

## Session 6: Into Exile

### 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Ester, Nehemiah

#### 1 and 2 Chronicles:

The books of Chronicles parallel the historical timeline of the books of Samuel and the books of Kings. Unlike the other historical books, the books of Chronicles focus on the kingship and reign of David, and, more notable, the Temple and worship. This parallelism may seem strange to most readers of the Bible. But the important point to note is that every time a story is repeated, the author changes the emphasis and focus. The books of Chronicles focuses on establishing the legitimacy of David's kingship. Therefore the authors will paint David in a rather favorable light. In a similar way, the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah form one text. These books are the same in style and focus. They attempt to fill in the gaps left in the recorded history of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, namely the exile. The Hebrew name for the books of Chronicles is "the Annals" or the "year by year." Since the Hebrew language doesn't have a word for "history" this phrase or word is their closest equivalent. Therefore these books are meant to be a history of the people of Israel.

#### Outline:

#### 1 Chronicles

- I. Genealogies (1:1—9:34)
  - a. Adam to Abraham (1:1-26)
  - b. Abraham to Israel (1:28—2:2)
  - c. The family line of Judah (2:3—4:23)
  - d. The family line of Simeon (4:24-43)
  - e. The family line of Ruben (5:1-10)
  - f. The family line of Gad (5:11-22)
  - g. The family line of Manassah (5:23-26)
  - h. The family line of Levi (5:27—6:66)
  - i. The family line of the other tribes (7:1—9:2)
  - j. The descendants in Jerusalem (9:3-34)
- II. The story of David (9:35—29:30)
  - a. Genealogy of Saul to David (9:35-44)
  - b. David made king (11:1-3)
  - c. Establishment of David's kingdom (11:10—12:41)
  - d. The ark comes to Jerusalem (13-15)
  - e. The song of the Levites (16)
  - f. David's census (21:1-15) (see parallel passage of 2 Samuel 24:1-9)
  - g. The beginning of the project to build the Temple (21:26—22:19)
  - h. The types of classes responsible for temple worship (23-26)
  - i. Plans for building the Temple (28:11—29:9)
  - j. Solomon anointed king (29:22b-25)
  - k. Death of King David (29:26-30)

## 2 Chronicles

- I. Reign of King Solomon (1:1—9:31)
  - a. Preparations for building the Temple (1:18—4:22)
  - b. Dedication of the Temple (5:1—7:11)
  - c. Solomon's great works (7:12—9:28)
  - d. Death of Solomon (9:29-31)
- II. From Solomon to Hezekiah (10:1—27:9)
  - a. The divided kingdom begins (10:1—11:4)
  - b. Apostasy of Rehoboam (12)
  - c. Asa's reform (14-15)
  - d. Asa's infidelity (16)
  - e. Jehoshaphat's reform (17)
  - f. Jehoshaphat's infidelity (19)
  - g. The evil deeds of Johoram (21:4-11)
  - h. Temple restored (24:1-16)
- III. Reforms of King Hezekiah (28:1—36:23)
  - a. Infidelity of Ahaz (28:1-8)
  - b. Reforms of Hezekiah (29-31)
    - i. Passover reinstated (30)
    - ii. Liturgical reform (31)
  - c. Invasion and defeat of Sennacherib (32)
  - d. Impiety of Manassah (33)
  - e. Reforms of Josiah (34:1—35:19)
    - i. Temple restored (34:8-13)
    - ii. Finding of the book of Deuteronomy (34:14-28)
    - iii. Renewal of the covenant (24:29-33)
    - iv. Passover (35:1-19)
  - f. Destruction of Judah, beginning of the exile (36:15-21)
  - g. Decree of Cyrus, rebuilding of the Temple (36:22-23)

## Passages:

David is made king 1 Chronicles 11:1-3

Compare this passage to its parallel in 2 Samuel 2:1-7. In 2 Samuel David asks the Lord whether he should go up to Hebron and be anointed king. Likewise the process of anointing him king takes less than a sentence whereas the entire passage has more of a militaristic sense; David is conquering the land so that he can claim his authority over the people. In 1 Chronicles David is widely praised by all the people who immediately give their assent. This points to the primary focus of the Books of Chronicles, namely, that David is the great king whom cannot error and whom no one will surpass.

