

The Church in Babylon

Study Notes

Session One

“Welcome to Babylon”

A. The Challenges We Face Today

1. **Challenge:** *“America is polarized politically, racially, morally, and religiously. Common ground with the wider culture seems to have vanished...as I watch some of the angry and often violent demonstrations on television and read the vitriol on social media, I think it is not an exaggeration to say that we are in danger of mob rule...we are a nation addicted to rage.”* - Erwin Lutzer
 - a. **Rise of the Nones:** According to a Pew Research Center survey, more and more people are abandoning religion and giving up on God. The religions “nones” (atheist/agnostic/no religious affiliation) make up 23% of the US adult population, with one-in-five (18%) representing those who were raised as Christians or members of another faith.
 - b. **The Sexual Revolution:** Emerging from the 1950’s and 60’s, the sexual revolution took America by storm. First, it was “free love,” adultery, pornography, and abortion. Second, it was homosexuality, which eventually led to so-called “same sex marriage.” Third, it was transgenderism and LGBT “rights.” According to Lutzer, who would have believed that *“our White House would be arrayed in rainbow colors to celebrate the Supreme Court’s ruling allowing same-sex couples to marry or that many in our society would support what the Bible so strongly condemns... Who would have dreamed a pregnant woman...would insist that a nurse use the pronoun ‘he’ to refer to her and was finally satisfied when the nurse relented and stated, ‘His cervix and bloodwork look healthy.’”* We live in a highly sexualized society, filled with broken families and more neglected children accompanied by sexual confusion of every sort.
 - c. **The Technological Revolution:** While there are benefits to technology and communication, we find our culture addicted to devices and emersed in harmful information. Families are no longer spending time together, people are bullying and embarrassing others online, everyone has a voice with little accountability for their words, the internet is filled with pornography, violence, and harmful worldviews. According to Lutzer, *“talk shows effectively try to normalize the bizarre while any objective story about the negative impact of illicit sexual relationships of various kinds is vilified and silenced.”*
 - d. **The Anti-Church Revolution:** Today, freedom of religion is being restricted, redefined, and compromised by secular agendas. Christians are accused of bigotry, hate, and intolerance, especially when it comes to the topic of homosexuality, transgenderism, religion, and political views. The late Haddon Robinson compared modern Christianity in our secular culture to being the visiting opponent in the home team’s stadium – outside of a few of our

fans, “*the wider culture sits in the stands shouting hateful epithets at us, rejoicing at our losses.*”

2. **The Bigger Challenge:** “*Yet, it is into this atmosphere of shrill voices and disdain for genuine tolerance that we have been called to represent Christ.... We have to be a church is, in some ways, repulsive to the world because of our authentic holiness, and yet very attractive to the world because of our love and care.*”

B. Welcome to Babylon

1. **Babylon is Now:** While we should rarely compare God’s relationship with Israel in the Old Testament to the United States, there are parallels for what we face today as believers. Israel’s experience as exiles in ancient Babylon reflects what it’s like today for Christians to live in a pagan culture.
 - a. **Babylon:** The ancient city of Babylon is one of the most infamous cities in the Bible. From the beginning, in Genesis 11, the “Tower of Babel” was built to oppose God’s command to populate the earth. Their intention was to build a tower to reach heaven, where they could observe and worship the stars rather than God. From that point, Babylon became a world power that was filled with violence, immorality, and false religion. The people sacrificed children to pagan gods, bowed down before stone idols, and served the gods of money, power, and sex.
 - b. **Exile:** As a result of Israel’s continued sin and disobedience, in 586 BC, God judged His people by allowing the Babylonians to attack and exile them to Babylon. These invaders had no regard for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Ten thousand Jews trekked about 800 miles over a period of weeks and months to arrive at a strange country with a strange language. It was not a peaceful journey. Some Jews died during the attack, others died along the way, children were malnourished, and babies starved for lack of milk. Those who arrived, were removed from all of the social, religious, and cultural supports they were used to. They would no longer have the temple, but probably met homes or makeshift facilities.
 - **Lamentation 1:3** – “*Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress.*”
 - **Lamentation 2:11** – “*My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out to the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city.*”
 - c. **Today:** Christians are not “exiles” geographically, but morally and spiritually.
 - **1 Peter 2:11-12** – “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation*”

2. The Options the Jews Faced

- a. **The Option of Isolation**: The first option for the Jews was to angrily isolate themselves from the Babylonian culture and condemn their captors. Their anger could be justified because of the harsh treatment they received. With this attitude, some Jews withdrew from all social involvement, except when strictly necessary in order to live. They exercised their faith quietly in their homes and said nothing about the Babylonian gods. Perhaps they were too embarrassed and angry to share their faith in God.
 - **Question**: Do you think there are Christians today who choose the option of isolation? Why would they do so? What does it accomplish?

- b. **The Option of Assimilation**: The second option was assimilation, where some of the Jews just drifted with the cultural flow, living in ways that were indistinguishable from the people around them. After all, spiritual assimilation is always the path of least resistance.
 - **Question**: Why is this option tempting for Christians today? What are the dangers?

- c. **The Option of Infiltration without Contamination**: Although Jeremiah stayed in Jerusalem, he continued to receive revelation from God. In a letter he sent to the exiles in Babylon, they would discover that God would not allow them to enter a future that He had not already prepared. He wanted them to understand that while their sin led them there as captives in judgment, the Lord used this opportunity to make them ambassadors of God.
 - **Jeremiah 29:4–7** – *“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But 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.”*
 - **Point**: Build a house. Connect with your neighbors. Learn the language. Be optimistic. Trust God to take you back to the land, but be missional while you are away. This is the same message that God has for believers today.
 - **John 17:15** – *“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”*
 - **Quote**: *“Doing the King’s work requires us to live within the world in some ways and to rebel against it in others. God calls us to do both”* – Ed Stetzer