

God's Story B.C. – Part 3

Bibles – 2 Kings 17; God's Story BC – Part 3

Trying to get the big picture so that we can fit the various pieces together, and gain a better appreciation of who God is and what he's done
Covered 9 historical time periods thus far – from Creation and the Fall of man, to the United and then Divided Kingdom where we left off last time

That brings us to 722BC and the start of the . . .

Surviving Kingdom – 722-586BC (136 years)

Just prior to this, the nation had split into two kingdoms in 931BC when Solomon had died – 10 tribes called Israel in the N; 2 tribes called Judah in the S

Things deteriorated very quickly, despite the warning/preaching of some of the prophets

So God brought punishment through the Assyrians in 722BC when they overpowered N tribes, dispersed them throughout their empire, and resettled the land with foreigners
Called the Assyrian Dispersion – 2 Kings 17:5-7, 18

God's Purposes – To punish the rebellion of his people

In this case, the Northern Kingdom

You'd think that Israel's fate would have been reason enough for Judah, the surviving kingdom, to change her ways – but it wasn't

Right smack dab in the middle of this turbulent time, God rolled out one of the most significant promises/covenants in the entire Bible – the New Covenant
A new way of getting right with God

God's Purposes: To reveal a new way of getting right with him

Thus far their relationship with God was based on obedience to the written Law, first given to Moses on Mt Sinai, with all its sacrifices and regulations

But in Jer 31:31-34 we see something completely different . . .

A permanent covenant of grace/mercy where our sins are forgiven once and for all time
An internal covenant impressed on our hearts – compels us to love/serve him w/ lives

Do you realize that this is the covenant/promise on which your salvation is based?
Heb 8-10 makes that clear when it quotes this passage verbatim, saying it's for *all* those who trust in the work of Christ to save them, not just ethnic Israel

One of God's purposes during this turbulent time was to reveal a new way of getting right with him – a way that wouldn't be realized for another 600+ years

Our Lesson: Wake up! Sin has consequences

If you're a child of God and enjoying your sin – take a clue fr the Israelites, and wake up
If you're indulging in repetitive, willful, ongoing sin – wake up and avoid the heartache that *will* come if you don't

God will not ignore it – sooner or later it will catch up with you
The longer it goes un-confessed, the worse the consequences

Babylonian Captivity – 586-516BC

2 Chron 36:15-21 (Sabbaths – because they didn't keep it, God forced it on them)

That was 586BC, fulfilling Jer's prophecy – *This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.* (Jer 25:11)

Bab eventually conquered Assyria in 612BC, and started taking prisoners from Judah, including Daniel and Ezekiel, shortly thereafter

But it wasn't until 586 and the destruction of the *temple* that they threw in the towel
As long as the temple was intact, their nation was intact (or so they thought)
But when the temple came crashing down – game over; that was it

So the destruction of the temple in 586BC is a key date that marks the end of their nation and the beginning of their captivity
While 516BC, 70 years later, marks end of their captivity, and the re-start of their nation

Put those 2 events together with the split of the kingdom in 931BC, and the Assyrian Dispersion in 722BC – gives you the context within which to read and understand the bulk of the OT from 1 Samuel to Mal

God's Purposes – To punish his people (again), *and* their captors

You could write this purpose over just about every one of the time periods we've covered
It's so common I've grown tired of trying to say it different ways
He will not (cannot) let sin go unpunished – which makes us appreciate the punishment that Christ bore for us, all the more

But this time, there's a twist – God is not only going to punish *his* people, but he's going to punish those he *used* to punish his people
That's what God said in Jer 25:12 – *After seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation . . . for their iniquity*
God used their evil intent to punish his people and accomplish his purposes, but it did not relieve them of their guilt in the matter

- But it wasn't all doom and gloom
In addition to Daniel, Ez was also preaching from captivity
With his messages of judgment, he also preached a message of hope

Ez 36:24-28 – Similar to Jer's New Covenant, the NT applies these promises to us
Like 1 Cor 6:19 where Paul says – *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?*
Once again, God's promise to Israel through Ez, is his promise to us, through Christ
There was punishment, and there was hope
And there always is, no matter how far you've fallen

But it doesn't come without consequences, because . . .

Our Lesson: God disciplines those he loves

That was the case with his people in Bab; It's the case with us now
See this truth explicit in **Prov 3:11-12** – *My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves [reprimands, disciplines] him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*

As miserable as God's discipline is, it's greatly reassuring to know that he cares enough to pursue us and conform us to the likeness of his Son

If you've been indulging in blatant sin, and you're going through a hard time – it *could* be because God is disciplining you, trying to get you to change
That's not necessarily the case all the time – that just because you're going through a hard time, doesn't mean you're doing something wrong
God could be refining you; It could be the result of living in a fallen/sinful world
It could be the result of Satan's attack
Rarely do we know, or need to know why we go through hard times
It's ours to simply do the right thing, and keep doing it

But if you *are* indulging in sin, *and* you're going through a hard time – it's likely God's way of saying, "I love you, and I'm not about to let you ruin your life and bring me shame"
God disciplines those he loves; And restores us as well

Like he did in the next time period of . . .

Release and Restoration – 538-c.400BC

Notice this time period overlaps the previous one because right in the middle of their captivity, Persia overthrew Bab in 539BC
One year later Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, began releasing God's people to return to the land of Israel and rebuild the temple

So the first wave of 50k left Bab in 538BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and they began rebuilding the temple (first part of Ezra)
Problem was, they got sidetracked with their own homes until the prophets Zech and Hag showed up ~520BC, and rebuked them for paneling their own houses while the temple remained unfinished
So, tail between their legs, they finally completed the task in 516BC . . .

