

LIFE IN EXILE
(What is God Doing In Your Life Today?)
Lesson 56

Where did you grow up? When I get asked that question, I find it a bit difficult to answer. After college, my Dad worked for the Texas and Pacific Railroad in Denton, Texas. Dad was not in the *“I’ve Been Working on the Railroad”* end of the business as the song goes. He was in the office sales and management end of things. Dad’s job for many years was to make sure businesses decided to ship their materials on the railroad, more specifically on the Texas and Pacific railroad.

Over time, the Missouri & Pacific Railroad (“MoPac”) bought out the Texas and Pacific, and the Union Pacific then bought out MoPac. Somewhere between Dad’s job and the consolidation of one railroad into another, we moved around a lot. From Denton, Mom, Dad, and Kathryn (my older sister who was born in Memphis) moved to Dallas, Texas where I was born. As I understand it, we lived in Dallas for just a matter of weeks before moving to Fort Worth, Texas.

We left Fort Worth for a move out of state, going to New Orleans, Louisiana. That is where I first began speaking, allegedly using good Cajun grammar. The story is told that Mom was covering my feet with a blanket noting, “I think his feet are cold.” To this, I proclaimed my first sentence: “My feet cold – No!” It was in New Orleans that I have my first memory, being on Dad’s shoulders for a Mardi Gras parade where candy was thrown from a float. Dad caught some and handed it up to me. I still remember thinking, “Why don’t we do this every day?”

From New Orleans, we moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, then on to Abilene, Texas. After Abilene, the railroad moved us to Memphis, Tennessee. It was there I started school. In December of second grade, we went north! We moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, living in what my grandfather called “Yankee Country.” This was a shock in more ways than one. My new second grade teacher, Miss Kennedy, mispronounced words like “tomato” and “vegetable” (the later word getting four syllables rather than three), all the while claiming *I* did not know how to say them right! The boy sitting next to me introduced me to the fine food that is called “Pop Tarts.” Most significantly, my little sister Hollie was born there. The same grandfather who labeled Pittsburgh “Yankee Country” brought a shoebox of dirt from his backyard in San Angelo, Texas, for Mom to put under the delivery table. Granddaddy wanted to be able to tell his friends that all his grandchildren were born over Texas soil. It was important to be connected to “our” land.

After eight months, we moved from Pittsburgh to Rochester, New York, where we lived for four and one-half years. I loved it there. Third grade through half of

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seventh grade were great. Life seemed super, with loads of friends, a fun school with great sports, student council responsibilities, and a great paper route producing serious seventh grade income!

It came as a shock to us kids when Mom and Dad told us we were moving to Lubbock, Texas. We had never heard of Lubbock, and moving in the middle of a school year did not seem optimal! The shock was only starting though. In Lubbock, there was a stark contrast from the things and people in Rochester. It is almost impossible to detail the differences. From clothing, food, speech, virtues and vices, it all was drastically different. As for daily life, it was an 180-degree change. I left a life of friends and placement, to one of knowing no one and having no place. I did not want to be in Lubbock!

As life turns, days are long, but years are short. Each day seemed a struggle, but the years passed, and the hard days got easier. After a while, Lubbock finally became home, and I was blessed to live there through high school graduation. To this day, we look on Lubbock as home, and is my answer to “Where are you from?”

I look back on that life of constant moving, and amidst the difficulties of the moves, I see God’s hand moving and molding me in unique ways. Having to constantly begin again at making friends taught me to see the world through others’ eyes, trying to understand how they think (and speak) so I could find my place in their world. Moving from one culture to another taught me to be alert to differences in approach to life. There are many ways God used this mobile childhood to form in me the aptitudes that have served me well as a lawyer seeking to communicate to jurors across America. In parallel ways, I am convinced these same experiences have given me tools that help in communicating these messages I teach in church. The moves were never easy and certainly were not fun, but I know now that God was at work in me through the moves. Those moves sowed certain seeds that grew me into who I am in his service.

