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We are Exiled in Babylon

An analogy. Like the Jews of old, believers today are exiled in **Babylon**. They longed to go home, and so do we.

1. Because of the nation's sin, the Babylonians came in and conquered Isra'el. Secular society has won the culture war.

2. The Babylonians were brutal. By the ninth day of the fourth month in 586 BC, the famine in Jerusalem had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. Then, about a month later, the City wall was broken through and what was left of the Jewish army fled. Nebuchadnezzar then killed hundreds of thousands with the sword in the Sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm (Jeremiah 39:1-2, 52:4-7a; Second Kings 25:1-2; Ezekiel 24:1-2; Second Chronicles 36:17).

Then the City wall was broken through and all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim a chief officer, and Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officials of the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 25:3). There were two generals/officials named **Nergal-Sharezer**. The first one is **Nergal-Sharezer** lord of Sin-Magir the Rabsaris. **He** came from the town of **Samgar-Nebo**, which was sometimes known in **Babylonian** literature as **Sin-Magir**. So, **he** was a mayor of a specific city in **Babylonia** and **he** also had the military title of Rabsaris. The second man was also known as **Nergal-Sharezer**. **He** is known in **Babylonian** writings as Neriglissar, the Rab-mag or chief of princes (it was not unusual for **the Babylonians** to have more than one name). **He** was married to the daughter of **Nebuchadnezzar** and would later murder **Nebuchadnezzar's** son, Evil-Murdock, and reign as **king of Babylon** from 559 BC to 556 BC.

The prophecies of **Yirmeyahu** were beginning to be fulfilled very quickly. **When Zedekiah king of Judah and his soldiers saw the Babylonian dignitaries sitting in the Middle Gate, they** realized that **the City** had fallen. Then **the king, his family and the whole army fled at night** and slipped **through the gate**

between the two walls by way of the king's garden near the Pool of Siloam. The royal family and a small group of ragtag **soldiers** were in the steep ravine near where Hinnom and Kidron Valleys unite. Climbing over the Mount of Olives **they fled toward the Arabah**, which is also known as the Jordan Valley in the area of Jericho (**Jeremiah 39:3-4; 52:7b; Second Kings 25:4**). **Zedekiah** tried to escape through an eighteen-mile long tunnel, but enemy soldiers who, while chasing a deer, saw **him** emerging captured **him** on the plains of Jericho.

Zedekiah was trying to get across the Jordan River at the very same location that **Isra'el** crossed over coming *into* Canaan (**Joshua 3:1-17**). Now **Zedekiah**, the last **king** of **Isra'el** was trying to *escape* the land of Canaan the same way! **The king** was without courage, resolve, or resource. **He** neither resists nor surrenders, but jumps ship in a disgraceful way. **He** abdicated **his** royal office and **his** royal responsibility, leaving the people in the lurch.

The king came very close to **his** goal of escaping, coming up short only a mile or two from the Jordan River. **But the Babylonian army pursued Zedekiah and his** little entourage, **and overtook them on the plains of Jericho. All Zedekiah's soldiers were separated from him and they scattered** trying to save themselves (**Second Kings 25:5**). **The Babylonian army captured Zedekiah and took him to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah** (**his** field headquarters) **in the north at Hamath** just south of Syria. There **the Babylonian King** waited while **his** generals conducted the sieges of **Jerusalem** and **Tyre** (**Jeremiah 52:8-10 and 26-27; Lamentations 4:19-20; Second Kings 25:6, 20-21**). In like manner Pharaoh-Necho after his victory over **the Babylonians** at Carchemish in 609 BC, returned to **Riblah** and summoned **Jehoahaz** from **Jerusalem** before **him** (**Second Kings 23:33**).

