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“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

God Still Cares

Central Truth: God can be trusted in trial, as well as in triumph.

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Topic: Discipline: Of Israel; Israel: Rebellion of; Mercy.

Discipline is a sign of love. It is not a way of saying, “I am mad at you for doing the wrong thing.” It is rather a way of saying, “I love you too much to let you follow the wrong course.” At no point is discipline more a sign of love than when God disciplines His people.

The Babylonian captivity of the kingdom of Judah was a discipline of God upon the nation He had chosen. The nation had been infected by idolatry from its inception. The final century of Judah's existence as a nation was marked by worship of the heavenly bodies, pagan gods, and almost every evil practice known among pagan nations. God had no choice but to discipline His people.

The judgment of discipline fell upon the nation, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple of God. Each was brought to almost virtual ruin. God had called and warned. His messages were ignored and His messengers abused. Rejection of the message and messengers was a rejection of God himself. God withdrew His protection from around His people and let sin take its course in all of its dire consequences.

Jeremiah the prophet wept over the fate which befell his nation. The book of Lamentations records his lament over the tragedy. Yet, even in his sorrow Jeremiah saw signs of God's mercy. He wrote, *“It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassion fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness”* (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

“God Still Cares” is the theme of today's study. It aims to inspire you to trust God during experiences of trials, knowing that He cares for you.

I. DISTRESS DOES NOT DENY THE CONCERN OF GOD

Three times the prophets of God cried out for Judah to repent. All cries were rejected. Once and again, and yet a third time, the Babylonian armies came into Judah and overran the land. Each time they departed with the treasures of the land, and thousands of the citizens were taken into bondage. The third time they came, they resolved to make an end. All the defenses of Jerusalem were destroyed, the temple was laid to ruins, and all but the poorest people of the land were deported to Babylon. After that, the prophets needed to cry no more except to say, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt” (Jeremiah 8:20, 21).

God did not forget or ignore the chosen nation after she had gone into captivity. He spoke through the prophet Jeremiah to send a letter to her in captivity (Jeremiah 29). He ministered to her through the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel, who were captives in Babylon with the rest. He was personally present in the foreign land with His people.

Ezekiel the prophet assured his deported and home-sick people of God's presence with them. He had a vision in which he saw the Shekinah glory of God — which dwelt between the cherubim above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies — move from its place to stand at the threshold of the temple (10:4). The glory of the Lord moved from the threshold of the temple to the east gate of the outer courtyard (10:19). Then it moved to the top of the Mount of Olives, which is on the east side of the city of Jerusalem (11:22, 23). Finally, it moved all the way to the land of Babylon where the Hebrews were held in their captivity (11:24, 25; 43:2). God's presence was personally with His people.

God still cares! Distress must not be interpreted as proof that He no longer cares. He cared then; He cares now. Cast the whole of your care — all your anxieties, worries, and burdens once and for all — upon Him, for He cares for you affectionately, and cares about you watchfully, (See I Peter 5:7 in The Amplified Bible.) God cares for YOU!

II. TROUBLE DOES NOT THWART THE PURPOSE OF GOD

The Babylonian captivity of the Jews did not mean God had given up on them and discarded them from His purpose. Trouble will never cause

God to give up as if He were unable to handle the situation. Jeremiah's message to the captives was very surprising. He said, "God has caused you to be in Babylon. Make the best of it. Be good citizens. Live normal lives. Eat, drink, marry, give in marriage. Bear children. Do not permit your numbers to be diminished, but increase instead. Be peaceable and pray for the peace of the city in which you are living. God is not through with you yet."

The promise of God's work through the Hebrew people goes all the way back to His identification of Shem (Genesis 9:27) and His selection of Abram (Genesis 12:1-3). The nation went through many "ups and downs" in her generations, but God knew all of it would happen before it came to pass (Genesis 15:13-16). None of the changing circumstances of the nation made any difference in God's purpose to work through it.

The Hebrews went into Egypt, prospered for a while, and then were placed in slavery. God came with the command, "*Let my people go*" (Exodus 5:1; 7:16; 8:1). They were still His people in spite of their circumstances. They rebelled against Him in the wilderness, but they were still His people. They faced fierce opponents in the conquest of Palestine, but they were still His people. They erred once and again during the days of the judges, but God kept sending them deliverers because He was full of compassion; He forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; many a time He turned His anger away (Psalm 78:38). The centuries of the Hebrew monarch witnessed revival and apostasy over and again. But God remembered His people.

