

# The Destruction of Jerusalem



## SABBATH—NOVEMBER 28

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Ezekiel 8; Romans 1:22–25; Jeremiah 37:1–10; Jeremiah 38:1–6; Jeremiah 29:1–14; Daniel 9:2.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘Also work for the success of the city I have sent you to. Pray to the LORD for that city. If it succeeds, you too will enjoy success’ ” (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV).

**“WITHIN A FEW SHORT YEARS GOD USED THE KING OF BABYLON AS HIS TOOL IN PUNISHING JUDAH.** Again and again Jerusalem was to be surrounded and entered by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. At first a few only, but later thousands and tens of thousands of the Jews were to be taken as slaves to Babylon for the next 70 years. Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, the last three Jewish kings, were to become servants of Nebuchadnezzar. And they all rebelled [warred] against Nebuchadnezzar. Serious and yet more serious punishments were to be given to the rebellious [disobedient] nation, until at last the entire land was to become totally destroyed. 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 have its former position of honor among the nations of earth.”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets [Special Messengers] and Kings*, pages 422, 423.

As we have found, and will find, none of this came upon them without plenty of warnings and pleadings by the prophets, especially Jeremiah. Their refusal to obey brought only ruin. May we learn from their mistakes!

WEEPING FOR TAMMUZ<sup>1</sup> (Ezekiel 8)

The people were weeping for the false god Tammuz on the sacred grounds of God's temple.

## DEFINITIONS

1. Tammuz—the name of a false pagan god.

Jeremiah might have felt very much alone at times. But he really was not. God had raised up Ezekiel, another prophet who was among the slaves in Babylon. Ezekiel was to comfort and to warn the people taken as slaves. He also was to repeat what the Lord had been speaking through Jeremiah all these long and hard years. Through his ministry (work done for God), Ezekiel was to warn the Jewish slaves against the foolish hope of the false prophecies (messages) about an early return from Babylon. He was also to foretell the attacks by Nebuchadnezzar that would destroy Jerusalem. The attacks happened because the people refused to repent.

**Read Ezekiel 8. What did God show the prophet? What does this tell us about how powerful culture can be and how it can influence even the most holy things? What warnings should be here for us?**

The writings of Moses and the prophets often had clear warnings against idol worship and worshiping other gods. But these verses tell us that this is exactly what was being done, even within the sacred grounds of the temple. “Weeping for Tammuz” was a false religious practice of crying for a false god. No wonder 2 Chronicles 36:14 said that “the people and the leaders of the priests became more and more unfaithful. They followed all of the practices of the nations. The LORD hated those practices” (NIRV).

Look carefully at Ezekiel 8:12. The translation about the chambers (rooms) of their (the elders’) own “imagery [idols; imagination]” (KJV) is a little unclear. It could mean the chambers where they stored their own idols. Or it could mean the chambers of their own imagination, their own hearts. Either way, the elders, the leaders, had fallen so far that they said the Lord did not see what they were doing. As an excuse, they also said that the Lord had left them. It is another way of saying, “The Lord does not care about these things. They are not important.” Right there, in the holy grounds of God’s temple, these people were involved in the worst kind of idol worship. Even worse, in their minds they made “excuses” for their evil actions. Here we find again what Paul meant when he talked about those who worshiped the creation instead of the Creator (read Romans 1:22–25).

## THE UNHAPPY RULE OF KING ZEDEKIAH (Jeremiah 37:1–10)

Zedekiah, whose name means “righteousness [holiness] of Yahweh [God],” was the last king on the throne of Judah before it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. At first he seemed to have been willing to obey the words of Jeremiah and submit to (obey) the Babylonians. But this attitude (feeling) did not last.

**Read Jeremiah 37:1–10. What was Jeremiah’s warning to King Zedekiah?**

Under pressure from his subjects, most likely the nobles, Zedekiah ignored the warnings of Jeremiah. He went ahead and made a military agreement with the Egyptians instead. He had hoped that the agreement would lessen the Babylonian threat. (Read Ezekiel 17:15–18.) As he had been duly warned, salvation did not come from the Egyptians at all.

