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OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY
by Peter Nicol

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NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

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BIBLE COLLEGE OF S. A.

SHORT – TERM BIBLE SCHOOL

Lecture One

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

Rev. Peter Nicol

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE STUDY OF O.T. HISTORY

1. The message of the O.T. is intimately linked to historical events. This makes it essential to have a knowledge of Israel's history if we are to understand the O.T.
2. The old concept of history as facts, names, dates and places is no longer adequate.
3. The first stage for the historian is to establish as accurately as possible the facts. To do this he will make use of other disciplines such as linguistics, philology, sociology, anthropology and archeology.
4. The second stage, (and the most difficult) is to interpret these facts. That is, to understand their meaning and significance and relationship to other events.
5. History therefore can never be purely objective or detached from human values.
6. This is especially so with O.T. History since it is the story of a people's relationship to God. Thus in interpreting the events of the O.T. period, religious and moral considerations are as important as political, social and economic factors.
7. The reverse is equally true. The religious and moral development of Israel or "salvation history" can never be separated or understood apart from the political, social and economic development of Israel's world.
8. Another factor which must be born in mind when studying O.T. history is that the ancient oriental outlook on, and compilation of historical events differs widely from our modern western historical methods. We must guard against a purely occidental interpretation of oriental history.
9. Some examples may help us understand this principle.
 - i) Ancient Egyptian historical monuments were on the whole official propaganda, and therefore not truly objective or accurate records. Disasters and defeats were often never recorded or were distorted.
 - ii) Use of numbers differed greatly from our present use. Numbers were used in symbolic fashion and were often, (though not always) greatly exaggerated.
 - iii) Since oral tradition usually preceded written tradition, much of the material handed down has a poetic basis. This means that the historiography of the Hebrews draws in part on the epic and dramatic forms of the ancient world. Hence, historical events of the past are often reconstructed as verbatim utterances. e.g. 2 Kings 18:17-35
10. Most O.T. historical narratives have a teaching function, due to the Hebrew view of history as basically theological. This means that they were more concerned with the meaning of events than with the description of those events. Hebrew records are therefore selective. In the total world view, events which are seen as significant are sometimes barely mentioned or omitted altogether from the O.T. account, while other events which receive no attention from other ancient historians, are given prominence in the O.T. account because of their theological significance.
11. A meaningful study of O.T. history will then be concerned not just with time, places, people and events, but will seek to understand and interpret these factors from the viewpoint of the people who recorded them.

B. THE SOURCES OF ANCIENT HISTORY

1. A high degree of literacy prevailed in Mesopotamia and Palestine during the second millennium B.C. This has resulted in a vast number of written sources of various kinds being available to the O.T. and Near Eastern scholar.
2. One common form of preserving important events was the stela. These were large upright inscribed monuments usually describing some great victory.
3. Biographies of notable persons were sometimes carved in stone or on the walls of tombs and provide information about events, customs and culture, etc.
4. Inscriptions on buildings and altars have proved valuable—in identifying contemporary rulers, or clarifying religious practices.
5. The Mesopotamians made extensive collections of laws, which throw considerable light on social conditions of the times. The most famous of these is the code of Hammurabi of Babylon, which draws upon earlier Sumerian legal codes.
6. Medical and scientific texts from Babylonia and Egypt go as far back as the late third millennium B.C., and relate to topics such as astronomy, mathematics, geography, pharmacy, medicine, and surgery. These are found both in papyrus documents and on clay tablets.
7. The king lists of Mesopotamia are of great value in establishing chronological sequences and historical personages, but their value in precise dating is limited, because of the exaggerated numbers involved.
8. Religious epics were common in Mesopotamia, and give us much information about the superstitions, religious beliefs and mythological traditions of the times.
9. Hymns, rituals, magic spells and curses all add to our understanding of the ancient world.
10. Literary compositions such as the Tale of Sinuhe throw light on the political and social conditions of the times.
11. Diplomatic correspondence, legal and business documents, together with genealogies and family trees all provide a wealth of information, especially about the customs and culture, as well as the connections between geographical areas and the migratory movements in the Near East.
12. Archaeological sources are also very important. Besides the written material there is a wealth of non-written material.
13. The major function of Biblical archeology is to provide us with a human and cultural setting in which to study the ancient Hebrews. Archeology cannot confirm theology or open up the realm of faith. Archeology cannot “prove” the Bible, because by its very nature, it is unprovable.

However, archeology can and has confirmed the Biblical narrative at many points, and some eminent archeologists have gone as far as saying that no archaeological discovery to date has ever been made that disproves the historical or religious testimony of the Old Testament, or discredited its basic trustworthiness.
14. What is beyond doubt is that the Biblical writings belong to an early phase of cultural development. and that the bulk of the source material is either contemporary, or of great antiquity. The Old Testament writings mirror their cultural background faithfully, so that they are seen to be historically reliable and trustworthy. Recent archaeological discoveries have made it plain that the Hebrews, along with the Hittites, were by far the best technical writers of history in the Near East.
15. The significant difference between the O.T. and other Near Eastern literature is the spiritual ethos of the Biblical authors. They wrote from a monotheistic viewpoint, which witnessed to the ethical and moral nature of God, who had chosen them as His covenant people.

II. THE ANCIENT ORIENT BEFORE 2000 B.C.

A. THE FOUNDATIONS OF CIVILIZATION

i) Earliest Stone Age Settlements

1. Israel's history begins properly with the patriarchs, some time during the first half of the second millennium B.C. However Israel's origins lie nowhere near the dawn of history. One thousand years before Abraham, ancient civilizations flourished in the Near East. These civilizations form the basis for the rise of Israel as a nation.

2. It is generally accepted that civilization began in the Near East, in the area called the Fertile Crescent. The earliest inhabitants of the region lived in caves, and existed entirely by hunting and gathering food.

3. The transition towards a food producing economy began in the Mesolithic age, and is represented by the Natufian culture of Palestine. Some limited agriculture was practiced and temporary villages were built.

4. It was in the Neolithic period that the transition was completed. Permanent villages were built, crops were grown, and animals were domesticated in larger numbers. One of the oldest known permanent settlements was Neolithic Jericho (ca. 8000 B.C.)

- i) houses were built of mudbrick, floors were covered and walls plastered.
- ii) There is evidence of trade with east and west.
- iii) A triad of gods was worshipped.
- iv) Systems of irrigation were developed.

Similar villages extended in various parts of Western Asia. e.g. Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Palestine, Egypt. By the end of the Neolithic Age villages and towns were dotted all over the Biblical world. Tools and pottery had been developed; civilization had begun.

ii) Chalcolithic Cultures in Mesopotamia

1. This period was marked by the increasing use of metal for implements and utensils, together with a development of pottery. Agriculture was expanded and improved, land was drained and irrigated. Population density increased and city estates developed. Toward the end of the period, writing made its appearance. By the end of the fourth millennium, Mesopotamian civilization had assumed its essential form.

2. The earliest phase – Halafian – was characterized by hand made, kiln fired glazed pottery. This culture, centred in Upper Mesopotamia, also developed weaving. Their villages were well built, mainly of pounded earth or crude mud brick. The population density was quite high. There is also evidence that the wheel was in use at this time.

3. In Lower Mesopotamia development was later since it took time to master the techniques needed to drain and irrigate the land. Once mastered, the plains attracted a succession of cultures that formed the basis of historical civilization in the Near East.

4. The Uruk phase (4000 B.C.) saw the construction of quite substantial mud brick buildings, particularly temples. Their pottery is artistically inferior to the Halafian, but indicates a greater technical mastery.

5. The next phase, the Uruk or Uruk period, brought a burst of progress which has been rarely equalled in world history.

- i) It was a period of great urban expansion. Cities and city estates were developed?

- ii) Architecture became more refined.
- iii) Pottery techniques together with copper casting processes were developed.
- iv) Writing was developed towards the end of the fourth millennium. Clay tablets were marked using a stylus.
- v) Trade links were established between Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as Palestine.

6. By the end of the fourth millennium, Sumerian civilization had entrenched itself in Lower Mesopotamia. Their culture was to flourish in the third millennium.

iii) Egypt and Palestine

1. In Palestine, village life developed more slowly. Stone implements still predominated, although copper was also in use. Pottery and architecture were both inferior to Mesopotamian arts.
2. It is evident, however, that by 3500 B.C. settlement of the land was wide-spread.
3. Predynastic Egypt presents a poor picture when compared with Mesopotamia. Pottery is known, but is markedly inferior to Mesopotamian. Houses were made of dried mud or reed mats. There are no great buildings.
4. The major development was in agriculture, thus making possible a greater density of population.
5. By the end of the fourth millennium the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt had developed. Pictographic writing had also developed.

B. THE THIRD MILLENIUM

i) Classical Sumerian Age. (2850–2360)

1. The land was organized into a number of small independent city states. e.g. Ur, Larsa, Erech, Lagash.
2. These states were ruled by their god, and life was organized around the temple. The chief priest was usually recognised as the civil governor on behalf of the deity.
3. Kingship finally developed from the need for one of the elders to assume responsibility during times of crisis. 'That began as an emergency measure, was later to become a permanent institution.
4. The close connection between urban and agrarian life meant greater economic stability and the development of arts and crafts, particularly in metal work, jewellery and pottery.
5. Trade and cultural contacts were widespread and temple schools marked the beginnings of formal education.
6. Sumerian religion was polytheistic and the gods were thought of as cosmic in function, rather than local. Earthly events were a reflection of conflicts between the gods, or their displeasure at human behavior.
7. The Sumerians had a sense of right and wrong, and their laws were supposed to be a reflection of the laws of the god.
8. Wars were frequent between the city states, but no single city was able to bring lasting unification to the area.

ii) The Akkadians

1. The Akkadians were a Semitic people, who settled in the northern part of the plain, and consolidated their position during the first half of the third millennium.

2. They adopted and adapted Sumerian culture, and even though they spoke a different language, they borrowed the cuneiform script for writing.
3. They also adopted the Sumerian gods, but added some of their own.
4. In the twenty–fourth century, Sargon established the city of Akkad, and then proceeded to conquer the Sumerian region as far as the Persian Gulf. To this, he and his successors added territory as far west as Syria and the Mediterranean coast. This was the first true empire in world history.
5. Their trade contacts were numerous and widespread, reaching as far as the Indus valley. Art and literature flourished.
6. The kings of Akkad still claimed that their power was derived from the gods, but the centre of the new state was no longer the temple (as in the city–states), but rather the palace.
7. Akkadian power only lasted for a hundred years, but its influence was widespread and lasting.

iii) Egypt and Western Asia

1. By the twenty–ninth century, Egypt had been unified under the kings of Upper Egypt.
2. By the twenty–sixth century, all the essential features of Egyptian culture had been formed. This was the age of the pyramids.
3. There are evidences during this period of contact with Phoenicia and Palestine. Canaanite pottery and even parts of their languages were inter–changed.
4. Attempts had already been made by some of the pharaohs to conquer these territories.
5. Organization of the state differed from Mesopotamia. The pharaoh was god and his decree was absolute. Hence there are no known law codes from this period in Egypt. The Egyptian saw his world as a changeless order, established from creation, as regular as the Nile floods.
6. Their religion was a highly developed polytheism, and again the gods were cosmic and not merely local in their dominion.
7. In comparison to Mesopotamia and Egypt, Palestine remained a cultural backwater. However progress was taking place.
8. Cities were built and population increased. The population was predominately Canaanite and their religion was essentially the same as we find later in the Bible.

iv) The Eve of the Patriarchal Age

1. The end of the third millennium was a very disturbed period. In all parts of the Biblical world, established patterns were upset by migrations and invasions.
2. In Mesopotamia, the power of Akkad was destroyed by an invasion of barbarian peoples known as the Gutis. This paved the way for a brief renaissance of Sumerian culture centred at Ur. Architecture, commerce and agriculture flourished, religion was revived and there is evidence of careful political organization and administration of the state.
3. Egypt suffered a period of disorder and depression, as power passed into the hands of the provincial nobility. Thus a strong centralized government was lacking.
4. Added to the political chaos, there was the problem of Asiatic semi–nomads moving into the Delta region.
5. Agriculture and trade suffered as a result of the confused power struggle.

6. Unity was restored at the end of the third millennium, when a Theban family was finally able to conquer the Princes of Middle Egypt, and so begin the task of reunification.
7. Palestine shows signs of major disruptions, as, city after city was destroyed by nomadic invaders. These people tended to continue their nomadic ways, or at the best, to establish only small villages.
8. They were probably Amorites, a north western Semitic people, who were pressing into the Fertile Crescent and Egypt at this period.
9. Thus by the time we come to the Biblical patriarchs, we are entering a world already ancient. Civilizations and empires had already flourished and fallen.

III THE WORLD OF ISRAEL'S ORIGINS

A. THE ANCIENT ORIENT 2000–1750 B.C.

i) Mesopotamia

1. The cultural renaissance of Ur came to an end when, as a result of the weakening of the central authority, the city states of Mari, Asshur and Elam broke away and eventually destroyed Ur itself.
2. This opened the floodgates to the Amorites, and by the eighteenth century, almost every state in Mesopotamia was ruled by these North–Western Semitic semi–nomads, who readily adopted the culture of Sumer Akkad.
3. With the fall of Ur, a period of dynastic rivalry began between smaller rival states. No single state was strong enough to assert complete control.
4. In the wake of such instability came economic depression, and cultural activity seems to be confined to the preservation of past achievement.
5. In Upper Mesopotamia, two states came into prominence, Mari and Assyria (Asshur).
6. Down through the nineteenth century, Assyria pursued a policy of trade expansion, which eventually would bring it into conflict with other Mesopotamian states.

ii) Egypt and Palestine

1. In contrast to Mesopotamia, Egypt, under the pharaohs of the middle kingdom, was entering a period of extreme prosperity.
2. The chaos of feudal independence was at an end, but certain inner changes did take place. A new class rose to high positions.
3. Medicine, mathematics and literature all flourished. Trade expanded rapidly and irrigation and mining projects were initiated.
4. There is evidence which suggests that Egyptian influence was extended over Palestine, Phoenicia and Syria, as well as in Nubia and Libya.
5. In Palestine, recovery from the upheaval of the third millennium was only gradual, and mainly confined to Western Palestine and Syria. New groups of immigrants arrived and semi–nomads began to settle down. The new–comers were Amorites, and it is most probable that the migration of Israel's ancestors was a part of this general movement.
6. By the end of this period, Egypt was again under pressure. Tribal chiefs in Palestine and Syria were virtually independent. Internal problems increased, and Asiatic peoples began to infiltrate Northern Egypt.

