

2141 - GROW, EXPAND in BABYLON - Jer 29:4-9

Background: 3 yrs before this letter was written, 3,023 Jews (God's covenant people) had been carried away **captive** to **Babylon** - in **judgement!** *whom **I** have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon* [4]. **APP** We in the UK are in similar situations today – not physically 'carried away' but **spiritually!** Just go down town, listen to the **language** in the streets, see the **posters/adverts/films/videos**, look/listen to **TV** and what is going on around you discover we too are living in **Babylon**, not the holy city Jerusalem! We are living in a **non-Christian culture!** A (foreign) **ungodly culture**. Foreign to our Xn heritage and to many of our **original Constitutional Laws!**

Here is an **amazing command** from God to Israel in a wicked city! He says '**Settle down** there and marry, raise a family, build a home', ***Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters*** [5,6] Despite their **unhappiness** there ('How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?'), **do not seek** or try **to return** to Jerusalem your home land!

Amazing! **Stay in a wicked culture? Yes.** For God is the God of all the earth including pagans! *kingship belongs to the LORD, and He rules over the **nations*** [Psa 22:28] God's **eyes** were **always on** the pagans, the **lost world!** From away back in Abraham's time, God's **intention** was to save Gentiles - **through** His covenant people. God said to Abraham *in **you** shall **all the families of the earth be blessed*** [Gen 12:3] Through Abram! Even **then**, God had the **Gentiles** in mind! Isn't that **lovely!** Jesus confirmed: ***Salvation is **from** the Jews*** [John 4:22]. God wants **pagans saved** – and He knows they will **never** be **saved** without the **gospel** being brought to them! And the true gospel is **always brought** by God's people - even if they are imperfect and backslidden! So God was sending the Jews (His covenant people) to bring the gospel to the people of Babylon!

God **multi-tasks!** By sending Israel to Babylon, He was **chastening** His covenant people for their **disobedience** - but He was **also** spreading His Word throughout the world! He was doing several things through the chastening of His people. He still **loves** His people and seeks their good - although it may be **painful** for them! **APP** So

you and I, may find ourselves in 2016 in a nation that is pagan and anti-Christian because of God's chastening us for our disobedience, yet He is doing us **good** at the same time! As far as our nation goes, there are many **disturbing** things regarding our Xn heritage. Well, it was also for a **good purpose**. Good for us and others - **if we obey** God. Remember **God** is behind everything that happens and He **only** intends **good** for His people - if they follow His Word. So God...

...wants us to **get involved** in **national life** with the gospel. **multiply** ...*seek the welfare of the city* [6] - even although we are **weak** and **vulnerable** and **lacking in manpower** and **talents!** We must **not** feel we have **no role** to play because we are small and **lacking in resources!** There's a **principle** that God **always** employs even in a time of **spiritual apathy/indifference/backsliding!** God employs the principle of **extension/expansion** rather than **stagnation** or further regression. Maintaining **status quo** is **not progress!** He **expects** His people to **grow** and **increase** in service and usefulness rather than retract from society and hide ourselves until better days come!

But surely Babylon, that foreign anti-Christian culture, is not the place to evangelise? Yes it is! God's people must be a **witness** - *let them say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!'* [1Chr 16:31] Israel wanted to return to Jerusalem and to get back to their **comfort zone!** **APP** That speaks to us today! Our **nation** and our **community** may be ungodly, and although we may be small, and vulnerable, God's will for us is to **engage the community** in which are placed! **Moving away** from where we are requires **extra special guidance** from a God that **doesn't do** that sort of thing very often!

Israel in Babylon were unhappy in Babylon. They wanted to **escape** and return to their familiar surroundings and more comfortable circumstances. So you/I may want more comfortable circumstances regarding our responsibilities and duties as a congregation. We want more **elders** to do evangelism and more **resources** and **finance!** But we must **make the most** of what we do have and pray God to provide. Now **how** can we **do** that? How can we **multiply** and be a **witness** and blessing to those around us? Well, **FIRST** - notice it is **internal growth!** Growth from our own numbers (marriage/children) [6a] *that they may bear sons and daughters* [6c] Just the same as

Israel in **Egypt!** They grew from within their own families. The church must keep their own people and children. If we at Dens Road **kept all** those who came here to worship, and all their families and children, this hall could not hold them all! Without any evangelism!

