

Restoring Part 2

There were two small country churches located on a quiet country road just outside the big city. The road was barely traveled during the week, but on the weekends it became a popular route for folks from the big city looking for a pleasant weekend drive. At a particular point along that road happened to be two small churches that sat opposite one another at the edge of the road.

The two pastors of these churches often enjoyed working together, and so one Friday afternoon they were both standing in front of their churches at the edge of the road holding large signs for the passing motorists to read. One sign said "The end is near. Turn yourself around while you still can." The other sign said, "You're on a road to destruction. We can show you a better way."

As they stood holding their signs, the first car of the weekend approached and as the driver zoomed by, he yelled out the window "Leave us alone, you religious nuts!"

As the car continued on around the bend and out of sight, there came the sound of screech tires followed by a loud splash.

At this point, one of the pastors yelled across the road to the other, "You think maybe the signs should just say 'Bridge out?'"

- You see how important it is that we understand the warning signs in our life?
 - If we see the signs but don't understand what they are telling us, we're likely to drive right past them and into destruction
 - For that reason, we've been pursuing our case on the Lord's discipline and renewal
 - It's a case study of Israel
 - Of how they disobeyed, were disciplined and then patiently restored by God
 - The thesis I presented to you over the past two weeks was that God moved in a particular way to bring discipline to the people of Israel
 - And furthermore, that God often works in a similar if not identical pattern in our own lives

- And that if we observe and understand that pattern, then we will be better positioned to respond to it in the right way
- Last week we studied the difference between judgment and discipline
 - Judgment is God's wrath poured out on unbelievers
 - It is irrevocable and intended to result in destruction
 - We saw evidence of God' judgment at work in the northern kingdom of Israel
 - Discipline was God's means of correcting and maturing believers
 - It is a loving response of a Father to his children
 - It brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness
 - Though it is sorrowful for a time, according to Hebrews
 - We saw God's discipline last week begin to play out in the southern kingdom of Judah
- We read a lot of passages from the OT last week on the history of Israel
 - Hopefully the handout you have will help keep some of that history straight in your memory
 - The final passage I read began our story of how the Lord acted to discipline Judah after nearly 400 years of ups and downs
 - Of disobedience followed by repentance followed by more disobedience
 - That discipline played out in the lives of Judah's final three kings
 - Last week we ended with the passage from 2Chr 36, where the first of those three kings saw God's discipline begin
 - The king was Jehoiakim
 - Let's turn to 2Chr 36 and re-read his short story in verses 5-8

[2Chr. 36:5](#) ¶ Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God.

[2Chr. 36:6](#) Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze *chains* to take him to Babylon.

[2Chr. 36:7](#) Nebuchadnezzar also brought *some* of the articles of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon.

[2Chr. 36:8](#) Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and the abominations which he did, and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son became king in his place.

- This young king reigned until he was 36, doing evil the whole time
 - He was the first king to see discipline
- King Neb is an important figure in Biblical history
 - Neb is covered in detail in the book of Daniel
 - We are told he was raised up by God precisely for the purpose of becoming an instrument against the nation of Israel to exact God's punishment upon them
 - And in his day, he was the most powerful man on earth
 - When he conquered a new land, he did so with ruthlessly, and with great destruction
 - He left no resistance and tolerated no defiance
 - And he understood how to subjugate a people
 - When he took Jehoiakim, he also removed the noble class from Israel
 - As we studied last week briefly in the book of Daniel, tthis first attack left the nation without the best and brightest of the nobles
 - The ruling class that led the people at all levels
 - Not only was the king gone, but so were any who had the ability and position to take his place
 - Only Jehoaikim's son is left behind, and he is rather young and without much power apart from the nobles and military leadership

- More to the point, God had ensured that the people of Judah would understand His disappointment and anger at the leadership
 - First, on the corporate level God removed the evil ruling class, the leadership responsible for bring His people down
 - The Kings of Judah – like the Kings of Israel – were the one God entrusted to rule in His place
 - And as such, they are called to give an account for the spiritual health of the people under their charge
 - The kings in this day had authority to enforce the Law of God and ensure that the people were conforming to its demands and honoring God throughout the nation
 - But as the kings turned to evil, so went the people
 - And they were called to account for their actions
- The principle hasn't changed
 - God still calls leaders among His people to account for their leadership in directing the sheep into spiritual maturity and godly living

