

# LESSON 1

## BACKGROUND FOR ISRAEL'S EXILE

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God birthed the nation of Israel by calling a man named Abraham to live a life of faithfulness to God. God made promises to Abraham recorded in:

**Genesis 12:1-3, The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. 2**

**"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**

**Genesis 13:14-17, The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."**

**Genesis 17:2-6, Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." 3 Abram fell facedown, and God**

**said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.**

**5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."**

**Genesis 22:18, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed Me."**

**Galatians 3:16, The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.**

Here is a summary of some of the promises made by God to Abraham and the nation of Israel that would come from Abraham:

1. God promised to lead Abraham to a new physical land.
2. God promised Abraham that he would make him into a great nation.
3. God promised to bless Abraham, make his name great and make him a blessing to others.
4. God promised to bless those who blessed Abraham and curse those who cursed Abraham.
5. God promised Abraham a physical plot of land and promised that his offspring would be greater than could be counted.
6. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that he would be fruitful and kings would come from him.
7. God promised to bless all the nations of the world through Abraham's offspring or "seed", which is referring to Jesus Christ.

So God birthed a nation through Abraham and passed on the promises to his son Isaac and then to Isaacs son Jacob. God changed Jacobs name to Israel, and he had 12 sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. These twelve tribes of Israel moved to Egypt and were enslaved by the Pharaoh of Egypt.

### **Lessons**

1. God keeps His promises. All Abraham had was the promise of God. Abraham started taking steps of faith based solely on God's word to him.

When God makes a promise, you can take that to the "faith" bank. *What promise of God should you act upon by stepping out in faith, trusting that God will lead you in His will?*

2. God's plans for His people cannot be thwarted.

Even though Abraham was faithful, he was anything but perfect. He sinned and made many mistakes along the way. But he continued to trust in God and walk by faith. And despite Abraham's occasional faltering of faith, God's will was still fulfilled for his life. What an encouragement to us that we cannot thwart the will of God for our lives. Warning...this is not a license to live recklessly and in rebellion to God. No, this principle simply gives us assurance that God is not sitting in heaven, waiting for us to make a mistake so that He can ruin our lives. Our job is the same as Abraham's...to walk by faith and not by sight. God's job is to insure that His plans are fulfilled in our lives.

3. God uses men like Abraham...faithful men that walk in obedience with God. Romans 4:1-3 says,

**"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.**

**What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."**

*Do you believe God?* If so, then do as Abraham did...walk by faith by trusting in the promises of God and you will be credited with the same righteousness that Abraham was... a righteousness that comes by faith in God.

### **God Delivers His People from Egyptian Captivity**

God had a plan to emancipate his people from Egypt and it included a man named Moses. God called Moses to this rescue mission of the nation Israel in Exodus 3:7-10, The LORD said,

**"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in**

**Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."**

God told Moses that every firstborn son in Egypt would die at midnight. God told Moses to have all the Israelites to mark the doorframes of their houses with the blood of lambs. God said in Exodus 12:12-13,

**"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."**

So, God passed over all Israelites that were covered by the lamb's blood. And God made a way of escape for Israel by miraculously causing the Red Sea to open up for them to cross it on dry land. Then the Red Sea flooded and killed the Egyptians that were attempting to keep them from escape.

### **Lessons**

1. The blood of the lamb over the doorframes in Moses' day points to the blood of the Lamb of God poured out on the cross. In ancient Egypt, the blood caused the death angel to "passover"

those covered by it. At the cross of Calvary,  
 the  
 blood atones for the sins of those who place  
 their  
 trust in Jesus Christ...the Lamb of God who  
 takes away the sins of the world. *Are you  
 trusting  
 in the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ,  
 as  
 your "passover" lamb?*

2. God will use anyone who will trust in Him.  
 Moses was a murderer, stutterer, and ill-  
 equipped  
 to lead a nation out of captivity. But God  
 chose  
 him and God equipped him and God  
 empowered  
 him and God used Moses mightily. *For what  
 task  
 do you feel inadequate, yet God has called  
 you to  
 perform for Him?*

