Unit 17, Session 2

The Return of Exiles

Summary and Goal
In this session we will walk with Israel as they are brought out of Babylonian exile and returned to their homeland. We will see that God is both faithful to keep His promises and that He delights in His children. We will also see that God’s activity on our behalf frees us to worship Him. It is in experiencing God and His work to secure our freedom that we see ourselves for who we really are, see Him for who He really is, and our lives can overflow in authentic worship and celebration of God.

Session Outline
1. God’s people return from exile by the Lord’s leading (Ezra 1:1-5).
2. God’s people worship the Lord by obeying His law (Ezra 3:1-6).
3. God’s people worship the Lord by declaring His goodness and faithfulness (Ezra 3:10-13).

Background Passage: Ezra 1–3

Session in a Sentence
God provides freedom for His people to worship and obey Him.

Christ Connection
God kept His promise to bring His people out of exile from Babylon and restore their freedom to worship Him. Since Adam and Eve’s first sin, all humans have been exiled from God and are in need of deliverance. Jesus came to end this exile, bring His people home, and restore our freedom to worship God.

Missional Application
Because we have been freed from sin and have experienced God’s kindness, we make worship our first priority so that others will see the goodness of the Lord.
EXPLAIN: Begin with the Voices quote by N. T. Wright and the paragraph in the DDG (p. 66) to broach the subject of worship, a theme prevalent in Ezra.

Worship captivates us like few other things, and worship is a commonality among every person on the planet. We all worship. We offer adoration and praise to the thing, or things, that we love the most. Each act of praise, sacrifice, and exaltation is a form of worship. Unfortunately, too few of us think deeply about our worship. Our worship tends to be reactive rather than proactive. As N. T. Wright makes clear, unless we understand the object of our worship well, our worship will remain vague and unsatisfactory. Put more specifically, the form and content of our worship reveals the object of our worship.

Voices from the Church

“Put it this way: if your idea of God, if your idea of the salvation offered in Christ, is vague or remote, your idea of worship will be fuzzy and ill-formed. The closer you get to the truth, the clearer becomes the beauty, and the more you will find worship welling up within you. That’s why theology and worship belong together. The one isn’t just a head-trip; the other isn’t just emotion.”

–N. T. Wright

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What are some things our worship of God should say about God? (He is sovereign; He is good; He is faithful; He is just; He is gracious and kind; He is the Savior of those who believe in Jesus; He is with us; He alone is worthy of worship)

SUMMARIZE: In Ezra, we are going to see how God is faithful to bless and preserve His people, how that is a picture of Jesus’ faithfulness to us, and how all of this leads us to worship. In this session we will walk with Israel as they are brought out of Babylonian exile and returned to their homeland. We will see that God is both faithful to keep His promises and that He delights in His children. We will also see that God’s activity on our behalf frees us to worship Him. It is in experiencing God and His work to secure our freedom that we see ourselves for who we really are, see Him for who He really is, and our lives can overflow in authentic worship and celebration of God.

For session-by-session training videos, please visit MinistryGrid.com/GospelProject.
For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
Point 1: God’s people return from exile by the Lord’s leading (Ezra 1:1-5).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Ezra 1:1-5 (DDG p. 67).

1 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah, the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus to issue a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom and to put it in writing:

2 This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of the heavens, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. 3 Any of his people among you, may his God be with him, and may he go to Jerusalem in Judah and build the house of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. 4 Let every survivor, wherever he resides, be assisted by the men of that region with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, along with a freewill offering for the house of God in Jerusalem.”

5 So the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and Levites—everyone whose spirit God had roused—prepared to go up and rebuild the Lord’s house in Jerusalem.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 67) to note how God’s sovereignty was manifested in Cyrus’s statement about his own decision-making in allowing God’s people to return home from exile.

Notice Cyrus’s language in verse 2. He was affirming the lordship and sovereignty of God even over his rule. He acknowledged that this movement to restore the Israelite people to their homeland came from God rather than of his own authority and decision-making. Truly, “a king’s heart is like channeled water in the Lord’s hand: He directs it wherever he chooses” (Prov. 21:1).

- God is sovereign over the entire world, and in His sovereignty He is able to accomplish His purposes, even in and through political systems that are far from God-honoring. God had promised that He would return His people to the promised land, and the prophet Jeremiah made it clear that that would happen after seventy years of captivity in Babylon (Jer. 29:10). Here is yet another example of God keeping His promises.