As I wrote this lesson, it occurred to me that God’s hand works mightily in ways we often do not perceive until much later. Even in the hard times, perhaps we might say especially in the hard times, God is at work molding not only the individual, but also putting into play the pieces that affect his kingdom as he wills. The hand of God is mighty in our life, even when we might not realize it! So it is with us, and so it was with Judah. Thousands and thousands of Judah’s people were relocated from Judah into Babylon, some not returning for up to seventy years, and some not returning at all. As we examine this time of exile, we see God’s hand working immediately and in the long range, for his kingdom.

BACKGROUND

From a religious perspective, the sixth century BC was a significant time in the world. This was the century of the births of Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) in India and of Confucius in China. The century saw the birth of the early Greek philosopher Heraclitus, famous for saying “no man ever steps into the same river twice.” It was also the century when a group of hill country residents, known as Judahites, were deported from their hills to the rivers of Babylon.¹

These deportations occurred in three main stages, from 597 to 586 BC. While not every Judean was exiled, the Babylonians took captive the artisans, craftsmen, many farmers, the educated, prominent citizens, and nobility. 2 Kings divulges that the first great deportation took ten thousand (2 Kings 24:13-16). Daniel specified that the fighting force taken captive was seven thousand strong while the craftsmen and artisans were one thousand of the deported (Dan. 1:2). The later deportation in 586 depleted the land even more, leaving “some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen” (2 Kings 25:12). In addition to the poor, those left behind included others, notably, Gedaliah, appointed by Nebuchadnezzar as governor over Judah (2 Kings 25:22-24). In 1935, during excavations in the Biblical city of Lachish, among the burn layer attributed to the Babylonian conquest was a seal stating: Belonging to Gedaliah, who is over this house.” This has led some scholars to suspect that Gedaliah was one of Judah’s Prime Minister of sorts before the conquest.²

Judah was depleted and its people devastated. They had lost their homeland held for over 500 years. The temple of Solomon was destroyed, and with it temple

¹ German philosopher Karl Jaspers labeled the time period between the ninth and third centuries BC as the “axial age.” His term gained acceptance among historians of religion because formative thinkers in Greece, the Middle East, India, and China emerged with thoughts and philosophies still relevant today. See, Jaspers, Karl, *The Origin and Goal of History* (Routledge 1953).

² Bromily, *et al.*, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans 1995), Vol. 2, at 918.

³ Thomas, D. Winton, “The Sixth Century BC: a Creative Epoch in the History of Israel,” *JSS* 6 (1961), at 46.

⁴ One explanation for the breaking of the glass in a Jewish wedding is the placing of the destruction of Jerusalem (symbolized by the broken glass) above all other joys, including the greatest joy of marriage. See discussion at Telushkin, Joseph, *Jewish Literacy*, (William Morrow 2001), at 689f.

⁵ “To its foundations” is a double entendre. It conveys the idea of stripping the town to its foundation, but is also the language for stripping the clothes off down to the buttocks.

⁶ Bromily, *et al.*, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans 1995), Vol. 2, at 918. The lesson on Lamentations and other lessons are available at www.BiblicalLiteracy.com.

⁷ Wiseman, Donald, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, (The British Academy 1985), at 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, at 48-49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, at 76ff.

worship – sacrifices and festivals. The priesthood was suddenly unemployed. The Ark of the Covenant was lost to history, either destroyed or hidden. Undoubtedly, a great deal of suspicion arose around innumerable false prophets who had repeatedly declared such a fall would never occur. These events were life shaking, and they must have made it nearly impossible to handle the death and destruction that accompanied Jerusalem’s fall. This was a time not only of military defeat, but also a time where mothers had to watch the massacre of their babies dashed against the rocks (Ps. 137:8-9). The lasting image of this wanton killing understandably burned itself into the minds and hearts of the survivors.

