

fall of Nineveh, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and, probably, Obadiah were his contemporaries. Ezekiel began his work in exile about B.C. 592, and continued for twenty or more years. Like the prophets of the Assyrian period, they now saw in Babylon Jehovah's instrument of punishment, and in the exile a necessary discipline. They confidently predicted a restoration, and the dawn of a new day of righteousness and prosperity.

The Exile.—The exiles remained in Babylon for fifty years. Many engaged in business, or were skilled craftsmen or farmers. Many, no doubt, were tempted by the luxury and wealth of Babylon, and forgot the faith of their fathers: but there were some who remained faithful. Carefully and jealously they preserved the records and laws of the past, and the first great series of historical books, *Genesis to Kings*, was, apparently, now brought to completion. *Isaiah*, chs. 40-66, contains messages of comfort and encouragement addressed to the exiles, with assurances of coming deliverance and future national glory under the restored favor and blessing of Jehovah.

Restoration.—Through the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus, the Persian King, in 539 B.C., the way was opened for the return of the exiles to their own land. The policy of Cyrus was to conciliate subject peoples, and attach them to his government. A large number of the Jews, under the leadership of Shesbazzar (or Zerubbabel), a prince of the ancient royal line, returned to Judah in B.C. 538. They met with much opposition from the Samaritans and other neighbors, and made but slow progress. It was twenty years before, urged by their prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they rebuilt the temple. They continued subject to the Persian empire, and the kingdom of David was not re-established.

Ezra and Nehemiah.—In the two generations following the return from exile, there was again moral and religious decline. Mingling with and intermarrying with their heathen