

# Christians in a Hostile World

a study of 1 Peter

By Kay Daigle

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### Bible Translations Quoted

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# Introduction

For decades many leaders of the American church have stoked fear in our churches, describing the culture as our enemy and encouraging Christians to fight by any means possible.

There's no doubt that biblical values don't align with secular worldviews, but we seem to be getting our methods of battle in this "war" from secular society, not the Bible. I wonder if God isn't more concerned with our reactions than what's going on in the rest of the culture. After all, Peter tells us here in 1 Peter that judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17, NASB).

In Peter's letter we find Christians facing a much stronger threat than we do now. They were a true minority experiencing real suffering for being Christians, something we haven't experienced. Of course, we have stories which are hyped by people looking for a bigger audience, but if they were added all together, there's not much loss of freedom. In some cases our own ungodliness has created the hostility.

So if Peter's letter is written to those who suffered more than we have, perhaps we can learn from his message how to face a less hostile culture with grace. It's time to think hard about how to apply biblical answers in our secular culture.

Kay Daigle

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# Week Two—Called to Be Holy

## Words to Live By

Like obedient children, do not comply with the evil urges you used to follow in your ignorance, but, like the Holy One who called you, become holy yourselves in all of your conduct, for it is written, “*You shall be holy, because I am holy.*”

1 Peter 1:14-16

Holy sounds so, well, holy! How can God call us as sinners, whom he accepted only by his grace, to be holy?

The theme of holiness in this letter begins in 1 Peter 1:2 when Peter refers to the recipients of the letter as “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by being **set apart** by the Spirit for obedience and for sprinkling with Jesus Christ’s blood.” The word translated “set apart” in the NET Bible (*hagiasmos*)<sup>1</sup> is often translated with a form of the word sanctify, which is a separation or consecration unto God. It is a cousin of the word for holy (*haggio*).<sup>2</sup> The main sense of the word holy is “separation, consecration, devotion to the service of Deity, sharing in God’s purity and abstaining from earth’s defilement.”<sup>3</sup>

This concept of being holy or sanctified refers to both our initial setting apart as God’s people to obey and serve him (1 Peter 1:2) and also the continuous setting apart in character that changes believers to become more like Jesus, acting out the obedience for which we are purposed.

Karen Jobes comments: “The two components of consecration and sanctification cannot truly be separated: the transformation of character away from conformity to the world is constitutive of consecration.”<sup>4</sup>

## Part One Study

**Read the entire section of 1 Peter 1:1-12 to keep it all in context.**

I find the last paragraph in this passage (vv.10-12) to be so interesting. Throughout the Old Testament, God sent prophets to speak to his people, calling them back to fidelity to him through repentance and faith. Their messages included predictions of future events and of a

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<sup>1</sup> *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*: 38, accessed at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

<sup>2</sup> Strong: 40.

<sup>3</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 70.

<sup>4</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 70.

coming king who would lead Israel into prosperity and peace. He was referred to as the Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek). These terms translated into English would be Anointed One, suggesting that he is God's anointed king.

When we read the prophetic books of the Old Testament, we often wonder what many prophecies mean. Well, apparently the prophets themselves wondered about the timing and circumstances of their own predictions, particularly those about Messiah's coming, his suffering and the glories to follow. Peter says that even angels wanted to understand these words. Today, we as God's children are privileged to be on the back side of Jesus' coming and can thus understand the prophecies about Jesus and his suffering for us according to the gospel.

What is the gospel? It is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the truth that Jesus is God himself who came to earth and became man to grow up to suffer and die, freeing us from sin and the power of the forces of evil. Because of his death, we become God's children and citizens of his kingdom by responding in faith to Jesus. We can't earn this salvation; we can only receive it as a gift. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we are called to follow him and allow God's Spirit to change us more and more into his likeness. This is sanctification, the process of being set apart in character. Our purpose is to serve him on earth, sharing this gospel message and giving people glimpses of the kingdom that is to come in full when Jesus returns by speaking of and showing God's love.

