

August 2, 2009 by Steve Brandon



Twelve Stages in the Bible - Exile

2 Kings 24-25

1. At the Beginning
2. At Home
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We have been in a sermon series catching the big picture of the Bible. We have been looking at the history of the Bible, divided into twelve stages.

The Bible begins with the account of the **Creation**. This portion of the Scripture deals with God's ways with the world. In six days, God made the heavens and the earth and the plants and animals and Adam and Eve. But, Adam and Eve rebelled against the Lord and sinned and brought the entire human race into sin. Eventually, this brought about the flood upon the entire earth.

The next stage in the Bible that we identified was that of the **Patriarchs** (which began around 2000 B. C.). This stage in Biblical history is the beginning of God's dealing with His people, Israel. In Genesis 12, God made a promise to Abraham that he would be made a great nation and would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. This promise continued to Isaac and Jacob and to the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel. And through them, to us, as believers in Jesus (Gal. 3:8).

After the era of the Patriarchs came the **Exodus**. Due to a famine in the land of Palestine, the nation of Israel was in slavery in Egypt for about 400 years). But God brought them out with a mighty hand, by signs and wonders (in about 1400 B. C.). Their redemption is a picture of our redemption.

The next stage that we looked at was the stage called the **Conquest**. In this stage, we looked at the book of Joshua, which records how the Israelites came and took the land that was promised to Abraham (shortly after the Exodus in 1400 B. C.). The failures of Israel were clearly seen in that failed to conquer the entire land that God had told them to conquer. The power of God is seen in that everything that they did accomplish, they accomplished through God's hand.

After the conquest came the sad period in Israel's history called the **Judges** (shortly after the Exodus). Judges were rulers in Israel given by God to deliver the people of Israel. Although the Judges helped save Israel from their distress, ultimately, Israel never reformed. They always needed another judge to come and help them.

Last week, we looked at the Kingdom stage (which began around 1000 B. C.). The first three kings in Israel were Saul, David and Samuel. They reigned over the united kingdom. But, after the days of Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided in two. Israel in the north. Judah in the south. Eventually, Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians. But, Judah was carried into Exile by the Babylonians. This is our topic this morning. We are looking at the Exile.

Now, I must admit that of all my messages in this series, this has been the most difficult to put together. In some measure, it's because I'm not as familiar with the exile as I am with the other stages in the Bible. I'm familiar with the Creation. I'm familiar with the Patriarchs. I'm familiar with the Exodus and the Conquest and the Judges and the Kingdom. But, I'm less familiar with the Exile. My guess is that you are as well. So, this morning's message ought to help you fill in some of the history of the nation of Israel.

The best place to begin is with the beginning of the exile. In fact, this is my first point, ...

1. At the Beginning

In this point, I simply want for us to look at what took place at the beginning of the exile, which is recorded in 2 Kings 24-25. This is the text we will focus upon in this point. Actually, the exile didn't take place at one time. Babylon came in three waves to conquer Judah. The first was in 605 B. C. The second wave was in 597 B. C. The third was in 586 B. C. We see the first wave coming in chapter 24.

At the end of chapter 23, Jehoiakim becomes king in Judah. Judah wasn't an independent state at this time. Rather, they were being ruled by Egypt. Pharaoh Neco of Egypt appointed Jehoiakim to be the ruler in Judah. In order to keep the peace, Jehoiakim was required to pay tribute to Pharaoh. But, in 605 B. C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came up and conquered Egypt. Jehoiakim was then required to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar. This is described in the following verses:

2 Kings 24:1

In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant for three years; then he turned and rebelled against him.

After three years of tyranny, Jehoiakim said, "That's enough!" He was tired of the tyranny and wanted free. But, such was not to be the case.

2 Kings 24:2

The LORD sent against him bands of Chaldeans, bands of Arameans, bands of Moabites, and bands of Ammonites. So He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken through His servants the prophets.

His rebellion wasn't successful. The Chaldeans, Arameans, Moabites and Ammonites all came upon Judah to destroy her. But, notice how it was that Judah was conquered. It was the LORD who sent Judah's enemies against them. Why? Because they refused to heed the warning of the prophets. Time after time after time the prophets warned them of their wickedness. They were called to repent, or be destroyed for their rebellion. Like a child being warned of coming discipline, so also was Judah warned of coming destruction.

