

RELEASE DATE: 10th September 2024

What lessons can we learn from the past?

When we look at what is going on in the world today, we should, and probably are, filled with a great sense of foreboding as to what the future holds for all mankind.

Our planet is struggling with rising temperatures, and all the consequences that brings. There is a war going on between Russia and Ukraine, trouble and strife in Israel and Gaza, lawlessness and fighting in many countries of the world including our own with terrible bloodshed in so many places.



But is this new? Not in the slightest. When people turn their backs on God and go against His commands, they must expect God's rebuke and anger.

Throughout the Old Testament, when Israel and Judah strayed from God's instructions they paid the penalty. In 1 Kings chapter 16 we read how Ahab when he became king, like so many before and after him, "did evil in the sight of the Lord". Elijah then confronts Ahab in chapter 17 and has to go into hiding. By chapter 18 Elijah meets up with Ahab again and in chapter 19 the words of Jezebel strike such fear in Elijah that despite having carried out God's instructions, human nature overcame him to such an extent that he thought he was the only servant of Almighty God left alive. So, it took a visit from an angel of the Lord to inform him of the provision of God for his journey to Mount Horeb and the provision of shelter on his arrival there.

As to Elijah's being the only servant left, God showed him His plan for the future, those he had chosen to be king in the appointed places and even in Elijah to be his successor.

Then came something that really took the wind out of the Elijah sails, God revealed that, He will "leave 7000 in Israel, none of whom had turned their backs on God, bowed the knee to Baal, or mouths kissed his image". Can you imagine Elijah setting off to carry out God's instructions with, as the saying goes, his tail between his legs, and yet rejoicing that after all he was not alone in his faithfulness to his God after all his doubts and concerns.

By the time we get to the "Minor Prophets" God graciously sent Haggai to warn his people to heed His words. Haggai also brought promises from God to motivate them to follow Him. All to no avail. Because the people of God reversed their priorities and failed to put God first in their lives, Judah was sent into Babylonian exile in 586 BC. Then in response to Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9 verse 1 to 19) and in fulfilment of God's promises (Jeremiah 25 v 11+12 and Isaiah 44 v 26-45) God directed Cyrus the Persian king to allow Jews in exile to go back to Jerusalem (Ezra 1 verses 1-4) shortly after 538 BC.

By 63 BC Israel was invaded by the Romans, so our Saviour was born into a land that was an occupied country. In fact, He spent his whole life on earth in that occupied state. He knew first-hand the restrictions that this brought, it's all too easy to forget that Jesus lived through what must've been very traumatic times for His nation.

On Sunday mornings Pastor Tim has been taking this through the book of Ruth and in chapter 4 the love between Ruth and Boaz grew deeper and the lineage to Jesus continued as God had planned.

How does this reflect on the situation that the world is in today. One thing is certain. Our great and merciful God has not changed. His love for mankind is just as strong as it was when he brought Adam and Eve into His picture in Genesis. Down through the years when mankind is gone against Him God has had to resort to seemingly extreme ways to bring His people back to Himself.

When Satan lead people astray God has used outsiders to bring His people back in line as in the case of the Egyptian and Babylonian exiles. When his people were in bondage God did not turn his back on them. In fact, quite the opposite. He watched over them even more intently, waiting for them to come to their senses and turn back to their rightful attitude of repentance.

During the two world wars of more recent times our country, in times of trouble turned back to God asking Him for protection and peace, but when we had positive answers to those prayers, what did we do? The country has drifted away again!

God has warned that "there will be wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains" (Matthew 24 verses 6-8).

To counter-balance that let us take encouragement from Isaiah 55 v 11+12 "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty (void), but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands".

Our God is in control. If mankind continues to turn their backs on God and His commands, we should not be surprised if He takes or allows action to bring us back to himself. As parents, when our children misbehaved, we took necessary steps to correct their misguided thoughts!!

Just as our heavenly Father, with love, grace and mercy, wants us to stay close to Him and His ways. Because of sin in the world around us we may have to share in God's unpleasant actions but we have his promise that He will bring us through whatever He allows if we walk with Him and keep trusting in His loving promises that will not fail.

Transcript of the presentation given by Deacon Rodney Burge and discussed at the church home group on Tuesday 10th September 2024. All scripture is from the ESV Translation.