

*Exile and Return*

*Many Judeans went into exile in Babylon. A second generation was born. Then the Persians conquered Babylon and, for economic reasons of their own, permitted the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. Some texts of the period deal with the early years in Babylon; others respond to the Return with hopes for renewal of God's promise to David. Here are some readings from that period.*

(58) Yehud. The Age of the Great Powers had arrived, and the former Judah (Hb Yehudah) is now known, in international Aramaic, as Yehud.

(59) The Torah Psalter. Devotion to the Law took the form of meditation on a group of Psalms, defined by the framing Psalms 1 and 119.

(60) Job. He represents loss of faith in Yahweh. Yahweh is too remote, and his plans too deep, to have any meaning for mortals.

(61) Qoheleth. "The Preacher" takes Job a step further. Not only is God inscrutable, but the mere life of man is ultimately without meaning.

(62) The Second Temple. When was the rebuilding of the Temple begun, and when was it completed? We have only the Prophetic literature to go on.

(63) The Samaritans. A rival to the Jerusalem Temple was established on Mount Gerizim, complete with a Samaritan translation of the Pentateuch.

(64) Elephantine. Egypt was one more place, in addition to Jerusalem, where Yahweh was worshiped in a temple dedicated to him.

(65) Songs of Ascents. These fifteen Psalms celebrate the return of the Exiles to Jerusalem and the rebuilt Temple, with all the hopes that attended it.



*Some responses to the times involved narrowing, and an ethnic definition of the people. Others involved widening, and there appeared more than one center of Yahweh worship. Some sought to rewrite all earlier history to permit the resumption of the old Promise to David. Other theological hopes took a different direction. We will see examples in the next and final section.*