

• Both Hezekiah (in Isaiah's time) and Josiah (in Jeremiah's) instituted reforms in worship and managed to reclaim northern territory (Israel). From what the prophets say, do you see the need for religious reforms? In Josiah's time, the discovery of a great book of the law (presumably Deuteronomy) in the temple stimulated the reform movement. Jeremiah evidently felt that reforms should go to the heart, beyond the outer forms of worship.

• Jeremiah gives more biographical material than any other prophetic book. This giant of a prophet deserves a study by himself (to be sure, Amos and Hosea and Isaiah do, too!). You can see clearly what he faced (compare his call with Isaiah's), and how he felt when the going became rough, how faithful he was and how convinced of God's righteousness, love, and power.

ASSIGNMENT 5

The Babylonian Exile, 586-538 B.C.

The first group taken into exile included among the 10,000 captives the prophet Ezekiel, the young king Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah and Coniah), many soldiers (to weaken Judah), and many able people whom Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon could use in the administration of his realm and as artisans. The second group (586) experienced cruelty. Psalms 137 and *Lamentations* reflect these events. The exile was a period of hard thinking: Yahweh had meant what the prophets had said He did: their violating the Covenant had resulted in the end of Judah. In a time of remembering, collecting traditions and manuscripts and writing, the exiles listened to Ezekiel and the Unknown Prophet, who underlined the lessons of the past and gave a new hope.

Readings

Excerpts from Ezekiel

- The call of the prophet: 1-3
- Principle of individual responsibility: 18
- Shepherds (indictment of poor leadership and followership in Judah): 34
- Valley of dry bones: 37:1-14 (the way to revive a dead nation!)
- The temple: 43:1-12; 47:1-12 (perhaps as a member of a priestly family, Ezekiel directed the thought of the exiles to the temple and to true worship as the center of re-building and restoration).

The "unknown prophet" Isaiah 40-55 or 40-66 (depending on the scholar!)

- Historical setting: 44:24 to 45:6
- Many familiar themes in lyric, poetic language: the infinitude of God and His Creation, man as His witness, the "servant" concept applying perhaps both to the Messiah and to Israel, this group, (Jesus, in Luke 4 quotes Isaiah 61:1-3), the idea of rebuilding the "old wastes," of being a "light to the Gentiles," of "a new heaven and a new earth."

ASSIGNMENT 5 Continued

NOTES

Other developments in Babylon

- The Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26; note especially 19:18)
- The synagogue: a new institution possibly arising in the Exile.
- The Priestly History: an editing and supplementing of earlier material. This was the compilation by Jerusalem priests of two strands of history and tradition from the past with the addition of priestly traditions, to comprise, in all, the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Leviticus; the great statements of Genesis 1:1-2:3 were added as an introduction or preface to the whole account.

J or *Yahwist* is the name given to a hypothetical document or writer of about the 10th century B.C. (time of David-Solomon). *J*'s name for God was Yahweh, or Jehovah. *J* was surely inspired as he surveyed the cycles of stories and traditions which he had in thought (mostly UNwritten). Running through the ancient myths, patriarchal legends, and the great exodus tradition of his people he could perceive a continuity based on God's promise to Abraham of a nation and a land, God's covenanting this people Israel to Himself at Sinai after rescuing them (a group of "nobodies" in the eyes of Egypt) from slavery — dignifying them with a relationship to Him based on obedience to law — and guiding them to the borders of the land which He had promised to their forefathers. Obedience was the keynote to man's relationship to God, and *J* infused this note into the materials which he wove together into what scholars believe was the very first written account from Adam through Moses.

Thus *J* (long before the Priestly Historian) was a compiler with vision who combined into the first written account what we call the *J* strand in the primeval "history" of Genesis 2-11, the patriarchal history of Genesis 12-50, and the Exodus (*Exodus* and *Numbers*).

E or the Elohistic writer is the name given to a writer of about the 9th century B.C., whose work was perhaps a national epic circulating in the *northern* kingdom. *E* used the name Elohim for God. He contributed the *E* strand to the three blocks of material mentioned above for *J*.

J and *E* were combined into one account, scholars believe, after the northern kingdom fell. Whoever made this compilation probably eliminated stories that exactly duplicated each other; however, as in the story of Joseph, where discrepancies can be noted in careful reading, he refrained from "harmonizing" the discrepant elements.

The Priestly Historian added to *JE* certain parts of Exodus (such as chapters 25-31) and of Numbers, and most of Leviticus. *P* was interested in covenants, genealogies, and rules and regulations for worship (the tabernacle, sacrifices, priests). Genesis 1:1-2:3 was a crowning contribution of *P*. The combined account (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers) was, scholars believe, in its final form the LAW BOOK which Ezra brought from Persia as the basis for the life of the newly constituted community after the Exile).

Questions and topics for discussion

- Ezekiel is noted for his pictorial word-power. What (amazing!) symbols for God's power and majesty (etc.) do you find in the first chapter? the next two? (Do you "recognize" some of these from the book of Revelation?)

