

# **Jeremiah**

## **The Destruction of Jerusalem**

Lesson #10 for December 5, 2015

Scriptures: Ezekiel 8; Romans 1:22-25; Jeremiah 37:1-10; 38:1-6; 29:1-14; Daniel 9:2.

1. In this lesson we will discuss the final events leading to the total destruction of Jerusalem. Daniel and his friends and many others had been taken into Babylonian captivity in 605 B.C. at the time of Nebuchadnezzar's first conquest of Judah. Ezekiel and most the population of Judah were exiled to Babylon in 598-597 B.C. The final destruction of Jerusalem occurred after a siege by Nebuchadnezzar lasting about two and one-half years, and the wall of Jerusalem was breached in 586 B.C. and the city completely destroyed.
2. So, during the times we are talking about in this lesson, Daniel was in Babylon, Ezekiel was in an area near the Chebar River in Babylonia, and Jeremiah was in Jerusalem as it was being besieged.

Within a few short years the king of Babylon was to be used as the instrument of God's wrath upon impenitent Judah. Again and again Jerusalem was to be invested [surrounded] and entered by the besieging armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Company after company—at first a few only, but later on thousands and tens of thousands—were to be taken captive to the land of Shinar [Babylon], there to dwell in enforced exile. Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah—all these Jewish kings were in turn to become vassals of the Babylonian ruler, and all in turn were to rebel. Severer and yet more severe chastisements were to be inflicted upon the rebellious nation, until at last the entire land was to become a desolation, Jerusalem was to be laid waste and burned with fire, the temple that Solomon had built was to be destroyed, and the kingdom of Judah was to fall, never again to occupy its former position among the nations of earth.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 422.2-423.0. [Content in brackets is added.]

3. What were the events that led up to that final destruction? Read Ezekiel 8. Ezekiel was taken in vision from his place of residence near the Chebar River in Babylonia to Jerusalem where he was shown groups of people hiding away **within the temple premises**, worshiping idols, snakes, and unclean animals; and he was even shown people in the courtyard bowing toward the east, worshiping the sun. Incredibly, at least some of those people thought that God had abandoned them and that He could no longer see them. There was a group of women weeping over the death of the "god" Tammuz who was believed to die each year in the autumn as the vegetation died and was thought to come back to life the next year in the spring. That was a fertility cult ceremony from Babylonia being carried out inside the premises of Solomon's Temple. What was God supposed to do with people who were behaving like that?
4. Read Ezekiel 8:12. What would lead them to say that God could not see what they were doing and that God had abandoned them? Did they really believe that the Lord no longer cared about what they did? Did they really think that those pagan gods could or would do anything for them? What had happened to their thinking?
5. Read Romans 1:22-25. Their minds had apparently been so corrupted by this behavior that God had to finally give up on them. (See Hosea 4:17.) When God gets "angry," it is

because we are running away from Him as fast as we can and have repeatedly rejected Him. So, there is nothing more He can do for us except to let us go.

6. Zedekiah, the last of the sons of Josiah to rule in Jerusalem and the last king on the throne of Judah before its destruction by the Babylonians, was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar in 598/597 B.C. At first, he apparently was willing to listen to instruction from God; but, he very quickly abandoned that attitude.
7. Nebuchadnezzar had become completely frustrated by the behavior of the Jewish people and especially the king he had placed on the throne. Instead of remaining loyal to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah had sought to establish a military relationship with the Egyptians. When Nebuchadnezzar surrounded Jerusalem at the beginning of that final siege, the Egyptian army started marching north, and Nebuchadnezzar's army temporarily abandoned Jerusalem to face the Egyptians. Zedekiah mistakenly believed that things were going to be better. But, Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah to recognize that Babylon was coming back. (See Ezekiel 17:15-18.) Babylon almost annihilated the Egyptians in the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. and then returned to siege Jerusalem.
8. Jeremiah continued to plead with the people to surrender to the Babylonians and remain faithful to Nebuchadnezzar. Unfortunately, to the military who were still left in Jerusalem and who were trying to fight off the Babylonians, that sounded like treason. Read Jeremiah 38:1-6.
9. As we have mentioned in previous lessons, conditions became so desperate toward the end of the siege of Jerusalem that people were actually eating their own dead children. (Jeremiah 19:9; Lamentations 2:20; 4:10) But, in that horrible situation, Jeremiah was pleading with the people just to leave the city and surrender to the Babylonian army, saying that they would save their lives by that action. Otherwise, he warned them that they would die of war, starvation, or disease. Jeremiah further assured them that the city was going to fall to the Babylonian army. As you might guess, the military leaders were not happy to hear such a message. They wanted to put Jeremiah to death. When people are unhappy about a message being received from someone who they are afraid might be telling them the truth and they cannot convince that person to stop saying what they are saying, then the usual human reaction is to kill the messenger. Jeremiah had grown up within a few miles of Jerusalem and spent most of his life there; but, like Jesus hundreds of years later, Jeremiah was not respected in his home territory. (Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44) Did the fact that Jeremiah remained in the city do any good? Why are we studying his book 2500 years later?
10. When the military leaders reported to the king what Jeremiah was saying, the king, who had no backbone at all—just to appease them—said, “Do what you like with him.” Jeremiah was taken and lowered into a more or less dry well in the courtyard of the palace. There, he sank down into the mud.
11. What do you think those leaders expected to happen to Jeremiah? They expected him to die there!
12. Read Jeremiah 38:7-13. Fortunately for Jeremiah, there was someone who took his messages seriously. Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian eunuch, who worked in the royal palace heard what had happened to Jeremiah and appealed to King Zedekiah. He was permitted to take three men with him and pull Jeremiah out of the well. After that, Jeremiah was kept in the courtyard under the auspices of Zedekiah in a kind of house arrest. Daily, he was provided at least a small amount of food.

