LIVING AS A TRANSFORMED PEOPLE
Introduction to 1st Peter

Historical Background

First Peter is a letter written by the apostle Peter to Christians living in the northernmost regions of Asia Minor, roughly the geographical area of modern western Turkey as we know it today. The author, recipients and destination of the letter are stated clearly in the opening words of the letter: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia…" (1 Pet 1:1). The five provinces named here were Roman colonies covering a substantially large area of northern Asia Minor. In the book of Acts, we learn that the apostle Paul and his companions had attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. In contrast, they evangelized much of the southern and western regions as recorded for us in Acts 16:6-10.

Who then were the 'elect exiles of the Dispersion' that Peter is referring to? How did they become Christians? There is no record, as far as we know, of Paul or Peter visiting the places named in 1 Pet 1:1. There were however, Jews from Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia present in Jerusalem during Pentecost who had heard Peter's first sermon (Acts 2:9). It is possible that some believed and were the first Christians bearing the gospel back to their places of residence. It is also possible that they were believers from Rome expelled during the reign of Claudius. Biblical scholar Karen H. Jobes noted:

"It is particularly striking that Claudius (reigning AD 41 – 54), whose administration was characterized by conquest and expansion, established Roman cities in all five of the regions named in 1 Pet. 1:1… Coins and inscriptions from Asia Minor, as well as extant writings of Pliny, provide relevant historical information that Claudius established a colonia as a mark of imperial favour in each and every one of the regions named in 1:1."

According to the scenarios mentioned above, if Peter was writing around AD 62 – 64, he would be addressing churches which likely had existed for some time, possibly as early as in the AD 30s or in the 40s. Uprooted from Rome and living as migrants in these regions, some would indeed be exiles and sojourners in the real physical sense, even as Peter developed this idea to encompass the whole of the believers' spiritual journey as pilgrims on earth.

It does appear from the letter that Peter was writing to an audience made up of believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Peter's extensive use of the OT references (1 Pet 1:10,15, 24-25; 2:6-8; 3:10-12), would have made instant connection with the Jewish believers familiar with the OT text. At the same time, the language used by Peter also indicates that he was addressing Gentile believers (see 1 Pet 2:10; 4:3-4). Yet, no matter their background, they were now people 'born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet 1:3).

Purpose

In 1 Peter 2:13-17, Peter exhorts the believers to submit to the governing authority and

to honour the emperor, doing good as a response to any false charges brought against them. Some scholars see this as an indicator that Peter was writing at a time prior to the onset of official persecution from the Roman authorities, such as that by Nero in AD 64, or subsequently by Domitian in AD 81 or Trajan in AD 108. As one commentator puts it: "It is difficult to imagine Peter writing such words in a time of systematic persecution of Christians." Nevertheless, the first hearers or readers of 1 Peter were living in a society hostile to their Christian faith. There was constant pressure on them to conform to the values and practices of the pagan culture around them. Their refusal to participate in the idolatry and sinful lifestyle of those in society at large earned them slander and insults (1 Pet 4:4, 14). They were living with 'various trials' (1 Pet 1:6) and were warned of more fiery ones to come (1 Pet 4:12). They were essentially suffering because of their faith in Christ.

Peter was concerned – how would the Christians fare under persistent harassment, discrimination and persecution from society and how will they face the start of possible persecutions from certain local provincial governors? Would their faith weaken? Would they fall back? Peter thus wrote this letter to encourage them to 'stand firm' and to 'stand firm in the true grace of God' (1 Pet 5:12). They were called to persevere, and more than that, to rejoice even in their suffering, holding Jesus as their supreme example (1 Pet 1:6; 2:19, 2:21-24; 3:18; 4:1-2). Just as Jesus had suffered while committing no sin, believers were also called to suffer for righteousness (I Pet 3:13-14; 4:13-16). They were called to good conduct in the midst of hostility even if they were to suffer for doing good (1 Pet 2:12; 3:1,16-17; 4:4,19). Keeping a clear conscience and a good conduct would be their defence and their witness.

In the World But Not of the World
There is a necessary tension Peter holds in his exhortation to believers living as minority groups in a society that have values and worldviews incongruent and largely incompatible and contradictory to their Christian beliefs. On the one hand, Peter speaks of the unbelievers, culture and societal norm in a negative light, calling it passions of their former ignorance (1 Pet 1:14), that they are not a people of God (1 Pet 2:10) but like sheep gone astray (1 Pet 2:25) and living in 'a flood of debauchery' (1 Pet 4:3-4). Christians are called to come out of such cultural darkness and godless societal norms. On the other hand, Peter does not advocate withdrawal from the world but rather to be in positive engagement with the world. In fact he devotes a large segment of his letter (1 Pet 2:11 – 4:11) addressing the issue of the believers' relationship to the world. How ought Christians to live in a world that has values obviously different from what they are called to? Peter exhorts them to stand firm in their faith, to continue in positive behaviour, even through hostile experiences, and be willing to suffer according to God's will, entrusting their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good (1 Pet 4:19).

As Charles Talbert puts it, "The letter has two goals at once: (1) the social cohesion of the Christian groups, and (2) the social adaptation of the Christian groups to their cultural setting. Without the first, Christian identity would have been lost. Without the second, Christians would have had no social acceptability, which is also necessary for survival and outreach."

As we embark upon the study of this letter, let us pray that we will take heed of Peter's exhortations. Rather than be conformed to this world and be influenced by societal worldviews which are hostile to biblical values, pray that we will be transformed by God

through His word and Spirit and consequently be used by Him to bring light into a world in darkness and in need of the gospel. May we continue to learn to live as a transformed people and be a witness to a world in need of Christ.

Outline

	Titles	Text	Sermon
1	Living in Hope	1 Pet 1:1-12	2/3 Jul
2	Living in Holiness	1:13-21	9/10 Jul
3	Living as the New People of God	1:22-2:10	16/17 Jul
4	Living as Servants	2:11-25	30/31 Jul
5	Living as Husband and Wife	3:1-7	6/7 Aug
6	Suffering for Doing Good	3: 8-22	13/14 Aug
7	Living as Stewards of Grace	4:1-11	20/21 Aug
8	Persevering in Suffering	4:12 – 5:11	3/4 Sep
9	Conclusion	5:12-14	10/11 Sep

Source:
Thomas Constable, _Notes on 1 Peter_ (Sonic Light: http://www.soniclight.com, 2016).
Peter H. Davids, _The First Epistle of Peter_. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990).
Wayne Grudem, _1 Peter_. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988).
Karen H. Jobes, _1 Peter_. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).
Howard I..Marshall, _1 Peter_. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991).