

HOME AGAIN TO PALESTINE

Message #10
BIBLE SURVEY

Dr. Charles Ryrrie

In our survey of the Bible, we have seen the division of the people of Israel in their civil war into north and south, the captivity into which God brought them--the northern kingdom first into captivity in Assyria in about 721 B. C. and the southern kingdom of Judah into captivity in Babylon about 606 B. C., a little more than a hundred years later.

The reason for the Babylonian captivity was that the nation had long lived in idolatry and part of the idolatry was disobedience to the law of God. One of the laws in the Mosaic commandments was that every seventh year the land should lie idle. This meant that in 490 years if the children of Israel did not do this that they would have owed God and the land seventy years--one out of seven. For 490 years apparently they had not kept this commandment, and so the Lord brought them into captivity into Babylon in order that the land might have back the seventy years that she was due. Now when you talk about 490 years it does not seem to be such a long time. Four hundred and ninety years is before the founding of our country and yet we think of ourselves as a fairly well established, and long standing nation. We would think that in two or three or four hundred years that God would forget and certainly not hold us accountable for what we had done, yet God was holding the people accountable for what they had done for these nearly five hundred years. Finally, He demanded the time which they had refused to give Him. Undoubtedly, many of the people thought they were getting away with it all of this time. But God was keeping account and His account said that the people owed Him seventy years; so into Babylonian captivity He finally brought them. Though He had dealt in mercy and longsuffering with them, now finally His patience was exhausted and they were brought into captivity.

The story of the rest of the Old Testament is chiefly concerned with those years in captivity in Babylon and then with the return from Babylon back into Palestine. This brings us to the close of the Old Testament Canon.

Probably the best known book that concerns the years in captivity in Babylon is the book of Daniel. You remember that Daniel was one of those who was carried off into captivity, and eventually elevated to a position of great power and authority in the country that had captured him and his people. This is a very unusual thing. If you can imagine a leader of some satellite nation becoming a great power in the nation that captured him. You get some idea of what Daniel's position was in Babylon. Not only that, but Daniel survived a change of government; he not only kept his power after a change of government, but he was elevated again to a position in the new government. This again was a most unusual thing. If you can imagine a leading member of one party being a leading member of the administration of another party--only these were not just parties, these were rival kingdoms in the days of Daniel. Then you have some idea of the place which Daniel continued to have under Babylon and then under the Medes and the Persians. You remember that Daniel was a captive slave when he came to Babylon, but because of his great intelligence he was being trained in the lore and the language of Babylon.

Daniel stood his ground from the very beginning in the most polite and courteous manner. His parents had taught him apparently the law of God, and the law of God had something to say about the kind of things the children of Israel should eat. When these things were not offered to Daniel in the King's palace, he very politely, yet firmly and persistently sought to be able to keep the law of God in his captive state. He had no right and so he could not insist upon this; yet God favored his very courteous approach to those who were over him so that he could effect the purpose that was in his heart--not to defile himself with the meat that was forbidden to him by the Mosaic Law. And when he was tested and proved, he was found to be better than the other men who were being trained in this school. Daniel took his stand immediately, but he took it in a very proper and courteous fashion.

When Nebuchadnezzar had his great dream about the image, it was Daniel who again in a very proper and courteous fashion interpreted the dream and thus was brought into favor by the king in the empire. You remember though, that he went through some other problems. There was the matter of the fiery furnace with his three friends. There was the matter of the insanity of Nebuchadnezzar which Daniel had to predict, much to his dislike, because apparently there was a real friendship between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. There was the matter of the lion's den later on in his life. These things are fairly well known from the book of Daniel. This belongs to the era of the captivity of the Southern nation in Babylon.

In the ninth chapter of the book of Daniel, we are told that as Daniel was reading the Bible one day, he understood that the seventy years of captivity were about to be fulfilled. He, himself, had lived through these seventy years and he could simply thing back in his own life and realise that the time had now nearly elapsed. So in Daniel 9:2 we read that he had been reading in Jeremiah the prophet and he understood that the seventy years were just about accomplished in the desolation of Jerusalem. Daniel sought the Lord's face in prayer to see what God would now do as far as His people were concerned. Daniel did not live to see all that God did do, but God did bring them back from their exile to Palestine again.

There were three important men involved in the return of the nation back to Palestine. The first one was Zerubbabel and you will find the account of this in the first six chapters of the book of Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah are the historical books that have to do with the return and many of the minor prophets are the prophetic books that have to do with the return from Babylon. If you want the history, read Ezra and Nehemiah. If you want the filler material in the prophets, then many of the minor prophets are concerned with this. Zerubbabel was the first who was involved with the return from exile in 538 B.C. He came back and began to build the temple. The work was hindered by the Samaritans and two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, were important in encouraging the people in those days to complete the building of the Temple. The Temple was finally finished and dedicated. This was the second Temple--Solomon's being the first.

The second important man in the return was Ezra and you read about him in Ezra 7 - 10. This is about eighty years after Zerubbabel returned to Palestine. Ezra was a priest and a scribe and he came back with a number of the people. But in his day, there was a very real problem; that was the problem of the people going back to Palestine after their seventy years of captivity and still not having learned their lesson to obey God. So

his problem was that of mixed marriages. The people of Israel were marrying with the foreigners of the lands around them even though God had strictly forbidden this.

The third man who was important in the return of the people from Babylonian captivity was Nehemiah and he returns just a few years after Ezra. You find the record of his return in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was concerned with building the walls of the city of Jerusalem. Even though the people who returned nearly a hundred years before Nehemiah had started to do that, the walls were still in ruins. For a hundred years they had procrastinated about the work, but under Nehemiah's direction and encouragement, the walls were built in 52 days.

There was a revival in Nehemiah's time too, because the law was read and explained and they began to practice the law which they heard--to confess their sins--specifically sins that concerned mixed marriages, concerned the exaltation of the Sabbath and concerning the matter of giving and this brought the revival to the people.

We often hear about the need for revival today. I think that from the book of Nehemiah, especially the 8 - 10 chapters, you have the secret of what is true revival. First, it must be based upon the Word of God being read and explained to the people. There is no true revival based on emotions. It has to be based on the Word that is God's message to man and God's requirements to man. These have to be known by man before man can respond to them.

The second thing involved in true revival is practicing what is heard from the Word of God. Again this is a very straightforward thing. And while it may involve emotion, it has to involve more than that because it has to involve a change of life--practicing the Word of God.

The third thing involved in Nehemiah's revival was the confession of sin, of specific sin--not general confession but very detailed confession of the sins which they were committing; they confessed these to God specifically. In Their case, it had had to do with their marriages, with the observing of the Sabbath and with the matter of giving. The specific sins were confessed to God and then gotten right in order that the people might obey God. This is really true revival and we can learn something from Nehemiah's revival for our own time today. If we want revival it will have to be based on the Word. It will have to bring people to a practice of the Word. And it will have to involve the getting right of those things which are wrong, specifically and in detail.

And thus we come now to the end of the Old Testament period. The people are back in the land, but God is not through dealing with them. All is being prepared for the opening of the New Testament and the coming of Jesus Christ.