B. THE ANCIENT ORIENT 1750–1550 B.C.

The Power Struggle in Mesopotamia

1. In Lower Mesopotamia, a struggle ensued between Larsa, Isin and Babylon, and by 1700 Larsa had succeeded in conquering Isin, and posed a serious threat to Babylon.
2. In Upper Mesopotamia, Assyria came under Amorite rule, and for a very brief period dominated most of the territory between the Zagros mountains and northern Syria. Assyria also put pressure on Babylon to the south.
3. Within a few years, Mari was able to reassert its independence, and for a time it ranked as the leading power in Upper Mesopotamia.
4. Mari reveals a way of life which was quite sophisticated. Its palace contained 300 rooms, including toilets and a drainage system. Economic life was highly organized, and military skills were quite advanced.
5. The victory in the power struggle was eventually to be won by neither Mari, Assyria nor Larsa, but by Babylon. Under Hammurabi, Babylon was able to defeat first Isin and Larsa, and then Assyria. Finally, Mari was taken and utterly destroyed, and by 1697 Hammurabi had built a considerable empire within the Fertile Crescent.
6. Literature and all forms of learning flourished, and Hammurabi's law code shed valuable light on the society of the day, particularly in the laws of the Pentateuch.

A Period of Confusion

1. In Egypt, a foreign people, the "Hyksos" came to power. Not much is known of them, but they were probably Canaanites or Amorites, who took advantage of Egypt's weakness.
2. They ruled Egypt for over one hundred years (1650–1540) and it is possible that Israel's ancestors entered Egypt at this time,
3. About 1540 the Hyksos capital was taken, the invaders driven out, and Egypt began a period of expansion that was to make her the greatest power in the world of her day.
4. In Mesopotamia, new peoples were pressing in from the northern mountains. In the 16th and 17th centuries there was an influx of Hurrians, particularly in the Upper Mesopotamian regions. Along with them were Indo-Aryans peoples who, by the end of the 16th century ruled all of Upper Mesopotamia.
5. Under such pressure, Babylon empire collapsed and Babylon itself was threatened.
6. Palestine also saw an influx of Hurrian and Indo-Aryans.
7. These people brought with them new weapons of war, particularly the chariot and the bow, together with new types of fortification. Cities grew and with it material culture.
8. About 1530, Babylon fell to the Hittites, a group of people who created an Empire in Asia-Minor. However, the Hittites quickly retreated to Asia-Minor, and Babylon passed into the hands of another group, the Kassites.
9. Thus by this time, Egypt was reviving, Mesopotamia was in confusion, and new peoples from the North-West and the East were pouring into the region.
10. It is against this background that the narratives of Genesis 12–50 need to be seen.

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Lecture Two

THE PATRIARCHAL AGE

LECTURE OUTLINE

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III. THE PATRIARCHS AND HISTORY

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B. THE PATRIARCHS AS HISTORICAL PERSONS.

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I. THE PROBLEM OF THE PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES A. NATURE OF THE MATERIAL

1. The narratives in Genesis are not historical documents which are contemporaneous with the events they speak about. Moses lived hundreds of years later.

2. Modern theological presuppositions have led to the traditions being viewed with a degree of scepticism. There tends to be a reluctance to rely on the early traditions as sources of historical information.

3. In recent years, archaeological research has shed more light on the patriarchal age, and consequently the narratives are being treated more sympathetically.

4. There are tens of thousands of texts which are contemporaneous with the Patriarchal period, and it has become clear that the narratives, far from depicting circumstances of a later age, fit quite clearly into the age which they describe.

5. Among the documents which have shed light on the Genesis narratives, are the Mari texts, Cappadocian texts, Babylonian and Nuzi texts, together with the Alalakh, Ras Shamra and Execration texts. These cover the period from the twentieth to the fourteenth centuries.

6. It becomes clear as the Genesis narratives are examined in the light of other documents from the period, that between the events and the account in the Pentateuch, there is a long unbroken stream of oral transmission of the traditions, before they reached their written form.

B. HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE TRADITIONS

1. The Biblical account must be recognised as extremely limited, as far as a history of Israel's origins are concerned.
2. Major events of the period are not mentioned. No single historical figure is named who can be identified from other sources.
3. No Hebrew ancestor has turned up in any contemporary inscription, and it is impossible to say within centuries when the Patriarchs of Israel actually lived.
4. Archeology can neither confirm or deny the Genesis narratives. The most it can do is suggest strong probability for the traditions.
5. We know nothing of the lives of the Patriarchs except what the Bible tells us. Detailed reconstruction is impossible.
6. It must always be remembered that the Biblical narratives are part of a theological history, and as such never seek to give a complete or comprehensive historical picture. This however does not make them any less reliable than other documents from the period.
7. It must also be understood that the events described were much more complex than the Biblical accounts indicate. Behind the simple account, of the Patriarchal families lie great clan migrations.

II. THE HISTORICAL SETTING

A. EARLY SECOND MILLENIUM

i) Names of the Period

1. Evidence that the patriarchs fit into the second millennium is overwhelming.
2. Names in the patriarchal narratives seem to have been in fairly common use during this period.
3. The names Abraham and Jacob are found in various forms in the Mari texts, and in certain Egyptian texts.
4. Benjamin, Zebulan, Gad, Dan, Levi, Ishmael, Ashar and Issachar or names closely related to them, can be found in the various texts of the period.
5. Thus, although the Biblical patriarchs themselves are not mentioned, it is clear that they fit into this period, rather than of a later era.

ii) Customs of the Period

1. Certain customs and incidents in the Biblical narrative are clarified from documents of the period, especially the Nuzu texts which come from the end of this period.
2. The adoption of slaves by childless couples was common practice. This explains the adoption of Eliezer by Abraham. (Gen. 15:1–4)
3. At Nuzu, marriage contracts provided that if the wife remained childless, she should provide her husband with a substitute. This explains Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham, and Rachel giving Bilhah to Jacob. (Gen. 16:2, 30:3)
4. Esau's giving up the birthright to Jacob is not as strange as it may seem at first. According to Nuzu texts, the birthright could be sold or transferred to another in the family. Texts from Alalakh indicate that a father could also designate which of his sons would be regarded as the firstborn, regardless of the order of natural birth. Examples of this are seen in the life of Jacob and Joseph. (Gen. 25:29–34, Gen. 48:22f., 49:3f.)
5. The relationship between Jacob and Laban is explained more clearly by reference to the Nuzu texts.

- i) The adoption of Jacob into the household and the marriage conditions laid down, (Gen. 31:50) are paralleled in Nuzian custom.
 - ii) Muzian custom also recognized as the leader of the household, the one who possessed the household idols. This ensured the title to the inheritance. (Gen. 31:19)
6. The elaborate blessings which are a feature of the Genesis narrative, are also a common feature of Nuzian society.
7. The transaction between Abraham and the Hittite for the cave of Machpelah, is a fine example of a custom that only applied to the early second millenium.
- i) Purchase price was weighed out (Gen. 23:16)
 - ii) Hittite practice required that trees be listed where property was sold. (Gen. 23:17)
 - iii) Under Hittite law, the purchaser of an entire property was obligated to certain services. Hence Abraham's desire to purchase only the cave, and Ephron's desire to sell both the field and the cave.
8. These, and other discoveries support the correctness of the Hebrew tradition which places the origins of the Patriarchs in the nineteenth and later centuries of mesopotamian history, rather than the more modern approach which would regard them as stories composed late in Israel's history.

iii) Mode of Life

1. The way of life and the nature of their wanderings fits perfectly into the cultural and political setting of the early second millenium.
2. They were semi-nomads who were searching for seasonal pasture.
3. They only farmed in a limited way and owned little land. (Gen. 26:12–14, Gen. 23, 33:19)
4. Until recently, it was asserted that the patriarchs were ass nomads, and that the mention of camels was an anachronism. However several archaeological discoveries have made it clear that camel had been domesticated and used as a means of transport at a date quite consistent with the Biblical references.
5. The areas in which the patriarchs are said to have travelled, accord well with an early second millenium date.
 - i) The Mari texts show that unhindered travel was possible over all parts of the Fertile Crescent at this time.
 - ii) The areas in which they moved are characteristic of contemporary nomadism. They roamed the central mountain range of Palestine, which was thinly populated, but not the north, the Jordan valley or the coastal plain. This accords well with the Middle Bronze Age, but would not hold for a later period.
 - iii) The same applies to the towns mentioned – e.g. Sheohem, Dothan, Bethel, etc. These cities were actually in existence at this time.

Seasonal occupation of the Negeb region took place between 21st to 19th centuries B.C., but not for a thousand years before, or eight hundred years after.

B. THE DATE OF THE PATRIARCHS

i) Limitations of the Evidence

1. It is impossible, even with all the above evidence, to precisely fix the date of the patriarchal migrations.
2. The most that can be said is that the events fit the Middle Bronze Age – i.e. between the twentieth and the late seventeenth or early 16th centuries.

3. There are no major events which can be precisely dated. The kings of Gen. 14 cannot be identified with any known kings 'of the period.

4. Biblical genealogies are not complete and so no reliable dates can be deduced from them.

ii) The Limits of the Patriarchal Period

1. Mile precision is impossible, there are certain limits which can be worked out.

2. The names, customs and areas in which they moved, all point to a period between the 20th and 16th centuries.

3. The power alliances indicated in Gen. 14 are typical of this period, but are not characteristic of the period before 2000 B.C. or after 1750 B.C.

4. The narrative appears to demand a time when Egyptian influence in Palestine was weak or non-existent.

5. There is little evidence in Genesis that Palestine was organised into city states. This state of affairs did not exist until the Late Bronze Age.

6. The concept of God as the "God of the fathers" is paralleled in Mesopotamian religion in the nineteenth century.

7. The Joseph narratives also help us to date the period more precisely. Several of the details in this account fit best into the time of the Hyksos rule. (1720–1570)

i) The high position of Joseph, a non-Egyptian.

ii) Hebrew occupation of Goshen (centre of Hyksos rule).

iii) Joseph's purchase of the land in the years of famine reflects the feudal upheaval in Egypt at this period.

8. Thus the available evidence would appear to limit the Patriarchal period to the Middle Bronze Age – i.e. between 2000 and 1750 B.C.

9. It must be remembered however that none of the above is to be taken as "proof". The most that can be said is that the Biblical narratives appear to be consistent with the facts thus far revealed by, archaeological research.

III. THE PATRIARCHS AND HISTORY

A. The MIGRATION

1. Biblical tradition is unanimous on the fact that Israel's ancestors originally came from Upper Mesopotamia.

2. Historical evidence points to the accuracy of this tradition.

i) People akin to the Hebrews were present in Haran and Nahor (cf. Gen. 11:32, 12:5, 24:10) in the first half of the second millennium.

ii) Laws and customs were similar among the population of this area at the same time as the patriarchs occupied Palestine.

3. Other evidence also lends weight to the tradition of the migration.

i) Israelite law (Exodus 21–23) is close to Mesopotamian legal tradition rather than Canaanite law, thus indicating a Mesopotamian background for Israel.

ii) The Creation and Flood stories together with the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel, have similarities to Mesopotamian stories, but not to either the literature of Canaan or Egypt.

4. The tradition concerning Ur as the original home of Abraham, is less easy to support, but there were ties of commerce and religion between Ur and Horan. Also the names Torah, Laban and Sarah are known to have been used in Ur.

B. THE PATRIARCHS AS HISTORICAL PERSONS

1. It is impossible today to dismiss the patriarchs as legendary. They are portrayed too realistically for this.
2. In all probability they are the chiefs of sizeable clans rather than single family units.
3. On the whole, they were men of peace. Their clans were not strong enough to wish the enmity of powerful chiefs.
4. It is probable that they belonged to a class of people known as the Habiru. These people lived on the fringes of the existing social structure, without citizenship or a fixed place in society. They were semi-nomadic, landless, status-less people.
5. This certainly fits the Biblical description and gives meaning to the Covenant. (Gen. 12:7, 17:1–8, 26:1–4, 28:13–15). Read also Heb. 11:8–16 in this light.
6. Ultimately their wanderings led their people into Egypt and slavery.

