



*Good News*  
**Bible Reading Program**

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

**— July 2003 —**

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-2 July	Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah and makes Jehoiakim his vassal; Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah taken to Babylon	2 Kings 24:1a; Daniel 1:1-17
3 July	Prophecy of 70 years; Judgment on the nations	Jeremiah 25
4 July	Example of the Rechabites	Jeremiah 35
5 July	Illustration of the potter and clay; Call to repentance rejected; Plans laid against Jeremiah	Jeremiah 18
6-7 July	Sign of the broken flask; Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks; Message to Pashhur; Jeremiah's suffering and further dejection	Jeremiah 19-20
8-9 July	Instructions to Baruch; Reading of Jeremiah's scroll; King Jehoiakim burns the scroll; The scroll rewritten	Jeremiah 36:1-7; 45:1-5; 36:8-32
10 July	Daniel and his friends complete their training; Nebuchadnezzar's dream; Daniel and his friends promoted	Daniel 1:18-2:49
11-12 July	Prophecies against Egypt and Philistia; Babylon quashes Jehoiakim's rebellion; Jehoiakim's death	Jeremiah 46:13-47:7; 2 Kings 24:1b-7; 2 Chronicles 36:6-8
13 July	Prophecy against Moab	Jeremiah 48
14-15 July	Prophecies against Ammon, Edom, Syria & Arabia	Jeremiah 49:1-33
16-17 July	Reign of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah/Coniah); Message to Coniah; Woe to shepherds; Branch of righteousness; False prophets	2 Chronicles 36:9; 2 Kings 24:8-9; Jeremiah 22:24-23:40
18 July	Signs of the linen waistband and wine jugs; Judah to be carried away captive	Jeremiah 13
19-20 July	Nebuchadnezzar besieges Judah; Jeconiah and the nobles carried captive; Zedekiah king of Judah; Sign of the fig baskets	2 Kings 24:10-20; 2 Chronicles 36:10-16; Jeremiah 52:1-3; 24:1-10
21-22 July	Symbolic bonds and yokes; False prophet Hananiah	Jeremiah 27-28
23 July	Jeremiah's letter to the captives in Babylon	Jeremiah 29
24-25 July	Jacob's trouble; Israel and Judah freed from captivity and restored	Jeremiah 30:1-31:26
26-27 July	New Covenant; Prophecy against Elam	Jeremiah 31:27-40; 49:34-39
28-29 July	Prophecy against Babylon	Jeremiah 51:59-61; 50:1-46
30-31 July	Prophecy against Babylon continued	Jeremiah 51:1-58, 61-64

**Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading****First Babylonian Deportation;****Introduction to the Book of Daniel (2 Kings 24:1a; Daniel 1:1-17)****July 1-2**

Continuing on from our previous reading regarding the Babylonian victory at Carchemish and the southward flight of the Egyptian forces, “the Old Testament suggests that Nebuchadnezzar followed them as far south as Egypt [pushing them out of Syria and Judah] and that he forced Jerusalem to pay tribute and yield prisoners, including Daniel the prophet. [The kingdom of Judah was thereby taken from Egypt and incorporated into the Babylonian Empire].... All this took place in a matter of a few weeks, for by August 15, 605, Nabopolassar had [unexpectedly] died and Nebuchadnezzar had to return at once to Babylon [to secure his succession]. As the author of Kings indicates, Jehoiakim remained a loyal subject to the Babylonians for the next three years (605-602)” (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, pp. 450-451).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus preserved this account regarding Nebuchadnezzar from the Chaldean priest and historian Berossus, who wrote around 290 B.C.: “Meanwhile, as it happened, his father Nabopolassar sickened and died in the city of Babylon, after a reign of twenty-one years. Being informed ere long of his father’s death, Nabuchodonosor settled the affairs of Egypt and the other countries. The prisoners—Jews, Phoenicians, Syrians, and those of Egyptian nationality—were consigned to some of his friends, with orders to conduct them to Babylonia, along with the heavy troops and the rest of the spoils; while he himself, with a small escort, pushed across the desert to Babylon. There he found the administration in the hands of the Chaldeans and the throne reserved for him by their chief nobleman. Being now master of his father’s entire realm, he gave orders to allot the captives, on their arrival, settlements in the most suitable districts of Babylonia. He then magnificently decorated the temple of Bel and the other temples with the spoils of war” (quoted by Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 1983, pp. 185-186). Here, then, is the time frame for our current reading, providing the context for the opening chapter of the book of Daniel.

Daniel was a remarkable man. His life and ministry spans the entire duration of Judah’s 70-year captivity in Babylon. We will see him rise to high office in the administration of both the Babylonian and Persian Empires and yet maintain his faith and obedience to God despite persecution and trial. The story of Daniel in the lion’s den is one known from childhood throughout the Judeo-Christian world.

But Daniel’s story begins *here*. Since Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion “took place in 605 BC, and Daniel was at that point placed in the category of ‘young men’ to be educated (Dan. 1:4), he would probably have been 15-20 years old. That would make his date of birth around 625-620 BC during the middle of the reign of the last godly king of Judah, Josiah (640-609 BC; 2 Chron. 34-35)” (“Daniel,” Paul Gardner, ed., *The Complete Who’s Who in the Bible*, 1995, p. 122). Indeed, Josiah may have been a great influence on the young Daniel. In fact, Daniel 1:3 says that those who were carried to Babylon to be educated included some of the nobles, even royalty. Josephus states that Daniel and his three famous friends were all members of the royal family (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 10, sec. 1). This is even more reason to suspect Josiah’s influence—and perhaps the influence of Josiah’s friend, the prophet Jeremiah.

Although Daniel served for around 70 years in the royal palaces of four great gentile kings (compare Daniel 1:21), we are given little information about his civil duties. The book that bears his name is not a complete chronicle of his life but is actually a short collection of different documents, most of them written by Daniel but one surprisingly authored by Nebuchadnezzar (i.e., Daniel 4). The only definite details we have about Daniel are the incredible and inspiring stories relating to his spiritual life and messages.

The book of Daniel is well-known for the remarkable prophetic visions and narratives contained within it. Yet, notes *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, “in the Hebrew Bible the book of Daniel is found in the third division, the ‘Writings,’ rather than in the second, in which the prophetic books occur. The reason for this is not that Daniel was written later than these prophetic books. In some lists, it may be noted, Daniel was included in the second division of the Canon” (introductory notes on Daniel). The same source suggests that Daniel is classed among the Writings because Daniel himself did not hold the *office* of a prophet—that is, a mediator between God and the nation, declaring God’s words as God declared them to him—even though he had the *gift* of prophecy, being

spoken of in the New Testament as a “prophet” in that limited sense (see Matthew 24:15). This, however, does not seem quite right. Daniel does appear to have been a prophet in the true sense of the word even though angels were sometimes used to bring messages to him from God. Indeed, it would seem odd for Christ to refer to him as a prophet if he were not really a prophet.

Why the inclusion with the Writings then? The *style and approach* of the book seems to be more at issue. The prophetic books alternate between warnings of chastisement for disobedience and promises of blessings for obedience. While Daniel contains numerous prophecies, the approach is not one of promises and warnings. It is laid out as a series of inspiring stories and rather detailed prophetic narratives. Then again, perhaps Daniel should be classed among the Prophets as some suggest. Either way, we cover the book here in time order mainly because of the historical perspective it provides on the other biblical books we are currently covering.

But not everyone, it should be mentioned, accepts the validity of the book of Daniel as being contemporary with these other books. “For various reasons,” says *The New Open Bible’s* introduction to Daniel, “many critics have argued that Daniel is a fraudulent book that was written in the time of the Maccabees in the second century B.C., not the sixth century B.C. as it claims. But their arguments are not compelling:

“(1) *The prophetic argument* holds that Daniel could not have made such accurate predictions; it must be a ‘prophecy after the events.’ *Daniel 11 alone contains over one hundred specific prophecies of historical events that literally came true.* The author, the critics say, must have lived at the time of [the Syrian invader of Judea] Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.) and probably wrote this to strengthen the faith of the Jews. But this argument was developed out of a theological bias that assumes true prophecy cannot take place. It also implies that the work was intentionally deceptive.

“(2) *The linguistic argument* claims that the book uses a late Aramaic in [chapters] 2–7 and that the Persian and Greek words also point to a late date. But recent discoveries show that Daniel’s Aramaic is actually a form of the early Imperial Aramaic. Daniel’s use of some Persian words is no argument for a late date since he continued living in the Persian period under Cyrus. The only Greek words are names of musical instruments in chapter 3, and this comes as no surprise since there were Greek mercenaries in the Assyrian and Babylonian armies. Far more Greek words would be expected if the book were written in the second century B.C.

