

Israel in Exile and the Church, Part Two

Last Things

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Our Scripture lesson today is taken from Psalm 137. Psalm 137, and you'll find that on page 973.

1 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. 2 There on the poplars we hung our harps, 3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' 4 How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. 6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. 7 Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. 'Tear it down,' they cried, 'tear it down to its foundations!' 8 O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us— 9 he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

The word of the Lord.

May we pray.

Lord, bless these Scriptures as we continue last week's sermon today, that we understand biblical truth and find practical meaning in our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now you may recall that last Lord's Day I cited this Scripture as an example of how people feel. In other words, the people to whom Jeremiah was writing in Jeremiah 29, where he said to them, "Pray for the peace of the city

where I send you,” the city where I send you. He was sending them to Babylon because he says, “in their peace,” that’s shalom, “in their prosperity,” that’s shalom, “in their harmony,” that’s shalom, “in their wholeness, in all areas of life, it will be your wholeness in all areas of life.” (Jeremiah 29:7, shālôm, שָׁלוֹם, Koehler, Ludwig and Walter Baumgartner (1958). *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill), pp. 973-974).

So, wherever God has put us, and God put the Jewish people in Babylon according to his sovereign purpose (Jeremiah 29:4), and so they were told not to pray for its destruction, but to pray for its shalom, because in its shalom, they would have shalom. But we see here in Psalm 137 that I cited last Lord’s Day, how they felt.

Now I want us to see something interesting today, and that is that how they felt was also a prayer, and that prayer was eventually answered, and if we turn in our Bibles to the book of Jeremiah again, and I find this very striking, on page 1,269, the same prophet Jeremiah who told them to pray for the prosperity of Babylon, because in its prosperity they’d have prosperity, does this. Looking there at the bottom of page 1,269, Jeremiah 51, beginning at verse 59.

This is the message Jeremiah gave to the staff officer Seraiah son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year of his reign (and that’s 594 BC), Jeremiah had written (verse 60), on a scroll about all the disasters that would come upon Babylon (turning the page), all that had been recorded concerning Babylon. He said to Seraiah, “When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud.” (Jeremiah 51:59-61)

Now commentators say, “Well, he read it to the Jewish people.” There’s no record that he read it to them. He simply read these words out loud.

Then say (verse 62), “O LORD (that’s God’s proper name, Yahweh), O Yahweh, you have said you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever.” (Verse 63) When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, “So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring

upon her. And her people will fall.” The words of Jeremiah end here.” (Jeremiah 51:62-63)

Now I want you to think about this for a moment. What has this government official, who was a believer who accompanied the last king that Judah ever had, because Judah never had a king again, after Zedekiah. Later, you know that Zedekiah was caught by the Babylonians, because he broke his promise to Nebuchadnezzar. They caught him, they executed his sons in front of him and the high officials and princes, and then they put his eyes out and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon (2 Kings 25:6-7). So, this is the last king of Judah. Judah has never had a king since then, except the one who came who said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). So here is Zedekiah, and he’s gone to take an oath in the name of Yahweh, to Babylon and notice what this man is instructed to do. What he’s instructed to do is to engage a curse over the city of Babylon; it’s spoken out loud and then there’s a ritual act carrying it out.

See, there’s something supernatural here. We often miss the supernatural because our minds are so tainted by a secularism that profoundly affects us. Going back to, for example, Immanuel Kant, who divided reality in the noumenal and the phenomenal.

In the noumenal world, that’s the world of faith, all kinds of things can happen, but in the phenomenal world, that’s the world that we observe right here this morning, where we can touch and feel wood and so on, in other words, what we would call **the real world**, the phenomenal world, there’s no God there, and that secular mindset has pervaded Western thought since the time of Kant in a growing, increasingly pervasive way. So, we’re apt to filter out the supernatural.

What I want you to see is that the same Jeremiah that wrote in Jeremiah 29, “Pray for the prosperity and peace of Babylon because in its prosperity and peace, you will have prosperity and peace,” also instructs this man to engage in a curse ritual, placing a curse on the city.

