

Lord, we tremble as we learn of Your judgments upon a godless nation; for we know that our own thoughts are only evil from our youth and that we deserve Your wrath and punishment. Merciful God cause the light of Your grace continuously to shine upon us and bring also all those who still walk in unbelief to the knowledge of the Savior. Keep us Your children in the way of truth, so that when the end of the world comes and the punishment of the wicked takes place, we may be found numbered with Your elect at Your right hand, where we will hear the sweet invitation to enter into the eternal courts of heaven with both our bodies and souls. Amen.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that He had made holy in Jerusalem. The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people, until there was no remedy. Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

In Christ Jesus, our Rescuer from this place of corrupt evil, dear fellow redeemed:

When will the last chapter be written in the book of human history on this earth? We have many chapters written from the very beginning in the Bible, starting with Adam and Eve, going through the times of Abraham, Moses, David, the Prophets, Christ Jesus, the Apostles. Since then we have had the histories of the Roman Empire,

the “New World”, the British Empire, the super power of the U.S. How many more chapters will be written before Jesus returns?

In the course of human history we are able to account for the movement of God’s people, from Mesopotamia, to Egypt, to the land of Canaan, to Babylon, to the utter most parts of the world. But nowhere in this world has the Church been able to escape the enemies of our Lord and His Church. But an escape day is coming and it is coming soon, as we are taught to anticipate. So as we consider a chapter of the Church in exile let us look forward to this: **Escape, Not Exile, for God’s People in His Final Day of Wrath.**

## I

The final days of Judah leading up to the exile were a judgment on all the inhabitants, believers and unbelievers alike. Similarly when the ten northern tribes were permanently scattered throughout the Assyrian empire it not only affected unbelievers, but even the faithful who remained. From Judah we know that believers with names like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshak and Abendego were taken into the judgment of exile. God is no respecter of persons, but we know all such judgments felt by God’s elect are meant for our good.

The cause of this judgment? King Zedekiah “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD ... He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. ... He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD ... All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that He had made holy in Jerusalem. ... they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people, until there was no remedy.” In the face of God’s persistent mercy the majority continued to rebel. Judgment needed to be meted out here in time according to the wisdom and perfect justice of God.

How many generations will pass before our descendants reflect on this – the super power, the U.S.A, did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. It has allowed the unborn to be slaughtered to the gods of money and pleasure, despising the voices of those sent to it calling to repentance. Voices have emanated from what appear to be from houses of the Lord throughout our land permitting the institution of holy wedlock to be disregarded and easily dissolved only to be replaced approvingly with unions of abomination before the Lord. True prophets of the Lord have been mocked as being on the wrong side of history and condemned for hate speech. Will there come a

time when there is no longer a remedy for us? Will God's judgment come through the powers of Communism, Islamism, another "ism"?

## II

But the final and great judgment upon the world for us who believe in the Lord's Christ will not be one of exile or annihilation. It will be an escape, an everlasting escape from all that is evil in this corrupt and sinful world. It will be an escape even from our own sinful selves. No longer will we ever witness nor take part in the wickedness perpetrated against others. Instead we shall always love, honor, esteem, help and befriend, speak well of, encourage one another in everlasting service to one another and especially to our Savior God and the Lamb at the center of the divine throne in heaven.

There will sadly be those who will experience everlasting abandonment from the presence of the Lord to be sure. There will be no escape for them either, not even exile for them, but only unrelenting tormenting banishment forever. We recount this not in delight, but in sorrow as we behold others in this life who also have had all their sins paid for by the blood of Christ Jesus, who had the holy Law fulfilled in their behalf by the perfect life of this same Savior of all people. Who do you know that appears now to be facing the great and final judgment of God's wrath without faith in Christ? Be renewed in your prayers for them. Serve them with that same selfless loving service you have come to know and cherish in Christ, your Savior. Look for every opportunity to bear witness to God's love for them in Christ and act accordingly.

Judgment is coming, whether here in time or at the end of all things. Our Lord calls us by the voices He sends to us today with His messages of repentance and forgiveness. Are you hearing them without rebellion and mockery? The great escape has been planned for you, my fellow redeemed. Even before the world was created by your gracious Lord who has sent His only begotten Son to take your place in the eternal abandonment, which you deserve, your escape plan was designed to perfection.

You are going to be surprised when your Lord turns to you and speaks of the righteousness He has beheld in you – feeding Him, giving Him to drink, clothing Him, visiting Him in this life of daily repentance. Not one of your sins, which surely are many, will be mentioned on that day of Judgment – not one. You will be surprised because this was not the content of your daily words of repentance, but through faith in Christ your Holy Substitute this is what your Lord sees in you now and forever.

Those who opt to face any threatened judgment based on their own unrighteousness, will experience the words of condemnation from our Epistle: “They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord.” From this preserve us, heavenly Father.

In Leviticus 26, a book of Moses written about 8.5 centuries before our text, our Lord warned His people of His chastisements that would come with an ever-increasing intensity until they would be removed from the promise-land for a time. Each stage of chastisement was to call them back to repentance. Here is some of what was threatened in that last phase, which would apply to Judah at the time of our text: “If in spite of this (*the last round of chastisement*) you will not listen to Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I will walk contrary to you in fury, and I Myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and ... daughters. ... I Myself will devastate the land ... I will scatter you among the nations. Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies land... If they (*their descendants*) confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers ... I will remember My covenant ... I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly”

So this 70 year exile into Babylon was a fulfillment of these words spoken many centuries before. They did return to await the coming of the Christ as promised. Now we await the final escape from this corrupt world. Christ has come and won us back for the Father in heaven. Now we await His return to bring us safely to our permanent home secured for us by His blood and righteousness. What a blessed sound your Savior’s words will be to you in the judgment: “Come you who blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” With that blessed invitation, your escape is complete forever in Jesus’ name. Amen.