
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 20: EXILE

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

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2. Creation
3. Fall
4. Noah
5. Abraham
6. Patriarchs I
7. Patriarchs II
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16. Solomon
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Lecture 20

EXILE

Lecture Theme:

God's promises bring privileges, but they also bring obligations. God's people learn that rebelling against him and breaking his covenant results in the mercy of chastening to train them in his ways and to turn them back to himself.

Text:

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11–12).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 20

The ancient world did not have newspapers, but imagine for a moment that they did. If you were reading the headlines of newspapers in Syria, Babylon, Persia, or even later on at the time of the New Testament, the Greeks and Romans, what do you think they would say? I imagine they would talk about news from the palace of the emperors, perhaps economic progress. They would talk about all the wars and battles on the foreign front, especially about the expansion of their nation's territory in glory, and many other such things, but you would find almost nothing about Judah and Israel other than perhaps some brief lines at some point about a new territory subjected under the Empire. But, when you open your Bible, you discover something remarkably different. That is because you are reading history from God's perspective. You learn that all these nations with their [supposed] importance are really a peripheral side story. The real story is about God's people. The other nations merely serve the Lord's intentions to uphold His plan of redemption. God controls all for that purpose, but you would never learn that from a newspaper. You would think that the important matters pertain to Babylon, or later on to Rome, or whomever. The Bible teaches us how to see history, and nothing has changed. What is important is what God is doing with His Church today.

In this portion of Old Testament history, we see God raise up the great nations of Assyria and Babylon to accomplish His purposes with His own people. When did God forewarn His people about the threat of exile? What did He say was the cause for their removal from their beloved land? How did the spiritual recoveries of reformation affect the delay of exile? What did these reformations entail? What spiritual lessons can we derive from the experience of those in exile, and did this leave them any hope at all? How does the example of the believing, God-fearing Jews in exile relate to the experience of the contemporary Christian? In this lecture, we will consider the period leading up to and during exile. This is only second in importance to their previous

captivity in Egypt. In the next lecture, we'll consider their return from exile, which could be described as the second Exodus, if you will.

So first of all, let's begin by surveying some of the history. From the very beginning, God had warned His people about persisting in unrepentant sin. Moses had said in Deuteronomy 31:20, "For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear to their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant." And He told them that if they turned from Him and broke covenant, they would be separated from the privileges associated with their land, and they would be scattered among the nations. So, if you go back and read, for example, Leviticus 26:27–33, or go to Deuteronomy 28 and consider verses 64–67, you'll see God in the book of the covenant providing these threats of the curse of the covenant. A little bit later, [in] Joshua 24:19, we read "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God."

Now, this whole business of exile first began with northern Israel, who turned more quickly and fully toward evil. Israel had existed as a separate country separate from Judah for about 200 years, but God sent prophetic warning after prophetic warning; and finally, northern Israel fell in 722 BC to the nation of Assyria. The northern 10 tribes were hauled off to foreign captivity. God then sent His prophets to Judah and warned them to learn lessons from their northern brothers, but Judah imitated the sins of Israel and suffered similar consequences. Southern Judah lasted well over 100 years after Israel fell, but invasion began with Babylon earlier, and then eventually Jerusalem fell in the year 586 BC. God prophesied that they would spend 70 years in Babylonian captivity. Just as Judah failed to learn from Israel, the church today can fail to learn from both of them.

The cause for this judgment is spelled out in detail throughout the prophets, but among other things, they committed sins of idolatry and imitation of the heathen, summarized in II Kings 17:15, "And they rejected his," that is God's, "statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them." But, God slowed the path toward exile for Judah through biblical reformations and spiritual recovery that took place under King Hezekiah and King Josiah.

Notice the description of God the King Hezekiah in II Kings 18:3, "And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did." No other king in the history of Israel or Judah receives the high praise of Hezekiah. And though he was imperfect and sinned, his overall testimony is one of faith and devotion to the Lord. Josiah's reformation seems to be the most thorough. Though young, he sought to pursue what God had commanded, and he pursued it with it with zeal for what pleased and glorified the Lord. Though these reformations slowed the path to exile, they did not remove it altogether. The Bible teaches that what we sow we will also reap. The gross sins of the nation still had to be answered by God, and the people continued to steer into the wayward ways of the godless world around them. Exile for Judah would come. The land of promise would experience a sabbath rest for 70 years, while the sinful nation suffered under captivity.