Here in 2 Kings 24, we see judgment day. They had refused the word spoken through the prophets. Highest among the disobedient was Manasseh, the king. He is mentioned in verses 3 and 4.

2 Kings 24:3-4

Surely at the command of the LORD it came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood which he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the LORD would not forgive.

Manasseh, if you recall, was the one of the most wicked of kings to ever walk the planet. In our day when the words "Hitler" and "Stalin" are mentioned, we think of the worst of the wicked. In the days of Judah, when the word, "Manasseh" was mentioned, they had similar feelings. Manasseh led the people of Judah into idolatry as many of the kings had done before. But, he went beyond them. He "practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists" (2 Kings 21:6). He practiced child sacrifice to the god of Molech (2 Kings 21:6). Perhaps worst of all, he took a carved image of Asherah and set it in the temple, which Solomon had made. Many kings had a syncretism about them. They let all gods stand. But, to bring a god into the temple is the height of blasphemy!

His reign in Israel lasted for fifty-five years. That's 55 years of wickedness in the land. And fifty-five years of wickedness was too much for the LORD to overlook. It was because of Manasseh's wickedness that God had determined to judge Judah, by taking her into exile. In light of Manasseh's sins, God had said, "Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle" (2 Kings 21:12). In other words, the destruction of Jerusalem is going to be so bad that people will cringe when they hear about it. You can read the book of Lamentations and such is the case. The destruction and bloodshed in those days was horrific. God further described what He was going to do. He said, ...

2 Kings 21:13-15

"I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they will become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies; because they have done evil in My sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day."

Since 1400 B. C., Judah had provoked the Lord. For nearly 1,000 years, Judah had provoked the Lord. So, God said, "I'm going to wipe them out." What used to be a city will become a ghost town (Lam. 1:4). The rich of the land will become slaves (Lam. 1:5). Where there used to be laughing, there will be tears (Lam. 1:2). Jerusalem will be burned to the ground (Lam. 2:3). Well, that day was coming upon Judah comes in 2 Kings 24.

In 2 Kings 24:10, Jehoiachin had just began his reign in Judah. And here we see the second wave of Babylonian aggression.

2 Kings 24:10-14

At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it. Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his captains and his officials. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign. He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had said. Then he led away into exile all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

It's right here that you see the difference between what took place in Judah as compared with Israel. When the Assyrians came and destroyed Israel, they carried some away captive (2 Kings 17:6) and filled the land with residents from the surrounding nations (2 Kings 17:24). The result was that in a few years, Israel was unrecognizable as a people group. However, the story of Judah was a bit different. When Judah was conquered, the skilled men and the leaders of the nation were brought into Babylon (verse 13), but the poor were left in the land (verse 14). Throughout the rest of the Scriptures, there is no mention of foreigners coming to fill their land, as took place in Israel. In part, this is because the cities were "wiped clean" (2 Kings 21:13). There was no place to live. But, in part, this was by design. Babylon didn't want to see Jerusalem flourish.

Babylon took the Jews from Jerusalem and brought them back to Babylon to indoctrinate them into the ways of Babylon. If you capture the culture of those who are most influential, perhaps it will permeate the society. Daniel was one of those who was taken captive and trained in the ways of Babylon. As you succeed in influencing the leaders, so will go the people. They may even be sent back to Judah to extend the kingdom of Babylon. Continuing on in 2 Kings, we see a list of those taken away into exile.

2 Kings 24:15-16

So he led Jehoiachin away into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, he led away into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. All the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all strong and fit for war, and these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon.

Here we see thousands of men being exiled into Babylon. They are the skilled people. Here they are described as the "men of valor." They are described as "the craftsmen and the smiths." They are described as the ones who are "strong and fit for war." I believe that these skilled men came back to Babylon with a purpose. These were the industrious citizens, who would be able to help build Babylon. God had instructed those people to build. After these people had been deported, Jeremiah sent a letter to those in exile. He wrote, ...

Jeremiah 29:4-7

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, "Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare."

In other words, God was telling the people, "While in Babylon, don't mope around. Be productive. Build your houses. Plant your gardens. Get married. Multiply in the land. Seek the welfare of Babylon. Pray for her." This is what Babylon wanted. This is what Babylon needed. They needed industrious people, who would work for her welfare, as pagan as she be.

