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**“Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly” (Nehemiah 9:33).**

## **To Be Continued**

**Central Truth:** God's work through His people is not finished yet.

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**Topic:** Israel: Future of.

The college student wore a button on his lapel which read “BPWMGIFWMY.” It said nothing, but I was sure it meant something. At my inquiry, he explained, “It means Be Patient With Me; God Isn't Finished With Me Yet.”

All the nation of Judah might have worn such a sign during those troublesome days covered by this quarter of studies. She was going into sin, suffering discipline, turning back toward the Lord, going back into sin again, etc. At last she sinned beyond remedy, and nothing but severe judgment was left. God sent her away into exile in the land of Babylon. For seventy years the nation languished there, free in every way except the one freedom she most longed for — to return to her homeland in Palestine. Be patient, however, for God had not finished with her.

Today's study is entitled “To Be Continued.” The title suggests the idea that God's purpose in the Jews did not reach its conclusion with the close of the Old Testament period. He had promised Abram centuries before that He would bless all the families of the earth through his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3). That promise was not yet fulfilled. God's work with the Jews was “To Be Continued.”

## **I. ARE WE THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

Judah might well have asked that question, “Are we really the chosen people of God?” Her history hardly showed it. Of course, there were many

signs of God's blessings upon her which indicated she was His chosen people, but her response to His blessings was not what one would expect in a chosen nation.

The history of the nation of the Hebrews is a repetition of God's grace and man's rebellion. The period of the judges (which is continued through the period of the kings) was a repeated cycle of prosperity, apostasy, oppression, repentance, deliverance; prosperity, oppression, repentance, deliverance. Over and over history repeated itself.

One king would lead a revival, but the next king might turn the nation to grossest idolatry. For generation after generation, God dealt graciously and lovingly with His weak and wayward people.

At last, justice could wait no longer. *“They . . . dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them”* (Nehemiah 9:16, 17). It happened so often one loses count in the records of their history. God's grace continued long. *“According to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee . . . and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies; And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly and hearkened not unto thy commandments”* (Nehemiah 9:27-29). At last, justice must be satisfied and that is why Judah went into the Babylonian captivity.

A nation can turn from God without every citizen forsaking God. There is always a remnant, a minority, of righteous people in any nation. There was in Judah. But the remnant could not spare the nation from the just judgment of God.

Judah had shown such a propensity to idolatry that God resolved to make her sick with idols. He put her in a land that was so filled with idols that never again did she set her heart to seek them.

National sin can be forgiven through national repentance. The Levites spoke the heart of the nation of Judah by the prayer of confession they prayed (Nehemiah 9:5-38). *“And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God”* (Nehemiah 9:3). That was how cleansing came to the chosen nation of Judah; that is how cleansing comes to any person or nation.

## **II. IF WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

*“Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us”* (Judges 6:13).

Those words, spoken by Gideon in his distress, might have been repeated by the people of Judah during their exile. Their nation had been overrun. Their capital city had been sacked. Their sacred temple had been desecrated and destroyed. Where was God? Why was God not active among His people?

God was active in the days of Gideon just as He was active in the days of the exile and restoration of Judah. In both instances, God was disciplining His wayward people because of their sins.

God's prophets in Judah spoke words of warning against the land. Ezekiel (chapter 21), Jeremiah (chapter 27), and Habakkuk (chapters 1-3) each testified that God was using the Babylonian army to discipline His people. And signs accompanied the words they spoke. Jeremiah made a yoke and wore it upon his shoulders to warn of the coming captivity. Ezekiel made a besieged city of tile to picture the siege against Jerusalem.

Warnings were clear and repeated. Warnings are indications of mercy. They are given that men might repent. But if the warnings are not followed by repentance, the forewarned judgment will surely come. God's delay in judgment does not mean He is unsure of His course. It is only to show His forbearance and longsuffering in giving opportunity to repent (Romans 2:4).

“If we are the people of God, why have such difficult times come upon us?” Judah might ask. The answer must be, “God loves you too much to let you continue uncorrected in your sin” (Hebrews 12:6). *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities”* (Amos 3:2).

### **III. WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD!**

God's discipline is designed for good. His purpose in punishment is to purify. God never intended to destroy the little nation of Judah. He sought to rid her of sin and to refine her through suffering as ore is purified when it passes through the fire of the smelter.

Jeremiah saw a potter work at his wheel. He saw a marred vessel remade into a good vessel by the hands of the potter. He made this application of that event: *“O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel”* (Jeremiah 18:6). God assured Judah once

and again that He had not forsaken her in her distress. He foretold her restoration to her homeland. He continued to speak to her through His prophets, even in her exile. He extended special protection over her when danger threatened, as in the case of Haman trying to get the Jews exterminated in the days of Esther. At last, He changed the government which ruled her and moved King Cyrus to decree that the captive people could return to their homelands. *“Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God”* (Nehemiah 9:31).

Judah could shout with joy, “We are the people of God! He has not forsaken or forgotten us! Our calamity has become our cleansing! He is restoring us to our homeland and will complete the purpose He announced to Abraham. All the families of the earth shall be blessed through us!” And so it was.

Judah was restored to her Promised Land. She continued as a national and religious entity for centuries more. In due time, God sent forth His only begotten Son incarnate in the human flesh of a descendant of Abraham, of the nation of the Jews, of the tribe of Judah, of the house of David, of a virgin mother named Mary. God fulfilled His purpose in the people He had chosen as His own.

Think back for a moment over the course of the thirteen lessons just concluded. Behold the sovereign work of God! *“He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”* (Daniel 4:35).

He is the same God who is dealing with men and nations today. He controls the destiny of each of them today. Let the people of God live in humble devotion to Him. Let them be totally available to Him. Let them be fully separated and holy unto Him. God's work is not yet finished in the world. It is still, “To Be Continued.”

1. In what sense is God's work “to be continued” today?
2. In what sense were the Jews the chosen people?
3. Why did they live so wickedly if they were chosen of God?
4. Why does God judge nations as well as individuals for sin?
5. How is discipline a sign of love?
6. What prophets ministered to Judah during her captivity?
7. How are warnings an indication of mercy?
8. What is the meaning of Jeremiah 18:6?

9. How does Amos 3:2 apply to the people of God today?
10. What practical benefit have you received from this series of lessons?