



Second Chronicles - Chapter Thirty Six

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Six

The Chronicler briefly describes the reigns of the final four kings of Judah: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. However, his main focus is the demise of Judah as it is first made a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and then Jerusalem and its temple finally destroyed, with the majority of the population taken away into exile. It was not the kings that are blamed for this outcome but the people themselves who had turned away from the Lord and ignored the warnings of his prophets.

Chronicles comes to an end on a positive note as King Cyrus of Persia recognised that the Lord has used him to ensure that a remnant returns to Jerusalem following exile in order to rebuild the temple.

III.p 2 Chronicles 36:1-21 - The Last Four Kings

The Chronicler presents the reigns of the last four kings of Judah quite summarily, as the history of the nation accelerates toward an outcome that has been inevitable since Manasseh's reign. With Josiah's death, the covenant is abandoned by king and people alike. The Chronicler treats the last four reigns essentially as a unit: he omits the names of the queen mothers and the customary death notices, so that there is no strict separation between each of the reigns, and the common fate of these kings is exile, as it will be for the people. Another common theme is the temple vessels. As well as the kings, the whole nation from its leaders down shares in the mounting collective guilt that finally overwhelms it in destruction. Yet the exile is a positive time of purification, and the book concludes on a surprising upswing in a new act of God's grace declared through a pagan king.

III.p.i 2 Chronicles 36:1-4 - Reign of Jehoahaz

Pharaoh Neco II asserted control over Judah after Josiah's death. The 'people of the land' who made Jehoahaz king probably hoped he would continue Josiah's opposition to Egypt. Neco pre-empted this risk by deposing him in favour of Eliakim, whom he renamed Jehoiakim as a mark of his authority over him. The tribute that Neco imposed on the land was a tax exacted from those who had supported Jehoahaz: <<***Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land in order to meet Pharaoh's demand for money. He exacted the silver and the gold from the people of the land, from all according to their assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Neco***>> (2 Kings 23:35).

¹ The people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah and made him king to succeed his father in Jerusalem. ² Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; he reigned for three months in Jerusalem. ³ Then the king of Egypt deposed him in Jerusalem and laid on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. ⁴ The king of Egypt made his brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim; but Neco took his brother Jehoahaz and carried him to Egypt.

2 Chronicles 36:1-4

The people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah and made him king. The regular succession to the throne of Judah, the practice of primogeniture, ceased with the lamented Josiah. Jehoahaz was not the eldest son of the late king. Johanan and Jehoiakim were both older than he according to 1 Chronicles 3:15. He was made king by popular choice: it was the preference of the multitude, not the appointment of God, and that has never boded well throughout history.

The parallel account states: <<***He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestors had done***>> (2 Kings 23:32). The reforms of King Josiah were wonderful, but they were not a long-lasting revival. His own son Jehoahaz did not follow in his godly ways. His name is omitted from among those of the Lord's ancestors in Matthew Chapter 1, which may imply that God did not recognise Jehoahaz, the people's choice, as being in a true sense the successor.

Jehoahaz means 'Yahweh has seized' and was probably a throne name, for his personal name as Shallum according to 1 Chronicles 3:15 and Jeremiah 22:11. As the Egyptians return from the unsuccessful siege of Haran in 609 BC, the new king of Judah is summoned to Pharaoh Neco's temporary headquarters at Riblah on the eastern bank of the Orontes River: <<***Pharaoh Neco confined him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, so that he might not reign in Jerusalem, and imposed tribute***>>

on the land of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold>> (2 Kings 23:33). Jehoahaz is removed from power and subsequently imprisoned in Egypt.

Inscription 88 of the Arad Ostraca, dating to circa 600 BC, is fragmentary but appears to be a letter from a king who has just been enthroned. The king is apparently warning the military commander of Arad of a possible military encounter with Egypt. Arad at this time guarded the southern end of Judah. The excavator identified the king who wrote this letter as Jehoahaz, who ruled Judah for three months in 609 BC.

