

The Exiles Return

June 21, 2015

Ezra 3:8-11

We ended last week with Daniel 6 and Daniel in the Lions Den as we compared Darius' indifference to God with Daniel's commitment to God.

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther cover **100** years and close out the Old Testament historical books.

Isaiah 44:27-55:12 is a prophecy given from Isaiah (that came straight from God) 150 years before it would take place. In fact, Isaiah predicted the fall of Babylon before it was even an empire.

Remember, Israel had been in bondage for **70** years to Babylon and it was of their **own** doing.

The Israelites were carried away into exile because they refused to listen to the warnings God spoke through the prophets. Remember, Jeremiah gave words and warnings for **23** years.

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: ² "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." ³ Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. ⁴ And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. ⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ⁶ "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! ⁷ The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, ⁸ if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. ⁹ And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, ¹⁰ if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

Jeremiah 18:1-10

Israel is reminded that God is **in** control and they were to trust and obey Him. They were not to disobey, question, or do their own thing!

Through the whole 70 years of captivity and even before, God's desire was to show Israel His love, grace, mercy and hope for them.

God loves His Children and He has proven it. Here's how:

1) Through revelation.

God's Word, prophets, and prayer.

The Old Testament people mainly knew God's plan and words through the prophets and God's messengers.

Today we have His Word to know Him by, learn about Him, and grow with Him.

God has given us His **Word**, the Bible, to allow us to know Him better and He has given us a direct route through **prayer** to know Him more.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalms 119:105

2) Through his intricate plan, just as we have seen in the Old Testament.

We have evidence through all the prophecies, words and fulfillment that we have already seen and the few still to come.

God's plan to continue a people group for hundreds of years is incredible! Did we mention everyone has tried to wipe the Israelites off the face of the earth?

God has been **faithful** to walk with us and lead us as believers for thousands of years. He is faithful, His plan can't be thwarted.

I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.

Job 42:2

3) Through warnings, when we step off the path.

From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the LORD has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking,

but you have not listened. ⁴ And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. ⁵ They said, 'Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. ⁶ Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.' **Jeremiah 25:3-6**

Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

Hebrews 3:15

A good parent warns their child of consequences or punishment if they continue to do something wrong—God does the same for us through His word and revelation. **The question is do we listen? Do we try and negotiate, over think it and go our own way or listen and obey?**

4) **Through punishment when we continue on our own way.**

My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. ⁷ *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?* ⁸ *If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* **Hebrews 12:6-11 (NIV)**

If our child continues in disobedience we seek to stop it because we know the future consequences will be greater than any punishment and consequences we could give.

We correct them and punish them not because we are mean, hateful or bad parents, but because we love them.

God's punishment is always for our good!

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. ⁶ Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. ⁷ And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace. ⁸ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. ⁹ For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the LORD. ¹⁰ For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. ¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. **Jeremiah 29:4-13**

5) **Through His death because we can't fix it ourselves.**

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

Romans 5:8-9

We have two options:

1. **Hear his voice, get back on track, follow Him, and don't veer to the left or the right.**
2. **Continue on our own path destroying our self, families, friends and our witness all along the way.**

What did Israel do after they tried it their way choosing not follow God, not hear the warnings and be punished? In time they turned back to God:

*They sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." **Ezra 3:11***