For decades, the Judahites remained in exile. They were finally allowed to return to Judah once Cyrus and the Persians conquered Babylon. The great return took place starting in 538 BC. These decades of captivity undoubtedly produced major changes in the life of God’s chosen people. Scripture does not provide a lot of the details of the time in captivity, and a number of commentators are quick to dismiss the time as one of relative obscurity. The paucity of data, however, should not deter us from looking at what data there is. For certainly, as British Old Testament Professor D. Winton Thomas wrote:

This sixth century was a century of hope renewed. Rebirth followed on ruin, new life on decay. The disaster of the opening years was the opportunity for a new outburst of faith in the future.³

As we study this period, we will consider the Scriptures that bear on the subject, as well as the archaeological data. Not surprisingly, it seems that Judah adjusted to this dramatic change in life in stages. We will break apart our considerations into three stages: (1) pain and shock, (2) settlement and service, and (3) hope for redemption. Of course, these are not ready categories that have clear lines of demarcation as if one day the entire exiled population awoke proclaiming, “it is time to move from phase one to phase two!” Instead, these are general categories we can discern from the Scriptures and we will consider them in that light.

PAIN AND SHOCK

We see the initial pain and shock of the people evidenced most clearly in several Psalms written out of the experience. While scholars debate which Psalms may have been written in this period, there is a consensus that Psalm 137 falls into this category. We will start there.

³ Thomas, D. Winton, “The Sixth Century BC: a Creative Epoch in the History of Israel,” *JSS* 6 (1961), at 46.

Psalm 137

This Psalm is one of the saddest in the Old Testament canon. It is brief, and worthy of setting out fully in this lesson:

137 By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.
 ² On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.
 ³ For there our captors
required of us songs,
 and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

 ⁴ How shall we sing the LORD’s song
in a foreign land?
 ⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget its skill!
 ⁶ Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
 if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy!

 ⁷ Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem,
 how they said, “Lay it bare, lay it bare,
down to its foundations!”
 ⁸ O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you
with what you have done to us!
 ⁹ Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones
and dashes them against the rock!

While this Psalm is a Hebrew student’s delight to translate and consider, it is one laden with pain and misery that must not be lost in the analysis. The poem has assonance, alliteration, word play, and even a double entendre, but the overwhelming reaction is one of pity, remorse, and a bit of surprise that the writer is proclaiming blessing upon those who might kill the infants of others.

The Psalm certainly conveys the pain and shock of the survivors exiled in Babylon. Once there, they sat by the waterways stunned and weeping. The waterways were not simply the rivers, but would likely include the canals and irrigation ditches that permeated the settlements. Sitting was a Hebrew posture of mourning (remember Job’s friends sitting on the ground with him in mourning for

seven days and night in Job2:13), and this was what the Judahites were doing as their captures sought songs of the temple. There was no joy for the exiles, however, and they hung their harps up, with the time for music gone. They could not sing songs of YHWH when they were away from his temple and in mourning.

Even as the people were sent from their homeland, they pledged themselves to remember it.⁴ For if they were to forget Jerusalem, they wished their hands would lose the ability to play at all, and their tongues would stick to the roofs of their mouths, making singing impossible. The psalmist urges YHWH to remember the role that Edom played in the debacle, laying it “bare down to its foundations.”⁵ The curse on Edom extends to Babylon as well, recounting the pain of what had happened during the battle for Jerusalem.

Psalm 74

A second Psalm that scholars generally place in this time period is Psalm 74. Over its 23 verses, this Psalm recounts the destruction wrought by the soldiers on the temple, where they “smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatches,” and “burned” the “sanctuary to the ground” (Ps. 74:6-7 NIV). In this Psalm, the people lament the absence of any word from YHWH from prophets, and they do not understand God’s failure to act. The Psalmist does recognize that YHWH is still king. He places YHWH over the gods of Babylon, attributing to YHWH the feats normally ascribed to the pagan gods. It was YHWH who “divided the sea,” not Marduk. It was YHWH who “broke the heads of the sea monsters,” not Baal. It was YHWH who Split open springs and brooks.” YHWH established to heavenly light and the sun. YHWH fixed the boundaries of the earth and made the seasons (Ps. 74:12-17). This Psalmist cries out for God to defend his cause and rise to defeat his enemies.

