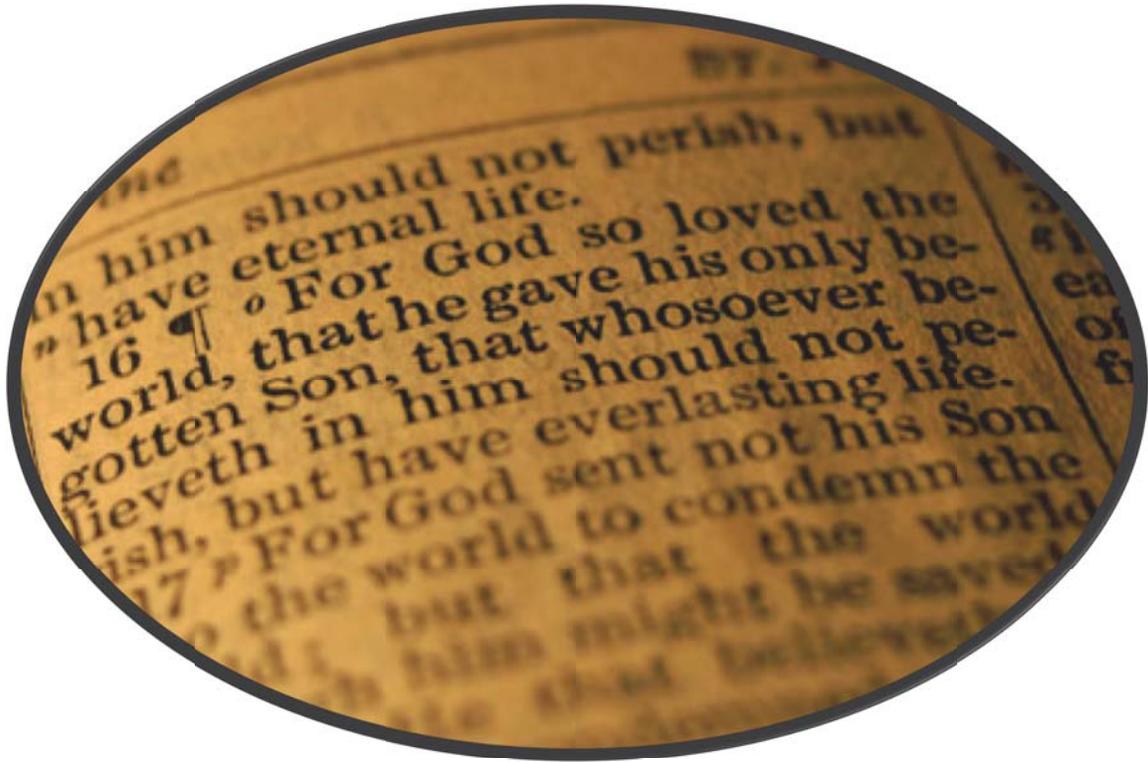


THE HEART OF GOD
EXILE AND BEYOND



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,

He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Heart of God: Exile and Beyond
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Introduction to *Exile and Beyond*

God was not finished with His people. He condemned them to 70 years of captivity – one year for each of the 490 they had failed to keep the Sabbath Year – but He did not abandon them during that time. Prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel kept the Word and promises of God alive, and pointed forward to a day of great covenant fulfillment yet to come.

Upon returning to the land, the people set about the task of rebuilding the temple, to ensure the presence of God with them. Only after the temple was complete would they take up the work of rebuilding the city. First, the security of God's presence, then the security of their outward lives: clearly they were off to a good start.

But it could not last. Prophets continued to encourage and instruct the people, foretelling a day of great blessing and Kingdom glory to come. But the people, lacking the Spirit of God, could not stay the course. By the time we reach the end of the Old Testament, God is again confronting His people with their drift from and rebellion against Him.

But even then, He holds out great hope for a future of glory and blessing.

The Heart of God studies provide a road map through the Scriptures, unfolding key unifying threads and following the development of those matters closest to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Genesis to Revelation. Through all our study we'll see how the Scriptures lead us to Jesus, and how He, in turn, brings into the presence of our heavenly Father and His Kingdom. There, as we encounter God and His glory, the Spirit can transform us increasingly in to the very image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

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T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 Ezekiel

Read and meditate on Ezekiel 2, 3, 7, and 16.

God's judgment on His people was not the last word. His covenant cannot be broken; His promises remain sure. God's grace continues with His people through a season of judgment and trial. The message is clear: God's chosen people may deny Him, but He can never deny Himself. Grace will prevail over sin, for the honor and glory of God and His Name. Ezekiel sets the stage for this next period of the unfolding of God's covenant.