I hope that this gives you incentive in our day. We are in Babylon. We are in a pagan nation. We are exiles. Peter calls us "aliens and strangers" (1 Peter 2:11). Our home is in heaven (Phi. 3:20). And yet, we are called to be productive in our country. For all intents and purposes, this makes sense to us, as we plan on living on in this country. We don't expect to be defeated or exported, where we would need to leave our land for any reason soon. But, God gave this instruction to Judah, even though He knew that they would be coming back into the land. Later on (in the same letter), Jeremiah told the people this, ...

Jeremiah 29:10-14

For thus says the LORD, "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you," declares the LORD, "and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile."

This passage here is one of the greatest promises in the Bible. Judah had been exiled for their sin. And yet, God had promised that in a mere 70 years, they would be brought back into the land. He would restore their country. Such is the heart of God! Judah is sinful, but God is gracious. This is the same heart that we see in Jesus. Though we are sinful, Jesus still remains merciful.

At this point, I also want you to notice that it was no accident that Judah had been taken to Babylon. Now, to be sure, it was their sin that brought them there. But, it wasn't the Babylonians, who had come by chance to defeat them. No, God said through Jeremiah, "to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon" (Jer. 29:4). Who took the people captive? On one level, Babylon did. But, God, Himself, takes the responsibility for why the people are in exile. In fact, that's what it says in 2 Kings 24:20, "For through the anger of the LORD this came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence."

Don't ever think that God is not actively in the affairs of men. He is. When nations conquer nations, God is in control. When the economy in America tanks, God is in control. When God's disciplining hand comes upon you, God is in control. He will bring appropriate chastisement upon your life. With Judah, they needed a time in Babylon. And in a mere 70 years, they would be brought back as well.

In chapter 25, we see the third wave of Babylon come up against Judah. And Babylon gains the final victory.

2 Kings 25:1-2

Now in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it and built a siege wall all around it. So the city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

It took Babylon two years of siege. It took two years of starving out the people. And then, finally, in 586 B. C., the city falls and the king is captured and tortured. Here is the suffering of Zedekiah.

2 Kings 25:3-7

On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled by night by way of the gate between the two walls beside the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. And they went by way of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and he passed sentence on him. They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon.

A month later, the city was destroyed.

2 Kings 25:8-12

Now on the seventh day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire. So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Then the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the people, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile. But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.

In verses 13-17, we read how the temple was plundered.

2 Kings 25:13-17

Now the bronze pillars which were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea which were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried the bronze to Babylon. They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the spoons, and all the bronze vessels which were used in temple service. The captain of the guard also took away the firepans and the basins, what was fine gold and what was fine silver. The two pillars, the one sea, and the stands which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD--the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight. The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and a bronze capital was on it; the height of the capital was three cubits, with a network and pomegranates on the capital all around, all of bronze. And the second pillar was like these with network.

The summary comes in verse 21.

2 Kings 25:21

So Judah was led away into exile from its land.

There is the beginning of the exile. Judah is defeated. Jerusalem is laid waste. The countryside is left barren. The temple was pillaged (25:13-17), with the precious metals taken away. The temple was burned to the ground (25:9). The house of the king was destroyed (25:9). The wall was broken down (25:10). Those of influence were brought back to Babylon. Only "some of the poorest of the land [were left] to be vinedressers and plowmen" (25:12).

There is application here for us. Just as Judah was taken away in her sin, you may find yourself this morning, beaten down and discouraged and under God's disciplining hand. Your life may seem barren. There may be some things in your life where it appears as if God has forsaken you. But know this: God never forsook Judah. Yes, He destroyed their city. Yes, He took them away captive. But, God did not forsake His people.

Seventy years later, they returned to the land to rebuild it (according to Jeremiah's promise in Jeremiah 25:10). Why did they return? Because God is faithful to His promises. He had promised (in 2 Samuel 7) that a king would rise up to sit on the throne of David forever. Judah had to come back. God had promised it.

And for you, if you are in a time of exile in your life, if you are His child, God will bring you back. Perhaps there are things that you need to learn during these days. So, learn those things. Trust the Lord. Seek Him out. Seek His face. Know that God is for you. He is not against you. Learn His lessons, and learn them well.

