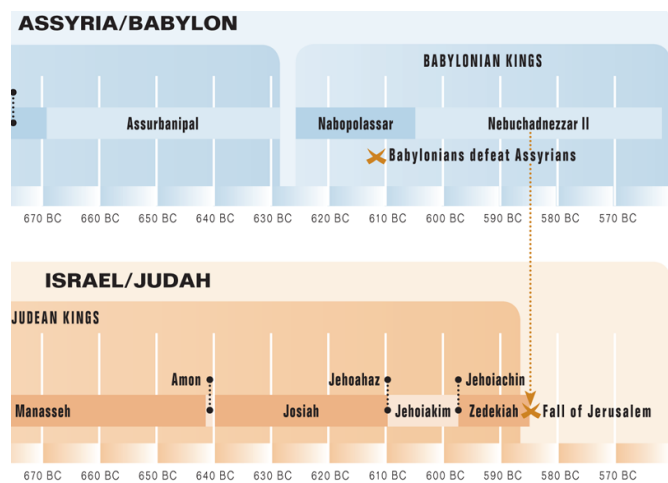


SPENDING TIME WITH THE PROPHETS

the book of Habakkuk

The rise of Babylon

Even before God brought Israel into Canaan, He warned them that if they persisted in unbelief and disobedience they would be ripped away from the promised land (Deut. 28.63-68). By the time of Habakkuk, the northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken captive by the Assyrians. They were punished by God for their rebellious ways and for their failure to heed the message of His prophets (2Kings 17.7-14). While the southern kingdom of Judah would remain in the land for a while longer, they were by no means a righteous people (cf. 2Kings 17.19-20). Sadly, since Judah continued in their rebellion, God decreed during the unrighteous reign of Manasseh that they would also be ripped from the promised land (2Kings 21.10-15). This time the Lord would not use the Assyrians, but a new world power: Babylon.