Psalm 79

A third Psalm we will consider in this section is Psalm 79. This Psalm remembers the invaders defiling the temple and laying Jerusalem in ruins. The battle scars included pouring out “blood like water” and feeding the birds and animals the dead bodies of the defeated (Ps. 79:1-4). The Psalmist knew that the events were God’s judgment on Judah’s sins and wonders how long God’s judgment will burn

⁴ One explanation for the breaking of the glass in a Jewish wedding is the placing of the destruction of Jerusalem (symbolized by the broken glass) above all other joys, including the greatest joy of marriage. See discussion at Telushkin, Joseph, *Jewish Literacy*, (William Morrow 2001), at 689f.

⁵ “To its foundations” is a double entendre. It conveys the idea of stripping the town to its foundation, but is also the language for stripping the clothes off down to the buttocks.

like fire. The “prisoners” set their groaning before God, and, confessing their sin, pray for salvation:

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name;
Deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name’s sake! (Ps. 79:9).

The recognition of Judah’s fault behind God’s judgment is also expressed repeatedly in the Lamentations written in this same time period, as covered in the previous lesson.⁶

This period of pain and shock left an indelible impression not only on the generation that experienced it, but also on the Jewish people centuries later. Both Peter and John use Babylon as a symbol of all that is evil. (*See*, 1 Pet. 5:13; Rev. 14:8; 17:5; and 18:10). At some point, however, we see that “life goes on,” and the exilic population eventually settled in and began to find their life in Babylon.

SETTLEMENT AND SERVICE

In Jerusalem’s last decades before destruction, the prophet Jeremiah was a persistent voice. Jeremiah repeatedly told the people about the impending judgment, always to his own detriment. Not only was he not believed, but he was also beaten, mocked, imprisoned, and threatened with death. False prophets, priests, leading citizens, and royalty, all despised him and his “thus saith the Lord’s.” Yet when the final destruction came, when the king was taken exactly as Jeremiah had prophesied, and when the events unfolded as clearly as if Jeremiah had written history rather than prophesy, at least some of the people likely saw Jeremiah differently. One could reasonably suspect that a letter from Jeremiah to the exiles would have caught the attention of many.

Jeremiah wrote a letter to the “surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon” (Jer. 29). In the letter, Jeremiah instructed the people:

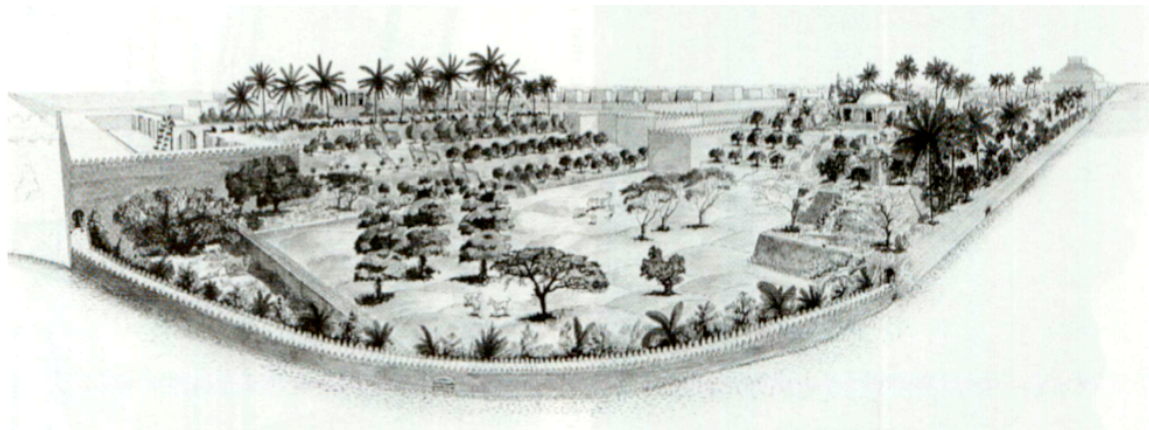
Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they 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

⁶ The lesson on Lamentations and other lessons are available at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jer. 29:4-7).

It seems apparent that many took to heart the advice of Jeremiah. In Ezra chapter 2, the people that returned to repopulate Judah were numerous (42,360). They brought with them camels, donkeys, horses, and mules. In a freewill offering, the people gave 100 priests garments as well as 61,000 darics of gold and 5,000 minas of silver. This was a substantial amount of money! The daric was a Persian coin and weighed 8.4 grams of better than 95% pure gold.

How were exiles able to accumulate such goods in such a short time? For this, we look to the work of archaeologists and historians and we get some important information. One of the express reasons that Nebuchadnezzar brought expert artisans and others back from his military campaigns was to use the labor in his massive building campaigns in Babylon.⁷ Nebuchadnezzar built, refurbished, and supplied countless numbers of temples (Babylon had 43 cult-centers or temples, 900 chapels, and hundreds of shrines⁸). This included his restoration of Babylon's ancient ziggurat. He also did extensive canal work, works on streets and gates, and on bridges. Antiquity ranked his hanging gardens as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.



Reconstruction of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon
(Wiseman reconstruction explained in *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, at 56ff)

Wiseman conjectures that Nebuchadnezzar would need foreigners for much of this work so as to not radically displace the local economy by drawing the farmers and other workers from their pre-building tasks.⁹ This labor, however, was not slave

⁷ Wiseman, Donald, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, (The British Academy 1985), at 42.

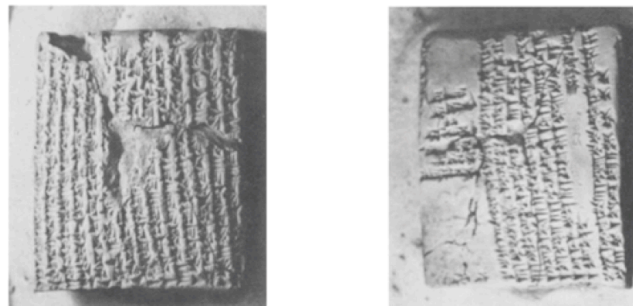
⁸ *Ibid.*, at 48-49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, at 76ff.

labor in the sense that we might think of it. The skilled craftsmen were well provisioned. Furthermore, it appears that the Babylonians required service from the exiles, but then liberated the exiles to pursue their own industry.

Another aspect of the Ezra account is the large numbers of returning exiles. Those numbers tie in with Jeremiah's charge to the people to take wives and have families while in exile. Excavations have shown that there were nearly 200 settlements along 60 named canals in the Nippur region alone (this region was by the area scholars generally associate with *Chebar* and *Tel Abib*, the locations of Ezekiel). These settlements were for groups who were allowed to maintain their ethnic identities, rather than forced into assimilation and integration.¹⁰

Certainly not all of the Jews returned to Jerusalem as the exile drew to a close. In Ezra 8, the details of the return to Judah include information about many who were living at "the river that runs to Ahava." It is clear from verses 15 through 20 that many of these Jews were not returning with Ezra, but had opted to stay in Babylon. Evidence corroborating this comes from 730 tablets that date from 464 to 404 BC. These tablets (called the "Murashu tablets") list clients of the Murashu family. The Murashus ran the ancient equivalent of a bank. Among those clients, approximately 70 names are Jewish names, indicating a substantial presence even as late as the mid-400's. The documents show no discrimination against the Jews, but are normative records of contracts for land rental, specifying payment terms and responsibilities of the parties. The roles of several Jews indicate "relatively important positions" in the society. These tablets indicate that, "by the fifth century B.C. the exiles at Nippur had become fully integrated into the economic life of their society, fulfilling the instructions of Jeremiah 29:5ff."¹¹



Here are two of the Musharu tablets kept by the University of Pennsylvania. These tablets were written in Akkadian cuneiform. Many of them also have Aramaic inscriptions in ink that is still visible.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Coogan, Michael David, Life in the Diaspora: Jews at Nippur in the Fifth Century B.C., *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 37 (1974), Vol. 1, at 12.

