

HISTORY OF REDEMPTION

BY

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Lesson 8

God's Restoration and Preservation

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Well, let's summarize Act Two.

Summary View of Act 2

***931 – The Nation is Divided:**

Jeroboam (10 tribes of the North)

Rehoboam (2 tribes of the South)

***722 – Northern 10 Tribes Judged by Assyria**

606 – Nebuchadnezer Invades Jerusalem

597 – Nebuchadnezer comes back for more

***586 – Nebuchadnezer makes a final end of it**

(70 years of captivity in Babylon)

In 931 the nation is divided. Jeroboam gets ten tribes, goes to the north. Rehoboam stays with two tribes in the south. The two tribes are Judah and Benjamin. Then in 722, the northern ten tribes are judged by Assyria. And of course, Judah is in the south thinking—“well, she is finally getting what she deserves.” But later, in 606, Nebuchadnezzar actually invades Jerusalem, takes a lot of the temple treasures back to Babylon and says, “I will check you guys later.” He comes back in 597 a second time for more. And that is when he takes 10,000 of the princes and the choice people, probably when Daniel went off with him. And then he came back a final time, a third time in 586 and that is when Nebuchadnezzar made a final end of Jerusalem and he burned it to the ground. He took the temple apart or I mean he just destroyed everything that was there. And they went into seventy years of captivity.

Kings and Chronicles Compared

Kings

Political View

Written by a Prophet

Message of Judgment

Man's Failings

Chronicles

Spiritual View

Written by a Priest

Message of Hope

God's Faithfulness

- **Kings provides the headlines and front page news items. (Man's View)**
- **Chronicles is the editorial page of priestly commentary. (God's View)**

So that is the way the history works out for them. So, when you look at the Kings and the Chronicles and you compare them, and you look at this history, when you read the Kings you are going to get the political view. But when you read the Chronicles you are going to get the spiritual view. Or, you know, the reason for that is the Kings were written by prophets, but the Chronicles were written by priests. And the prophets were always prophesying concerning the world situation, but the priests were writing about the personal, religious situation. And so when you read Kings you are getting the more political, prophetic view. But when you read Chronicles you are getting a spiritual, priestly view. And so, in Kings you get a message of judgment. But when you get to Chronicles you get a message of hope because what is God trying to do? He is wanting to change our hearts. And there is hope for that.

So in Kings you see man's failings but when you read Chronicles, you see God's faithfulness. And you cannot read the two apart from each other. You really need to read them together to get the whole picture because Kings is sort of like reading a newspaper. You read the headlines and you read the front page news items. You know, you just pick

up a newspaper and you go, “Oh okay, what is happening?” And you get the general picture of what is happening in the world. But when you go to Chronicles you get the editorial page. You get the priestly commentary. And so Kings is more from man’s view and Chronicles is more from God’s view. And you put the two together to get a whole picture of what happened during that time of the history.

What books were written during the seventy years of captivity? Well, Ezekiel was written and Daniel was written during that time. And it is interesting that as Ezekiel is on the river Chebar, he introduces a word to us we know of the Lord. And it is the word *Adonai*, which means absolute ruler. That He is the possessor and ruler of all of earth. And it is interesting that while they are down there not owning anything—they are 700 miles away from their home, sitting by the river of Babylon. They cannot even sing the Lord’s song. And you read the book of Lamentations and just the feeling that is there. And it is at that point that Ezekiel uses the word *Adonai* over 200 times in the book of Ezekiel, speaking of the lordship of God because God is going to bring them back eventually. But He has got to teach them His lordship before He can really do all that He wants to do. They have to be broken completely for God to be able to work. And it is no different for us, the same principles apply.

