

Redemption For The Exiles Matthew 1:1-17

Side 1

In mid-March, 2023, United Nations investigators asserted that, *“Russia's forced deportation of Ukrainian children to areas under its control amounts to a war crime as there was evidence of the illegal transfer of hundreds of Ukrainian children to Russia. The Ukrainian government put the number of children forcibly taken to Russia at 16,221.”*

Any parent would be shattered to have his or her child forcibly taken and relocated to another country. It's unbearable to think about, but it's happening, and this atrocity isn't unique.

Throughout history, it was common for victorious armies to force vanquished people to leave their homeland to go and live in the triumphant army's country.

The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* defines “exile” as the *“mass deportation of large population groups practiced in ancient times usually for political purposes, frequently to destroy the power of an enemy nation and to prevent rebellion.”*

In the Old Testament, there were two main exiles. After King Solomon died, the twelve tribes of Israel split into two kingdoms.

The ten tribes in the north were known as the Kingdom of Israel, and the two tribes in the south were known as the Kingdom of Judah.

In 722 BC, the Kingdom of Israel was taken into exile by the Assyrians. The people of Israel never returned to their homeland.

Then, in 586 BC, the southern kingdom, Judah, was taken into exile by the Babylonians. At this time the temple in the city of Jerusalem was also destroyed.

The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* suggests that *“the total number of captives taken in all the deportations from Judah probably didn’t exceed more than 70,000 men, women, and children.”*

In 538 BC, some Jews returned to Judah and started rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

They also started on the reconstruction of the temple which was completed about 516 BC after more Jews were allowed to return to their homeland.

The exile was a very dramatic and painful experience for the Israelites, but it was also a major pivotal point for them, too. Matthew wrote about the exile of Judah in the opening section of his Gospel.

Matthew 1:17, *“Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.”*

Professor Don Carson writes, *“It was customary among Jewish writers to arrange genealogies according to some convenient scheme, possibly for mnemonic reasons.”*

So, why did Matthew break up his genealogy in groups of fourteen?

Various proposals have been given why Matthew set up Jesus’ genealogy the way he did. I won’t bore you with the details of each proposal, but Dr. Carson summarizes it like this:

“The simplest explanation is that Matthew uses the numerical value of “David” which, in Hebrew, is fourteen. By this symbolism, Matthew points out that the promised “son of David,” the Messiah, has come.

And if the third set of fourteen is short one member, perhaps it will suggest to some readers that just as God cuts short the time of distress for the sake of His elect, so also He mercifully shortens the period from the Exile to Jesus the Messiah.”

This word “exile” has also been translated to read “*deportation,*” “*carrying away,*” or “*Babylonian exile*” in other Bible translations.

So, what is the exile? Today we’re going to learn that this exile forms an important part of the genealogy of Jesus because it highlights His mission of redemption for those who are separated from God.

Slide 2

An anonymous poet once wrote, “*Though we may roam, Be it ever so humble, There’s no place like home.*” That’s so true. There’s something about home that’s important to all of us.

This is why the phrase in verse 17, “*the exile to Babylon*” figures prominently in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus.

Home is where everything is just right. Home is where our loved ones live. Home is where we’re surrounded by people we love and trust. Home is where there’s a feeling of security and safety.

Now, while some people get to experience a home like this, many do not, like those 16,221 Ukrainian children who were forced to leave their homes to go and live in a foreign land.

Those children were forced into exile. In exile, everything’s disoriented. You’re in a strange and unknown place. This is where the people of Judah found themselves.

They were conquered by the Babylonians, after which they were deported to Babylon to live in a strange and foreign land, far, far from home.

They must have asked themselves, *“How did we end up here?”* or *“Is there any hope of going home?”*

The whole story of the Bible is designed to answer questions like these. If you go back to the very beginning, where did Adam and Eve live?

Adam and Eve lived in a beautiful and idyllic garden. That was their home. They enjoyed fellowship with God. There was no sin.

They enjoyed their work. They enjoyed each other. There was harmony in all that they did.

While they were there, they just had to trust God and obey only one command: Don't eat of the fruit of *“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,”* but they blew it.

Adam ate the fruit of the tree, as did Eve. So, God banished them from the garden, their home.

They were sent away from their home to live in a new place that wasn't their home. Adam and Eve were sent into exile.

The account of Adam and Eve points to the story of the Jews in the promised land.

God promised to give His people land on one condition. They were to be faithful to obey the terms of their covenant relationship with Him.

Sadly, the people of God weren't faithful to the covenant. So, in 586 BC, the people of God were deported and sent into exile in Babylon.

Now, there's a parallel between the exile from the garden and the exile from Judah.

In Genesis, as the population grew in numbers, so did sin. Eventually, the rebellion of the people against God climaxed in their building of the tower of Babel located in what later came to be known as Babylon.

That was the same place that the people of God were sent to in 586 BC. But that's not all.

When God called Abram to leave and travel to the promised land, do you know where Abram lived? He lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. Do you know where that is? It's in Babylon.

That kernel of truth was designed to give the people of God hope centuries later when they were living in exile in the very place where Abram was born.

Eventually, some of the exiled people of God were able to leave Babylon in 536 BC and travel back to the promised land.

