

## THE RESTORATION PERIOD

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When the southern kingdom went into Babylonian captivity, the people became slaves in Babylon. Daniel especially, but also his three friends, through the special providence of God were given special places of authority under the Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. When Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians (as predicted by Daniel at Belshazzar's drunken feast – Daniel 5:22-28), Daniel enjoyed the same kind of prominence under Darius, the Mede, and Cyrus, the Persian. Generally speaking, the first six chapters of Daniel tell of Daniel under the Babylonian king and the last six chapters of him under the Medes and Persians.

With the enthronement of the latter kings, the enslavement that had been upon the Israelites came to an end. One of the factors that no doubt entered in to bring about this more pleasant condition was that in the Jews' own Scriptures, more than one hundred fifty years before the coming of Cyrus to the throne, God had told how He was going to raise up Cyrus (even calling him by name) to perform His good pleasure (Isaiah 44:24-28; 45:1-4, 13). This, of course, would please Cyrus greatly and at the same time cause him to reverence the God of the Jews. He was most cordial to the Jews and was greatly blest of God for it. Thus, the latter years of the Jews' exile from home were much more pleasant than their early years in Babylon.

In this study, with the above thoughts as a background, we are to consider the period of returning from the land of exile.

### **THE CAPTIVITY FOREVER CURED THE JEWS OF THEIR IDOLATRY.**

As we have seen in former studies, the Hebrews' enslavement in Egypt got idolatry into them, which kept cropping out at every opportunity. What an up-and-down, in-and-out relationship they had with idolatry during the days of the judges and the kings! It was because of idolatry, as we have before studied, that they were taken from their land and the north carried to Assyria and later dispersed and the south to Babylon. It is a fact of history that when they returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, the Jews were never again an idolatrous people. A scribe of Jesus' day well stated the attitude of the Jews ever after the Babylonian captivity when he approved Jesus' word concerning the first commandment of all:

***“Teacher, you have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him.”***

In apostolic times, idolatry plagued the Gentile world, and the apostles had to deal with it wherever they went (Acts 14:11-16; 15:19, 20; 17:16). But, as odd as it may seem the Jews of the apostles' times were so married to the law of Moses, which their fathers constantly turned from in the days of Old Testament history, that the apostles' problem with the Jews of their day was to get them to accept Christ and Christianity in place of their former Mosaic religion. Even to this day, the worshipping of images is so foreign to the Jews even though it has been more than two thousand years since their forefathers returned from Babylonian captivity.

Prior to the fall of the southern kingdom, the people listened to false prophets instead of to God's true prophets. God's prophets were all foretelling the doom to come upon the nation because of idolatry, but the false prophets were all prophesying peace and prosperity for the

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Daniel and his three friends were assigned different names in Babylon (Daniel 1:1-7). What are some names the world assigns to Christians?

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It is easy to adapt to the culture in which we live. List some characteristics of the culture in which we live that are not consistent with our heavenly citizenship and should, therefore, be avoided.

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future. This is why the people all spoke well of the false prophets (Luke 6:26). They rebuked the true prophet because he didn't prophesy unto them "smooth things" (Isaiah 30:9, 10). With every prophet of God prophesying so certainly concerning the coming destruction, though the people did not accept their prophesyings, they could not forget them. They even mocked the prophets, all of which helped them to remember exactly what the prophets had predicted. The prophets had one retreat – the future. They said a time would come when they would know that Jehovah – not Baal, not Moloch, nor any other idol – was God. **Read** the effective way that Ezekiel stated it (6:3-7). Continue reading his quotation about those who would escape the sword in the day of slaughter upon Jerusalem (6:8-10).

When the "smooth words" of their false prophets failed them and the messages of the true prophets came to pass, they were all too willing to acknowledge that Jehovah was the one and only God. Though it took a most bitter chastisement to bring them to their senses, the chastisement brought results. When people won't learn any other way, God will teach them with a chastening hand, but oh how bitter!