Application: We often look to political, corporate, or economic structures as if they were the dominant expressions of authority. Yet God reminds us that each of these pales in comparison to the strength of His rule, and each of these ultimately operates under the authority of His kingship. In an increasingly politicized culture, we can feel our confidence in the future rise and fall based on our perception of political outcomes. When our candidate wins office, our hope rises; when our candidate fails to win, the future looks dim. This passage reminds us that politicians, business leaders, financial leaders, and more are all subject to the authority of God. While they can make decisions that do not honor God, in the end God will accomplish His purposes. This gives us tremendous optimism and confidence in both the present and the future. It allows us to rest, confident that God is in control and that we who follow Him will see His kingdom come.
INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

Why do we often act and feel as if God were not sovereign? (we don’t trust His timing; we believe our plans are right and perhaps better than God’s; we know that God often works through people, so we do what we think God would want based on our preferences; our circumstances seem beyond hope)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 67) to show the pattern of God’s activity to invite and stir up people to go and work to accomplish His purposes.

Ezra shows us that Cyrus was not just returning the people to Jerusalem but was also helping them rebuild the temple of God. This call to go, return to Jerusalem, and rebuild the temple was a breath of fresh air for God’s exiled people. It would have encouraged them. It is also interesting to note that Cyrus called for volunteers. Those who desired to return were free to go and take part in the building of the temple, but it was those who were stirred up by God who took advantage of this great opportunity.

• This is consistent with God’s activity across the rest of Scripture. God calls people to go and work to accomplish His purposes (see Isa. 6; Jer. 1). God’s people are called to go as His representatives to do the work of His kingdom. God is not coercive, but He does stir up people to join Him in this work.

• God invites and stirs up His people today as well. Believers in Christ are called to join Him in His work of redemption and restoration. Through Christians sharing the gospel and blessing the world, God continues to work sovereignly and redemptively that His glory would spread throughout the whole earth.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How have you seen God work around you in unlikely scenarios to accomplish His purposes? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
Point 2: God’s people worship the Lord by obeying His law (Ezra 3:1-6).

READ Ezra 3:1-6 (DDG p. 68).

1 When the seventh month arrived, and the Israelites were in their towns, the people gathered as one in Jerusalem. 2 Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests along with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brothers began to build the altar of Israel’s God in order to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. 3 They set up the altar on its foundation and offered burnt offerings for the morning and evening on it to the Lord even though they feared the surrounding peoples. 4 They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed, and offered burnt offerings each day, based on the number specified by ordinance for each festival day. 5 After that, they offered the regular burnt offering and the offerings for the beginning of each month and for all the Lord’s appointed holy occasions, as well as the freewill offerings brought to the Lord. 6 On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, even though the foundation of the Lord’s temple had not yet been laid.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 68) to connect the people’s desire to worship the Lord with the Lord’s faithfulness to restore them to the promised land.

The Israelites were settling into the promised land, but they wasted little time committing themselves to the reconstruction of the temple and also to the practice of sacrificial worship and festival celebration. In other words, the Lord had restored them to the land, so they were faithful to respond in obedience to God and His commands. As they put their roots back into the ground, they also put aside their various tribal differences and committed themselves to the work of God—together.

• One aspect of the returning Israelites’ motivation for partnering together was their common satisfaction of being back in their homeland and enjoying communal gratefulness for God’s work. Beyond that, though, we see that worship is not only a reflection of the redemptive activity of God but also a unifying activity that pushes people toward obedience.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How do people commonly measure a successful worship service? (singing the songs I like; seeing the people I like; learning something new; seeing people commit themselves to the Lord in repentance, faith, and baptism; Jesus was lifted up in worship; goosebumps)
**SAY:** Often we think of worship as an activity that serves us, but worship is an activity that calls us to self-denial as the means to a greater self-fulfillment. The beauty of worship is that as we pour ourselves out in worship, God fills us up with more of Himself. The measure of faithful worship, then, is not that we leave full but rather that we leave empty of ourselves and committed to serving our King in faithful obedience.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 68) to highlight the Israelites' eagerness to worship the Lord through various sacrifices.

