

THE PROGRESS OF REDEMPTION

Lesson 11 – Act 1, Scene 3 Begins, Dave Sturkey

Intro: Okay, let's get our bearings. Here's where we are so far.

Prologue:

1) God's Good Creation and Plan – The Perfect Earth Filled with God-Honoring People (Gen. 1-2)

2) Man's Failure in Three Pictures

- Adam and Eve through Cain and Abel (Gen. 3-5)
- Noah and the First World (Gen. 6-10)
- Babel and the Second World (Gen. 11)

Act One — God Provides Salvation

Scene One — God Makes of Abraham a Great Nation (The People of God Introduced and a Picture of the Final State). 11 Steps — From Founding Fathers to a Great Theocracy (Gen. 12 - 1 Kings 11)

Scene Two — God Destroys Israel and Scatters Judah Across the World in 3 steps.

Step One — The Nation Divided (Israel and Judah)

Step Two — The Nation of Israel Destroyed (722 BC by Assyria)

Step Three — The Nation of Judah Scattered (586 BC by Babylon)

The Prophets: All the prophets speak of a Great Future Restoration of God's Nation (All the prophets speak to this time except for Zechariah, Haggai, Jonah, and Malachi) (1 Kings 12-End of Kings)

Scene Three — God Brings Back a Partial Remnant

Today we begin looking at five historical books ...

Esther — Ezra — Nehemiah and 1 & 2 Chronicles.

When we left here last time, we had watched one of the most confusing parts of Scripture history take place. God took that great nation that He created, that nation through which he promised would grow and prosper and be an everlasting kingdom, and He split it into two pieces. With one piece of the nation, the 10 Northern tribes, he destroyed them completely. Assyria in 722

BC came down and destroyed the Nation of Israel. Those 10 tribes have been lost forever. They will never again be found on the Earth. You cannot find on the earth the Philistines, or many of the other nations mentioned in the Bible. You also cannot find this nation, Israel, ever again.

With Judah God acted differently! Rather than destroying them, God left a very small remnant. Two very important things happened.

First, most of the nation of was scattered across the world.

This is called the **Diaspora** in Greek or the **Dispersion** in English. The policy of the conquering nation of Babylon was to take the skilled people of Judah and scatter them across the earth. Babylon moved Judah into different parts of the Empire.

Have you ever wondered where Polish Jews and Russian Jews and German Jews came from? They come because the Jews were scattered around the world. The conquering country of Babylon would want to do this to weaken and to destroy the nation. **But when the Israelites were scattered around the world, the Southern Kingdom kept its identity.** How? They remained a culture. They even reinstated worship. Where do Jews away from the land of Israel worship? They worship in **SYNAGOGUES**. And this is how they survived.

Second, many of the Judeans were taken into Babylon itself. And so, we find two communities of Judah in exile. We find the people from Judah scattered in the dispersion, or diaspora, and the people of Judah remaining in Babylon.

We read of this account in

2 Chronicles 36:17-21 ⁷ Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans (Babylonians), who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸ **And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon.** (probably includes the ark of the covenant) ¹⁹ And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. ²⁰ He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

Notice here that Babylon destroyed the temple of God and took all of its furnishings. Some people have wondered where the Ark of Covenant is? And the answer, according to Scripture, is that it was taken into Babylon and lost.

GOD'S PRESENCE WAS NOT FOUND IN THE TEMPLE ANY LONGER. We skipped over this last time because of time, but Ezekiel is a book where we see God's Spirit leaving in stages. He leaves the inside of the Ark and hovers over the outside of the ark. He leaves the Holy of Holies and moves to the outer courts. He leaves the temple and hovers over Jerusalem. He leaves Jerusalem and is gone. **DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE DEVASTATION OF THIS. God picked up and moved out.** After God moves out, Babylon comes down and defeats Judah and takes them into captivity because of their continued rebellion and spiritual adultery of worshipping other gods.

Now, as 70 years approaches, some of the prophets begin looking for the restoration of Judah. God promised that their discipline would last for just 70 years. And as the 70 years approach, the prophets begin looking.

Finally, something happened.

In :20 above, it says that the people of Judah became servants to Nebuchadnezzar, **UNTIL** something happened. What happened? Persia came to power and conquered and destroyed Babylon. And with a new world power, came a new world king.

Look with me at 2 Chronicles 36:22-23.

2 Chronicles 36:22-23 ²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ²³ "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. **Let him go up.**'"

To the Judeans that were in Babylon, Cyrus made a change. Now, let's be clear, where were most of the Judeans? That's right, they were in the diaspora. But here, Cyrus calls the Babylonian Judeans, permission to return to the land of Israel.