How the Jews lived in the land away from home is a matter of conjecture. Scholars cannot give the details with precision, but a number of deductions seem common sense weighing the Biblical texts with the results of history. For example, we know that at this point in time, there was some shifting of the language from Hebrew to Aramaic, the official language of commerce and life in Babylon. The book of Daniel, placed squarely in this time period,¹² is written partially in Hebrew and partially in Aramaic. The Hebrew people took on, either at this time or soon afterwards, the square Aramaic script, using it even when writing their Hebrew Scriptures.¹³

Over time, the linguistic shift might have led to the need when reading Hebrew Scripture, to translate those Scriptures into Aramaic, perhaps also giving rise to verbal commentary on written Scripture to explain what the text meant. We do know that within several hundred years, we have the Hebrew Old Testament translated into Aramaic. We also have Targums developing, which were interpretative translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic.¹⁴

Worship changed significantly during the exile. Some scholars look at the passages that reference meetings at the rivers as indications that some types of prayer gatherings were happening in those locales. Before the exile, religious practice was tied both to the temple and, to a lesser degree, the monarchy, yet after the exile, both of those ties were impossible. Religious practice found its place independent of the old trappings. Considering what was lost and what was left of religious practice, gives insight into what shape worship might have taken, as well as what aspects of religion likely grew in emphasis:

ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP IMPOSSIBLE IN BABYLON	ELEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE STILL AVAILABLE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Temple rituals (including sacrifices) 2. Temple festivals 3. Temple dedications 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Circumcision 2. Honoring the Sabbath 3. Psalmody 4. Reading of the Scriptures

¹² There is a scholastic dispute over when Daniel was written; however, there is no dispute over its narrative placing it in this historical period.

¹³ Breneman, M., *The New American Commentary Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, (Broadman & Holman 1993), at 27.

¹⁴ The Targum discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls in Cave 11 is generally thought to have been written in Babylon and brought from Babylon to Qumran.

There can be no question these changes must have shaken many to the core.

Some scholars believe that this time gave rise to the synagogue as a combination worship center, school, and place of social gathering.¹⁵ We do not have any evidence of this beyond the recognition that synagogues must have started some time in some place. Some point to the apparent meetings of elders and others on river banks, like in Psalm 137, and consider this a predecessor to synagogue meetings, citing also Acts 16:13. This does not seem logical, however, for the idea of meeting at such places indicates there was no synagogue present. In fact, when Paul met the women at river's edge in Acts 16, most scholars use that presence to indicate that there were not ten Jewish men in the town, the requisite number to make up a synagogue. We can say for certain only that in pre-exilic times, there were gatherings of community elders in the city gates to discuss and handle community problems (*see, e.g.,* Dt. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:11). During the exile, we know that the elders of Judah still met, even as they sought out Ezekiel for counsel (Ezek. 8:11; 14:1; 20:1ff). So even without a synagogue, we can safely surmise, the people still congregated somewhere.

As we noticed in our study of Ezekiel, his prophecies indicate familiarity with the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) as well as historical books and a number of the prophets that preceded him. It makes sense that a prophet/priest like Ezekiel would have copies of holy writings among his possessions. This is a time when a number of scholars who are skeptical of early authorship of Biblical books begin to place the written record of certain accounts by different groups.¹⁶ It certainly makes sense that the Jews would want to hear the voice of YHWH at this time, especially when deprived of all the trappings of

¹⁵ *See, e.g.,* Hinson, David, *History of Israel*, (S.P.C.K. 1973), Vol 7, at 155.