The king of Egypt made his brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. After the defeat of King Josiah in battle, Pharaoh was able to dominate Judah and make it effectively a vassal kingdom and a buffer against the growing Babylonian Empire. He imposed on the land a tribute and put on the throne of Judah a puppet king, a brother of Jehoahaz.

III.p.ii 2 Chronicles 36:5-8 - Reign and Captivity of Jehoiakim

Jehoiakim's reign (609-598 BC) was marked by a return to idolatry recorded in Jeremiah 25:1-7, and the king's persecution of the prophets; refer to Jeremiah 26:20-24 and 36:20-31. Nebuchadnezzar, following his defeat of Neco at Carchemish in 605 BC, besieged Jerusalem and carried off some of its citizens and some of the temple vessels to Babylon (v.7); refer also to Daniel 1:1-2. This may have been the occasion when Nebuchadnezzar bound him in chains to take him to Babylon, making Jehoiakim into his vassal. Jehoiakim later rebelled against the Babylonians, and in 598 BC Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem, just after Jehoiakim's death.

⁵ Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. ⁶ Against him King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up, and bound him with fetters to take him to Babylon. ⁷ Nebuchadnezzar also carried some of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon. ⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and the abominations that he did, and what was found against him, are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah; and his son Jehoiachin succeeded him.

2 Chronicles 36:5-8

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. In the parallel account it states that: <<*Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land in order to meet Pharaoh's demand for money. He exacted the silver and the gold from*

the people of the land, from all according to their assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Neco>> (2 Kings 23:35). Jehoiakim was nothing more than a puppet king presiding over a vassal kingdom under the Egyptians. He imposed heavy taxes on the people and paid the money to the Egyptians, as required by his master. Neco had simply made Jehoiakim into a tax collector rather than a true king. Yet at the same time Jehoiakim was wasting resources on the construction of a new palace by forced labour; refer to Jeremiah 22:13-19.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. Jehoiakim, like his brother Jehoahaz, did not follow the godly example of his father Josiah. Jeremiah 36:22-24 describes the great ungodliness of Jehoiakim - how he even burned a scroll of God's Word. In response to this, Jeremiah received this message from God: *<<And concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah you shall say: Thus says the Lord, You have dared to burn this scroll, saying, Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it human beings and animals? Therefore thus says the Lord concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: He shall have no one to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night>>* (Jeremiah 36:29-30).

To add to his evil deeds, this vassal king even killed one of the Lord's prophets: *<<There was another man prophesying in the name of the Lord, Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim. He prophesied against this city and against this land in words exactly like those of Jeremiah. And when King Jehoiakim, with all his warriors and all the officials, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard of it, he was afraid and fled and escaped to Egypt. Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him to Egypt, and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and threw his dead body into the burial place of the common people>>* (Jeremiah 26:20-23). It is hardly surprising that God did not relent from bringing punishment on this king and the people who followed his lawless ways.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up. Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian Empire, was concerned with Judah because of its strategic position in relation to the empires of Egypt and Assyria. Therefore, it was important to him to conquer Judah and make it a subject kingdom, i.e. his vassal state, one securely loyal to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem because the Pharaoh of Egypt invaded Babylon. In response, the young prince Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at Charchemish, and then he pursued their fleeing army all the way down to the Sinai. Along the way or on the way back, he subdued Jerusalem, who had been loyal to the Pharaoh of Egypt. This happened in 605 BC and it was the

first but not the last encounter between Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiakim. There would be two later invasions in 597 and 587 BC.

This specific attack is documented by the Babylonian Chronicles, a collection of tablets discovered as early as AD 1887, held in the British Museum. In them, Nebuchadnezzar's 605 BC presence in Judah is documented and clarified. When the Babylonian chronicles were finally published in 1956, they gave a first-rate, detailed political and military information about the first 10 years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. L.W. King prepared these tablets in 1919; he then died, and they were neglected for four decades.