Why did the city of Babylon fall? You can look at all kinds of external reasons, but the fundamental reason why Babylon fell is that Jeremiah instructed this man to curse the city, both out loud and then with a ritual act, as he threw the scroll into the Euphrates River. And that’s exactly what happened. What happens is that Babylon falls in 539 BC.

They were all secure. You remember the story, of course, there in Daniel, how Belteshazzar, who was the second ruler in Babylon (Daniel 5:7,16), because his daddy liked archaeology and was off on a dig, and so that was Nabonidus.

Belteshazzar's there in Babylon, and he's having a high old time. The Medes are outside the gate, but they weren't worried. "We're in an impregnable place. We have an iron dome that nobody can penetrate. Totally secure. We have a Pacific on one hand, the Atlantic on the other."

Never forget that nations tend towards hubris in thinking that they are invulnerable, and so invulnerable did they feel that he decided to have a party that night and get drunk, and so he had the gold cups and other things from the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar, he has them brought out, and they're drinking, and they're praising the gods of gold and silver (Daniel 5:1-4).

All of a sudden, there's handwriting on the wall, and people look, and if you could see something suddenly appearing back here on this back wall, and it said, "Mene tekem upharsin" (מְנֵא טֶקֶל וּפְרָסִין, Daniel 5:25), and was a code to say that they were weighed in the scales and found wanting (Daniel 5:27). Everybody's terrified (Daniel 5:6). If you saw something being written right here right now, we'd all be very frightened. Why did that happen?

It happened because of Jeremiah's curse that was enacted ritually and out loud, and so what happens that night is that the Medes, who were the dominant nation, and along with them the Persians who came to be more dominant afterwards, had their engineers, their army corps of engineers, divert the water, and therefore they were able to march into Babylon on dry ground, and they took the city very fast, suddenly like that.

Nations rise and fall by the ordination of a sovereign God, and so he uses means to that end, not only using the ambition of the Medes and of the Persians, but also using Jeremiah's curse.

Now I want you to see a very basic principle here, and that is if you'd turn with me to Deuteronomy 32, the basic principle is this: survival and blessing. How are you and I to survive and be blessed? Deuteronomy 32:35, page 325. And how are we to be blessed? We live in a foreign land. We

should never forget that. Israel in exile, and whatever nation any Christian happens to find herself or himself in is a foreign land, and the point is, how do we prosper?

We pray for the prosperity of the place where we live. God blessed Texarkana and all of its suburbs in both Arkansas and Texas. We should be praying for the prosperity of this city because we'll prosper as it prospers. And so, we see here a very fundamental principle, and that's this: We may have great resentment because of how we perceive we're being treated, but if you look here at what God says, and it's repeated a number of times, and that's verse 35:

It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near upon them. (Deuteronomy 32:35)

And the point we want to see here is this, that if you think you've got to defend yourself, if you're worried about a government that's hostile to God, and you say, "Well we've got to take matters in our own hands," we never do that. We never do that. We allow God to do that.

And so, turn with me to a couple of passages where this is used. Turn with me, if you will, to Romans 12. Romans 12, because this passage from Deuteronomy is quoted a couple of times in the New Testament. Romans 12 and verse 14, page 1,764. Look at what we're told here. Verse 14, "Bless those who persecute you." Bless those that persecute you. This goes right back to Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. (Verse 16) Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. (Romans 12:14-16)

Now look at verse 17. This is the meat of the coconut. Verse 17, we pray for the prosperity of a heathen government, even if the government where we live happens to be headquartered in Moscow or Kiev or in Austin or Baton Rouge or Little Rock, wherever we live, we pray for the prosperity and peace of the people where we live. We seek God's blessing on it in spite of the fact that they do not deserve it. If we're living in Beijing, China, where

there's great persecution, we pray for the peace and prosperity of that community. If we're living in Riyadh, in the most virulently anti-Christian nation on the face of the earth, Saudi Arabia, you pray for the peace and the prosperity of that place. And so, what does he say? Verse 17:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Verse 19, this is critical. In the present time, in our time of exile from our true home, which is the heavenly Jerusalem, he says) Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, (and there's the quote from Deuteronomy 32:35) "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." (And if you look down at the bottom of the page, you see that's a quote from Proverbs 25:21 and 22, Romans 12:17-20).