¹⁶ Over the last century and half, a good bit of scholarship has explored and supported the idea that major blocks of the Old Testament were written by separate groups and then combined later into a coherent whole. For example, Old Testament professor Joseph Blenkinsopp sets out this older view as a "consensus" that "the history of the Israelite nation from the death of Moses to the Babylonian exile (= Dtr) was composed around the middle of the sixth century B.C.E., either in Babylon among the deportees, or in the province of Judah, or less probably in Egypt." *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Westminster John Knox 1996), at 161. More recent scholarship is showing this approach to be seriously challenged on academic grounds. A major work that should have repercussions on these views is currently at the German publishers. This three-volume set by Ken Kitchen is the fruit of several decades of research into each treaty, law and covenant from antiquity, still available today for study. Kitchen's work shows with amazing clarity that the various eras in history produced legal forms of these treaties, laws, and covenants that allow dating based on form. This work is not targeted to Biblical treaties and laws, but it does include them. The thorough analysis makes it even more difficult to believe that a writer in 6th century Babylon would have ready ability to duplicate so clearly a legal form that properly dates from an era 600 years earlier or more. Once this work is public and subjected to scholastic review and analysis, it should add to the academic discussion.

temple worship and their homeland. However, it seems a bit strained to think that massive portions of history and law were developed and written in this time period, with no evidence of any authoritative prophet's hand in such. Surely, the people were a bit gun shy about authenticating prophetic voices, especially after the delusions of so many false prophets led to Judah's near annihilation. Psalm 74:9 certainly indicates the sensitivity of the people to this as the psalmist proclaimed, "We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet."

It seems more reasonable that the writings were already in a form where Ezekiel and others had access to them, appreciating those writings that were self-authenticating. For example, the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel certainly met the test of genuine prophetic voices by their accuracy in prophesying in such detail over Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. Similarly, history confirmed the prophetic writings of Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Habakkuk. Those writings associated with them would have likely had authority as well. As the proven prophets used (edited?) and maintained the historical writings, those writings must have merited the special status of Scripture as well. It also is apparent from Lamentations as well as the prophetic books that a number of Psalms were already in circulation and found usage in worship and festivals. These psalms were likely including those referenced in Psalm 137 as "songs of Zion." The accumulation and authentication of all these writings during this time in exile was a likely necessity for the survival of the people and the growth of faith in YHWH. The people were cut off from their institutions, and meditation on Scripture was one of the few acts of devotion and worship available.

HOPE FOR REDEMPTION

As the Jews moved from shock and panic into settlement and service, they did so in expectation that exile was not permanent. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both proclaimed with certainty that Judah would return to the Promised Land. Daniel 9:1-19 recounts Daniel studying the prophetic promise from Jeremiah about Judah's return:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus... I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely seventy years.

Daniel sought the Lord God with prayer and fasting seeking the day of redemption.

Ezekiel's vision of the resurrected dry bones must have been similarly compelling on the Judahites as they sought God's forgiveness and redemption. Some scholars place Psalm 102 in this period, and its words certainly express the hope of many:

Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you! ...my bones cling to my flesh...for you have taken me up and thrown me down...But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever; you are remembered throughout all generations. You will arise and have pity on Zion; it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come. For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust.

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord: that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners...that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord, and in Jerusalem his praise, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the Lord. (Ps. 102:1, 5, 10, 12-14, 18-22).

As noted earlier, not all the Jews returned to Judah. Those that did not, continued to live in the Jewish community in Babylon (and Egypt as well), which prospered and grew in what came to be called the "diaspora." This concept comes from a Greek word *diaspora* used mainly in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) and a few times in the New Testament. The word derives its meaning from its root "to scatter." The diaspora was the scattering of Jews among the Gentiles outside of Palestine. It was the scattering of the Jews that prepared the world for the fast conversion of so many to Christianity centuries later. From the diaspora came the need to translate Hebrew Scriptures into the languages of the day, notably Greek, after the worldwide conquest of Alexander the Great. This Greek Bible (the Septuagint) became the Bible for a Greek speaking church. It gave ready access to Old Testament Scriptures to Gentile converts to Christianity. A second major result of the diaspora was the rise of the synagogue. As noted earlier, while the rise cannot be specifically tied to the time of the exile, it can be tied to the need for places of worship and study in the diaspora at some point prior to the age of the church. This meant that missionaries like Paul had a focal point for preaching and teaching of Jesus to receptive audiences of both Jew and God-fearing Gentiles (The presence of those God-fearing Gentiles is also a by-product of the diaspora, as neighbors to Jews grew to appreciate the Jewish faith and practice).

