



# Theological Guide

The Bridge Church

*1 Peter presents the Christian community as a colony in a strange land, an island of one culture in the midst of another. The new birth that gives Christians a new identity and a new citizenship in the kingdom of God makes us, in whatever culture we happen to live, visiting foreigners and resident aliens there.*

Karen H. Jobes

## INTRODUCTION

As your Teaching Pastors, we are so thrilled to begin this new series of teachings through the book of 1 Peter. For the next few months we will lead you on a journey to learn from the apostle for how we should live in a culture that is increasingly growing more and more hostile to Christianity. The reality is that America as a whole is becoming "Post-Christian." What this means is that Christianity, as being culturally accepted, is on its way out rather than on its way in. In fact, the Christian research organization, Barna Group, recently released a study<sup>1</sup> in 2019 showing that Wilmington ranks #37 on the list of Post-Christian cities, higher than Las Vegas, Baltimore, and Portland.

As followers of Jesus, it's more critical now than ever that we recognize our heavenly identity and learn how to live and suffer in a society that is pushing us to the margins. Fortunately, this is not new to Christianity. For a couple millennia, the gospel has thrived in the midst of pagan, hostile cultures. As your pastors, we are actually encouraged by what's happening in our culture because it will force Christians to relinquish apathy and complacency and comfort. We believe the gospel is going to shine brighter in this cultural moment. The light shines brightest in the midst of darkness. The kingdom of God is coming and we are glad we get to be a part of it.

Pastor Ethan & Pastor Chris

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/post-christian-cities-2019/>

## SERIES VISION

In every culture, there is a temptation for the Christian to assimilate. Rather than go against the grain, rather than remain distinct in one's identity as a Jesus-follower, there is significant pressure to absorb the mindset, practices, and behaviors of the culture. Following Jesus brings, not only great blessing, but also great opposition. To live according to the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of the world comes at great cost, great adversity, and great persecution.

1 Peter is such a helpful letter because the apostle Peter's teaching is not only inspirational but also practical. While he inspires us to remain strong through adversity, he also helps us to practically understand what it looks like to follow Jesus in the midst of a pagan, worldly, godless culture. And his words we read today are just as pertinent and relevant as they were 2,000 years ago.

## KEY VERSES

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 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. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

1 Peter 2:9-12 ESV

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Karen H. Jobes

*1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, Thomas R. Schreiner

*1 Peter For You*, God's Word for You, Juan Sanchez

*The Message of 1 Peter*, Bible Speaks Today, Edmund P. Clowney

## SERIES OUTLINE

Part 1-1 Peter 1:1-2, Greeting

Part 2-1 Peter 1:3-12, A Living Hope

Part 3-1 Peter 1:13-2:3, A Call to Holiness

Part 4-1 Peter 2:4-8, Living Stones

Part 5-1 Peter 2:9-10, The Jesus Nation

Part 6-1 Peter 2:11-17, Sojourners and Exiles

Part 7-1 Peter 2:18-25, Suffering Like Jesus

Part 8-1 Peter 3:1-6, The Holy Wife

Part 9-1 Peter 3:7, The Holy Husband

Part 10-1 Peter 3:8-22, Blessing in Suffering

Part 11-1 Peter 4:1-6, No Longer Living in the Flesh

Part 12-1 Peter 4:7-11, Serve One Another

Part 13-1 Peter 4:12-19, Rejoice in Suffering

Part 14-1 Peter 5:1-5, The Role of Elders

Part 15-1 Peter 5:6-14, Closing

## OVERVIEW OF 1 PETER<sup>2</sup>

The apostle Peter ends his letter with a statement of its significance, “This is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (1 Pet. 5:12 TNIV). For two thousand years, believers around the world have read the letter Peter wrote to the Christians of first-century Asia Minor as God’s word. The apostle explains the significance of Jesus’ suffering and how those who follow him must live out their faith. Some have accurately described 1 Peter as “the most condensed New Testament résumé of the Christian faith and of the conduct that it inspires” (Clowney 1988: 15). Martin Luther describes it as “one of the noblest books in the New Testament” and a “paragon of excellence” on par with even Romans and the Gospel of John (Pelikan 1967: 4, 9; Blevins 1982: 401). Luther believed it contained all that is necessary for a Christian to know (Achtmeier 1996: 64). Perhaps this letter’s universal relevance is due to its presentation of how the gospel of Jesus Christ is the foundational principle by which the Christian life is lived out within the larger unbelieving society.