C. THE RELIGION OF THE PATRIARCHS

1. The real significance of the patriarchs lies not in their migratory history, but in their religious experiences and their place in salvation history.
2. They worshipped God under various names. (Cf. Gen. 17:1, 43:14; Gen. 14: 18–24; 21:33; 16:13; 22:14; 31:13; 35:7).
3. Their worship is quite unlike the pagan worship of Mesopotamia or Canaan, and certainly bears no relation to the religion of Egypt. There are, however, certain similarities to the type of worship found among Semitic nomads.
 - i) The establishment of a personal, covenantal relationship between the clan and their god was common.
 - ii) Names incorporating the name of the god were common. Cf. EL–IEZER, EL–IAB, EL – IMELECH.
4. Israel's ancestors had once been pagans, (Joshua 24:2, 14) but we do not know what gods they had worshipped.
5. While the patriarchal religion was personal and covenantal, based on promise, it was also a clan religion – the whole clan being regarded as the family of God. It is doubtful however at this stage (just as in later Israel) if God was worshipped to the exclusion of all other gods, by the whole clan (cf. Gen. 31:17–35).
6. The patriarchal cult was simple and was centred around animal sacrifice. The clan head acted in the place of the priest.
7. Israel's faith and indeed her structure as a nation, was shaped greatly by the religious experience of the patriarchs.
 - (i) Firstly there was the strong feeling of tribal solidarity springing from the solidarity between God and his people.
 - (ii) The idea of covenant and promise was deeply embedded in the mind and life of Israel.
8. Thus it is clear that although there are gaps, the Bible's picture of the patriarchs is deeply rooted in history. If we are to appreciate the fulness of salvation history, we must understand the cultural, social and religious roots of Israel which begin in this period.

Lecture. Three

Peter Nicol

THE FORMATIVE PERIOD

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. THE FORMATION OF ISRAEL – EXODUS AND CONQUEST

A. WESTERN ASIA IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE.

1. The Rise of the Egyptian Empire.
2. The Amarna Age.
3. The Nineteenth Dynasty.
4. Canaan in the Thirteenth Century.

B. THE TRADITIONS AND THE EVIDENCE.

1. The Egyptian Bondage and the Exodus.
2. The Wilderness Wanderings.
3. The Conquest of Palestine.
4. The Period of the Judges.

II. EARLY ISRAEL – ITS FAITH AND CONSTITUTION

A. THE TRIBAL SYSTEM

1. The Tribal League.
2. Its Institutions.

B. ISRAEL'S FAITH

1. The Covenant People.
2. The God of the Covenant.

1. THE FORMATION OF ISRAEL – EXODUS AND CONQUEST**A. WESTERN ASIA IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE****i) The Rise of the Egyptian Empire.**

1. The Pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1552–1306) were able to bring Egypt to a power and prestige never again equalled in her history.
2. The expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt laid the way open to Asia. The use of the chariot and the bow enabled the Egyptian armies to penetrate as far as the Euphrates.
3. At the same time they pushed south in Africa into Nubia.
4. In Upper Mesopotamia, Egypt clashed with a new kingdom, the Mitanni, a group of Indo–Aryans, who had inter–married with the Hurrian population.
5. The Mitanni were never completely defeated, and around 1410 a treaty was sealed by marriage. This practice was repeated for several generations, allowing Egypt to consolidate her Asian gains.

ii) The Amarna Age.

1. The empire remained intact until the 14th century, when an unexpected revolution threatened to destroy the empire and Egypt.

2. Amenophis IV worshipped the sun god Aten, and founded a new capital in honour of the new god. This created serious conflict with the priestly class who were followers of Amun.
3. During this period of internal conflict, the position of Egypt in Asia also deteriorated. In Palestine many of the small city states rebelled, while to the north, there was a resurgence of Hittite power.
4. The Hittites took control of Syria and Phoenicia, and soon controlled the Mittannian Empire.
5. With the death of Akhenaten, the new religion quickly disappeared. A power struggle developed, and for a time the generals ruled Egypt.

iv) The Nineteenth Dynasty

1. One of the generals, Ramesses I was able to pass on power to his son Sethos I, and so establish a new dynasty. Under their rule, Egypt set out to restore its rule in Asia.
2. Sethos restored Palestine to Egyptian control, but this made war with the Hittite king inevitable. It finally broke out in the reign of Ramesses II.
3. Early in the war the Egyptian army was badly beaten, and this sparked off revolts all over the empire. It took Ramesses five years to establish control, but further conquest in Syria was impossible.
4. A peace treaty was signed some ten years later, basically because neither side could strike a decisive blow, and both sides were exhausted.
5. Ramesses now turned to developing Egypt culturally, especially in the area of building. Texts from this period make constant mention of the Hapiru as slaves working on the projects.
6. Ramesses successors did not survive long. Western Asia was once more in turmoil, and Egypt could no longer control it. Invasions were coming from Libya and from the islands of the Aegean.
7. This invasion by the "Peoples of the Sea" completely destroyed the Hittite empire, and so by the end of the 13th century the only major power left standing was the growing kingdom of Assyria to the East.

(iv) Canaan in the Thirteenth Century

- 1: The population of Canaan was concentrated on the coast, the Plain of Esdraelan and the Jordan Valley. In race and language, they were not much different from Israel herself.
2. Other groups (Hittites, Hivites, Jebusites, Perizzites etc.) were non-Semitic, but fully integrated with the Canaanite-Amorite population.
3. Their material culture, though declining, was still impressive. Cities were well built, and trade in timber and textiles flourished.
4. They had developed writing to the extent of forming a linear alphabet which was the ancestor of our own.
5. Their religion was a debased form of paganism. Their chief god was Baal, the storm god, together with several female deities who were portrayed as goddesses of war, or pregnant mothers. Ritual prostitution, homosexuality and even infant sacrifice were part of their religion.
6. Politically, Canaan was still a collection of feudal city states, none being strong enough to unite the whole country.
7. East of Jordan, the kingdoms of Edom and Moab were being established, together with two Amorite states in Heshbon and Bashan. These kingdoms were more united and certainly stronger than the city states of Canaan.

B. THE TRADITIONS AND THE EVIDENCE

i) The Egyptian Bondage and, the Exodus.

1. There is no direct evidence in Egyptian records of Israel's presence in Egypt, but there is indirect evidence.

i). Egyptian names are prevalent in early Israel e.g. Moses, Hophni, Phinehas, etc.

ii). In Exodus 1:11 we are told that the Hebrews built Pithom and Raamses. These were in fact built by Sethos I and Ramesses II. Raamses was only so called until the eleventh century.

2. There is no extra-biblical evidence for the Exodus, but it is impossible to deny it in the light of the part which it played in the formation and development of the nation Israel.

3. The role of Moses is quite authentic. His Egyptian background is in no way improbable, and his desert sojourn with Midianites, especially the clan known as the Kenites fits the period.

4. The plagues of Egypt also ring true, as most of these would affect Egypt during the inundation of the Nile. The miracle is not so much what happened, but in the way it happened, and Moses' prediction, and in the fact that Israel was untouched.

5. The crossing of the Red Sea had always caused scholars difficulty until it was recognised that the "Yam Suph" is in reality the Sea of Reeds. It is far more likely that this body of water would be parted by an east wind, and it is much more likely to be the route followed by Israel in its escape.

6. The fact that there is no Egyptian record of the Exodus is not surprising, since the Pharaohs were not in the habit of recording their reversals.

7. The date of the Exodus is one of the most perplexing problems in the whole of Hebrew history. Some scholars place the Exodus in the middle of the 15th century, while others place it in the first half of the 13th century.

8. As the evidence is evaluated the thirteenth century date appears to be the more likely.

9. For the Hebrews to have helped build Anaris (Raamses) they must have been in Egypt some time between 1305–1224.

10. Israel's detour around Edam and Moab demands a 13th century date, since these kingdoms were not (as far as we know) established before that time.

11. Excavations at Hazor show that the last Canaanite city there fell during the 13th century, and this is in conformity with Joshua 11:10 ff.,

12. The evidence though not conclusive, points to Sethos I being the Pharaoh who oppressed Israel, and Ramesses II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

ii) THE WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

1. The mass escape of a captive people was not unknown in the Near East. A similar event took place in the 15th century by a group under Hittite control.

2. The actual route of the Exodus is uncertain since almost all the places mentioned, including Sinai (Horeb) are unable to be positively identified. This is so because many of the places were names in connection with events during the Exodus, and were lost when the population moved on.

3. The traditional southerly route is probably the more likely for a number of reasons.

1. Quails (Num. 11:31) would not be found on the Mediterranean coast in spring, but only in the autumn.

2. The Kenites (Smiths) would be located in the south near the copper mines of Sinai.

3. Ex. 13:17 ff makes it clear, that they did not take a northern route (more direct), but a round about route.

That is certain is that it was the desert experience which gave Israel the law and the covenant and which made her a people – a people who worshipped YAHWEH.

i. Before this time there is no trace of Yahwism in Palestine or elsewhere. 2. Yet from her beginnings, Israel worshipped Yahweh.

5. Little can be said about Israel's further wanderings, as this type of wandering is not verifiable by external evidence. However, the total picture is authentic. It would have been difficult to break through from the south-east due to the strong hold which Edom and Moab had on the land in the 13th century.

6. The incident with Balaam is quite typical of the period. Diviners were often called upon to curse an enemy. The cursing took place before the sun had risen and three curses were usual. cf. Numb. 22–24.

iii) The Conquest of Palestine

1. The conquest of Canaan was a mixture of swift decisive campaigns by all the tribes, together with a slower consolidating process by individual clans.

2. Three distinct stages are discernable.

1. Occupation of Eastern Palestine prior to the fall of Jericho.

2. The capture of Jericho, Ai, the defeat of the five kings, and the capture of Lachish and Hebron.

3. Galilee and North Palestine – Hazor.

3. Some sizeable cities, such as Jerusalem and Megiddo were still to be occupied, and the whole conquest was still to be consolidated. This was not completed in Joshua's lifetime.

4. Archaeological excavations give clear indications of violence and destruction during the second half of the 13th century. Work on sites at Bethel Ai, Lachish, Debir and Hazor, all help to confirm the Biblical account. Some show early Israelite occupation immediately after their destruction.

5. The situation at Jericho is different that was once thought to be Joshua's Jericho has now been shown to be an earlier occupation of the site. Virtually nothing remains of Late Bronze Age Jericho, which is the one Joshua captured.

6. Independent evidence in the form of an Egyptian inscription witnesses to the fact that Israel occupied the land at least by 1220 B.C.

7. Finally then, despite the fact that Canaanite enclaves remained in their midst and fighting continued for years, the Israelites were in possession of the land.

8. Soon after the conquest, all the components of Israel, both those who had crossed the desert and those who had joined them in Palestine, met at Shechem and by a covenant with Yahweh agreed to be his people and to worship him alone. Israel's history as a people had now begun.

iv) The Period of the Judges.

1. The Israelite occupation was completed probably by the end of the 13th century. Egypt's weakness enabled Israel to establish herself firmly.

2. The Egyptian Empire faded away as Egypt was repeatedly attacked by the Libyans and the People of the Sea.

3. During this period, internal conditions also deteriorated and the priesthood became as powerful as the Pharaohs and was virtually an independent rival.

4. In Western Asia, no major power was able to capitalize on Egypt's weakness.

5. Syria and Upper Mesopotamia became a series of small Aramean states, while the coastlands of Canaan were occupied by the Philistines and other People from the Sea.

6. The Philistines expanded inland, and became a threat to Israel.

7. Our knowledge of Israel's first two centuries is very sketchy. The general picture, of intermittent fighting, followed by periods of peace, tallies perfectly with archaeological evidence.

8. Geographical factors, together with local interests, tended to disunite Israel. It was a period of adjustment. Agricultural and technical skills had to be learned and the economy developed.
9. Elements of Canaanite culture and religion gradually crept into Israel's life and the Book of Judges reflects this unsettled period.
10. As idolatry increased, so did Canaanite resistance.
 1. Moab asserted its authority and was temporarily halted by Ehud.
 2. Hazor presented a formidable threat until finally defeated by Barak.
 3. The Midinnites and Amalekites created havoc in Ssdraelon until Gideon defeated them in a surprise night attack. He also revived briefly the worship of Yahweh.
 4. Jephthah and Samson won victories over the Ammonites and the Philistines respectively. However it is clear that the Philistines were never really defeated, and they were to be the major threat to Israel in the century that followed.
11. During this period the tribal league was planed under severe pressures.
 1. Reuben had been almost wiped out, probably by Moabite aggression.
 2. Dan was forced to migrate north due to pressure from the Philistines (Judges 1:34–36 ch. 18)
 3. Rivalry between clans led to civil war (Judges 12:1–6 ch. 20)
12. Despite these pressures, Israel as a people survived, but it was clear that changes in the tribal system were in the wind. It took the Philistine crisis to bring matters to a head, and Israel moved towards monarchy.

II. EARLY ISRAEL – ITS FAITH AND CONSTITUTION.

A. THE TRIBAL SYSTEM

i) The Tribal League

1. The tribal system was an expression of Israel's covenant faith. Even though some tribes were able to take up dominant roles (e.g. Judah, and Joseph), while, others (Reuben and Simeon) quickly lost significance, yet all were regarded as equal.
2. The number twelve was rigidly held to, even though some were absorbed or split into two (of. Josh. 19:1–9 and the half tribes of Manasseh).
3. Israel was tribal, not national. There was no central government or capital city, and no administrative machinery.
4. The elders of each clan arbitrated in disputes. The focal point was the tent–shrine, where the tribesmen met on feast days to renew their allegiance to Yahweh, and to deal with matters of common interest.
5. In times of danger, a Judge would arise, but his authority was neither absolute, permanent nor hereditary. He was a man who gave evidence that the spirit of God was upon him.
6. There was no standing army. In time of danger the clans were rallied. They were obligated to respond but could not be compelled to do so.
7. The origins of the covenant league are to be found at Sinai, although the tribal divisions extend back much farther. (Numbers ch.2)
8. As they moved into Palestine, other groups were absorbed, but always into the existing structure. (cf. Joshua 24:14 ff)

ii) The Institutions.

