

# The Return from Captivity

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Many times, when we study the Old Testament, we tend to focus on the origin and rise of the nation of Israel. We focus in on stories of the patriarchs, stories surrounding the exodus from Egypt, the period of judges leading to Israel's first king, and the stories surrounding Saul, David, and Solomon, and their reign of Israel during the period of the United Kingdom. However, a large portion of the Old Testament is dedicated to discussing the period of time when Israel was divided. Their kingdom was split into a northern and southern kingdom. When Rehoboam took the throne, he refused to lighten the tax burden and all tribes but Judah and Benjamin left. The northern Kingdom was called Israel, and the Southern was called Judah. Sin was at the heart of the division. Idolatry played a role, and political unrest played a role, but sin was the heart of the issue. In the book of Second Kings, we can learn that sin not only caused their division, but would be the cause of both Kingdoms entering into captivity, losing their national identity.

- I. The Northern Kingdom of Israel's Captivity (2 Kings 17:1-18)
  - a. During this time, the northern kingdom was falling into the sin of idolatry, not putting God first in their lives, but putting other gods before Him.
    - i. This is a recurring theme among the Israelites
      1. The Golden Calf (Exodus 32)
      2. Micah's Idolatry/Idolatry of Dan (Judges 17-18)
    - ii. This is still a huge problem for God's people today
      1. When we sin, we become slaves to sin, and our allegiance is no longer to God (John 8:34, Romans 6:15-23)
      2. We can be guilty of treasuring our physical and material things more than God, yet we need to seek Him first (Matthew 6:19-21, 33)
    - iii. The consequence of their unfaithfulness to God was this captivity, and they were taken captive by Assyria.
- II. The Southern Kingdom of Judah's Captivity
  - a. This is prophesied by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 25:1-11
    - i. Jeremiah tells them that they will be taken for the very same reason: their problem was with serving other gods.
    - ii. We see a thread here that can unfortunately be woven into our lives today. Do we serve other physical things with more diligence than we do God? Do we put things before Him?
    - iii. Verse 4 – God wanted the nation to repent of their sin and gave them His message of repentance through the prophets Urijah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel.
    - iv. God feels the same way for us today. He wants us to be repent, and has given us the words that lead to eternal life (2 Peter 3:9). Every time we

hear those words and don't obey them, we're likening ourselves to the unfaithful nation of Judah and we remain in the captivity of sin, with no hope of eternal life.

- b. Jeremiah's prophecy comes to fruition in 2 Kings 24:1-16
  - c. 2 Chronicles 9:1 – This happened due solely to their unfaithfulness.
- III. Lessons and Benefits from the Time of Captivity
- a. Personal responsibility for sin was learned
    - i. Ezekiel emphasizes this in his message (Ezekiel 18:19-20; 33:10-11)
    - ii. You are the victim of your sin. You will suffer for your sin. It's your personal responsibility to care for your soul, repent, and live righteously. (Romans 5:12; Acts 2:37-38)
  - b. Many turned to God during the captivity
    - i. Daniel 3:8-18
      - 1. We see a total change in the hearts of those who were in captivity.
      - 2. The Jews were in captivity because of their idolatry as we're told in 1 Chronicles 9:1
      - 3. Daniel 3:17-18; No matter what their fate might be, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused to serve the kings gods and the golden image that was set up.
    - ii. Daniel 6
      - 1. Daniel was also faced with the threat of death, however he refused to worship King Darius
      - 2. Not only did he refuse to worship King Darius, he also allotted time throughout his day to worship Yahweh. He epitomized how our relationship with God should be today. We should put him first in everything.
  - c. The story of Daniel and his friends shows that not only were Jews becoming more and more faithful to the one true God, but that this was happening despite their surroundings/circumstances.
    - i. We likewise should remain faithful to God in all circumstances.
    - ii. This faithfulness will not only benefit us but can also bring others to know God as Nebuchadnezzar came to know Yahweh as the one and only true God.
  - d. The story of Daniel shows us that God cares for His people and will save them when they dedicate their lives to His service and remain faithful to Him.
    - i. God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3)
    - ii. God closed the mouths of the lions for Daniel (Daniel 6)
    - iii. These Jews escaped death due to their faithfulness to God.
  - e. God rejoices when he can forgive His people and restore them. This is shown in the return from captivity.

#### IV. The Return

- a. This is prophesied in Jeremiah 33:7
  - i. Jeremiah prophesies that Judah and Israel will return from captivity and become as they were before
  - ii. They would return together according to Jeremiah 3:18
- b. Ezekiel 37:1-23 is another prophecy that depicts the return
  - i. This prophecy shown to Ezekiel is not only a foreshadowing of the nation of Israel, but of all the Earth, and it would be fulfilled in Christ.
  - ii. God shows a valley of dry bones, representing the nation of Israel
    1. The dry bones relate to Israel because they are dried up without hope. We are completely cut off.
    2. These dry bones can also represent us; sinners against God
      - a. Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) our sin completely cuts us off.
      - b. We are without hope; only in Christ do we have no condemnation (Romans 8:1)
    3. The dry bones rose from their graves and were resurrected and given life.
      - a. This represents the nation of Israel being led out of captivity and given their land.
      - b. This is fulfilled in Christ because Christ died, was buried, and was raised (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)
      - c. We can join with Christ in this union, and die to sin, be buried in baptism, and rise to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-4)
    4. Just as the Lord brought the bones to life and the nation of Israel out of captivity with His Spirit, we are promised his Spirit when we rise from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:13)
    5. Just as God, through the return, brought together Judah and Israel, two nations that were separated, Christ brings Jew and Gentile together, and all are one in Him (Colossians 3:11; Romans 1:16)
    6. Ezra 1:1-4; just as God fulfilled His promise of salvation to the nation of Israel, he has fulfilled his promise of salvation to us in Christ.

#### V. Our Captivity

- a. We are captives to sin as the Jews were captives of Babylon and Assyria (Romans 5:12, 3:23)
- b. Just as Israel's captivity taught them the responsibility and suffering sin causes, we must take responsibility for our sin, and realize the suffering it brings (Romans 5:12, Acts 2:38)

- c. Just as many turned to God during the captivity, and put away all other gods and idols, we must repent and turn to God; putting away our service to sin and the things we put before our relationship to God.
  - d. God loved the Israelites and was happy to restore their kingdom and bring peace to them. God loves us today and rejoices when we turn to Him and commit our lives to Him (Luke 15; The Prodigal Son)
  - e. Just as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to remain strong and faithful through discouragement, difficult circumstances, and even when faced with governmental punishment and death, we are also to have an unfailing dedication to God. (Rev. 2:10)
- VI. What must you do to return from sin, and be given new life through the Spirit of God?
- a. You must believe in Jesus Christ as the son of God; believe in His death, burial, and resurrection that ultimately fulfilled a return from captivity.
  - b. You must confess with your mouth Jesus as the son of God (Romans 10:9-10)
  - c. You must repent of your sins (Luke 13:3) and turn away from the things that led you into this captivity
  - d. You must be baptized for the remission of your sins