David's sin: 1 Chronicles 21:1

In 2 Samuel David clearly takes the blame for his sin. He realizes that he wants to take a census for tax purposes and goes forward with the idea. The Chronicler doesn't like this image of David as sinful so he changes the story to say that David was tempted by an evil spirit to engage in a census.

#### The Temple:

I cannot understate the importance of the Temple in Jewish worship and society. The Temple not only stands as a physical sign of God's presence among the people, it also stands as the icon of their religion, the house where God dwells, and the place of rituals, sacrifices, and the place where God is pleased and appeased. Without the temple no sacrifices can happen and the people lose favor with God. The Temple also stands as an icon of the fidelity of God towards his people; an ever-present sign that this is the land of the Israelites and God will protect them. The Chronicler emphasizes the importance of the Temple much more than the writers of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. Notice that eight chapters in 1 Chronicles and five chapters in 2 Chronicles are devoted to the importance and structure of both the Temple and the worship and ritual that happen in the Temple. The Chronicler will emphasize the importance of the Temple from this point forward. The sins of the kings will be their refusing or rejection of proper worship and rituals. The good kings will be the ones who restore the Temple, its worship and rituals, and the covenant (see 2 Chronicles 29-31).

#### Exile and Return:

Unlike the ending of 2 Kings where all the nobles, priests, and officials are shipped off to a foreign land, the ending of 2 Chronicles is the return from the land of exile. Following the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., the Persians rose to power and conquered all of Babylonia. The strategy of the Persians contrasted to that of the Babylonians. The Babylonians exiled the nobles, officials, and priest and imposed their own rulers over the people. The Persians released all the captives and let them live in their own land with their own religious practices. The Persians tolerated different religious practices which was unlike any other civilization of its time. Therefore the Israelites viewed King Cyrus as the great king who saved the people of Israel from exile. King Cyrus also paid for the rebuilding of the Temple. On a side note, the Persians also invented crucifixion, which creates a historical irony (Ezra 6:11).

#### **Book of Ezra:**

The Book of Ezra continues where 2 Chronicles finished. As we recall from 2 Chronicles, the Israelites were released from their exile by King Cyrus of Persia, who conquered all of the lands controlled by the Babylonians. After Cyrus became the new king he gave the order to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Disputes among the Israelites arose that led to a halt in its building, and then a restart later on by King Darius. The book is split into two parts. The first part is the historical side of the book. The second part is the story of Ezra the priest/ prophet. As a prophet and scribe Ezra is tasked with the rebuilding of the Temple and the purification of the returned exiles.

#### Outline:

- I. Return from exile (1:1—6:22)
  - a. Decree of King Cyrus (1:1-11)
  - b. The list of those who are returning. (2:1-68)
  - c. Restoration of the Temple and rebuilding (3:1—6:18)
    - i. The rules and regulations for building the Temple (3)
    - ii. Construction is halted by King Artaxerxes (4:1-23)
    - iii. King Darius reinstates the process of building the Temple (4:24—6:18)
  - d. The Law of Moses is reinstated (6:19-22)
- II. Ezra the Scribe (7:1—10:44)
  - a. Command by Artaxerxes for the exile to return led by Ezra (7:1-26)
  - b. Ezra begins the process of building the Temple (7:27—8:36)
  - c. Ezra learns of the mixed marriages between the people (9:1-2)
  - d. Ezra commands fidelity to the law (9:3-15)
  - e. List of the guilty (10)

### **Book of Nehemiah:**

The events in the Book of Nehemiah take place after those in the book of Ezra, but also coincide with some of the same events. Whereas the Book of Ezra focused on the building of the Temple, the Book of Nehemiah focuses on the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. Although they are different events some of the same themes run through both books: permission to start, problems in building, rebellion of the people, completion of the task. Unlike Ezra, Nehemiah held a position of high honor in the palace of the king: Nehemiah was the cup-bearer. The job of the cup-bearer was to bring the king his drinks and test them for poison. Basically the king trusted Nehemiah with his life. This piece of information helps us understand why the king was willing to let Nehemiah leave his service.

