



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

Living "By the Waters of Babylon"

Daniel 9; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 29; Daniel 1

Daniel 9:1-3, 17-19

1. Despite his relatively good circumstances and influential position, Daniel wanted out of Babylon and boldly "reminded" (?) God¹ that the promised 70 years were nearing their end.
2. If Daniel, in his good circumstances, felt that way, what were the feelings of his fellow-exiles who had not experienced Babylon as Daniel had?
 - What was life like for them?
 - What were they feeling?
 - What was expected of them? Go along to get along? Resistance? Or something else?

Psalm 137:1-9

3. Just as many of our songs protest conditions and express frustration (cf. Johnny Cash's, "Man in Black," "Ohio" by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, etc.), so some of Israel's songs did the same.
 - The captives' experience: taunting captors (2-3).
 - The captives' feelings:
 - Weeping (1) in despair — "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" (4)
 - Commitment — "If I forget you, O Jerusalem . . ." (5-6)
 - Anger, therefore prayer — "Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites . . . O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed . . ." (7-9).² (See the box at the top of p. 2)

¹ Of course, strictly speaking, God was not really being "reminded" of his promise, but from his perspective, Daniel was raising the issue for the Lord's attention.

² "The recollection of these hurtful taunts leads to a prayer that God will remember (see note on 25:6-7) the deeds of his people's enemies; he selects the **Edomites** (a conventional representative of all those who hate God's people, as in Obadiah) as well as the **daughter of Babylon** (the personified city). The Edomites took great delight in destroying Jerusalem utterly (cf. Obad. 11-14), while the Babylonians had carried out excessive violence against the helpless in Jerusalem. (On Ps. 137:9, see note on Psalm 137.)" (ESV Study Bible note, p. 1115).

This community lament remembers the Babylonian captivity, and provides words by which the returned exiles can express their loyalty to Jerusalem and pray that God would pay out his just punishment on those who gloat over its destruction. This psalm is notable for the ferocity of its final wish (v. 9). This is a vivid application of the principle of *talion*, the principle that punishment should match the crime (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:23-24). It is a prayer that the Babylonians, who had smashed Israelite infants, should be punished appropriately. Three additional comments may be made. First, even though Babylon was the Lord's tool for disciplining his people, they apparently went about their work with cruel glee (cf. Isa. 47:6; cf. the Assyrians, Isa. 10:5-7). Second, the vile practice of destroying the infants of a conquered people is well-attested in the ancient world (e.g., 2 Kings 8:12; Hos. 10:14; 13:16; Nah. 3:10; Homer's *Iliad* 22.63), and was therefore foretold of the fall of Babylon (Isa. 13:16). Further, the Babylonians had apparently done this to the Judeans (as the connection with Ps. 137:8 suggests), and the prophets led the people to await God's justice (Isa. 47:1-9; Jer. 51:24). In this light, the psalm is not endorsing the action in itself but is instead seeing the conquerors of Babylon as carrying out God's just sentence (even unwittingly). Neither Israelites nor Christians are permitted to indulge personal hatred and vengeance (cf. Lev. 19:17-18; Matt. 5:44); generally speaking, the repentance of those who hate God's people is preferred (see note on Ps. 83:9-18), and yet, failing that, any prayer for God's justice (and for Christ's return) will involve punishment for those who have oppressed his people (cf. Rev. 6:9-10). ~ *ESV Study Bible* note, p. 1114

Jeremiah 29:1-32

4. Daniel recalled the promise: "... the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years" (Dan. 9:2).
 - A letter to surviving elders, priests, prophets, and people captured by Nebuchadnezzar (1-3).
 - The promise that exile would last 70 years (10-14):
 - "... I will visit you, ... and bring you back ..." (10).
 - Grounded in "plans" for their "welfare" (*shalōm*); ahead: "a future and a hope" (11).
 - Chastened, they would "call upon," "pray to," "seek," and "find" the LORD (12-14).
5. Jeremiah's letter also told them what they were to do *during* the 70 years.
 - Build lives that were as normal as possible (4-6).
 - Seek "the welfare (*shalōm*) of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare (*shalōm*) you will find your welfare (*shalōm*)" (7).
 - Recall how evil the Babylonians were (see Habakkuk 1:6-11); in Revelation, John used them as his model for the evil the church was facing (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21).
 - Be faithful to God despite what appeared to be his improbable ways and dissenting voices trying to convince them to pursue another course (8-9; cf. 15-23, 24-32).

Living in Babylon: Returning to Daniel 1³

6. Chosen for "a three-year degree plan" (Dan. 1:5) because of their wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and qualifications to serve (NRSV); their curriculum: "the literature and language of the Chaldeans [Babylonians, NIV]" (4).

³ I'm drawing on ideas in Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Loving God with all Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in a Postmodern World*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 17-27 (chapter entitled: "The University of Babylon").

7. Recall Daniel's approach:

- He discerned the difference between what could not be compromised and where he could work with the Babylonians.
- Regarding things he could not compromise, Daniel was both sensible and respectful.

8. Some thoughts as we face the prospect of a culture that is increasingly "Babylonian."

- "Daniel could hardly have read a cuneiform tablet without some reference to pagan deities and mythology.... If Scripture indicates that Babylonian 'literature and language' were nevertheless worthy of study, there should be nothing objectionable to a Christian's studying any legitimate field of contemporary thought, which ... is probably less shot through with error than that of the Chaldeans" (Veith, 30). [cf. Arthur Holmes's book title: *All Truth is God's Truth*]
- Daniel did not compromise God's word; more importantly, he was so thoroughly prepared in God's word when he went to Babylon that he could apply it to things not seen before. This is the difference between being told "what to think" and taught "how to think".

9. T. R. Glover (*The Jesus of History*) said of the early church: "... the Christian 'outlived' the pagan, 'outdied' him, and 'out-thought' him. ... The Christian read the best books, assimilated them, and lived the freest intellectual life the world had. Jesus had set him free to be true to fact. There is no place for an ignorant Christian. ... Who did the thinking of the ancient world? Again and again it was the Christian. He out-thought the world" (pp. 213, 217).