

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Telling the Old Testament
Story of God



SESSION 9

The Period of the Exile

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SESSION 9

The Period of the Exile

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Exilic Period

Prophetic Responses to the Exilic Period

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- describe the dramatic impact of the Babylonian exile (living conditions in exile and back in Ancient Israel, the resultant “Jewish Diaspora,” etc.).
- understand the unique ways in which the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel word their messages of hope in response to the exilic conditions.

INTRODUCTION

This session will close out the period of the monarchy of Israel, and look at the downfalls of the Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah) Kingdoms and the period of exile in Babylon.

THE EXILIC PERIOD



NOTES

FALL OF ISRAEL (NORTHERN KINGDOM)

The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians around 721 BC. This loss of the Promised Land and defeat at the hand of enemies is clearly explained as the result of disobedience to the covenant, turning away from God, and worshipping false gods and idols (2 Kings 17:6-18). The Assyrian policy was to scatter the peoples they defeated. Thus, the leading citizens of Israel were relocated to other lands, while foreigners were relocated to live in the land of Israel.

FALL OF JUDAH (SOUTHERN KINGDOM)

The Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon early in the 6th century (500s) BC. Unlike Assyria, Babylon took the leading citizens of Judah and placed them in exile back in the land of Babylon. Thus, the Babylonian conquest of Judah begins what is known as the exilic period, the period in which the citizens of Judah are in exile in Babylon.

The Babylonian conquest of Judah took place over a period of several years and involved at least three deportations of citizens from Judah to Babylon. The initial siege of Jerusalem and the first deportation are described in 2 Kings 24:10-16. The poor (farmers, uneducated, etc.) were left in Judah, while the leading citizens (the educated, priests, rulers, administrators, scribes, military officials, artisans, etc.) were taken into exile to Babylon. This first deportation is dated around 598 BC.

The second deportation and the actual destruction of Jerusalem are described in 2 Kings 25:8-12. The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were burned. More leading citizens were taken into exile to Babylon, while the poor were left behind. This second deportation is usually designated the Fall of the Southern Kingdom or the Fall of Jerusalem, because of the destruction of the capital city (Jerusalem). This second deportation is dated around 587 BC. A third deportation seems to have taken place around 582 BC. Not much is known about this third deportation.

LIVING CONDITIONS DURING THE EXILIC PERIOD IN BABYLON

The Judean exiles in Babylon were not placed in prisons or dungeons. Instead, they were actually allowed to live under rather comfortable conditions. Scripture indicates Babylon began to treat the exiles with some sense of favor and tolerance (2 Kings 25:27-30). The exiles were allowed to settle in villages and rural areas

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near Babylon itself. They were free to establish their own neighborhoods and even engage in profitable business ventures. The prophet Ezekiel was free to move about and preach to the exiles. The prophet Jeremiah, from back in Jerusalem, was able to write letters and maintain contact with the exiles.

Some of those in exile became so comfortable and prosperous they remained in Babylon, even after the period of exile ended, when Babylon fell to Persia. It is in relation to this period of the exile of the Judeans from the Southern Kingdom that the term Jews begins to be applied to the remnant of Israel. The term is especially applied at first to the exilic remnant during the rebuilding of life centered around religious faith (focused on the Torah) in the postexilic period.

LIVING CONDITIONS DURING THE EXILIC PERIOD IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

The land of Judah lay in ruins from the devastation of war. Almost all the fortified towns in Judah were destroyed (razed to the ground). The population of the land was drained away by various factors. Some had been taken into exile, many were killed in battle, many more died from the impact of war (i.e., from starvation or disease), and some fled as refugees (to Egypt and elsewhere). Babylon did not replace the population with others from outside nations (as was the Assyrian policy that repopulated Samaria, in the North, with a foreign element). The few poor people who remained in Judah eked out a minimum subsistence living off the land, among the ruins. The Temple remained a holy spot for pilgrimages to offer sacrifice, even among its burned ruins.

