

Handout Ezra Lesson 3

Persian kings mentioned in this lesson:

Darius I ruled from 522-486 BC

Xerxes ruled from 486-465 BC

Artaxerxes I ruled from 465-424 BC

The events in the Book of Ezra are related to the work of the prophet Haggai who was one of the three post-exile prophets along with the prophets Zechariah and Malachi. The dates of Haggai's prophetic ministry are according to the Liturgical lunar calendar (Hag 1:1, 15; 2:1, 10, 20). He refers to events in Judah between August the 29th, 520 BC and December the 18th of the same year (according to our calendar), covering about 3 ½ months during the second year of the reign of King Darius I of Persia and a decade after the death of King Cyrus I. The focus of Haggai and Zechariah's messages is that the physical rebuilding of the Temple represents the spiritual revival of the covenant people that is necessary for their Messianic hope.

Haggai's first oracle is in two parts:

1. Haggai's message to Zerubbabel and Jeshua/Joshua (Hag 1:2-11).
2. The positive response of his Jewish audience (Hag 1:12-15).

In his first oracle, Haggai presents three images:

1. "the time" (verses 2 and 3)
2. "the house" (verses 2 and 3)
3. the invitation to "think" (verse 7).

Haggai's message reminds the people of Judah that the conditions of the Sinai Covenant Treaty are still in place. Their lack of prosperity indicates that the sanctions concerning blessings and judgments in Israel's Covenant Treaty with Yahweh in Leviticus 26:3-13 (blessings), 14-46 (judgments) and Deuteronomy 28:1-14 (blessings), 15-69/29:1 (judgments). In a Covenant Treaty, both the dominant King and his vassal swear an oath in treaty form, thereby creating a covenant bond between the two parties. A Covenant Treaty is ratified in three ways:

1. The vassal swore an oath of loyalty and alliance.
2. A sacrifice was offered.
3. Finally, the eating of the sacrifice in a sacred meal.

For example, at the covenant ratification at Mt. Sinai, Moses read the treaty (Ex 24:4a):

1. The people offered a sacrifice, and Moses sprinkled the blood on the people and on the altar that represented Yahweh the Great King (Ex 24:4b-6).
2. Then, the people swore an oath to obey Yahweh's commands and prohibitions (Ex 24:8).
3. Finally, they ate a sacred meal binding the covenant between the two parties, Yahweh the Great King and Israel the vassal people (Ex 24:9-11).

Biblical covenants with Yahweh, however, were unique in that they were not just a treaty between a Great King and His vassal(s), but they also created a family bond through the blood sacrifice with the Divine King and the subject of the Covenant Treaty becoming "one blood."

The standard Biblical covenant had five parts:

1. Preamble: Identifying the Lordship of the Great King and stressing his greatness, dominance, and immanence.
2. Historical Prologue: Recounting the Great King's previous relationship to his vassal with emphasis on the benefits of that relationship.
3. Ethical Stipulations: Enumerating the vassal's obligations to the Great King (the guide to maintaining the covenant relationship).
4. Sanctions: A list of the blessings for obedience and the curses/judgments that will fall on the vassals if they break the covenant.
5. Succession: Arrangements and provisions for the continuity of the covenant relationship over future generations.

Pagan covenant treaties had a sixth part calling on the pagan gods of both nations to witness the document.

Oracle #2: Haggai 2:1-9 ~ Yahweh's message to the people and their leaders:

1. Have courage and do not be afraid because I am with you (verses 4-5).
 2. God will shake the universe on their behalf to bring treasures to their restored Temple (verses 6-8).
 3. The glory of the Second Temple will surpass that of the First Temple (verse 9).
- Haggai's second oracle has Messianic promises that the Second Temple will herald a new era in the history of salvation and a turning point in experiencing God's bounty of the "treasures" of peace with God and spiritual blessings to humanity.

Zechariah's first prophecy dates to October-November 520, two months after the first prophecy of Haggai. In Zechariah 4:6-10, Yahweh Commands Three Sayings About Zerubbabel in which Yahweh reveals that the rebuilt Temple on Mt. Moriah is not as significant as Zerubbabel who is the central figure in God's continuing plan for humanity's salvation:

1. Zerubbabel will set in place the physical keystone or cornerstone of the Temple, but he is the foundational "keystone" in God's divine plan.
 2. He will lay the foundations and finish rebuilding the Temple, but he also lays the foundations of Yahweh's "chosen one" who will be the Davidic Messiah.
 3. He will do these things that affect the present and the future moved by the Spirit of Yahweh.
- Like his brother prophet Haggai, Zechariah's concern is with the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, but he is even more concerned with the spiritual restoration of the nation and the moral conduct of commitment to a life of holiness required of a covenant people. The prophecy for Zerubbabel points to a Messianic fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah.

