

Epic: Babylonian Captivity to Silent Years

2 Chron 36:15-21; We're in the middle of a series called Epic – discovering God's work of redemption from creation to eternity
Intended to not only refresh your *memory* about all that's happened in God's work of redemption, but your heart

And thus far we've covered **10 time periods**; From . . .
Creation and the Fall, to the United, Divided, and Surviving Kingdoms
Calling us to everything from praise and worship, to courage and repentance

➤ But that's not where it stops; B/c next up is the . . .

Babylonian Captivity

(Time Period – 586-516BC)

Key People – Daniel, Ezekiel, Nebuchadnezzar

Key Places – Jerusalem, Babylon

Main Events – Destruction of the Temple, Captivity, Daniel and the Lion's Den)

Which started when the Chaldeans conquered Assyria in 612BC, and started taking prisoners from Judah; Including Daniel and the prophet Ezekiel
But it wasn't until 586 and the destruction of the *temple* in Jerusalem, that the Israelite nation was no more; When that happened, it was game over
And it's recorded in 2 Chron 36:15-21

[15] The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. [16] But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

[17] Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He [God] gave them all into his hand. [18] And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. [19] And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.

[20] He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword [20k], and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, [21] to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

That was 586BC; Fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy (**Jer 25:11**), that . . .
This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations [Israel and Judah] shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. That's what v21 refers to
And it gave the land a long-overdue Sabbath, a break, to honor the Lord; B/c the people didn't do so themselves

Which ought to clue us in to the fact, that if we fail to live God's way, he may very well force it upon us; He's not above that
B/c he's jealous for his glory, and passionate for our purity (**Summary**)
The Babylonian Captivity forced a Sabbath on the land

➤ But God's main purpose here, was . . .

God's Purpose – To fulfill his word and vent his wrath

B/c the word of the Lord stands forever; Unless *he* changes it; Which he didn't in this case
B/c he will not and cannot let sin go unpunished; His perfect holiness and justice won't allow it

Nor would his anger be *appeased* at this point in time; Look at v16b
The wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy; No appeasing it; No *propitiation* like we have in Jesus (1 Jn 2:2); Just wrath

And not just for the people of *God*, but for those he used to carry it out
That's what he said in **Jer 25:12** – *After seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.* It was wrath for them, too

➤ But wait a minute; Didn't God raise them up to do exactly what they did (17)? Weren't they the *means* of fulfilling his word and venting his wrath?
And isn't God's sovereignty irresistible? Absolutely

Then how could they be held responsible? B/c they *wanted* to do the things he ordained;
That's how God works*****
Just like he used the willing choices of those who crucified Jesus (Act 2 & 4), and held *them* responsible; Fulfilling his word and venting his wrath *then* . . .
Just like he did during the Babylonian Captivity
God's purpose was to fulfill his word and vent his wrath

➤ And *our* response, just like theirs, should be one of . . .

Our Response: Perseverance

Perseverance to keep *walking* when we can't even see the step we're *on*; Just like they did
Perseverance to keep *obeying* when it doesn't seem to make any difference
To keep *loving* when it's met with nothing but disdain
To keep *trusting* God, when you've lost confidence in the outcome
To keep *following* when you flat out don't want to; *That's* perseverance

And there are **3 Keys** to it – *3 keys to persevering in tough times*

1. Trusting in God's Word

That when he says he's good, he's good; And that he will *indeed* bless you, and keep you, and make his face to shine upon you; No matter what your captivity
And trusting that he *does* love you; And *will* protect you
And will work all things together for *good*, and make all things *new*, even if it means waiting for the other side of eternity

2. The encouragement of others

There's nothing worse than being or feeling alone in the midst of trying times; That's why POW's like Jim Stockdale in the Vietnam War, organized fellow prisoners to . . .
Communicate secretly while in solitary confinement
They needed one another's encouragement; And so do we, in our *spiritual* battle
That's why the Bible tells us over and over to *encourage* one another; And why all of our discipleship ministries are formed around small *groups*; Encouragement is key

3. Hope

Something God gave the Israelites through the prophet Ezekiel, and still applies today
Ez 36:24-28; God is speaking to the Israelites in captivity, and says . . .

[24] *I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. [25] I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. [28] You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

Glorious promises, that still apply; To *us* – followers of Christ

What God promised then, to give *them* hope, applies now

B/c **1 Cor 6:19** says – *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?* It's a direct fulfillment of Ez 36:27

As is 2 Cor 1:22 – *God has given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee*

Who will teach [us] all things [Jesus said], and guide [us] into all the truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13)

All for the purpose of walking in his statutes and obeying his rules (Ez 36:27) (**Summ**)

God's promise to Israel through Ezekiel, is his promise to us, through Christ – to give us *hope*; Not the absence of pain or struggle or trials or tribulation or opposition . . .

But hope in the midst of it all; So that we might persevere in *our* struggles, just like the Israelites did in theirs; That's the Babylonian Captivity

➤ Followed, by a time of . . .

