# BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON

Never in all the history of man's relationship with God has there been such sadness portrayed IN God's WORD. The Psalm in question pours out grief without measure over the fate of the residue of God's people, Israel. Let us review it in all its sorrow!

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive demanded a song from us; and those who laid us in heaps demanded gladness, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth; if I do not prefer Jerusalem above my chief joy." Psalms 137: 1-6

Israel was being punished for her sins. Jerusalem had been captured and destroyed, the Temple of Solomon on Mt Moriah had been sacked [redacted] and the great majority of her people had been led into captivity. Among them were included the King [redacted] with all the royal family along with the flower of the sons and daughters of Israel.

Through all the sorrow and grief expressed there shines a silver lining of hope. The psalmist said, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth;" In all his tribulation, he was determined not to lose sight of the center of his devotion, Jerusalem. This was his uppermost thought in all he did, and he was determined that nothing would supplant this from its proper importance. The prayer on the lips of the dispersed Jew has always been NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!

Today there is a message in all this for the Church of Christ. For many years in the lifetime of many of us in the Church we have been witness to many troubles brought about by men, sometimes sincere, sometimes [redacted]. Many innovations have been imposed upon the brotherhood and these have resulted in unwanted and hurtful divisions, [redacted] The organ (instrumental music) was one of the first modern divisions to attack the Church. This was quickly followed by the plurality of cups in the Lord's Supper as well as the practice of dividing the Church into classes for teaching, and a few years later the practice of "individually breaking" the loaf in the Communion. These are all "recent" additions which have caused much and seemingly irreparable harm to the Lord's Body, the Church. THEY NEED NOT HAVE OCCURED!

Every one of these could have been avoided if all concerned (including all of the "latter-day" adherents) had heeded the words of Paul, the Apostle in Rom 14: 15. "But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."

All sincere and honest Christians agree that the Church could have prospered without these innovations, but many claim the right to do these things as a "liberty". Even if there is such a "liberty" expressed in the scriptures, (I do not believe there is) it is truly sinful to excercise it if our (brethren) are grieved with it. I can contend with all my might that I have the right to eat meat, but if my brother is grieved with this, my duty is clear: I must "eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." 1 Cor 8: 13. If the brethren who insisted on initiating these innovations had heeded the Apostle's admonition, these divisions WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED.

Today we are troubled by worldly practices having entered into the Church. It is not my intent to thrash these issues in these pages. Permit me

to say [redacted] no-one contends that one MUST do these things in order to go to heaven. Some, however, insist they have "liberty" to follow after worldly things if they do so in "moderation". If we should concede for the sake of argument that this is so, (and I do not) all must concede the admonition of Paul is the proper path to follow. If these things make our brethren to offend, we must not indulge in them while the world stands. To do otherwise would not be "walking charitably". Rom 14: 15

"Babylon" is defined as "confusion". Today we stand, as it were, by the "rivers of Babylon". It seems that the Church today is characterized by each person following his or her own ideas, which, of course, do[redacted] not always correspond with those of others. In a situation such as this, it must follow that some are wrong. (possibly all) But it is an evident fact that all cannot be correct according to scripture.

This is bad enough, but to make matters worse, there is almost total reluctance to discuss the differences. Gone is any desire to heed the prophet's callto "come, let us reason together". Isa 1: 18

Never have I seen, nor do I remember any time when there [redacted] WAS such disregard for the spiritual welfare of our brothers. We bend an effort to go great distances to attend "meetings" and express our joy at the great spiritual benefits to be had. Yet when we are called upon to come together to discuss problems that are amongst us, there is almost total apathy. It seems that some are willing to accept the fact that some of their brethren are going to hell and they just DON'T CARE enough to talk to them about it. Are they forgetful of the words of Apostle James, "--he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins". Jas 5: 20

Each of us believes we are to keep the "unity of the spirit in the bond of peace". Eph 4: 3 Yet are we willing to accept a situation where we will not speak to our brother who is trying to make peace? Will we refuse to even answer our brother's letters when he is trying to make peace? If this is what we are willing to accept and do, we are, by our silence, declaring to the Church and the world that we are satisfied with things the way they are and don't care to change them. Perhaps, we should all go once more to Eze 3: 17-21 and read the solemn charge laid on the prophet by God.

If we are willing to accept the dreadful condition of much of the Church of Christ today, we truly stand "by the rivers of Babylon". WHY DO NOT OUR EARS HEAR THE SOUND OF WEEPING AS WE THINK OF ZION?

Brethren, think on these things. Your brother in Christ,

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