But it is not only Ezekiel, but there is Daniel. And Daniel is a statesman. And by the way, what tribe was Daniel from? He was from the tribe of Judah. Didn’t God say that He would always have somebody from the tribe of Judah sitting on the throne until the Messiah came? Isn’t it interesting that even during the seventy years of captivity, when they were removed from the land, that while they were in a foreign land, who was the guy that stayed second in charge to the king all the time, running the whole kingdom, right through about five different guys? It is Daniel all the way. There is a guy from the tribe of Judah ruling. And God never broke His promise. And then they were back. And then finally one comes, born of Mary, through Nathan, a true son of David that can sit upon the throne of David, and that is Jesus Christ.

But they knew the Scripture, Psalm 125:1–2, as much as we know John 3:16. You ask any kid that goes to Sunday school in almost any church in town here, and say, “Can you quote me one Bible verse?” And there is a good chance that they one that they will probably come up with—if they don’t know any other Bible verse, they might know John 3:16. “For God so loved the world....” Well, the same thing would have happened back in their day with Psalm 125:1–2. You could take any little kid and say, “Quote me one verse that you know from the Old Testament.” And if there was any verse they would know, it would be this one.

Those who trust in the Lord are like mount Zion which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people, from this time forth and forever.

Now can you imagine what they thought when they saw Assyria take Israel away and then they saw Babylon take Judah away and destroy Jerusalem? Then it is like, what? I mean, it is almost like God is dead, isn’t it? And many people think that is why the name God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, because it is during this time that Esther is up in the 120 provinces of Persia, later. And His name is not mentioned, but they were being preserved nonetheless. Though His name is in acrostic form, at least the tetragrammaton is in acrostic form in the book of Esther, which we might be able to see later.

But here they are and it is just unbelievable, you know, what has happened during this time here of history. It is amazing.

In 931, what took place in 931? The nations were split. Up until that time, you might say, we had 120 years under Saul, under David, under Solomon and we were united as a nation. But all of a sudden in 931, there is a split. And we know there is a group that goes to the north under who?—under Jeroboam. And there is a group that stays in the south under Rehoboam. Now which one was Solomon’s son? Rehoboam. And how many stayed with him? Two. And how many went north? Ten.

And then what happened to them—in 722 something took place. What happened in 722? The nation of Assyria came down against the northern tribes of Israel. And so, they are attacked by Assyria, by Sennacherib. He comes down and he carries them away, that is, Israel. But Judah continues on for a while. And they think they are pretty cool. But in 606, they get a visit by Nebuchadnezzar. They get another one in 597. And then finally in 586 he comes back and he totally destroys these people. So they get a visit from Babylon. And Babylon comes down and wipes them out.

So God has now destroyed both Israel the northern kingdom, and Judah, the southern kingdom. And it is always like when you go into the books of Kings and you start reading in Chronicles and all the prophets as they start prophesying and you are always trying to remember like, well, which prophet prophesied where and to whom? And either they were prophesying to the northern tribes of Israel or they were prophesying to the southern tribes of Judah because there was a distance between them. And the capital for these ten here was what? Where was their capital? Samaria. And the capital down here was what? Jerusalem. So you have—these guys have Samaria as a capital in the north and these guys in the south have Jerusalem as a capital. There is a difference. And the prophets are going to them all the time, when you get to the section of the prophets. And they are just taking one message after another message as God sent all of His prophets out to just say, “Turn! Repent! Change and we can work this out. I am a forgiving God. But if you are going to keep going off with every green tree on every high hill, there is going to come a point where I just cannot do this anymore. And I am not going to do it anymore.” And so they did, and so, with Assyria, He took them off early. And then He took Judah off later.

So then they did what? They went down and they were taken away. This is the line of redemption here. So for seventy years, they are in Babylon. So they went from what? They went from a theocracy to what? A pagocracy. For seventy years. And their whole land is destroyed. But God isn't through with them because He wants to bring them back. And what happens? When does He bring them back? They come back again at what point? 536. What happens in 536? Cyrus issues a decree in 536. So in 536 Cyrus, King

Cyrus says, "Okay, you guys can go back." Who went back? Zerubbabel. All right, Zerubbabel goes back. Zerubbabel heads back in 536 and what do they do? What is the first thing they build when they get there? Not the temple. Not the wall. They build an altar. The first thing that they build is an altar. Isn't that important? I think so.

