

Israel Divided Exiled Returned
1-2 Kings (mostly)

[Time line on last page] Turn to 1 Cor 10 please. We'll mostly be in 1 and 2 Kings today, but we'll get around a fair amount. We will talk about the history of Israel during the second half of OT times. Let's divide Israel's history very roughly into two halves, David the king as the dividing point. The first half is from Abraham to David, and the second half is from David on.

The second half of Israel's story is not a happy story. That's why God sent prophets. We are doing a Tour of the OT Prophets, we've done Isaiah, and Jeremiah is next. So we'll talk about Israel's history to get an idea of why God called the prophets, and what the prophets were up against. That's the first reason to look at the history of Israel: to understand the prophets better.

But there's another reason, and for that we'll read what Paul writes the church in Corinth. These OT stories were written so for *us*, so that *we* would understand *our* God and what it means to be his people. Paul reminded that church about some OT stories of Israel sinning and God's judgement on Israel. Then Paul says:

(1 Cor 10:6) - Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as [the Israelites] did....¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Paul writes to a Gentile NT church, as we are, *these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.*

These stories happened to them as examples, and were written down as warnings for us. You may have heard that God is different now, since Christ, he's kinder and would never do these things. Don't you believe that for a minute. Paul does not know anything about that. He's the same God. If it was good for the Corinthian church to know these stories, it's good for us.

Solomon's Failure, and the Division of Israel (950 BC, 1 Kings 11:7-13)

King Saul ruled all Israel for 40 years, then David ruled for 40 years, then David's son Solomon ruled for 40 years. As soon as Solomon's son Rehoboam became king, ten tribes of Israel rebelled against him. They pulled out, from then on they had their own king, and made Samaria their capital city instead of Jerusalem, built God different temples, and so on.

That was Solomon's fault: 1 Kings 11:7 - *On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek, the detestable god of the Ammonites.*
⁸ *He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their*

gods. ⁹ *The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.*

Solomon's heart had turned away from the Lord. These actions toward his wives show that his heart had turned away from the Lord. The Lord was angry because that happened even though God had appeared to him twice. Solomon had two remarkable experiences of God, the only such king. In spite of this, Solomon's heart turned away from the Lord, and our God became angry.

1 Kgs 11:10 *Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. ¹¹ So the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.*

We might want to say, "I am not keeping all God's instructions, but at least my heart has not turned away from the Lord." That's wrong. Jesus was adamant that we know a tree from its fruit. For Solomon not to keep God's covenant and commands, and for his heart to turn away from the Lord, are one and the same.

God always forgives people to come repent and return to him. But repeated disobedience changes us. What seemed wrong becomes okay, and our hearts lose interest in God. Solomon was not obeying the basics, and that was his practice, which meant his heart had turned away.

Ps 51 tells us that God will never reject a broken spirit, a contrite heart. But sin hardens us, we can't help that, and we lose the ability to be contrite and broken. And that's big trouble.

V11b *I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. ¹² Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³ Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.* (Jerusalem was in the territory of Benjamin, so David's line of king ruled Judah and Benjamin. The OT is not always clear on this.)

And that is what happened after Solomon died, which was about the year 930 BC. (Time line a bit out.) His son Rehoboam did not rule 12 tribes, but only Judah. The 10 northern tribes separated, and they never came back. A lasting heartache. Now, please turn to 2 Kings 17.

Israel, the Northern Ten Tribes, Exiled by the Assyrians (722 BC; 2 Kings 17:6-8)

Now we will go ahead a bit more than 200 years, from 930 to 722. The Assyrians conquered Israel, the northern 10 tribes, killed many of them, and marched many others to Assyria. 2 Kgs 17:6 begins, "*in the ninth year of Hoshea [the king of Israel]...*" That was the 6th year of king Hezekiah. This happened to Israel when Hezekiah was king of Judah, when Isaiah the prophet was one of God's messengers in Judah.

2 Kgs 17:6 *In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. ⁷ All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods ⁸ and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced.*

¹³ *The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: “Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your ancestors to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.”*

¹⁴ *But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the Lord their God.*

The writer of Kings lumps Israel and Judah together here. God sent many messengers to warn Israel and Judah, “turn from your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees.” Our main commands are much the same, “love the Lord your God with all your might, and love the people in your household.” But they would not listen, they did not trust in the Lord.

“They did not trust in the Lord their God.” Trusting God is about how we act, not how we feel.

We think trust is a state of mind, but when you read about faith or trust in the Scripture, try to pay attention to what else is going on in that paragraph. It is usually actions, obedience. Trusting God often describes actions, as it clearly does here. These people did evil, did not obey God, did not listen to the warning, which means they did not trust in the Lord.

¹⁸ *So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, ¹⁹ and even Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced. ²⁰ Therefore the Lord rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence.*

Twice it says God thrust them from his presence. When we sin, we fear that God will leave us. That was not how it happened. God didn’t move away, instead he had the people taken away from him. That’s what happened when he was very angry, and had been a long, long time. Ps 51 – *Do not cast me from your presence, O God.*

Remember 1 Cor 10:6 - *Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.... ¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.*

I don't know how exactly God would act in our time, but there are some pretty severe teachings in the NT, so let's be careful that our hearts don't turn away from the Lord, and that we don't fail to live in his ways, and that we keep trusting in God and worshipping only God.