1. The central shrine which housed the Ark of the Covenant was central to Israel's life. Originally a tent-shrine (tabernacle) it was probably replaced by a permanent structure before the end of the Judges (I Sam. 1:9; 3:3).
2. Other shrines did exist and were allowed, but the centre of Israel's corporate life was the shrine which housed the Ark. It was normally located at Shiloh.
3. The clergy who presided over the tent and its cultic worship were Levites. This did not mean that they all came from the tribe of Levi, but rather that they were men bound by a vow to serve YAHWEH (cf. I Sam. 1:1).
4. Israel's cult centred around three annual feasts, Passover, Weeks and Ingathering. The important distinction between these festivals and those of other cultures, is their association with the mighty acts of Yahweh towards Israel, and the time of covenant renewal.
5. The sacrificial system did not appear to assume full importance until a permanent Temple was built, but it was, no doubt practiced in early Israel.
6. Without doubt, covenant-law was the central factor in Israel's life. The law of the Covenant is similar in structure to other covenants used in the Near East in the second millennium B.C.

1. Proposer of covenant identified (Ex. 20:1)
2. Historical relationships (Ex. 20:2)
3. Obligations, general (Ex. 20:3–17) and detailed (Ex. 21–23) 1+. Prohibition against foreign alliances (Ex. 34:14)

5. Covenant to be read publicly to each generation (Deut. 31:10–13)

6. Blessings and curses attendant on the covenant (Deut. 28:1–14.) .

This covenant became the basis of Israel's social development and was the corner stone of her judicial system.

B. ISRAEL'S FAITH

i) The Covenant People

1. Israel's idea of God was unique in the ancient world, but it did not rest on abstract theological ideas. Israel's faith was based on the historical experiences of deliverance from Egypt and the reception of the covenant at Sinai, by which they became God's people.
2. The idea of election is strong right from the beginning of their history. This calling was seen to be God's act of grace and the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham.
3. As a covenant people, Israel accepted the kingship of Yahweh, and promised Him obedience.
4. Israel was in effect a theocracy, but her king was no local god. He was the God of all the world and His demands were moral not materialistic.
5. Israel's faith was also characterized by a confidence in the promises of Yahweh and a sense of divine purpose in history. The covenant was not only a covenant of obedience, but a covenant of hope. (cf. Deut. 33:13–17, 25–29, Numb. 21+:9) .

ii) The God of the Covenant

1. The meaning of the name YAHWEH is disputed, but it is probable that the revelation to Moses meant "It is he who causes to be, what comes into existence" or "Yahweh who brings into being" i.e. Moses claim for God was that Yahweh was the God above all gods.
2. Israel was forbidden to worship any other god. Yahweh, unlike the gods of Egypt, Canaan and Mesopotamia, had no consort, headed no pantheon and had no progeny. He alone is the totality of deity.

3. Israel did not deny the existence of other gods, but what she did do was to deny them status as gods. Only one God was God – Yahweh.
4. The prohibition of images set Yahwism apart from all other current religions. Even when Israel moved into idolatry, she never tried to make an idol–image of Yahweh. No image of Yahweh has ever been found in archaeological excavations.
5. Israel did not spiritualize God. He was thought of as intensely personal and yet as the Holy One who could not be approached lightly.
6. Yahweh differed in his essential nature from the pagan gods. He was not localized or identified with any natural force or heavenly body. He was above nature and history and controlled and directed both.
7. His power was seen basically in the unrepeatable events of history which expressed His purposes for the world which He created.
8. He was no maintainer of the status quo, to be ritually appeased, but rather a God who called His people to participate in the ongoing of His kingdom.

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Lecture Four

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY Peter Nicol

ISRAEL UNDER THE MONARCHY**LECTURE O U T L I N E****I. THE RISE OF THE MONARCHY****A. FIRST STEPS – SAUL**

1. The Philistine Crisis.
2. King Saul.
3. Saul's Failure.

B. ISRAEL UNITED – DAVID

1. David's Rise of Power.
2. Consolidation.
3. The Empire.
4. The Davidic State.
5. The Latter Years.

C. ISRAEL UNITED – SOLOMON

1. The National Policy.
2. Trade and Commerce.
3. The Golden Age.
4. The Burden of the Monarchy.
5. The Theological Problem.

I. THE RISE OF THE MONARCHY**A. FIRST STEPS – SAUL****i) The Philistine Crisis**

1. The Philistines were really a military aristocracy who ruled a predominantly Canaanite population.
2. They saw'' Israel as a threat to the security of their trade routes and made moves to gain control of the whole of Western Palestine.
3. Their disciplined army together with their use of the chariot and iron weapons meant that the ill-trained, ill-equipped, poorly organized tribal army of Israel stood little chance in open battle.
4. What began as a series of border incidents especially against Judah and Dan, turned into a full scale war in which the Israelite army was cut to pieces near Aphek. (I Sam. 4).
5. The Ark was captured, Shiloh was taken and the land placed under the control of Philistine garrisons.
6. The old tribal league was destroyed and would never be recreated. The priest-hood was discredited.
7. During this period Samuel sought to keep the tribes together, moving from shrine to shrine throughout Israel, administering the covenant law among the clans. (I Sam. 7:15-17).
8. Little is known about what happened during the Philistine occupation, but it is clear that the leaders of the clans saw the need for some kind of central control, if the Philistine menace was to be overcome.

ii) King Saul

1. The institution of the monarchy was totally foreign to Israel's tradition, and so evoked not only support, but also bitter opposition.
2. It is clear that Samuel acted as he did in the face of popular demand from the tribal elders. However he was afraid of where monarchy would lead, and was to become Saul's main opponent.
3. Saul was accepted for two reasons:–
 - i) He was designated king by the prophets. (I Sam. 10:1–16)
 - ii) He was able to lead the people against Ammon and win a notable victory, and so win the support of Israel. (I Sam. 11)
4. These things convinced the people that Saul was Yahweh's chosen one, and they brought him to Gilgal and there proclaimed him king over Israel.
5. During the early part of Saul's rule, the Philistines were ejected from the mountains and while this by no means ended the Philistine threat, it did give Israel hope for the future. (I Sam. chs.13 & 14).
6. Saul's whole reign was spent in warfare.
 - i) He defeated Amelek in the South. It was this affair which caused Samuel to break with Saul. (ch.15)
 - ii) He took harsh measures against the Gibeonites, possibly because of their collaboration with the Philistines.
7. Israel's monarchy was quite unique.
 - i) It was not patterned on the feudal city–state system of either Canaan or Philistia.
 - ii) Saul was a charismatic leader, who was elevated to the position of king. He still carried out the function of the judge.
 - iii) His position was confirmed not so much by his victories, as by his anointing by Samuel.
8. Saul made no changes in the internal structure of Israel. he had no administration, no officials, no court.
9. While he never led all of Israel, he came closer to it than any of the Judges, so that he was in no way a merely tribal king. During his rule the beginnings of a standing army and a military aristocracy were in evidence.

iii) Saul's Failure.

1. Saul's reign ultimately was a failure and was to leave Israel in a worse position than before.
2. Part of the failure was due to Saul's own temperament. He showed signs of emotional instability. Added to this was his own ambition.
3. He clashed with Samuel and violated the sacred law concerning Holy War. His presumption in usurping the function of the priesthood led to Samuel publicly revoking his kingship.
4. His decline and downfall followed rapidly. It was the popularity of David which finally drove Saul beyond the bounds of rational behaviour. He feared that the people would make David king, and made repeated attempts on David's life.
5. David was forced to flee, and Saul, in his anger, even had the priestly family of Shiloh butchered because of their support of David. This action did irreparable harm to Saul, since it shocked even his supporters and drove the priesthood to support David. (I Sam. 22:17–23).
6. In the wilds of Judah, David's kinsmen, together with fugitives, and other dissatisfied individuals, rallied around him, and a fighting force of 400 men soon emerged.

the Philistines. He soon found that even the population of Judah resented or feared him. (23:12, 25:10, 26:1) and became a vassal of Achish, king of Gath. (I Sam. 27:1–4).

8. By false reports, he convinced Achish that he was conducting raids into Judah. In fact he was campaigning against the Amalekites and others south of Judah, and distributing the booty to the clans in the Negeb. In this way he convinced his own people of his loyalty.

9. The Philistine war had lagged somewhat, but the defection of David encouraged the Philistine forces to move against Saul. At the foot of Mount Gilboa, the Israelite army was cut to pieces. Saul's three sons were killed and Saul himself committed suicide. David was not trusted by the Philistines and took no part in this battle.

B. ISRAEL UNITED – DAVID (1000 – 961 B.C.)

i) David's Rise to Power

1. The Philistines once more established garrisons in the central mountain range, and Israel's position appeared hopeless.

2. Eshbaal, Saul's surviving son, was made king over the northern region, but appears to have had only partial support from the tribes.

3. David became king over Judah with Philistine blessing, and was anointed at Hebron. The real significance in this step lies in the fact that Judah acclaimed him as king, without any reference to the other tribes. Judah was beginning to emerge as a separate entity alongside Israel.

4. David strengthened his position by diplomatic means.

i) He avoided open war with Eshbaal, although there were border skirmishes.

ii) He made alliances with Ammon and Geshur and tried to win over Jabesh–Gilead (a people loyal to Saul.)

5. Finally Abner and Eshbaal quarrelled, and Abner transferred his loyalty to David. Eshbaal was murdered by two of his officers, who hoped to gain David's favour. David denounced their action and had them executed.

6. The people now flocked to support David and acclaimed him king over all Israel. He was seen as the man upon whom Yahweh's spirit rested. Thus a leader by divine designation was again to become king.

7. The effect was to unite under one military leader, the southern and the northern clans, and so create a new state. As it turned out, the state was a brittle one. Section differences between the two areas together with the claims of Saul's kinsmen, were problems that the monarchy never solved.

ii) Consolidations

1. David's rise to power meant an inevitable conflict with the Philistines. The first phase took place near Jerusalem (II Sam. 5:17–25), where the Philistines attempted to cut David off from the Northern tribes. They failed, and were driven from the mountains.

2. The remainder of the war is not clear, but it appears that David took the offensive and eventually occupied the coastal plain as far south as Joppa. Lath and Ekron were taken by Israel, but the other cities Ashdad, Ashkelon and Gaza were not destroyed, probably because David wished to avoid conflict with Egypt. The Philistine threat was ended, and they were forced to recognize Israelite supremacy. (II Sam. 8:12).

3. David now turned to internal matters. Jerusalem was captured and made the centre of administration. The choice was excellent, as it offended neither the north or the south.

4. His next step was to transfer the Ark to Jerusalem. A new tent–shrine was erected and new priests were appointed. Thus Jerusalem became the religious and political centre of the new Israel. This act did more to bind Israel to David than anything else.

5. Other Canaanite city states were captured, along the coastal plain, in Esdraelon and in Galilee. In reality this completed the conquest of Canaan.

6. This consolidation brought its own problems. "Israel" now denoted a geographical entity made up of Israelites and Canaanites. This meant that Israel had to make further adjustments as she came more and more into conflict with Canaanite culture and religion.

iii) The Empire.

1. Having put his own house in order, David embarked on a campaign of conquest against his neighbours.

2. His first campaign was against Ammon. Joab attacked Rabbah and eventually after fighting both the Ammonites and the Arameans, whom they had appealed to for help, he was able to take the city. It was during this campaign that David was involved in the adulterous affair with Bathsheba.

3. Moab and Edom (southern Transjordan) was also conquered. The Moabite army was crippled by mass executions and severe reprisals were taken against Edom. Moab became a vassal state while Edom was ruled as a conquered province.

4. Because of their interference in the Ammonite war, David turned on Syria. Hadadezer was defeated, his chariots captured and then Damascus captured. David placed garrisons in Damascus and ruled it as a province of the Empire.

5. This campaign in particular made David a wealthy king. Vast supplies of copper were taken from Syria, and the king of Hamath and the king of Tyre sent lavish gifts David to cement friendship treaties.

6. Thus in a few years David's conquests had transformed Israel into the leading power in Palestine and Syria.

iv) The Davidic State

1. Israel was no longer a tribal confederacy led by a charismatic leader, but a complex empire organized under the crown.

2. The centre of the new Israel was David. It was David's personal army, rather than tribal levies which had conquered these people and held them subject. Concentration of power in the crown was inevitable.

3. We know little of how David administered the Empire. The lists of officers given in II Sam. 8:15–18 and 20:23–26 indicate a bureaucracy modelled on Egyptian lines.

4. There is no record of systematic taxation, but it is probable that the census of ch.24 was the groundwork for taxation and conscription. The priests branded it as a sin against Yahweh.

5. Judicial matters were handled by the elders of the cities, but there was the right of appeal to the king.

6. David sought to promote the religious cult both by his personal involvement, and by his plans to resettle the Levites throughout the kingdom.

7. His royal court was considerable in size, and consisted of his wives and their children, together with numerous people who ate at the king's table. He also possessed his own personal body guard consisting of 30 picked troops.

v) The Latter Years

1. David's declining years were marred by intrigue and violence which placed the future of the state in doubt.

2. Most important was the question of succession. The problem was which of David's sons would succeed him.

3. Rivalries developed and David appeared to be reluctant to settle the question.
4. The first and most serious crisis was Absalom's rebellion. (II Sam. 13–19) After a period of exile (for murdering his half brother) Absalom was allowed to return, and began to plot against his father. It was a carefully planned rebellion, and erupted when Absalom had himself proclaimed king, and then marched on Jerusalem with a considerable force, so that David was obliged to flee.
5. While it is clear that Absalom had support even in David's own household, the majority of Israel did not support him, and Joab made short work of Absalom's army. The rebellion fell apart.
6. A fresh revolt broke out when David promised the elders of Judah that Joab would be replaced as head of the army by Amasa the rebel general. (David could not forgive Joab for killing Absalom). The northern tribes were enraged and sought to withdraw Northern Israel from its Union with Judah under David.
7. The leader of the rebellion was the Benjamite Sheba ben Bichri. The rebel–lion fizzled when Joab killed Amasa, resumed control of the army and then moved against Sheba, who was murdered by citizens loyal to David. Again it was the professional troops that were the deciding factor.
8. Still David did not declare publicly which of his sons would succeed him, and in his old age, he faced yet another rebellion. Adonijah tried to seize the throne, He split David's support by gaining the loyalty of Joab the general and Abiathar the high priest, together with other court dignitaries.