**Read Jeremiah 38:1–6. What happened to Jeremiah again because he preached the word of God to the people?**

As Jesus said, “ ‘A prophet is not honored in his hometown. He doesn’t [does not] receive any honor among his relatives. And he doesn’t [does not] receive any in his own home’ ” (Mark 6:4, NIV). Poor Jeremiah again faced the anger of his own countrymen. Like the rest of the nation, though, Jeremiah could not say that he had not been warned. In this case the warning was about the troubles that he would face if he stayed faithful, which he did!

How difficult it must have been for Jeremiah, too. This is because he was blamed for weakening the spirit of the nation. After all, the people were facing an enemy that had not come yet. And Jeremiah had been going around for years and years saying that it would be a lost cause, that they could not win, and that even the Lord was against them. It is easy to understand that the leaders would want to shut him up. They were hardened in sin, and they did not hear the voice of the Lord talking to them. They thought it was the voice of an enemy instead.

**Being thrown into a muddy hole in the ground was hard for Jeremiah. But think about how much harder it was for him to hear the charge against him that he was trying to hurt and not help his own people. How does it feel to be blamed for hurting the very ones you are trying to help?**



**The people blamed Jeremiah for weakening the spirit of the nation.**

**THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (Jeremiah 40:1–6)**

The siege (continued attack) of Jerusalem began in January, 588 B.C., and lasted until the late summer of 586 B.C. Jerusalem had been able to hold out for more than two years before Jeremiah's prophecy (special message from God) was fulfilled. The soldiers of Babylon broke through the wall and destroyed the city. Starvation was so bad inside the walls that the Jews lost all strength and could not fight any longer. King Zedekiah tried to flee with his family, but he failed. He was captured and taken to Nebuchadnezzar, who had his sons killed before his eyes. We can read much of this sad story in Jeremiah 39:1–10.

**Read Jeremiah 40:1–6. What is the important meaning of the words of Nebuzaradan to Jeremiah?**



**The Babylonian commander gave credit for the defeat of Jerusalem to the Lord rather than to his own gods.**

How interesting that this pagan (unbelieving) commander (Nebuzaradan) understood the situation so much better than Jeremiah's own people did! Clearly the Babylonians knew something about Jeremiah and his work. And they were treating Jeremiah differently from the way they did others, such as Zedekiah (read Jeremiah 39:11, 12). This pagan leader gave credit for the defeat of Jerusalem to the Lord as a punishment for the sins of the people rather than to his own gods over Judah's. The verses do not say why. The reason is unknown, but it is a surprise to learn how the Lord had shown something about Himself to the pagans.

What choice would Jeremiah make: Go with the slaves to Babylon or stay behind with those remaining? Both choices did not look good. The spiritual needs of both groups would have been great, and Jeremiah could minister (work for God) wherever he went. But Jeremiah decided to stay among the group that remained behind in the land, with the poor people who were going to need all the encouragement and help that they could get (read Jeremiah 40:6, 7).

**How can you learn to minister to (help) others, no matter what situation you are in? Why is it important, even for you to minister in whatever way you can?**

**ALL YOUR HEART (Jeremiah 29:13)**

**“When you look for me with all your heart, you will find me” (Jeremiah 29:13, NIV). What has been your own experience with this promise? What does “with all your heart” mean?**

The Lord knows the beginning from the end. People in Jerusalem were still fighting the Babylonians. They were still hoping that the words of the false prophets were true. But the Lord was using Jeremiah to speak about the future, to speak to those who were already in Babylon and to those who would be there. And what words he spoke!

**Read Jeremiah 29:1–14. How is the love and mercy of God shared in these verses?**

Here was a true message of grace (forgiveness and mercy). It was not the same as the false message of “grace” that the people had heard from the false prophets. The false prophets told the people that their suffering would be over before long, even just two years. That was not God’s plan. And it was not going to happen. Instead, based on the clear teachings of Moses, they had to accept that this was their fate.<sup>2</sup> But just as Moses had said, if they repented (turned away from sin), they would return to the land.

