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Encouragement for Exiled People

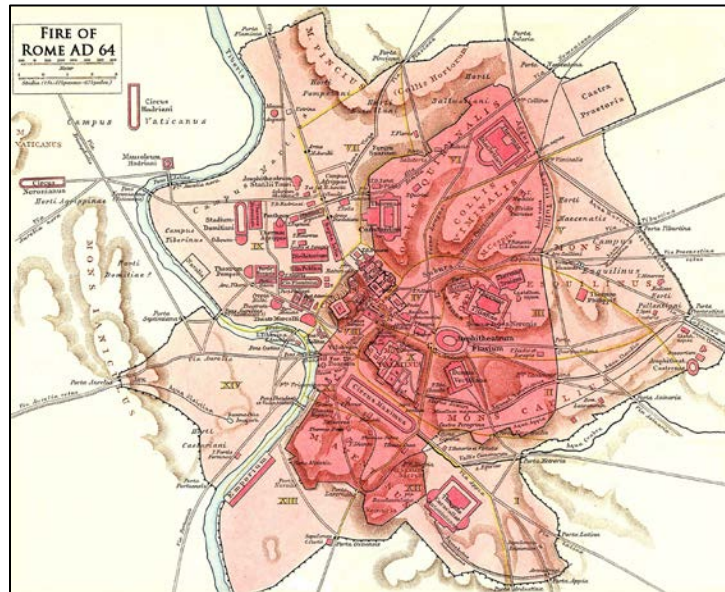
A verse that summarizes the reality facing God's people at the writing of 1 Peter as well as the Divine assurance, it would be Psalm 34:19.

Psalm 34:19: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all."

Because of God’s great love for us His children, the Lord delivers us out of every affliction we could ever face on this earth. Yet because of His Redemptive program which culminates in Christ at His Second Coming, many will be the afflictions of the righteous in this age!

And so it soon would be for the people of God who received this epistle. Whether it was because he was an apostle or simply because he could read the handwriting on the wall, Peter clearly foresaw that difficulty and trial were headed towards God’s people. And that time came soon after Peter penned this epistle around 63 BC.¹

On July 18, 64 AD fire broke out in the commerce section of Rome and spread throughout the wooden structures of the city, burning for six days and seven nights and destroying 70% of the Rome! The citizens of Rome blamed Nero for setting the fire and watching it burn. In fact, the backlash Nero faced was so severe that in order to relieve this pressure, he placed the blame for the fire on Christians who had become an increasingly large population in Rome. The Roman historian Tacitus recorded the following:



Therefore, to scotch the rumor [that he ultimately was behind the fire], Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts’ skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed, were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit [the clothes] of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. (Tacitus, 2008, pp. Book 15, CH 44)

And so began the Neronian Persecution which spread throughout the empire, eventually impacting Christians in all the lands over which Rome ruled, including the churches of Asia Minor, the recipients of this letter!

Accordingly, Peter wrote 1 Peter which revolves around three major themes: Suffering, Trust, Doing What is Necessary or Right (obedience). In fact, all three are seen in 1 Peter 4:19.

1 Peter 4:19: “Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

As we begin our study of this great epistle! And on account of its occasion, it is little surprise that Peter began with a word of encouragement to his persecuted brethren! We begin with the encourager and the encouraged.

Peter, πέτρος (petros), means “rock” and was the name Christ gave to a fisherman named “Simon bar-Jonah”² whom the Lord called as one of His apostles around 27 AD. In fact, the name “Peter” was more of a nickname, for Luke introduced Peter with these words, “Simon, whom He also named [that is equivalent to our AKA] Peter” (Luke 6:14). John described Jesus’ first face-to-face meeting with Peter saying this:

John 1:42, “Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, ‘You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated, Rock).”

Most likely these were the first words Jesus spoke to Peter. From then on, “Rock” (Peter) was his nickname!

