

Monday Week 24 Judah's Captivity

Bible Reading: 2 Kings 24:19,20 and 25:1-12

Q 93 Why did Judah go into captivity?

A. Judah was captured by the Babylonians because they did evil in the sight of the Lord.

A farm boy threw a stick at a goose. To his surprise, his stick hit the goose, and it fell down dead. The boy hid the goose, but his sister saw him. Later they were told to do the dishes. The girl whispered, "You do my part of the dishes or I'll tell about the goose." He was surprised that she knew. "Don't tell," he whispered back. "I'll do your dishes." For the next several days, he did all of her chores. When he grumbled, she whispered, "I'll tell." So he did her work. Finally, he had had enough. He told his parents about the goose. Whatever they wanted him to do about it was not nearly as bad as being a slave to his sister. The next time she told him to do her work, he said, "No." "I'll tell," she whispered. "I don't care," said the boy. "They already know. I'm not your slave anymore."

When we have unconfessed sin in our hearts, we become slaves to evil. When we turn from sin, then we can be free. Judah continued in their sin and became slaves. They should have gone God's way. It would have saved them from seventy years of slavery.

Thinking Deeper

What can Christians expect who compromise with the world and the world system? It is helpful to see the big picture of the story of God's people in the Old Testament. They were chosen to be His people, a special people in all the earth. He gave them His Word so that they would know how to live to please Him and be a witness to the world. As long as they followed Him, God blessed them. But they became hard-hearted and turned away from him. Despite the pleas of the prophets, they took on the ways of the world they lived in. God allowed their enemies to harass them, and even put them into servitude. Eventually, though, God allowed them to be taken away from their land as slaves, first Israel to the Assyrians, then Judah to the Babylonians.

Here is what can be expected for the compromising church in our day. The world is systematically taking over the moral issues that the church has ignored or accepted – the definition of marriage, the abortion issue, the evolution dogma. In many places, the church has already become enslaved to the world on those issues. The next step, if the past gives a clue to the future, is for the world to make it illegal for the "prophets" in the church to speak out on those issues. Then it's prison for the prophets. That's not all bad. "Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matt. 5:11).

Tuesday Week 24 Judah's Captivity and Return

Bible Reading: Ezra 1:1-6

- Q 94 Who gave authority for the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem?
A. Cyrus the King of Persia sent the Jewish people back to Jerusalem.

Two boys were swimming in a farm pond. A man who sometimes worked on that farm drove by and saw them. He stopped his car and yelled at the boys. "Who said you could swim in there?" One of the boys yelled back an answer. "Cal did!" The man didn't say anything more. He got in the car and drove away. The boys kept swimming. They were not afraid of someone who was trying to bully them. Cal was the owner of the farm and the pond. They were confident to stay because they had permission from the right person.

When the Jewish people returned to their land, they were confident because they had permission from the King of Persia, the most powerful king in that part of the world. God had put it in the king's heart to send the people to their homeland. "The king's heart is in the Lord's hand."

Thinking Deeper

How real is the Bible? How much can we put it into actual daily life? Can we make major changes in our lives because of what the Bible says? Daniel believed that the Bible was true in real time history. He believed it was accurate. If it spoke, he was careful to listen. He didn't relegate it to mythology to pick and choose from. He relied on it as historically accurate and presently relevant.

Here is how Daniel looked at the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the return of the exiles to the land of Israel: "In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:2). Daniel had been reading Jeremiah the prophet, who wrote "For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jer. 29:10). Like Daniel, Ezra had read Jeremiah and understood that events in real history were part of God's plan for Israel.

Don't be mistaken. God is working His will in the world and in your personal life. Don't miss out on His plan. Apply the truths of the Bible as though your personal eternal future is at stake. It is.

Bible Reading: Ezra 3:8-13

Q 95 What was the first rebuilding project in Jerusalem?

A. The first project was rebuilding the house of the Lord.

A widow lady in Mississippi had a very large tree fall on her house because of Hurricane Katrina. Thankfully, it didn't crash all the way through the roof. Other trees were fallen around her property. Some Christian volunteers came to help the lady. They decided that one of the first things to do was to get the tree off her house so the house could be fixed up. The rest of the land could be cleared later. After several hours of work, the tree was off her house, some plastic was put in place so her roof wouldn't leak, and many of the trees had been cleared off her land. She stood outside her house, weeping tears of gratitude. She was so thankful that things were being repaired. "I didn't know what I was going to do," she said. God saw her need and sent her help.

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem, they saw the whole city in ruins. The first thing that needed to be done was to rebuild the house of the Lord. They began to do the work, and God blessed them. But some people began to oppose them, and the work stopped. Then the prophet Haggai told the people that they should build God's house. They listened to the prophet and completed the work. The people were happy that they had rebuilt the house of the Lord.

Thinking Deeper

Is there hope for rebuilding what has been destroyed? Can a backslider come back to faith? Can a family that is divided be rebuilt? Can ruined relationships be repaired? Can a church that has departed from truth return? The story of Ezra indicates that all these are possible.