- Note the timeliness of his statement on individual responsibility (no blame on someone else for your own being in captivity, perhaps?) Great concept of God, here in 18.

- Ezekiel kept alive traditions of the temple so that its significance would be central in a return to Jerusalem. How does he symbolize the spiritual significance of the sanctuary?

- What ideas about a new life appear in Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah (differently expressed)?

- Why do you suppose you are familiar with so much of the Unknown Prophet's work?

- What concepts of Messiah and Zion do you find?

- Note the differences between Deutero-Isaiah (Unknown Prophet) and Isaiah: in *time* (Cyrus of Persia, not the Assyrians, as the historical focus): in *purpose* (to "rebuild the old wastes" and not to defend Jerusalem from attack): in *concept* of Messiah ("my servant"). What concepts do they perhaps have in common?

What new ideas come from II Isaiah?

If you have ever sung *The Messiah* or various church solos, you realize that there is great lyricism in the poetry of II Isaiah. Note also the imagery!

Though the material kingdom of Judah has now ceased to exist historically, what of the moral-spiritual kingdom in II Isaiah?

Deutero-Isaiah speaks of God's servant (Israel or Messiah) as being a "light to the Gentiles." (Remember Genesis 12:3?) IF the Bible should end with this prophet's work, do you think the Bible people would have had a good deal of "light" for mankind? Just what "light" have you discovered in the Old Testament, thus far? (REVIEW OF THE COURSE TO THIS POINT!)

- Here it might be of interest to notice a few examples of typical elements in the Priestly History:

J:

Genesis 2:4 to 3:24

COMPARE *P* Genesis 1:1 to 2:3

Genesis 4:1-16, 17-26

Genesis 5:32 to 8:22

COMPARE *P* Genesis 9:1-17

Genesis 11:1-9

Notice *J*'s rather anthropomorphic God, who, despite the way man keeps turning out, shows mercy toward him, making Noah (a good man) the ancestor of all mankind surviving the flood. In the Garden of Eden, the Cain and Abel story, and the flood story, *J* is using bits and scraps of old myth material well known in the ancient Middle East; he shapes these to his own concepts of God, showing the necessity of obedience, God's saving of good and destroying of evil. Abraham no doubt brought these ancient myths along with him as part of his cultural heritage when he migrated to Canaan from Haran—a flood story was in circulation 1000 years before Abraham! *J* writes in the 10th century B.C., using his own concepts of Yahweh to infuse the early stories with something of his vision of Yahweh's purpose in and for the Abraham-Isaac-Jacob family and its descendants.

E: Genesis 22 is a fusion of *J* and *E*.

The Joseph story likewise, (Gen. 37, 39) with the two strands discernible as follows:

J: uses Israel as Joseph's father, Judah as Joseph's protector, and the Ishmaelites as the traders.

E: uses Jacob's name, Reuben as the protecting brother, and Midianites as traders who discover Joseph by accident and sell him to Potiphar.

P: Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 is the crowning contribution of *P*, whose hand is also seen in Genesis 5; 9:1-17; 17; Exodus 25-31, 35-40; Leviticus (except 17-26); etc.

All this can become a very specialized study; awareness of these different strands and of the points of view which they represent does contribute valuable insight into the content of the Old Testament.

ASSIGNMENT 5 Continued

NOTES

The Persian Period (Return and Rebuilding) 538-332 B.C.

Cyrus of Persia, having become master of the Middle East, allowed captives taken by the Babylonians to return to their homelands. A small group of Jews evidently returned to Judah about 537 B.C. They found Jerusalem a shambles, the temple still in ruins. The hopes of a new era, so bright in the concepts of Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, seemed far away, though they remained to give the people faith in God's purpose for them. The immediate need was to create a group identity; this they began to do, and it developed into the way of life we know as Judaism. Ruled by Persia, they could have *no political* sovereignty. They turned to develop a *religious* identity, focused on three elements of their life — the temple (first rebuilding project), the wall, and the book of the law. Two prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) and two leaders (Zerubbabel, the governor, and Jeshua, the high priest) played important roles in the rebuilding of the temple, a project which, early in the return, had been beset by difficulties. Nehemiah came a little later from Persia to rebuild the wall and serve as governor. Then Ezra, the scribe, commissioned by Persia to head up religious affairs for the group, was foremost in reconstituting the community as a people of God, adhering strictly to the law. (Scholars differ on the exact chronology of Nehemiah and Ezra.) Reforms were needed already, you will see.

Tendencies toward ritualism, segregationism, and legalism and literalism appeared in their experience and their books. They had, however, been thoroughly cured of Baalism through the Babylonian exile. Never again would they err in that way! Believing that Baalism was the result of the influence of outsiders in the past, they began to segregate themselves from outsiders in their own time. Having broken the law in the past (and lost their kingdom as a result), they would now adhere to the strictest sense of the law, abide by the very letter. This is an interesting period, with elements ranging from apathy to over-zeal, from narrowness to universality, from conformity to inspired thought.