One of the most **important** things about our Xn faith is that **we** are **convinced** of it ourselves! I am persuaded that Xns today are **not** convinced **enough** of their religion! They do **not** ‘live it out’ daily! They are somehow **ashamed** and **embarrassed** to belong to Christ – they *hide their light under a bushel!* Xns **ought** to be like a **magnet**. We do **not need** to do anything **special** in order to win souls. If Xns lived godly lives and were proper **witnesses**, **that** would win many **enquirers!** We live too much like the world around us, in our attitude to **money**; to **sex**; to **possessions!** Our **goals/ideals/values** are to be **different from** the world’s! The world around us are **not seeing** anything **different** in us from themselves! We joy in the same things!

In the **community** we must be **very peaceable people!** Easy to get on with! Nice to have around! Good company! Look: *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* [7]. The word ‘welfare’ is **shalom!** A wide meaning word covering peace/blessing/welfare/health/prosperity/friendly/favour/wholeness.

Did you note: *pray on its behalf!*!! How much time do you spend praying for **Dundee?** At the DECA meetings many there was always prayer for the city of Dundee! There is a **promise** for those who pray for their cities: *for in **its welfare** you will find **your** welfare* [7c]. Prayer in Inverness years ago ‘Lord help us to break the alabaster box of ointment, for if we do, we will get a **share** of the smell’! *blessed is he who is **generous** to the **poor*** [Pro14:21].

Don’t be a **troublemaker!** Don’t start arguments – try your best to **stop** an argument. Be a *peace-maker* or a **peace-keeper**, but not a **peace-disturber!** If you have to rebuke someone, do it in a way that can **heal** rather than hurt! – for that is the **purpose** of rebuking.

Another important lesson for us to remember from this passage is the **awareness of wrong doctrine - error!** *Do not let your prophets and your diviners **who are among you** deceive you, and do not listen to*

*the dreams that they dream, for it is a **lie** that they are prophesying to you in My name; **I did not send them**, declares the LORD [8,9]*

Most Civilisations/Movements/Organisations/Churches **fade/die**, not because of some **external cause** which destroyed them – not because of an enemy without - but because of enemies **within** the system! **Internal** causes! **Gibbon** re Fall of Roman Empire says “the most potent and forcible cause of destruction, the **domestic hostilities**... **private war**...**quarrels** of the **nobles** and the **people**...this stupendous destruction...was perpetuated by her **own** citizens”! It **internal strifes** destroyed the great Roman Empire!

APP My friends, the **Church** can have enemies of the gospel **within** it! Paul referred to: *many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with **tears**, walk as **enemies** of **the CROSS of Christ**?* [Phi 3] He warned the Ephesian elders ***fierce wolves will come in among you and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things*** [Acts 20:30] Always false prophets **in the Church**!

We always feel, don't we, that the **real criminals** are the liberal theologians. Those who **deny** the **Virgin Birth**; **Resurrection**; etc – and **so they are**! But there are also **orthodox believers** who can be **wrong** and **mislead** us! Their message can be very far from what **ought** to be preached! Churches can have sound **doctrine**, sound **worship**, sound **practice**, but also sound **asleep**! Not **aware** of the evil of **dead orthodoxy**! Those who are **content** with the **status quo** and see **no need** to evangelise the people around them. Who do not **pray for** and **witness to** the nations that are now around them in their multi-cultural society! Those who do not **emphasise** God's **Great Plan** for the **human race**– to save **all** that believe - no matter of what **race**! God's Great Plan:- *I know the **plans I have for you**...**plans for welfare** and not for evil, to give you a **future** and a **hope***[12]

Now here there is **imperfection** in the salvation and revival of God's people-**temporary**, **incomplete**! Everything here is **not quite perfect**! Thus there is **always** a pointing towards a **future and a hope**! To something **better**! Why? Its Jeremiah, not **Christ**! Because **everything** here on earth **IS flawed** - and the best **is YET to be**! The salvation of X in the **new heavens and new earth IS PERFECT**!