

NOON BIBLE STUDY: EXILE (PT. 1)

TODAY'S PURPOSE: EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED AFTER 2 KINGS 25.

- TEMPLE DESTROYED, JERUSALEM DESTROYED
- PEOPLE EXILED TO BABYLON DURING THE REIGN OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

2 CHRONICLES 36:11-21 - SUMMARY OF JERUSALEM'S FINAL DAYS

V. 21 - "TO FULFILL THE WORD OF THE LORD BY THE MOUTH OF JEREMIAH". JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY IS BEFORE THE ACTUAL EXILE

JEREMIAH 25:1-6, 7 - JEREMIAH IS PREACHING, BUT THE PEOPLE AREN'T LISTENING

JEREMIAH HAS BEEN SPEAKING TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM FOR YEARS. HIS MESSAGE WAS A CALL FOR REPENTANCE AND RETURN TO THE LORD. YET IN ALL HIS PREACHING, THE PEOPLE DID NOT LISTEN TO GOD'S WORDS (THROUGH JEREMIAH).

JEREMIAH 25:8-11 - SPECIFIC CONSEQUENCE FOR JUDAH'S DISOBEDIENCE: 70 YEAR EXILE

JEREMIAH TELLS THE PEOPLE THAT BECAUSE OF THEIR DISOBEDIENCE, THE LORD IS RAISING UP BABYLON (NEBUCHADNEZZAR) TO DESTROY JERUSALEM AND LEAD THE NATION INTO EXILE FOR 70 YEARS.

THIS PROPHECY IS IN LINE WITH WHAT GOD HAD ALREADY TOLD THE NATION, EVEN AS FAR BACK AS MOSES' DAY IN THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS.

LEVITICUS 26:14-15 - 'BUT IF YOU DO NOT OBEY ME AND DO NOT CARRY OUT ALL THESE COMMANDMENTS, 15 IF, INSTEAD, YOU REJECT MY STATUTES, AND IF YOUR SOUL ABHORS MY ORDINANCES SO AS NOT TO CARRY OUT ALL MY COMMANDMENTS, AND SO BREAK MY COVENANT,...

(THE LORD OUTLINES VARIOUS PLAGUES AND CONSEQUENCES THAT WOULD COME UPON THEM TO CALL THEM BACK TO HIM)...

LEVITICUS 26:27-39 - 'YET IF IN SPITE OF THIS YOU DO NOT OBEY ME, BUT ACT WITH HOSTILITY AGAINST ME, 28 THEN I WILL ACT WITH WRATHFUL HOSTILITY AGAINST YOU, AND I, EVEN I, WILL PUNISH YOU SEVEN TIMES FOR YOUR SINS. 29 'FURTHER, YOU WILL EAT THE FLESH OF YOUR SONS AND THE FLESH OF YOUR DAUGHTERS YOU WILL EAT. 30 'I THEN WILL DESTROY YOUR HIGH PLACES, AND CUT DOWN YOUR INCENSE ALTARS, AND HEAP YOUR REMAINS ON THE REMAINS OF YOUR IDOLS, FOR MY SOUL SHALL ABHOR YOU. 31 'I WILL LAY WASTE YOUR CITIES AS WELL AND WILL MAKE YOUR SANCTUARIES DESOLATE, AND I WILL NOT SMELL YOUR SOOTHING AROMAS. 32 'I WILL MAKE THE LAND DESOLATE SO THAT YOUR ENEMIES WHO SETTLE IN IT WILL BE APPALLED OVER IT. 33 'YOU, HOWEVER, I WILL SCATTER AMONG THE NATIONS AND WILL DRAW OUT A SWORD AFTER YOU, AS YOUR LAND BECOMES DESOLATE AND YOUR CITIES BECOME WASTE. 34 'THEN THE LAND WILL ENJOY ITS SABBATHS ALL THE DAYS OF THE DESOLATION, WHILE YOU ARE IN YOUR ENEMIES' LAND; THEN THE LAND WILL REST AND ENJOY ITS SABBATHS. 35 'ALL THE DAYS OF ITS DESOLATION IT WILL OBSERVE THE REST WHICH IT DID NOT OBSERVE ON YOUR SABBATHS, WHILE YOU WERE LIVING ON IT. 36 'AS FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO MAY BE LEFT, I WILL ALSO BRING WEAKNESS INTO THEIR HEARTS IN THE LANDS OF THEIR ENEMIES. AND THE SOUND OF A DRIVEN LEAF WILL CHASE THEM, AND EVEN WHEN NO ONE IS PURSUING THEY WILL FLEE AS THOUGH FROM THE SWORD,