Despite the fears the Israelites had from antagonistic people groups surrounding them, they did not cease to lift up the King. They offered sacrifices out of tradition and obedience to God’s commands, but they also began to offer sacrifices abundantly, freely on their own accord, even before the temple foundation had been laid. They were both generous and eager to please the Lord. These sacrifices went past making atonement for their sins; they were an outpouring of joyful worship for what God was doing.

- The Israelites’ worship was sacrificial and obedient, generous, heartfelt, rapid, and voluntary. In other words, they were acting like the typical person who is moved to the core by who the Lord is and what He has done, not just like a person operating under compulsion. Their worship was real, it was genuine, and it was passionate. It was a reflection of their relationship with God, and this is an important indication of a healthy relationship with God. The manner of our worship is indicative of the object of our worship.

**Commentary:** “The seventh month was also the time for the celebration of the Festival of Shelters (also referred to as ‘Tabernacles,’ or by its Hebrew name Succoth), a harvest festival in which Israel remembered their sojourn in the wilderness and God’s provision. The sacrifices during the seven-day festival were offered in accordance with the law of Moses as written in Numbers 29:12-38. They included 71 bulls, 15 rams, 105 lambs as well as 7 goats—a major financial sacrifice for the small postexilic community.”

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 68).

**Worship:** The aim and focus of worship is **God**, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. **Corporate** worship serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the **greatness** of God.

**Essential Doctrine “Worship”:** While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is **God**, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. **Corporate** worship serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the **greatness** of God.
**Point 3:** God’s people worship the Lord by declaring His goodness and faithfulness (Ezra 3:10-13).

**READ** Ezra 3:10-13 (DDG p. 69).

10 When the builders had laid the foundation of the Lord’s temple, the priests, dressed in their robes and holding trumpets, and the Levites descended from Asaph, holding cymbals, took their positions to praise the Lord, as King David of Israel had instructed. 11 They sang with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord: “For he is good; his faithful love to Israel endures forever.” Then all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord because the foundation of the Lord’s house had been laid. 12 But many of the older priests, Levites, and family heads, who had seen the first temple, wept loudly when they saw the foundation of this temple, but many others shouted joyfully. 13 The people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shouting from that of the weeping, because the people were shouting so loudly. And the sound was heard far away.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 69) to observe the depth of the Jewish people’s worship as the temple was being rebuilt and they reflected on God’s faithful love to them.

Israelites had come from near and far for this moment. With Cyrus’s decree, they left their lives of exile throughout the known world with the longing to celebrate the goodness of God and worship Him at home. As the foundation of the temple was laid, they sang God’s praises because His love was with Israel forever, despite their sinful ways. They were beyond thankful for His faithful love to them.

- In this passage, the Israelites responded to God’s deep and rich steadfast love. They couldn’t help but shout, sing, and (we can assume) dance in celebration and jubilation. The depth and nature of their worship was an indication of the depth and nature of their redemption. Jesus spoke about the relationship of redemption to affection in Luke 7:47: When we recognize that we have been forgiven much, we respond with great love and worship to God, but the inverse is also true—those who think they have been forgiven of little will only love little.

**Commentary:** The Hebrew word for “faithful love” (v. 11) is *chesed*. It has a wide range of translations, such as “lovingkindness,” “mercy,” “love,” and “compassion,” all of which describe God’s covenant love for His people. His is a bulldog kind of love, resilient and never giving up. The Old Testament is full of references to this kind of love when it speaks to us about God.
INTERACT: Ask group members to use the scale in their DDG (p. 69) to consider the relationship between their awareness of personal sin and personal worship.

How does awareness of your sin typically affect your personal worship?

Paralyzed by Guilt  Grateful for Forgiveness  Motivated to Obedience

EXPLAIN: Reference the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 69) as you contrast the emotional responses among the people to the temple’s foundation being laid. Apply this contrast of sadness and celebration to individuals and church communities.

The Israelites were split on how they should react to the rebuilding of the temple. Older Israelites remembered the grandeur of the old temple that Solomon had built, and they wept because what they had before them was unimpressive and would not compare with the previous temple. There were plenty of others, however, who could not contain their celebration for the movement of God in restoring them in the promised land. The cacophony of the competing emotions was overwhelming and overheard far away.

As God works to sanctify and to restore, there are often competing emotions, both in us as individuals and in our church communities.

