

# Controversy of the exile



After reading 2 Kings 25 and the two articles, the main source of contrast between these two sources is the amount of detail they go into on different aspects of the Exile. The Biblical reading mentions King Nebuchadnezzar and his capture of King Zedekiah, the efforts of General Nebuzaradan and his detailed destruction and pillaging of Jerusalem and the Temple, the capturing and execution of Judah's chief officers and priests, Judah's revolt against Gedaliah and fleeing to Egypt, and the benevolence King Evil-merodach of Babylon demonstrated towards Jehoiachin.

The articles, however, mentioned nothing of to do with any of these circumstances. They concentrated, instead, on the life in Judah during the Exile. The Biblical picture of life in Judah during the Exile was expressed in only a few verses. One states, " But the poorest of the people were left to farm the land (2 Kings 25: 12). " This gives us little information to work with, and all that can be assumed is that not many people were left in Jerusalem, and those that were, farmed. Whether they farmed for themselves, or for Babylon cannot be reasonably determined from this one verse.

Later on, we see that some underground guerrilla forces were also left in Judah as they assassinated Gedaliah and fled to Egypt. Other than this, we know nothing from 2 Kings 25 about life in Judah during the Exile. The articles, however, give us much more light into life in Judah during these times. Graham illustrates that the people that worked in Jerusalem, Mozah, and Gibeon during the Exile were primarily vinedressers and plowmen. 2 Kings 25 does not give us enough information to have known that people worked in these three cities.

Their work, however, was not for themselves, but for the greater power of Babylon, as can be illustrated in an engraving on a jar that read, " belonging to the lord" in reference to the work done by the people for the Babylonian king. This, also, was not explicitly illustrated in 2 Kings 25. The king of Babylon collected the goods produced and used them to better the Babylonian economy and the royal crown. Governor Gedaliah also was expected to have overseen people of Judah work to produce wine, fruit, and oil for Babylon.

Outside Benjamin, people worked to make perfume, especially balm, for the royal crown of Babylon. The insight Graham gives us into the work done at Mizpah stresses an important point that 2 Kings 25 leaves out. Not only was work done to produce dyes for Babylon, but the choice of using Mizpah as the city for this work was important because it implies that Jerusalem was uninhabited, and Mizpah was more ideal. This shows that Mizpah was saved, in order that this work could be done there, and that Jerusalem was desolate.

2 Kings 25, however, states that workers were in Jerusalem. Additionally, the information from the Bible reveals that Gedaliah was appointed to watch over the people left in Judah, however, Graham adds that he was also in charge of royal estate management. Graham speaks of the area of Judah as being divided up into labor districts, and also notes that the transport of the goods to Babylon were illustrated on Erech tablets that were discovered. No information on these subjects were found in 2 Kings 25.

Lastly, 2 Kings 25 says nothing about life for the inhabitants of Judah after the Exile under Persian rule, other than talking about how Jehoiachin was

treated. Graham informs us more by saying that forced labor was engrained in the minds of the people because, under Persian rule, the prophet Trito Isaiah promised that there would be no more forced labor like that under the Babylonians. Thus, from Graham, we can tell that forced labor must have been a serious hardship for the people of Judah during the Exile, and that the Perisans appeared to rule in a more benevolent manner than the Babylonians.

According to Williamson, a more archaeological view is taken in contrast to 2 Kings 25. Williamson says that, because of the discovery of tombs of wealthy Jews in Jerusalem, that there must have been more than poor people living in Jerusalem at this time. Based on these discoveries, Williamson goes on to state that the population of Jerusalem may have been more than 2 Kings 25 implies, and that religious liturgy was probably more productive, including people offering prayers at the site of the destroyed Temple.

He also uses other pieces of Scripture to analyze the Exile. By using Ezra, Williamson speaks more of the Persian benevolence and God" s promises not to abandon His people than 2 Kings 25 does. Graham also believes that the book of Nehemiah was used as a prayed for restoration from the view of those in Jerusalem, and that Isaiah 40-55 was also from the view of those in Jerusalem during the Exile. These books support Graham" s belief that more people inhabited this city than implied by 2 Kings 25.

It is thus inferred that the Levites in the post-Exilic period, when the books of Ezra nd Nehemiah were created, drew on their knowledge of these prayers when leading the people in confession. In Williamson" s opinion in light of

Isaiah 40-55, it is impossible to suppose that Isaiah was not present with the people in the Exile, of which he speaks. Thus, Williamson agrees with the consensus of scholars that the work of Isaiah 40-55 was the work of another prophet, commonly referred to as deutero-Isaiah.

