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### The Influence of the Babylonian Captivity on the Religion of the Jews

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**THE INFLUENCE OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY**

**ON THE RELIGION OF THE JEWS**

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Department of Historical Theology  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Jewish people knew what it meant to be under God's protection. They had been led out of Egypt, across the Red Sea and through forty years of wilderness travel. They had conquered their enemies, and, they had been directed into the promised land. All of these acts were part of God's plan, and they were directed according to God's ruling power. He was the God of Israel, and He was concerned about His people.

The Jews thanked their God and rejoiced to be His people. They grew and the land prospered and they became a mighty nation. But, together with power and riches there came a turning away from God. Israel began to place their trust in earthly kings and in heathen alliances. Their worship turned from God to Baal, and heathen altars began to dot the countryside. Again and again their God sent His prophets to warn the people and to direct them back. A few heeded His call and returned to Him, but, many more continued in their sinful ways.

Still, the Jewish people knew that God was their Covenant God, and, therefore, He would never forsake them. They believed that it did not make any difference what they did or how they lived because God would never deceive them. They were secure in their belief that Jerusalem would never be taken and that God would never permit the Temple to be



destroyed. In spite of the warnings and the pleadings of God's prophets and the signs of the times, the people did not heed the call of God. The destruction of Jerusalem was to become a reality. The Temple would be destroyed. The people would be taken away into captivity, into a foreign land, away from their sanctuary, and away from their God. The writers of the Old Testament speak very clearly concerning the coming disaster when they say:

The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve gods, wood and stone. . . . And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. . . . For the Lord shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the Lord to anger. . . . The cities of the south shall be shut up, and none shall open them: Judah shall be carried away captive all of it, it shall be wholly carried away captive. . . . And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.<sup>1</sup>

But the words of the prophets, and, therefore, the word of God Himself fell on deaf ears. The people were more concerned about their rich and carefree life in and about Jerusalem. Surely the city would not fall. But the city did fall. The long foretold captivity became a reality. We hear the prophets speaking of the fulfillment of their prophecies when they say:

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<sup>1</sup>Deut. 28:36, Lev. 26:33, I Kings 14:15, Jer. 13:19, Is. 39:7



And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. . . . In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. . . . And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. . . . And he (Nebuchadnezzar) carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land.<sup>2</sup>

The foretold destruction and the captivity of the Jews had become a reality. The city was destroyed and the Temple defiled. The people were being taken away as slaves into a heathen country. If only they had heeded the words of the Lord. If only they had heard the words of the prophets and turned from their ways to the ways of God. But it was too late. The Jewish nation was destroyed.

But the Jewish race was not destroyed. God, in His might and wisdom, was with His people even during this great disaster. The captivity and the exile which was to follow would accomplish God's purposes. Through this destruction and captivity there would come a greater and a stronger Israel. There would come an Israel that would be prepared to represent God and to witness to the world that they were God's people. There would come an Israel that would give birth to the promised Messiah. Something was going to

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<sup>2</sup>Eze. 36:19, II Kings 17:6, II Kings 18:11, II Kings 24:14



happen to this Israel during the captivity. Israel was going to change. The period of the exile would give them a new attitude towards God. It would give them a different conception of their duties toward one another and toward other nations. Above all the exile would give them a new and purified religion.

It is the purpose of this paper to uncover the importance and the influence of this exile upon the religion of the Jews, more especially, to understand the changes which the Babylonian Captivity brought upon the religion of the Jews. For it was during the exile in Babylonia that the Jews changed as a people, as a nation, and, what is most important of all, as a religious society. These changes and developments, which occurred during the exile, have remained until the present day and are of the utmost importance in our understanding of the Jewish people.

Since we are dealing primarily with the Babylonian Captivity and its influence on the religion of the Jews, we will consider the Jewish religion before the Captivity, the changes during the Captivity, and the results of the Captivity in post-exilic times. This will entail a basic understanding of the Jewish religion during the eighth and seventh centuries and the main message of the prophets at this time. We will then turn to the exile and witness the changes which the Jewish religion took at this time and what effects these changes had on the Jews in captivity. We will



then witness the results of these changes and attempt to discover their importance for the Jews in post-exilic times and also for the Jew of today.

"The sixth century B. C. was a turning point of critical importance in the political history of Israel. It was also an age of great religious changes."<sup>1</sup> This is an accurate description of the Jewish state during this century. The Assyrian power was on a rampage, and, for those who had any insight at all, the threat of this power was increasing and ultimate destruction was near. But the average Jew of the city of Jerusalem thought of himself as God's special possession, and, therefore, no matter how near the Assyrian army he was not in any real danger. He was still a worshipper of Yabon, and, his country's armies had, up until now, defeated the enemy. There was no need for concern.

But, the average Jew of Jerusalem was to discover that there was need for great concern. Much of the worship of his day had become occasions for sin and revelry. The people had taken over heathen cults, and, many were worshipping Baal.<sup>2</sup> Those who still worshipped Yabon were no longer interested in their moral obligations towards Him and were

<sup>1</sup>E. L. Godley, *The Religion of Israel* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>Godley, *The Religion of the People of Israel* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1935), p. 135.



## CHAPTER II

### JEWISH RELIGION BEFORE THE EXILE

"The eighth century B. C. was a turning point of critical importance in the political history of Israel. It was also an age of great religious teachers."<sup>1</sup> This is an accurate description of the Jewish state during this century. The Assyrian power was on a rampage, and, for those who had any insight at all, the threat of this power was increasing and ultimate destruction was near. But the average Jew of the city of Jerusalem thought of himself as God's special possession, and, therefore, no matter how near the Assyrian army he was not in any real danger. He was still a worshipper of Yahweh, and, his country's armies had, up until now, defeated the enemy. There was no need for concern.

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<sup>1</sup>R. L. Ottley, The Religion of Israel (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>Rudolf Kittel, The Religion of the People of Israel (New York: The Macmillan Co., c.1925), p.135.



more concerned with the prescribed sacrifices and the correct rituals.

But it was to this that the prophets of the day spoke. They realized that the people were not only God's people outwardly, but that they also owed their God an ethical obligation.<sup>3</sup> It was their righteous conduct that Yahweh was concerned about. Therefore, it was Yahweh Himself who had brought down the Jewish nation. The people, because of their guilt, would be overcome.

Even as the prophets spoke of the impending destruction and doom, they were, at the same time, speaking of another aspect of Yahweh in His relationship with His people. This was the aspect of Yahweh's holiness, a holiness which consisted in His righteousness and in His loving kindness.<sup>4</sup> The prophets looked upon Yahweh as a righteous God, who punished according to the sin committed, who blessed according to the deeds accomplished. But, He was also a God of love. It is this emphasis of God's love which finds new stress during this period.

G. W. Wade points this out when he says:

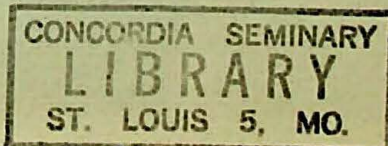
From the first there had entered into Israel's religion the belief that Jehovah was the author and vindicator of moral laws enjoining uprightness and humanity. But, a noteworthy advance was made in this age by the revelation of Jehovah as a God not of righteousness only, but of love.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 134

<sup>4</sup>Ottley, op. cit., p. 71

<sup>5</sup>G. W. Wade, Old Testament History (London: Methuen and Co., 1951), p. 401.





This idea of love finds full expression in Isaiah when he speaks of Jehovah offering the fullest forgiveness to His sinful people and then inviting His people to return to Him.<sup>6</sup>

It was also during this century that the prophets stressed the omnipotence of Yahweh. Up until this time the people had looked upon Yahweh as a God who was interested only in Israel. He was not concerned with other nations. His only concern was the defense and protection of Israel. But, the prophets, especially Amos, bring out the concept that Yahweh was not confined to Israel. Amos gives a wider meaning to this when he speaks of Yahweh as the God of all hosts.<sup>7</sup> This would mean that Yahweh was also the God of the Assyrians in that He used them to punish Israel. In fact He was the God of all nations, of the entire universe, and, "the whole earth is full of His glory."<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most important thought which the prophets emphasized during this period was the thought of monotheism, that Yahweh was the one and only true God. Before this period we have traces of this thought, but, it takes many centuries before it is firmly established in Israel's religion, and, it is at this time that renewed stress is given to the importance of worshipping Yahweh and Him alone. R. L. Ottley tells us that "The monotheism of men like Amos and Isaiah

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<sup>6</sup>Is. 1:18, 31:6

<sup>7</sup>Amos 3:13

<sup>8</sup>Is. 6:3



had its roots in their ethical conception of God."<sup>9</sup> For they knew that Yahweh was God of all people and more powerful than all other gods. They knew Yahweh to be a God of righteousness and holiness. They saw His power and His protection and realized that He must be the one and only supreme ruler of the universe and, in truth, "the Lord of the whole earth."<sup>10</sup>

But, even though the prophets preached the loving kindness and mercy of God, and, at the same time, spoke of His justice which would soon come down upon the people, very few of their hearers heeded their message. That Yahweh was actually the God of the universe, the one, true God, both just and full of love was of little concern to the people. Their immediate concern was false idols and heathen cults. To know that Yahweh was their God was enough to protect the people or, at least, so they thought. Morality was of no concern to them. It was not until the exile that the people learned that what they had called worship of Yahweh was only a false concept of what worship ought really to be.

Even as the prophets spoke against the sacrifices and lip service of the people, the sensuality and the idol worship continued.

In Judah itself, though its resources were few and its danger great, there was much worldliness and degeneracy, a want of loyalty to God, especially in regard to the

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<sup>9</sup>Ottley, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, m o, 65.



worship of the Queen of heaven, which had become almost legal; and even among the very prophets and priests a degeneracy which warranted the greatest fears."<sup>11</sup>

In Israel it was much worse. We hear the prophets Amos and Micah speaking against the sins of social injustice. Hosea warned the people that they have no knowledge of God, and Isaiah condemned the materialism of the day. All the prophets agree that Assyria will be the power which God will use to destroy Israel. But, while Amos and Hosea saw only complete captivity and wholesale deportation of Israel, Isaiah saw a remnant surviving which would grow into a new nation. He knew that the sins of Israel must be punished and he saw the coming invasion.

But there would be a remnant, who must start a new life, in a better community, and a more perfect order. At the head would be a king, the perfect ruler. This continued into the full Messianic doctrine of the Jewish people.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Herman Schultz, The Religion of Revelation in its Pre-Christian Stage of Development, in Old Testament Theology, translated from the German by J. A. Paterson. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1892), I, 301.

<sup>12</sup>W. O. E. Oesterly and Theodore H. Robinson, Hebrew Religion, Its Origin and Development (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), p. 209.



## The Seventh Century

The seventh century began with the withdrawal of Sennacherib from Jerusalem in 701. Samaria had fallen, and Judah was left to carry on the hope of God's people. Hezekiah was still King of Judah, but, his kingdom had shrunk to little more than Jerusalem itself.<sup>13</sup> Isaiah gives us a clear picture of the situation at this time:

Your country is desolate; your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour in your presence, and it is desolate, as the overthrow of strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.<sup>14</sup>

Thus Isaiah painted a terrible picture of destruction and desolation. It is difficult to determine the influence which Isaiah had upon king Hezekiah, but, it is important that we remember that the king did attempt reforms even though they were not of any permanent effect.

But, after Hezekiah's death, which is given as the year 695, the voice of Yahweh and that of His prophets seemed to have almost been silenced. For Hezekiah was succeeded by his son, Manasseh, who was considered to be the "incarnation of wickedness,"<sup>15</sup> by the faithful. We are told that:

He did evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abomination

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<sup>13</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, The History of Israel (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1954), p. 115.