Ezra 6:1-12: King Darius' reply to Governor Tattenai:

1. The dimensions of the structure as sixty cubits by sixty cubits; built of stone and timber.
2. The royal treasury will subsidize the building costs of the Jerusalem Temple from the taxes of his province.
3. He must return all the sacred items looted by the Babylonians.
4. Tattenai and his associates must assist the Jews and not prevent them from rebuilding the Temple.
5. Anyone who disobeys Darius' orders concerning the Jerusalem Temple will be executed.

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COVENANT TREATY FORMAT OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN KINGDOMS AND THE APPLICATION OF THAT FORMAT TO YAHWEH'S TREATY WITH ISRAEL

Covenant Treaty formats that are similar to the treaties between ancient Mesopotamian and Near Eastern city-states and kingdoms appear in the Old Testament texts. In a Covenant Treaty, both the dominant King and his vassal swear an oath in treaty form, thereby creating a covenant bond between the two parties. A Covenant Treaty is ratified in three ways:

1. The vassal swears an oath of loyalty and alliance.
2. There is the offering of a sacrifice.
3. Finally, by eating the sacrifice in a sacred meal.

For example, at the covenant ratification at Mt. Sinai, the people made a sacrifice and Moses sprinkled the blood on the people and on the altar that represented Yahweh the Great King (Ex 24:4-6). Then, the people swore an oath to obey Yahweh's commands and prohibitions (Ex 24:8). Finally, they ate a sacred meal binding the covenant between the two parties, Yahweh the Great King and Israel the vassal people (Ex 24:9-11). Biblical covenants with Yahweh, however, were unique in that they were not just a treaty between a Great King and His vassal(s), but they also created a family bond through the blood sacrifice with the Divine King and the subject of the Covenant Treaty becoming "one blood."

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- 5. Succession:** Arrangements and provisions for the continuity of the covenant relationship over future generations.

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Covenant Treaties of Old Testament:

One of the best examples of a Covenant Treaty in the OT is the Book of Deuteronomy written by Moses just before the new generation of the Sinai Covenant took possession of the Promised Land. It is a covenant renewal treaty. The book naturally divides into five sections which correspond to the five parts of the ancient Covenant Treaty structure.

1. Preamble (1:1-5)
2. Historical Prologue (1:6-4:49)
3. Ethical Stipulations (5:1-26:19)

4. Sanctions (27:1-30:20)
5. Succession Arrangements (31:1-34:12)

When a vassal kingdom violated the terms of the covenant agreement, the Great Lord would send emissaries to warn the offenders of the coming judgment and enforcement of the curse sanctions. In the Bible, it was the mission of God's holy Prophets (who acted as God's prosecuting attorneys) to bring the message of the covenant Lawsuit to the offending nation = in Hebrew a 'rib' or riv. For example, Isaiah and Hosea brought a Covenant Lawsuit against Israel in the 8th century BC; both Jeremiah and Ezekiel brought a Covenant Lawsuit against Judea in the 6th century BC. Each prophet addressed the generation on which the covenant curses would fall. Some examples in Scripture:

1. Dt 4:26; 30:19; 32:1
2. Ps. 50:4-7
3. Isaiah 1:2 & 21; 3:13
4. Micah 6:1
5. The Book of Hosea [see 2:4 (2)-15 (13);

Israelites, hear what Yahweh says, for Yahweh indicts ["brings a riv" = Hebrew for "covenant lawsuit" to] the citizens of the country: there is no loyalty, no faithful love, no knowledge of God in the country (Hosea 4:1).

The book of Hosea is laid out in the classic Covenant Treaty format:

1. Preamble: Hosea Chapter 1
2. Historical prologue: Chapters 2-3
3. Ethical Stipulations: Chapters 2-7
4. Sanctions: Chapters 8-9
6. Succession Arrangements: Chapters 10-14

For further study see Kline: *Treaty of the Great King*; also, Sutton *That you may Prosper: Dominion by Covenant*.

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