

A Survey of the Bible

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” Psalm 119:105

Lesson 6

Israel in Bondage and Restored

The Destruction of Jerusalem to the Birth of Jesus

2 Kings 25:22-30; 2 Chron. 36:20-23; Daniel; Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther

In the 15th century B.C. Israel went from a nation of slaves to a nomadic nation and eventually to a conquering nation. From the 14th to the 11th centuries Israel conquered the land of Palestine and became one of the most powerful nations in the region. The 10th century saw Israel in her height led by David and Solomon but she soon declined. Solomon’s sin, Rehoboam’s pride and the succeeding disobedience of both the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah, brought Israel full circle. Israel was again subject to a foreign power. Israel became captive to Assyria in 722 B.C. and Judah finally fell to Babylon in 586 B.C. Although Israel never again returned to her national prosperity and favor as in the days of David and Solomon, she did have hope. Israel’s promised Messiah was yet to come!

Israel in Captivity.

“So Judah was carried away captive out of his land” (2 Kgs 25:21). There were only a few Israelites who remained in Palestine. Nebachudnezzar, King of Babylon, left Gedaliah as governor over Judah after he had destroyed Jerusalem. Jeremiah the prophet was one of those in Judah. Much of Jeremiah’s prophecy has to do with the sin of Judah which caused the captivity, a plea for them to repent, and also records the assassination of Gedaliah and the ultimate flight to Egypt for fear of Babylon’s retaliation for that murder. Jeremiah’s writing provides a glimpse into the life of those left and their disarray following Jerusalem’s fall.

Writing Prophets

Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Daniel
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

Most of Judah was in captivity in Babylon. Biblical sources for this period are found in Ezekiel and Daniel. Ezekiel told the Jews to expect a long captivity, in contrast to the false prophets who predicted a quick return to Judah. Ezekiel’s prophecy is filled with figures to impress upon the Jews the condition of Jerusalem, the impending fall of Jerusalem [Ezekiel was taken captive in 606 B.C. before Jerusalem fell], and God’s departure from the temple. His message of doom was matched by an equally impressive message of hope. He pictured God’s return to the temple which was to be rebuilt - a figure to the Jews that they would return to the land and God would once again bless them and be with them. Through Ezekiel God both reproved the Jews and gave them hope.

The first six chapters of Daniel’s book are largely historical. These chapters span the entirety of the seventy years of captivity, giving “snapshots” of Daniel and his three companions as they lived and worked in the capital of Babylon and, after Babylon fell, a provincial capital of Persia. Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego illustrate faithfulness to God even in the face of death (Dan. 3). Daniel demonstrates faithful service to the earthly king as well as the heavenly King. Daniel was God’s messenger to Nebachudnezzar, Darius, and Belshazzar. In these messages Daniel gave detailed information concerning events which were to come. Many of these prophecies are found in chapters seven through twelve of Daniel. Daniel and his three companions were different than

Historical Periods

Babylonian Captivity

Fall of Jerusalem to the decree of Cyrus

Period of Restoration

Decree of Cyrus to the End of the Old Testament

Intertestamental [Between the Testaments]

End of the Old Testament to the Birth of John

the Jews by the River Chebar with Ezekiel. However, most Jews had an interest in their home and their relationship with God. It was this time of chastening that brought permanent changes in Israel. Although they were not a perfect people after they returned to Palestine, they never again had the terrible problems with idolatry which brought about their captivity.

After seventy years the children of Israel were once again permitted to inhabit the land of Palestine. God had promised this restoration and God delivered. Through the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, God caused his children to return to the land of promise. See 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4.

Israel Restored.

God had warned Israel of the captivity through Isaiah and explained it further through Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Each prophet reproved Israel for their sin, urged their repentance, and told them that God would return Israel to Palestine. Their return was due to God fulfilling his promise. They were, it appears, a people ready to serve God again but God made it plain through Ezekiel that it was for his holy name's sake and not their righteousness that they would be returned to the land (Ezek. 34-37). Remember, the Messiah was yet to be born and the Messiah was to be the descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12-14).