For reflection

1. Ezekiel prophesied to the people of Israel after the initial deportation of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Ezek. 1.1-3). In chapters 2 and 3, Ezekiel finds his calling both sweet and bitter. Why?
2. What does it mean that God described Ezekiel's role as a "watchman"? In what sense are those who are entrusted with the Word of God *watchmen* for His people? Is this a calling we share in some respects? Explain.
3. Why, according to chapters 7 and 16, was it necessary for God to bring this judgment upon His people? What did God intend as a result of this judgment (cf. Ezek. 7.4, 27; 16.60-63)?
4. Can you see how Ezekiel's message of judgment winds around the three unifying ideas of Scripture – God's glory, God's people, and God's work of redemption? Explain.
5. Meditate on Hebrews 12.3-11. What should God's people today try to learn from God's judgment against His people in Ezekiel's day?

Summary

We don't like the idea of judgment – that God might bring trials or suffering against us because of our sin. But God uses judgment to remind us that He is the Lord and to bring us back to the paths of obedience He has marked out in His covenant and by His Law. What kinds of judgment might we expect the Lord to bring upon us? How should we respond?

Closing Prayer

God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.
How long will you judge unjustly,
And show partiality to the wicked?
Selah
Defend the poor and fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and needy.
Deliver the poor and needy;
Free *them* from the hand of the wicked.
They do not know, nor do they understand;
They walk about in darkness;
All the foundations of the earth are unstable.
I said, "You *are* gods,
And all of you are children of the Most High.
But you shall die like men,
And fall like one of the princes."

Arise, O God, judge the earth;
For You shall inherit all nations.

Psalm 82

2 Daniel

Read and meditate on Ezekiel 33, 34, 37 and Daniel 2, 4, and 9.

We have a bit more to learn from Ezekiel, then we'll turn to Daniel, who will remind us both of the sovereignty of God over the nations and the unfailing grace of His covenant.

For reflection

1. Ezekiel enlarges upon the role of *watchmen* in chapter 33. Who were the watchmen in ancient Israel? Some had failed in their duty, and some fulfilled their calling. Explain. How should one prepare to serve as a watchman for God's people today?
2. How had the shepherds of Israel – their watchmen – failed the Lord's sheep (Ezek. 34.1-10)? How was God planning to remedy this situation? Who is this promised good shepherd (cf. Jn. 10)? How would His coming benefit the people of God?
3. Explain the prophesy of the dry bones (Ezek. 37). What is the role of the Spirit (breath) of God in this vision?
4. Looking at Daniel 2 and 4, what do we learn about the sovereignty of God over the nations and kingdoms of the earth? When would God establish His Kingdom? How would you describe the character of that Kingdom, as Daniel foresaw it, and Nebuchadnezzar came to experience it?
5. What led Daniel to seek the Lord in prayer in chapter 9? What seem to be the main components of his prayer, as He sought the Lord for revival in Israel?

Summary

God is sovereign over His people and over all the nations. His Spirit brings real power to the earth – spiritual power, to be sure, but power than can bring revival, renewal, and awakening, and an impact on all nations. In times of judgment, it's good to seek out the promises of God, and to be reminded of His will for us, and of what He can do. Why is this so?

Closing Prayer

“Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you!
O Israel, if you will listen to Me!
There shall be no foreign god among you;
Nor shall you worship any foreign god.
I *am* the LORD your God,
Who brought you out of the land of Egypt;
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.
But My people would not heed My voice,
And Israel would *have* none of Me.
So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart,
To walk in their own counsels.
Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
The haters of the Lord would pretend submission to Him,

But their fate would endure forever.
He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat;
And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.”

Psalm 81.8-16

3 Rebuilding the Temple

Read and meditate on Ezra 1, 3, 5, 6, and Haggai 1 and 2.

When Rehoboam began to reign after Solomon, he sought to fortify himself against his enemies by armies, fortified cities, and bringing many sons into the world. He did not seek the Lord (2 Chron. 12.14). As the people began to return from exile to the land of promise, God intended to make certain they had their priorities right this time around.

For reflection

1. How do you see God at work in the history of nations and the hearts of people in Ezra 1 and 2? Can there be true revival apart from God working this way? Explain.
2. After a delayed start, the work on the temple resumed. Why did the people begin the rebuilding of their nation by starting with the temple? Wouldn't they have been smarter to start with the walls of the city, and with training an army? Explain.
3. Again (Ezra 6), we see that God is sovereign over the nations as He moves to renew covenant with His people. Comment on the importance of what we read in Ezra 6.13-22.
4. God's people always need prophets to keep them from straying from His vision and lapsing into self-serving ways. How can you see that from Haggai 1?
5. Haggai 2 expresses disillusionment and disappointment. Explain. Yet, through the prophet, God used the events and people of that day to point forward to a greater day to come. Explain. What is the role of those entrusted with the Word in keeping God's people focused on His promises?