Isn't that the way in our life? So many times we want to build a temple. We want to build a wall. And the first thing we ought to build is an altar out of our heart to serve the Lord. We want to do this. We want to do that. And we got all these things going on. But what God wants is a broken and contrite heart. He wants our heart on the altar. That is what He always wanted. That is what He wanted with these kings and they would not rule for Him and they would not follow Him. And that is why they went through all of this mess, you know.

So in 536 Cyrus says, "You can go back." So we call this what? What would you call this? I call it the first return. How many returned? Almost 50,000—but something happened. They got there and things what? Like usual, people have great starts, don't they? And then they kind of like—it fizzles out. You start doing it for a while and you say, "Well, this is just too much work, man. I need to go build a house. My wife says she is tired of living in this tent. If she is tired of living in this tent, I am pretty tired of it too then." So it is like they take a break. But what happens later? Something else takes place. It resumes when? In 520 by whose decree?—Darius. Darius gives a decree and in 520 the thing resumes. So they resume work because they are going to try to build God a temple.

I mean, that is what they wanted to do, right? The work is resumed. You can read about it in Ezra 4:24 and Ezra 6:1–15. So this has taken place. Now, they resume the work. Work on the temple is resumed. How long did it take to finish it? Once they resumed the work, and they really got into it, how long did it take them to finish the temple? Four years. So the temple was finished in what year? In 516 the temple was finished, complete.

So they are back in the land. They finally have a temple to worship at and it is complete.

Then what takes place after that? What is going on outside of the area because not everybody is there? Where are the rest of the people? They are in Persia, aren't they? And we know what is going on there. In 479 and in 478, we know that in 479 they had 180 day party and Vashti was summoned to go kind of show herself off at the party and she would not do it, for whatever reason. And so she got displaced and Esther came on the scene and she became the queen.

And so, God is working, isn't He? I mean, it is like, if God can work through a beauty pageant, I do not think there is any limit to what God can do. So, you know, the king is upset with Vashti and so he calls this beauty pageant and says, "I am getting a new queen because when I throw a party, you need to show up and look good." And so God uses that. God is doing it. But look how God does it. He chooses the most interesting ways, it seems, to do things. And it is pretty amazing.

So, what happens though while they are there is—you know the story—Esther has an opportunity. In 473 Esther stands up and she does what? She preserves her people because they are going to just do away with her people. It looks like a lot of neat things are happening. So when Ezra goes back in 458, we will call this the second major return. And then when Nehemiah goes back that is the final or the third major return of the people to the land. So they return first under Zerubbabel. They return again under Ezra. And they return finally under Nehemiah. And in these three stages the work is complete.

And then at that point, what do we have here? We have 400 silent years until Jesus Christ comes on the scene. And so that is what is happening in terms of the timeline of the history that we are looking at here.

So that gives you an idea of what is taking place. But God is doing it. And you need to know this timeline. How are you going to read the prophets? You will never understand the prophets and you will always misinterpret the prophets if you do not understand the history to which they are prophesying into. You won't get it. So you have got to understand this history of what is happening to appreciate what the prophets are saying

and what they are addressing. And there are many principles, when you start going through the prophets that apply. Like we have already seen, just in the history, there are principles that apply to the church. Well, when you go through the prophets there will be principles that apply to the church, but they are founded upon this history that we see.

Act Three

God Restores Israel to the Land for the coming of the Messiah

Ezra - Nehemiah - Esther

So, we begin Act Three and God is going to restore Israel to the land for the coming of the Messiah, as we read in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther because His plan has been to bring the Messiah. So we are going to go through it rapidly.

