

Scattered Among the Nations

Yet Not Forgotten by God

Main Text

Leviticus 26:33, 38–39

Deuteronomy 4:27

Deuteronomy 28:25, 36–37, 64–68

Deuteronomy 30:1–4

1 Kings 8:46–50

2 Chronicles 6:36–39

Nehemiah 1:8–9

Sermon Theme

God warned Israel that rebellion would bring scattering, captivity, and sorrow among the nations. Yet even in judgment, God left a door of mercy. If His people would remember His word, repent, pray, and return to Him, He promised to hear, forgive, and gather them again.

Introduction

The same God who brought Israel out of Egypt also warned Israel not to forget Him when they entered the land.

He had delivered them from Pharaoh.

He had opened the Red Sea.

He had led them by cloud and fire.

He had fed them in the wilderness.

He had brought them to the land He promised.

But with blessing came responsibility.

Israel was not free to live as though the Lord had not redeemed them. They were not brought out of Egypt so they could become like the nations around them. They were called to be a covenant people, holy unto the Lord.

So God warned them.

If they turned away, broke His commandments, followed other gods, and hardened their hearts, the land itself would not protect them. Their temple would not protect them. Their king would not protect them. Their name as Israel would not protect them.

Disobedience would bring scattering.

Leviticus 26:33 says:

“And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.”

That is a fearful warning.

But the story does not end with scattering. God also gave a promise of return.

Deuteronomy 30:3 says:

“That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations...”

So this sermon is not only about judgment. It is also about mercy. It is about the God who warns before He wounds, who scatters because of sin, but who gathers because of covenant mercy.

1. God Warned Israel Before Judgment Came

Leviticus 26:33 says:

“And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.”

This warning was given before Israel ever experienced full national exile. God told them plainly what would happen if they forsook His covenant.

That is important.

God did not judge Israel without warning. He did not hide the consequences. He did not let them drift into destruction without speaking first. He set before them blessing and curse, obedience and judgment, life and death.

God’s warnings are acts of mercy.

When the Lord warns His people, He is not being cruel. He is calling them back before judgment falls. A warning is a sign that God is still speaking. A warning is an invitation to repent before the sword comes, before the land is desolate, before the cities are waste.

Israel’s scattering was not random tragedy. It was covenant judgment.

The Lord said, “I will scatter you.”

This meant that Israel’s greatest danger was not Assyria, Babylon, or any foreign army. Their greatest danger was sin against God. Foreign nations could become instruments of judgment, but the root issue was covenant rebellion.

The people could not say, “No one told us.” God had spoken clearly.

2. Sin Can Turn a Promised Land Into a Place of Desolation

Leviticus 26:33 says:

“...and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.”

The land was a gift from God. It was the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was a land of inheritance, a land of blessing, a land where Israel was meant to worship and obey the Lord.

But sin could make the land desolate.

That is a serious truth. A blessing can be lost when the heart turns from the Blessor. A place of promise can become a place of judgment when God’s people abandon God’s ways.

The cities would be waste. The land would be desolate. The people would be scattered among the heathen.

Israel may have thought, “This land is ours forever, no matter how we live.” But God warned them that covenant privilege did not remove covenant responsibility.

The land was not a charm.

The temple was not a charm.

The king was not a charm.

The name Israel was not a charm.

The people had to walk with God.

When a people receive God’s mercy but reject God’s commandments, they place themselves under discipline. Israel’s history teaches that sacred privilege must never become spiritual pride.

3. Scattering Was the Fruit of Iniquity

Leviticus 26:38–39 says:

“And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies’ lands...”

This passage shows the cause of their sorrow: iniquity.

They would not suffer among the nations because God had forgotten His covenant. They would suffer because they had broken covenant. They would pine away in their enemies’ lands because of sin.

Verse 39 says:

“...and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them.”

Sin does not stay private. It spreads. It affects families. It affects generations. It affects nations. Israel’s rebellion would not only harm one person in one moment. It would create long sorrow among their children.

This is why sin must never be treated lightly.

Sin promises freedom but leads to bondage.
Sin promises pleasure but produces sorrow.
Sin promises independence but ends in exile.

Israel's scattering among the nations was a national picture of what sin does spiritually. Sin drives people away from the place of fellowship, peace, obedience, and blessing.

But even here, the purpose of God's discipline was not meaningless destruction. God was exposing sin so His people might be humbled and eventually return.

4. God Said They Would Be Left Few in Number

Deuteronomy 4:27 says:

"And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you."

