

The Captivity

THE STORY #8 - Pastor Gary Combs - March 22, 2026 - 2 Chronicles 36:15-23

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing our series called THE STORY: How the Bible Explains Everything. We're on a 12-week journey through the meta-narrative of Scripture. From creation to consummation, the Bible tells one great story of a good and holy God rescuing His broken world through Jesus. We're looking for Jesus on every page!

So far in The Story, we've traced God's rescue plan from creation until the crowning of Israel's King David. God created everything good and made humanity in His image, but sin shattered that design and brought separation. In judgment, God sent the flood, yet preserved a remnant by grace. He then made a covenant with Abraham, promising a people and a future. God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, gave them His law to shape them, and faithfully brought them into the Promised Land. Though their faith often wavered, God remained true.

Last week, we saw how God established the crown through David, promising an eternal King and kingdom, which pointed to its fulfillment in King Jesus.

But today, in The Captivity, we'll see a devastating turn of events. God's people lose the land, the kingdom falls, and they are carried into exile. What will become of God's people? How does this chapter fit into God's STORY?!?

Need: We all know what it's like to ignore God's voice... to keep putting Him off... to drift further than we ever intended. And eventually we find ourselves in a place we never thought we'd be, far from God, facing the consequences of our choices.

Trans: So the question is this: When we rebel against God, how does God respond to us? Does He give up on us? Does He walk away? Or does He reveal something deeper about who He is?

BODY: In the book of 2 Chronicles, the chronicler Ezra wrote to the post-exilic community recounting how God's dealings with His rebellious people revealed His character. We can see how God's dealings with His people reveal His character. How does God reveal His character in dealing with His people? The text reveals three truths about God's character.

Text: 2 Chronicles 36:15-23 (ESV) 15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy. 17 Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels 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 princes, all these he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. 20 He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. 22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: 23 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'"

THREE TRUTHS REVEALED ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER:

1. His persistent compassion.

EXP: (15-16a) The text says, "The LORD... sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people." Before judgment ever came, God kept sending prophets again and again. His warnings were not harsh, they were compassionate. Yet the people mocked, despised, and scoffed.

"**The LORD**" (15, 8x) (יהוה, *y^{eh}ōvâ*) - Yahweh; Jehovah "the existing One." His covenantal name.

"**Sent persistently**" (15) (שָׁלַח, *šālāḥ*) - Lit., "rising early and sending." NIV: "sent word to them again and again." God was not passive. He was actively, repeatedly, compassionately pursuing His people.

"**Messengers**" (15-16) (מַלְאָךְ, *mal'āk*) - messenger, representative. Here, refers to His "prophets" (16).

"**Compassion**" (15) (חָמַל, *hāmal*) - to spare, pity, have compassion on.

"**Kept mocking**" (16) (לָעַב, *lā'āb*) - to joke, jest, deride, mock

"**Despising His words**" (16) (בָּזָא, *bāzā*) - to despise, hold in contempt, disdain

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ARG: God's warnings are expressions of His compassionate, "longsuffering" mercy. (Longsuffering is literally the idea of having a long fuse, patient.)

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV) The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

ILL: **Jeremiah, last prophet before the exile.** God sent Jeremiah to warn Judah for decades before the exile. He pleaded with the people to repent, turn from idolatry, and return to the Lord—but they refused to listen.

- He was beaten and put in stocks by Pashur, priest over the Temple (Jeremiah 20).
- Imprisoned by the Judean officials, but later protected by King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 37).
- Thrown into a cistern and left to die until the Ethiopian eunuch Ebed-Melech intervened (Jer. 38).

Jeremiah's words to Judah's kings and leaders were similar to Ezra's chronicles.

Jeremiah 25:4 (ESV) You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the Lord persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets

APP: **Jeremiah's words remind me of Jesus' words to Jerusalem:**

Matthew 23:37 (ESV) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

What about you, my friend? Are you willing? God's persistent compassion is in full view in Jesus! Don't ignore His voice. If He is speaking to you, through His Word, conviction, or by His Spirit, that is His compassion pursuing you. Today is the day to respond before your heart grows hard.

2. His passionate holiness.

EXP: (16b-21) The tone shifts: "until the wrath of the LORD rose... until there was no remedy" (16). Because they rejected His word, God brought judgment through Babylon. The temple was destroyed, the city burned, and the people exiled. This fulfilled His Word through Jeremiah, the land itself observing its Sabbath rest (21).

"Brought up against...gave them all" (17) - It was God who "brought" the Babylonians against Judah and "gave them all" over to them. God used Babylon to discipline His people.

"King of the Chaldeans" (17) (בַּשְׂדֵי־מֶדְיָה, *kaśdîmâ*) - This king is Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

"Their" (17) - Notice the shift in God's language from "His" to "their." He gave them away for a time.

"Sanctuary" (17) (מִקְדָּשׁ, *miqdāš*) - sanctuary, temple. Ezekiel saw the Spirit leave (Ez.10-11)

"No compassion" (17) - The compassionate God gave them to a king with "no compassion."

"Took into exile in Babylon" (20) (גָּלָה, *gālā*) - to remove, depart; to carry away into exile, take into exile.

