

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD

I. THE RISE OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

- A. Babylonian empire under pressure of a coalition of Medes and Persians
 - 1. Last king Nabonidus and his regent Belshazzar were ineffective
 - 2. Belshazzar and the hand-writing on the wall (Dan 5)
- B. **539 BC: Babylon surrendered to Cyrus the Great (550-530 BC)**
- C. **Persia** (= modern Iran)
 - 1. Ruled most of the Near East until 333 BC
 - 2. Persian royal cities: Ectabatana, Susa, Perepolis
 - 3. Significant rulers after Cyrus
 - a. Cambyses (529-522 BC): conquered Egypt, 525; tragic death
 - b. Darius I (521-486 BC): administrative reform
 - c. Xerxes I (485-465 BC): wars in Greece; = Ahasuerus of Esther
 - d. Artaxerxes I (465-425 BC): period of Ezra, Nehemiah
 - e. Darius II (424-407 BC)
 - f. Artaxerxes II (407-361 BC)
 - g. Artaxerxes III (361-338 BC)
 - h. Darius III (338-331 BC): last Achaeminid king

II. RESTORATION OF THE JEWS AND REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

- A. **538 BC: the Edict of Cyrus** (Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5)
 - 1. Jews allowed to return to Judah
 - 2. Temple in Jerusalem could be rebuilt
- B. The initial returns; their leaders
 - 1. **Sheshbazzar** (Ez 1:5-11; 5:16) probably led small 1st group
 - 2. **Zerrubbabel** (Ez 2:2; 5:2), nephew and successor of Sheshbazzar
- C. Rebuilding of the temple
 - 1. Foundations laid (Ez 3); opposition, work stopped (Ez 4:1-7)
 - 2. Revival under prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ez 5:1-2)
 - 3. Rebuilding continued; complaints against the work (Ez 5:3-17)
 - 4. Decree of Darius (Ez 6:1-12)
 - 5. **515 BC**: temple completed under Zerrubbabel the governor and Jeshua the high priest; Passover kept (Ez 6:13-22)
- D. Prophets that encouraged the rebuilding of the Temple (ca 520 BC)
 - 1. **Haggai**
 - a. Urges rebuilding of the temple
 - b. Rebuke, encouragement, and blessing for Zerrubbabel
 - 2. **Zechariah**
 - a. Rebuilding of the temple; visions of restoration/future glory
 - b. Apocalyptic material

III. EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

A. Ezra (Ez 7:1-10:16; Neh 8:1-10:36): Traditional date 458 BC

1. Ezra: priest and archetypal scribe (Ez 7:1-5)
2. Return to Jerusalem under Ezra (Ez 7-8)
 - a. Ezra's commission from Artaxerxes (Ez 7:6-28)
 - b. Journey to Jerusalem (Ez 8)
3. Ezra's **religious reform** (Ez 9-10)
 - a. Problem of mixed marriages (Ez 9-10)
 - b. Public reading of the **Law of Moses**, confession, and covenant (Neh 8:1-10:39)

B. Nehemiah (Neh 1:1-7:4; 11:1-13:30)

1. Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 1:1-7:4)
 - a. Nehemiah's commission by Artaxerxes in 444 BC (Neh 1:1-2:10)
 - b. Arrival, inspection of the walls (Neh 2:11-16)
 - c. Distribution of the work (Neh 2:17-3:32)
 - d. Opposition to the work (Neh 4; 6)
 - e. The wall completed, dedicated (Neh 6:15-16; 7:1-4; 11:1-12:47)
2. Nehemiah's second visit/administration in Jerusalem (13:1-30)

IV. THE POST-EXILIC PROPHETS (in addition to Haggai & Zechariah, above)

A. Joel

1. Judah; date disputed: 6th century?
2. Message/content
 - a. **Locust plague** (1:1-2:27)
 - 1) Locusts (1:4; 2:25): literal or foreign armies?
 - 2) Call to repentance
 - b. The Day of the Lord (2:28-3:21)
 - 1) Outpouring of God's spirit (2:28-32; Acts 2:17)
 - 2) Judgment on nations; restoration of Judah

