

THE STORY: UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE OF THE BIBLE

Week 9 – Israel’s Exile/Israel’s Restoration

SCRIPTURE: Jer. 32:36-42; Jer. 33:7-9, 14-16, 20-21, 25-26

“That the world may know”! This is a huge subtheme in the Bible!

That the world may know WHAT? That there is a God in Israel (I Sam. 17:46. . .). If God’s intent is that the world may know Who He is as they observe His covenant with Israel, how can anyone think that God is finished with Israel? And there are theologians who do think – that God is finished with Israel. What say you? What do you believe the Bible is teaching? And, on what are you basing your beliefs?

If God’s intent is that the world may know Who He is – that He is a faithful God. . . that He is faithful to His promises to Israel AND to us – why would some believe that God would scrap His plan that He laid out from eternity past, which includes Israel, which SURROUNDS Israel?

And, if you’re of the theological persuasion that believes and teaches that the Church has replaced Israel – that all the promises that God gave to Israel are now fulfilled in the Church (this view is known as Replacement Theology [or Supersessionism in theological circles] – which I DO NOT embrace/endorse/believe) – the question that begs to be asked is this: “If God can rescind His promises to Israel, what about His promises to the Church? Can He take those promises back – those promises He’s made to the Church

Rom. 11:29 – *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.* Unalterable! God calls us, equips us, and He will deliver on His promises. PERIOD!

Israel is not a restored nation today. They were not a restored nation in OT times. BUT, Israel will be restored in the future – following the Tribulation - because God is a God of restoration! Restoration – part of the Bible’s plot. Creation, fall, redemption, restoration.

The book of Isaiah has been labeled as the Bible in miniature:

- There are two parts to Isaiah which are clearly different from one another:
 - First part – Chapters 1 through 39 = 39 books (OT)
 - Second part – Chapters 40 through 66 = 27 books (NT)
- Isaiah 1 echoes Genesis 1-3: God created the heaven and the earth; He created Adam and Eve; they sinned against God.
 - Isaiah 1:2 – “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken (creation of the world), I have nourished and brought up children (Adam & Eve) and they have rebelled against me.”
 - Isaiah 66:22 closes the book with a fleeting glimpse of the new heavens and the new earth. Revelation, the last book of the Bible, closes with a description of the new heavens and the new earth in chapters 21 and 22.
 - Isaiah opens with the Genesis account and closes with the account in Revelation.
 - Isaiah 40 is the beginning of the second part of Isaiah. The first 39 chapters in Isaiah speak of Israel’s history and the nations. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah encompass the OT.

- Isaiah 40 through Isaiah 66 speak equate to the NT. Isaiah 40 specifically points to the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew is the 40th book of the Bible.
- How does Isaiah 40 begin? “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people.”
- Isaiah 40:3 - *The voice of one crying in the wilderness:*
“Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert
a highway for our God. Who is the voice? John the Immerser to whom we’re
introduced in Matthew.
 - NT counterpart of Isa. 40:3 – Matthew 3:1-3 – *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying. . . The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.*
- The Suffering Servant (Messiah – Jesus) chapters begin in Isaiah 42 and move through Isaiah 55.
 - Isaiah 53 corresponds with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus found in the Gospels.
- Isaiah 56 focuses on Gentile salvation. The book of Acts records Gentile salvation. While salvation has always been extended to Gentiles, the door was opened wider to Gentiles at Pentecost.
- In Isaiah 57 through Isaiah 66 we read of Israel’s restoration, the Millennial Kingdom, the Eternal state which is found in Revelation!

The first half of Isaiah covers Israel’s tumultuous history with glimpses of RESTORATION! Israel’s history in the OT leads up to her exile in foreign countries. Yet Israel’s exile paves the way for her return to the land of Israel – and points to future restoration! Why did God emphasize giving the children of Israel the land and then scatter them from their land? We need to look at the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant.

God required obedience on the part of the children of Israel to the Mosaic Covenant – the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Covenant was CONDITIONAL. Israel was required to obey. There were two parties who made promises to one another in the Mosaic Covenant: God and Israel (Ex. 19:8; Ex. 24:3, 7).

The Abrahamic Covenant was UNCONDITIONAL. God made promises to Israel of the land, the seed (descendants AND THE Messiah), and the blessing through the Messiah in salvation. Abraham was NOT a participant in the cutting of this covenant because he fell into a DEEP sleep. And God, in cutting the covenant alone, committed Himself to the fulfillment of – the land, the seed/Seed, and the blessing. God obligated Himself to deliver on those promises. He swore by Himself (Heb. 6:13).

