

Old Testament Background for the Gospel of Mark

EXODUS (roughly 1300 years before Jesus). From slavery in Egypt, God rescued the Hebrew people in a night called Passover, and brought them into the wilderness, where he made a covenant with them. Then he brought them into the promised land.

Exodus 2:23 “During these many days... the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.”

Exodus 12:21, 27 “Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them... ‘Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb... It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt...”

Exodus 19:2-3, 5-6a. “There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, saying... you have yourself seen how I brought you out of Egypt on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...”

Establishing the KINGDOM (roughly 1000 years before Jesus). Once the people of Israel were settled in the land, God appointed kings who were anointed to act on God’s behalf. Solomon built the temple and God’s presence filled it.

1 Samuel 16:13 “Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward.”

2 Samuel 7: 4-5a, 16 “But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, ‘Go and tell my servant David... your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

1 Kings 6:14 “So Solomon built the house [temple] and finished it.”

1 Kings 7:10-11 “And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.”

Punished and sent into EXILE (roughly 600 years before Jesus). After many generations of disobedience and breaking the covenant, the people are sent into exile in Babylon.

2 Chronicles 12, 14, 16-17, 19-20 “[King Zedekiah] did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God... All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem... they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people.... Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their

sanctuary... And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem..... He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him..."

Promises given during the EXILE. Amidst the pain of exile, prophets announce that God will come once again to his people, bring them again out of slavery (like the Exodus), re-establish them in the promised land, and heal them.

Isaiah 35:3-6, 10a "Say to those with an anxious heart, 'Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy... and the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing."

Isaiah 40:1-3 "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she had received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: in the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

Return from EXILE, rebuilding the Kingdom. (beginning ~540 years before Jesus) After a time of captivity, the people of Judah are allowed to return to the land and rebuild the temple and walls of Jerusalem. However, it seems that God's promises during the exile are only partially fulfilled. The temple is rebuilt, but God's presence doesn't fill the temple as during the time of Solomon.

Ezra 3: 11b-12a "And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' house, old men who had seen the first house [temple], wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid..."

Malachi 1:10 "Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand."

The time of the Maccabees. (roughly 170 years before Christ) Israel has been conquered by a Greek state called the Seleucid empire. The Seleucids are determined that everyone adhere to Greek religion and culture, so the Jewish people are forced to eat pork, and are forbidden from observing the Sabbath. The Seleucid King Antiochus erected a statue of Zeus in the Jerusalem temple, and sacrificed a pig on the altar. An observant Jewish family called the Maccabees start an uprising which eventually defeats the Seleucid occupiers. The temple is cleansed, a new priesthood is inaugurated, and a new kingly dynasty of the Maccabees (called the Hasmoneans) begins.

The time of the Herodians. (roughly 40 years before Christ) Herod the Great became the new King of Israel while it was coming under the control of the Romans. Herod and his successors sought to please the Romans (by raising taxes and building cities dedicated to Roman emperors), and to please the Jewish people by rebuilding the temple so it measure up to the first temple built by Solomon.