



# OVERVIEW

## Survey of the Old Testament: The Prophets Fall 2005

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### Overview of the Old Testament

#### Contents of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is primarily the literary history of the nation of Israel from its founding around 2000 BC to its return from Babylonian exile in 500 BC. The Old Testament consists of 39 books written by at least 29 different authors over the course of 1,000 years and includes several different literary genres, including historical narratives, poetry, prophecy, and law.

The books themselves cluster around four specific points in Israel's history. These four clusters are covered in great detail, with the history narratives focusing on a few years, supplemented by the poetry, music, and legal aspects of Israelite culture for these time frames. Between these four clusters, the narrative covers vast periods of history in broad strokes primarily so as to connect these clusters.

#### The Exodus

Around 1500 BC the people of Israel were a slave nation, held under the control of the Egyptian Pharaoh. The first historical cluster found in the Old Testament tells of the events surrounding the miraculous liberation of the Israelites slaves by God through the man Moses. This is known as the Exodus.

It is during the Exodus that the first 5 books of the bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) are written. These books tell the history of this Israelite people beginning with God calling their ancestor Abraham out from among the nations to become the father of a new nation. It speaks of their ancestor Jacob (a.k.a. Israel) and his 12 sons, and how those 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel, and how that family ended up in Egypt. These books describe the miraculous redemption of the nation from Egypt, and their subsequent wanderings in the desert for 40 years. Mostly, these 5 books outline the civil, criminal and religious law for a new nation. In all, these 5 books were written over a period of about 40 years.

These five books were written by Moses during their desert wanderings, and were probably compiled by Joshua as the nation was conquering Palestine ("the Promised Land").

#### The Davidic Kingdom

After Israel conquered Palestine, there is a dark period of 400 years where Israel neglects God. These four centuries are covered in one book: Judges. At the end of the period of Judges, the second historical cluster tells of the rise of the Davidic Kingdom. The book of Samuel and Ruth tells of the transition from the time of Judges to the time of Kings, and explains how David, a humble shepherd, became the great warrior king of Israel. The book of 1 Kings continues the story as it tells of the actions of David's son, Solomon. In all this period covers about 120 years.

Also during this time, the great poetic books were mostly written. David wrote most of the book of Psalms, which is a collection of songs used in the Israel's worship. Solomon wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

## The Divided Kingdom and Exile

Following Solomon, Israel experienced a civil war, where the north broke off from David's royal line. The northern kingdom continued to be called Israel (or sometimes Ephraim), while the southern kingdom came to be called Judah. Over the course of 400 years, both kingdoms found themselves in spiritual decline, until God allowed both kingdoms to be taken into captivity. Assyria captured Israel in 722 BC and Babylon captured Judah in 586 BC.

The third cluster of books covers the spiritual decline of Israel and Judah, both in the historical book of Kings, and in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea through Zephaniah. The prophetic books warn of the coming captivity if the nation does not turn back to God. Most of the prophetic books are clustered around the last 150 years of this time.

The Babylonian exile lasted for 70 years. During this time, the prophetic books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah were written.

## Post Exile

After the exile, the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland, although only a small number actually returned. This post-exilic period represents the fourth historical cluster. The historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah cover this period, along with the prophetic books of Haggai and Malachi. Finally, Esther relates a story of Jews who did not return to their land following the exile.

## Purpose & Theme of the Old Testament

Why would God use the historical literature of one nation as His revealed Word for the entire world? What makes Israel's history so special and distinct from the history and literature of other nations?

The history and literature of Israel is special because the Israelites are God's "chosen people." This is the nation through which God would reveal himself to the nations (Isaiah 42:6) and through which God would reveal His Chosen One (Isaiah 49:6, Galatians 3:8). To be the chosen people is to be the family or nation through which the Messiah would descend. Therefore God specially worked in this nation in order to prepare all things at just the right time to reveal His Messiah (Galatians 4:4).

Israel was not chosen because it was especially righteous or had any special qualities. Indeed, Israel repeatedly failed to live up to the standard that God had for them. Instead, the history of Israel is a testimony not to the greatness of the nation, but to the sovereignty, faithfulness and the grace of God.