<sup>14</sup>Is. 1:7-8

<sup>15</sup>Henry Preserved Smith, Old Testament History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1903), p. 254.



nation of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. . . . And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.<sup>16</sup>

So great was the evil of Manasseh that God's wrath was provoked, a wrath that could never be quenched:

Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.<sup>17</sup>

Judah had reached a new low in their religious history as God's people. Every evil thing which Hezekiah had destroyed was now reintroduced by his son Manasseh. All of Isaiah's words of warning and his pleas to return to Yahweh were turned aside. Manasseh was only concerned about Assyria and was willing to pay tribute in order to remain in the good graces of his imposing enemy. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Manasseh introduced the star-worship of Assyria. Idolatry was so prevalent that Baal worship was maintained even within the Temple itself. Yahweh was no longer the only God, but He "became one member, though the most important, of a pantheon."<sup>18</sup> Everything for which the eighth-century

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<sup>16</sup>II Kings 21:2-6

<sup>17</sup>II Kings 22:17

<sup>18</sup>Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 118.



prophets had struggled had been discredited. So great was the distrust against the prophets that a fierce persecution broke out against those who had remained loyal to the teachings of Yahweh. For we are told that Manasseh "shed innocent blood very much, til he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another."<sup>19</sup> What was most disheartening to the prophets was the fact that the mass of the population approved of such action. So also the ruling class, who had always resisted the influence of the prophets, was in favor of the policies of Manasseh.

This was a dark period in Jewish religious history. Throughout Manasseh's long reign, the voice of the prophets had been silenced, or, if heard, violently repressed. Samaria had fallen, and Manasseh was paying tribute to Assyria. Most, if not all, of the reforms of Hezekiah and of the eighth-century prophets, especially Isaiah, had been cast away and forgotten. But, there came a change in the political history of the world at that time which brought about a change also in Judah. The Assyrian rule, which had dominated for more than a century, was now rapidly declining. Babylonia was coming upon the scene and would soon gain supremacy. What was to effect Judah to a greater extent, at least at this time, was the death of Manasseh and his son Amon and the setting up of Josiah as King of Judah.

Josiah became king at the age of eight years. During

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<sup>19</sup>Ottley, op. cit., p. 93.



the early years of his reign he was under the influence of the reformation party, which had now made its presence known and was eager to bring Judah back to Yahweh.

We are told nothing of the reign of Josiah til his eighteenth year, when there occurred an event of the first importance not only for his time but for all succeeding ages. This was the finding of the Book of Instruction.<sup>20</sup>

It was discovered by Hilkiah in the Temple, and it had an immediate effect upon Josiah. We hear him speak through the writer of II Kings:

Inquire of Yahweh for me for the people and for Judah, concerning this book, for great is the wrath of Yahweh which is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.<sup>21</sup>

Josiah saw immediately that reform must be accomplished and it must be accomplished without delay. He set about the task of reformation at once. Using the book as his basis, a thorough reform was begun throughout the land. The Temple was purified and the strange cults thrown out and destroyed.

G. W. Wade speaks of this when he says:

The reformation which Josiah instituted, indeed, was, in its external aspect, only the accomplishments of a scheme related to and in part executed by Hezekiah, viz. the abolition of the "high places" as shrines, and the restriction of the national worship of Jehovah to the central sanctuary at Jerusalem; but it was rendered remarkable by the circumstances attending it. It was conducted in accordance with the directions of the Law-book discovered in the Temple, in which centralization of worship was represented as being expressly

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<sup>20</sup> Smith, op. cit., p. 260.

<sup>21</sup> II Kings 22:13



enjoined by Moses.<sup>22</sup>

Thus we see that Josiah was concerned only with the altar at Jerusalem and that it was only at this altar that sacrifices could be legitimately offered to Yahweh. Therefore, the Temple and its services were purified, and, there was even a collection received from all the Israelites throughout the land in order to make the Temple as magnificent as possible.<sup>23</sup>

But, Josiah didn't stop with the purification of the Temple. Also the local sanctuaries must be abolished and all cults and idol worship destroyed. In II Kings 23:4-16 we are given the details of Josiah's efforts against idolatry. The cults of Baal and Astarte were taken to the fields of Kidron and burned. The immoral cults of the qedeshim and qedeshath were also destroyed.<sup>24</sup> The heathen priests were removed from their sanctuaries, and, their places of burnt-offering were defiled. The altars which Ahaz and Manasseh had made were broken, and the high places of the gods of Sidon and Moab and Ammon were defiled. Even Solomon's sanctuaries, erected to the various gods of his many subjects, were not left untouched. Josiah's concern was so great that he went far

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<sup>22</sup>Wade, op. cit., pp. 413-414.

<sup>23</sup>Alfred Edersheim, From The Decline of the Two Kingdoms To The Assyrian and Babylonian Captivity, in The History of Israel and Judah (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1887), VII, 180.

<sup>24</sup>These names denote "holy" men and women, engaged in ritual prostitution at the sanctuaries.



beyond Jerusalem in order to free his country of the heathen cults.

In order to make his reform complete, Josiah ordered the observance of the Passover.<sup>25</sup> It is true that such a religious festival was held as far back as their bondage in Egypt, but it is at this time that the Passover took on a new significance and importance according to the emphasis given to it by the Book of Instruction.

The Book of Instruction, discovered by Hilkiah, and the reforms of Josiah had far-reaching effects upon Judah and its people. There are some who have believed that this book was actually the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>26</sup> Whether this is true or not is difficult to say, but we do know that this book resembled the outlook of the eighth-century prophets.<sup>27</sup> In this Book of Instruction prominence is given to Yahweh's supremacy and His exclusive claim upon the people of Israel. The importance of the people and their devotion to Yahweh is also stressed. Yahweh is looked upon as the one God and there is none beside Him. For the first time in the history of Israel the use of one sanctuary is legally decreed. The people are directed to become aware of their God and to know what it means to worship Him. There is to be a spiritual worship and this may be accomplished by sacrifice. These

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<sup>25</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 263.

<sup>26</sup>Oesterly and Robinson, op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.



sacrifices will be not only of goods but more especially sacrifices of self. W. O. E. Oesterly and Theodore H. Robinson sum up the contents of the Book of Instruction this way:

It is generally held to be a compromise between the ideals of Hosea and Isaiah and the priestly establishment, an attempt to obtain the moral aim of the prophets without abandoning the institution of sacrifice and all that it implied.<sup>28</sup>

So the Book of Instruction had an important place in the religious history of Israel. For the first time the people were given, in a practical way, the ideals and the concepts of the eighth-century prophets. For the first time there was an acceptance of what we might call Scripture. There had been much written earlier than the seventh-century, but it was at this time that these earlier writings and the works of the present day were accepted.

Up to this point we have looked at the political history of the seventh-century, and, we have seen how it greatly affected the religious history of the Jews. We now turn to the prophets of this century to see their contributions to the religion of the Jews.

The first of these prophets was Zephaniah, and he is believed to have prophesied immediately after the time of Manasseh. He lived during the period when the Assyrian power was on the decline and the Babylonian power was on the way up. He witnessed the many sins of Manasseh and probably supported the reforms of Josiah. Like the eighth-

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.



century prophets he denounced Israel because of its many sins. He took a dark view of the situation and offered only one hope, namely, turning to Yahweh the God of Israel. This hope was always open and would be a constant joy for those who still remained true to Yahweh. We hear Zephaniah speaking of this to his people:

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O, Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. . . . The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.<sup>29</sup>

Zephaniah also gives us a picture of the Day of Yahweh which is to come. W. O. E. Oesterly and T. H. Robinson believe that:

His picture of the Day of Yahweh is thoroughly apocalyptic, and in the third chapter we have set before us a great gathering of the nations which ends in the triumph and final supremacy of Judah.<sup>30</sup>

During this same period another prophet came forth who was to be one of the greatest prophets in a long line of great prophets. This was Jeremiah, whose ministry lasted for forty years. He lived through the last years of the kingdom of Judah, he saw Jerusalem fall and the people taken away, and later on he himself was forced to go with a small group of Jews to Egypt. His ministry was difficult and discouraging. But, his importance was great and beneficial.

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<sup>29</sup>Zeph. 3:14,17

<sup>30</sup>Oesterly and Robinson, op. cit., p. 218.



H. I. Hester sums up the manifold message which Jeremiah had to preach in this way:

He was called to the unhappy task of condemning the corrupt life and practice of his people, of warning against the consequences of sin, of pleading with his brethren to turn to their God and save themselves. In later years he had to kindle their hopes and undergird their faith when they faced the certainty of exile. Still later he must encourage and keep together as far as possible the remnant of those left in Jerusalem in the confusion and desolation of a ravaged community.<sup>31</sup>

Jeremiah was filled with a great love for his people, but he had an even greater love for his God. He wanted to unite these two loves into a band which no sin could break. But, Jeremiah was doomed to disappointment. For forty years he preached of the coming destruction, warning, pleading and the people would not listen. He turned to his God in chapter 20:7 of his book and we hear him say: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me." But it was this very turning of Jeremiah to his God that made him different from many of the other prophets. The religion of the Jews had been, for the most part, a religion of the tribe or of the nation. But, Jeremiah emphasized that "the individual had an infinite value in God's sight, and he apprehended the relationship between man and God in personal terms."<sup>32</sup> This was a new emphasis

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<sup>31</sup>H. I. Hester, The Heart of Hebrew History (Missouri: The William Jewell Press, C. 1949), p. 276.

<sup>32</sup>Kittel, op. cit., p. 152.



in the history of Jewish religion. The prophets before Jeremiah showed more concern with the nation and its relationship to Yahweh. Jeremiah stressed that the individual was important and that God was interested in each and every person. This contribution of Jeremiah did not reach full development until the exile.

But Jeremiah had something else to contribute. He seemed to have accepted the Book of Instruction as a basis for the religion of the people. But as he continued his ministry and realized that the people were not heeding the God of their fathers nor his call to turn back to Yahweh, he began to understand that it would be futile to base a religion merely on a book. There had to be something more. It was true that there existed a covenant between God and His people and that this was a voluntary agreement on both sides. But what was needed was a covenant which would enter into the heart and mind of man and which would make a breach as impossible for man as for God.<sup>33</sup> Jeremiah believed such a covenant would be realized and that the people would learn to worship Yahweh in spirit and in truth. For Jeremiah the very nature of religion is essentially spiritual. This was his concern when he said to his people:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the

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<sup>33</sup>Oesterly and Robinson, op. cit., p. 220.



house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.<sup>34</sup>

"This new covenant had to wait 600 years to be fulfilled when on that night Jesus said, "This is my blood of the Covenant, which is shed for many."<sup>35</sup>

There is still another prophet which we must consider during this period. The prophets of the eighth-century had proclaimed Yahweh as a God that was righteous and omnipotent, that punished sin and rewarded goodness. A century and a half later, Habakkuk looked over the city and he was concerned. Josiah had died and Jehoiakim was now king. The years of reform were past, and false prophets were once again leading the people away. All the purifying and cleansing of Josiah was being destroyed, and the righteous were suffering. Why does Yahweh permit this to happen to His people? We hear Habakkuk say:

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them

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<sup>34</sup>Jer. 31:31-34

<sup>35</sup>Oesterly and Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 221.



that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?<sup>36</sup>

Habakkuk was looking for an answer to this question, but, he and Israel had to wait until the exile and after before the complete answer was given.

