

## 1 Peter: Introduction

**Lesson 2:** There is nothing like it.

### Goal Today:

Our goal in this lesson is that we may be moved by the apostle's word to appreciate more fully the size of God's grace as shown by His choosing us, before history ever began, as members of the New Israel, which is the church as God's own people in a very special sense.

**Read:** 1 Peter 1:1-2

### The Origin

According to these verses (**1:1-2**) what is the church? Perhaps it would be better to ask, who is the church? What makes the church, your congregation, different from such organizations as the Rotarians, the Kiwanis, Optimists, etc.?

The church exists because God the Father drew up a blueprint for it long before history ever began.

It is one thing to draw up a blueprint; it is quite another to work it out. The latter task is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit, as the text indicates. He has been given the assignment called *sanctification*. What does that word mean? What this means is that the third person of the Trinity implements God the Father's choice of us, which was made way back in eternity. In this way the church, as the assembly of believers, is created and is present right here, in this place, where we gather around God's Word and Sacrament.

## Background

While, in a sense, the church is part of the “new” in the New Testament age, going back particularly to the first “new” Pentecost (see **Acts 2**), it has as its background the whole story of God’s dealings with His people during the days of the Old Testament. To remind us of this fact, the apostle applies to us three words which, in the Old Testament, are used in reference to Israel. They are the words *elect*, *strangers* (i.e., resident aliens), and *scattered*. Compare the words used in other versions.

All three concepts are used by the apostle to remind us that the church, as the new Israel, stands in succession to God’s ancient people. Thus we have a long history behind us. Our story goes back all the way to creation and to the fall of humankind. In particular, however, the story of the church has its roots in God’s gracious choice of Israel (see **Deuteronomy 7:6-8**) as His people, which, for much of its history, has lived in dispersion because of sin (see **Deuteronomy 4:27**). Hence, Israel of old, like Abraham, may properly be described as “a stranger” and “an alien” (see **Psalms 39:12**).

We must ask ourselves how these words describe us who belong to the church as the new Israel. In what sense are we modern-day Christians “aliens” like Abraham or Israel of old?

## Purpose

The triune God created the church to serve a particular purpose. That purpose is indicated in the words, “for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood.” This phrase is best understood in light of what we are told in **Exodus 24:3-8**. Which words in this **Exodus** passage spell out the meaning of *covenant*? It is important to note in what way and for what purpose God made Israel His covenant nation, because those very ideas are applied by the apostle to us of the church.

- Where does the word *covenant* or *testament* occur in our worship service?
  
- How is it connected there with blood, the blood of Jesus Christ?

With the Exodus reference in mind it is not difficult to see how the expression “sprinkled by His blood” applies to us. By Jesus’ death a new covenant was established once and for all. This part of our redemption was assigned to the second person of the Trinity: to seal our very special relationship to God by the shedding of His blood.

## Means

Compare the way a civic club gets its work done with the manner in which the church goes about her work. *What similarities can you think of? What differences are there? What is the unifying factor for each?*

The church has been entrusted with the apostolic Word. It is in this gathering of God's people that His grace and peace are at work. Both are "in abundance" to meet whatever needs arise to trouble God's people. Accordingly, Peter closed his salutation with the wish that this may continue to happen: that God's undeserved favor (grace) as well as the calm and splendor of the Messianic age (peace) may increase more and more. At the very outset of this epistle, Peter, therefore, reminds us that he was writing as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

## Discussion:

1. Some people have likened churches to drug stores: they are places you go to when you need help badly. Comment
2. Name a number of great nations in history that have perished since the days of the apostle, while the church continue her work amid the debris of history.
3. What do we mean when we say in the Nicene Creed, "I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church?"
4. What is the relationship between the general word *church* and *congregation*?