

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

This week we continue our survey of the Old Testament by taking a look at the book of Ezekiel. Called the "father of Judaism", Ezekiel was the prophet God called to serve as His prophet to the exiles living in Babylon. Ezekiel was one of two major prophets in Babylon, the other being Daniel. Ezekiel was called to be God's prophet to the very people who had so strongly resisted God's word before the exile. Their stubbornness would lead to the destruction of the Temple, and then to their eventual exile to Babylon.

For more information on Judaism as a religion today, you may want to explore the Judaism 101 web site.

While Ezekiel was God's prophet to the exiles of Israel, Daniel served as God's ambassador to the king's court of Israel's captors, the Babylonians. We will study more about Daniel in our next lesson.

We know that Ezekiel was approximately twenty-five years old when, during the second Babylonian attack on Jerusalem, he was taken to Babylon. We also know that he was raised as the son of a priest and would have been well-trained in the study of God and His Word. There were a total of three exiles conducted by the Babylonians; Daniel was taken in the first one in 605 BC (Daniel 1:1-7); Ezekiel was taken during the second one in 597 BC (2 Kings 24:10-16); and the collapse of Jerusalem occurred during the third exile in 586 BC. This means that by the time the exiles from the fall of Jerusalem arrived in Babylon, both Daniel and Ezekiel would have been well-known.

For our study this week, let's see what we can learn about Ezekiel, Judaism, and Ezekiel's message to the exiles. Specifically, let's explore what Ezekiel's role as the "father of Judaism" really means.

1. What does the word Judaism mean in terms of a religion?
 - a. ANSWER: Initially, it referred to those who were the descendants of Judah, and then those who inhabited the territories claimed by them. After the collapse of the Northern Kingdom, the only survivors who were taken into the Babylonian exile were from the Kingdom of Judah. These are the people that Ezekiel was sent by God to speak to for Him.
2. When did Judaism have its earliest roots, and what was the effect of the exile to Babylon on Judaism?
 - a. ANSWER: As discussed above, Judaism originally referred to the descendants of Judah. In Babylon, Judaism as a religious form took its roots under Ezekiel's leadership. By the end of the exile, Judaism, as practiced today, had rooted itself in the returning Jews as their "religion".
3. What does it mean to be called a "Jew"? Where did that expression originate from? (For examples, see Jeremiah 32:12, Esther 2:5, and Nehemiah 1:2.)
 - a. ANSWER: The original term comes from the root word for Judah plus the application of various languages in translating it, including French, Latin, and Middle English.
4. What do the following terms mean, and how do they apply to the religion currently called Judaism?
 - a. Synagogue
 - i. ANSWER: The gathering place. These were local places of worship and instruction, established primarily during the time of the Babylonian exile, since the Temple had been destroyed. Since many were carried and dispersed into exile, local places were required in which to meet for worship and instruction.
 - b. What was the Jewish criterion for when a local Synagogue was to be established?
 - i. ANSWER: Whenever there were as many as ten Jewish men.

- c. What was a typical Sabbath synagogue service like? (see Luke 4:16-21 for an example.)
 - i. ANSWER: The congregants would recite the Shema, i.e., the confession of faith in one God; then prayers; then Scripture readings from the Law and the Prophets; and then a sermon. It was concluded with a benediction.
 - d. What body of people had the general oversight of the Synagogue?
 - i. ANSWER: The local body of Elders.
 - e. Rabbi
 - i. ANSWER: Teacher. In New Testament times, more particularly it referred to one learned in the Law of Moses.
 - f. What did the Jews of Jesus' day believe in?
 - i. ANSWER: They believed in one true God, the study of the scriptures, and that the promised Messiah was coming.
 - g. Sadducees
 - i. ANSWER: A religious group of Jews who formed during the inter-testamental period when the Maccabees ruled Judah. The name means "righteous ones"; They only accepted the "Law" -- the first five books of the Bible -- as authoritative. They practiced a literal interpretation of the Law, observed past beliefs and tradition, denied that there was life after death, and they denied the concept of reward and punishment occurring after death. They also denied the existence of angels and demons.
 - h. Pharisees
 - i. ANSWER: The largest and most influential political/religious party during the New Testament times. They believed in life after death and the resurrection of the body. They believed in miracles, and the reality of demons and angels. They were also very strict on tithing, keeping the Sabbath holy, and purification.
5. God made Ezekiel a specific way for a specific purpose. What was that? (see Ezek. 3:8-9)
- a. ANSWER: God made Ezekiel strong, unyielding, and hardened, in order to resist the opposition of the hard-hearted and rebellious Israelites.
6. What often occurred at Ezekiel's home in Babylon during the exile? (see Ezek. 8:1, 14:1, and 20:1)
- a. ANSWER: The Elders of the exiles would come to consult with Ezekiel at his home.
7. Ezekiel's prophecy contains the phrase "They shall know that I am Lord" (or the equivalent) approximately seventy times. Yet the exiles still did not know God as they should have, but God would continue to speak to them through Ezekiel. He gave Ezekiel a three point prophecy. Can you describe it?
- a. ANSWER 1: You still need to repent of the sin that brought you here.
 - b. ANSWER 2: The exile will last for 70 years.
 - c. ANSWER 3: There will be a future restoration of Israel for a believing remnant.

Ezekiel is an excellent example of a servant of God who was well-trained for the task God gave him. With a willing heart, he committed himself fully to that task. He stands as an example to us today, as we seek to know and do God's perfect will in our lives and in His kingdom. May He find us to be as faithful a servant as Ezekiel!

Thanks for studying with us, and have a great week everyone.

In Christ,

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