Excavations also document the victory of Nebuchadnezzar over the Egyptians at Carchemish in May or June of 605 BC. Archæologists have found evidence of battle, vast quantities of arrowheads, layers of ash and a shield of a Greek mercenary fighting for the Egyptians.

This campaign of Nebuchadnezzar was interrupted suddenly when he heard of his father's death and he raced back to Babylon to secure his succession to the throne. He travelled about 500 miles in two weeks - remarkable speed for travel in that day. Nebuchadnezzar only had the time to take a few choice captives including Daniel, a few treasures and a promise of submission from Jehoiakim.

And bound him with fetters to take him to Babylon. According to 2 Kings 24:1-7, this happened because Jehoiakim foolishly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. God did not bless this rebellion because even though Jehoiakim was a patriot of the kingdom of Judah, he was not a man submitted to God. These sins were among those things that were found against him.

It is interesting that the text says 'to take him to Babylon' for it seems that he did not actually get there but probably died in or near Jerusalem according to the reliable words of a significant prophet: <<*With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried – dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem*>> (Jeremiah 22:19).

The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

III.p.iii 2 Chronicles 36:9-10 - Reign and Captivity of Jehoiachin

The reign of Jehoiachin lasted only for the duration of the siege, before he was exiled to Babylon.

⁹ Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned for three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the

sight of the Lord. ¹⁰ In the spring of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon, along with the precious vessels of the house of the Lord, and made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 36:9-10

Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign. Second Kings 24:8 states that Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king which, since he is taken away into exile, seems most likely. The difference between these two accounts is probably due to the error of a copyist in Chronicles. He was also known as Jeconiah, often abbreviated to Coniah.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. The Lord's anger was kindled against him for his evil deeds: <<*As I live, says the Lord, even if King Coniah son of Jehoiakim of Judah were the signet ring on my right hand, even from there I would tear you off*>> (Jeremiah 22:24). God had spoken similar words concerning his father: <<*Therefore thus says the Lord concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: He shall have no one to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night*>> (Jeremiah 36:30). The word 'sit' here means to 'firmly sit,' or 'dwell'; and Jehoiachin's short three month reign was not that surely. And Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's successor, was Jehoiakim's brother, not his son.

In the spring of the year was 597 BC.

King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon. The previous king of Judah, Jehoiakim, led a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar. Now the king of Babylon came with his armies against Jerusalem, and Jehoiachin hoped to appease Nebuchadnezzar by submitting himself, his family, and his leaders to the Babylonian king. God allowed Jehoiachin to be taken as a bound captive back to Babylon. His presence in Babylon is attested by tablets listing oil and barley supplies to him, his family and five sons in 592-569 BC and naming him as 'Yaukin king of the Judæans.

Along with the precious vessels of the house of the Lord. On this second attack against Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar took whatever valuables remained in the temple or in the royal palaces of Jerusalem.

The fall of Jerusalem did not come about in one cataclysmic battle; it occurred in stages:

- Nebuchadnezzar's initial subjugation of the city about 605 BC.
- Destruction from Nebuchadnezzar's marauding bands, 601 to 598 BC.
- The siege and fall of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar's main army on 16 March, 597 BC.

- **Nebuchadnezzar returns to completely destroy and depopulate Jerusalem in the summer of 586 BC.**

Nebuchadnezzar made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.

Since Nebuchadnezzar had completely humbled Judah, he put a king on the throne who he thought would submit to Babylon. Brother here denotes 'relative' for Zedekiah was Jehoiachin's uncle. He chose an uncle of Jehoiachin, a brother to Jehoiakim. This king ruled from 597-587 BC and inherited a much reduced Judah, for the Negeb was lost: <<*Say to the king and the queen mother: 'Take a lowly seat, for your beautiful crown has come down from your head.' The towns of the Negeb are shut up with no one to open them; all Judah is taken into exile, wholly taken into exile'*>> (Jeremiah 13:18-19), and the land weakened by the loss of its experienced personnel. There were both a pro-Egyptian element and false prophets among the survivors: <<*King Zedekiah said, 'Here he is; he is in your hands; for the king is powerless against you'*>> (Jeremiah 38:5). Refer also to Jeremiah Chapters 28-29.

