

Revival in the Book of Ezra - Part 1

by Roy Hession

The sermon explores the revival and rebuilding of the temple in Israel, highlighting the importance of repentance, humility, and listening to God's voice.

Duration: 54:01

Scripture: Psalm 102:13, Daniel 9:3, Matthew 18:20, Ephesians 2:21

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of God's word being a living and active force. He questions why God would warn the people of Nineveh about their impending destruction and emphasizes the importance of God's word being fulfilled. The speaker then mentions the signs that were present as the seventy years of captivity were coming to an end, with Daniel being a significant figure. The sermon focuses on the last days of Jerusalem and the prophet Jeremiah's warnings that went unheeded, leading to the city's ultimate downfall. The speaker concludes by stating that despite the ruin, God's revival can still occur, and the sermon will explore the process of rebuilding after the destruction.

Transcript

Time of Israel's history. Indeed, the more I give myself to the study in mind, the more vital and important it is in our understanding of the whole Bible, Old Testament especially, and in the truths that come from it. The period we're going to think about is that period in Israel's history when the great calamity had happened, foretold by prophets again and again, but which they refused to believe was imminent.

But it happened. That time when Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city, and the city was broken up, and Israel and Jerusalem fell to her foes. They did thorough work.

They destroyed that city. They broke down its walls, brick by brick, so there wasn't a wall left. They burnt, alas, that most sacred edifice of all, the temple of the Lord, took away its treasures, its gold and its brass, and left it but a smoking ruin.

And more than that, great companies of Judah were taken away captive. There were successive waves of deportations. It doesn't often happen today.

When a whole nation is deported from its land and taken as slaves to another country, to Babylon, but that's what happened to them. And they remained for 70 long years in Babylon, while their own land lay

waste, their city and temple in ruins. It really seemed the end of the world.

But then the unbelievable happened. There was a change in dynasty. The Babylonian empire fell to the Persian empire, and Cyrus became the emperor instead of Nebuchadnezzar and his descendants.

And one of the first things that Cyrus, king of Persia, did was to issue an edict that any who chose of this captive people in his midst could return to the land. He gave them every support they needed, even financial, and he commissioned that people to return there and build again the house of the Lord. Absolutely unbelievable.

It says the Lord stirred the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia. And so it is in the book of Ezra and in the book of Nehemiah, you have the story of that company that returned, some 50,000 of them, not a great many, though it was enough to rebuild temple and city and the whole national life again. And the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah tells how out of the rubble there was built another temple.

And out of the ruins a new city. And that's the period of time we're going to look at together. We're going to think not about the building of the temple, but the rebuilding.

It had been built once, it had been brought to ruins, but now God in his mercy and grace to Israel was sending them back to rebuild that temple. And what we've got here is a wonderful picture of the revival of the church. It isn't the building of the church that we're concerned about, but the rebuilding of it.

I was over in France for a conference of what they called pioneers. I didn't know what I was being invited to until I got there. I thought it was some youth movement, the pioneers, this conference.

It wasn't at all. There were 120 doughty warriors of God. And they were pioneers in the sense that they were church planters.

Men would give their lives, spend a few years in one place, plant a church, go to another and plant a church. Because as you may know, France is one of the most un-evangelized countries in the world. Africa is far more evangelized than France.

And they said to me, some of them, they said, do you have church planters in England? I said, no, we don't. We've got the churches, but they need reviving. That's what we need.

We need them replanted, done again. And that's what we've got a picture of here. In the rebuilding of the house of the Lord, we've got a picture of the reviving, not vival, but the revival of the church of God in our lands, beginning with ourselves.

So that really is the theme. You got it? Not revival. I don't like that word.

The revival of what? Revival is not all a wonderful experience that suddenly comes. No, no. The revival of something.

And the something is that group of which you're a part. You're one of the living stones in it. And the temple of the Lord of which we're part, its spiritual state today is very much pictured by the ruined temple in Jerusalem.

