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NEW CREATION**

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Roderick D. Belin
President/Publisher

Garland F. Pierce
Executive Director, Department of Christian Education

Andre' Wright
Chief of Operations

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THE ORDER OF SERVICE

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary as a signal for silence
- II. Singing
- III. The Apostles' Creed
- IV. Prayer, closing with the Lord's Prayer in concert
- V. Singing
- VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
- VII. Responsive reading of the lesson text by school
- VIII. The Decalogue

THE LESSON

- I. Organ interlude while the classes are being arranged
- II. Class study of the lesson
- III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
- IV. Closing bell — silence

THE CLOSING

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

EDITORIAL STAFF

Rev. Dr. Roderick Belin, Publisher
Dr. Dennis Dickerson, Jr., Lessons
A.L. Stanfield, Copy Editor
M.E. Russell, Layout Design

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

THE CHURCH SCHOOL CREED

I believe my AME Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

AME Discipline



LESSON 1

JUNE 5, 2022

GOD FORETELLS DESTRUCTION

SAMPLE

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 47
Focus Scripture: Isaiah 47:10-15

KEY VERSE: *You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, “No one sees me.” Isaiah 47:10a*

WORDS TO KNOW

ENCHANTMENTS – *the condition of being put under a spell; something that delights or charms; great delight*

SORCERIES – *magic formed with the supposed aid of evil spirits; witchcraft*

STUBBLE – *the lower ends of stalks of grain left in the ground after the grain is cut; any short, rough growth*

INTRODUCTION

The book of Isaiah is one of the longest books in the Bible, spanning 66 chapters. Isaiah is one of the major prophets of the Old Testament, and the book by the same name is considered prophetic literature. The book of Isaiah is divided into three parts. Chapters 40-55 are called Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah.

Thematically, this division of Isaiah centers on the return of God's people from Babylonian exile. King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire invaded Judah in 598 BCE, and many of its people were taken into exile in Babylonia. During the invasion, the Babylonians destroyed the temple and looted its treasures. The Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great would soon come to power and add the Babylonian Empire to its territory. The Lord announces in Isaiah that God used Cyrus to defeat the Babylonians so that the Israelite people could return home. In Isaiah 47, God foretells the impending fall of Babylon, speaking directly to the Babylonians.

BIBLE STORY

¹⁰ **You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, “No one sees me.” Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.”** Notice the use of the second person and the repetition of “you.” How does that add to the force of this scripture? ¹¹ **But evil shall come upon you, which you cannot charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to ward off; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing.** ¹² **Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror.** With words like “charm,” “enchantments,” and “sorceries,” the implication is that the Babylonians may derive some false power from the gods they worship or from their own supernatural abilities. ¹³ **You are wearied with your many consultations; let those who study the heavens stand up and save you, those who gaze at the stars, and at each new moon predict what shall befall you.** Again, this is a dig at those such as astronomers who study the constellations, the moon, movement of the stars, and the sun as to offer prophecy. God, who is omniscient (all-knowing), scoffs at those who seek prophetic insights from others or themselves instead of worshiping the one true source of wisdom and light. ¹⁴ **See, they are like stubble; the fire**

consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before!¹⁵ Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth; they all wander about in their own paths; there is no one to save you.

What/who is being compared in verse 14? How effective is this comparison?

SANKOFA

What we see in this scripture is that if God is on your side, all others who try to stand in the way will be eliminated. Babylon, although commissioned by God, forced Israel, God's chosen people, into exile after having destroyed their city and temple. We see that God can do the extraordinary to protect God's people.

For black Americans, slavery is an indelible mark in our nation's history. The Civil War (1861-1865) was fought on the issue of continuing slavery in America. The proslavery Confederacy met the antislavery Union army on the battlefield to decide the fate of our ancestors taken from their homeland into bondage. Even if advocates of slavery point to scripture for justification, God is a God of the oppressed and will stand with God's people pushed to margins.

Just as the Babylonians had their own belief systems and practices, proslavery southerners had their own interpretation of God's word. God is quick to chide those who fight against the well-being of God's people. In fact, God will raise up unlikely heroes to fight his battles. In the case of the Civil War, look to the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment of all-black Union soldiers. Although unsuccessful in their attack on Fort Wagner in South Carolina, their bravery opened the door for the enlistment of more black soldiers. In this case, the Confederate army won the battle at Fort Wagner but ultimately lost the Civil War. Similarly, in Babylon, despite sacking Jerusalem, God protected God's people, setting them on the road to prosperity.