13. How many prophets in the history of the Bible have had their lives threatened? How many have been thrown into prison because of their messages. What about John the Baptist? Isaiah? Think about Peter and John even in the New Testament.
14. Could God's modern church ever be guilty of doing anything like that? When Ellen White returned from Europe and established her home in California in 1887, she recognized that there were problems developing in the Adventist Church. She traveled with the delegation from California to the Minneapolis General Conference Session in 1888 and gave her approval and support to the messages brought by E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones. The church leaders from Battle Creek were very unhappy about what Waggoner and Jones were preaching, and they thought Ellen White had been misled by those two young men. After the Minneapolis meetings, Ellen White began to travel to a series of camp meetings around the eastern United States in the company of A. T. Jones. The two of them emphasized the message of righteousness by faith and a correct understanding of the law which the young men had been preaching.
15. Shortly thereafter, the General Conference leadership decided it was best to ask Ellen White to go to Australia. She said clearly that she had received no revelation from God that she should go; but, she went anyway because the church leaders had asked her to go. They were hoping to get her out of their hair! Fortunately for us, Ellen White used the time in Australia not only to establish and build up the church there but also to write *Steps to Christ*, *The Desire of Ages*, and *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*.
16. When the wall of Jerusalem was finally breached and Jerusalem fell, what happened to Jeremiah? Read Jeremiah 40:1-6. How did the Babylonians know who Jeremiah was? How do you explain the speech of Nebuzaradon? How did they know about the messages that he had been given over the prior several years? No doubt, some who had taken Jeremiah's advice and fled to the Babylonians told them of his work. Even though he was a "captive," Jeremiah was given the option of staying in Jerusalem or going with the exiles to Babylonia. (Jeremiah 39:11-12; 40:6-7)
17. Jeremiah chose to stay in Judah. Nebuchadnezzar exiled everyone whom he thought might be of use to his nation. He left behind people who were so poor and weak that they perhaps could not even have made the journey to Babylonia.
18. As we have noted before, Zedekiah, his family, and his high officials were caught after escaping from Jerusalem. Zedekiah was forced to watch as his entire family and his high officials were put to death; and then, his eyes were gouged out. He was dragged to Babylon where, shortly thereafter, he died. (2 Kings 25:7; Jeremiah 52:6-11)
19. Read Jeremiah 29:1-23. As we noted at the beginning of this lesson, Ezekiel had been taken in vision to Jerusalem to see the evil things taking place in the compound of the temple itself. Jeremiah was also told to prepare a letter to be sent from Jerusalem to the exiles already in Babylonia. He told them to settle down, to marry, to have children, and to prosper in Babylonia. He told them to work for the good of the nation where they were living. If the nation prospered, the Jews would prosper also. Isn't that what Joseph had done? Jeremiah also told them not to be deceived by prophets trying to tell them that they would soon return to Judah. That would not happen for 70 years.
20. What kind of response do you think Jeremiah got to that letter? Were the exiles in Babylonia any more responsive to his messages than were the people in Jerusalem?
21. Look again at Jeremiah 29:10-13. Did those words seem almost impossible to the exiles?