The plot was foiled when Nathan, Zadok and Benaiah persuaded David to pro–claim Solomon as king at once. The whole episode was clearly one of court intrigue, with various people hoping to benefit by their support of one or other of the parties.

C. ISRAEL UNITED – SOLOMON (961 –. 922)

i) The National Policy

1. Solomon is a difficult person to assess. He was obviously an astute person, but at the same time displayed fatal blows of judgement which were ultimately to destroy the unity of the Empire.
2. He was pre–eminently a statesman not a warrior, who saw his task as the preservation of the Empire, rather than its enlargement.
3. After his father's death, he moved quickly to remove all who might challenge his authority.
 - i Adonijah was executed.
 - ii Abiathar was banished and Joab was murdered by Benaiah.
 - iii Shimei, who represented the house of Saul was also executed.

Solomon sought to maintain peace through a series of alliances, many of which were sealed by marriage to foreign noblewomen.

5. These alliances included one with Egypt, (revealing just how weak Egypt had become) and a more important one with Tyre.
6. As a result of the alliance with Tyre, a growing maritime power, Solomon established new avenues of trade and industry which were to make Israel economically powerful.
7. Solomon secured the national defense by fortifying key cities and turning them into a chain of military bases to protect the heartland of Israel. He developed the army as a standing army and by greater use of the chariot. (4,000 horses, 1,400 chariots, 12,000 men to man them).
8. Generally the Empire remained intact. There was constant trouble in Edom, but it was not lost to the Empire. In Syria the situation was more serious

Rezon seized Damascus and made himself king, and Israel's hold over Syria weakened. Probably Solomon retained nominal control only over his Aramean holdings.

ii) Trade and Commerce

1. It is in the realm of trade and industry that we see Solomon's true genius.
2. He was aware of the possibilities of sea trade, and constructed a fleet at Ezion-geber which traded along the Arabian coast and the African coast, as far south as Ophir (Somaliland). Gold, silver, wood, jewels and ivory were the main items brought back from this area.
3. He was also interested in the overland trade with the South. The visit of the Queen of Sheba (from the Sabean kingdom – Yemen) was largely to secure trade concessions for Sabean caravans on their way to Syria and Mesopotamia. Taxes and duties from the Arabian trade helped to keep Solomon's treasury in a healthy state.
4. Probably Solomon's exports consisted largely of copper, mined and smelted in the Arabah, south of the Dead Sea.
5. He traded also in horses from Cilicia and chariots from Egypt, and had a monopoly over these products. Surrounding nations could only buy through Solomon.

iii) The Golden Age.

1. Solomon's reign was one of great prosperity, security and material plenty. It was an age which Israel would never know again.
2. The standard of living rose throughout the land. Cities grew, productivity increased and the population probably doubled between the time of Saul and Solomon.
3. Solomon's wealth was invested in numerous building projects.
 - i) These included new cities, fortifications, and other military installations.
 - ii) The Temple however, was the most important of these projects, taking seven years to complete.
 - iii) Adjacent to the Temple there was a vast complex of State buildings – the palace, the treasury, the judgement hall and a minor palace for Pharaoh's daughter.
4. Cultural pursuits were not lacking during this period.
 - i) Literature was important during this period, particularly historical literature and Wisdom literature (Proverbs).
 - ii) Music and psalmody flourished, but little is known about the musical techniques of the day.

iv) The Burden of –the Monarchy

1. Solomon's reign had its dark side as well. There were financial problems, since the costs of such enormous projects such as the palace and the temple, outran the income.
2. This, together with military spending and the costs of administration, meant that the National Budget was too high.
3. To overcome the problem, Solomon decided to tax his people.
 - i) The land was divided into twelve districts, each having its own governor.
 - ii) Each district was to provide for the court for one month.
4. The effect was to weaken the old tribal system.
 - i) Canaanite were integrated more thoroughly.
 - ii) Power was consolidated in the King's hands.
 - iii) In place of twelve tribes caring for a central shrine, were twelve districts being taxed to support Solomon's court. This created discontent.

5 The need for labour was chronic, and so Solomon introduced the corvee, i.e. labour gangs were conscripted from Israel itself. This created tremendous resentment among the clans, who were proud of their freedom.

6. To further alleviate the financial burdens, Solomon sold certain cities and territory to Tyre, in payment for building materials. (I Kings 9:10–14).

7. Perhaps the most significant change during this period was the change taking place in Israel.

i) The tribal confederacy had become a national state. Tribal independence was lost and basis of social obligation was no longer the covenant, but the state, with its political, financial, and military liabilities.

ii) Commercial and industrial development meant the urbanization of life and a further break up of tribal ties and patterns.

iii) Distinct class structures appeared and the gap between rich and poor increased.

iv) Religious life also revolved around the crown. Samuel had renounced Saul and so broke his authority, but it was Solomon who broke Abiathar:

v) The Theological Problem of the Monarchy

1. To many, the reigns of David and Solomon seemed to be the fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham. The fact was stressed that Yahweh had made a covenant with David that his line would rule for ever, and that Zion would be Yahweh's dwelling place for eternity.

2. The whole pattern of kingship was linked strongly to Yahwism. The king was Yahweh's chosen vice-regent, and thus the theory arose that the state could never fall, The promises to David, (out of which eventually arose Israel's Messianic hope) and the presence of Yahweh in his Temple, guaranteed the continuance of the state.

3, However, there was tension; as many were not prepared to accept the Davidic state as a divinely ordained institution. Others could not accept the claims of the Davidic house to rule forever, and so rejected the Davidic succession in principle. Still others rejected the monarchy on the grounds of its tyrannical rule as evidenced during Solomon's reign.

4. Resentment grew, and the differences between the old tribal tradition and the claims of the new order were never resolved. The result was that by the end of Solomon's reign, the northern tribes had been completely alienated from the house of David.

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THE MONARCHY CONTINUED.

LECTURE O U T L I N E

II. FROM SOLOMON TO THE MID EIGHTH CENTURY

A. THE DIVIDED MONARCHY.

1. The Schism.
2. The Rival States.
3. Internal Affairs.

B. THE PERIOD FROM OMRI TO JEHU (876–814.2)

1. Israel's Recovery.
2. Internal Policies.
3. The Fall of the House of Omri.
4. Internal Affairs in Judah. (873–837)

C. ISRAEL AND JUDAH TO THE 1ZD EIGHTH CENTURY

1. Half a Century of Weakness.
2. Resurgence.
3. Israel's Sickness.
4. The Prophetic Protest.

II. FROM SOLOMON TO THE MID EIGHTH CENTURY

A. THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

i) The Schism

1. Solomon's death was the signal for the pent-up feelings of the northern people to erupt. Rehoboam's arrogance made the breach inevitable.
2. He was accepted by Judah, but the northern tribes demanded that the taxation and cornee system instituted by Solomon be lightened. Rehoboam, rejecting the advice of hi elders, refused their demands and Israel seceded from the state, and named J boam as their king.
3. The prophets of both north and south supported the schism (I Kings 11:29–39; 12:21–24). In fact it was a strong indication of the desire to return to the old tribal covenant-league. They resented Solomon's patronage of foreign cults. (11:1–8)
4. The empire was lost overnight, since neither the north or the south had the power to hold it.
 - i) The Aramean territories were increasingly dominated by Damascus.
 - ii) The Philistines, except for Gath, reasserted their independence, but posed no real threat to Judah.
 - iii) Ammon and Moab also regained their independence, but it seems that Edom was still controlled, at least to some extent by Judah.
5. Israel and Judah were now second-rate states. Added to their territorial losses, there were heavy economic set-backs. Tribute ceased to flow in, and trade monopolies were broken.

ii) The Rival States

1. The schism was followed by two generations of sporadic fighting which was inconclusive.

2. No major war took place between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Judah was not strong enough, and Israel was more concerned with defending its independence.
3. The only major offensive was Rehoboam's occupation of Benjamite territory around Jerusalem.
4. More serious was the invasion of Palestine by the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak. The Egyptian armies devastated Palestine from one end to the other. Both Israel and Judah were defeated and forced to pay heavy tribute.
5. Egypt was unable to maintain its position (due to internal weakness) and was forced to withdraw. However, the effect was to weaken Judah to such an extent that there was no hope of a forcible reunion of the two states.
6. Frontier fighting continued throughout the reign of Abijah and Asa. (II Chron. 13) Jeroboam was defeated, but the gains were short lived. Asa was forced to meet another Egyptian invasion from the south. He defeated the Egyptian forces, but in the meantime Baasha had seized power in Israel, and took the offensive against Asa.
7. Jerusalem was threatened (I Kings 15:16–22), but Asa was able to persuade Benhadad of Damascus to attack Galilee, thus forcing Baasha to withdraw. Asa hastily strengthened the defenses of Geba and Mizpah, thus removing the capital from immediate danger.
8. At this point it was apparent that neither side would win, and the war was dropped by both sides.

iii) Internal Affairs

1. Jeroboam had the task of creating a new state. That he succeeded, is evidence of his many abilities.
2. He chose Shechem as his capital. It had cultic connections and was a Canaanite enclave which would arouse a minimum of tribal jealousy. The capital was later moved to Tirzah.
3. We know little of his military or administrative structures, but they probably differed little from Solomon's, except that they did not impose such harsh burdens.
4. His most significant action was to establish a religious cult to rival that of Jerusalem. (I Kings 12:26–33). He established shrines at Bethel and Dan and instituted an annual feast to rival that in Jerusalem.
5. He revived old traditions and practices, but tied them too closely to features which could be branded as idolatrous (e.g. the golden bulls – I Kings 12:28) The prophets of the north found his religious policy intolerable, and some were to break with him.
6. Dynastic changes were common in Israel. Instability was its chief characteristic, Dynastic succession was still not an acceptable concept. Kingship was still regarded as charismatic and prophetic support was important.
7. When Jeroboam died, his son Nadab tried to succeed him, but was soon assassinated by Baasha. His son tried to succeed him, but was in turn assassinated by Zimri. Within a week Omri had challenged him and Zimri, who had neither prophetic nor popular support, committed suicide.
8. Judah presents a different picture. There were no dynastic changes. The major tension was between the religious conservatism of the rural population, and the syncretistic paganizing tendencies of the aristocracy. (cf. I Kings 14:21, 31; 15:2).
9. Reaction set in during the reign of Asa, and when he reached manhood, he instituted reforms which freed Judah from pagan cults. (I Kings 15:11–15)
10. Judah entered a period of relative peace and prosperity late in Asa's reign.

B. THE PERIOD FROM OMRI TO JEHU (876–842)

i) Israel's Recovery

1. After fifty years of instability, Israel was restored to a measure of strength and stability by the policies of Omri and his successors.
2. Omri and Ahab secured relations with Judah and the Phoenicians by marriage alliances (I Kings 16:31, 2 Kings 8:18), and in doing so, improved Israel's military and commercial position.
3. In conjunction with Judah, Israel reconquered the Transjordanian states with the exception of Ammon. Israel took Moab, while Judah (under Jehoshaphat) took Edom, and pushed west into Philistine territory.
4. Israel, under Ahab, was also able to defeat the Aramean forces to the north, and force Benhadad to enter into an alliance. Part of the reason for this truce was the threat from Assyria. The kings of the West formed a defensive coalition, which was able to stave off temporarily, the Assyrian advance.

ii) Internal Policies

1. Omri shifted the capital to Samaria and strengthened the defences of key cities.
2. The army was developed, particularly chariotry.
3. Much of this development was at the expense of the general populace. The decline of the covenant law tended to place the poor at the mercy of the rich. Large estates grew at the expense of the small landholders. (I Kings 21).
4. Ahab's wife Jezebel, created a crisis by seeking to make the cult of Baal the official religion of the court.
5. Wholesale apostasy soon threatened Israel, and Ahab, although a nominal Yahwist, permitted the policy, probably to gain the support of the Canaanite population.
6. As Jezebel's policy met resistance, she used harsh repressive measures, especially against the prophets of Yahweh. The result was a schism in the prophetic order, as some yielded to, and others resisted the royal pressures. (I Kings 22:1–28).
7. It was during this period that Elijah stood firm against the flood of paganism. Indeed he declared war against the pagan state and its pagan god, and encouraged the prophets to stand firm.

iii) The Fall of the House of Omri

1. Ahab's successors, Ahaziah and Jehoram were unable to quell the pent up anger which was building up against their pagan policies. Reform was impossible as long as Jezebel lived.
2. The external situation worsened. The war with Damascians (which had led to Ahab's death) dragged on, and Moab also rebelled.
3. In Judah, the situation was little better. Jehoshaphat was succeeded by Jehoram (Not the king of Israel above) and during his reign Edom and the sea port of Ezion-geber were lost.
4. In Israel opposition to the house of Omri mounted. It came basically from the prophetic order, headed by Elisha. Foreign entanglements, foreign customs, the worship of foreign gods and disregard of the covenant, gave them justification for their opposition.
5. There was also dissatisfaction within the army, probably at the way in which the war with Aram was being conducted.
6. Other conservative elements, such as the Rechabites, were ready for rebellion and a return to the old patterns of life.

