

Introduction to the Old Testament

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The Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture

Did God command certain individuals to write? Did God dictate into the ears of the writers? Was the writer in a hypnotic state, in ecstasy, or even possessed by God?

When we speak of the inspiration of Scripture, we speak of the Holy Spirit assisting human authors to write sacred books. The reader must consider the conditions of the time and culture, the literary genres of the time and the modes of feeling. Human faculties are employed to bring out the full message of the book. Christianity is not merely a religion of the book (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 101-141).

If the writer were in a hypnotic state, the Bible in its literal sense would not exist because the human author's intention would be void. No relationship would exist between the author and his contemporaries and history would be vacant.

If the writer were in an ecstatic state or even possessed by God, the event of ecstasy would be vital to the writing.

When we speak of inerrancy, we are saying that the Bible is free from error in the sense that the meaning intended by the writers is itself free from error. Investigation of the literary form will help one to judge what the meaning was, while the doctrinal affirmation of the meaning will not be overthrown by growth in historical understanding. The intention of the author must be judged in terms of the book's relevance to human salvation. Since the Bible is a response to revelation and revelation is a process, so too the human understanding of an unfolding relationship changes. The inerrant truth of Scripture is the inerrant saving truth.

ABRAHAM and Period of Patriarchs (1850 BC- 1250 BC)

Genesis 12:1-9 God elects a race or a clan of **Abram**. God chooses Abram over all peoples.

Stories of Jacob and Joseph

EXODUS EVENT (1300 BC- 1250 BC)

Exodus 3 and 4

Call scene, flees to **Midian** after killing an Egyptian

- 1) Identity- "I am the God of your fathers..."
- 2) Character- "I have seen the affliction of my people..."
- 3) Call- "You will go to Egypt..."

Confrontation with Pharaoh

Plague happens and a pattern of events always follows.

Exodus 9: 27-35

- 1) Moses asks for release
- 2) Pharaoh refuses
- 3) Plague occurs (Hebrews not affected)
- 4) Pharaoh's meeting (he backs down)
- 5) Plague ends, Pharaoh changes his mind.

Exodus 19- 10 Commandments and Theophany

Pentecost

Shavuot (or Pentecost) is a festival that commemorates the day on which God gave the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai as terms of a covenant. This festival takes place in the early summer.

You shall count for yourselves -- from the day after the Shabbat, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving -- seven Shabbats, they shall be complete. Until the day after the seventh sabbath you shall count, fifty days... You shall convoke on this very day -- there shall be a holy convocation for yourselves -- you shall do no laborious work; it is an eternal decree in your dwelling places for your generations. -Leviticus 21:15-16, 21

Shavu'ot, the **Festival of Weeks**, is the second of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (Passover is first and Sukkot is third). Agriculturally, it commemorates the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the Temple.

Historically, it celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and is also known as the Festival of the Giving of Our Torah

Exodus 32 Golden Calf Incident

Story of rebellion, Aaron makes the calf; Moses gets so angry he breaks the tablets on the calf. God promises punishment later: 1) Deut. 9: 7-28 (Moses' reflection)

Books of Leviticus and Numbers

Continuation of the law presented at Sinai up to the point where the Hebrews enter the **Promised Land**. The focus of all the stories is legal lists on either preparation for the journey or problems encountered on the journey, or on attitudes that threaten the journey. The central theme of Leviticus is holiness in the ordinary areas of life such as food, clothing, sickness, moral ethics and regular worship. Numbers intensifies these expectations and stresses the need for dedication and total commitment to God for Israel to succeed as a nation. Its goal is to live prosperously in the Holy Land.

Sukkot

This festival is also known as the **Feast of Booths**, the **Feast of Tabernacles**, or simply **Booths** or **Tabernacles**.

Historically, Sukkot commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Agriculturally, Sukkot is a harvest festival and is sometimes referred to as the Festival of Gathering.

In the United States, Jews commonly hang dried squash and corn in the sukkah to decorate it, because these vegetables are readily available at that time for the American holidays of Halloween and Thanksgiving. Many families hang artwork drawn by the children on the walls. Building and decorating a sukkah is a fun family project, much like decorating the Christmas tree is for Christians.

Deuteronomy- mostly speeches by Moses, very different in style and language.