And what does this mean? What this means is this: God wants you to overcome evil with good. Don't be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). What is he describing? When you feed those who hate you, when you give water to the person that despises you, when you do that, you're heaping burning coals on his head.

Now people have sometimes, commentators have come up with this or that idea. You know what it is? Have you ever been convicted of something? Have you ever really been bothered about—has your conscience really stung you? What is a stinging conscience, but fires of coal on your own head, and when somebody that you've been mean to, somebody that you have hurt, but rather who has hurt you, when you're kind of that person, what you're doing is causing them to come under conviction for sin for what is God's general plan for the whole human race? I said his general plan: It is to draw everybody, everywhere to Christ. And how do people come to Christ? They only come to Christ when they see they need a Savior. Most people don't think they need a Savior, but when people see the need of a Savior, they will begin to look to Christ who died on the cross for our sins.

And so, he says, leave room for God's wrath. God says he's the one that will avenge, he will repay, which he did to the Babylonians. He fulfilled the

anguished cry of pain and hurt and bitterness of the Jewish people by the waters of Babylon and when they said, “How blessed, *ashrei* (’Asheriy, אֲשֶׁרִי), how happy will be the person that does to your little babies what you’ve had done to our little babies.” (Psalm 137:9)

And you know what? In the course of time, that literally and exactly happened. Wow, to the Babylonians. “It’s mine to repay.” But God’s general plan for the humanity is that people would repent of their sins and come to know him and trust in Christ and we do that by bringing them under conviction of sin.

What will bring a person under conviction of sin? Will fussing at them? Will saying, “You shouldn’t do that! You shouldn’t do that! You shouldn’t do this,” and so on? That rarely brings anybody under conviction. All it does is make people bow up, and then they just bristle, and they harden their hearts, and they don’t want to hear it—don’t want to hear it. But when you act in kindness and love to relieve the suffering of your enemy, God does something. More often than not, it’s like coals of fire on the head, bringing conviction so that people do repent.

Now we need to see something else here, and that is if you turn over to 2 Thessalonians 1. 2 Thessalonians 1. How we live in the present time, we live in the present time before the second coming of Christ, and we want to look here at page 1,842. In the present time, we live in a time when we’re still in exile. Where is our true home? Hebrews 12 tells us very plainly that our true home is the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22; Galatians 4:24-31). That’s why nothing on this earth can really satisfy us. No matter how much money we may make, no matter how many material goods we may have, no matter how good relationships are in this life, nothing ultimately satisfies.

I remember a friend of mine who later died of pancreatic cancer, he became a Presbyterian minister, but he was a rebel. His father had been a non-Trinitarian Pentecostal preacher and had gotten his mother pregnant. She was a guest in their home, and he, his name was Ron Davis. Anyhow, his father got his mother, a teenage girl, pregnant, and then his father divorced his own wife and married Ron’s mother, and thinking this would be a good thing to do, which is not a good thing to do. And in the course of time, then he got convicted, and he divorced Ron’s mother and went and remarried his wife and got his ministerial credentials back by starting ten churches and

donating them to the United Pentecostal District. So that earned his way back.

What about poor Ron? Poor Ron was raised without a father because his father had gone back to his other wife. And Ron, as a teenager, was extremely rebellious, and one day he hit the road. He hitchhiked all the way to California, looking for fulfillment, looking for joy, looking for peace, because he was abandoned by his own father. And he's looking for it, looking for it, looking for it, not finding it. And one day he decided to go back to Louisiana. He lived in Lake Charles. And so, when he gets back to Lake Charles, he's sitting there with his mother, eating breakfast with her, and I'm often struck at his mother.

His mother was a real Christian. In spite of the things that happened to her, in spite of being part of a non-Trinitarian group, his mother did love Jesus and wanted people to know and love Jesus. And she said these words to her son. She said, "Son, you know there is no happiness in this world but in God."

And that is a profound truth. There is no happiness in this world but in God. Nothing can fill it, no matter how rich, no matter how powerful. Nothing can fill it. Nothing can fill it.