Peter and his brother Andrew (who introduced him to Jesus, cf. John 1:40–42) ran a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:18; Luke 5:1–3) on the north shore of the lake (John 1:44). They were originally from the village of Bethsaida (John 1:44), but later moved to the larger nearby town of Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29). The brothers’ business was a successful one, which allowed them to own a spacious house in Capernaum.³ We know that Peter was married for Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Luke 4:38–39); furthermore, we read that his wife accompanied him on his missionary travels (1 Corinthians 9:5).

As to his death, the universal tradition of the early church places Peter in Rome at the close of his life. He evidently was NOT there when Paul wrote Romans (~57 AD), since his name does not appear in the list of people Paul greeted.⁴ NOR is it likely that Peter was in Rome during Paul’s first imprisonment, since Peter once again is not mentioned in the Prison Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or Philemon which were written between 59-61 AD. Accordingly, it is believed by most scholars that Peter arrived in Rome after Paul’s release from his first Roman imprisonment. It was there that he, like Paul, suffered martyrdom in connection with the Neronian Persecution (most likely around 64 AD⁵) being crucified upside down because “*he was not worthy to die in the same manner of His Lord*”!

Now together with his brother, Peter was the first disciple called by Christ to follow Him to become a fisher of men,

Matthew 4:18-20, “And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him.”

Peter’s initial response to Jesus summons is characteristic of his personality. Peter was NOT one to wait around and think things through. He was quick to speak, quick to act, and so quick to get into trouble. Accordingly, Peter’s name is mentioned in the Gospels more than any other name except Jesus. No one speaks as often as Peter, and no one is spoken to by the Lord as often as Peter. No disciple is so frequently rebuked by the Lord as Peter; and no disciple ever rebukes the Lord except Peter (Matthew 16:22).

No other man or woman confessed Christ more boldly or acknowledged His Lordship more explicitly; yet no other disciple ever verbally denied Christ as forcefully or as publicly as did Peter! No one is praised and blessed by Christ the way Peter was; yet Peter was the only one Christ ever addressed as Satan. In fact, the Lord had harsher things to say to Peter than He ever said to any of the others. John MacArthur wrote in his wonderful book *Twelve Ordinary Men* this description:

By nature Simon was brash, vacillating, and undependable. He tended to make great promises he couldn’t follow through with. He was one of those people who appears to lunge wholeheartedly into something but then bails out before finishing. He was usually the first one in; and too often, he was the first one out. When Jesus met him, he fit James’s description of a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). (MacArthur, 2006, p. 34)

Yet in the hands of the Master, Peter’s ambivalent, vacillating, and impulsive personality was used by the Lord to produce quite the servant-leader! Accordingly, during Christ’s first advent, Peter was the acknowledged leader and spokesman of the twelve (his name heads all four New Testament lists of the apostles⁶). And when the dark days of persecution confronted the church as they did in 64 AD, it was Peter (not Paul) who ministered to God’s hurting and wounded people! And that ministry came in the form of the 1 Peter! And yet, what is in our hands is NOT simply the mind, work, or will of Peter. For notice how the epistle begins:

1 Peter 1:1, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*)

The term “apostle” appears 79 times in the New Testament. It primarily refers to “being sent.” In the secular Greek world of Paul’s day, the word referred to someone who was officially commissioned by a king to a position or task, such as an envoy or ambassador. In Classical Greek, cargo ships were sometimes called “apostolic” because they were dispatched

with a specific shipment for a specific destination. Accordingly, an apostle was one who was sent by King Christ as an ambassador/envoy to deliver the message of salvation.⁷ Christ told the twelve these words;

John 15:27, “And you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”

In this regard an Apostle differed from any other person Christ sent out in that the Apostolic office was invested with the Authority of Christ.

