



The First Letter of Peter
Bible Study Session 8
1 Peter 2:9-10



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Greek NT

9 Ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς· 10 οἱ ποτε οὐ λαὸς νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ, οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

9 Ihr aber seid das erwählte Volk, das Haus des Königs, die Priesterschaft, das heilige Volk, das Gott selbst gehört. Er hat euch aus der Dunkelheit in sein wunderbares Licht gerufen, damit ihr seine machtvollen Taten verkündet. 10 Früher wart ihr nicht sein Volk; aber jetzt seid ihr das Volk, das Gott gehört. Früher galt euch nicht sein Erbarmen; aber jetzt habt ihr sein Erbarmen erfahren.

NRSV

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

NRSV

9 But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. 10 "Once you were not a people; now you are the people of God. Once you received none of God's mercy; now you have received his mercy."

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Introduction to Study.

This final subunit in the pericope of 2:1-10 brings the affirmations of spiritual status to a climax. By reaching back into the Hebrew Bible Peter finds a series of titles originally applied to covenant Israel by the prophets and re-applies them to the new covenant people of God, the believing church. This powerful affirmation of being God's very own people stands in stark contrast to the negative label of "the exiles of the Dispersion" used in 1:1. While the surrounding world may look down on the communities of believers, in God's eyes they are His very own people. No higher status can be found anywhere!

I. Context and Background¹

This single sentence in Greek is packed full of rich concepts, largely taken from the Israelite heritage in the Old Testament. The background aspects mostly center on the historical understanding of each of these titles as they were applied to ancient Israel.

a. Historical

External History. The copying of this text over the first eight centuries of the Christian era is relatively stable and consistent. The UBS 4th rev. ed. Greek New Testament does not list any variations of readings considered significant enough to impact the translation of this text into other languages. The only variation listed in the more detailed apparatus of the Nestle-Aland 27th ed. of the Greek New Testament is the omission of the pronoun αὐτοῦ (*his*) at the end of verse nine, so that the text reads εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν φῶς, "into the marvelous light." Only two ancient copies adopt this reading, neither of which is a major ancient copy of the New Testament: P⁷²

¹Serious study of the Bible requires careful analysis of the background and setting of the scripture passage. Failure to do this leads to interpretive garbage and possibly to heresy. Detailed study of the background doesn't always answer all the questions, but it certainly gets us further along toward correct understanding of both the historical and contemporary meanings of a text. This serious examination of both the historical and literary background of every passage will be presented in summary form with each of the studies.

and some copies of the Boharic Coptic translation.

Thus the reading of the current printed Greek texts represent with great certainty the original wording of this passage.

Internal History. The time / place markers in this sentence focus on the present spiritual status of Peter’s initial readers as believers in Christ. The one set of time markers is found in verse ten with “once...but now” (ποτε... νῦν δὲ). The shifting point between ‘once’ and ‘now’ is the conversion to Christ of the believer. The coming of Christ into the person’s life marks the transition from the former life to the present life. The qualities of contrast are normally spelled out in the details attached to both sides of the contrast. Here two sets of contrasts are attached to each era: 1) “once”: not a people, not objects of mercy; 2) “now”: God’s people, objects of mercy.

The five spiritual titles and one affirmation about believers used by Peter here have their background in the Old Testament with initial application to covenant Israelites.² Two key texts surface here:

Exodus 19:5-6. 5 Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be **my treasured possession** out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6 but you shall be for me **a priestly kingdom and a holy nation**. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.³

Isaiah 43:20-21. 20 The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to **my chosen people**, 21 **the people** whom I formed for myself **so that they might declare my praise**.⁴

To re-apply them to the believing community that included non-Jews was indeed shocking and considered rank heresy from the Jewish synagogue perspective. Yet Peter does not indicate that he is picking a fight with the synagogue here. Whether he saw the believing community with Gentiles as a ‘new Israel’ replacing the ‘old Israel’ or whether he saw the believing community being added to the ‘Israel of God’ is not indicated here or elsewhere in the letter. One can be certain, however, that from the synagogue perspective either one of these perspectives would have been vigorously rejected. Gentiles could be added to covenant Israel only by circumcision and a formal pledge to Torah obedience.⁵ And even then they would forever only have second class status as the people of God. For anyone to suggest that an alternative way existed would have quickly caused them to be labeled as heretics. But Peter expressly declares here that the only way to be the people of God is through accepting the cornerstone Jesus Christ, something most Jews refused to do.

b. Literary

Literary Form (Genre). Verses nine and ten do not fall into a distinct genre form, as a part of the letter body. They come somewhat close to a virtue list, but the honorific titles are not ethically oriented as are the qualities found in ancient virtue lists.⁶

Literary Context. As noted in the outline of First Peter on

²“All four of these titles of honor (or five, depending on how they are counted) appear to be adaptations of titles from either Exod 19:6 or Isa 43:20–21, and were therefore originally designations of Israel as the people of God (cf. the specific phrase, ‘people of God,’ in v 10). With the use of these titles, Peter makes explicit his basis for consistently addressing his Gentile Christian readers as if they were Jews (see Comment on 1:1).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 107.]