Because the Mosaic Covenant requires Israel’s obedience, Deut. 28 lists blessings for keeping the law as well as curses for disobedience – not keeping the law! Deut. 28:1-14 – the blessings are listed. Deut. 28:15-68 – the curses are spelled out! Israel has been chosen to accomplish God’s purposes. They’ve been set apart so that the world may know that there is a God in Israel. Obedience to God’s law resulted in God’s protection and blessing. Disobedience/transgression resulted in judgment!

Deut. 29:24-25 - Moses states what the nations would think upon seeing God judge Israel - *All nations would say, 'Why has the LORD done so to this land? Why is there great anger on God's part? The nations would then realize that Israel has forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. The nations would understand that God is holy when He judges Israel. The nations would understand that God is serious!*

Before the children of Israel even reach the Promised Land under Joshua, we note a prophetic passage in Deut. 30:1-6 (READ). What a look into the nation of Israel's future! Yes, there is a glorious future for Israel; however, what about now? Blessings and curses!

Big picture re: Israel's exile:

- Israel and Judah were exiled because God kept the covenant He made with them at Sinai – the Mosaic Covenant.
- Israel and Judah will be restored (Eze. 37) because God is keeping the covenant He made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob – and with the physical descendants of those patriarchs.

BOTTOM LINE: God is keeping His covenants. God is faithful to His word.

Distinction between the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant:

- When Israel obeyed the Mosaic Covenant there were blessings. When Israel disobeyed the Mosaic Covenant, they were disciplined.
- Whether Israel obeyed the Abrahamic Covenant or not, God would deliver on His promises of the land, the Seed (the Messiah), and the blessing (salvation for all through the Messiah).

Why was Israel carried away into exile? They broke the Mosaic Covenant. How?

- Israel broke the first commandment: I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before Me.
- Solomon's many foreign wives paved the way to idolatry. After Solomon's death, God divided Israel into two kingdoms – the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.
- After the kingdom was divided, all the kings of Israel and the majority of the kings of Judah "did evil in the sight of the LORD." The kings sanctioned idolatry.
- The Lord sent His prophets to confront both the monarchs and the people with their sin and their need to return to Him. Because the message of the prophets was rejected, the prophets foretold that the two kingdoms would be carried away into exile (II Kings 17:13-23 – the northern kingdom of Israel carried away to Assyria; II Kings 21:10-15 – the southern kingdom of Judah [w/ Jerusalem] carried away to Babylon).

- God commanded the children of Israel to let their land lie fallow one year out of every seven years. They disobeyed this commandment for 490 years. Because the land did not lie fallow for 70 years out of the 490 years (one out of every seven years within the 490 time frame equates to 70), the prophets foretold of a 70 year exile for the kingdom of Judah in Babylon.
- God told the southern kingdom of Judah, that He was going to bring calamity upon them because of King Manasseh, King Hezekiah's son, "who did evil in the sight of the Lord" (II Kings 21:2, 11-12).

God sent the prophets to warn them of their sin! GOD'S GRACE! God told them if they didn't obey, He would scatter them from their land. He told them to repent. But they didn't. God disciplined Israel by carrying them away into exile. Throughout the barrenness of the exile. . . when the people felt God had forsaken them. . . God continued to express His love to the Jewish people. The unifying principle of the Bible: the character of God. The Jews knew Who God was to them. God had told them that He loved them with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3-6)

Isa. 49:16 – God tells Israel He has inscribed them on the palms of His hands. God administers tough love through discipline. . . .

In 722 BC God used the Assyrians as His instrument of judgment. The Assyrians took captive the northern kingdom – Israel.

The southern kingdom of Judah fell into the hands of the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC (II Chron. 36:17-20).

Even this captivity was a part of God's plan. That the world may know there is a God in Israel – and that He is HOLY and true to His word! He keeps His word. And in His holiness, because of His holiness, we read of the glory of God departing from the Temple in Eze. 8 through Eze. 10.

AND, we know of fruit from the time of exile: Daniel, a faithful Jew, shared the one true God with Nebuchadnezzar – and the Magi. Nebuchadnezzar repents (Daniel 4). The descendants of the Magi from Daniel's day – seek the Messiah! They seek Jesus!