Zedekiah's real name was Mattaniah but Nebuchadnezzar changed it when he installed him as his puppet king. The name Zedekiah means, 'the Lord is righteous'. The righteous judgement of God would soon be seen against Judah.

III.p.iv 2 Chronicles 36:11-14 - Reign of Zedekiah

Zedekiah's reign (597-586 BC) culminated in rebellion, a siege of almost two years, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and the palaces, and the deportation of its leading citizens. This reign is presented as the zenith of disobedience to God, with the king leading the way and the people becoming exceedingly unfaithful. Their mocking rejection of the prophets meant the refusal to repent, so now there was no remedy against God's wrath.

¹¹ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹² He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. He did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah who spoke from the mouth of the Lord. ¹³ He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁴ All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 36:11-14

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign. Since Nebuchadnezzar had completely humbled Judah, he put a king on the throne whom he thought would submit to Babylon. He chose this uncle of Jehoiachin, who was also a brother to Jehoiakim.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. His evil was especially shown in that he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet. Instead of listening to Jeremiah or other messengers of God, he and his officials instead mocked and disregarded the message.

He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah reveals that there were many false prophets in those days who preached a message of victory and triumph to Zedekiah, and he believed them instead of Jeremiah and other godly prophets like him. Therefore, he rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. For example, Jeremiah 32:1-5 states that Jeremiah clearly told Zedekiah that he would not succeed in his rebellion against Babylon. Zedekiah arrested Jeremiah and imprisoned him for this, but the prophet steadfastly stayed faithful to the message God gave him. Through acts of infidelity toward his imperial master, he unwisely ignited the final revolt that brought down the vengeance of the Babylonians on Judah and Jerusalem; and thus both the state and the city were destroyed.

All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. These last kings of Judah were all wicked and deserving of judgement; but they were not alone in their sin and rejection of God. The leaders, the priests, and the people also transgressed more and more, pushing both God and Nebuchadnezzar to the limit.

In summary:

- **Zedekiah was not willing to listen to God's word through Jeremiah.**
- **He broke an oath made in the Lord's name as a vassal of Babylon.**
- **He was unrepentant and failed to restrain leaders and priests from defiling the temple with the reintroduction of idolatrous practices.**

III.p.v 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 - The Fall of Jerusalem

The people had turned away from the Lord and his prophets therefore he brought King Nebuchadnezzar against them one final time. Following a siege, Jerusalem was destroyed and most of those who remained alive were taken away into exile along with the remaining treasures from the temple and the palaces. Judah was left a virtual waste land with few people left to tend it.

¹⁵ The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his

dwelling-place; ¹⁶ but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy.

2 Chronicles 36:15-16

The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers. God, great in mercy to his people, sent many warnings but these warnings were rejected. The greatness of the Lord's compassion towards his people is shown by the expression sent persistently.

They kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets. This tragic triple rejection of God's message and messengers sealed the doom of Judah. They rejected the message until there was no remedy and nothing could turn back the judgement of God. Three complaints are made in particular, that they were unfaithful, defiled the temple, and laughed at the prophets. All three are frequent themes throughout Chronicles, and it is as if the entire message of Chronicles were being summed up.

¹⁷ Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their youths with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or young woman, the aged or the feeble; he gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸ All the vessels of the house of God, large and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all these he brought to Babylon. ¹⁹ They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels.

2 Chronicles 36:17-19

He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans. Having rejected the message and the messengers of his compassion (v.15), God turned Judah over to a leader and a people who had no compassion upon the people. The end comes remarkably swiftly, like a bird of prey suddenly swooping down after circling repeatedly over its victim. The final collapse under Zedekiah is therefore merely the final stage in a process that has long been inevitable.