#### **GOD DID RETURN THE SOUTH TO ITS LAND**

The people in Old Testament times were just as wicked-hearted and as guilty of misrepresenting God's prophets as people today are of gospel preachers. They hated God's men and hesitated not to slander them most villainously. They looked upon the prophets as old sore-heads, who had nothing but a message of doom. But in this they were not altogether accurate. Amid the prophets' utterances of God's coming wrath, they included predictions of an actual return to their homeland, and when once they had been carried away, it was as difficult for them to believe they would ever be returned to their land as it had been for them to believe that they would ever be carried out of it. Such was unbelief then, and it is the same today. People [who are] down cannot grasp God's promises of goodness – discouragement prevails. People who are enjoying smooth sailing cannot be moved by warning preaching – they do not look for judgment upon them.

Actually, God's prophets had a message of condemnation for those who were reprobate in their evil, but a message of ultimate consolation for those who, though evil now, would in time be corrected to repentance. In this connection, Jeremiah had a vision of two baskets of figs after Nebuchadnezzar had carried some already away to Babylon, God showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One basket had very good figs in it, but the other one figs that were too bad to be eaten. God explained the vision as representing the two classes referred to above. **Read** Jeremiah 24:5-10.

Jeremiah predicted that the years of the Jews in Babylon would be seventy (Jer. 29:10). As proof of his sincerity in the message that he preached that the righteous would be restored to Palestine after seventy years, Jeremiah bought a field (Jeremiah 32:6-15). By this they could see that he believed in the restoration of the Jews to their land.

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What evidence suggests this is true of people today?

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What lesson does this teach us in the church context today re: preaching/teaching, literature, etc.?

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How does your manner of life validate your faith that you are a sojourning pilgrim here?

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The historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah all enlighten us concerning the return of the Jews to their land and their re-establishment in it. The opening verses of Zechariah contain a lot of important truth as he delivered them to the people of his day. **Read** Zechariah 1:2-6.

The four books referred to above tell of the return of about fifty thousand under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple, then of the return of about two thousand under Ezra almost eighty years after Zerubbabel's return, to revive the spiritual life of the people, and finally of the return of Nehemiah and his workmen to rebuild the wall around the city of Jerusalem.

When Jesus was born among the Jewish people in Palestine, they had been back in their homeland for about five hundred years.

Surely, His purpose in returning them to their land was at least two-fold. One was in consideration of His promise of goodness to the house of David, which, of course, embraced the Messianic in its actual fulfillment. The other was that people might know that His goodness was as great upon the penitent as His wrath had been upon the impenitent. Let us look at these two reasons briefly.

As long as God could consistently be good to the tribe of Judah (David's tribe) and the city of Jerusalem (David's capital city where God had recorded His name), He certainly was. When the prophet Ahijah cut up Jeroboam's garment and promised him the most of the kingdom, he did not give him all the tribes. Notice the reason as you **read** 1 Kings 11:32-38.

According to prophecies already uttered, Bethlehem (the birthplace of the Christ) had already been pointed out (Micah 5:2), and the prominence of Jerusalem in relation to the new covenant had already been pointed out (Isaiah 2:2, 3 among others). All of these transpirings were to come to pass in fulfillment of God's special promises to David. For instance, in the angel's announcing the birth of the Savior to the Judean shepherds, they said He had been born that day "in the city of David" (Luke 2:11). This One, the angel Gabriel had said, would be given "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32).

Now let us consider the other motive for restoring them to their land. When God spoke to the wicked of the way He was going to punish them, He meant it, and He wanted them to know it. Everything that He threatened them with concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar and the pillaging he gave their city and the sorrowful results to follow upon them surely came true. This was because they had deserved such treatment. Jonah well realized the great mercy of God (Jonah 4:2). But let us consider the other side of God – that of mercy upon the penitent. David praised the multitude of His tender mercies (Psalm 51:1). Even interspersed within the ten commandments was a direct statement of God's mercy (Exodus 20:6). God had punished the generation of idolaters with Babylonian captivity. However, with the new generation free from the idolatry of their parents, God was going to deal differently with them. In speaking of this very question, read what Ezekiel wrote (Ezekiel 18:2-17).

#### **THE MOSAIC ORDINANCES WERE REINSTATED IN THEIR RELIGIOUS LIFE.**

Thus, God wanted it to be known that He was as willing to show His goodness to those who were obedient as He was to show His wrath to those who were disobedient.