The people of Judah were so far from God that they were allowed to go into exile. Jerusalem had been destroyed. The temple had been raided and destroyed. But Ezra gives the account of them coming back. God blessed their efforts. Even from the far country before they ever returned, God was with them, blessing their desire to come home.

God blesses a man who turns his steps toward the right. It doesn't matter where those steps have been, if he turns them in the right direction, God will bless him. A man was heading toward the bar one snowy day. He chanced to look behind him and saw his young son following him. Deliberately, the boy was planting his little feet into the footprints left by his father. The dad paused, then turned his steps from the bar and went, instead to the church. What caused God's blessing on that family? It was the direction that the man took.

God will bless you based on the direction you are heading. Past failures can be overcome by present grace. God blesses the rebuilders.

Bible Reading: Nehemiah 2:12-20

Q 96 What was the second rebuilding project in Jerusalem?

A. The second project was to rebuild the walls.

The city of New Orleans was flooded by water during Hurricane Katrina. A major reason was that levees broke. A levee is a barrier between the water and the land that is built to keep the land from being flooded. When the levees broke the water that was held back poured into the city. There was so much water that some people had to climb to their roof tops to keep from drowning. Many people were rescued. After the flood, the people had to rebuild their homes. After that they had to work on the levees. The levees are like a wall that keeps out the water so that the houses are safe. If the levees don't get fixed, the houses will be flooded again in the next big storm. It is important to repair the levees.

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem, they began their work by repairing the temple. But the walls of the city were broken down. To keep the enemies out, they had to repair the walls. Nehemiah was the leader. He made sure that the great work of repairing the walls was completed. Nehemiah trusted in God to protect them from their enemies while they rebuilt the walls. God was faithful to help them.

Thinking Deeper

When a backslider returns to God, he must repair the "house of the Lord." His heart needs to be brought back into a right attitude to God. Whatever a person's past, he must have a humble heart come into fellowship with God. "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." The humble in heart will be accepted by God. But there is more that needs to be done after the "house of the Lord" is repaired. Just as Jerusalem's walls were needed to keep the enemies from invading the homes of the Hebrews and defiling the temple, so too the barriers against the onslaught of the world must be erected around a person's life.

Take the example of a person who fell into a sin of the flesh. For a time he was held in the grip of a habit that he could not break. Every day he lost the battle to its allurements. But the man humbled himself and sought the Lord, who graciously took him back. Now it is up to that man to build some walls. He must build walls around his entertainment, so he is not unduly tempted. He must build walls around his reading material, his internet usage. He must be careful where he goes and who he is with. Anywhere there is a possible weakness, he must build walls. Just as God helped Nehemiah do the great work of building the walls around Jerusalem so too God will help the humble man build walls around his life to keep his enemies from destroying him.

Review the week's questions.

- Q 93 Why did Judah go into captivity?
A. Judah was captive to the Babylonians because they did evil in the sight of the Lord.
- Q 94 Who gave authority for the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem?
A. Cyrus the King of Persia sent the Jewish people back to Jerusalem.
- Q 95 What was the first rebuilding project in Jerusalem?
A. The first project was rebuilding the house of the Lord.
- Q 96 What was the second rebuilding project in Jerusalem?
A. The second project was to rebuild the walls.

It was a cold and icy morning in Kansas, and the country road was slippery. The driver of a car was pretty careful until he took his eyes off the road for just a second. In that moment, the car started to slip. By the time the driver tried to stop, it was too late. The car went out of control and slammed into a bank. The front of the car was damaged. The driver got help and took his car home.

After removing some damaged parts, the driver was able to use the car. But it looked bad. After some time, he decided to fix the car. It took time and money. It took energy and help. Finally the car was fixed. But it would have been a lot easier and better had the driver been more careful and never have been in a wreck.

Many years after their city had been captured, the temple destroyed, and the people taken away, the Hebrews were able to return to Jerusalem. It took a lot of time, a lot of effort, and a lot of people to rebuild Jerusalem. They would have been far better off to have obeyed God in the first place. But God was good to them and helped them return. God is gracious.

Thinking Deeper

When Daniel studied the book of Jeremiah, he understood that the time of the exile of the Hebrews was coming to an end. Soon there would be a return to Jerusalem. We can read what Daniel read (Jeremiah 29:10) and see how he came to his conclusions. The time of the exile was to be seventy years. Seventy years. About two generations. Think of the people who were born, lived and died without ever seeing Jerusalem. They had never seen the holy places. They had never been where the glory had been revealed. Children were raised without a sense of God's blessing. Children were brought up in a heathen land. Families were living without trips to the temple. Perhaps there were good people where they lived. The laws may not have been very rigid. Some of their rulers may have been decent. But seventy years away from God's presence. What kind of fall out did that have? How many people were lost? God's grace brought them back, but that was seventy years and two generations later.

What happens when a home turns from God? How long will it be before someone in that home returns? And what will the cost be of living away from God? It invariably is paid by the children, some of whom are lost, and some of whom are scarred from the years away. It is good to return, no matter how far one has strayed. It is better to remain faithful and fight the good fight from the beginning to the end.