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One God or Many?

Opening:

1. Music. It is often associated with joyful celebration. Such simple tunes as “Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you . . .” take us to pleasant places of joy with the people we love.
2. But music, or the lack thereof, sometimes reminds us of painful experiences. My mother requested that no songs be sung at my father’s funeral. She did not want to be reminded of the grief of the loss of my dad when she sang those same songs later.
3. Recently, my wife and I watched a Smithsonian Channel Special on the Vietnam War. The music took us back to re-experience the same emotions we had experienced as children.
4. Tell about your joyful or sorrowful experiences with music.
5. Watch the video Ep. 3 The Holy Land: From Exile to New Hope. Go to johnabeckauthor.com. At the bottom of the page click on The Holy Land, then click on YouTube. It will take you to where you need to go for Episode 3.

Into the Text:

1. Music played an important role in the history of Israel and Jerusalem. King David was well known as a musician. Even as a young lad he was skillful. He brought comfort to King Saul as he play on his harp (1 Sam. 16:16-23). David wrote many songs. One is recorded in 2 Sam. 22. There David praises God as his rock, his fortress and his deliverer. The Book of Psalms is filled with songs written by David. In these Psalms there is no song praising any god other than the LORD. David only had one God. When Goliath challenged, David said, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should taunt the armies of the living God?” (1 Sam. 17:26).
2. Moses had warned that kings should NOT multiply horses, that they should NOT greatly increase silver and gold, and that they should NOT multiply wives for themselves (Deut. 17:14-17). Instead, kings were to write a copy of the law of God on a scroll and read it all the days of their lives (Deut. 17:18-20).
3. David’s son, Solomon, did not follow Moses’ instruction. He multiplied horses, silver and gold and loved many foreign women. “His heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David, his father had been” (1 Kings 11:4). He built places of worship east of Jerusalem for his wives to worship Astoreth, Milcom, Chemosh and Molech (1 Kings 11:5-8).
4. Ultimately Israel was taken into exile because of their unfaithfulness to God. Ezekiel 16, in very graphic language, describes them as an adulterous wife, a harlot who instead of being paid actually paid her lovers. Note Jer. 3 and Hosea 1-3.

5. The shekinah glory, representing God's presence among the people (2 Chron. 7:1-3), was removed from the temple (Ezek. 10:18-19). In Babylon they hung up their harps in grief. There was no song of rejoicing (Psa. 137:1-6).

6. Ezekiel saw in a vision a time that the glory of God would return (Ezek. 43:1-5). What a time of rejoicing that would be. In Ezekiel 36:25-27 God said,

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."

7. The people of Israel came out of Babylonian captivity. They rebuilt the temple, but the shekinah glory was noticeably absent. When Titus destroyed Herod's temple in 70 A.D. it was an especially bleak moment for Jews. Today Jews are looking forward to the restoration of the glory of God. The "Western Wall," part of the retaining wall of the temple is described by some as the "wailing wall," a place where Jews pray, often placing written prayers in the crevices of the wall, as they long for the restoration of God's presence.

8. But New Testament writers see the situation differently. Recognizing Jesus as the Messiah they see those who accept Him as the promised One as the temple of God. In Eph. 2:19-22 Paul says,

"You are fellow-citizens with the saints and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

In 1 Cor. 6:19 he asks, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

9. Eph. 2:11-22 says that the blood of Christ is the means of bringing people together in this one temple. It would appear that the events described in Acts 2 mark the return of the glory of God to His people. Can this be the beginning of the fulfillment of such passages as Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-32? Such was the interpretation of Peter. See Acts 2:14ff.

The glory has not returned to a physical structure in Jerusalem, but His presence is powerfully demonstrated in the lives of His people, the church (present and intimate NOT remote). Nowhere is this any more clearly in evidence than in their rejoicing! Eph. 5:18-19 says,

“Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”

Harps hung on the willows in Babylon in grief have been transformed into hearts filled with the Spirit singing praise to the LORD!!!!

10. From exile to hope. From grief to rejoicing. From silence to celebration in song. From death to life. Such is the radical transition made possible by the one and only living God!

Application:

1. How has your understanding been affected by this study?
2. What will you do differently as a result?
3. Why are the people of God known for their songs of praise? What does singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs mean to you?
4. What are other manifestations of the presence of the glory of God in you?

1 Cor. 6:20
Gal. 5:16-26
Rom. 8:9-13