Therefore, **the Jewish** puppet **king** was captured after fleeing 25 miles from **Jerusalem** to Jericho, then **he** was taken another 25 miles back to **Yerushalayim** and then another 180 miles north to **Riblah**. This would have taken several days. One wonders the thoughts going through **his** mind being as **he** was transported in chains with **his** family. Did **he** fear the worst, or did **he** hold out hope that **Nebuchadnezzar** would be merciful towards **him**? What would happen to **his** family? What would happen to **the nobles** captured with **him**? **He** would soon find out. Those who were associated with **Zedekiah** were **killed**.

Jeremiah's prophecy had been fulfilled to the letter. **Zedekiah** did not die by the sword (**39:18**), but **he** was disgraced. **The Babylonian king pronounced**

judgment on him. He had the sons of Zedekiah killed before his eyes and also killed all the nobles of Judah. This would be the last thing **Zedekiah** would see as long as **he** lived. The thing **he** could never forget. **Then the Nebuchadnezzar put out Zedekiah’s eyes and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon, where he put the Jewish king in prison until the day of his death (Jeremiah 39:6-7, 52:8-11; Second Kings 25:7).** The **eyes’** being gouged out was a common form of punishment in ancient times. It is mentioned in the Code of Hammurabi. The Septuagint text of **52:11** specifies that **Zedekiah** was put in the “house of milling” **until the day of his death**, that is, **he** did women’s work, which calls to mind **Samson’s** fate: **Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison (Judges 16:21).** The secular society is just a brutal.

3. The Babylonians destroyed the Temple and carried of the sacred furniture back to Babylon.

4. The Jews were allowed to participate in Babylonian society.

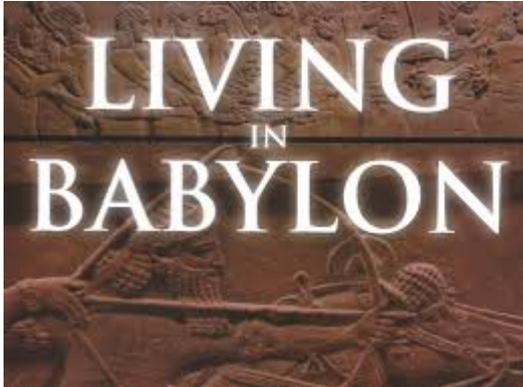
5. Babylonian law was not based on the Torah, but on the Code of Hammurabi.

6. But the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was not recognized or worshiped.

7. The Babylonians sacrificed their children to the god Anu.

8. The Jews longed to return to their homeland.

9. But Jeremiah told them: Yes, exile is traumatic and terrifying. Our sense of who we are is very much determined by the place we are in, the people we are with, and the laws that govern us. When that changes, violently and abruptly, who are we? The accustomed ways we have of finding our worth and sensing our significance vanishes. The first wave of emotion recedes and leaves us feeling worthless, meaningless. We don’t fit anywhere. No one cares what we think. No one needs us. We are extra baggage. We aren’t necessary.



How did these **Jews** in **exile** feel? How did **they** respond? If we imagine ourselves in a similar situation, remembering how we respond when we are forced to spend extended time with people we don't like in a place we don't like, we will not be far from the truth. It's as if they were saying, "A terrible thing has happened to us. And it's not fair! I know we weren't perfect, but we were no worse than the rest of them. And here we end up in this **Babylonian** desert while our friends are carrying on life as usual in **Jerusalem**. Why us? We can't understand the language; we don't like the food; the manners of **the Babylonians** are boorish; the schools are substandard; there are no decent places to worship; the temples are polluted with immorality and everyone speaks with an accent. **They** complained bitterly about the terrible circumstances in which **they** were forced to live. **They** longed, achingly, for **Jerusalem**. In other words, **they** wallowed in self-pity.

