

What was the Babylonian captivity/exile

Question: "What was the Babylonian captivity/exile?"

Answer: The Babylonian captivity or exile refers to the time period in Israel's history when Jews were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. It is an important period of biblical history because both the captivity/exile and the return and restoration of the Jewish nation were fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies.

God used Babylon as His agent of judgment against Israel for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against Him. There were actually several different times during this period (607-586 B.C.) when the Jews were taken captive by Babylon. With each successive rebellion against Babylonian rule, Nebuchadnezzar would lead his armies against Judah until they laid siege to Jerusalem for over a year, killing many people and destroying the Jewish temple, taking captive many thousands of Jews, and leaving Jerusalem in ruins.

As prophesied in Scripture, the Jewish people would be allowed to return to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile. That prophecy was fulfilled in 537 B.C., and the Jews were allowed by King Cyrus of Persia to return to Israel and begin rebuilding the city and temple. The return under the direction of Ezra led to a revival among the Jewish people and the rebuilding of the temple.

Under the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar II, the Babylonian Empire spread throughout the Middle East, and around 607 B.C., [King Jehoiakim](#) of Judah was forced into submission, becoming a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar ([2 Kings 24:1](#)). It was during this time that Nebuchadnezzar took many of the finest and brightest young men from each city in Judah captive, including Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego). After three years of serving Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim of Judah rebelled against Babylonian rule and once again turned to Egypt for support. After sending his army to deal with Judah's revolt, Nebuchadnezzar himself left Babylon in 598 B.C. to deal with the problem. Arriving in Jerusalem around March of 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, taking control of the area, looting it, and taking captive with him Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, his family, and almost all of the population of Judah, leaving only the poorest people of the land ([2 Kings 24:8-16](#)).

At that time Nebuchadnezzar appointed [King Zedekiah](#) to rule as his representative over Judah, but after nine years and still not having learned their lesson, Zedekiah led Judah in rebellion against Babylon one final time ([2 Kings 24-25](#)). Influenced by false prophets and ignoring Jeremiah's warnings, Zedekiah decided to join a coalition that was being formed by Edom, Moab, Ammon and Phoenicia in rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar ([Jeremiah 27:1-3](#)). This resulted in Nebuchadnezzar again laying siege to Jerusalem. Jerusalem fell in July 587 or 586 BC, and Zedekiah was taken captive to Babylon after seeing his sons killed before him and then having his eyes plucked out ([2 Kings 25](#)). At this time Jerusalem was laid to waste, the temple

destroyed and all the houses burned. The majority of the Jewish people were taken captive, but, again, Nebuchadnezzar left a remnant of poor people to serve as farmers and vinedressers ([2 Kings 25:12](#)).

The books of 2 Chronicles and 2 Kings deal with much of the time leading up to fall of both the Northern Kingdom and Judah. They also cover the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah was one of the prophets during the time leading up to the fall of Jerusalem and the exile, and Ezekiel and Daniel were written while the Jews were in exile. Ezra deals with the return of the Jews as promised over 70 years before by God through the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah. The book of Nehemiah also covers the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile was over.

The Babylonian captivity had one very significant impact on the nation of Israel when it returned to the land—it would never again be corrupted by the idolatry and false gods of the surrounding nations. A revival among Jews took place after the return of the Jews to Israel and the rebuilding of the temple. We see those accounts in Ezra and Nehemiah as the nation would once again return to the God who had delivered them from their enemies.

Just as God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah, God judged the Babylonians for their sins, and the Babylonian Empire fell to the armies of Persia in 539 B.C., once again proving God's promises to be true.

The seventy-year period of the Babylonian captivity is an important part of Israel's history, and Christians should be familiar with it. Like many other Old Testament events, this historical account demonstrates God's faithfulness to His people, His judgment of sin, and the surety of His promises.
