

Citizens of Heaven  
Rev. Dr. Eric Kennaugh  
Immanuel, Batavia

This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace. 1 Peter 1:1-2 (NLT)

Peter's letter is directed to "God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in [the world]." The English Standard version says, "to the elect exiles." Peter begins his letter by reminding his hearers who they truly are. They are not citizens of the world hoping for a place in heaven. They are citizens of heaven living away from their true home while they are in this world. So often we get our identity backwards. We think of ourselves as Americans first and Christians second, when the truth is we are citizens of God's kingdom first and foremost. It reminds me of when Paul was in jail in Philippi and, after a miracle that frightened the town council, they asked Paul to leave (Acts 16). Paul refused to go because he was a Roman citizen and they could not treat a Roman citizen that way. The council came out groveling for forgiveness. Because Paul was a Roman citizen, his father was Roman and his mother a Jewess, he had rights and privileges far beyond those of other men. The same is true for you. As a citizen of heaven, you have rights and privileges from your Heavenly Father that far exceed those of other people in the world. You have the right to forgiveness from God and the right to offer it to others (Matt 16:19). You have the right to an estate in God's kingdom, a room in His mansion (John 14). You have the right to divine protection, guidance and care. You have not lost your rights just because you live outside of your homeland. Remember that you are a citizen of God's kingdom first and your earthly nation second. Don't neglect your most important rights.