

THE HOME-COMING OF THE JEWS

II Chronicles 36:11-21; Ezra 1:1-11; Ezra 3:10-13; Ezra 4:1-6; Ezra 6:14-16.

LESSON 90 -- Primary Course

MEMORY VERSE: “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory”
(I Corinthians 15:57).

Obedience and Disobedience

Many, many years had passed since the day that Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments written on tables of stone. God promised the people many good things if they obeyed these commandments. But He also said he would punish the people if they did not obey. For many years the people did not keep the commandments. They disobeyed the very first one: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).

Sometimes a father will say to his child, “If you do not obey me, I will punish you.” A faithful parent – one who loves the Lord – will not let his children “get by” with disobedience, but will punish them for it. God treats His children just as a good father treats his children – punishes them when they disobey. Let us never forget that God keeps His promises: whether He promises to send good things to the obedient, or punishment to the disobedient, He keeps His promises.

The Jews Taken Away

In the lesson last Sunday we learned that a forgotten book was found in the Temple. In this book – their Bible – the people read that God was going to send punishment upon them because they had not kept the commandments. But the good king, Josiah, had prayed to God, and God had promised not to send this punishment during his lifetime. God kept that promise, too.

God gave the people one more chance: He sent messengers to try to help the people love and worship Him. But they mocked the messengers and even killed some of them. Jeremiah, a prophet of God, warned the Jewish people that they would get into trouble because of their sins. He told them that they would be carried to a country far away and would have to stay there a long time – seventy years. Now the time had come when the words of this faithful prophet of God were coming to pass.

A wicked man, the king of Chaldees, came into their land and carried them far away from home, to the land of Babylon. This king also took all the gold and silver things, the vessels used in the worship of God, and many valuables out of the House of the Lord and brought them to Babylon – the city where he lived. But those things were to be used only in the House of God. It was wrong to take them away.

Temple Destroyed

The people from Babylon burned the beautiful Temple that Solomon had built – the House of the Lord. It had cost much money because many parts of it were made of gold. They tore down the walls around the city of Jerusalem and then the wicked kings with their armies could easily come in. They burned the homes of the kings and princes and great men and took their children away. All these terrible things happened to the Jews because they had turned away from the Lord and disobeyed Him.

Learning to Obey

At last they learned their lesson – they were taken far away from home and were kept in a strange land for seventy years. Now they learned that they must turn to God with all their hearts and give up idol worship, once and for all. They never again worshiped idols.

When God wants to teach us His will and wants us to obey Him, we may not learn our lesson the first time, or the second or the third time. Then God must punish us very hard. How often parents, also, must punish their children for disobedience. That causes the children to remember not to do the naughty things again.

Home-coming

When the seventy years were ended the Lord caused a king named Cyrus, who was ruling Babylon, to want to build a house for God in Jerusalem. He told the Jews that all who wanted to go back to their homeland could now go. Those who did not wish to go back were to give gold, silver, goods, and beasts, for the House of God. King Cyrus also brought the vessels, which had been taken out of the house of God in Jerusalem, and gave them to the Jews to take back home with them; there were 5,400 vessels. These were used when the people worshiped God, and were not to be used for any other purpose. It was a wicked thing to take them out of God’s House, and those who did it were sure to be punished.

A great many prepared to start back to Jerusalem to build the House of God. What a happy company – almost 50,000 Jews returning to Jerusalem! While they were in Babylon they were not happy. When the people there asked them to sing, they answered that they could not sing the song of the lord while so far away from their homeland. They did not play upon their harps, but hung them on the willow trees (Psalm 137). But all was changed now; they were once more a happy group of people, travelling toward home.

It was a long journey – hundreds of miles – and no doubt many of the people walked. We know that some of the priests carried the precious vessels for the Temple on their shoulders as they journeyed. They probably had covered wagons in those days, but there were all the camp things, their musical instruments, and many other things to bring. The horses, camels, mules and asses, numbering over 8,000, must have been heavily loaded. The joy in the hearts of the people at the thought of returning home made the way seem less hard. The young people who had made this same journey 70 years before, when they were driven away from home, were now returning – old men and women – bringing their children and grandchildren with them.

At last the long, hard journey was ended. One of the first things they did upon reaching Jerusalem was to build an altar unto the Lord and thank Him for bringing them home again. They offered sacrifices for their sins and perhaps asked God's blessings on the new Temple.

Temple Built

When the builders laid the foundation for the church, there were the priests all dressed in their robes with trumpets in their hands, and others had cymbals to praise the Lord. They played and sang together, praising and giving thanks unto the Lord. All the people shouted with a great shout when they sang praises to the Lord, because the foundation of the House of the Lord was laid, and they were going to have a beautiful place in which to worship God. They wanted no more idol worship.

But many of the old men, who had seen the Temple that Solomon built, wept, and the young men shouted aloud for joy. This must have been a very touching scene. But no doubt both old and young were happy to be back in their own homeland where they could worship their God in the City of Jerusalem. A prophet, named Haggai, told them these beautiful words: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former," which probably meant that God would bless them even more in the new Temple than He had in the old one.

When God is pleased with people who build a church in which to worship Him, often His presence is especially felt at the opening service. We are thankful that God still dwells among His people – those who believe and teach the whole Word of God. People can feel and know that God is there with them even if they cannot see Him. God has promised to be where two or three people are gathered to worship Him.

QUESTIONS

1. What prophet warned the people of God's punishment for their sins? II Chronicles 36:21.
2. What happened to the Temple that Solomon built? II Chronicles 36:19.
3. Who wanted to build a house for the Lord? Ezra 1:2.
4. How long were the Jews in captivity? II Chronicles 36:21.
5. To what country were they taken? II Chronicles 36:20.