



Christian Report

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Welcome to Babylon!

Perhaps one of the most important questions for believers today is this:

“How should Christians relate to this new world where they have lost a home-field advantage and are increasingly marginalized in popular culture?”¹

This article’s title, *Welcome to Babylon!* Is also the title of Chapter 1 in Erwin Lutzer’s 2018 book *The Church in Babylon*. Dr. Lutzer’s chief concern in writing the book was what he termed the death of Christian America:

“What concerns me is the death of Christian America. Many of the biblical values upon which America was founded are no longer being allowed to shape our laws or our lives. In some lesser ways, Christians can identify with the Jews in Babylon. Our culture is instead being shaped by religious fragmentation, widespread disaffection with the church, changing sexual attitudes, and moral and spiritual relativism. Add to that “political correctness” and the “religion” of our political parties run amok, and it’s no wonder America—in the eyes of Christians—looks different each day.”²



What was true in 2018 is perhaps even truer today, in 2024. What Dr. Lutzer described in general terms has various acronyms that have become institutionalized as almost ‘sacred’ in today’s society and culture, and at the same time violates clear Biblical teaching concerning how we as Christians ought to live as salt

and light in a dark world. So without getting into the shameful details of we see all around us every day, what can we, as Christians do? How are we to respond to today’s world? Dr. Lutzer suggests that there are at least three ways we could re-

spond, one of which is our *only* choice:

- (1) *assimilate the secular culture,*
- (2) *isolate from the secular culture, or*
- (3) *engage the secular culture.*

In light of the gospel, the only choice for the Christ follower is to engage.”³

Cultural *assimilation* would mean the church adopting cultural norms from the world in order to appeal to the world we want to reach. To isolate from the culture in which we live would require separating completely from the world we are trying to reach with the light of the gospel of Christ. The remaining option is to *engage* the culture, leaving us with the question; “What does it mean to *engage* the culture?”

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To answer that question, we need only examine the instructions God gave, through His prophet Jeremiah, to the Israelites living in Babylonian captivity:

“These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ²This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. ³The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said: 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: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Take 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. ⁷But 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. ⁸For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, ⁹for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 29:1-9, ESV)

After those instructions, is the promise with we are very familiar, and we often claim as our own:



¹⁰ “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (vv. 10-11)

Do the instructions given to the Israelite captives in Babylon pertain to Christians today? What is God telling Christians who are living as strangers in a strange land today? (*1 Peter 2:11-12*)

Once again Dr. Lutzer offers us a suggestion:

Let us read every word of this challenge from George MacLeod, a twentieth-century Scottish clergyman, who reminds us where the cross of Christ should be planted. We can’t change the world from a distance: “I simply argue that the Cross be raised again at the centre of the market-place as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage-heap; at

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a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek ... at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where churchmen should be and what churchmanship should be about.”

As Christians, we are called to be lights in the darkness:

*“Though outnumbered and experiencing the humiliation of being marginalized in our culture, the church is still sent into the world to represent Christ. We are still the best witnesses of hope this hapless planet has! We, as the church, will never be effective unless we see ourselves as sent by Christ into the world. He prayed, “As you [the Father] sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17: 18). We are pilgrims, out of step with the ever-changing culture—yet we are sent by Christ, the Head of the church. The church is the last barrier between the present moral breakdown and total chaos.”*⁴

A final question. If the church is the last barrier between the present moral breakdown and total chaos, *how* do we shine as lights in the darkness and make a difference for the Kingdom of light? Two ways come immediately to mind as starting points.



First, just at the Israelites were commanded to do in 6th century Babylon, we are to live normal lives in today’s Babylon, but not in service to the gods of this world. We are to seek to glorify God in all that we do. (*Matthew 5:16*)

Secondly, we must be prepared to share with others the hope that we have in Jesus Christ:

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:15-16, ESV).

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¹ Ibid, p 52

² Ibid, p 12

³ Ibid, p 73-74

⁴ Ibid, p 58

*Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer (born October 3, 1941) is an evangelical Christian speaker, radio broadcaster, and author. He is the pastor emeritus of The Moody Church in Chicago, Illinois. His book *The Church in Babylon: Heeding the Call to Be a Light in the Darkness* can be obtained from Amazon.com, as well as from other Christian book outlets.*





Chapter 2 of the Book of Jonah is a psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord for His deliverance. Poetically, Jonah recounts his near-death experience when thrown into the sea by pagan sailors. He describes his descent into the abyss of mysterious and deadly waters. When he is just at the point of drowning, he cries out for help and is rescued at the last minute by God's sovereign hand.

After pledging to return to the temple and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, Jonah's psalm ends with these simple but profound words: "Salvation is from the Lord."

This is the lesson of the experience and the point of the psalm. Jonah was delivered from certain death and saved when he almost died. But the lesson is that it was the Lord alone who saved him. Jonah recognizes this and gives a simple praise: "Salvation is from the Lord."

The Lord is the one who delivers His people when they are in distress. In this case, and often in the Old Testament, salvation means physical deliverance. God delivers His people from enemies, drought, disease, wild animals, and death and destruction.

In these cases, salvation in a theological sense is not in view. We think of salvation in the redemptive sense that God saves our souls. Indeed, He does. But the Israelites recognized that the Lord alone is the one who intervenes to save us from all manner of calamity. This, in turn, is a picture of eternal salvation. God's deliverance of His people from the many ills of life was a reminder of the assurance of eternal salvation by redemption.

When applied to our own salvation, the words are every

bit as true: Salvation is from the Lord.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; *and that not of yourselves*, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

And, "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, *not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness*, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:4-5).

He is the source of our salvation.

He is the goal of our salvation.

He is the subject of our salvation.

He is the reason for our salvation.

Salvation is by the Lord.

Salvation is for the Lord.

Salvation is about the Lord.

Salvation is through the Lord.

Do not forget, and do not neglect to thank Him, that from start to finish, from beginning to end, "Salvation is from the Lord."

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