



BETHEL  
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### A Pilgrim Mind, Part 6

You may or may not realize it, but the oldest book of the Bible<sup>1</sup> revolves around a man's struggle with God's purpose and plan for his life! That book is Job!

If our dating of this book is correct, that means that though God at first could have addressed with His people, He chose as of first importance to address a man's struggle with God's will! Yet it is not a surprise because we are image bearers; we think, reason, and calculate. But because we are finite, sinful, and autonomous from God in our sin, we think, reason, and calculate imperfectly and rebelliously. And so it seems that as long as man lives in this state of sin and misery, we will struggle with God's will.

That no doubt is why God gives us statement after statement in the Bible assuring us that the future belongs to Him; we need NOT worry! Ours rather is to focus on fidelity when it comes to serving God!

Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things [regarding the future] belong to the Lord our God, BUT the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."

In other words, Christians! I've got the future; don't concern yourself with it. Your call in the present is to serve Me!

Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

Jesus Christ told His disciples this:

John 13:19, "From now on I am telling you before *it* comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am *He*."

Again, throughout the word, God gives us assurance after assurance that He has the future locked up. Accordingly, the exhortation to us is to get out of the business of worrying about tomorrow and focus on the call to trust the Lord and so follow Him! Alan Redpath wrote this:

There is nothing- no circumstance, no trouble, no testing- that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment. But as I refuse to become panicky, as I lift up my eyes to Him and accept it as coming from the throne of God... no sorrow will ever disturb me, no trial will ever disarm me, no circumstance will cause me to fret, for I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is! (Redpath 1955)

Recall the words of Christ to Peter:

John 13:7, "What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter."

Because God holds the future in His hand, we can live with this conviction... tomorrow all the mysteries and questions will be answered. Today, it has been given to me to serve the Lord! Family of God, that which produces this kind of conviction in the face of trial is Ezekiel 39.

The year is 585 BC and God's people are in exile having lost everything/anything that was dear

to them- their:

- City.
- Home.
- Jobs.
- Loved ones.
- Nation.
- Autonomy.
- Religion.
- Everything!

To comfort His people as well as to inspire them unto godly living, God gave Ezekiel 38-39 to frame their thinking in preparation for the answer He would give to the many questions that their exile raised like *“Why has God forsaken us?”*

As we have seen, the answer is found in Ezekiel 39:21-29 which consists of three sets of two exhortations. Thus far we have seen the first three responses. Why the difficulties and trials?

- Vindication: That all may know that God is the Sovereign Lord of Creation, v. 21.
- Instruction: That God’s People might know that they are Ever and Always Precious (via Discipline) to the Lord, vv. 21b-22.
- indication: That all may know that God is Just, vv. 23-24.

We pick it up with the second part of the second explanation which was directed NOT at the nations, BUT the people of God. So why the exile? Why the difficulties of life? The point is found in their education that God’s people might eternally delight in the Lord for their forgiven sins.

Ezekiel 39:25-26, “Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name. And they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their *own* land with no one to make them afraid.”

There are three elements in this passage which impact our overall understanding of it. We begin with the first one:

Ezekiel 39:25a, “Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob [c. 2,000 BC]...”

When did God “restore the fortunes of Jacob”? Consider that this is NOT talking about temporal blessing (like livestock or the amount of money/wealth he had), BUT the showering upon His people of the richest of blessing- the “fortunes of Jacob.” Furthermore, this is NOT talking

about the nation of Israel, but “Jacob” which is the name of the covenantal line which sprang from Abraham. In this regard, “the fortunes of Jacob” is a reference to the embodiment of all that God promised to Jacob in Christ!

So, when did God grant this blessing to His people?

In answering this our minds might gravitate to the first advent of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Ephesians 1:3, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with EVERY spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ.”

It is in light of this verse we say that we shouldn’t pray for God to bless us; for He already has! Rather, we should pray for God to enable us to utilize His blessing to His glory and our good! Truly, in Christ “the fortunes of Jacob” have been realized in full! In fact, Paul told us that Christ died on the cross:

Galatians 3:14a, “In order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles...”

That is the “fortunes of Jacob”! In light of this we might think that a reference to the restoring of “the fortunes of Jacob” has in mind the Kingdom of God established in Christ! But the next phrase blows that theory out of the water.

Ezekiel 39:26b, “...when they live securely on their *own* land with no one to make them afraid.”