Israel had once multiplied in Egypt. They had grown into a great people. God had made them fruitful. But here God warns that rebellion would reduce them.

"Ye shall be left few in number."

The people who had been gathered into a nation could be scattered into remnants. The people who had been established in the land could become strangers among foreign nations.

This is a humbling warning.

It shows that national strength cannot preserve a people who forsake God. Numbers cannot save them. Armies cannot save them. Kings cannot save them. The land itself cannot save them.

Only the Lord can preserve His people.

When God says, "whither the LORD shall lead you," it reminds us that even scattering was under His sovereign hand. Foreign nations might carry Israel away, but God was still Lord over history. Their exile was not outside His authority.

That means judgment is not chaos. Even when Israel was scattered, God still knew where every scattered soul was.

5. Disobedience Would Bring Defeat Before Their Enemies

Deuteronomy 28:25 says:

"The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them..."

This verse describes military defeat and fearful flight.

Israel would go out one way, but flee seven ways. That is a picture of panic, confusion, collapse, and defeat.

Why? Because the Lord would no longer fight for them as He had fought at the Red Sea.

At the Red Sea, Israel stood still and saw the salvation of the Lord. But here, if they rebelled, they would flee before their enemies. The same people who had once watched God overthrow Pharaoh could later be scattered by foreign armies if they turned away from Him.

This teaches us that past deliverance must not become present presumption.

Israel could not say, "God delivered us from Egypt, so we may now live however we please." No. The God who saves is also the God who commands. The God who redeems is also the God who disciplines.

Deuteronomy 28:25 continues:

"...and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth."

This is scattering on a vast scale. Israel would not merely lose one battle. They would be removed among kingdoms.

Sin would turn the people of inheritance into a people of dispersion.

6. Even the King Would Be Taken Away

Deuteronomy 28:36 says:

"The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known..."

This warning reaches the highest level of the nation.

Not only the common people, but the king himself would be taken away. The throne would not protect Israel. Royal power would not save them. Political structure would not preserve them if they abandoned the Lord.

The king would be carried to a foreign nation.

Deuteronomy 28:37 says:

"And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee."

This is deep humiliation.

Israel was called to be a light and witness to the nations, but rebellion would make them a warning among the nations. Instead of being known only for blessing, they would become a proverb and a byword.

That is what sin does. It takes what God intended for honor and turns it into shame.

The fall of a nation does not begin with broken walls. It begins with broken covenant. It begins when the heart turns away from God.

7. Scattering Would Reach From One End of the Earth to the Other

Deuteronomy 28:64 says:

“And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other...”

This is one of the broadest warnings in the covenant.

Israel would be scattered far and wide. Their dispersion would not be limited to one nearby land. They would be driven among peoples from one end of the earth to the other.

The verse continues:

“...and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.”

This is a tragic reversal.

The people delivered from Egypt to serve the Lord would be scattered among nations and tempted by idols. The people who had heard, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” would find themselves surrounded by false worship.

Deuteronomy 28:65 says:

“And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest...”

Scattering would not bring peace. Running from God never gives rest. Life among the nations would be marked by unease, fear, sorrow, and trembling.

Verse 66 says:

“And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night...”

This is the sorrow of exile: uncertainty, fear, and no settled rest.

The warning is severe because sin is severe. God wanted Israel to understand what rebellion would cost before they chose it.

8. Rebellion Could Bring Them Back Toward Egypt

Deuteronomy 28:68 says:

“And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships...”

This is one of the most painful warnings in the whole passage.

Egypt was the place from which God had redeemed them. Egypt was the house of bondage. Egypt was the iron furnace. Egypt was the place of Pharaoh’s cruelty.

And yet God warned that rebellion could bring them back toward Egypt.

The verse says:

“...by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again...”

They were not meant to return. God had brought them out. But disobedience would reverse the direction of their life.

This is what sin does. It pulls people back toward the bondage God delivered them from.

Israel’s story warns us not to long for Egypt, not to return to Egypt, and not to live in such a way that the path of bondage opens again.

God had brought them out to be His people. To turn from Him was to move backward.

9. Yet God Promised Mercy After Scattering

Deuteronomy 30:1–3 says:

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee... and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God... That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee...”

Here the sermon turns from warning to hope.

God knew Israel would fail. He knew they would be scattered. But He also told them what to do in exile.

They were to remember.

Deuteronomy 30:1 says:

“...and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations...”