And God's great purpose of grace to rebuild that temple is a picture to us of his purpose of grace to rebuild the house of the Lord in our day, beginning, as I've said, with ourselves. And thank God that ruined temple

wasn't the end. God is the God of revival, both materially and spiritually.

And he set forth to rebuild through his returned people that ruined house. And thank God failure with us and our church is not final with God. I love every word that begins with R-E.

That's the Latin prefix which means again, God building again his house that's fallen down. He did it in Ezra's day, and spiritually he's doing it today. Now the story is told principally in the book of Ezra, but also in the book of Nehemiah.

Ezra deals with the rebuilding of the temple. What a story it is, and we're going to especially look at that. Nehemiah, we shall only just touch Nehemiah, that deals not with the rebuilding of the temple, but the rebuilding of the city, and the rebuilding of the walls of that city.

And along with the physical rebuilding, there was the moral re-establishment of things, both in Ezra and in Nehemiah. And really and truly, this is why you're given the long, long stories in the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, telling about king after king failed. Judah, after Israel parted from her, had twenty kings.

Nine were good, they did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and eleven did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. It's a great study. And why is there all this long, long bit of history, to prepare us for our subject today? Its culmination comes at the end of the book of Chronicles, where you see Jerusalem, the last days of Jerusalem.

In order then, to prepare you for the exciting new thing that God did in the midst of the ruin. So we're going to read the relevant portions for today, and then we're going to go through and see the successive stages by which the ruin was rebuilt. And we're going to learn much of God's ways in revival with us.

Now we're not going to read firstly, we're going to get into the first chapter of Ezra, but we must go to that passage that briefly summarizes the last days of Jerusalem. Who was it? Some great historian had his book, The Last Days of Pompeii. Here we have the story of the last days of Jerusalem, occasioned only through the unbrokenness of its king.

The one, the prophet, who was especially prominent at that time was Jeremiah. And he testified and testified, but they wouldn't hear. And therefore the final judgment became inevitable.

But thank God that wasn't the end. God was the God of grace, and we have the story of how God did something with the rubble. All right, let's look at the second book of Chronicles, chapter 36, verse 11.

And here is the last of the kings of Judah. But for him, the city would never have been destroyed and the temple broken. If he'd been willing to give in, as Jeremiah told him to, and submit to Nebuchadnezzar, whereas he might have lost their independence, the city would have remained and the temple would have stood.

But as we read, he wouldn't listen to Jeremiah, and the final catastrophe took place. I suppose you've been reading perhaps that book of Masada and saw perhaps the program about the last stand of the zealots, Jews against Nebuchadnezzar. It's only then that I realized what a terrible, terrible catastrophe it was that overtook Jerusalem.

Hasn't often happened, even since. It's outstanding on the page of history. Verse 11.

Zedekiah, he was a fellow, the last king, was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who made him swear by God, but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord, the God of Israel.

Moreover, all the chief priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord, which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord, God of their fathers, sent to them his messengers, rising early and sending them. Do you know that phrase, I counted up this morning, comes twelve times in Jeremiah and here.

Eleven in Jeremiah, one here. I like it. Rising up early and sending them.

Isn't that a quaint expression? I don't know what the other versions, I think, one says, he said to them persisted, but I rather like it. Rising up early and sending them. They rose with the sun, and they were there at the gates testifying to the people.

And the Lord, God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending them, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. No remedy, because there was no repentance.

Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew the young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or he that stooped for age. He gave them all into his hand, 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. And they burnt the house of God, and break down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon, where they were servants to him and to his sons, until the reign of the kingdom of Persia. And all this to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbath. For as long as she lay desolate, she kept Sabbath to fulfill three score and ten years.

Do you understand that about the land keeping Sabbath? It was a Mosaic command that the seventh year should be a year when the land had a rest, where you didn't till it, you didn't plant it, you didn't gather in harvest, it was left fallow. And I imagine that was good husbandry, but they never did it. They couldn't afford to do it, they thought.

And so one of the incidental purposes in the people being taken captive for 70 years was that the land might enjoy the Sabbath she hadn't done. And that 70 years was her Sabbath. But no Sabbath for Israel, who were taken as captives again into Babylon.