"They became servants" (20) (עֲבָד, *ʿēbēd*) - slave, servant; subjects

"Fulfill the word of the LORD" (21) (מָלָא, *mālā*) - to fill, to satisfy, to fulfil, accomplish, complete

"Land had enjoyed its Sabbaths" (21) (שָׁבַת, *šabāt*) - In Lev. 25, God told Moses that for six years, the Israelites could sow fields and prune vineyards, but in the seventh year, there was to be no farming at all. The 70-year exile allowed the land to "enjoy its Sabbaths" for the 490 years that the nation had failed to observe the law. While the "Sabbath of the Land" is the reason given for the specific duration of the exile, the Bible lists a much broader "rap sheet" for why the exile happened. The Sabbath years missed determined the sentence, but the crimes were far more extensive: rampant Idolatry (Spiritual Adultery), social Injustice and oppression, rejection of the prophets, etc.

ARG: **The LORD is slow to anger, but His passion for righteousness means He will judge the guilty.**

Nahum 1:3 (ESV) The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.

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God acted to discipline and also to bring back His people, not for their sake, but for His holy name.

Ezekiel 36:22-23 (ESV) Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations... And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name... And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

ILL: **Jesus' cleanses the Temple (tell the story).** In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a "den of robbers" (Luke 19:46).

Then His disciples remembered David's psalm (Psa. 69:9), which pointed to Jesus:

John 2:17 (ESV) His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

APP: When we see Jesus with a whip in the Temple, we aren't seeing a 'loss of temper'; we are seeing the 'passionate holiness' of God in the flesh. We love to talk about God's compassion, but we must not ignore His holiness. So examine your life: Is there sin you are tolerating? Excusing? Hiding? Don't wait until there is "no remedy." Run to God now. His discipline is not meant to destroy you, but to bring you back. He is "clearing the tables" in your heart because He wants His house to be a house of prayer again.

3. His promised restoration.

EXP: (22-23) Just when it seems like the story is over, God moves. He "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" (22) to send the people back. This fulfilled God's Word through Jeremiah concerning the 70 years. Even in exile, God was already planning their return.

"Cyrus king of Persia" (22) - Cyrus overthrows Babylon and frees the Jewish exiles to return. Isaiah prophesied about Cyrus 150 years before he was born (Two times: Isa. 44:28 & 45:1).

Isaiah 44:24,28 (ESV) "I am the Lord...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

"The LORD stirred up the spirit" (22) (עורר, *ûr*) - to rouse oneself, awake, awaken, incite

"Charged me to build him a house" (23) (פקדו, *pāqad*) - to charge or commit.

"Let him go up" (23) (עלה, *ālā*) - to go up, ascend.

ARG: **God always keeps His promises.**

Numbers 23:19 (ESV) God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

ILL: Think of the Cyrus Cylinder, an archaeological discovery from 539 BC. It was discovered in 1879 in the ruins of Babylon (modern-day Iraq) and is currently housed in the British Museum. It's a clay barrel covered in cuneiform where Cyrus describes his conquest of Babylon. While the cylinder shows Cyrus's political strategy of letting displaced people go home, the Bible pulls back the curtain to show the Divine strategy.



Cyrus thought he was just being a savvy politician, but Isaiah named him 150 years before he was born! God was 'stirring' a pagan king's heart like a barista stirs a cup of coffee. He was moving the most powerful man on earth to serve the needs of a few thousand exiles because God always keeps His appointments.

APP: Maybe you feel like you're in a kind of exile right now, distant from God, far from where you once were. Hear this: God is still stirring hearts. He is still calling people to "come home." You are not too far gone. Your failure is not final. If God kept His promise to bring Israel back, He will keep His promise to restore all who turn to Him. Return to Him and you will find that He has already been moving toward you.

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CONCLUSION: Today, we've seen that even in captivity, God was not absent, He was revealing His character.

- He is persistently compassionate—calling again and again.
- He is passionately holy—judging sin rightly.
- And He is faithfully committed to restoration—keeping His promises no matter what.

As we close today, I want you to notice something unique about where we are in The Story. In our English Bibles, the last book of the Old Testament is Malachi. But in the Hebrew Tanakh, the Bible Jesus would have read, the books are arranged differently. The very last book of the Hebrew Bible is 2 Chronicles. And these verses we read today—2 Chronicles 36:22-23—are the final words of the entire Hebrew Old Testament.

Think about that. The Old Testament ends with a pagan king saying, 'Let him go up.' It ends with a command to go back to Jerusalem and build a house for God.

But here's the problem: The people went back, and they built a temple, but it wasn't enough. The glory didn't fall like it did for Solomon. The people were still under the thumb of worldly empires. For 400 years after these words were written, there was silence.

The Hebrew Bible ends on a cliffhanger. The story ends not with creation... not with a king on the throne... but with ruin, exile, and a fragile hope: "Let him go up."

It ends with a 'Go up!' but the people were still waiting for the 'Coming Down' of the true Glory.

When you turn the page from 2 Chronicles 36 to the gospels, you realize that the 'House' God was really building wasn't made of stone. It was made of flesh. It was a Person. For as the apostle John wrote:

John 1:14 (ESV) And the Word became flesh and dwelt (*tabernacled*) among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus is the true Cyrus who liberates us from the exile of sin. He is the true Temple who brings us into the presence of God.

The Hebrew Bible ends with an invitation to 'go up' to Jerusalem, but the New Testament begins with God 'coming down' to us in the Person of Jesus Christ!

If you are far from home today, the King has issued a decree. The debt is paid. The way is open.

So, let us go up!

Let's pray.