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Living as Exiles in a Hostile World – The Epistle of 1 Peter

(Part 01 – Life in Babylon)

July 10, 2016

Sermon Text: 1 Peter

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-21

Background Scriptures for 1 Peter

1Pe 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, (2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

As we begin this new study of Peter's first epistle, we start where we must – with a consideration of its author, its audience, its date, its purpose, and its

theme. This is a very, very pertinent portion of Scripture for us in our day and time. It deals with the experience of Christians living in a world that is hostile to Christ – exiles in a world that is not their real home. That is us, and it is increasingly our own experience as this world continues to spiral into darkness and evil in its rejection of the light of Jesus Christ.

The subject goes directly along with what we have been learning in the Sunday School class lately – *Christ and Culture*. How does a Christian live out his or her life under the rule of a pagan government, in a marriage to a non-Christian spouse, or (as in Paul's day) as the slave of a pagan master? What is this present world anyway? What is our hope? What does obedience to Jesus Christ look like in our daily lives in a wicked world?

These are the issues Peter is addressing.

Let's start off by reading through some key Scriptures that provide us with the

background and setting of this letter. We start in the Old Testament at 2 Kings 25, one of the saddest in the entire Bible –

2Ki 25:1-26 And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. And they built siegeworks all around it. (2) So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. (3) On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. (4) Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, and the Chaldeans were around the city. And they went in the direction of the Arabah.

(5) But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. (6) Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. (7) They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon.

(8) In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—that was the

nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. (9) And he burned the house of the LORD and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. (10) And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. (11) And the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile.

(12) But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen. (13) And the pillars of bronze that were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried the bronze to Babylon. (14) And they took away the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the dishes for incense and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service, (15) the fire pans also and the bowls. What was of gold the captain of the guard took away as gold, and what was of silver, as silver. (16) As for the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands that Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of

all these vessels was beyond weight. (17) The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and on it was a capital of bronze. The height of the capital was three cubits. A latticework and pomegranates, all of bronze, were all around the capital. And the second pillar had the same, with the latticework.

(18) And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest and the three keepers of the threshold; (19) and from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the men of war, and five men of the king's council who were found in the city; and the secretary of the commander of the army, who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land, who were found in the city. (20) And Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. (21) And the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was taken into exile out of its land.

(22) And over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, he appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, governor. (23) Now when all the captains and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah

governor, they came with their men to Gedaliah at Mizpah, namely, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite. (24) And Gedaliah swore to them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid because of the Chaldean officials. Live in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you." (25) But in the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck down Gedaliah and put him to death along with the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. (26) Then all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the forces arose and went to Egypt, for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

This all happened around 587 BC and it took place because of the sins of Judah, just as the Lord had promised that it would if they broke His covenant:

Deu 28:36-37 "The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. (37) And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away.

This then is the setting for the book of Daniel. He and his friends are captive, where? In Babylon. Exiles. The elect people of God in a foreign land serving a pagan king, hoping in and looking for their return to Jerusalem. God's word to them was:

Jer 29:4-14 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: (5) Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. (6) Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. (7) But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (8) For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, (9) for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD. (10) "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. (11) For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to

give you a future and a hope. (12) Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. (13) You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. (14) I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

And the Lord fulfilled His Word to them 70 years later as a remnant of the Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple under Ezra and Nehemiah.

However, the majority of Jews did not return. They remained in the various areas in the Near East, scattered throughout those regions (see accompanying map handout). So that by the time of the New Testament the scenario is just as Peter describes:

1Pe 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, **To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,** (2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

It is the explanation of Acts 2 and why you have all of those Jews from the

various regions of the Empire at Jerusalem for Pentecost. Listen to this portion of that account once more -

Act 2:5-11 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. (6) And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. (7) And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? (8) And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? (9) Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, (11) both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

We will look more closely next time at just who it is that Peter addresses with the phrase “elect exiles of the dispersion.”

The Apostle Peter

It is also necessary when we are studying a book of Scripture to think about who the author is. What do we know about Peter?

- He was an apostle of Jesus Christ. This was one of the chief tests in establishing the canonicity of a book or epistle was this – “was it written by a true prophet or apostle?” In this case the author identifies himself as the Apostle Peter and the words written in this epistle ring true to the Holy Spirit abiding in the people of Christ.
- Peter was appointed as the Apostle to the circumcised:

Gal 2:7-9 On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (8) (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), (9) and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

1. Peter had substantial difficulty understanding that the gospel was for the gentiles as well as the Jews:

Gal 2:11-14 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (12) For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. (13) And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. (14) But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

(And recall the Lord sending him to Cornelius in Acts 10 after giving him the vision of unclean foods and telling him to eat).

- And of course Peter is the one who denied Christ 3 times, was forgiven and restored by Him.
- Peter knew this too:

Joh 21:15-19 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." (16) He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I

love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." (17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (18) Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (19) (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

Peter knew, in other words, that he would be martyred and he says so in 2 Peter –

2Pe 1:12-15 Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. (13) I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, (14) since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. (15) And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

A Quick Survey of the Theme and Purpose

What then is this epistle about? And what was Peter's purpose in writing it? Even a brief overview will give us the answer:

1Pe 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, (7) so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1Pe 1:13-16 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (14) As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, (15) but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (16) since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

1Pe 2:1-4 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. (2) Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— (3) if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. (4) As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

1Pe 2:11-14 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. (12) 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. (13) Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, (14) or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

1Pe 2:15-18 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (16) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (17) Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (18) Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

1Pe 3:9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

1Pe 3:14-15 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, (15) but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always

being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

1Pe 4:1-4 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, (2) so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. (3) For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. (4) With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;

1Pe 4:7-8 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. (8) Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

1Pe 4:12-16 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (13) But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (14) If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed,

because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (15) But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. (16) Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

1Pe 5:8-10 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (9) Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (10) And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Peter is writing to people very much like ourselves. Believers who find themselves in a fallen, evil world, pressed on every side with temptation to go back to the world and live in the flesh, persecuted and suffering at the hands of those who hate Christ, wondering how to behave toward rulers who do not acknowledge the Lord, and wondering when it will all end.

Peter is writing about such things in order to encourage such people to remain steadfast in their faith, to not yield to the pressures and temptations

of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to model the love and holiness of Christ for one another to the world, and to reassure them that their hope in the promises of Christ yet to be fulfilled are true and certain.

Do we find ourselves today living in an evil world that is spiraling more and more rapidly into darkness and evil? Yes. Do we see people who have professed Christ going back to the world and their former manner of life? Yes. Do we have to deal with ungodly rulers? Yes. Are we increasingly insulted and maligned for following Christ? Yes. Are we tempted to take matters into our own hands as Peter did when he pulled out his sword and cut off the guy's ear? Yes. Do we wonder how in the world we are going to be able to tell people about Christ and His great salvation when the climate we live in is so set against the Lord today? Yes. Are we surrounded by people who claim to be Christians yet live like the world? Yes.

Then, you see, this First Epistle of Peter is a book for us. It addresses each one of these issues, and more and we pray that the Lord will use our study of it to His praise and glory and our good in the weeks to come.