

Eastertide Series



Introduction

Easter runs from Easter Sunday (12th April) right the way through to Pentecost (31st May), when we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit in fulfilment of God's promises and which is known as the birthday of the Church. Within this fifty-day celebration of Easter is also included Ascension Day (20th May) when we commemorate Jesus' ascension into heaven. The readings for the Sundays of Eastertide 2020 include a series of readings taken from 1 Peter. This message of this book seeks to offer hope in the midst of exile and is well suited both to our current predicament with Coronavirus (COVID-19) but also reminding us of our need to re-locate our identity in Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead and it is the resurrection of Jesus that provides the foundation for the hope we have.

Exiles in Babylon

These are strange days in which we live, we have been unable to gather together since 15th March and our *exile* from our church buildings provides us with a glimpse into the upheaval that the Israelites faced when, having been invaded by the Babylonians, they were taken off into captivity in Babylon. The major symbols of their national and religious life – the monarchy, the temple, and the holy city of Zion (Jerusalem) – were lying in ruins, the destruction was complete.

Seven decades later the Israelites were permitted to return to rebuild Jerusalem, Babylon had itself been conquered by Persia who implemented a different foreign policy. We read about this in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the post-exilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Whilst this era is known as post-exilic period, the Jews of the first century still thought of themselves as in exile, yes they inhabited the promised land and worship at the temple, however they were ruled over by a foreign power (Rome) and were awaiting the fulfilment of the promises God had made, longing for a new exodus. The gospel writers, and especially Paul in his letters, articulate how Jesus was the fulfilment of the promises and that through his death and resurrection the exile had finally come to an end: the trajectory of human history was now homeward bound!¹

Exiles in Rome

One of the significant questions Jews wrestled with as they lived out their lives in Babylon was: "how can we be faithful to God in a foreign land?" This was the very question that the apostle Peter was wrestling with when he wrote his first letter, what we know as 1 Peter. Peter uses the metaphor of exile, along with its associated imagery, to describe the situation of Christians of his day, and ours today.

He is writing to Christians who are suffering, and this suffering was blinding them to all visions of hope. Peter writes to encourage them, reminding them of the hope that they have because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and he seeks to address the question of how they can live faithfully in the present as they await this future hope.

Exiles in Brooklands

We are in the same situation as those first Christians to whom Peter was writing. As Christians we are 'foreigners and exiles' in a world that is not our final home. Perhaps it was fortuitous that I have been reading a book with the title: *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*. It is against the backdrop of our being 'resident aliens' that 1 Peter helps us to address the question: ***how do I live faithfully in the present as I***

¹ I'm not going to tease this out here, an excellent introduction to the background of the New Testament is *The New Testament in its World* by Tom Wright and Michael Bird which guides us through the New Testament documents within their first century context - <https://zondervanacademic.com/pages/new-testament-in-its-world>

await my future home? In other words, accepting that Jesus will come again, how should we live in the meantime?

Peter also speaks into the current predicament in that we find ourselves in a sort of exile, unable to gather physically to worship God together. Although we are unable to gather together, we can still grow in faith as we practice the tools of discipleship that nurture our relationship with Jesus: personal prayer and Bible reading.

When we are at last allowed to gather again to worship in the hopefully not too distant future, we will get a taste of what it will be like when Jesus comes again to gather his family around his table and feast in the heavenly banquet. I am looking forward to seeing you all again and I hope that through this study, God encourages us as we become equipped to follow Jesus as we reside in the midst of our current 'Babylon'.

How to use this study

When we read and study 1 Peter our primary goal is not to amass information about the historical background of the letter or the intricate details of Greek syntax. The primary purpose of scripture is ***life change!*** The apostle Paul wrote how *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). As we read 1 Peter, we should begin with the anticipation and expectation that God is going to change us as we read it, as we reflect on its meaning for our lives, and as we pray it through.

I have provided a series of questions to help you interact with each chapter and primarily invite you to consider what you have learned about God and what you have learned about yourself. The passage you're reading may focus on what God has done for you which leads you to offer praise and adoration; but, it may focus more on what you should do, in which case invite the Holy Spirit to equip you to do whatever it is you are being asked to do and you may feel it appropriate to begin your response saying sorry to God (confession).

Eastertide lasts 6 weeks, but there are only 5 chapters in 1 Peter so my suggestion would be to spend the first week reading and re-reading the whole letter: at this stage you're simply trying to become familiar with the flow of what is being said. Highlight the text: use **green** for what you like and **yellow** for what you have questions about.

Basic orientation to 1 Peter

Author: The letter claims to come from the apostle Peter (1:1), although this has been contested, however the arguments in favour of 1 Peter being pseudepigraphal are inconclusive and the problems raised are insufficient to require us from affirming that Peter is the author, even if it is likely that Silas put pen to parchment, writing the letter on behalf of the apostle (5:12).

Date: Peter died in 64CE and so it would have been composed sometime in the early 60s.

Location: Peter was writing from “Babylon” (1 Pet. 5:13), i.e. Rome.

Audience: Peter was writing to Christians living in modern day Turkey.

Notes on chapter 1

- Some people think this letter was originally written for people planning to be baptized: note the language of ‘new birth’ in verse 3 and ‘born again’ in v. 23, typical baptismal language.
- A slave was *redeemed* when someone paid money to buy their freedom.
- Jesus is described as a lamb in v. 19 – look up Exodus 12:5. The death of Jesus is linked with Passover, the exodus and freedom from slavery!
- The quote in v. 24 from Isaiah is taken from chapter 40 which foretells the end of exile.

Notes on chapter 2

- When you see a ‘therefore’ (v. 1) ask what it’s there for!