- As such, an Apostle was chosen, called, and sent forth by Christ Himself, John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19; Galatians 1:6.
- Was endowed in a special measure with the Holy Spirit, Matthew 10:20; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-14; 20:22; 1 Corinthians 9:2; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 2:8.
- Was inspired, John 14:26; 16:13.
- Had the power to work miracles, Matthew 10:8.
- Could communicate this power by the laying on of hands, Acts 9:15, 17, 18; 19:6.
- Had the gift of “distinguishing of spirits,” 1 Corinthians 12:10.
- Performed specific signs as a mark of their Apostolic authority, 2 Corinthians 12:12.
- Served as the foundation of the church, Ephesians 2:20.

From all of this we conclude that this epistle was far more than the words of Peter. As an emissary of Christ, the words of this epistle constitute Christ’s word and will to all God’s people everywhere!⁸ In this regard, consider Peter’s choice in referencing, Jesus Christ.

Recall the name order used in Scripture of our Lord is significant. ‘Jesus’ is the humble *Savior* born of Mary whereas ‘Christ’ is the *Messianic Ruler and so the King of kings*. Therefore, to ‘be an apostle of Jesus Christ’ is to be one sent from the humble, yet now exalted God-Man and Savior who reigns over the universe!! What an encouraging reality for the recipients of this letter. They were right where their Sovereign King wanted them to be!

That is the encourager, now concerning the encouraged.

1 Peter 1:1, “who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...”

As reflected in the picture, the initial recipients of this epistle were Christians living in the five major districts of Asia Minor which were under Roman rule. The order in which they are named most likely reflects the route Silvanus, the bearer of the letter,⁹ would



have taken¹⁰ when he delivered it to the churches.

From 1 Peter 1:14, 18; 4:3-4 we know the congregations consisted of a large population of Gentiles. And based on Paul's epistles, Revelations 2-3, and Peter's choice of language here we know that the churches in this area also were comprised of a significant population of Jews. This is important on account of the language Peter chose to utilize both in our verse this morning and throughout this epistle. See, Judaism was NOT so widespread that a typical Gentile in that day would have been familiar with the main nuances of the religion (much less its subtleties). Accordingly, the Gentile recipients of this letter initially would have been at the mercy of their Jewish brethren to explain the profound statements being made about them in this letter.

For example, when Peter called the Christian recipients of this epistle:

1 Peter 2:9, "...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession..."

And then said this:

1 Peter 2:10, "For you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God..."

Very few of the Gentiles present would have initially understood that Peter here was using language reserved in the Old Testament exclusively for the Jew, this made the Gentiles NOT simply a privileged group, BUT the same group as their Jewish brethren!¹¹ In fact, had Peter not made it abundantly clear that he was addressing Gentiles in this epistle, based on the many allusions to Judaism that Peter makes here, we would be tempted to think that — with the Gospel of Matthew — this epistle was written with a Jewish congregation in mind. Yet it wasn't, which becomes extremely important for us as we consider the ones to whom Peter wrote this epistle. Look at the opening words again:

1 Peter 1:1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..."

On account of our study of Ezekiel (which you recall was God's first response to His exiled people when they were brought to Babylon when Jerusalem fell in 586 BC), most of you know that the language here is thoroughly Jewish and incredibly significant.¹² Consider the two terms.

"To those who reside as aliens" *παρεπίδημος* (*parepidēmos*). The idea with this word is that of a temporary resident alien. It is THE term used in the Old Testament for what God's people became in the exile (cf. Hebrews 11:13). At this time, there no longer was a place on this earth which God's people could lay their head!

That is why the Final State (and so the longing for the advent of the Messiah) became such a big

deal to the Intertestamental Jew. On account of the fall of their nation, God's people were left to long for that day and time when the Messiah would come to the earth and (according to their misunderstanding) make it God's Kingdom and so His land again!¹³ At that time (and this is where they were confused) (1) the wicked and unrighteous would be judged, and (2) God's people would live as royalty in a land which would be characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy!