³LXX: ⁵καὶ νῦν ἐὰν ἀκοῆ ἀκούσητε τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς καὶ φυλάξητε τὴν διαθήκην μου, ἔσεσθέ μοι **λαὸς περιούσιος** ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν· ἐμὴ γὰρ ἐστὶν πᾶσα ἡ γῆ· ⁶ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι **βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα** καὶ **ἔθνος ἅγιον**. ταῦτα τὰ ῥήματα ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ. [*Septuaginta*: SESB Edition, ed. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), Ex 19:5–6.]

⁴LXX: ²⁰εὐλογήσει με τὰ θηρία τοῦ ἀγροῦ, σειρήνες καὶ θυγατέρες στρουθῶν, ὅτι ἔδωκα ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ὕδωρ καὶ ποταμούς ἐν τῇ ἀνύδρῳ ποτίσαι **τὸ γένος μου τὸ ἐκλεκτόν**, ²¹**λαόν μου**, ὃν περιποιησάμην **τὰς ἀρετάς μου διηγείσθαι**. [*Septuaginta*: SESB Edition, ed. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), Is 43:20–21.]

⁵Sometimes proselyte baptism was a third requirement, but not always.

⁶See my “New Testament Virtue Lists” for details at <http://cranfordville.com/NTVirtueLists.html>.

Outline of Contents in First Peter:

Praescriptio: 1:1-2

- **Superscriptio, 1:1a**
- **Adscriptio, 1:1b-2a**
- **Salutatio, 1:2b**

Proem: 1:3-12

- **Core, 1:3a**
- **Expansion, 1:3b-12**

Body: 1:13-5:11

- **Holy living 1:13-2:10**
 - **Ideals 1:13-25**
 - **Privileges 2:1-10**
- **Obligations 2:11-3:12**
 - **Civic 2:11-17**
 - **Haustafeln 2:18-3:7**
 - **Social 3:8-12**
- **Persecution 3:13-5:11**
 - **Encouragement 3:13-4:11**
 - **Explanation 4:12-19**
 - **Proper Conduct 5:1-11**

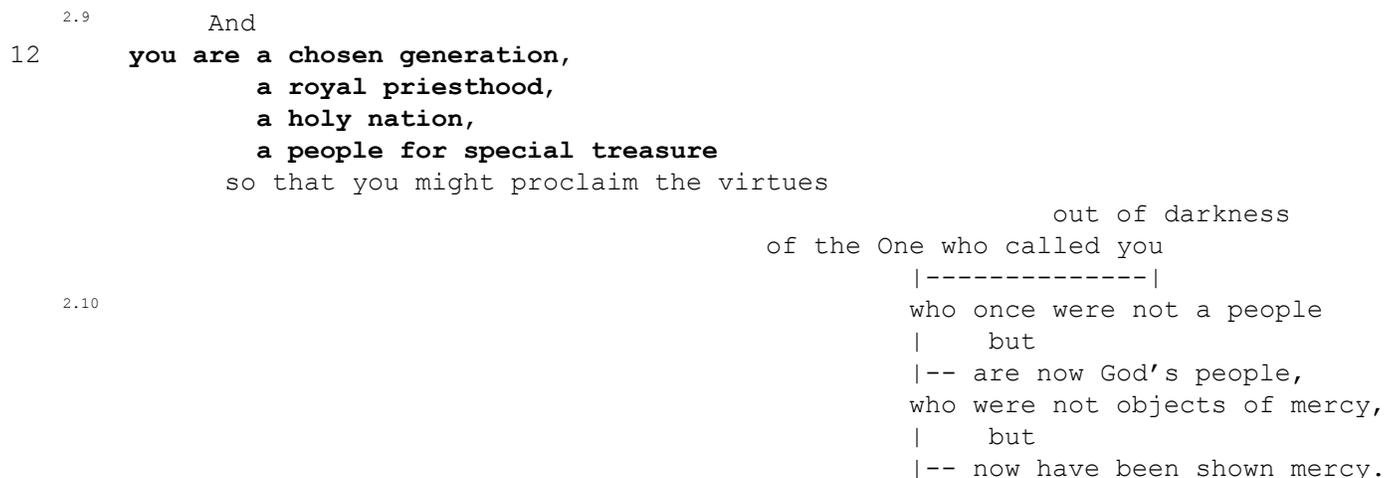
Conclusio: 5:12-14

- **Sender Verification, 5:12**
- **Greetings, 5:13-14a**
- **Benedictio, 5:14b**

the preceding page, 2:9-10 comes as the third sub-unit of verses one through ten, which itself is the final section of the first major division of the letter body in 1:13 - 2:10. This section is largely made up of a series of admonitions to certain standards of Christian living. Peter begins transitioning from admonitions to declarations in 2:4-8 and shifts completely to declarations in verses nine and ten. The Christian life then is depicted in terms of high standards of living as the very people of God Himself. As God's own people, we are called to live dedicated to our God and true to His character and standards of morality.