- Peter quotes Psalm 118 which speaks of God’s unchanging love in the midst of changing situations. It is also associated with Palm Sunday and military victory.
- Verse 9 describes Christians in the same way Israel was described in Exodus 19:6.

Notes on chapter 3

- A controversial beginning! It’s worth keeping in mind Peter is addressing a very different society than today, but read the translation in *The Message* to get a better sense of what Peter is getting at.
- The ‘Harrowing of Hell’ by Jesus on Holy Saturday is partly based on v. 19.

Notes on chapter 5

- The elders of v. 1 are church leaders.

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Week beginning 26th April

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles, scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Praise to God for a living hope

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not

seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Be holy

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy' (Lev. 11:44,45; 19:2).

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For,

'All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the
flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers
fall,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord
endures for ever' (Isaiah 40:6-8).

And this is the word that was
preached to you.

Questions for reflection

1. What do you learn about God? (vv. 2, 3-9, 15-16)
2. What do you learn about Jesus? (vv. 20)
3. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit?
4. What do you learn about salvation? (vv. 2, 3-9, 18-19)
5. What do you learn about the church?
6. What do you learn about what God has done for you? (vv. 3-9, 23)
7. What do you learn about how you should live? (vv. 2, 13-16, 22)
8. What is your response to what you have read? Adoration, Confession, Intercession, Petition, Praise, Thanksgiving?
9. How will you need to change in the light of what you have read?
10. What is God saying to you through this chapter?

Week beginning 3rd May

2 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, **3** now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The living Stone and a chosen people

4 As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – **5** you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **6** For in Scripture it says:

‘See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious
cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame’ (Isaiah 28:16).

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone’
(Psalm 118:22),

8 and,

‘A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall’
(Isaiah 8:14).

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. **10** 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.

Living godly lives in a pagan society

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. **12** Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, **14** or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. **15** For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. **16** Live as free people, but do not use your

freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for

you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth' (Isaiah 53:9).

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.' ²⁵ For 'you were like sheep going astray' (Isaiah 53:4,5,6), but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Questions for reflection

1. What do you learn about God?
2. What do you learn about Jesus? (vv. 21-25)
3. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit?
4. What do you learn about salvation? (vv. 24, 25)
5. What do you learn about the church? (vv. 5, 9-10)
6. What do you learn about what God has done for you?
7. Are you seeking to 'grow up' in your faith? (v. 2)
8. What do you learn about how you should live? (vv. 1-2, 9, 11-17, 21)
9. What is your response to what you have read? Adoration, Confession, Intercession, Petition, Praise, Thanksgiving?
10. How do you need to change in the light of what you have read?
11. What is God saying to you through this chapter?

NB: Verses 5 and 9 form the foundation for what is commonly called 'the priesthood of all believers' or 'every member ministry'- everyone who has been baptised is a minister, priests who are to offer 'spiritual sacrifices'.

Week beginning 10th May

3 Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Suffering for doing good

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with

insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For,

'Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful
speech.

¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil' (Psalm 34:12-16).

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened' (Isaiah 8:12). ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous,

to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits – ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through

water, ²¹ and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Questions for reflection

1. What do you learn about God?
2. What do you learn about Jesus? (vv. 18-22)
3. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit? (v. 18)
4. What do you learn about salvation? (vv. 21-22)
5. What do you learn about the church?
6. What does Peter say about baptism? (v. 21)
7. What do you learn about what God has done for you?
8. What do you learn about how you should live? (vv. 1-11)
9. What is your response to what you have read? Adoration, Confession, Intercession, Petition, Praise, Thanksgiving?
10. How do you need to change in the light of what you have read?
11. What is God saying to you through this chapter

The Message translation for 1 Pet. 3:1-7 The same goes for you wives: Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs. There are husbands who, indifferent as they are to any words about God, will be captivated by your life of holy beauty. What matters is not your outer appearance—the styling of your hair, the jewellery you wear, the cut of your clothes—but your inner disposition.

⁴⁻⁶ Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in. The holy women of old were beautiful before God that way, and were good, loyal wives to their husbands. Sarah, for instance, taking care of Abraham, would address him as “my dear husband.” You’ll be true daughters of Sarah if you do the same, unanxious and unintimidated.

⁷ The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honour them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.

Week beginning 17th May

Living for God

4 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body has finished with sin. ² As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴ They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks,

they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Suffering for being a Christian

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And,

'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?' (Prov. 11:31)

¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should

commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Questions for reflection

1. What do you learn about God? (v. 19)
2. What do you learn about Jesus? (vv. 1, 13)
3. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit? (v. 14)
4. What do you learn about salvation?
5. What do you learn about the church?
6. What do you learn about what God has done for you?
7. What are the gifts God has given you to serve others with? (v. 10, 11)
8. What do you learn about how you should live? (vv. 7-11)
9. What is your response to what you have read? Adoration, Confession, Intercession, Petition, Praise, Thanksgiving?
10. How do you need to change in the light of what you have read?
11. What is God saying to you through this chapter?

Week beginning 24th May

To the elders and the flock

5 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: **2** be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; **3** not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. **4** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

5 In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because,

'God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.'
(Prov. 3:34)

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. **7** Cast all

your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. **9** Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. **11** To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Final greetings

12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. **14** Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Questions for reflection

1. What do you learn about God? (vv. 5, 7, 10)
2. What do you learn about Jesus? (v. 4)
3. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit?
4. What do you learn about the devil? (v. 8)
5. What do you learn about salvation?
6. What do you learn about the church? (vv. 1-5))
7. What do you learn about what God has done for you?
8. What do you learn about how you should live? (vv. 5-9)
9. What is your response to what you have read? Adoration, Confession, Intercession, Petition, Praise, Thanksgiving?
10. How do you need to change in the light of what you have read?
11. What is God saying to you through this chapter?