Thus we have seen a marked progress in Jewish religion through the seventh-century. Although the people rebelled against the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, the prophets proclaimed their message of Yahweh as the one and only true God. Jeremiah proclaimed Yahweh as the God of the universe.<sup>37</sup> It was Yahweh who was the only hope of all the ends of the earth, the one God in whom all the nations of the earth are one. It was to be Ezekiel, the prophet of the exile, who would expand this contribution of Jeremiah into an important part of Jewish religion.

Likewise the prophets of the preceding age had affirmed that Yahweh was the moral judge of all nations. But we see that during this seventh-century the prophets began to point out that Yahweh was the judge not only of the nations but of each individual. Therefore, Yahweh's judgment was to come upon both the innocent and the guilty alike. We hear Zephaniah speaking concerning this:

Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness:

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<sup>36</sup>Hab. 1:13

<sup>37</sup>Jer. 2:2



it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's  
anger.<sup>38</sup>

But it remained for Jeremiah to pour out in clear terms the fact that the individual is able to stand in direct relationship to his God. Jeremiah had experienced this and knew whereof he spoke. He had stood alone as he proclaimed God's message. He saw God's judgments, and he felt his need of Divine grace. He, perhaps more than anyone else, realized that the consequences of the sins of the people must be placed upon the individual sinner. For "everyone shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge."<sup>39</sup> These concepts of individual responsibility and the importance of personal repentance laid the foundations for a new spiritual concept of religion which was to be developed in exilic and post-exilic times.

With this stress of the individual and his responsibility toward Yahweh there came also the concept of the New Covenant as it was developed by Jeremiah. This covenant would not only include a visible redemption of Israel from its enemies, but it would also mean Israel's spiritual regeneration. This covenant would not be written on stone but in the hearts of the people.

It was these concepts of the Jewish religion, which

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<sup>38</sup>Zeph. 2:3

<sup>39</sup>Jer. 31:30



were developed during the seventh-century, which became the foundation on which Ezekiel built up "a sense of personal sinfulness, and a desire for renewal through the gift of Yahweh's Spirit."<sup>40</sup>

As the seventh-century came to a close, Jeremiah and his contemporaries knew that the people would not heed the message of Yahweh and that the punishment which had been threatening for so long was now certain and immediate. Even the city of Jerusalem, which, until this time had been impregnable and had withstood the attack of the Assyrians, was now expected to be overrun. Jerusalem and all of Israel would be captured, and the people would be led into captivity.

As we look upon the religious history of Israel before the captivity, we hear the prophets thundering their principles of the moral nature and demands of Yahweh. We see each succeeding prophet placing a certain characteristic of the Jewish religion into prominence, and slowly the religious picture of the Jewish nation becomes more and more complete.

But there was much that Israel had to learn. Although the prophets spoke of Yahweh as the one and only true God, there is very little of a real, unmistakable monotheism among the people. The individual has little concern for his sin and the punishment of sin, and the people were not concerned with the impending punishment that was due them because

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<sup>40</sup>Ottley, op. cit., p. 104.



of their sin. They knew themselves to be God's people and Yahweh to be their God, but that He was the God of the universe, of all nations, was difficult for them to understand. What was most tragic of all was the fact that what the prophets had spoken about was not accepted by the people. Through preaching and pleading the prophets tried to make the people turn from their ways and return to Yahweh. But Israel refused to accept the hope offered to her and went on the way that led to destruction. Therefore, the monarchy and Israelite independence were no longer necessary. They had become a hindrance to God's plan, and the people needed something much greater to teach them God's ways. Thus, when the armies of Babylon surrounded Jerusalem, broke down its walls, destroyed its temple, they were unconsciously fulfilling the purpose of the God of Israel. This was to be His way of bringing His people back to the essential principles of the kingdom of God. The period of the exile was to purify and to teach. John Punnett Peters considers the fall of Israel this way:

The breaking up and destruction of the Hebrew nation had very much to do with developing the idea of an individual, personal relation to God and an individual, personal religion, and finally a conception of individual immortality, as over against the conception of race immortality, a race religion, and a race relation to God.<sup>41</sup>

The prophets had spoken and destruction was near. Josiah had brought about a great reform within Judah, but

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<sup>41</sup>John Punnett Peters, The Religion of the Hebrews (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, c.1914), p. 283.

(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), p. 122.



Josiah had been killed at Megiddo and his army defeated by Necho.<sup>42</sup> What would now happen to Judah and to the reform of the king? Sad to say, everything that had been suppressed during the reform now returned with renewed vigor. The Jewish people fell, once again, into the sin and heathenism which had characterized the period before Josiah's reign. By the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, through the reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiachim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, Judah had fallen into complete and utter Godlessness.

It has been said that the death of Josiah was the most tragic event in Hebrew history.<sup>43</sup> This is not an exaggeration, for with his death Judah fell into the pit of idolatry, and sin, and their only end was destruction and captivity. The corruption of Judah was complete. The nobles, the priests and especially the kings, from Jehoiachim to Zedekiah, considered luxury and ease more important than Yahweh and His word. There was no hope of repentance for Judah. The words of the prophets had fallen on deaf ears.

After the death of Josiah events moved very rapidly toward the final destruction. Nineveh was taken in 607. At Carchemish in 605 the final battle between Egypt and Babylonia was fought, and Babylonia became the supreme ruler of Western Asia. Now all of Palestine and Jerusalem

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<sup>42</sup>Ottley, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>43</sup>Charles Foster Kent, A History of the Hebrew People (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), p. 184.



itself lay at the mercy of Nebuchadnezzar. "Already during Jehoiakim's reign a number of the inhabitants of Judaea had been carried captive to Babylon."<sup>44</sup> In 597 another large number of people were deported to Babylon. Then, on the occasion of Zedekiah's revolt, Judah was invaded by the army of Nebuchadnezzar and Jerusalem was besieged. The horror and destruction of this siege cannot be adequately described. The famine and pestilence which was suffered during the final siege, the murder and bloodshed, the condition of starving men and women, of parents being forced to eat their own children, all this was part of God's righteous anger. But the days of fear and suffering which were to come were to have a purpose in God's plan for Israel. This plan was to bring His people back purified and renewed. Even as the greater portion of the people were being led away into captivity, leaving a burning and devastated city, a temple defiled by heathen soldiers, the words of the prophets must have raced across their minds and they were taking the first step in God's plan of purification and rededication. But, it would take many years of captivity before this process of purification would be complete.

What the people had been deceived into believing impossible had now become a horrible and tragic reality. They were now being taken to Babylon. A new nation, with

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<sup>44</sup>Ottley, op. cit., p. 105.



new people and new customs would confront them. How could they go on without their Jerusalem, their Temple, and their God? But what at first appeared to be an act of great punishment was to also become an Act of God's mercy in which the people would be purified and cleansed and renewed in order to become a new nation. For the people to learn this lesson would take a long time. But, it was a lesson that had to be learned. For it was through the seventy years of the exile, that the Jewish nation, by means of various instruments, conditions, and circumstances, returned to the true worship of Yahweh. From this point onward the religion of Israel depended upon the constancy of the exiled community in Babylon.

The connection between the service of God and the outward forms in which it had for centuries found its embodiment had now been broken. But, this little group of seemingly crushed and hopeless people had to go on living. They had to make the best of a new and different life. They had to go on without the sanctuary of Jerusalem, without the Temple of Yahweh, and without their important services. This seemed to be too great a punishment to these people as they caught sight of the great city of Babylon for the first time. But, what they did not understand now would soon be revealed to them. The great Babylonian empire



### CHAPTER III

#### JEWISH RELIGION DURING THE EXILE

To the historian of religion the exile is not merely a great upheaval, a total revolution in the external circumstances of the chosen people. It is of interest chiefly as being the occasion of an immense change in the thoughts of men about religion.<sup>1</sup>

This was the purpose of God in bringing the Exile upon the Jewish people. This was a time of humiliation and sorrow for the captives. But, it was also to be a time of significant changes in nearly every area of their lives. New experiences in a strange land awaited them. Gone were the days of splendor and luxury in Judah. But, more important, "the connection between the service of God and the outward forms in which it had for centuries found its embodiment"<sup>2</sup> had now been broken. But, this little group of seemingly crushed and hopeless people had to go on living. They had to make the best of a new and different life. They had to go on without the sanctuary of Jerusalem, without the Temple of Yahweh, and without their important services. This seemed to be too great a punishment to these people as they caught sight of the great city of Babylon for the first time. But, what they did not understand now would soon be revealed to them. The great Babylonian empire

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<sup>1</sup>R. L. Ottley, The Religion of Israel (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922), p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



which now possessed such great power would soon fall. The Persians would come and destroy Babylon even as Babylon had destroyed Assyria. But, the Persians, themselves, would flourish for only a short time and they, too, would be destroyed. Then the great world powers of Macedonia and Rome would come upon the scene, stay for but a moment, and then pass away. But, the little remnant of Jewish people, the people who were now entering into captivity, would not be destroyed. For the captivity was really a beginning for the Jews and for their religious thought. Much of the old would be put aside. A new development in their religious experience was soon to begin.

We know that as early as 605 there had been a group of Jews that were taken away captive to Babylon. This was repeated in 597 and then the final and greatest deportation took place in the year 586 when Jerusalem was destroyed. It is difficult to determine the total number of Jews taken to Babylon. Estimates have been given as low as 30,000 and as high as 200,000. "Probably the most frequent estimate of 50,000 is not far wrong."<sup>3</sup> We do know that Nebuchadnezzar picked the best of the Jews to be taken to Babylon, those whom he believed would benefit his country. This would mean that the upper classes, those who had been influential in Jerusalem, those who had learned a trade and the many

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<sup>3</sup>H. I. Hester, The Heart of Hebrew History (Missouri: The William Jewell Press, c.1949), p. 289.



government officials, were led away to serve in Babylon.

In spite of their defeat at the hands of the Babylonians, those who remained in Judah once again rebelled against their rulers. Ishmael, a member of the royal family, murdered Gedeliah and soon civil war broke out.<sup>4</sup> Because the leaders feared the anger of Nebuchadnezzar, they fled to Egypt and took Jeremiah with them. It is possible that all that remained in Judah was the lowest class of people, and they were content to mix with the neighboring peoples who came in to possess as much of the land as possible. Therefore, we see the Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites and the Edomites coming in and taking advantage of the weak condition of the Jews. Throughout this period, and for many decades to come Judah remained a broken and defeated country and Jerusalem a ruined and desolate city. There was little hope of a new nation, rising out of the ashes, to come forth with a purified Yahweh-centered religion. This new nation with its new religion was to be born with the exiles in Babylon.

As for the Jews which fled to Egypt, we know very little about them. They seemed to have been received openly, and they were able to set up their own communities and also able to practice their own religious customs. But, again we hear Jeremiah speaking against the falling away of the people. He rebukes the people in Pathros and the women for their

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<sup>4</sup>Hester, op. cit., p. 257.



worship of the "queen of heaven." We hear the people refusing to give up their idolatry as they answer Jeremiah:

Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah saying, As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do what soever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem:<sup>5</sup>

Because of this the destruction of all the men of Judah in the land of Egypt is prophesied by Jeremiah in verse twenty-seven of the forty-fourth chapter, as well as the downfall of the king of Egypt in verse thirty of the forty-fourth chapter. We do know, however, that the Jews continued to live in Egypt even after those from Babylon returned to Jerusalem. At the time of Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt in 333-32 B. C. there were many Jews living in Egypt and especially in such cities as Alexandria.<sup>6</sup> But, no new nation was to come from the Jews in Egypt. There would be no reawakening of their religious life. There would come no purification of their faith. God's plan was that the Jews in Babylon would take up this task, and through their prophets become the true people of Yahweh. It is to the exiles in Babylon that we now turn.

