

10. JUDAH'S EXILE & RESTORATION

586-400 B.C.

I. Judah's Seventy Years of Exile in Babylon

For continued covenant rebellion, God determined to send Judah into Babylonian exile. The 70-year length of the exile (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10) was determined by the number of Sabbath/ sabbatical years in which Israel had planted crops when the land should have had a "year-off (2Chronicles 36:21).

Psalm 137 describes the sadness of Jews in Babylon, but they were treated well and eventually a large Jewish colony remained in Babylon when 50,000 Jews returned under Zerubbabel and Ezra. When, eventually, two Talmuds (Jewish oral traditions written down and collected) were produced, the Babylonian version was large and more scholarly than the Palestinian version.

Historical Empires in the Middle East

The Bible identifies the political setting in places, but it would help to just know when various nations were dominant and the larger political landscape against which Biblical history unfolds.

- A. The *Assyrian* Empire was powerful down to its decline and fall to Babylon in 612 B.C.
- B. The *Neo-Babylonian* Empire was powerful from the time it finished off the Assyrian empire (612 BC) to the time when Persia conquered Babylon (539 BC).
- C. The *Medo-Persian* Empire ruled the Middle East from 539-330 BC
- D. The *Greek* Empire of Alexander the Great and its later divisions ruled from 330-170 BC
- E. The *Roman* Empire moved into control of Judea in 63 B.C. and continued to control things for several centuries

II. Prophets of the Exilic Period

A couple of prophets predicted the events of the exilic (586-516 BC) and Intertestamental era (400-5 B.C.), so the Jews would have some idea of what was coming as they waited on the promised Messiah. Hosea 3:3-5 also probably spans this era.

A. *Daniel* - The prophet Daniel became an honored administrator in Babylon and worked with various rulers until the Persians conquered Babylon. He also recorded a number of predictions that outline the major events from his time to the first century AD. Beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, four kingdoms (portrayed in chapter 2 as a 4-sectioned statue, then in chapter 7 as 4 beasts coming up out of the sea) would rule the Middle East and God's kingdom would be established during the fourth (Ch. 2,7), also presented in years (9:24-27).

B. *Ezekiel* - in Babylon with the exiles, his prophecies predict a day when spiritual shepherds will take care of God's people (34), the end of Edom (35), restoration of Judah from exile (36), Israel will come back to life as a nation (37), and after a period of peace back in their land Judah will be attacked from the north but the attackers will be defeated (38-39). A separate

vision portrays Israel's future in terms of a glorified Temple (40-48), probably a typological image of the current age.

III. Restoration of Judah & 2nd Temple Era

A. Return to Judah (539-516 B.C.)

1. *Ezra 1-6*/ The end of 2Chronicles and Cyrus' release of captives is repeated (1), the returnees genealogical information (2), the restoration of the altar and Temple is described (3), troubles from the Samaritans (4).

2. Haggai and Zechariah arose as prophets to encourage the people to finish the temple restoration.

B. *Esther* (479 B.C.?) - a Jewish girl wound up in the Persian king's harem and a bureaucrat tried to have the Jewish people destroyed. Esther had opportunity to help her people because of her position in court life (4:13-14). The feast of Purim commemorates what she did (9:24-28).

C. Reforms Under Ezra & Nehemiah (457-423 B.C.)

1. *Ezra 7-10*/ Ezra was a descendant of Aaron, skilled in the Law, godly in lifestyle and committed to teaching the Law to Israelites (7:6,10). The Persian decree to restore the Jewish commonwealth is recorded (7:11-26) in its original Aramaic (the decree in 457 BC that begins the 483-year countdown of Daniel 9:24-26 and leads to the Messiah's appearance in 26 AD). The genealogical list of those who accompanied Ezra back to Judah (8). Ezra had to deal with intermarriage problems (9-10).

2. *Nehemiah* - cupbearer to the Persian king, he was allowed to return to Judah as Governor and assist Ezra in bringing order to Judah, according to the Law (1-2). Samaritans were a threat, so Nehemiah organized repairs to Jerusalem's walls in spite of troubles (2:12 - 6:15). Jerusalem was not well-populated (7:4) and Nehemiah found the genealogical listing from Zerubbabel's original group that returned in 536 BC (7:5-73). Ezra led a spiritual restoration, reading and explaining the Law (8). Then, Israel's history is recounted and this leads into a prayer for help (9). The people enter into a covenant to obey the Law (10). Lots were cast to bring Jews to live in Jerusalem (11:1ff). Nehemiah went to Persia for awhile, but when he returned to Judah, he had to deal with foreigners living in the Temple (13:1-9), restoring the tithe so Levites could serve (13:10-14), Sabbath violation by merchants (13:15-22), and a continuing intermarriage problem (13:23-29). 13:29 may serve as a parallel to Malachi 2:1-9).

D. *Malachi* - Demonstrates that around 430 B.C. God was not truly being honored in the hearts of Jewish people (1), the Levites had failed in their teaching ministry (2:1-9), divorce and re-marriage problems (2:11-17), the forerunner & Messiah are coming (3:1-4), a challenge to restore the tithe (3:5-12), some have counseled rebellion (3:13-15). Warning of coming judgment, keep the Law, look for the promised forerunner (4).

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