

Knowing The Message

Week 3 - Failure & Commitment (6/15)

Even though God blessed Israel, forming them into a special nation with land and his own laws, Israel failed to fulfill their role as God's witness to the nations. As Israel wavers in their commitment to God, God demonstrates his continued commitment to them while at the same time being committed to justice and righteousness. God is determined to form a people who will be a faithful witness for God to the nations.

The story of 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings tells how Israel began as a faithful nation led by Samuel, Saul and then by King David. God made a covenant promise to David that there would always be a son of David on the throne in Israel. (2 Sam 7)

God also promised that his dwelling place would be among his people. He would make his sanctuary among them. David's son Solomon built the temple, the sanctuary for the presence of God represented by the Ark. (2 Sam 7; Ezek 37:24f; 1 Kings 8-9)

When Solomon died the nation was divided into two kingdoms, one in the north called Israel and one in the south called Judah. God was angry with both kingdoms because of their continual sin and he punished them using foreign nations who captured them. In 722 BC the Assyrians captured the northern kingdom of Israel and in 586 BC the Babylonians took the southern kingdom into exile. (2 Kings 17; 25)

In the prophetic books of the Old Testament we see that God judged Israel and Judah because they had failed to create the kinds of nations that fulfilled their role as God's witness; imitating his character. They did not care for the poor and weak, they distorted justice, they pursued wealth, luxury, and pleasure at the expense of others, they worshipped other Gods and did not trust in God's provision. (Is 1:1f; 10:1-5; 43:8f; Jer 22:1-5; Hosea 4-5; Amos 2-6; Ez 5; 20)

God is just and loving. Despite their sin God remained committed to his people and his promises. When God punishes Israel for their failure he preserves a remnant of Israelites. It is an amazing story of love and commitment that demonstrates the extent of God's love for us. God even says that he will do more than simply restore Israel, he promised to recreate them, to make a new covenant commitment to them. But as we will see, God's new kingdom will not be like the old kingdom. (Is 10:20-25; 49:8-26; Jer 31:27-37; Ez 11:16-21; 18:25-32; Hosea 1-2)

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Discussion

- How would you summarize this story to someone in 5 minutes. What are the most important features?
- What do these events in the history of Israel tell us about God?
- Why does God make promises to David and the people that seem hard to keep?
- What role do the prophets serve to the nation? To God?
- What kind of nation did God want Israel to become? Why?
- If you had to list God's values, what would you list from this section?
- What do we learn about the kind of people, nations, community God desires?
- Based upon the kind of nation God asked Israel to be, what is the message that God was sending to the other "nations" through his witness nation?
- In what ways do you see yourself as a "witness" for God
- What are the parallels between God's selection of Israel as a witness nation and God's selection of the church as his witness community?
- What does your life communicate to the people around you? What would they conclude about God based on watching you?