

Backsliding

Harmony M.B.C., Aug. 4, 2012 (Morning)

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Psalms 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

Psalms 137:2 We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

Psalms 137:3 For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion.

Psalms 137:4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?

I want to say today that this cry from the Psalmist is about the terrible spiritual condition the Lord's people get in when they backslide. This account about the Jews being in Babylon in captivity is about what happened to them when they neglected their spiritual lives, became worldly, and were taken captive by individual and national sin. When this sin grew and took away Israel's capacity to serve or honor God, He gave them up to slavery in Babylon. They spent 70 years down in Babylon, and the Psalmist here writes of their sad, sad state while they were down there. The description here is, as I said, a great commentary on how the Lord's people get when they are at the point that they realize their really sad state and are looking for a way out.

The experiences that are pictured here may be hidden and secret for each child of God, or they may be experiences that a Christian family, or a church can identify with. They may even be experiences that all Christians in an entire country can feel and identify with; much like we as God's people here in America are feeling right now. We are in a sad spiritual condition, our nation is filled with crooked and criminal people; they fill our positions of leadership in government, they corrupt and defile our businesses with their lack of ethics or honesty, and they confront us on the street in defiance of everything righteous and moral. So many of the citizens of this country right now are acting like the Babylonians and we have become the weakened, defiled, unhappy people of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. So, whether individually, as a believer, or collectively as the Christian community today, we ought to be able to identify with these Jews that our text is written about.

The greatest hindrance God's people have in forward progress in their spiritual lives relates to backsliding. So, it is very important that we give some thought to backsliding, or the danger of it. That said, let's take a look at the condition of the Lord's people when neglect of spiritual things, and sin in their lives, brings them to the place represented by our text.

I. "By the rivers of Babylon..." - The first thing about backsliding that we should realize is that it takes us away from our native environment (we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, and backsliding takes us to spiritual Babylon)

- We are made to walk in the light, as He is in the light, but when we backslide, we are in gloom
 - ▶ Around here, we have day lilies growing alongside the roadway in June and July. You see blooms on them every day. But did you know that when night comes, those big beautiful

blooms close up and die? The darkness is a new and hostile environment to those blooms that grew in the sunlight!

▶ That is what we are like in a backslidden condition. Our spiritual force withers and goes away.

II. "...we sat down...." Next, when we backslide, we sit down on God

■ Nothing takes the wind out of our sails in regard to doing things for the Lord like getting backslidden. Not only does our mind become clouded by the spiritual backward step, but we lose our spiritual energy and motivation

■ We are also wrapped up in guilt, and this makes us totally unprepared and unequipped to do spiritual things

▶ In **Rev. 2**, we find Christ rebuking the church at Ephesus for backsliding: **Rev 2:5**

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

■ When we are backslidden we will not stand up for the things of God

▶ This condition is best illustrated by using a problem we all know about that is taking place right now in America. That is, the way our government is treating crime within the government community. Do any of you wonder why so many of our national figures are committing crimes and nothing is being done about it. Why was it that the justice system of America sent Martha Stewart to prison for insider trading, but until recently senators and congressmen were doing it every day and nothing was being done about it? It was because they could not stand up against in-house crime when so many of them were doing it themselves.

▶ How is it that mayors can declare that they are not going to let Chick-Fil-a come into their cities because the president of that Christian enterprise said he stood for traditional marriage (when that is a direct violation of the constitutional law concerning freedom of speech)? It is because the whole head of our legal system is sick; being totally corrupted with crimes itself, it cannot prosecute its own kind.

III. "...we wept...." The next thing about backsliding, after we have realized what we have done is the intense sadness that overtakes us

■ Illustrate: I used to go out on the locks and dams on the Ohio River and shoot pigeons at night as part of my damage control job. Some nights would be really foggy and out on those dams it would sometimes seem eery and really depressing. I would go from lock to lock and down those stairwells checking nooks and crannies and a real sad kind of feeling seemed to hang over the whole place. It was the dark night, and the thick fog, the silence and the solitude...this is a kind of thing that reminded me of that deep sadness that is with us when we have backslidden and lost touch with our Lord.

■ "...when we remembered Zion." Our sorrow comes as we regret our actions and remember how it was with the Lord and the happy times we had when our hearts were set on the Lord, before we acted foolishly

IV. "We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof." We lose all desire to express gladness; our lives are dreary.

- This could be the answer to why some of the Lord's people cannot sing out in a worship service
 - Notice that the harps were hung on Babylonian willows, in the middle of Babylonian country (i.e. when we backslide, we are not in a state to handle the tools of gladness and praise; those things being playing and singing spiritual music, participating in praise with other saints, thinking about things of joy that are part of our Christian experience).
 - Illustrate: my first time in San Francisco harbor on the Constellation after being out in the Pacific for months; my feeling of homesickness; my sense of being in a strange place, of feeling the dreariness of life, of wanting to go home.

V. **v. 3** The things of the world try to speak to us about being happy and having fun.

- Those who know nothing about the believers relationship with a spiritual God, and the enjoyment that exists imagine that backslidden Christians can find plenty of joy right where they are.
 - Backslidden Christians in a room full of unbelievers who are having the time of their lives sometimes feel like a cat in a room full of dogs,
 - Or like Moses at the time Zipporah his wife bore him Gershom; Moses named him Gershom because he said "I have been a stranger in a strange land."

VI. "How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?" We realize, sadly, that we cannot express anything that has to do with joy in the Lord while we are in backslider country.

- In backslider country, the Lord's song sounds out of tune (really, it's that we can't carry the tune!)
- In backslider country, the Lord's song cuts into our hearts because it speaks of glorious things which we have lost sight of

VII. What can we do when we come to the realization that we are backslidden?

- Face our iniquities and confess them to the Lord: **Jer. 14:7** O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou *it* for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee.
- Listen to, and respond to God as the great forgiver: **Jer. 3:22** Return, ye backsliding children, *and* I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou *art* the LORD our God.
- Wake up and look back toward home
 - **Luke 15:17** And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
 - Luke 15:18** I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
 - Luke 15:19** And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.