Speeches by Moses

- 1) Numbers 20: 10-13 why didn't Moses enter the Promised Land? He struck the rock twice.
- 2) Numbers 27: 12-20 Moses is told by God to choose **Joshua** as the new leader because Moses will die.
- 3) Deut. 2: 23-29 Joshua will enter the Promised Land, Moses will not.
- 4) Deut. 31: 1-8 Moses commissions Joshua.

Moses' Farewell Tour

- He tells them to remain faithful. He outlines the blessings and curses they can expect depending upon their commitment to Yahweh
- 1) Deut. 28: 1-15 blessings- stand in awe, give and receive
 - 2) Deut. 28: 15-68 curses
 - 3) Deut. 30: 15-20 final speech- choose life and not death.
 - 4) Deut. 32: 48-52 Moses sees the Promised Land, but can't enter.
 - 5) Deut. 32-33 prayers and blessings
 - 6) Deut. 34 death of Moses

JOSHUA

The book of Joshua presents that first step, the conquest and distribution of land; the succeeding stages of development, ultimately unsuccessful because of Israel's failure to obey the law.

"The New Moses"

Joshua 3

- 1) Moses leads people across the Red Sea, Joshua will lead them across the Jordan River
- 2) Moses had a staff of powers; Joshua has the Ark of the Covenant (both are sacred objects).
- 3) Moses' theophany was a burning bush; Joshua had a vision of an angel.

Settling in the Promised Land

Joshua 2: 1-24 Rahab and the Spies

Joshua 5: 5:1-15 Israel in the Promised Land

Joshua 6: 1-19 Siege at Jericho

Joshua 7: 1-26 Defeat at Ai for breaking the ban

Ban- total destruction without taking any possessions for yourself

Joshua 24: 1-33 Personality and death of Joshua

AGE OF JUDGES (1130 BC- 1020 BC)

Judge- temporary leaders of the 12 tribes assigned by Moses before his death. When the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, they were assigned by tribes and each tribe had a leader called a Judge. This represents the period between the death of Joshua and the days of Samuel. Judges were mostly military leaders sent by God to aid and relieve his people in time of external danger. These are stories of how God raises up deliverers to save Israel when, after settled in the Promised Land, is unfaithful and overcome by enemies. Whenever the people were obedient, things went well. When they were disobedient, pagan nations attacked them.

Major Judges: Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson

Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings:

The ancient authors used stories and traditions that already existed; each major work covers many centuries of history, and therefore it cannot be an eyewitness account by one person. The ancient authors created the final form of each work. Sometimes they took over older accounts with little or no change; sometimes they rewrote the source. It is important, however, to pay attention both to the older materials (they tell important things about ancient traditions) and to the final form of the documents (they tell us what the authors thought was important and therefore emphasized). The Bible often tells the same story from different points of view (crossing the Red Sea, parables and miracles of Jesus); this gives clues to that perspective, and not just the story. An example of this is a saga like tale of David and **Goliath** while, on the other hand, David's household is pure history.

So, Deuteronomy- II Kings was written long after the time they actually happened and is considered one long narrative. Most likely, Genesis through Numbers and Deuteronomy through II Kings were finally assembled in the years subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The stories were there, they just were not written down yet.

Book written at this time:

Ruth

AGE OF MONARCHY (1120- 587 BC)

SAMUEL

I Samuel 2: 12-36, 3:1-21 Call of Samuel

I Samuel 5:6-7 Attack of the **Philistines**

- Loss of the ark because they could not handle its power
- Philistines had bad luck with it as well and simply return it (hemorrhoids).

A King for Israel

1) Anti- Monarchy I Samuel 8:6-22, 10: 17-27, 12: 13-18
Monarchy would break the covenant with God

2) Pro- Monarchy I Samuel 11: 1-15
Need a king to be a blessing to other nations.

Problem: Traditionally, Israel's king was Yahweh himself. Others believed that a human leader was essential for many reasons- war, enemies, diplomacy, and immediate decisions. One of the big problems was unity among the nation because allegiance till this point was tribal.

I Samuel 12:18-25 Assistance Promised

Warnings for the people about sin. God should be first and the king should be second.