Now we have this wonderful bit. Now, in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished. Hello, there's another prophecy then.

Not merely the first one, that if they wouldn't break, they were going to captivity, but this second one, that this captivity was to last but 70 years. And as the 70 years drew near to its end, as the clock ticked on God's dial, something began to happen. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord

spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished.

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me. He hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judea. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord is God, be with him, and let him go up.

And so this great historical portion is leading us to this next exciting thing. God has not finally forsaken his land. So we go on for the first few verses of Ezra.

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, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord Jehovah, the God of heaven, hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth. How in the world did he know Jehovah, that Jehovah, the God of this pathetic little decimated nation, was the God of the whole heaven, who had given him the kingdom.

My inference is that Daniel, who had survived the change of dynasty, bore faithful witness to Cyrus, and Cyrus' heart was ready, and he began to believe that Jehovah, the God of Israel, was indeed the God of heaven and earth, and that God had given him the kingdom. I would write down Cyrus as another glorious Old Testament conversion. I have listed eight Old Testament conversions.

One day, when I have a chance to give a series of eight, we'll have a go. The great Old Testament conversions, and I would say Cyrus was one of the great thing for a Gentile to make such an acknowledgement. Verse three, Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Jehovah, the God of Israel.

He is the God, yes he's got it, which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the free will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. And so there you have the background for our first study.

Yes, the last days of Jerusalem. Now as I look at that passage, that last bit in Chronicles, I notice that reference is made to two words of prophecy that Jeremiah gave. The first prophecy related to the certain destruction of the city and temple, if they refuse to listen to the word of God and return to him.

And the second one refers to that other prophecy which he gave, in which judgment was softened by grace, that they were told it had to be a long time, but at the end of 70 years. He would visit his people again, and they would yet return. And that passage tells us the destruction was to fulfill the word of the Lord by Jeremiah, and so was their restoration.

He spoke two prophecies. And so it is, it is made quite clear that the calamity that fell upon Israel, was to fulfill the word of the Lord by Jeremiah. Jeremiah was essentially a prophet of doom.

He foretold this terrible thing, if they wouldn't heed God's word. But he was a weeping prophet. He took no pleasure in announcing the destruction of his own dear people.

And the God who sent him to give that prophecy, was a soft-hearted God, if you like, a weeping God, because we are told he sent his messengers, rising up early and sending them, because he had

compassion, verse 15, on his people, on his dwelling place. He had no desire to see the city destroyed. He was concerned for his own dwelling place, and he sent Jeremiah with these solemn prophecies of doom, not because he wanted to give them doom, but hearing those prophecies, it might be that they would heed them, and repent and turn.

God would forgive, and therefore the threatened doom wouldn't happen. And it was just because he loved them so much that God sent Jeremiah. And it was because Jeremiah loved them, that he gave the word, it cost him dearly, God said, you give it them, diminish not a word, it may be, it may be, they will heed.

And therefore always remember that the message of judgment is really an offer of mercy. He who has occasion to preach about hell, it's an offer of mercy, that you might never go there, that you might turn and return, and so you'll never get away from it. Our God's merciful and gracious, even in his most solemn messages.

Why did, for instance, God tell Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh that in six weeks' time he'd destroy them? Why did he just do it? They deserved it, because that message was really an offer of mercy. And they were given time to repent, which actually they did. Strangely, to the dissatisfaction of the man who gave the message.

Yes, a funny sort of evangelist was Jonah. But I want you to notice, if you get into the book of Jeremiah, you will notice that Jeremiah's denunciations are not so much about sin and going to idols and departing from the Lord, but rather on their refusal to repent and return to the Lord. His denunciations are reserved not for sin so much, but for unbrokenness.

Because that's just unbrokenness, the refusal to heed, the refusal to bow, the refusal to bend. And it says so. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees.