During the exile there were two groups of people. Those who stayed in Jerusalem, as vine dressers and plowmen. Those who were exiled to Babylon. For my next two points, I want for us to get a glimpse of life in each place. First of all, let's look at Jeremiah, who remained ...

2. At Home

One man who stayed at home was the prophet, Jeremiah. His ministry spanned at forty years and five kings. He ministered in Judah during the days of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. His ministry extended on through the exile. Rather than going into exile, he remained at home, ministering to his people.

Throughout the ministry of Jeremiah, he called the people of Israel to repentance, or else he warned them, the judgment would come upon them. And the closer that the time came for Babylon to conquer, Jeremiah increased his warnings to the people. He spoke with the people. He spoke with the kings. He spoke to Jehoiakim. He spoke to Zedekiah. He warned them over and over and over again of the coming judgment. And yet, the kings and the people were hard toward his message.

At one point, Jeremiah sent a scroll to Jehoiakim, the king. Before it was read in the king's presence, it was read by quite a few of his officials. They were all fearful when it was read. However, when it came time to read it before the king, the king had no time for it, and after a reading of only three or four columns, he took it from the scribes hands and burnt it without repenting (Jer. 36:23).

On another occasion he was imprisoned by Zedekiah, the king, who was perturbed at the manner in which Jeremiah was always prophesying badly of Judah. He said, ...

Jeremiah 32:3-5

Why do you prophesy, saying, "Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will take it; and Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but he will surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; and he will take Zedekiah to Babylon, and he will be there until I visit him," declares the LORD "If you fight against the Chaldeans, you will not succeed"?"

This is Zedekiah's own summary of Jeremiah's words. "Why do you prophesy saying that Babylon will come up against our nation and will carry me away captive?" And thus, he threw him into prison. I can understand this. In a time of war, you cannot tolerate pessimists in your camp. And Jeremiah was a pessimist. Or, better yet, he was a realist, proclaiming the inevitable. After all, Jeremiah was inspired by God to say these things.

As prophesied, the Babylonians came and conquered the land. Jeremiah was right in the middle of it. In fact, the book of Lamentations describes the desolate state of Jerusalem. It starts, "How lonely sits the city that was full of people! She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations" (Lam. 1:1). Jeremiah was there to see the Babylonians conquer Judah. Jeremiah was there to see the devastation that they left. He said, "The roads of Zion are in mourning because no one comes to the appointed feasts. All her gates are desolate; Her priests are groaning, her virgins are afflicted, and she herself is bitter" (Lam. 1:4). He had an opportunity to go to Babylon, but he chose to remain. This comes out in Jeremiah 40.

Jeremiah 40:1-6

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan captain of the bodyguard had released him from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. Now the captain of the bodyguard had taken Jeremiah and said to him, "The LORD your God promised this calamity against this place; and the LORD has brought it on and done just as He promised. Because you people sinned against the LORD and did not listen to His voice, therefore this thing has happened to you. But now, behold, I am freeing you today from the chains which are on your hands. If you would prefer to come with me to Babylon, come along, and I will look after you; but if you would prefer not to come with me to Babylon, never mind. Look, the whole land is before you; go wherever it seems good and right for you to go."

These are the words of a pagan military commander! He knew that the Babylonian victory wasn't because of him. Rather, he knew that it was because of the LORD. At any rate, he gave Jeremiah a choice as to whether or not he wanted to stay in Judah or come with him to Babylon. In Babylon he offered him safety and security. And yet, Jeremiah was undecided.

Jeremiah 40:5-6

As Jeremiah was still not going back, he said, "Go on back then to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and stay with him among the people; or else go anywhere it seems right for you to go." So the captain of the bodyguard gave him a ration and a gift and let him go. Then Jeremiah went to Mizpah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land.

Jeremiah went to Mizpah to stay with Gedaliah, the Babylonian assigned ruler. The reason why Gedaliah was ruling the people from Mizpah, rather than Jerusalem, is because Jerusalem was so devastated that there were no places to stay. Life in Judah was filled with turmoil. Within the year, Gedaliah was murdered. The people didn't know what to do. They were fearful of Babylon coming again for revenge. They had serious thoughts about going down to Egypt to fear the wrath of the king of Babylon. So, they sought out Jeremiah. The story is told in chapter 42.