While the Jewish people were in exile in Babylon, they did not have access to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple had been destroyed. Synagogues (schools) were established. There was no Temple – no sacrifices – no priests. Rabbis replaced priests as there were no sacrifices to offer! Another Judaism began to develop in Babylon – Rabbinic Judaism – which is taught through the opinions and teachings of the Rabbis – NOT based on the Scripture! How did this happen? The Rabbis began embellishing on the 613 commandments that God had given Israel. The Jewish leadership questioned their exile to Babylon. "How did we get to this place of exile? We disobeyed God's 613 commandments. What should we do? We need to make sure we don't disobey, so we need to DO better." And, so, they added legalistic, external rulings that would be impossible to obey. The 613 commandments were impossible to obey. Keeping one commandment 100% of the time is impossible!

Within this Big Picture series, we've talked about the nations and Israel – and their connection.

- God's plan is to use Israel to bless the nations of the world.
- Ever since Judah's exile in Babylon, God has used the nations to impact Israel. Luke 21:24 – Jesus refers to “the time of the Gentiles” – when Jerusalem is oppressed by the Gentile nations. We are in the time of the Gentiles.

Rev. 11:1-2 - *Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood¹ saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.”² But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.* The Gentiles will continue to tread Jerusalem during the Tribulation. There's a cut-off point re: the oppression of Jerusalem by the Gentiles. The oppression of Jerusalem will end at the end of the Tribulation according to Rev. 11:2.

How have the nations impacted Israel?

- Babylon attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple and carried Judah into captivity in Babylon.
- God then carried out judgment against Babylon. Babylon is conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire.
- God used Persia to bring the Jews back into the land after their captivity. Ezra 1:22-23.
 - WHY would Persia allow the Jews to return to the land?
 - Fulfillment of Bible prophecy. The Jewish people had been in exile for 70 years in Babylon. Jeremiah had prophesied a 70-year exile (Jer. 25:11-12; Jer. 29:10); and we read about the 70-year exile in II Chron. 36:21). It was time for the Jewish people to return to Israel.
 - Cyrus conquered Babylon and permitted the Jews to return to their homeland in fulfillment of Isa. 45:1-4.
 - Cyrus gave the orders for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (II Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:2; 5:13; 6:3), restored the vessels of the House of the Lord (Ezra 1:7), and provided funds to bring cedar trees from Lebanon (Ezra 3:7).
 - Persia implemented the repatriation of conquered peoples – sending them back to their own lands. That's how they governed! GOD orchestrated the conquering of Babylon by Persia so that Israel would be returned to their land.
 - God orchestrated Greece to conquer Persia – along with most of the known world. Alexander the Great appeared on the scene.
 - He commissioned Rabbis (legend – 70) to translate the Hebrew OT into Greek – the language of the nations! The world was able to understand the OT!
 - Aside from the Greek translation of the OT, Greece attempted to bring Greek philosophy to the world. Greece Hellenized the world.

- Greek philosophy taught:
 - Man is the center of the universe, not God!
 - Piety is in external actions and reality is based on human logic.
 - Traditions are more important than any word of God.
 - Hellenism massively seeped into Judaism.

As Hellenism/Greek philosophy infiltrated Judaism – many of the Jews departed from the Biblical Judaism that God gave to Abraham, Moses, and David. Jesus was not born into the Judaism that Abraham, Moses, and David knew! As we read the Gospels, Jesus contends constantly with exterior rules – with the letter of the law – upon which the Rabbis embellished. Jesus teaches throughout the Gospels the spirit of the law!

In summary:

- Babylon took Judah into captivity.
- Persia returned Israel to the land of Israel.
- Through Greece the world understood the OT. . .
- Rome conquered Greece. God used Rome to build a system of roads that linked the world under Roman rule and enhanced the spread of the Gospel.
- God used Rome to bring peace to the world (pax Romana). That peace made travel and the exchange of ideas possible on a broader scale. Pax Romana led to the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the uttermost part of the world!

To reiterate, the Jewish world that Jesus entered at His first coming was not the same Jewish world that Abraham, Moses, and King David knew. The world had changed. Judaism had changed.

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The final warning from the prophet Malachi re: Israel's self-righteousness ends the prophetic message in the OT! We then read, historically, of 430 years of silence. 430 years of silence – no prophets warning the children of Israel – no angelic visits – no revelation from God!

God does NOT change. Mal. 3:6 – *For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.*

God promised the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give them the land, seed (descendants and THE Messiah), and a blessing (salvation). And, so we read in Jeremiah, AFTER God tells them in Jer. 30:7 that a time is coming that will be called *the time of Jacob's trouble*, which we know as the Tribulation. . .