REAL TALK-FAITH WALK

The role Babylon played in the oppression of Israel is reminiscent of the white Methodists in St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, whose mistreatment of Richard Allen and other black congregants

led to their exodus. Yet, it was white Methodists' treatment of Allen and others after the impending establishment of Bethel AMEC that often gets lost in the retelling of this story. In Allen's autobiography, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*, he describes how troublesome his Methodist elder was in Allen building his African church. For example, as Allen tells it, the elder refused to have anything to do with this new black church, including a refusal to preach there. It was disappointing for Allen because he always felt bonded to the Methodist connection because he felt that "no religious sect or denomination would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodist..." Allen admired the plain doctrine, the good discipline, and the fact that they had converted so many blacks.

Just as the Israelites were in exile from their home, Allen and the black Methodists were in exile from their spiritual home, the MEC. The Jewish people stayed faithful while in exile. Allen also put his trust in God. Notably, Allen said in his autobiography, "We bore much persecution from many of the Methodist connection; but we have reason to be thankful to almighty God, who was our deliverer." Regardless of the obstacles Allen and other black Methodists faced, Bethel would receive the blessing of one of the first Methodist bishops of the United States in 1794. Eventually, solidifying autonomy and independence from white Methodist persecution, the AME Church formed a unity of black churches established and run by African Americans. In the instances of both Babylon and the white Methodists, God used a people to further the progress of an oppressed minority. As Allen said, God acted as a deliverer and never left the side of those who called out to him.

Share two examples, one in history, and one in your personal life, of a time when God acted as a shield and protected you/historical figures against wrongdoing. Share if God punished the oppressor or not, as God punished Babylon.

SUMMARY

1. To whom is God speaking in this scripture?
2. For what reason does God aim God's ire (anger) toward these people? What is their fault?
3. What is God's message?

QUESTIONS

1. God foretells destruction in this scripture. But does God ever really leave us to our demise or does God punish us just enough for us to repent and change our ways? Will God cease to punish us if we learn from our mistakes?
2. Do you find it difficult to justify how God would allow God's chosen people to suffer in exile when God knew he would redeem them later?
3. The Jewish people post-exile still faced hardships in the centuries to come, including pockets of people remaining in foreign lands, oppression under the Roman Empire, and the destruction of the second temple, to name a few. What hardships did African Americans face postbellum (after the war)?

Create a two-column table. In one column, list all the emotions God is displaying in this scripture or adjectives that describe God in this context. In the second column, offer reasons for these emotions. After completing this, consider what this tells us about the type of God we serve.

CLOSING DEVOTION

Eternal and wise God, we sincerely ask you to give us the wisdom and the understanding to know that we should always seek you during the confusion of life. Bless us to labor with those who are dedicated to your vineyard and ever save us from our errors, even as we may not trust you in our darkest, most dreary moments. AMEN.

APPENDIX A

Babylonian Zodiac Sign Names

<i>Babylonian Name</i>	<i>Modern Name</i>	<i>Babylonian Name</i>	<i>Modern Name</i>
Agrarian Worker	Aries	The Scales	Libra
Steer of Heaven	Taurus	The Scorpion	Scorpio
The Great Twins	Gemini	The Soldier	Sagittarius
The Crayfish	Cancer	The Goat Fish ²	Capricorn
The Lion	Leo	The Great One	Aquarius
The Furrow ¹	Virgo	Tail of the Swallow	Pisces

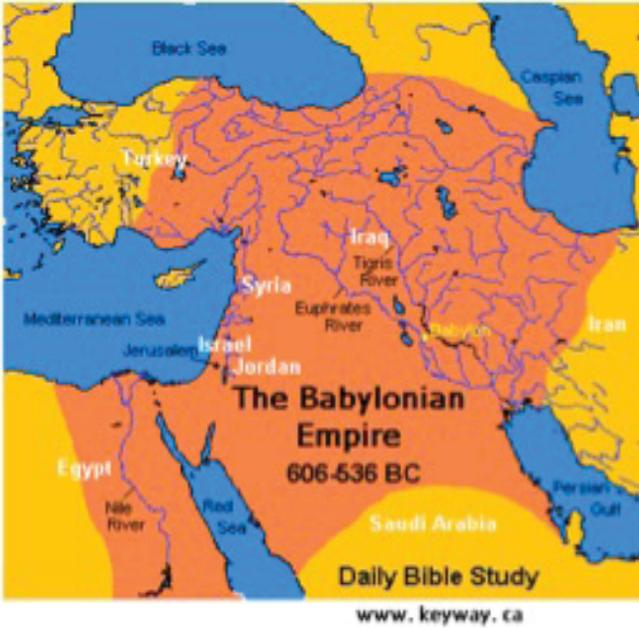
Note 1 (for Virgo). "The Furrow" is a reference to the goddess Shala's symbolic ear of corn. Shala is the Sumerian goddess of the grains, of abundant harvests, agriculture, and of compassion and health.

