

SESSION 3: GOD, GOSPEL, PEOPLE & MISSION IN THE EXILE AND RETURN

PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 9, 13; Daniel 2, 9; Joel 3; Zechariah 3, 13, 14; Malachi 3.

Summary of the Video: Module 4, Episode 3

In this short module, we turn now to Biblical Theology. We'll summarize all these topics in one session.

GOD

With Nehemiah 9, we wrestle with the faithfulness of God. If the people haven't experienced the promises of God, in what sense has or has not God been faithful? We will do the exercise together when we gather.

Then we look at divine judgment as seen through two prophets: Obadiah and Malachi. When God's enemies gloat over the destruction of God's people, God promises to bring his judgment upon his enemies.

On the heels of judgment, we talk about how God plans to cleanse his people (as seen in the prophets Zechariah and Malachi). God is not only a judge, but he is also a judge who commits himself to purifying his people.

GOSPEL

In some sense, the people still probably felt like "the Gospel" simply meant "returning from exile". But already, the prophets began pointing to something much grander than leaving one land and returning to another. We discover in the NT that only Jesus can bring an end to exile and deliver God's people in God's ultimate exodus.

By comparing Zechariah 3 and Romans 8, we gain a vivid picture of God declaring his people righteous, free from condemnation, delivered from the devil's accusation.

PEOPLE

The OT ends with prophetic promises through Haggai and Zechariah that God would bring his glory into the rebuilt temple. The temple had been rebuilt, but his glory hadn't come. So, what are we waiting for? (See John 1:14, 1 Corinthians 3:16 and Revelation 21:3 for the answer!)

God seems to judge some nations harsher and to restore others more quickly. Is that true? If so, why does he do it? Those who are "part of Israel's" (Ammon, Moab, Edom) family seem to be treated by a higher standard because of the familiarity. Ezekiel 25-29 seems to indicate different motivations that bring different measures of God's wrath.

For theological and apologetic reasons, we need to get into the teaching about “purity and the nations.” How can we address separating from foreign nations and peoples in the OT from a NT perspective? Andrew Wilson gives us four perspectives on how the church has viewed itself in reference to culture: bomb-shelter, mirror, parasite, city within a city. He would have us adopt the fourth option. By presenting a number of practical scenarios that come up in church life, Andrew Wilson allows us to see how important this question is for us.

MISSION

As we continue to (re)shape what “Mission” refers to, we look at Daniel’s visions in chapters 2 and 7 which describe the overthrow of pagan kingdoms and the establishment of God’s kingdom.

We end (appropriately) by talking about the Day of the Lord. Joel 3 and Zechariah 14 describe the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem and the ultimate enthronement/glorification of God.

There are such clear pictures of Messiah in the OT and yet it seems the people in the NT had a hard time seeing it and putting the pieces together to see Jesus as the fulfillment. Please comment. It’s really only at the glorification of Jesus in resurrection/ascension that the pieces begin to seem to fit with each other.

It seems that half of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9-12 is fulfilled and half is not. What’s going on? Perhaps the Jewish expectation was that it would all happen at once, but Christianity introduces a challenging notion of “already and not yet.” Some things happen right away (Jesus rides in to take his throne), some will happen in the future (judgment), and some begin to happen now but in an unexpected way (peace spreads throughout the earth).

Terms You’ll Need to Know:

Edom—the descendants of Esau.

Watch Video

Watch Module 4 Episode 3 (1hr 6 minutes).

Exile and Return

- I. The Story so Far
- II. The Return from Exile back to Judah
- III. From Malachi to John the Baptist
- IV. **God, Gospel, People, Mission**

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God: Divine Faithfulness in Nehemiah 9

Passage	People's unfaithfulness (if any)	Yahweh's faithfulness
9:6-8		
9:9-15		
9:16-21		
9:22-25		
9:26-31		

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God: Divine Judgment for Edom in Obadiah and Malachi

