

A Nail From God

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“And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.” (Ezra 9:8).

Strange wording? On the surface, yes, but with study, a beautiful description of thankfulness from a suffering, repentant people. To understand the words of Ezra, one would need to read this entire chapter, however verses 13 and 15 really help in explaining verse 8. “After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us an escaped remnant as this...” (v. 13); “...for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day...” (v. 15).

Ezra acknowledged to Jehovah the transgressions of His people, yet Jehovah had punished them ‘less than they deserved’. The Babylonian captivity had ended and a small remnant had returned to the ‘promised land’. Yet it is discovered that one of the same behaviors that had CAUSED the captivity, had been repeated – intermarriage with non-Israelites. Jehovah had forbidden this in Moses’ day (Deuteronomy 7:3). Jehovah had destroyed them as a nation, yet not totally. A remnant had been spared and returned to the land of Abraham’s sojournings.

The prophet Isaiah was one of many prophets who described this less-than-deserved punishment. He wrote in Isaiah 1:9, “Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah.” Jehovah showed grace to the nation, in the midst of punishing them for their sins. Isaiah would again state in Isaiah 10:2, “For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness.” Although they were no longer intact as a nation, would the past be repeated?

The ‘grace’ was seen in that Jehovah did not punish His people, Israel in the manner that He punished Sodom and Gomorrah. A remnant of the nation was spared. This was in keeping with His eternal purpose to redeem all His people through Jesus. In fact, the creation of the nation of Israel was a bestowal of grace...not because of what Israel had or hadn’t done, for it was a gracious choice Jehovah made PRIOR to the nation’s existence (Exodus 33:19).

The apostle Paul quoted this in Romans 9:15, in explaining that God’s grace toward the Gentile peoples was according to God’s choice just as it was to the Jews. His people Israel had been shown grace ‘first’, but for the purpose that all would later be shown His grace for the same

purpose: redemption for their sins. Jehovah would hold the nation of Israel accountable just as He did all nations, punishing and blessing without respect of persons. But Jehovah always acted in accordance with His eternal purpose: to provide salvation to all nations through His Son. The remnant was not spared without respect to their ways. The spiritual blessing of forgiveness will be in accordance with Jehovah's word – blessings for any who fear Him and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13); punishment for any who fail to treat Him with reverence (Leviticus 10:3).

Isaiah called this act of punishing the disobedient, while at the same time extending grace to the obedient a, "...destruction...overflowing with righteousness" (Isaiah 10:22). Jehovah was not only gracious TO His people, but gracious AMONG His people. God is righteous in all His ways. Even in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God did not destroy any righteous in those cities while punishing the wicked (Genesis 18:23). So Ezra would say that, "grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape...to give... 'a nail in his holy place'." (Ezra 9:8). A "NAIL" has reference to a stable abode (Isaiah 22:23); a 'secure hold' in His holy place. As a nail, a peg, or a stake would secure that which is attached to it; a 'nail' in His holy place refers to the security provided for those who are enlightened by the knowledge from Jehovah's word. As Jehovah promised Eliakim, He would "...drive him, like a peg, into a firm place. He will be a throne of honor for his father's house." It is a figurative way of describing spiritual blessing. Isaiah worded it this way, "...the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness" (Isaiah 10:2).

Let us give thanks to God for similar grace for the same reason: to be made secure in Christ, being punished LESS than we deserved.