



# Exile

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## 1 Introduction

The Exile refers to the conquest of the Kingdom of Judah by the Neo-Babylonian Empire after the year 605 BC. It was an event that was to have a profound effect on those who survived and brought to an end Judah's existence as an independent sovereign state (except for a brief period in the Second Century BC). The exile was brought about by a number of factors. The prophets had no doubt that this was the result of Israel's sin that caused Yahweh to punish her (Lam. 1:5; Ezek. 39:21-24; Neh. 9:2-31). Looking at the exile in an international perspective it seems obvious that it resulted as a consequence of the rise of Neo-Babylonian power in the Ancient Near East. Judah's kings rebelled against their new Suzerain Nebuchadnezzar and as a result of this the nation was destroyed and carried away into captivity. It should not surprise us to learn that both the above explanations are correct, for as Yahweh is the Lord of history we should therefore expect both history and Scripture mesh together perfectly.

## 2 Breaking of the Covenant

Following the Exodus from Egypt the people of Israel under the leadership of Moses entered into a Covenant relationship with Yahweh. He was to be their God and they his people. In common with the standard pattern of covenants between suzerains and vassals in the Ancient Near East during this period a covenant brought the vassal blessings if it was kept and cursings if it was broken. The Israelites were well aware of their responsibilities which were set down for them by Moses in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (cf. Jer. 7:21-26). Of particular interest to us is the ultimate sanction that Yahweh threatened to use against the people of Israel. If they refused to obey him and went their own way then they would find themselves scattered amongst the nations (Lev. 26:27-35; Deut. 4:25-31, 40; 8:19-20; 28:36-37, 62-68). Although continually warned by the prophets about where their actions would lead them (Isa. 6:8-13; Jer. 1:13-15; 5:14-18; 6:11-12, 22-26; 7:32-34; 8:1-3; 9:13-16; 10:17-22; 12:14-17; 13:20-27; 17:4; 20:4-6; Ezek. 7:21-26; 16:59-62; 44:5-9; Mic. 4:10) the prophetic books make clear God's charge against the people of Israel: they had broken even one of his Covenant Stipulations (see **Table 1**) and as they refused correction the Exile was the inevitable result (Jer. 32:20-23).

**Table 1: Prophetic Utterances Connecting Breach of Covenant Stipulations with the Exile**

Covenant Stipulation	References
General References to the Covenant being broken	Jer. 11:1-8
1st Commandment - No other gods (Exod. 20:3)	Jer. 1:16; 7:9; 9:14; 10:13, 17; 13:10; 16:10-13; 17:1-4; 19:1-4, 13; 22:8-9; 25:4-7; 32:26-29; 44:1-6; Zeph. 1:4-9
2nd Commandment - No idols	Jer. 1:16; 2:1-3:6, 23-25; 5:7, 19; 7:6, 9, 17-19, 30;

(Exod. 20:4-6)	11:9-13; 16:18; 18:15; 25:4-7; 32:34-35; Ezek. 5:8-9; 6:1-7, 11-14; Ezek. 16:35-36; 22:9; 36:17-19
3rd Commandment - No blasphemy (Exod. 20:7)	Jer. 5:1-2; 7:9; Ezek. 20:27
4th Commandment - Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11)	Jer. 17:19-27; Ezek. 22:8, 26; Neh. 13:9-18
5th Commandment - Honour parents (Exod. 20:12)	Ezek. 22:7
6th Commandment - Murder (Exod. 20:13)	Jer. 7:9; Ezek. 22:9; 36:17-19
7th Commandment - Adultery (Exod. 20:14)	Jer. 5:7-9; 7:9; Ezek. 22:11
8th Commandment - Theft (Exod. 20:15)	Jer. 7:9
9th Commandment - False testimony (Exod. 20:16)	Jer. 7:9; Ezek. 22:9
10th Commandment - Covetousness (Exod. 20:17)	Micah 2:2-5
Human sacrifices (Deut. 12:31)	Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35; Ezek. 16:20-22, 35-36; 20:31
False Prophecy	Jer. 23:9-39
Mistreating the fatherless, the alien and the widow (Exod. 22:21-24; Deut. 27:19)	Isa. 10:1-4; Jer. 5:28; 7:6; Ezek. 22:7, 29
Bribery (Exod. 23:8; Deut. 16:19)	Ezek. 22:12; Micah 3:11-12
Consulting the dead (Deut. 18:11)	Isa. 65:4
Eating unclean meats (Lev. 11:7-8)	Isa. 65:4

**2.1 Idolatry.** Foremost in the charges brought against the children of Israel was that of idolatry (as indicated in **Table 1** above). The writers of Kings and the prophets were in no doubt that the Northern kingdom fell to Assyria because of the worship of other gods (2 Kings 17:7-23; Jer. 19:1-15). Both Hezekiah and Josiah had actively sought to purge Judah of idols, but the death of Josiah at the hands of Pharaoh was interpreted by many as a divine punishment for his campaign against the Canaanite deities. Even during the third siege of Jerusalem (see **4.3**) the people worshipped other gods in the hope that they might save them from their enemies (Ezek. 8:12). At that time Ezekiel saw in a vision that an idol stood in the northern gateway of the temple (Ezek. 8:5, cf. 2 Kings 23:6) while in a secret room of the Temple seventy elders of the house of Israel were engaged in a pantheistic worship, possibly based on one of the cults of Egypt (Ezek. 8:7-11). Leading the worship was Jaazaniah, whose father Shaphan had been a key member of the cabinet of king Josiah and played an important role in the rediscovery of the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:3-14). In the North Gate women mourned for Tammuz the Sumerian/Babylonian god of plant life who died during the heat of summer to be reborn during the Spring rains (Ezek. 8:14). While within the inner court, a place reserved for priests alone, twenty-five men with their backs to the Temple worshipped the sun (Ezek. 8:16; cf. 2 Kings 23:5, 11) (Stuart, 1989: 89-91). Even after the fall of Jerusalem those who had escaped to Egypt still persisted in worshipping the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 44:1-28) (Ackroyd, 1994:40-41).

**2.2 The Sins of the Kings of Judah.** Although Kings and Chronicles make it clear that the activities of all of the godless kings of Judah were responsible for the disaster that was coming on Jerusalem, two are singled out for special condemnation by the prophets: Manasseh and Zedekiah.

**2.2.1 The Sins of Manasseh.** Manasseh of Judah reigned longer than any king in either the Northern and Southern Kingdom - a total of 55 years (697-643 BC). He reversed the reforms of his godly father Hezekiah by actively promoting the worship of the gods of the Canaanites. He sacrificed some of his

sons in the fire, set up an Asherah pole in the Temple and "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" (2 Kings 21:1-8, 16; 2 Chron. 33:1-8). The people were led astray by the kings actions and spiritual life in Judah fell to an all time low (2 Kings 21:9; 2 Chron. 33:9). In response the Lord promised to bring judgment upon Judah as he had the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 21:9-15; 24:3-4; Jer. 15:1-4). Even though Chronicles records how Manasseh repented of his deeds after being taken prisoner by the Assyrians (2 Chron. 33:10-17) the damage was already done. After his reign God's judgment in the form of defeat and Exile was inevitable (cf. 2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28).

**2.2.2 The Sins of Zedekiah.** The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel twice charge Zedekiah with breaking covenants he had sworn. As Zedekiah's covenant with Nebuchadnezzar was sworn in the Lord's name his rebellion was viewed as being against Yahweh (Ezek. 17:11-21). Later during the third siege of Jerusalem (see 4.3) Zedekiah made a covenant with all the people of Jerusalem to free their Hebrew slaves in accordance with the command of Moses (Jer. 34:8-10; Deut. 15:12). However, when an army marching North from Egypt caused the siege to be lifted the covenant was broken and the people to back their slaves (Jer. 34:11). This action brought swift condemnation from Jeremiah, who reminded the king of the terms of the Mosaic Covenant concerning Hebrew slaves (cf. Deut. 15:12) and the consequences of breaking it - sword, plague and famine (Jer. 34:12-22).

**2.3 Historic Precedents for God's Judgment on Judah.** A number of specific comparisons are made by the prophets between earlier judgments on sin and what was about to happen to Judah.

**2.3.1 Sodom and Gomorrah.** Genesis records that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were so great that the outcry concerning them reached heaven (Gen. 13:13; 18:20-21; 19:13). The Lord completely destroyed those cities and not a living thing was left in them (19:23-25) and this act was remembered by later writers. By the days of Isaiah he could write that the people of Judah were as reckless in their sins as the inhabitants of Sodom (Isa. 3:8-9). The writers of Kings and Chronicles both accuse Judah with being worse than the former inhabitants of the land (2 Kings 21:11; 2 Chron. 33:9), while Ezekiel and Jeremiah say that they are more sinful than Sodom (Ezek. 16:46-50; Lam. 4:6).

**2.3.2 The Northern Kingdom.** The writers of Kings emphasise that Judah did not learn the lesson of the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:7-20, esp. v.19), a thought echoed by Jeremiah (Jer. 3:7-14). Manasseh himself was given a foretaste of what was to come upon his kingdom when he brought a change of heart on his part (2 Kings 21:13-15; 2 Chron. 33:10-13), but the people failed to heed the warning.

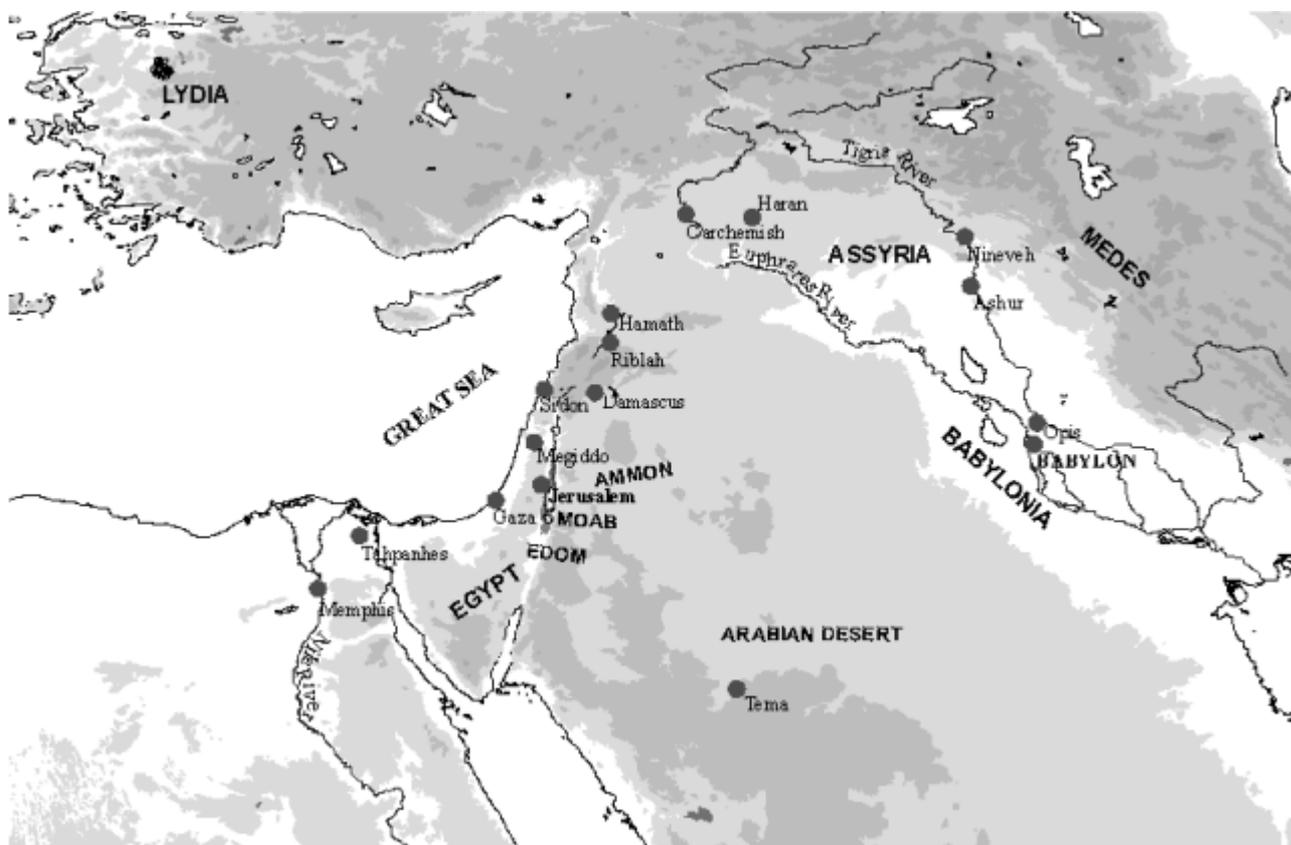
**2.3.3 Shiloh.** Jeremiah prophesied that if the people did not repent of their sin then the Temple would become "like Shiloh" (Jer. 26:4-6). Shiloh was located just North of Bethel and was remembered as the first place the Tabernacle was set up in the cis-Jordan (Joshua 18:1; 19:51; Judges 18:31; 21:12-21). Such was the corruption of the priesthood under Eli and his sons that the Lord allowed the ark to fall into the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 1-4) in about 1050 BC. It is probable that Shiloh itself was destroyed soon afterwards (1 Sam. 4:10; cf. Psalm 78:60), although it was re-inhabited later (1 Kings 14:2). Its significance for Jeremiah's prophecy is that like Shiloh the Temple would be abandoned as a place of worship (Jer. 7:12-14). A place's historic associations does not guarantee the Lord's presence if the people abandon their loyalty to Him.

## 3 Ancient Near Eastern Background

**3.1 The Rise of Babylon.** Babylon had always proved a thorn in the side of the Assyrian Empire. In 689 Sennacherib (704-681) destroyed the city, which was rebuilt and repopulated by order of his successor Esarhaddon (681-669), only to be destroyed again in 648 by Ashur-banipal (669-633). Following the death of Ashur-banipal Nabopolassar, king of the marshland, took the city in 626 and repulsed the Assyrian force sent against him. The Assyrian Empire continued to decline due to

leadership and the continued attacks of the Medes. For the period from 623-616 we know little events in Babylon, but in 615 the Babylonian Chronicle records that Nabopolassar made his move against Assyria, attacking the city of Ashur (see [Map 1](#)). The assault was repelled with the help of Egyptian forces and the Babylonian king fled the field, narrowly avoiding capture. Ashur fell to the Medes the following year and shortly afterwards the Median king Cyaxares and Nabopolassar made a treaty against Assyria. The treaty was sealed with a wedding of State between the crown prince Nebuchadnezzar and the Median princess Amytis. The Babylonians and Medes joined forces with the *Umman-manda*, a marauding Scythian tribal people from the steppes of Southern Russia. They harried the Assyrians along their borders, further weakening the Empire. Despite Egyptian support under the combined threefold assault was too much and Assyria collapsed. In 612 Nineveh fell and Sinsihkun perished in the flames of his palace (cf. Nahum 3:12-19). His army fled westward to Haran where Assur-uballit reigned briefly as the last king of Assyria.

**Map 2: The Ancient Near East During the Neo-Babylonian Empire**



The Egyptians, recovering after a long period of weakness, had sought to support their old enemy Assyria. Apparently they thought it better to have a weakened Assyria as a buffer between them and the growing power of Nabopolassar, but even their combined forces were not sufficient to stay the Babylonian advance. Haran fell in 610 and the following year Pharaoh Necho II marched North to assist Ashur-uballit in his attempts to retake the city. The campaign was a failure and from this time Assyria ceased to exist as a world power. Pharaoh Necho had faced Judean opposition on his northward march and had fought and killed Josiah at Megiddo. When he returned in defeat three months later he took control of Judah, deposing Jehohaz taking him away into exile in Egypt. This was followed by a brief period of Egyptian control in Palestine until the year 605 when Necho was defeated at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar son of Nabopolassar. Nebuchadnezzar pursued the Egyptians southwards, defeating them yet more convincingly at Hamath (see [Map 1](#)), but was forced to turn back at the border of Egypt when he heard of his father's death. Nebuchadnezzar made a swift return across the desert to Babylon to be made king. In his absence his army took control of Judah and replaced the

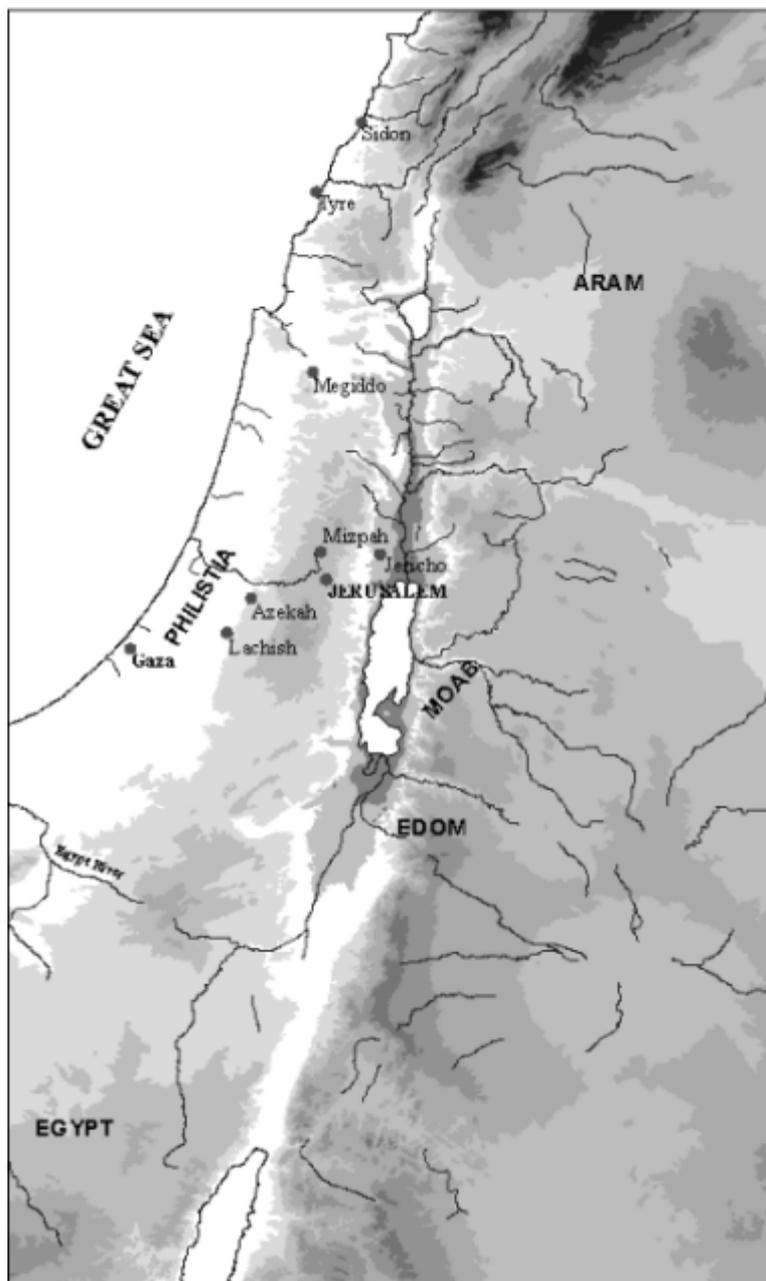
Egyptians as the ruling power in that region (see further Bruce, 1987: 82-92; Miller & Hayes, 1983: 386-387; Noth, 1996: 269-271) (see **Table 2 for simplified chronology**).