The life of Jesus and the believer’s life are inseparable in Peter’s thought. In 1 Peter Jesus is not only the object of Christian faith; he is also the pattern of Christian destiny. Jesus’ resurrection is the source of the believer’s new life (1:3). His willingness to suffer unjustly to fulfill God’s purpose is the exemplar to which Christians are called as they live out their lives in faith, following in his footsteps (2:21).

For the original readers to whom Peter wrote, their identity as Christians was not only the source of great joy but ironically also the reason they suffered grief in various kinds of trials (1:6). Because of their Christian faith, they were being marginalized by their society, alienated in their relationships, and threatened with—if not experiencing—a loss of honor and socioeconomic standing (and possibly worse). Many Christians around the world throughout these last two thousand years have experienced a similar negative reaction to their faith by the societies in which they live. Even today there are those who live in peril because of their faith in Christ. For them, the words of the apostle speak directly to their situation, providing consolation, encouragement, and guidance.

The social ethos of the first-century Greco-Roman setting of 1 Peter is undoubtedly substantially different from that of those cultures today founded upon the Judeo-Christian ethic. Nevertheless, the principles upon which Peter offers his original readers consolation, encouragement, and guidance in their specific situation are applicable to all Christians at all times. The apostle wants his readers to recognize the

---

<sup>2</sup> Jobes, K. H. (2005). *1 Peter* (p. 1-5). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

sweeping scope of new life in Christ and the implications for how they view themselves now that they have been born again by the mercy of God the Father through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1:3). They must no longer think of themselves and their relationships to family and society in the same way they did in their former life (4:3). As S. McKnight (1996: 36) puts it, "Peter intends his readers to understand who they are before God so that they can be who they are in society."

However, a Christian self-understanding based on the NT is Christocentric and society is not. Herein lies the significance of 1 Peter for modern readers. Christians need to be transformed in their thinking about who they are in Christ and what that implies for relationships with other believers and with society, regardless of one's historical moment or geographical location. First Peter applies principles of Christian conduct to a specific Christian community living out the faith in troubling times, and so this letter has something important to say about the engagement of Christians and culture. These concepts of Christian self-understanding and cultural engagement speak to the heart of the believer, whether babes in Christ or seniors in the faith.

First Peter encourages a transformed understanding of Christian self-identity that redefines how one is to live as a Christian in a world that is hostile to the basic principles of the gospel. Acknowledging that estrangement, Peter writes to those whom he addresses as "foreigners and resident aliens" (2:11) within the society in which they lived. He holds up Jesus Christ as the true outsider, coming into this world but being rejected and executed by it.

Reflecting on the message of 1 Peter, M. Volf (1994: 17) writes, "The root of Christian self-understanding as aliens and sojourners lies not so much in the story of Abraham and Sarah and the nation of Israel as it does in the destiny of Jesus Christ, his mission and his rejection which ultimately brought him to the cross." The example of Christ's suffering in 1 Peter is the pattern that explains the experience of Christians who suffer for their faith. The relationship between Christ and the world defines the basic principle of Christian self-understanding and engagement with culture.

Therefore, Peter exhorts Christians to engage the world as foreigners and resident aliens, having a healthy respect for the society and culture in which they live while at the same time maintaining an appropriate separation from it. It is as foreigners and resident aliens that Peter's readers are to abstain from carnal desires that, even though perhaps socially acceptable, war against the soul, while at the same time living good lives among the Gentiles (2:11-12). The relationship between the Christian and culture is an overarching theme of 1 Peter, as relevant now as it was when first penned.

In addition to thoughtfully reflecting on the Christian's relationship to society, 1 Peter raises a second related issue by presenting the challenging principle that it is better to suffer than to sin. Christians are to understand themselves as a people who are done with sin (see comments on 4:1), which means that one must be prepared to suffer the consequences of not sinning. The thought that suffering is a normal part of the Christian life (4:12) and within God's will may be a startling thought, especially for those who became Christians with the idea that "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." It is easy to confuse vicarious atonement with vicarious suffering and think that because Jesus suffered, Christians do not have to.

The place of suffering in God's will was also confusing to Peter's original readers. The apostle explains their experience in light of the example of Jesus and challenges the Christian to live out the gospel boldly by embracing suffering if it should come. In the face of pressure to conform to social expectations, Peter exhorts his readers to live good, godly lives, to accept consequential suffering, and to continue trusting God.