Scripture seems to blame the evil King Manasseh: <<*Still the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him*>> (2 Kings 23:26), and: <<*Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, for all that he had committed, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed; for*

he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord was not willing to pardon>> (2 Kings 24:3-4). Yet the problem lay with generation after generation of those who so frequently abandoned God to go their own way and worship pagan gods.

All the vessels of the house of God, large and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all these he brought to Babylon. The emphasis is on the complete nature of the destruction the Babylonians brought to Jerusalem and its people. Nothing was spared and all was destroyed.

They burned the house of God. This was the end of Solomon's great temple. Solomon's magnificent temple was now a ruin. It would stay a ruin for many years, until it was humbly rebuilt by the returning exiles in the days of Ezra. The Talmud declares that when the Babylonians entered the temple, they held a two day feast there to desecrate it; then, on the third day, they set fire to the building. The Talmud adds that the fire burned throughout that day and the next. The temple had existed for just four hundred and twenty four years, three months and eight days from the time in which Solomon had laid its foundation stone.

Broke down the wall of Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem - the physical security of the city - were now destroyed. Jerusalem was no longer a place of safety and security. The walls would remain a ruin until they were rebuilt by the returning exiles in the days of Nehemiah.

Burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. The Chronicler paints a picture of the utter destruction of this once magnificent city: *<<How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations!>>* (Lamentations 1:1a).

Excavations on the Ophel hill in Jerusalem have revealed some domestic structures belonging to Judæans just before Nebuchadnezzar's destruction in 586 BC. One four-room house sits at the base of the massive stone-stepped structure. It is called the 'house of Ahiel' because an inscription with his name was found in the house.

²⁰ He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.

2 Chronicles 36:20-21

He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword. This was the third major wave of captivity, taking the remaining people except for the poor of the land according to 2 Kings 25:12. Of the prominent men of Jerusalem, only Jeremiah and Gedaliah were left behind; refer to 2 Kings 25:22 and Jeremiah 39:11-14. Jeremiah's stand on the Babylonian issue was doubtless well known.

They became servants to him and to his sons. Some commentators believe this was the taking of Daniel and his companions into captivity. Daniel was one of the king's descendants and was taken into the palace of the king of Babylon. Others believe that Daniel was taken earlier; refer to Daniel 1:1-4. The exiles came to Babylon where they became servants; and yet, after an initial period of discouragement, e.g. Psalm 137, and oppressive service: *<<And the nations will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess the nations as male and female slaves in the Lord's land; they will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them. When the Lord has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve>>* (Isaiah 14:2-3), at least some Jews gained favour and status; refer to 2 Kings 25:27-30, Daniel 1:19, 2:49 and 6:3.

Until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia. The Persians, together with the Medes, conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC and the Jewish people were only allowed to return to their native lands after the Persians came to power.

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus relates that the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon by diverting the flow of the Euphrates into a nearby swamp. This lowered the level of the river so his troops marched through the water and under the river gates. They still would not have been able to enter had not the bronze gates of the inner walls been left inexplicably unlocked. This was exactly what God predicted in Isaiah 44:28-45:7 and Jeremiah 51:57-58. God opened the gates of the city of Babylon for Cyrus, and put it in writing two hundred years before it happened.

All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath. The land lying desolate while the exiles pay for their sins is a covenant curse: *<<Then the land shall enjoy its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbath years. As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it>>* (Leviticus 26:34-35), but also an opportunity for the land to recuperate and prepare to receive a purified people back: *<<Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, or abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God; but I will remember in their favour the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations,*

to be their God: I am the Lord>> (Leviticus 26:44-45). God had commanded Israel to observe a Sabbath for the land, allowing it to rest every seven years: <<*For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard*>> (Exodus 23:10-11). The people of Judah had denied the land its Sabbaths over a period of some 490 years, meaning that they ‘owed’ the land seventy Sabbaths, and to fulfil seventy years God took the years back during the Babylonian exile: <<*This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon for seventy years*>> (Jeremiah 25:11), and: <<*For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon’s seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place*>> (Jeremiah 29:10).