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<sup>5</sup>Jer. 44:15-17

<sup>6</sup>Hester, op. cit., p. 289.



The Jews in Babylon came upon a completely different life from the one they had experienced in Judah. From an existence, which centered around shepherd and sheep, farmer and field, fisherman and sea, they came upon a civilization that was centered around trade and commerce. The Jews found an advanced culture, great wealth, and majestic splendor. At the center stood the great city of Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates river. H. I. Hester gives us a description of the city:

Ancient writers describe it as a city surrounded by four walls, each fifteen miles in length. Twenty-four streets ran north and south and the same number east and west. In this way each street terminated at a gate in the wall (100 of these) and the city was thus made up of more than six hundred square blocks. It is said that in the center of each square was a garden. The city contained many elaborate and expensive buildings such as palaces and temples. To relieve the homesickness of his wife for her native hills Nebuchadnezzar constructed, at tremendous expense, the famous hanging gardens. In reality these were immense terraces placed on top of each other until they reached the height of the city walls. On these were planted beautiful shrubs and flowers. Even if this ancient description be a bit exaggerated, one may be sure that this great city was one of the most beautiful and famous of ancient times.<sup>7</sup>

Along with this splendor and wealth there was also great culture and much learning. Astronomy and astrology were practiced and studied. Libraries were in abundance. The making of pottery and textile manufacturing were important concerns.

Into all of this the Exiles were placed. They saw the splendor and the wealth. They remembered their little

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 289-290.



Palestine, and, no doubt, many were tempted to forget their homeland and to accept Babylon with all its opportunities. Many of the people did turn to the ways of the Babylonians because of the unique position they held while in the Exile. They were not treated as slaves. It seems they were, for the most part, unmolested and they were able to set up their own communities. They were able to become a part of the commerce and trade round about them. It is no doubt that not before too many years had passed many of them had become wealthy. John Punnett Peters tells us that: "The Jews of the Captivity were not poor men, as is evidenced by the fact that they early began to play an important role in the commercial life of Babylonia."<sup>8</sup> We may safely say that many of them became wealthy merchants while in Babylonia and that they lost all interest in some day returning to Palestine. This is brought out very clearly by the fact that, when the Jews were given permission to return home by Cyrus, many of them remained in Babylonia. It is no doubt that it was here in Babylonia that the Jews developed their special talent for business and business practices.

The Jewish exiles were placed in scattered communities throughout the rich plain beside the river Chebar.<sup>9</sup> Here

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<sup>8</sup> John Punnett Peters, The Religion of the Hebrews (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, c.1914), p. 285.

<sup>9</sup> Ezek. 1:1-3.



they enjoyed great freedom and were able to do as they pleased as long as they remained loyal to the Babylonia government. H. Wheeler Robinson believes that:

Their position seems to have been that of recognized foreigners, affiliated to the plebian class of citizens and naturally without the privileges of the Babylonian aristocracy, but distinctly higher in status than the slave-class.<sup>10</sup>

This thought is also brought by Jeremiah when he writes to the exiles and tells them to:

Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters: that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.<sup>11</sup>

This letter of Jeremiah would seem to imply that the exiles had complete freedom within their settlements. It would also imply that they had much freedom as far as their religious exercises were concerned. We are told by Ezekiel that "certain of the elders of Israel came unto me, and sat before me."<sup>12</sup> Evidently each community had its own elders and they were able to exercise their religious authority and also able to meet together to discuss the welfare of the Jewish people. It must be remembered, however, that their leading

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<sup>10</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, The History of Israel (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1954), p. 134.

<sup>11</sup>Jer. 29:5-7

<sup>12</sup>Ezek. 14:1



citizens were expected to conform to the religious practices of the nation as was the case with Daniel and his companions. But this seems to be the exception and it must also be remembered that Ezekiel was allowed to work among his people and to keep their hope alive concerning the future of their nation.

With all this freedom which they enjoyed, and with all the opportunities which they possessed, it would seem that the people would soon forget about Jerusalem and their past life of poverty, and would take up the new life in Babylonia with zest and interest. It would almost seem that this was not really a punishment but a wonderful blessing. Perhaps some of the exiles felt this way, but the majority of the people could not and did not experience this happiness. As we study the Jews in Babylonia we see homesickness, resentment and bitterness especially toward their captors. We see this vividly expressed in Psalm 137.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song: and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.



Thus even though the Jews were to all outside intents experiencing a life much better than the life they had experienced in Palestine, they were actually living in disgrace. They had lost their freedom, their country had been destroyed. They were strangers in a strange land. It is no wonder that at first the exiles hoped and believed that the period of the Exile would be very short. H. Wheeler Robinson agrees with this when he says:

At first, there must have been the expectation of a speedy deliverance by the hand of Yahweh, but as the years passed and the sky did not lighten, they said, "The days are prolonged and every vision faileth"; "our bones are dried up and our hope is lost."<sup>13</sup>

This was the thinking of the first exiles who were taken to Babylon in 605 and also those taken in 597. They took comfort in the fact that Jerusalem still stood intact and that the Temple had not been destroyed. They believed the city would never be taken nor the Temple defiled. Yahweh had protected them against Assyria, and He would also overcome the Babylonians, and they would be able to return to Palestine and this return would come soon.

But "with the destruction of the Temple their religion and their nationality were at once annihilated and a new situation was created."<sup>14</sup> The people began to realize that what the prophets had spoken years before was actually coming

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<sup>13</sup>Robinson, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>14</sup>Peters, op. cit., p. 286.



true, and what was even more important they began to understand that this message of the prophets was actually the message of Yahweh Himself. Some saw that the Exile was actually God's way of showing the religious and moral responsibility of the people. We hear them saying: "If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how shall we then live?"<sup>15</sup> Others were not ready to make their repentance or to see their guilt and were ready to say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."<sup>16</sup> Still there was now a growing eagerness to hear what the prophets had to say: "Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord."<sup>17</sup> But again there were those who bitterly answered: "The way of the Lord is not equal."<sup>18</sup>

Even though there were some who refused to listen to the words of the prophets, as there always are, throughout the years of the Exile the people were drawn closer to the fact that the prophets and the message they brought was true. More especially the people learned that it was Yahweh their God which was speaking through these prophets. Thus when Jeremiah wrote to them concerning their life in Babylon and later as Ezekiel told them of their responsibilities

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<sup>15</sup>Ezek. 33:10

<sup>16</sup>Ezek. 18:2

<sup>17</sup>Ezek. 33:30

<sup>18</sup>Ezek. 18:25



and duties they began to take heed and to listen. As the people thought of their last years in Palestine, their lives of idolatry and wickedness, they also had to think of Jeremiah the prophet, the one man who had pleaded that they might repent. The man they had laughed at and ridiculed was now writing to them, once again giving his aid and guidance. And the people began to see their sin, and that the punishment they were suffering was punishment for their sin. They would soon realize that their past religious life was not the life which Yahweh desired. They began to see that it was repentance that Yahweh was searching for and they remembered the words of Jeremiah:

Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the stranger under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

With thoughts such as these the people heeded the words of Jeremiah, and they resolved never again to forsake Yahweh. They were beginning to understand that they must rally around God's prophets and their message in order to know God's holy will.

With this message of Jeremiah ringing in their ears the people turned to their life in Babylon. Jeremiah would not be there to speak to them nor to give them God's

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<sup>19</sup>Jer. 3:12-13



message. In a short time he would be taken to Egypt and there he would give God's message to the Jews who had fled from Palestine. But what was to happen to the exiles in Babylon? God was to send another prophet. A prophet, who was also a priest, would now come forth and direct the people. A prophet who was already in Babylon and who had probably been taken captive in the year 597. It was Yahweh's purpose that Ezekiel become the successor of Jeremiah. It would be Ezekiel who would lay the foundations of righteousness and holiness for the new kingdom of Yahweh. It would be through Ezekiel that the Jewish people would learn that they were under Yahweh's guidance and protection, and that their Yahweh was the supreme God of all nations.<sup>20</sup> Thus Ezekiel was to become the main instrument of Yahweh in bringing back the Jewish people into a close relationship with their God.

R. L. Ottley gives us a concise picture of Ezekiel's early life when he says:

Ezekiel was in all probability a Temple-priest of Zadokite descent, and had doubtless been powerfully influenced by the example and teaching of Jeremiah. In large measure he shared the ideas of his predecessor, and continued his work. He was apparently carried captive to Babylon with king Jehoiachin in 597, and five years later (592) he entered on his public career as a prophet at a place called Tel-Abib, where he had settled down in the midst of a colony of Jews.<sup>21</sup>

Ezekiel carried with him the message of the seventh

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<sup>20</sup>Ezek. 20

<sup>21</sup>Ottley, op. cit., p. 108.



century prophets as he "announced the certainty of the judgment on Jerusalem."<sup>22</sup> He was assured that Jerusalem would be destroyed. Through a vision he told of the slaughter and bloodshed that would come. He pointed out that it was because of the justice of Yahweh that Jerusalem would fall. He impressed upon the people that this judgment was well deserved because of their sins. Ezekiel, however, was a man to whom the justice of Yahweh was manifest in His dealing with individuals. We remember that Jeremiah had begun to change the idea of Israel as a nation being guilty, and that he tried to point out that each individual was responsible to Yahweh. This concept is now taken up by Ezekiel and emphasized with renewed strength.

There was a tendency among the exiles to trace their present misfortune to the transgressions of their fathers. But, Ezekiel qualifies the principle that men are involved in the consequences of ancestral sin by insisting equally upon the fact of personal responsibility, and upon the efficacy of sincere repentance. This is pointed out by Ezekiel when he says:

The soul that sinneth it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteous of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>J. M. Weidenschilling, The History of Israel (Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, c.1951), p. 146.

<sup>23</sup>Ezek. 18:20



This entire chapter, chapter 18, deals with the subject of individual responsibility. In fact, much of Ezekiel's book deals with this subject and it may be said that this concept of the individual soul and its responsibility is one of Ezekiel's most significant contributions to the Jewish religion.

Previous to the Exile, the belief in the solidarity of the nation, brought with it the belief that the individual shared in the prosperity or doom of the nation as a whole. Therefore, if the ancestors did what was right, or what was wrong, every member of the nation partook of the resulting prosperity or misfortune. But now the nation had ceased to exist. The people were in a foreign country. They could no longer worship together. Now the Jew of the exile was faced with the necessity of praying and worshipping Yahweh in his own home and with his own family. It was only natural that the individual would take on more importance. Ezekiel taught that each person:

is responsible for his own acts; for the evil that he suffers, if he has sinned, he has nobody but himself to blame, while, on the other hand, he can not rely on the good deeds of his ancestors to stand him in stead if he himself is lacking in these.<sup>24</sup>

Ezekiel felt the concept of individual responsibility very strongly. He was called to be a minister to individuals

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<sup>24</sup>W. O. E. Oesterly and Theodore H. Robinson, Hebrew Religion, Its Origin and Development (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 252.



and it was his responsibility that he warn the wicked and turn the doers of iniquity back to righteousness. If he failed to do this their blood would be required of him.<sup>25</sup> This concept is continued in the fourteenth chapter of his book in which he stressed that the crimes of one man do not bring judgment upon another, nor does the righteousness of one man secure immunity for the sins of another. Ezekiel then proceeded to point out the importance of true repentance, and that it was through repentance that the Jew will not die but surely live.<sup>26</sup> Charles Foster Kent sums up Ezekiel's concept of individual responsibility in these words:

In the clearest terms he enunciates the great principle that each man is responsible, in the sight of God, simply for his own acts whether good or bad, and that present, not past, attitudes and deeds determine the issues of life. Ezekiel's ultimate message, therefore, in the hour of the nation's overthrow, was a call to individual repentance and the assurance that Jehovah was not only just in his treatment of each individual, but also eager to forgive every soul that truly turned to him for pardon and protection.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, it didn't take long before the people realized that a new foundation was being built, and a new religion was being formed. With Yahweh directing, and a devoted man such as Ezekiel leading the way, the people were well on their way to being purified and revitalized.

