

Dr. Tiberius Rata, Old Testament Theology,

Session 7, God as Restorer

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This is Dr. Tiberius Ratta in his teaching on Old Testament Theology. This is session 7, God as Restorer.

Today, we're going to talk about God as Restorer. God takes sin seriously and told his people, if you do not repent, I'm going to send you into exile. I'm going to take from you the land that I promised you. And the prophets speak a whole lot about the reason for this exile.

Actually, when we read the prophets, there are these three themes that keep coming over and over again. Sin, judgment, and restoration. So the children of Israel have sinned, and God sends prophets and tells them, thus says the Lord, you have sinned.

And because you have sinned, God says, I'm going to judge you. And one of the judgments was the exile. He says I'm going to take you into exile.

And God did exactly that. To the northern kingdom into the Assyrian exile and to the southern kingdom of Judah into the Babylonian exile. But when you read the prophets, you have to read to the end because there's also the language of restoration.

God promises and says, I'm going to bring you back. I'm bringing you back. A lot of people stop reading the prophets because sometimes it's so boring and repetitive.

Sin, judgment, sin, judgment. But you have to read until the end when there's language of restoration. God always promises that he'll bring his people back and that there will be a restoration.

So, the God who judges is also the God who restores. Now a simple English definition of restoration is bringing back to a former position or condition. But when we talk about biblical restoration, we're talking about the renewal of the fortunes of God's people after they experience exile.

And again, we have to keep in mind that both the northern and the southern kingdoms went into exile. When they came back under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, we saw that people from all tribes came back. It was a total, total restoration.

So, the promises of restoration is that God's people is there in all the prophets. So, let's look at it gradually, chronologically. For example, again, some scholars debate the date of Joel; some put it in the 9th century, and some maybe later.

Wherever we land, Joel promised, God, through Joel, promises a return from exile. For behold, in those days and at that time when I restored the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I would gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter them into judgment to them on behalf of my people and my inheritance Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations and they divided up my land.

So, God promises a restoration to the land. Fast forward to the 8th century, through Amos, at the end of the book, and I will restore the captivity of my people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will also plant vineyards, drink their wine, make gardens, and eat their fruit.

The idea is that the restoration will be complete. Contemporary of Amos, Hosea, and Judah, there is a harvest appointed for you when I restore the fortunes of my people. Isaiah, also the 8th-century prophet, is a small thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel.

I will also make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. In every century, God sends prophets and says, I will judge you, but I will also restore you. Jeremiah, as the Lord lives, brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where he had banished them, for I will restore them to their own land, which I gave to their fathers.

By the way, Jeremiah spans both the 7th and the 6th centuries because he actually witnesses the destruction of Jerusalem in 587. By the way, in Jeremiah, God uses a lot of language of judgment, but there is also a lot of language of restoration. Chapter 27, verse 22, they shall be carried to Babylon, and they shall be there until the day I visit them, declares the Lord, then I will bring them back and restore them to that place.

So, in Jeremiah, God not only said that they were going into exile but prophesied that the exile would last 70 years. Jeremiah 29 verse 14, I will be found by you, declares the Lord, I will restore your fortunes, and I will gather you from all the nations, from all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you. It is actually here in Jeremiah, after Jeremiah 29 and 30 to 33, that we have a whole book called the Book of Comfort, which is where God promises the giving of the new covenant.

And part of that is also a language of restoration. In chapter 32, men shall buy fields for money, sign and seal deeds, and call in witnesses in the land of Benjamin, in the

environs of Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the low land, in the cities of the Negev, for I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord. So, this is part of that Book of Comfort or Book of Consolation, where even though Jeremiah speaks a whole lot about sin and judgment, there is also the language of restoration.

Fast forward to Ezekiel, the 6th-century prophet, therefore, thus says the Lord God, now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I shall be zealous for my good, for my holy name. So you have pre-exilic prophets, you have exilic prophets, and then you have post-exilic prophets. But what happens after the exile? You have Ezra and Nehemiah.

And it is in Ezra and Nehemiah that we have the description of the actual restoration. We also have a description of what happens in the Book of Ezra. But now, for a brief moment, grace has been shown by the Lord our God to leave us an escaped remnant.

And here, we get the idea of the remnant theology. Again, not everybody went into exile, but not everybody came back. But God speaks about a faithful remnant that will come back.

So, remnant theology is very important in the prophets. So, an escaped remnant, give us a peg in his holy place so that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are slaves, yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended loving kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving, to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

All the promises of restoration are fulfilled in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Now just like there were three deportations into exile, there are three returns from exile. There are three deportations: 605 B.C., 597 B.C., and 587 B.C. In the same way, you have three returns from exile under different leaders.

So the first one that is described in Ezra 1-6 is about 50,000 Jews coming back under the leadership of Shesh Bazar, Zerubbabel, and Yeshua. The second one is described in Ezra 7-10: about 2,000 Israelites return under the leadership of Ezra. Then, the third one, under the leadership of Nehemiah, is returning, and an unknown number are.

All three of them are described again in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Both Ezra and Nehemiah proved to be great leaders that God raised for this time. Now, Ezra is more of a spiritual leader; he's a teacher of the law.

Nehemiah, on the other hand, is kind of sometimes a political guy; he's a governor, but he's a leader. And sometimes, he fights with the word in one hand and with the sword in the other, which we learn that sometimes a leader needs to plan and pray. And by the way, Nehemiah is a man of prayer.

We have a lot of his prayers recorded in the book of Nehemiah, but sometimes we learn that while we have to pray, sometimes we have to get off of our knees and do something. So piety, as someone said, is no substitute for preparation. And neither is preparation a substitute for piety.