“(3) *The historical argument* asserts that Daniel’s historical blunders argue for a late date. But recent evidence has demonstrated the historical accuracy of Daniel. Inscriptions found at Haran show that Belshazzar reigned in Babylon while his father Nabonidus was fighting the invading Persians [a matter we will look at more in our reading of Daniel 5]. And Darius the Mede (5:31; 6:1) has been identified as Gubaru, a governor appointed by Cyrus.”

In the end we will no doubt conclude as Josephus does regarding Daniel’s fulfilled prophecies: “And indeed it so came to pass, that our nation suffered these things under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniel’s vision, and what he wrote many years before they came to pass. In the very same manner Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them. All these things did this man leave in writing, as God had showed them to him, insomuch that such as read his prophecies, and see how they have been fulfilled, would wonder at the honor wherewith God honored Daniel” (Book 10, chap. 11, sec. 7).

### **Training in Babylon (2 Kings 24:1a; Daniel 1:1-17)**

### **July 1-2 Cont’d**

Daniel 1 opens with what appears to be a chronological inconsistency. Jeremiah gave the battle of Carchemish as occurring in the “fourth year of Jehoiakim” (Jeremiah 46:2). But in Daniel 1, Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Judah—which definitely came after the battle of Carchemish—is said to have occurred in the “third year of the reign of Jehoiakim” (verse 1).

As most commentators agree, the problem is due to a different way of counting years. Some account for the difference this way: In Jeremiah’s system, a king’s first year was counted as the calendar year he assumed the throne (even if there was only part of a year left) while, in Daniel’s, the first year was counted from beginning of the next full calendar year. Others account for the difference this way: Jeremiah used a spring-to-spring reckoning of calendar years while Daniel used a fall-to-fall reckoning. In any case, Jeremiah and Daniel both referred to events that transpired in 605 B.C.—which was Jehoiakim’s fourth year by Jeremiah’s reckoning and Jehoiakim’s third year by Daniel’s.

Verse 2 emphasizes the fact that Nebuchadnezzar did not really *take* Judah—but that God “gave” it into his hand. And this was because of God’s judgment on His people. The items taken from the

temple later appear on the night of Babylon's fall (see Daniel 5). Eventually, they will be brought back to the Promised Land following Judah's exile (see Ezra 1:7).

Daniel is also taken from Judah at this time. "Soon after arriving in Babylon Daniel and some of his young comrades were selected by Ashpenaz, a court official, to be trained in the arts and sciences of Babylonia. The apparent goal was to prepare them to be members of the diplomatic corps who could someday represent Babylonia's interests, perhaps in Palestine itself" (Merrill, p. 484). Ashpenaz was chief of the eunuchs (Daniel 1:3). "In ancient Middle Eastern monarchies, royal harems were typically superintended by men who had been emasculated and were considered reliable to serve in that capacity. A eunuch was often regarded as a privileged official. He enjoyed the personal friendship of the king, and his advice was frequently sought. Some have speculated that Daniel and his friends were eunuchs or at least that they were set apart to advise the king (v. 9), but there is no specific statement in the book to this effect" (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 3). In verse 9, we do see that Daniel and his friends were answerable to the chief eunuch. And in Isaiah 39, the prophet Isaiah had told Hezekiah that some of his descendants would "be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (verses 5-7). But as to whether this included Daniel and his three friends, we can't be sure.

"When Daniel began the three-year programme of training for those who would enter King Nebuchadnezzar's service (Dan. 1:5), he (and his Jewish friends, v. 6) was given a Babylonian name, Belteshazzar (v. 7), which means something like 'Bel (a Babylonian god), protect his life' [or perhaps "protector of *Asshur*"—that is, of *Assyria*—as some scholars reckon "Asshur" (Assyria) to have been a common suffix among the Assyrians and then among the Babylonians who took control of their territory, as is later explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 50]. Since the name is not merely the Babylonian form of Daniel ["God Is My Judge"], and it specifically incorporates the name of a Babylonian deity in place of that of the Jewish God (i.e. the 'El' suffix in Daniel), it seems that the renaming was part of a systematic, comprehensive reorientation of the students to embrace fully all aspects of the dominant Babylonian society" ("Daniel," Gardner, p. 123).

The name of Hananiah ("The Eternal Is Gracious") was changed to Shadrach (perhaps meaning "I Am Fearful of the God" or "Rejoicing in the Way"). The name of Mishael ("Who Is What God Is?") was changed to Meshach (possibly "Shadow of the Prince" or "Guest of the King"). And the name of Azariah ("Helped of the Eternal") was changed to Abed-Nego ("Servant of [the god] Nebo" or "Servant of Splendor [the Sun]").

In Babylon they were all to be taught the language of the Chaldeans. Interestingly, a large part of the book of Daniel is written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. Aramaic was the language of international communication in the empires of Assyria, Babylon and Persia. It's probable that Daniel, likely having grown up in a royal household, would have already spoken Aramaic as well as Hebrew.

"The full nature of the educational process that Daniel went through after arriving in Babylon is not clear, though its rigour and broad outline can be surmised reasonably well. Daniel and his friends were trained among the best and brightest of the empire (Dan. 1:4). By God's enablement (Dan. 1:17) they proved not only to be far superior to all the other students (v. 19), but also to 'all the magicians and enchanters' (v. 20) in the kingdom. The subject matter is said to have been 'the language and literature of the Babylonians.' However, v. 17 expands the scope to 'all kinds of literature and learning'" (p. 123). "The wisdom of the Chaldeans consisted of sciences current at the time, including the interpretation of omens, communicated through astrology, the examination of livers, kidneys, and other entrails, and the examination of organs and flight patterns of birds" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 17).

Thankfully, Daniel and his friends were well grounded in the truth of God before receiving such an education. This should serve as a model for young people today embarking on a college career. Liberal academia today is rife with an anti-God, anti-biblical, pro-evolution, pro-humanist agenda. But if a strong commitment to God and a proper understanding of His truth are already present—and *remain* present—an education in the world's universities need not be corrupting.

Of course, it is one thing to merely *learn about* pagan matters. It is another thing to *participate* in wrongdoing. Daniel and his friends would not cross that line. For instance, they would not allow themselves to be defiled with the "king's delicacies" nor with the wine he drank. There were evidently multiple problems here. First, it is likely that the food included animals that God declared to be unclean (see Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). Even the clean meat may not have been properly drained of blood and trimmed of fat (see Leviticus 3:17; 7:22-27). But what was wrong with the wine? Sometimes animal-based products are used in winemaking as clarifying or fining agents, such as eggs

or even blood, to make wine clear (see Caroline Pyevich, “Why Is Wine So Fined?,” *Vegetarian Journal*, Jan.-Feb. 1997, online at <http://www.vrg.org/journal/vj97jan/971wine.htm>). It is possible that this was also done in ancient times. It could also be that the king’s wine was dedicated in pagan ritual so that drinking it would give the appearance of participating in idolatry on some level (compare Deuteronomy 32:37-38; 1 Corinthians 10:20-33). Probably much of the meat had been similarly dedicated as sacrifices, so that Daniel and his friends could not consume even the clean meat with blood and fat removed. Therefore, a vegetarian diet was the only reasonable option—as vegetables were apparently not offered in sacrifice. This was certainly a much simpler matter than declaring to the Babylonians all the requirements meat had to meet before they could eat it—which likely would have availed nothing anyway.

Notice how Daniel handled the situation. He respectfully approached his supervisor with a request (verse 8). This is always the way to approach such matters—for example, when asking an employer for time off of work to observe God’s festivals. If the request is denied, then a stronger approach will need to be taken—but we should always show tact and respect. Daniel presented a way to make their particular situation work out, trusting God to back it up, which God did. Perhaps the vegetables included beans and nuts, providing them with sufficient protein in their diet. Or God could have simply enhanced their physical appearance and well-being while doing the opposite with everyone else. After all, 10 days doesn’t seem like much time to make a huge difference by itself. We can’t know with certainty exactly what happened. What we do know is that the refusal of Daniel and his friends to disobey God prepared them for future greatness as true witnesses for the one true God in a powerful pagan culture.

