

JUDAH'S LAST KING AND CAPTIVITY

BIBLE TEXT : II Chronicles 36:11-21; Jeremiah 25:1-33;

28:1-17; 38:14-18; 39:4-8; 29:8-14.

LESSON 375 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

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

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Return of Judah to Idolatry

1. Zedekiah rebels against the Lord and His prophets, II Chronicles 36:11-13;

2 Kings 24:17-20

¹⁷ And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

¹⁸ Zedekiah *was* twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

¹⁹ And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.

²⁰ For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

2. The Temple is again polluted by the priests and people, II Chronicles 36:14.

3. The voice of the prophets goes unheeded, II Chronicles 36:15, 16; Jeremiah 38:14-18; 25:1-7;

Matthew 23:34

³⁴ Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city:

Matthew 23:35

³⁵ That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

4. A false cry of peace is heard, Jeremiah 28:1-17;

Jeremiah 29:8-9

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.

1 Thessalonians 5:3

³ For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Deuteronomy 18:22

²² When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

¹³ For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

¹⁴ And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

¹⁵ Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil 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

II The Judgments of God

1. The king, princes, and nobles are taken, Jeremiah 39:4-8;

2 Kings 25:4-7

⁴ And the city was broken up, and all the men of war *fled* by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which *is* by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees *were* against the city round about:) and *the king* went the way toward the plain.

⁵ And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.

⁶ So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.

⁷ And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

Isaiah 30:15

¹⁵ For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not.

Isaiah 30:16

¹⁶ But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

2. The Temple, city, and people are destroyed, II Chronicles 36:17-19;

2 Kings 25:1-21

¹ And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth *day* of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

² And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

³ And on the ninth *day* of the *fourth* month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.

⁴ And the city was broken up, and all the men of war *fled* by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which *is* by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees *were* against the city round about:) and *the king* went the way toward the plain.

⁵ And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.

⁶ So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.

⁷ And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

⁸ And in the fifth month, on the seventh *day* of the month, which *is* the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem:

⁹ And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great *man's* house burnt he with fire.

¹⁰ And all the army of the Chaldees, that *were with* the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.

¹¹ Now the rest of the people *that were* left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carry away.

¹² But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land *to be* vinedressers and husbandmen.

¹³ And the pillars of brass that *were* in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that *was* in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon.

¹⁴ And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they

words which I have pronounced against 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

ministered, took they away.

¹⁵ And the firepans, and the bowls, *and* such things as *were* of gold, *in* gold, and of silver, *in* silver, the captain of the guard took away.

¹⁶ The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD; the brass of all these vessels was without weight.

¹⁷ The height of the one pillar *was* eighteen cubits, and the chapter upon it *was* brass: and the height of the chapter three cubits; and the wreathen work, and pomegranates upon the chapter round about, all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen work.

¹⁸ And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door:

¹⁹ And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which were found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of the land, and threescore men of the people of the land *that were* found in the city:

²⁰ And Nebuzaradan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah:

²¹ And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land.

Jeremiah 52:1-30

¹ Zedekiah *was* one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name *was* Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

² And he did *that which was* evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.

³ For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, till he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

⁴ And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth *day* of the month, *that* Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it round about.

⁵ So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

⁶ And in the fourth month, in the ninth *day* of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land.

⁷ Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which *was* by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans *were* by the city round about:) and they went by the way of the plain.

⁸ But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him.

⁹ Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him.

¹⁰ And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah.

¹¹ Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.

¹² Now in the fifth month, in the tenth *day* of the month, which *was* the nineteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, *which* served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem,

¹³ And burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great *men*, burned he with fire:

¹⁴ And all the army of the Chaldeans, that *were* with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem

ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be 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

round about.

¹⁵ Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive *certain* of the poor of the people, and the residue of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude.

¹⁶ But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left *certain* of the poor of the land for vinedressers and for husbandmen.

¹⁷ Also the pillars of brass that *were* in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that *was* in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans brake, and carried all the brass of them to Babylon.

¹⁸ The caldrons also, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the bowls, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away.

¹⁹ And the basons, and the firepans, and the bowls, and the caldrons, and the candlesticks, and the spoons, and the cups; *that* which *was* of gold *in* gold, and *that* which *was* of silver *in* silver, took the captain of the guard away.

²⁰ The two pillars, one sea, and twelve brasen bulls that *were* under the bases, which king Solomon had made in the house of the LORD: the brass of all these vessels was without weight.

²¹ And *concerning* the pillars, the height of one pillar *was* eighteen cubits; and a fillet of twelve cubits did compass it; and the thickness thereof *was* four fingers: *it was* hollow.

²² And a chapter of brass *was* upon it; and the height of one chapter *was* five cubits, with network and pomegranates upon the chapters round about, all of brass. The second pillar also and the pomegranates *were* like unto these.

²³ And there were ninety and six pomegranates on a side; *and* all the pomegranates upon the network *were* an hundred round about.

²⁴ And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door:

²⁵ He took also out of the city an eunuch, which had the charge of the men of war; and seven men of them that were near the king's person, which were found in the city; and the principal scribe of the host, who mustered the people of the land; and threescore men of the people of the land, that were found in the midst of the city.

²⁶ So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah.

²⁷ And the king of Babylon smote them, and put them to death in Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive out of his own land.

²⁸ This *is* the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand Jews and three and twenty:

²⁹ In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty and two persons:

³⁰ In the three and twentieth year of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred forty and five persons: all the persons *were* four thousand and six hundred.