**Table 2: Time Chart of the Rise and Fall of Babylon**

Date	Event
639	Josiah becomes king of Judah, aged eight. Assyria's power continues to decline.
633	Ashur-banipal King of Assyria dies and is succeeded by Ashur-etil-ilani
627	Josiah starts his reforms in his 12th year of his reign.
625	Babylon becomes independent of Assyria. Nabopolassar founds the Neo-Babylonian dynasty.
621	18th year of the reign of Josiah. Book of the Law found in the Temple. Reforms efforts redoubled.
616	Nabopolassar invades Assyria. Pharaoh Psamtek of Egypt aides the Assyrians against Babylon.
614	Ashur falls to Median forces. Nabopolassar of Babylon and Cyaxeres of the Medes make a treaty against Assyria.
612	The Assyrian capital Nineveh (see <b>Map 1</b> ) falls to the forces of Nabopolassar, Cyaxeres the Mede and Scythian raiders. Sin-shur-ishkun King of Assyria slain.
610	Haran falls to Babylon and it allies. Assur-uballit King of Assyria flees.
609	Pharaoh Necho marches North to assist the Assyrians in retaking Haran and is opposed by Josiah of Judah at Megiddo (see <b>Map 2</b> ). Josiah is slain (2 Kings 23:29) and Jehoahaz his son succeeds to the throne of Judah. Necho is defeated by Nabopolassar and forced to retreat South. Necho annexes Judah and deposes Jehoahaz after he had reigned only three months (2 Kings 23:31). Eliakim his brother becomes Necho's vassal and his name is changed to Jehoiakim. From this time Assyria ceases to be a world power.
605	Necho is defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish (see <b>Map 1</b> ). Nabopolassar dies (August 16th) and is succeeded by his son Nebuchadnezzar (in September). While he is being crowned king in Babylon his army besieges Jerusalem for the first time. They deport some of the young men of the nobility and remove some of the gold articles from the Temple (Dan. 1:1-4). <b>SEVENTY YEARS FOR BABYLON BEGIN.</b>
604	Nebuchadnezzar takes control of the Philistine Plain (see <b>Map 2</b> ). Judah becomes a vassal of Babylon (2 Kings 24:7).
601	Nebuchadnezzar is defeated by Necho on the Egyptian border and forced to retreat. Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon along with several other vassal states (against the advice of Jeremiah).
598	Jerusalem is besieged for the second time. Jehoiakim dies during the siege (December 7th) and is succeeded by his son Jehoiachin.
597	After three months the city surrenders to Babylonian forces (March 16th). Nebuchadnezzar deports the king, royal officials, craftsmen and community leaders to Babylon, as well as the golden articles from the Temple. Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah (renamed Zedekiah) becomes Nebuchadnezzar's vassal (2 Kings 24:17).
590	Zedekiah rebels against Babylon against the advice of Jeremiah.
589	Jerusalem is besieged for the third time (2 Kings 25:1).
588	Only the cities of Jerusalem, Lachish and Azekah remain in Judean hands (see <b>Map 2</b> ). The siege is briefly lifted while the Babylonians deal with an Egyptian force sent to help Judah led by Pharaoh Hophra.
586	Jerusalem falls to Nebuchadnezzar in late July/August. Zedekiah is captured, blinded and deported. All but the poorest people in the land go into exile. The city, palace and

	Temple are burnt and the walls cast down. Gedeliah appointed Governor of Judah.
581	Fourth deportation takes place to avenge the murder of Gedeliah and the Babylonian garrison at Mizpah (Jer. 52:30) (see <b>Map 2</b> ).
562	Nebuchadnezzar dies and is succeeded by Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach)
561	Amel-Marduk releases Jehoiachin (2 Kings 25:27-30).
560	Amel-Marduk assassinated and his brother-in-law Neriglissar takes the throne
556	Neriglissar dies and his infant son Labashi-Marduk loses the throne to Nabonidus.
553	Nabonidus makes Belshazzar coregent and departs Babylon for Tema in Arabia.
550	Cyrus defeats the Medes and becomes king of both the Medes and the Persians.
546	Cyrus defeats the army of Lydia and enters southern Babylonia.
543	Nabonidus returns to Babylon to counter Cyrus' advance.
539	Cyrus captures Babylon and Belshazzar is killed, Nabonidus captured. Cyrus issues decree to allow Exiles to return. <b>END OF BABYLON'S SEVENTY YEARS.</b>

**Map 2: Palestine During the 6th Century BC**



## 4 The Last Years of Judah

The death of Josiah at the hands of Pharaoh's forces at Megiddo brought to an end his program of religious and political reforms. Only three months passed before its brief period of independence came to an end and it became a vassal of Egypt and forced to pay heavy tribute (2 Kings 23:33; 2 Chron 36:3). Necho set up Eliakim, son of Josiah as his puppet king and changed his name to Jehoiakim as a sign that he was under Pharaoh's authority. Like his younger brother Jehoahaz, whom he replaced, had none of his father's godly character (2 Kings 23:32, 37; 24:4; 2 Chron. 35:27) and his reign was characterised by evil and bloodshed (e.g. Jer. 22:13-19; 26:20-23).

**4.1 The First Deportation.** We have little information regarding the siege of Jerusalem and the subsequent deportation as no extrabiblical source mentions the event. What little we do know is derived from Daniel 1:1-6 (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 11.222). It would appear that the city surrendered fairly quickly and Jehoiakim reluctantly became a vassal of the newly crowned King Nebuchadnezzar. The victors deported members of the royal family as well as some of the golden articles from the temple. Included in the deportees were **DANIEL**, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah who were to be trained in the Royal academy of Babylon. In this way Nebuchadnezzar sought to enrich his Empire with the best minds that his empire had to offer (Archer, 1985: 31-33).