Note 2 (for Capricorn). "The Goat Fish" is a reference to the Sumerian god Enki, a patron deity of the crafts, trades, water, commerce, and intelligence. The god Enki was represented by a goat-fish chimera.

SAMPLE

APPENDIX B

Babylonian Empire



LESSON 2

JUNE 12, 2022

GOD FORETELLS REDEMPTION

SAMPLE

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-17

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-13

KEY VERSE: *I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. Isaiah 49:6c*

WORDS TO KNOW

JACOB – father of the 12 ancestors of the 12 Israelite tribes; son of Isaac and Rebekah; twin of Esau; name later changed to Israel

ABHORRED – shrunk away from with horror; felt disgust for; hate very much

PROSTRATE – to lay down flat; cast down; to make very weak or helpless

ZION – hill of Jerusalem; used to refer to the city of God or heavenly Jerusalem; Jewish people

SYENE – (sahy-ee-nee) Modern Aswan in Egypt off the Nile River

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this scripture is God's assurance that Israel will be returned to their land and that his chosen people will again be prosperous. What's potentially confusing about this passage for a reader is sorting out who is who. It appears Israel as an entire people is personified as one figure who serves the Lord. It is also possible to see this speaker as a Messiah who will be the savior of God's people. This passage is littered with allusions to Jesus Christ, the true Messiah. As we learn from the New Testament, Jesus will be the light of the world (49:6), the savior of the world (49:6), despised by many (49:7), but worshipped later (49:7). So why is Jesus synonymous with Israel? We learn through the genealogies of Matthew and Luke that Jesus comes from Israel, having been traced back to David and Abraham. Here, Israel represents the coming Messiah, Jesus. With that said, Jesus is not the only individual to whom Isaiah attributes the word "Messiah." A "chosen one" is someone God chooses to carry out God's plan for his people. Cyrus was described as a "chosen one" for his role in delivering Israel out of exile and rebuilding their temple.

BIBLE STORY

¹ Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! This refers to Gentiles. **The Lord called me before I was born; while I was in my mother's womb, he named me.** We learn from John 1:1 that Jesus was always present in the beginning. The Gospel of Matthew says that the angel told Joseph that Mary's baby is from the Holy Spirit and to name him Jesus, which means "The Lord saves."² **He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.** ³ **And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."** Here, Israel represents the entire people of Israel. Based on what you know about the Old Testament, how was Israel God's servant? Think about figures such as Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, and even look forward to Jesus from the line of Israel. ⁴ **But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God."** Think of all Israel has gone through as God's chosen people. From enslavement in Egypt to exile in Babylonia, Israel has endured much, and it may be natural to question their plight. Furthering the Jesus connection, think of what Jesus endured during his ministry. Yet, he understood

his mission and that his reward would be in heaven. As a servant of the Lord, do you ever feel worn out? Can church work get tiring? ⁵ **And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—** ⁶ he says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” God can yet do even greater things for and through Israel. By sending them into exile, their restoration will be a shining example of God’s grace and the truth of God’s promises. His mercy knows no limits. ⁷ **Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, “Kings shall see and stand up princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”** ⁸ **Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages;** Israel’s deliverance out of exile would be an example of a covenant from God to his people. The prophet Jeremiah told Israel that God would allow them to be held captive under Nebuchadnezzar, would stay in captivity for 70 years, and then he would restore them. If other nations saw the power of God and the truth of God’s promises, maybe they too would worship God. ⁹ **saying to the prisoners, “Come out,” to those who are in darkness, “Show yourselves.” They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;** ¹⁰ **they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.** ¹¹ **And I will turn all my mountains into a road, and my highways shall be raised up.** ¹² **Lo, these shall come from far away, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene.** ¹³ **Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.** King Cyrus and other foreigners contributed to the rebuilding of the temple once Israel settled in their land. The point of these last few verses of the scripture is that God will open a way out of no way.