### **Seventy Years; Judgment on the Nations (Jeremiah 25)**

**July 3**

This chapter of Jeremiah was written either just before or just after Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah—following the battle of Carchemish—and made Jehoiakim swear allegiance to him. Since mention is made of the “first year of Nebuchadnezzar,” it seems most likely to refer to the period following his accession to the throne of Babylon in September of 605 B.C.—which occurred just after the invasion of Judah. If so, then Nebuchadnezzar basically came and went. It does not appear that he wrought any real damage on Judah at this time. Most likely, with Egypt in retreat, Jehoiakim switched allegiances rather quickly—giving up the temple treasures and prisoners mentioned in Daniel 1 without any resistance.

Yet Jeremiah views what has transpired as a turning point—the beginning of the fulfillment of what he has proclaimed at God’s behest for 23 years, in conjunction with other prophets, since the beginning of his ministry (see Jeremiah 25:3). At that earlier time, he had proclaimed that destruction would come on Judah from “the north...all the families of the north” (1:14-15). Now, he makes it clear that this refers to the Babylonian forces under Nebuchadnezzar (25:8-9).

Verses 11-14, relating to the “seventy years,” have been a source of confusion to many. It seems to say that Babylon would fall in 70 years, and that this would be the same period as Judah’s desolation. Jeremiah later writes to captives, telling them that God would cause them to return to the Promised Land “after seventy years are completed at Babylon” (29:10). According to 2 Chronicles 36:20-23, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. began the 70 years of desolation in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy. Daniel and Zechariah apparently understood it this way too (Daniel 9:2; Zechariah 1:12).

So where is the difficulty? Jeremiah gave his prophecy around the time that the initial deportation of Jews (such as Daniel) occurred, in 605 B.C. But ancient Babylon fell to Cyrus of Persia in 539 B.C., just 66 years later. And in that first year of Cyrus, he issues a decree allowing the Jews to return to the Promised Land—again in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Ezra 1:1). Nothing significant appears to have happened in 535 B.C., 70 years after Jeremiah gave this prophecy. Furthermore, it seems strange that punishment was supposedly to come on Babylon in 535 B.C. when the Babylonian Empire ended four years earlier, in 539 B.C.

How, then, do we resolve this? We must realize that Jeremiah was foretelling two distinct things, each lasting 70 years *but not necessarily the same 70 years*. They are linked together because the accomplishment of the one is necessary for the fulfillment of the other. Jeremiah 25:11 mentions: 1) the desolation of Judah; and 2) the duration of the Babylonian Empire. Verses 8-10 describe the first element. Verse 11 is the transitional verse, which includes both elements. And verses 12-14 amplify the second element, explaining that Babylon will be destroyed at the end of its imperial reign.

How long did the Babylonian Empire last? While the last pockets of Assyrian resistance were eliminated in the 605 Battle of Carchemish, the Assyrian Empire really came to an end with the fall of Haran to Babylonian-led forces in 609 (this was the defeat of the army that had fled Nineveh at its fall three years earlier in 612). Starting in 609, Babylon turned from battling the Assyrians themselves to subduing all the former Assyrian territories, beginning with the land of Armenia. Thus, the Babylonian Empire began in 609 B.C. It then lasted 70 years, until the conquest of Cyrus in 539 B.C. So this 70-year period had already begun when Jeremiah prophesied. Notice that he didn't say otherwise.

The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple of God, and took the bulk of the population captive in 586 B.C. This accomplished its desolation, which Jeremiah foretold. As mentioned, the fall of Babylon to Cyrus in 539 enabled the return of the Jews to the Promised Land. But the repopulation of the land took place over time. It is significant to note that 70 years from 586 B.C. brings us to 516 B.C., the time the temple reconstruction begun under Zerubbabel was completed. The mirth and gladness of verse 10—repeated from 7:34 and 16:9—found greatest expression during the annual festivals, which were observed in the presence of the temple. Thus, the restoration of the temple brought an end to the 70-year desolation Jeremiah prophesied. (See also Jeremiah 33:10-11, where the return of the voice of joy and gladness, and of bride and bridegroom, is associated with bringing “the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD.”)

Moving on in chapter 25, notice the reference in verse 13 to prophecies against the nations recorded in the book of Jeremiah. It may simply refer to what follows beginning in verse 15. But it could also refer to chapters 46–51. *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* notes regarding 25:13: “It follows from this, that the prophecies against foreign nations (chs. 46-51) must have been already written. Hence LXX [the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures] inserts here those prophecies. But if they had followed immediately (vs. 13), there would have been no propriety in the observation in the verse. The very wording of the reference shows that they existed in some other part of the book, and not in the immediate context. It was in this very year, the fourth year of Jehoiakim (ch. 36:1, 2), that Jeremiah was directed to write in a regular *book* for the first time all that he had prophesied against Judah and *foreign 'nations'* from the beginning of his ministry. Probably, at a subsequent time, when he completed the whole work, including chs. 46-51, Jeremiah himself inserted the clause, ‘all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations.’ The prophecies in question may have been repeated, as others in Jeremiah, more than once; so in the original smaller collection they may have stood in an earlier position; and in the fuller subsequent collection, in their later and present position.”

Starting in Jeremiah 25:15 and continuing to the end of the chapter, God pronounces judgment on the nations. Notice that He begins with Jerusalem and Judah—“put first: for ‘judgment begins at the house of God’; they being most guilty whose religious privileges are greatest (I Pet. 4:17 [compare Ezekiel 9:6])” (*JFB Commentary*, note on Jeremiah 25:18). Yet in fairness, judgment is brought on all nations (see especially verse 29).

In verse 26, the name *Sheshach* refers to Babylon (see Jeremiah 51:41). Various explanations have been given for it. One is that it was written according to a code wherein the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is expressed by the last, etc., so that the word Sheshach would exactly correspond to Babel. However, it seems unnecessary to conceal the word Babel here since the word Babylon is given in close context in both places. Others translate the word as meaning “Bronze-Gated” or “House of a Prince.” And there are still other explanations (see *JFB*, note on 25:26; Alfred Jones, “Sheshach,” *Jones' Dictionary of Old Testament Proper Names*, 1997). Perhaps the most likely meaning is “thy fine linen” (*The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*, Strong No. 8347, on-line at bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/ Hebrew). This would seem to tie in with the description of end-time Babylon in Revelation 18:16: “that great city that was *clothed in fine linen*, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls.”

The prophecy of judgment on the nations in Jeremiah 25 applied in part to what happened in ancient times. All of those mentioned in verses 17-25 fell to Babylon. Then, as in verse 26, Babylon fell after them. But this scenario will be repeated in the last days. Indeed, it is clear from verses 31-33 that a final fulfillment of this prophecy will come in the end time, when a large percentage of mankind will be destroyed during the Day of the Lord (compare Isaiah 66:16).

### **The Example of the Rechabites (Jeremiah 35)**

**July 4**

The events of this chapter transpired during the reign of Jehoiakim, following the initial invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. (see verse 11). His Chaldean host was accompanied by

Syrians, as the Babylonians had just taken Syria from the Egyptians (compare same verse). The invading army prompted the Rechabites to quickly relocate to Jerusalem.

The Rechabites were descended from the Kenites and hence were related to Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (see Judges 1:16; 1 Chronicles 2:55). Rechab was the father of Jehonadab (here called Jonadab), who supported Jehu in his purge of the Baal prophets from Israel (2 Kings 10:15-28).

Jeremiah brings the Rechabites—probably several of their representatives—into the temple for a test that others are to witness. “We know essentially nothing of the persons mentioned in vv. 3-4, except for Maaseiah, who was probably the father of Zephaniah the priest (cf. 21:1; 29:25; 37:3). He was in charge of the money given for the temple repair (cf. 2 Kings 12:10). Jaazaniah was probably the leader of the group. The name, not uncommon in Jeremiah's day, has been found on a seal (c. 600 B.C.) at Tell en-Nasbeh.... ‘The sons of Hanan’ (a prophet of God [or, as “man of God” could also signify, merely a faithful priest]) were probably his disciples. He appears to have been in sympathy with Jeremiah. The three leaders (cf. 52:24; 2 Kings 25:18) probably had charge of the inner and outer court of the temple and the entrance door. They ranked next to the high priest and his deputy” (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1986, note on Jeremiah 35:3-4).