By the way, God was not concerned about the details of how they worshipped. If their lives shows that they trusted God and aimed themselves in his ways, their worship was fine.

Fall of Jerusalem and the Exile of the Jews (600 BC, 2 Kings 25)

[The fall of Jlm actually happened in 3 stages, first in 604 (2Kgs 24:1); second in 598 (2Kgs24:12-13); third and final in 586 (2Kgs 25:1-9). Dates are approximate.]

So now we'll go forward about another 125 years, 722 to 600. Judah took a little longer to offend God so completely, but around the year 600 it happened to Judah as well. Jeremiah was the main prophet around this time, leading up to this exile.

We will start reading at 2 Kings 24:18 *Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah; she was from Libnah.* ¹⁹ *He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done.* ²⁰ *It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence.*

25:8 *On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem.* ⁹ *He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down.* ¹⁰ *The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the imperial guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem.*

And he took the people who survived to Babylon, which is a very long walk. As far as from here to Vancouver, + 200 miles more. They settled there, did their best to make it home. You would think that little nation would disappear at this time, as many other nations have done, but not so.

In Babylon, while they were there, God called Ezekiel, a priest in exile like the other Jews, and Ezekiel preached to the exiles. He told them that God had not forsaken them, but he also preached, because many of the Jews were not sure why they were exiled, and they had not repented, had not changed their ways. So God called Ezekiel in Babylon to speak to them.

The first prophet to predict the exile was Moses. Back in Deuteronomy, Moses saw all this coming. He said that the Israelites would turn their backs on God, and God would scatter them among the nations, from one end of the earth to the other. Dt 28:63-64.

And then, Moses said, God would bring them back! Deut 30 - *Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and*

bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. And God did!

Turn to Ezra 1. (After Kings comes Chronicles, and after Chronicles comes Ezra.) The prophets also said that after God scattered the Jews he'd bring them back. But Moses was the first.

The Exiles Return to Judea – 540, Ezra 1:1-4

Babylon ruled until about 540, and then the Medes and the Persians joined forces and rebelled against Babylon, and defeated them. The story in Daniel 5 about the writing on the wall happened the night that Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians. And the Medes and Persians encouraged all the exiles to go back home.

Ezra 1:1 - In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing: ² “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. ³ Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. ⁴ And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock.

What's more, Cyrus gave the Jews all the temple dishes and pans and bowls, temple things that had been taken out of the temple before it was burned, taken to Babylon. Cyrus gave it all back to the Jews, and they took it back to Jerusalem to put it in the temple there that they would build.

So the Jews returned. Not all returned, they could stay in Babylon if they wanted, and many did stay, but whoever wanted to go back to the promised land could go.

Nehemiah's Prayer – Nehemiah 9:36-37

Our last Scripture is from Nehemiah 9. Nehemiah lived about 100 years later, about 440. One of the last books of the OT. The Jews had rebuilt the temple by then, but there were still no walls around the city, so Nehemiah got the Jews organized to rebuild the walls of the city.

In Nehemiah 9 is a long prayer of confession. The Israelites confessed their sins to God. We'll read the last paragraph of this prayer. The prayer has a sad ending.

Nehemiah 9:36-7 - But see, Lord God, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.

They were living in the promised land, and their lives were about the same as they had been back in Egypt, where the Egyptians ruled over their bodies as they pleased. Judah at this time was ruled by the Medes and Persians, later by the Greeks, later by the Romans. The Jews were poor, these rulers taxed them heavily.

“God, the abundant harvest of the land you gave us goes to the kings you placed over us. They rule our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.”

And that continued for centuries, and that’s how it was when Christ was born. This sermon would work well on the last Sunday before Advent, and the next sermon would be the genealogy in Matthew 1, the birth of the Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.

So, this is the world of the prophets. God sent his messengers into this story. And we the Gentile followers of Christ must never feel superior to Israel in these things, because while Israel was doing this, we were worse, generation after generation, Gentiles were much worse. “*God has bound everyone over to disobedience, so that he may have mercy on them all.*” Rm 11:32

These things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. These things and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the end of the ages has come.

Hebrews was written to a church that was beginning to drift. I don’t see that we are beginning to drift, but prevention is a good idea. *See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of us has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of us may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.* (Hb 3:12) Amen.

Prayer: Father, this history of Israel is a hard story. We do not enjoy it. And we know that we are not better people than they were. So, we pray for help. Guard us so that our hearts never turn away from you. Strengthen our faith, so we always trust you. May our hearts not be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. Help us obey you in the hard tests, and live in your ways. We want to fight the fight, and run the race, and keep the faith. Thank you that you want that for us even more than we do. Thank you that you promise to always be with us, never leave us. Thank you that you are able to keep us for yourself. Keep us for yourself. Amen.

Doxology: *To him who is able to keep us from stumbling, and to present us before his glorious presence, without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior, be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now, and forevermore! Amen.*

Israel Time Line

1000 BC	900	800	700	600
	X		X	X
	930		722	600
	Israel		Israel	Judah
	Divides into		Exiled	Exiled
	Judah & Israel		(Hez., Isaiah)	(Jerem.)
600		500	400 300 200 100	0
	X	X	X	X
(Ezek.)	540	Temple	Walls Built,	Christ
	Jews	Built	Nehemiah's	Born!
	Return		Prayer	