**In light of the 1 Peter passage, think through these questions and write down your thoughts:**

- Comment on how these first twelve verses connect to Peter's purpose written in 1 Peter 5:12: "I have written to you briefly, in order to encourage you and testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it."
- Where are you on your spiritual journey? We all begin far from him. Where are you in knowing and following Jesus, not only for initial salvation but also for growing more like him?



Read more about the salvation Jesus brings in Romans 3:10-18, 21-23; 5:6-11; 6:23. Write down your insights.

- What is God saying to you through his Word today? How will you respond?

## Part Two Study

**We now move into the next section of Peter's first letter (1 Peter 1:13-21). Since it begins with "therefore," indicating a link from what came before to what is about to be said, reread vv.1-12 and continue reading through v. 21 to put it in context. Then write down any insights or questions you have as you answer the bulleted questions:**

- Verses 13-21 are built on the truths of vv.1-12. How would you explain their relationship? How do they fit into the purpose of the book (1 Peter 5:12)?

Often the Bible calls us to do something and yet also describes it as God's work. How are we to understand that? He calls us to obey, but all the while it's the Spirit within us providing the power.

- Knowing that it's God's Spirit who gives us the power to change and obey, what commands do you find in vv. 13-21? List them and consider underlining and marking them in blue in the text of 1 Peter on p. ? as you go. (You will generally recognize them by the lack of a subject. When I say to my child, "Clean your room," I don't put a subject in the sentence. The "you" is understood. But that said, Peter sometimes doesn't talk to "you" but to a specific group and may use the terms "let him or let them," suggesting that a command follows. It may be profitable to mark them also, especially if the person or group applies to you.) How do these commands relate to living in a hostile culture? How do you see vv. 13-21 relate to the command to be holy?
- Read Philippians 2:12-13. Comment on how it relates to the commands you found.
- What is God saying to you today through his Word? What will you do about it?



Read these other verses about God's work through his people, and comment in your journal: John 15:1-5, 26; Acts 4:5-12, 31. If time permits, also look at Acts 12:25-13:3; Romans 8:14-17 and 2 Peter 1:19-21.

## Part Three Study

**Reread all of 1 Peter 1:13-21. If you want to mix it up and likely gain new insights, read it in a different translation. (There are a number of Bible apps with multiple translations, or you can go to [netbible.org](http://netbible.org) and switch to a different translation at the top left of the passage where it says NET2, the default translation which is in the Appendix to this study.)**

In 1 Peter 1:17 we see the Greek word *paroikias*<sup>5</sup> meaning a time of residence in a foreign land, a time of exile, living as an alien. It refers not to the alien, as the word in 1:1 does, but to the period of time lived in an area that isn't really home.

**Think about how we would need to live if we were aliens in a physical country. How should we relate to its culture, government and people?**

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<sup>5</sup> Strong's: 3940.



**Write down your insights from 1 Peter 1:17 as you consider these questions:**

- Do you live with an awareness of how alien the character and actions of Jesus and his disciples are in our broader culture, or do you feel at home here? How would living into the new identity that God has given you as a resident alien or stranger in your country and the larger world change your attitude and actions? (Be specific about things that may need to change as you write in your journal.)
- What truth about God's grace does Peter give as the reason to adopt that attitude? How does it relate to the command?

**Read Philippians 3:17-21, and comment on these questions in light of 1 Peter 1:17:**

- In the Philippians passage, Paul contrasts his own attitude as a citizen of heaven with those of others. What do you learn from this contrast?
- How do you see the attitudes mentioned in Philippians 3:19 in our culture today? How do you see them in yourself?
- What is the Spirit saying to you as you consider how well you're living out Peter's suggested attitude as a resident alien? What do you need to do about it?



If you have ever lived in a foreign land as a temporary resident, how does that experience help you understand Peter's use of these words? Does it suggest to you ways that you may need to adjust your attitude toward your permanent home?

**Take time to pray, asking God to continue to show you what it means to be a foreigner on this earth.**