Jeremiah sets wine before the Rechabites and tells them to drink (verse 5). Jonadab had apparently given strict commands to his descendants regarding the lifestyle they were to live (verses 6-10). Instead of settling down in houses or cultivating fields, they were to dwell in tents as nomads. Perhaps he was concerned over the fact that God had prophesied that once the people of Israel settled into private homes and lands that they would become forgetful of God because of their abundance (compare Deuteronomy 8). Maybe he had even seen the truth of this in the society of his day. Jonadab also commanded his descendants to avoid wine. Perhaps this was motivated by the restriction against alcohol in the Nazirite vow or dangers of abuse he may have witnessed. Interestingly, the Rechabites saw that obedience to these commands from their forefather would allow them to “live many days in the land”—which was the blessing God promised for following the Fifth Commandment in obeying one's parents (see Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

In any case, Jeremiah 35 doesn't say that God approved of the restrictions Jonadab placed on his descendants. Indeed, the Bible nowhere condemns the use of alcohol—only its abuse and drunkenness. And housing and agriculture are certainly not forbidden. The lesson here is not one of refraining from settling down or abstinence from alcohol, but a lesson in obedience for Judah. The Rechabites were prepared to obey a human progenitor who had died many generations before. How much more should Judah have been willing to obey God Himself—their divine parent—who was still alive and still instructing them?

We should note that when Jeremiah put the wine before the Rechabites in verse 5, he did *not* say, “The Lord says, ‘Drink wine.’” That would have overruled their past commitment. Instead, he simply placed the wine before them and told them to drink, which they refused. Indeed, God certainly knew they would refuse and had Jeremiah perform the example for just this reason.

In verses 18-19, a blessing is pronounced on the Rechabites for their faithfulness to their father's commands. Jonadab will never lack a descendant to stand before God. This may simply mean his family line would always continue, as everyone who exists is “before God.” But it could also signify that a descendant of Jonadab would always be in God's service (compare 15:19). “The Mishnah [Jewish oral tradition later written down] indicates that in the Second Temple period a special day was set aside for the Rechabites to bring the wood offering (*Ta'an* 4.5)” (Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan, editors, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993, “Rechabites,” p. 643). Perhaps this is just one way the Rechabites were to serve before God if standing before Him implied such service.

### Clay in the Potter's Hands (Jeremiah 18)

July 5

God here uses the example of a potter forming clay vessels. Almost a century earlier, Isaiah had written, “But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8). Thus, the potter and clay was a familiar image of God's absolute authority over His creation. But “the message God intended to communicate through this illustration was not, as some have thought, one of divine sovereignty. It was a message of grace. Judah had resisted the divine potter. Yet even now God was willing to begin anew and reshape His people into that good vessel He had had in mind from the beginning” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, note on Jeremiah 18:6). God desires that all Israel be saved (Romans 11:26)—in fact, all mankind (1 Timothy 2:4).

In verses 7-8 of Jeremiah 18, we see what Jonah well knew when he “dragged his feet” in bringing God’s warning message to Nineveh (see Jonah 3:10). If people will repent at God’s warning of destruction, He will call off the destruction. But the opposite is also true. If God pronounces good on a nation and it turns to evil, He will bring punishment on it instead (Jeremiah 18:9-10). So there was a warning inherent in the potter-and-clay analogy as well. But the main focus here was on mercy. God was fashioning disaster but was willing to start over with the people if they would soften their hearts and allow Him to work with them.

“But when Jeremiah preached this good news the people continued to resist the heavenly potter! It was too late to surrender their passion for idolatry and sin. What a tragedy! In the coming invasion the people who were unwilling to change would be crushed by suffering. The few survivors would become workable clay in His hands” (note on verse 6).

In verse 12, it is interesting to consider that people here see obedience to God as hopeless—perhaps viewing it as impossible. It may be that the false prophets had corrupted them by a message of “cheap grace”—teaching that since they supposedly couldn’t obey God, the only thing to do was mouth confessions and rely on their sacrifices and other acts of piety. This is not so different from what is often espoused in modern mainstream Christianity. Furthermore, the people’s concept of God had been corrupted by pagan teachings so that they were essentially appealing to pagan gods while believing they were trusting in the true God. He is astonished that they would forsake Him and His ways for false religion. “Snow water of Lebanon” (verse 14) refers to the waters from high Mount Hermon, which looms over the northern part of the land of Israel (*Lebanon* actually means “White Mountain”). These waters sank into the ground and emerged in the form of many springs, providing most of the water for the Jordan River to water the Promised Land. God likewise provided their physical and spiritual needs. Why would they look elsewhere?

Since the people have forgotten God and forsaken His ways, the land will be desolate and the people taken captive and scattered (verses 15-17). God will turn His back on His people (verse 17), just as they had turned their backs on Him (2:27). While this was, no doubt, difficult for God, being a loving Father (compare Hosea 11:8), the evil of the people had to stop. Today some might call this needed approach “tough love.” Indeed, the need for intervention was made even more pressing by the people’s mistreatment of each other and of God’s servants.

In Jeremiah 18:18, we find the people again plotting against the prophet, whereupon he cries out to God (verses 19-23). Jeremiah has done all he could to intercede for them, and yet they are trying to bring him down (verse 20). So he now cries out for God to act in terms that seem to violate Christ’s instruction that we love our enemies and pray for them (Matthew 4:43-48). But we should suspend such judgment, not really knowing all the facts. It is likely that Jeremiah understood the truth of the second resurrection—that these people would be given an opportunity for salvation at a later time—and that he was here asking that God not provide a *present* atonement so as to relent from *present* destruction (as God had said earlier in Jeremiah 18 that He would upon repentance), for the sake not only of himself but of God’s message. “Some have questioned the bitter prayer for vengeance. But those Jeremiah inveighs against have not only slandered him, but distorted the truth and so brought judgment upon the entire nation” (note on verses 19-23).

Moreover, God Himself may have inspired His prophet with this call for judgment. *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary* states: “In this prayer he does not indulge in personal revenge, as if it were his own cause that was at stake; but he speaks under the dictation of the Spirit, ceasing to intercede, and speaking prophetically, knowing they were doomed to destruction as reprobates; for those not so, he doubtless ceased not to intercede. *We* are not to draw an example [of how to pray concerning our enemies in general] from this, which is a special case” (note on verse 21). In any case, as with other calls for vengeance in Scripture, what is expressed is that the perfect vengeance of God is awaited rather than any hint of personal acts of revenge being taken by God’s servant (see Romans 12:17-21).

The Psalms of David contain several calls for God to exact vengeance. Regarding these, the *Tyndale Commentary* remarks, “We may summarize [these] as the plea that justice shall be done and the right vindicated” (note on Psalms 1–72, p. 26).

### **The Broken Flask; Jeremiah Put in the Stocks (Jeremiah 19–20)**

**July 6-7**

Chapter 19 contains the sign of the smashed clay flask. “Like the previous oracle this is an acted parable. The place is significant, the valley of Ben-hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, i.e. the rubbish tip [garbage dump] for broken crockery” (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verses 1-2). Indeed, Jeremiah escorts a number of elders and priests out to the trash dump to witness what is to

become of Jerusalem. Some of the prophecy here regarding Tophet and the Valley of Hinnom, it should be noted, is repeated from Jeremiah 7:31-33. Tophet was the place in the Valley of Hinnom where children were sacrificed in pagan ritual, one of the most abhorrent customs the Israelites adopted from the Canaanites. Josiah had destroyed this place and it was now just a big trash pile in the valley.

Many innocents had died here, but now many guilty would die or be cast here—the corpses of the people of Jerusalem thrown out onto this heap. The dead would thus be given over to wild animals, causing the desecration of their remains (19:7). Compounding the horror, the people of Judah would sink to cannibalism out of desperate hunger during the coming Babylonian siege (verse 9), as God had pronounced at the time of Moses in the curses for disobedience to His laws (see Deuteronomy 28:52-57).

Jeremiah then smashed the clay flask as he was instructed, rendering it no longer useful (Jeremiah 19:10-11). It is interesting that this imagery followed the previous chapter, wherein God as the potter declared that He could refashion the people if they were willing. But they had refused—and therefore they will be smashed and, like this clay flask, cast into the refuse of Hinnom. God explained that just as Tophet, a place of pagan sacrifice, had been destroyed and turned into a garbage dump, so Jerusalem—the whole of which was a place of pagan sacrifice—would be destroyed in like manner (verses 12-13).