**4.2 The Second Deportation.** Many scholars argue that Jehoiakim was passed over by the people in favour of his brother because of his pro-Egyptian tendencies. His true colours showed themselves when Nebuchadnezzar suffered a setback in 601 while fighting on the borders of Egypt. Jehoiakim and several other vassal kings rebelled against him (2 Kings 24:1) (Bruce, 1987: 88). It took Nebuchadnezzar a year to recover from his defeat and refurbish his chariot forces before he was ready to start putting down the rebels. In the mean time he sent raiders from neighbouring states against Judah (2 Kings 24:2; cf. Jer. 35:11). In 598 Nebuchadnezzar launched his long-awaited assault on Jerusalem and the city was besieged for three months (24:10-11). During the siege Jehoiakim died, perhaps assassinated in the hope of more lenient treatment from the Babylonians and Jehoiachin's son succeeded to the throne (24:5-6). There is no direct evidence for assassination, but there are hints that Jehoiakim was not a popular king. Despite the large tribute demanded of him by Pharaoh (2 Kings 23:35) he had a new palace built for himself using forced labour (Jer. 22:13-14).

As no help was forthcoming from Egypt (2 Kings 24:7) the city surrendered on 16th March 597. The new king Jehoiachin, his mother and his captains, officials, craftsmen - ten thousand in all - were deported to Babylon, together with the rest of the larger golden items from the Temple (24:12-16; Jer. 22:24-27). Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah (renamed Zedekiah) the new vassal king (2 Kings 24:17).

**4.3 The Third Deportation.** Zedekiah was put in a difficult position. On the one hand he had lost most of the experienced men who had served in his predecessors. On the other he was never accepted as a legitimate ruler by the people, who continued to look upon Jehoiachin as their king. The exiles in Babylon, for example, dated events from the exile of Jehoiachin (Ezek. 1:2) and the false prophets in Jerusalem confidently predicted that Jehoiakim and the other captives would soon return (Jer. 28:3-4). The Babylonians too weakened Zedekiah's position by referring to Jehoiachin as "king of Judah" even after his deportation (Pritchard, 1955: 308). John Bright notes that Zedekiah, though "...he seems to have been well-intentioned (cf. Jer. 37:17-21; 38:7-28), he was a weakling unable to stand up to the nobles (ch.38:5), and fearful of popular opinion (v.19)." (Bright, 1980: 328). By the fourth year of his reign he had given in to the pressure of the pro-Egyptian party at court and was plotting rebellion with the rulers of Edom, Moab, Ammon, **TYRE** and Sidon (27:3-7). It is probably that he was summoned to Babylon at this time to reassure Nebuchadnezzar of his loyalty (Jer. 51:59). Rejecting the advice of Jeremiah to remain loyal (Jer. 27:1-22) Zedekiah broke his covenant with the king of Babylon (see **2.2.2**). In 588 a Babylonian army marched westwards and Nebuchadnezzar consulted his augers

decide whether to deal first with Judah or the Ammonites (Ezek. 21:18-29). The signs pointed to Judah (2 Kings 25:1) and all the cities except Jerusalem, Lachish and Azekah were quickly subdued. Recalling the desperate pleas of Hoshea (2 Kings 17:4) Zedekiah made an alliance with Pharaoh Apries (Hophrah) (Ezek. 17:15; cf. 2 Kings 18:21) by which he hoped to throw off the yoke of Babylon. For a brief period it looked like he might succeed as Pharaoh marched out of Egypt and the siege was lifted (Jer. 37:4-21). As Jeremiah had predicted the Egyptian threat was soon dealt with any major military engagement and the Babylonian army resumed their attack (Miller & Hayes, 1980: 413-414).

Jerusalem was besieged for almost two years from January 587 until July 18th 586. A collection of ostraca (inscribed potsherds) addressed to the commander of Lachish (known as the *Lachish Letters*) reveal the desperate state in which the defenders found themselves in the year 588. Ostrakon IV reports that the signals from Azekah were no longer visible - indicating that the city had fallen to the Babylonians. Interestingly Ostrakon VI speaks of those who "weaken the hands of the land and the city." Although Jeremiah is not mentioned by name, he and those who agreed with him are clearly implied (Jer. 38:1-4) (Pfeiffer, 1962: 37-41; Pritchard, 1955: 321-322). After the fall of Lachish Nebuchadnezzar turned his attention to Jerusalem and conditions in the city became increasingly desperate (cf. 2 Kings 18:27). Although the people had had time to prepare, their food supplies eventually began to run out. Cannibalism, predicted by the prophets (Lev. 26:29; Jer. 19:9) became grim reality (Lam. 4:10; Ezek. 5:10). Despite Jeremiah's counsel to surrender (Jer. 21:8-10; 38:17-21) the king refused to do so and just as the last of the food in the city was exhausted the Babylonians broke through the wall (2 Kings 25:2-4; Jer. 52:6). Zedekiah fled with remains of his army, but was overtaken and captured near Jericho. From there he was brought before Nebuchadnezzar at his field headquarters at Riblah (**see Map 1**), his sons were executed in front of him and he was blinded. From there he was taken in chains to Babylon (2 Kings 25:4-7; cf. Jer. 32:1-5; 39:1-7; 52:7-11; Ezek. 12:1-14). The key members of his cabinet were executed before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah shortly afterwards (Jer. 52:24-27).

A large part of the population of Jerusalem was put to the sword and everything of value plundered. The bronze articles from the Temple were cut up and removed and the building together with the palace and the important houses were set on fire. In order to ensure that the city would never rebel against him again Nebuzaradan, the commander of the Imperial Guard, ordered that the walls be demolished. All who survived in the city were carried off into exile in Babylon, with the exception of the very poor of the land (2 Kings 25:8-21; Jer. 39:8-10; 52:12-23; cf. 9:11; 26:18). The book of Lamentations paints a sad picture of Jerusalem at this time. The starving population exchanged whatever riches they had left for food (Lam. 1:11), its leadership and priesthood were gone (1:19) and the Temple burnt (2:6-12; 4:3-10). The Babylonian soldiers oppressed the survivors and forced them to work for their food (5:11-18).

**4.4 The Fourth Deportation.** We know little of the last deportation other than what we are told in Jeremiah 52:30. In 581 BC Nebuzaradan deported a further 745 people in retaliation for the murder of Gedaliah and the soldiers of the Babylonian garrison at Mizpah (**see 5.1**). It is probable that from that point the government of Judea was incorporated within the province of Samaria and so it effectively ceased to exist as a separate state (Bruce, 1987: 94).