### **Outline:**

- I. Nehemiah (1:1—7:42)
  - a. The call of Nehemiah (1:1-11)
  - b. Appointment to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls (2:1-10)
  - c. Rebuilding the walls (2:17-
    - i. Requirements for the project (3:1-31)
    - ii. Opposition (3:33—6:14)
    - iii. Completion of the walls (6:15-19)
  - d. Census (7:4-72)
- II. Promulgation of the Law (8:1—13:31)
  - a. Ezra reads the law (8:1-12)
  - b. Reinstatement of the Mosaic Law (8:13-18)
  - c. Song of confession by the people (9:5-15)
  - d. Reopening Jerusalem (11)
  - e. Dedication of the Walls (12:27-43)
  - f. Reform (13)

Passages:

Nehemiah 6

Notice some of the details of this passage. Nehemiah realizes that the opposition wants to take his life. One of the ways to guard himself against their attack was to sleep in the Temple. The Temple is heavily guarded by strong walls and is not easy to access. Plus, killing a prophet in the Temple would anger the people and cause a rebellion. But, kings upon the coronation would enter the Temple for the ritual. Nehemiah knows that if he enters the Temple, they will think he is being named king.

Nehemiah 8:1-12

This passage highlights the level of importance the Mosaic Law has on the people. Ezra reads the Law and the people listen for over three hours. As the Law is being read, the people weep for joy and sorrow since they can now hear the Law again but know how much they have transgressed the Law.

### **Book of Ester:**

The book of Ester takes place at a time slightly different from those of the other books mentioned in this session – 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The setting is during the Persian occupation of Judah. Although 2 Chronicles ends with the return from exile and the beginning of the Persia occupation, the setting of Ester is not in the land of Israel like the other books but in the city of Susa, which is located in the Persian occupied lands of modern day Iran. After the Persian conquest of the Land of Israel, all the exiled peoples from the previous two nations were released and sent back to their homelands. Strangely, the book of Ester seems to assume that some of the exiles did not return home but instead remained in the settled cities that were their place of exile. I want to note a few things about some of the details of this book. In ancient societies, such as the Persians, the statues of the kings, specific songs, and procession all represented the authority of the king. In like manner, any of the gods of that land were considered the focal point of all worship. Therefore anyone who chose not to worship the representations of the king, the king himself, or the gods committed and were convicted of treason, a crime punishable by death.

Outline:

- I. Prologue: Setting and prologue (A:1-17)
- II. Queen Vashti (2:1-23)
  - a. Banquet of the king (2:1-9)
  - b. Vashti's refusal of the kings orders (2:10-22)
  - c. Ester made queen (2:1-18)
- III. The Plot of Haman (A:3:1—C:1:30)
  - a. Mordacai's refusal to honor the king (3:1-4)
  - b. Haman's plot to destroy the Jews (3:5—B:3:15)

- c. Ester seeks council from Mordacai (B:4:1-16)
- d. Prayer of Ester (C:1:13-30)
- IV. Ester's plan (D:1:1—E:10:3)
  - a. Ester takes an audience with the king (D:1:1-5)
  - b. Ester reveals Mordacai's plan (6:14—7:8)
  - c. Haman is punished (7:9—8:2)
  - d. The Jews are victorious (9:1-10:3)
- V. Epilogue: Mordicai's dream is fulfilled (F)

Passages:

Haman refused to worship the king: A:3:3

Notice some of the details of the passage in regards to the rules of foreign lands. The refusal to kneel or bow before the king's servants resulted in death. More importantly, an entire people who refused to do this would lead to the extermination of the race. Preservation of the society was the most important task of the king. Preserving the society meant correct worship of the gods as well as obedience from its subjects.