

**On The Way to Jesus pt 9
Lament and Consolation in Exile**

On Monday I was reading a book, *The Men We Need*, by Brant Hansen. In chapter three he tells of a conversation with an UBER driver who asked him, "What is reality?" Hansen then quotes Dallas Willard by saying, "Reality is what hits you when you are wrong."

For the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Reality was The Assyrians and the Babylonians, respectively. It's what hit them when they were wrong. At least that's how it appeared on the surface.

But if we read more closely and are willing to grapple with some uncomfortable ideas, what 'hit' them was the FAITHFULNESS OF God. That is a Reality that we must not overlook.

Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel and Judah is faithful to His nature- He is holy, righteous, and just. He is also gracious and compassionate. Those are not mutually exclusive.

A psalm of Lament Ps 137

I recently came across an article written for our current day that better applies to the time period leading up to the scattering of Israel and the exile of Judah.

I'll contextualize the content as we consider where we are as we follow God's people and His Work On the Way to Jesus.

<https://disntr.com/2023/04/28/americas-greatest-threat-not-transgenderism-not-lgbtq-not-progressivism-but-god-himself/>

NEWS ALERT For The Two kingdoms of God's Rebellious People.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel (722 BC)

Southern Kingdom / Judah (605 BC).

YOUR GREATEST THREAT COMES FROM THE FAITHFULNESS OF God HIMSELF.

"Top of the news tonight for Israel and Judah" – Religious commentary

In these troubled times, when the moral fabric of our nation is stretched thin and the noise of discord echoes in the land, it is easy to fall into the trap of fearing only the tangible threats against us. Yet, as we fixate on the visible sins, we must not forget the invisible, omnipotent hand that guides the fate of nations. As a nation founded on Covenant principles, it is our duty to examine the divine implications of our current path, lest we find ourselves on the brink of judgment.

As we contemplate the state of our nation, we observe the rise of multiple evils, such as the erosion of covenantal values by the rise of pagan sexualized practices. These are demonstrative of a nation given over by God to the lusts of their heart. We also see the deceptive machinations of the kingly politics.. Yet, in the shadow of these obvious dangers, we often overlook the true peril that looms over us all.

Yahweh Himself, the one who holds the power to judge and bring calamity, is the greatest threat to the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

The Scriptures bear witness to the truth that the Yahweh is a God of justice, who "takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (**Ezekiel 33:11**), but carries it out as a matter of justice, as is His nature. When a nation strays from the precepts of righteousness and lapses into ungodliness, it is God who causes calamity and judgment to befall it. The iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, the hubris of Pharaoh, and the waywardness of the Israelites themselves stand as a testament to God's judgment upon those who

disregard His commandments.

To avert the judgment of Yahweh, we cannot merely fight the worldly fight against evils we dislike, which is a noble but insufficient cause. It isn't that we shouldn't stand against the evils of the world, it's simply that we should recognize the real, eternal threat that looms over us. We must humbly acknowledge our own sinful nature and cast ourselves upon the mercy of Yahweh.

We must remember and heed to Word of Yahweh which he said to Solomon after he completed the house of the Lord... 2 Chron 7

12 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.

Our problem, Israel and Judah, is that we have abandoned Yahweh and we no longer seek His face. We have turned to the wicked ways of the nations and pursued their gods. The religious life of both kingdoms became centered on Baal, Ashteroth, and Molech.

While we continue to speak the truth to the conscience of these nations, and we continue to battle against the darkness that pervades us, ultimately, we must confront the reality that the greatest threat to our nations is not the tangible evils that surround us, but the judgment of God, who will judge the world in righteousness" (Ps 9:8). What good is it to win our nation back to our moral ideals yet continue to lose our souls? The people of this nation must urgently turn from their own wayward path, seeking repentance and turning to Yahweh alone as their only hope. And that can only happen if the Lord God is our first love.

In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

Yahweh has sent prophets and afflictions to get our attention, yet we have not repented.

Isaiah 1 (Complete Jewish Bible)

2 "Hear, heaven! Listen, earth! For Yahweh is speaking.
"I raised and brought up children, but they rebelled against me.
3 An ox knows its owner and a donkey its master's stall
but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.

4 "Oh, sinful nation, a people weighed down by iniquity,
descendants of evildoers, immoral children!
They have abandoned Yahweh, spurned the Holy One of Israel,
turned their backs on him!
5 "Where should I strike you next, as you persist in rebelling?
The whole head is sick, the whole heart diseased.