KING SAUL (1020-1000 BC)

I Samuel 10: 17-27 **Saul** hides. He is a tall, reluctant king

I Samuel 14: 16-23 Saul will be a warrior-king

Saul is the first king of Israel from the **tribe of Benjamin**. Saul was very successful at first with his military. Saul leads people into battle with the Philistines, their enemy, and wins. Saul builds a

strong army and is successful in battle. Politically, Saul could care less about a centralized government. He had no military draft. No hierarchy in court, no court officials.

At the end of his reign, Saul was faced with two difficult situations:

- 1) Continual pressure from the Philistines.
- 2) Military success of a young man named **David**.

Saul spent so much time trying to hunt down and kill David that he eventually lost to the Philistines.

Saul's Downfall

Battle with the **Amalekites** (ancient enemies from Exodus 17: 8-16). "*Holy War*" was waged by God's command. No sex, no loot, no property but rather give everything as an offering to God. I Samuel 15: 1-35 Saul broke the ban on keeping treasures. They beat the Amalekites, but Saul spares the life of the king (Saul had to kill him) and some livestock. Saul also offers a sacrifice reserved for priests.

KING DAVID (1000- 961 BC)

I Samuel 18: 6-16

David's Rise:

- 1) I Samuel 16: 14-23 Brought into court of Saul as a musician.
- 2) I Samuel 17: 50- 18:5 Victory over Goliath

KING SOLOMON (961- 930 BC)

I & II Kings contain the history of Judah and Israel from the time Solomon (961 BC) through the destruction of both the Northern and Southern Kingdom into the period of the Exile (561 BC.). It is about the ascension and reign of Solomon, the history of the two kingdoms and the Kingdom of Judah after the fall of Israel.

Solomon was not a soldier or a military man. He was an educated man. God grants Solomon the gift of wisdom- I Kings 3: 1-14

4 Areas of National Development

- 1) Foreign Policy- peaceful relations with neighbors, formed alliances with other nations by marrying their king's daughters.
- 2) Defense- large army with superior weapons
- 3) Trade- invited ships and merchants into the land
- 4) Cultural Flourish- fine arts, literature, history, music (psalms), philosophy (proverbs).

Construction of the Temple of Yahweh I Kings 5-7

Took seven years to build. Housed ark of covenant, combined politics and religion like his father David and he used it as a tourist attraction. I Kings 8: 9-14 was considered the holiest place on earth. God said that if Solomon and his descendants forsake the covenant, he would destroy the temple.

Solomon's Downfall- Idolatry

I Kings 11: 1-4 Solomon's marriage to all the pagan women that God asked him not to marry. Solomon began to perform their rituals to keep them happy and turned away from God. Beyond that, he let pagan gods be worshipped in the temple of Yahweh.

Punishment Speech I Kings 11: 1-43

Solomon's son will have the kingship fall, but God will leave one tribe (faithful remnant). Solomon broke #1 commandment by worshipping other gods because of his intermarriage. Solomon blamed his old age.

Problems with Solomon's Reign in the North

- 1) High taxes- Solomon broke the country into twelve tax districts that were split up in tribal fashion. North did not want to pay for the military, Solomon's court and harem.
- 2) Forced labor I Kings 5:27-32- Solomon had many construction projects. He had 30,000 Israelites in labor camps and 80,000 in stone quarries.

Rosh Hashanah: "Head of the Year"

The **New Year (Rosh Hashana)** and the **Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)** are serious- though not sad- occasions, marking the beginning of the Ten Days on Penitence. The Ten Days are called **Days of Awe**, a forty-day penitential period which begins a month before the New Year (A bit like Lent, but in the late summer). (Solomon, 62)

"Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation."

The shofar is a ram's horn which is blown somewhat like a trumpet. One of the most important observances of this holiday is hearing the sounding of the shofar in the synagogue. A total of 100 notes are sounded each day. The shofar's sound is a call to repentance...to wake up from your sin.

Ten days after Rosh Hashanah is **Yom Kippur**, also known as Day of Atonement. It is the holiest day of the year for the Jewish people. Its central themes are atonement and repentance. Jewish people traditionally observe this holy day with an approximate 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services.