It is not that God didn't work in and among other nations. In fact several times the Old Testament refers to priests and prophets of His who are at work in other nations (Genesis 14:18, Exodus 18:1ff, Numbers 22). However, Israel is unique because the salvation of all humanity would come through this nation.

Therefore, the Old Testament is not just a history of Israel, but it is the revelation of God's plan of salvation for all of humanity, culminating in the coming of the Messiah. The Old Testament is not a record of all God's interaction with humanity during this time, nor is it even an exhaustive record of all that happened in Israel. Instead the Old Testament is a deliberate collection of books which are carefully written and compiled to reveal how God founded, developed, nurtured, disciplined and raised a nation through which He would reveal His Messiah in order to bring salvation to the entire world.

## Arrangement of the Old Testament

The ancient Hebrew bible arranges the Old Testament around 24 books grouped into three sections: the Torah (law), the Nevi'im (prophets) and the Ketuvim (writings). These sections correlate to the timing of the books compilation and addition to the canon:

- The Torah was most likely compiled by Joshua shortly after the death of Moses (~1500 BC).
- The Nevi'im was mostly written primarily around the time of the exile as an explanation as to why Israel had been taken into captivity (~600 BC).
- The Ketuvim was compiled by Ezra after the exile as part of his efforts to re-institute temple worship (~450 BC).

Because this arrangement is based upon periods of history, studying the Old Testament according to this arrangement helps a student to more easily understand the historical and spiritual background into which these books were written. The overriding purpose of the books become more apparent, and provides the context for the message.

Hebrew Arrangement		Greek/English Arrangement	
The Torah (Law)	"In the beginning" (Genesis) "These are the names" (Exodus) "And He called" (Leviticus) "In the wilderness" (Numbers) "These are the words" (Deuteronomy)	Law	Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy
The Nevi'im (Prophets)	<u>Former Prophets:</u> Joshua Judges Samuel Kings  <u>Latter Prophets:</u> Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel  <u>The Twelve:</u> Hosea                      Nahum Joel                          Habakkuk Amos                        Zephaniah Obadiah                    Haggai Jonah                        Zechariah Micah                        Malachi	History	Joshua Judges Ruth I Samuel II Samuel I Kings II Kings I Chronicles II Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther
		Poetry	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon
The Ketuvim (Writings)	<u>Sifrei Emet (The 3 Poetic Books):</u> Praises Proverbs Job  <u>Hamesh Megillot (The Five Scrolls):</u> Ruth Song of Solomon The Preacher (Ecclesiastes) How! (Lamentations) Esther  <u>Other Historical Books</u> Daniel Ezra-Nehemiah The Words of the days (Chronicles)	Major Prophets	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel
		Minor Prophets	Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

By contrast, our modern English bible consists of 39 books arranged into five sections. This arrangement, along with the names for the books, came out from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC translation of the Old Testament into Greek called the Septuagint. In this translation, some books were split (Samuel, Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah), and they were rearranged more according to literary genre than historical context. It is also through this Greek translation that we get our modern English titles to the books (e.g. Genesis is Greek for “origins”).

Because this arrangement is based on literary genre, studying the Old Testament using the Greek/English arrangement helps the student to use consistent hermeneutical techniques for each genre.

## What Bible Did Jesus Use?

In Matthew 23:35 Jesus condemns the Jews for killing prophets “from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah.” Abel was the first martyr, whose murder was in the book of Genesis (Genesis 4:1-16). Zechariah was martyred in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21. Jesus’ point is that prophets had been martyred from the beginning to the end of the Old Testament. This point would be clear only in the Hebrew bible, which concludes with Chronicles. Therefore Jesus most likely used the Hebrew Bible, not the Greek translation.

Jesus alludes to the three part division of the Old Testament from the Hebrew arrangement in Luke 24:44-47.

*Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:44-47)*

In other places, Jesus uses a two fold division: Law and Prophets (Matthew 5:17-18; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16-17). Jesus is most likely grouping the Writings with the Prophets and is certainly not discounting the importance of the Writings. Nonetheless, Jesus’ reference to the Old Testament by the traditional three-fold arrangement of the Hebrew bible, gives further evidence that this is the bible Jesus used.

However, while Jesus used a Hebrew bible, it is clear that many of the apostles used the Septuagint. Throughout the New Testament epistles, when the apostles quote the Old Testament, they quoting the Greek translation. The Septuagint was used because most of the original readers of the epistles could not read Hebrew. Nonetheless, this affirms to us that it is acceptable to study the Old Testament in its English/Greek arrangement, as well as affirming to us that it is legitimate to use translations (albeit with caution) in our reading of scripture.

While knowing which bible Jesus used is certainly a fascinating issue, we should not lose sight that in each of these references, Jesus is affirming that all the Old Testament, Law, Prophets, and Writings, teach that the Messiah would come, suffer and die, and then be raised from the dead so that we could be forgiven of our sins. The gospel, which we so often consider a New Testament doctrine, according to Jesus, is contained in every part of the Old Testament.

Indeed, Jesus is the purpose and focus of the Old Testament, and Jesus is the focus of our study of the Prophets this term.

## Overview of the Nevi'im

### What is a Prophet?

#### Prophet Defined

The Old Testament prophets were messengers of God, calling on the nation of Israel (and Judah) to remember and keep their covenant with God. They were the enforcers of God's covenant, serving as God's direct representative and messenger to the people. The prophets were addressing specific situation in the history of Israel as they brought forth the word of God to the people.

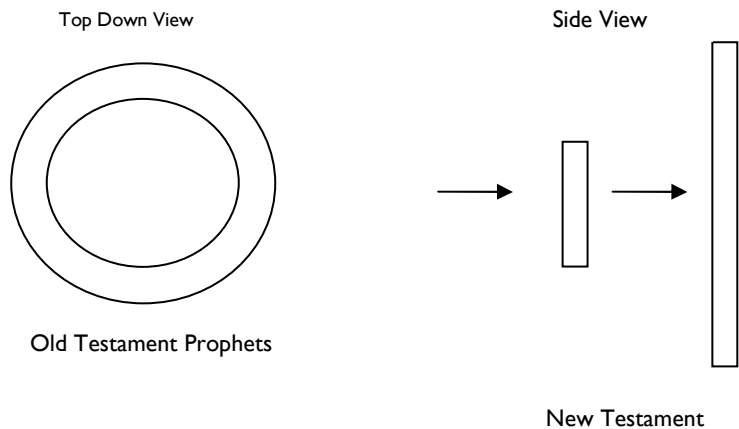
#### Forth-telling vs. Fore-telling

The primary purpose of the prophet was to proclaim God's word to the people. In conjunction with the "forth-telling" message, the prophets often also were "fore-telling" the future. Usually this foretelling was a prediction of future events should the nation continue in their sinful behaviors. However, the foretelling spoke not just of judgment, but also a time of restoration and peace for Israel and the entire world.

#### Law of Double-Fulfillment

However, foretelling in the prophets presents significant interpretative difficulties for the modern reader. Often the prophet sees two or more future events as one. This is called the Law of Double-Fulfillment, the Law of Transparency, or "Foreshortening."

Double fulfillment means that often a prophecy will have a near term and a later, greater fulfillment. The diagram on the right illustrates this<sup>1</sup>. The prophets look down on the future and don't see the depth



between the two concentric circles. However, later we can see that these two circles are some distance apart. The concept is also likened to seeing a large mountain in the distance which looks like it is just beyond the nearest hill. However, the distance to the mountain can be miles away.

An example of this principle is found in Isaiah 9:6. The prophet foretells the coming of the Messiah, saying, "unto us a child shall be born." This is clearly understood as the being fulfilled with the birth of Jesus. However, the prophet goes on to say, "and the government shall rest upon His shoulders." This aspect of Isaiah's prophecy has yet to be fulfilled. We anticipate the second advent of our Messiah who will bring peace as he takes his place as King.