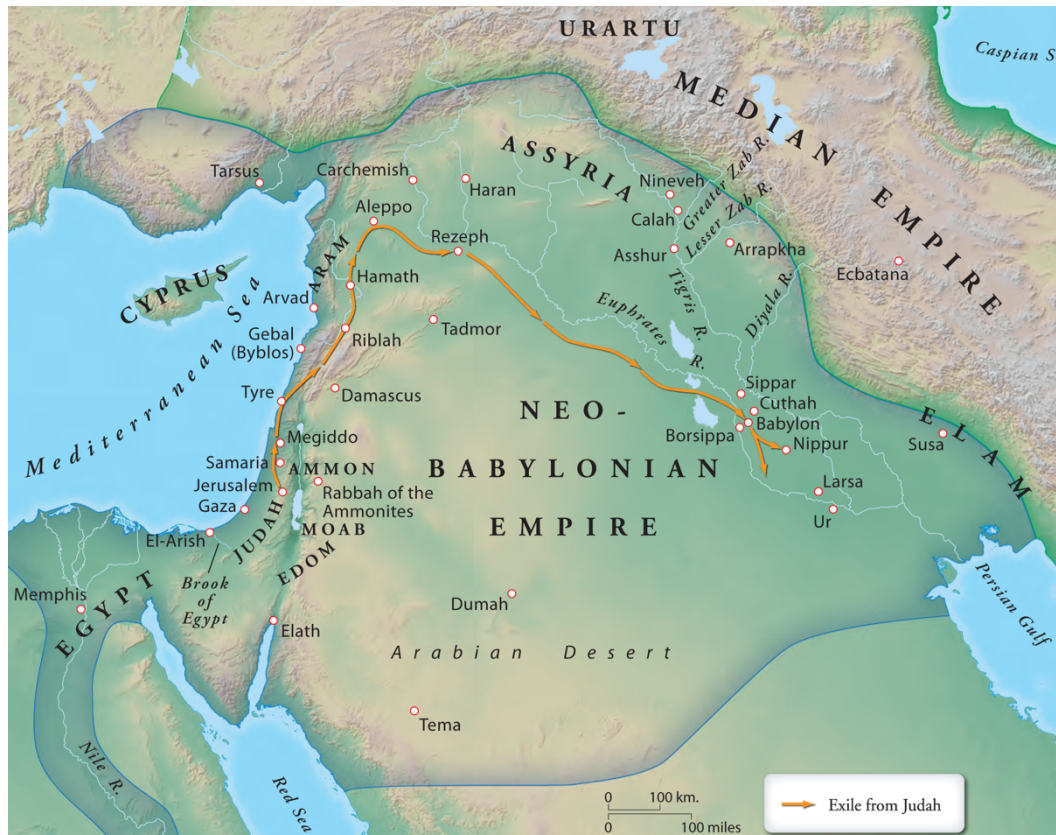


For centuries the Babylonians and Assyrians had been striving for mastery of Mesopotamia... and the entire ancient near east. For much of the divided kingdom period Assyria had been the dominant power, with occasional periods of Babylonian strength. For instance, when Hezekiah recovered from his illness, the king of Babylon sent ambassadors to him (2Kings 20.12ff). But later, the Assyrian king imprisoned Manasseh in Babylon (2Chron. 33.11), indicating Assyria was again the dominant power.

Assyrian might weakened rapidly after the death of Assurbanipal. The city of Asshur fell to the Medes in 614 and the Assyrian capital of Nineveh fell to the Babylonians in 612. As Assyrian power began to crumble, the Egyptian Pharaoh rushed to his aid, a move opposed by Josiah, the last righteous king of Judah (cf. 2Kings 23.28-30). However, nothing would withstand the might of Babylon and their commander Nebuchadnezzar. The Assyrians suffered their final defeat at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. and the Babylonian forces pursued and defeated the Egyptian army. It was at this time that the Babylonian army first came to Jerusalem, subjugating the Jewish king, looting the temple and taking captives (see 2Kings 24.1; Daniel 1.1-2). They would return in 597 to suppress a rebellion and deport much of the population (2Kings

24.10-14). They would return once again 586 to destroy Jerusalem and the temple of God (2Kings 25.1-2).

Habakkuk's prophecy occurred after 605, but before 597. Babylon was a recognized power, but the Lord had not yet used them to fully judge His people. But that was coming soon.



The message of Habakkuk:

1. Habakkuk's first complaint and the Lord's response (1.1-11)
 - a. Habakkuk complains that the Lord had not yet judged the iniquity of His people (1.1-4)
 - b. The Lord replies that He would soon bring the Chaldeans (i.e. Babylonians) in judgment against His people (1.5-11)
2. Habakkuk's second complaint and the Lord's response (1.12-2.20)
 - a. Habakkuk complains that the Lord was using a people more wicked than the Jews to punish them (1.12-17)
 - b. Habakkuk waits for the Lord's reply (2.1)
 - c. The Lord's reply: the proud will perish, but the righteous will live by faith (2.2-20)
3. Habakkuk's prayer of faith (chapter 3)
 - a. Habakkuk approaches in reverence (3.1-2)
 - b. Habakkuk remembers how the Lord delivered His people in the past (3.3-15)
 - c. Habakkuk pledges to rejoice in the Lord no matter what hardships may come (3.16-19)

Lessons:

1. God keeps His promises in His way (1.12). When the Lord revealed that He was using the Babylonians to punish His people, Habakkuk did not understand. He petitioned God based on His nature, "Are You not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One?" "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor." Habakkuk was also aware of God's promises to Abraham that his descendants would be His people, thus Habakkuk asserts, "we will not die." What Habakkuk may not have fully comprehended is that the captivity was a means of fulfilling God's promises. The people had to be purified of their idolatry and sins and ultimately the Christ would come from them.
2. The righteous have always lived by faith (2.4). This passage is well known primarily for its use in Romans 1.17. God's point to Habakkuk was that His true people would have life, true life, if they maintained faith in Him. Paul uses the passage to show that God's people have always been those who placed their faith in Him.
3. Faith will endure trial (3.16-19). The book closes with stirring words. Habakkuk knew that difficult days were coming, days of distress and famine. Yet, he would continue to rejoice in the Lord knowing He would provide strength and salvation. Habakkuk would live by his faith.