CONCLUSION

What an unusual time for the children of God. They left their homeland and the familiarity of their customs and practices. They found new places to live, a new climate and landscape, new jobs, and new opportunities. Their neighbors were different, their food likely changed. They had to adjust to understand how the hand of YHWH was working in their lives. Yet YHWH was working. He was working to make them who they needed to be, both for their own day and for God's larger kingdom. He was preparing the people and the world for a coming incarnation and liberating atonement.

Sometimes in the most unusual ways, and sometimes the most painful ways, God works his special touch in the lives of his children. What is God doing in your life?

POINTS FOR HOME

- (1) *“How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?”* (Ps. 137:4).

There are definite times in everyone's life when pain and shock are the only recognizable emotions. My friend Ken Kitchen recently divulged his insight of seventy-nine years on earth, sixty of it in fellowship with the Almighty:

“The New Testament says, ‘you will have much trouble’ [Jn 16:33], and this is true. The way life works out, there are things very hard to bear. That's the way it is. When you become a Christian, you're not in for a glory ride now – the glory comes later. There are things that happen, and you have to throw yourself on your bed, burst into tears, and get the emotion out. Then you think about it, and in prayer, find the direction of God.”

I am touched to hear these words from one of the most prolific scholars of the last 100 years. The words show his humility as well as the godly wisdom accumulated alongside the earthly knowledge he has garnered in a lifetime of academia. On those days (or weeks, months, or years) of sorrow and distress, I am taking Ken's advice to heart, for it is the teaching of Scripture. Pain and shock are appropriate responses in appropriate times. But living through them to God's glory is the life of faith. For days are long, but years are short.

- (2) *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion”* (1 Pet. 1:1).

What a tremendous work of God – to move through the agony of exile and destruction to build a kingdom! I have little doubt, that had Judah been allowed to continue on its course, ignoring YHWH, killing his prophets, mutilating his Law, incorporating the pagan religions, and courting the international powers, Judah would have disappeared as a people group and a religious testimony to YHWH, the delivering and saving God. The traditions and histories would have been for naught, as the people became the religion *du jour*, and passed into history, never fulfilling the promises of God.

This course God did not allow, for Israel's destiny was God's promise. God's reputation was on the line. The words of God would not be thwarted, even by the disobedience and sin of man. So God brought about the exile, destroyed the religion and crutches of the people, and built something new, even as he renewed that which was old. The Lord restored his people, leaving the dispersed to prepare the world for the coming gospel. The hand of God moved mightily in the midst of sin, disobedience and tragedy.

This speaks to me, not only for my life, but also for the tragedies that afflict my friends and loved ones. Another wonderful Christian man of many years, my friend Charles Mickey commented in reading this lesson,

The very thought that God could use the consequences of my own sin is beyond many of us. We see it only as punishment and not much more. But the Jewish exile proves us wrong. I see the same truth today when a criminal ministers to criminals, an addict to addicts, etc. What we endure (whether from undeserved mistreatment of others, disease, or consequences of our own sinful devices) God can and will use, if we allow him.

God never turns a blind eye without regard for what he sets in motion. Praise God!

- (3) *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them ”* (Eph. 2:10).

You are not an accident, and neither is your life. God has some serious work for you in his kingdom. This is true whether you are young or old. It might be as simple as praying for others, or it might be more complicated. But rest assured, God has good works planned specifically for you! He has

worked in and through your circumstances to place you uniquely in a position to do those works. Some of your qualifications may have come as a result of the consequences of sin, either your own sin or that of others. It all is a part of who you are today. It is *today* that the assurance is certain: God has work for you in his kingdom.

I am committed to finding out how to best serve him today. I want to play my role in having his kingdom come and will done on earth as it is in heaven. This is more than my opportunity; it is my honor!