7. The revolution came in 842, when Elisha ordered that Jehu (the general) be anointed as king.
8. With the support of the army, Jehu confronted Jehoram; killed him, and proceeded to exterminate the whole family and court of the house of Omri.
9. He then moved on Samaria, and had the worshippers of Baal butchered. The temple was destroyed and officially at least, the cult of Baal was destroyed.
10. The purge of Jehu also had its effect on Judah, since one of the victims was Ahaziah, king of Judah.

iv) Internal Affairs in Judah (873 – 837)

1. Jehoshaphat, who succeeded Asa, was a just and able king. He suppressed pagan tendencies, and undertook to overhaul the legal system by appointing magistrates and establishing a court of appeal in Jerusalem.
2. His mistake was to form an alliance with Ahab, by marrying his son Jehoram to Athaliah of the house of Omri.
3. Athaliah introduced the cult of Baal into Jerusalem, and when Jehoram– died and his son Ahaziah was killed in Jehu’s purge, she seized the throne of Judah.
4. As a foreigner, she had no real support and after five years, the infant son of Ahaziah, Joash, was proclaimed king. Athaliah was executed and the temple of Baal, together with its priesthood was destroyed.

C. ISRAEL AND JUDAH TO THE MID EIGHTH CENTURY

i) Half a Century of Weakness

1. Jehu’s purge, while it saved Israel from paganism, left the country internally paralysed and externally vulnerable.
2. The murder of Jezebel brought relationships with Phoenicia to an end. The alliance with Judah suffered the same fate.
3. The purge destroyed Israel’s leadership and left a cloak of bitterness over the land. Jehu seemed incapable of correcting social and economic abuses, and pagan practices soon re–emerged,
4. Jehu now faced trouble from the north. Affairs closer to home meant that Assyria, for the time being, was unable to menace the Aramean states. Hazael of Damascus first took the whole of Transjordan, and Jehu’s son Jehoahaz was defeated totally, Israel becoming little more than an Aramean dependency.
5. Judah was also weak. Joash was forced to pay tribute to Hazael of Damascus. His religious laxity, together with his military failures, led to his assassination. He was succeeded by his son, Amaziah.

ii) Resurgence in the Eighth Century

1. The ascendancy of Damascus was abruptly ended by Assyria, but after crushing the Arameans, they were unable to maintain their foothold west of the Euphrates. However, the effect was to free Israel from Aramean domination.
2. Jehoash, Jehu’s grandson, was able to recover all the cities lost by his father. He also reduced Judah to a position of helplessness. (II Kings 14: 1–:U4., II Chron. 25:5–24)
3. Jerusalem was taken and looted, but Jehoash had no desire to incorporate Judah into his realm, and restored the throne to Amaziah.
4. Amaziah was soon assassinated and his son Uzziah made king in his place.
5. The recovery of Israel and Judah reached its zenith during this period.

- i) Jeroboam II, who succeeded Jehoash, was one of the strongest military leaders in Israel's history. He restored Israel's northern border to that of Solomon's day, and ejected the Moabites and Ammonites from Israel's territory.
 - ii) Uzziah repaired Jerusalem and refitted the army. He re-established control over Edom, re-opened the part of Ezion-geber and penetrated deep into the coastal plain. The trade routes to Arabia were also under his control.
 - iii) By the mid-eighth century, the extent of Israel – Judah was little short of the old Solomonic empire.
6. The prosperity of the two states also rivalled that of Solomon's day.
- i) The upper classes enjoyed luxury.
 - ii) Population reached its greatest density.
 - iii) Industry flourished (weaving and dyeing).
 - iv) Agriculture was developed, especially in the Negeb.

iii) Israel's Sickness

1. In spite of material prosperity and political stability, Israel was in an advanced state of social, moral and spiritual decay.
2. It is clear from the book of Amos that injustice was rife.
 - i) There were extremes of wealth and poverty, and the poor were at the mercy of the moneylenders. (Amos 4:6–9)
 - ii) The rich expanded their extremes by crooked dealing (Amos 2:6, 5:11, 8:4.—6) and justice was impossible to obtain (5:10–12)
 - iii) The old patterns have given way to entrenched class distinctions,
3. Religious decay was just as rife. Yahwism had been debased and paganised almost everywhere'. (Hosea 1–3, 4:11–14) Baal, not Yahweh, was their lord.
4. The result was that the covenant and its law had little meaning, and the priests little interest in maintaining it. Even the prophets were caught up in the complacency of the day, and were widely regarded with contempt. (Amos 7:10–13, Micah 3:5,11).
5. A false optimism based on the covenant traditions pervaded the nation. The obligations of the covenant were forgotten, but the promise of protection and blessing were still clung to. (Amos 3:1, 9:7, 2:9–12). To ensure the blessings, cultic observance rather than moral obedience was all that was needed in the eyes of the populace. Thus the essential features of election, covenant and promise were still there, but in such a perverted form that Yahwism was in danger of becoming a pagan religion in Israel.

iv) The Prophetic Protest

1. Hosea and Amos, though both different, in their approach, attacked the abuses of their day.
2. Amos confined his ministry to the north, and spoke out so strongly at Bethel that he was forbidden to speak there any more.
3. He attacked the social evils of the day, together with the immorality and luxury which was rife. He also made it clear that Israel's election did not guarantee her protection. (chs. 1, 2, 3, 9:7). The cult was branded as sin, and Amos offered Israel no word of hope.
4. Hosea's message belongs mainly to the next period, but during Jeroboam's reign he did attack the Baal worship, the moral corruption and the paganism which attended Yahwism. (4:1–14, 6:8–10) He saw Israel as forfeiting her claim to be God's people and saw no hope for the future. (1:9, 5:11–17)
5. These men and the great prophets who followed them, broke sharply from the prophetic orders and sharply denounced them. Their disciples preserved their message, and it is interesting to note that their oracles and not those of their rivals have survived.

6. Their attack on Israel was based on their overwhelming sense of Yahweh's lordship over Israel, and Israel's unconditional obligation to obey the covenant.

They could see only judgement for Israel, but it was precisely in this judgement that the note of hope in Israel's faith was to take on a new dimension. The nation would be destroyed, but the people of Yahweh would not. Through the message of the prophets, Israel's faith was to gain new life.

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THE MONARCHY: CRISIS AND DOWNFALL

LECTURE O U T L I N E

III. THE ASSYRIAN CONQUEST

A. THE FALL OF ISRAEL

- 1, The Beginning of Israel's Downfall.
2. The Last Days.
3. Judah – A Satellite.

B. THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE.

1. Hezekiah's Policy.
2. Hezekiah and Sennacherib.

C. THE PROPHETS

- 1., The Emergency and the Message.
2. The Effects of Prophetic Preaching.

D. THE END OF ASSYRIAN DOMINATION

1. Judah in the Mid-Seventh Century.
2. Assyria's Downfall. 3, Josiah's Reign – An Indian Summer.

III. THE ASSYRIAN CONQUEST

A. THE FALL OF ISRAEL

i) The Beginning of Israel's Downfall

1. For five hundred years Israel had lived in a great power vacuum in which no power was strong enough to master Israel permanently. The situation changed dramatically with the rise of Assyria.
2. Under Tiglath-Pileser III, Assyria secured its position to the south and the north, thus leaving it free to expand to the west.
3. From 7430 Tiglath-Pileser campaigned in Syria, and by 738 had conquered most of Syria and northern Palestine.
- 4.. During this period Israel, plagued by anarchy, virtually ceased to function as a nation.
 - i) In the ten years following Jeroboam's death, five kings ruled, three of them seizing the throne by violence.
 - ii) The result was a civil war of unspeakable atrocity (of. II Kings 15:8–28).
5. One of these kings Menahem. (745–738) paid heavy tribute to the Assyrians. He raised it by heavy taxes, and thus caused resentment throughout the land. His son was assassinated, and his successor Pekah joined Damascus and Philistia in an anti Assyrian coalition which was to spell disaster for Israel.
6. Bright describes Israel's situation in these words. "Her ship of state, leaking at every seam, without compass or competent helmsman and with crew demoralized, was sinking."

7. Hosea reveals the seriousness of the situation – plots and, counter plots (Hos. 7:1–7, 8:4, 10:3) changes of national policy (5:13, 7:11, 12:1) and the complete collapse of law and order (4:1–3, 7:1).

8. Drunkenness, debauchery and s(xual license, all under the cloak of religion, had destroyed the national character. With the moral collapse, political chaos followed.

9. Hosea pronounced Israel's doom (9:11–17, 13:9–16), but with it the promise of restoration and a new covenant. (Ch. 2:19–23, 12:9, 14:1–7).

ii) The Last Days

1. The Aramean–Israelite coalition naturally wanted Judah to join them. However Jotham (Uzziah's son) reused, and the coalition turned on Judah.

2. At this point Jotham died, and was succeeded by Ahaz. Finding himself in danger of losing his throne, he appealed to Tiglath–Pileser for aid against his combined enemies (Philistia, Moab, Israel and Damascus)(Isa. 7:1 – 8:18, II Kings 15:37–16:9).

3. The Assyrians utterly destroyed the coalition, and Israel felt the full force of the attack. Galilee and Transjordan were overrun and part of the population deported. Only the fact that Pekah was murdered and his suoessor Hoshea surrendered, saved the rest of Israel.

4. Hoshea planned to defect as soon as it was safe, and when Tiglath–Pileser died, he sought to make an alliance with Egypt and defied the Assyrians. Shalmaneser attacked in 724, took the land and beseiged Samaria. The city fell in 722/21 and 27,000 of its inhabitants were deported to Upper Mesopotamia, Israel's political history had ended.

iii) Judah – A Satellite

1. Ahaz' policy of becoming an Assyrian vassal proved to be disastrous for Judah.

2. He was forced to pay homage to the Assyrian gods, and set up an altar to them in the Temple of Yahweh.

3. Paganism flourished and Judah entered a period of serious apostasy.

4. Economically too, Judah was in a bad way. Territory load been lost and the Assyrian tribute placed heavy demands on the population.

5. The type of social and moral decay which had destroyed Israel, was evident in Judah, but not to the same extent. (Micah 1:5, 3:1–4, 9–11) (Isa. 3:13–15, 5:1–8) The clergy were corrupt, concerned mainly for their livings.

B. THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

i) Hezekiah's Policy

1. Hezekiah's policy was one of independence. While patriotism played a major role in shaping this policy, it was not the only factor.

2. There was a strong element who wanted both religious and social reform and this was impossible as long as Judah was subject to Assyria.

3. The national theology laid heavy emphasis on the continuation of the covenant through the dynasty of David. The prophetic message spoke constantly of a Messiah (Isa. 9:2–7), 11:1–9; Micah 5:2–6) so that independence seemed to be the logical development.

Such hopes were encouraged by the world situation at the time.

i) Assyria was defeated by rebels in Babylonia, and lost control in this area.

ii) Rebellions also took place in Asia Minor and in Media, so that Sargon was too busy elsewhere to worry much about Palestine.

iii) At the same time, Egypt was again in a position of relative strength and Assyrian vassals in Palestine could look in her direction for help.

5. Ashdod and other Philistine towns revolted against Sargon and invited Judah, Edom and Moab to join them. Egyptian aid was promised. In Judah, opinions were divided, but apparently Isaiah's advice was heeded and when Sargon crushed the revolt, Judah, which remained neutral, was left untouched.

6. Hezekiah did however, introduce sweeping religious reform. (II Kings 18:3–6, II Chron. ohs. 28–31)

i) Foreign practices were set aside and attempts were made to close the local shrines.

ii) Hezekiah also tried to encourage the remnant of Israel to join the reform, but was unsuccessful.

iii) No open break with Assyria was made, but these actions did constitute rebellion on Hezekiah's part.

ii) Hezekiah and Sennacherib

1. When Sennacherib succeeded his father (704 B.C.), Hezekiah refused tribute and took steps to defend his independence (II Kings 18:2).

2. Revolt against Assyria flared up in both the East and the West, and in Palestine–Syria a sizable coalition, with Egyptian support, was formed. Hezekiah prepared Jerusalem for siege.

3: In 701, Sennacherib was ready to strike. The campaign is described in Assyrian records—as well as II Kings 18.

i) Tyre was destroyed and many of the minor kings capitulated. Judah and most of Philistia held out, hoping for Egyptian help.

ii) Sennacherib defeated the Egyptians near Ekron and then proceeded to capture the Philistine cities and the cities of Judah.

4. Hezekiah sued for peace while Sennacherib was besieging Lachish, and was forced to pay a crippling tribute (II Kings 18:13–16).

5. The events after this are uncertain, but it is possible that II Kings 18:17 – 19:37 refers to a second invasion by Sennacherib in 688. Whatever the date, it is clear that Jerusalem was delivered by a mighty act of Yahweh, just as Isaiah predicted. This event only served to strengthen the belief that Jerusalem could never be destroyed.

6. Events close to the heart of Assyria meant that the question of Judah became relatively unimportant.

7. Hezekiah's son Manasseh did not continue the rebellion, and so, Judah's attempt to regain independence ultimately failed.

C. THE PROPHETS

i) The Emergency and the Message

1. The prophets of the late eighth century exercised a considerable influence on the life of the nation.

2. During the above period, the nation faced a spiritual crisis which threatened to destroy it.

3. During the previous generations, the nation of the Mosaic covenant had weakened somewhat, and given place to the Davidic covenant. Thus the state's existence was in the eyes of the people guaranteed by the unconditional promises to David, rather than the covenant obligations, of Sinai?

4. Thus the events of the late eighth century were like a bomb shell to the Nation. The whole national ideology was called into question. Reactions were divided. Some presumed that Yahweh would support Judah no matter what she did, while others (e.g. Ahaz) abandoned Yahweh completely.

5. It was the prophets of this period who were able to direct the people's thinking into different paths, which ultimately led to a new understanding of God's plan and promises.

