

JUDAH'S LAST KING AND CAPTIVITY

BIBLE TEXT : II Chronicles 36:11-21; Jeremiah 25:1-33;
28:1-17; 29:8-14. 39:4-8

LESSON 375 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

2 Chronicles 36:11-21

¹¹ Zedekiah *was* one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

¹² And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD his God, *and* humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet *speaking* from the mouth of the LORD.

¹³ And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.

¹⁴ Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:

¹⁶ But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till *there was* no remedy.

¹⁷ Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave *them* all into his hand.

¹⁸ And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all *these* he brought to Babylon.

¹⁹ And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

²⁰ And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia:

²¹ To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: *for* as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Evil Conditions in Judah

Jeremiah was known as the Weeping Prophet. He was a man who had a burden on his heart for God's people. He gave his whole life to try to help others, and lived in such a way that God could talk to him and tell him things that would happen in the future.

God had promised the Israelites when they came out of Egypt that He would be with them so long as they stayed with Him, or obeyed Him. But He had also promised punishment to those who did not obey. Many generations of Israelites had lived and died since then, who had proved that God meant what He said: the good had enjoyed His blessings, and the bad had suffered His punishments.

Because of the wickedness of the people, the twelve tribes had been divided at the time of the death of Solomon. Ten tribes were called Israel and the other two were called Judah. Israel had no good kings; so the ten tribes had been taken captive, and their land inhabited by heathen people.

There had been some good kings in Judah, such as Asa, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, and Josiah. For their sakes God had spared the nations of Judah a while longer. The great reformation under King Josiah had brought the blessing of God for a time; but when Josiah died, the last hope of Judah's becoming a great nation was gone until the time of the Millennium. Josiah's sons and nephew, who succeeded him, were all wicked and did no good for the people. The whole nation of Judah sat in their iniquity and misery, awaiting the captivity.

Nebuchadnezzar's Rule

It was at this time that Nebuchadnezzar became the king of Babylon, a great heathen nation. God called Nebuchadnezzar His servant, and used him to punish Judah.

When the armies of Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah, the best people were carried into Babylon. (Among them we find Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.) The poorer people were left in the land, and Josiah's descendants were placed over them as rulers.

Jeremiah warned the people to be obedient to Nebuchadnezzar and live at peace under their foreign rulers, but Zedekiah broke his promises to the Babylonian king and also continued to turn his back upon God. He would not listen to the advice of anyone.

Propheying "Smooth" Sayings

In spite of the fact that God had told Jeremiah that the captivity would continue for seventy years, a prophet, Hananiah, now arose and said that the captivity would end within two years. People like to hear "good tidings" whether they are true or not. Many times people have been lulled by promises of peace until the sword was upon them and it was too late to avoid it. The Apostle Paul wrote that there would be people in our day who would turn away their ears from the truth, and would be turned unto fables, because they would not "endure sound doctrine."

threescore and ten years.

Jeremiah 25:1-33

¹ The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that *was* the first year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon;

² The which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying,

³ From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that *is* the three and twentieth year, the word of the LORD hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened.

⁴ And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending *them*; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear.

⁵ They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever:

⁶ And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt.

⁷ Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.

⁸ Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words,

⁹ Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.

¹⁰ Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle.

¹¹ And this whole land shall be a desolation, *and* an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

¹² And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, *that* I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.

¹³ And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against

Jeremiah would have been happy to have the captivity last only two years, but he knew that those were not the words of God. He prophesied that Hananiah would soon die, and he did. But Jeremiah lived on to tell the people the Word of God.

Sabbaths Ignored

When the Israelites had come out of Egypt, God had made a rule that every seventh year should be a Sabbath for the land. No crops were to be planted, and that which grew of itself was to be given to the poor. In the sixth year the crops would be so great that there would be plenty for the following year. We have no record that the Israelites ever kept this rule and let the land rest throughout the 490 years that they had been free. It would take 70 years to make up for the neglected Sabbaths, just the time prophesied for the captivity.

If God is so particular in seeing that His laws are obeyed in things in nature that seem unimportant, how much more so will He be particular concerning our soul's salvation! He has promised eternal life to all who live according to the Bible; but eternal punishment awaits those who refuse to come His way, regardless of the "smooth things" that some people preach in denying that there is an eternal hell.

Jeremiah's Yoke

Jeremiah had been wearing a wooden yoke around his neck as an object lesson to show the Jews of their captivity, reminding them that they were under the yoke of the enemy. They had been living pleasantly enough under Nebuchadnezzar's rule so long as they behaved. Hananiah broke that yoke of wood to try to prove to the people that their captivity would soon end. This was a lie, and God sent Jeremiah to say: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also" (Jeremiah 28:14). Because of their rebellion, the captivity of the Israelites would become more burdensome.

When Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, the people inside the city could not get food. (They had always had enough to eat before.) None of the nations round about them would help. They could not, for they had been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar themselves. Besides, there had been times in the history of the Israelites when they had conquered those nations, so this would be a good chance for them to even the score, if they could. So we see that all the world was against the Jews, and they must suffer for turning from God and worshiping idols.

Faithful Prophets

God wanted to do good to the people. He had sent faithful prophets who continued daily to warn the people of judgment. But the people "mocked and messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy" (II Chronicles 36:16).

God said that He would make the Israelites a "hissing." Other nations would pass by their country and hate them so greatly that they would sneer at those who were supposed to be God's chosen people. What a dreary land it would be!

Strangers also would wonder why this desolation had come upon Israel. "And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city? Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them" (Jeremiah 22:8, 9).

We do not live to ourselves alone. Others are watching our

it, *even* all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations.

¹⁴ For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands.

¹⁵ For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it.

¹⁶ And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them.

¹⁷ Then took I the cup at the LORD'S hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me:

¹⁸ *To wit*, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as *it is* this day;

¹⁹ Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people;

²⁰ And all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod,

²¹ Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon,

²² And all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles which *are* beyond the sea,

²³ Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all *that are* in the utmost corners,

²⁴ And all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert,

²⁵ And all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes,

²⁶ And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which *are* upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them.

²⁷ Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you.

²⁸ And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink.

²⁹ For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be

lives. If we serve God faithfully, that is noticed. And if we backslide, the sinners will notice it immediately and wonder what has happened. Every backslider brings disgrace upon the name of Jesus. He dishonours the cause of Christ. God is merciful, and tries to cause all sinners, including the backsliders, to return to Him. But many people become so much interested in their work, their ambitions for wealth and fame, that they do not have time for God.

God told the people of Judah, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice" (Jeremiah 22:21). God has warned the people of Africa as much as He ever warned the people of the Old Testament time, but in their prosperity they do not feel their need of a Saviour. Though many have a form of godliness, and go to church on Sunday, they do not repent of their sins. People still do worship idols, while many do worship the works of their own hands. They will do everything else first; and then if there is time left, they may offer a little to God. When people stand in the judgment, God will remind them of the many warnings He gave.

Babylon Destroyed

God used Nebuchadnezzar to bring judgment upon Judah; but later Nebuchadnezzar suffered, too, because he did not honour God. The Babylonian dynasty flourished for a while, and the hanging gardens that Nebuchadnezzar built were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But God said that He would make of Babylon "perpetual desolations." Today the mighty Babylon that once had double walls more than 300 feet high, sixty gates, beautiful bridges, mosques, temples, gardens and fountains, lies buried under the debris of centuries. Only a few mounds of dirt indicate where the capital city once stood.

God's Mercy

Jeremiah wept much because of the messages of doom he had to bring, but he also had hope to offer to the poor captives. After the seventy years of punishment, God would again listen to their prayers for deliverance from captivity if they would call upon Him. "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:12, 13).

That same message comes to us today from God's Word. If we search for our Saviour with all our heart He will be found of us. We cannot cover up sin and find favour with God. But if we repent, confess, and believe, we shall be saved. The promise is the same to everyone: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

QUESTIONS

1. Who was the king of Babylon? What did God call him?
2. Why was captivity to come upon Judah?
3. How long did God say that the captivity would last?
4. What was God's law concerning the Sabbath of the land?
5. Why did Jeremiah wear a wooden yoke?
6. What did the iron yoke mean?
7. What had the faithful prophets told the Israelites?
8. What happened to Babylon after Israel was punished?
9. What hope did Jeremiah offer to the Israelites?
10. How can we find the Saviour?

unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts.

³⁰ Therefore prophesy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread *the grapes*, against all the inhabitants of the earth.

³¹ A noise shall come *even* to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them *that are* wicked to the sword, saith the LORD.

³² Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth.

³³ And the slain of the LORD shall be at that day from *one* end of the earth even unto the *other* end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground.

Jeremiah 28:1-17

¹ And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, *and* in the fifth month, *that* Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which *was* of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying,

² Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.

³ Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD'S house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon:

⁴ And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.

⁵ Then the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the LORD,

⁶ Even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the LORD do so: the LORD perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the LORD'S house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place.

⁷ Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears

of all the people;

⁸ The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence.

⁹ The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, *then* shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him.

¹⁰ Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it.

¹¹ And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way.

¹² Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah *the prophet*, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying,

¹³ Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron.

¹⁴ For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also.

¹⁵ Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.

¹⁶ Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD.

¹⁷ So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.

Jeremiah 39:4-8

⁴ And it came to pass, *that* when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain.

⁵ But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to

Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him.

⁶ Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah.

⁷ Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon.

⁸ And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 29:8-14

⁸ For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that *be* in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed.

⁹ For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD.

¹⁰ For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

¹² Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.

¹³ And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

¹⁴ And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.