

## Prayers

### To God

*Pray for hope, ask the Lord God to give His people hope, and pray that the church will become a place where God is worshipped and where people outside the church know what is happening within it.*

### For myself

**Thank You, Jesus, for Your love by which I am continually blessed and saved. You are doing things for me constantly and I barely know what or how; You are keeping me alive, You are leading me in the decisions I take, and You are constantly holding me in the palms of Your hands. So give me the grace, I pray, to recognise all You are doing for me, and give you thanks throughout my day!  
AMEN**

### For others

*Weekly theme: the beauty of life*

*We do not always recognise the beauty of our surroundings, whether in the natural order or in the stranger beauty of those ways that our landscape and our surroundings have been affected by 'human' development; that is, roads, buildings, and more. Pray for the insight to see beauty wherever God has placed it, and delight in it.*

## Meditation

*(a blessing)*

May Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His life for all,  
Bless, preserve and keep you from the Evil One.

May the Lord deliver you from the tyranny of the world,  
And from the sinfulness that fosters anger and greed.

May the God who made everything, make you new again,  
Remaking your mind and spirit in the image of love.

May the Spirit of God, who is ever active around you,  
Inform and direct you towards everything that is good.

Now to Him who is your strength, your joy and your salvation,  
Be all glory, all honour, all power and majesty. forever.

# Bible Passage

## 1 Peter 2:9-12

<sup>9</sup> *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you might declare the supreme work of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* <sup>10</sup> *Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

<sup>11</sup> *Dear friends, who live in the world as strangers and exiles, I urge you to keep yourselves free from worldly passions, which battle against your soul.* <sup>12</sup> *Live such good lives among the Gentiles, so that even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and give glory to God on the day of visitation.*

## Review

The first half of this fascinating passage (2:9-10) is Peter's classic description of the Church, and the second half is an equally classic description of God's call to His people to live 'good lives' (2:12). Parts of this passage are often quoted because it is rich in meaning, and it connects with much O.T. Scripture and in particular the prophet Hosea (2:10). As with the whole of 1 Peter, everything he says is succinct and memorable, as befits a sermon to newly baptised converts.

Our passage speaks to all God's people and not merely to individuals, so we must remember this as we read. Peter's point is that where God previously chose the descendants of Abraham to be His people, this great privilege now belongs to those who have responded to God's call by faith. So everything true of Israel is now true of the church. Now Israel had been given the holy, priestly task of representing God to the world, and be a '*light to the nations*' (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6), but they had failed. She had not done God's work of bringing light into a world of darkness (2:9 - see Psalm 18:28, 139:12, Isaiah 9:2 etc.), it had been done by Christ (2:4-8). Peter emphasises this with a quote from Hosea which was known far better to the early church than to us, because it is a prophecy of this extraordinary transformation of God's will; '*once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God ...*' (2:10).

Peter now calls on his hearers to reflect this transformation in their lives. Verses 11 and 12 encourage them to separate themselves from '*worldly passions*' (2:11); he knows that unless these things are fought, they will create strife within. Peter does not say here how to do this, but his general answer is found throughout his letter, which encourages the Christian to be immersed in the things of God and content in Christ. he knew that throughout Old Testament history, God's people came closest to their Lord not when settled in the Promised Land, but when they were slaves in Egypt, or struggling in the wilderness, or evicted from Jerusalem and exiled in Babylon. In the new world order established by Christ, God's people would have no earthly home, they would live in the world '*as strangers and exile*' (2:11).

Again, the last verse has a Biblical background, though we may not spot it. In Abraham's days, God led this great man to recognise the godliness and goodness of a priest called Melchizedek (Gen. 14), to whom he brought a tithe offering after doing a good deed for God. Melchizedek's story was well known in the early church as an example of God's blessing resting upon good people outside of Israel, so Peter encouraged his hearers to live '*good*

*lives*', and like this great ancient saint, '*give glory to God ...*' (2:12). Remember, living a good life within the world does not save the soul, but it is what God calls His people to do!

## Going Deeper

### Notes on the text and translation

#### V9

The phrase 'royal priesthood' (Greek 'basileon hierateuma'), translates equally well as a 'kingdom of priests'. See text for a discussion of the significance of this strange phrase.