You need both. And Nehemiah proves to be this great leader, and both Ezra and Nehemiah are great leaders in this process of restoration. In Nehemiah 3, you have the rebuilding of the wall, and sometimes the wall is being stopped, and the construction is being stopped because of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gershom the Arab.

You have a lot of opposition. And we learn here that sometimes, when we do something right, we will have opposition. Remember that opposition is not necessarily a sign that you're doing something wrong.

Sometimes opposition is a sign that you're doing something right. And we see this both in Ezra and Nehemiah because they get a lot of opposition. And people conspire against Nehemiah.

They speak evil against him. They speak untruth. And yet Nehemiah perseveres.

In chapter 6, we are told that the wall was finished on the 25th day of Month Elul in 52 days, which is obviously a record miraculous time. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and felt greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. Even the unbelievers see what's happening and know that God is at work.

Then, in Nehemiah, you have the list of returnees, and they finally celebrate the Feast of Booth. They celebrate Passover and then dedicate the temple wall. Now, they came back from exile.

Does that mean that they lived happily ever after? No, again, they didn't return because of the goodness of their hearts. They didn't return because they lived a holy life. They returned because God promised that they would return.

So, what we see is that God is faithful. And God is not just the maker of promises. He is the keeper of promises.

Now, when we get to the New Testament, we see in Luke and Acts this restoration of Israel motif. The question is, was the restoration fully accomplished? Because when

Jesus reads from Luke Chapter 4 in the synagogue, remember they're bringing to him the scroll as he's in the synagogue at Nazareth. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recover sight to the blind and to set liberty for those who are oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. So, is the restoration of Israel, was it completed as Isaiah prophesied it? Isaiah 61, we have the original text. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to grant to those who mourn in Zion, to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations, they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks, foreigners shall be your plowmen and vine dressers, but you shall be called priests of the Lord.

They shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of nations, and in their glory, you shall boast. Instead of shame, there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor, they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore, in their land, they shall possess a double portion, and they shall have everlasting joy. For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery and wrong, I will faithfully give to their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant to them.

Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples, and all who see them should acknowledge them that they have an offspring of the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what has sown it up to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout out before all the nations.

So, the question is, has all of this been already accomplished, or is part of the restoration still to be done in the future? In Acts chapter 3, verses 9, 19 through 21, we read, therefore repent therefore and turn again that your sins may be blotted, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, that he may send the Christ appointed for you Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long

ago. Oh, so it looks like the restoration was not fulfilled during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but some form of restoration needs to be fulfilled during the reign of Christ. The scholar N.T. Wright suggests that the restoration of Israel is not yet completed, that in a sense Israel is still in a state of exile.

So, he has argued that for many Jews, Israel's exile has not ended and would not end until God redeemed his people. This is very similar to what Paul writes in Romans 11 26, when he writes in the end, all Israel will be saved. So there seems to in the end times, around Christ's second coming, there will be a mass conversion of Jews who will accept Jesus as the Messiah.

As we know right now they are in a of the heart as Paul writes in Romans. This is what N.T. Wright writes that although she had come back from Babylon, the glorious message of the prophets remained unfulfilled. Israel still remained in the thrall to foreigners.

Worse, Israel's God had not returned to Zion. Very, very interesting. Now Yeshua Ben Sira 100 BC was a Hellenistic Jewish scribe and sage.

He's the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus, also known as the book of Sirach. He believed that Israel remained in a state of oppression, at least for those scattered abroad in a state of exile. And this is the idea that N.T. Wright also takes.

We also have exilic imagery in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the 2nd century BC book of the 2nd Baruch. At that time, after a short time, Zion will be rebuilt again, and the offerings will be restored, and the priests will again return to their ministry, and the nations will again come to honor it but not as fully as before. So, what role does Jesus play? When Jesus appoints the 12 disciples the question is, is this intended to symbolize the reconstitution of the 12 tribes of Israel? It's a question that's open-ended.

But Jesus says that the 12 disciples will sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. So again, there seems to be a continuity of the language from the prophets. Matthew 19 28 Jesus says, truly I say to you in the new world when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne you who have followed me will sit on the 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

Again, speaking, it seems to be here the language of judgment that restoration is not yet fulfilled. So, a totally restored Israel will be similar to the idealized pre-exilic period when God was Israel's king. So, when we think about these things, we also have to think about promises, for example, made to Abraham because some people say, well, some promises were fulfilled, but Israel never fully got their land back, and that only happened when Christ came again.

So, there are certain prophecies that will be fulfilled only in the Eschaton. And Jesus makes an allusion to Zechariah's prophecy in Mark 13. In Zechariah chapter 2, again, post-exilic prophet, starting in verse 6, there is a vision, up flee from the land of the north declares the Lord for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens declare the Lord up escape to Zion you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.

Well, this is not talking about the first Babylonian exile because this was written after that. For thus said the Lord of hosts after this glory send me to the nations who plundered you for he who touches the apple of his eye behold I will shake my hand over them and they shall become plunder for those who serve them then you'll know that the Lord of hosts has sent me sing and rejoice oh daughter of Zion for behold I come I will dwell in your midst declares the Lord and many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day and shall be my people and I will dwell in your midst and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you and the Lord will inherit Judah and his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. So this is obviously eschatological language, and in Mark chapter 13, Jesus alludes to this very passage in Mark 13:24: but in those days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light and the stars will be falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken and they will see the son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the end of the earth to the ends of heaven language again used by Zechariah.

So, Jesus understood his message and ministry as the beginning of the end of Israel's exile; however, the complete restoration will not happen until Christ comes again. So, there is in a sense an immediate historic fulfillment. There was Christ fulfillment when Christ was here, but there is ultimate fulfillment when Christ comes again.

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