3. Seventy years of captivity are decreed and started, II Chronicles 36:20, 21; Jeremiah 25:8-11.

4. All nations are to be included with Judah in God's judgment, Jeremiah 25:15-33;

1 Peter 4:17

¹⁷ For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it* first *begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God?

1 Peter 4:18

¹⁸ And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

5. After seventy years God will visit Israel and judge Babylon, Jeremiah 25:12-14, 26;

Jeremiah 29:10-14

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 38:14-18

¹⁴ Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that *is* in the house of the LORD: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me.

¹⁵ Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare *it* unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?

¹⁶ So Zedekiah the king sware secretly

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. .

Daniel 9:2

2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Micah 7:18

18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy.

NOTES:

Pride

Zedekiah "humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD" (II Chronicles 36:12). Although Zedekiah was the son of Josiah (**Jeremiah 1:3** 3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.) he did not inherit the humble spirit of his father. Josiah had inaugurated great reforms, but they were soon thrown off in the days of his sons.

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Zedekiah had little to be proud of, but he was proud. It is true that he was king, but it was a subjected rule – he did not even rule in his own name, for the king of Babylon changed his name. His people were "the poorest sort of the people of the land" for Nebuchadnezzar took all the mighty men, the craftsmen, the smiths, and the royal families into Babylon. Zedekiah had no wealth of which to boast, for Nebuchadnezzar had taken all the treasures of the house of the Lord and of the king's house with him. But still Zedekiah was proud.

Oftentimes men kneel before God who look as if they are at the bottom rung of the social ladder, drunk, ragged, and the picture of despair; yet when one counsels with them they justify themselves and say they are not so bad. Instead of humbling themselves and pleading for mercy they justify themselves with a pharisaical pride. A compassionate heavenly Father stands ever ready to receive the humble and contrite heart, but rejects the proud. Ahab and Manasseh, the most wicked kings, received consideration from God when they humbled themselves. Zedekiah had every opportunity to obey God, but "he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel" (II Chronicles 36:13).

The Rejection of Mercy

God sent his prophets to the king and to the people, "because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place" (II Chronicles 36:15). "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Nehemiah 9:17). God dealt long and mercifully with his people -- His compassion

unto Jeremiah, saying, *As the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.*

¹⁷ Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house:

¹⁸ But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.

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

went far beyond that of any human love. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up" (Psalm 27:10). "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" (II Chronicles 36:16).

What sad and indicting words, "till there was no remedy." The Bible tells of the prodigal son who wasted his substance in riotous living, but the Father stood with open arms to receive him the moment he returned home. "Lord, remember me," cried a thief on the cross, and received the comforting reply. "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43); but Israel, God's own chosen people, rejected his messengers "till there was no remedy." Men of enlightened lands today need to give serious heed to the warning, "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1).

Excuses

Zedekiah sought counsel of Jeremiah, the true prophet of God, and was told a way of escape. "If thou wilt assuredly go forth . . . then thy soul shall live, . . . but if thou wilt not go forth . . . thou shalt not escape" (Jeremiah 38:17, 18). The way was clear and plain, a fool could follow it if he chose, but Zedekiah offered the excuse, "I am afraid of the Jews . . . lest . . . they mock me." He had his choice: a laugh or a city burned; a jeer or a temple destroyed; a sneer or a soul lost; face it and live, or run and be lost. Zedekiah ran.

Today men still shun the way of salvation because of the same flimsy excuse: "I am afraid of what my friends will say," "I will take my chances" is the answer that people give as they turn down the way of eternal life and try to climb up "some other way," only to be overtaken with death and destruction, as was Zedekiah with his nobles and princes.

False Prophets

At a time of crisis such as this was in Judah, there are always false prophets around to cry, "Peace and safety." Hananiah was one of them. He and others like him received an audience because he preached what the people wanted to hear. Isaiah knew what was in the hearts of the people and proclaimed, "Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits" (Isaiah 30:10).

Jesus warns us that false prophets would be one of the dangerous evils of the last days. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). Peter also states it, saying, "There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways" (II Peter 2:1, 2). It is sad, and almost unexplainable, that many will forsake the truth for error, and neglect the plain way of eternal life for the hard way of destruction.

God's Plan

What a pity that man failed to follow God! In Eden God placed man in the ideal environment, but he rebelled. In the promised land God provided a way for one year out of seven to be a year of rest and enjoyment, but man refused to keep it. "If ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years"

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.

(Leviticus 25:20, 21). Because the Israelites had not kept the sabbatical years, God decreed that they should go into captivity and the land should be desolate for seventy years, "until the land had fulfil threescore and ten years" (II Chronicles 36:21). The seventy years was an accumulation of the Sabbaths the land would have enjoyed if the Israelites had obeyed God and left the land idle each seventh year.

Judgment

God's judgment was not limited to Judah at this time, but all nations were to drink of the cup of His fury. God could not see the city called by His name destroyed and let the rest of the idolaters go unpunished. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Babylon, God's instrument of destruction, rode high for a time, but the day came when Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled: "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there" (Isaiah 13:19, 20).

The Way Back

But unto Israel the Lord hath said: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, . . . thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11). God's mercy was extended to Israel; and her way back was the same as for sinners today. "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Judah's last king?
2. What prophet of God did he have to instruct him?
3. Why did he not follow true counsel from God's prophet?
4. How long was the captivity of Judah to last?
5. What reason did God give for leaving the land idle?
6. What were some of the other nations that were to be judged?
7. When was Babylon to receive her punishment?
8. What were the predictions of the false prophets?
9. What are some of the warnings against false prophets of our day?
10. What was God's plan for providing for Israel's sabbatical year?