I look at the geriatric ward called the U. S. Senate, and I look at why, I mean, I'm an old man—I ain't as old as some of them, but you know, I think why? Why, when you are obviously suffering serious problems, you stand there and you go blank and other things and you wonder, what is this? You know what it is?

They're still looking for fulfillment and power and control and those things give some measure of fulfillment. But are they happy? Are they happy? Are they happy? There's only one way to be happy, and you can be happy here this morning on Robeson Road. You can be happy in ICU in a hospital. You can be happy even in prison, because when you have God, you have it all. The Lord Jesus Christ.

Now notice what he says here in 2 Thessalonians as he talks about things there on page 1,842 as he writes to the believers in Thessalonica, verse 5: "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering."

What is the mark of a believer? One is happiness, as our dear friend Baxter shared this morning, “Why are you so happy?” And another mark is suffering. Wow, another mark is suffering. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you’ve got a target on your back.

And then he says this in verse 6:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

And the point I want to make with this is this, whatever you’re going through, think about a lawsuit. You ever been sued? I remember being sued once for an automobile accident, and the insurance company provided me with an attorney I didn’t know, and the attorneys on the other side I all knew. But anyhow, it was okay, it wasn’t a big deal. But a lawsuit can be a bad thing. If you think about 1 Corinthians 6, he talks about lawsuits, and he says this, “Why not rather be defrauded?” That’s a striking thought, isn’t it? “Why not rather be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:7)

How can you have an attitude like that? You know how you can have an attitude like that? Because this world isn’t my real home. My real home is in heaven and my real home is the place from which Jesus is going to return and rescue my mortal body.

If I die before he returns, he’ll rescue it out of the ground, and he will make it like his glorious resurrection body (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 John 3:2). That’s the key.

The key is this, you don’t have to right wrongs in this world. You don’t have to get even. You don’t have to get the best attorney in the world to defend

you against these people. You don't ever have to take up arms against the government. Never, never, never do that.

We're not in the position of Old Testament Israel as a civil entity protecting a civil entity. We are an alien people exiled from our true home and we live in exile with this confidence, the agonies we feel, like Psalm 137, eventually God is going to right the wrongs. It won't be long. It won't be long. God will right the wrongs, and that's our great comfort. That's our great solace in this life of so much wrongdoing and so much evil and so much trouble. God will take care of you. We don't have to worry.

The Lord said, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you." So that we may say with boldness, "The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5)

If you really trust in Christ, that should be your great confidence, and that's all due to one reason and one reason only. Jesus is both our example, and he is our Savior.

The Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross. He suffered in your place, in my place. He took your guilt and my guilt on himself. He did that and shed his precious blood that all our sins would be forgiven and that is the reason that we have confidence because he is our Savior, because he is our healer, because he is our protector and defender, and lastly, because there is coming a day when those who have afflicted us and have never repented, when those who hate and persecute Christians just because they're Christians, if they never repent, God will take care of them and that's what's so clear there in 2 Thessalonians 1.

And all that is sealed to us, if we think about it, in the Lord's Supper.

I love the Lord's Supper because the Lord's Supper reminds me that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3). He is my substitute. He died in my place. I don't have to do anything except receive that gift with the empty hand of faith, and I'm forgiven, my sins are wiped out.

And he also deigns to have real communion and fellowship with me. That's what the bread speaks about. You know, there are a lot of people in life that will shun you. They don't like you for one reason or another, but Jesus never

shuns us. If we put our trust in him, he embraces us in his arms, and he welcomes us and that's what the bread speaks to us about, and by the power of the Holy Spirit and his word of promise, those symbols become a reality to us when we partake.

May we pray.

Lord, we pray that you would take this message as a follow-up of Israel in exile and the church, of how we're to pray for those who do bad things to us, but we do so confident of the supernatural power of God who will one day right every wrong and straighten things out. We thank you that heaven is our home, not this earth, and Lord, as we see troubling times, may we suck great comfort from your word and from the Lord's Supper, these visible words of God. For Jesus' sake. Amen.