Why? What's the therefore? Because they wouldn't listen to those messengers and mocked them and turned them and persecuted them. And for that reason, this great calamity was prophesied. And had it been time we could read passage after passage, where you see here Jeremiah speaking ill, terrible words, I say again, not on sin so much, but on unbrokenness.

The truth of the matter is this, God cannot speak anything but ill against unbrokenness. No, not against sin firstly. Of course he judges sin.

But that's not the thing that really matters, strangely. Because if you repent, it's all over. But if you won't, then it's that attitude that makes disciplines, troubles, judgments, inevitable.

And this is what happened to Israel. And they went into captivity and their city was ruined just because their kings and leaders would not humble themselves before Jeremiah and the many other prophets. And for that reason, this is what I call the rhythm of the prophets.

I see it again and again. It's all sat out and it's always, therefore, this and this happened. Why? What is the therefore? Not because they sinned, because they wouldn't repent.

And the issue God has with us is not our sin so much, but our refusal to listen to him when he speaks to us about it. That's the thing that makes a Christian life go wrong. If a man's got a broken spirit and a contrite heart, he may have his failures, but he knows what to do.

And he's on the receiving end of the mercy of God all the time. But if he won't break, God has nothing for him but to have to discipline him in one way or another. And sometimes grievous things happen because, as in the case of unbroken.

And so, all that Jeremiah said would happen, did happen. When he talked about their city being destroyed, he said it can't happen to us. When he talked about that beautiful house of the Lord being burnt with fire, couldn't happen.

Just look at it. No, no, nothing will touch that. And these walls, nothing will happen.

And they really couldn't get themselves to believe it. But it happened nonetheless. And their noble city, and that beautiful house of the Lord, was left a smoking ruin.

Now, its application for us is simply this, that the state of the house of the Lord is in much the same state as we see here in Israel. And really, it's only because of unbrokenness, both corporately and individually. Do you see that you were intended to be the temple of the Lord? Ephesians 2 tells us there is a house much more beautiful and important than Solomon's temple.

In Ephesians 2.21, it talks about this wonderful temple that we are built, who are believers, upon the foundations, Ephesians 2.20, of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. That temple of the Lord, it wasn't a place of worship, don't think that. It was a habitation of God.

In the holy of holies was the Shekinah glory. It was God's habitation, in the same way today that the saints are built together to be a habitation of God, by the Spirit, God's meant to dwell among us. You get the same picture in the epistle of Peter, chapter 2, verse 4, to whom coming we read, as unto a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house and holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Yes. If we want the analogy, there it is complete. Please turn the cassette over now.

Do not fast wind it in either direction. In old times they had that habitation of God, that temple. In these days there's still a habitation of God but it's made up of living stones.

Each one who comes to Jesus Christ, another stone, building up this glorious temple in which God himself intends to dwell. But I want to suggest to you that that habitation of God by the Spirit, both corporately and individually, has been laid waste in various degrees. I believe it's true in Britain.

Something's happened among the saints. It's been, we've been laid waste. Individually, we're not always a habitation of God by the Spirit.

We ought to be anything but, and corporately. And I can only speak about my own country in contrast to other countries to which I've gone. And those who have travelled all come to say, what's happened to Britain? Things are not happening in Britain, they're happening in other parts.

The temple of the Lord has been laid waste and is in ruins. How's it with your church? And how's it with you individually? Could it be that living stones are not being added to that house? We're not fitly framed together? Anything but. Is that true in your church? A church? Habitation of God by the Spirit with all the

living stones fitly framed together? They're not fitly framed.

They're competing with one another. They don't love one another. We have our troubles, our divisions.

One man, one young man, who saw his father, the pastor of the church, suffer deeply at the hands of the church members, said to his dad, he said, Dad, that scripture which says where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst. It ought to be rewritten. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there's bound to be trouble.

What a terrible thing that that could even be thought and said. And I believe the temple of the Lord is in ruins. And if we're not fitly framed together with one another, to that extent we're not fitly framed with Jesus.

In fact, I would say too many of our churches are simply Jesus, the living cornerstone, yes, with a conglomeration of other stones lying around in some sort of close proximity, but not fitly framed into him or with one another. No new stones are being added. Some that used to be there aren't there.