THE JEWISH DIASPORA

The *diaspora* is a term referring to the Jews living outside their homeland during and after the exile. Israelite settlement outside of Ancient Israel actually began with the fall of the Northern Kingdom. In 721 BC, Sargon II of Assyria deported many inhabitants of Samaria. They were resettled in Assyria; in Halah, on the Habur river in Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes (2 Kings 17:6). These deportees have sometimes been referred to as the ten lost tribes of Israel. As previously described, the exilic period resulted in some dispersion as well. That is, some Jews remained in the comforts of Babylon even after the exile; and some fled from Ancient Israel to Egypt during the war. As a result of these dispersions, in the period following the exile, three major centers of Jewish settlement developed. There were major Jewish settlements in Ancient Israel, Babylon, and Egypt.

PROPHETIC RESPONSES TO THE EXILIC PERIOD

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Chapters 40-55 of Isaiah address the situation of the exile within Babylon. The structure of this section of Isaiah reveals two important themes that envelop the material, with an important central theme within the material:

- These chapters begin and end with a focus on the power and endurance of God's Word (40:1-8; 55:6-11).
- Near the beginning and end of these chapters appears an emphasis on the announcement of salvation for Jerusalem (40:9-10; 52:7-10).

Two themes surround or envelop the material of Isaiah 40-55 and within this envelopment is the central concern of God's action on behalf of the exiles: the collapse of Babylon and her idols, and the rise of Persia as God's chosen instrument of deliverance (44-47) are seen as God's action to save God's people and return them home. King Cyrus of Persia is depicted as God's chosen instrument for the restoration of the Jews (44:28-45:4).

The overall theme of Isaiah 40-55 is the restoration and salvation of the exiles. This theme is set forth by the prologue in 40:1-11. "Comfort my people, her exile has ended, prepare ye the way of the Lord, a highway in the wilderness." Long before the Spirit inspires the application of this text to the coming Messiah in Jesus Christ, it serves as God's promise to bring the exiles home via a highway through the wilderness from Babylon to Ancient Israel.

Following are three significant themes that emerge in Isaiah 40-55:

- God will do a "new thing" (42:9). Israel is called to forget the past and notice the new thing God is doing (43:18; 48:6-7). This new thing refers to the promise of restoration.
- The theme of "universal salvation" is introduced. God's salvation is not only for Israel, but also for all the nations. The nations will recognize God and His salvation, and God will call to them (45:14-15, 22-25).
- The "restoration of Zion," or Jerusalem. (52:8-10; 54).

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah's ministry stretches over the period from the reign of Josiah up to and including the exile (Jer. 36:2). Jeremiah's ministry covers the period of the final series of kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.

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Following is a brief outline of the major themes in Jeremiah:

- The condemnation of idolatry (2:27-28; 10:3-5); and the condemnation of injustice (2:33-34).
- Proclamation of God's wrath/punishment for evil and apostasy (leaving God for other gods) (1:13-15).
- A pleading for renewal and repentance among the people through the prophet, God proclaims His desire to receive repentant children from Judah. The people are called to turn back to the covenant and to God (3:12, 22; 4:1; 7:3; 8:5; 18:8).
- Proclamation of hope for restoration after the destruction in 29, in a letter to the exiles, Jeremiah claims that after 70 years of exile, God will restore the people to the land of Ancient Israel. God promises a new covenant written on the heart, with a promise of forgiveness and renewal (31:31-34).

In chapter 32, Jeremiah is described as buying a family farm, even though Babylon has already taken the land. This reflected Jeremiah's conviction that the punishment of Babylonian exile was only temporary.