- At the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Edom (Esau's descendants) did not assist the Jewish people, but instead gloated over their defeat. Because they neglected their brotherhood with Jacob, Edom is destined for destruction by God. Obadiah, writing most likely just after 586 BC, promises this divine vengeance
 - “Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you [Edom], and you shall be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them” (Obad 10-11)
 - “How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out!” (Obad 6)
 - Divine justice is promised: “As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head” (Obad 15)
- Within 100 years, the nation of Edom was completely wiped off the face of the earth. (You never hear someone say, “I’m packing for my trip to Edom.”) Malachi reminds the Jews of God’s vengeance upon Edom
 - ‘Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares Yahweh. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.’ If Edom says, ‘We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,’ Yahweh of hosts says, ‘They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called “the wicked country,” and “the people with whom Yahweh is angry forever” (Malachi 1:2-4)
- The idea of Obadiah – ‘your deeds shall return on your own head’ – is central to God being just. A judge who simply lets people get away with injustice and evil is not a good judge
 - The language of final judgment according to works is present in the New Testament (Matthew 12:36-37; Romans 2:6-11; 8:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 20:13)
 - How does this idea of judgment according to works fit in with justification by faith?

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God: Yahweh and the Messiah Cleansing the People

Zechariah 13:7-9

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,
against the man who stands next to me,”
declares Yahweh of hosts.

“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered;
I will turn my hand against the little ones.

In the whole land, declares Yahweh,
two thirds shall be cut off and perish,
and one third shall be left alive.

And I will put this third into the fire,
and refine them as one refines silver,
and test them as gold is tested.

They will call upon my name,
and I will answer them.

I will say, ‘They are my people’;
and they will say, ‘Yahweh is my God.’”

Malachi 3:1-3, 4:1-2

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the
way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will
suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of
the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is
coming, says Yahweh of hosts.

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can
stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire
and like fullers’ soap.

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will
purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and
silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to
Yahweh ...

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven,
when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.
The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says
the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither
root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the
sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its
wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the
stall.

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Gospel: The True Return from Exile

- It is difficult to read the great end-of-exile prophecies of Isaiah 40-55, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and to see them completely fulfilled in the return from Babylon in the late 6th century BC
 - “Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress” (Nehemiah 9:36-37)
 - Daniel 9:24 clearly states that the exile will not last seventy years, but “seventy weeks” (i.e. 70 times 7 years). In other words, 539 BC is not the end of it
- Jesus brings a true end to the exile
 - Mark, the first Gospel to have been written, begins by quoting Isaiah 40:3, a prediction of the end of exile
 - Jesus announces the coming kingdom of God. Isaiah predicts that the end of exile happens when Zion hears “your God reigns” (Isaiah 52:7)
 - Jesus brings about the new exodus, freedom from slavery: “he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14)
 - God’s true enemies, not primarily Babylonia and Persia, are dealt with in Jesus: “he disarmed rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Colossians 2:15)
 - Jesus restores Davidic kingship: he “was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:3-4)

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Gospel: God Gives the Verdict

Compare Zechariah 3:1-5 and Romans 8:31-34

Who will accuse God’s elect?

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Yahweh, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

Who is the condemner?

And Yahweh said to Satan, “Yahweh rebuke you, O Satan! Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?”

God is the one who justifies

Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.”

Christ is the one who died ...

And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.” And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments.

He who did not spare his own son ... will he not also grace us with all things?

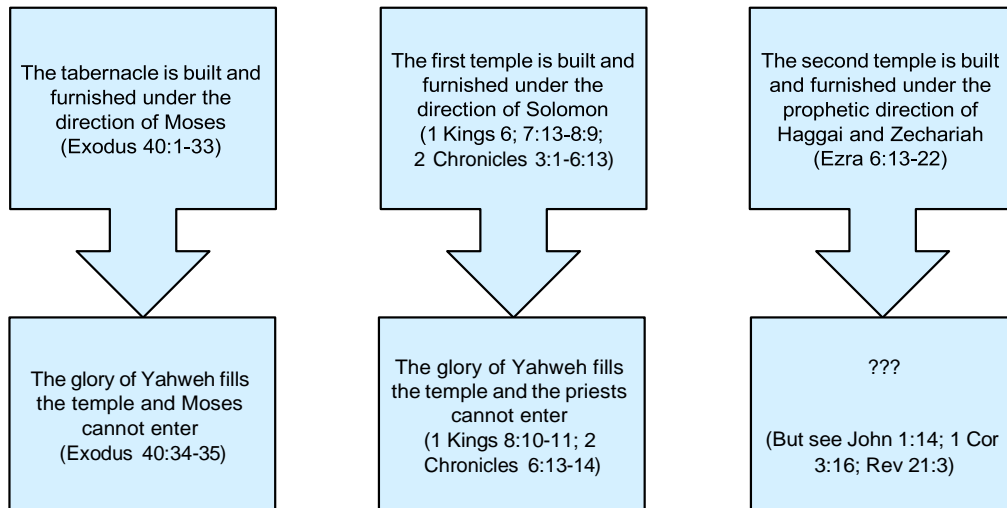
If God is for us, who is against us?

