

# 14. How God’s People Failed – Part 2












## Previously...

Even though Yahweh rescued Abraham’s descendants from Egypt, gave them good laws and good land, the nation of Israel as a whole rebelled against Him.






Just as Yahweh had caused the land of Canaan to vomit out the Canaanites for their wickedness, He did the same with the Israelites. God threw them out of the land for their rebellion and wickedness. He used the Assyrians to take the northern kingdom of Israel away and the Babylonians to take the southern kingdom of Judah away.

At this point in history:

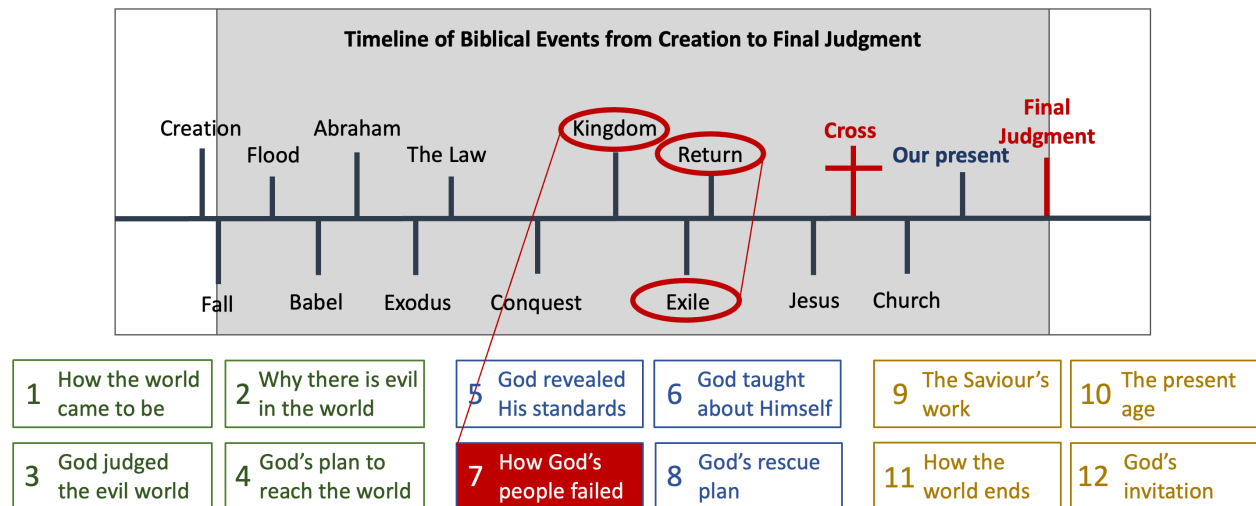
- They were no longer an independent nation.
- They no longer had their land.
- They no longer had a kingdom.
- They had no king on the throne.

Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man	
People rejected God and His History and Truth	Election	
 Babel		God chose Abraham
 Egypt		God saved Israel
 Canaan		God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Law</li> <li>▪ National anthem</li> <li>▪ Temple worship</li> <li>▪ Feasts &amp; festivals</li> </ul>
God’s restraining hand on the Pagan Kingdom of Man		Conquest and Settlement in the Promised Land
		Kings in Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unified kingdom</li> <li>▪ Divided kingdom</li> </ul>
		
	Israel and Judah turned against God: Paganised—unbelievers	Few believers
Rise of the Kingdom of Man	 Exile: Physical Kingdom of God Ended	

What would happen to the nation of Israel? This was the very nation of Abraham's descendants, whom God had made an unconditional covenant with.

 <b>Abrahamic Covenant</b>	
 <b>Parties</b>	God, Abraham and descendants
 <b>Promises</b>	Land, descendants, worldwide blessing
 <b>Signatories</b>	God alone (by passing between the animal halves)
 <b>Type</b>	Unconditional

In this lesson, we will see what God did when Israel failed. We will learn more about His character. And we will see that He is not thwarted by mankind's behaviour and choices.