<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stewart. *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1993), 182.

## Who were the Prophets?

The biblical prophets of Yahweh were all based out of Judah and Israel, and prophesied during the ninth through fifth centuries before Christ. The prophets were from all walks of life and class. They were not pawns of the monarchy, nor were they the agents of the priesthood. The prophets did include some priests. But they were just as likely to be farmers or common people. Some prophets were wealthy and part of the kingly court, while others were peasants. What they all did have in common was a calling from God, and a willingness to pursue this calling.

## How did the Prophets Communicate God's Word?

During the *golden age* of the prophets, the message was almost always directed at the monarchy. But these messages were never written down for later generations. These early prophets also performed miracles, as seen with Elijah and Elisha.

Later prophets recorded their messages in books bearing their names. We have 16 of these books today, and they are the final books of the Old Testament. Their writing included poetry, historical prose, and descriptions of visions and direct revelations of God's word (oracles).

## History of Israel in the Time of the Prophets

### Prophets Before the Rise of the Monarchy

God has used prophets to communicate with humanity from the beginning. The earliest recorded prophet was Enoch, who six generations after Adam warned of the coming of the Lord. Noah prophesied about his children. Abraham and the other patriarchs are called prophets, as is Moses. But the role of the prophet as a distinct office developed primarily with the rise of the monarchy.<sup>2</sup>

### From David to the Rise of Literary Prophecy (1000 to 800 BC)

#### Solomon (1000-931)

Israel reached its greatest military and economic height under the reign of Solomon. Solomon built upon the military success of his father, David, who not only finally ridded Israel of the Canaanite tribes, but also extended the kingdom to Edom in the south, Moab and Amon in the east, and Syria in the north (2 Samuel 8). Economically, Solomon was the richest king of his day. Solomon's annual receipts were nearly 800,000 oz. of gold (1 Kings 10:14). 1 Kings 10 says, "that silver (was) as common as stones in Jerusalem, and... cedars as plentiful as sycamore trees..."

With this wealth, Solomon built the first temple to Yahweh. While the temple was not particularly large (less than 3,700 sq. ft.), the ornamental accouterments were unbelievable. Of greater significance than the physical beauty of the temple, was the fact that the glory of Yahweh himself came and filled the temple, signifying God's approval of the nation (1 Kings 8:11).

But this Golden Age of Israel was short lived. Solomon attempted to achieve peace with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. He went on to marry 700 wives, many of them foreign, "and his wives turned his heart away" from God (1 Kings 11:3). Solomon built temples for the gods of his foreign wives. As a result, God told him that upon his death, his son's kingdom would consist of only one tribe of Israel, and the other tribes would follow his servant.

The prophets rose to prominence during this era in Israel's history. The prophets anointed the kings, signifying God's choice for the new monarch. The prophet Samuel anointed Saul and David, while Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon. God also used the prophet Ahijah to proclaim to

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<sup>2</sup> C. Hassell Bullock. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, pg. 15.

Jeroboam that he would be receiving Solomon's kingdom. These anointings were not a formality. David, Solomon, and Jeroboam's anointing as king came at a time when the populous was ready to crown a different king.

It was during the early monarchy that we see the prophets as the "conscience of the King." This is most obvious in Nathan's confrontation of David regarding his sin with Bathsheba.

### The Kingdom Divided (931)

While Solomon was the richest King in the history of Israel, that prosperity came at a price. Solomon taxed and worked the people hard. So, upon his death, the people of Israel petitioned the new king, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, for relief. Rehoboam, taking the advice of his peers rather than his father's advisers, told the people, "Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." (1 Kings 12:11)

As a result, the ten tribes of the north rebelled against Rehoboam and installed Jeroboam as king, just as prophesied by Ahijah the prophet. Rehoboam was ready to squelch the rebellion and plunge the nation into Civil War, but the prophet Shemaiah warned that God designed this turn of events. Rehoboam responded and returned his troops to Jerusalem. Rehoboam remained the King of the southern tribe of Judah while Jeroboam became king of the Northern Kingdom, Israel.