SANKOFA

Firstly, this scripture centers around God's promise of impending prosperity. Secondly, God promises that he will appoint a leader to act as a light for oppressed people. For both points, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stands out as a shining example. Black people throughout the African Diaspora have not yet achieved full racial equality. Yet, throughout our history, we can see examples of when God raised up vessels to bring about our liberation.

Dr. King was the face of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Dr. King embraced his role as God's vessel for change in a country in desperate need of it. When we think of King, we think of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the march from Selma to Montgomery for voting rights, and the "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The presence of Dr. King brought national attention to the injustices happening in various corners of our country. The Memphis Sanitation Strike was no different. Sanitation workers were underpaid, overworked, and endured substandard working conditions. Of the many peaceful protests of this movement, Dr. King appeared on March 28, 1968, for a march in downtown Memphis.

Dr. King would lose his life in Memphis a week later at a downtown Memphis motel, shot on his second-floor balcony. What we learn through Dr. King is that God does work through people to convey a message. Sometimes God's message is to hold firm and be patient because change is coming. Sometimes the message is to leave the comfort of one place for a promised better life elsewhere. In this scripture, Israel is the shining example of God's people and the assurance that God makes good on God's promises. Though both imperfect vessels, both Israel and Dr. King carry with them a message of God's fidelity in return for faith in God.

REAL TALK-FAITH WALK

This scripture, if nothing else, lays out the complicated history of the Israelite people. Going all the way to Genesis, Israel's patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob saw the fulfillment of God's promises. Generations later, their descendants would be enslaved in Egypt and led to freedom. Then, their city would be sacked, and their temple looted. God punished his chosen people at various stages of this history for losing faith, disobedience, and worshipping other images.

In the end, Israel would find its way back to the Lord, and God would deliver them from their oppressor Babylon.

The history of the AME Church is similarly complex. We as a denomination have grown to have a presence in five continents, more than a dozen educational institutions, and countless members represented in law, medicine, politics, etc. In spite of our successes, we have endured declining membership, closed churches, closed and unaccredited colleges, and other misfortunes. With all that said, the fact that the denomination which has its roots in an old blacksmith shop is still surviving two centuries after its founding is remarkable. What's even more noteworthy is that in the church's infancy, it was slaves, ex-slaves, sharecroppers, and common laborers who grew the denomination. For whatever reason, God allows us to go through trials and tribulations, but if your heart is in the right place and if you serve God faithfully, God will look on you favorably.

SUMMARY

1. Who is speaking at the beginning of the scripture? To whom does the scripture allude?
2. What if God's promises are detailed in this scripture?
3. What is the Lord's vision for Israel?

QUESTIONS

1. This is one of many instances where the Old Testament alludes to a coming Messiah. With that said, how do you connect the Old and New Testaments? What is their relation to each other? Can one exist separate from the other?
2. Can you recall a time when you felt God had something in store for you, but you could not wrap your head around how God would make it work?
3. Describe an instance in your life when you knew someone was put in your life by God to help you through a situation.
4. Name some other figures throughout a civil rights movement, not just in America, who you believe were sent by God to carry out a cause.
5. Talk about the hard times of your local church. When has God

SAMPLE

worked a miracle in your church where you and others doubted the impossible could happen?

6. Can you name any other organizations, or are you a part of any organization, that does what you believe is the Lord's work? How has God blessed this organization?

Our God is a redeemer. Create a thorough definition of redemption. Include examples. Based on the scripture, who is being/will be redeemed and why?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Dear Lord, even as you formed us in our mother's womb and called us unto you, we ask you to open our ears to hear your voice clearly. We ask that you keep us ever surrounded by the distinctness of your direction as we go to the places in which you lead. AMEN.

LESSON 3

JUNE 19, 2022

GOD'S RESTORED PEOPLE SHALL PROSPER

SAMPLE

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 49:18-26

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 49:18-23

KEY VERSE: *Thus says the Lord God: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples, and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Isaiah 49:22*

WORD TO KNOW

BARREN – *not producing anything; not able to bear offspring, yield fruit or seeds; without interest*

INTRODUCTION

A continuation of last week's scripture, this section focuses on God's promise coming into fruition. We learn from the prophet Jeremiah that Israel would be punished for its disobedience. The Lord will punish them by letting Babylon make subjects of them. After a predetermined amount of time, God would punish Israel's oppressors and return them to their land.