## YAHWEH'S UNCONDITIONAL PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

In the midst of all the chaos and failures of the entire nation of Israel, Yahweh never forgot His unconditional promises to Abraham of land, descendants and that he would be a worldwide blessing.

Yahweh's promises to Abraham were not dependent on Israel's good or bad behaviour. Rather, God's unconditional promises relied on His own character as a promise-making, promise-keeping God. They relied on His willingness and determination to rescue mankind from eternal death in the lake of fire.

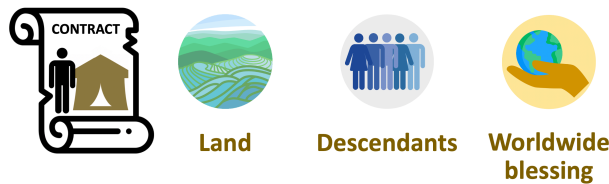
So all through the good and bad times of the rule of kings in Israel and Judah, God continued to instruct His prophets to remind the people that He had not forgotten nor abandoned His contract with the nation of Israel.



Even while they were being disciplined by Him and were suffering greatly, Yahweh wanted them to remember that He would fulfil His unconditional promises to them.

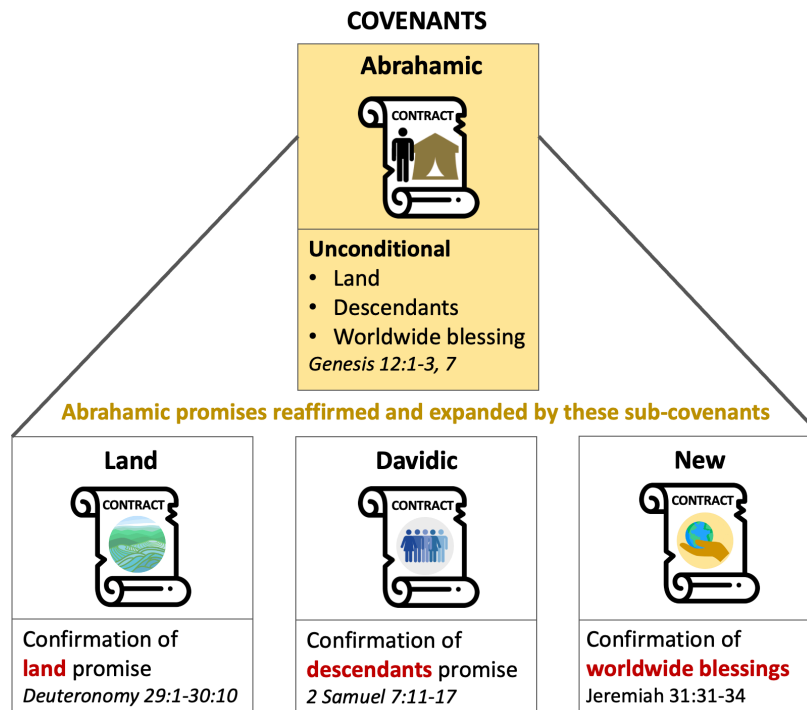
How did He assure them of this?

Yahweh made other unconditional contracts that reaffirmed His promises in the Abrahamic Contract.



Earlier, God had reaffirmed His land promise to Abraham through a separate land contract He made with Israel. He wanted to assure the people that no matter what happened in their future, at the end, God would indeed give them possession of the land in the Middle East that He had promised Abraham.