Jeremiah prophesies of the restoration. In Jeremiah chapter 29, he says, "After seventy years God is going to visit you. God is going to cause you to return. His thoughts are going to be back there towards you. He is going to gather you. And every place He has driven you away, He is going to bring them back from those places. And He is going to bring them back to the land." And He says, "Then you are going to call upon Me and you are going to pray to Me and I am going to listen to you. You are going to seek Me. You are going to find Me when you start searching for Me with all your heart. I will bring you back, I promise" (cf. Jeremiah 29:10-13). So God keeps His promise.

Now, Jeremiah prophesied that. Well, while Daniel was reading Jeremiah—you know the story—he discovers this prophesy. And Daniel goes, “Oh, yea. We are right at the end of the seventy years of captivity.” And so...

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face...(cf. Daniel 9:1-3)

And he begins to fast. So he understands the word of God. And instead of doing what I would have done, he sets his face to fast. Because I just would not have done that. I would have probably just thrown a party and invited everybody and said, “You know, God’s word says we are going to be restored! Isn’t that great?” And that is what I would have done. And that is probably what you would have done because that is what we are still doing.

But when he (Daniel) reads God’s word he becomes so impressed by it and he is so serious about it. And he knows God wants prayer and prayer is the way that we cooperate with God’s will being done on earth. And so when he reads something that is God’s will, he gets down and starts praying about it. And it is so special and intense. He says, “I have to both fast and pray about it.” That is a man who has a heart for God and is in cooperation with God.

Whereas me, you know, I would have just said, “Well, God said He was going to do it. He did everything else He said He was going to do. I might as well chill out. God will do it.” And how many times that is our attitude even in these last days, isn’t it? When God has told us it is time to work. It is time to rise up. It is time to awake out of sleep. It is

time to be serious about the gospel going out to the world. It is time to be on our knees praying that God would send people out with the gospel. Why? Because we see and we know that the world cannot last a whole lot longer like it is. Things have got to change. We know it as sure as we are living and breathing. But oftentimes what we do is say, "Well, the Lord is coming back." And we see it and we know all of this stuff is happening. And we see what is happening in the politics of the world today, therefore, let's just chill out. Let's don't do anything. Let's just wait. It will happen.

Instead, it is like, let's be like Daniel and let's really start praying the Lord of the harvest to send people out into the harvest field. That is a real understanding of what is going on. And that is what Daniel does when he reads Jeremiah.

**The Temple and the
City of Jerusalem are Rebuilt**
Ezra and Nehemiah

**God told Cyrus King of Persia
that He would rebuild the Temple**
(Ezra 1:1-4)

The prophets spoke clearly about this
(Jeremiah 29:10-11; Isaiah 44:28; 45:1)

So in Scene One, the temple and the city of Jerusalem are being rebuilt, Ezra and Nehemiah. Now both books begin in what country? Ezra begins in it and Nehemiah begins in it—in Persia. But where do both books end? They end in Jerusalem. Ezra starts in Persia, ends in Jerusalem. Nehemiah starts in Persia, ends in Jerusalem.

So God tells Cyrus king of Persia that He is going to rebuild the temple. And He does. And the prophets speak very clearly about it.

Now, why are the last two verses of 2 Chronicles the same as the first two verses of Ezra? Because originally it was thought Chronicles and Ezra were just the same book. They were not two books. And you read the old Bibles, the old Jewish Bibles, and they were just one book. They were not separate books because they were of the same history. And that is one reason, too, why 2 Chronicles was the last book in their Bible.

So, here they are. The Babylonian captivity ends by way of a Persian decree. And the Lord stirs up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia. And Cyrus says,

All the kings in the earth, the Lord God of heaven has given me. He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who among you of all His people will go up? May his God be with him. Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, for He is God. (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:22-23)

So it is like—God stirs up a king and he makes the proclamation. And he provides them with silver and gold and goods and livestock. And they take off. And all these freewill offerings come in for the house of God. And they are off to go back and build the house of God. It is a great time because they have been through this complete devastation. They cannot even sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. They have been wiped out completely. Now it looks like God is going to bring them back. So their hope is renewed. And the Lord uses Cyrus this way.

