

Series: **Aliens 3.0**
Today's Title: **"Living in Babylon"**

April 21, 2024 – *Selected passages*

Objective: To help people understand how God wants us to live in a unbelieving culture.

Opening prayer

Important questions each of us must think about an answer...

- How do we live in a culture that is rapidly moving away from Christianity?
- How do we live for Christ – live a Christian life – when the culture we live *in* - is moving *away* from Christ and it is rejecting, and in some cases, making it illegal to live in-line with Biblical teaching?

In his book, "The Great Evangelical Recession", written in 2013, John Dickerson lists a number of headlines that demonstrate the anti-Christian attitudes and actions in our nation.

- Christian ministers arrested for praying near gay festival, July 10, 2007, FreeRepublic.com
- Pastor is shot and killed at Illinois church, March 8, 2009, New York Times
- Christians arrested for proselytizing near Muslim gathering in Dearborn MI, June 19, 2010, politics4all.com
- California University [policy handbook] defines Christians as oppressors, February 16, 2011, FoxNews.com

- Oklahoma police captain faces disciplinary action for refusing to attend a mandatory Islamic event, February 23, 2011, Fox News.com
- California pastor arrested for reading Bible in public, May 23, 2011, christianexaminer.com
- Texas school punishes boy for opposing homosexuality, September 22, 2011, FoxNews.com
- Shooting at the Family Research Council: hate from the left, August 17, 2012, Washington Times

The extent of the change – and the rate of the change in our nation against Christianity – Christians – and Christian churches is deeper and more pervasive than most of us realize.

These headlines are shocking to us, because for the first 230 years of our nation, Christianity – Christians – and Christian churches were viewed in a positive light – as one of the good things about the United States.

The American experience - *for Christians to be viewed as a positive cultural influence* - is not what most nations have thought about the followers of Jesus.

I find it helpful to think beyond our American experience, which is not normative in human history.

We need to realize that our experience has been the outlier – the exception – the historical unicorn, when it comes to the culture embracing the Christian faith (at least until recently).

There have certainly been a few nations – who for brief periods of time – have been pro-Christian, but for the most part, Christians have been persecuted and maligned for the past 2,000 years.

I find it helpful to remember – and remind myself – that the ‘normal’ state of the world – is to reject Christ – and to reject those who follow Christ.

This is what Jesus promised His followers:

John 15:18-20

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. ...because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

...if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”

John 17:14 – Jesus, praying to the Father...

“I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”

The world will tolerate us – and affirm us – as long as we don’t take this whole ‘faith thing’ too seriously.

But when we live it – when our faith changes our life to the point of impacting those around us and the culture around us – then the world starts getting upset and intolerant.

We have seen a shift over the past 30-40 years (+ / -) in our nation – in the Western world – away from Christ, Christianity, and the Christian Church.

Europe and Canada are further along this path than the United States, but we are catching up.

I so appreciate the Bible – and how this ancient text applies to our most modern problems and situations.

That is because truth is truth – no matter what technology exists – or what nations rule.

Truth is timeless.

God's truth – His Word is timeless.

Turn to Jeremiah 29:1-14

Jeremiah was one of the O.T. major prophets.

- His ministry lasted 41 yrs. - from 627 B.C. to at least 586 B.C.

His contemporaries were: Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Obadiah.

Kings in Judah and foreign nations during his prophetic ministry were: King Josiah, Zedekiah, and Jehoiakim of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Darius the Mede.

Part of Jeremiah's writing, recorded in the O.T., is a letter he wrote to the Jewish exiles (POW's) who were taken from Judah in 586 B.C. (or shortly after) to Babylon.

We see this in **29:1-3**.

The Context: Trouble – Disruption of lives – Unsettled – Uncertainty – exiles – paganism – demonic worship.

Read vs. 1-3

We haven't been taken captive as POWs to a foreign land, but our land has become foreign to what it has been.

It has become a land that rejects the God of the Bible, and embraces humanism, paganism, secularism.

Our culture worships the ‘self’, sex, money, status, sports, and celebrity.

The elevation of ‘self’ – possibly to the top of this list – is what has led to the rejection of objective truth, and to the embrace of relativism.

Just like we read in the book of Judges, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (21:25b).

This is where we find ourselves in 2024.

So, although our circumstance is not the same as those who were taken captive as POWs by king Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon, we do have some things in common with them.

So, how did God tell His people to live in this foreign land – in Babylon?

And as we read what God told His people - can we see anything that we can apply to our own **‘Babylon’** that we find ourselves in?

I believe the answer to that question is: **YES!!!**

God has placed us in this culture, at this time. vs. 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:

Notice vs. 4: “whom I have sent”

God takes the credit for their exile in Babylon.

Being conquered by a foreign power – and taken captive into exile to that foreign land – was not a pleasant thing. Death and suffering were everywhere.

But God takes credit for all of it.

According to His providential plan, and since He is sovereign over all things, He is the one who orchestrated everything that had happened – both the good and the bad.

In Israel's case, God was judging them – punishing them for their sin of idol worship and rejecting the Lord. We know this because the Bible clearly tells us why Israel and Judah were defeated and taken into exile.

In our case – the case of the United States – our nation was not founded under a covenant with God – like Israel was (See Deuteronomy 28-30).

Is the decline in our nation – the move away from God and His truth – and the chaotic results of that move away from God - some sort of divine judgment or punishment?

I have no idea.

Maybe...

But this is what cultures do.

This is what unbelievers do.

They reject God – and they worship themselves – or something other than God.

That doesn't mean God is not orchestrating these things for His purposes.

God is sovereign, which means He is over all things – He controls all things.

Psalm 22:28

“For the kingdom is the LORD’S and He rules over the nations.”

Job 12:23

“He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.”