The temple to Yahweh remained in the capital of Judah, Jerusalem. Fearing that pilgrimages to the temple by his subjects would erode his authority, Jeroboam instituted a perversion of Yahwehism. He built his own temples in the north and set up two golden calves as an image of God for them to worship. Many of these temples and sites of worship were in the "high places." The *Golden Calf Cult* is the first of two major religious perversions that Israel, and to a lesser extent Judah, embraced.

### The Ahabic Dynasty (874-835)

Except for Rehoboam, Judah had kings that followed after God for the next 90 years. In the north, however, things moved from bad to worse. Because of Jeroboam's perversion of true Yahwehism, God stripped away the kingdom from his descendants. Upon Jeroboam's death, the nation followed the rebel Baasha and made him the king. Then for a period of about 5 years the nation was embroiled in a civil war, until finally Omri became victorious. Again it was the prophets who took the role of "King maker," proclaiming God's dissatisfaction with both Jeroboam and Baasha through the words of the prophets Ahijah and Jehu.

It was under Omri and his son Ahab that Israel again gained prosperity. Ahab regained control of Moab and defeated Syria in the north, and then made peace with Judah in the south. But it was also Ahab who promoted the second major religious perversion of Israel, Baalism.

*And it came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshipped him (1 Kings 16:31).*

Baal was the ancient Canaanite god of fertility. The fertility of the land, however, depended not upon the loyalty of the people to Baal, nor the keeping some moral law. Instead, Baal worshippers would practice sexual rites and temple prostitution in the hopes that these actions would excite Baal and he would then engage in sexual relations with his consort. When Baal engaged in sexual relations with his consort, the earth gave forth a bountiful harvest.

The sexual nature of this cult made it particularly evil in God's sight, for it violated those basic moral and ethic underpinnings of Judaism and attacked the boundaries of familial relationships.<sup>3</sup> But more than that, the worship of Baal was an attempt to manipulate the gods to the will of the people.

<sup>3</sup> Bullock, 23.

However the worship of God is not an attempt to mold God to our will, but to conform ourselves to His will<sup>4</sup>.

Perhaps because of the extreme evil of Ahab and Baalism, God raised up perhaps the greatest prophet in the history of Israel, Elijah. Through him, God defeated the prophets of Baal in a dramatic show of his power (1 Kings 18). Along with Elijah, there were a number of other prophets, including Elisha, a group of apprentice prophets who studied with Elijah, and at least 150 others who hid from the wrath of Ahab. Yet, even with these prophets expressing God's warning to the nation Israel, their idolatry was not eliminated.

In fact, the sins of Ahab began infecting the relatively faithful kingdom in the south. As part of Ahab's peace with Judah, he gave his daughter, Athaliah, to Jehoram, the future king of Judah, as his wife. When Jehoram's son became king, he adopted the sins of his maternal grandfather. After his assassination by the new king of Israel, Jehu, his mother, Queen Athaliah, continued the evil legacy. Only through the courage of a young princess, the priests of God, and the army, was Athaliah defeated, the rightful king crowned, and the worship of Yahweh restored to Judah. Israel, however, continued its evil ways for the next 120 years, with not a single King seeking after God.

The prophets from this period were very involved with the northern Kings, expressing God's dissatisfaction and His judgment. The prophets did not appear to speak much to Judah, nor do we have any evidence that these prophets recorded their words for future generations. Both of these characteristics change in the following century with the rise of the literary prophets.

## 8th Century Israel

During the 8th century, we see God begin to use the prophets in different ways. First, the prophets began writing down their messages from God. Secondly, while the prophets main audience was always Israel and/or Judah, they also began proclaiming God's judgment and call for repentance to other nations.

### The Glory of Assyria

From a global perspective, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were insignificant nations seen merely as pawns between larger nations. Furthermore, the Jewish people began to be influenced much more by these foreign powers surrounding them.

Without a doubt, the most dominant empire of the 7th, 8th, and 9th century before Christ was Assyria. Militarily, Assyria's empire extended from Egypt to Iran. The Assyrians were amazing engineers who built beautiful palaces and amazing temples in their capital city, Nineveh. Through archeology we have seen their sculptures, painting, and wall reliefs. They had a very sophisticated literary tradition, and an extensive and sophisticated bureaucracy.