B. Jonah

1. Message is the story of what happened to the prophet
 - a. Told to go to **Nineveh**, Jonah flees task and suffers the consequences (1:1-2:10)
 - b. Jonah follows second command; Nineveh repents (3)
 - c. Jonah's attitude and conclusion (4)
2. Interpretations
 - a. Historical
 - 1) Jonah was an 8th century prophet of Israel (2 Ki 14:25)
 - 2) Historical interpretation has serious difficulties (3:3)
 - b. **Parable** for Israel, showing:
 - 1) Unwillingness of "Jonah" (Israel) to love "Nineveh"
 - 2) Inability of Jonah to understand God's heart

C. Malachi

1. Post-exilic Judah; perhaps ca. 450 BC
2. The prophet: Malachi = "my messenger"
3. Series of moral oracles
 - a. Lord's love; denunciation of clergy (1:1-2:9)
 - b. Idolatry and intermarriage (2:10-16)
 - c. God of justice (2:17-3:5)
 - d. Withholding tithes (3:6-12)
 - e. Righteous and the wicked (3:13-4:3)
 - f. Elijah and the Day of the Lord (4:4-6)

V. THE WRITINGS: DANIEL AND ESTHER

A. Daniel

1. Date and authorship
 - a. **Traditional view: Book written 6th century**
 - 1) Daniel taken into exile in 605 BC
 - 2) Deals with kings of Babylon and Persia up to mid-6th century
 - b. **Critical view: written 2nd century BC**
 - 1) Technical reasons (language)
 - 2) Historical allusions
2. Type of literature
 - a. Included in Writings; not “prophecy” in the literature sense
 - b. **Apocalyptic:** future history characterized by
 - 1) Determinism: God in control
 - 2) Dualism: conflict between good and evil
3. Contents
 - a. **Third person stories about Daniel (1-6)**
 - 1) Daniel, companions brought to Babylon (1)
 - 2) Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the image; Daniel interprets (2)
 - 3) Golden image; Daniel’s friends put in furnace (3)
 - 4) King’s 2nd dream (4)
 - 5) The handwriting on the wall; Daniel’s interpretation (5)
 - 6) Daniel in the lions’ den (6)
 - b. **First person reports of Daniel’s visions (7-12)**
 - 1) 4 beasts from the sea/interpretation (7)
 - 2) Ram, he-goat, horn/interpretation (8)
 - 3) Daniel and Jeremiah’s 70 years (9)
 - 4) Vision by the Tigris (10)
 - 5) Kings of the south and north (11)
 - a) Profaning of the temple (11:29-35)
 - b) King exalts himself (11:36-45)
 - 6) Time of trouble, resurrection; scroll; blessings (12)

B. Esther

1. God not mentioned; difficulty gaining canonicity
2. Setting
 - a. Esther = a Jewess in Susa, a Persian royal city
 - b. Persian King **Ahasuerus = Xerxes I**
3. The story
 - a. King order Queen Vashti to display beauty; she refuses
 - b. Vashti banished; Esther becomes new queen
 - c. Haman, a royal advisor, is promoted to place of honor
 - d. Mordechai, Esther’s cousin, refuses to bow to Haman
 - e. Haman plots to eliminate Jews; king approves plan
 - f. Mordechai learns of plot; asks Esther to help
 - g. Esther pleads case of Jews before king
 - h. Haman hanged on gallows intended for Mordechai
 - i. King cannot countermand order to attack Jews on 13 Adar
 - j. Gives Jews permission to arm, defend themselves
 - k. Enemies of Jews defeated, killed
4. Basis for holiday of Purim (*Pur* = lot that Haman cast [3:7])
5. Justification for inclusion in Canon/Religious significance; Some possibilities:
 - a. Background for Jewish holiday **Purim** (= “lots” [cast by Haman])
 - b. Doctrine of providence (God not mentioned, but He is present, guiding events)
 - c. Against Anti-Semitism