AND THEY WILL FALL. 37 'THEY WILL THEREFORE STUMBLE OVER EACH OTHER AS IF RUNNING FROM THE SWORD, ALTHOUGH NO ONE IS PURSUING; AND YOU WILL HAVE NO STRENGTH TO STAND UP BEFORE YOUR ENEMIES. 38 'BUT YOU WILL PERISH AMONG THE NATIONS, AND YOUR ENEMIES' LAND WILL CONSUME YOU. 39 'SO THOSE OF YOU WHO MAY BE LEFT WILL ROT AWAY BECAUSE OF THEIR INIQUITY IN THE LANDS OF YOUR ENEMIES; AND ALSO BECAUSE OF THE INIQUITIES OF THEIR FOREFATHERS THEY WILL ROT AWAY WITH THEM.

THE PEOPLE HAD IGNORED THEIR CALLING AND ABUSED THE LAND. AND SO NOW THEY WILL BE SENT AWAY DEFEATED AND THE LAND WILL "REST". THIS IS THE PURPOSE OF THE 70 YEAR DURATION. THIS WILL BE A TIME OF GREAT SORROW. SURELY FOR SOME, THERE WILL BE MEMORIES OF HOW THINGS "USED TO BE". THEY WILL REMEMBER HOW THE NATION OF JUDAH HAD FALLEN - THINKING BACK TO THE DAYS OF KING DAVID, THE DEDICATION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE, THE TIME OF ZION - THE PRAISE, THE WORSHIP, THE JOY. REMEMBER, DURING SOLOMON'S REIGN, THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD CAME TO JERUSALEM TO LEARN OF YAHWEH'S WAYS. AND NOW THE NATION IS SCATTERED AND SMALL IN NUMBER, WITH THE TIME OF ZION ONLY A MEMORY. IN FACT, ONE OF THE PSALMS RECORDS THIS SORROWFUL TIME

PSALM 137:1-6

1 BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON, THERE WE SAT DOWN AND WEPT, WHEN WE REMEMBERED ZION.
2 UPON THE WILLOWS IN THE MIDST OF IT WE HUNG OUR HARPS.
3 FOR THERE OUR CAPTORS DEMANDED OF US SONGS,
AND OUR TORMENTORS MIRTH, SAYING, "SING US ONE OF THE SONGS OF ZION."

4 HOW CAN WE SING THE LORD'S SONG IN A FOREIGN LAND?
5 IF I FORGET YOU, O JERUSALEM, MAY MY RIGHT HAND FORGET HER SKILL.
6 MAY MY TONGUE CLING TO THE ROOF OF MY MOUTH IF I DO NOT REMEMBER YOU,
IF I DO NOT EXALT JERUSALEM ABOVE MY CHIEF JOY.

IT IS HARD TO THINK SUCH A GLORIOUS TIME WHEN ALL AROUND YOU IS REMINDERS OF THE PUNISHMENT THE NATION HAS JUST RECEIVED. BUT, THERE IS MORE TO THE PROMISE WHICH MOSES SPOKE TO THE PEOPLE MANY YEARS BEFORE:

LEVITICUS 26:40-45 - 'IF THEY CONFESS THEIR INIQUITY AND THE INIQUITY OF THEIR FOREFATHERS, IN THEIR UNFAITHFULNESS WHICH THEY COMMITTED AGAINST ME, AND ALSO IN THEIR ACTING WITH HOSTILITY AGAINST ME-- 41 I ALSO WAS ACTING WITH HOSTILITY AGAINST THEM, TO BRING THEM INTO THE LAND OF THEIR ENEMIES-- OR IF THEIR UNCIRCUMCISED HEART BECOMES HUMBLER SO THAT THEY THEN MAKE AMENDS FOR THEIR INIQUITY, 42 THEN I WILL REMEMBER MY COVENANT WITH JACOB, AND I WILL REMEMBER ALSO MY COVENANT WITH ISAAC, AND MY COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM AS WELL, AND I WILL REMEMBER THE LAND. 43 'FOR THE LAND WILL BE ABANDONED BY THEM, AND WILL MAKE UP FOR ITS SABBATHS WHILE IT IS MADE DESOLATE WITHOUT THEM. THEY, MEANWHILE, WILL BE MAKING AMENDS FOR THEIR INIQUITY, BECAUSE THEY REJECTED MY ORDINANCES AND THEIR SOUL ABHORRED MY STATUTES. 44 'YET IN SPITE OF THIS, WHEN THEY ARE IN THE LAND OF THEIR ENEMIES, I WILL NOT REJECT THEM, NOR WILL I SO ABHOR THEM AS TO DESTROY THEM, BREAKING MY COVENANT WITH THEM; FOR I AM THE LORD THEIR GOD. 45 'BUT I WILL REMEMBER FOR THEM THE COVENANT WITH THEIR ANCESTORS, WHOM I BROUGHT OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT IN THE SIGHT OF THE NATIONS, THAT I MIGHT BE THEIR GOD. I AM THE LORD.'

ALONG WITH THE PROMISE OF EXILE, THERE IS ALSO THE PROMISE THAT IF THE PUNISHED PEOPLE (WHILE IN EXILE) CALL TO THE LORD ONCE AGAIN, HE WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON THEM AND BRING THEM BACK TO HIS PROMISED LAND. JEREMIAH CONTINUES WITH THIS TRUTH AS HE INFORMS THE NATION THAT THEY ARE SOON GOING TO EXPERIENCE THE 70 YEAR EXILE AT BABYLON'S HAND.

JEREMIAH 25:12-13 - BABYLON WILL BE PUNISHED FOR THEIR SINS

AT THE END OF THE 70 YEARS, THE LORD WILL PUNISH BABYLON FOR HER SINS. REMEMBER, THE LORD USES THE PAGAN NATION TO DO HIS WORK, BUT THAT DOES NOT IMPLY THEY ARE NOT EVIL. THROUGH HIS JUDGMENT UPON BABYLON (HISTORICALLY THROUGH THE MEDIAN-PERSIAN EMPIRE), HE WILL END THE 70 YEARS OF EXILE. THIS IS WHERE WE WILL PICK UP THE STORY OF EZRA.

SO NOW, FOR THE NEXT 70 YEARS THERE WILL BE A REMNANT OF THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM (JUDAH IN THIS CASE) THAT WILL HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM JERUSALEM (WE READ ABOUT THIS IN 2 KINGS 25 & 2 CHRONICLES 36). THE CITY IS DESTROYED BY BABYLON AND THE NATION SENT AWAY. THIS IS ALL THE JUDGMENT OF GOD UPON HIS PEOPLE FOR THEIR REBELLION AGAINST HIM.

AND SO THERE IS A SMALL JUDEAN COMMUNITY THAT WILL LIVE IN BABYLON DURING THIS 70 YEARS. JEREMIAH WILL ACTUALLY WRITE A LETTER TO THIS COMMUNITY PREPARING THEM FOR THE TIME OF EXILE. NO AMOUNT OF SACRIFICE OR RITUAL IS GOING TO CHANGE THE DECREE OF 70 YEARS. SO WHAT SHOULD THESE PEOPLE DO AS THEY WAIT?