Literary Structure.

This single sentence is broken down into its component elements in the visual diagram below.



The main clause contains four honorific titles, highlighted in **bold type**, and then followed by the dependent purpose clause stating the intended mission for those enjoying such privilege before God. Peter comes back to two sets of additional declarations in the poetic structured relative clause in verse ten. These sets which are antithetical internally but are set in synonymous parallelism as sets affirm the foundation position of believers as the very people of God. The 'once not...but now are' sets have a more Gentile thrust, while the first four honorific titles in the main clause are more Jewish in their orientation.

II. Message

Our structuring of the study will focus attention on the position of believers before God and their purpose in this world aspects of this one sentence in the Greek text.

a. Our Position before God

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,... Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Ἕμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν,... οἱ ποτε οὐ λαὸς νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ, οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες.

Notes:

Placed in emphatic position is Ἕμεῖς δὲ, 'but you,' stressing the positive position of believers in contrast to those rejecting Christ as the cornerstone.⁷ What believers enjoy before God is not possessed by those who stumbled over Jesus as the cornerstone of God's new temple. Their disobedience to the message of the Gospel (τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθοῦντες) brought about their downfall. Their disobedience to the Word is defined mainly in terms of refusing to believe in Jesus (ἀπιστοῦσιν). But in contrast, the targeted readers of the letter had begun a life long pattern of believing in Jesus (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν). In consequence they had entered into a profound new existence of having standing before Almighty God, the very standing the unbelievers claimed

⁷“The words Ἕμεῖς δέ, picking up the ὑμῖν οὖν of v 7, introduce a series of honorific titles spelling out the τιμή of those who believe. If the ‘honor’ of v 7 was eschatological because of its connection with the οὐ μὴ κατασχνυθῆ of v 6b, its basis ‘in God’s sight’ (παρὰ δὲ θεῶ, v 4) implied a present dignity for Christian believers as well. Vv 9–10 unfold both the present and future aspects of this ‘honor.’” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 107.]

through their Jewish heritage but did not possess in light of their rejection of Jesus.

What was this standing? It is defined in two ways here. Primary honorific titles are set in the main clause and have a Jewish thrust to them. Secondary declarations are set in a dependent relative clause at the end with a more Gentile thrust to them.

Jewish oriented titles, primary.⁸ The first set of four titles⁹ have a strong Jewish heritage from the Old Testament and were titles, which covenant Judaism claimed exclusive ownership during the first century. Not clear from Peter's words whether his thinking was that the believing community now constituted God's new Israel, thus taking the place of covenant Israel from the Old Testament. It is possible to assume this as an implication of this text, but one must remember that the text does not state this in clear, direct language. And so whether this was in Peter's thinking or not remains uncertain, although the injection of the necessity of faith in Jesus as required of God's people would point towards 'replacement' thinking.

A chosen race, γένος ἐκλεκτόν.¹⁰ This label and the fourth one are taken from the LXX translation of Isaiah 43:20-21.¹¹ The noun γένος underscores the collective designation of a community and not individuals. Peter doesn't intend to label Christianity as a 'race.' The term γένος, although it possesses the meaning of race, is here used to simply designate a distinct group of people. The adjective ἐκλεκτόν specifies the divine choosing of the believing community for God's own purposes, and continues the theme of divine choosing begun in 1:1 and 2:4.¹²

⁸"In the last two verses of this section, the author now turns his attention once more to his readers, particularly in their corporate existence as a believing community. Using the Old Testament liberally, he ascribes to the Christian community the titles applied to Israel. The conclusion is inevitable that here the church is described as the new Israel, although the thought perhaps is not that the church has supplanted Israel, but that God's people should be what the church is now, namely, a community not bound to one nation or blood, but encompassing all nations and all peoples. But you contrasts the believers with the unbelievers referred to in the immediately preceding verses. What follows are four descriptions of the church, all taken from the Old Testament." [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 62.]

⁹"The relationship between the four expressions the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, and God's own people must be explicitly indicated in some languages, for example, 'you are the chosen race; you are also the King's priests, also the holy nation, also God's own people.' Otherwise, readers might understand that the believers were divided into four different groups rather than being related to God in these four supplementary ways." [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 64.]