God is always above the circumstances. Changing circumstances make a great deal of difference with people, but not with the infinite God. Troublesome times never thwart the purpose of God.

III. MEN DO NOT CHANGE THE TRUTH OF GOD

There have been false prophets in every generation of human history. Ever since Satan whispered the lie to Eve by the agency of the serpent, he has sought to change the truth of God or to cause people not to believe the truth.

There were false prophets in ancient Judah who spoke in the name of God, just as there were true prophets who spoke in the name of God. It was not always easy for the public to distinguish the true from the false. Since the false prophets declared a message which sounded good, whether it was true or not, they were generally more popular than the true prophets. The false prophets followed the Hebrew people into the Babylonian captivity.

They had previously declared that the Babylonians would not conquer the Hebrews (Jeremiah 27:9). Some were prophesying in Palestine that within two years the captivity would be overturned and the precious vessels taken from the temple would be returned (Jeremiah 28:1-11). Jeremiah was saying the captivity would last a full seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11, 12; 29:10).

“Who would the people believe?”

Thank God His truth does not vary with the changing thoughts of men. What is truth does not depend upon trends in theology. Some men have spoken in the name of God in every generation, but have not known the person of God or received the message of God. The truth of God stands sure.

Men who wish to be popular with men in the field of religion feel it necessary to be original and new in their ideas. That opens the door to all kinds of heresy. The devil is ready to direct someone who is willing to play “fast and loose” with the teachings of the Bible. The people of God must always be on their guard using this guideline: *“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”* (Isaiah 8:20). The child of God must stay close to the Word of God. There is no other dependable guide to belief or behavior.

IV. TIME DOES NOT CHANGE THE PLANS OF GOD

It might seem that God suffered a seventy-year delay in His plans for the Hebrew nation, because of the Babylonian captivity. Not so. He knew all the while it would take that seventy years to cure the nation of her tendency to idolatry. He scheduled that “stop over” for her to perform that very purpose. God does not look at time as humans do. *“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”* (II Peter 3:8). He is not affected by the changes of time. Therefore, time does not make any changes in His plans or in His performance of that which He plans.

“After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you” (Jeremiah 29:10). The Babylonian captivity of Judah was not a hindrance to God's plan. He said He had driven the people from Palestine; He had caused them to be carried away captive to Babylon. It was all His doing. Therefore, it was a part of His plan, not a hindrance to His plan.

Judah's absence from her Promised Land did not remove her from the mind of God. The words of the Lord toward His people are so beautiful they make one want to cry: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,*

saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jeremiah 29:11). Praise God for His thoughts toward His beloved people in every generation.

God’s announced purpose was to settle the Hebrew people in the Promised Land, make of them a great nation, and bless all the descendants of the world through the Christ whom He would send through them. The passing of seventy years during the Babylonian captivity did not change that plan. God said, “After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place” (Jeremiah 29:10). He will fulfill His promise to Abram, and to the world, in spite of man's failure. God's promises are as certain of performance and fulfillment as if they were already fulfilled. He who has promised is able also to perform (Romans 4:21). Neither the weakness of man, nor the rebellion of sinners, nor the passing of time, nor the changing of circumstances can keep the fulfillment of His holy purposes from coming to pass in the right way at the exact time.

Now, what does the study mean to you in terms of practical experience? It means you can trust God. It means He never forsakes His own. It means trouble is not an indication that God is gone, but may be only His means of working in your life a new way. On the basis of today's study, settle the issue in your heart once for all: God cares for you affectionately and cares about you watchfully. *“The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us”* (Psalm 115:12).

1. How is discipline a sign of love?
2. How does God discipline individuals?
3. How does God discipline a nation?
4. How can one know the love of God in trouble?
5. How can God fulfill His will in spite of man's failures?
6. How can a true prophet be distinguished from a false prophet today?
7. Why are God's plans unaffected by time?
8. What does Jeremiah 29:11 mean to you?
9. How can you trust God more completely?
10. How can you bear trials triumphantly?