Teshuva, or penitence, is not only the major theme of Yom Kippur, but a leading concept in Judaism. It is a "return" to God, and consists of the recognition of sin, regret and confession, and renewed commitment to the right path. No sacrifice or intermediary is required to complete this process, which depends on God's grace alone. (Norman, 63)

The concluding service of Yom Kippur, known as *Ne'ilah*, is one unique to the day. It usually runs about 1 hour long. The ark (a cabinet where the scrolls of the Torah are kept) is kept open throughout this service, thus one must stand throughout the service. There is a tone of desperation in the prayers of this service. The service is sometimes referred to as the closing of the gates; think of it as the "last chance" to get in a good word before the holiday ends. The service ends with a very long blast of the shofar.

JEROBOAM- First King of North (922- 901 BC)

Books written at this time:

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Tobit

The Prophet Elijah

I Kings 17- 19

Elijah and the **Prophets of Baal**- who owns the fertility rights? Baal or Yahweh? Israel did not abandon the Lord, but worshipped Baal in addition to Yahweh. Why? Because Yahweh was not a God of fertility to a nomad people. Elijah convinces the people that Yahweh is also a fertility god. Later, Elijah goes back to Mt. Horeb to learn that Yahweh has not deserted his people.

Some words about prophets:

- 1) Only concerned with the present, not the future. They are not fortunetellers.
- 2) Their goal is to remind people of the covenant made with Yahweh now, not later.
- 3) Prophets feel they are called by God but are usually not willing.
- 4) Use words like, "Thus says the Lord..."
- 5) Southern Prophets- Covenant with David
Northern Prophets- Covenant with Moses

Written to Israel in the North:

Amos- 750 BC. 7: 10-15. Amos confronts **Amaziah**, a professional prophet and tells him that Assyria will attack. Amaziah disagrees. Amos calls Israel to social justice- 3:1-2.

Hosea- 745- 725 BC. Hosea says the covenant is like a marriage and the bride (Israel) has been unfaithful to Yahweh. In the meantime, Hosea' wife, **Gomer**, has been unfaithful to him. Hosea says that if Israel returns to Yahweh, they could have a honeymoon all over again. 14: 1-9.

Written to Judah in the South:

Joel- 835 BC- a recent plague of locusts illustrates the far more terrifying Day of the Lord.

Written to Edom

Obadiah 840 BC

Written to Judah in the South:

Isaiah 1-39- 740 BC- Isaiah is called (6:1) the same year Azariah dies. Two-fold message of condemnation (1-39) and consolation (40-66). God judgment on the sins of Judah by the surrounding nations, and the world, followed by salvation and restoration. Vineyard image 5: 1-7, faithful remnant 10: 20-27, rule of Immanuel 11: 1-9, 9:2-8.

Written to Assyria

Jonah 760 BC

Written to Judah in the South:

Micah- 735 BC- In spite of judgment by God to lands of Israel and Judah, God's covenant will be restored in the Messiah's future kingdom.

Written to Assyria

Nahum 660 BC

Reign of **Josiah** (640- 609 BC)- positive, got rid of pagan images, destroys High Place at Bethel. Dies in Battle. Establishes public worship in Jerusalem. Sometimes compared to David.

The Book of Deuteronomy and Josiah

Josiah had a hope to reunite the North and the South. Egypt is now gaining power and has weakened Assyria. Josiah works with the Pharaoh, **Necho**, to build an alliance so the south could stay a nation. Josiah was very successful in ridding the land of pagan images and worship. But Josiah finds something in the temple that could unite the North and South to become one nation to stand up to their neighbors- **The Book of Deuteronomy**. Some scholars say it was written by the temple priests during the reign of Josiah, but II Kings says it was found. Most likely it was written by Northern scribes who fled to the South after Assyria conquered the North.

Some scholars speculate that Josiah commissioned its writing in the spirit of religious reform to unite the North and South under the Law of Moses. Either way, in 622 BC, Josiah decided to repair the temple and spared no expense in doing so. Politically, the unification of the North and South would provide Josiah with a stronghold on the land. However, the Assyrians occupied the land to the North. So, he promised the Assyrians that he would be a caretaker of the people in the North. To the Assyrians, Josiah kept up the appearance of loyalty to them, but in reality, he wanted to reconvert the North to the Law of Moses and Covenant with David.

With Deuteronomy, Josiah could entice the North to join them in a fight against neighbors. One problem faced was the fact that the Northern Israelites were intermarrying with the Assyrians so their allegiance would be mixed. Josiah saw himself as a new Joshua- a new conqueror and he is presented that way in the Bible. Josiah hopes it would motivate North and South just as David did by bringing the ark to Jerusalem. However, after Josiah dies, the whole plan is over.