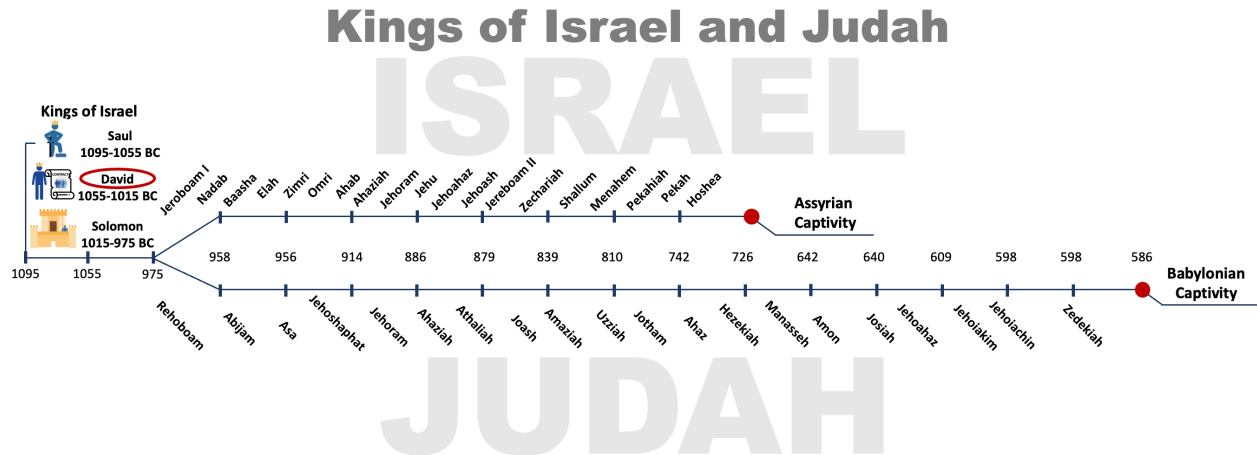
But during the period of the kings and exile from the land, He also made two more covenants: the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant, which He proclaimed to them but would fulfil in the future.





## Yahweh's covenant with King David

To confirm the promise of “descendants”, God made a contract with King David, the second king of Israel.



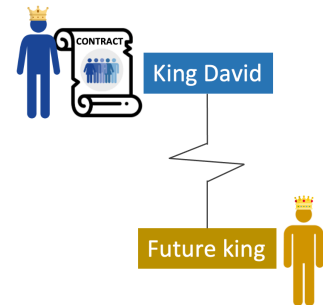
Through this contract, known as the Davidic Covenant, God gave more details about the promised Saviour. God sent a prophet to tell David the following.

### 2 Samuel 7:11b, 16

<sup>11</sup> “Furthermore, the LORD declares that he will make a house for you—a dynasty of kings!  
<sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever.”

Yahweh was promising David that some time in the future, He intended for a Son of David (a descendant of David) to take the throne and rule from Jerusalem forever. In this way, David's dynasty would be eternal.

God was talking about the promised Saviour, the future political and spiritual king. This was the one who would die as the substitute for mankind. He was telling David that the rescuer of mankind that He promised would be one of David's descendants.



## Yahweh's promise of the New Covenant

God had also promised Abraham that he and his descendants would be a “worldwide blessing”, meaning they will be a blessing to the whole world.

However, throughout their history since the time Yahweh rescued them from Egypt, Israel had never been able to obey God's law consistently. Sinful mankind simply could not deal with, nor get rid of, their own sin natures on their own.

So Yahweh intervened by promising a New Covenant for Israel and Judah. This New Covenant would enable them to be a worldwide blessing.

There were three promises in this new contract.



This is what the prophet Jeremiah wrote:

### **Jeremiah 31:27–28, 31–38a**

<sup>27</sup> "The day is coming," says the LORD, "when I will greatly increase the human population and the number of animals here in Israel and Judah. <sup>28</sup> In the past I deliberately uprooted and tore down this nation. I overthrew it, destroyed it, and brought disaster upon it. But in the future I will just as deliberately plant it and build it up. I, the LORD, have spoken!

<sup>31</sup> "The day is coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. <sup>32</sup> This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> "But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the LORD. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>34</sup> And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already," says the LORD. "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."

