

Old Testament 3

Exile, return and hope

Objective

In the first year of the cycle we looked at the first part of the Old Testament, the first six books of the Bible, covering the time from creation to settlement of the land of Israel. In the second year of the cycle we looked at the time from the settlement to the fall of Jerusalem. In this third part we look at the exile in Babylonia and return to the land of Israel and also at the promises God gave about the coming King.

Exile and Return Powerpoint

There are a series of Powerpoint presentation, numbered by day as a visual aid. These also include a timeline. The main picture is of Jerusalem with its people, houses, walls and temple. These are all removed as the people are taken into exile and the city and temple destroyed. The various parts are then added back as the history unfolds over the units. The various units will mention when there is a particular powerpoint. Animation may be added if desired!

Historical Overview

This period of history can seem a bit confusing because various books overlap. The Kingdom of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, collapsed because the people had repeatedly disobeyed the Lord. The period that followed is known as the exile when the Jews (people of the kingdom of Judah) were living in Babylon. The return began about 50 years later but the city walls were not rebuilt for another 80 years.

The following dates are probably only accurate to within one or two years and there are differences of opinion about some of them. In particular it is not certain when Esther was made Queen. The Hebrew text of the Old Testament uses the name King Ahasuerus but it is not clear which foreign king this refers to. Some Bibles have his name as Xerxes, a shortened form of the name Artaxerxes which is used in an early Greek translation of the Old Testament. Many therefore reckon that Esther became Queen in about 480BC, but the notes below give 515BC.

Into exile

606BC - Israel defeated by the Babylonians - many taken captive including Daniel

597BC - More taken captive

Ezekiel prophesies that Jerusalem will be destroyed

592BC - The glory of the Lord leaves the Temple

588BC - Jerusalem besieged.

586BC - Jerusalem captured and crushed, the walls and the Temple torn down.

Return

539BC - Medes and Persians defeat Babylon, Darius ruling in Babylon under King Cyrus.

536BC - Cyrus says people should return to their homelands.

- Sheshbazzar leads 50,00 back to Israel (Ezra 1 & 2)

535BC - Foundation of new temple laid (Ezra 3) but stops because of fear

520BC - (a different) Darius King of the Persians.

- Haggai and Zechariah tell the people to rebuild the temple

- 516BC - Temple completed
- 515BC - Esther became Queen in Shushan (Susa)
- 508BC - Mordecai and Esther delivered the Jews
- 467BC - Ezra returns to teach and beautify the Temple
- 454BC - Nehemiah returns to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
- 441BC - Prophecy of Malachi - end of the Old Testament

Later Jewish history is partly told in books such as Maccabees. Although these books can be found in some (particularly Roman Catholic) Bibles they were never part of the Hebrew Scriptures and therefore not part of Jesus' Bible.

It is suggested that some children are allocated to play particular named parts whenever those parts appear whilst other children are allocated to be extras and play whatever parts are necessary on particular days.

Where is the King?

When we looked at earlier history of the Old Testament we kept asking the question "who is king?" Israel rejected God as their king, but God graciously gave them kings like other nations. God promised David that his descendant would rule over Israel forever. When we look at the later part of the Old Testament history an obvious question is what has happened to that promise? After the fall of Jerusalem the line of kings seems to come to an end and even after the rebuilding of Jerusalem there is no reinstatement of the line of kings. There were later attempts to reintroduce kings (such as the Maccabees) but these failed. Yet the promises of God still stood and it is more than five centuries later that we discover how those promises will be fulfilled when a child is born in Bethlehem, the city David.