

Day 79 – May 18

And so we come to the end. Israel has already been conquered and exiled. Judah is next, and last. Nebuchadnezzar, the villain of many a bible story, is introduced and proceeds to clear the temple of its riches and wealth. And then the people of Judah, except for the very poor, are exiled to Babylon. While this sets up the stories of Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, it is the most terrible fate for God's people. For they have been expelled not only from the temple, and not only from their land, but from God's presence.

We get a quite terrifying sentence in this reading, one that should have brought consternation and fear to every one of us: "The Lord would not forgive this." We have been told that God can forgive anything. We have been told "Once saved, always saved". We have been told that once we accept Jesus, we're free from sin and, while our salvation is "worked out" in our lives, we don't really have to worry about it anymore. And then we read things like this: "The Lord would not forgive this."

It is interesting that we have such a visceral repulsion to the violence of the Kingdoms book, yet when it comes to something so powerful and terrifying, we read right past it. (Did you?) But what do we do with this? What do we do with a God who will not forgive the spilling of innocent blood? Do we decide that this is just the Old Testament God, not the God of Jesus? Do we decide that it's a statement based on how they justify the Exile, but not a lasting theological comment? Do we decide that God must be fickle, forgiving and not forgiving on a whim, and so we are either terrified into strict behavior or we walk away? I know people who have answered this question with all of these statements.

I know we love clear, easy answers. We love to have all of our theology wrapped up in a pretty bow. But that is the power of a study of the Kings and Kingdoms: it forces us to realize that we don't know it all. We don't know (and more importantly can't control) God fully, and really live at His whim and pleasure. It forces us to honestly put our trust in God, not just in our belief about Him. God can choose not to let us into heaven no matter what we do. So our faith is in the loving, gracious kindness of God, a faith that He will welcome us for eternity not because we believe correctly, or because we act correctly, but because He chooses to. He chooses to love us, to forgive us, to put up with us, and ultimately to gift us with eternity with Him.

*Thank you, God, for forcing our hands, for forcing us to put our trust in You rather than in our own knowledge, belief, or behavior. We trust You and You alone, and so we put our lives, our eternities, in Your hands. Amen.*