The style of the Book of Deuteronomy is that, although put into the mouth of Moses, the homilies are directed at a people living long after the events of the exodus, people who are urged to recall and keep the teachings of Moses. The book looks back at the conquest of the holy land as a completed event, and its legal ideas presuppose the highly developed government set up by David and Solomon. Because the outlook of the book comes from the 7th century and not the 13th century, Deuteronomy's teaching does not center so much on warning against the dangers ahead as it does on returning to covenant and learning to be more faithful than their ancestors.

Look at Dt. 30:15-18. The author is looking back at a very special situation that has already happened and he knows that God asked for obedience and Israel has many times disobeyed and turned away. In other words, Deuteronomy is more of an explanation, in the mouth of Moses, for Israel's troubles- failed kings, idolatry, injustices, etc. It says how Israel could have been if the people had taken the covenant seriously.

Written to Judah in the South:

Jeremiah- 627 BC- Declaration of certain judgment of God against Judah. But promises to establish a new covenant with his people.

Zephaniah- 630 BC- The Day of the Lord will bring judgment upon the people followed by a blessing to the people. God will restore the remnant. 3: 12-20.

Written to Judah in the South:

Habakkuk- 607 BC- troubled with God's plan to use Babylon as his judgment tool, Habakkuk praises God for gaining a better respect for him.

Written to Judah in the South:

Lamentations- 586 BC- series of five lament poems is a funeral dirge for a fallen city of Jerusalem.

BABYLONIAN EXILE 587-539 BC

Here is where the religion of Judaism becomes a religion of the Book because in order to maintain the religion, everything in their history had to be written down. It becomes a religion that is written instead of oral. It is during the exile that a majority of the Pentateuch and history is compiled and organized, edited and produced. It is written in sequence.

Those who had put together the history of Deuteronomy (and Jeremiah), also write and assemble Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. It is often called the Deuteronomistic History because these works are assembled in the spirit of the book of Deuteronomy. In one sense, the whole history was organized to explain why the nation had failed and why their punishment had been deserved.

Notice how each of the heroes- Joshua, David, Samuel, Solomon and Moses all give long speeches, from their own mouth. When linked together, these narratives follow a theological vision of the relationship between God and man- especially how man has failed. There are consequences for sin, forgiveness and mercy followed by more sin.

Organization of the Jewish Religion

The whole religion is starting to change into the religion it was during Jesus' time and even today. It is at this time that the prophet Jeremiah tells the exiles that Yahweh is everywhere, not only in Jerusalem. The exile produced the Bible. The Torah is written in response to exile. It is an attempt to recapture and salvage the origins of the faith. Does this mean that no part of the OT was written prior to this? No. However, this is the time that much was written and edited using prior sources.

Mezuzah

“And you shall write [the words that I command you today] on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. -Deuteronomy 6:9, 11:19”

On the doorposts of traditional Jewish homes, you will find a small case. This case is commonly known as a **mezuzah** (Heb.: doorpost), because it is placed upon the doorposts of the house. It is a constant reminder of God's presence and **mitzvot** (blessing).

The mitzvah to place mezuzah on the doorposts of our houses is derived from Deut. 6:4-9, a passage commonly known as the **Shema** (Heb: Hear, from the first word of the passage). The words of the Shema are written on a tiny scroll of parchment, along with the words of a companion passage, Deut. 11:13-21.

Every time a Jew passes through a door with a mezuzah on it, he/she touch the mezuzah and then kiss the fingers that touched it, expressing love and respect for God and his mitzvot and reminding yourself of the mitzvot contained within them.

Tefillin

Bind [the words that I command you today] as a sign on your arm, and they shall be ornaments between your eyes. -Deuteronomy 6:8

The Shema also commands us to bind the words to our hands and between our eyes. Jews do this by "laying tefillin," that is, by binding to their arms and foreheads leather pouches containing scrolls of Torah passages.

Like the mezuzah, tefillin are meant to remind us of mitzvot. Jews bind them to their head and arm, committing both intellect and physical strength to the fulfillment of the mitzvot. At weekday morning services, one case is tied to the arm, with the scrolls at the biceps and leather straps extending down the arm to the hand, then another case is tied to the head, with the case on the forehead and the straps hanging down over the shoulders. Appropriate blessings are recited during this process. The tefillin are removed at the conclusion of the morning services.