Now THIS (and ALL the nuances and subtleties that accompanied this teaching) was conveyed by the term "alien"- which is why this was a massively significant label prior to the coming of Christ. This one word NOT ONLY described what God's people had become after 586 BC, BUT ALSO WHAT THEY MUST BE! Their future, their hope, their joy, and so much more were to revolve around the coming Messianic Kingdom of our Lord! And that is because, as God's people living without a home they were "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..." The word choice here likewise is of Old Testament significance. The word is *διασπορά* (*diaspora*) which referenced NOT so much *what* God's people had become, BUT *where* they had come. They now lived in the Dispersion, without a home, a land, or a familiar place to call their own!

...and so it was Peter's and so God's intent in preparing His people for persecution to remind them (if they were Jews) or teach them (if they were Gentiles) that when they came to Christ this world ceased to be their home. For indeed, in Christ they had "a better home, that is a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16)!

And herein lies the first word of exhortation arising from this epistle. And this is an important one for you and me who have found such a comfortable life here in the United States. This world is NOT our home! This world is NOT a friend of grace! To come to Christ is to become homeless and so comfortless when it comes to anything this world has to offer!

Recall the biblical use of "wilderness." It is in the wilderness that God brings His sons and daughters to train them up (cf. Hosea 2:6-7; 3)! That is why when Christ said in His first advent that He had "no place to lay His head" (cf. Matthew 8:20) we take this not only as a literal expression (Christ most certainly did not have a place which He could call His own to lay His head at night), but also as an important statement on His part that He was an Exiled Jew! Accordingly, any who would be a follower of Christ must likewise leave "civilization" and join Christ in the wilderness (cf. Hebrews 3:13)!

In light of this it is no surprise to discover that this is the mindset of all maturing Christians! Recall how Hebrews described the healthy child of God:

Hebrews 11:13-16a, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one..."

It is this mindset which leads the child of God in this life "not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12)!!

This is an important mindset we must acquire! As image-bearers charged with subduing the earth, there is a natural tendency in us to make where we live into our castle! We want to go "where everybody knows our name and they're always glad you came!" Like Peter who endeavored to build a tent on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:4), we inappropriately endeavor to sink our roots deep into this age and into this life. Most in the church today are more American than they are Christian! In fact, in their fellowship they will be more apt to talk about Trump than Christ!

Such was the temptation of God's people in exile which is why during the Intertestamental Era, God countered this urge by *LABELLING* His people, calling them "aliens, dispersed throughout the world" knowing that ONE'S IDENTITY EVENTUALLY BECOMES ONE'S COMMISSION!¹⁴

That is exactly what Peter contended in the text before us! God's people needed to see that just at their Old Testament brethren had no place to call their own, so it is with every individual who comes to Christ! Because our mark of identity is Christ, we must view this world as a foreign land and not our home!¹⁵

Finally, the question is asked, "How can we in our weakness live in Christ this way?" The only way we as God's people can do this is if we know that all that is really important in this life is safe and secure in Christ! It was with this conviction that our fathers and mothers in the faith once lived *and so*:

Hebrews 11:33b-34, "...conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of* righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight."

It was with this conviction that Paul became the Apostle he was.

2 Timothy 1:12, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day."

And it would only be with this conviction that the believers of Asia Minor would overcome the fiery ordeal among them- which again is one of the main themes of this epistle.

1 Peter 4:19, "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."

May this be our mindset this day as we work out our salvation!

Works Cited

- MacArthur, J. (2006). *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Tacitus, C. (2008). *The Annals of Imperial Rome*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

End Note(s)

¹ Most believe that Peter died during the Neronian persecution which began in 64 AD. The epistle of 1 Peter acknowledges that the Christians of Asia Minor were suffering persecution which is believed to be the result of the persecution which spread from Rome following the fire that devastated its capital. This obviously creates a small problem in seeking to date this letter. The obvious solution is to posit that Peter penned this epistle as persecution was looming in 63 AD or early 64 AD.

² Lit. *Simon the son of Jonah/John*, Mt. 16:17.

³ cf. Mk. 1:29, 32–33; Lk. 4:38.

⁴ cf. Rom. 16:1–15.

⁵ But no later than 68 AD since that is when Nero died.