Memory would become the beginning of repentance. In a foreign land, among strange people, under sorrow and displacement, Israel was to remember the word of the Lord.

Then they were to return.

Deuteronomy 30:2 says:

“And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice...”

The way back to God begins with repentance. Not merely regret. Not merely sorrow over consequences. But returning unto the Lord.

Then comes the promise:

Deuteronomy 30:3

“That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee...”

This is mercy.

God’s discipline was real, but His compassion was not gone. The scattering did not mean God had forgotten how to gather. The captivity did not mean God had abandoned His covenant.

If they returned to Him, He would have compassion.

10. God Can Gather From the Uttermost Parts of Heaven

Deuteronomy 30:4 says:

“If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee.”

This is one of the most beautiful promises in these passages.

God says even if His people are driven to the farthest places, He can gather them.

Distance cannot defeat God’s mercy.

Exile cannot erase God’s covenant.

The nations cannot hide God’s people from His sight.

The farthest place is still within reach of His hand.

“From thence will the LORD thy God gather thee.”

The same God who scattered in judgment can gather in mercy.

The word “fetch” is tender and strong. It shows God personally bringing His people back. He does not merely send a message from far away. He gathers. He fetches. He restores.

This gives hope to the repentant heart.

No one is too far for God to reach. No nation is too distant. No exile is too deep. No scattered condition is too complicated for the Lord.

If God says, "I will gather," then the scattered can come home.

11. Solomon Prayed for the Captive People Before Captivity Came

1 Kings 8:46 says:

"If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives..."

Solomon understood the possibility of future captivity.

At the dedication of the temple, he prayed ahead of time for a people who might one day be carried away. He knew that sin could bring judgment. He also knew that God's mercy could reach His people even in a far country.

1 Kings 8:47 says:

"Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent..."

Notice the order.

They must bethink themselves.

They must repent.

They must make supplication.

Solomon continues in verse 48:

"And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul..."

God was not looking for empty words. He was calling for a full-hearted return.

Then Solomon prays in verse 49:

"Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause."

The temple was in Jerusalem, but God's hearing was not limited to Jerusalem. Even in captivity, prayer could reach heaven.

That is a powerful truth.

A person may be far from home but not beyond prayer. A nation may be under judgment but not beyond mercy. A people may be captive but not unheard.

Solomon prayed that when the captives repented, God would hear.

12. Confession Is Part of the Way Back

1 Kings 8:47 says:

“...saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness.”

This is the language of true confession.

Not, “We were unlucky.”

Not, “Our enemies were too strong.”

Not, “Our fathers failed, but we are innocent.”

Not, “The times were hard.”

But:

“We have sinned.”

“We have done perversely.”

“We have committed wickedness.”

True repentance does not excuse sin. It names sin.

Israel’s way back would require honesty before God. They would need to confess that captivity was not only a political disaster. It was the fruit of covenant rebellion.

This is where healing begins.

A people cannot return to God while defending the sin that drove them away from Him. A heart cannot be restored while still blaming everyone else. Confession opens the mouth to tell the truth before God.

The prodigal must say, “I have sinned.”

The captive must say, “We have committed wickedness.”

The backslider must stop hiding and return.

God’s mercy meets truthful repentance.

13. The Prayer in Chronicles Repeats the Same Hope

2 Chronicles 6:36–39 gives the same prayer as Solomon’s dedication.

2 Chronicles 6:36 says:

“If they sin against thee, (for there is no man which sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives...”

Again, the Scripture is honest: “there is no man which sinneth not.”

Solomon does not excuse sin, but he recognizes human weakness. He knows the people may fall. He knows they may be carried far away. So he prays for mercy before the disaster happens.

2 Chronicles 6:37 says:

“Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee...”

There it is again: remember, turn, pray.

The far country can become a place of awakening. Captivity can become a place of repentance. The land of exile can become the place where the heart begins to return to God.

2 Chronicles 6:39 says:

“Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee.”

The prayer asks God to hear, maintain, and forgive.

That is what the scattered need most.

They need God to hear.

They need God to uphold their cause.

They need God to forgive their sin.

Without forgiveness, return is not complete. The deepest need of the scattered people is not merely geography. It is restored fellowship with God.

14. Nehemiah Remembered the Warning and Claimed the Promise

Nehemiah 1:8 says:

“Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations.”

Nehemiah prayed after the judgment had happened.

Jerusalem’s wall was broken. The people were in distress. The exile and its aftermath were real. Nehemiah did not pretend the warning had never been given. He brought God’s own word back to Him in prayer.

