**CHRONOLOGICAL BACKGROUND FOR EZRA**

* David’s son, Solomon, built the original (1st) Temple in Jerusalem.
* **931 BC**= Solomon’s Kingdom split:
  + Northern tribes= Israel, under Jeroboam, Shechem (later Samaria) was the capital- 2 temples, 1 @ Dan & 1 @ Bethel.
  + Southern tribes= Judah (which had absorbed Simeon) & Benjamin- capital & Temple in Jerusalem.
* **733 & 722 BC**= In 733 BC, King Pul (Tiglath-Pilezer III) of Assyria (modern Iraq)- with main cities of Asshur & Nineveh- invaded Israel and deported most Israelites to other portions of the Empire. In 722 BC, Sargon II conquered and destroyed Israel’s ruling city, Samaria, after a 3-year siege, which had been begun by Shalmaneser V. Sargon carried away 27,290 citizens from the Northern Kingdom, including those E of the Jordan, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and ½ tribe of Manasseh, and replaced them with people from Syria and Mesopotamia. [Only peasant farmers remained in Palestine.]:
  + Some Israelites escaped, including many Levites, who fled to Judah. Others went to Egypt & Asia. (Extensive documents from Ezra’s time, 5thC BC, confirm a large Jewish garrison was on Elephantine Island opposite an Aramean settlement and garrison at the 1st Nile cataract protecting Egypt.)
  + The Southern Kingdom escaped Assyria’s onslaught when King Azariah paid Sargon tribute, but the virtual destruction of Israel left Judah to fend for itself among warring kingdoms.

* **701 BC**= King Hezekiah withheld tribute and Assyrian King Sennacherib invaded Judah. He conquered Lachish in Judah after a fierce siege and again deported many Jews. (Archaeologists have found mass graves with 1500 bodies and Assyrian reliefs depicting the siege, captives, and plunder.) But the Assyrians stopped short of Jerusalem. Excavations from 1935 unearthed ostraca, broken pottery pieces, containing correspondence between an outpost officer and the commander at Lachish. They record the fall of Azekah and note that from Jerusalem the signal fires of Lachish were visible, but not those of Azekah. The name of YHWH was prominent on the pottery.
* **605 BC**= Assyria fell to Babylon’s Nebuchadnezzar II, and he began efforts to conquer Egypt, Judah, and the critical trade route, the Way of the Sea which went from Egypt to Damascus and beyond. Nebuchadnezzar did not replace existing populations with others, but he deported Judah’s best and brightest, including Daniel & friends, to Babylon.
* **597 BC**= Jerusalem surrendered to Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, who established a puppet government in Judah. Again, important and educated Judahites were deported, including Ezekiel & 10,000 others.
* **587 BC**= Judah rebelled. This time, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem after a fierce 2-year siege. Jerusalem’s walls were pulled down and the Temple was demolished. Judah’s King Zedekiah was taken prisoner and forced to watch as his sons were killed and then his eyes were gouged out. The Temple was destroyed, and all its furnishings and & vessels were taken to Babylon. Thousands more Jews were deported. Only the poorest subsistence farmers remained in Judah.

**539 BC**= Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon. Nabonidus, perhaps another name for Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, in his madness, as depicted in *Daniel,* ruled an enlarged Babylonian empire with his co-regent son, Belshazzar, who gave a lavish idolatrous banquet at which mysterious fingers and a hand wrote on the wall in Hebrew (translated by Daniel. (Dan.5):

* *Mene* = Measure (God has numbered the days of your kingdom & brought it to an end),
* *Tekel* = Weight (You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting),
* *Parsin* = Divide (Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes & Persians.)

That night Babylon fell to Cyrus and the Persians.

* The Persians, Indo-Europeans who had lived on the Iranian plateau for centuries, allied with the Medes, who were monotheists/Zoroastrians. (In 1924, a tablet was found in Babylon saying Babylon’s citizens opened the gates to the Persians. Legend declares one entrance into the city was through the Euphrates River. In theory, a soldier could hold his breath and swim to the other side. Cyrus’ men swam the river and entered the city without a fight.)