## 5 Israelite Life During the Exile

We have very little evidence about the day to day life of the ordinary Israelite during the period of the Exile, apart from a few scattered references in Scripture.

**5.1 Life in Judah.** As described briefly above Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC and all but the poorest people of the land were removed to Babylon (2 Kings 25:11-12). These people had

previously been landless peasants and presented the least risk to the Babylonians, but were required work the land to prevent the fields falling into disuse (25:12; Jer. 39:10; 52:15-16). The biblical account of the depopulation of Judea is supported by archaeological evidence that demonstrates that during the exilic period no site in Judah was continually inhabited (Hoerth, 1998: 369; Miller & Hay 1986: 416-417; Pfeiffer, 1962: 43-44). This much reduced population was probably able to survive quite comfortably and at the end of that season they harvested "wine and summer fruit in great abundance" (Jer. 40:12). From this the Babylonians probably received a portion as tribute (Hoerth 1998: 369). With them lived Jeremiah, who had been spared by Nebuchadnezzar and entrusted by him into the safekeeping of Gedaliah the new ruler (Jer. 39:11-14; 40:5-6). It is possible that Gedaliah was actually made king by Nebuchadnezzar and not "governor" as some translations describe him. The writers of Kings may have been reluctant to accept him as such because he was not of the line of David but references to the "Kings daughters" at Mizpah in Jeremiah's account make more sense if they refer to the children of Gedaliah than they those of Zedekiah (Jer. 41:10). On this line of reasoning Jer. 41 would refer to Ishmael being one of Gedaliah's chief officers, rather than Zedekiah's (Miller & Hay 1986: 423). However, the textual evidence is ambiguous and the verse could be translated to support either view (cf. *NIV* and *NASB* translations of Jer. 41:1).

Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam (who had protected Jeremiah - Jer. 26:24) was appointed governor and set up his residence in Mizpah, 12 km (8 miles) North of Jerusalem in what had once been territory of Benjamin (see **Map 2**). This city had probably been left more or less intact after the invasion and had old associations with the Patriarch Jacob (Gen. 31:49) and prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 7:5-7; 10:17-18). There Gedaliah welcomed the survivors of the army who had been scattered when Zedekiah fled Jerusalem and those who had sought refuge in countries around Judah. For a short time it seemed as if the survivors would continue to live peacefully in the land, but it was not to be. Although he was warned about a possible plot against him by Ishmael son of Nethaniah inspired by Baalis, the king of Ammon, Gedaliah refused to believe it. Nevertheless, Ishmael, a man of royal blood *was* seeking to supplant him. He struck Gedaliah down while he was eating, together with the Babylonian garrison and many of the Jews in the city. Ishmael then enslaved the rest of the people of Mizpah and attempted to take them to Ammon, but he was foiled by Johanan son of Kareah who intercepted him at Gibeah. Fearing for their lives the remnant of the people fled South to Egypt, against the advice of Jeremiah who urged them to remain. They traveled as far as Tahpanhes (Daphnae) (see **Map 1**) and settled there (2 Kings 25:22-26; Jer. 40:7-43:14; 52:8). Even there, Jeremiah notes, they continued to worship other gods (Jer. 44:7-30). As noted above (see **4.4**) a further deportation took place in around 581 in retribution for the murder of Gedaliah and the garrison at Mizpah.

There is some evidence that the altar in the ruined Temple remained a place of worship during the Exile. The eighty men from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria ambushed by Ishmael were all carrying grain offering and incense for the house of the Lord (Jer. 41:4-9). Apart from this tantalizing reference we know little for certain about what form the religious practice of those who remained in Judea took. It is assumed that the ark was burnt with the Temple, but it is probable that the altar remained intact but it is not known whether the Babylonians defiled it (Ackroyd, 1994: 25-26).

The remaining people of Judea intermarried with the Samaritans to the North, a practice not followed by the exiles in Babylon and one that was to cause many problems during the Restoration (cf. Ezra 4:24; 9:10; Neh. 13:23-28) (Pfeiffer, 1962: 44-45).

**5.2 Life in Babylon.** The exiles were naturally distressed when they arrived in what was to be their new homes, such as the settlements at Tel-Abib on the Chebar River (Ezek. 1:1; 3:15), Tel-melah, Tadmor, Harsha, Cherub, Addan and Immer (Ezra 2:59; Neh. 7:61). Donald E. Gowan describes the psychological trauma that the people must have suffered:

Many must have been isolated individuals, still in shock from seeing their loved ones die, or frantic with anxiety because they did not know what had become of husband or child, wife or parent. And they walked, day after day, for months. The route from Jerusalem to Babylonia is about 700 miles. They walked, and

more died, and then found themselves in a strange and forbidding land, not hilly and wooded like Palestine, but a flat alluvial plain, marked only by great rivers and an extensive network of canals watering fertile fields; and here and there what seemed to them to be immense walled cities, with temple towers looming into the heavens. (Gowan, 1998: 122).

Psalm 137 expresses the people's grief when they were taunted by their captives concerning their former home that few, if any, were to see again. Yet in many ways their condition was better than those who remained in the land. Jeremiah had promised that the Lord would be with the exiles and gave instructions that they settle down and serve the Babylonians as best they could until the Lord restored their descendants to the Land (Jer. 24:1-10; 29:4-14). It is assumed that they had to render labour to the Babylonians, but generally they enjoyed a great deal of freedom (Noth, 1996: 296). Some of the exiles, like Daniel and his three friends rose to positions of power within the Royal Court of Babylon (Dan. 2:48-49) and many others became wealthy (cf. Ezra 1:4, 6; 2:68-69). Later, during the Persian period Jews like Mordecai (Esther 2:19-23), Esther (7:1-10) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:1-10) found themselves in key positions in the government and were able to act on behalf of their people because they took Jeremiah's advice.

Zedekiah died shortly after he arrived in Babylon, but Jehoiachin lived on under some form of supervision or arrest, though we know little of the form that this took. When Amel-Marduk (Evmerodach) succeeded to the throne of Babylon in 562 he released Jehoiachin and honoured him as a guest at his table (2 Kings 25:27-30). This does not, as Martin Noth points out, "...imply a restoration of his royal prerogatives but was simply a friendly, purely personal gesture." (Noth, 1996: 28). Archaeological evidence recovered from the Royal palace in Babylon provides support for Jehoiachin's presence there and lists the daily rations set aside for him and the members of his family (Pritchard, 1955: 308).

