The Scattering of Israel

Reading Assignment Key Concepts

There are six key points to learn from this reading assignment necessary to the course paper–

1. Overview of the Scattering of Israel (the kingdoms of Israel and Judah)

   Division of the Kingdom In 953 B.C., the united kingdom of Israel divided into two separate nations: the kingdoms of Judah (Judah and Benjamin) and Israel (the northern 10 tribes). The division could be considered the first step in the scattering of Israel (Israel meaning the House of Israel, not the kingdom of Israel–the 10 tribes). The next event took place in the days of King Asa of Judah (929-873 B.C.) when many from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon left the northern kingdom of Israel and migrated to Judah when they saw that Jehovah was with the kingdom of Judah and not with Israel (see 2 Chron. 15:8-9). So, the kingdoms are now being “scattered” from the lands allocated to them by Joshua.

   Scattering of the Northern Kingdom of Israel

   However, generally what is referred to as “the scattering of Israel” is usually thought to have begun in 734-732. This is when Assyria, eventually wanting to control Egypt, descended upon Israel capturing most of the northern kingdom except for capital of Israel, the city of Samaria. Many Israelites–mainly the aristocratic and wealthy classes–were sent into exile (some as slaves but most were resettled) in various lands controlled by Assyria. By 720, Assyria returned and destroyed Samaria and more of the northern kingdom were forced into exile. Israel ceased to exist as a political entity. In 716 B.C., Assyria forced non-Israelites from other lands they had captured to live in the vacuum left by the exiled Israelites. They inter-married with remaining Israelites peasants and became known as Samaritans. Further, in 701 B.C., Assyria attacked Judah, destroying many cities–except for Jerusalem–and took thousands of Jews (the general name for anyone living in the kingdom of Judah) into permanent exile throughout Assyrian lands.

   Eventually, the exiled Israelites from Israel and Judah continued to “scatter” mixing themselves among many land and nations. As Nephi said: Israel was “scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations” (1 Ne. 22:3) As a result, most lost their identify and become have become known as “the lost tribes.” With the northern kingdom scattered, “there was none left but the tribe of Judah only (2 Kings 17:18).

   The Exile of Judah. After the “whipping” Assyria gave Judah in 701 B.C., the Kingdom of Judah was allowed to continue but only as a vassal state of Assyria–meaning they had to regularly pay taxes to Assyria and follow any Assyrian edicts given them. In the later part of the 600's B.C., as Assyria began losing power. Josiah (639-609 B.C.), king of Judah rebelled against the ailing Assyrian government and Judah became a rather independent state. Unfortunately, Josiah was killed in a battle against the Egyptians who were coming to the aid of Assyria in a war against the Median-Babylonian coalition who was trying to destroy
Assyria. As a result Judah became a vassal to Egypt. By about 605 B.C., Assyria fell to the Medians and Babylonians. Media took over northern Mesopotamia while southern Mesopotamia was taken over by the Babylonians. The Babylonians place Judah under vassalage. Eventually, Judah rebelled against Babylon who responded by sieging Jerusalem in 597 B.C. (600 B.C. in Book of Mormon chronology). Surrender to Babylon, the king of Judah was deported along with many others (including Ezekiel and perhaps Daniel and his friends). Zedekiah was put on the throne as a client-king of Babylon. That year, Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. But only after a decade of loyalty, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon and entered into an alliance with Egypt. Babylon’s response was quick—Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C. and the Jews were exiled to Babylon. Ten years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, the Lord led Lehi and his family to “the promised land” where He hoped to preserve the seed of Jacob (this will be discussed later in this lesson).

The Exiled Jews Return to Jerusalem. In 538 B.C., Babylon fell to the Persians. Cyrus, the King of Persia, issues a decree that would free the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city and the temple. The Jews—actually a small minority—returned and during the next few decades rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple which was dedicated in 515 B.C.

The history during the next several decades is not clear. However, sometime after the dedication of the temple, the Jews were struggling with their faith. Malachi, responsible for the last prophetic book in the Bible, chastised the Jews and called them to repentance. His book ends with two critical chapters, chapters 3-4. The importance of these chapters can be seen in the fact that the Savior quoted them verbatim to the Nephites when he appeared to them at Bountiful after His resurrection. He had them place in their scriptures and Mormon placed them in the Book of Mormon (see 3 Nephi 24-25). Portions of these chapters will be discussed in the next few lessons.

Probably after the ministry of Malachi came the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah who helped shaped Jewish history between 458 to about 430 B.C. From this time to the time of Christ, there is no scriptural history. But it is clear from the New Testament that the Jews had strayed in various ways from the Lord in various ways.

The Roman Destruction of Jerusalem. With the coming of Christ, the Jews were given an opportunity to receive the fulness of the gospel. But Christ was rejected by the Jews who crucified Him. The Lord had warned the Jews the rejecting Him would spell their doom: Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed and the Jews scattered. This came to pass as a result of the first Jewish-Roman war of 66-70 A.D. and the second Jewish-Roman (132-135 A.D.).

Gospel Goes to the Gentiles. Several years before Jerusalem was destroyed in the Jewish-Roman War of 66-70 A.D., the gospel began to be taught to the Gentiles. A revelation (Acts 10) was received by the Apostle Peter, head of the Church after Christ was resurrected and ascended to heaven. In this revelation, he was told that the Gentiles could now receive the gospel. The Apostles began going to all the world. The main missionary to the Gentiles however was the Apostle Paul who’s missionary efforts are recorded in Act 12-28. By about 100 A.D., after all the apostles had been killed (John was translated) the Church fell into apostasy.

In the New World, the gospel established by Jesus Christ upon His visit to the Nephites in Bountiful (3 Nephi 11-27). Apparently, the Savior also set up the Church in other areas where the remnants of the House of Israel existed (see 3 Nephi 15). But within two hundred years, apostasy began to take over the Church among the Nephites until the final battle between the Nephites and Lamanites about 385 A.D. when the Church was destroyed. Wherever else the gospel had been established throughout the world, eventually those churches also fell to apostasy. As stated in Zenos’s allegory: the earth “had all become corrupt” (Jacob 5:39). The Gospel could not be found anywhere in the world.

During this time, he scattering of Israel continued.