22. In order to understand how impossible those words might have seemed to the Jewish people in Babylonia, we need to understand that in ancient times most of the people believed that “gods” were “assigned” to certain territories. It was believed that *Yahweh* the God of the Israelites only lived and worked in Palestine. Thus, they thought that praying to Him while living in Babylonia would be a futile thing to do. But, here was a message of hope and grace from one of the prominent prophets from Judah. He told them to pray while they were in Babylonia and that God would answer them. That must have surprised many of them.
23. Read Deuteronomy 30:1-4; 4:29. There was 800 years between Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. Do these words sound familiar? Many so-called biblical scholars today believe that Deuteronomy was not written until after the Babylonian exile. How could anyone writing back in the days of Moses have so precisely predicted what was going to happen hundreds of years later? Did Moses weep as he gave them these messages? They do not believe that even God has the ability to predict the future. But, here is evidence very clearly presented in Scripture that God can predict the future and that the seventy-year prophecy he gave to the people in Babylonia would also come true. What was the purpose of these messages if they were not going to pay any attention to God anyway? (See John 13:19.)
24. It is a well-known fact that aliens, slaves, and exiles were not treated very well. Minorities often get treated as scapegoats if things go badly. This has happened right down through human history. But, God promised those exiles that He would be with them and that when the 70 years were over, they would have an opportunity to return to Jerusalem and Judah. (See Jeremiah 29:10; 25:11-12; 2 Chronicles 36:21; and Daniel 9:2.) Interestingly enough, they were not only promised that they would have the opportunity to return to Jerusalem but also they were told that Babylon would be destroyed and no one would ever live there again!
25. If you are a careful student and read back through history, you will realize that everything that God has predicted has taken place exactly as He foretold it. Some of His prophecies have been conditional; we recognize that. Is the history of the fulfillment of His prior prophecies an adequate reason for believing His future prophecies?
26. There are some interesting suggestions also in the writings of Moses as to why this period of seventy years was necessary. Read Leviticus 25:4; 26:34,43. Try to imagine the implications of those verses. God had said that the land of Palestine was to lie fallow for a whole year at the end of every seven-year cycle. If one was a subsistence farmer living off what he could raise each day, how difficult would it be to trust God and to leave one’s fields unworked for a whole year? That would certainly be a great act of faith. Don’t you wish we knew how many of the Israelites actually did that? Were they blessed by God? Evidence suggests that most of them did not. God was saying that since they did not allow His land to rest, it would get seventy years of rest all at one time.
27. Do we have any prophecies in Scripture or the writings of Ellen White to give us hope for the future? Does a correct and thorough reading of the book of Revelation provide encouragement? Or, does it frighten you?
28. How did Ellen White feel about the progress of the gospel in her day? In a sermon at Lansing, Michigan on September 5, 1891, just before leaving for Australia, she said:
- We are in continual danger of getting above the simplicity of the gospel. There is an intense desire on the part of many to startle the world with something original, that shall lift the people into a state of spiritual ecstasy,

and change the present order of experience. There is certainly great need of a change in the present order of experience; for the sacredness of present truth is not realized as it should be, but the change we need is a change of heart, and can only be obtained by seeking God individually for His blessing, by pleading with Him for His power, by fervently praying that His grace may come upon us, and that our characters may be transformed. This is the change we need today, and for the attainment of this experience we should exercise persevering energy and manifest heartfelt earnestness. We should ask with true sincerity, "What shall I do to be saved?" We should know just what steps we are taking heavenward.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 187.2-188.0.

29. Why is there such a burning desire among so-called scholars to come up with something new? Is it so they can make a name for themselves? Are they looking for followers?
30. How are the writings of Ellen White treated by Seventh-day Adventists and especially Seventh-day Adventist scholars in our day? Is the church taking her messages seriously?
31. How do you think you would have survived the siege of Jerusalem? How does the seventy-year prophecy fit with the historical facts? Daniel had gone into Babylonian captivity in 605 B.C. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem in 535 B.C. That is precisely the seventy years that had been predicted.
32. Do you think the wickedness in Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day was worse than the wickedness in which we live in 2015?
33. Unfortunately, for whatever reasons, most Jews settled down so comfortably in Babylonia and later in Persia that they never returned to Jerusalem. Is that what God intended by His message through Jeremiah? Or, was Jeremiah's message God's way of sifting out those who were truly faithful to Him and leaving the others behind? What do you think is going to happen in our day in the time of the shaking? Will the remnant spoken of in Revelation include most of the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Or, will many be shaken out? We know that the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an organization will not be able to survive legally when it becomes against the law to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. What do you think you will do if you are alive at that time? Are we taking the words of God through the ancient prophets and His modern prophet seriously?

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For some interesting pictures and information about the destruction of Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, see Google Images at:

<https://www.google.com/imghp?hl=en&tab=wi&ei=I8QAVof8CZPhgwS7vq-4Bw&ved=0CBUQqi4oAQ> and then search for House of Ahiel.