And the angel of Yahweh was standing by.

... who is also at the right hand of God, who is also interceding for us!

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People: “The Latter Glory of this House Shall be Greater than the Former”



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People: Purity and the Nations

- One of the main issues brought up in Ezra-Nehemiah is the issue of separation from the nations
 - Zerubbabel forbids the people of the land to help with building the Temple (Ezra 4:1-3)
 - Ezra commands the Jews to put away their foreign wives (Ezra 9-10)
 - The Israelites separate themselves from all foreigners. Presumably, this involved more than just their foreign wives (Nehemiah 9:1-2)
 - Nehemiah says that he “cleansed [the people] from everything foreign” (Nehemiah 13:30)
- Is this idea of separation and purity a mandate for the New Covenant community? How does the New Testament understand purity?
 - Between Jews and Gentiles? (cf. Acts 10; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-22)
 - Between the Church and the world? (Jas 1:27; Eph 4:17-24; 2 Cor 6:14-18)
- This brings up the question of how we now work this idea out under the new covenant. How should the church relate to the surrounding culture?
 - Church as Bombshelter: “Let’s huddle together and never interact with the dirty world”
 - Church as Mirror: “Stuff purity! Let’s just do whatever the culture says.” Are we seeing this with recent debates on gay marriage?
 - Church as Parasite: “Let’s use some fancy ways of communication the culture gives us, but let’s not serve our community or city”
 - Church as City within a City: “We are here to seek the welfare of the city we live in but without compromising our holiness”

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People: Divorce and Intermarriage

Questions on Divorce (Ezra 9-10; Neh 13)

"My wife is a non-Christian. She won't accept Jesus. Ezra 9-10 suggests I should divorce, right?"

"How come Ezra commands divorce when Jesus said it was only allowed because of hardness of heart?"

"Can I go out with this non-Christian? We're under the New Covenant now, right?"

"Can I marry someone who is of a different race?"

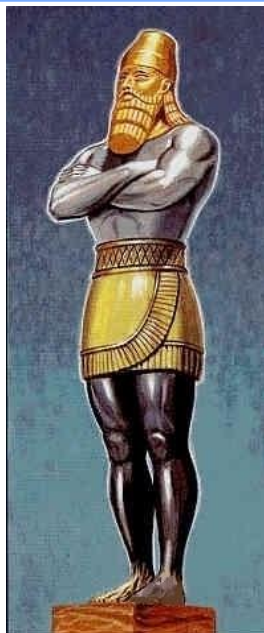
Ezra is worried the 'holy seed' will be mixed. How come Paul speaks about an unconverted husband or wife being 'made holy'?

"Mark's wife has become a Muslim. Shouldn't he divorce her?"

How does the Ezra-Nehemiah story dovetail with the Exodus-Numbers story? How might this help us make sense of the restrictions on foreigners here?