Israel's greatest greatness was in those days when they walked according to God's revealed law. God had given them laws concerning sacrifices, the priesthood, feasts, marriage, tithing, presenting the firstborn, morality, honesty, Sabbath-keeping, defilement, and countless other matters of their private and national life. But with kings who were idolaters so much of the time, it is no wonder that the law of God through Moses had been forgotten. With the law of Moses

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In what years did the three groups return? You may research on Google, Ask.com or some Bible reference work (e.g., Bible dictionary). Provide a Bible reference for each.

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pushed aside, it is no wonder that its precepts were not kept. With the people deported to far-away lands as they were, without a temple and without a place for their priests to function, there were many Mosaic rites that could not be observed by them during their years in Babylonian captivity. So it had been a long time since they had had a pure religion. Just as there has been a “Dark Ages” since the giving of the New Testament, so did they have their “Dark Ages” during Old Testament times. Observing, then, what they of the restoration period did with reference to the law of God under which they were to live can give us today divine enlightenment as to what we should do with reference to the law of God under which we are to live.

They rebuilt their temple. They put back into it the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken out. They kept the feast of Passover as it had been instituted. They set up the altar and offered Scriptural sacrifices upon it. They had priests as God had ordained through Moses. They began to keep the feast of Tabernacles as God had ordained. They put away their foreign wives and the children born of them. The observance of the Sabbath was reinstated. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell of this great return to God’s plan for them.

Just because it had been about one thousand years since the law of Moses had been given from Mt. Sinai was no reason for its obedience not being reinstated and thereafter obeyed. Many would so argue today, feeling that God would not expect us to abide by a law delivered almost nineteen hundred years ago. But it is not a matter of how long ago God delivered a law, but are we still in the same dispensation as that for which the law was given. The Mosaic dispensation began at Mt. Sinai about fifteen hundred years before Christ, and it continued until the death of Christ. The laws for that entire dispensation of time were given at the first of the dispensation, but those who lived at the end of that dispensation were as much expected to carry out those laws as those who lived when they were actually given. This is true of any dispensation. When God gives a commandment, it is in effect until He repeals it or supersedes it with another. So many today do not realize this. Therefore, they continue doing whatever they have been doing, or whatever their parents did, or whatever the rest of the people do and “hope” that it is pleasing to God, supposing that it is, but not being definitely sure that it is. At the same time, they do not see the need of returning to the New Testament plan of salvation, the Bible description of a Christian life and Christian home, and the divine pattern for the church found in the Scriptures. In fact, they not only question whether such is necessary, but they resist all attempts at being reformed in their religious practices by that which is to be found in the Bible. They will either say the Bible is out of date, or that it has been translated so many times we can’t be sure of it, or that there are so many different ways of interpreting the Bible, or that the thing God is interested in is the condition of the heart and not particularly a rigid adherence to precepts. Needless to say, such thinking paralyzes any attempt to return to the primitive pattern of Christianity.

Except for the objection about numerous translations, almost all are such as could have been raised in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. People could have said their law was out of date. The

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What measures can we take to prevent against forgetting God’s instructions today?

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Dispensation (dis-pən-'sā-shən) - the period of time in which God relates to people according to the covenant He established

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How would you respond to the idea expressed by many that the Bible is irrelevant for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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objection of numerous times of translation of our New Testament is not well founded, for our English versions represent but one translation – from the original Greek into our English (no more!). In Ezra’s day, they could have charged their law with difficulty of interpretation. The fact is the Old Testament law is far more complicated than the New Testament. In Nehemiah’s day, they could have argued that all that God was interested in was the heart condition. But the great reforms of Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s days – all God-approved – argue against the loose thinking of today!

The truth is, when God gives a law it is divinely in force until God removes it. In Jesus’ day, He referred the cleansed lepers to the law of Moses for instructions on how to become ceremonially clean (Matthew 8:4; Luke 17:14). The third from the last verse in the Old Testament (Malachi 4:4) says

***“Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.”***

In conclusion, let us notice that they had been punished with deportation to Babylon because of not keeping the law of God under which they were to live, and they were returned to their land and blest by keeping the law. May each of us get the lesson that God has for us in the restoration period of Old Testament history!

*With only a very few exceptions where I have improved the wording ☺ these are the words of Donald G. Hunt from his book, The Unfolded Plan of God.*