He said, “Remember... the word.”

This is how a servant of God prays in a broken time. He does not begin with denial. He begins with Scripture. He acknowledges that God warned them through Moses.

“If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations.”

Nehemiah understood that the scattering was not proof that God's word failed. It was proof that God's word was true.

But Nehemiah also remembered the promise.

Nehemiah 1:9 says:

"But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them... yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there."

Nehemiah prayed both sides of the word: warning and promise.

That is mature faith.

He did not claim mercy while ignoring sin.
He did not confess sin while forgetting mercy.
He held both together.

God had said, "I will scatter."
God had also said, "I will gather."

So Nehemiah prayed with repentance and hope.

15. God's Scattering Was Not the End of His Covenant

This is the great comfort in all these passages.

Scattering was judgment, but not the end.
Captivity was discipline, but not the end.
Foreign lands were sorrowful, but not the end.
Broken walls were shameful, but not the end.

God still left a promise:

Deuteronomy 30:3

"...the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee..."

Nehemiah 1:9

"...yet will I gather them from thence..."

The covenant God disciplines His people, but He does not forget His mercy. He warns, He judges, He humbles, and He calls them back.

This does not make sin small. It makes mercy great.

The same God who brought Israel out of Egypt could bring Israel back from exile. The same God who gathered them from bondage could gather them from the nations. The same God who heard their cry in Egypt could hear their prayer in Babylon, Persia, or any far country.

God's people may be scattered because of sin, but they are not hidden from God.

16. Lessons From the Warnings of Scattering

First, God warns before He judges.

Leviticus 26:33 says:

“And I will scatter you among the heathen...”

The warning itself was mercy.

Second, covenant privilege does not cancel covenant responsibility.

Israel had the land, the promises, the temple, and the law, but rebellion still brought judgment.

Third, sin leads to scattering.

Sin separates, drives out, unsettles, and removes peace.

Fourth, no earthly strength can protect a people who forsake God.

Kings, armies, cities, and land could not save Israel from covenant judgment.

Fifth, exile is not beyond the reach of prayer.

Solomon prayed that God would hear His people even in a far country.

Sixth, true return requires confession.

“We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness.”

Seventh, God can gather from the farthest place.

Deuteronomy 30:4 says:

“...from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee...”

Eighth, God's mercy is greater than distance.

No scattered place is too far for the hand of the Lord.

Ninth, God's promises should shape our prayers.

Nehemiah prayed by remembering what God had spoken through Moses.

Tenth, the God who scatters in righteousness can gather in compassion.

Judgment is real, but mercy is also real.

Closing Exhortation

Israel was warned.

God told them plainly that rebellion would bring scattering. He told them the sword would follow. He told them the land would become desolate. He told them they would be carried among nations. He told them they would find no ease among the peoples. He told them even their king could be taken away.

These were not empty words.

God is holy. His covenant is serious. His commandments are not suggestions. A redeemed people must not live like an unredeemed people.

But God also gave hope.

If they remembered His word, returned to Him, prayed, confessed, and sought Him with all their heart and soul, He would hear. He would forgive. He would have compassion. He would gather.

Deuteronomy 30:4 says:

“If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee.”

That is mercy.

So let the warning humble us.

Let the scattering teach us the seriousness of sin.

Let the captivity teach us the cost of turning from God.

Let Solomon’s prayer teach us to repent.

Let Nehemiah’s prayer teach us to stand on God’s word.

Let the promise of gathering teach us hope.

The far country is not too far.

The scattered people are not forgotten.

The broken nation is not beyond mercy.

The repentant heart is not beyond hearing.

God still hears prayer from the land of captivity.

God still receives confession from the humbled heart.

God still remembers His word.

God still gathers according to His mercy.

The Lord who warned Israel is righteous.

The Lord who scattered Israel is holy.

The Lord who promised to gather Israel is merciful.

And blessed is the people who hear the warning before judgment, return before ruin, and trust the mercy of the God who gathers the scattered.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, You are holy, righteous, and merciful. You warned Israel that sin would bring scattering, captivity, and sorrow, yet You also promised compassion to those who returned to You. Teach us to take Your word seriously. Keep us from pride, presumption, and rebellion. Give us hearts that confess sin honestly and return to You fully. Hear us when we pray from far places. Gather what has been scattered. Restore what has been broken. And make us a people who remember Your warnings, trust Your promises, and walk in obedience before You. Amen.