EZEKIEL

- 1-24: Oracles against Judah and Jerusalem before 587 BC
- 25-32: Oracles against foreign nations
- 33-48: Oracles of hope and restoration for Judah

Major Themes in Ezekiel

- Judgment/punishment against deteriorating spiritual conditions such as:
 - Pagan cults that had reached as far as the Temple grounds and were supported by the priests themselves
 - Widespread use of magicians, fortune-tellers, and other false authorities
 - False prophets proclaiming all would be well, despite the evil conditions
 - Idolatry that had become worse than in Samaria or even Sodom
 - Injustice, bloodshed, violence, bribery, and stealing from poor (5-7, 18)

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- Proclamation of Babylon as the instrument of God's punishment against Judah. It is a common theme among the prophets to understand the nations as the instruments of God.
- The promise of restoration. Ezekiel describes a new version of past history. He relates the period of the exile to the time of slavery in Egypt, and therefore, the Exodus from Egypt foreshadows the new promise of a return and restoration from exile in Babylon. The new covenant God will make with the exiles will reflect the Sinai covenant of the Exodus.
- God announces a two-fold plan of restoration.
 - Restoration to the Promised Land and the purification of the covenant relationship. There is a focus on conversion and change (33-39; key text: 36:22-38).
 - God announces a new order of community life (40-48). Ezekiel has a vision of a new Temple at the center of a renewed nation, in which each person has a place. Central to the vision is a picture of life-giving waters flowing from the Temple and touching all living things in the land (47:1-12). The source of prosperity becomes the true worship of God alone.

APPLICATION



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1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
 - Describe the dramatic impact of the Babylonian exile (living conditions in exile and back in Ancient Israel, the resultant Jewish Diaspora, etc.)?
 - Understand the unique ways in which the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel word their messages of hope in response to the conditions in exile?
2. Read the Book of Haggai. Identify the four oracles/messages from God. Give the scripture references for each oracle/message. Describe how the beginning of each oracle is marked. Summarize the message of each oracle, followed by a summary of the overall book.
3. Write in your journal. Include your reflections and insights from this session and from your reading and study. Include specifically reflections on Isaiah 60.

EXAM



NOTES

1. The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians _____.
 - A. Around 586 BC
 - B. Around 692 BC
 - C. Around 721 BC
 - D. Around 500 BC
2. The fall/destruction of Jerusalem occurred in _____.
 - A. 598 BC
 - B. 587 BC
 - C. 582 BC
 - D. 553 BC
3. The Judean exiles in Babylon were placed in prisons until they were returned to Jerusalem.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. Some of the exiles became so comfortable and prosperous they remained in Babylon, even after the period of exile ended, when Babylon fell to Persia.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. During the exile, the few people who remained in Ancient Israel did well for themselves by trading linens and spices.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. The *diaspora* is a term referring to the Jews living outside their homeland during and after the exile.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. Chapters 40-55 of Isaiah address _____.
 - A. The situation of the exile with a setting in Babylon
 - B. The situation of the exile with a setting in Ancient Israel
 - C. The situation of the exile with a setting in Jerusalem
 - D. None of the above

 NOTES

8. The overall theme of Isaiah 40-55 is the restoration and salvation of the exiles.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. Which of the following is NOT a major theme in Jeremiah?
 - A. The condemnation of idolatry
 - B. Proclamation of God's wrath/punishment for evil and apostasy (leaving God for other gods)
 - C. The negative effects of globalization
 - D. All of the above

10. In chapter 32, Jeremiah is described as buying a family farm, even though Babylon has already taken the land. This reflected _____.
 - A. Jeremiah's conviction that the punishment of Babylonian exile was only temporary
 - B. Jeremiah's need for a place to raise his family
 - C. Jeremiah's wish to stay in his homeland during exile
 - D. None of the above

11. One of the major themes in Ezekiel is the promise of restoration.
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. A second theme in Ezekiel is the coming Messiah.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Describe the dramatic impact of the Babylonian exile (living conditions in exile and back in Ancient Israel, the resultant Jewish Diaspora, etc.). What must it have been like for those who lived in Babylon? For those who stayed behind?
2. What are the unique ways in which the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel word their messages of hope in response to the exilic conditions? What are their messages? Is there one book which seems to you to be more or less hopeful than the others?
3. What is an oracle? How can you separate the oracles from God in books like Haggai?
4. According to Ezekiel, what caused the exile? Who is to blame? How can such terrible consequences be avoided in the future? What is about to happen that shows God's continuing love for His people?
5. Describe the way in which the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah may have two different identities. Who might the people in Isaiah's day have seen the servant to be? To whom does the identity of the servant apply for Christians today?