### **God's People Wander in the Desert for Forty Years**

Not too long after God used Moses to  
 deliver  
 Israel from Egyptian captivity, the people of  
 Israel  
 began to grumble and complain on their  
 journey  
 to the Promised Land. What should have been  
 a  
 few weeks journey for Israel turned into forty  
 years  
 of wandering in the desert. The nation rebelled  
 against their leader Moses and their God. At  
 the  
 end of Moses life, God said these words  
 recorded  
 in Deuteronomy 34:4, Then the LORD said to  
 him,

**"This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it."**

Then God said these words to Joshua recorded in Joshua 1:2-5,

**"Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

So Joshua took up the mantle from God to lead Israel into the land that He had promised them. During Joshua's leadership, God established a form of government that included Judges. But Israel continued to break their covenant with God and rebel against Him. The people insisted on a new form of government with a man as their King, because they had rejected God as their king...1 Samuel 8:7-8,

**"And the LORD told him: " 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected Me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking Me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.'"**

### Lessons

1. God is faithful, despite the unfaithfulness of His people. Even when God's people grumbled

and rebelled against Him, He was faithful to them. Even when God's people wanted a human

king to rule over them, rather than the King of the Universe, He was still faithful to His people. *Is anyone other than God the king over your life?*

2. God always has the right man for the right job.

When Moses died, God called Joshua to take over

leadership of His people. Remember, God does not need **any** of us...but He wants to use **all** of us. *Could God be preparing you for some service for Him?*

### The Nation of Israel Splits

King Saul was Israel's first king and King David

became Israel's second king. After David's death,

his son, Solomon succeeded him as Israel's king. 1 Kings 11:1-6, gives us insight into Solomon's reign:

**"King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites.**

**They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, " 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely**

**turn your hearts after their gods'" Nevertheless,**

**Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed**

**Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So**

**Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done."**

Because Solomon did evil in the eyes of God,

God promised to split the kingdom, but He would

wait until Solomon's son, Rehoboam, reigned

as  
the king of Israel. Jeroboam, from Ephraim,  
rose  
up against King Rehoboam of Israel and King  
Rehoboam fled to Jerusalem in Judah. 1 Kings  
12:20-21 says,

**"When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David. When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered the whole house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin—a hundred and eighty thousand fighting men—to make war against the house of Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam, son of Solomon."**

This marks the beginning of the division of  
the  
kingdom that lasted for centuries. Ten of  
Israel's  
twelve tribes followed Jeroboam and called  
their  
new nation Israel or the Northern Kingdom. The  
other two tribes remained loyal to Rehoboam  
and  
called their nation Judah or the Southern  
Kingdom.  
Judah and the area of Benjamin around  
Jerusalem  
would remain loyal to David. Judah, the largest  
tribe,  
and Benjamin, the smallest, were often  
mentioned  
as one tribe because they shared the same  
border.  
The kingdom did not split overnight. It was  
already  
dividing as early as the days of the Judges  
because  
of tribal jealousies, especially between  
Ephraim, the  
most influential tribe of the north, and Judah,  
the

chief tribe of the south. Before the days of Saul and David the religious center of Israel was located, for the most part, in the territory of Ephraim. When Solomon built the temple, he moved the religious center of Israel to Jerusalem. This eventually brought tribal rivalries to the breaking point. (Source, *Life Application Bible Commentary*)

**Assyrian and Babylonian Exiles** (Source, *Israel's and Judah's Captivity and Judah's Return* by Stephen Ricker)

Because both the 10 tribe Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the 2 tribe Southern Kingdom (Judah) continued in their rebellion and sin against God, God sent the Northern Kingdom into Assyrian captivity never to return; and Judah was sent into Babylonian captivity. Both Assyria and Babylon were eventually conquered and ruled by the Medes. Though Israel slowly returned to the Promised Land through the centuries, they were ruled by other kingdoms and nations until they became an independent nation in 1948. In 1967, Jerusalem officially became Israel's capital for the first time in around 2,500 years.