But what theology does God reveal to us during this period of Old Testament history? Well, once again God keeps His promises, both the blessings and the curses of the covenant. This history is rooted in the revelation of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. All that God spelled out in Deuteronomy 28 came to fruition in the face of Israel and Judah's unbelief and disobedience, and God has not changed. In the opening of Romans 3, Paul recounts all of Israel's privileges under the Old Testament. But then the New Testament teaches us to learn from Old Testament history. I Corinthians 10:11-12, for example, say "Now all these things happened unto them," the Old Testament saints, "for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The whole book of Hebrews, consider for example chapters 3 and 4, reinforces the warnings about present unbelief and the dangers of reaping the dreadful consequences, so we do well to take heed and to not harden our hearts. The lessons from the prophets during the period of exile are lessons that are just as relevant today as they have ever been.

You should also notice God's sovereign disposal of nations. He uses even the enemies of God's people to accomplish His, God's, good intentions toward His people. We sing in Psalm 76:10, "Surely, the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." God used Assyria to punish Israel, but Assyria was still culpable, guilty, for their wicked deeds. So, God raised up Babylon to destroy Assyria for their actions, while

also employing Babylon to chasten Judah. Later, God would use the Medes and Persians to destroy Babylon from their lofty height as a punishment for what they did to Judah.

We could go on and on, but God's sovereignty is displayed in all the details of the world. Think of how what I've just said comes together at the cross in the New Testament. The enemies of Christ are guilty for their wicked deeds in crucifying the blameless Son of God. But, the Lord ordained these events for the salvation of His people, their good. Peter says to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost (verse 23), "Him," that is Christ, "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," there's God's sovereignty, "ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Well, there is the Jews' culpability. You see the same thing in Acts 4:27-28. It says, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." Were these wicked individuals responsible for the guilt of their wicked deeds? Yes, absolutely. But had God sovereignly ordained it all to accomplish His purposes? Yes, indeed He had. God has a sovereign disposal of all the nations.

But, the prophecies during the period of exile also include God's intentions in the future. And, many things could illustrate this, but for example in Daniel 2 and again in chapter 7, God reveals in a dream a great image to Nebuchadnezzar depicting foreign nations that would arise. And it depicted Babylon, the Medes, and Persians, the Greeks, and lastly the feet, which [were] the Roman Empire. And, he foretells that in the days of the last kingdom during the Roman Empire, in Daniel 2:44, "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." This foretold of the establishment of Christ's invincible kingdom at the time of the New Testament when the Roman Empire was in power.

Later on in Daniel, we learn more about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But during this period of exile, we have many examples like the one I've given of prophetic revelation that is foretelling things that would unfold in the future regarding the church and beyond. It is important that you remember all that we covered about the land in the lecture that was entitled "Kingdom". Remember those points of theology about the significance of the land of Canaan, the land of promise? Well, those points of theology speak directly into the significance of the unfolding events of exile. The land signified God's presence, as you will remember, God dwelling among His people. Well, their extensive unbelief and apostasy resulted in their removal from God's favorable presence. That's what's taking place during the exile: their removal from the land itself and the destruction of Jerusalem. Israel was cast out of the land of promise, cut off from the Lord. The New Testament parallel can be seen in the spiritual realities found in the ordinance of church discipline, for example, excommunication where the unrepentant and rebellious are removed from the visible church, the dwelling place of God, and lose the place of those privileges. Well, that brings us to the connections between the prophetic period of exile and the New Testament.

First of all, the Old Testament reformations under Hezekiah and Josiah provide enduring patterns for the church in all ages. When the church begins to adopt the ways of the unbelieving world and to corrupt God's appointed worship, they must retrace these same steps in returning to the Lord. If you study church history, you'll notice for example, the close parallels between the patterns of these Old Testament accounts and God's great work at the time of the 16th century Protestant Reformation and the 17th century second Reformation. Every time men forsake God, and forsake God as God by putting themselves in God's place and walking after their own devices in the imaginations of their evil hearts, then follows the evil ways of sins that men commit against each other. In other words, violations of the first table of the law, the first 4 Commandments of the 10 Commandments, lead to transgressions of the second table of the law, Commandments 5 to 10.