Some people today in their arrogance criticize God for being unfair. They fail to realize how great God is and how insignificant all mankind is by comparison. The potter analogy is a reminder of stark reality. As our Creator, God may shape us as a potter shapes clay. Like the potter, He can keep and use a vessel (a person) able to be shaped into a form of His choosing. Or, like the potter, He can simply discard the vessel that cracks or becomes misshapen in the process of His working with it. Of course, this is merely an analogy, which serves to illustrate a limited point. It does not convey the loving family relationship God seeks with mankind or the full spiritual potential He plans for it. Nonetheless, it remains a sober reminder of how insignificant a human being is compared to God, as well as of the fact that God will destroy the rebellious in *gehenna* (the Valley of Hinnom), a trash dump.

Jeremiah then proclaims the message of doom right in the temple court (verses 14-15)—with the elders and priests who returned with him probably explaining to others what they had just seen him do.

Pashhur, the “chief governor” of the temple—a priest who was head of security, being over the temple guards—takes action against Jeremiah for his pronouncements (20:1-2). Pashhur had evidently proclaimed, perhaps even in God’s name, that Jerusalem would not be destroyed (see verse 6). He is incensed at Jeremiah’s preaching, perhaps viewing him as an insurrectionist. As it stood, things were going quite well under Babylonian vassalship.

Whatever his motive, Pashhur “struck” Jeremiah (verse 2)—meaning either that he personally hit him or had another guard do so, perhaps to arrest him, or that he had the prophet beaten. This is the first recorded instance of actual physical violence against Jeremiah. Pashhur then had God’s prophet put into the stocks. “The Heb[rew] word (*mahpeket*) means ‘causing distortion,’ and the stocks forced arms, neck, and legs into an extremely painful position” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verses 1-6). While Jeremiah had escaped punishment a few years earlier by a council ruling, Jehoiakim may have overturned that ruling by his killing of Urijah (see Jeremiah 26). Or perhaps Pashhur had authorization to hold anyone temporarily at his own discretion until a higher order was issued.

In any event, Pashhur’s treatment of God’s prophet led to a pronouncement of divine judgment, which Jeremiah delivered when he was brought out of the stocks the next day—showing that the prophet had suffered in them overnight. Jeremiah declares that Pashhur, whose name meant “Large” or “Free,” which implied safety and security such as he proclaimed for Jerusalem, would instead be called *Magor-Missabib*, meaning “Fear on Every Side” (20:3). Pashhur, his family and his friends would all be dragged away captive to die in Babylon (verse 6).

The rest of chapter 20 shows the personal anguish Jeremiah experienced. In verse 7, the word the King James Version renders “deceived” is better translated “enticed,” “persuaded” or, as in the New King James Version, “induced.” God had called Jeremiah with a strong appeal and, though Jeremiah gave some resistance, the urging of God was just too strong to deny. But in following His call and commission, the prophet was mocked every day. It got so bad that Jeremiah tried to cease prophesying (verses 8-9). But that was even harder to endure, so powerful was the urge to declare

God's message when it so very much needed to be said (verse 9)—particularly with all the taunting that just continued anyway (verse 10).

We find the scorners making fun of what Jeremiah had proclaimed regarding the new name of Pashhur, "Fear on Every Side" (same verse). However, Jeremiah is confident that God is with him and will judge these mockers (verse 11). He prays for God's intervention (verse 12) and then rejoices in God's deliverance (verse 13) in terms reminiscent of Psalm 109:30-31.

But then he sinks back into terrible depression (Jeremiah 20:14-18)—perhaps because God has not yet put an end to the mocking. It just goes on and on and on. Perhaps he had even been thrown back into the stocks for a time. Whatever the case, we again see the humanity of Jeremiah. Subject to constant ridicule, dire threats and now humiliating punishment, he felt so alone. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states, "He had encountered more opposition from more enemies than any other O[ld] T[estament] prophet" (introductory notes on Jeremiah). Perhaps we can identify with the feelings he must have had to some extent. Other heroes of the Bible experienced similar moments. In wishing that he had never been born, he was echoing the cry of one of God's great servants, Job (see Job 3). Of course, this is a passing phase that Jeremiah does overcome. In times of severe suffering, human beings think and say things that are not complete thoughts, but fragments of feelings and emotions that well up from deep inside. Indeed, all of us vent occasionally with outbursts due to frustrations, and what we say at such times isn't necessarily what we truly mean or think.

God's people do stumble at times, but they rise to go forward again and again (Proverbs 24:16), as Jeremiah certainly did. We should not be too hard on him here, but should rather learn a lesson about the need for endurance—a need Jesus Christ and His followers proclaimed (Mark 13:13; Matthew 10:22; 1 Corinthians 13:7; James 1:12; Hebrews 10:36).

## **Baruch the Scribe; A Failed Attempt to Destroy**

### **God's Word (Jeremiah 36:1-7; 45:1-5; 36:8-32)**

**July 8-9**

At the start of the current reading, it is still the fourth year of Jehoiakim—March-April 605 B.C. to March-April 604 B.C. The Battle of Carchemish happened in the late spring of 605. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah sometime during the summer, carrying away a number of Jews, including Daniel and his friends. Jehoiakim had become a Babylonian vassal. And Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon in August to assume the imperial throne, which he did on September 7. Since the events in the past several readings occurred following Nebuchadnezzar's invasion but apparently prior to the events described in the current reading, it appears likely that the events of the current reading begin in the early part of 604 B.C.

Jeremiah is told to write everything he has prophesied from the beginning of his ministry in Josiah's day up till now in a book or scroll (Jeremiah 36:2). "Scrolls (Heb[rew] *megilla*; G[ree]k *biblion*) were made by gluing together, side by side, separate strips of papyrus, leather, parchment or vellum and then winding the long strip around a pole, which would often have handles at both ends to facilitate transporting and reading the scroll. Papyrus, or specifically the pith of the papyrus reed, had been used as a writing surface since the early 3rd millennium B.C.E. [B.C.] It was probably a papyrus scroll, written by Baruch while Jeremiah dictated, that King Jehoiakim ordered burned (Jer. 36)" (*Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 2000, p. 1174).

The writing down of everything at this point does not mean that Jeremiah had written nothing before. Perhaps he had written many things and now dictated them into a single document—though God could have enabled him to reconstruct all he had said from memory. Jeremiah does not now personally write but instead dictates everything to Baruch the son of Neriah, a trained scribe.

While many people doubt the authenticity of the Bible, "through a most amazing combination of circumstances, it would appear that we now have two extraordinary reminders of reliability of the witness to Baruch's presence in the time of Jeremiah.... One particular *bulla* [a lump of clay impressed with a seal]... bears the same name as the scribe in the book of Jeremiah. In three lines of ancient Hebrew text, writing in the formal cursive style of the seventh century B.C., the seal reads, 'belonging to Berekhyahu, son of Neriyahu, the scribe.' Berekhyahu is almost certainly the complete name of the shortened form Baruch, which means 'Blessed of Yahweh.' Baruch's father, likewise, in its full form is also Neriyahu, called Neriah in the Bible. The suffix *-yahu* is a shortened form of Yahweh...

"Now a second *bulla* has shown up.... The same seal that impressed the *bulla* just described as belonging to Baruch was used on this one, for the three registers of writing are identical.... On the back of this *bulla* are impressions of the papyrus fibers from the document to which it was once tied. What is remarkable about this second *bulla* is that the edge is embossed with a fingerprint on the

edge, which is presumably that of Baruch the scribe himself. Baruch must have written and sealed the document to which it was attached” (Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Old Testament Documents; Are They Reliable and Relevant?*, 2001, pp. 158-159).

Not only does Jeremiah have Baruch write down all his words, but he informs the scribe that, because he is “confined” (verse 6)—either physically restrained as in our previous reading or, more likely as he is able to hide later, merely barred from entering the temple—Baruch must go into the temple on the next fast day and read the words.

This is a difficult assignment, considering the punishment previously heaped on Jeremiah. Turning to chapter 45, we find it one of the shortest in the Bible. But it has a vitally important message. We can all find ourselves like Baruch, sympathizing with his comment: “I am overwhelmed with trouble! Haven’t I had enough pain already? And now the LORD has added more! I am weary of my own sighing and can find no rest” (verse 3, New Living Translation). “Baruch came from a family of achievers. His grandfather was governor of Jerusalem in Josiah’s time (2 Chron. 34:8) and his brother [would later be] the staff officer in Zedekiah’s court (Jer. 51:59) [and was likely already involved in government]. He [Baruch] had expected to receive some high office, but found himself the secretary of the most hated man in Judah! God told Baruch what He tells us. Be the best you can be, but don’t expect to be more than you are ([Jeremiah 45] v. 5). Self-seeking ambition was hardly appropriate when the nation was facing divine judgment—or at any other time” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verses 1-5). Furthermore, although he couldn’t see it at the time, God was with him and would protect him wherever he went (compare Matthew 6:8, 25-32; Hebrews 13:5; Joshua 1:5; Deuteronomy 31:6; Philippians 4:11).