<sup>35</sup> It is the LORD who provides the sun to light the day  
and the moon and stars to light the night,  
and who stirs the sea into roaring waves.  
His name is the LORD of Heaven's Armies,  
and this is what he says:

<sup>36</sup> "I am as likely to reject my people Israel  
as I am to abolish the laws of nature!"

<sup>37</sup> This is what the LORD says:

"Just as the heavens cannot be measured  
and the foundations of the earth cannot be explored,

so I will not consider casting them away  
for the evil they have done.  
 I, the LORD, have spoken!

<sup>38</sup> “The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when all Jerusalem will be rebuilt for me...

Yahweh promised that one day in Israel's future, He would do something extraordinary to help them get rid of their sin. Yahweh Himself would pave the way for reconciling Israel to Him.

When this happened, Israel would indeed be able to be a blessing to the whole world. They would fulfil their mission of bringing the good news of rescue from eternal death to the whole world. So while Yahweh announced the New Covenant to Israel, He would enact and fulfil it in the future.



## YAHWEH GIVES INFORMATION ABOUT THE FUTURE

God's original intention was for Israel to be the superpower of the world. Earlier, God had told Moses to tell the people this:

### **Deuteronomy 28:1**

“If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the world.”



If Israel had been obedient to Yahweh, He would have made them the supreme political power. No nation, regardless of how big or strong, would have been able to defeat Israel.

But since they rebelled, God was handing over political power of the world to the Gentiles. And He wanted the Israelites to know this.



Yahweh did not want Israel to think that He had lost control over the whole world. God wanted them to know that He was still very much in charge. In fact, He was the one who sent them into exile. And He was going to allow other nations to become the superpowers.

So God gave a dream to King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. God revealed the dream and its interpretation to a young man called Daniel, who was a Jew (from Judah) who had been exiled to Babylon.



### Let's turn to our Bibles and read Daniel 2:26–45.

(The leader reads aloud. For reference, the verses are also here.)

#### Daniel 2:26–45

<sup>26</sup> The king said to Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar), “Is this true? Can you tell me what my dream was and what it means?”

<sup>27</sup> Daniel replied, “There are no wise men, enchanters, magicians, or fortune-tellers who can reveal the king’s secret. <sup>28</sup> But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future. Now I will tell you your dream and the visions you saw as you lay on your bed.

<sup>29</sup> “While Your Majesty was sleeping, you dreamed about coming events. He who reveals secrets has shown you what is going to happen. <sup>30</sup> And it is not because I am wiser than anyone else that I know the secret of your dream, but because God wants you to understand what was in your heart. <sup>31</sup> “In your vision, Your Majesty, you saw standing before you a huge, shining statue of a man. It was a frightening sight.

<sup>32</sup> The head of the statue was made of fine gold. Its chest and arms were silver, its belly and thighs were bronze, <sup>33</sup> its legs were iron, and its feet were a combination of iron and baked clay.

<sup>34</sup> As you watched, a rock was cut from a mountain, but not by human hands. It struck the feet of iron and clay, smashing them to bits.

<sup>35</sup> The whole statue was crushed into small pieces of iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold. Then the wind blew them away without a trace, like chaff on a threshing floor. But the rock that knocked the statue down became a great mountain that covered the whole earth.

<sup>36</sup> “That was the dream. Now we will tell the king what it means. <sup>37</sup> Your Majesty, you are the greatest of kings. The God of heaven has given you sovereignty, power, strength, and honor. <sup>38</sup> He has made you the ruler over all the inhabited world and has put even the wild animals and birds under your control. You are the head of gold.