This is spelled out in the New Testament in places like Romans 1: the causal connection, forsaking the first table, which leads to this gross immorality of sins outlined in the second table. And, the further men stray the more evil and perverse their ways become, like we saw on the day of the judges, resulting in unthinkable forms of sexual perversion and murderers and so on, like Sodom and Gomorrah. But, the way back always begins with reestablishing God as God. Remember the words of David's repentance in Psalm 51, "against thee and thee only have I sinned." God was preeminent. So, when we see God as God, then we will submit to God's rule and to His holy worship, which leads then to holy practices in our relationships with other people. We see that reformation must begin with the return to God's Word. One prominent feature under Josiah was the recovery

of God's law. It was read to the king and then read before all the people. God was speaking again to His people, and they were listening.

This revelation produced acute contrition for sin, humiliation, and the fruits of repentance. They confessed their sins and they fled from worldly influences and idolatry. They made their top priority the removal of all of this idolatry and the restoration of God's commanded worship ordinances. The same was true in the Protestant Reformation: the recovery of God's Word being brought back to center stage within the church, God being recognized as God, and the first priority, therefore, given to the Reformation of God's worship. John Calvin wrote these words: "If it be inquired then by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence among us and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity: that is a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshiped, and secondly, the source from which salvation is to be obtained." These Old Testament reformations involved a return to God's biblical law of worship, which resulted in a return, consequently, to godly living more generally. When God is given His place, and our allegiance to Him is our first priority, it will bear the fruit of godly living in other areas of life.

Secondly, we must not forsake our own mercies. When God's people sin against the Lord, God's chastening serves to train them in His ways and to turn them to Himself. So, discipline is a mercy and a mark of God's love. Hebrews 12:5–11 reinforces this point. Part of it reads as follows, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the LORD, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? It goes on a bit later, "Now no chastening for the present [time] seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." When you feel the pain of conviction under the Word of God, recognize this as tokens of the Lord's love. God disciplines His people in providence, through the rebukes of His Word, and in the ordinances of His church. The Lord will not leave those He loves to wander from Him in their sin. While this correction comes with a painful sting, God designed this chastening to produce beautiful spiritual fruit.

Another connection that we should draw is this: some of the godly, that is the God-fearing Jews, during this period suffered with the rest of the nation, and they themselves went into exile. Daniel and his three friends are one example, but they remained tenaciously loyal to Jehovah. They upheld His law and sought His glory amid the devastating circumstances of exile. For the New Testament Christian, our ultimate home is centered in the Jerusalem above, in the words of Galatians 4. The New Testament describes Christians as what amounts to exiles. It uses language like *foreigners*, *strangers*, *pilgrims*, *aliens*, *sojourners*. This is a description of Christians in this world, separated and en route to their heavenly abode.

Peter opens his first epistle to the scattered believers with these words, "To the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." He goes on in chapter 2:11–12 to exhort God's people in all ages, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." We live as exiles in loyalty to Christ and in opposition to the sinful ways of the world all around us. We are called not to cave to their influences but rather to hold to consecration to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are to have our heart and mind fixated on seeking the good of God's cause, God's kingdom, above all else.

Psalms 137 was a song that was penned during the Babylonian exile, and it is a song that remains the Christian's heart cry. In Psalm 137:5–6 we sing, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem," the New Testament Christian thinks of the church, "let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." As we consider the experience of the godly who suffered during this period of exile, there is a great deal for the contemporary Christian to learn. How do we live as those who by way of equivalency also are exiles in a hostile world with pagan influences that are all around us? We live as those [who] have our devotion and loyalty fixed on Christ Himself, walking in His ways, holding His

Word, pursuing His glory. We have at the very center of our heart a concern for His cause, His kingdom, Zion, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, in this world. We recognize that all the fanfare that passes in the public media about nations and about all of their accomplishments are really the side story [and] that the main story continues to be God's work of redemption carried out through His Church. And, we view our present time and recent history in light of those biblical theological truths.

Well, in conclusion, after all of the trauma of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews in a pagan land, does any hope remain for those that are in captivity? That's a pressing question. In the next lecture, we will consider their deliverance and their return under what could be called the second great Exodus.