Baruch has to wait several months before carrying out his assigned duty but the fast day finally comes. Surprisingly, it is not God’s commanded fast day, the Day of Atonement in the seventh month. Apparently the people had already forsaken this command since Josiah’s death, which was only five years earlier. The fast mentioned in Jeremiah 36 occurs in the ninth month of Jehoiakim’s fifth year—November-December 604 B.C. (verse 9). There was no traditional fast at this time that we know of, but there is a historical context to perhaps explain the fast. In “604, Nebuchadnezzar was back again in the Hatti-territory to receive tribute from all its kings. This no doubt included Jehoiakim. At that time the march went as far south as [the Philistine city of] Askelon, which was captured in the month Kislev [the Hebrew ninth month]” (Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 1983, p. 186). The fast was probably called by the elders or priests at the urging of the people, who may have had some fears regarding Nebuchadnezzar’s approach. The king, Jehoiakim, seems to have had no such fears. He was evidently secure in his position as a vassal to Babylon. In any case, with Nebuchadnezzar close at hand and the people perhaps somewhat softened by their fasting, it was a fit time to pronounce destruction on Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon.

Baruch reads aloud from the chamber of Gemariah. “Gemariah was the son of Shaphan, the scribe who read the scroll found during Josiah’s reign (see 2 Kin. 22:1-20). It seems Gemariah was sympathetic toward Jeremiah, allowing the use of the room in the upper court, a room overlooking the temple courts” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Jeremiah 36:9-10). Gemariah’s son Michaiah reports the gist of what Baruch was proclaiming to his father and the other national leaders at the palace (verses 11-13). Elnathan, mentioned here, was the one who, on orders from Jehoiakim, brought the prophet Urijah back from Egypt to suffer execution (see 26:22-23). He is probably the same Elnathan named in 2 Kings 24:8 as the father of Nehushta, Jehoiachin’s mother and therefore Jehoiakim’s wife—thus making him Jehoiakim’s father-in-law. Elnathan’s father Achbor “also played a role in the reading of the scroll in the days of Josiah’s reform. The parallels between Josiah’s reform and Jeremiah’s desire for national revival were included by Baruch deliberately, to remind the people of the earlier event” (note on 36:11-13).

The leaders send for Baruch to read the scroll to them. When he does, they become alarmed and decide that the king must be informed (verse 16). But, apparently fearing what Jehoiakim’s reaction might be, they tell Baruch and Jeremiah to go hide out somewhere (verse 19). Perhaps some of them actually had a change of heart—though it may have been just momentary fearfulness. We do see Elnathan beseeching the king not to destroy the scroll (verse 25).

Outrageously, however, the king does destroy it—brazenly and contemptuously. Jehoiakim would have a few columns of the scroll read, whereupon he would cut that part out and cast it into the fire in the hearth before him. This is repeated until the entire scroll is read and burned (verse 23). The king and his servants show no fear at all (verse 24). It is not clear whether his servants here include all the leaders who had previously heard the scroll’s contents. It may be that they did not all

go to the king but sent just a few representatives, such as Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah, who did implore the king to not burn the scroll.

In verse 26, Jehoiakim sends men out to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. Concerning Jerahmeel, the phrase “the king’s son” should probably instead be “the son of Hamelech,” as in the King James Version, since Jehoiakim had no grown sons at this time—his heir Jehoiachin being a 12-year-old boy. (It is also possible that “king’s son” was the title of a particular office.) Thankfully, God protected His servants from being arrested and probably murdered.

How utterly horrible all of this was. God was giving a last chance for repentance—a possibility for reform as in the days of Josiah, Jehoiakim’s father, who had responded positively to Jeremiah’s pronouncements and to finding the Word of God. But no, this king of Judah will not repent. Instead, he burns the words of God and seeks to kill God’s messengers. His actions are outrageous beyond description.

Jeremiah pronounces judgment on the king for his vile effrontery and blasphemy. He would die in disgrace. His lineage would not continue on David’s throne, as his son Jehoiachin would reign for just three months. And Jerusalem would be destroyed. The Word of God, on the other hand, which Jehoiakim had tried to destroy, would endure. God had Jeremiah and Baruch rewrite everything, with even more added to it. And we have it today, before our very eyes. As Isaiah had proclaimed under divine inspiration, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

**Supplementary Reading:** “King Jehoiakim: A Lesson From Biblical History,” *Bible Study Course*, Lesson 2: “The Word of God: The Foundation of Knowledge,” p. 11).

### The Dream of Empires (Daniel 1:18–2:49)

July 10

Daniel 1:18 brings us to the end of the Babylonian court training period for Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (a.k.a. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego). But there appears to be a chronological discrepancy with chapter 2. Chapter 1 says that the boys were to be trained for three years after their capture by Nebuchadnezzar (verse 5). Yet chapter 2 says that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream occurred in the second year of his reign, and verse 13 implies that the training was finished since Daniel is considered to be one of the “wise men.” How do we resolve this?

In its note on the second year of the king in Daniel 2:1, *The New Bible Commentary* states: “This phrase is thought by some to conflict with the three-year period of training mentioned in ch. 1. But the phrase ‘three years’ (1:5) need refer only to portions of years.” What this would really mean is that the training was for a time period spanning three calendar years and not three full years. The short time prior to Nebuchadnezzar’s first year on the throne would have been year one. The first year of Nebuchadnezzar would have been year two. And the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign would have been year three. It was during this year—in 603 B.C.—that the training period ended.

*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary* points out: “The very difficulty [in chronology here] is a proof of genuineness; all was clear to the writer and the original readers from *their* knowledge of the circumstances, and so he adds no explanation. A forger would not *introduce* difficulties; the author did not then see any difficulty in the case” (note on 2:1).

Remarkably, Daniel and his friends proved far wiser than not only the other students, but than all the wise men of the realm (1:20). Besides the fact that God surely aided their intellectual development, we should consider that these young godly men of Judah’s court were surely well studied in Scripture, including the brilliance of the civil law system God gave through Moses as well as the unparalleled wisdom of the book of Proverbs.

In verse 21, we are told that Daniel continued in the service of the Babylonian court until Cyrus of Persia conquered the empire in 539 B.C., 66 years later.

Sometime later in Nebuchadnezzar’s second year, he has his famous dream, the subject of chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar was immensely troubled by this vivid dream. He knew it meant something and he felt he had to know what. Perhaps he saw it as a “message from the gods.” When he mentions the dream to his spiritual advisers, they respond in Aramaic (verse 4). Starting with their response and continuing to the end of chapter 7, the original language of the book of Daniel is Aramaic, the common language of the empire. Perhaps Daniel intended a broad gentile readership for this section.

The advisers asked that the king tell them his dream. But to be sure that whoever interpreted the dream was telling the truth, he required that they first tell him what he had dreamt. Any good storyteller could make up an “interpretation” (and perhaps the suspicious Nebuchadnezzar suspected his “wise men” often did just that!), whereas only one with supernatural knowledge could reveal the

dream itself. Nebuchadnezzar let his fear turn to hostility and, ever the absolute ruler of his kingdom, goes “over the top” with his very real threats to kill all the “wise” men. Like too many rulers who have absolute power, it seems he was extremely ill-tempered with no care for human life. People were replaceable, even innocent young men who were not even involved in his problem. Among those threatened were Daniel and his three friends—but all of this was ultimately from God for a purpose.

How do we react when others make bad decisions that affect us? Daniel’s reaction carries an important lesson for every Christian. We all face bad decisions on the part of others—at work, at home, from the government and even at times in the Church. And this was a bad decision. Daniel’s very head was on the line. But he didn’t just stand around and complain about the government. Instead he took action—but it was tempered with tact and wisdom (verses 14-16; compare James 1:5). The word translated “wisdom” in verse 14 is related to the Hebrew word meaning “to taste.” In English we talk about a person having “good taste,” meaning having a sense of appropriateness. Daniel’s “good taste” was spiritual in nature. He had the wisdom (good taste) to know what was appropriate when approaching the rulers of the land. But he took no personal pride in his wisdom. He knew it came from God (Daniel 2:18).