This is what the LORD of heaven's angelic armies, the God of Isra'el says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. You are not camping. **Build houses and settle down (Jeremiah 29:4-5a).** Make yourself at home. If all you do is sit around a pine for the time you get back to **Jerusalem**, your present lives will be neglected and empty. Your life right now is every bit as valuable as it will be when you get back to **Jerusalem**. **Babylon** is not your choice, but it's your judgment. Dwell there. Plant gardens and eat what they produce (**Jeremiah 29:5b**). Become a productive member of society. Don't expect others to do it for you. Get your hands into the **Babylonian** soil. Become knowledgeable about the **Babylonian** irrigation system. Acquire skill in cultivating fruits and vegetables in this soil and climate. Get some **Babylonian** recipes and cook them. Grow where you're planted.

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 (Jeremiah 29:6). Just as the Jews did not assimilate with the Egyptians in Egypt; they did not assimilate with **the Babylonians in Babylon**. To assimilate would be no more than to repeat the sins of **Jerusalem in Babylon**. No, this was not a command to intermarry with the **Babylonians**; on the contrary, it was to increase the Jewish population (**Exodus 1:9-10**).

Seek the shalom of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to ADONAI for [Babylon] because if it prospers, you too will prosper (29:7 CJB). Jeremiah's letter was both a rebuke and a challenge. Don't sit around feeling sorry for yourselves. Don't have the attitude of a prisoner of war. Prisoners "do time." They count the days until their release, days that are essentially empty. Don't listen to **the lying prophets** feed you false hopes. You are not there accidentally, victims of bad luck. I have sent you there deliberately and you will be in **Babylon** for a long time. Do not live your days morning for the good-old-days. Live your lives there, in **Babylon**, and live them fully. Do not put aside **the prayer of Psalm 122:6: Pray for shalom in Yerushalayim!** Learn a new **prayer: Pray for shalom in Babylon!** For in **Babylon's shalom** you will find your **shalom**.

Living in **exile** forces a decision: Will I focus my attention on what is wrong with the world and feel sorry for myself? Or will I focus my energies on how I can live at my best in this place I find myself? It's always easier to complain about problems than to live a life of dignity. Daily we face decisions on how we will respond to these exiled conditions. We can say, "I don't like it. I want to be where I was ten years ago. How can you expect me to throw myself into what I don't like . . . that would be sheer hypocrisy! What sense is there in taking risks and tiring myself out among people I don't even like in a place where I have no future?"

Or we can say, "I will do my best with what is here. Far more important than the climate of this place, the economics of this place, the neighbors of this place, is the **God** of this place. **God** is here with me. What I am experiencing right now is on ground that was created by **Him** and with people whom **He** loves. It is just as possible to live out the will of **God** here as any place else. I am full of fear. I don't know my way around. I have much to learn. I'm not sure I can make it. Change is hard. Developing intimacy among strangers is always a risk. Building relationships in unfamiliar and hostile surroundings is difficult. But I can do it with **God's** help.

When their time exile was over, the righteous of the TaNaKh, those of faith, returned home. However, not all the Jews did so. Most, in fact, chose to stay in

Babylon.

Believers in America and around the world are now in **Babylon**. **We** have a choice. **We** long to return home. But **we** must remember daily that **we are citizens of heaven, and it is from *there* that we expect a Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20)**. As long as we are here **on this earth**, we are strangers in a foreign land. **Aliens, temporary residents**, just passing through (**Hebrews 11:13; First Peter 2:11**). **For we have no permanent city; on the contrary, we seek the one to come (Hebrews 13:14)**.

We do not belong to this world - on the contrary, the Lord has picked us out of the world - therefore, the world hates us (John 15:19). Therefore, **the world is passing away, along with its desires. But whoever does God's will lives forever (First John 2:17)**.

So, since we have come to be considered righteous by God because of our faith, let us continue to have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Also, through Him and on the ground of our trust, we have gained access to this grace in which we stand; so, let us boast about the hope of experiencing God's glory. But not only that, let us also boast in our troubles; because we know that trouble produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope; and this hope does not let us down, because God's love for us has already been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:1-5).

We are to dwell here for now, and increase the believing population. Be in **the world (Babylon)**, but not of **the world (Babylon)**. Instead of worrying about what the future holds, we need to focus on **Who** controls the future.