Because of these things, we have a tremendous body of historical evidence describing the history and culture of the Assyrians. This evidence is consistent with the bible and sheds some fascinating light on the history of Israel and Judah. For example, a black obelisk found in the British Museum today shows an engraving of King Jehu of Israel paying tribute to the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III.



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<sup>4</sup> J.A. Moyer. "Old Testament History." *Expositors Bible Commentary*. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, ed. Victor Books, 1985. Electronic Edition STEP files.

## The Fall of Israel (722)

After the Ahabic dynasty, the nation Israel continued in its idolatry. They continued to worship both the golden calves first established by Jeroboam and Baal. Militarily and politically there was a brief rise in power under the reign of Jeroboam II. But this also was a period of relative weakness in Assyria, where they just endured several epidemics and internal political turmoil. A young Assyrian general named Tiglath-Pilasser III (called Pul in 2 Kings)<sup>5</sup> seized power in the midst of this turmoil, and began reasserting Assyria's domination. From that point until the final destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, the kings of Israel continued to lose power, yielding to the great empire from the north.

King Menahem of Israel paid Tiglath-Pilasser three million shekels of silver to keep him from attacking the nation around 743 BC (2 Kings 15:19). Ten years later, however, Pekah of Israel joined forces with Syria and attacked Judah in the south. Ahaz of Judah called on Tiglath-Pilasser to help. The Assyrian army needed little to entice them to wage a campaign against its southern neighbors. In 732 BC they destroyed the Syrian capital, Damascus, invaded large sections of northern Israel, and carried off the residents to captivity (2 Kings 15:29). Hoshea, the next king of Israel was forced to pay tribute to Assyria.

God warned Israel through the prophets, Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah, that unless they repented of their idolatry, that Assyria would destroy them (2 Kings 17:13-18). The message of these prophets came in various forms, and the prophets themselves were of different backgrounds and style. Yet the people did not listen. In 722, Tiglath-Pilasser's son, Shalmaneser V, discovered that Hoshea was plotting with Egypt to rebel against him. So he destroyed the capital of Israel, Samaria, and carried away all the people of Israel into captivity.

## Hezekiah of Judah (729-686)

While Israel ignored the prophets of God and was destroyed, Judah heeded the words of Isaiah and Micah, and under the leadership of King Hezekiah, experienced a national revival. Hezekiah destroyed the idols, which were tripping up the Jews, and trusted Yahweh, "so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him" (2 Kings 18:5).

The most telling example of Hezekiah's trust in God came in 701 BC, when King Sennacherib of Assyria launched an invasion of Palestine. Sennacherib had faced the Egyptian army in a major battle in the plains of Judah and won. With this victory under his belt, Sennacherib headed to Jerusalem to lay siege to the capital city. In this story, told both in 2 Kings 19 and Isaiah 37-39, Hezekiah does not surrender, but heeding the advice of the prophet Isaiah, leads the nation in prayer and fasting. The Assyrian army is stricken by a plague from God and returns to Nineveh.

## 7th Century Judah

### Manasseh (695-642)

As renown as Hezekiah was for his trust in God, so Manasseh, his son was renown for his idolatry and abominations. Under Manasseh, Judah's idolatry became so great that God announced that his judgment on this nation was inevitable. Manasseh reigned for 55 evil years during which he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood (2 Kings 21:16). Assyria was at its largest geographically at this time. Under Esarhaddon and his successor Ashurbanipal, the empire expanded into Egypt and Persia. Manasseh avoided Assyrian invasion, not by trusting God as his father had, but by paying tribute and by adopting many of the Assyrian gods.

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<sup>5</sup> "History of Ancient Mesopotamia- Tiglath-pilaser III and Shalmaneser", from *Britannica On-Line*, 1995.