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<sup>25</sup>Ezek. 3:17-21

<sup>26</sup>Ezek. 18:21-28

<sup>27</sup>Charles Foster Kent, The Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 279.



We have discovered that, after the idolatry and heathen worship had been stopped because of the destruction of Jerusalem, the focal point of Jewish religion once again was centered around Yahweh. There was no need for idolatry. It was utter foolishness. Yahweh was the all wise and all powerful God, both for the Jewish nation and also for the individual Jew. The Jews were beginning to understand their relationship to Yahweh, and God's plan for His people was being fulfilled. But now that the work of purification had begun it could not cease. The Jew of the exile must learn his duties and obligations toward Yahweh. In order to do this the Jewish remnant must return to the Law of Yahweh.

During the pre-exilic days the Law was almost entirely disregarded. It is true that with the finding of the Book of Instruction in the Temple there was a great reform based on the Law, but after the death of Josiah the people returned to their idolatry and sin. This was the situation at the time of Jeremiah, and we hear him renouncing the Jews because of their lack of love and devotion both towards Yahweh and towards their fellowmen. It was this lovelessness which had led the people into idolatry. Jeremiah speaks against this idolatry when he says:

And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.<sup>28</sup>



Jeremiah continues his denunciation of idolatry in this way:

The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.<sup>29</sup>

This lovelessness and idolatry also led to the forsaking of the worship of the Sabbath day:

Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction.<sup>30</sup>

This also meant a rejection of the word of the Lord.

For we hear Jeremiah say: "Behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it!"<sup>31</sup>

The forsaking of Yahweh and His Law was complete. The people even refused to heed Yahweh's warnings. They were so deep in their sins that they thought that they had done no wrong, and the people answered: "Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me."<sup>32</sup> It was indeed time for a period of purification.

This period of purification came during the Exile. We have already mentioned that the exiles were not looked upon

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<sup>29</sup>Jer. 7:18

<sup>30</sup>Jer. 17:22-23

<sup>31</sup>Jer. 6:10

<sup>32</sup>Jer. 2:35



as slaves in Babylon. They had been brought to Babylon as a defeated enemy, but, while there they would help build the city and work in the shipyards and mines. Therefore, the Jews were given a free hand. Jeremiah told them to build houses and to raise families. Ezekiel wrote of elders meeting in his house. The importance of these elders can not be over stressed. The very fact that there were elders shows us first of all that the disappearance of the monarchy had brought the exiles back into an organization which made the elders the leaders of the community. Secondly, we may conclude that the exiles were permitted to live together as families and as a tribe since their representative elders were able to gather for meetings.

What is even more important for our consideration is the fact that the exiles could also meet together for their religious exercises. The exiles had a priest in Ezekiel, but, they had no place to come together for worship. Everything was entirely different from what they had experienced in Palestine. Perhaps the most important difference was the fact that there was no Temple. This was of great significance because without a Temple it was believed there could be no possibility of sacrifice nor of worship. This would be one of the most significant differences which they would have to overcome. Their relationship to Yahweh would have to change. W. O. E. Oesterly and Theodore H. Robinson speak of this relationship before the Exile when they say:



For the relationship hitherto conceived to exist between them and their God had been exhibited in such numberless ways; no animal was killed for food but that part of it was dedicated to Yahweh as His due; no bread was eaten of which in some form the first-fruits had not been offered to Him; no feast was inaugurated without bringing to Him the feasts due.<sup>33</sup>

Now the exiles were cast into altogether different circumstances. What kind of substitute religion could they have here in exile? Ezekiel gives us the answer when he says:

Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God: Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore we see that:

the important externals of the worship of Yahweh, as it had been in the past, were now wanting and therefore the form of worship was insignificant as compared with what they had been accustomed to in the Temple.<sup>35</sup>

There was only one substitute which could be used during the Exile. This substitute religion, which was really not a substitute but a going back to God's plan for them, was the Law of Yahweh. This was the natural religion for them to follow at this time. They had now seen their transgressions and were receiving their punishment in the Exile. They now knew Yahweh was their God, the God of

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<sup>33</sup>Oesterly and Robinson, op. cit., p. 243.

<sup>34</sup>Ezek. 11:16

<sup>35</sup>Oesterly and Robinson, op. cit., p. 243.



justice and also the God of mercy. Above all they knew that He was their God, and they were anxious to obey Him. So, the Law was studied and read in their public meetings. As the years passed, this return to the Law of Yahweh came as close as possible to being the religion which Yahweh had commanded long before.

Alfred Edersheim had these words to say concerning his discussion of the Law in Messianic times:

Even the destruction of the Temple, and with it the necessary cessation of sacrifices if, indeed, which is a moot question, all sacrifices did at once and absolutely cease - only caused a gap; just as exile from the land could only free from such laws as attached to the soil of Israel. The reading of the sacrificial sections in the Law - at any rate, in conjunction with prayers, but especially study of the Law, took in the meantime the place of the sacrifices.<sup>36</sup>

The importance of Ezekiel in the return to the study of the Law cannot be over stressed. It was through this prophet-priest that the Jewish people were led to understand God's Law as it applied to their every day life. Ezekiel was concerned about his people, and he was constantly warning and directing them with regard to their religious life in order that their return to Jerusalem, and the new Temple, which had been promised to them, might become a reality.

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<sup>36</sup> Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1943), II, 764.



An important part of this Law of Yahweh which received renewed emphasis was the observance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath, though now without its prescribed sacrifices, became the chief and regular day of worship. Henry Thatcher Fowler tells us that: "From the exile onward this day became, among the orthodox Jews, a more and more prominent and cherished institution."<sup>37</sup> We also take notice of the stress laid upon the observance of the Sabbath and the denunciation against its non-observance in Ezekiel:

Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them. . . . I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God.<sup>38</sup>

Thus the Sabbath became a day for congregational worship. Each week they would meet to read the Law and to gather for instruction in Yahweh's Book of Instruction.<sup>39</sup> It is perhaps not too difficult to show, through the light of later evidence, what liturgical parts came into the observance of the Sabbath at this time. W. O. E. Oesterly and Theodore H. Robinson believe that both priest and

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<sup>37</sup>Henry Thatcher Fowler, The Origin and Growth of the Hebrew Religion (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1916), p. 143.

<sup>38</sup>Ezek. 20:12-24

<sup>39</sup>Many scholars feel that it was at this time that the so-called "Deutero" or "Second" Isaiah was written.



prophet were leaders in the worship. They believe that the reading consisted of parts of the prophetic books and such books as Deuteronomy, and that this reading of the Law made the spoken word an important part of the service. Together with the reading of the Law there were also sacred songs sung during the service, and also public prayer came into prominence at this time. All of these went into the making of the earliest forms of Sabbath liturgy.<sup>40</sup> Whether or not this liturgy, or any one of its parts, can be substantially proven to have been in existence at this time is difficult to determine. But, it is agreed that the renewed interest of the Sabbath worship began at the time of the Exile. We believe that it may also be said that during this time, or at least in the years immediately following, these liturgical elements also came into the Sabbath service. Many of these same liturgical elements have come down to the present day and they are still practiced in the Sabbath Day worship. It was this worship of the Sabbath Day, and the services conducted on this day, which helped to set apart the Jew from his captors and also from the heathen world around him.

It is interesting to note that the idea of being separated from their captors, even from all the rest of the people of the heathen world, became a very strong concern of the people in the Exile. Once the Jewish people had seen

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<sup>40</sup>Oesterly and Robinson, op. cit., p. 244.



their personal responsibility, once they had realized that only in the Law of Yahweh could they find His will for their life, they began to elaborate upon this Law. They began to consider themselves as a people chosen by Yahweh and that through ritual and outward acts they could demonstrate to the world that they were the people of the Yahweh-God.

We have seen how this concept of separation was enlarged upon by the observance of the Sabbath. This stress upon the Law of Yahweh continued until ritual once again became an essential part of the Jew's life. One of the most important rites which was renewed at this time was the rite of circumcision. This rite would not only separate the Jews from those who did not practice circumcision, but it would also emphasize the importance of the clean or the unclean. Ezekiel was very concerned with the whole system of the clean and unclean. This not only applied to animals and to the Temple, but also to the entire religious life of the people and to the people themselves. Ezekiel was quick to point out Yahweh's abhorance of the uncircumcised foreigners who had been employed in His service. He wanted this rite to continue, especially now when the people were living among the uncircumcised people of Babylon. Ezekiel expressed his contempt for the uncircumcised when he said: "Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God."<sup>41</sup> Ezekiel's language

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<sup>41</sup> Ezek. 28:10



became even stronger when he said: "The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword."<sup>42</sup>

We must not leave the impression that the rite of circumcision was begun during the Exile. This was one of the first rites which the Jewish people practiced. But it was during the Exile that the rite is brought to the fore once again and emphasized especially for the purpose of setting the Jews apart from the heathen people around them. The rite of circumcision became so important that the Jew who neglected this rite soon found himself being regarded with scorn and contempt by his fellow Jews.

Thus we see that two ancient practices take on new meaning during the Exile. The ancient practice of the Sabbath observance now assumed a new importance. Along with this new importance there came also a new character to this observance. It was one of self-denial and distinctiveness. So also the ancient rite of circumcision took on a new meaning. Living among people who were uncircumcised, the Jew looked upon circumcision as a rite which set him apart from his enemies and from the heathen about him.

We have alluded to the fact that Ezekiel was deeply interested in his people and their relationship to Yahweh.

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<sup>42</sup>Ezek. 32:21



He combined what had come from the seventh-century prophets, especially Jeremiah, with new elements which were to be developed during the Exile. The concept of individual responsibility was one of these. We have seen the observance of the Sabbath and the rite of circumcision take on new meaning and importance. This was all a part of Yahweh's plan for the people. They were learning, and at the same time they were being purified. Already the Jews had changed from an idolatrous people to one who had seen their sin and were eager to know Yahweh's will. This will was being made known to them through the Law.

One of the most important parts of the Law was the relationship between the people and their God. Ezekiel understood this relationship, and it was his duty to make the people aware of this relationship. Ezekiel understood that as long as the people gave honour to Yahweh their fortunes would be blessed. He realized that if the Jewish people were to regain their lost glory it would only come because Yahweh was dwelling in the midst of them and sanctifying their community by His presence. But Ezekiel also understood that Yahweh could not be approached in just any manner. There must be certain rites and restrictions which must be followed. The Sabbath and circumcision were two such rites. Using the Law of Yahweh as the foundation, Ezekiel, together with the people, began to reintroduce the ancient rites and customs of the Yahweh religion.