The impending judgment of God is not a matter to be taken lightly. It is a call to repentance, a clarion call for all people to humble themselves before the Almighty God, the creator of the universe, the one who gives life and takes it away.

Jeremiah 25 predicts the coming 70 year exile under the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, who God calls "My servant" 25:9 The affliction comes from the hand of God to manifest his justice and to call His people to repentance.

God is not obligated to extend mercy and grace to Israel or Judah. God does not need Israel and Judah in our current form, but He does graciously promise to restore his people.

Jeremiah 30 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. ³The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity^[a] and restore them to the land I gave their ancestors to possess,’ says the LORD.”

Scripture has told us that it is through faith alone, apart from works, that we can find the grace of God and the hope of salvation. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Habakkuk warned of the coming judgment of God at the hands of the Babylonians and he also points us to a life of faith. As we witness the encroaching darkness in our nation, we must remain steadfast in the knowledge that our hope lies not in our own efforts but in the ultimate faithfulness of Yahweh. We are saved by faith alone, through grace alone, in Yahweh alone.

**God will be faithful to His holiness and justice by judging our sin, just as he warned.
He is our greatest threat AND HE IS our ONLY HOPE.**

*** End of NEWSBREAK COMMENTARY***

The initial judgement of God is in turning us over to our own desires. Then God may send in the Babylonians to complete the process and restore the people when there is repentance. Rom 1 – NT, BUT where did Paul get this idea? From what he knew of God in the OT and divine providence.

Ps 19:9 “the judgements of the LORD are true and righteous altogether”.

Lincoln quoted that verse in his Second Inaugural Address as he spoke of the divine providence in the American War between the States.

Baylis... The God of the Bible is the one who claims the right to judge injustice. He carries out the vengeance due because of man’s inhumanity to man and national sins that weaken the social fabric.

Consider The sadness of Godly discipline- Amos

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (3:2), he was not claiming favored status or a chauvinistic partisanship for Israel; he merely reminded them of God’s election.

God set His love on the people of Israel by His grace. They were not more righteous than any other people. They were not less sinful than any other people. It is a sad testimony to the reality and power of sin that this chosen people who had this favored status turned from God and brought godly discipline upon themselves.

YET, YAHWEH is their only HOPE. Ezek 11:16-23

Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.’ 17 Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’ 18 And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. 19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And **they shall be my people, and I will be their God. ...**

Two key promises that were given in Genesis of a Land and the presence of God are revived and the people come out of Exile and return to the Land under Cyrus of Persia.

Looking at a bare timeline or taking any of these events individually would seem like they are disconnected.

But as we listen to the prophets, we see how they understand the big picture of what God is doing. From the promises to Abraham (Gen 12, 15) to the return from exile, we're looking at a period of around 1500 years. (2062 BC to 516 BC)
It was another 400 years to Christ - 400 years of 'silence' from God.....no prophets, no new Word.

YET when John the Baptist shows up, the people are still looking for THE Seed, who was promised in Gen 3. They see the CONTINUITY of God's promise and His work the entire time.

** EX: by contrast, in our age today we have trouble agreeing on what happened in the past two years. We have trouble holding on to the thread of our own national history - just 416 years if we go all the way back to Jamestown- May 14, 1607

The prophets in the Exile tied together the promises that went back to Genesis. This represents a remarkable adherence to the sacred texts and promises of God. It is an appreciation for this heritage and the Word of God that sustained the people of God in the Exile and beyond.

** As believers today, we share in that heritage. Since our spiritual roots go back to Genesis, we should lean into the ancient wisdom of God. This is counter-cultural in a "progressive" world that wants to throw out old values to redefine everything and everybody on a regular basis..

** Do you want to be radical and counter-cultural? IS THAT STILL A THING?

If so, "don't be carried away by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming." (Eph 4:14)

But speak the TRUTH in love. Stand for truth, for the very idea of truth. Stand for the eternal truths that come from the Word of God. That is not opposed to love; it is an expression of Love.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE in a land where we may feel like we are exiled?

There is a sense in which God's people should always feel like strangers and aliens in this world. If we are comfortable with what the world offers in terms of values and success, then we've given up and have given in.

Seek the good of the city where we are...