And those that are there, somehow they've lost their shape. And I don't think we're exaggerating if we take that picture of that ruined temple of old to be a picture of things spiritual in our country. And it isn't only in association with others that we're to be a habitation of God by the Spirit, but individually.

It may be, it's a long time since you were really and truly, I was really and truly a habitation of God by the Spirit. And I believe we've got to recognise that fact. Because I want to say the one who's prepared to be honest about his present condition, he doesn't wreck his chances, he improves them.

Because the moment you're prepared to say that ruined temple is in some degree a picture of me, you become a candidate for restoring grace. And so this was the prophecy that they make reference. And those calamities happened according to the word of the Lord through Jeremiah.

That word that he's spoken on brokenness, I beg you, I say to my own heart, if God challenges me, even through what somebody else says, let me take it seriously. For my digging my heels in and saying, I'm right, they don't understand me, is enough to bring the chastening hand of God upon you, dear one. Not to lose your salvation, but he nonetheless has to chasten and humble.

If only by taking from you his peace, and the old time joy you're left empty. And so those calamities that fell upon Jerusalem and the temple, are a picture of how it is with the church. But the reason that we spend time, and the Bible tells us this, is to prepare us to see what grace is going to do in that situation.

Because God is the God of revival. With God, failure is never final. These wonderful words, beginning with Ari, God is prepared to do a work again.

In any old temple that's fallen down, and build it again. Once again to be what it was intended to be, a habitation of God through the Spirit. And that's what we really stand for in this conference, that our vision, if you want to know what it is, is the revival of the church, beginning with us.

We need it as much as anybody else. I don't know that we're called to be an evangelizing agency, we love it when those that don't know the Lord come and find the Lord. But most are the Lord's people, representing other churches.

And our vision is the revival of the church, because it's fallen down, it's in ruins, all too often. And so it was that there was another prophecy. There was another prophecy.

There it is in verse 22, 2 Chronicles 26, 22, Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord, this is verse 36, 22, Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia. And he made that proclamation. Unbelievable! He gave them liberty in return, and promised them every support for one reason, not that they should have it happier, but they should build the house of the Lord that had been broken down.

And in one place he adds, and pray for the king's sons. And what was this other prophecy that Jeremiah gave? Well I haven't quoted you the other, the darker prophecies, if you want to know one particular, Jeremiah 25, but there's so much of it. But what's this other prophecy? In order that the word of the Lord by Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus.

Turn if you will to Jeremiah 29. Now when they were taken captive, the first wave of deportees in the reign of Jehoiakim and Jeconiah, a whole 10,000 of them went off. There was a prophet among them.

And he says, you know I'm a prophet I am, and thus says the Lord, it'll be okay, in two years you'll see us back. And he comforted them falsely. He didn't call anybody to repentance, he just gave that prophecy.

And of course the wish was father to the thought and they fairly grabbed it, it'll be only for two years, we'll see you back, we'll be back, God will do it. But Jeremiah knew it was going to be different from that. And so in chapter 29 he sends a letter to those deportees in Babylon, and he says it's not going to be all that short boys.

You better settle down, and marry, and establish yourself, you're going to be in Babylon a long time, not two years. You're going to be there for no longer than 70 years. Verse 10, we haven't got to read the whole chapter, it's a lovely chapter, but here's the relevant part.

For thus saith the Lord, that after 70 years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts or the plans that I think toward you, saith the Lord. Plans of peace or welfare and not of calamity, says another version, to give you a future and a hope.

Now this is the context of that oft quoted place. He's giving those captives this ray of hope. No, not two years, 70 years.

Some of them of course won't even survive the 70 years, but at the end of 70 years, I'm going to come back to you, and I'm going to be a God of grace to you. Then ye shall call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you, and ye shall seek me and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart, and I will be found of you, and I will turn your captivity, and gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I've driven you, and will bring you again unto the place whence I cause you to be carried captive. That was the other prophecy.