Exile to Babylon 597, 586 and 582 BC

It appears that three separate deportations of Judæans to Babylon took place under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, confirmed by an eye witness: <<*This is the number of the people whom Nebuchadrezzar took into exile: in the seventh year, three thousand and twenty-three Judæans; in the eighteenth year of*

Nebuchadrezzar he took into exile from Jerusalem eight hundred and thirty-two persons; in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadrezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took into exile of the Judæans seven hundred and forty-five persons; all the people were four thousand six hundred>> (Jeremiah 52:28-30). The first came during the reign of Jehoiachin, when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and carried away many of the treasures of the temple and the royal palaces. The second occurred after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, when the walls of the city were levelled and the temple was completely destroyed. The third appears to have occurred around 582 BC, the twenty-third year according to Jeremiah, while King Nebuchadnezzar was reasserting his control over the general region of Palestine.

III.q 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 - Cyrus Proclaims Liberty for the Exiles

Following the seventy years of Babylonian exile and following the defeat of the Chaldeans at the hands of the Medes and Persians, the king of Persia, Cyrus, allowed any Jew who wanted to go the right to return to Jerusalem in order that the temple may be built in honour of the Lord.

At last restoration; Israel's history has resumed through God's gracious initiative. These words are almost identical to Ezra 1:1-3a.

²² In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfilment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: ²³ 'Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up.'

2 Chronicles 36:22-23

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia. God gave the Persian king a sense of urgency about this, and the relief from exile was granted the very first year of his reign as the Lord stirred up his spirit. Cyrus made a decree giving Ezra and the Babylonian captives the right to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in 538 BC; refer to Ezra 1:1-4 and Ezra 5:13-17.

Cyrus' policy of cooperating with local religions and of encouraging the return of exiles has received explicit archæological confirmation from the inscriptions of the king himself especially the famous 'Cyrus Cylinder'.

The Cyrus Cylinder is an ancient clay cylinder, now broken into several fragments, on which is written a declaration in Akkadian cuneiform script in the name of Persia's Achæmenid king Cyrus the Great. It dates from the 6th century BC and was discovered in the ruins of Babylon in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) in 1879.



The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. This remarkable recognition of God's hand upon his life may be connected with the remarkable prophecies regarding Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28-45:7.

He has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem. The words of Cyrus recall David's temple commission to Solomon in 1 Chronicles 22:6 and 22:18-19, and God's dynastic promise to David in 1 Chronicles 17:12 and 22:10; and 2 Chronicles 6:9-10. The command of Cyrus not only allowed the return of the exiled people, but also a rebuilding of the destroyed temple.

Let him go up is an invitation to a restored people around a restored temple (1 Chronicles 9:2-34) to respond to the Davidic covenant with obedient faith and worship.



The Empires of Daniel's Visions: The Persians circa 538-331 BC

After Cyrus the Great united the Median and Persian empires, he overthrew the Babylonians and established the greatest power the world had ever known. Under later rulers the Persian Empire eventually extended from Egypt and Thrace to the borders of India, and Cyrus himself declared: <<*The Lord, the*

God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth>> (Ezra 1:2b). Consistent with his regular policies to promote loyalty among his subjugated peoples, Cyrus immediately released the exiled Jews from their captivity in Babylon and even sponsored the rebuilding of the temple.

The Books of Chronicles end with this wonderful and remarkable encouragement to return and rebuild Jerusalem. This was the necessary and helpful encouragement to the first readers of Chronicles, letting them see their connection with God's broader plan of the ages. Sadly, only a small percentage decided to return from exile; but those who did needed the encouragement to know they were making a valuable contribution to God's work. Unlike the Book of Kings, with its central message of stern moral judgements, Chronicles exists essentially as a book of hope, grounded on the grace of the sovereign Lord God.