By 516 BC, all the rest of God's people had returned to the promised land from their exile, but they weren't quite home. They still acted in the same disobedient ways as their ancestors.

Over the years, various oppressive empires ruled over them. God sent prophets to His people, and they told the Israelites that their exile wasn't over yet.

"Well," someone might ask, *"how could the prophets say that the people were still in exile when they were home?"* That's an important question.

As the Old Testament unfolded, the Babylonian exile became an image of something more universal.

The Babylonian exile taught the people that they have a feeling of alienation and a longing for something more, no matter where they lived.

Can you relate to that? You may have a great home. You may live in comfort and security, but you still lock your doors at night. You dare not let your children wander outside without supervision.

We live in a world that is scarred with pain and brokenness. We live in a world of suffering and sin.

So, in the Bible, the exile is a picture of our human condition. All of us struggle with disobedience to God and we constantly break our covenant with Him.

Even though we go to God and confess our sins, we long for a time and place where we'll have a permanent home that's free from sin and corruption and suffering and death.

That brings us to our second question. What does the exile mean for us today?

Slide 3

The Old Testament pointed to the hope that one day God would send a King who would deliver His people once and for all from the Babylonian exile in which we all find ourselves living.

This is what Matthew hints at in Jesus' genealogy because Jesus is the King sent by God to bring redemption for those who're separated from Him.

Jesus Himself was in a sense an exile? He left His home in glory to come and live in this world of sin and corruption. He wandered about without any place on this earth that He could call home. Why?

First, because He knew that His permanent home was yet come. And second, He came to rescue sinners like us so we could live with Him in His Father's home.

On the night of His betrayal, when Jesus was in the Upper Room with His disciples, He had a Passover meal with them.

At that time, He taught them many important things, most of which are recorded in John's Gospel.

When Jesus indicated to His disciples that He would be leaving, He meant that He was going home to be with His Heavenly Father in glory.

John 13:36-14:3, "Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times! Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Jesus knew that all people have lost their way. He knew that all people struggle with sin and disobedience.

He knew that all people struggle and strive to create false homes based on the things that give us satisfaction and enjoyment. He knew that we all live in an exile of our own making.

Jesus continued, saying to his disciples in verses 4-6:

“You know the way to the place where I am going. Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus was saying that there’s only one way to the Father and that one way was through Him. But what does that mean to us?

It means that we must believe that Jesus fully obeyed God His entire life and that He paid the penalty for all our sins.

It means that we’re to surrender to Jesus as the King sent from God to rule and reign over our lives and this world.

It means that we’re to turn from our sins and wicked ways and live for Him. It means living as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

But that is not all. Jesus wants us to show others the way to their true home as well. The same Peter who asked Jesus where He was going, later wrote a letter that began like this,

1 Peter 1:1, *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, exiles scattered...”* Peter wrote this letter to the *“elect exiles.”*

In one sense, he may have meant that they weren’t living in the Promised Land because he went on to list all the places they were presently living.

But Peter also meant that they, like all elect believers, have yet to arrive at the home that Jesus went to prepare for them. Later in his letter, he told them how they were to live in this world.

1 Peter 2:11-12, *“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*

Peter acknowledged that all believers are *“foreigners and exiles”* in this world. We haven’t yet arrived at our true home.

Then he urged believers to *“Live such good lives among the pagans.”* That’s how believers must live in a world of unbelievers. So, what does such living by elect, exiled believers produce?

Two things will happen at the same time. Peter puts it this way: *“that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*

Unbelievers will *“accuse you of doing wrong,”* but they’ll *“glorify God”* when Jesus returns.

Notice, Peter didn’t say, *“If you conducted your life honorably, then unbelievers will glorify God,”* nor did he say, *“If you conduct your life honorably, then unbelievers will speak against you.”* He said both things will happen.

So, as believers, we’re called to keep our conduct among Gentiles honorable which will result in misunderstanding. We’ll be accused. People will think we’re strange.

They’ll accuse us of being evil. And yet, those same unbelievers will glorify God on the day of His return.

That means that some people will be mad at us for living as a consistent Christian, while others will be drawn to the beauty of God that they see in us and eventually come to believe in Jesus.

Slide 4

Conclusion

Therefore, we must commit ourselves to see that those who're separated from God are restored to a right relationship with Him.

Dr. Henry Okullu of Maseno South in East Africa, wrote in *Church and Politics in East Africa*:

“The former President of Uganda, Milton Obote, declared on the day Uganda attained its independence in 1962 that had it not been for the revolutionary teaching of the Church, Uganda would not have achieved its independence when it did. He went on to emphasize that the Church could not now sit back and congratulate itself and see what it had set in motion—nationalism—take its own course without guidance.”

President Obote was grateful for the Church proclaiming the truth of the Gospel. It had such a profound effect that the country of Uganda gained its independence.

But he wanted the Church to keep proclaiming the truth of the gospel so that more and more people would be restored to a right relationship with God.

If you're not a Christian today, turn to Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Believe in Him and repent of your sin. If you are a Christian, remember that you're an exile; you're not yet home.

Let me close with these encouraging words of Peter, *“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*