However, to Daniel, just realizing God’s help was not enough. When God answered his need, his next reaction was to go back to God and offer thanks and praise (verses 19-23). Author Sinclair Ferguson correctly remarks on Daniel’s example: “We need men and women with that spirit today. We do not need more pomp or noise or triumphalism. In the last analysis, we do not need money in order to establish a witness to God in the highest reaches of our society. We need Christians of complete integrity who know that God’s eye is on them. With that we need people who pray. Perhaps more than anything else we need Daniel’s spirit of prayer” (*Mastering the Old Testament*, 1988, Vol. 19, p. 59).

With the answer in hand, Daniel goes to the king and reveals the dream and its meaning. The image the king saw may have been frightening, but it had great significance, foretelling a succession of great empires. Even in the first century, the identities of the four gentile kingdoms mentioned were understood, as we can see from the writings of Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 10, sec. 4). The head of gold, as Daniel explained, was the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar. The silver chest with two arms signified the empire of the Medes and Persians, which conquered and supplanted Babylon. The belly and thighs of bronze represented the Greco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, which swallowed up Persia. After Alexander’s death, this Hellenistic empire continued in a divided form until its divisions were taken over by the next great kingdom, the Roman Empire, represented by the legs of iron. (The two legs apparently signified the east-west division that characterized the Late Roman Empire). Each succeeding metal is less valuable—perhaps showing the wealth of each succeeding empire being more thinly spread, as each empire was bigger than the previous. But, though less valuable, each succeeding metal is stronger, as each empire was more powerful than the last.

However, extending from the legs are feet and toes of iron mixed with clay—a brittle and unstable mixture because it would not bond well. These are destroyed by a stone from heaven, which reduces the entire image to dust. This stone clearly represents the Messiah, Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:4; Psalm 18:2; Matthew 16:18; Romans 9:33; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-8), coming from heaven to smash the governments of this world. The stone then grows into a great mountain that fills the whole earth. As a mountain in Bible prophecy is often symbolic of a kingdom, this signifies the Messiah’s Kingdom extending to fill the entire earth after destroying the succession of great empires. And indeed, that is what we see in Daniel’s explanation in Daniel 2:44. This fact is important to understand, for it shows that the Kingdom of God is a literal kingdom to be set up on earth—the fifth and final kingdom in succession—and not some ethereal sentiment set up in men’s hearts, as many believe the Kingdom of God to be.

While most biblical scholars agree that the stone from heaven refers to the Messiah coming to set up His Kingdom, there are differing views about when it occurs. Some claim that “these kings” mentioned in verse 44 refers to the four preceding kingdoms with the stone representing Jesus Christ’s first coming during the days of the first-century Roman Empire. Others view the toes as representing 10 nations extant at the end time in a loose federation (the brittle mixture) as a final resurrection of the Roman Empire (compare Revelation 17:12-14). The latter is the correct meaning. The Roman Empire has continued intermittently throughout history since its official fall in A.D. 476. The darkest and most ominous revival will exist on the world scene at the time of Christ’s return.

To understand, we have to look at all the prophecies concerning the succession of empires and the Kingdom of God, especially those in the book of Revelation. Part of the key is given in Daniel 2:35, which states regarding the kingdoms that “the wind swept them away without leaving a trace” (NIV), something that did not happen to the Roman Empire while Jesus was on earth—nor has it *ever* really happened. In addition, the description in Revelation makes it very clear that the Kingdom of God is not here yet, but will commence at the return of Jesus Christ. To learn more about this, request or download our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

Writing to a Roman audience, Josephus explained the succession of gentile empires. But it is interesting to see what he said to the Romans regarding the stone from heaven. Notice: “Daniel did also declare the meaning of the stone to the king; but I do not think proper to relate it, since I have only undertaken to describe things past or present, but not things that are future; yet if any one be so very desirous of knowing truth, as not to wave such points of curiosity, and cannot curb his inclination for understanding the uncertainties of futurity, and whether they will happen or not, let him be diligent in reading the book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings.” In the same space, Josephus could certainly have explained what the stone was, but it is clear that he did not want to provoke the Romans by telling them their empire would eventually be smashed by God.

Daniel 2 ends with another glimpse of Daniel’s magnificent character wherein he shows his loyalty to his friends and petitions the king for special favor for them. As will happen numerous times during his long sojourn in Babylon, God rewards Daniel’s character and loyalty with wealth and position.

### **Jehoiakim’s Rebellion**

**(Jeremiah 46:13–47:7; 2 Kings 24:1b-7; 2 Chronicles 36:6-8)**

**July 11-12**

A historical context for this section is helpful. Biblical historian Eugene Merrill writes: “As the author of Kings indicates, Jehoiakim remained a loyal subject to the Babylonians for...three years (605-602 [B.C.]). He then rebelled for some unexpressed reason.... Nebuchadnezzar had undertaken several western campaigns against Judah’s neighbors. It may have been his preoccupation with these states...that gave Jehoiakim the courage to break his alliance with Nebuchadnezzar” (*Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 451).

One source “associates Jehoiakim’s rebellion with the Babylonian conflict with Egypt in the winter of 601/600 B.C., which is attested to by a letter written in Aramaic from the town of Saqqarah” (p. 451, footnote). Another source “points out that the campaign against Jehoiakim is not mentioned in the Babylonian records...because Nebuchadnezzar’s main objective was Egypt and not Judah” (p. 451, footnote). The reference here is to Nebuchadnezzar’s fourth year, when “he engaged Neco II in a great battle near the border of Egypt, a contest which evidently ended in a draw. Perhaps the Babylonian was not altogether unsuccessful, however, for he may have brought Judah back under his control in the course of this campaign” (p. 451).

This seems likely, especially given what Scripture says right after describing the Babylonian response to Jehoiakim’s rebellion: “And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore...” (2 Kings 24:7). This makes it appear that the king of Egypt coming out of his land had something to do with Jehoiakim’s rebellion. Jeremiah 47, in the current reading, mentions an Egyptian pharaoh of Jeremiah’s time attacking Gaza, the southernmost of the major Philistine cities, right near the border with Egypt. We have no parallel record of this event in secular history, which makes the dating of it difficult. But it would seem to tie into these events, and certainly occurred before 2 Kings 24:7.

Perhaps Necho attacked Gaza sometime in 602 B.C., which would have been an incursion into Babylonian territory—Nebuchadnezzar having subdued the Philistines in 604. This may well have prompted Jehoiakim to rebel against Babylon, declaring Judah’s reaffiliation with Egypt. “Retribution was swift and sure (2 Kings 24:1-2). Nebuchadnezzar sent troops from Babylonia and from some of his western vassal states such as Aram, Moab, and Ammon, and forced Jehoiakim to submit. The chronicler says that Nebuchadnezzar went as far as to bind Jehoiakim with shackles in order to take him as a prisoner of war to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:6). Apparently he relented [as Jehoiakim remained as king for a few more years] but as punishment stripped the temple of many of its sacred articles [as he had before] and took them to his own pagan temples in Babylon. Thereafter until his death in 598 Jehoiakim remained in subservience to the Babylonian overlord” (p. 451). After dealing with Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar apparently continued on to his engagement with Necho, in which the pharaoh was pushed back into Egypt.

While Jehoiakim's death is recorded, none of the details regarding it are given. We do know from Jeremiah's prophecies that this wicked ruler was to die without lamentation from the people, being cast out and buried as a donkey (see Jeremiah 22:18-19; 36:30). His lineage would not continue to rule, as his son's reign would last but a few months.

### Prophecies Against Egypt and Philistia

**(Jeremiah 46:13–47:7; 2 Kings 24:1b-7; 2 Chronicles 36:6-8)**

**July 11-12 Cont'd**

Before the Egyptian attack on Gaza, Jeremiah prophesied against Egypt (Jeremiah 46:13-26). While Babylon is the one coming against Egypt (verse 26), God is the one bringing the punishment (see verses 15, 18, 25). The prophecy concludes with "an effective contrast, a sound of an incredible weakness where the roar as of a lion is necessary: the snake, Egyptian symbol of royalty, creeping back into its hole. The hiss of enmity is ineffective, as the Babylonians come on as an army of woodcutters levelling Egypt as a forest appointed for timber felling" (*New Bible Commentary*, note on 46:22-24). This prophecy speaks of far more than what Nebuchadnezzar did in his campaign against Egypt of 601. Rather, it looks a number of years forward, beyond even the fall of Judah in 586 B.C., to the time when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt "in 568 and laid waste a great part of the Nile valley" (Merrill, p. 475). In fact, Egypt was made part of the Babylonian Empire. And Jeremiah foresaw it all, at least 34 years in advance. For more prophecies against Egypt, see Ezekiel 29–32.