In Isaiah 45 we have that neat prophecy. He says, "I have chosen you. I have anointed you, Cyrus. You are, in a sense, My right hand. I have held you there and I am going to use you. And I am going to go before you. And I want you to know, that I am doing it so

that you can know that I, the Lord who called you by your name, am the God of Israel.” (cf. Isaiah 45:1-3).

So God is working for His people. He is going to bring them back. And He says, “I have called you by name and I am doing all these things.” So, who is doing it? God is doing it.

What is grace in the Old Testament? It is God doing it. What is grace in the New Testament? It is God doing it. That is what it is. God is doing it. “He began a good work in you and He will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (cf. Philippians 1:6). God is doing it. He started it and He will keep doing it.

It takes some weird turns, doesn't it? Look at your life. Doesn't God's grace take some really strange turns in your life? But who is doing it? God is doing it. Does He do it through your rebellion? Yeah. He does it when you are good. He does it when you are bad. God is doing it. He just doesn't stop. And He wants all the ends of the earth to look to Him.

So 50,000 return under Zerubbabel. They go through 700 miles of trackless desert. They get there and it says, “All whose spirits God had moved, they arose to go up and build the house of God” (cf. Ezra 1:5). Isn't that neat? So God is doing it.

And from this time on they were called what?—Jews. Why? Because that is when Judah (the people from Judah) came and they started calling them Jews because their name was Judah. They referred to them by that name, Jews. So that is when the name Jew began, when these people went back with Zerubbabel and most of them were from Judah.

And the temple is rebuilt. There is a mixed reaction to it. It was a place, though, where they could meet God. Only a small remnant returned. Most of the Jews remained in the provinces there in Persia.

And so the first thing they build was what? In Ezra 3:2 it says they built an altar. They got there and they arose and built the altar of the God of Israel. And they set the altar on its bases. And they had daily burnt offerings from the first day of the seven month. Although the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not yet been laid, they did this with permission. This is because we must first get the altar of our hearts right. But then Zerubbabel finally rebuilds the temple and that takes place in Ezra 3.

And we see the mixed reaction. Many of the old guys were going, "This isn't a temple!" And the new guys were all excited. "Yeah, this is a temple. This is great!" But the old guy says, "Oh man, you should have seen Solomon's temple. This isn't a temple." But the important thing was they were back in the land as God promised and they were seeking the Lord.

And there were hindrances all the way as they were trying to build. You know, and I think we need to expect that. Even when you know it is God's will, there are going to be hindrances. And especially if you know it is God's will because the enemy is not going to sit still while you are trying to accomplish God's will on earth. Somehow we think, as Christians, once we have found God's will and know God's will, it is just going to automatically happen without any effort on our part. And this is not true because He has chosen to work through you. And so you are going to find hindrances.

Like Paul said: "You guys pray for me because there are many open doors, but also, there are many adversaries." He said, "I am really going to need your prayer support to go into these new fields to do church planting." And it has not changed. It is the same today as it was then.

Which two men encouraged the work to continue?

- **Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.**

“You dwell in sealed houses and God’s house isn’t finished? No wonder your life is like putting money into a bag with holes!” (cf. Haggai 1:1-9)

- **When things look grim, remember who began the work...**
 - **It is God at work!**

So, who encouraged the work to be completed? It was Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. He said, “You dwell in your sealed houses and God’s house is not finished? No wonder your life is like putting your money into a bag with holes. You know, put God first. Get out there and do His will” (cf. Haggai 1:6-9). And so, God is working because He is stirring up the spirit of His people.

And He can still do that today. He still does do that today. And that is why we just get on our knees and pray. Lord, stir up people to go where You want them to go. Lord, send out laborers into the harvest field. And if we will get on our knees and pray, God will stir up the people. He says that He will.