<sup>39</sup> “But after your kingdom comes to an end, another kingdom, inferior to yours, will rise to take your place. After that kingdom has fallen, yet a third kingdom, represented by bronze, will rise to rule the world. <sup>40</sup> Following that kingdom, there will be a fourth one, as strong as iron. That kingdom will smash and crush all previous empires, just as iron smashes and crushes everything it strikes. <sup>41</sup> The feet and toes you saw were a combination of iron and baked clay, showing that this kingdom will be divided. Like iron mixed with clay, it will have some of the strength of iron. <sup>42</sup> But while some parts of it will be as strong as iron, other parts will be as weak as clay. <sup>43</sup> This mixture of iron and clay also shows that these



HEAD OF GOLD

CHEST & ARMS OF SILVER

BELLY & THIGHS OF BRONZE

LEGS OF IRON

FEET OF IRON AND CLAY

CRUSHING ROCK

kingdoms will try to strengthen themselves by forming alliances with each other through intermarriage. But they will not hold together, just as iron and clay do not mix.

<sup>44</sup> “During the reigns of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed or conquered. It will crush all these kingdoms into nothingness, and it will stand forever. <sup>45</sup> That is the meaning of the rock cut from the mountain, though not by human hands, that crushed to pieces the statue of iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold. The great God was showing the king what will happen in the future. The dream is true, and its meaning is certain.”

The dream that Yahweh gave King Nebuchadnezzar was about the transfer of political power from Israel to four Gentile kingdoms that were coming.

Daniel interpreted a span of history from that day (603 BC) to the final earthly return of the Kingdom of God in the future.

He explained that the statue in the dream represented a series of coming kingdoms. (Daniel chapters 2, 7 and 8 give details that are summarised in the diagram on the right.)

Each successive kingdom is represented by a metal of lesser value but greater strength (or military power).



**HEAD OF GOLD**

Kingdom of Babylon

**CHEST & ARMS OF SILVER**

Kingdom of Medes and Persians

**BELLY & THIGHS OF BRONZE**

Kingdom of Ancient Greece

**LEGS OF IRON**







Kingdom of Ancient Rome

**FEET OF IRON AND CLAY**

Kingdom of Restored Rome

**CRUSHING ROCK**

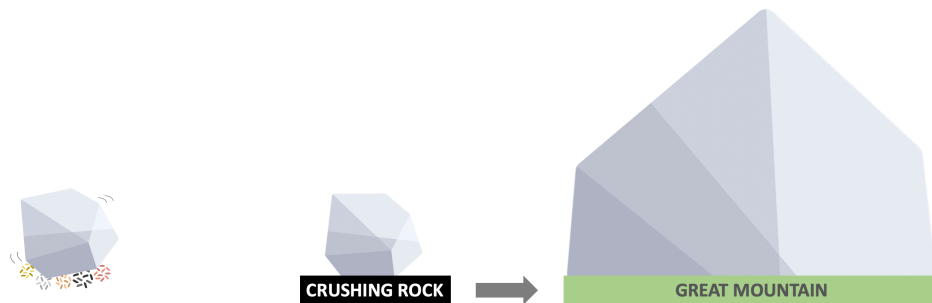
Kingdom of God

Part of the Statue	The Kingdom it Represents	Notes
 Head of gold	The kingdom of Babylon.	This information pleased Nebuchadnezzar. It was his kingdom which has now passed.
 Chest and arms of silver	The co-kingdoms of the Medes and Persians.	This kingdom has passed. (It occurs in the later part of the books of Daniel and Esther.)
 Belly and thighs of bronze	The empire of Greece.	This kingdom has passed. It was initially led by Alexander the Great.
 The legs of iron	The Roman Empire.	This kingdom was present throughout the time of the New Testament.
 The feet of mixed iron and clay	A future kingdom that is some form of revived Roman Empire.	This has not happened yet. It is in the future.
 <b>The crushing rock not cut by human hands</b>	<b>This is God’s kingdom, headed by the Saviour.</b>	<b>It comes to smash the Kingdom of Man. This has not yet happened. It is in the future.</b>



However, these kingdoms will finally end when the Kingdom of Man statue is crushed by a stone. The fact that the stone is not made by human hands means God Himself will do this.

After this crushing stone destroys the statue, it grows to be a mountain that dominates the world.