After returning from exile, God promised Israel would live in peace. However, among the casualties of the Babylonian invasion into Judah in 598 BCE was the destruction of the temple and looting of its treasures. Hence, in this passage, the Lord promises a prosperous future.

The verses leading up to this scripture in Isaiah read that while Israel may have thought the Lord forgot them in exile, nothing could have been further from the truth. The Lord had already established a new city for Israel. Not only will it be built quickly, but no one will stand in their way.

BIBLE STORY

¹⁸ Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put all of them on like an ornament, and like a bride you shall bind them on. God assures Israel that they will return to home as lovely as a bride wearing jewelry.

¹⁹ Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land—surely now you will be too crowded for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. During the Babylonian invasion, Jerusalem was in ruins. Mainly the wall fell, and the temple was destroyed and pillaged. The Israelites were taken into exile and forced to live in a foreign land. In addition to God eventually destroying Israel's oppressors, God also allowed the Jewish people to thrive while in captivity. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah give a detailed account of the Israelites who returned from exile, a number above 42,000. **²⁰ The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your hearing: "The place is too crowded for me; make room for me to settle."** **²¹ Then you will say in your heart, "Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away—so who has reared these? I was left all alone—where then have these come from?"** **²² Thus says the Lord God: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples, and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried**

on their shoulders. While many returned after Cyrus' edict to return Israel to their land in Jerusalem, many did stay. Over decades of exile, imagine how many Jewish children were born in exile. The Lord will play a role in these children finding their way back to their real homes. ²³ **Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust off your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.** What will happen could only be the work of the divine. God orchestrated the events so Israel's oppressors would be punished for doing essentially what God ordered them to do: oppress Israel. The fortune of the Jewish people would then turn in that they would be in place of conquerors only to serve as shining examples of God's grace, mercy, and power.

SANKOFA

The Lord sent Nebuchadnezzar in the early 6th century BCE to lead the Babylonians' sack of Jerusalem. They killed men and women in the temple, carried away the treasures inside, and burned down the temple and other important buildings in the city. Then, the Israelite people were displaced out of their homeland and forced to live in Babylon. The crux of this scripture is that while the Lord allows destruction for whatever reason, God will promise restoration and return somewhere down the road.

In 2005, the city of New Orleans was ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. Just under 2,000 residents were killed, and the city suffered over \$100 billion in damage. Many lost their homes and were forced to evacuate. Students in New Orleans' schools transferred to nearby colleges and universities. It was a dark time for New Orleans and the rest of the country.

Not that there is ever a happy ending to such a crisis, but God, as we see in the scripture, encourages the downtrodden. God the comforter assures us that better days are on the horizon. While the city has not been and will never be the same, people did return to New Orleans, went back to work, and students were able to eventually enroll back in local colleges and universities. Levees have been redesigned. The hurricane transformed real estate to better handle such a calamity should it befall the city again. For sports fans, the Saints won the Super Bowl in 2010. There is still much work to be done, but God's word promises restoration and triumph. New Orleans' natives may derive comfort in that.

Do you have a personal connection to anyone involved in Hurricane Katrina? How have they fared in subsequent years? In what way did faith play in their survival/prosperity?

REAL TALK-FAITH WALK

In 1863, Daniel Payne, the sixth bishop of the AME Church, purchased Wilberforce University in Ohio for \$10,000. Payne advocated for an educated clergy and laity, believing that education was the key to liberation. He envisioned Wilberforce as the national university for AMEs, which it essentially became. In addition to the university, Payne Theological Seminary was incorporated on June 19, 1894.

The AME Church appropriated significant monies to the institution as to its prized jewel. However, Wilberforce was not without its challenges. By 1882, the school was in debt of \$100,000. It needed an endowment that could chip into its debt and contribute to various improvements. With the creation of an industrial division, Wilberforce was able to receive state funds. In the 1940s, it lost its accreditation, which led to the dismissal of Charles H. Wesley as president. In turn, Wesley established a state-funded school named Central State College next door to Wilberforce. Decades later, Wilberforce would lose its accreditation again in 2018. It has recently earned back its status as an accredited institution.