Included in the decree of King Cyrus was the charge to build a house [temple] for God in Jerusalem. The first of the Jews to return to Jerusalem set about to build this temple. Their work of construction, however, was met with opposition. The construction of the temple was halted a couple of times because of opposition by those within the land of Palestine. Twice there were letters written to the King and twice the instruction to build was renewed. Finally the temple was completed on the 3rd day of Adar, in the 6th year

Build the Temple!

Both Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews encouraging them to rebuild the temple. It appears that not only had political disruptions held up the temple, but self-interest also was a problem. Haggai and Zechariah succeeded in moving the people to complete the house of God.

Zechariah included many promises of the Messiah to come as well as challenges to build the temple. This challenging book provides a fascinating picture of the Messiah. The prophecies he gave helped prepare the people for Jesus the Christ.

of Darius the king and was dedicated by the children of Israel with joy. Now they were back in their land and the temple of the Lord was finished.

Following the building of the temple came the building of the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was in Shushan the palace when the condition of the city of Jerusalem came to him. He was troubled at the condition of Jerusalem and his unhappiness was perceived by the king [Nehemiah was a cup-bearer to the king]. Nehemiah prayed to God for fear of the king's response and then told the king why he was sad. The king granted Nehemiah permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild. Nehemiah's prayer was answered. See Nehemiah 1,2.

Nehemiah then returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. He scouted the city by night, brought to the Jews' attention the condition of the city, and challenged them to build the walls. The people accepted the challenge. There were several obstacles put in Nehemiah's way, again by the people of the land, but "the people had a mind to work" and all obstacles were successfully overcome. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in 52 days! See Nehemiah 2-6.

The remainder of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 7-13) describe the continued work of rebuilding the nation of Israel. The temple was built and the walls were finished, but the people needed to be reminded of their need to serve God. Specific problems had to be addressed and solved. Israel was being rebuilt spiritually and physically!

Esther, a Queen of Courage.

While Israel was rebuilding in Judah several Jewish families remained in the land of their captivity. It appears that many of them had prospered in those lands. Esther was a Jewess who found herself in a unique position.

King Ahasuerus of the Medo-Persian kingdom took Esther as queen after his own wife, Vashti, had refused his request. Esther was in a position to help her people.

The Jews were in danger because of one man's hatred of another. Haman, a minister of the king, developed a hatred for Mordecai, a Jew and cousin to Esther. This hatred grew from Haman's desire for honor and Mordecai's refusal to give him honor. Haman decided to punish all the Jews rather than just Mordecai. Haman succeeded in obtaining a decree from the king to kill all Jews. It was not known to the

king nor to Haman that Esther was also a Jew.

When the decree became known Mordecai urged Esther to speak with the king. He told Esther, "For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Es. 4:14) Esther told Mordecai to have all the

Jews fast three days and nights, and she and her maidens would also fast, then she would go before the king. [Note: If she went before the king without being summoned and he did not hold out his scepter toward her to accept her presence she could have been killed.] After three days Esther went in before the king, was received by him, and requested that he and Haman dine with her. Her invitation was accepted.

Haman was delighted at the invitation to dine with the king and queen. His delight however turned to anger when he saw Mordecai. Upon the advice of others he had gallows made to hang Mordecai the next day. It seemed, however, that Haman was his own worst enemy.

That night the king asked for his chronicles be read to him. He was reminded that he had not rewarded Mordecai for revealing an earlier plot against his life. He inquired of Haman what should be done for the man he wanted to honor. Haman thought it was him and suggested that the man be lead through the city on the king's horse and in the King's robe wearing a royal crown with one of the king's most noble princes proclaiming that this would be done to those the king chooses to honor. The king had Haman do so to Mordecai!

