

A few more things about the Babylonian Exile

Judah (southern kingdom) and its capital are captured by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon about 597 B.C., and he destroys the kingdom and deports most of the population after a rebellion 10 years later.

Changes in Jewish life because of the Exile

I. Invention of the synagogue.

Since there was no Temple, the Jews had to figure out a different way to worship the LORD. They began to gather weekly, on Saturdays, to read Scripture and to pray as a group. Our present Liturgy of the Word in Mass is a direct descendent of this practice.

Changes in Jewish life because of the Exile

2. The *Diaspora* (Dispersion)

Since Jerusalem no longer existed as a focal point, Jews began to spread out all over the Mediterranean area. Even after Jerusalem and the Temple were restored, many of them continued to live in foreign lands. All of these “foreign” Jews were known as the “Diaspora.”

Changes in Jewish life because of the Exile

3. A different language

Hebrew fell out of everyday use and was replaced by the closely related language of Aramaic. People still knew Hebrew and used it for sacred things, but it wasn't everyday speech.

Changes in Jewish life because of the Exile

4. A different alphabet (or “aleph-bet”)

Hebrew used to be written in letters more closely related to our letters (the Greeks and Hebrews both got their letter shapes from the Phoenicians). The Babylonians had completely different sources for their letters, and they began to be used instead of the old Hebrew letters, which eventually fell entirely out of use.

א	'alep	'	ל	lamed	l
ב	bet	b	מ	mem	m
ג	gimel	g	נ	nun	n
ד	dalet	d	ס	samek	s
ה	he	h	ע	ayin	'
ו	waw	w	פ	pe	p
ז	zayin	z	צ	tsade	š
ח	het	ḥ	ק	qop	q
ט	tet	ṭ	ר	reš	r
י	yod	y	ש	šin	š
כ	kap	k	ת	taw	t

א	'alep	'	ל	lamed	l
ב	bet	b	מ	mem	m
ג	gimel	g	נ	nun	n
ד	dalet	d	ס	samek	s
ה	he	h	ע	ayin	'
ו	waw	w	פ	pe	p
ז	zayin	z	צ	tsade	š
ח	het	ḥ	ק	qop	q
ט	tet	ṭ	ר	reš	r
י	yod	y	ש	šin	š
כ	kap	k	ת	taw	t

End of the Exile

In about 540, Cyrus the Great of Persia conquers Babylon, and shortly thereafter lets the Jews go home.

By the way, the prophet Isaiah calls him “the anointed one,” and he’s a type of Jesus leading His people out of captivity (just as Moses had done centuries before).

Back Home Again

Not all the Jews had gone into exile. Some had stayed and intermarried with other people in the region. When the Jews returned from Babylon, they regarded these people as “not real Jews,” and they became known as the *Samaritans*, because they lived in the area of *Samaria*. For centuries they had their own temple on Mt. Gerizim.

Ezra and Nehemiah

The Jews came home in several waves; Ezra led one, Nehemiah another. Each worked to restore the Temple and the city walls of Jerusalem. Ezra in particular was concerned with maintaining Jewish identity and therefore was strongly opposed to intermarriage.