#### V9 **'supreme work'**

Other translations:

*'declare the praises'* (NIV)

*'proclaim the mighty acts'* (NRSV)

Where I have translated the passage 'the supreme work', you will find that most translations are different. The original Greek word 'aretas', has its origins in the idea of 'moral excellence', but as applied to God here, it means His great work in redemption and salvation, no less. It is tempting to use 'the Gospel' as a translation, but because the Greek for Gospel is not used, I have avoided it. The expression 'the supreme work' encompasses all God's redeeming work.

#### V10

This verse is a reworked quote from Hosea 2:23 (also 1:6,9, 2:1). Some translations use quotation marks, but I have not done this as it is not an exact quote, and all we are asked to see is the clear general connection with the story of Hosea.

#### V11 **'worldly passions'**

Other translations:

*'sinful desires'* (NIV)

*'desires of the flesh'* (NRSV)

The phrase 'worldly passions' translates two Greek words 'sarkikon epithumion', and the second word is a general word referring to worldly lusts, longings, passions or even covetousness. It has a very wide range of meaning.

#### V12 **'day of visitation'**

Other translations:

*'the day He visits us'* (NIV)

*'when he comes to judge'* (NRSV)

The last three words; 'day of visitation' are not found in the New Testament very often. The Greek word for 'visitation' is 'episcopos' which is also used of the office of a bishop (see 1 Tim 3:1). However, it carries the meaning of God's presence amongst His people. This, of course, is partially true now, but in this

passage, it does appear to refer to the day when God 'visits' again, i.e. the second coming.

## ***Further Comments***

### ***A chosen, holy people. (2:9)***

It is perhaps natural that Peter should present the converts he was addressing with a high ideal of the church. They had not made a casual commitment to a self interest society, but a life-changing pledge to God to be His people and to do His will, and it is not surprising that Peter used key words from the Old Testament to describe their calling. They were God's new people who replaced those who had stumbled (see 2:4-8), but the nature of their calling was the same as for those who had gone before.

The first phrase is 'you are a chosen people'. Peter had already used the word 'chosen' in his letter before; in 1:2 and 2:4. In the first of these (1:2), Peter emphasised that God always chose people for a purpose, essentially to be witnesses to Jesus Christ within the world. The people of Old Testament times had been called to be witnesses to God and be a blessing for the whole world, but they had failed in their task. Now that the Messiah had come, the new 'chosen people' were to be witnesses to Jesus because it was through Him that people would come to know God. In 2:4 it is Jesus Himself who is called 'chosen' for this very reason, and the word 'chosen' serves to remind all God's people that they are bound to Christ. Christ is chosen by God to bring salvation to the world, and now he has ascended, the church is chosen by God to continue and fulfil this task.

### ***Royal priesthood***

The work of God's people is described by the wonderful expression 'a royal priesthood'. Priesthood is a word which can conjure up a picture of individual church leaders, but there is no doubt that by addressing a group of converts after baptism in this way, Peter clearly regarded all of God's people as priests! Yesterday, we learned that priesthood means both representing God to people and people to God; and today Peter emphasises in this text that all God's people are called to this task, the church represents God to the world and the world to God. If we take the translation 'royal priesthood' (see notes above) then this must be by the royal command of God, the King. The alternative translation 'kingdom of priests' simply confirms that all God's people take part in this priesthood without exception. Perhaps we need to read this both as a 'royal priesthood' and a 'kingdom of priests'!

### ***Holy nation***

The last designation in verse 9 is this, the church is a 'holy nation'. The word 'holy' is full of meaning, but at its heart, it means 'set apart' for the purpose God has intended. People naturally think of the word 'holy' as meaning 'pure' because God is pure and holy, but it is important to understand this sense of being special and set apart for a specific task. God has called all of His people to be one nation with one purpose, and although in reality we may fail, this does not stop God continually calling His people. No-one in church becomes holy by 'doing things properly in worship', for example, or getting everything right. We are made holy in the fulfilment of our call to be witnesses of Christ and the Gospel to the world.