Jer. 30:10-11, 16-22 - *'Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' says the LORD, 'Nor be dismayed, O Israel;*

*For behold, I will save you from afar,
And your seed from the land of their captivity.*

*Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet,
And no one shall make him afraid.*

¹¹ *For I am with you,' says the LORD, 'to save you;
Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you,
Yet I will not make a complete end of you.
But I will correct you in justice,
And will not let you go altogether unpunished.'*

¹⁶ *'Therefore all those who devour you shall be devoured;
And all your adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity;
Those who plunder you shall become plunder,
And all who prey upon you I will make a prey.*

¹⁷ *For I will restore health to you
And heal you of your wounds,' says the LORD,
'Because they called you an outcast saying:
"This is Zion;
No one seeks her."'*

¹⁸ *"Thus says the LORD:*

*'Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob's tents,
And have mercy on his dwelling places;
The city shall be built upon its own mound,
And the palace shall remain according to its own plan.*

¹⁹ *Then out of them shall proceed thanksgiving
And the voice of those who make merry;
I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish;
I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.*

²⁰ *Their children also shall be as before,
And their congregation shall be established before Me;
And I will punish all who oppress them.*

²¹ *Their nobles shall be from among them,
And their governor shall come from their midst;
Then I will cause him to draw near,
And he shall approach Me;
For who is this who pledged his heart to approach Me?' says the LORD.*

²² *'You shall be My people,
And I will be your God.'"*

After 430 years of no prophetic voice from God to the Jewish people, the silence was shattered!

Isaiah 40:1 - *Comfort ye, comfort ye My people.*

What we read in Isaiah 40 is the dawning of a new day for Israel!

Isaiah 40:3 – *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’”*

In the history and culture of the day, it was the custom of some Eastern monarchs to send a herald before them to announce that they, the monarch was on his way. They would send an envoy to ensure that the roads were safe. Obstacles had to be cleared away, causeways had to be built, and crooked roads straightened, and the land leveled.

John the Immerser was the voice calling the Jewish people to repent (Isa. 55:7 - return; Hosea 5:15). Why? Because the King was coming. John was calling people to humble themselves and prepare for the arrival of the King.

John would be the HERALD for the Messiah – the Messiah Who would come as the ULTIMATE SACRIFICE for sin. Do you know when the announcement of John’s birth was given to his father, Zacharias, a priest? At the time of SACRIFICE in the Temple in Jerusalem! How fitting! Zacharias’ name means “Remembered of Jehovah”! The silence is shattered! After 430 years of silence – God remembers. Did God forget? NO! To mankind it seems that God forgets at times. . . . God always remembers! And, God acts because He has promised to do so. God always acts; however, we don’t always realize that He is acting – that He is moving toward His goal – that the world will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God (Hab. 2:14). Perhaps we don’t realize that God is acting NOW – but He is! He acted during those 430 years – altho’, the people wondered. God prepared the world into which the Messiah would come.

The announcement of John’s birth truly shattered the silence. His parents: Zacharias and Elizabeth, righteous Jews. Elizabeth was barren and advanced in age. This was a double symbol of hopelessness. Yet, this became the means by which God would announce to the world that nothing is impossible for Him. The silence was broken.

Luke 1:5-17

Zacharias knew the Scriptures – he and Elizabeth walked according to God’s commandments. He knew what the prophet Malachi had told the people about Elijah coming before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Zacharias knew the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12; Gen. 15; Gen. 17) and the Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7), and the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31). These three covenants God made with Israel.

Can you imagine the excitement that Zacharias felt? God had showed up – He was visiting His people – the Messiah would come! AND, Zacharias’ son would come before the Messiah!

Luke 1:18-25; 57-66

- Irony – the father of the herald of the Messiah – mute.
- The proclamation from the outset is NOT from Zacharias – it’s FROM GOD (Luke 1:57-64)!!

- Unbelief cannot speak. (Gabriel had told Zacharias that he did not believe his words)
- Faith restored his speech.

So, Zacharias speaks! He can now give the benediction that he could not deliver after emerging SPEECHLESS from the Holy Place in the Temple more than 9 months earlier. Here's another forgotten Christmas chapter! I am praying that the Christmas that each of you celebrates would take on such a MARVELING this year – after realizing all of God's orchestration throughout Scripture.

John is born. The birth of his son is an historical happening! Zacharias now knows that the Messiah is about to arrive. So Zacharias bursts out in song. In this song (Luke 1:67-79), he connects the Messiah's arrival with the salvation of his people – the salvation of Israel. In particular, Zacharias understands that the coming of the Messiah means the fulfillment of three covenants that God made with Israel: the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant.