The prophets are strangely silent during Manasseh's reign. None of the surviving prophetic books were written during his reign, and there is no evidence from the history books to indicate that the prophets were active. Tradition holds that the prophet Isaiah was martyred by Manasseh.

### Josiah (640-609)

Manasseh's grandson was given the throne by the palace guards when he was 7 years old. Under the King Josiah, and the priest Hilkiah, the temple was repaired, the law rediscovered, and Passover again celebrated. Yet, the revival was too late. The evil of Manasseh had sealed Judah's judgment, and the revival under Josiah merely delayed the inevitable. Furthermore, while the national leadership emphasized a return to God, there is evidence that this repentance was not deep rooted in the people.

God began using prophets again during the reign of Josiah. The message of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah was again for Judah to repent of her evil or face destruction. However, destruction would not be at the hands of Assyria, but at the hands of a new power, Babylon.

### The Rise of Babylon & Decline of Assyria & Egypt (626-605)

Upon the death of Ashurbanipal of Assyria in 633, the empire was thrown into civil war as the dead king's twin sons battled for the throne. The first son, Sinshariskin was able to control the eastern part of the kingdom, and set up his capital in Nineveh. His brother, however, took control of the west and settled his capital at Harran.

Because of this weakness, Josiah was able to suspend tribute payments to Assyria. But it was also this weakness that allowed a new power to arise. In 626, Nabopolassar of Chaldea seized power in Babylon, and after allying himself with Persia, was able to destroy Nineveh in 612 and Harran in 610.

Egypt also sensed the change in the balance of power, and launched a campaign to stop the march of the Babylonian army. Josiah foolishly tried to engage the Egyptian army as it passed through Palestine, but was killed in the battle while his son Jehoahaz was taken captive to Egypt. Then, in a dramatic battle that signified the change in the balance of power, Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish (605). Babylon was the new dominant empire, and would become the agent by which God would bring judgment to an unrepentant Judah.

### The Fall of Judah (605-586)

Egypt had taken Joahaz, Josiah's son, captive. Pharaoh put Jehoiakim on the throne and applied a tribute to the struggling nation. After the battle of Carchemish, which ended Egypt's domination over Judah, Nebuchadnezzar entered Jerusalem, made Jehoiakim a vassal, and took many of the Jewish nobles (including Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego) to Babylon.

Four years later, Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon and sought Egypt's defense. He died in 597, and his son, Jehoiachin reigned for 3 months before Nebuchadnezzar retook Jerusalem, deporting young Jehoiachin and placing Zedekiah on the throne as his vassal.

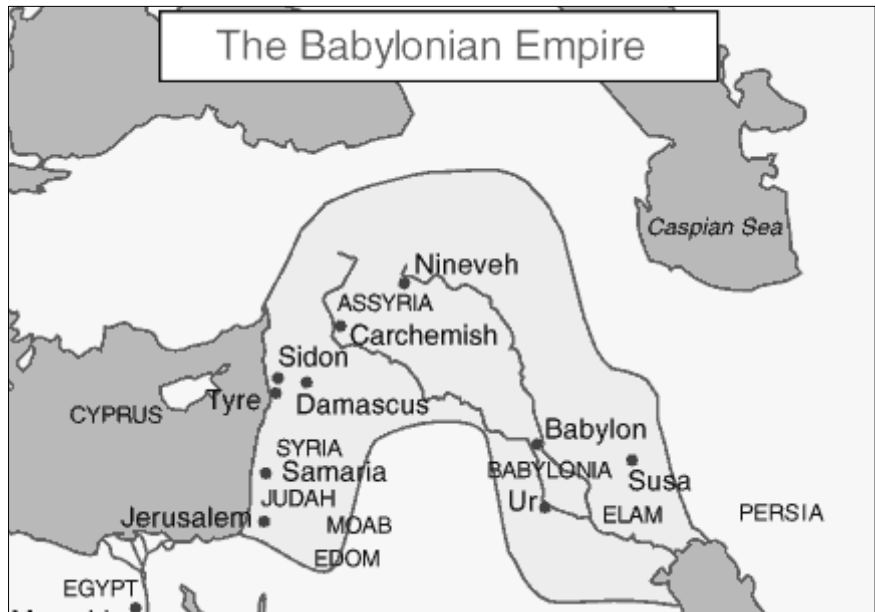
Zedekiah reigned for 11 years, until he too rebelled against Babylon, looking to Egypt for help. Egypt never came to help, and this time Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple and hauling off the rest of the Jews to Babylon (586 BC).