¹⁰"*The chosen race* (literally 'a chosen race') is from Isaiah 43:20. For *chosen*, see 1.1 and 2.4, where it is applied to Christians and to Christ respectively. Here it is applied to the whole church. The implicit actor is God, since in the New Testament it is normally God who chooses (compare Phps 'God's chosen generation'). In the Old Testament, Israel is God's chosen people; here it is Christians as members of a believing community who are the chosen people of God. *Race* (Greek *genos*) includes the idea of blood relationship and is a term appropriate for the old Israel. When applied to the church as the new Israel, blood relationship is no longer in focus, but corporate unity; that is, Christians of all races are one family in union with Christ. The passive phrase *the chosen race* must be rendered in some languages as 'the people that God has chosen.' In certain instances the concept of race may be expressed as 'tribe,' that is to say, 'the tribe that God has selected.' In employing a word for 'chosen' or 'selected' it is important to avoid the implication of God having shown undue favoritism." [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 62.]

¹¹NRSV: 20 *The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.*

LXX: ²⁰εὐλογήσει με τὰ θηρία τοῦ ἀγροῦ, σειρῆνες καὶ θυγατέρες στρουθῶν, ὅτι ἔδωκα ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ὕδωρ καὶ ποταμούς ἐν τῇ ἀνύδρῳ ποτίσαι τὸ γένος μου τὸ ἐκλεκτόν, ²¹λαόν μου, ὃν περιποιησάμην τὰς ἀρετὰς μου διηγείσθαι. [Septuaginta: SESB Edition, ed. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), Is 43:20–21.]

¹²Quite interestingly, evidence suggests that this phrase γένος ἐκλεκτόν later beginning in the second century became a major label for Christianity, as Michaels notes:

Possibly (although by no means certainly) on the basis of either this passage or Isa 43:20 itself, γένος ("race" or "stock") became in the second century a collective designation for Christians throughout the world: e.g., *Mart. Pol.* 3.2: "the God-loving and God-fearing race of the Christians"; *Mart. Pol.* 14.1: "the whole race of the righteous" (cf. 17.1); *Diogn.* 1: "this new race" (καινὸν τοῦτο γένος); Tertullian, *ad Nat* 1.8 and *The Preaching of Peter* in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.5.41 ("the third race,," in distinction from Gentiles and Jews; cf. 1 Cor 10:32). Like *Mart. Pol.*, but unlike the others, 1 Peter has no particular interest in the Gentiles or Jews as "races" distinct from the community of Christians. His single focus at this point is the Christian community itself.

[J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 108.]

A royal priesthood, βασιλειον ιεράτευμα.¹³ This second label follows exactly the LXX text of Exodus 19:6, which differs from the Hebrew text.¹⁴ The label reaches back to the reference in 2:5, ιεράτευμα ἅγιον, but with the distinct emphasis upon a priesthood in the service of the king, i.e., God Himself. The believing community exists solely to serve God in ministry to others.

A holy nation, ἔθνος ἅγιον.¹⁵ The noun stresses the collective community of believers in terms of a ‘nation’ with the example of Israel as a nation in the background.¹⁶ The phrase ἔθνος ἅγιον is taken directly from Exodus 19:6 (LXX).¹⁷ Holy, ἅγιον, specifies not just the moral character of the community of believers, but more importantly it stresses being set apart to God, i.e., dedicated to God, for His own purposes.¹⁸ This label, similar in thrust to the previous one, heightens the emphasis on belonging to God in ministry and service. The very existence of the community depends on its belonging to God; otherwise, it would have no justification for existing.

God’s own people, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν.¹⁹ This final label comes from Isaiah 43:21 along with the first

¹³“*The King’s priests* translates the Greek phrase *basileion hierateuma* (literally ‘a kingdom of priests,’ or ‘a kingly priesthood’). The quotation is from Exodus 19:6. The difficulty here is that *baseleion* can be taken either as a noun or as an adjective. Arguments for it being a noun include: (1) The word *baseleion* is usually used as a noun both in religious and secular literature of that day. (2) If it is an adjective, then it would be more natural to have it after ‘priesthood’ rather than before it. (3) Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word, taken with ‘priesthood,’ is used as a noun. (Compare Rev 5:10, where the TEV translates ‘kingdom of priests.’ The word used in Revelation, however, is not ‘priesthood’ but ‘priests.’) As a noun, the meaning could be (a) a royal palace (compare Kelly ‘a royal house’), (b) kingdom, as territory, (c) a group of kings. To treat it as a noun would further mean that it should be taken separately from *hierateuma* (for example, Kelly ‘a royal house, a priesthood’). Most translations and interpreters, however, take *baseleion* as an adjective for the following reasons: (1) Since the other collective nouns in the verse are modified by adjectives, it is logical to expect an adjective modifying ‘priesthood.’ (2) It is more likely that *baseleion* in Exodus 19:6 is treated by the Septuagint translators as an adjective (TEV ‘you will serve me as priests’). As an adjective, the term then can mean ‘kingly,’ but more probably ‘royal,’ that is, priests in the service of the king, who in this instance is God. Most translations follow this interpretation. The idea of the church as the King’s priests harks back to 2:5, but with the focus not on function, but on privilege. In verse 5, every believer is a priest, but here, the whole church as a corporate body is a ‘priesthood.’ In most instances the mere use of capitalization of King’s will not indicate that this is a reference to God (this is certainly true in oral communication of the message). It may therefore be important to translate the King’s priests as “the priests of God who is King” or ‘the priests who serve God as King.’” [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 62-63.]

