

## Story of the Old Testament

### Lesson 8 - The Exile - Babylonian Captivity

Welcome back to the story of the Old Testament. We'll continue with lesson eight. This portion of the story focuses on the exile period, the Babylonian captivity.

The northern kingdom of Israel already went into captivity in Assyria back in 722 BC. 150 years has passed, and in 586 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed. The southern kingdom is now in captivity, in exile in Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar, and will remain there for 70 years. And this lesson begins on page 39.

You see the number 70 is in a bright red circle. That's the number to focus on and to remember for this lesson. Some of the introductory background for this lesson shows that the time period for the exile spans from 605 BC to 536 BC.

It's a period of 70 years. This was the amount of time that was prophesied by Jeremiah for the number of years that the remnant would remain in captivity. At the end of that time, God will bring them back into the land to fulfill God's plan, his purposes for building his kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar defeats and ultimately destroys the southern kingdom of Judah in three stages.

In 605 BC, Jehoiakim, one of the kings of the southern kingdom, was defeated. There was a political collapse that took place, and there was a group of exiles sent into Babylon. Daniel and his three friends given their new names of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego were all part of that group of exiles in 605.

In 597 BC, with Jehoiakim and Jehoiakin both rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and they were defeated again, and another group, about 10,000 exiles, were taken into Babylon. The prophet Ezekiel was in that group.

Finally in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's army comes against Jerusalem. They destroy the temple, they destroy the city, and about 25,000 of the inhabitants of the southern kingdom are taken into captivity in Babylon. The scriptures that begin to tell this story of the exile period, are Lamentations written by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah wrote about the fall, his weeping over the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel and Daniel are two prophets who God speaks through to encourage and give hope to those in exile. Some key people that we see in this portion of the story are Jeremiah, obviously King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Ezekiel and Daniel, Darius, a future king of Persia who will overtake and conquer Babylon and set up his kingdom as well as King Cyrus as well. You can see off to the right of the page, there's a gray box, it gives us some of the background and the scriptures for the captivity of both the northern and southern kingdom.

The northern kingdom was taken into captivity in Assyria in 722 BC. We read about that in 2 Kings 17:7-18.

The southern kingdom went into exile in Babylon between 605 and 586 BC. We read about that in 2 Chronicles 36:15 - 21.

There's a box on again at the bottom of page 39 speaking about this exile that took place of the southern kingdom into Babylon, and as we've talked in 605, there's a group that went into captivity. Daniel was included in that group. In 597 BC, the second group went to Babylon, Ezekiel was part of that group. And in 586 BC, the third group went into captivity in Babylon, and that was the fall of Jerusalem.

Again, we talked about this number 70 being a focal point for this lesson. Let me just read where that number comes from in Jeremiah chapter 29:4 - 17.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce, take wives and have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters, multiply there and do not decrease, but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, do not listen to the dreams they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name. I did not send them, declares the Lord. For thus says the Lord, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare, not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I've driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. Because you have said the Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon, thus says the Lord concerning the king who sits on the throne of David and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your kinsmen, who did not go out with you into exile. Thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, I am sending on them sword, famine, and pestilence, and I will make them like the vile figs that are so rotten that they cannot be eaten.”

And it continues on from there. Through Jeremiah, God is giving people a perspective and a hope. He's saying you're going into captivity, don't lose hope, continue to live, even though you're in a foreign land, you're in exile, it seems like you have lost everything, continue to live for the Lord while you are in a foreign land.

And at the end of that 70-year period, God will bring them back. He will gather His people, He will fulfill His promise made to Abraham and then also to David to build His kingdom, and have a land set apart and have a people set apart and a purpose for them. And through them, the world will come to know God and have an opportunity to receive this wonderful blessing of salvation and a renewed relationship with God and forgiveness of sin. This is the

picture of hope, the 70 years of promise. At the end of 70 years, God's people will return to the land.

In 586 BC, Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians. And at the bottom of page 39, you can see just a short summary from Lamentations. Jeremiah was an eyewitness to the destruction that was taking place.

It was a time of despair, a time of hopelessness for the people. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet and Lamentations really is a series of five sorrowful poems, written after the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the midst of great destruction, there is hope. Remember back in the time of the Judges. There was darkness, spiritual decline. It was an awful time, yet we find the book of Ruth. It was a book of hope. God was at work even in the darkest times.

God is a promise-keeping God, and he's going to fulfill his promises to his people. Lamentations 3:20 - 24, gives us a glimpse of this hope. In the midst of the destruction, Jeremiah writes this through the power of the Holy Spirit.

He says, "...my soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in him."

In the midst of this darkness, in the midst of the destruction, in the midst of going into exile, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies are new every morning, and the people, as Jeremiah wrote, as Daniel would write, as Ezekiel would write, there would be hope, hope for the exiles of the future return, the future fulfillment of God's promises. We turn to page 40.