So Ezra gets back there and we see the place is complete. But note this: the 49,690 people are called “all Israel” in Ezra 2:70. You might want to hold that and go over to the book of Romans and read Romans 9, 10, and 11. When it says, “All Israel shall be saved.” But here in this case, who is all Israel? All Israel is just the remnant that returned. It wasn’t really all Israel, completely all Israel, was it? It was just that little group that went back to the land, 49,000 of them, and they are called “all Israel.” Because they were

representative of the people God chose. But it really wasn't in the sense that we think of all Israel, you know. It was like at least ten tribes missing. And it is interesting when we get to the book of Romans, we will see that phrase again "all Israel." And when you get there, you might want to remember or put a note in your Bible, jot a note there to think about, hey, I need to at least weigh the fact that the term "all Israel" is used in the Old Testament in Ezra 2:70.

What happened between Ezra chapters 6-7?

The time of Esther fits between Ezra chapters 6 & 7

➤ **3 world battles were fought:**

- **Salamis**
- **Thermopylae**
- **Marathon**

➤ **2 world leaders died:**

- **Confucius**
- **Buddha**

Well, what happened between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra? We don't have time to go into it, but three world battles were fought—Salamis, Thermopylae, and Marathon. All those battles were fought in the middle of that and two world leaders died. Confucius died and Buddha died. That was all happening right between chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Ezra. So there was a lot going on in the world at the same time that God was working with His people.

Artaxerxes finances Ezra's expedition and gives him all the help that they need, and Haggai and Zechariah are prophesying to go back and finish things. This is because Darius had found an old decree that King Cyrus had made. And he was not going to be

outdone. He said, "I will do better than that. I will give you more stuff to work with." So he encouraged them and got them back. And his mother, his stepmother being Esther did not hurt anything.

And you know Ezra's prayer of confession and how sincere it was. And he just said,

God, I am ashamed. I am embarrassed. I don't even want to lift my face up to You. Our iniquities they are over our heads. Our guilt has grown to the heavens. But for a brief moment grace has been shown from the Lord our God to leave us an escaped remnant, to give us a peg in His holy place that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. (cf. Ezra 9:6-8)

So, I mean, he was like Daniel in that he just confessed that it was their fault and he was very glad that God would give them any opportunity whatsoever to return and establish that relationship with God.

The City of Jerusalem is Rebuilt

The Wall is Rebuilt

(Nehemiah 1-6)

**They rebuilt the city, but they were not a Theocracy.
They were under Persian rule.**

**The majority were still scattered
throughout the 127 Persian provinces.**

(Ezra 9:8-9; 13-15)

They do not have a King, but are under Gentile rule.

(Nehemiah 9:36-37)

So the city is rebuilt. The wall is rebuilt, you know, with Nehemiah. And everything is back but they are not a theocracy, are they? They are still under Persian rule. The majority were still scattered through 127 provinces in Persia. And they do not have a king. They are under Gentile rule. So it was not like before, even though they are back. They do not rule themselves. Nehemiah was the cup bearer there to Artaxerxes. You know the story of how he gets to go and take a little sabbatical and be involved in rebuilding the wall. The Lord answers his prayer and he is off and running.

So he comes to Jerusalem thirteen years after Ezra and he starts working. He says, "Let's finish the wall of the city, guys." He says, "You have got an altar. You have got a temple. You have been in your houses. Let's fortify the city." And so they rise up to build but they are met with opposition because it is like—"You can come and worship and that is cool. But don't try to become some real national, political entity. And don't build this wall around your city because we are going to fight back" (cf. Nehemiah 2:17-20). And they did fight, but God helped them and they still built it.

But something was missing in the temple and that was what? They had a temple but what was missing in the temple? Well, when Moses finished the tabernacle, what do we read in Exodus 40? God filled it with His glory. When Solomon finished in 1 Kings 8, the temple, what do we read? God filled it with His glory. But in Ezra 6 when they finished the temple, what do we not read? There is nothing in there that says God came and filled it with His glory. It just says the temple was finished, period, end of story. They got a building.

