

Paradise to Promised Land

A Bible study about the history of the Old Testament

Prophets and Exile (continued)

Today we continue to look at the prophets, going into the time of the Exile of Judah. While this is a relatively short period of time in Israel's history, it is very meaningful for Israel.

- **What are some relatively short but meaningful events in the history of our own country?**

Micah: Major Aspects of the Text

Micah prophesies about the fall of Israel for its sins to the people of Judah, but does this as a warning to the people of Judah, showing what will happen to them due to their sins that continue to mark them for the same kind of punishment as Israel.

- Read Micah 1:2-9

Nahum: Major Aspects of the Text

Nahum wrote during one of the darkest times of Judah, during the reign of the evil king Manasseh. God reveals to Nahum His plan to strike down the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, but also gives warning to the Judahites of a coming day of judgment for them and their sins.

- Read Nahum 3:5-7

Zephaniah: Major Aspects of the Text

Zephaniah likely comes with a warning sticker as it is probably the most clear and therefore most disturbing notice of God's judgment for Judah. Zephaniah makes sure that the people of Judah understand that a "day of the Lord" is coming with fire (Zephaniah's predominant image) that will burn up the sinful people of Judah.

- Read Zephaniah 1:2-6

Habakkuk: Major Aspects of the Text

A contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk is given a vision or oracle from God about the coming Babylonian invasion. God tells Habakkuk that this is something that could not be imagined by anyone, but will come to pass in its own time.

- Read Habakkuk 1:5-11

Jeremiah: Major Aspects of the Text

Jeremiah is the last of the pre-exilic prophets. He brought an unpopular message to Jerusalem as a sort of last warning. God uses Jeremiah not so much to warn Judah as to inform them of the coming doom and the reasons for the doom. Jeremiah ends with the people of Judah being taken into captivity, but with a glimmer of hope that they will return one day after the current generation has died off.

- Read Jeremiah 29:10-14

The Exile: Historical Context

The Exile began in 598 BC. The political history of the Exile is many times understated or misunderstood. God had warned Judah that they would be taken from their homeland, but they refused to believe it would happen. How it happened was that there were two rival world powers: Egypt and Babylon. During this time, Judah had allied itself with Babylon through paying tribute. After a defeat in battle in 605, the Judahite king Jehoiakim revolted against Babylon by refusing to pay tribute any further. This angered Nebuchadnezzar who then put Jerusalem under a 3 month siege that ended with the fall of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar was left without confidence in the Judahite kings and took the leadership of Israel into exile and captivity in

Babylon, thus fulfilling what the prophets had said. Additionally, during this time Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and carried off its riches to Babylon as a sign to other would-be revolting nations.

During this time, Judah lost its status as an independent kingdom and became a Babylonian province. Babylonian-appointed governors then encouraged Jews who had expatriated or left Judah for places like Moab to return to Judah. This brought further confusion in national and religious identity to Jerusalem, although it could be argued that most of Judah by this time already had a fair degree to intermixing in its religious identity.

Some 60 years later in about 537 BC, Cyrus the Great defeated an already struggling Babylonian capital and amassed its empire land-holdings including Judah. Cyrus afterwards declared the end of the Judahite exile and the return of the Jewish aristocracy and religious elite to Jerusalem as a part of his overall policy of more religious leniency.

- While the Exile is short in terms of number of years, the blow was felt heavily by Judah. How do you imagine this time of exile impacted Judah?

Lamentations: Major Aspects of the Text

Lamentations is a poetic book (a part of the Ketuvim/writings) that was likely written by Jeremiah as a capstone to his prophecy. This book is similar to the book of Job in that it ponders over the problem of evil and pain. The Hebrew name for the book can be translated “Alas” and the subject largely is sorrow over the destruction of Jerusalem with moments of enduring hope woven in.

- Read Lamentations 1:1-8

Daniel: Major Aspects of the Text

Technically, Daniel is not considered a prophet of Israel, but rather is one of the books of the Ketuvim (the Writings). This may strike you as odd since Daniel is apocalyptic (revealing) in its nature and it displays many visions and dreams that appear to tell the future. Prophetic or not, Daniel does give us an enduring picture of the history of the Exile, beginning with Daniel himself being taken into exile up until his death in the court of a Persian king.

- Read Daniel 1:1-5

Ezekiel: Major Aspects of the Text

Ezekiel, like Daniel, was carried off into Exile by Babylon and some estimate him to have been around the same age as Daniel during the time of the exile. Ezekiel was placed in settlement about 100 miles south of Babylon proper. There he prophesies many things, including explanations for the destruction of Jerusalem, God’s judgment on the surrounding nations, and finally the return and restoration of God’s people. Ezekiel’s prophecies are often very image-based and come to him as visions that are then interpreted, or as words that are interpreted by him as images to God’s people.

- Read Ezekiel 3:1-7

Obadiah: Major Aspects of the Text

Obadiah writes a prophecy against Edom during the time of the Exile. The historical significance of the text is that Edom, the hill-dwelling descendants of Esau, were something of a territory or vassal state of Jerusalem that helped Babylon during the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s raid of Jerusalem. Obadiah expresses anger and judgment at this familial treason. This may have also been written as a warning to other relative nations to Judah who would later contest with the return of the exiles.

- Read Obadiah (1:)10-14