H. Wheeler Robinson believes that one of the reasons for this new emphasis upon ritual is this:

The new consciousness of sin, and the new need of atonement, seen in the book of Ezekiel were surely not confined to him; they are reflected in that subsequent development of ritual (in which Ezekiel himself was a pioneer) which warrants his title, "the father of Judaism."<sup>43</sup>

Therefore we see Ezekiel concerned about the ancient laws of purification, forbidden food and clean and unclean animals. When Ezekiel speaks of a strict observance of the Sabbath, he also speaks of a rigid abstinence from the use of blood and from unclean food. He was able to say of his own life:

Then said I, Oh Lord God! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth.<sup>44</sup>

But when he speaks of the sins of the priests he clearly shows his concern for the despised Law of Yahweh:

Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and the profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.<sup>45</sup>

Ezekiel then proclaimed that the people must be taught the difference between the clean and the unclean and that the

<sup>43</sup>Robinson, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>44</sup>Ezek. 4:14

<sup>45</sup>Ezek. 22:26



priests have a special obligation to perform:

And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. . . . The priests shall not eat of any thing that is dead of itself, or torn, whether it be fowl or beast.<sup>46</sup>

All of these rituals and rites, which came into the life of the Jew during this time, were not only of importance during the Exile and the years immediately following the Exile, but also for the many centuries to come. During the Exile sacrifices were impossible in a foreign land, at least sacrifices which could be offered in the Temple. Therefore, the Law of Yahweh regained its importance and Ezekiel, together with the elders and priests, began to build a new religion which was to become the main source of Judaism as we know it today. Perhaps John Punnett Peters gives us the best reason for the many rites and rituals of this period when he says:

It was necessary to prepare for that day of the return to Palestine by gathering together all the laws and usages of the Temple, or which had been handed down in connection with the Temple, and an interpretation of the torah, so that when the time of Jehovah's great deliverance came the people should be ready, especially the priests, to resume in a proper way the sacrificial and ritual life interrupted by the destruction of the Temple.<sup>47</sup>

These rituals and observances, which were now being stressed once again, had also another effect upon the Jews

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<sup>46</sup>Ezek. 44:23,31

<sup>47</sup>Peters, op. cit., p. 341



of the Exile. This, as we have mentioned before, was the feeling of aloofness and superiority which they felt towards others. As the people became more conscious of Yahweh's concern for them and their responsibility to Him, they also became conscious of being different from others and this was with good reason. They were in direct contact with Yahweh through their priest Ezekiel, and they themselves were able to stand before Yahweh and plead their cause. They knew of the ethical righteousness of Yahweh and His demands upon them, and this marked them as being on a much higher plane than any other people.

Thus we have seen that the ritual system expanded during the period of the Exile. New festivals were added, especially on anniversaries connected with past events in Jewish history. At these festivals the natural things to remember would be the mercies of Yahweh. Such things as the exodus from Egypt, the revelation at Sinai, the entry into the promised land and its final possession, were part of their religious rites. In this way they would remember Yahweh's past mercies and gain new hope for the future. One of the most important rituals was the ritual celebrated on the anniversary of the fall of Jerusalem. There are many scholars who believe that the festival of the great Day of Atonement was begun during this time. John Punnett Peters is one such scholar. He states:

This ritual system culminated in a fast which we



meet for the first time in this period, the great Day of Atonement, observed on the tenth day of the seventh month, five days before the feast of Tabernacles, which summed up and interpreted the whole conception of sacrifices designed by divine appointment to gain for man access to God. The fundamental idea of the day was that the community as a whole, from the high priest downward was defiled by sin and therefore rendered unholy, and that it needed some special and periodical purgation in order to restore it to its true position as the people of God.<sup>48</sup>

Whether or not this Day of Atonement reached such great proportions during the Exile is difficult to prove. But its emphasis may be traced to this period, and the idea of the people being defiled by sin and in need of purification in order to be restored to the correct position with Yahweh, is an important development of the Exile.

There are many who believe that it was during this period of the Exile that the Levitical Code was developed. This code has also been called the Holiness Code or Priestly Code. It is said that much of the older writings were gathered, studied and rewritten at this time. This is a subject which takes us beyond the considerations of this paper and will therefore not be treated. But, in consideration of the interest of the Law of Yahweh at this time, and considering the evidence which is given concerning this period of Jewish history and this includes Jewish religious history, we believe that, although much of the Law was collected at this time and gathered to be used during this

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 350.



period and in the periods to come, the so-called Holiness Code did not originate in the Exile. The Code and the Law was known at this time, but it had come to them from their earliest history in the form of the Pentateuch, written by Moses almost 600 years before.

The life of the Jew in Babylon became more centered in worship and Sabbath day gatherings and the reading of the Law. The people were centering their whole life around Yahweh, and Yahweh was once again the leader of their nation. As the people continued to meet on the Sabbath to hear of Yahweh and His Law, a new institution slowly began to be formed. "It was these gatherings which ultimately came to constitute the Synagogue."<sup>49</sup> We cannot say exactly when and where the synagogue began:

But we can safely say that its foundations were laid in the needs of exile, and that the study of the Scriptures, which was to become the distinctive feature of the synagogue, undoubtedly contributed at this time to maintain the religious spirit.<sup>50</sup>

It is important to remember that it was the conditions forced upon the Jewish people, during the Exile, that gave rise to the Synagogue. They knew that the Temple was destroyed and that there was no longer any place to give sacrifices to Yahweh as had been their custom. Therefore, in order to preserve as much of their Yahweh worship as

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<sup>49</sup>Peters, op. cit., p. 382.

<sup>50</sup>Robinson, op. cit., p. 138.



possible during the Exile, they had to inaugurate a new center where they might gather for worship, for study and for instruction. The Synagogue was the answer to their needs.

In the Synagogue the people gathered to study and to be instructed in the Law. It really was a school for adults in which they would meet everywhere, on the same day, and at the same time, to study the same Law. It can easily be seen that the Synagogue did much to unite the Jews of the Exile, and even more to unite the Jewish people in the years to come.

But the Synagogue had also another purpose. Once again John Punnett Peters points this out when he says:

But the synagogue, with its study of the Law, with its prayers and hymns, in which all joined as individuals, was in its nature personal and individualistic. . . . By its interpretation of the Law and the prophetic writings it applied to the individual the lessons of the community.<sup>51</sup>

John Punnett Peters continues:

The synagogues were partly the product of the scribal movement, and in their turn they further fostered and developed that movement. The first scribes were priests, like Ezekiel. . . . As the life of the Jew became narrowed down to religion, this came to be a function of layman as well as priests, and so the synagogue offered an opportunity for the layman to express himself in religion.<sup>52</sup>

Thus we see that the Synagogue was a democratic institution,

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<sup>51</sup>Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 383.



and both priest and layman took part in the reading and study of the Law. For it was the study of the Law which was the main function of the Synagogue.

It is also during this period that we are brought into contact with the scribes of the Jews. Herman Schultz believes, "it is only during the Exile that prophecy begins to fade away into the learning of the scribes."<sup>53</sup> However, we believe that it was not so much the fact that the scribes were replacing the prophets at this time, but rather that the scribes began to work more and more with the prophets. It is nevertheless true that it was at this time that the scribes became more important to the Jewish religious picture. We have maintained that the first scribes were priests, such as Ezekiel, whose main concern was the preservation of the Law of Yahweh. But there were laymen interested in preserving the records also, and it did not take long before the scribal body came to include laymen also.

The interest in the Law of Yahweh completely changed the religious life of the Jews during their years in captivity. The concern for the Law resulted in a higher code of morality between fellow Jews, but it also made the Jew think of himself as being above any outsider who did not know Yahweh.

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<sup>53</sup>Herman Schultz, The Religion of Revelation in its Pre-Christian Stage of Development, in Old Testament Theology Translated from the German by J. A. Paterson. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1892), I, 300.



John Punnett Peters summarizes this development very correctly when he says:

Unfortunately this relation of brotherly kindness was to a Jew's relationship to his fellow Jews. Precisely because God stood in this relation to the Jews He was, according to the legalistic view, removed from a similar relation to the world at large. So the hatred of the outsider, and of the sinner within Israel, goes hand in hand with lofty teachings of love toward one's neighbor in the faith.<sup>54</sup>

John Punnett Peters continues:

The law did undoubtedly, however, teach the ordinary Jew a high code of duty toward his fellow countrymen, and established in him a fine and exalted sense of his own relationship to God as his Father. But legalism also tended toward and developed certain prejudice within Israel itself, making a distinction between men on grounds not simply of righteousness and moral worth, but of legal knowledge and technical fulfillment of the Law.<sup>55</sup>

This stress of the Law not only changed the Jew and his outlook toward his fellowmen, but it also changed his concept of Yahweh Himself. While God was still conceived of as terrible and His wrath beyond measure:

yet He is now recognized to a much fuller extent than heretofore as a God of Law: not a capricious monster whose wrath might burst out at any moment, but a God whose relations to His people Israel were governed by a law which He had given them as a covenant.<sup>56</sup>

As the Law received greater emphasis, so there came a greater concern for Yahweh Himself and for His relationship to His people. We will remember that the earlier prophets

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<sup>54</sup>Peters, op. cit., p. 385

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 385-386.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 390.



proclaimed that Yahweh's holiness, in order to be vindicated, demanded the temporary rejection of His people. We now hear Ezekiel proclaiming that the holiness of Yahweh also means that the restoration of Israel is inevitable. For Yahweh will show Himself the God of power and might. He will show Himself holy through the redemption of His people. Now His name was being profaned among the heathen. They judged Him to be unable to protect His people. We hear Ezekiel state:

And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land.<sup>57</sup>

But this would not be the case. Since Yahweh's name was inseparably bound up with the destiny of Israel, He would redeem Israel and all the world would see the righteousness of Yahweh's rule. Once again we see Yahweh's sovereignty and His omnipotent power being displayed in the election of Israel and in the control of history.

But Ezekiel went on to add to this the personal relationship which Yahweh had with His people. All souls belong to Him, and He will require of them according to their deeds. This was the message of Ezekiel when he said: "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth it

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<sup>57</sup>Ezek. 36:20



shall die."<sup>58</sup> This was why it was so important for the people to see their sins, so that they might see Yahweh's plan for them and repent of their evil. There would be a regeneration of which all the heathen would be witnesses and they would know that the God of Israel was the powerful one, the God of the universe. Therefore, Yahweh's plan would ultimately prevail. This plan and purpose of Yahweh is brought out very emphatically in chapter thirty-six of Ezekiel. Permit us to quote a few of the verses:

And I will sanctify my great name which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. . . . A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. . . . Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. . . . Then the heathen that are left around about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.<sup>59</sup>

There are a number of important points which must be taken into consideration at this time. First of all we

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<sup>58</sup>Ezek. 18:4

<sup>59</sup>Ezek. 36:23-36



notice the significance which the prophet has given to the Divine honour of Yahweh. He is a God who will keep His Word. He will reveal Himself to all mankind. His works will be justified and Israel will be saved. Ezekiel speaks concerning this when he says:

Then will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord. . . . And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me.<sup>60</sup>

We will remember that in the age before the Exile, even though the existence of other gods was generally accepted, the superiority of Israel's God over the gods of the surrounding peoples was affirmed. By the time of the seventh-century prophets and especially Jeremiah, the religious faith of Israel, at least that of the prophets, had become monotheistic to a much greater extent than ever before. But in the Exile we see the belief in Yahweh, the one and only true God, being expounded and enforced with explicitness and directness. Ezekiel proclaimed that Yahweh had not remained in Palestine, but that He had come to Babylon, and that He was with His people. Even more important was the fact that Yahweh was the God of all nations, and that the day would come when every knee would bow before Him and call Him Lord. The heathen would learn who Yahweh is, partly by actual experience of His judgments falling

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<sup>60</sup>Ezek. 38:23, 39:23



on themselves, and partly by observation of His gracious dealings with Israel. Ezekiel proclaims this when he says:

So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel: and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel.<sup>61</sup>

This stress on Yahweh, as the only true God, set very well into Ezekiel's concept of the Temple in Jerusalem, and its being the only dwelling place of Yahweh. For it will be here, at the new Temple at Jerusalem, that this God of the universe will dwell. John Punnett Peters pulls this concept of monotheism and the new Temple together when he states:

Theologically at this period we have reached absolute monotheism. Jahaweh still remains Jahaweh, that is to say His personal relation to Israel is prominent; but He is no longer conceived of as the one greater god among many lesser ones. . . . As there is only one place for the worship of Jahaweh, so there is no opportunity for different Jahaweh's with different attributes, the result of different theologies. But while this personal relation of Israel to the one supreme God is manifested in the continuance of the name Jahaweh, in the presence of God's dwelling-place, the Temple, in the midst of His people in Jerusalem, and in His expression in His Law in the hearts and lives of His people, yet He is conceived of as transcendent, not immanent. . . . With this conception of the transcendence of God comes a higher conception of His glory and His personal relation to Israel is for the purpose of showing forth His glory.<sup>62</sup>

Thus Ezekiel prepared the way for the monotheistic doctrine of Judaism which was to gain greater emphasis through the years and which, after the return to the present day,

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<sup>61</sup>Ezek. 39:7

<sup>62</sup>Peters, op. cit., p. 392.



was to become one of the most important characteristics of Judaism.