One of the most significant changes brought upon the Jews in exile was their forced introduction to a new language: Aramaic. Although Hebrew remained a living language learning Aramaic allowed them to communicate with their neighbours and engage in business. It remained the *lingua franca* of Syria and Palestine until the seventh century AD. After the exile Aramaicisms and text in Aramaic is found in the Old Testament writings (e.g. Ezra 4:8-6-18; 7:12-26; Dan. 2:4b-7:28) (Pfeiffer, 1962: 54). It also became necessary to translate the text into Aramaic for those in the congregations who did not know Hebrew (e.g. Neh. 8:8). These were written down and became what we know today as the Targums.

## 6 Babylon the Lord's Instrument of Judgment

Just as the Lord brought judgment on the Canaanites through Israel He used Babylon to punish not just Judah, but the surrounding nations as well.

**6.1 Seventy Years of Servitude to Babylon.** Jeremiah gave a very specific prophecy concerning Babylon, one that was referred to both by Daniel and the Chronicler. Judah and the surrounding nations were to serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. If any nation refused to submit to him they would be punished and uprooted from its land. Conversely, if a nation obeyed Nebuchadnezzar then they would be allowed to remain in the land (Jer. 25:8-26; 27:3-11; 29:10; cf. Chron. 36:21-23; Dan. 9:1-2). As can be seen from the events described in **Section 4** Judah rebelled and was carried off into exile and a direct result.

The starting point for the nations' servitude to Babylon is a matter of debate. The Assyrian Empire ceased to exist in 609 BC (see **3.1**) and from that time on Babylon ruled much of its territory. The seventy years of servitude must have ended when Babylon fell on 5th/6th October 539 BC, which gives a period of exactly seventy years of servitude. The seventy years must have started before Jeremiah wrote his letter to the exiles in 595/94 BC (Thompson, 1980: 544-545) because he refers to it as a period already in progress in 29:10 (Jonsson, 1998: 210).

Alternatively, historical evidence from the *Babylonian Chronicle* indicates that the nations of Syria and Lebanon began to serve the king of Babylon shortly after the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC - a date supported by Daniel 1:1-2. This gives a period of 66 years of servitude, which should therefore be seen as a round number representing a human lifetime (Goldingay, 1989: 239). The use of seventy in this way is not without precedent in Hebrew thought. The Greek translation of the Old Testament was started by 72 translators, yet is referred to as the *Septuagint* - the Seventy (*Letter of Aristeas*, 50) and Zechariah 1:7-15 & 7:1-5 refer to a 68 year period as "seventy years" (see **6.1.3**). There is also some evidence that the number seventy had a symbolic meaning elsewhere in the Ancient Near East representing "a time of penitence intended to appease divine anger" (Baldwin, 1972: 97). For example

The Babylonian King Esarshaddon (681-669 BC) has left an inscription to the effect that the God Marduk should have been angry with his land until seventy years had been accomplished, though in fact he had mercy, and reduced the number to seven. (Baldwin, 1972: 97).

Even if seventy years was intended symbolically Jeremiah's prophecy was still remarkably accurate.

**6.1.1 The land enjoyed its Sabbaths.** 2 Chronicles 36:21 is sometimes mistakenly interpreted suggesting that Judah was desolate for seventy years. In fact the verse refers to two distinct prophecies. The first (Lev. 26:34-35) states that as a result of the Exile the land would rest and enjoy its Sabbath but does not mention seventy years. The second (Jer. 25:11) refers to seventy years of desolation, but not a Sabbath rest. What the Chronicler was doing by bringing these two prophecies together was indicating that both the paying-off of the Sabbaths and the seventy years of servitude to Babylon would end at the same time - he was not saying that they *began* at the same time (Jonsson, 1998: 220-222).

**6.1.2 Daniel's Prayer.** Daniel 9:1-2 records how Daniel realised from studying the prophecy of Jeremiah (esp. 25:11) that the period of the desolation of Jerusalem was almost over. The rule of Babylon had ended and therefore the seventy years had been completed. However, as the Lord's promise through Jeremiah was conditional on the people turning back to God before they could be restored to the land (Jer. 29:10-14), Daniel prayed a prayer of repentance (Dan. 9:4-19).

**6.1.3 Other References to Seventy Years.** In Zechariah 1:7-15 & 7:1-5 the prophet refers to seventy years from the destruction of the Temple until the time at which he wrote (719 BC). There is no reference in either passage to the prophecy of Jeremiah and so these passages should not be connected with Jeremiah's prophecy. The exact time elapsed was of course only 68 years, which strengthens the case for the 605 dating of Babylon's Seventy Years referred to above (see **6.1**).

**6.2 Prophecies of Babylon's Fall.** Although the Lord allowed Babylon to destroy Judah, she in turn would be punished for her own sins. A nation from the North would attack her and the mass would become a slave (Isa. 13:1-22; 14:3-23; 47:1-15; Jer. 25:12-14; 50:1-51:64). Not only Babylon but the other nations surrounding Israel would be punished because they sought to benefit from Judah's downfall. These included Ammon (Ezek. 25:1-7); Moab (Ezek. 25:8-11); Edom (Lam. 4:22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35:1-36:7); Philistia (Ezek. 25:15-17), and the city-state of **TYRE** (Ezek. 26:1-21).

**6.3 Babylon's Decline and Fall.** The Neo-Babylonian Empire had grown strong under the able leadership provided by Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar. However, by the time Amel-Marduk succeeded to the throne on Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 weaknesses in the Empire were beginning to come to the fore. Nebuchadnezzar had contributed to a growing economic crisis through his extensive and elaborate building projects, which was made worse by pressure on the trade routes to Media, Lydia and Egypt (Miller & Hayes, 1986: 428). During that time he released Jehoiachin from prison (see **5.2**). Only two years later he was assassinated and Neriglissar, a son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar, seized the throne. Neriglissar himself died in 556 under mysterious circumstances when he returned to Babylon from a campaign in Asia Minor. His son Labashi-Marduk was only a child and was quickly ousted by army officers who made Nabonidus (himself an army commander from Haran) their king. In a move reminiscent of Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) of Egypt (1352-1336

Nabonidus sought to unify the Empire through the worship of a single god, in this case the moon-god Sin. He devoted much effort to rebuilding the sanctuaries of Sin. He did not forbid the worship of other gods, but like Amenhotep IV before him, he angered those who did not worship his chosen deity and the Empire was weakened as a result. Nabonidus spent most of the last ten years of his reign in the Arabian Desert while in Babylon his son Bel-shar-usur (Belshazzar) served as regent (Dan. 5:22; 7:8:1) (Miller & Hayes, 1986: 428-429). It is thought that he used the oasis of Tema as his headquarters in a campaign to secure the southern trade routes across the desert. His continued absence from Babylon and neglect of the important religious New Year ceremony served only to make him more unpopular with his people (Bruce, 1987: 95).