[Heb. 13:17](#) ¶ Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- Your leaders will give an account to the Lord Himself for how they handled their charge over you
 - And we have an obligation under scripture to make their jobs easy, not more difficult than it already is
 - But when the leaders fail to steer the ship correctly, and God decides to bring discipline, he often will begin at the top
 - As He did with Judah under Jehoiakim
- Secondly, God began to break down their protections
 - By removing their evil leaders, God had left the nation vulnerable
 - Without strong effective leadership, the people no longer could depend on an uninterrupted way of life

- They had to worry about outsiders, not the least among them, Neb and his army
 - Life became more difficult and more uncertain
 - They had to re-evaluate their disobedient way of life, or at least they should have
- This pattern is mirrored in our personal life
 - First, God may remove the leading influences in our lives that are bringing us harm and leading to disobedience
 - Whether those influences are friends, families, hobbies, financial obligations, time obligations
 - Perhaps a relationship ends abruptly
 - Perhaps a business fails
 - Perhaps a client withdraws his business
 - Perhaps our health declines suddenly
 - These negative influences in our spiritual life can take on a million forms because the enemy is crafty and he will use anything he can to bring us down
 - But God loves us too much too much to ignore those mistakes, and so He removes our protections
 - Like the high paying job or the carefree lifestyle or good health
 - And He brings us face to face with the vulnerability we each have before Him and His holiness
 - This is the discipline of the Lord
 - Are we ready to consider the possibility that sometimes, those difficulties we face in our life are not random chance, and they are not the product of the enemy
 - Sometimes they are God dealing with us where it hurts the most, so he can bring us to our knees
 - This is what He tried to do through Jehoiakim and the nobles of Judah
 - But it didn't work

- Let's read about Step 2 in God's discipline of Judah

[2Kings 24:8](#) ¶ Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem.

[2Kings 24:9](#) He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.

[2Kings 24:10](#) ¶ At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem, and the city came under siege.

[2Kings 24:11](#) And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it.

[2Kings 24:12](#) Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his captains and his officials. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign.

[2Kings 24:13](#) He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had said.

[2Kings 24:14](#) Then he led away into exile all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

[2Kings 24:15](#) ¶ So he led Jehoiachin away into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, he led away into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

[2Kings 24:16](#) All the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all strong and fit for war, and these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon.

[2Kings 24:17](#) Then the king of Babylon made his uncle Mattaniah king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

- So here again is a familiar pattern
 - The king does evil according to all his father had done
 - And this time he's reigning three months before God decides to take action against him
 - And so in the eighth year of Neb rule, the king returns to Judah, takes Jehoiachin captive and continues to ransack the city
 - He takes more treasure from God's house
 - He removes more men of valor, the fighting men of the army

- And he removes all the craftsman and smiths
- All that remained were the poorest people of the land
- And then Neb places Jehoiachin's uncle in his place and changes his name to Zedekiah as a sign of domination
- And so God continues with the stripping away, with the discipline of Judah
 - But there's clearly a new level of discipline in step 2
 - First, God removed all the treasure in the House of God
 - The house was standing, but the contents were gone
 - Not much could happen in the empty building now
 - Second, God has stripped away the artisans and craftsman
 - Commerce stops and building stops and daily life now is at risk
 - Poverty is the natural result
 - And he left behind only the poorest
 - God removed all source of privilege and honor
- And I would add, knowledge
 - God removes their sources of spiritual knowledge
 - I won't read the verses to you, but Ezek 11 gives us a description of God's anger burning against the evil teachers and prophets of this time
 - And how they were responsible for leading the people astray
 - So as Neb returns, God uses him to kill many of these evil men, so that the people are without teaching and spiritual direction

- So what does Step 2 look like in our lives
 - Well, consider what Step 1 meant
 - It was God removing the protected comfort of our disobedience lives
 - He removed those things in our life that we used to build and sustain our disobedient way of life
 - Those things that provided leadership, whether personal or material
 - We find ourselves searching for answers and new meaning
 - Questioning why life has thrown us a curveball
 - What happens if we don't use that opportunity to seek God and find answers in His word and through His Spirit?
 - Well, usually we turn elsewhere for answers
 - Our world loves to give us answers for why life is hard or why our circumstances are not to our liking
 - For why bad things happen to good people
 - And so we seek answers in the world's wisdom
 - It reminds me of former first lady Nancy Reagan

In *Leadership in the Reagan Presidency* Donald T. Regan famously revealed Ronald and Nancy Reagan's "most closely guarded domestic secret":

"Virtually every major move and decision the Reagans made during my time as White House Chief of Staff was cleared in advance with a woman in San Francisco who drew up horoscopes to make certain that the planets were in a favorable alignment."