Summary

The finishing of the temple was a bittersweet moment for the people of Israel. For all their celebrating and rejoicing, it just didn't seem to have the "punch" many were looking for, and they soon began to drift into self-serving ways again. But as significant as this return to God was, it was merely a sign of greater covenant blessings to come. In what ways?

Closing Prayer

Your God has commanded your strength;
Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us.
Because of Your temple at Jerusalem,
Kings will bring presents to You.
Rebuke the beasts of the reeds,
The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples,
Till everyone submits himself with pieces of silver.
Scatter the peoples *who* delight in war.
Envoys will come out of Egypt;
Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God.
Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth;
Oh, sing praises to the Lord,
Selah
To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, *which were* of old!
Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice.

Ascribe strength to God;
His excellence *is* over Israel,
And His strength *is* in the clouds.
O God, *You are* more awesome than Your holy places.
The God of Israel *is* He who gives strength and power to *His* people.
Blessed *be* God!

Psalm 68.28-35

4 Zechariah

Read and meditate on Zechariah 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, and 14.

Even as the people were struggling to rebuild the temple, and looking forward to rejoicing in the Lord again, Zechariah was pointing them ahead to fuller covenant blessings yet to come.

For reflection

1. What did Zechariah mean by saying that the Word of God had *overtaken* Israel's fathers (1.3-6)? How should this serve to warn and counsel God's people today?
2. Meditate on Zechariah 3. The priest, named Joshua, is accused by Satan, justified by God, established as ruler of His people, and given the promises of God's covenant. How many ways can you see Jesus in these verses?
3. Chapter 6 connects with chapter 3 through the image of the Branch. Who is this Branch? What will He do? How do these verses teach us to think about the coming reign of God (cf. Dan. 2.44, 45)?
4. Zechariah 8 and 9 foresee a day of great expansion of God's Kingdom. How many details of this can you identify? What will the coming rule of God be like? Why would such a vision have been important to the people of Israel at this particular time?
5. Jonathan Edwards wrote an entire book on Zechariah 8.20-23, in which he called on the people of New England to seek the Lord for revival. What are the key elements of such prayers, as you see them outlined in these verses?

Summary

Israel's return to the land of promise was a big deal. But it was not as big as some had hoped, and the people don't seem to have been much different from those who'd gone into exile. Would the great promises of "blessed to be a blessing" ever come to realization? What vision did Haggai and Zechariah hold out for these people, as they stood before their disappointingly small temple, and their feeble and still-ruined city? How should their preaching serve to counsel pastors in our day?

Closing Prayer

O God, You know my foolishness;
And my sins are not hidden from You.
Let not those who wait for You, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed because of me;
Let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel.
Because for Your sake I have borne reproach;
Shame has covered my face.
I have become a stranger to my brothers,
And an alien to my mother's children;
Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up,
And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.
When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting,
That became my reproach.
I also made sackcloth my garment;
I became a byword to them.
Those who sit in the gate speak against me,

And I am the song of the drunkards.
But as for me, my prayer *is* to You,
O LORD, in the acceptable time;
O God, *in* the multitude of Your mercy,
Hear me in the truth of Your salvation.

Psalm 69.5-13

5 Ezra

Read and meditate on Ezra 7-10.

As we consider the situation in Jerusalem during the time when the temple was being rebuilt, we can understand why God sent prophets like Zechariah to point the people beyond the present to a more expansive Kingdom vision for the future.

For reflection

1. What kind of qualifications did Ezra possess as a watchman for God's people (7.1-11)?
2. This period of rebuilding the temple reminds us in some ways of David's preparation for building the temple, and the work Solomon did in finishing it. How do you see this? Do you suppose the people of that day made a similar connection with their past? And would doing so have helped to encourage them in their work? Explain.
3. Right away, though, the people followed a path of compromise (Ezra 9, 10). Was this inevitable? Why or why not? What dangers of compromise do God's people today face?
4. Summarize Ezra's message to the compromised people of Israel, as well as his motivation in preaching this word. How did the people propose to rectify this situation (Ezra 10)? What do we learn from this situation about repentance?
5. The people had rebuilt the temple and re-established the proper worship of God in Jerusalem. But their hearts were still distant from the heart of God. They still needed that which Moses had promised in Deuteronomy 30.1-10, and Ezekiel prophesied in Ezekiel 36.36, 27, and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31.31-34. Explain what yet had to happen for God's people, and do so in the light of what we've seen in Haggai and Zechariah.

