

## The Exodus

### *Week 4: Learning From Mistakes*

#### **1. The Destruction of a Remnant**

God led the Israelites through the wilderness for forty years to strengthen and unite them, to prepare them to both retake the promised land and fully devote themselves to him (God). Yet the older generation, those who had lived in Egypt, all died off except for two successors to Moses: Joshua and Caleb.

Fast forward about three hundred years. For centuries, God's people have been split in half between 10 tribes of Israel in the north and the tribe of Judah to the south, with Levi spread between the two. Suddenly, the powerful Assyrian Empire completely wipes out the northern kingdom of Israel, leaving only Judah and a remnant of Levi behind (appx. 722 B.C.). This leads to the legend of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. In the south, a prophet named Isaiah predicts, among many things, hope for the fretting nation of Judah.

*I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you. (Isaiah 44:22 RSV)*

**First Question:** If God's goal is to strengthen his people, why does he destroy a portion of them, rather than simply discipline them? Why would he forgive the younger generation in the desert, and Judah centuries later, but not the rest?

#### **2. The Purifying Exile**

Before the destruction of the ten tribes to the north, a southern prophet named Micah predicted that a similar fate would befall his homeland of Judah. This was confirmed in 586 B.C., when the southern nation of Judah was conquered by the dreaded Babylonian Empire. Jerusalem was destroyed and the Judeans (now called *Jews*) were led into exile away from their homeland. The people remembered the words of Micah not only because his words were true, but because they held a note of hope.

*Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field;  
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the  
house a wooded height. It shall come to pass in the latter days that  
the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the  
highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills;  
and peoples shall flow to it.  
(Micah 3:12 - 4:1)*

Rather than be lost to the wind like the Ten Lost Tribes were, Judah became much more powerfully committed to God, copying down the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible) for the first time, as well as committing to a more pure monotheism. Thus, Judaism actually became far more developed during the exile.

**Second Question:** What are some of the ways in which God's discipline sets us on a radically different path of improvement?

### **3. The Return Home**

After Babylon was conquered by the Persians, the Jews were allowed to return back to their ancestral homeland and begin rebuilding. However, the task was not an easy one. Most of the returning Jews had grown up in Babylon, and they were resented by the descendants of those who had stayed behind, as well as by the foreigners who had settled the land during the Jews' absence. This led to open hostility against those who set about to rebuild the city (led by Nehemiah) and those who tried to reestablish a more pure priesthood (Ezra). It was during this time that the prophet Malachi began to preach against corruption in the priesthood.

*You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Every one who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?" (Malachi 2:17)*

Echoing the words of Isaiah from centuries earlier, Malachi tells the people "Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts" (3:7). But also like Isaiah and Micah, Malachi promises the people a future beyond the suffering.

*Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? "For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the LORD.  
(Malachi 3:1-3 RSV)*

**Third Question:** If the people have been purified over and over again, if that great day of glory has arrived repeatedly, then why does God still need to discipline his children?

### **4. Revisiting the Cycle**

Again and again, we see God punishing his people before bringing them into a maturity greater and more devoted to himself. In this way, we can view God like a parent disciplining his young children. Hebrews 12 says

*It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If*

## **life group study guide**

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*you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*  
(Hebrews 12:7-11)

**Final Question:** Why must there be pain and discipline in order for there to be growth and maturity? Why do we need discipline, and where is the line between discipline leading to maturity, and judgment leading to destruction?

**Elizabeth's Bonus Question:** Why are some people disciplined in a way that seems much harsher than are others? Why, for instance, might one person receive a more difficult life while others lead one that seems more blessed?