When, if ever, have God’s people “live[d] securely on their *own* land with no one to make them afraid”? Can you think of a time in redemptive or world history where this could be said to be true? I can’t! Can you think of a time referenced in Scripture where this promise will be said to be true? With that we most certainly can! Speaking of the final state, the New Heavens and Earth, and the New Jerusalem, John wrote this:

Revelation 22:14-15, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. [at this point John utilizes a prophetic tool which views the future in light of present circumstances...] Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.”

This does NOT mean in the final state there will be unbelievers outside the city of God waiting to pounce on God’s people. Rather, John is referencing that which poses the greatest threat to God’s people in the present and telling them that such a threat will not exist in the final state!

Because this is the case: when and only when will God’s people “live securely on their *own* land

with no one to make them afraid”? In the New Heavens and Earth! In eternity future! (By way of note, that is the focus of the next and final section we are going to look at in our study of Ezekiel, Ezekiel 40-48- The Final State!)

In light of this we conclude that the time-frame Involved here is the eternal state, specifically the New Heavens and Earth! At that time, notice with me that which will continue to be the over-arching concern of God and His people.

Ezekiel 39:25b, “Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name.’”

If you are at all familiar with the Bible, you know this is NOT the first time this expression is used. In fact, the concern for “God’s name” is referenced no less than 78 times in Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Clearly it is a major theme of Redemptive History as well as the Christian life!

Not surprisingly then, we discover here that the glory, honor, and praise of “God’s name” will continue to be a major theme of eternity future. And that only makes sense.

1. As we have seen: As it is man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, so it is and will always remain God’s chief end (to glorify Himself and enjoy Himself forever)- which makes God’s glory the focus and theme of Eternity!
2. At first glance this may sound rather selfish. And it would be *IF* God were not worthy of such concern. But because He is worthy of all glory by virtue of the fact that He created us (Revelation 4:11), **HEREIN WE FIND OUR GLORY!** Think of it, if in everything God does His first concern is His glory, His honor, and His name, we must conclude that that is what drove Him at creation. Because this is the case, then -- and get this -- this world and everything in it was created to serve as its telos God’s honor and glory. That means that built into our existence is this profound principle: we are at our best NOT when we get our way, BUT when God is exalted and glorified in and through us!
3. That was the teaching of the greatest American theologian that ever lived, Jonathan Edwards. Recently, the teaching of Edwards has been made popular by John Piper. Consider that John Piper wrote this:

Christ did not die to make much of us, but to free us to enjoy, and participate in, God’s making much of God forever. ¶ It is profoundly wrong to turn the cross into a warrant for self-esteem as the root of mental health. If I stand before the love of God and do not feel a healthy, satisfying, freeing joy without turning that love into an echo of my self-esteem, then I am like a man who stands before the Grand Canyon and feels no satisfying wonder until he translates the canyon into a case for his own significance. That is not the presence of health, but bondage to self. ¶ The only ultimate love is the sacrificial act of God saving us to share God’s passion for the supremacy of God. Nothing glorifies Him, or satisfies us, more. (Piper 2005)

As the time-frame involved here is the eternal state, specifically the New Heavens and Earth, it should NOT surprise us that the focus of God’s concern then, as it is now, will remain His honor, majesty, and glory! This will remain our greatest good and the source of richest blessing throughout all of eternity.

That brings us to the last element of this passage that we need to discuss before addressing the answer Ezekiel provided in this verse for “Why the exile? Why suffering?” The mistranslation of verse 26.

Ezekiel 39:25- 26a, “Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name. And they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me...”

There is quite a bit of discussion surrounding this verse for in the Masoretic Text as well as the LXX, the text reads quite differently. Instead of “they shall forget their disgrace” the text reads, “and they shall BEAR their disgrace.”<sup>4</sup>

The word is נָשָׂוּ (w<sup>e</sup>nasu) which could have come from either נָסָוּ (nesa) which means “to bear/carry” or נָשָׁח (nashah) which is translated as “to forget.” Of the two there is little question that the former, נָסָוּ (nesa), is the proper reading- that is, “And they shall BEAR their disgrace and all their treachery...” There are four compelling reasons why this is so.

- Almost every ancient version of the Old Testament follows the Masoretic Text.<sup>5</sup>
- It is noteworthy that the use of נָשָׁח (nashah) in the sense of “forgetting” is NOT found in the Book of Ezekiel.
- In contrast נָסָוּ (nesa), in the sense of “bearing” or “carrying,” is found throughout Ezekiel, and translated as “bearing shame” (cf. Ezekiel 16:52, 54; 32:24-25, 30; 34:29; 36:6-7, 15; 44:13).
- Finally, the same expression used here is found in Ezekiel 16:54 where it is translated, “In order that you may BEAR your humiliation, and FEEL ashamed for all that you have done...”

