

## *Don't Lose Hope*

Many of us have loved ones or acquaintances who are not faithful. This is not only heart breaking, but it can turn into a tremendous source of discouragement. We know ourselves first-hand how tightly the world can grab onto an individual. Our discouragement originates from our doubt on whether or not the individual is going to let go of the world. We even convince ourselves that God cannot reach or forgive a person because of how far he or she has drifted away. Even though the outcome of one's spiritual life is not always clear, it is important that we remind ourselves about God's perspective towards those who have fallen away.

The Jews suffered consequences for their sins several times throughout their history; however, God had a greater concern that saw past their immediate circumstances. God's people during the Mosaic dispensation did not have as good of an understanding of His grace as we do today; but as we look back with this superior understanding, we can recognize that the concept is clearly expressed throughout the Old Testament. During Israel's time in captivity, God spoke words of correction and words of encouragement through the prophet Ezekiel. God said, "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live" (Ezekiel 18:21, 22). Just because the nation as a whole was being judged for their iniquity, that does not mean God did not want repentance on an individual bases.

At the end of the day, those who have fallen away have to make the choice to return, which is exactly what God wanted with Israel. What we can take comfort in is His response to their apostasy. Even though Israel had drifted far away from the Lord, He told them that if they repent, their transgressions would no longer be remembered. It does not matter how far our loved ones drift away into fleshly deceit, God is always there to welcome them into the fold with open arms. All we can do as Christians is offer them the choice, and encourage them to make the right one, leaving the rest to the Lord. That is exactly what was done with the nation of Israel through the prophet. Let us take comfort in knowing that there is always hope while we remain on earth, because that is just the kind of God we have.