We have highlighted two of these prophets that God worked through at this time.

First, looking at Ezekiel.

He's a prophet to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. His name means God strengthens, or we are strengthened by God, and he brought a message of hope. In the right-hand column of the page, you can see a number of key messages, key passages of Scripture that Ezekiel wrote about.

In chapter 34:11-31, Jesus talked about the true shepherd. There were false shepherds, there were evil shepherds that existed. They were the spiritual leaders, the priests, and even the kings at that time. God said that He would raise up a true shepherd.

Again, a red thread, looking ahead to Jesus as the good shepherd who would come.

Look at Ezekiel chapter 36. It's a promise of God to bring about a new heart and a new spirit.

This is fulfilled in the near term when God's people return to the land, but it'll be fully experienced after the second return, the second coming of the Lord Jesus when He sets up His kingdom, and the nation of Israel recognizes Him as the Messiah. We read this is in Ezekiel chapter 36:24 - 28.

“I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I'll sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

What a message of hope, a message to keep your eyes focused on the Lord and his promises, even in the midst of darkness, even in the midst of exile.

In Chapter 37, Ezekiel talks about dry bones, the valley of dry bones. God can bring about a revival of his people. Even though things look like they are dead, God can spark new life, He can revive this nation.

And even in Ezekiel 40, there's a future return of the glory of God. The glory of God had left the temple during the time when the people of God were going into exile. There's a time when the glory of God will fill this temple, and actually, it will be fully realized when Jesus returns, and he's ruling and reigning for a thousand years from Jerusalem on the throne of David, as promised in this unconditional covenant promise that he made to David back in 2 Samuel 7.

When you look through the structure of the book of Ezekiel, chapters 1 to 32 focus on condemnation for Israel's sin. Chapters 33 to 48 have this picture of hope, consolation, and view of a future blessing that's coming. That is the message of the gospel, the message of the new life we have in Christ.

Daniel was the other prophet during the exile. Daniel was a man just like us.

You can see that in the little gray box to the right of page 40. It says, Daniel was a man like us. He lived in an ungodly culture, chapter 1.

He was treated unjustly.

He was troubled in spirit, and he was distressed over the things that God gave him the ability to see.

He was concerned.

He was fearful at times.

He was exhausted at times.

He experienced all the things that we do.

He was just like us.

He was a man who walked in obedience to God.

He was a man of scriptures, a man of prayer. He was a man of faith.

He was a man of great wisdom, and he was a man who walked in righteousness, a man that through the spirit of God was able to interpret dreams and visions.

In the book of Daniel, during this time of the exile, Daniel was writing and looking ahead to the future triumph of God, the triumph of the kingdom of God. There is a picture that tells a story on page 40.

In chapter 2 of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon. He had a dream of a great image. It was like a statue, and he was troubled by this dream.

He could not understand it, and he said to all of his wise men, I want you to tell me what my dream is, and then I want you to interpret it. All the wise men said, there's no one who can do that.

The king said, if you can't tell me what my dream is and then interpret it, you are all going to die. This word made it way back to Daniel since he was one of the wise men. He prayed, and then he asked for some time from the king. That night, God gave him the ability to interpret this dream. Daniel went and appeared before the king.

He said, I can not do this, but God has given me the ability to do this. He first described King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a large statute. The statue had a head of gold, and then a chest made of silver, and a waist made of bronze, and there were legs made of iron, and there were feet mixed with iron and clay. There was also a rock that would crush the feet, and this rock would grow and grow and become a great mountain, and it will fill the whole earth. That was the dream.

Then Daniel said, through the power of God, this is what this dream means. He said, each of these parts of the statue represent a different kingdom. King Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head.

You are the gold head. That's the current kingdom of Babylon, but you will be replaced by another kingdom even greater than yours, and that will be Persia. That was symbolic of the chest of silver. Yet Persia would be defeated and overtaken by another kingdom, and that will be the waist of bronze. Greece, led by Alexander the Great. And that kingdom would be succeeded by another kingdom, even greater kingdom. The legs of iron would be the Roman Empire. And there will still be another kingdom to come. There were feet mixed with iron and clay. This seems to point to the time of the Tribulation when the Antichrist will usher in a time of great tribulation through the pouring out of God's wrath on the world due to sin and rebellion. After the seven-year tribulation, the rock that comes appears to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

He will conquer the Antichrist, and the beast, and the false prophet. He will set up his kingdom, and will reign forever and ever, fulfilling the promise that God made to David back in 2 Samuel 7. You can see this is a fulfillment of the 70 weeks that Daniel prophesies in Daniel 9 and 12. This 70 weeks is 70 sets of 7 years. 69 of these sets of 7 years have taken place from the time when Cyrus, the king of Persia in 2 Chronicles chapter 36:22 -23, declared it was time to let the people of Judah leave exile in Babylon and return to the promised land, to rebuild the temple and populate their land.