As the children of Israel had been waiting for the Messiah, there had been a languishing; any joy they had – had dissipated. Centuries had passed with no fulfillment. BUT NOW Zacharias knows that since his son, John, who is the “prophet of the Highest,” (Luke 1:76) has arrived, the Messiah will soon arrive.

And, so we read. . . .

Luke 1:67-79 - ⁶⁷ *Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:*

⁶⁸ *“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,
⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David, (Davidic Covenant)*

God has visited His people – God has showed up. That's what the Jewish people were waiting for – God showing up! Here was the Redeemer Who had been prophesied so long ago – in the Garden of Eden!

The Hebrew word for “horn,” *kehren*, means strength. **I**t denotes power/killing power. It's a common expression in the OT for a powerful person – drawn from the animal kingdom.

⁷⁰ *As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,
⁷¹ That we should be saved from our enemies (Davidic Covenant)
And from the hand of all who hate us,
⁷² To perform the mercy promised to our fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob)
And to remember His holy covenant, (Abrahamic Covenant)*

Because God remembers and delivers on His promises – He performs! He is a merciful God. What is God going to perform/deliver upon?

⁷³ *The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: (Abrahamic Cov.)*

⁷⁴ *To grant us that we,*

Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,

Might serve Him without fear, (in the Mill. Kingdom)

⁷⁵ *In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. (Davidic Cov.)*

It is through God's mercies that we are saved! Zacharias understands that it is God's mercy that would change them. Transformation is an act of mercy – it's not something we can earn by works.

Zacharias speaks of the Abrahamic covenant (promising the land, seed/Seed, blessing) which will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom. It is at that time that Israel will be restored and will receive the land God promised them and serve King Jesus Who will reign from David's throne in Zion!

⁷⁶ *“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;*

For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,

⁷⁷ *To give knowledge of salvation to His people (Israel; the Jews)*

By the remission (forgiveness/removal of sin) of their sins, (New Covenant)

Zacharias is speaking of his son, John, who was called to preach the need of repentance on the part of the nation of Israel. To prepare their hearts for God's way of righteousness!

Zacharias speaks of forgiveness – of the New Covenant – God's provision of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31ff) – new heart, Spirit within them, new relationship: They shall be My people and I will be their God, and forgiveness – REMOVAL – of sins!

And how will this come about?

⁷⁸ *Through the tender mercy of our God,*

With which the Dayspring from on high has visited^[e] us;

This is all because of the tender mercies of God in sending the Messiah!

In this little word “tender” (*splanchna* in Gk), we see God's heart. Tender refers to the inner organs, the bowels – the seat of tender affections, kindness, benevolence, compassion. So, it speaks to the heart. Tender mercies – the deep-seeded desire of God for showing favor, kindness and mercy to undeserving sinners. The very nature of God is mercy. How can we say that?

In Exodus 33:18, Moses says to God, “Please show me Your glory.”

God tells Moses that His goodness will pass before him – and God speaks of His compassion and mercy.

Dayspring – lit. - dawn/sunrise - Messianic reference:

Isa. 9:2 - the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Isa. 60:1-2 – “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you;”

Mal. 4:2 – “. . . the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.” (healing – Isa. 35:4-5; Isa. 53:5).

John 8:12 – “I am the Light of the world!”

Many of the ancient Rabbis (prior to 1100 AD) believed that “light” in Scripture refers to the Messiah.

⁷⁹ *To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Zacharias knew that the promises God made to Abraham and to David could not be totally fulfilled until the New Covenant was fulfilled. The New Covenant which is the covenant that offers forgiveness!

The only hope to receive the promises God made to Israel through Abraham and David would be through forgiveness – the removal of sin (not just the covering of sin). They would need a new heart and God’s Spirit indwelling them.

Zacharias’ blessing is a glorious bridge between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels. This blessing proclaims the fulfillment of all that God spoke to Israel – the fulfillment Who is JESUS!

Next week we will look at Christmas – from the Hebrew Scriptures.

QUESTIONS:

What was new to you re: Israel’s exile and promise of restoration?

How does Christmas fit into the big picture of the Bible? Give detail.

Any V8 moments?

How would you write a Christmas pageant? What would you emphasize?

HOMEWORK:

Work on your big picture chart.

Read Luke 2:1-20 and Matt. 2:1-12. Make observations and note questions.