Time was running out for the Empire. Even as Isaiah had predicted 150 years before a king named Cyrus arose who was to become founder of the Persian Empire (Isa. 44:28 - 45:1-4, 13; 46:11, cf. 41:3, 25-26) (Yamauchi, 1990: 72-73). Cyrus defeated the Medes in 550 and was made king of the Medes and the Persians. In 546 he conquered the Lydians and spent the next six years consolidating his Empire in the East. Initially Cyrus had been an ally of Nabonidus, but by 543 the Babylonian king left Babylon to strengthen the city against the Persian threat. In an act of desperation he had the gods of the outlying cities moved into his capital, seeking their aid in the coming battle. It proved to be a serious mistake because the people were demoralised by this move and many defected to the Persians. A decisive battle was fought in October 539 at Opis (**See Map 1**) on the Tigris river, which Cyrus' engineers had diverted. After the battle Babylonian resistance collapsed and Cyrus was able to capture Babylon probably by means of the channel of the Euphrates and the many canals that ran under its walls. He thought that a drought had lowered the water level allowing easy access to the city. The city fell on October 12th, the night of Belshazzar's famous feast (Dan. 5). Belshazzar was killed and his father fled the city, only to be captured later. The population welcomed Cyrus as their new Emperor on October 29th when he entered the city in triumph (Bright, 1980: 360; Yamauchi, 1990: 80-87). With this event the Seventy Years of Babylon came to an end.

## 7 Israel's Restoration

Cyrus' policy was to win the favour of his subjects by reversing the policies of the Elamites, Hittites, Assyrians and Babylonians. Instead of deporting conquered populations and their gods he allowed them to return home and practice their own religions. On his conquest of Babylon he restored the gods that Nabonidus had moved into the city to their shrines and reversed his policy of favouring only the moon-god Sin.

In line with this policy Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their own land in 539 BC (Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5) (Bright, 1980: 360-362; Yamauchi, 1990: 89-92). In doing so he set in motion the fulfillment of the prophecies made many years before (Deut. 30:1-5; Isa. 44:24-28; 45:1-13; 48:20-21; 51:9-11; 61:1-7; Jer. 12:15-17; 16:14-15; 29:10-14; 30:1-24; 31:1-40; 32:6-15, 36-40; 33:6-26; Ezek. 20:39-44; 36:8-15, 19-38-37:1-23; 39:25-29). Although only a small percentage of the people actually returned (Neh. 7:4-69; cf. Isa. 6:13; 10:20-23) the period of the exile was technically over.

## 8 Developments in Hebrew Theology and *Praxis*

**8.1 The Synagogue.** Although Jewish tradition traces the origin of the Synagogue back to Moses there is no evidence for their existence before the time of the exile (Rowley, 1967: 213-225). There is no mention of these institutions in the Old Testament itself and the small amount of evidence we have indicates that they developed in Babylon as a means of communal worship independent of the Temple. It is probable that it developed from informal meetings in the homes of believers into a more structured institution.

gatherings in purpose built structures. There is less evidence for the rise of synagogue worship in Judea, where there is some evidence that some limited form of worship continued at the site of the ruined Temple (Jer. 41:5) (Rowley, 1967: 227). The development of the Synagogue allowed the Israelites to retain their faith and cultural identity wherever they lived. It was primarily a place of instruction in the Law of Moses and provided both basic and advanced levels of education in the Scriptures (Rowley, 1967: 229-230). The New Testament bears witness to this noting the existence of Synagogues in most of the cities both inside and outside Judea that Jesus and Paul visited (e.g. Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:21, 29; 3:1; 6:2; Luke 4:44; John 18:20; Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1, 10; 18:4, 19; 19:28:17, 28). The Synagogue was therefore one of the most significant changes that the experience of the exile brought about (Rowley, 1967: 239-240). Their importance might be summarised briefly under the following headings: **a) Sabbath Observance.** Without them it is unlikely that the practice of weekly Sabbath observance would have survived (Rowley, 1967: 240-241). **b) Independence from Temple Worship.** The destruction of the Temple by the Romans in AD 70 did not have dramatic effect on the Jewish religion, because it was to a large extent independent of that institution, the majority of Jews at that time living outside Judea and only rarely visiting it (Rowley, 1967: 241). **c) Centres of Evangelism.** Synagogues proved an important means of converting the Gentiles to Judaism (cf. Acts 2:10; 13:43) and later of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the First Century AD. It was Paul's custom to visit first start his ministry in a city amongst the Jews in the synagogue (Acts 17:1-3; cf. Romans 1:16). Only after he was rejected by the Jews did he move on to the Gentiles, taking with him the converts he had already gained (Rowley, 1967: 242-245). **d) A Pattern for the Early Church.** The general style of worship established in the Synagogues was continued by the early Christians (Rowley, 1967: 241-242).

**8.2 Jerusalem.** Before the exile a theology had developed that saw Jerusalem as having special status as the city of David. During the Assyrian invasion in the days of Hezekiah Isaiah promised the king that the Lord would defend the city for David's sake (2 Kings 19:34). This was taken up by the faithful prophets during the siege as a promise that the city could never fall because it housed the Temple of the Lord (Jer. 7:4). This idea was rejected by the true prophets. Jeremiah warned that the Temple would become like Shiloh (Jer. 25:9) (see **2.3.3**). While Ezekiel pictured the presence of the Lord departing from the Temple because of the sins of the people (Ezek. 10) and prepared those already in exile for the imminent fall of the city (24:15-27) (Gowan, 1998: 123-128).

**8.3 A Davidic King.** Amidst the promises of restoration the prophets reminded the people of the covenant made with David (2 Sam. 7:12-16) that his throne would be established forever. This promise would never be fulfilled through the descendants of Jehoiachin (Jer. 22:28-30). Instead the Lord would raise up a godly ruler from the line of David (23:5-8), with whom the Lord would make a new covenant (Ezek. 37:24-28). These prophecies were ultimately fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:11-16).

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