- **Sadness:** The elders among the Israelites recognized the fallout of sin in their community. The sin of their people had diminished and devastated the people and their homeland. They were small in number, small in territory, small in stature, and small in temple. They were right to be sad, but there is a danger in always longing for the “good old days.” We can miss what God is doing in the moment and fail to recognize His goodness and grace in the present and His preparation for the future.

- **Celebration:** The younger Israelites were seeing the movement of God in their midst, and they were right to celebrate this work with joy. God was keeping His promises to restore the people. But they didn’t dismiss the elders who were struggling with sadness. In fact, the sadness of the elders would have reminded them that what they were experiencing was not the fullness of God’s redemption—the Messiah and His salvation was yet to come. We should remember that joyful worship of God’s faithfulness with sadness for our sin is not an affront to our good and gracious God.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How does a church benefit from those who are both young and old in the faith? (godly wisdom from spiritual elders can be passed down to those who are younger; joy and passion from those new in the faith can encourage those who are older; the mixture of young and old in the faith provides an opportunity for God’s love to be manifested in the church in a way the world does not often see)
My Mission

**EXPLAIN:** Salvation is by grace, and our worshipful response to salvation is the result of grace. This was true for Israel, both with regard to their original redemption from Egypt and also with their return from exile. Redemption and restoration always result in the same outcome: God’s people worshiping God at God’s time and in God’s place. What is good for God’s people is also glorifying to God; these two realities are not inherently at odds. The exiles’ experience of God’s goodness in being restored to their land resulted in their praise of His faithfulness. Our experience of being restored to relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ results in worship throughout our lives in all places that others may hear of His goodness and grace in Jesus and believe and worship Him too.

**READ** the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 70), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have been freed from sin and have experienced God’s kindness, we make worship our first priority so that others will see the goodness of the Lord.

- **What has the Lord freed you to do by faith?**
- **What are some ways your group can make worship a first priority?**
- **How will you declare God’s goodness and faithfulness in Christ so others can believe in and worship Him?**

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:** Father, eternal life is to know You through Your Son, Jesus, whom You have sent to free us from sin so that we might worship and obey You by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank You for not leaving us in the exile we have deserved ever since Adam and Eve first rebelled against You. In Your mercy, You have gathered us to Yourself so that we might declare with worshipful hearts the good news about Christ to others. Amen.

**PACK ITEM 9: GRACE TO SERVE:** Cut out these cards and pass them out to group members to remind them that our worship, service, and obedience to God must be based on our understanding of His grace to us.

**INSTRUCT:** As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 71-73), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 74) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 71-73) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 74) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 71-73) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 4 as a part of point 2 in the session: Conflicts of many sorts truly do exist, and yet, the work of God must triumph over those things. We need to unite to see God’s work accomplished.

  Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

  - Day 1: “There may be no greater truth in the universe than the reality that God is in authority over all things.”
  - Day 5: “Too often we have forgotten just how significant God’s grace is in our lives.”

  Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 74) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to recall to one another the last time thinking deeply on God’s goodness moved them to worship.

- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1:** God’s people return from exile by the Lord’s leading (Ezra 1:1-5).

“The first year of King Cyrus refers to the first year of his rule over Babylonia (538 BC) and not the first year of his reign in Persia that began in 559 BC and continued until 530 BC. Spoken through Jeremiah may allude to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy years of captivity (Jer. 29:10-14). More likely it is a reference to Jeremiah 51:11, ‘The Lord has roused the spirit of the kings of the Medes.’ The same vocabulary occurs here in Ezra 1:1 where the Lord roused the spirit (cp. Jer. 51:1) of King Cyrus. The ‘proclamation’ (v. 1), often referred to as the ‘Decree of Cyrus,’ reflects Cyrus’s policy to allow the exiles to return to their homeland. The decree, from the closing words of 2 Chronicles (36:23), appears in two versions in the book of Ezra: here in Hebrew, reflecting a strong Jewish perspective, and in 6:3-5 written in Aramaic (the language of diplomacy in the Persian Empire), which appears to be an official court memorandum. Some scholars question whether a Persian king would refer to God as The Lord, the God of the heavens. Possibly this reflects a paraphrase provided by the Jewish leaders in Babylon. One of Cyrus’s tasks was to build a house at Jerusalem in Judah. ‘House’ (Hebrew beth) often refers to the house of the Lord. The Babylonians had destroyed the temple in 586 BC.”