But that wasn't the end of their release and restoration, nor the end of their hardship
Many Jews remained in Persia during this time, and God put his people in key positions to preserve/protect them
Like Esther – who became queen in 479BC *for such a time as this* (Esther 4:14)

Things went well until Ezra returned with another group of exiles in 458BC . . .
Only to discover that the people had once again forsaken God
Eventually, God used him to bring about a national revival and restoration of worship
But there was only one problem – the walls of Jerusalem still lay in ruins

That became so heavy on the heart of a guy named Neh back in Babylon . . .
That he led another group back to Jer in 445BC, and rebuilt the walls in 52 days
All of which fulfilled God's promises through Jer 150 years earlier in Jer 29:10-14

Have you ever realized the context within which that was first said?
It's was a glorious *prophecy* for them, and a glorious *truth* for us
Applied to our lives by Scriptures like Rom 10:13 – *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*
Saved as in released from the bondage of sin and restored to a relationship with God

Clearly, one of . . .

God's Purposes – To re-establish his people in the land he promised

And second . . .

God's Purposes – To clear his name

God says in Ez 36:22, referring to the release/restoration of his people – *It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.*

God makes it clear that he's not going to return them to the land for *their* sake – to show *them* kindness or favor
But for *his* sake – so that he would no longer be thought of as second rate, or powerless, or uncaring
As much as we'd like to think otherwise, it's not always about us
It's about him because God is jealous for his glory, passionate for the fame of his name

When you put all that together during this time period, the lesson to be learned is that . . .

Our Lesson: God saves those who trust him

Is 10:20-21 – *In that day [the time of God's judgment], the remnant of Israel [a small number] and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them [their captors], but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.*

More important than returning home was returning to God
And God promised to save those who did
To save those who trusted *him* – who leaned on him and him alone
It was true then, and it's especially true now on this side of the cross
That when we entrust our lives to God, believing in faith that Jesus paid our entire punishment when he died on the cross – when we do that, he promises to save us
God saves those who trust him

I wonder – do you?

Have you put your entire past, present, and future into the hands of Almighty God, who loves you and gave his life for you?
If you have, you can rest assured that God has saved you – now and forevermore
If you haven't – he wants to, and waits

That brings us to the 13th and final historical period of God's Story BC . . .

Silent Years – c.400-5BC

After Mal preached in ~430BC, God went silent
For 400 years there were no prophets like Isaiah; No leaders like Gideon; No kings like David; And no messiah – just silence
That's why there are no key passages or books
There's no explicit reference to this time period in all the Bible

But that doesn't mean that nothing was happening – quite the opposite
It was a time of intense upheaval in the world, especially for God's people
The Persians eventually fell to Alexander the Great in 332BC, and with that came sweeping reforms of Hellenization, including the Greek language/culture (not all bad)

It was during this time period that the OT was translated into the Greek language ~255BC
Referred to as the Septuagint (LXX – 70) – folklore says 70 scribes translated in 70 dys
Significant because helps scholars understand both the Heb/Greek languages

Also during this time, ~200BC – Jewish sect sprang up in the Dead Sea area, who copied/preserved much of the OT
Together with some other religious writings of that day, we know these as the Dead Sea Scrolls, first discovered in 1947
Significant because they are invaluable for confirming the accuracy of our OT

In addition to that, much of the Apocrypha (hidden things) was written during this time form about 200BC to 100 AD
It's a collection of about 20 Jewish writings ranging in content from theology to history
Some of them fairly normal, others pretty strange
They're helpful to us for understanding Judaism just before/during the time of Christ
But they were never considered inspired by the early church, nor did the apostles ever quote them like they so often did the OT
At best, they were devotional in nature, much like some of the books written today

- In 198BC then, the alliance of Alexander's empire fell apart and began what sounds more like a soap opera than a time period of history
It started with the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes in 175BC
Who not only outlawed the worship of God, but desecrated the temple by offering a pig on the altar, and installed a statue of Zeus

That caused a revolt among the Jews led by Judas Maccabeus – Maccabean revolt, recorded in 1&2 Maccabees of the Apocrapha
And the start of Hanukah – based on the miraculous burning of the oil in the lamp of the temple menorah for 8 days, when there was only enough for 1 day's worth

That was followed by ~100 years of Jewish autonomy from foreign rule – not good years
But at least they were out from under foreign rule
All of which came to a sudden halt in 63BC when the Roman empire came rolling in under the leadership of Pompey
Conquered the land, and eventually, in 39BC, installed Herod the Great as King

Herod was crazy and brilliant at the same time
He was the one who tried to kill Jesus just after his birth out of jealousy
He was also the one who started rebuilding the temple in 20BC, a project that was so huge, it wasn't finished until 63AD (83 years later)
The foundation of which we still see today in Jerusalem

God's Purposes – ???

Could speculate, but the Bible doesn't speak to it
Could have been a time to prepare the world for his Good News
Could have been a time to let the weight of his promises and prophecies sink in

More important is what we can learn from it
That no matter how silent God seems in your life
No matter how distant you may think he is . . .

Our Lesson: Keep the faith

Just like the remnant who stayed true to God during the Silent Years
And eventually recognized Jesus as the Messiah because of it

Keep the faith when the . . .

Night is dark and the way is narrow
Journey is long and the path is rough
Silence is deafening and the situation hopeless
When all seems lost and you've lost sight of God
Because God hasn't lost sight of you
It's one of the oldest truths in the book, from one of the oldest parts of the book

Job 23:8-10 – *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*

When God seems silent in your life, keep the faith – because he still hears you, he knows your way, and you can rest assured that he'll deliver you as gold refined by the fire.