**Read Deuteronomy 30:1–4. How do these verses explain what Jeremiah said to the people? Read also Deuteronomy 4:29.**

We have been given the gift of prophecy in the wonderful ministry of Ellen G. White. How can we be sure that we do not have the same attitude (feeling) toward her today that many (but not all) had toward Jeremiah?

**DEFINITIONS**

2. fate—an event that is beyond people’s power or control.

## THE SEVENTY YEARS (Jeremiah 29:10)

Jeremiah's prophecies should have influenced the thinking of Jewish people in Babylon: (1) they should not have believed what the false prophets were saying, and (2) they should not have felt discouraged. He asked them to pray for Babylon. This might have surprised those who had been taken to Babylon. What Jeremiah was asking from the Jewish slaves was unheard of in the earlier history of Israel. It had been unknown among God's people to pray for an enemy who had done what the Babylonians had done to God's chosen nation. The prophet broke all their understandings regarding the temple and Jerusalem. They could pray in a pagan country, and the Everlasting God would listen to them.

Notice, too, what Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 29:7. He says that the success of their "host" nation will mean their success too. As strangers in the land, they were in danger if things went badly in the nation in general. All through history, we have found sad examples of cruelty and suffering when a nation faces hard times. People search for those whom they can blame. So, unpopular people or strangers often become easy targets. It often happens in real life.



**Jeremiah asked the Jewish slaves to pray for their enemies.**

**What wonderful hope is given to the Jews in Babylon? Read Jeremiah 29:10. Also read Jeremiah 25:11, 12; 2 Chronicles 36:21; and Daniel 9:2.**

Everything the Lord had said would happen had happened. So, the Jews in Babylon had every reason to trust that He would fulfill this prophecy (Jeremiah 29:10). Why 70 years would be the exact time of their slavery in Babylon, we do not know. But it clearly is connected with the idea of Sabbath rest for the land (read Leviticus 25:4; Leviticus 26:34, 43). What is so important about this prophecy? If the Jews had accepted it in faith and surrendered their will, the prophecy would have given them great hope and promise of the Lord's complete power. No matter what happened to them, they could know that all was not lost, and the Lord had not left them. They were still His special people. The Lord was not done with them or the nation of Israel. Freedom was available there for all of those ready to meet His rules and conditions.

**What prophecies give you great hope for the future? Which ones make your faith stronger and help you to learn to trust the Lord for whatever will come?**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** “The gospel is simple. But we are in continual danger of trying to set it aside for false teachings. Many believers want to surprise the world with something new that will make the people very excited about religion and change the present order of experience. Yes, there is surely great need of a change in the present order of experience. This is because the holiness of present truth is not fully understood as it should be. But the change we need is a change of heart. And it can be done only by each one of us asking God for His blessing, by pleading with Him for His power, by praying hard that His grace may come upon us, and that our characters [thoughts; feelings; actions] may be changed for the better. This is the change we need today. For us to succeed in getting this experience, we should continue to show much energy and desire in our prayers. We should ask with true hearts, ‘What shall I do to be saved?’ We should know just what steps we are taking heavenward.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pages 187, 188.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 As we learned, Jeremiah told the people to “seek [find; look up to] the Lord.” How do we do that? What if someone were to say to you, “I want to know God for myself; how do I find Him?” How would you answer?
- 2 Think more about this idea of why the prophets had been mistreated and misunderstood in their own time. What could and should this teach us about how we think about the ministry of Ellen G. White? Think of her situation as you read what Jesus said here: “ ‘How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You pretenders! You build tombs for the prophets. You decorate the graves of the godly. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of those who lived before us, we wouldn’t [would not] have done what they did. We wouldn’t [would not] have helped to kill the prophets.’ So you give witness against yourselves. You admit that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets’ ” (Matthew 23:29–31, NIV).
- 3 Think more about the final question at the end of Thursday’s study. Many Bible prophecies have been fulfilled in the past. And from where we are today in history, we can know that they were fulfilled. In what way can these fulfillments help us to trust the ones that are still in the future and that have not been fulfilled yet?