⁶ cf. Mt. 10:2–4; Mk. 3:16–19; Lk. 6:13–16; Acts 1:13.

⁷ In Peter's case, his apostolic commission had a large pastoring element to it. He was called and sent by Christ "to shepherd [Christ's] sheep" (Jn. 21:15-17).

⁸ Peter H. Davids wrote, "The letter is to be seen, not as the pious opinions of a well-wishing friend, but as the authoritative word of one who speaks for the Lord of the church himself." (*The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT, p. 46)

⁹ cf. 1 Peter 5:12.

¹⁰ Peter H. Davids also wrote, "The course follows known routes traveled by people in that age; for example, in 14 B.C. Herod the Great followed part of this route from Sinope on the Black Sea (in Pontus) via parts of Galatia and Cappadocia to Ephesus (in Asia), accompanying Marcus Agrippa." (*The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT, p. 47)

¹¹ cf. Rom. 2:28-29!

¹² Peter H. Davids further wrote, "The Jews had used the term 'dispersion' or 'diaspora' to refer to their scattered communities outside Palestine ever since the Exile (cf. the Greek form of Deut. 28:25; Neh. 1:9; and Isa. 49:6); it appears several times in the NT with this meaning (see John 7:35; 11:32)." (*The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT, p. 46)

¹³ When the intertestamental Jew thought of the Messiah, they meshed Christ's first and second advents into one event.

¹⁴ Such was the exhortation Paul gave to the Philippians! Recall that in 31 BC Philippi was named a "Roman colony" by Octavian, following the battle of Actium. Consequently, life in Philippi as it related to its laws and standards was equivalent to life in Rome- a fact that would have been the source of great pride! To be born in Philippi meant yours was a superior birth, for you were a Roman citizen! John MacArthur wrote, "Philippi had the distinction of being a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), a highly privileged status that gave its inhabitants many of the rights enjoyed by citizens of Rome itself. Such colonies considered themselves 'little Romes' and took great pride in that association. They gave unqualified allegiance to Rome and to the emperor, adopted Roman dress and Roman names, and spoke Latin, the official language of Rome." (*Philippians*, p. 84) How treacherous it would have been to be a Christian born under this identity! For though you were in Christ, nevertheless your tendency would have been to boast in the fact that you were a Roman Citizen! Accordingly, listen to the exhortation Paul gave this congregation...

=Phil. 3:20-21: "...our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord

Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

Such would have been the boast of most of the Christians in Philippi! Unlike any other city close by, they were a Roman Colony and so worthy of the honor, privilege, and wealth that such a distinction brought! Yet what was Paul’s exhortation? All you who might think that your home is here on this earth, all who have grown quite comfortable with your life, you are making much ado about that which ought to be as nothing to you! THE land and nation which ought only to be of importance to you is the Kingdom of God!¹⁴ In this regard, William Hendriksen wrote, “Do citizens of Philippi think of Rome as their native land to which they belong, in whose tribal records they are enrolled, whose dress they wear, whose language they speak, by whose laws they are governed, whose protection they enjoy, and whose emperor they worship as their Savior? ¶ In a sense far more sublime and real these Christians dwelling in Philippi must realize that their homeland or commonwealth has its fixed location in heaven. It was heaven that gave them birth... Their names are inscribed on heaven’s register. Their lives are being governed from heaven and in accordance with heavenly standards. Their rights are secured in heaven. Their interests are being promoted there. To heaven their thoughts and prayers ascend and their hopes aspire. Many of their friends, members of the fellowship, are there even now, and they themselves, the citizens of the heavenly kingdom who are still on earth, will follow shortly.” (*Philippians*, NTC, pp. 182-183)

¹⁵ Thomas Schreiner wrote, “Believers are exiles, not because they are displaced from their homeland. Many people in the Greco-Roman world no longer lived in their place of origin. Believers are exiles because they suffer for their faith in a world that finds their faith off-putting and strange.” (*1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, p. 50)