God was saying to Daniel that the Gentile powers all looked very big, strong and frightening, but even those unbelieving powers were controlled by Him. One day, He would crush all five kingdoms. We will see in a later lesson what God meant by this.

Note: In a later lesson, we will also discuss where we are today in terms of the timeline represented by the statue.

What was God's purpose in giving Nebuchadnezzar the dream and having Daniel interpret it?

- God was saying that it was He who was allowing all these political changes of power to take place.
- It was He who was allowing His people to be defeated and exiled.

When God caused Israel and Judah to be exiled, their monarchy ended. They no longer had their own kings nor their own land. They were prisoners in foreign lands under foreign governments.












God told Israel to submit in defeat to Babylon. In fact, God told the prophet Jeremiah to tell all the kings of the surrounding lands to also submit to Babylon.

#### **Jeremiah 27:4–8**

<sup>4</sup> Give them this message for their masters: 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: <sup>5</sup> With my great strength and powerful arm I made the earth and all its people and every animal. I can give these things of mine to anyone I choose. <sup>6</sup> Now I will give your countries to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who is my servant. I have put everything, even the wild animals, under his control.

<sup>7</sup> All the nations will serve him, his son, and his grandson until his time is up. Then many nations and great kings will conquer and rule over Babylon. <sup>8</sup> So you must submit to Babylon's king and serve him; put your neck under Babylon's yoke! I will punish any nation that refuses to be his slave, says the LORD. I will send war, famine, and disease upon that nation until Babylon has conquered it.

While Israel was a nation, God had restrained the power and influence of the Kingdom of Man. However, God was now allowing its rise to power. He was even allowing other nations the freedom to conquer the world. The Bible calls this era or age, which stretches from this point till our current day, “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24).

Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man	
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Rise of the Kingdom of Man	 Exile: Physical Kingdom of God Ended	

Even today, the modern state of Israel could not have come into existence except with Gentile permission. Gentile leaders in the United Nations issued a mandate for Israel to be given land and modern Israel was created in 1948.

God told Daniel about this transfer of power because this period would be long and hard and have massive impact on the Jews.

In fact, to enable His people to endure this period of time, God summarised the future for them in a new type of writing: the apocalyptic writings. The English word “apocalypse” comes from the Greek word “apokálypsis” which means “revealing”. These writings gave the people hope by revealing what was to come and how human history would end.



Yahweh wanted His people to know what was happening and have long-range hope based on the fact that He was in control of world events and that in the future, He would fulfil all His covenantal promises.

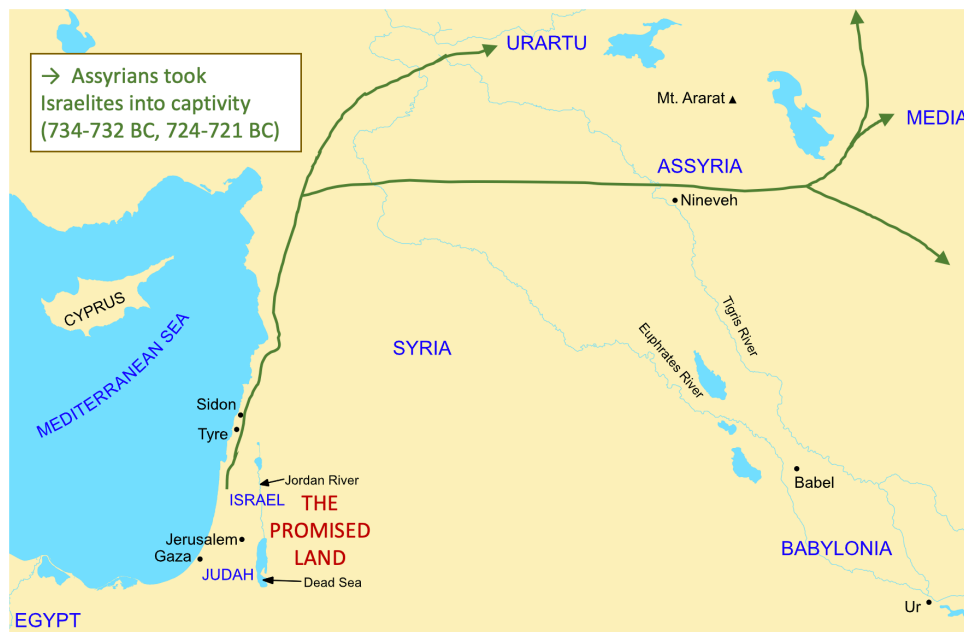
To further help His people live while under foreign governments, God also recorded much wisdom for them. Yahweh wanted the people to turn to Him for help, strength, comfort and encouragement during these tough and challenging times. Yahweh never stopped wanting a genuine personal relationship with mankind. Yahweh promised to be with them through this hard time.

