

THE EXILE, THE RETURN, AND THE REVOLT

The Exile

Assyria effectively removes the Northern Kingdom (Israel) from the face of the earth and replaces it with conquered people from five different nations. These people eventually unite and later come to be known as Samaritans. Later, Jerusalem is destroyed by Babylon. God actually uses the king of Babylon to bring his children back into line. Things look bleak except for a prophet named Daniel and a promise about

a Persian king named Cyrus who will allow the Jewish people to return to the Promised Land. Even in exile, God is still perfecting and forming his people. They will one day bring humanity back to the Garden and teach us how to love again. These are dark days for the children of God, but the flame of hope is still flickering like a candle that can never be extinguished.

The Return

After seventy years, the Jews are allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem. This time, they must do whatever they can to remain faithful to God. This means an extreme separation from the outsiders who introduced false idols into the worship of the one true God. The Temple is rebuilt despite efforts to sabotage its reconstruction.

As we see in Ezra, it is because the Israelites are unfaithful to God that he is forced to teach them a lesson. God is ever-faithful to the promise he made to his children, however. From the remnant that returns, will come a Messiah

to save them, in fulfillment of the Scriptures (remember the *protoevangelion*).

There are actually three “returns,” and the story does not take place entirely in the land of Canaan. Notice what the people are returning to in each of the three returns. How are they preparing themselves to receive the Messiah that Isaiah and the other prophets spoke of? Pay particular attention to how certain heroic people turn their backs to the crowds, to public opinion, and even to the threat of death to lead the Israelites through this period.

Maccabean Revolt

Yet again, many Israelites deny God and follow the popular culture—this time, at the hands of the Greeks. But, as we read in the narrative book of First Maccabees, we are also given a picture of true hope. A small but faithful family stands up to the mighty Greek armies and leads a revolt that shows us what it means to have courage in the face of cultural pressures, temptations, and death. Before you read, be sure that you understand what Alexander the Great did in conquering the known world. What was

the pressure to conform to the popular culture of the time? When Antiochus Epiphanes takes control and there is a concentrated effort to make the entire world Hellenistic (i.e., Greek in its language and customs), God saves the faithful of Israel through the rebellion of the few. Through this short time period—one filled with blood—we see the impact that a small group of people focused on God can have not only on their local region or culture, but on the entire world, for history.