- In Judah's day, the nation had long been under the direction of false teachers
 - And when God decided to bring discipline, He started with the leadership in removing their negative influence
 - And then He progressed to the nobleman
 - Then to the craftsman

- Then to the teachers and spiritual advisors
 - Each step was intended to discipline the people by removing their comfort and protection and earthly blessings
 - But each step also had the beneficial effect of removing the negative influences of evil leadership, selfish pursuits and false teaching
- Remember, God's purpose in discipline is not to destroy but the rebuild
 - He is systematically dismantling the elaborate system that had been built over the centuries within Judah
 - A system of leadership, commerce and teaching and worship that was false and deceptive and contributed to disobedience
 - The nation stopped following God and turned to follow evil leaders
 - They stopped pursuing holiness and became absorbed in pursuit of personal wealth and pleasure
 - They stopped learning God's commandments in his word and turned their ears toward false teachers and sorcerers who brought a more appealing message
 - So the Lord tore these things down
 - Have you seen some of these patterns in your life or in the life of someone close to you?
 - Remember, the point of this study is to recognize these patterns in our own lives and learn to respond in faith rather than in continued disobedience
 - So when you seen your security torn down and your personal plans disrupted and your opportunities to grow and learn shot down, where do you turn?
 - Do you seek the Lord and even praise Him in the midst of your circumstances?
 - Are you prepared to accept the Father's correction?
 - Or will you continue to rebel against it?

- Well, the people of Judah didn't get the message, and they continued to rebel
 - And so Neb returned once more

[2Chr. 36:11](#) ¶ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

[2Chr. 36:12](#) He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD.

[2Chr. 36:13](#) He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear *allegiance* by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel.

[2Chr. 36:14](#) Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful *following* all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem.

[2Chr. 36:15](#) ¶ 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;

[2Chr. 36:16](#) 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.

[2Chr. 36:17](#) Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave *them* all into his hand.

[2Chr. 36:18](#) All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought *them* all to Babylon.

[2Chr. 36:19](#) Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles.

[2Chr. 36:20](#) Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,

[2Chr. 36:21](#) to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

- This was God's final act against the nation of Israel
 - More evil, more disobedience
 - So God acts to bring His stiffest penalty
 - A remnant would be preserved, the rest destroyed and the nation and city devastated

- God were told brought messengers, prophets, to try to and turn the people one last time
 - But they would not listen
 - It's remarkable to me that after all they had experienced with the prior Kings
 - Neb having been there twice already
 - Having put down earlier rebellions
 - Having hauled away family members, leaders, craftsman, teachers, etc.
 - Still, they have a heart to rebel against God and Neb, whom God had appointed to judge the nation
 - It just goes to show us how deceitful sin can be
 - It drives us to ignore all the facts
 - It can cause us to set aside all the warnings and truth spoken to us by God through His messengers – through His word
- So God's anger burned against the people
 - Look at verse 16 – no remedy
 - And He brought the final step of discipline that He warned the people would come
 - If we think that because we are saved that God will overlook our sin indefinitely, we need only remember verse 16
 - Neb returns one last time, angry at yet another rebellion against his rule
 - So this time he is determined that there will be no further Jewish rebellions
 - Everything is taken and destroyed
 - And most notably, the city walls are destroyed and the Temple is burned and destroyed

- The effect is devastating
 - Judah is gone from the land
 - The people of Judah have lost the monarchy
 - They have lost their land
 - And they have lost their temple
 - And all three were taken by God because they had long ago left His word
 - And so it goes anytime God's people ignore the counsel of His word
 - When we obey God in our own lives, we can expect to receive a spiritual blessing in our work and in our obedience
 - And we also enjoy earthly blessings as well
 - But both these blessings are at risk when we allow our flesh to rule in our lives
 - But if we do, our heavenly Father will work in our lives through discipline to bring us into conformity with His word and His expectations
 - Judah paid a heavy price for disobedience
 - And in the coming weeks, we turn our attention to how God brought them back from captivity and began a work to restore them
 - Because His discipline isn't complete without restoration
 - He will restore us, but only after He has stripped away the crutches and distractions that are standing in the way of our obedience