From all of this there is little question that the translation here should read, “and they shall BEAR their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me.” As D. I. Block put it this way:

Far from being a source of pride at having been selected as the objects of divine compassion, the experience of grace will lead to a recognition of their own unworthiness. By the comment [‘they shall bear their disgrace and all their treachery’], Ezekiel affirms that they will own or assume responsibility for the disgrace and the covenantal treachery that they have perpetrated. There is no excusing the rebellion, no passing off responsibility, no charge of injustice against Yahweh, no blame

at having abandoned them. As predicted earlier in 16:61-63 and 36:31, far from causing them to forget their history, the experience of divine grace sensitizes them to their guilt. (Block 1998, 486)

With this in mind, we now can consider the teaching that Ezekiel wanted the exiles to understand in answer to the question of “Why the pain... why the exile?” The answer is profound. By disciplining His people on account of sin, it was/is God’s intention to give His people a lesson which would remain with them forever, specifically the reprehensible nature of their sin! Consider the expression: and they shall bear their disgrace and... treachery: the word for “bear” as we have seen is נָשָׂא (nesa) which references here an inward feeling of self-reproach.

The words for “disgrace” and “treachery” both come from the same Hebrew root, כָּלַם (kalam). The word denotes the sense of “public disgrace” which clearly points to the Final Judgment! We are told that at the Last Judgment “everything hidden will be uncovered” (Luke 8:17; 12:2-3) such that there will be a sense of public shame/humiliation for the sins we have done- which in fact already has been referenced in Ezekiel as one of God’s stated purposes in disciplining His people. recall the parable of the two sisters corresponding to Israel and Judah and God’s ultimate plan as it pertains to their restoration:

Ezekiel 16:62-63, “Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, in order that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done,’ the Lord God declares.” (cf. also Ezekiel 16:54, 61)

It is this sense of gratitude in the face of God’s super-abounding grace for sins forgiven that shall occupy our heart and mind for eternity! In fact, look again at verse 25.

Ezekiel 39:25a, “Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel...’”

This is the first time Ezekiel referenced “mercy” in this prophecy! As such, it sticks out here like a sore appendage (not just a thumb)! Marveling over God’s mercy here is the point! As God’s people reflect upon their sin in glory, they will marvel over God’s grace and forgiveness... His mercy... forever!<sup>6</sup>

Yet this raises a question: How can this be as there are multiple passages in the Bible which speak of God’s restored people *FORGETTING* their shame? For example:

Isaiah 54:4, “Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; neither feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; but you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.”

This no doubt is why later scribes felt the need to amend the passage before us from “bear” to “forget”; they could NOT imagine that in the final state we would have the memory of our sin! Yet that is unnecessary! We understand that the forgiveness we receive from God is such that it completely wipes away our sin (which is why we read that “our sins will be remembered no more” [Isaiah 54:4]). However, this does NOT mean we or God will have no memory of our sin. I love how R. C. Sproul, Jr. put it:

...the Bible regularly uses language about the depth of God’s forgiveness for our sins. He forgets them; He washes us thoroughly from them; He removes them as far from us as the east is from the west. Does this mean He has no knowledge of these sins? Of course not. God knows all things... ¶ The glory of the gospel is not that God, just because He’s a nice guy, decides not to hold our sins against us. The glory of the gospel is that my sins are already dealt with, already punished. There is no grudge not because He has forgotten, but because He remembered our sins at Calvary. (Jr. 2011)

So, in our relationship with the Lord in eternity future, God will *NEVER* parade before our eyes our past sin. Our relationship with God will be secure, for our sins will be “forgotten” in that they will be remembered as forgiven in Christ! And what will be the result in us? Eternal gratitude and wonder over the grace of God!

That is the fourth point God would have His people understand as it relates to their sin! While our sins NO LONGER factor in to our right standing with God (they are forgotten/forgiven), nevertheless for the rest of eternity we will be moved to praise and thanksgiving as WE remember the “disgrace and treachery” which we committed against Christ... and we will be moved to praise, glory, and wonder on account of His forgiveness!