Williamson goes on to examine a prayer in Isaiah that was written as a lament by the Jerusalem community who did not leave during the period of the Exile. Jerusalem is in ruins, as are the other cities of Judah, and the Temple had been destroyed. The entire passage (Isaiah 63: 7-64: 12) connects nicely with the passage from Nehemiah that Williamson spoke of earlier. Thus, if the conclusions about Nehemiah are true, they should give support that the passage from Isaiah is also a lament from Jerusalem during the Exilic period focussing on the destroyed and deserted Temple.

In addition, several distinctive details suggest a relationship between the passage from Nehemiah and the passage from Isaiah. For example, only in these two passages in the entire Hebrew Bible is there a reference to God's Spirit (ruach) in connection with Israel's wilderness wanderings. But beyond such details, Williamson believes that there is similarity in the overall shape of the two passages, especially in the last paragraph of each. Each, of which, contains an appeal to God which begins "But now", and in each, a title for God is given that picks up a central aspect of His character.

Both passages then hold up to God His people's state of need, based on a previous recital of details, and both emphasize that "we" are failing to enjoy what "our fathers" once enjoyed. Additionally, in each case there is no specific request, only a laying before God of the source of the distress.

Finally, each begins with a hymnic introduction, then comes a historical recital used as a vehicle for confession of sin and faithlessness. Each then concludes with an appeal for salvation. In fact, this combination also occurs in Psalms 106.

As a whole, Williamson's proposal is that the three passages in Nehemiah, Isaiah, and Psalms should be taken together as giving us insight into the liturgy recited on the ruined site of Jerusalem's Temple during the Exile. None of which was gleaned from 2 Kings 25. Indeed, it is a testimony to their religious insights and to the intensity of their expression that these passages were taken up again by the post-Exilic Jewish community and so given a wider application - one in a Nehemiah, another in Isaiah, and still another in Psalms.

Harmonizing between the Bible and the articles is difficult. All the details that 2 Kings 25 did not address can be filled in with the articles. However, much criticism must be taken in weighing what is possible and what is Biblical. Only those things that accord with archaeology, like Williamson's tombs and Graham's Ezech tablets, or other pieces of Scripture can be taken with much confidence in compilation with 2 Kings 25.

Those assumptions from the articles that do not necessarily contradict, but add to what is already said in 2 Kings 25, must also be taken with caution. For example, the assumption that wealthy people lived in Jerusalem during the Exile adds to what 2 Kings says about poor people living there. 2 Kings never says that no rich people lived there, it only states that many poor people did. Thus, it is possible that some rich lived there also, and because it

is supported with archaeological evidence of tombs, the assumption can be taken with much more confidence.

The articles do not outright claim that 2 Kings 25 is false in any way, they instead add details to what is said there. Because these details are rooted in other passages of Scripture and archaeological evidence, they can be more harmonized with 2 Kings 25 with much confidence because their roots are in reliable sources. Based on the readings for this week, I tend to agree with Williamson's conclusion and description of the literary activity in Judah during the period of the Exile.

What was stated in 2 Kings 25, I believe is very credible evidence about the Exile, however I think it lacks in detail. Williamson made some very convincing arguments that filled in these gaps with details that seemed congruent with other Biblical passages. He made a very important point that the authors of the Bible used earlier sources in compiling their writings, which gave him justification to use other parts of Scripture to strengthen his conclusions on the Exile, as opposed to taking 2 Kings 25 by itself.

The other passages from Nehemiah, Psalms, and Isaiah all seemed to be in the same context as that of 2 Kings 25. They made sense in how they fit into the historical timeline of the Exile, along with God's ongoing provision for His people. These passages all added some important detail to Judah during the Exile, and I was convinced about his conclusion when I discovered that none of the passages were mutually exclusive.

In addition, the archaeological evidence compiled about tombs of wealthy Jews in Jerusalem further supported my belief in Williamson's view that

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more people inhabited Jerusalem than just the poor. Through Williamson" s archaeological and Scriptural arguments, I was convinced that the population of Jerusalem during the Exile must have been more than expected, that more people than just the poor lived there, and that religious liturgy was productive and prevelant in the city and on the ruins of the Temple.