

to the east.

At the battle of Carchemish in 604 B.C. the Medes and the Babylonians together destroyed the last remnants of the Assyrian empire and Babylon became supreme in western Asia. In 586 Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the city, leaving it a ruin and taking thousands of its people across the desert far to the east.

The first group of people that had been taken into exile from Judah had gone at about 604 B.C. A little less than 70 years after that this phase of the exile came to an end. A group of people subordinate to the Medes had succeeded in gaining control over them. This group were known as the Persians, and their leader was a king named Cyrus. Cyrus gained control over the entire Median empire which laid east of the Babylonian empire. Then led his army westward, north of the region of the Babylonian empire, conquering various nations there, going on rapidly into Asia Minor and conquering area after area in that region until eventually his armies came clear to the borders of Europe. After this great process of rapid conquest, Cyrus turned his forces southward against the Babylonian empire and conquered it. Having done so, he made it a part of his own Persian empire. Cyrus reversed the policy of the Assyrians and the Babylonians, of taking the people of the subject nations off into exile. He allowed the exiles to return to their homes, so that a large group of Jews were able to leave Babylonia and with Cyrus' help to proceed westward across the desert and to undertake the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The historical account of this is contained in the book of Ezra and of Nehemiah.

We have sketched very briefly the historical background of the time of Isaiah and of the next two centuries. Because an understanding of it is vital to the understanding of the wonderful section of the book of Isaiah which we are now going to examine.