

# Bible History Survey

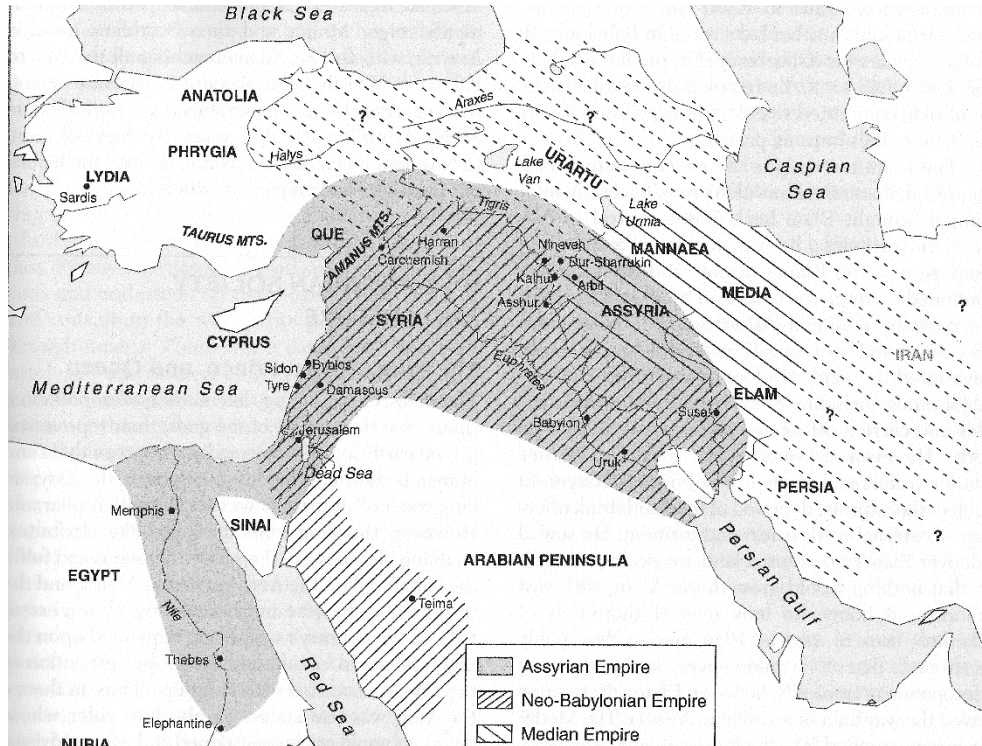
## Part VI: The Exilic & Post-Exilic Period

### Setting and Background

Babylon defeated Egypt and Assyria at the Battle of Carchemish and Judah was added to the Babylonian Empire as a vassal state in 605 BC. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon ordered young members of the Judean nobility to be brought to Babylon. This is the **First Deportation** from Judah and included Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

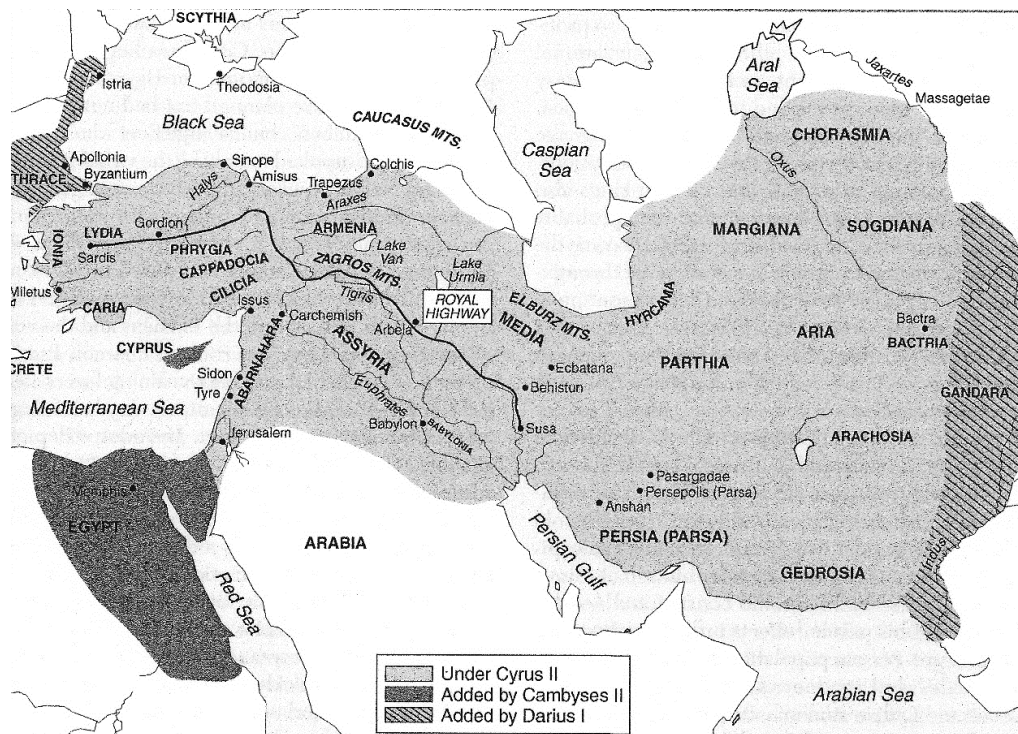
The **Second Deportation** occurred in 597 BC after Kings Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin of Judah rebelled against Babylon. Jehoiachin, many members of the royal family and the higher ranks of society, including Ezekiel were part of this Deportation. This is also when many of the sacred articles of the Jerusalem temple were taken to Babylon to be placed in the temple of Marduk. Jehoiachin/Jechoniah was considered the real king of Judah both by the Judeans and the Babylonians. In exile he was eventually treated well (2 Kings 25:27–30). It is from him that the Messianic line continued (see Matt 1:11–16). The Babylonians put Zedekiah, a son of Josiah and uncle of Jehoiachin, on the throne to rule Judah.