Jeremiah 42:1-12

Then all the commanders of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people both small and great approached and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Please let our petition come before you, and pray for us to the LORD your God, that is for all this remnant; because we are left but a few out of many, as your own eyes now see us, that the LORD your God may tell us the way in which we should walk and the thing that we should do."

Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, "I have heard you. Behold, I am going to pray to the LORD your God in accordance with your words; and I will tell you the whole message which the LORD will answer you. I will not keep back a word from you."

Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with the whole message with which the LORD your God will send you to us. Whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, we will listen to the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, so that it may go well with us when we listen to the voice of the LORD our God."

Now at the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. Then he called for Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces that were with him, and for all the people both small and great, and said to them, "Thus says the LORD the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition before Him: 'If you will indeed stay in this land, then I will build you up and not tear you down, and I will plant you and not uproot you; for I will relent concerning the calamity that I have inflicted on you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you are now fearing; do not be afraid of him,' declares the LORD, 'for I am with you to save you and deliver you from his hand. I will also show you compassion, so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your own soil.'"

Isn't this typical of God? He's showing His mercy to His people. If they would stay in the land, God would build them up again. God would plant them again. They would be secure in the land again. God would protect them from the hand of the king of Babylon.

I think it's clear why God was extending His mercy. These were the poor of the land. These were the broken of the land. God always shows mercy to the poor and downcast. But, there is a condition. They needed to believe the Lord and trust in the Lord. This comes in verse 13, ...

Jeremiah 42:13-19

But if you are going to say, "We will not stay in this land," so as not to listen to the voice of the LORD your God, saying, "No, but we will go to the land of Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the sound of a trumpet or hunger for bread, and we will stay there"; then in that case listen to the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "If you really set your mind to enter Egypt and go in to reside there, then the sword, which you are afraid of, will overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are anxious, will follow closely after you there in Egypt, and you will die there. So all the men who set their mind to go to Egypt to reside there will die by the sword, by famine and by pestilence; and they will have no survivors or refugees from the calamity that I am going to bring on them."

For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "As My anger and wrath have been poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so My wrath will be poured out on you when you enter Egypt And you will become a curse, an object of horror, an imprecation and a reproach; and you will see this place no more." The LORD has spoken to you, O remnant of Judah, "Do not go into Egypt!"

This message here is typical of the entire ministry of Jeremiah. "Trust the LORD. Obey the LORD. It will go well with you. If you go your own way, it will go badly for you." Sadly, the people of Judah didn't learn their lesson. We see the result in the next chapter. Look at chapter 43.

Jeremiah 43:1-7

But as soon as Jeremiah, whom the LORD their God had sent, had finished telling all the people all the words of the LORD their God—that is, all these words—Azariah the son of Hoshai, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, "You are telling a lie! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, 'You are not to enter Egypt to reside there'; but Baruch the son of Neriah is inciting you against us to give us over into the hand of the Chaldeans, so they will put us to death or exile us to Babylon."

So Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces, and all the people, did not obey the voice of the LORD to stay in the land of Judah. But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took the entire remnant of Judah who had returned from all the nations to which they had been driven away, in order to reside in the land of Judah—the men, the women, the children, the king's daughters and every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan, together with Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah—and they entered the land of Egypt (for they did not obey the voice of the LORD) and went in as far as Tahpanhes.

So off to Egypt they went, leaving the land barren and without inhabitant. Where 900 years earlier, they had been delivered from Egypt by the mighty hand of God, they now return a defeated people.

It is interesting to note that when people come back into the land according to God's promise. They come from Babylon. Nothing is mentioned about them returning to the land from Egypt. This is probably due to the fact that they were destroyed by the sword, famine and pestilence, just as had been prophesied of them (Jer. 42:17).

The extending of the lovingkindness of the God is amazing! Here these people were in the land because of their sin. And yet, God gave them another chance to find blessing in Him. They had every reason to believe Jeremiah. All of his prophecies had come true. Here was another prophecy and he made. Certainly, it would come true as well. But, the people blew it. They sought the safety of Egypt, rather than the security of the Lord. They blew it.

Perhaps you are here in your life. You have strayed from the Lord, but are being given another opportunity. I urge you. Don't be like Judah. Don't lose your last chance and be destroyed for your rebellion. Repent and look to the Lord. He will be gracious to you.

Let's look at my third point.