Jer 29

4 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, 5 'Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce.

6 Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease.

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.'

Keep following the creation mandate - build, create, pro-create, seek the welfare of your city and pray.

** Do you know how radical v.6 is to TODAY'S CULTURE? - get married- men with women- have children. That is counter-cultural today. Sadly, many nations have bought into the world's values so deeply that they have declining rates of marriage and children.

US birthrates have fallen 20% since 2007

The anti-population ideology took hold by the sixties and the consequences are really starting to be felt around the globe. When having babies is seen as being the problem, the world is in bad shape.

We are living in a world where the ideology is geared toward NOT having children or doing away with the pre-born or chemically sterilizing those reaching puberty.

Up until the last 50 years, every generation of every culture would consider what we are doing as being similar to the practices of those who sacrificed their children to pagan gods.

Such were the practices of those on the road to Exile so God brought his discipline to his people. The

spiritual and theological irony is that God used an evil empire to get His people's attention.

Habakkuk, one of the prophets who gave warnings about the coming judgement on the sin of God's people, was disturbed that God would use even bigger sinners for His purpose. He wanted God to intervene against the injustice in Judah, but he complains when God gives His answer – He will use the Babylonians to bring about His intervention..

In response to the prophet's complaint, God responds with 2:4 – **The just shall live by faith**

Hab 2:4

i.e. Trust God even when you don't think He knows what He is doing.

CAN YOU RELATE???

Then in chap 3 Habakkuk offers another prayer and response v 2, 17-19

3:2; 17-19

2 Lord, I have heard the report about You; Lord, I stand in awe of Your deeds.

Revive Your work in these years; make it known in these years.

In Your wrath remember mercy!

Habakkuk ends with a perspective that demonstrates the movement of faith...

**17 Though the fig tree does not blossom and there is no fruit on the vines,
though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,**

though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,

18 yet I will triumph in Yahweh; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!

**19 Yahweh my Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like those of a deer
and enables me to walk on mountain heights!**

This perspective of Habakkuk gave hope to the people of God enabling them to persevere in faith.

Do we understand that walking by faith in the ultimate goodness of God is what provides a meaningful existence between the present day and the not yet of the final consummation of the promises of God.

HOPE found in Lamentations 32:22-24

Though the judgement of the Exile is not fully lifted, God uses Cyrus to release the remnant of God's people to return to Jerusalem. They are not free from foreign domination, but they now have a new start.

Ezra 9 says that God has given them a "tent-peg" in the holy place to revive them in their bondage.

On the Way to Jesus the people are still waiting for a full deliverance. They have experienced a 'mini-Exodus' with the return, but the better Exodus is yet to come through Christ. We have the benefit of knowing how God brought about this Exodus through the death and Resurrection of Christ.

On this Ascension Sunday, we can celebrate THE RESTORATION that comes through the work of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

After the return from Exile, Israel experienced 400 years of silence until John came to proclaim the Messiah. With the availability of God's Word, we don't ever have to experience such silence.

Let us say with Habakkuk...

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and enables me to walk on mountain heights!**

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/seek-your-citys-good>

<https://econofact.org/the-mystery-of-the-declining-u-s-birth-rate>

US birthrates have fallen 20% since 2007

<https://albertmohler.com/2023/05/17/briefing-5-17-23> pt III

13. Grief and Consolation during Exile

Judah grieves during exile but is comforted by the prophets, who reiterate God's promise of restoration.

- Lamentations 1 (Mourning over Jerusalem)
- Psalm 44 (Plea for God to rescue them)
- Psalm 69 (Zeal for the temple)
- Jeremiah 25 (Promise of 70-year exile)
- Habakkuk 2 (Faith to endure judgment)
- Daniel 1-2 (Babylon to be judged)
- Daniel 9 (Revisiting Jeremiah's promise)
- John 2 (Zeal for the temple)*
- Hebrews 10 (Faith to endure judgment)*

14. (Partial) Restoration from Exile

Though the Northern Kingdom is never fully restored (rather, repopulated with Samaritans), the Southern Kingdom is released under Persian rule to rebuild the temple. But things are never quite the same.

- Ezra 1-6 (Return under Cyrus, rebuilding)
- Nehemiah 8-9 (Covenant renewal)
- Haggai 1 (Encouragement to rebuild)
- John 4 (Jesus and the Samaritan woman)*

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