

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 122 Exile 587 to 428BC

The Assyrian Babylonian Exile begins, for our purposes, in 587 BC with the fall of Judah to King Nebuchadnezzar. There are three empires we need to be familiar with in order to understand Jewish history over the next 250-year period.

First the Assyrian Empire, which reached its peak between 880 BC & 612 BC. In 722 BC Assyria conquered the northern 10 tribes often identified in scripture as Israel.

Second the Babylonians took the capital of Assyria in 612 BC and after defeating Egypt in Carchemish in 605 BC controlled the area around Judah. This led to the eventual fall of Judah after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Finally, around 50 years later in 539 BC, Persia captured Babylon and took over the empire. The following year in 538 BC the Jewish people were repatriated, encouraged by the Persian King Cyrus II to practice their faith and culture, restoring Jerusalem and the temple. The Persians ruled the region for another 200 years although they struggled with the Greeks for supremacy from 513 BC until around 333 BC when Alexander the Great swept through the region.

On this exterior framework we can now hit some of the highlights of the history of God's people during this time of great struggles over the Levant (historical geographical term for a large area of the Eastern Mediterranean).

We get Nebuchadnezzar's insanity recorded in Daniel chapter 4 somewhere between 573 BC and 569 BC. Daniel records some of the final visions for King Belshazzar of the Babylonian empire in chapters 7 and 8. Daniel reads the handwriting on the wall "mene, mene, tekel, upharsin" in chapter 5 on the eve of the fall of Babylon. While much can be said about that evening in history, I find it quite amazing that we can, with great certainty, date that event to Sunday October 11th 539 BC. (I will refer you to page 175 of Andrew Steinmann's book "From Abraham to Paul" as my source for this date. Most of the dates in this series are drawn from that book)

Ezekiel and Daniel are good sources for history during the exile while we look to Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah for post exilic or return from exile information. We learn in the first chapters of Ezra that Cyrus decreed the return of the exiles in 538 BC in 533 BC. They arrive in the summer and in that same year they build a new altar and conduct their first sacrifice on it. The second temple construction begins in 532 BC, only to be halted the following year because of suspicious neighbors. It was not until Haggai and Zechariah prophesied in 520 BC that the second temple building resumed. We know of a number of events and their dates during the reign of Xerxes through the book of Esther. These are Jews who chose to stay in the Susa instead of returning to Jerusalem. Most of the events leading to deliverance of the Jews, allowing them to defend themselves, came in Mordechai's edict in 474 BC. This edict leads to the celebration, of the first festival of Purim, on Friday April 6th 473 BC.

Ezra and Nehemiah record a number of key events that close out the Old Testament chronology. In 445 BC, the wall of Jerusalem is built and a number of events reestablishing the Jewish culture and identity as God's people take place. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem in late 429, early 428 BC, and that is the last solidly datable event in the Old Testament.

Next month we will examine the time between the testaments.

Till next month
Pastor Portier