Genesis 50:20

But Joseph said to them, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

Jesus tells Pilate...

John 19:11

Jesus answered him (Pilate), “You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above.”

The Apostle Paul writes:

Romans 13:1

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

The Bible's teaching is clear: God is in control – God places kings on the throne – and displaces kings.

He raises nations - and brings them down.

We aren't Israel – so we can't be certain and dogmatic on 'why' things are happening in our nation.

But we do know God is in control – and He has placed us here on purpose – like He did Esther – who was also an exile – in a foreign land.

Esther 4:14 – *Mordecai's response to Esther who was hesitant to take a stand.*
“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

God has placed you in this culture, at this time.

Are you hesitant to stand for Christ?

Are you bold – yet tactful to live for Him and tell others about Jesus?

Live a faithful life as a witness to the culture. vs. 5-7

Read vs. 5-7

God doesn't promise to deliver them, but He commands them to settle down – to put their roots down in Babylon.

Stop longing for the old days – for home – and live in the current situation God has placed you!

He tells them to get married - have kids, “multiply there, and do not decrease.”

Listen...kids are a blessing.

Even in bad times – kids are still a blessing.

“I don't want to have children – I don't want to bring them into this world.”

God doesn't think along those lines.

Being exiles in Babylon was not a good place – or a pleasant place.

But God is clear.

“multiply there, and do not decrease.”

He even tells them to:

“...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 find your welfare.”

Wow!

Any application here for us?

Absolutely!!!

Pray for those in your life – those you know – family, friends, neighbors, co-workers – who don't know Christ – who live in opposition to Christ – and seek their welfare – pray to God on their behalf – that God would bless them.

There is a principle / promise God gives here...

“for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

Bless those around you – and you will be blessed.

If we can improve our city – then we will have a better city to live in.

If our city prospers – we will benefit.

But...there are dangers to be aware of when we find ourselves 'living in Babylon'.

Beware of false teaching that satisfies your deep longings.

vs. 8-9

When we find ourselves living in a place / in a culture that is contrary to the truth – contrary to our convictions – it’s very easy to listen to and surround ourselves with voices that say the things we long to hear – the things we want to be true.

But we need to recognize bias (both sides), and we need to be wise – and discerning – to know when someone is accurate in what they’re saying / proclaiming, or not.

Read vs. 8-9

There were false prophets in Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar’s army conquered Judah and Jerusalem – and they were also in Babylon.

They were saying,

‘Thus says the Lord – in 2 years we’ll be home.

God will crush Nebuchadnezzar – and we will go back to Jerusalem!’

And the people loved to hear what the prophets were saying!!

But they were false prophets.

They didn’t speak for God.

They were lying, but they were saying what the people longed for deep in their soul.

They wanted to go back home – to Jerusalem – to Judah – to the way things used to be.

But God had other plans.

God wanted them to make Babylon their home.

They were going to be in Babylon for 3 generations, so they needed to make their home in Babylon – get married – have kids – multiply – don't decrease!

What voices do you listen to?

Are they voices that speak to your deepest longings – of what you want to happen – what you want to hear?

Or...

Do you listen to voices that tell you the truth – that are accurate in what they say?

It's difficult to tell sometimes.

Be wise – be cautious in what / who you listen to.

Don't be "deceived".

Our future is full of blessing. vs. 10-14

Don't get all depressed on me here.

Don't think that the culture's decay will ruin you – or ruin your future.

God is bigger than the culture – and He has promised you very specific things about your future as a follower of Jesus.

But let's see what God told the exiles in Babylon.

Read vs. 10-14

There is a lot here...but let's focus on 3 things.

1. God has a *plan*.

He is in control of history – God does not react to history.

He not only has plans for the nation – but He has plans for each person.

God's plan was for them to be in Babylon for 70 years – and then He would bring them back.

His promise for them was good – their welfare, their future, and their hope.

Trust that God is in control and He has a plan.

2. God keeps His *promises*.

“I will fulfill to you My promise and bring you back to this place.”

His promises to Israel were specific.

His promises to us are just as specific.

Forgiveness – peace – love – power – joy – eternity in heaven – purpose, etc.

God always keeps His promises.

He has promised to forgive you all of your sins – when you put your faith in His Son – Jesus, as your Savior.

He has promised to seal you with the Holy Spirit – to adopt you into His family – to bring you into the Kingdom of light from the kingdom of darkness. He has promised you eternity in heaven – with Him – with never-ending joy and purpose.

Are you trusting in Jesus as your Savior?

Are you confident in the promises of God?

In the darkness of our world, do you hold onto God's promises of a bright, amazing future with Him?

3. These verses are a promise to *Israel*.

This is not a promise to the United States.

The promise of restoring them to the land (vs. 14) is a promise to exiled Israel – not a promise about the United States – or any other nation.

The principle and promise are in **vs. 12-13**.

When we call upon Him – when we pray to Him – He will hear us – when we seek Him, we will find Him.

But the promise of restoring them to the land – is a promise specifically to Israel.

This is not a promise that if we seek Him and pray to Him – that He will restore the United States to what it used to be.

Another verse, **2 Chronicles 7:14**, is often used by people / preachers in regard to God restoring the United States.

“...if 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 and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

But that is another specific promise to Israel – and Israel only.

Apply it...

1. God has placed us here – and now – for His purposes. We are not here to live for ourselves. God has placed us here so we could live for Him – to be His ambassadors – to point people to Christ through our words and life.
2. Beware of false teaching that satisfies your deep longings. It’s really easy to be misled – when someone is saying something that resonates deep within us. But we must know God’s truth – and know when something is not aligned with His truth.
3. Don’t let difficult circumstances distract you from your future blessings of heaven.

Closing prayer