increasingly amplify the cognitive

[64]Ibid., 341.

[65]E.g., see Glenny, "The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2"; Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Troy W. Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter*, SBL Dissertation Series 131 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992); Andrew M. Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity in 1 Peter* (London: T&T Clark International, 2007); Torrey Seland, "παροικος και παρεπιδημος: Proselyte Characterizations in 1 Peter?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11 (2011): 239–40; etc. James M. Hamilton, Jr. claims that 1 Peter should be understood in terms of new-exodus imagery. Some of his interpretations seem forced, but even so, in his and other such attempts the application would make more sense if applied to Jewish believers. See James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 522–28.

dissonance inherent within supersessionist theology. If it were ever possible to make a credible case that the Jewish people were no longer uniquely relevant to God's purposes, that possibility is rapidly eroding.

Conclusion

The interpretations of, and conclusions based upon, 1 Peter are directly dependent on the question of the recipients of the epistle. Yet, strangely, there is seldom a rigorous review of the evidence. This article has attempted to suggest that such an investigation will indicate that the original readers were Jewish believers. This profoundly affects the epistle's interpretation. Just as when an old masterpiece is cleaned and restored, stripping away a supersessionist presupposition is sure to yield the surprising beauty intended by the author.

When 1 Peter is read in light of an original audience of Jewish believers in Jesus, nothing is lost, but much is gained. Reading this letter "over the shoulders" of the Jewish believers to whom it was originally addressed is deeply instructive for all believers today. Peter writes these Jewish believers as they are experiencing escalating persecution from both Jews and Gentiles, and he encourages them to endure faithfully and victoriously by living holy lives and by keeping their focus on Jesus, the Messiah, who died for them. This is the very message Jewish believers will need in times of future tribulation.