

Exile or Captivity

The term that is usually used for the Exile is Captivity. There were two major captivities of Jews recorded in the bible. Israel was taken into captivity in 732 BC by the Assyrians and Judah in 605 BC by the Babylonians. Each of them took place in stages over a period of time. Both were brought upon the people of God as judgment for disobedience to the word and covenant of God.

Captivity of Israel

Following the death of the Assyrian King Shalmanezar III (859-824 BC), Assyria began to weaken in its strength and resolve to fight. This gave the surrounding nations, especially Israel an opportunity to strengthen her armies and develop economically. This was a period of great prosperity for Israel and Judah. During this period they extended their borders from Egypt to Hamath in Syria.

However the prophets Amos and Hosea make it clear that their spiritual prosperity did not match their economic. Corruption swept throughout the two nations. With the death of Jeroboam II in 753 BC, Israel began to unravel. The assassinations of Zechariah and Shallum reflect the state of Israel during this time.

In the purpose of God, Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) was raised up in Assyria as a great military leader in order to punish Israel. Tiglath-Pileser III is also called Pul or Pulu in the list of Babylonian names and this is the name that he goes under in Scripture. Over the next ten years Israel tried to live at peace with the Assyrians but paying them tribute money. However despite Isaiah's warning King Ahaz continued to appeal to Tiglath-Pileser III who eventually invaded Damascus and destroyed it, taking the inhabitants into captivity. Pekah, King of Israel was killed by Hoshea who ruled under the authority of the Assyrians.

Hoshea was given time to reorganize while Tiglath-Pileser III and his son Shalmanezar V were putting down revolts in their own country. During this time Hoshea withheld the tribute money and went for help against the Assyrians to the Egyptians. The Assyrians invaded Palestine in 725 BC and took Hoshea captive after a three year siege.

According to Assyrian records some 27,290 Israelites were taken into captivity. Isaiah had prophesied in 734 BC that the Captivity would continue for 65 years. This is verified by the fact the Esar-haddon (681-669) and Ashur-banipal (669-633 BC) carried foreigners into Samaria.

Ten Lost Tribes

There has been a question raised about the location of the ten 'lost' tribes. While many of them were taken into captivity, some remained in Samaria and were even invited to the Passover feast in Jerusalem. 715 BC) Some of the Jews from the North fled to Judah as a result of their religious convictions.

It is significant that in the New Testament period Anna was from the tribe of Asher and James addresses 'the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion.' During the New Testament period the Jews had a knowledge of the location of all twelve tribes.

Phase I – 605 BC

The Babylonian Captivity of Judah took place in a similar way to the captivity of Israel in that it was accomplished in stages. Following the Assyrian Empire's overthrow by the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nabopolassar in 612 BC, he sent his son Nebuchadnezzar against the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar not only destroyed the Egyptians but also took control of most of Palestine. He entered Jerusalem, removed some of the temple furnishings and took captives to Babylon. Jehoiakim, King of Judah, paid Nebuchadnezzar tribute money to continue ruling in Judah.

Phase II – 605 BC

Within a month Jehoiachin was also taken into captivity, along with 10,000 citizens and the prophet Ezekiel. Generally speaking the exiles enjoyed a peaceful and productive life. In later years when the exiles were permitted to return in the days of Cyrus many of them stayed in Babylon and sent their money back to help in the reconstruction of the Temple and wall of Jerusalem.

Phase III – 588 BC

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, as King of Judah in 597 BC. Jeremiah warned him not to plot against Nebuchadnezzar but Zedekiah would not listen. Nebuchadnezzar entered Palestine on January 15, 588 BC and besieged Judah for three and a half years resulting in the remaining residents being taken into captivity.

When Nebuchadnezzar broke through the wall of Jerusalem, Zedekiah tried to flee to the Jordan but was captured, forced to witness the killing of his sons and then was blinded. He was then carried off to exile in Babylon. Jeremiah recorded that he would see the king of Babylon while Ezekiel prophesied that he would never see the city of Babylon. His blindness fulfilled the seeming contradictions of these two prophets.

Shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, entered the city and burned it, including the temple with the ark, and carried off the rest of the furnishings to Babylon. The Priests were taken to Riblah and executed.

Gedaliah was appointed the new governor of Judah and Jeremiah was to assist him in his administration. However this new government was interrupted by the murder of Gedaliah by Ishmael. The tiny remnant feared Babylonian retaliation and fled to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them. Jeremiah had warned them against this move but would not be listened to.

Thus Judah went into captivity and the land of Palestine was desolate for 70 years. The Jews were permitted to return to rebuild the temple under the decrees of Cyrus King of Persia. 535 BC The captivity was to teach the people of God that obedience to the Word of God is necessary to enjoy and possess the land. Disobedience meant judgment and exile.

The Babylonian Captivity and the subsequent return to Israel were seen as one of the pivotal events in the drama between God and His people: Israel. Just as they had been predestined for, and saved from, slavery in Egypt, the Israelites were predestined to be punished by God through the Babylonians, and then saved once more. The Babylonian Captivity had a number of serious

effects on Judaism and the Jewish culture. For example, the current Hebrew script was adopted during this period, replacing the traditional Israelite script.

This period saw the last high-point of Biblical prophecy in Ezekiel, followed by the emergence of the central role of the Torah in Jewish life; according to many historical-critical scholars, it was edited and redacted during this time, and saw the beginning of the canonization of the Bible, which provided a central text for Jews.

This process coincided with the emergence of scribes and sages as Jewish leaders (see Ezra and the Pharisees). Prior to the exile, the people of Israel had been organized according to tribe; afterwards, they were organized by clans, only the tribe of Levi continuing in its 'special role'. After this time, there were always sizable numbers of Jews living outside Eretz Israel; thus, it also marks the beginning of the "Jewish diaspora", unless this is considered to have begun with the Assyrian Captivity of Israel. In Rabbinic literature, Babylon is a metaphor for the current Jewish diaspora.