JEREMIAH 29:1-9 - MESSAGE TO THE EXILES

JEREMIAH'S ADVICE IS THIS: GET USED TO LIVING AS AN EXILE IN BABYLON. START SETTLING IN, LIVE LIFE AND DO YOUR BEST TO BE MY PEOPLE IN THE MIDST OF ANOTHER NATION. IF YOU HEAR A SO CALLED PROPHET RISE UP IN BABYLON AND SAY "WE'RE GOING BACK TO JERUSALEM" OR "LET'S REBEL AGAINST NEBUCHADNEZZAR" OR SOMETHING, DON'T LISTEN TO THEM - THEY ARE NOT SENT FROM THE LORD.

THAT BEING SAID, THE LORD IS STILL WITH THEM, EVEN WHILE IN EXILE. AND AT THE END OF THE 70 YEARS, YOU WILL RETURN TO JERUSALEM. SO KEEP THIS HOPE IN FRONT OF YOU. REMEMBER THAT EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE IN A STRANGE LAND, THIS IS NOT YOUR FINAL HOME.

JEREMIAH 29:10-14 - THE LORD'S PLAN FOR HIS PEOPLE.

THE LORD GIVES HOPE TO THE NATION IN EXILE. GOD SAYS "I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU AND THEY ARE PLANS OF GOOD (V. 11).

THEY ARE TO WAIT IT OUT, SEEK THE LORD, AND HOPE IN HIS PROMISE OF RETURN TO THEIR LAND. WHILE THIS VERSE CAN BE MIS-APPLIED TO CHRISTIANS IN GENERAL, (AS IN "NOTHING BAD IS EVERY GOING TO HAPPEN, BECAUSE GOD ONLY GOOD PLANS FOR YOUR FUTURE") IT IS A TRUTH SPOKEN TO THE EXILES ABOUT THEIR END OF THEIR TIME IN BABYLON.

AND SO BEFORE WE TURN TO EZRA AND NEHEMIAH, WHICH RECORD THE HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH RETURNING TO JERUSALEM, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO SEE WHAT HAPPENED AFTER JERUSALEM'S DESTRUCTION. THE PEOPLE ARE DEPORTED TO BABYLON WHERE THEY WILL LIVE AS STRANGERS AND EXILES FOR 70 YEARS. THIS ALL WAS THEIR CONSEQUENCE FOR REBELLION AND DISOBEDIENCE TO THE LORD.

WHILE THEY ARE IN BABYLON, THEY SHOULD NOT TRY TO REBEL, ESCAPE OR RETURN. THERE IS NOTHING THEY CAN DO TO CHANGE GOD'S MIND ABOUT THE 70 YEAR DECREE. BUT THEY SHOULD HAVE HOPE - BECAUSE THOUGH THERE IS A PROMISE OF 70 YEARS OF EXILE, THERE IS ALSO A PROMISE OF AN END TO THAT EXILE. AND THAT IS PART OF THE COMPLETE MESSAGE OF JEREMIAH TO THE PEOPLE.

SO THE PEOPLE OF GOD, SIT IN EXILE AND ARE CALLED TO REMEMBER THE PROMISE OF GOD TO SET THINGS RIGHT AGAIN ONE DAY. THIS MOMENT IN BIBLICAL HISTORY DOES PROVIDE US WITH SOME GREAT DIRECTION FOR OUR LIVES TODAY.

SURELY WE LIVE AS CHRISTIANS IN A LAND WHICH IS NOT OUR "HOME." AS THE SONG SAYS *"THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME, I'M JUST A PASSING THROUGH. MY TREASURES ARE LAID UP, SOMEWHERE BEYOND THE BLUE..."* THE NEW TESTAMENT REFERS TO CHRISTIANS AS "STRANGERS," "PILGRIMS", AND "EXILES". WE HAVE NO COUNTRY WHICH IS "GOD'S NATION" AND WE WAIT FOR OUR KING TO RETURN AND "GATHER US TOGETHER". WE HAVE A HOPE AND FUTURE WHICH GOD HAS DECLARED AS SURE - THOUGH THE WORLD AROUND US IS BLEAK AND WE DON'T *"...FEEL AT HOME, IN THIS WORLD ANYMORE..."*

SO WHAT DO WE DO IN THE MEANTIME?