Like the scrolls in a mezuzah, the scrolls in tefillin must be hand-written in a special style of writing. A good, valid set of tefillin can cost a few hundred dollars, but if properly cared for they can last for a lifetime.

Tzitzit, Tallit (in Hebrew) Tzitzit and Tallit

“They shall make themselves tzitzit on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and they shall place on the tzitzit of each corner a thread of techeilet. And it shall be tzitzit for you, and you will see it, and you will remember all the mitzvot of the L-RD and do them and not follow your heart or your eyes and run after them.” -Numbers 15:38-40

The Torah commands us to wear **tzitzit** (fringes) at the corners of our garments as a reminder of the **mitzvot**, (the blessing).

To fulfill this mitzvah, adult men wear a four-cornered shawl called a **tallit** during morning services, along with the **tefillin**. In some Orthodox congregations, only married men wear a tallit; in others, both married and unmarried men wear one. In Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist synagogues, both men and women may wear a tallit, but men are somewhat more likely than women to do so. A blessing is recited when you put on the tallit.

There is no particular religious significance to the **tallit (shawl)** itself, other than the fact that it holds the **tzitzit (fringes)** on its corners. There are also very few religious requirements with regard to the design of the tallit. The tallit must be long enough to be worn over the shoulders (as a shawl), not just around the neck (as a scarf), to fulfill the requirement that the tzitzit be on a "garment." Likewise, it should be draped over the shoulders like a shawl, not worn around the neck like a scarf, though that is commonly done. A longer tallit is commonly folded over the shoulders, to prevent the tzitzit from dragging on the ground. The tallit may be made of any material but must not be made of a combination of wool and linen, because that combination is forbidden on any clothing. (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:11).

Prophets during the Exile

Ezekiel- 592 BC- ministry to Jewish captives in Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem. Says Judah is a rebellious house, the exile will be temporary, God will renew his covenant, and reminds the people of their past unfaithfulness. Why will God restore the people? Not out of compassion or because they deserve it, but rather to preserve his holy name.

Daniel- 605 BC- Outlines God's plan for the Gentile nations and portrays Israel during a time of Gentile domination.

Isaiah 40-55 written 550-530 BC

II Isaiah is a very pivotal text in the OT. It is exilic literature and has many differences in style, language, thought and vocabulary from I Isaiah. An obvious example of this is that II Isaiah mentions Cyrus of Persia (who lets the exiles back) as an anchor and hope to the Israelites. Isaiah of Jerusalem (I Isaiah), writing in the 8th century would not know who Cyrus was.

II Isaiah is a community which has experienced a major disaster from which it still suffers. It is a disaster which has reduced the community to political impotence. The motif of hopelessness is a running theme in II Isaiah. The prophet addresses the people with a message of hope; he promises early deliverance, which will be fulfilled in the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem.

The community is being prepared for a new exodus and a new march through the desert, themes which reoccur so frequently and so obviously. II Isaiah 41: 17-20, 43: 1-7, 16-21. There is no period of Israelite history known to us which offers a suitable background in which such a community could exist except the period between the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 BC and the surrender of Babylon to Cyrus of Persia in 539 AD. The prophecies read intelligibly as addressed to the Babylonian community in exile.

RETURN AND RESTORATION

Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylon at the Battle of Opis on the Tigris River and issues an Edict for all Jews to return to their land.

Ezra and Nehemiah- the only narrative accounts of the post-exilic period (after 539 BC).

These two books deal with the following phases of new life after

- 1) The rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem in 515 BC.
- 2) The reordering of Jewish life

Some people did not want to go back to Jerusalem because they started new lives in Babylon and started raising their families there. They also had businesses and a comfortable life. It is just like Egypt minus the slavery.

Some people did not want the temple rebuilt while others did. In the end, the Persian imperial authorities allowed it to happen.

Prophets After the Exile to the Faithful Remnant

Haggai- 520 BC- urges people to put God first and finish the temple so they can once again be a blessing.

Zechariah- 520 BC- same as Haggai, but he relates the finishing of the temple to the coming of the Messiah through a series of visions.

Malachi- 420 BC- After 100 years back on their land, the Jews have turned cold and Malachi rebukes them. They need to turn back to God with faithful hearts.