## THE PARTIAL RETURN

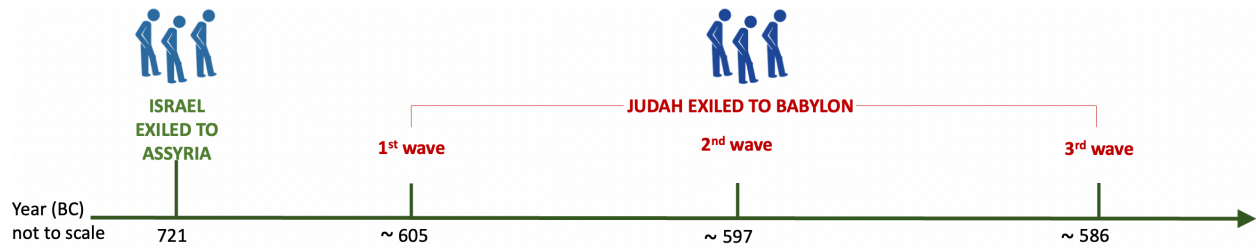
Due to Israel's repeated disobedience and rebellion, God had used the Assyrians to send Israel, the northern kingdom, into exile.



Israel remained in captivity and ended up scattered throughout the nations. They never returned to their land.



As for the people of Judah, the southern kingdom, God used the Babylonians to exile them.



Then, after 70 years, God allowed some of them to return to their land.



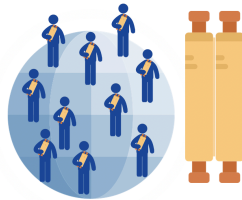
However, they were no longer the free and mighty nation they once were. They no longer possessed their land. They were subjects of the Babylonians. Also, only a small group of about 50,000 returned. Most of the scattered Jews never returned but lived and died outside the Promised Land.

## Despite Israel's rebellion, God was not thwarted

God's purpose for Abraham and his family was that they would (i) record His history and truth and preserve it in the form of Scriptures, and then (ii) go to all the world bringing these truths to the other nations.

Despite Israel's rebellion that led to the nation's collapse, God was still able to achieve this goal. How?

Ironically, even though the exile was to punish and discipline God's rebellious people, it actually caused the Jews to take God's Scriptures all over the world. When God scattered the Jews, they took with them the Old Testament Scriptures containing the message of how mankind can be reconciled with the Creator-God!



In fact, the Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that by his time (the first century AD), the Jews had already been living in every part of the earth for quite some time.

So the other nations had access to God's Word through the scattered Jews. God's will is never thwarted. It is always accomplished with or without mankind's cooperation.

## What happened next?

Even though God caused His Word to go throughout the world through the Jews, Israel was not a cooperative nation. Throughout their history with Yahweh, they consistently failed to live as the counterculture that would draw people to learn about about Yahweh and His rescue plan. In the next lesson, we will learn more about God's next major intervention in history.



**Bible reading for review**

Daniel 1:1–2:49; Ezra 1