Summary

Being fully established in God's covenant is not, in the first place, about outward trappings. It's about what's going on inside us, and what we need from the Lord if He is to rule in our *hearts*, and not merely in the outward circumstances of our lives. In what ways does this period of return from the exile enlarge our view of God's covenant, beyond what we've seen thus far?

Closing Prayer

Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early,
To sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows;
For so He gives His beloved sleep.
Behold, children *are* a heritage from the LORD,
The fruit of the womb *is* a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So *are* the children of one's youth.
Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them;

They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Psalm 127

6 Nehemiah

Read and meditate on Nehemiah 1-6.

We note that only *after* the temple is rebuilt does God turn the attention of His people to their *outward* defenses. Nehemiah seems an unlikely candidate for the calling God gave him, so we have much to learn from him about trusting the God Who is faithful to His covenant.

For reflection

1. Do you agree that Nehemiah seems an unlikely person to have been called to the task of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem? What does this suggest about your own calling from the Lord? Are you thinking like Nehemiah the cupbearer or Nehemiah the visionary and willing servant of God? Explain.
2. We can see that Nehemiah was living in sync with God's covenant by his zeal for the glory of God and the wellbeing of His people. Explain.
3. Comment on Nehemiah's preparation for his calling. What did he do? How did he enlist others to help him in his calling? What can we learn from his example about preparing to work our own [Personal Mission Fields](#)?
4. In chapter 5, Nehemiah can be seen as embodying both a prophetic and kingly role among the people. In what ways? What does his example suggest about what God is looking for in leaders?
5. Comment on Nehemiah's approach to the problem posed in chapter 6. What can we learn from this episode about trusting God in the midst of adversity and trial?

Summary

Nehemiah's calling to build the wall of Jerusalem is a type of our calling to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Fulfilling our callings from the Lord requires a clear sense of His leading, careful preparation, the ability to enlist, encourage, and equip others, and determination to stay on task in spite of challenges and difficulties. How does Nehemiah's example instruct you in working your own Personal Mission Field?

Closing Prayer

Those who trust in the LORD
Are like Mount Zion,
Which cannot be moved, *but* abides forever.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the LORD surrounds His people
From this time forth and forever.
For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
On the land allotted to the righteous,
Lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.
Do good, O LORD, to *those who are* good,
And to *those who are* upright in their hearts.
As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways,
The LORD shall lead them away
With the workers of iniquity.
Peace *be* upon Israel!

Psalm 125

7 Restoration

Read and meditate on Nehemiah 8-10, 13, and the book of Malachi.

We still have one large section of the Old Testament to consider, that of the sacred writings. But the story of God's covenant comes to an end with an *actual* restoration, and the promise of a *greater restoration* yet to come.

For reflection

1. How would you describe the heart of God's people toward Him in the chapters assigned from Nehemiah? In what ways is this similar to other periods of revival and renewal we've seen previously?
2. How would you describe the covenant consciousness of the Levites and other leaders revealed in their prayer in chapter 9? Can you identify all three of the unifying threads of revelation there?
3. From Nehemiah 9, it seems that keeping covenant with God is a matter of remembering both His faithfulness in times past and His promises for the days to come – looking back, looking ahead. How should we apply this principle to our own walk with and work for the Lord?
4. In Malachi it is clear God's people have once again begun to drift from Him. In what ways? How does this happen? Whom does Malachi single out for blame?
5. Like many of the prophets before him, Malachi points forward to a day of restoration, a day which comes in two stages. Explain.

Summary

God is faithful to His Word and covenant, even though His people tend to be fickle and feeble in faith. Throughout the Old Testament, periods of revival and renewal are interspersed with periods of drift and decline. But always the Word of God remains, and the prophets of the Lord point the people to Him and His promises, encouraging them to turn from their sins and wait on the Lord. What can we learn about the power of grace from the story of Israel in the Old Testament?

Closing Prayer

When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us,
And we are glad.
Bring back our captivity, O LORD,
As the streams in the South.
Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,

Bringing his sheaves *with him*.

Psalm 126

For reflection or discussion

1. In what ways does Israel's return from exile demonstrate the faithfulness of God?
2. In what ways does Israel's return from exile remind us of the blinding and distracting power of sin?
3. This period is rich with prophecies and types pointing forward to a day of greater covenant blessings and restoration yet to come. Explain.
4. Give some examples of the ways all three unifying threads of divine revelation appear during this period.
5. What are the most important lessons to emerge from this period of the Old Testament?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word *to* the way we live for His glory in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God's glory in our reading and meditations in this week's studies? That is, how has He shown Himself *to* you more clearly?

How do you expect this *experience* of God's glory to help you *live more consistently for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from this week's study to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom? To equip you for serving Christ in your [Personal Mission Field](#)?

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Thank you.