“This edict referred to in Ezra applied to Jews living in any locality within his empire and instructed the people in those areas to help the survivors of the exile to return to Israel (1:4). The word ‘survivors’ identifies these Jews as the remnant whom God had promised would survive and return to Jerusalem (Lev. 26:36; 2 Chron. 30:6; 34:21; Neh. 1:2-3; Jer. 23:3; Hag. 2:3). The people among whom they were living were encouraged to provide assistance in the form of silver and gold, as well as goods and livestock and other gifts (compare Ex. 11:2-3; 12:35-36). God-fearing Jews like Ezra may have been asked what they would need for the ceremonies associated with the temple that they were to rebuild.”

**Point 2:** God’s people worship the Lord by obeying His law (Ezra 3:1-6).

“Though the temple was not completed, the people did not refrain from resuming their worship of God. When Jeshua and Zerubbabel built the altar, the people came together in Jerusalem from their neighboring towns, despite their fear of attack from surrounding peoples. They feared and honored God more than they feared what men could do to them.”
“These returned exiles kept the [Feast of Tabernacles] ‘in accordance with what is written,’ emphasizing the authority of the Pentateuch (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:33-36,39-43; Deut. 16:13-15). During the Feast of Tabernacles the people lived for seven days in tents or booths to remind them of God’s protection of their ancestors in the wilderness, his continuing providential care, and their dependence on him … Having just returned from exile in Babylon, this festival would have had special significance. It was also at the festival of Tabernacles that Ezra was to read the Law to the people (Neh. 8:14-18) … The point of verse 6 is that even though the sacrificial system had been re instituted, there remained much to be done.”

Point 3: God’s people worship the Lord by declaring His goodness and faithfulness (Ezra 3:10-13).

“They rejoiced greatly because they had been freed from captivity and had received the authority to restore the temple, but they wept loudly because they knew that the first temple, whose size and beauty they could in no way equal, had been destroyed on account of their wickedness. For the prophet’s words, ‘The glory of this new house will be greater than that of the first’ [Hag. 2:9], pertain not to the greatness or decoration of the house but to the act of building itself, because the fact that the few surviving captives were able to accomplish such a great undertaking even as their enemies were opposing them was a greater and more obvious miracle of divine power than that a very rich king who had no adversaries at all but rather the very powerful and wealthy king of Tyre as a collaborator [see 1 Kings 5:1-18], did this with most accomplished craftsmen, just as he desired.”

“Why have [the people] been left so pitifully reduced? Because of sin. They had sinned against God. They had broken the covenant. He visited the curses of the covenant upon them. This mention of the weeping at the foundation of the temple shows us that while the people have been restored to the land, they can tell that all the glorious end-time promises the prophets made are not coming to pass. The desert isn’t blooming. The Messiah isn’t reigning. Jerusalem isn’t being exalted. There is a sense, here, in which they are already seeing prophecies fulfilled, but not yet seeing all of them realized. This points the reader of Ezra forward, doesn’t it? This tells the reader of Ezra to keep watching because greater fulfillments are coming. The New Testament Gospels tell us about those greater fulfillments, and John’s Revelation tells us about how all things will be consummated.”

References
1. N. T. Wright, For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 8.
A Word from the Editor

Think about the encouragement people often share to help others through times of adversity. We might hear someone speak of how pressure is required to transform coal into a diamond; thus, pressure can be good for us, transforming us into someone better. Or we might be told of the hatchling that has to work to break through its eggshell, and that struggle is good for this creature—even necessary—so that it grows strong. Likewise, adversity strengthens us and positions us to be who we were meant to be.

While these illustrations might provide encouragement, they reveal something quite important about the world’s view of adversity. The world sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to dig deep, gaze within their soul, and discover who he or she truly is. But the gospel tells a different story—a better story. The gospel sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to look high above, gaze upon Christ, and see who He truly is. For it is Christ, not ourselves, who carries us through all trials and suffering. Adversity positions us to rely on Christ’s power, not an inner human strength that has been lying dormant.

In this volume we pick up the story of Scripture with the Jews living in bondage in a foreign land, the result of their rebellion against God. But even in the midst of judgment, God’s faithful love still shines forth brightly. We will witness God continuing to guide, strengthen, and protect His people in their time of great adversity, not to help them discover who they were but rather to understand who He is. At the same time, we will see God continue to drive the events of history toward the fulfillment of His ancient promise to provide the Rescuer, the One who would free people from an even greater bondage, that of sin and death.