Now, with that in mind, let's look at Ezra 1:1-3.

Ezra 1:1-3 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ² "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³ Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel- he is the God who is in Jerusalem.

We are now in Scene Three of Act One.

Remember, Act One is God providing Salvation for the World.

Scene One — God makes a Great Nation from Abraham.

Scene Two — God Scatters Judah Across the World.

Scene Three — God calls back a Partial Remnant.

Scene Three has Four Steps.

With Cyrus' decree, there is a return of Judah to the Land of Israel. The First Return is recounted for us in **EZRA 1-6**.

STEP ONE — THE RETURN UNDER ZERUBBABEL TO REBUILD THE SECOND TEMPLE.

This happens in 538 B.C. Now, the defeat of Israel by the Babylonians began in about 609-608 BC and the first deportation to Babylon occurred in about 605 BC. Daniel and the stories of Daniel in Babylon are stories of the first deportation. Other deportations happened, and Babylon finally came and ransacked and destroyed Jerusalem completely in 586 BC. The 70 years of Babylonian influence and power ends in 538 BC.

What is amazing is that archeologist have uncovered BABYLONIAN WRITINGS that confirm the Biblical story. There are writings describing the defeat of Judah and even the order of the towns that were defeated, that perfectly align with the biblical account. There is also Babylonian writings which describe the Judean king in exile and even his rations that were allowed while he was in captivity. Remember too that Daniel and his friends had "rations of food" in Babylon.

This is what happens in the 6 chapters of Ezra.

- Chapter One - Cyrus of Persia's Decree to Return and the Collection of Treasures to Rebuild the Temple.
- Chapter Two - A list of those who returned — 49,897 people returned.
- Chapters 3-6 - The Construction of the Temple - Completed and Dedicated.

There is a very important passage I want you to see. It relates to the rebuilding of the temple. After the foundations were laid, we read this ...

Ezra 3:10-13 ¹⁰ And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. ¹¹ And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ¹² But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, ¹³ so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.

Why were these older priests crying?

Because only a "shell" of a temple was being built. All the young people were rejoicing, but those who had seen the original temple and the great glory of Israel and the great glory of Solomon's Temple were WEEPING.

They had no ark, no shekinah glory of God! This temple was not a "real" temple in a sense. It was not what they had before. It was empty compared to the great temple of Solomon when God's presence was mighty. JUDAH IS STILL IN SLAVERY. They still belong to Persia! It seems that God is not their King, and they will have no more earthly kings ever again.

Mark this well ... The day of Israel as a Great Nation has ended.

The construction of the second temple took about 20 years. **And then there is about a 50 year gap between what happened in Ezra 1-6 and what happened in Ezra 7-10. And in that 50 year period, we have the book of Esther.**

Historically, the books go like this.

EZRA 1-6 — REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE UNDER ZERUBBABEL (50 year gap)

ESTHER

EZRA 7-10

So let's take a moment and consider what happens in the book of Esther.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

The book of Esther concerns what happened in the capital city under King Xerxes who reigned from 486-465 BC. Xerxes is also known as "Ahasuerus". Xerxes or Ahasuerus is the king that arose after Cyrus. Cyrus is also known as Darius.

Cyrus = Darius I
Xerxes = Ahasuerus

A surprising story happens during the reign of Ahasuerus. **Whereas Judah was secure during the days of Cyrus, during the days of Ahasuerus, there was a threat of Judah's extinction.**

ESTHER'S STORY

Five Main Characters in the Book

- King Ahasuerus
- Queen Vasti — the wife of the King.
- Haman — one of his top officials.
- Mordecai — an uncle of the Jewish girl Esther.
- Esther — Jewish girl who has lost her mother/father.

The Story of the Book of Esther

- Chapter One — Queen Vashti will not Dance for the Party of Ahasuerus. (He wants her to come out and dance in her crown in 1:11. This might mean that he wanted her to dress ONLY in her crown. She refuses to be humiliated and Ahasuerus dethrones her. He banishes her and the law of the Medes and Persians is enacted, that law which cannot be altered, that she will never come before him again).
- Chapter Two — A Search for a New Queen. (The King searches for a new queen. He sends for the most beautiful girls of the kingdom, and Esther comes. She is a Jew, but her uncle Mordecai tells her not to make this known.)
- Chapter Three — Haman Plots to Kill the Jews (Mordecai, Esther's uncle, refuses to bow down to Haman, an official under King Ahasuerus. Haman talks the King into making it a law of the Medes and Persians that the Jews will be attacked and killed and slaughtered.
- Chapters Four-Five — Esther Decides to Help the Jews (She tells Mordecai that she will act to help the Jews -- Haman plots the killing of Mordecai because he sees him everyday in the gate and has a gallows built).
- Chapters 6-7 — Mordecai Triumphs Over Haman (Mordecai is Remembered Favorably because he previously revealed a plot against the king, Esther Reveals Haman to be a dirty dog; and Haman is Hanged on His own Gallows.

