

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSE



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Date: _____

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LESSON 6 • How the children of Israel fit into God's Plan -1

WEEKLY READINGS
READING FOR STUDY PAPER

Genesis 18-20, Luke 19-21
Genesis 37; Isaiah 43

The beginning of the story

The story of the Israelites really begins with that faithful man Abraham. He had a son in his old age named Isaac, and Isaac had a son named Jacob, who was afterwards called Israel. Jacob had twelve sons, who were the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The youngest but one of these sons was called Joseph, and the story of his life, which we have in the Bible, is one we never get tired of reading. But it is more than a good story - it tells us about important events in the history of the 'people of the Bible' - the Israelites. It gives us, too, a wonderful example of the over-ruling care of God for His people.

We all remember the story of how Joseph's jealous brothers sold him as a slave; and, how after many trials, he became governor of Egypt. Then, in a time of famine, his father and his brother came down to Egypt, because - thanks to Joseph, and thanks, of course, to God - there was corn in Egypt.

For a time, the Jews (originally called Israelites, or children of Israel) were quite happy in Egypt. But after Joseph's death, as the number of Jews in Egypt grew more and more the Egyptians began to oppress them, and treat them as slaves.

Freedom for the slaves

Perhaps you know the story of how God brought these Jewish slaves out of Egypt, under the leadership of a man called Moses, and led them through a barren and deserted land to the borders of the land of Israel. On this long and dangerous journey, God fed them and cared for them. As we read in Nehemiah, chapter 9, verses 20-21,

"Thou gavest also Thy good Spirit to instruct them and withheldest not Thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst.

"Yea, forty years didst Thou sustain them in the wilderness so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not."

God drove out the wicked tribes who lived in the land of Israel, and gave it to the Jews. He gave them laws, and chose Judges to rule over them. He said to them, "If you disobey, you will be punished." You will read in Deuteronomy, chapter 28, the blessings which God would give them if they obeyed Him, and the curses that were to come upon them if they disobeyed Him.

The Jews demand a king

Nearly 400 years went by. During those years, God had appointed Judges to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel. (The descendants of Jacob were divided into twelve family groups, called tribes). But the Jews became dissatisfied and wanted a king like the nations around them. In asking for a king, they were refusing to recognize that God was their king. When Samuel, their Judge, told God how they had demanded a king, God said,

"They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (I Samuel, chapter 8, verse 7).

God granted their request, and gave them the king they wanted. You may like to read for yourself the interesting story of the anointing of Saul, the first king of Israel. You will find it in I Samuel, chapters 8 and 9.

A divided kingdom

Saul was followed by the great King David, of whom you will be hearing more in a later lesson. After a long reign of 40 years, David died, and his son Solomon became king.

Solomon was very rich, he taxed the people rather heavily. This made the people discontented, and when Solomon died, they came to his son, Rehoboam, and asked him to ease their burden. You will read, in I Kings, chapter 12, how Rehoboam listened to his young friends, instead of taking the advice of the wise old men who had been his father's counselors.

When the people came to King Rehoboam to ask whether he would agree to their request, he answered very unwisely. We read in I Kings, chapter 12, verses 13-14, that the king "answered the people roughly" saying,

"My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

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No wonder the people rebelled against such a king! Ten of the tribes of Israel went away, and formed a kingdom of their own, under a man named Jeroboam. Only Judah, the tribe to which Rehoboam belonged, and the little tribe of Benjamin, remained faithful to him.

So from this time on, we have two histories, side by side, in the Bible. There is the history of the ten tribes, often spoken of as `Israel` or the Northern Kingdom (because they lived in the northern part of the land) and the history of the two tribes spoken of as `Judah` or the Southern Kingdom.

The continual disobedience of the Jews

In the first and second books of Kings we read the sad story of how the people continually forgot about God, and forsook His ways.

At last, things became so bad that God said He would punish the people, as He had warned them continually that He would, by causing them to be taken from their land as slaves.

You will see from these words from II Chronicles, chapter 36, verse 15-16, how God had done everything He could to bring His people back to His ways,

"And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place:

"But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy."

Punishment at last

Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was first taken captive. The king of Assyria came and carried the people into Assyria, and, as a nation, they never came back to their own land. You can read about this in II Kings, chapter 17, verses 6-18, and in verse 23, where the writer says,

"...the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He has said by all His servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day."

Later, the kingdom of Judah was taken captive by the king of Babylon. But their state was not as hopeless as that of Israel; God promised that after 70 years they should be brought back to their own land, and the Temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, should be rebuilt.

Back in their own land again

Some of the Jews had grown so comfortable and wealthy in Babylon that they did not want to go back to their own land. But a faithful company led by men raised up by God were prepared to make the difficult journey, and to start to rebuild the Temple, and settle down to a new life.

They met with many difficulties, but God sent prophets to encourage and correct them; and the last three books of the Old Testament - Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi - are the writings of these prophets.

Through the prophet Micah (Micah, chapter 3, verse 6) God had spoken of a time when the "sun should go down over the prophets". And from the time of Malachi onwards until the coming of John the baptist, of whom we read in the New Testament, there was no word from God for the people, except what had already been written.

Yet the Jews were, and still are, God's people, and, in our next lesson, we will follow their history right up to the present day.

Summary

1. Thousands of years ago, God chose the Children of Israel to be His own special nation and obey Him.
2. He brought them into the land of Israel, and afterwards He gave them a king.
3. They became divided into two separate kingdoms, one called Israel and one called Judah.
4. Both Israel and Judah were carried away into captivity in foreign countries.
5. After 70 years, Judah went back to their own country, and - as we shall see in the next lesson - were there when Jesus was born among them.