So when did the glory of God actually enter the temple again? It entered it when Jesus Christ came and walked in and cleansed it. That is when the glory of God came back to the temple—to that one anyway. So that is the next time, in the person of Jesus Christ, and He cleansed it. His glory was in the world in Christ. And His glory is now in the world in every true believer. His glory is in you. His glory is in me. We are the temple of

the Holy Spirit right here on earth, our bodies. So God's glory is in a temple today, but it is different. We will talk more about that next time.

So after the close of Nehemiah, you have these 400 silent years. And the rest of the Old Testament books, Job through Malachi, retrace and amplify the history that has already been described. They contain what God said during those years. So when we go back through the Bible the second time, we are going now from Genesis to Revelation to look at what God did in terms of history; but we are going to go back through again and we are going to look at what God said more than what He did. But we will place on top of what God did, what God said. So it is important you know what God is doing or else when we go back through and talk about what God said, you are going to go: "what has that got to do with anything?" Well, it is based on what He did.

God Providentially Preserves His People

**Many of the Jews did not return to Jerusalem
from Babylon but remained in Persia.**

Esther makes no mention of God.

Hebrew Acrostic 1:20; 5:4; 5:13; 7:7

**God providentially controlled circumstances and events
so that His purposes were fulfilled.**

And then while all this is going on, up in Persia in those 127 provinces, you've got Esther. The people are scattered and the Jews who did not return back to the land are there. But even though Esther does not make a mention of the name of God, there is a Hebrew acrostic in Esther 1:20; 5:4; 5:13; and 7:7. So they believed that God could be

met in Jerusalem and perhaps that was another reason why they did not mention His name at that time. They had some weird ideas about things.

But here she is and God has preserved His people through three great distresses. In Egypt in 1500 Pharaoh wanted to exterminate the seed. God said, "Can't do it. I will preserve them." Assyria in 722 and Babylon in 586, don't you know Satan would have liked to wipe out the Jewish people completely at that time. God judged them for their idolatry but He preserved them and restored them back to the land. So they did not get destroyed then either. And then in Rome in 70 AD when Titus came in, God did not allow them to be totally wiped out either. And He said in Romans 11:5, "I will always keep a remnant and a seed." And why is He even doing that? Because like He promised, "and all Israel shall be saved" (cf. Romans 11:26). There will come a time in history, in the end, where there will be a turning back to God, nationally. And so Israel's continuance and development is a riddle of history that mocks all explanation apart from God. God is the only reason they exist as a nation.

He is the only reason that they are still living today over there. When you have got the whole United Nations against them and it wishes they could just wipe them out of the picture. They know if they could just remove Israel it would take care of all the problems, in their view. And so everybody is still against them. Except we are kind of hanging in there with them, thank the Lord.

But Esther gets this opportunity to go save her people and you know that story. It is a wonderful story. She learns about Haman's plot against the Jews. And Mordecai comes to her and says, "Look, if you think in your heart that you are going to escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews," he says, "you are thinking wrong, girl."

If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows

whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. (Esther 4:14)

And then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai:

Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast for me and so I will go to the king, which is against the law, and if I perish, well, I perish. So they sought the Lord with all their heart in fasting and prayer. So it was when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court that she found favor in his sight and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. And Esther went near and she touched the top of the scepter. (cf. Esther 4:16 to 5:2)

There again, the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. And He turned it. So Esther was used, not only to turn the king's head, but to turn his heart. The first time he saw her, she turned his head. But later, she turned his heart for a good thing.

And then of course Haman is hung, you know, on the same gallows that he made for Mordecai. His pride went before the fall. So the Lord has worked and the Lord continues to work.

