

Earlier this week, I was reading along in my regular devotional readings, when I came upon a verse that I was surely reading for the hundredth time. Yet this time, it stuck out at me like never before. It's this verse...

"Hear the word of Yahweh, O nations, And declare it in the isles afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, And keep him as a shepherd does his flock.' (Jer 31:10)

What's the big deal with that?, you might ask. Just this...

It spoke to me at once, of utter sovereignty and utter love. Jeremiah was prophesying that Israel would be conquered and taken captive by the Babylonian Empire... and they were. But included in Jeremiah's prophecy of conquer/captivity, here was Yahweh telling all the Gentile nations of the world (for that is what is meant by "O nations"), including Babylon, that they are not to gloat, nor get the big head, nor think that Yahweh had/has abandoned his people Israel, just because they're not in their own home land at this moment, and are scattered abroad, away from Israel. Just because they've hit an icy patch – yes, an icy patch of their own doing/making/fault – doesn't mean that their Shepherd, God Himself, Yahweh Elohim, has cast them off or abandoned them and no longer cares for them.

Here God was assuring Jeremiah, even as Jeremiah was in the midst of pronouncing unrelenting doom and judgment from Yahweh upon Israel, that that same God would redeem them, gather them, renew and restore them, just as a Shepherd does with his helpless, stupid, wandering sheep. The Shepherd could be trusted to care of those sheep even after their hapless, stupid wanderings. Sound familiar to anyone? Yeah, it did to me too. I loved it.

We can know that we know that we know, that even during times that seem like – and might just be – times of judgment, that God is still the Good Shepherd, and has not abandoned us. Now here's the tricky part...

If things don't go as you think they should, does that then indicate that God has abandoned us, and is no longer to be trusted? No, it does not.

And here is true trust in that fact...

I think the best example of this in Scripture, outside of Jesus of course, is the testimony of the three Hebrews boys, Hannaniah, Misharl and Azaria... better known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These boys were about to be killed for obeying their God rather than the king of the land in which they found themselves living... Babylon, by the way. You know the story, the king threatened their lives if they didn't worship the idol that he'd set up. And in doing so he asked, "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?".

The boys' response to King Nebuchadnezzar was as encouraging as God's words to Jeremiah, above. In direct response to the king's question, "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?", the boys said...

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.

But if not, *let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." (Dan 3:16-18)*

Whether things look scattered or secure... whether they look gloomy or promising...

whether they look like we'd like them to or otherwise, we can know that the Shepherd will gather us. Whether it happens in this life or in the next, we can know that the Shepherd will gather us. Indeed, it was He who scattered us, and it will be He who gathers us... whether in this life, or in Glory.

We won't always know why, nor can we always tie the events of our lives to certain sins, victories or otherwise... but whatever God does, He is to be praised and trusted. The appropriate response to whatever we experience is Worship.

Pastor