**The initial Assyrian captivity of the Northern Tribes (Israel)** is recorded in 2 Kings 15:29 in around 734 BC.

**The final Assyrian captivity of the Northern Tribes (Israel)** is recorded in 2 Kings 17:1-6 in around 722 BC.

**The initial Babylonian captivity of the Southern Tribes (Judah)** is recorded in Daniel 1:1-7. In 605 BC the Babylonians led by Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince, came from the north, attacked,

and defeated Egypt at the battle of Carchemish. (2 Kings 24:1-7) That same year Nebuchadnezzar was made king of Babylon. He reigned from 605-562 BC. When Egypt fell, Judah became a colonial state of the Babylon Empire but was allowed to keep its own national, spiritual and cultural identity. King Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem and spared King Jehoiakim of Judah. However, King Nebuchadnezzar carried off several of the princes of Judah; among them were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The captivity of Israel lasted 70 years.

**The second Babylonian captivity of the Southern Tribes (Judah)** is recorded in 2 Kings 24:1-16 in around 597 BC. Jehoiakim, the king

of Judah, rebelled against Babylon a second time. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem and miserably defeated Jehoiakim and Judah. Because of this rebellion Nebuchadnezzar ransacked Jerusalem and many other major cities, as Jeremiah had prophesied. Nebuchadnezzar killed many Jews. He also took around 10,000 selected captives. Ezekiel, the prophet, was among the captives.

**The third Babylonian captivity of the Southern Tribes (Judah)** is recorded in 2 Kings 24:20-25:21 and Jeremiah 39:1-10 in around 586 BC. King Zedekiah took an oath of allegiance to the Babylonian monarch but soon became disloyal. So Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city, and about 80 distinguished leaders of the community were executed. The royal palace and the city were set on fire, and most of the survivors were taken

into  
captivity.

**The final Babylonian captivity of the Southern**

**Tribes (Judah)** is recorded in 2 Kings 25:22-26 and Jeremiah 40-44 in around 581 BC. This part of the captivity was caused by the rebellion of the remaining Hebrews of strong anti-Babylonian feeling. They fled to Egypt, forcing Jeremiah who had been given special consideration by Nebuchadnezzar, to accompany them. It is thought that 70,000 Jews were taken into captivity.

**Lessons**

1. Man can choose his sin, but God determines the consequences of those sins. The people of God suffered the consequences of their rebellion by being taken into captivity by foreign empires.

Despite the long exiles, God was always calling His people back to a right standing with Himself.

*Are you attempting to "manage" your sin, or will you choose to confess your sin to God and walk in obedience with Him?*

2. God will use ungodly people for His own purpose. Ungodly Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was an instrument of God used to chastise Israel. Though Nebuchadnezzar had the

earthly power, it was given to him by God and God was the one ultimately in control. *Are you trusting in earthly powers or in God the Father?*

**Judah's Return from Babylonian Exile to Jerusalem**

As recorded in Ezra 1-6, the Persian King Cyrus overcame the Babylonian Empire and issued a decree to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem.

Many returned to rebuild the temple and the temple vessels were returned. The number returning was 49,697, led by Zerubbabel in around 538 BC.

As recorded in Ezra 7-10, in around 458 BC, Ezra led 5500 men and women, 38 Levites and 220 temple servants back to Jerusalem. The final group of Jewish exiles was led back to Jerusalem by Nehemiah. Their mission was to rebuild the broken-down walls of Jerusalem.

### **Lessons**

1. The beginning of God's people returning to their rightful home in Jerusalem is the beginning of God fulfilling His promise that He made to Abraham back in Genesis 12. The ultimate and complete fulfillment of this promise to the nation Israel is still future to our time and will coincide with the return of Jesus Christ to earth. As you read about current events happening in the Middle East today, interpret them through the prism of God's Bible, as we watch His plan and promises unfold for the nation Israel.
2. Being called to a mission for God is just the beginning. Committing to a mission for God does not insure completion. It takes great devotion and diligence and perseverance to stay the course to complete a mission for God. Is *there something God has called you to do for Him that you have left unfinished?* Now is the time to re-commit and ask God to help you complete the task to which He has called you.