During the Persian period, two historians compiled significant works — the Deuteronomic historian and the Chronicler.

The Deuteronomic History is a product of the period after the exile. The book found in the temple during Josiah's time was probably Deuteronomy or parts of it, which the Deuteronomist used as the *introduction* to his great history of the people IN the land. It recounted the people's experiences as they settled, formed the tribal league, set up a monarchy, split into two separate kingdoms, declined — and fell, BECAUSE THEY HAD VIOLATED THE LAW OF THE LAND GIVEN BY GOD at Horeb-Sinai. God's love of His people, the obedience and gratitude they owed Him, the fatal consequences of disobedience (idolatry, Baalism, injustice to their own people) were the themes of the *D* writer or writers — this history being completed probably between the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. Deuteronomy, with traditions going back to the time of the tribal league (and even the exodus), Joshua (probably), Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings constitute the work of *D*.

The Chronicler's History is a product of the latter part of the Persian Period, completed about 400 B.C., probably. This is a history of Judah from David to Nehemiah, Ezra, and the (new) post-exilic community. Though paralleling in I and II Chronicles what *D* had written in I and II Kings, the Chronicler has a particular interest in the temple worship, especially in its music. He may have been a Levite with access to traditions of this sort. His work undoubtedly helped the struggling post-Exilic community to relate itself to the past, to become more firmly than ever the "people of the book" of the law, trying to adhere to every provision rather than seeking to find the spirit of the great covenant relationship God had initiated with His people. I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah form the Chronicler's History.

Reading

1. The return.....Ezra 1:1 to 2:70
2. The temple: difficulties, encouragement, completion (515 B.C.)Ezra 3:1 to 6:22
Haggai: the book of Haggai the prophet
Zechariah: the book of Zechariah the prophet
3. The wall, 445-433 B.C.....Nehemiah 1:1 to 7:73; 12:27-47
4. The community: people of the BOOK of the law; reforms.....Ezra 7:1 to 8:36; Nehemiah 8; Ezra 9:1 to 10:19; Nehemiah 9; 10; 13
5. The Protest Literature: protesting against the narrow, segregationist views and policies of Nehemiah and Ezra.....Ruth: the book of Ruth
Jonah: the book of Jonah

Questions and topics for discussion

- How did the exiles get out of captivity?
- What was the first thing that the returnees did?
- What attitude did they have towards the Samaritans, who offered to help rebuild the temple? Why? (From 721 B.C. on, the Samaritans (people of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel) had become a "mixed" culture. As you see in II Kings 17, the Assyrian conquerors of 721 B.C. deported thousands of them and brought in to Samaria various other peoples whom they had conquered so as to prevent nationalist uprisings in different parts of their empire. Some of the new residents adopted the worship of Yahweh; many did not. Both Hezekiah and Josiah in their reform movements (initiated at times when Assyrian power was at a low ebb) reached out to include the Samaritans. The Jews returning from exile, Nehemiah, and Ezra did not advocate mixing with "foreigners" (Samaritans and others), even with people who had moved into the region of Jerusalem during the period of the Babylonian exile. Note this segregationist attitude.

- The morale of the community at Jerusalem certainly needed the boosts that Haggai, Zechariah (520-516 B.C.), Nehemiah (about 445 B.C.), and Ezra (428? B.C.) gave it. What were their particular roles? What concepts of Messiah and God's kingdom did Zechariah (especially) set forth? How did these two prophets (Haggai, Zechariah) forward the rebuilding of the temple?

- The vigor of the narrow, segregationist policies of Nehemiah and Ezra gave rise to two books of protest, Ruth and Jonah. Ruth dips back into history to show a Moabitess as adopting Israelite ways and eventually becoming the great-grandmother of King David! Jonah shows a recalcitrant prophet declining to obey God and preach to Nineveh (capital of Assyria); however, God sets him on his course again, and he is successful in his mission — the Ninevites all repent; this apparently distresses him, as he sits sulking outside the walls of Nineveh. What is wrong with Jonah? He cannot bear to have God be a God of "foreigners" too (although Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, II Isaiah had thought He was!). The author of Jonah laughs at his hero. How, then, did these two books protest against narrowness?

- *History*: You have already read considerably from the Deuteronomic historian. Here, you might review his themes (Deuteronomy 4:44 to 6:15 and Judges 2:11-23, for example) and read a few of the cultic credos he used (Deuteronomy 6:20-25; 26:5-10; Joshua 24:2-13.) In passages like II Kings 17:7-23 and II King 23:26, 27 he reveals his concept of Yahweh's view of the actions of His people and the inevitability of the fall of Israel and the captivity of Judah because of their disobedience.

The Chronicler's viewpoint and style are represented in the following excerpts: I Chronicles 15-17; 29; 36:11-23, and Nehemiah 9.