Release and Restoration

(Time Period – 538-400BC)

Key People – Zerubbabel, Cyrus the Great, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah

Key Places – Babylon, Jerusalem

Main Events – Temple Rebuilt, Esther's Courage, Ezra's Revolt, New Walls)

That's the next time period; And notice that it overlaps with the previous one

B/c right in the *middle* of their captivity, Persia *overthrew* Babylon; In 539BC

And one year later, Cyrus the Great, the king of Persia, began *releasing* God's people to *return* to Israel; Which was one of God's purposes

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

And it started with a guy named Zerubbabel; Who led the first wave of about 50k people back to Israel, and immediately began rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1-4)

But it wasn't long before they got sidetracked, and started building their *own* homes

Until, the prophets Zechariah and Haggai showed up and set them straight

So that they *finished* the temple in 516BC, and formally ended the 70 years of captivity

➤ But that wasn't the end of their release and restoration; Nor the end of their hardship
B/c many Jews *remained* in Persia during this time; And God put key people in key positions to preserve and protect them

Like Esther, who became *queen* of Persia in 479BC

And Ezra, who returned with *another* group of exiles in 458BC to lead a revival

And then Nehemiah 13 years later, who led a group to rebuild the *walls*

➤ All of which fulfilled some *more* of God's promises through Jeremiah – Jer 29:10-14
[10] *"For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. [11] For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. [12] Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. [13] You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. [14] I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

Have you ever realized the context within which that was first said?

It's was a glorious *prophecy* for *them*, and it's a glorious *truth* for *us*

Fulfilled for *them*, when they were released from *physical* captivity; And fulfilled for *us*, when we're released from *spiritual* captivity

Like it says in **Rom 10:13** – *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*

Saved from what? Saved from evil, and the bondage of sin

That's the *present* fulfillment of this prophecy; And the plan for welfare that God has for those who seek him with all their heart

But that's not even the best of it; B/c the ultimate fulfillment is yet to come*****

When God restores our fortunes and gathers us from every tribe, tongue, and nation like he says in v14 – in order to stand before the throne and before the Lamb

No longer strangers and *aliens* in this world, or exiles who are scattered *abroad* – but a family; Gathered for the marriage supper of the Lamb, in perfect bliss and harmony . .

Just like Thanksgiving; Or maybe not depending on your family

➤ The point being – there was a *past* fulfillment, when they called on the Lord to release them from *physical* captivity . . .

There's a *present* fulfillment, when we call on him to *save* us

And there's a *future* fulfillment – when the roll is called up yonder

His purpose continues

All of which should give us . . .

Our Response: Confidence

That's *our* intended response; Confidence that God does what he says; That he saves those who trust in him; That his steadfast love endures forever

It was true then, and it's true now; Especially on this side of the cross, with a Savior like *Jesus* (**Heb 4:16**)

Which is why the writer of Hebrews says – *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

And later on says – *Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.*

(Heb 10:35); We can *have* confidence in God and his Word, and we ought to *keep* it

Don't let it go; Hold on tight; (**Summary**)

He who *began* a good work in you, *will* complete it; He will release, and he will restore

➤ Which brings us to the final time period of the OT, and that's the . . .

Silent Years

(Time Period – 400-5BC)

Key People – Alexander the Great, Judas Maccabeus, Herod the Great

Key Places – Israel

Main Events – Hellenization, Septuagint, Roman takeover, Herod's temple)

After Malachi preached around 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

- But that doesn't mean nothing was happening; In fact, it was a time of *intense* upheaval, especially for Israel; Starting with a guy named **Alexander the Great** Who overthrew Persia in 332BC, and with it, gained control of Israel

Which led to 4 very important things:

1. **Hellenization** – the adoption of the Greek language and culture; The same language in which our NT was originally written; That's important
2. The **Septuagint** – the OT translation from Hebrew into Greek; Which gives us great insight into *both* languages, as we seek to rightly understand the Scriptures
3. The **Dead Sea Scrolls** – containing large portions of the OT in *Hebrew* from ~200BC, and confirming the *accuracy* of the text today
4. The **Apocrypha** – a collection of about 20 Jewish writings, written over the course of 300 years, from 200BC to 100AD
None of which was ever considered *inspired* by the early church, but does have some historical value; All the result of Alexander the Great

- But in 198BC, the alliance of his empire fell apart, and began what sounds more like a soap opera than anything else
Starting with the temple desecration in 175BC by **Antiochus Epiphanes**; Who outlawed the worship of *God*, offered a *pig* on the altar, and installed a statue of Zeus
Which led to a *revolt* among the Jews, under the leadership of **Judas Maccabeus**, and a hundred years of Jewish autonomy . . .
Jumpstarted by the **Hanukah** miracle; When the oil in the temple *menorah*, the lampstand, burned for 8 days instead of only one

- Unfortunately, the tradition lasted longer than the autonomy; B/c in 63BC **Pompey** and the Romans took over . . .
And eventually installed **Herod the Great** as the leader of Israel
The same Herod who tried to kill Jesus just after his birth (**Summary**)
Those are the Silent Years; Filled with noise and events from everybody *but* God

- And the closest we can get to his purpose, comes from **Gal 4:4-5**
When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

God's purpose during the Silent Years, was . . .

God's Purpose – To complete the fullness of time

To let the weight of his promises and prophecies sink *in*, and fully prepare the world for his Son; And the gospel he'd bring; And the changes he'd make
Including the changes to our *lives*

And one of the things *we* can learn from it, is . . .

Our Response: Patience

That's our response

Patience to wait on *God's* timing in our lives; Just like they did

Patience to wait on *his* move in our world

Patience to wait on *his* work in those we love

Patience to wait on his *second* coming, like the remnant waited on his *first*

When the silence is deafening in your life, and the situation hopeless, the worst thing you can do is plow ahead
Be patient and *wait* on the Lord – listening, and watching, and praying
B/c waiting on God to act is often his way of preparing us to receive

Pray – God, thank you for the lessons of these time periods, and the example of those who have gone before us; Help us to persevere; And wait on you with patience and confidence and hope; We trust you, and love you
And give now of our tithes and offerings