¹⁴“This phrase follows exactly the LXX of Exod 19:6, which differs in meaning from the MT, ממלכת כהני, ‘a kingdom of priests.’ If βασιλειον is understood as an adjective (i.e., the neuter of βασιλειος, BGD, 136), then βασιλειον ιεράτευμα is a ‘royal priesthood’ or ‘king’s priesthood’ (virtually reversing the relationship implied by the Hebrew, a ‘priests’ kingdom’ or ‘kingdom of priests’).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 108.]

¹⁵“*Holy nation* is also from Exodus 19:6. As in 1:15 and 2:4, *holy* characterizes the church’s unique relationship to God: it is holy because it is consecrated to God and set apart for his service. (Compare NEB ‘a dedicated nation’; JB ‘a consecrated nation’; also Mft, Knox.) In Exodus 19:6, the TEV translates the same expression as ‘a people dedicated to me alone.’ *Holy nation* may be rendered as ‘the nation dedicated to God’ or ‘the nation dedicated to serve God.’” [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 63.]

¹⁶“ἔθνος, like the other nouns in the series, is used with Israel in mind as the prototype. Although in Jewish literature and in the NT the plural τὰ ἔθνη means predominantly ‘Gentiles’ (in 1 Peter, cf. 2:12, 4:3), the singular ἔθνος is normally to be translated ‘nation’ and often refers to Israel (e.g., Luke 7:5; 23:2; John 11:48, 50–52; 18:35; Acts 10:22, 24:2, 10, 17; 26:4, 28:19; cf. ‘nation of Samaria’ in Acts 8:9). The beginnings of the transfer of the singular ἔθνος to the Gentile Christian movement can be glimpsed in Matt 21:43, in Paul’s use of Deut 32:21 LXX in Rom 10:19, and in the present passage.” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 109.]

¹⁷NRSV: **but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.**

LXX: ὑμεῖς δὲ ἕσεσθέ μοι **βασιλειον ιεράτευμα** καὶ **ἔθνος ἅγιον.**

¹⁸The concept of ‘holy’, ἅγιος, -ία, -ον, is a significant theme in First Peter: 1:12, 15, 16; 2:5, 9; 3:5. See 1:2, ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος, ‘being made holy by the Spirit,’ which sets the definition for the concept.

¹⁹“*God’s own people* is literally ‘a people for possession,’ an allusion to Exodus 19:5 (RSV ‘my own possession among all peoples’); Malachi 3:17 (RSV ‘my special possession’); and Isaiah 43:21 (RSV ‘The people whom I formed for myself’). The Old Testament background of the expression indicates that God is the implied subject of ‘possession,’ and most translations make this fact explicit (for example, NEB ‘a people claimed by God for his own’; Knox ‘a people God means to have for himself’; Mft ‘the people who belong to him’; GECL ‘God has chosen you to be his people’; SPCL ‘a people that belongs to God’). The word for

label. It has an eschatological thrust pointing to God's own possessing of His people in final judgment.²⁰ That the believing community indeed belongs to God will be decisively demonstrated in final judgment.

When brought together in such a list as here, the collective impact is substantial. The believing community enjoys a status before God that equals, or surpasses, that of ancient Israel. Privilege beyond description are implicit in these titles, taken together. This new community being brought together through common commitment to Christ enjoys blessing and privilege unimaginable in the non-Jewish world of Peter's time. And the ultimate affirmation of that privilege will come in final judgment when God takes full possession of this community and brings them into His eternal presence.

Gentile focused titles, secondary.²¹ All of this comes together fully at the end of the sentence with two sets of contrasts of the pre-Christian status of Peter's Gentile readers to their new position before God now through Christ.²²

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people, οἱ ποτε οὐ λαὸς νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ. The first of the two contrasts captures the essence of the beginning four labels: the believing Gentiles have become the "people of God."²³ The amazing aspect of this is the reality of the ethnic diversity of the Gentiles who belonged to the believing communities of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1). Greeks, Romans, Parthians, Persians, Jews etc. were just a few of the many ethnic groups who inhabited this region in the first Christian century. Although they possessed ethnic identity by way of language, customs etc., they had no collective identity across these ethnic heritages. But in Christ they had come together to form the people here is *laos*, a term used for Israel in the Old Testament to describe its intimate relationship with God; this term is now used of the Christian community. What is being emphasized here is that the Christians now have a relationship to God which is different from that of non-Christians: they are God's people and are completely dedicated to him. In the phrase God's own people there is an emphasis in the Greek text upon the corporate unity and entity which is involved. It is not simply God's 'persons.' The closest equivalent of God's own people may simply be 'the nation that belongs to God' or 'God's tribe.'" [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 63-64.]