Through all of these events, Jeremiah was God's primary voice warning the people of Judah to repent. Jeremiah, like the prophets before him, was very active in the politics of the day. He explained to the latter kings that Babylon had been divinely appointed as Judah's punishment. As such, the kings should not rebel against Babylon nor join forces with Egypt. Because the kings ignored Jeremiah's advice, the destruction of Jerusalem was perhaps greater than would have otherwise been necessary.

## The Exile (605 to 536)

### The Kings of Babylon (626-539)

Nabopolassar died in 605 shortly after the battle of Charchemish, leaving his son Nebuchadnezzar as the King of the new empire. The Babylonian Empire stretched from Egypt to Persia. Through his high taxes and tributes he established incredible building projects in Babylon and made it the largest most advanced city in the world. After Nebuchadnezzar's death, Evil-Merodach reigned



for about 2 years, followed by brief reigns by Neriglissar and Labashi-Marduck.

Daniel is the most famous prophet during this time. Daniel ministered to Nebuchadnezzar, and even spoke God's word to the great king himself on more than one occasion. While Daniel proclaimed God's word to the Babylonians, Ezekiel was a prophet living in Babylon who spoke to the Jewish captives.

The next King of Babylon was Nabonidus, who seized power in 556 BC. Nabonidus recognized that Babylon was exposed to attack by the increasingly powerful Persians due to its geography. He therefore moved his court to Taima in Northern Arabia and established his son Belshazzar as his viceroy in Babylon. This set the priestly class against Nabonidus. They secretly promised Cyrus, King of Persia, that they would surrender Babylon without a fight if they received certain privileges in return. Cyrus defeated Nabonidus in a battle north of the city, and then marched into Babylon without a fight.

### The Rise of Medo-Persia (550-400)

The Persians and the Medes united their kingdoms in 550 BC. After the defeat of Babylon, the new Medo-Persian Empire controlled everything from Iran to present-day Turkey to Egypt in the south. The Persians were unsuccessful in their invasion of Greece, being rebuffed at Marathon.

## Post-Exile Judah

### Zerubbabel & the Rebuilding of the Temple (538-516)

The prophets not only had forewarned Judah of the captivity to Babylon, but had also foretold of the restoration of Judah. Nearly all the prophets told of a time when God would gather the nation back and they would no longer worship idols. Jeremiah was specific about the return, stating that it would come after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:12).

In 538 BC, King Cyrus of Persia gave permission for the Jews to return to their homeland. A group of 49,897 people returned to Judah led by Zerubbabel. Under his leadership they began rebuilding the temple. But life in Judah was not easy. Jerusalem had no walls, and the returning

exiles had little to protect them from those who had settled in Judah while they were gone. As a result, the construction on the temple was halted. Furthermore, several of the Jews began to intermarry with the non-Jewish settlers.

God sent the last wave of prophets to this remnant to encourage them to continue to build the temple and to rebuke them for intermarriage. The people heeded the words of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and the temple was finally completed in 536 BC.

### Ezra (458-420)

Sixty years later, a priest named Ezra returned to Judah from Babylon. Ezra also dealt with the sin of marriage to foreigners, and also took it upon himself to instruct the returning Jews of their heritage and law. Ezra is believed to have written the books of I & II Chronicles. He edited the book of Psalms, and is believed to have first assembled the books of the Old Testament into one collection.

The last recorded prophet was Malachi, who also dealt with the intermarriage problem and with the sincerity of the people's sacrifice. While there were prophets recorded in the scriptures having come after Malachi, he was the last prophet for which we have a written record of his words. Nonetheless, the prophets were successful in eliminating idolatry from the nation, as the worship of foreign gods would never again take place in Judah.

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