Isaiah 56-66- 450 BC

Another thing Ezra did was break up mixed marriages and force the people to marry only Jews. However, this led to an idea of exclusivity of Jews as a “holy race”. Ezra believed the Jews were in danger of being absorbed into other cultures. His belief was a reality. One of the people

excluded from marriage is the Samaritans. Samaritans are half-Jew and half-Babylonian/ Mesopotamian people who intermarry with Jews during the exile.

In 515 BC the Samaritans offered assistance in the rebuilding but were shunned. So, even though they may be half Jew, they are forbidden from marrying full-blood Jews. Hence, Samaritan writings are full of negative feelings towards Ezra while the Talmud (collections of oral history) sees Ezra as a second Moses. This animosity continued up through the time of Jesus.

One must note- Ezra did not imply that the Jews were morally superior to anyone, but rather ritually pure. But when ritually pure means not associated with Gentiles, tensions arise. If Ezra is claiming Jews as a chosen race, holy people and ritually pure, that leads to more exclusion rather than inclusion. Upon returning to the land, there was great emphasis on ritual purity. Once again, it was not about race or ethnicity, but rather pure worship of Yahweh. Therefore, a priestly class emerged in the society. This class is known as the **Sadducees** whom Jesus has words with in a few hundred years.

One good thing- In Nehemiah 8 Ezra has a public reading of the Torah that was, as some scholars say, drafted during the exile. After the reading, there was a public pledge and signing of the law.

Ezra shaped Judaism into what it was at the time of Jesus and continues up until this day. The people of Jesus' time had no association with Judaism as it appeared in the time of Moses, David and Solomon. Their Judaism was shaped after the exile by Ezra and Nehemiah. What Ezra formed in terms of strict adherence to the law most definitely continued up to the time of Christ.

I & II Maccabees

By 323 BC, **Alexander the Great** conquered the world and Seleucid is the name of the Greek dynasty that ruled in Syria following Alexander's death. It comes from the name of Seleucus, one of his generals. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's general, who ruled from Egypt, ruled right after Alexander's death. The word "**Maccabee**" derives from the Hebrew word for hammer and was a nickname for Judas, a leader in the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid ruler, **Antiochus Epiphanes** who outlawed Judaism (165-161 BC). So, from the time of Ptolemy in 323 BC until Antiochus Epiphanes in 165 BC, the Jews faced much interference in terms of the *hellinization* (spread of Greek thought) of culture, politics and economy from Egypt. Some Jews eagerly accepted it while others resisted hellinization. The term "Maccabean" came to designate the period of Jewish History that witnesses the successful revolt against the Seleucids many years after hellinization.

After the revolt, the descendants of the Maccabees assumed religious and later political leadership of the Jewish community in Palestine. They ruled an independent Judah from 135- 67 BC until Pompey conquered Palestine for Rome.

Chanukah celebrates the re-dedication of the Temple by the Hasmoneans in about 165 BC. This is how the Talmud describes its origins:

Eight days of Chanukah commence on the 25 of *Kislev*, and one may not eulogize or fast on them. For when the Greeks entered the Temple they defiled all the oils in the Temple, but when the Hasmoneans became strong and defeated them they searched, and found only one cruse of oil remaining with the High Priests seal, and there was sufficient in it

for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit from it for eight days. In a later year they fixed these days as a festival for praise and thanksgiving.

Although this festival is another example of the Jews taking up arms and defeating an enemy, nowadays this festival is associated with light conquering the darkness as noted in Zechariah 4:6-“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.”

Jews today celebrate this feast in their homes with a *menorah, or hannukiya*, specifically for Chanukah.

Hanukkah is a Jewish feast celebrating the purification and rededication of the Second Temple (built by Ezra) during the Maccabean revolt. It was Judas Maccabee who mandated this service because of the way Antiochus Epiphanes had treated it. Jewish historian Josephus calls it the Feast of Lights because the rededication involved lighting the temple's menorah. The Talmud relates the story of how one day's supply of oil lasted for the full eight days even though it was meant for only one day.

Hanukkah is a feast day because it is remembering Jews taking up arms, defending their land and winning which allowed Judaism as a religion to survive. Nowadays, Hanukkah is not so much military conquest as it is light conquering the darkness.