70 years. And so they languished for 70 years. Oh, they vaguely remembered a little bit of what Jeremiah said, but there was no hope of it, because he had chance of it.

But in due course, the clock ticked out the years, 68, 69, 70. And a new emperor came to the throne, Cyrus. Had he come as I suggested he might have done under the influence of Daniel? But the Lord put it into his heart to have a concern for this captive people.

He'd heard tell that Jehovah, the God of heaven, whom he felt now had ready put him on the throne, had a house back there that was in ruins. And the unbelievable happened. And he gave the edict.

And as many as were willing to, they got settled down, not everybody was ready to move, but 50,000 of them made the long trek back to their own poor ruined land. If it was hard for them at an earlier time to believe that their land could be wrecked and destroyed, now that it had been destroyed and had remained though for 70 years, they could hardly believe it could be revived. And I want to tell you, when you know the situation you're in, when you know the situation your church is in, you can well believe just about that because of sin and unbrokenness it's been brought down.

But as for believing it could be revived, you can't take it in. Grace is harder to believe in than anything. It's so good.

It deals with impossibilities. But there's nothing too hard for Jesus. That's what he's coming to the world for, for ruined temples, for decimated lands, for lives that are messed up, for marriages that are broken down.

Can you believe he can yet revive that which our sin and unbrokenness has broken up? And this was the marvellous thing. They could hardly believe it. They'd given up hope.

And I want to tell you this. This is something that may help you in your study of the world. You know there are many glorious passages, in Isaiah in particular, bright ones, you see, like, you should go out with joy and be led forth with peace.

And the fields and trees will clap their hands, you know. Isaiah 55. And another one, and the highway shall be there, and away, and my people shall come to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads.

Do you know what that is? It's referring to this. Those prophets were foreseeing a day, first, when the land would be destroyed and the temple burnt, but they saw beyond that to another day, when the temple would be rebuilt, when God would bring them back and their nation reconstituted. And so it is you have these glorious things.

Remember that. Interpret it. You see, and what's so extraordinary in the book of Isaiah, for instance, is this.

That Isaiah prophesies a return from captivity before they've ever gone into captivity. He's only telling them they're going to go into captivity. But he always sees beyond judgment to a bright future of grace.

I tell you, grace has the top most place. My grace had got it all planned before sin came into the world, and the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. But that's the context of these passages, and rightly, of course, we pick them up and apply them to the Gospel.

Their return from Babylon is a picture of our return from whatever bondages we've got into. Read it that way. And then also we have to say, however, that these prophets in Isaiah, when he spoke of this return, really went beyond this immediate one.

They must have been speaking of this one, but this one, well, it only related about 50,000, but the final restoration of Israel and the coming of the Messiah, that's a bigger thing. And so it is, you find that. So this is very important.

And all that prophecy of Jeremiah, he was vindicated. And you know, God isn't content to leave his habitation amongst us in ruins. Maybe he's had to be humbled.

We've had to be made aware of the fact that something's desperately wrong, but he purposes to restore that which has been broken down. There's a very important verse to me, Psalm 102, verse 13. Psalm 102, verse 13.

Verse 13. Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion. Look at this.

For the time to favour her, yea, the set time has come. And that's what's happened. They say, well, this is how it's got to be.

But Jeremiah had spoken at the end of 70 years, God would visit them. And God's clock was ticking on. And the time to favour Zion was about to dawn.

Now, I believe we can take that for ourselves. Yes, we may speak about our parlous state and the parlous state of our churches. But I believe we can appropriate this verse for ourselves, that the time to favour Zion, even the set time has come.

And I'm glad I'm alive at this time. And I hope I shall still be here when that set time does come. It's already here.

Twelve years ago, in the tent at Clevelton, I remember using this text. Indeed, I've gone back to those recordings and I've spent hours listening to what was said there. And I remember saying, is this just a nice bit in the Bible study or is it God's word to us? The time to favour Zion has come.

I said, I believe it's God's word to us. I'm accepting it as God's word for me. I know the house of the Lord may in some degree be in ruins.