Ignoring the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah, King Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon. This was crushed in 587/6 BC after a siege that lasted a year and a half. Many of the Judeans were taken to Babylon in a **Third Deportation**, leaving only peasants to work the fields (2 Kgs 25:12). The city, wall, and temple of Jerusalem were completely destroyed.



Assyria (900–609 BC)  
height of power:  
744–627 BC

Babylon (625–539 BC)  
height of power:  
616–560 BC



Persia (650–330 BC)  
height of power:  
539–448 BC

**Ezekiel** (“God strengthens”): prophesied in Babylon 593–570 BC)



Addresses the exiles in Babylon after the Second Deportation who insisted on a speedy return to Jerusalem. After the news of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6, they are more receptive to his preaching.

Ezekiel preaches repentance in light of the doom upon the earthly Jerusalem as punishment for impenitence and sin. More than any other prophet Ezekiel had to act out his prophecies, all of which pointed to the destruction and judgment of Jerusalem: model siege (4), lying on his left side for 390 days, and on the right side for 40, bound by cords, eating cakes of bread baked over dung (4), shaving and dividing his hair (5), carrying out his possessions from the city in “exile” (12), eating and drinking while trembling (12)

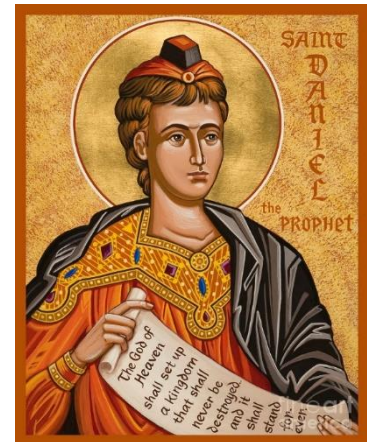
Ezekiel also preaches consolation to penitent exiles who were bid to look to the future glory of God’s people with the coming of the Messiah and the eternal Jerusalem: God Himself the Shepherd who will seek and gather His people (34), a new and living heart given by God (36), restoration from exile/resurrection from death (37), *Davidus redivivus* (37), the temple of the Messianic era (40–48).

**Daniel** (“God is my judge”): prophesied in Babylon/Persia 605 – 536 BC)

The prophet Daniel writes about his time in Babylon, the conquering of Babylon by the Medes and Persians in 539 BC, and events shortly after that, completing his book around 536 BC.

Deals with the temptation of God’s people to forsake national/religious identity while in exile, and reminders of the God of Israel as the Lord of history and the master over even the greatest human empires.

Prophesies the coming empires of Persia, Greece, and Rome, the return of the Jews to Palestine, and the arrival of the Messiah.



### Results of the Captivity

God’s people were taken to Babylon as a chastisement for their sins, especially the gross idolatry and horrific excesses which threatened the very existence of the true faith. As a result of the 70 years of captivity, we see a number of distinct features in the people of Judah:

#### 1. Extinction of idolatry

While in possession of the Temple in Jerusalem, the people of Judah had repeatedly fallen into idol worship. Seeing first-hand the impurity of heathen worship in Babylon, they longed to reestablish the pure worship of the true God in Jerusalem. Their religious thinking underwent a thorough chastening. Never again were idols openly tolerated among the people of Israel.

#### 2. Advance of religious education

In the synagogues or schools established during the captivity, the Jews undertook the systematic study of the Torah and prophets. Vulgar, open rejection of the Law was largely checked, however this began to give rise to the dangerous thought that would characterize Pharisaism: that outward obedience to the letter of the Law was the source of righteousness before God.