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Mission: The Mountain that Fills the Whole Earth



- Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 is probably the best known prophetic passage from the book of Daniel. It speaks of various kingdoms (or kings) being destroyed, and overtaken by a kingdom which is set up by God himself, and which fills the whole earth
 - Traditionally, the scheme of four kingdoms is understood to refer to the following empires: Gold: Neo-Babylonian (until 539 BC); Silver: Medo-Persian (539-331 BC); Bronze: Greece (331-63 BC) and Iron: Roman (63 BC onwards)
 - Most critical scholars reject this understanding, but this is often because of their assumption that prophecy cannot be predictive (although see Goldingay's commentary on Daniel)
- Whatever precise kings or Empires we assign to the various parts of the statue, the message of the vision is clear: all these empires, despite their wealth (represented by Gold and Silver) and strength (Bronze and Iron – see chapter 7) will come to an end. However, God's kingdom will not
 - Unlike worldly kingdoms, God's kingdom will be everlasting (notice the similarity of ideas with Daniel 7:14)
 - Unlike even the greatest worldly kingdoms, the kingdom of God will be truly worldwide – the ultimate fulfillment of the prophetic burden for the Glory of Yahweh to fill the whole earth
- Jesus, in the parable of the unfaithful tenants (Matthew 21:33-44), seems to identify himself with the stone which crushes the empires
 - He combines a quotation from Psalm 118:22 (speaking of a rejected but vindicated Davidic king) with the idea of a stone crushing someone. Note also the *ben / eben* play on words
 - Rather chillingly, in this passage it is not on the pagan empires that the stone falls on, but rather on the religious leaders of God's people. Anyone who sets himself up against God will be crushed

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Mission: The Day of Yahweh and the Return to Zion

- The expression “day of Yahweh” (*Yom Yahweh*) probably appears firstly in book of Amos (8th century), denoting judgment and then restoration, and recurs throughout the prophets (Isa 13; Jer 46:10; Ezek 30:3)
- In Joel 3 and Zechariah 14, we find elaborate and similar depictions of what this day of Yahweh, the day of judgment will look like
 - It is associated with the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem (Joel 3:1, 17-18, 20; Zec 14:1, 10-11, 20-21)
 - It is the nations, and not Judah, that Yahweh enters into judgment with (Joel 3:2-8, 11-12, 16, 21; Zec 14:3, 12)
 - Yahweh is the one who does the fighting/judging (Joel 3:2, 11-12; Zec 14:3-4, 12)
 - Yahweh himself comes with his holy ones (Joel 3:11-12; Zec 14:5; cf. Jude 14)
 - In Zechariah, the remnant of the nations turn to serve Yahweh (Zec 14:16-19)
 - Also in Zechariah, this judgment is associated with Yahweh becoming king over the whole earth (Zec 14:9; cf. Isa 52:7)
 - Malachi says that the great and awesome day of the LORD will be preceded by the coming of Elijah, who will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers (4:5-6)
- The return of Yahweh to Zion is another related theme, and this is pictured in beautiful terms
 - Mountains flowing with wine, hills flowing with milk, fountains coming to water the deserts (Joel 3:17-18)
 - Old people sitting outside in the city, with boys and girls playing in the streets (Zec 8:3-5)
 - Following the king's humble entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, weapons will be abolished, and peace will spread throughout the earth (Zec 9:9-12)

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GROUP MEETING:

Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification.

1. Together, do the exercise on God's faithfulness in Nehemiah 9. (See PowerPoint slide.)

2. Describe some of what you've learned about God's judgment from this session

3. How would you use “end of exile” or “exodus” to communicate the Gospel in your culture? What Scripture passages would you build your picture from?

4. Try to think of a “purity and separation” issue that presents itself in your culture. Talk through that issue in light of what you’ve learned in this session.

5. All empires come to an end (according to Daniel 2). How might we use this insight in talking to our non-Christian friends about the Lord?

6. Jews in the first century were waiting for “Jesus to finish what he started.” What would you like to see Jesus finish doing in your community, in your church, and in the nations?

Meditation on Scripture

Pick verses from Nehemiah 9 that stood out in your discussion.

Obadiah 15

Zechariah 3:1-5

Malachi 3:1-4

Putting This Session into Practice

In this session, the contrast between judgment and salvation appears stark. God’s justice can be seen in its fullness. Salvation comes in full relief. This week, in your times of prayer and worship, ask the Lord to keep this contrast strongly expressed. Attempt to go as deep as you can in meditation on God’s judgment and do the same for his salvation.