Next time, we will look at Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and we will go on into the New Testament. God has built His nation, He has scattered His nation, He destroyed them because of their idolatry, and the fact that their hearts turned away from Him. But He brings them back, even after prophet after prophet after prophet after prophet went to them and they still rejected Him. Now this is what gets me, after all of that, it is like God says: "I will not be defeated! Love will never fail!" And He still finds a way, because of His love. Not that their love didn't fail, because their love did fail. But God says, "My love is not going to fail." And so, because of His love, He still brings them back, restores

them, lets them, you know, build the temple, build the altar, build the city back, you know.

And He is going to send His Son to be the Savior of the world because “God so loved the world that He gave His Son” (cf. John 3:16). God is doing this all through history and it is like people don't even, they are not even aware of it. And don't understand that it is His history. It is His story. And He has not changed at all in where He is going with His plan. And when Jesus comes, they reject Him.

Now, you would think—I mean if I was God, I would have sent one prophet anyway. That would have been it. Then I might have sent two prophets, I don't know. I could have sent two. If I was having a good day, I might have sent two. The chances of sending three, I don't know about that. But I mean, just prophet after prophet after prophet was sent—all the rejection! Bringing them back, doing it, and then sending His Son. Then they reject His Son and it is like, that is it! I mean, you know, don't you have to close the book sometime and just walk away? And it is like, you know, man...

But that is not God's heart. And so even after they have rejected Jesus, I believe, He is still holding His hand out to them. And the gospel goes out. And this is so tender, isn't it? Do you see God? He sends the gospel out and how does God say the gospel ought to go out?—“to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” And it is just like, boy, what is this weird, strange relationship that You have with these people? That now, after this, You still are saying that even in the gospel goes to the Jew first and also to the Greek. And if they return—and they will at some point—then You will graft them back in. And it is just, you see the love of God as it goes through history and it just never quits. It never ends.

And then I think, “That's our God.” And when you see Him, you are changed more into His image. When you meditate on it, when you take time to study to show yourself approved, and even looking at the history alone without even looking at a Bible verse, just looking at the history alone and meditating on the history, you see your God. And

you can be changed more into the image of your God when you see that's Him and that's the way He works.

And the next time you are in a relationship and things kind of go sideways a bit that you cannot help, start thinking: "Well, what about my God? How did He deal with relationships that didn't seem to go right? How did He deal with it? What did He do?" He just had grace. You know, when I say I have just had all I can take of this relationship; but grace comes along and says, "Oh, I have got a whole lot more to give to this relationship." And that is just our God. And that is the way He did it in history. And that is the way He wants to work in my life and your life.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank You that after these silent years that the fullness of time came. You sent forth Your Son. And now we look at Jesus and we see the Alpha, the Omega. We see the Logos, the full mind of God. And the heart of God so perfectly demonstrated in Jesus laying His life down on the cross for us and shedding His blood for us. I mean, there are days when I just want to have an intimate relationship with You and I mean, you know, it is just wonderful. And then there are other days, in all reality it is like, well, I am just busy. And that is sad that we can still, after You have done so much for us that our hearts can still be so rejecting and so selfish and turned inward. And yet You still love us. And it is like, it is beyond us because we just don't usually love the way You love. And we give up quickly. And our strength runs out almost immediately.

So Lord, we pray that You would fill us with Yourself and change us evermore into who You are, Your image. Lord,

we are seemingly, totally at Your mercy and we cry out for that mercy. And yet at the same time, we receive and accept the grace that does more than we ever deserve and supplies us with Your life and Your power. Lord, we thank You that Your grace is sufficient for whatever we will face today that Your grace is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we would ever really even think was possible.

And it is Your love, Your patience, Your faithfulness; and You won't fail Yourself. And so, Lord, thank You for beginning a good work in each of us. And increase our faith to believe that it is going to happen. And everything You promised us, in time is going to happen if we will step out and keep trusting You and believing You to work. We want to do that. So grant us faith, Lord, as we go through Your Word and see it. Build up our faith. It is a holy faith because it is centered in You and in Christ Jesus our Lord in whose name we pray. Amen.

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