



Week 5 - Way of the Exile

Dr. Tim Mackie

“In 2020, all of us experienced loss—loss of hopes or expectations, jobs or stability, and some even lost loved ones. This is a traumatic time that has left our once familiar world feeling foreign and strange. And in times like these, we may begin to question where God is in all of this. We see God’s people ask similar questions throughout the story of the Bible when they found themselves in times of fear and instability.”

“In this week’s Bible Study, we will ponder the story of Israel’s exile in Babylon, when God’s people lost everything they knew and loved and were forced into an unfamiliar world. This loss was devastating, but it also made them imagine new ways to be faithful to God and his promises to restore the world. In a similar way, we are all experiencing loss during the COVID-19 crisis, but perhaps there is wisdom and hope for us in these biblical stories of exile and restoration.”

Daniel 1

“Daniel and his friends are exiled to Babylon and made to serve in Babylon’s royal court. They’ve lost everything they know and love and are forced into an unfamiliar world. Notice the balance they strike between resistance and cooperation, demonstrated by their adherence to the Israelite food-laws. Daniel is willing to serve Babylon, but not when it requires compromise in serving his God.”

- In what ways do you resonate with the Israelite’s experience of losing what they knew and loved? It’s okay to be sad and grieve this loss. Take a moment to reflect on how you might honor the loss you’ve experienced during this time.
- **Question for Reflection** - Consider the combination of loyalty and subversion displayed by Daniel. Do you see any ways this can be a model for your own life in this time of change?

Jeremiah 29:1-14

“Jeremiah writes a letter to a community of Israelites who were recently exiled to Babylon. He encourages them to settle in and build communities that seek the well-being of their captors. They are to seek peace and harmony not because they’ve given up, but because of their bold hope that God will rescue them and restore them to the promised land one day.”



This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace 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." Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

- What resonated most with you in this passage?
- What could it look like to extend love to our leaders and the broader culture in this time?
- **Question for Reflection** - Take a moment to reflect on what it means to "settle in" to this time, while still maintaining hope in the future.

1 Peter 1:1-2; 2:4-17

"Peter addresses followers of Jesus in the Roman empire, yet he calls them priests of God who are living in exile. He calls them to distance themselves from the value system of their surrounding culture, while at the same time being faithful to God and those around them."

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood Grace and peace be yours in abundance. As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:



“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

- For many of us, our previous way of life has come to a halt. In what ways has your practice of worship and faithfulness to God changed?
- **Question for Reflection** - Think creatively about what faithfulness to God could look like in this strange new world. How can you connect with God and others and live faithfully in this time?