The Christians to whom Peter wrote were suffering because they were living by different priorities, values, and allegiances than their pagan neighbors. These differences were sufficiently visible to cause unbelievers to take note and in some cases to heap abuse on those living out faith in Christ. 1 Peter challenges Christians to reexamine our acceptance of society's norms and to be willing to suffer the alienation of being a visiting foreigner in our own culture wherever its values conflict with those of Christ.

Even those Christians who do not suffer persecution for the faith are called to the suffering of self-denial. Sin is often thought of as being motivated by the temptation for pleasure. But perhaps the real power of sin lies in the avoidance of pain and suffering. It is better to suffer unfulfilled needs and desires than to sin. Is this not what self-denial means? Jesus linked self-denial with following in his footsteps when he said, "Those who would be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34 TNIV).

For instance, isn't the temptation to lie often an attempt to save face rather than face the consequences of the truth? Isn't the temptation to cheat on an exam an unwillingness to suffer the loss of reputation or other consequences that failure might bring? Isn't sexual sin often the alternative to suffering by living with deep emotional and physical needs unmet? According to Peter, the pain and suffering that self-denial brings is a godly suffering that is better than yielding to sin (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

The “foreignness” of Christians increases as modern society accepts values and legalizes principles that are inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Reflecting on tolerance as a highly esteemed modern virtue, S. Gaede (1993: 11) writes, “We live in strange times. Or the times we live in make strangers out of folks like me. I’m not sure which.” 1 Peter presents the Christian community as a colony in a strange land, an island of one culture in the midst of another. The new birth that gives Christians a new identity and a new citizenship in the kingdom of God makes us, in whatever culture we happen to live, visiting foreigners and resident aliens there.

## SETTING OF 1 PETER<sup>3</sup>

The letter of 1 Peter is addressed to Christians residing in Pontus, Cappadocia, Galatia, Asia, and Bithynia, a vast area of approximately 129,000 square miles (J. H. Elliott 2000: 84). (As a comparison, the state of California covers about 159,000 square miles.) The regions addressed in 1 Peter comprised the area of first-century Asia Minor that lay west and north of the Taurus Mountains. Tite (1997: 30) has suggested that the specification of these five provinces is merely metaphorical, but his proposal is unconvincing because he offers no explanation for why these particular provinces would be cited.

Asia Minor, now known as Turkey, is a peninsula bordered on three sides by great seas: to the north the Euxine (now called the Black Sea); on the west the Aegean; and to the south the Mediterranean. Its east-west extent was about 1,000 miles, and north-south about 350 miles. A great salt lake and desert occupied the center of Asia Minor, separating the northern Royal Road (built during the Persian period) from a more southern passage that became the great commercial route of the Greco-Roman period, for it was the shorter and less difficult route to travel. Along this southern route, Roman colonies first appeared, one of which was Antioch in Pisidia, established during Augustus's reign and not long thereafter visited by Paul, as recorded in Acts 13 (Goodman 1997: 238). The outstanding feature of the geographical destination of 1 Peter "is the enormous diversity of the land, peoples, and cultures" (J. H. Elliott 1981: 61).

The westernmost region of Asia Minor was the point of the Asian continent closest to both Greece and Rome—hence its provincial name of Asia. It was the first region of Asia Minor to be annexed as a Roman province in 133 BC. Within a few decades, the first 173-mile segment of the great southern road from Ephesus to the eastern Cilician Gates had been reconstructed to Roman standards (Ramsay 1890: 164). This route would later become the conduit of the gospel.

The westernmost province of Asia was the most populated area of Asia Minor, with at least forty-two cities in the Roman period, and was also the most Hellenized region of the peninsula (Ramsay 1890: 95). Here the great Pauline mission took root in Ephesus, Colossae, Laodicea, and other locales where the seven churches of Rev. 2–3 were located. Of all the Roman provinces, Asia most wholeheartedly embraced the Roman imperial cult (Alston 1998: 310; S. Johnson 1975: 93; Magie 1950: 1.544). Because of their indigenous religious tradition, the peoples of western Asia Minor easily

---

<sup>3</sup> Jobes, K. H. (2005). *1 Peter* (pp. 19–23). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

accepted the emperor as both a monarch and a god (Momigliano 1934: 28-29). Most of the thirty-four cities in Asia Minor with temples dedicated to Augustus were located in this western province of Asia.

