



## The Babylonian Captivity and the Discipline of the Lord

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### It's all about Christ.

*Colossians 1:16* — “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.”

### All of history is His Story. It is all by Him and for Him.

We have divided the Old Testament into six parts: Beginnings, Wilderness Wanderings, Promised Land, United Kingdom, Divided Kingdom, and Captivity and the Coming Kingdom.

During the 5th part, the Divided Kingdom, God sent prophets to Israel and Judah to urge the people to repent of their idolatry and return to Him. But they would not.

*2 Chronicles 36:15-16* — “And the LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.”

God sent the Assyrians to destroy Israel, and He sent the Babylonians to overtake Judah. Assyrian practice was to weaken conquered peoples by assimilating them. The result was that even the people who remained in the land did not remain distinct and intermarried with the Assyrians who settled there. Babylonian practice was to take conquered peoples into captivity, so Judah remained distinct even in a foreign land. According to prophecy, this captivity was to last 70 years.

In the early years of this exile, Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied to the captives in Babylon. During that period, the Babylonian Empire was overthrown by the Persians, whose policies toward the exiles eventually allowed the captives to return. God had a plan: He was preparing Israel to represent Him not only in the ancient land of promise but also in the far reaches of civilization.

*Numbers 14:21* — “Indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.”

God is committed to using all the events of history and of our lives to reach that goal. He called Abraham and promised to make him a great nation that would impact the nations of the world. Now, God has to bring discipline to draw Israel and Judah back to Himself and back to their mission.

Even in our worst predicaments, He sees the end of the story and promises that it can be good. **Our trials are more than just trials, they are the means to a good end.** Jesus illustrates this and more in John 15:

*John 15:1-2* — “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit.”

In these verses, Jesus is talking about Christians. The New Testament repeatedly describes the believer as “in Christ.”

*2 Corinthians 5:17* — “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.”

So, Jesus has in mind someone that is a Christian but is not bearing fruit.

The Greek word “*airo*”, translated as “take away” or “cut off” can also be translated as “take up” or “lift up.” When Simon was forced to “take up” Christ’s cross and carry it in Matthew 27:32, Simon was instructed to take it up or lift it up and carry it.

“Lifts up” suggests an image of a vinedresser leaning over to lift up a branch. New branches have a natural tendency to trail down and grow along the ground where they don’t bear fruit. When branches grow along the ground, the leaves get coated in dust, and when it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless.

How does the Vinedresser lift us from mud and misery? If your life consistently bears no fruit, God will intervene and move to enable you to bear fruit. **Discipline is what happens when our loving Father steps in to lift us away from our own destructive and unfruitful pursuits.**

How should we respond to discipline? By repenting. If necessary, the Vinedresser will even use painful measures to bring you to repentance. His purpose is to cleanse you and free you of sin so that you can live a more abundant life for His glory. God’s discipline starts because of a major sin problem, an unconforted behavior or attitude that is blighting your life. It ends when the problem

ends. A key text for our understanding of how God seeks to clean us up is found in Hebrews:

*Hebrews 12:5-6 — “And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.’”*

Why would a loving God want to bring us pain?

*Hebrews 12:10-11 — “He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”*

This is what God is trying to work in our lives through His discipline: **our good, holiness, peace, and righteousness.**

*Hebrews 12:9 — “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”*

We have a choice to “be subject to the Father of spirits and live” or rebel against the Father of spirits and die. Trials and difficulties can make us better or bitter. Discipline is the Vinedresser’s strategy for cleansing us so we can start to produce fruit in our lives.

If you know that you are under the discipline of the Lord, you can bring it to an end today. All you have to do is repent.

*John 15:2 — “...and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”*

Because of the grapevine’s tendency to grow so vigorously, a lot of wood and leaves must be cut away each year. Grapevines can become so dense that the sun cannot reach the area where fruit should form. That’s why the vinedresser cuts away unnecessary shoots. **Pruning is a grower’s single most important technique for ensuring a plentiful harvest.**

For the Christian, rampant growth represents all those preoccupations and priorities in our lives that, while not wrong in and of themselves, are keeping us from more significant ministry for God. Without pruning, growing Christians will only be able to live up to a fraction of their potential.

Our heavenly Father, the Vinedresser, cuts away parts of our lives that drain precious time and energy from what’s truly important. If your life bears some fruit, God will intervene to prune you. His purpose is to cut away immature commitments and lesser priorities to make room for greater fruit-bearing for His glory. Pruning is God’s way of helping you put into practice His command to “seek first the kingdom of God.”

How should we respond to His pruning? By trusting Him and by focusing our attention once again on Kingdom priorities. We can complain, rebel, compromise, or run away, or we can experience the joy, comfort, and rest that comes to disciples who keep their eyes on the prize, not the pain.

To go from **no fruit** to **fruit**, we must experience the discipline of the Lord. To go from **fruit** to **more fruit**, we must experience the pruning of the Lord.

If you are experiencing the discipline of the Lord, He will alert you of your sin so you can repent.

If you are experiencing the pruning of the Lord, you may not be doing anything wrong; He is just trying to cut away those draining branches so you can bear more fruit.

**Your right response to the Lord is what He is waiting for.**