#### 3. Messianic hope deepened

From Daniel and Ezekiel’s preaching, faith in the coming Messiah filled the hearts of the exiles as they were taught to long for deliverance not only of their bodies, but of their souls from sin and the evils of this earthly life. However, this also gave rise to an un-scriptural conception of the Messiah and His kingdom as one of *national* deliverance.





## Return from Exile and Resettlement

In 539 BC, the Medo-Persian Empire overtook Babylon. Cyrus the Great took a different approach than the Assyrians and Babylonians who deported their conquered peoples and allowed all deportees in the empire to return to their homelands if they wished, including the people of Judah. Even as Babylon was God's instrument of judgment (see Isaiah 47), Cyrus was God's anointed agent for Judah's return (see Isaiah 45). Though many of the Judean exiles remained in Babylonia, a large number returned to Judea. The return and rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple and wall took place in several stages and under the leadership of different men:

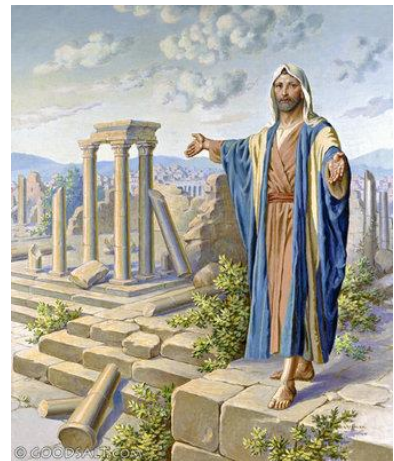
### 1. First Group Under Zerubbabel

In 538, about 70 years after the first deportation, Zerubbabel, a prince of the house of David, and Joshua, high priest from the line of Zadok, led 42,500 people back to Judah. Under their leadership the foundation of the temple was laid, but work ceased in 536 before it was rebuilt. Under the encouragement of the prophet Haggai, the work of rebuilding resumed in 520 and the new temple was completed in 516 BC, exactly 70 years after the destruction of the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar's army.

**Haggai** ("festal"): prophesied in Jerusalem 520 BC

Encouraged the people of Judah to complete the construction of the second temple with joyous priority and assured them that it was destined to a glory that would greatly surpass the first temple.

One startling teaching of Haggai is that the temple should be built *before* private homes, or at least before luxurious homes (1:4). Another startling teaching is that a poor economy can be a good reason *to build a temple*, rather than a good reason *not to* (2:15–19).



Notable passage: "thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts" (2:6–9).



**Zechariah** ("YAH has remembered"): prophesied in Jerusalem 520–518 BC

Addresses all the people of the land of Judah after the exile and their descendants, special attention given to his fellow priests and Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Judah. Like his contemporary Haggai, Zechariah addresses the failure to rebuild the temple, encouraging them to repent and take up their work with joy.

Notable passages:

Joshua the High Priest given clean garments to withstand Satan's accusations (3)

Prophecy of the Messiah as priest and king (6)

Righteous King on donkey bringing salvation (9)

God will pour out His blessings on Jerusalem even as its inhabitants look on Him as He is pierced (12)

A fountain to cleanse Jerusalem, the Shepherd struck and sheep scattered (13)

## 2. **Interlude: Queen Esther Saves the Jews in Persia from Destruction**

King Xerxes/Ahasuerus (486–465) of Persia took Esther as queen in 479 BC. She hid her nationality at first, but made it known in her effort to save the Judeans in Persia from destruction.

## 3. **Second Group Under Ezra and Nehemiah**

Two generations after the first return, in 458 BC, Ezra, a priest and scribe, led another group of 1,500 back to Judah. The first returnees had begun to fall into sin, not through crass idolatry but through the neglect of the poor and injustice. Judeans had also begun to intermarry with their Samaritan neighbors. He revitalized worship, read and explained the Law to the people and renewed the covenant.

Nehemiah, a Jew who served in the court of the Persian king Artaxerxes I (465–424), was appointed governor of Judah in 445 BC. He rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem, restored monetary support of the temple from the people and enforced the Sabbath. The division between the Jews and Samaritans was solidified, and they no longer attempted to unite.

**Malachi** (“my messenger”): prophesied ca. 420 in Jerusalem

Nehemiah returned to Babylon for a time beginning in 433 BC, and Malachi likely preached during that time since he reproved the same sins as Nehemiah did upon his return (not supporting the temple, violating the Sabbath, intermarriage with Samaritans, wicked priests). He also addressed the frustration of the people who were discouraged by the delay in the Messiah's coming. He strengthened their faith with promises of the coming Christ who will come to His temple after a messenger has prepared the way for Him, speaking of John the Baptist.

Notable passages:

Promises of “Elijah” who will come to prepare the way for the Messiah (3 & 4)