We have said that Ezekiel emphasized the grace of Yahweh in that He will restore His people and give to them strength and hope through the Spirit. This was the only way the people of Israel could be restored, namely, that it would be the action of Yahweh Himself who would bring this about. This concept Yahweh proclaims through His prophet:

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.<sup>63</sup>

Thus it would be Yahweh who would enable His people to walk in His statutes and live worthy of their vocation as people of God. This concept of the Spirit and the promise of the Spirit's work in the heart of Yahweh's people is a new emphasis in prophecy. It was true that Jeremiah and others alluded to this, and even went so far as to say that it was the action of the Lord which placed the Law into the hearts of the people, but Jeremiah does not expressly indicate the agency by which this Law is placed into man.<sup>64</sup> But Ezekiel added to Jeremiah's words by stating that this power of Yahweh was in reality the Spirit of God.

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<sup>63</sup>Ezek. 11:19-20

<sup>64</sup>Jer. 31:33



It is important to note that while Jeremiah spoke of a religion independent of Temple and ark,<sup>65</sup> Ezekiel looked forward to the day when a visible sanctuary would once again become the center of the nation's religious life. This is brought out by Ezekiel in an elaborate and detailed discussion in chapters forty to forty-eight of his book. For Ezekiel the very existence of religion is bound up with a careful and systematic organization of worship. This is to be a worship in which every member of the holy community is bound to take his appointed part. It was this mode of conceiving religion which has earned for Ezekiel the title "Father of Judaism." For it was Ezekiel's thoughts concerning the Temple and the holy city which became the spirit of Judaism.

Together with the new Jerusalem and the new Temple which was to come, Ezekiel believed that there would also be a great moral change among the people. This change would be brought about by the Spirit of God. R. L. Ottley gives us a description of Ezekiel's picture of the future Israel when he states:

The nation, in whose midst Jahveh deigns to dwell, is a nation prepared for His indwelling by a thorough regeneration of heart and life. Jahveh is a King reigning in the midst of His people, and justly requiring holiness in those who approach Him. This holiness indeed finds its outward expression in a system of lustration and of atoning sacrifice. Jahveh's land and dwelling-place are protected from pollution

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<sup>65</sup>Jer. 3:16

Ottley, pp. 212, p. 118.



by the removal of all possible causes of Levitical defilement; even the tombs of the kings are to be excluded from the sacred precinct. But Ezekiel's conception of holiness is rooted in a profound conviction of the evil of sin, and in a keen sense of the necessity of personal faith and repentance for acceptance with God.<sup>66</sup>

It is important to note that throughout the period of the Exile there is a strong feeling of hope for the future. This was the basis of Ezekiel's preaching, and it showed forth in his concern for the new Temple and the ritual of the coming sanctuary, and in his concern that the people might be prepared for a greater day. One of the reasons that Ezekiel pointed out the errors of the past was in order to avoid their repetition in the future. For it was the future that the people must now be concerned about.

The seventy years of the Exile were soon to be completed. The Jews had accomplished the purpose for which Yahweh had sent them into exile. Above all else they had seen their sin, and they had repented of their ways. They had renewed their covenant relationship with Yahweh, and they were about to begin a new life in Palestine. The Exile had influenced them in just about every phase of their life. They had been brought from a land of sheep and shepherds, of farms and vineyards into a land of commerce and trade. They had to adjust to their new environment, and they had to learn to become traders and workers in business. They

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<sup>66</sup>Ottley, *op. cit.*, p. 118.



had to learn to live in a heathen country among heathen people. They had become a people without a country and they were forced to learn to live as exiles, as people in the service of others. But most important of all was the effect which the Captivity had upon their religion.

They had left Jerusalem a fallen city and their country a desolate place. At first they couldn't believe that Yahweh would permit the city to fall and the Temple to be destroyed. When this became a reality they felt that Yahweh had turned from them, and that He had remained in Jerusalem. The punishment was too severe. But, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had His purpose for the Exile. This purpose would be fulfilled through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The people would be purged of their sins. They would be purified and placed into a new relationship with their God. Through the prophets they are rebuked for their sins, and they learn that it was for their sins the the Exile was brought about. But they are directed back to a God who is not only a righteous God who will punish evil, but who is also a merciful and loving God, whose grace and mercy is poured out upon the faithful. So they are instructed and they return to the forgotten Law of Yahweh and rediscover His message for them. They begin to cultivate a feeling of humility and personal repentance towards Yahweh and their confidence is restored in His

The Jews were completely cleansed of idol worship and



great mercy. Through Ezekiel they learn that Yahweh's actions are just and true and that their faith must now grow and increase even under the pressure of adversity. Because their nation is destroyed and their sanctuary defiled, the people learn what it means to have individual faith and individual responsibility. Because the glory of Jerusalem has been destroyed the exiles turn to Yahweh, and they find comfort in the practice of personal religion. It is now Yahweh and His kingdom which becomes the ruling factor in their heart and in their lives.

The Exile was a period of purification and growth. It was during this period that the Jewish people learned of their God and of His relationship to them. But it was also a period in which the Jewish people learned of their relationship to God. The changes and developments which were brought about during the Exile are many. Perhaps a few of the more important developments may be summarized at this point.

The Jews had sinned against their God. Idol worship and heathen cults were part of their every day life before the Exile. This was the sin that was chiefly responsible for their downfall and captivity. It was during the Exile that the Jews forsook all idolatry to serve Yahweh. He became, in a much greater way, the one and only true God, the God of all nations. During this period of purification the Jews were completely cleansed of idol worship and



Yahweh became their covenant God once again.

Along with this stricter monotheism there came the renewed interest in the Law of Yahweh. The Law is studied and the people are instructed as to the ways of Yahweh. It is the Law which becomes a major part of their worship and which becomes an important part of their Sabbath day services. It is the concern for the Law, and the need for instruction in the Law, which probably brought about the renewed observance of the Sabbath day worship at this time.

Together with the study of the Law and the observance of the Sabbath day there came into existence the Synagogue. Because the Temple had been destroyed, and there was a need for worship services, the people met together in little groups, and these became the centers of later worship which, in turn, became the Synagogues of the next centuries. It is true that the beginnings of the Synagogue cannot be determined, nor can it be proved that the Synagogue was actually in existence during the Babylonian Captivity. But the roots of the Synagogue can be traced back to this period. For it was at this time that the people gathered together to worship and to be instructed in the Law. These small groups continued to grow and the Synagogue became a distinguishing mark of Judaism in the centuries to come.

As interest in the Law became stronger so also interest in all of the ancient writings became evident at this time. The people had realized their sin and they were anxious to



know of Yahweh's message for them. Therefore, it was during this period that a great deal of the collecting of their literature took place. There was also a greater concern for the word of the prophets, and it may safely be stated that the scribes, who played a major role in New Testament times, came into prominence at this time.

Through this renewed interest in the Law there followed a more personal and spiritual concept of their entire religious practice. They could not observe the elaborate ceremonies which had been connected with their worship in the Temple, but their worship now took on a more spiritual character. Although ritual had been important and would be important again, Yahweh was also interested in the inner worship of the people. Their worship was to be more than acts and ceremonies. It must also be a part of them, a personal part. They must not worship Yahweh with their lips but also with their hearts.

This concept of a greater spiritual and personal religion helped to unify the Jews of the Exile. They were Yahweh's people, and they had a purpose to accomplish. They were to witness to all the world that Yahweh was the true God, and the only God. Still they considered themselves separate from those who did not know Yahweh, and it is perhaps because of this that circumcision became prominent during the exilic period.

Tied into this concept of unity among their fellowmen



and separation from the heathen world about them was their understanding of their destiny as a nation. They had realized that Yahweh was the true God, the God of the universe, and that the day would come when every knee would bow and call Him Lord. This was the mission of the Jewish nation. This was the reason why the remnant had been saved, purified and reestablished. They would now be a witness to all the world that Yahweh was the true God, that Israel was His people, and most important of all that Yahweh would send a Servant who would come to be a Savior, not of Israel alone, but of all nations.

Ezekiel continued this promise of the return of the Jews and added his thoughts concerning their duties when they reach Palestine:

For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the first fruits of your oblation, with all your holy things.<sup>1</sup>

The prophets had proclaimed that the Jews would return, but this returning would not take place until Yahweh's purposes had been fulfilled. Yahweh's purposes were fulfilled for in the year 539 Babylon fell to one of the greatest leaders the world has ever seen, Cyrus the Great, of Persia. Cyrus was not in sympathy with the Assyrian and

<sup>1</sup>Jer. 16:15, 23:13

<sup>2</sup>Ezek. 20:40



## CHAPTER IV

### JEWISH RELIGION AFTER THE EXILE

We have mentioned that throughout the Exile there was a growing hope for the future. Already Jeremiah, before the Exile, spoke of the return of the Jews:

But the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. . . . And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds: and they shall be fruitful and increase.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jer. 16:15, 23:3

<sup>2</sup>Ezek. 20:40



Babylonian policy of deportation. Therefore, he decreed that all those people who had been taken captive should return to their home land. We are told that a number of these groups were set free from the Exile. But, the important point to remember is the fact that Yahweh had kept His promise. The Jewish people were at last free to go home and Yahweh had proven once and for all that He had not forsaken Israel. In the book of Ezra we read of Cyrus' decree concerning the Jewish exiles:

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth: and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the man of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the free will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the beginning of a new period in the history of the Jewish nation had begun. The first return from the Exile was led by Zerubbabel,<sup>4</sup> who was assisted by Jeshua.<sup>5</sup> Under their direction the Temple was completed, after many years of opposition by the leaders of the nations surrounding Jerusalem. It was during this period that Haggai and Zechariah did their work of exhorting and comforting the

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<sup>3</sup>Ezra 1:2-4

<sup>4</sup>Ezra 2:2

<sup>5</sup>Ezra 3:2



people. But, more important it was Yahweh who was providing the assistance for His people that they might be restored as a nation.