### ***Transformation (2:10)***

All the titles of God's people which previously applied to the Jewish people have now been transferred to the Church, and Peter now quotes the famous prophecy of Hosea 2:23; 'I will say to "Not my people", "You are my people", and He shall say "You are my God"', but because this text is rather hard to understand, he part interprets it by using other parts of the prophecy of Hosea (1:6,9; 2:1) in order to make the meaning plain. Hosea's devastating prophecy told the people of Israel (of the northern Kingdom) that because of their sins they had counted themselves out of God's covenant blessings; however, Hosea knew that

because of His faithfulness, God would find a way of redeeming this catastrophe and creating a new people who would return to the Lord and keep His covenant. He never lived to see this day himself, but Peter was happy to declare that this prophecy had now come true through 'Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light' (2:9). Yet again, Peter was using the Old Testament to make his basic point that the Church was now the 'People of God', and therefore the recipient of God's mercy.

### ***A people who are prepared to do what is right (2:11,12)***

The idea of living in this world as 'strangers' is one which is hard for most people today to grasp (2:11). Most of us are fully committed to living and raising families where we find ourselves and in the culture in which we are born, and we naturally find it easy to spiritualise verses such as these by saying that we live half in this world and half in heaven by means of our heavenly citizenship. This world is for now, we reckon, and heaven is for what comes next, and the two come together spiritually in our faith.

However, this is not what this passage says. By worldly passions, Peter does not mean evil desires, otherwise he would say so. The word he uses refers to the normal passions and longings which govern the lives we naturally create for ourselves and our families, whether culturally, financially, or socially. Most people have a natural tendency to try and find permanence and security, and create a 'home' which reflects ourselves. But by using the example of the nomadic forefathers, Peter encourages Christians to think of their life as fundamentally transient, not permanent. He does not identify this or that as wrong but rather, he suggests making sure that the heart is set on heaven and not on earthly things, just as Jesus did in His own teaching (see Matt 6:25-34 for example).

### ***Motives - and doing what is right***

This is the source of the goodness which Peter suggests will win over the Gentiles, and the reason is simple. If we are motivated in our actions by the same selfish desires as everyone else, then we will not stand out and therefore have no message. If our actions in this world come from different motives because we do not worry about the things of this world and know we can trust in God, then what we do will appear very different to other people, and if we are following our Lord, then we will show Christ to others through what we do. People (Gentiles – 2:12) may not like this, but when Christ comes, they will have to admit that we were doing what was right!

## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***Being ready for Christ's call and for action***

It is hard for us to try and picture how we should live in the light of the blessing of being God's people, but Peter's call to live 'as strangers and exiles' is powerful. The true call for every Christian is to be ready at Christ's command, willing to follow Him wherever and at whatever cost. In this sense our lives are indeed transient, and we never have a complete home here on earth, knowing that the only complete home we ever have will be in heaven with the Lord.

This whole idea is frightening to many people within the church. However, it is my experience that it is most frightening to people who have found security in this world, and part of that security is going to church on Sunday's and having a group of people to trust and love. The only trouble is that this is not the life of Christ that God has called us to, and those who are comfortable with their lives will find it hard to be a 'chosen nation, a royal priesthood, a

holy nation', simply because when God asks about doing certain things, the answer will be no if it cuts across earthly or personal security.

### ***Being on the move ...***

I write about this out of concern, because within settled churches, self-centred faith is one of the big reasons why churches fail to grow or die. The whole of scripture asks God's people to be a people on the move and aware of their transient life. Sometimes God will give us stability, perhaps for the sake of our children and their upbringing in a troubled world, for example. But the call to us all is to be available to Him for the work of the Kingdom. All those who have found the truth of this call of God will testify that the security we have in Christ means far more than any security this world can offer, but unfortunately, many people who call themselves Christians today do not know this blessing; and it is the true blessing of being the 'People of God'.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Take a week to think about this passage of scripture, dwelling on it and exploring what it means for you. Go out and walk by yourself and think through what it means to live knowing that this life is passing and not permanent.
- Discuss this passage with your spouse or with a close friend, and find out whether they understand this passage in the same as you do

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Which part of this great passage appeals to you most, and helps you feel part of the worldwide church of God?
2. Do you agree with me that this passage exposes ideals that our churches today would be unwilling to put into practice?
3. Have you ever known anyone observe the good works of the church and be attracted to it as a consequence? How can you make your church fellowship be attractive?

## **Final Prayer**

Creator God, I do not understand why the world has become so full of the sin and evil I see around me. Give me the courage to face up to reality and confront evil wherever I find it, in Jesus' name; for Jesus has won the victory over all evil, and in Him I have total confidence. Thank You, Lord, AMEN