

4. Exile and Return

I. Assyrian Empire

Tiglath-pileser III (745-727), Shalmaneser V (727-705), Sargon II (722-705), Sennacherib (705-681), Esarhaddon (680-669), Ashurbanipal (669-627)...

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was the first Mesopotamian kingdom to expand westwards from its capital Nimrud/Calah into the Levant, beginning with Ashurdan (934-912). Shalmaneser III (859-824) exacted tribute from Jehu, king of Israel (Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, British Museum). None of this is mentioned in the OT until:

Tiglath-pileser III (745-727, aka Pul)

Began a rapid expansion the Assyrian empire in all directions.

738 Menahem, king of Israel, paid tribute (2 Kgs 15:19-20)

735 Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel besieged Jerusalem (Syro-Ephraimite War) to replace king Ahaz with a king who would join them against T-p (2K 16:5; Isa 7:1). Through Isaiah Yhwh gave Ahaz a sign (Isa 7:14-17). Ahaz refused, sent treasures of temple and palace to T-p begging for help; he obliged:

733 Tiglath-Pileser invaded Israel, absorbing 80% of territory into his empire, and deporting many to Assyria (2K 15:29). Ahaz went to see T-p in Damascus, where he saw the altar and ordered a replica be made for the Jerusalem Temple (2K 16).

Shalmaneser V (727-705)

725 Discovering that Hoshea had switched sides to Egypt, Assyria again invaded, besieging Samaria for 3 years (2K 17:3-5).

722 Samaria captured. Many people deported to Assyria (2K 17:6); captive peoples from other conquered nations were settled in the land (17:24). Intermarriage would eventually lead to the Samaritans.

2 Kgs 17:7-23 gives an explanation for the end of the northern kingdom, Israel: the people had forsaken the Lord for false gods, and had ignored the Lord's repeated warnings through his prophets. Yhwh removed the people from his sight, as he had warned. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria.

Sennacherib (705-681)

Hezekiah (r. 715-687 BC) made tunnel to bring water inside city (2K 20:20); expanded Jerusalem to Western Hill.

701 Sennacherib attacked Judah (2K 18:13-19:37; Isa 36-37:38), capturing all the fortified cities, notably Lachish. Besieged Jerusalem.

Other kings: Esarhaddon (680-669), Ashurbanipal (669-627)...

Josiah (r. c. 640-609, 2K 22:1-23:30), godly king. Book of the Law found in the Temple. Josiah led a religious renewal, culminating in the celebration of Passover.

II. Babylonian Empire

Nabopolassar (625-605), Nebuchadnezzar (604-562), Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach, 561-560), Nergal-shar-usur (559-556), Labashi-Marduk (556), Nabonidus (555-539)

Nabopolassar (625-605)

612 Nabopolassar captured Nineveh, defeating Assyria, which had weakened.

609 Pharaoh Neco of Egypt headed north to assist Assyria against Babylon. Josiah foolishly tried to stop Neco and was killed by him at Megiddo (2K 23:28). Judah became vassal of Egypt.

605 Babylon (army commander Nebuchadnezzar) defeated Neco at the Battle of Carchemish. Judah became a Babylonian vassal. First deportation to Babylon, including Daniel and friends. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to assume throne.

Nebuchadnezzar (604-562)

600 Jehoiakim switched sides to Egypt

597 Babylon captured Jerusalem, deporting many leading citizens to Babylon.

587 Babylon besieged Jerusalem (2K 25) after another revolt, this by Zedekiah. After 18 month siege the city was captured, the temple, palace and walls destroyed, and many more people deported into exile/captivity.

Every mark of Israel's status as God's covenant people was lost: city, temple, land, king, priesthood.

Other rulers: Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach, 561-560), Nergal-shar-usur (559-556), Labashi-Marduk (556), Nabonidus (555-539).

III. Persian Empire

Cyrus the Great (559-530), Cambyses (529-522), Smerdis (522), Darius I the Great (521-486), Xerxes I (485-465), Artaxerxes I (464-425)

Cyrus the Great (559-530)

c. 559 became ruler of the Persians, capital Anshan.

550 defeated Astyages, king of Media (capital Ecbatana), inheriting the Median Empire. Founded the Achaemenid Empire, named after his grandfather Achaemenes.

547 captured Sardis, defeating Lydia and its king Croesus.

539 captured Babylon, where Belshazzar ruled the neo-Babylonian Empire on behalf of Nabonidus, thereby taking control of the Land.

538 issued decree allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild temple (2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; cf. Cyrus Cylinder, British Museum)

537 Some exiles returned to Judah under Zerrubabel (Ezra 1:5-2:70). Started rebuilding Temple, but stopped in the face of opposition.

Cambyses (529-522)

525 Cambyses conquered Egypt.

Darius I the Great (521-486)

520 resumed temple construction under prophetic chastisement of Haggai.

Opponents sent a letter to Darius (Ezra 5:6-17). Found Cyrus's decree in royal archive; Darius issued decree to continue the temple (6:1-12)

515 Temple finished, dedicated; Passover celebrated (6:13-22).

4. Exile and Return

Darius divided the empire into 20 satrapies, each headed by a satrap (xsacapaban Heb. אֶחָדָּרְשָׁן).
His far flung empire was linked by an efficient system of horse-mounted messengers, pirradaziš.
490 Athens defeated Persians (Darius) at Marathon

Xerxes I (485-465)

= Ahasuerus of Esther.

Capital Susa; ruled from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces. Imperial messages sent throughout empire:
mounted couriers (Esth 8:10; cf. Herodotus, *Histories*).

Feast of Purim.

480 Greeks defeated Persian fleet (Xerxes) at Salamis; further defeats at Plataea and Mycale in 479.

Artaxerxes I (464-425)

458 Ezra returned from Babylonia to Jerusalem (Ezra 7) with letter from Artaxerxes to teach Torah.

444 Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer in Susa, returned to Jerusalem to rebuild walls; finished (Neh 6:15).

Ezra the scribe reads Torah, prayer of confession, covenant renewal (Neh 8-10).

IV. Hellenistic Rule

Alexander the Great (356-323)

son of King Philip of Macedon

Overran the Persian Empire in just 3 years (334-331)

defeated Darius III at Battle of Issus (333), conquered Palestine (332), Babylon; reached India.

Died in Babylon 323, leaving no heir.

Spread Greek culture, language: Hellenism. Founded many cities named after himself.

Wars of the Diadochi (323-301)

Alexander's generals fought each other to carve up his empire: the Diadochi (successors).

The Land was caught between two of these Diadochi: Ptolemy in Egypt, Seleucus in Syria.

Judea under Ptolemaic Ruler (301-200)

Judea under Seleucid Rule (200-164)

167 Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the temple.

One family rose up in revolt, launching the Maccabean Revolt.