3. Abroad

The best place to see this is in the book of Daniel. You may be familiar with the book of Daniel. He was young man in Judah during the days

leading up the exile. He was one of those taken captive into Babylon. I want to pick up the story right at the beginning of the book of Daniel. He gives us a good flavor of what things were like in the exile.

Daniel 1:1-7

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.

Now, of course, not everyone was treated like Daniel. I'm sure that the skilled craftsmen who came from Judah were put to work, building Babylon for the pride of Nebuchadnezzar. Those who were capable were probably enlisted into the Babylonian army. Whoever else had abilities were used by the Babylonians to build their kingdom. Daniel was a youth. We don't know how old he was at this time. Perhaps he was a young teenager. We don't know. But, we do know that he was ripped from his family and placed in a private school, to train him in the ways of the kingdom of Babylon.

On the one hand, life was very good for Daniel. He was in the school of the kings and governors, learning to be a leader. He lived in luxury. He had the finest of teachers and had the finest of food available to him. But, surely, it was difficult for Daniel in these days. Being away from your family at this age would be very tough. He had to learn a new language. He had to learn a new literature, that of the Chaldeans. They sought to indoctrinate the young boys, even giving them Babylonian names. Daniel was given the name was "Belteshazzar" (Dan. 1:7).

We can only imagine what it was like for others who were exiled into Judah. They were probably treated like immigrants, earning a low wage, trying to eek out a living. We know that they faced some mocking. Psalm 137 gives us an insight into the life of the Jews in Babylon.

Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.
Upon the willows in the midst of it
We hung our harps.
For there our captors demanded of us songs,
And our tormentors mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."
How can we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?

Here's the picture. The Jews are refreshing themselves by the rivers. They cried as they remembered Jerusalem. They put their instruments aside, refusing to sing. Their captors (the Babylonians) said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." They wanted to be entertained by the joy and mirth of the Israeli songs. Perhaps there was a bit of mocking in their voice. "Hey little Jewish boy, how about a song from the homeland?"

But, the Jews said, "How can we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" (verse 4). You can hear the distress in their words. "We are in a foreign land! We want to be home! We want to be in Jerusalem! But, we have been taken captive here in Babylon."

Life in Babylon was difficult for the godly Jews who lived there. Perhaps you remember the story in chapter 3, when Nebuchadnezzar made a giant statue of himself and decreed that all in the land bow down to the idol when the music played (Dan. 3:5-6). Those who refused to bow down to the image were thrown into the furnace. That only three men refused to bow might give an indication of how few devoted followers of the Lord existed in Babylon at this time. But, there were some.

4. At the End

The end of the exile comes in Daniel, chapter 9.

Daniel 9:1-2

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

Daniel was in his daily devotions in the Scripture. He was reading in the book of Jeremiah. He was reading either from Jeremiah 25 or from Jeremiah 29, both of which mention that the exile was set to last 70 years. As he then looked to the calendar, he realized that next year the 70 years was up! And so, how did Daniel respond? He repented. His entire prayer is included below.

Daniel 9:3-19

So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land. Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day--to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You. Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice. And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself, as it is this day--we have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us. So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary. O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

What an amazing prayer! It demonstrates so many aspects of true repentance. It acknowledges God and His rightful place. It acknowledges sin in great detail, far beyond a mere passing mention. It seeks forgiveness.

I find it interesting to not that Daniel is praying for the sins of his nation. Perhaps we ought to take it upon ourselves to pray for our nation in the same way, confessing the sins of our people.

Anyway, at the end of the prayer, God sends an answer in the form of an angel named Gabriel. He gives the following instruction, ...

Daniel 9:22-27

O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision. Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

Now, we don't have the space here to fully unravel all of the details of this passage. But, it is sufficient to point out that these verses are pointing to the greater promise of the Messiah. To be sure, Judah will be restored back into the land, but the greater promise is that the Messiah is coming! He is coming "to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, [and] to bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24). He will do so by being "cut off" (Dan. 9:25).

This, of course it the glorious reality of the work of Jesus. He has finished transgression. He has made an end of sin. He has made atonement for iniquity. He has brought in everlasting righteousness. You merely need to believe in Him and these realities will be yours. Believe in Him today!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 26, 2009 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] These stages are from the book, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, by Max Anders. It's an excellent book to help you grasp the main storyline of the Bible.