

## The Gospel of the Kingdom

### Week 6 - Day 1: Israel Returns

**Daniel 9:3-5 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: “Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.”**

We pick up the Kingdom story with the book of Daniel as the Israelites find themselves in Babylon. There are many jaw dropping moments where Daniel and his friends stand up for the Lord even when it meant they would potentially lose their life. You might be familiar with these stories; the Daniel fast, the fiery furnace, the illegal prayers, or the lion’s den. If you are not, I would encourage you to check out the book of Daniel and those incredible stories!

However, not all of God’s people had the same courage. There was still doubt and ungratefulness from God’s people in exile. They constantly fought the battle within themselves turning to their own desires rather than to God’s glory and His Kingdom. They continued to bow the knee to the kingdom of the serpent...

When will this cycle of sin ever stop?!

Daniel witnessed this with God’s people and took it upon himself to pray for their unfaithfulness. He took the blame and responsibility upon himself with faith and hope that the Lord will keep His promises that He has made up to this point. Daniel knew in His heart that God’s people were in need of a Savior, the promised King who would deliver humanity from the kingdom of sin and bring us back into God’s family under God’s rule in His kingdom space.

**Daniel 7:13-14, 27 I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.**

**And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.**

As we have seen in the kingdom story so far, humanity constantly falls short. We are in need of someone who would be like us, like a **son of man**, to advocate on our behalf. However, who would be worthy enough to go up to the Lord?

As we all continue to rebel, God’s story continues to unfold with a hope that points to His promises. The pattern is no different in the era of exile.

**Ezra 1:2-4 This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”**

After 70 years in EXILE, God’s people were allowed to return to the kingdom land that He had promised to Abraham years ago! The book of Ezra reveals God’s faithfulness by the way He fulfills His promise of salvation and restoration of His kingdom people. Just look at how the 70 years of exile fulfills this exact prophecy from Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 29:10-11 For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope**

He loves His people so much and wants to bring His blessings through them! He restores their future and gives them hope! In the same way, He picks us up and restores us, even when we constantly turn from Him.

Do you remember a time you were wounded? Maybe it was from a hike, a sport, or even in your heart. I remember one time I hurt my knee really bad and needed to have surgery in order for it to be fixed. The initial pain was awful, but then I had to face months of recovery. Everything in a lot of ways was upside down and I kept asking myself “what if?” Then finally the day came where I could truly walk, it was glorious!

In a lot of ways God’s people felt broken and cut off, but our God wants to give His family a hope and a future! So how would all of this turn out? Would the people take advantage of the opportunity God had given them to repent from their sin? Would this be the era when the *Son of Man* in Daniel’s vision comes to take the throne? When God’s people head back to the promised land led by Zerubbabel (descendant of David), the first thing they attempt to do is rebuild the temple to God’s kingdom space. Here is what happens:

**Ezra 3:11b-12 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. 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.**

**Ezra 4:1-3 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers’ houses and said to them, “Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here.” But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers’ houses in Israel said to them, “You have nothing to do with us in**

**building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.”**

We are never told that the Lord takes up His residence in this new temple. Furthermore, the elders complain that it is not as nice as Solomon’s temple. Instead of the nations being welcome to participate in the blessings of God, they are turned away. This is not the Kingdom of God that we have been anticipating!

Next, Ezra returns to Israel and is passionate about teaching the commands of God. Would this academic effort restore God’s kingdom rule over His people? Here is what happens:

**Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.**

**Ezra 10:2-6 While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. Then Shekariah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it.” So Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested. And they took the oath. Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.**

In His law, God commanded Israel not to intermarry with foreigners (Deut. 23:1-4). At the same time, God’s heart breaks over divorce (Mal. 2:13-16). Here we have both! Just like the foreigners who wanted to participate in the temple construction, we see the women and children being sent away from participation in God’s kingdom family. This is not the Kingdom of God that we have been anticipating!

Finally, Nehemiah’s passion was to rebuild the walls of the great city of Jerusalem. Perhaps if the city walls were rebuilt, then Israel could become the mighty city it once was:

**Nehemiah 1:2-11 They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.**

**Nehemiah 4:7-8 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.**

Instead of a *wall-less* kingdom that would bless the nations and bring peace (Zech. 2:4-5), the rebuilding of the wall sparks conflict between God's people and the nations. This is not the Kingdom of God that we have been anticipating!

Even after spending 7 days reflecting on the laws given to Moses, we read that God's people continued to neglect the Sabbath, their temple duties, and set up markets around the walls. God's kingdom people had a fundamental misunderstanding of what it meant to live under God's kingdom rule and in God's kingdom space. This generation clearly remained under the power of the kingdom of sin.

This pattern may feel so repetitive to you by now, but the Old Testament is written this way to describe who we are as humans. I am sure there have been plenty of times where you have "that will never happen again", or "Lord if you give me \_\_\_\_\_, I will never \_\_\_\_\_".

Perhaps you feel like the kingdom in your mind is better than the one God wants to establish? I am constantly reminded of this kind of rebellion not only in myself, but as I raise my kids. As parents, there are consistent moments of correction yet my children do not always listen. I show them what to do and what not to do, but they still want to touch the stove when it's hot. We go through this same habit even as we grow up. You may be going through a similar type of thing at home with your parents or friends. They may tell you to do something, most likely trying to help you, but for whatever reason you think you have a better idea. Sometimes it works out, but most of the time we fall short again and again.

Yet no matter how much we may sin, have good intentions and mess up, or try our best to just fail again, God in His mercy is still moving His kingdom story forward!

Who would be the *Son of Man* that would come and put a stop to this ugly pattern of sin?

The Hebrew Bible concludes with the collection of Chronicles. Essentially, the Chronicles are written to restate the history of Israel. This time, the Chronicles come at Israel's history from a perspective centuries after the Babylonian Exile (a key difference from Kings). This author has a fuller picture of the Old Testament! The chronicler restates genealogies, the stories of David, and the stories of Israel's kings to prove that the one we have been looking for - the seed of the woman, the descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Judah and from the line of David, the Good Shepherd, the Suffering Servant, and the Son of Man - has *still* not appeared.

However, we are told that the Decree of Cyrus sets in motion a timeline (see 70 weeks in Dan. 9:24-27) as we await the promised Messiah and deliverance from sin. Pause for a moment and compare the last sentence of the Hebrew Bible to Ezra 1:2-4 listed above!

**2 Chronicles 36:22-23 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: "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.' "**

You will notice that in the last sentence of Chronicles, the Decree of Cyrus is cut off. It is as if the Chronicler is telling us to start the countdown as we await to meet the *Son of Man*!

-Austin Foxworthy

**Share the Gospel:** Even though Israel returned from Babylon to their promised land right on schedule, they still could not defeat the kingdom of sin! Daniel foreshadows the one like a son of man who would establish his throne. Chronicles offers us one last retelling of Israel's history before the countdown to the Messiah begins!

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers: