

THE LAND OF THE CHANGING RULERS

The story of one nation trying to dominate the land of another is common throughout history. The Jews were no exception. They were conquered by more powerful nations. However, the Bible tells us that God often used these nations to punish Israel because she had turned against him. Together with the use of a good map you will see and hear about this portion of the history of Israel. On this section of tape I will give you directions as to what to look for on the map. (you might find it more interesting by drawing a copy of the map as we go along!) If you need help turn off the tape and ask one of the catechists for help.

We begin with the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. On our map Israel is in the upper half of Palestine and Judah is the lower half. You have studied how these nations fought against each other and the result was a civil war between families.

Lying to the north and east of Israel is the country called Assyria. After centuries of building, the greatest Assyrian empire came into being under a man named Shalmaneser III. By this time the Assyrians were looking southward to new lands. In 853 BC. Shalmaneser fought the king of Syria but was unable to defeat him. The struggle caused the Assyrians to halt their southern thrust for a while. For about 100 years the Jewish kingdoms were left alone. But then another great king of Assyria arose. His name was Tiglath-pileser III. He secured the borders of his country and began to head south in search of new lands. His successor, Sargon II, conquered the northern kingdom called Israel.

Now the Assyrian empire included the kingdom of Israel. The people were scattered far and wide in the Assyrian empire. Only a few people were left in the land and they intermarried with others who were driven into this land by the Assyrians. This mixed people came to be known as the Samaritans and were despised by the people of the kingdom of Judah because they were not pure Jews any more.

Judah was saved in 701 BC from being conquered by the fact that it agreed to pay a large sum of tribute money to the Assyrians. But the Assyrians, too, had their problems. Another country was coming to power and wanted their land. So Assyria had to turn her attentions to the east and Judah was saved for the time being.

The Babylonians were the next people to invade the scene. Look for Babylon on the map. Here in Babylon was a ruler whom I am sure you have read about. His name was Nebuchadnezzar. He was a strong ruler and there was very little to oppose him. Yet Judah under the leadership of Jehoiakim did just that - they provoked Nebuchadnezzar. As a result Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and captured the town in 589 BC, taking the young king captive back to Babylon.

Ten years later another rebellion of the kingdom of Judah spelled its destruction, for Nebuchadnezzar would not tolerate this in his kingdom. So about 587 BC the kingdom of Judah was destroyed beyond recognition and the people were taken into exile in Babylon. Babylon was a country in which commerce, literature, art and science flourished during this time. The Chaldeans were the founders of astronomy as a science. Careful astronomical observations were continually kept for over 360 years. From these calculations came the length of the year into 365 days, 6 hours, and 15 minutes and 41 seconds. It was into this environment that the Jews were taken.

But again a stronger nation, Persia arose from the east. A Judean prophet rightly interpreted the signs of the times and saw in this nation's leader one who was anointed by God. As it says in Isaiah about this ruler, *who gives nations before Him, and makes Him rule over kings*. Thus the Jews were waiting for Cyrus of Persia to come and deliver them. His armies swept in from the east and conquered the Babylonian empire.

Now look at the map and find the Persian Empire. Notice how small Israel and Judah are by comparison. Cyrus allowed the Jews to go back to their land in 530 BC. Not many Jews went back to Palestine when they could. Mostly priests and their families returned (Levites). The books of Nehemiah and Ezra tell the story of the difficulties these people had in restoring the Temple and building the walls of Jerusalem. The land had been taken over by the Samaritans and Edomites and Moabites. They didn't want the Jews back so whenever an opportunity presented itself they would fight them, especially when the walls of Jerusalem

were going up.

This is as far as we will go in this package. Let's review what took place. The Israelites disappear and become part of Assyria, and Judah is a tribute nation. The Babylonian empire conquers the Assyrian empire and the Jews do not have control of their lands any more. It has disappeared.

The Persian empire allowed the Jews to go back and establish their worship centres. The nations were again back but they did not have the glory which once was theirs.

God used the stronger nations of the world at that time to punish Israel for turning away from him. This is something that every age must think about and every person must ask about their lives. Do you think that God uses evil to punish you in your life because you have turned away from him? Think about it.