²⁰"λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, 'a people destined for vindication.' This phrase, together with the whole clause that follows, recalls Isa 43:21 LXX (not, as in Titus 2:14, the λαὸς περιούσιος of Exod 19:5). Peter has changed Isaiah's λαὸν μου ὃν περιποιήσάμην to the more future-oriented λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν. In view of Peter's characteristic use of εἰς in various eschatological expressions in 1:3-5, and especially the εἰς σωτηρίαν of 1:5 and 2:2, περιποίησις could be plausibly understood as a synonym for σωτηρία (cf. BGD, 650.1) in the sense of future or final salvation (cf. S. Halas, Bib 65.2 [1984] 254-58, who translates accordingly, 'people destiné au salut' [258])." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 109.]

²¹"The meaning of darkness and light is here made clear, as Peter contrasts the previous condition of his readers to their present state. In doing this, he draws heavily from the book of (Hosea 2:23; 1:6, 9; 2:1). You were not God's people is literally 'you were no people.' In Hosea 1:10, Hosea's son is called lo-ammi ('not my people') to show God's displeasure against Israel, but in 2:1 (or 1:12 in the Hebrew text) the name has been changed to 'my people,' and in 2:23b (or 2:22 in Hebrew) we have 'and I will say to Not my people, 'you are my people ...' (RSV). This Old Testament background clearly indicates that 'no people' should be understood in terms of the believers' relationship to God; they were 'no people' simply because they were not yet God's people. As already noted, the word for people here (*laos*) is used only of Israel in the Old Testament; its usage for the Christian church indicates that Christians now have the same intimate relationship with God as Israel had in the past." [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 65.]

²²"The plural article οἱ picks up the plural 'you' of the preceding verse, while ποτε, used elsewhere in 1 Peter in connection with well-known events from Israel's past (cf. 3:5, 20), refers here to the past life of the epistle's readers in idolatry and paganism (cf. the πρότερον of 1:14). The paired adverbs, ποτε ... νῦν, are used not to underscore a parallel between biblical times and present experience (like the ποτε ... νῦν of 3:20-21) but to underscore a contrast between the past and present status of Gentile Christians before God (like the ποτε ... νῦν δὲ of Eph 2:11-13 (cf. Eph 2:2,3))." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 112.]

²³"The phrase οὐ λαὸς echoes the LXX (οὐ λαὸς μου) of Hos 1:9; 2:1 [1:10] (cf. 2:25 [23]). The μου of the LXX is dropped because God is not represented as the speaker (cf. the γέος ἐκλεκτόν of v 9, in relation to Isa 43:20 LXX), and the effect of the omission is to generalize what Peter is saying. Not only were his readers not the people of God, they were not a 'people' (in the sense of a corporate community) at all. For the positive side of the contrast, Peter bypasses the highly appropriate phrase from the LXX of Hos 2:1 [1:10], 'sons of the living God' (υἱοὶ θεοῦ ζῶντος; cf. Rom 9:26) in favor of the simpler λαὸς θεοῦ (cf. the positive λαὸς μου of Hos 2:25 [23]). With this he echoes the λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν of v 9 and provides a kind of postscript and summary to the four titles of honor listed in v 9a." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 112.]

one people of God, thus bridging all their diversity into a single community. For everyone living in a highly pluralistic society, the difficulty of succeeding in bridging such diversity is enormous. But it was accomplished in Christ, and the result was a unified ‘people of God.’ For Jews this label was assumed in the midst of their ethnic unity. But Peter’s declaration here alludes to something far more significant. Out of the nations of the world, God was forming a single people for Himself.

Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy, οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες.²⁴ In their pre-Christian existence they were not being shown mercy by God. But now in their Christian conversion, they became objects of divine mercy through Christ.²⁵ Closely linked to becoming a people of God is the experience of receiving God’s mercy in conversion. Forgiveness of sin, the showing of divine favor, the shielding of the sinner from divine wrath -- all these and more are bundled together in the concept of God’s mercy being shown to the community of believers.

b. Our purpose in the world

in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς κατέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς·

Notes:

One should carefully note that these privileges given to the believing community had an important goal in them. That of the community becoming a shining witness of the greatness of the God who worked in their midst. Spiritual privilege never comes because individuals or groups of individuals deserve them. They never are given because individuals work sufficiently to earn them. Spiritual privilege comes because God has something in mind that He wants to accomplish through them.

