

The kingdom divides

After Solomon, the tribes were divided and the kingdom split into two (1 Kings 12). The southern section (called Judah) was ruled by Solomon's son Rehoboam and the northern (called Israel) by Jeroboam. There was constant tension between the two.

The role of the prophets

As the people drifted away from God, prophets called them back to him.

The prophet Elijah confronted Ahab (king in the north) who was known for worshipping the false god Baal and oppressing the poor. Elijah won a famous victory over 400 prophets of Baal when God showed his power on Mount Carmel.

Later, Amos and Hosea spoke about God's judgement on injustice and the worship of other gods, but also of the love of God even to disobedient people. Prophets spoke about what was happening at the time, but also looked forward and spoke about what God was going to do.

The rise and fall of Assyria

Until 612 BC, Assyria and Egypt were the main powers in the region. Israel and Judah were caught between the two. While the Assyrians conquered Samaria, Jerusalem was also besieged. God intervened and the city was saved. In 612 BC the Babylonians defeated Assyria.

Fall of Jerusalem

Judah's power gradually weakened and, following a decisive Babylonian victory over the Egyptians in 605 BC, it fell under Babylonian control. A number of inhabitants including Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:15; Daniel 1). The city was finally ransacked and the population scattered in 587 BC.

More kings: good and bad

Initially Israel's defeat and the prophets' warnings had a positive impact on Judah. Hezekiah, encouraged by Isaiah, cleared out some of the false god worship introduced by Ahaz (2 Kings 18–20). But the next two kings, Amon and Manasseh, soon reintroduced much of the evil practice. Josiah, encouraged by Jeremiah, also called the people back to God, but it didn't last for long (2 Kings 22, 23).

Kings: good and bad

In the north, they set up separate centres of worship where the emphasis was not on God. Most kings did not worship God or encourage the people to do so. The nation became wealthy, the rich exploited the poor and God was ignored.

In the south, there were both good and bad kings, but the nation stayed closer to God.

Disaster strikes

From 753 BC, the north was weakened by a series of coups. In 722 BC, the Assyrian army (from what is now northern Iraq) conquered the kingdom and the capital Samaria fell, bringing an end to the northern kingdom. Prophets saw this as a punishment for deserting God and oppressing the poor.

Isaiah and Jeremiah

Based in Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah warned the people of God's judgement if they did not worship and obey God.

Later on, Jeremiah saw that the change introduced by Josiah would not last and that the end was coming. But, like Isaiah before him, he also emphasised God's love and his desire to restore his people. In one prophecy, he looked forward to the new covenant that God would make with his people and to the coming of Jesus (Jeremiah 31:31–33).

900 BC

800 BC

700 BC

600 BC



Paul's journeys

God told the church in Antioch to send Paul and Barnabas to tell others about Jesus (Acts 13:1-3). They went to Cyprus and then to a number of towns in what is now Turkey. In some places, they received a good response and people became Christians. In others, they had a tough time. They returned to Antioch to report what God had done.

Later, Paul set off again, this time with Silas. He visited some of the churches formed on the previous trip. God then led him to Greece, where he founded churches including those in Athens and Corinth. He then made a third journey before returning to Jerusalem.

Travel

In the first century, only important government and military officials rode horses. On land, Paul walked. Over sea, he travelled in boats that carried goods across the Mediterranean.

Paul in Rome

When he returned to Jerusalem, Paul faced opposition. After various trials and imprisonments, he appealed to Caesar and was taken to Rome. On the way, he was shipwrecked (Acts 27,28). In Rome, he wrote more letters to churches and some to his friends, like Timothy, who were church leaders. He seems to have been released and travelled some more before being re-arrested and executed.

Revelation

On Patmos, John had a vision of God in his power and glory. This vision is recorded in Revelation, which, although complex to us, was a reminder to the persecuted Christians that God was in control and that they had a great future.

AD48

AD60

AD67

AD95

Paul's letters

Paul wrote a number of letters, mostly to churches he had founded. Many of Paul's letters were written to deal with problems faced by the early church and to help people understand more about Jesus and how to live for him.

A growing church

During this time, the church was growing rapidly and spreading right round the Mediterranean world. Both Jews and non-Jews became Christians and this led to some tension.

Key towns

Paul's strategy was to go to key population centres. He visited Athens where he came up against the best thinkers in Greece. In Ephesus, he had a run-in with the worshippers of the goddess Artemis. The first Christians in Philippi included a wealthy business woman and a rough prison governor.

More letters and four Gospels

As the church became established, other leaders, including Peter, John and James, also wrote letters to encourage and teach Christians. The books we call Gospels were written to tell the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Before they were written down, they were told and remembered by the Christians. Ancient societies passed on stories very accurately.

Tough times for the church

Early opposition came mainly from some Jews stirring up trouble. Some Romans and Greeks blamed Christians when things went wrong, saying that it was because they did not worship the gods. Roman emperors Nero and Domitian started more organised persecution. Paul and Peter were probably killed during Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome.

John on Patmos

The apostle John was the leader of the church in Ephesus. The emperor Domitian, who built a temple to himself in Ephesus, sent John to the island of Patmos just off the coast of modern-day Turkey.