6. Chief among these was Isaiah. He was motivated by a sense of the holiness of God, His sovereignty, and an awareness of Judah's sin.

i) His message was one of judgement, particularly during the reign of Ahaz, together with one of hope (Isa. ohs. 1–9). He viewed national tragedy as discipline, the end of which would be a chastened and purified remnant.

ii) During Hezekiah's reign he protested vigorously against reliance upon Egypt, predicting nothing but disaster from such an alliance (ohs. 28–31). He was opposed and mocked by the nation's leaders, but again events proved him to be a prophet of Yahweh.

iii) With Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem, it was Isaiah alone who stood by his king and encouraged him to trust Yahweh. His confidence was vindicated and undoubtedly the a tion was made to think deeply.

7. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, who also followed the classical pattern and attacked the socio-economic as well as the moral abuses of his day. (Chs. 1–3) The people's confident presumption amazed him (3:11) and he pro-claimed their downfall, going even further than Isaiah (3:12). However, he does not abandon the Davidic hope and confidently points to a Messiah (5:2–5)

ii) The Effects of Prophetic Preaching

1. The effects of the prophet's message were threefold.

i) It provided an explanation of the nation's humiliation by Assyria that enabled the national theology to adjust to the crisis.

ii) It generated a reform movement in Judah.

iii) It enabled the hope of the nation to crystallize more clearly.

2.. Both Isaiah and Micah rejected the national theology based on unconditional promises. They preached the Davidic covenant, but urged that nation was in distress because it had not believed those promises. What was happening to the nation was not a revocation of the promises, but a purifying chastisement. Thus the Assyrian scourge was not evidence of Yahweh's failure, but evidence of Yahweh's judgement and part of his plan for his people.

3. It is precisely this view that encouraged Hezekiah to institute reform, and although that reform was short lived, it made it\$ impact. The obligations of the covenant could never be forgotten, and it was the covenant law which was again to become the basis of Israel's faith in the years which followed.

4. Most significant however, was the development of the national hope. Judgement did not mean the end. Ultimately the nation would survive. The preaching of Isaiah and Micah retained the Davidic promises but pushed them beyond the existing nation to a new and obedient Israel which as yet ad not exist. Thus the national hope could and did survive the fall of the nation. The preaching of Isaiah was to bring more clearly into focus the figure of Him who would redeem Israel and establish divine rule over all the earth. Israel's hope was now clearly linked not just to the Davidic dynasty, but to Messiah.

D. THE END OF ASSYRIAN DOMINATION

i) Judah in tie Mid Seventh Century

1. During this period, Assyria's empire was at its largest. Rule was re-established over Babylon, and in 633 the Egyptians were finally defeated. In the face of such power, Manasseh, Hezekiah's successor remained docile.

2. As a loyal vassal of Assyria, Manasseh was bound to re-establish Assyrian religious practices. He went far beyond this however, and restored all that his father had destroyed. Pagan cults, divination and magic flourished, and human sacrifice made its appearance.

The law was disregarded and once more violence and injustice prevailed. The prophets were silenced.

ii) Assyria's downfall

1. Assyria's massive Empire was based in force and could not survive internal and external pressures brought to bear on it.

2. Neither Babylonia nor Egypt could be effectively controlled, and Indo-Aryan peoples, especially the Medes, were pressing upon the northern frontier.

3. From 652–648 Assurbanapar was engaged in putting down one rebellion after another. The last years of his reign were peaceful, but within twenty years of his death (627 b.c.) the empire had collapsed and Assyria was destroyed as a nation.

4. The course of events is uncertain, but the end came when the Babylonians under Nabopolassar defeated an Assyrian army. The Medes captured Asshur and a combined Mede-Babylonian army destroyed Nineveh in 612 Assyria was finished

iii) Josiah's Reign – Awn Indian Summer

1. Josiah came to the throne in the midst of a struggle between pro and anti Assyrian factions in Israel.

2. Little is known of his early years but by his twelfth year it is clear that a change in national policy had taken place. (II Chron. 34).

i) He took possession of the provinces of Samaria and Megiddo and extended his influence to Joppa on the coast.

ii) Thus Judah was able once more to assert its independence without opposition from either Assyria or Egypt.

3. At the same time, Josiah launched the most sweeping reform of Judah's history. The course of the reform is not clear, but its main features can be identified,

i) The Assyrian cult was repudiated and repairs on the Temple begun. Idolatrous practices were purged from Judah, and even in former Israel.

ii) With the finding of the lawbook, the reforms were given clear direction, and the covenant with Yahweh was restored.

Josiah was able to achieve what Hezekiah could not. He once more centralized all public worship in Jerusalem, and destroyed the rival shrines through-out Judah and Samaria.

The reform was an expression not only of Josiah's faith, but also of his desire to rid Judah of all that was Assyrian – i.e. it was an expression of nationalism.

6. This national movement was aided by the prophets, particularly Zephaniah and the young Jeremiah. Both attacked the idolatry of the day and announced judgement should the nation prove to be unrepentant.

7. The reform called the people back to the older covenant and committed the nation to obedience to its demands.

8. The last years of Josiah's rule are clouded in mystery. From the history of Judah which follows, it appears that the reforms did not penetrate the nation deeply.

i) It established a priestly hierarchy in Jerusalem and this created tensions within the clergy.

ii) Many were satisfied with external reform, and Jeremiah complained that the reality of faith was lacking (6:16–21)

iii) Judah possessed the law, but would not listen to the prophets. Morality, not faith was revived.

9. Thus the popular mind supposed that by making external and even moral reforms, the demands of Yahweh's covenant were fulfilled, and the permanence of the Temple, the dynasty and the state were guaranteed. Judah was experiencing an Indian summer.

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THE EXILE

LECTURE O U T L I N E

I. THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAH

A. THE NEO BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

1. To the First Deportation.
2. The End of the Kingdom.

B. THE PROPHETS

1. The Theological Emergency
2. The Survival of Israel's Faith.

II. THE EXILE

A. BEGINNINGS OF JUDAISM

1. The Jews After 587
2. Exile and Faith.

B. EVE OF RELEASE

1. Last Days of Babylon.
2. Jewish Hope.

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I. THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAH

A. THE NEO- BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

i)- To the First Deportation.

1. Assyria's western empire now became the bone over which Babylon and Egypt fought.
2. In 609, Josiah tried to prevent Egypt's forces from moving north. He failed and was killed at Megiddo, and his son Jehoahaz was made king.
3. The Egyptian forces moved north to the Euphrates, but were unable to help the Assyrians.
4. Pharaoh Neco sought to consolidate his position west of the river. He deposed Jehoahaz, and set up Jehoiakim as a puppet ruler. Judah's independence was ended. (II Kings 23:31-35).
5. For the next five years Babylon and Egypt were engaged in skirmishes, but no decisive blow was struck.
6. Judah declined rapidly. The economy suffered, territory was lost and Jehoiakim acted as little more than a tyrant. (cf. Jer. 22:13-19)
7. Reform lapsed and there were three who blamed it for the calamity which had overtaken Judah. Paganism returned, and morality deteriorated. (Jer. 7:16-18, 11:9-13; 5:26-29, 7:1-15).

8. Yet confidence in the permanence of the state remained high (Jer. 5:12, 7:4, 14:13)
9. The bubble burst in 605, when Nebuchadnezzar crushed the Egyptians first at Carchemish and then again at Hamath.
10. By the end of 604, Babylonian forces had pushed south to the Philistine plain, and Judah transferred its allegiance to Babylon.
11. Egypt rallied and in 601 halted the Babylonians. Jehoiakim was encouraged and made the fatal mistake of rebelling.
12. Nebuchadnezzar marched against Judah in 598. Jehoiakim died and was succeeded by Jehoiachin.
13. Within three months Jerusalem surrendered. The royal family and the nobility were deported and the city was sacked. The king's uncle Zedekiah was installed as ruler.

ii) The End of the Kingdom

1. Zedekiah's reign (597–587) saw nothing but agitation and sedition, until ultimately the nation destroyed itself.
2. The war with Babylon had further reduced Judah's territory and her population. The economy of the country was crippled and the cream of her leaders had been deported.
3. Zedekiah was a weak ruler and uncertain of his position. In 594, certain Jews in Babylon rebelled and this, although quickly squashed by Nebuchadnezzar, encouraged the Palestinian kingdoms to plan a revolt.
4. The prophets boasted that within two years Judah would be free and Jehoiachin restored as king. Jeremiah denounced such a plan quite vigorously (ch. 29) The plot came to nothing.
5. Five years later Judah's false optimism and fierce patriotism pushed her into the final rebellion. Babylonian reaction was swift.
6. Jerusalem was put under siege and except for a brief hope (due to Egyptian interference – Jer. 37:5) morale in Judah sank to rock bottom.
7. In July 587, with food supplies exhausted, the end game. The city was captured, the royal family executed, the walls levelled, and the leading citizens deported. Judah was finished as a political state forever.
8. For a time, Gedaliah ruled as governor, but was assassinated by royalists within twelve months. In 582, a third deportation of Jews took place, and Judah ceased to be even a province, and was incorporated into the province of Samaria.

B. THE PROPHETS

i) The Theological Emergency

1. Judah's national theology left her totally unprepared to meet the crisis which came. They believed that the God who had thwarted Sennacherib would frustrate Nebuchadnezzar also.
2. The nation was thrown into confusion. Even after the humiliation of 597, they did not believe the nation could fall, so that when the end did come, the official theology was helpless to explain it.
3. Yahweh's ability to control events, his faithfulness to his promises, etc. were questioned deeply.

4. The literature of the period is intensely preoccupied with this issue.

- i) It is the major theme of Habakkuk as well as in Jeremiah and Ezekiel,
- ii) While the Babylonians are seen as Yahweh's 'instrument of judgement, they themselves would be judged in their own time.

ii) The Survival of Israel's Faith

1. That Israel's faith survived the political tragedy and the theological questioning, was due in large measure to Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
2. Jeremiah's message was firstly that Judah was doomed as the righteous judgement of Yahweh was upon her for her breach of the covenant.
3. He realized that the demands of the covenant had been lost in the external performance of the cult (7:21–23), and that ref arm was not repentance (4:3f., 8:4–7) .
4. He rejected the national confidence in the Davidic promises together with the popular trust in Yahweh's eternal choice of Zion. In popular eyes, he committed both treason and blasphemy.
5. Even after 597, when hopes of restoration were strong, Jeremiah continued to proclaim doom. In the final months; he promised no reprieve, and even denounced those who saw Egypt as the saviour of the Jewish state. For Jeremiah, hope lay beyond the kingdom of Judah.
6. Ezekiel too; announced Judah's doom as the righteous judgement of Yahweh. Deported in 597, he preached among the exiles for at least fifteen years after the fall of Jerusalem. His message did not change. Judah was finished.
7. He spoke strongly against the idolatry and rebelliousness of his people. He rejected the national hope as strongly as did Jeremiah, but he did not abandon the hope contained in the promises to David. Rather, he saw their fulfilment in the future, when Yahweh would vindicate himself as King. (14:21–33)
8. The prophets demolished false hope and explained the tragedy in terms which were not contrary to faith in Yahweh's actions and promises.
9. They emphasised Israel as a community of God's people, rather than as a political state.
10. They also introduced a strong emphasis on individual responsibility (Jer. 4:3, 14, Ezek. 18), They encouraged the individual Jew to be loyal to Yahweh, and assured them that Yahweh would meet them without temple and with-out cult in the land of their exile, if they sought Him with their whole heart. (Jer. 29:11–14, Ezek. 11:16)
11. More than this, they spoke of a restoration and hope which lay in the future, based on the redemptive acts of Yahweh, (Jer. 31, 32, Ezek. 34, 37). He would give his people a new heart and establish a new covenant – an eternal covenant of peace.

II. THE EXILE

A. THE BEGINNINGS OF JUDAISM

i) The Jews after 587

1. The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile mark a real turning point in Israel's history. Her national existence and the institutions of her corporate life were all lost. The marvel is that Israel did not cease to exist.
2. The deportation was by no means total, but life in Judah was totally disrupted. Cities were destroyed, the economy collapsed. Thousands died of starvation and disease; while others migrated to other lands. Judah's population which had been 250,000 in the eighth century, was reduced to 20,000.

3. The history of Judah for the next 50 years is almost unknown. To the north, the Israelite population of Samaria continued intact, but hardly faithful to Yahwism. Thus although the population of Palestine was still largely Israelite, the true future of Israel lay with the exiles.

4.. The exiles, though few in number (15–20,000) were the cream of Jewish leader–ship.

They were settled in communities in southern Mesopotamia, where they engaged in business and agriculture. On the whole, they did not suffer peculiar hardship, and as Daniel shows, they could rise to positions of importance.

5. A large number found their way to Egypt, where they' settled at Tahpanhes, just inside the border. No doubt the Jews were scattered in other lands as well.

ii) The Exile and Faith

1. There can be little doubt that Israel did not lose her identity as a people, only because of the development of her faith.

2. This faith was tested to the. limits. A pagan power had destroyed Yahweh's nation, city, and temple. Was it not reasonable therefore to abandon Yahweh for the more, powerful pagan gods?

3.– The. severity of this temptation is seen in Isaiah 4.0–48. Jeremiah and Ezekiel had already provided an explanation of the exile, and laid a foundation of hope for the future.

4.. A new community began to develop, based no longer on the cult, but on tradition and .law. The Sabbath and circumcision took on a new perspective for the Jew, as experiences of his obedience to the covenant. There was a renewed interest in the Mosaic books, and it is probable that they were edited during the exile.