- Chapters 8-10 Esther Saves the Jews (Esther risks her life by going before the King when she has not been requested. The King has favor on her and comes up with a second plot to save them. He cannot revoke the first allowance of the enemies of the Jews to destroy them, but he can warn the Jews. He does, and in chapter 9, the Jews overcome their enemies. A Feast was enacted and Mordecai rose to power in the Kingdom.)

Now there is a problem with the book of Esther. Anyone know what it is?

It is a most unusual book of the Bible. **It is the only book in the Bible that does not mention the name of God or Yahweh.** Why? Because it is a book demonstrating again the great PROVIDENTIAL CARE of God for His people and His plan of redemption. NOTHING WILL STOP THE PLAN OF GOD FROM PROGRESSING ACROSS THE EARTH.

SCENE THREE — GOD CALLS BACK A PARTIAL REMNANT

- **STEP ONE** (Key Word - Temple Built) Ezra 1-6 FIRST RETURN (49,000) AND REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE UNDER ZERUBBABEL.
- **STEP TWO** (Key Word - Future Built {Extinction Avoided}) – Esther - PROVIDENTIAL CARE FROM EXTINCTION IN ESTHER
- **STEP THREE** (Key Word — People Built) - Ezra 7-10 SECOND RETURN (1,754) AND SPIRITUAL RENEWAL UNDER EZRA.

The problem in the last part of Ezra is the **mixed marriages of Judah**. The people of Judah are now sensitive spiritually. **Mixed marriages were a problem because it led to mixed religion.** God had warned Israel about this and now Judah repents and separates themselves from their pagan wives.

STEP FOUR — (Key Word — Wall Built)

Neh. 1-13 — The people of Judah, who have returned from captivity, are unprotected. Nehemiah returns to rebuild the wall. Spiritual renewal takes place again.

During these days, three prophets spoke: Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi.

This takes us up to about 400 B.C.

Then we have 400 years of silence, until the coming of John the Baptist.

Before we end this lesson — let's talk about the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Who knows what these books are about?

The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles covers the exact same history covered in the four books of Samuel and Kings. Why two episodes covering this same history?

Compare these verses.

II Samuel 7:1-2 with 1 Chron. 17:1-2

Chronicles omits "rest from enemies" in :1

Chronicles calls the ark the "ark of the covenant" rather than "of God."

Why?

Compare these verses.

II Samuel 7:14-15 with 1 Chron. 17:13.

Chronicles omits "discipline" section of Samuel.

WHY?

Compare these verses.

II Samuel 21:15-18 with 1 Chron. 20:4-5

Chronicles omits the time when David was tired when fighting the Giants.

WHY?

Let me give you an illustration. Let's say that you have a friend that has lost his child in a mountain climbing accident. And one summer, you go out west and you have a great vacation with your family. You do all sorts of things over the summer. You white water raft, you pan for gold, you take pictures, you fly fish for trout. And you also go mountain climbing. When you come back, your friend asks you about your vacation. You tell him everything you did, but you are hesitant to tell him about mountain climbing. Why? Because that's not what he needs to hear. **You share the parts of the story that will help him, and you leave out the parts that will hurt him.**

Chronicles was written more than 100 years after the books of 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. It is a retelling of the story, but it has a similar purpose. **It is meant to encourage the returning remnant and not to mention the things that are too sensitive.**

- The “Ark of God” is changed to the “Ark of the Covenant” because the returning remnant does not have the ark anymore. It has been destroyed. They have only the covenant.
- The PROMISE OF DISCIPLINE in the prophecy of Nathan is omitted because the people of Judah had already been disciplined.
- The “weariness” of David is omitted because they need to know of God’s strength, not David’s old age and growing weakness.

The story is re-written and edited, like a sermon, so that the people of Israel will know that God still loves them, that He still has a plan for them, **even though the temple is not as nice, they have no king, and they are slaves of another nation.**

AND WITH THAT THE OLD TESTAMENT ENDS. THERE IS FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF SILENCE BEFORE JOHN THE BAPTIST COMES.