From that date to the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem leading up to His crucifixion, this marked the period of the 69 sevens, or 483 years.

But then there is one more period of seven years that's still to come. We're in this church age now.

There's a gap between when Jesus was crucified and resurrected and ascended to when this final seven-year period will take place. As we compare Daniel with Revelation, particularly chapters 6 through 18, we see that will be period of the tribulation, a seven-year tribulation period where the Antichrist will reign, and at the end of that seven-year period, that fulfills the 70<sup>th</sup> week or 70<sup>th</sup> seven year period. That is when Jesus will come again, the second coming of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 19.

We read in Revelation chapter 20 about Jesus setting up his kingdom, the millennial kingdom, where he will reign on David's throne for a thousand years, leading into the final great white throne judgment and the setting up of the new heaven and new earth, where sin, Satan, death will completely be destroyed.

This is the message of hope from Daniel and Ezekiel. They were prophesying to the people while still in exile to give them hope, saying God is the promise-keeping God. God is a faithful God. He's going to finish the work that he started, the story of the Old Testament about God building his kingdom. And even in exile, God is faithful, and he works through Daniel and Ezekiel give hope to those in exile, and even us today. We are waiting for that final period of seven years, the final tribulation to be completed as we look forward to the return of Jesus. At some point, the church will be raptured. It will be lifted up, and there will be a resurrection of the believers, we will receive glorified bodies, and we will return with Jesus when he comes again to rule and to reign, and we will reign with him.

On page 41, there a few concluding thoughts relative to the exile, the results of the exile, the results of what took place because of this 70-year period.

It was a refining period, a period of judgment, but it was a period where God was fulfilling his promises. A new holiness was produced. God used the Assyrians and the Babylonians complete what Israel failed to do. The land was fully conquered. Israel had never done it. Assyria and Babylon brought this conquest and since that time, the Jews have never returned to the worship of idols. God used Assyria and Babylon to cleanse the nation.

When God's people returned to the land, there was a renewed focus on worshipping God. They had a new identity. Those who returned from captivity were called Jews because they were from the tribe of Judah. Previously, they were called Israel or the Hebrews. The spoken language changed from Hebrew to Aramaic, and this was the mother tongue of Jesus as well.

There was a new form of worship that took place. The temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. The people were going to begin to rebuild a temple much smaller than Solomon's temple. A new emphasis was placed on the use of scripture as the Word of God in worship. During the exile, many of the Old Testament scriptures were written and

collected. Such as Jeremiah and Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and many others were written and gathered together during this period of the exile.

Synagogues were established as places of worship and prayer and the reading of scriptures, and these synagogues became centers of Jewish worship. These synagogues would eventually be spread throughout the Roman Empire during the life of Jesus.

These gathering places would allow for the gospel to be spread very easily, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

There was also a new witness that came about. The Jews now were sharing this hope for the coming Messiah as Savior, a Redeemer for all the people, looking to fulfill the promise made to Abraham and to David.

The Babylonian Empire fell to the Medo-Persian Empire under King Cyrus at the end of that 70-year period, and God even used King Cyrus to bring the Jews back to the land. King Cyrus, moved by God, said it's time now for God's people to go back to the promised land. We can read about that in 2 Chronicles 36.

One of the lessons we can take from this is that, even in the darkest places, there's always hope. God says He is going to accomplish something. We may not understand His timing, but we can trust Him.

We can persevere even in the midst of difficult times, and we can keep our eyes on Him and have hope that God is a promise-keeping God. God is a faithful God. God is going to build His kingdom.

Even when there's a conflict between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God, God will accomplish it. He can accomplish that through persecution, through trial. He brings it about by the transformation of our spirits, of our character.

As His people are walking in step with Him, living, loving Him with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving their neighbor as themselves, the world will begin to see the one true God and the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham.

God is beginning to fulfill his promises in the Old Testament. Through Abraham, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Ultimately, these promises will be fulfilled as we look ahead to the New Testament where all the promises are yes, and amen, in Jesus.

Everything promised in the Old Testament is ultimately fulfilled in the New Testament.

As we conclude this period of the exile, Jeremiah 29:11 is a great verse to reflect on.

It would have been a great encouragement to those in exile, and it's an encouragement to us as well.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

We will conclude the Story of the Old Testament with Lesson 9 and the return of God's people back into His land.

God's people will be in His land living out His purposes, but they will be waiting for the promised King to return. This will be Jesus as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

So, we'll finish up the story of the Old Testament with the restoration of the people of God in the land as we continue with the story of the Old Testament. God bless you.