On the second day of the banquet with the queen Haman's plot was made known to the king along with Esther's identity as a Jew. Haman was hanged on the gallows he had made for Mordecai and Mordecai was promoted to the position Haman had occupied. With the king's permission Mordecai and Esther drafted another decree for the Jews to defend themselves against those who would follow the decree already sent through Haman's intrigue. [Persian law forbade the changing of a law once made, but this second decree offset the first and its effect. See Esth. 8:8;

Dan. 6:15] By this decree the Jews were delivered from destruction. The Jews celebrated their deliverance and victory. They set an annual celebration for the fourteenth day of Adar (the twelfth month) which was called the feast of Purim. [Purim is from the word Pur, the lot, which Haman used to destroy them].

The book of Esther provides yet another look at God's providential care of his people. Esther's courage and

Mordecai's faithfulness are examples to God's people in every age.

From Malachi to Matthew.

The period between the Old Testament and New Testament is one of silence, when considering the inspired text. However, this period was a critical period in the history of western civilization.

The Old Testament closes with the Persians dominating the scene in the eastern Mediterranean world. The Persians though were in the early stages of a conflict with the Greeks. This conflict they would eventually lose. The Greeks were threatening and troubling the western region of the Persian kingdom, Asia Minor.

The fourth century was a complete change in politics for the eastern Mediterranean. Young Alexander [the Great] unified the Greeks and then made his amazing sweep eastward. He conquered Asia Minor, Palestine, Egypt, and Persia. His untimely death prevented his continued eastward progression. After he died his kingdom was divided among his four generals. Israel was passed between two of the resulting kingdoms.

While Israel was dealing with the powers to her north and south the Roman empire was building toward the west. The Romans were drawn further and further east until they ultimately controlled the Mediterranean world. Their eastern frontier was in the middle of Mesopotamian valley. It was during the days of these kings that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1). Just six months prior to his birth John was born to Zechariah and Elizebeth. The birth of John ended the period of silence and ushered in the period we know as the life of Christ. The world which sat in darkness saw a great light!

Babylonian Captivity		Intertestamental
606-536 B.C. 70 years		App. 400 years
Daniel	Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther	Alexander
Ezekiel	Haggai, Zechariah,	Ptolemy
Jeremiah	Malachi	Seleucus
		Julius Caesar
Period of Restoration		
536-400 B.C. 135 years		

For Review.

1. Where did Daniel live during the Babylonian captivity?
2. Where did Ezekiel live during the captivity?
3. Where did Jeremiah live during the captivity?
4. How did Esther show her courage?
5. Who oversaw and encouraged the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem?

Identify the Following.

- Daniel
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- Esther
- Nehemiah
- Ezra
- Mordecai

Chronology. Put the people listed below in chronological order, using the spaces on the right.

- Daniel _____
- Noah _____
- Joshua _____
- Solomon _____
- Hezekiah _____
- Josiah _____
- Nehemiah _____
- Saul _____
- Jacob _____

For Further Study

Merrill C. Tenney, New Testament Survey. Revised by Walter M. Dunnitt (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1985). Pages 1-47 for the period between the testaments.

J.W. McGarvey, Lands of the Bible (Indianapolis, IN: Faith and Facts, 1880). A terrific volume on Bible Geography. A needed addition to any library.

Wayne Jackson, A Study Guide to Greater Bible Knowledge (Stockton, CA: Courier Publ., 1986). A great tool in developing your skill in understanding the Bible.

See also the web page at: www.christiancourier.com

A Survey of the Bible is written by Greg Weston Go to www.tftw.org for Chinese and Spanish studies.

Event Chronology. Place the following events in order on the time line below.

- Feast of Purim
- Solomon's death
- John the Baptist's birth
- Crossing the Jordan
- Jerusalem's fall
- King Saul anointed
- Noah building the ark
- Call of Abraham
- Creation
- Crossing the Red Sea