Because of its relative proximity to Greece and Rome, more of the population of the province of Asia was urban and Hellenized than that of the rest of Asia Minor. The educated spoke the Greek language, assimilated the Greco-Roman culture, embraced emperor worship, and traveled freely to the west. It would, however, be a great mistake to assume that the sociopolitical situation of Asia applied equally to Pontus, Cappadocia, Galatia, and Bithynia, where Hellenized urban centers were few and far between and where Greek or Latin was spoken only by administrative officials.

The picture that emerges of the regions to which Peter wrote is one of a vast geographical area with small cities few and far between, of a diversified population of indigenous peoples, Greek settlers, and Roman colonists. The residents practiced many religions, spoke several languages, and were never fully assimilated into the Greco-Roman culture (Frank 1932: 374; S. Johnson 1975: 143; Yakar 2000: 61-65). The problem of linguistic diversity would have been an obstacle to any evangelistic efforts of the indigenous peoples, since Greek and Latin are poorly attested in vast areas of Asia Minor except among officials in the cities that became Roman administrative centers.

And yet this untamed region became the cradle of Christianity. From Asia Minor emerged people whose names are immortalized in Christian history. From Pontus came Aquila, the Jewish tentmaker and husband of Priscilla (Acts 18:2), as well as Marcion, the wealthy shipowner and Christian dissident of the second century who resided in the prominent city of Sinope (S. Johnson 1975: 124). Aquila, the famous translator of a Greek version of the OT, hailed from Sinope as well (Juster 1914: 194n6).

From Hierapolis in Phrygia (in Roman Galatia of the first century) came Epictetus, the famous Roman slave and Stoic philosopher (S. Johnson 1975: 91), as well as Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, repeatedly quoted by Eusebius (S. Johnson 1975: 109). In the fourth century came the Cappadocian fathers, such as Basil, bishop of Cappadocia's capital city, Caesarea; his brother Gregory of Nyssa; and Gregory of Nazianzus, bishop of Constantinople—all three defenders of the Nicene Creed against the heresies of Arius.

To this remote and undeveloped region, the apostle Peter writes his letter to Christians whom he addresses as “visiting foreigners and resident aliens” (1:1; 2:11), scattered across the vast reaches of Asia Minor.

We may surmise that, in no small part because of this letter and the faithfulness of those who received it, well-established churches flourished in all five of these regions by AD 180. Their bishops attended the great councils of the second through fourth centuries, where the doctrines were forged that Christians hold dear yet today.

## PURPOSE OF 1 PETER<sup>4</sup>

As with all NT epistles, the purpose for which 1 Peter was written must be inferred from the text itself. Fortunately, the letter states a reason for its existence, at least in general terms. Peter concludes his letter: "This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" (5:12). Peter is concerned to present the nature of God's true grace as it relates to the experience of his original readers, and is eager to see them standing fast in it. Peter's stated concern implies that the situation of his readers was causing them doubt or confusion about God's work and presence in their lives and that the temptation to abandon, or at least waver in, the Christian faith was a real and present possibility.

Expressing the opinion of most ancient interpreters on the purpose of this letter, Oecumenius (sixth century) prefaced his commentary on 1 Peter by stating: "This Epistle is written by Peter to Jews of the Dispersion who had become Christians, and it is a teaching Epistle; for after they had come to the faith from Judaism, his endeavour was to strengthen them still further" (quoted by Selwyn 1958: 64). Although modern interpreters have almost unanimously concluded that Peter's original readers were primarily Gentiles and not Jews, Peter's intent to teach and thereby strengthen his readers in the Christian faith remains clear. Therefore, the teaching of 1 Peter continues to be relevant to the church today as presenting the true grace of God, in which believers must stand.

Peter's readers were experiencing various kinds of trials that were causing them varying degrees of grief and suffering. Their Christian faith was being slandered and maligned. Their social status, family relationships, and possibly even their livelihood were threatened. When one's Christian faith is criticized and even mocked, it is natural that one may begin to doubt the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is, after all, extraordinary to believe that the body of a dead man was raised to some kind of new eternal state of being. Ancient people no less than modern might understandably find that claim outrageous. And yet for Peter, the resurrection is the central point of the Christian faith by which God has extended his mercy and has given new birth into a living hope (1:3). Therefore, assuaging the doubt of his readers concerning their faith in Christ in light of society's response is one clear purpose of the letter.

---

<sup>4</sup> Jobes, K. H. (2005). *1 Peter* (p. 42). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.