5. The hope of restoration also never died. Again it was foretold by Isaiah, and no doubt the latter half of Isaiah took on new meaning for the Jews in exile. They saw themselves not as permanent exiles, but as sojourners in a strange land. (Psa. 137) They awaited Yahweh's judgement on Babylon (Isa. 13:1–14:23) and prayed for the restoration of Zion (Isa. 63:7–64:12)

6. It. was the new Jerusalem which existed only in faith,. that the eyes of exiled Judah turned towards. (of. Ezek. 1044.8)

B. THE EVE OF RELEASE

i) The Last Days of Babylon

1. The instability of the Babylonian empire no doubt helped to raise the hopes of the exiles.

2. Twenty five years after Jerusalem fell, the Empire began to disintegrate.

3. After Nebuchadnezzar's death, there was a period of extreme instability. The throne changed hands three times in seven years.

4. Internal dissent grew as Nabonidus' religious policies created resentment among the populace generally, and the priesthood of Marduk in particular. Babylon was a land divided against itself.

5. At this point, a new threat developed. Cyrus the Persian, took control of Median Empire and undertook campaigns in other areas. Nabonidus entered into defensive alliances with Egypt and Lydia.

6. In 54.7, Cyrus conquered Lydia and northern Syria. He then turned to the east, and enlarged his empire enormously. For the time, Babylon was free, but it was clear that Cyrus could take it whenever he chose to do so.

ii) Jewish Hope

1. These events led the exiles to look for the restoration of their homeland.
2. The message of Isaiah 40 following, spoke clearly of the Sovereign Lord of History. The pagan gods are seen for what they are – chunks of wood. Only Yahweh is God, the One who creates and redeems.
3. The whole rise and fall of empires is seen as part of Yahweh's purpose for his people whom he has called.
4. Cyrus will play his part because he has been chosen to do so, but the message of hope goes far beyond the physical restoration of Israel. What was expected was no mere revival of the old order, but the coming of Messiah and the ultimate triumph of Yahweh's rule.
5. Great stress was placed on the re-establishment of the covenant and the promises. What is an entirely new emphasis, is the declaration of Yahweh's universal rule. Israel's election is not questioned, but the prophet looks forward to the time when all nations will recognise Yahweh As God.
6. It was this universal concept which later Judaism found hard to accept. However, the die was cast, and from this point on the faith of the Jews could not remain simply nationalistic.
7. The prophet also made it clear that Israel's role was not to be a passive one. Israel by her existence was to be a witness to Yahweh's purposes for the world. She was to be a light to the Gentiles.
8. The Servant passages reveal that not only Israel is involved, but the time is foreshadowed when One who, is both priestly, royal and prophetic. will accomplish Yahweh's redemptive purpose for Israel's and the world.
9. These prophecies, more than any other, gave to Israel an explanation of her history and her sufferings. It gave real hope for the future, and no doubt the faith of Israel enabled her to survive until the Servant found fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah.

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RETURN AND RESTORATION

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. THE RETURN

1. The Beginning of the New Day.
2. Early Years of Restoration.
3. The Completion of the Temple.

II. THE REFORMS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH,

A. TO THE MID-FIFTH CENTURY

1. The Persian Empire.
2. The Jews.

B. RE-ORGANIZATION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

1. Ezra.
2. Nehemiah.

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I. THE RETURN

(i) The Beginning of the New Day

1. The fall of Babylon brought new hope to the Jews in exile.
2. In 539, the city fell to Persian forces; and Cyrus entered the city, welcomed as a liberator by the Babylonians, who by this time were heartily sick of the religious policies of Nabonidus.
3. Cyrus' policy was one of easing tension within the Empire. As a consequence he issued a decree in 538; ordering the restoration of the Jewish community in Palestine.
4. Cyrus ordered the rebuilding of the Temple, and permitted those Jews who wished to do so, to return to Palestine. The sacred vessels of the Temple were also returned.
5. It was in Cyrus' interests to have a nucleus of loyal subjects near the frontier of Egypt, and this no doubt influenced his decision to free the Jews.
6. The first return was not large. Many of the Jews were too settled and too prosperous to undertake such an uncertain journey. In 536, a small group under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel did return.
7. The altar of burnt offering was rebuilt and the foundations of the Temple were laid. (Ezra 3:6—11) A beginning had been made.

(ii) Early Years of Restoration.

1. The early years, despite their encouraging start, brought little but frustration and discouragement. The morale of the new community sank very low.
2. By 522, the total population of Judah can scarcely have been more than 20,000, and Jerusalem itself remained largely a ruin.

3. The new settlers faced many problems.

- i) Poor seasons and crop failures left many destitute.. (Hag. 1:9–11, 2:15–17).
- ii) The Samaritans proved to be hostile since they regarded the land as theirs.
- iii) The resident Jews also were hostile as they found little acceptance among their more orthodox brethren.
- iv) Aid promised by the Persian court did not materialize in any great proportions.

4., The Samaritans, indulging in political intrigue, were able to obtain an injunction from Cyrus' successor to halt work on the Temple. (Ezra 3:1–4:5) Thus 18 years after the work had begun, it had not progressed beyond the foundations.

5. This period of depression is seen clearly in Haggai and Zechariah. The promised restoration had not taken place, and a spiritual crisis threatened the new community.

- i) The syncretistic religious practices showed that the inhabitants of Judah were anything but dedicated Yahwists.
- ii) The view that separation was necessary within the community grew.
- iii) The people lost heart and indifference settled over Judah. Both Haggai and Zechariah urged to completion of the Temple and spoke of the adversity as a punishment for apathy and indifference.

(iii) The Completion of the Temple

1. In 522, the Persian empire was racked with serious internal rebellions. Darius, the new king, was hard pressed to maintain order.

2. In this climate of uncertainty, the prophets spoke out strongly of the fulfilment of the Messianic hope. The community was seen as the remnant of Israel ever who the Davidic line would once again rule, and to whom all the nations would be subject.

3. Such prophecy encouraged the people to work once more on the Temple. When this was questioned by some of the Syrian population, Darius was approached and confirmed the decree which Cyrus had made. He forbade any interference and provided a large subsidy for the completion of the project. (Ezra 6:1ff.)

4. Thus in March 515, the Temple was completed and dedicated. No longer was it a national shrine, but rather a rallying place for the faith of the remnant.

5. The Davidic line was not restored, and Judah continued not as a kingdom, but as a theocratic community under the authority of the high priest.

II. THE REFORMS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

A. TO THE MID FIFTH CENTURY

(i) The Persian Empire

1. Little is known of the Jewish community for the next 60 years. Under Persian rule, it is clear that there was no political future as a nation.

2. After mastering the revolts of his early reign, Darius began to expand the Empire. By the end of the century, the empire extended from the Indus valley to the Aegean. It penetrated into both Africa and Europe and was without doubt the largest empire the world had ever known.

3. The empire was well organized, seeking to balance central authority with local autonomy. Culturally, as well as economically and politically, Persia reached her zenith.

4. Darius was succeeded by Xerxes (Ahasuerus), a man of far less ability. During his reign, the Persian foothold on Europe was lost when both his fleet and his army were destroyed by the Greeks.

5. He was succeeded in 465 by Artaxerxes I, who continued the struggle against Greece, but was finally forced to grant the Greek cities their independence.

Other internal difficulties led to defeats in Egypt. This, although the Persian empire was far from it end, there were internal weaknesses evident.

(ii) The Jews

1. The failure of the restoration to produce a new Davidic state meant that the majority of the Jews were content to remain where they were throughout the Empire.

2. The Babylonian Jews were well established and some such as Nehemiah had risen to high positions in the Persian court. There is evidence too, of Jewish communities in lower Egypt, and Sardis (Asia Minor), although little is known of them.

The most well known Jewish colony was at Elephantine on the Nile. Religiously they had departed largely from Yahwism. And although they felt no desire to return to Judah, they still called themselves Jews, and felt strong kinship with their Palestinian brethren.

The Judean community was being continually supplemented by Jews returning home. By the middle of the century the population doubled. (50,000).

i) Numerous towns had been re-populated (e.g. Tekoa, Bethel, Jericho) but Jerusalem had few inhabitants. (Neh. 3:4)

ii) The community was not in any way secure. They eked out a precarious living, and were at the mercy of anyone who chose to oppose them.

iii) Opposition came from Samaritan officialdom – they accused the Jews of sedition. In addition, there was trouble with the Edomites and the Arabs, who were pressing into their territory. (cf. OBAD.)

5. Because they lacked adequate protection, they took matters into their own hands, and in the reign of Artaxerxes, began to rebuild the fortifications of Jerusalem. The work was stopped by order of the king. The intention of Judah's enemies was to keep them defenseless.

6. The spiritual situation too was not encouraging. Malachi makes it clear that moral and religious laxity was rife (Mal. 1:6–14, 2:1–9). The sabbath was neglected, Levites were forced to abandon their duties to make a living.

7. Divorce was prevalent, and everywhere men took advantage of the plight of the poor.

8. Intermarriage was very common, and again it appeared that Israel would lose its identity.

B. RE-ORGANIZATION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

(i) Ezra

1. The third quarter of the fifth century saw a thoroughgoing re-organization of the Jewish community.

2. It was largely the work of two men, Ezra and Nehemiah. To Ezra fell the task of re-organizing and reforming the spiritual life of Israel.

3. There is some doubt about the chronology of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, but none as to the historicity of their contribution. For this reason, we will concern ourselves with the contribution of the two men, rather than the chronological order of events.

4. Ezra was a member of a Jewish priestly family living in Babylon. He came to Jerusalem as a royal commissioner with the express object of establishing the Jewish law, He had the king's authority for this mission.

5. He was not a civil governor, and was concerned with civil affairs only where they affected the sacred law. His authority extended over all who called themselves Jews.
6. When he came to Jerusalem, together with a company of Babylonian Jews, he was distressed to see the way Jews had intermarried with the heathen population.
7. His proposed reforms were drastic. Mixed marriages were to be dissolved. This was particularly offensive to the Samaritans. The reform affected not only the common people, but also the princes and elders of the land.
8. It is possible, but by no means certain, that at this time Ezra returned to Persia, and that after a time these initial reforms lapsed.
9. The rest of Ezra's reforms took place after the rebuilding of Jerusalem by Nehemiah. These reforms were the basis for the re-organization of the community on the basis of the Law.
 - i) The feast of Tabernacles was revived and the law was read to the people.
 - ii) The vexed question of mixed marriages was raised again and the people covenanted to abandon them.
 - iii) The sabbath was to be kept holy and the sabbatical year re-introduced. iv) Tithes and offerings were revived.
 - v) The congregation was purified, Israel's enemies being expelled.
10. Both Ezra and Nehemiah played significant roles in this religious reconstitution of the community.
11. The significance of Ezra's work was that he revived the law and therefore the life of the Jews. The Temple had provided a focal point for the Jews. Nehemiah provided political stability, but it was Ezra who re-organized and integrated the community. Thus the covenant was renewed before Yahweh.
12. Israel was no longer a nation, but a community of people bound together by law and covenant. From here on, the distinguishing mark of a Jew was not political nationality, ethnic background, nor even participation in the Temple cult, but rather adherence to the law of Moses.

(ii) Nehemiah.

1. Nehemiah's career is able to be fixed with certainty. He was a highly placed Jewish official in the Persian court, devoted to the cause of his people.
2. Deeply distressed by the conditions of his people in Jerusalem, he sought permission from Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem and rebuild its fortifications. Conditions within the empire made it expedient for the king to grant his permission.
3. Artaxerxes appointed Nehemiah as governor of Judea, gave him the necessary authority, and provided a military escort. By 440, the work was well underway.
4. Whereas Ezra had shown little practical ability, Nehemiah quickly assessed the situation in practical terms.
 - i) The basic need was for physical security, and so after inspecting the walls, he called the Jewish leaders together and announced his plan to rebuild the city, before seeking to restore the economy.
 - ii) Labour was recruited and specific sections of the wall allocated to various groups.
 - iii) Within fifty two days a wall of sorts was established.
5. The result was that a wave of patriotism and hope spread through the Judean community. But alongside of this, there was opposition, particularly from Sanballat, the governor of Samaria.
6. A conspiracy between Sanballat, Tobias the Ammonite and Geshen the Arab, to attack the builders was foiled by Nehemiah's quick action in posting guards around the walls.

It is interesting to note that archaeological discoveries of the period have turned up the names of Tobias and Geshe and shown them to be governors of Ammon and north-west Arabia.

7. Further attempts to disrupt the work and to destroy Nehemiah also failed. The morale of the people rose considerably, and once the city was safe from attack the people were free to build their own houses and cultivate their own land without fear of outside interference.

8. Part of the reason for Nehemiah's success was his great administrative abilities.

i) He dealt with those who were taking advantage of the poor, making them promise to leave off usury and restore their lands.

ii) He, only took such levies as were necessary to maintain the administration.

iii) He was aware of the laxity of the religious situation and was later to take steps, in conjunction with Ezra, to reform the situation.

9. After twelve years, Nehemiah was recalled to the Persian court. The reasons for the recall are vague. Within a year or two, he was back in Jerusalem.

10. The situation had deteriorated in his absence and he took immediate steps to remedy the situation.

i) The high priest had allowed Tobias (Nehemiah's former enemy) to reside in the Temple. Nehemiah had him evicted and the Temple cleansed.

ii) He introduced religious reform assuring the Levites of an income, collecting the tithe and enforcing the Sabbath.

iii) He enforced Ezra's decree concerning mixed marriages.

11. One of the most significant results of these reforms was the worsening of relations between the Jews and the Samaritans.

i) The grandson of the high priest Shad married one of Sanballat's daughters and was expelled by Nehemiah from the community.

ii) Tradition has it that he became the high priest of the Samaritans at Shechem. It is certain that this event precipitated the rupture between Jew and Samaritan which occurred in this period.

12. With the work of Nehemiah and Ezra, we come to the end of the Old Testament period. The period between 432 and the coming of Messiah is a period which is completely passed over in canonical Scripture.

13. The Intertestamental period, as it is called, is a significant one for our understanding of the New Testament, and it is in connection with New Testament background that we will deal with this period,

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