The point of this narrative is to bring us full circle back to the scripture. God may allow us to live through trials and tribulations, but God will offer a calm after the storm. Wilberforce's history is rife with peaks and valleys, similar to the plight of the Israelites. When the Lord brings you through or allows you to flourish, you become living proof of the grace and power of God. How remarkable it is that Wilberforce is still standing 150 years after its founding.

1. What problems, other than financial, do you think you would encounter running your own college or university? How would you go about solving such problems?
2. How do educational institutions contribute to the cause of black liberation?
3. Quickly look up two other historically black colleges or universities. Briefly tell when they were founded, why they were founded, and after whom they were named.

SUMMARY

1. Who is the bride in verse 18? Why use this metaphor?
2. How will God's people prosper based on the scripture?

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you think Israel was disobedient? Do research if you must. Do you think their sins merited exile?
2. Imagine you were born in a foreign land where the religious beliefs run counter to your parents' religious teachings. What obstacles would you encounter to fit in with the beliefs and teachings of your family?
3. Theodicy is the term used to describe the questions people have about why a good God allows evil and suffering to take place. What is your response to how we can worship an omnipotent God who allows events such as Hurricane Katrina to take place?

At the end of the day, Israel was restored and prospered, while Babylon was punished for following God's plan. Do you think the Babylonians were justly punished by God if they were only doing God's will? Why or why not?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Lord, restore us and make us whole from the margins. Hear our call for help when we are barren and broken and battered and bruised, only so that your hand is seen upon us, and it is your grace, mercy, and power that lifts us up and yet calls us blessed. AMEN.

APPENDIX A

Cyrus' Edict Freeing the Jewish People from Exile

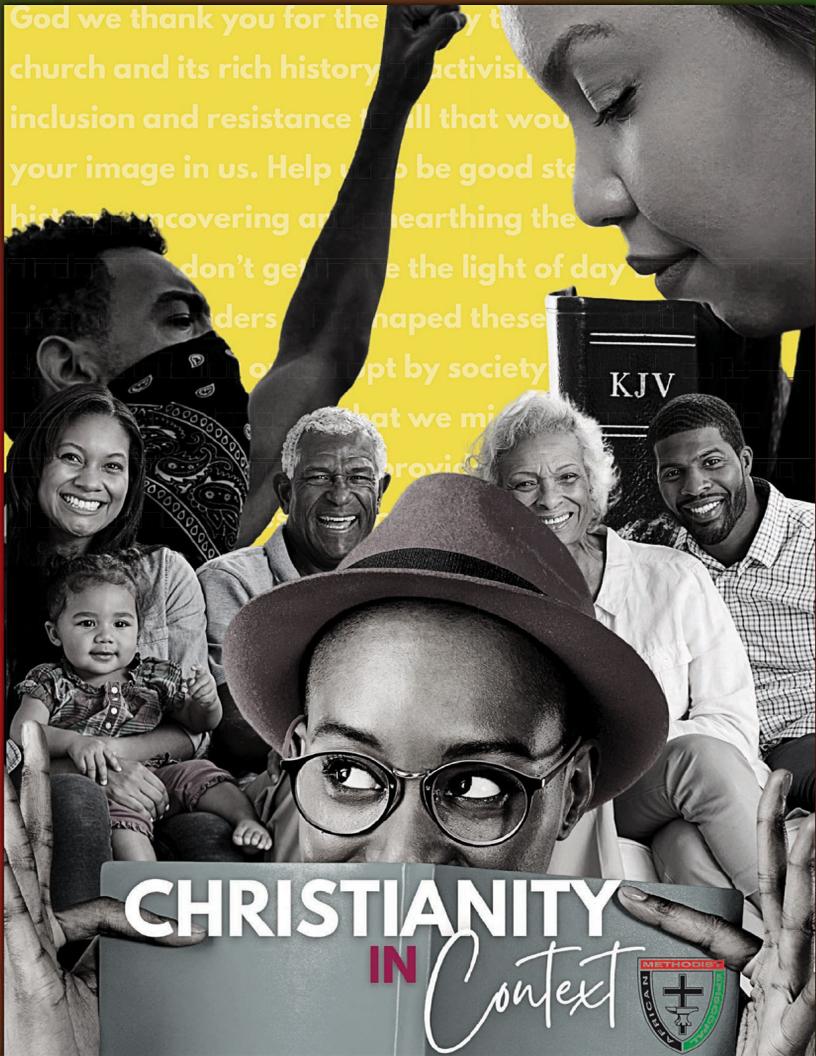


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