In a college class titled, “Death, Dying, and Grief” which discussed death, dying, and grief the course describes that as a child grows and develops mentally, they will reprocess a childhood tragedy (like the death of a parent) over and over again. I think this is a beautiful illustration of what is going to happen to us as we mature “in wisdom” (cf. Luke 2:52) in glory. As we reflect upon this life in the perfect state, we will reprocess everything that happened, including our sin, in light of our growing understanding of Christ, His Cross-work, and His glory! So while in eternity future we will be relieved of the miseries of this life, nevertheless they will NOT be forgotten by us! D. I. Block put it this way, “If divine mercy were a summons to blind forgetfulness, the benefactor would lose sight of what grace in essence is- sheer unmerited favor!” (Block 1998, 486)

I realize that this may sound shocking to some of you. In glory, I will remember my sin. I will remember “their disgrace and treachery.” If that is the case, consider the question is frequently asked, “Why did God ordain the Fall?” If man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, we could not fulfill this calling without the Fall. Think of it:

- Prior to the fall, what did man have known about God? Only that He was holy, awesome, and glorious.



- All of the “Kind Attributes” of God were unknowable: His mercy, forgiveness, grace, compassion, longsuffering, and much, much more! For these can only be understood in the context of the violation of God’s standard and will.
- And so, it is through the Fall and God’s redeeming grace that we come to know of God’s kindness!

We see it in the Angels in Heaven! For them to understand God, specifically His kind attributes as they are not fallen, they must watch us!

Ephesians 3:10, “...the manifold wisdom of God [is] made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places* [that is, the angels].”

The only way an unfallen angel can come to know the glory of God’s grace is by watching us! So will we remember the disgrace and treachery of our sin in glory? Yes! To have no knowledge of our sin would revert us back to the time when Adam and Eve were in the garden and could only know of God’s Transcendent Attributes!

Yet once again, all that we remember, which will be everything, will be remembered in light of the cross of Christ. This means in glory, we continually will be moved to wonder, love, worship, and amazement that the God before us allowed us into heaven! Truly in heaven all that we do and think will be “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Ephesians 1:6)!

That is the fourth reason why God disciplines us on account of sin: That God’s people might eternally delight in the Lord for sins forgiven.

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> There is debate surrounding this. However, the traditional understanding for the book of Job is a patriarchal dating, ~2,000 BC.

<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, consider Ephesians 1:7-8a: "In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, ACCORDING TO the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us."- what is the difference between "according to" and "out of"? If a rich man gave me "OUT OF" his wealth, how much could I receive? A penny. But, if a rich man gave me "ACCORDING TO" his wealth, how much would I receive? All that he has! In Christ, we do NOT receive "out of the riches of His grace" but "according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us." Truly "the fortunes of Jacob" are realized in Christ!!

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 9:16; 20:24; 2 Sam. 7:13; 1 Kings 5:5; 8:16, 18, 19, 29; 9:3; 11:36; 2 Kings 21:4, 7; 23:27; 1 Chron. 22:8, 10; 28:3; 2 Chron. 6:5, 6, 8, 9; 7:14, 16, 20; 33:4, 7; Neh. 1:9; Ps. 89:24; Is. 29:23; 42:8; 43:7; 48:9, 11; 52:5, 6; 65:1; Jeremiah 7:10, 11, 12, 14, 30; 16:21; 23:27; 25:29; 32:34; 34:15, 16; 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 13:9; Mal. 1:6, 11, 14; 2:2; 4:2; Mt. 18:5; 19:29; 24:9; Mk. 9:37; 13:6; Luke 21:8, 12, 17; John 14:13, 14, 26; 15:16, 21; 16:23, 24, 26; Acts 9:15, 16; Rom. 9:17; Revelation 2:3, 13; 3:8.

<sup>4</sup> The BHS which is later has "they shall forget..."

<sup>5</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls have shown the Masoretic Text to be nearly identical to some texts of the Tanakh dating from 200 BCE but different from others. (*Emanuel Tov [1992]. Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.*)

<sup>6</sup> Daniel I. Block wrote, "Within the context of the book, the present announcement of mercy is almost shocking. Apart from 20:26, where the root *rḥm* is used in its literal sense, 'womb,' this word is absent from the prophecies of Ezekiel. He has used terms like *ḥāmal*, 'to have compassion,' and *ḥūs*, 'to pity,' but except for 36:21, always in a negative sense. The present reference to divine compassion is novel, celebrative of the new reality. Finally Yahweh's fury, provoked by Israel's rebellion and covenantal infidelity, will give way to grace." (*The Book of Ezekiel*, NICOT, p. 486)