1 PETER 2:11-17 - BELOVED, I URGE YOU AS ALIENS AND STRANGERS TO ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS WHICH WAGE WAR AGAINST THE SOUL. 12 KEEP YOUR BEHAVIOR EXCELLENT AMONG THE GENTILES, SO THAT IN THE THING IN WHICH THEY SLANDER YOU AS EVILDOERS, THEY MAY BECAUSE OF YOUR GOOD DEEDS, AS THEY OBSERVE THEM, GLORIFY GOD IN THE DAY OF VISITATION. 13 SUBMIT YOURSELVES FOR THE LORD'S SAKE TO EVERY HUMAN INSTITUTION, WHETHER TO A KING AS THE ONE IN AUTHORITY, 14 OR TO GOVERNORS AS SENT BY HIM FOR THE PUNISHMENT OF EVILDOERS AND THE PRAISE OF THOSE WHO DO RIGHT. 15 FOR SUCH IS THE WILL OF GOD THAT BY DOING RIGHT YOU MAY SILENCE THE IGNORANCE OF FOOLISH MEN. 16 ACT AS FREE MEN, AND DO NOT USE YOUR FREEDOM AS A COVERING FOR EVIL, BUT USE IT AS BONDSLAVES OF GOD. 17 HONOR ALL PEOPLE, LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD, FEAR GOD, HONOR THE KING.

WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION OF JESUS (HIS WORD), WHILE WE PHYSICALLY DWELL IN A LAND NOT UNDER HIS VISIBLE RULE.

PHILIPPIANS 1:27 (NLT) - ABOVE ALL, YOU MUST LIVE AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN, CONDUCTING YOURSELVES IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT CHRIST. THEN, WHETHER I COME AND SEE YOU AGAIN OR ONLY HEAR ABOUT YOU, I WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE STANDING SIDE BY SIDE, FIGHTING TOGETHER FOR THE FAITH, WHICH IS THE GOOD NEWS.

PHILIPPIANS 3:20 (ESV) - BUT OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN, AND FROM IT WE AWAIT A SAVIOR, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST,

WE MAY NOT BE IN OUR CURRENT SITUATION BECAUSE OF SIN, BUT THE WORLD IN GENERAL IS. AND RATHER THAN DIRECTING OUR ENERGIES TOWARDS REBELLING AGAINST THE POWERS OF THIS AGE, WE SHOULD FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF JEREMIAH'S WORD TO THE BABYLONIAN EXILES:

JEREMIAH 29:7 - SEEK THE WELFARE OF THE CITY WHERE I HAVE SENT YOU INTO EXILE, AND PRAY TO THE LORD ON ITS BEHALF; FOR IN ITS WELFARE YOU WILL HAVE WELFARE.'

AND PAUL HAS A SIMILAR WORD TO OUR GENERATION OF "EXILES"

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-16A - DO ALL THINGS WITHOUT GRUMBLING OR DISPUTING; 15 SO THAT YOU WILL PROVE YOURSELVES TO BE BLAMELESS AND INNOCENT, CHILDREN OF GOD ABOVE REPROACH IN THE MIDST OF A CROOKED AND PERVERSE GENERATION, AMONG WHOM YOU APPEAR AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD, 16 HOLDING FAST THE WORD OF LIFE

WE PRAY FOR OUR NEIGHBORS AND NATION AND SHINE THE GOSPEL LIGHT EVERYWHERE WE GO, AND WE WAIT. WE DON'T GET "BENT OUT OF SHAPE" ABOUT HOW THINGS ARE GOING...WE ALREADY KNOW THE END OF THE STORY. WE PUT OUR EFFORTS TOWARDS CALLING CITIZENS OF THE STRANGE LAND IN WHICH WE LIVE TO JOIN THE REIGN OF OUR COMING KING. WE DON'T TRY AND TAKE OVER, NOR DO WE GET DISCOURAGED AND LOSE HOPE.

INSTEAD WE STAY FAITHFUL TO OUR GOD AND KING AND WAIT FOR THE APPOINTED TIME OF RECUSE AND RESTORATION. A DAY THAT IS SURELY WORTH WAITING FOR.