During this early post-exilic period we see the concepts which were developed in the Exile becoming more important. After the Temple was completed there followed the purification of the priests and Levites, the resoration of sacrificial offerings, and the keeping of the Passover. There must have been great rejoicing and much joy with the people as they saw, after more than seventy years, that they were now able to worship in their homeland and live as they had longed to live these many years.

Sixty years after the dedication of the Temple, a scribe, who had remained in Babylon, came to Palestine to proclaim his message of calling the people back to the worship of the true and only God and to the observance of the Law. The exact purpose of Ezra's coming to Jerusalem is given to us in his book. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."<sup>6</sup> Already at this time the Law, which had been rediscovered during the Exile, was again being forgotten. We are told that they had not separated themselves from their heathen wives.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ezra 7:10

<sup>7</sup>Ezra 9:1-2







the return. The Law is stressed by the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah. The importance of worship was noted. "One of the first tasks of the returned exiles was the restoration of the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem."<sup>8</sup> Daily sacrifices once again were offered. Those who neglected the Sabbath are rebuked. There could be no compromise when it came to the obeying of the Law of Yahweh. Even those who had married heathen wives are led to understand that they must be separate from the heathen and they must put them aside because it is the Law of Yahweh.

There were also other examples of exilic influence during this period. We will remember the stress placed on worship by Ezekiel. Besides the Sabbath worship and the beginnings of the Synagogue, we find Ezekiel emphasizing the new Temple and the sacrificial worship which would be carried on in Jerusalem. We see this emphasis also in Ezra and Nehemiah as they concern themselves with the rebuilding of the city and of the Temple. Haggai is troubled when the people lose interest in the Temple. But, from the time of the completion of the Temple in 516 to its final destruction in 70 A. D., the Temple constituted an important element of the Jewish religion. In the New Testament period the Temple was still considered the great sanctuary of Jehovah. The interest and the time which Jesus Himself spent in or

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<sup>8</sup>J. M. Weidenschilling, The History of Israel (Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, c.1951), p. 150.



near the Temple are ample evidence to show that the Temple still held a position of high esteem in the Jewish nation. Today the orthodox Jews still consider the final destruction of the Temple to be the great catastrophe in the history of the Jewish nation.

In spite of the importance of the Temple in later Jewish history, it was never restored to the influential position it held before the Exile. The Synagogue, which had its roots in the Exile, accomplished the task of uniting the Jews who were together in one dispersion; the Temple kept all the dispersions together to maintain the position of the Jewish people as a nation. It is interesting to note that on entering a Synagogue today we would find many of the features of the Temple of ancient Jerusalem. But the Synagogue was to become the important meeting place for worship, prayer and instruction for every Jew throughout the world. W. O. E. Oesterly and Theodore H. Robinson believe that if it had not been for the Synagogue the Jewish religion would have died.<sup>9</sup> Whether this can be stated so definitely is open to debate, but, the Synagogue has played and will continue to play an important role in the religious history of the Jews.

The Synagogue has also served the purpose of keeping

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<sup>9</sup>W. O. E. Oesterly and Theodore H. Robinson, Hebrew Religion, Its Origin and Development (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 332.



the eyes of the Jewish nation fixed on its future in the world. Salo Wittmeyer points this out when he says:

By orienting all prayerful assemblies in the direction of Jerusalem, it also focused world Jewry's attention in a single goal. The Jewish people could soon entertain the hope. . . . that ultimately the Jerusalem "house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Is. 56.7)"<sup>10</sup>

Thus the developments of the Exile regarding worship and life, Temple and Synagogue, became a part of the future religious history of the Jews. Add to this the stress of monotheism and universality of Yahweh's power, together with the strengthened unity of the Jews and their separation from all the heathen, and we have a clear picture of the important influences of the Babylonian Captivity on the religion of the Jews.

Perhaps no single feature of the Jewish life has done so much to keep the Jews united, though not as an outwardly visible nation, yet surely as a nation united in purpose, than the hope for the Messiah. From the earliest times this Deliverer had been looked upon as one who should right the physical evil done to the Jewish nation, individually and collectively. He would deliver His people from temporal evil, and would protect them with His power and love.

Whenever any social evil was committed against the true worshippers of Yahweh it was Yahweh's rights that were

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<sup>10</sup> Salo Wittmeyer Baron, The Jewish Community - Its History and Structure to the American Revolution (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942), p. 74.



being infringed; when a Jew was deprived of his property, it was Yahweh who was robbed of his ownership; when the worshipper of Yahweh was hindered in the performance of his religious rites, it was Yahweh who was wronged. In this way the material interests of Jewish life were inseparably interwoven with the interests of the kingdom of Yahweh. Therefore, throughout Jewish history, but more especially during the Exile and post-exilic periods, we hear the prophets speaking of the hope for the future and a yearning for the reign of justice and freedom. The only leader of such a reign must necessarily be a king, for to the Jewish mind the king was all in all. He would be a king who would reign in righteousness and he would relieve the suffering of the oppressed and helpless. This Deliverer would be one that would be concerned about His people:

He shall judge the poor of the people,  
 He shall save the children of the needy,  
 And shall break in pieces the oppressor . . .  
 For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth;  
 The poor also, and him that hath no helper.  
 He shall spare the poor and needy,  
 And shall save the souls of the needy.  
 He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence;  
 And precious shall their blood be in his sight.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the Messianic hope was the hope for one who should right all social and civil wrong and bring Israel to its own again. James Frederick McGurdy agrees with this when he says:

Under him Judah and Israel should dwell safely, each one under his own vine and his own fig-tree, none making

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<sup>11</sup>Psalm 72:2, 12-14



them afraid, (I Kings, 4, 25, Mic. 4,4) enjoying the labor of his hands amid peace, order, good will and plenty.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the characteristic elements of the King's reign are mentioned in the writings of the prophets. We hear Daniel, a product of the Exile, speaking of a "son of man, one of human form, who shall receive royal powers and authority from the Ancient of days."<sup>13</sup> The King was also to be of Davidic origin. Jeremiah proclaimed this when he said:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.<sup>14</sup>

Again Jeremiah spoke of the King as being the Lord of righteousness and that He would save Judah and Jerusalem:

In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name where with she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.<sup>15</sup>

When Ezekiel came upon the scene a new designation was given to this Deliverer. Ezekiel spoke of a time when all the exiles would be gathered together under one

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<sup>12</sup>James Frederick McCurdy, History, Prophecy, and Fulfillment (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), Book VII, Chapter VI, p. 221.

<sup>13</sup>Daniel 7:13-14

<sup>14</sup>Jer. 23:5

<sup>15</sup>Jer. 33:15-16



## Shepherd:

Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey: and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord, will be their God and my servant David, prince among them: I the Lord have spoken it.<sup>16</sup>

It must be remembered that a number of passages which speak of the Deliverer seem to have a particular person in mind. Haggai closed his book with Yahweh's words which make Zerubbabel a "signet," one who should be set up as ruler over the nation after the heathen nations are overthrown. Zechariah spoke of the Branch and applied the name to Joshua.<sup>17</sup> Whether the Jewish people were able to interpret these Messianic passages at this time as referring to someone in particular, living at that time, or to someone who would come later is difficult to conclude. But we may draw the conclusion that everything which was said of this Messiah seemed to point to an earthly, temporal King, who would be sent by Yahweh and who would reign as Yahweh willed. Nevertheless the stress of the hope of the future in the Exile and the concern over the one who should come to rule is definitely found during this period. It continued to develop in post-exilic times and the hope of the Jewish people was that some day a king would come who would bring

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<sup>16</sup>Ezek. 34:22-24

<sup>17</sup>Zechariah 6:10-12



back the glory of Israel.

The influences of the Exile were many and varied during the post-exilic period. Many believe that Judaism itself, at least as we know it today, was born out of the Exile. Many of the concepts and developments which came from the Exile are still important factors in the Jewish religion of modern times. For, in a sense, the Jew of today is also in exile. Until a short time ago he had no land to call his own, no country he could claim as Israel. To make up for this the Jew had to develop his own life, his own religion, in strange countries and among people he believed to be heathen. Therefore, the Synagogue continued to be of great importance to him. The Reading and instructing in the Law of Yahweh came to have an even greater part in his worship life. The Sabbath took on new importance and helped to distinguish him from the people about him.

Although the Jews of the twentieth-century are divided they still have that certain Jewish trait which separates them from all others. They often live in large cities where business is great, and they usually live together. They may easily be recognized by their Sabbath worship and their Synagogues. Many of them still practice circumcision, but this is no longer a special trait of the Jew alone. They still possess their teacher, or rabbi, who instructs them in the Law and in the ritual. The Sabbath service still remains a democratic service, at least to the extent that



the laymen are permitted to read from the Law.

The Jew of today possesses a great concern for his homeland and once again many have moved to Palestine to claim what they believe to be their own. It is to Palestine that many Jews would like to go. For it is here that the Jews would see the land that Yahweh had given to them and it is here where nationalism is the strongest. They believe that Yahweh has revealed Himself to them through the Prophets, they are still waiting for the great King to come. Their conception of the King who would come to raise up Israel and destroy its enemies was not filled by Christ, and they still long for the day when their promised One will come. Therefore, it is with great difficulty that any Jew is won for Christianity because Christ has become a stumbling-block to them.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

It is, of course, very difficult to draw definite conclusions from a study such as this. We cannot be sure when or how certain developments in Jewish religion arose during the Exile, nor can we state to what extent these developments influenced the Jewish religion. However, we may definitely conclude that the Babylonian Captivity had a lasting and an important effect on Jewish religion.

The real importance of such a study as this is to make us able to better understand the Jewish people. It enables us to understand the Jews of the New Testament period, and the Jews of today.

We have been able to determine that the Jews were greatly changed by the Exile and that these changes are part of Jewish life today. The Jew learned to live with outsiders, that is outsiders of his community and of his religion. He learned to make a living in commerce and trade and branch out into the world of business. He learned to live without a country, and to worship Yahweh wherever he went, even without a Temple. He discovered that Yahweh was just and righteous, that He punished the wicked but showed mercy to the faithful. He learned that as an individual he could stand before Yahweh and make his



request known to Him.

But he also learned that Yahweh had a plan for him. This plan was revealed through the rediscovery of the Law. During the Exile he learned about Yahweh and his relationship to Him. He realized that there was no other God except Yahweh, and that honour and glory must be given only to Him. Above all, he learned that the Exile was Yahweh's punishment of his sin, and that only through repentance and trust could there ever be a return. But the return would come and the people would be cleansed and purified by the power of Yahweh and through His Spirit.

So the purpose of the Exile was to purify the Jewish nation and to bring them back a new Israel. A part of becoming a new Israel was the beginning of a new and purified religion. Without Temple and sacrifices the Jew turned to the Law and there, together with the renewal of the Sabbath worship and the rite of circumcision, he began to come close to Yahweh once again. Through the Law the Jew discovered that Yahweh had not forsaken him, but, was with him even in the Exile, for He was a God of the universe. He discovered that not only ritual and rites were important, but that Yahweh was concerned also with the heart and the spiritual part of worship. He began to understand that Yahweh had a mission for His people, and that the glory and honour of Yahweh are intimately united with the future of His people.



Most important of all was the fact that from the Jewish nation would come a prophet who would be greater than all others in Israel. This prophet would be sent by Yahweh Himself and would come as a babe to redeem Israel, and the whole world.

It is to this witness of the Christ, which the Jews have not accepted, that the Church is dedicated. By our understanding of the Jew and His experiences in the Exile, we will be better able to understand the Jewish character and religious background, and, therefore, deal with him more effectively. May God bless this witness.

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