The purpose clause introduced by ὅπως states the divine objective behind granting such privilege to the believing community. Their mission is to ‘proclaim’ the powerful actions of God. The verb ἐξαγγέλλω in its single NT use here has the idea of give a report. In its LXX usage it uniformly suggests collective worship of God as a public means of affirming the actions of God in behalf of His people.²⁶ Through worship the believing

²⁴οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες, ‘once, destitute of mercy, you have now received mercy.’ The language of ‘mercy’ (cf. 1:3) also comes from Hosea (i.e., οὐκ—ἠλεημένη, 1:6, 8 LXX; ἐλεήσω τὴν οὐκ—ἠλεημένην, 2:25 [23]), but the structure of the clause, like that of the previous one, is Peter’s own, built around the implied contrast of ποτε and νῦν. The repetition of οἱ requires a masculine plural participle in place of the feminine singular of the LXX (which reflected simply the particulars of the Hosea story). This first participle is perfect passive, as in the LXX, but to express the positive side of the contrast Peter shifts to the aorist, in keeping with his fondness for aorist passives (whether participles or indicatives) with ἄρτι (1:6) or νῦν (1:12; 2:25) to refer to present Christian experience (cf. also 1:20; 2:21a, 24b; 3:6, 9).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 112.]

²⁵ἐλεέω fut. ἐλεήσω; 1 aor. ἠλέησα, impv. ἐλέησον. Pass.: 1 fut. ἐλεηθήσομαι; 1 aor. ἠλεήθην; pf. pass. ptc. ἠλεημένος (s. ἔλεος; Hom.+)
to be greatly concerned about someone in need, have compassion/mercy/pity τινά on or for someone (Diod S 12, 30, 4; 20, 4, 6 τοὺς πολίτας; PCairZen 145, 12 [256 B.C.]; UPZ 78, 24 [159 B.C.]; PFay 106, 16 [II A.D.] ἀξιῶ σε ἐλεῆσαί με; PFlor 378, 3; TestJob; Philo) Hv 1, 3, 2. τὸν σύνδουλον **Mt 18:33**. Abs. feel pity MPol 2:2. Esp. *show mercy to someone, help someone (out of compassion)* **Mt 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30f** (on κύριε ἐλέησον cp. Epict. 2, 7, 12 [TZahn, D. Stoiker Epikt. u. s. Verh. z. Christentum 2 1895, 46f; FDölger, Sol salutis 1920, 62f]; Ps 6:3; 9:14 al.; EPeterson, Εἶς θεός 1926, 164–67; Achilles Tat. 3, 5, 4 ἐλέησον δέσποτα Πόσειδον; Jos., Ant. 9, 64 δέσποτα ἐλέησον); **Mk 10:47f; Lk 16:24; 17:13; 18:38f**; D 2:7; **do acts of compassion** **Ro 12:8**; τινά **to someone** (Chariton 1, 9, 5; Celsus 2, 71) ApcPt 15:30; B 20:2; D 5:2. Of God’s mercy (Epici p. 43 B.=p. 20 K.: Cypria Fgm. 1, 3 Ζεὺς ἐλέησε; Hes., astron. Fgm. 182 Rz.: Ἡφαιστος; Phanodemus [IV B.C.]: 325 Fgm. 14b Jac.: Artemis; Menand., Epitr. 855, 874 S. [535, 554 Kō.] θεῶν τις ὑμᾶς ἠλέησε; Diod S 24, 12, 2 δαίμονιου ἐλεήσαντος; UPZ 78, 24 [159 B.C.] of Isis, the θεὰ θεῶν: ἐλέησον τὰς διδύμας; Jos., Ant. 11, 1; SibOr 3, 628); **Mk 5:19; Phil 2:27; Ro 9:15** (Ex 33:19), **16, 18; 11:32**; 1 Cl 18:2 (Ps 50:3); 59:4; 2 Cl 1:7; B 3:5 (on the acc. of the thing cp. Diod S 18, 25, 2); Dg 9:2; AcPlCor 1:6. Pass. **find or be shown mercy** (PsSol 7:6; 15:13; ὑπὸ κυρίου 16:15; Appian, Hann. 28 §119 ἐλεεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τινος, Bell. Civ. 4, 13 §52) **Mt 5:7; Ro 11:30f; 1 Ti 1:13, 16**; IEph 12:1; 1 Cl 56:16. οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες **who once had not found mercy, but now have found it 1 Pt 2:10**. Of a congregation ἠλεημένη that has found mercy (cp. Hos 1:6) IRo ins; IPHld ins; ISm ins; **receive as a gracious gift, be favored with** ἠλεημένος ὑπὸ κυρίου πιστὸς εἶναι (Herm. Wr. 13, 7 ἐλεηθεῖς ὑπὸ τ. θεοῦ) **1 Cor 7:25**; cp. **2 Cor 4:1**; IRo 9:2; IPHld 5:1. Also s. ἐλεάω.—DELG s.v. ἔλεος. M-M. EDNT. TW. Spicq. [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 315.]

²⁶ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε, ‘to sound the praises,’ echoes to some degree the τὰς ἀρετὰς μου διηγείσθαι of Isa 43:21b. Peter, in keeping with his rather free treatment of this LXX passage, has replaced διηγείσθαι with ὅπως ... ἐξαγγείλητε. Elliott argues that both terms involve preaching to the world in the sense of “proclaiming the mighty acts of God” (42), but D. L. Balch

community is to celebrate God's mighty actions by recounting them and affirming them as praise to God.

