

126) PSALMS OF THE EXILE *Psalm 44, Psalm 74, Psalm 79, Psalm 80, Psalm 85, Psalm 89, Psalm 102, Psalm 106, Psalm 123, Psalm 137* September 19

Even though we have just finished with the book of Job, if you think about it, we haven't moved too far from the idea of suffering, because we are right back (chronologically, that is) with the exiles. We can assume that the righteous among them were trying to sort out what was happening to them, and what they needed to learn during this time. The ten Psalms assembled here by Dr Smith, covering two days of reading, "expose the agonizing LONELINESS of not only the Hebrew captives but of anyone who has ever awakened to the realization that he or she is in SPIRITUAL EXILE."

Psalm 44 was definitely written by those who truly felt they had done nothing wrong. Imagine if there had been some faithful few who could say this with a clear conscience – the whole of Israel would have still needed to go into exile. So these folks in the tiny minority felt deserted by God. These feelings can be very real, but we know the big picture, and we know that eventually God is always there for us in the end.

Psalm 74 is another poem written by one who felt that God had rejected him. This may or not have been written during the time of the exile but it most certainly was written by someone who felt that the Lord had deserted him in hard times. This was a call for God to rise up and defeat the enemy. If Satan is the enemy today, then I say a hearty AMEN!

Psalm 79 - In this sad tune, Asaph, the writer, begged for deliverance from the sins of his ancestors. Praise God that in Christianity we don't need to worry about this in a redemption sense. However, beware that your parents' sins (or yours, if you are a parent) can still deeply affect your children. This psalm is also interesting because it sounds like the writer has called for revenge on his enemies. However, since the Hebrews had a strong sense that they were God's chosen and that anyone who opposed them would eventually get it from God, it makes sense that they would naturally have felt like this.

Psalm 80 is a bit softer, but still painful, with the writer crying out in from the position of a flock that needed to be rescued by its Shepherd. The psalmist spoke of having been fed tears – what a sad visual! If you have had some hard times lately, this psalm is for you! And what do we want to feel when we are depressed? The face of God shining on us, Amen! Three thousand years ago, God's people yearned for the same things!

Psalm 85 written by the Sons of Korah starts to feel a bit more positive. These guys seemed to understand that God's restoring of Israel meant that they had to keep up their side of the bargain –

*I will listen to what God the LORD will say;
he promises peace to his people, his saints—
but let them not return to folly.*

And while this is still a psalm of mourning, the language seems more hopeful –
9 Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

10 Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.

12 The LORD will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.

13 Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.

Don't you just love that line in verse ten – about righteousness and peace kissing?
What a cool picture! It does bring to mind a certain call to discipline from Hebrews:
*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of **righteousness and peace** for those who have been trained by it. (12:11)*

Wonder if that means anything? Could it be that part of getting restored back to God from spiritual exile involves discipline? Just ruminating...

Psalm 89, which begins with lines that were made into a popular Christian song about 50 years ago (“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever, I will sing, yes I will sing...”), employs a technique that I like to refer to as “calling God on his promises!” The psalmist was going through rough times, so instead of moaning about it, he reminded God of all of God’s awesome promises of deliverance, and then begged God to deliver! This is a great device – I have done it many times! It gets us thinking of how big God is and our problem somehow seems (a bit) smaller...

Psalm 102 reads like a diary of a dying hospital patient – for that is how we feel when in spiritual exile, when we feel far from God, and when we need God’s deliverance. I have been with some sick friends recently, so it seems very real. Even in this sadness, the writer had the strength to end praising God.

Psalm 106 is a great prayer to have for your quiet time. It goes through the history of Israel, blow by blow, from the time they left Egypt til the time they were rescued from their wanderings and brought into Canaan. The moral – God redeemed even **those** people, so surely he will rescue us! And it is hard to go wrong with a song to God that ends with *Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.*

Psalm 123 is just a prayer for mercy! One of the songs of ascent, it is a poignant request for deliverance from the arrogant after much humiliation...very touching in its humility, simplicity and genuineness.

Psalm 137 is the last psalm in our exile list, but it is certainly not the least, seeing as how it was made famous back in 1978 in the UK by the band, Boney M. See if this brings you down memory lane: (can be seen on YouTube)

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down;
ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down;
ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion.

When the wicked
Carried us away in captivity
Require from us a song -
Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

When the wicked
Carried us away in captivity
Requiring of us a song -
Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts
be acceptable in Thy sight here tonight

Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts
be acceptable in Thy sight here tonight

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down;
ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down
ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion.

By the rivers of Babylon (the waters of Babylon)
there we sat down (You got to sing a song)
ye-eah we wept, (Sing a song of love)
when we remember Zion. (Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah)

By the rivers of Babylon (by the rivers of Babylon)
there we sat down (You hear the people cry)
ye-eah we wept, (They need their God)
when we remember Zion. (Ooh, got the power)

Now if that didn't do anything for you, do you remember the song sung as a round?
You can go to YouTube and look up "By the Waters of Babylon" to hear it. I quite
the version by a chap called David LaMotte. Not sure who made this famous, but I

think it gets sung around the campfire... This tune captures the mournful state that the writer of this sad poem would have been in as he penned this prayer about babies being dashed into rocks and the futility of trying to sing to God when you don't feel like singing... great stuff for those of us grappling with our walk with God.

But don't despair – we have been in exile, but soon we will be reading the entries which take place AFTER THE EXILE, and we will be talking about restoring, and rebuilding – just the thing for anyone trying to start over with God!

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