Now, that's no problem to Jesus. That's where he's at his best. Ruins? Rubble? That's where he builds his church or rebuilds it.

And I believe, in those intervening twelve years, we've been seeing that. I believe we're in the midst of God favouring Zion. Other countries are being thus favoured.

Zion is there and here too. Maybe you can report how you've begun to see that God's favouring Zion again. And we're in the midst of something that is going to be the glorious fulfilment pictured of here.

I have wondered, could in some sense, the charismatic movement be an answer to this word that in these intervening twelve years, the time to favour Zion has come and that movement has made a contribution. I believe it has made a contribution. And I personally am grateful, but I have certain concerns about it.

I don't think it's the whole answer to the church's need. And I'm interested to learn that the very leaders of that movement are much more concerned than any others of us are. And I read with great interest the articles of those leaders to those that they are leading.

And they're much more concerned probably than anybody else. I believe it's been part of what God has used. I believe we can thank God for any new life that's come.

And it has. But without going to details, there are, not only on my part and a few of us, but on the part of others, more in a position to judge causes for concern. But God's going to use everything.

And I believe there's even a larger, more glorious favouring of Zion to come. Why should it be that living stones are not being added to the church? Is not the gospel the power of God to salvation? You haven't got to have a big congregation to have conversions. Certainly in the Anglican church there's never a Sunday but there are unconverted people in the pew.

I remember when John Collinson went to one of his churches, I said, John, ask God to give you a conversion the very first Sunday. He did. Why not? It's a living word.

It ought to be happening. It's going to happen, friend. Provided you and I are willing for God's deeper work to begin in us.

So whereas we praise God for every sign that his favourings are, we're not going to latch onto one thing in particular. Our eyes are still toward the Lord and we're still going to offer ourselves as candidates for the grace that needs to meet our own deep need. Now as the seventy years ticked to their fulfilment, there were certain signs.

For those who had eyes to see, one of the signs was dear old Daniel. And Daniel has that great chapter of his, Daniel 9. What a chapter. Daniel 9. He was one of the captives.

He was not one of those that returned. He was one of those that thought it right to remain in Babylon, but he stood there for God. And in chapter 9 of Daniel, we read in the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans.

In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. He said, what was it that Jeremiah meant? Yes, seventy years. What was the year he prophesied? Let's have a look, see if I can discern.

Oh yes, that's it. It's almost seventy years now. He says, if that's true, we're on the verge of something.

And what did he do? He made a prayer. And it wasn't an ordinary prayer, it was a prayer of penitence. He confessed the sins of his nation and the rightness of the fact that they had been scattered.

Thou hast done right, for we have done wickedly. Oh, what a wonderful prayer. There are three great prayers of penitence in the Old Testament.

They indeed deserve special study. Ezra 9, we'll look at that, Nehemiah 9, and Daniel 9. And he began to bring the nation's need. Your people, Lord, redeemed from Egypt, here we are, out here.

And Daniel must have been but a kid when they were taken captive, but he could still remember. And it's that promise, that sense, that they were on the verge of it that got him praying. Spurgeon said, the prayer of faith is the decree of God beginning to operate.

And the fact that he was praying as he was, was one of the indications that the time to favour Zion, even the set time had come, and he began to get as low as he'd ever been before God. He didn't only confess his nation's sin, but he said, I and my father's house, we've all been involved in the apostasy. And I believe there is perhaps something of the prayer of faith going up.

But above all, do be clear of this, the best contribution you can make to the you. To what extent is the temple broken down in you? To what extent has the holy place been defiled? And we need to let God begin in us. But please, Lord, don't end with us.

Look at it. There are pastors here. Oh, dear one, be encouraged.

Could it be? Could it be? If you're willing to go deeper with Jesus, that the time to favour Zion has come for you? Why not? Why not? Oh, hallelujah, what a verse. Do you think you could take it for yourself? The time to favour Zion, even the set time, has come. Praise the Lord.

Don't you think he wants to? Of course he does.

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