



The Story Of Salvation

NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010

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16. The Exile

Geoff Bingham says, “Had [Israel] listened as a nation to the prophets, they would have repented, lived at true covenant-level, and succeeded as a nation. However this was not so; they did not listen. Behind their idolatry and rebellion, God had his purpose and it was one of amazing grace. The exilic and post-exilic prophecies are indeed very exciting. They promise so much, that the mere success of Israel as a nation would seem mediocre beside it.”

1. The Exile as Judgment on Israel for Idolatry and Disobedience

The invasions by Assyria and then Babylon, the destruction of the Temple and the city, the exile of Israel out of the Promised Land and the seeming destruction of the Davidic kingship—these events must have seemed tragic to the people of God. Throughout the history of these gifts, the LORD had made clear that these were in fact gifts that He reserved the right to remove. When these things happened then, Israel had no excuse to be shocked or surprised by them; they had ample warning.

*God’s discipline and judgment never come without warning. Warning comes through His word in His prophets. If His warning is ignored, repentance is refused, and disobedience persists, He must act in giving the promised judgment lest we despise His holiness and, so, miss His mercy. That this is not simply an Old Testament principle is clear throughout the pages of the New Testament. See, for example, the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3; **1Corinthians 10:1-14**; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5-7; 1Thessalonians 4:3-8; 2Thessalonians 3:11-15; 1Timothy 5:19-20; and **Hebrews 12:18-29**.*

When Israel entered the Promised Land, in the covenantal blessings and curses which were spoken in Deuteronomy 28, the LORD made very clear to His people that their continued occupation of the land was not guaranteed however they responded to His grace, in either obedience or disobedience. Warning was given about not hearing and heeding the LORD’s voice in the law. There was the threat of foreign invasion:

⁴⁹ The LORD will bring a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, ⁵⁰ a grim-faced nation showing no respect to the old or favour to the young. ⁵¹ It shall consume the fruit of your livestock and the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed, leaving you neither grain, wine, and oil, nor the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, until it has made you perish. ⁵² It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout your land; it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout the land that the LORD your God has given you. (Deut. 28:49-52)

This invasion would have terrible consequences in the breakdown of social decency (vv. 53ff) and finally if still not received as His corrective discipline, the time would come when...

Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. *You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess* (Deut. 28:63).

Taken away from the land by an invading enemy, Israel would then suffer this shame:

⁶⁴ The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other; and there you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known.

⁶⁵ Among those nations you shall find no ease, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and a languishing spirit. ⁶⁶ Your life shall hang in doubt before you; night and day you shall be in dread, with no assurance of your life. ⁶⁷ In the morning you shall say, "If only it were evening!" and at evening you shall say, "If only it were morning!"—because of the dread that your heart shall feel and the sights that your eyes shall see. ⁶⁸ The LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, by a route that I promised you would never see again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.

Later, when the Temple was dedicated in Jerusalem, Solomon prayed thus, in prophetic anticipation of such an exile:

⁴⁶ When they sin against you—for there is no-one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to his own land, far away or near; ⁴⁷ and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their conquerors and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly'; ⁴⁸ and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you towards the land you gave their fathers, towards the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; ⁴⁹ then from heaven, your dwelling-place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. ⁵⁰ And forgive your people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offences they have committed against you, and cause their conquerors to show them mercy; ⁵¹ for they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace. (1Kings 8:46-51)

As we have seen in the two previous studies, the ministry and the message of the prophets was to be the voice of warning to the people, and to speak God's word of judgment as Israel persisted in idolatry, lived in the social injustice and immorality that flowed from that idolatry, and covered this with a hypocritical faithfulness to the Temple and the sacrifices.

In disciplining/judging His people in this way, the LORD exposed Himself to shame and to misrepresentation. It would look on the surface, as Israel was deported, the Temple burned down and the kingly line brought to an end that all of the promises of God had failed. It would appear that His grace in choosing Israel without any contributing of merit from Israel's side, was no grace at all, for they would be brought to a seeming end by His judgments. Ezekiel says:

¹⁶ Again the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁷ "Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman's monthly uncleanness in my sight. ¹⁸ So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols. ¹⁹ I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. ²⁰ *And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the LORD's people, and yet they had to leave his land.'* ²¹ I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. (Ezekiel 36:16-21)

However, the truth is that through the judgments and disciplines God both vindicates His holy name and ensures the future of His people. The people of God have no future if the truth of God Himself is abandoned by God! As He vindicates Himself in holiness so He establishes the future for His people. So the Lord, through Ezekiel goes on to say:

²² Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. ²³ I will show the holiness of my great

name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes. ²⁴ For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the corn and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. ³⁰ I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. ³¹ Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. ³² I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel! ³³ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. ³⁴ The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. ³⁵ They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited." ³⁶ Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.' (Ezekiel 36:22-36)

The reality of the covenant in bringing deep communion with God, so that He is our God and we are His people, necessitates judgment and discipline when we refuse our participation in His holiness, but this discipline and judgment serves the work of grace which is that finally there be the harvest of righteousness:

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 our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, 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. ¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees! (Heb. 12:9-12)

2. The Events and the Experience of the Exile¹

(i) The Fall of Samaria – the Northern Kingdom

In II Kings 17 we read the account of Samaria's fall. Brought under subjection to Assyria, Israel had to pay tribute. However, Hoshea, the king of the northern kingdom, tried to effect an alliance with Egypt, and when this was discovered, the King of Assyria made a siege of the city of Samaria. The city resisted for three years (725–722 BC) and then fell. Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, died during the time of the siege and Sargon II, his successor, completed the siege. He then deported 27,290 of the elite of the northern kingdom, and resettled the region with ethnic groups from Cuthan and Sippar in Babylonia, and from Hamath in Syria. These became what were known as Samaritans, having adopted the worship of the Israelites, although this was in a form unacceptable to the later Jews. II Kings 17:7–18 gives the rationale for Samaria's defeat – failure to obey the covenant, which included the practice of idolatry. Virtually speaking, the deportees were lost for ever as an ethnic group.

(ii) The Fall of Judah – the Southern Kingdom

Following Samaria's fall, Judah's kingdom endured for almost 150 years. After the fall of Samaria, Assyria grew even more in power. Then it began to decline. Babylon began to grow in power, and Egypt, in order to destroy this power, set out to defeat Babylon, only to be met by Josiah of Judah, who was defeated and killed (see II

¹ This entire section is taken from *Salvation History*, by Geoffrey Bingham, NCP:Blackwood, 1977, 2008, pp. 52-54

Kings 23:29f), so that Judah was now under Egypt. Neco of Egypt sought to defeat the crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, but himself was defeated. In 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar sent a large army against Jerusalem and besieged it. He took 10,000 of the elite and artisans, transporting them to Babylonia. A son of Josiah, Zedekiah, was placed upon the throne, and should have remained faithful to his Babylonian agreement, but he played the political game his father had played, and shifted his allegiance to Egypt. The result was that in 587 BC the siege of Jerusalem began, and although there was a brief respite when Hophra of Egypt marched into Palestine, yet Hophra was defeated, and a year later the city surrendered, had its wall broken down, its temple destroyed. Zedekiah the king was taken to Babylonia, along with a large body of captives. A small government was set up under Gedaliah, who himself was shortly assassinated. So the kingdom of Judah had fallen.

(iii) The Babylonian Exile

In exile, the captives gradually formed their identity as 'the Jews'. The prophecies of the pre-exilic prophets, plus the ministry of the exilic prophecies, helped them to form this identity. In accordance with Jeremiah 29, they soon developed economic security and social stability, even though in a foreign environment. Ezekiel lived amongst these exiles, and the promises of the body of the prophets now had deep significance and meaning for the exiles. Not all would wish to return to Palestine, because they learned to adopt the new culture. Isaianic prophecies, with their promise of Messiah, of the Suffering Servant, of the new Kingdom, and of the time of harmony which was to come, fed the minds and spirits of the more thoughtful ones. In this exile, Israel was refined and cleaned from her idolatry, as her people could think over the dreadful outcome of that practice. The Law, too, took on new significance. In many ways a new people, a holy remnant, was being shaped – the material which would be useful for the fulfilling of God's plan. The old arrogance had been eliminated, which looked upon the nation as God's favourite people, rather than God's elect people. Judah was ready for the task God had for her.

3. The Promises of a Glorious Future Discovered in the Suffering

Through these terrible events, the Lord opened up to Israel something even more glorious than their history had promised. The prophets brought a word of great promise and encouragement. At the very depths of the awfulness of judgment, at the point of seeming abandonment, God appeared in glory to Ezekiel. The chariot of God was not burned up with the Temple, but the Presence was with the exiles. Moreover promises about God's own intervention to work through to completion His promised world-wide salvation through the descendents of Abraham grew rather than diminished. A servant was anticipated who would deal with the sin of the world through his own suffering obedience. A King would arise to reign in righteousness. A new Temple would be established. A Ruler will conquer the kingdoms of the earth. The everlasting Kingdom will come, ruled by Messiah. All the nations will flow to Zion to learn the Law of the Lord and to walk in His ways.