



Sermon Notes

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Title: Pilgrim Hearts

Series: #3 of "The Post-Exilic Community"

- 1) Quick reminder of the reasons behind the captivity –
 - a) God had expectations of what the people of God were to be like, a kingdom of priests.
 - b) Israel, and then Judah, entered into a series of unholy alliances. 2 Chron. 20:37, "*Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has destroyed your works.*" What did the Kings of the Judah have to do with the Kings of the idolatrous northern kingdom of Israel? Jehoshaphat went to war with Ahab, vile king of Israel, and married his eldest son, Jehoram, to Ahab's daughter Athaliah (cf. 2 Kings 8:18). Athaliah's son Ahaziah introduced Israel's particular sins to Judah. Athaliah took over the throne for 6 years after the death of her son by killing all the royal heirs except Jehoash whom the priests had protect in the temple until he was 8 and became King (cf. 2 Chron. 22:11-12, 2 Chron. 23:1-15).
 - i) Spiritual adultery
 - ii) Political syncretism
 - c) God sent His prophets with messages of warning if they did not repent and promises if they would walk in obedience. God was weary of their external religion empty of internal conviction, Is. 1:10-19; we can find parallels with the original exclusion from Eden due to their disobedience.
- 2) Jewish life during the captivity.
 - a) Jeremiah's ministry was contrary to the "*popular wisdom*" of his day, he counseled the exiles in a letter sent to Babylon saying, "*Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the LORD. For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.*" Jer. 29:4-14
 - b) The people of God grew to be comfortable in Babylon; they were settled and had prosperous businesses in Babylon. This wasn't Egypt from which they needed deliverance from slavery, they were doing ok. The Jewish people survived in Babylon because the Babylonian policy allowed the Jews to settle in towns and villages along the Chebar River (cf. Ez. 1:1, 3:15), which was an irrigation channel. The Jews were allowed to live together in communities; they were allowed to farm and perform other sorts of labor to earn income. Many Jews eventually became wealthy.
 - c) Although they had no Temple, they had the *Torah*, consequently they created "*Synagogues*", forums and communities built around the sacred texts which they could study, discuss and strive to follow. Their identity as Jews became concentrated around circumcision, food laws and Sabbath observance. They could study to their hearts content the record of God's events in history, they could practice their faith, and they could encourage one another. The offices of "*Scribe*" and "*Sage*" emerged as Jewish leaders (i.e. *Ezra himself*) as more and more sacred texts were copied and disseminated among the various Jewish communities. Prior to exile, the people of Israel had been organized according to tribe; afterwards, they were organized by clans, only the tribe of Levi continued in its special role.

- d) This period of captivity saw the last high-point of Biblical prophecy in the person of Ezekiel, followed by the emergence of the central role of the *Torah* in Jewish life. It was also rich in Hebraic literature with the writing of: Jeremiah chs. 39–43, the final section of 2 Kings (which portrays it as the temporary end of history), 2 Chronicles (in which the Exile is the "*Sabbath of the land*"), the opening chapters of Ezra, and Daniel chs. 1–6. Other works include the apocryphal stories of "Susanna", "Bel and the Dragon", the "Story of the Three Youths" (1 Esdras 3:1–5:6), and the books of Tobit and Book of Judith. According to many historical-critical scholars, the *Torah* was edited and redacted during this time, and saw the beginning of the canonization of the Bible, which provided a central text for Jews.
 - e) Many Jews at the end of 70 years had obviously been born in Babylon and found the Babylonian culture "*normal*," having lived among and apart from the Babylonians for so long. They were aliens in a foreign land, but a feeling of normalcy had grown into that. There was not the agony of Egypt, leaving this land would require quite another motivation.
- 3) Ezra 1:1-5a. God faithfully fulfills His word.
- a) The Jews had gone into captivity with the promise of release spoken through Jeremiah who had been rejected by his compatriots at the time. But "*being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*" Phil. 1:6
 - b) God moves upon the heart of the King of Persia as He promised in Is. 44:28, "*He says to Cyrus, You are My shepherd; and he shall complete all My pleasure, even for Me to say to Jerusalem, You are built; and to the temple, You are founded.*"
 - c) God also moves upon the heart of the people.
- 4) Ezra 1:5b-11. God requires His people to faithfully respond to His word.
- a) Daniel recognized that the days of captivity had come to an end and his response was to intercede. Dan. 9:2-3, "*...in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.*" He didn't lean back and wait, he responded by recalling, repenting and wrestling.
 - b) A few responded to the move of God. Only about 42,000 Jews were a part of the first wave to return and rebuild the Temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar). Ez. 1:11, 2:64. Zerubbabel was in the royal line of David, an ancestor of Jesus. Mt. 1:12-13. This required a new response, a pioneer company of believers.
 - i) Most movements of God begin with a small group of fanatics who want more. These wanted more than talking about what God was like; they wanted God's presence in their lives Today.
 - ii) Zech. 8:20-23, "*So says Jehovah of Hosts: There shall yet come peoples, and those living in many cities. And those living in one shall go to another, saying, Let us go at once to seek the favor of the face of Jehovah, and to seek Jehovah of Hosts; I will go also. And many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek Jehovah of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to seek the favor of the face of Jehovah. So says Jehovah of Hosts: In those days ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold, and will seize the skirt of a man, a Jew, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.*"
- 5) Aliens with vision. When God gets a hold on us, He changes our natural disposition from sin to holiness, our preferences change. We too are meant to be aliens in a strange land. This small group of pilgrims proved themselves to be the real children of Abraham, who also left Babylon (Ur).
- a) A city without foundations, Heb. 11:8-10, "*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*"
 - b) To be the people of God is not to be only the people of the Book. Rather we must be the people of His presence! Ex. 33:15-17, "*Then he said to Him, 'If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.'*" So the LORD said to Moses, "*I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.*"

- c) We read at the end of Revelations that Heaven itself will be enthroned on earth, that all the earth is to be the Temple of God. Rev. 21:1-4, *"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'"* God intends to restore all of creation as it was meant to be – a habitation of His presence.
- d) David for one made a fool of himself dancing, singing and worshipping as the Ark entered Jerusalem. David strove to bring and keep His presence in the city, both by welcoming the Ark and his desire & efforts to build a Temple for Jehovah. Keep in mind that his passion for God divided his household. 2 Sam. 6:14, 20-23
- 6) Parallels
 - a) We live within a culture that has become an intrinsic part of who we are, but it is an alien culture to those with a Pilgrim heart. We easily confuse our faith with elements of our culture, such that the two are so intertwined that we can no longer discern between the two. Like Moses, we must leave behind that secular culture and embrace our identity in Christ alone. Remember well the dangers of spiritual and political syncretism that befell Judah.
 - b) We could be satisfied with Synagogues where the study of the Word suffices. But we must do more than study and practice the Word, we must become identified by His awesome presence. The apostle Paul later came to the Jewish Synagogues that had the sacred writings and an expectation of the Messiah, but they often turned against him. They didn't like the implications of God's presence and the inclusion of the Gentiles. Our faith must be more than intellectual, note that *"more than"* does not mean the exclusion of the intelligent study of the Word, we must walk literally *Coram Deo*, *"before the face of God."*
 - c) It begins with a remnant. *"We few, we happy few..."* but as we are passionate for Him and faithful in our obedience, we shall not remain small. Let's be captivated by what God is doing in our generation, recovering His house and bringing back His presence.