



Lesson 20: EXILE: Faithfulness in Exile

Readings: Jeremiah 25:1-14, 29:1-14, 2 Chronicles 36:20-21; John 3:19-21; 15:18-25; 17:13-23; Matthew 5:10-16; Ephesians 6:10-12; Philippians 3:17-21; 2 Corinthians 5:16-20; Daniel 1-6; Esther

The Timeline of the Exile of Judah

605 BC: First wave of the Exile

- Cream of the crop were taken (like Daniel and friends) (Daniel 1:3-7)
- The Lord revealed to Jeremiah that the exile would last for 70 years. (Jer. 25:12)

597 BC: Second Wave of the Exile

- Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon

586 BC: Fall of Jerusalem & Destruction of the Temple

- Almost all Jews taken to Babylon
-

Jeremiah's Letter: How to Live in Exile (Jer. 29)

Settle Down in the Land: *"Build houses and settle down, plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters... increase in number there, do not decrease."* (v 5-6)

Seek the Shalom of Babylon: *"Also, seek the peace (shalom) and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."* (v. 7)

Seek the Lord: *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* Jeremiah 29:13

New Covenant Application: In the New Covenant, we are also living as exiles in a foreign kingdom. We are "citizens of heaven" living as sojourners on earth (Philippians 3:20).

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Daniel

Written by Daniel, 6th Century BC

Ch 1-6: Stories from the lives of Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were learning how to live in faithfulness to the Lord even while in the palace of the king of Babylon. How to be “in the world, but not of the world” and even change the world around them, influencing the kings of the superpowers.

Ch 7-12: Contains apocalyptic visions. They are designed to reassure God’s people that, in spite of their present persecution and suffering, God is in control and will ultimately be victorious.

Daniel 1: Daniel & Friends Are Raised Up and Tested

“At the end of the time... The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service.” (v 19)

Daniel & his friends didn’t seek to leave the palace or the king’s court. They stayed where they were, but remained faithful to God, even in enemy territory.

Daniel 2: Dream Interpretation & Rise to Power

“Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.” (v 48)

Daniel was placed in a very high position in Babylon. Just like Jeremiah said, Daniel worked towards the prosperity of the kingdom of Babylon because “in their shalom, you will have shalom.”

Daniel 3: The Fiery Furnace

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” (v 16-18)

“Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.” (v 28)

Daniel 4: Nebuchadnezzar’s Madness

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” (v 37)

God used supernatural means to convince the most powerful kings of the greatest superpowers on earth that He is the One Sovereign God.

Daniel 5: The Writing on the Wall

"You, Belshazzar, [Nebuchadnezzar's] son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this [about his madness]. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven... you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways." (v 22-23)

Daniel 6: The Lion's Den

Daniel engaged in a very public form of civil disobedience.

King Darius: "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end." (v 26)

Historical Context: In the ancient world, if your nation was overthrown by another nation, people thought that meant their god was more powerful than yours. In all of these stories, God proved that even though His people were in exile, He is greater than the gods of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. He is sovereign over all the earth and His eternal kingdom will replace them all.

Esther

Book of Esther

Author Unknown; generally believed to have been written sometime in the 4th century BCE or possibly as early as the 5th century BCE. God is not mentioned by name in the book of Esther, but it shows clearly that even when God is most hidden, he is still working to protect his chosen people.

Esther 1: Xerxes & Vashti

Xerxes deposes Vashti in a capricious fit of rage. This sets up our story for Esther, and we realize why Esther has to be very careful around the king.

Esther 2: Esther is Made Queen

"Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti and the king made her his new queen. (v 17)

Esther was placed in a position of prominence through the providential hand of God.

Esther 3: Haman Plots to Kill All the Jews

Haman convinced Xerxes to issue the edict to kill all the Jews. *"In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Xerxes, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar." (v 7)*

God was in the "Lots" - the Jews were given almost a full year to take action.

Esther 4: Mordecai & Esther Make a Plan

Mordecai's plea to Esther: *"If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish." "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (v 14)*

Esther's Response: *"I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (v 16)*

Esther was willing to do what was right, even if it cost her her life. Like Daniel, she was also willing to break a human law in order to do what was right - in this case, to save God's people.

Esther called for Fasting and Prayer. Fasting traditionally was a sign of mourning, but fasting also helps us to seek God as our highest priority. In her fast, Esther received divine protection, clarity and guidance.

Esther 5: Esther Goes to the King

Verse 4 is a Hebrew acrostic = the name of God

"If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king." (v 4)

Esther 6-9

God uses the King's Insomnia. The King offers half of his Kingdom to Esther and in response to her plea, spares the Jews. The Jews are allowed to defend themselves, they destroy their enemies, instituted a holiday, and many pagans became Jews.

Purim

Esther is celebrated every year at Purim, during which the Jews reenact the story and feast.

The book of Esther asks us to trust in God's providence even when we can't see Him working.

Life Lessons for People of the New Covenant

God is Sovereign over kings and kingdoms. He's God over history - past, present and future. We need not be distressed, anxious or despairing when we see trouble in the world.

As exiles living in this foreign land today:

- Remain faithful to God alone, but do so as respectfully as possible
- Live lives that are above reproach, so they can find no fault with you
- Obey human authorities unless they demand that we disobey God
- Be ambassadors of God's kingdom, bringing the message of reconciliation
- Seek the shalom of the world, bringing wholeness to the brokenness around us