What is it that they celebrate? τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς -- this is our assignment.²⁷ The content of this is focused on what God has done, more than on who God is. The LXX background of τὰς ἀρετὰς is more significant than the Greek philosophical heritage.²⁸ These mighty actions of God are specified in the dependent clause, "who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The Aorist tense of καλέσαντος alludes to the moment of conversion when those coming to Christ moved from spiritual darkness to the spiritual light of God.²⁹ The full illumination of divine light, of course, will happen in final judgment when the believing community is carried into the splendors of Heaven.

Wow! What we have been given in Christ, as well as what we anticipate on that final day, should motivate us to obedience and praise of our God. The believing community is called by God to this very end! God help us move toward that.

These two sets of affirmations both bring to a close the discussion of the letter body up to this, as well as set the stage for the subsequent emphases beginning in verse 11.³⁰ This realization is important not only for understanding what has led up to v. 10 in 1:13-2:10, but also in what will follow in the subsequent text beginning in 2:11.

(Domestic Code, 133) replies that 'in contexts where ἐξαγγέλλω refers to 'proclaiming' the praises, deeds, righteousness, or works of God, the proclaiming is always to God in worship' (cf. Pss 9:15[14]; 55:9[56:8]; 70[71]:15; 72[73]:28; 78[79]:13; 106[107]:22; 118[119]:13, 26; Sir 18:4; also Philo, Plant. 128)." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 110.]

²⁷τὰς ἀρετὰς (cf. Isa 43:21 LXX, for the Hebrew הַלְלָהּ, 'praise' or 'glory') does not refer to God's 'virtues' or ethical qualities in an abstract sense but to his praiseworthy deeds (i.e., 'praises,' BGD, 106.2; cf. τὰς ... δόξας in 1:11, the 'glorious things' planned and accomplished for Jesus Christ after his sufferings). What Peter speaks of elsewhere as 'glorifying God' (2:12; 4:11, 14b, 16) is here described as 'sounding his praises' for what he has done (cf. Isa 42:12 LXX, where τὰς ἀρετὰς αὐτοῦ ... ἀναγγελοῦσιν parallels δώσουσιν τῷ θεῷ δόξαν). What God has done is immediately defined (in the participial phrase that follows) by who he is." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 110-11.]

²⁸The Greek philosophical heritage understood the term as abstract virtues, i.e., character qualities. But the LXX uses the term for the Hebrew הַלְלָהּ meaning praiseworthy actions by God. It is that sense of the term that Peter intends here. Note Michaels comments in the above footnote 27.

²⁹"In this passage God's call is 'out of darkness into his marvelous light.' The 'darkness' of which Peter speaks is the same as the 'ignorance' (1:14) that belonged to his readers' Gentile past (cf. 'the empty way of life that was your heritage,' 1:18). It was the darkness of not being a people and of not knowing the mercy of God (v 10). What is the 'marvelous light'? The word θαυμαστὸν, possibly suggested to Peter's mind by the θαυμαστή of Ps 117[118]:23 in the immediate context of one of his preceding quotations (cf. Matt 21:42 // Mark 12:11), serves to heighten the contrast between light and darkness, but what is the nature of the contrast itself? Is it a contrast of 'then' and 'now' (cf. ποτε ... νῦν, v 10) or between 'then' and the final day of salvation (cf. the εἰς περιποίησιν of the previous clause and the εἰς σωτηρίαν of v 2)? Is the Christian community living in the 'marvelous light' of God, or waiting for it to dawn?

"Conversion from paganism to Christianity was commonly viewed by the early Christians as a passage from darkness to light (cf., e.g., Acts 26:18; 2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:12-13; 1 Clem 36.2, 59.2; Barn. 14.5-7), so that believers in Christ viewed themselves in some instances as 'light' (Eph 5:8-14) or at least as already living in the light (1 Thess 5:4-5; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:9-11). In 1 Peter, however, the phrase, 'into his marvelous light,' more likely belongs to the exalted language by which the author characteristically heralds the last day (cf. 'an indestructible, incorruptible, and unfading inheritance,' 1:4; 'rejoice with inexpressible and glorious delight,' 1:8; 'so that when his glory is revealed you may rejoice all the more,' 4:13; 'and when the one great Shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory,' 5:4)." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 111.]

³⁰"Taken together, vv. 9-10* are both climax²⁴⁹ and transition. As climax of the passage that has addressed itself to the nature of the community and its faith,²⁵⁰ it points out that those who suffer in their society as exiles and aliens are in fact the true people of God.²⁵¹ As transition it prepares the chosen community for the hostile confrontation with its antagonistic environment by assuring it that whatever happens in that confrontation, it remains God's own and chosen people. Armed with that assurance, the community can face its painful encounter with an increasingly malevolent society." [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 168.]