Egypt's desolation, we are told, would not last forever (Jeremiah 46:26). Furthermore, hope is then given to Israel (verses 27-28). Even though Israel was being rightly punished, it too would not suffer forever. Speaking to Jacob and Israel rather than Judah, this is a prophecy to all 12 tribes, which will be brought back to the Promised Land after Christ's return. Perhaps this prophecy is placed here because both Israel and Judah had pinned their hopes on Egypt, which provided them no help. Indeed, trusting in such allies rather than God is part of the reason they are being punished. The end-time context of this prophecy's fulfillment may indicate some duality in the prophecy against Egypt—that part of *it* may be for the end time as well, when Egypt will again fall to a northern invader (see Daniel 11:40-43).

Egypt may seem an insignificant nation to the casual observer of world affairs, but it is a leading nation among the Muslim nations of North Africa and the Middle East. Additionally, radical Muslim terrorist cells thrive there (one of which assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981). The Bible indicates that Egypt will figure prominently in the international politics of the end time.

In Jeremiah 47, we see God's judgment on Philistia. The Philistines were quite often an enemy of Israel. Their close proximity made them a dangerous thorn in Israel's side, somewhat like the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are to the nation of Israel today.

The Philistines (Jeremiah 47:1) and Caphtorim (verse 4) were closely related (Genesis 10:4) and probably intermingled. Of the original Philistine pentapolis—Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron (see Joshua 13:3, NIV)—only Gaza and Ashkelon are mentioned in Jeremiah 47. Among all the biblical prophecies of the Philistines, mention is made of four of these cities. "It is noteworthy that Gath is not mentioned in these prophecies, from which it may be inferred that Gath ceased to be of any major significance after the time of Uzziah" ("Philistines," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1986, p. 843).

In verse 2 we read of a flood of waters from the north. Generally, as we have repeatedly seen, invasions from Mesopotamia followed a route that brought them into Canaan and Philistia from the north. "Waters sometimes signify multitudes of people and nations (Rev. 17:15), sometimes great and threatening calamities (Ps. 69:1); here they signify both" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, note on verse 2).

Nebuchadnezzar attacked Ashkelon in 604 B.C., as earlier mentioned. But the prophecy in Jeremiah 47 appears to have been delivered after that time. Indeed, there is a hint of that in the fact that a "remnant" of Ashkelon is here mentioned (verse 5). The Philistines, which have already been attacked, are going to be hit again. Notice the specific reason here: "To cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper who remains" (verse 4). This provides us with the time of the destruction mentioned. "Within a year of the conquest of Jerusalem [in 586 B.C.] Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to the island portion of Tyre, having already brought Sidon, Arvad, and the mainland portion of Tyre under his control [shortly before]. The siege lasted for thirteen years" (Merrill, p. 475). So this prophecy refers to the overrunning of Philistia by Nebuchadnezzar's armies around the time of the fall of Judah. As with Egypt, though Babylon is the agent of destruction, God is the one who brings it (verses 6-7).

But the prophecy may have another fulfillment that is yet future. Almost certainly a small percentage of today's Palestinians, especially those in the Gaza Strip, are descendants of the Philistines. Interestingly, "the Greek name [for the land of Israel], Palestine, was derived from the name Philistia" ("Philistines," *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1970, p. 859). The next three nations mentioned in the book of Jeremiah—Moab, Ammon and Edom in chapters 48–49—are also represented in today's Palestinian population in both Israel and Jordan. So it may be that Jeremiah 47–49 refers, at least in part, to end-time calamity to come upon the Palestinians—again from out of the north.

Other prophecies of the Philistines may be found in Isaiah 14:29-31, Ezekiel 25:15-17, Amos 1:6-8, Zephaniah 2:4-7 and Zechariah 9:5-7.

### **Prophecy Against Moab (Jeremiah 48)**

**July 13**

Recall from our previous reading that when Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar sent Chaldean troops and mercenary forces from Syria, Moab and Ammon into Judah. This was actually according to *God's* will, to punish Jehoiakim and Judah for their rebellion against *Him* (2 Kings 24:1-5). But these nations, though guilty of their own great sins, exulted in their part in Judah's downfall—full of arrogance and pride. They did not acknowledge God. And their *hatred* of God's people was completely unjustified. So they, too, would be punished. Jeremiah prophesies against them in Jeremiah 48 and 49—and against Israel's age-old enemy, Edom, along with other adjacent peoples. This parallels end-time events, when God punishes modern Israel and Judah through other nations—nations that God then punishes as well for their own pride, arrogance and wrongdoing.

The Moabites and Ammonites are descendants of Lot's sons, Moab and Ben-Ammi (Genesis 19:36-38). These peoples, along with the Edomites, lived on the east side of the Jordan River and Dead Sea, where the nation of Jordan is now situated—Ammon on the north, Moab in the middle and Edom in the south. The hammer of Babylon would fall on them too—not just Judah (see Jeremiah 27:1-11). But while the prophecies in chapters 48 and 49 probably applied to the people of Jeremiah's day in part, it is evident that their ultimate application was for the end time—the Day of the Lord, the cataclysmic period immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ, which appears to be a year in length. Note Jeremiah 48:12 ("behold, the days are coming"), verse 41 ("on that day"), verse 44 ("the year of their punishment") and verse 47 ("in the latter days"). And we will see further proof as we examine the chapter.

As has been mentioned previously in the Bible Reading Program, the descendants of the people of ancient Ammon and Moab are evidently still concentrated in Jordan (with its capital named Amman after Ammon) and surrounding areas. Today's Palestinians of Jordan and Israel are probably a mixture of Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, Arabs and other ancient Middle Eastern elements. In reading Jeremiah 48 and 49, consider the attitudes of these people today toward the Jewish state of Israel. As the old saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Some of the wording in Jeremiah 48 is quite similar to that of the prophecy against Moab in Isaiah 15–16. Indeed, Jeremiah appears to have been led by God to actually use portions of Isaiah's prophecy himself. (That being so, you will probably find it helpful to reread Isaiah 15–16 at this point and review the Bible Reading Program commentary for those chapters.)

Let's look at some of the specifics of the prophecy in Jeremiah 48. Nebo (verse 1) was a town of Moab located at Mount Nebo, from where Moses surveyed the Promised Land. Kirjathaim (verse 1) and Heshbon (verse 2) were Moabite cities—Heshbon being the chief one. "Heshbon was midway between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok; it was the residence of Sihon, king of the Amorites [in Moses' day], and afterwards a Levitical city in Gad (Num. 21:26)" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on verse Jeremiah 48:2). Of course, Gad and the other Israelite tribes east of the Jordan had been carried away captive by the Assyrians and this territory reverted back to the Moabites (and even before that the land had changed hands numerous times because of frequent wars). It is interesting to notice that many of the Ammonite and Moabite cities were built by the Israelites: "And the children of Gad built Dibon and Ataroth and Aroer, Atroth and Shophan and Jazer and Jogbehan, Beth Nimrah and Beth Haran, fortified cities, and folds for sheep. And the children of Reuben built Heshbon and Elealeh and Kirjathaim, Nebo and Baal Meon (their names being changed) and Shibmah" (Numbers 32:34-38).

Madmen (Jeremiah 48:2) was another town in Moab, its name meaning "Dunghill." Horonaim (verse 3), meaning "Two Caves," was located in a "descent" or low place—in contrast to the "ascent of Luhith" (verse 5). "Horonaim lay in a plain, Luhith on a height. To the latter, therefore, the

Moabites would flee with ‘continual weeping,’ as a place of safety from the Chaldeans” (note on verse 5).

Chemosh, the tutelary god of the Moabites, was to go into captivity—apparently signifying that the idols representing him would be plundered by the enemy or would simply accompany the people into captivity, as with the priests and princes (verse 7). However, there may be an end-time application here. Consider that the world religion known today as Christianity is actually a false Christianity that is in many ways a modern form of Baal worship—and that Baal and Chemosh are often identified as one and the same. In many ways, Islam—the religion of today’s Moabites and virtually all Middle Eastern peoples other than the Jews—arose out of a blend of Judaism and this false Christianity mixed with Arab mythology. In spite of the fact that there are numerous sects within these three major religions, which provide hundreds of minor variations in practices, their roots are remarkably similar to each other, as well as to the ancient Canaanite and Babylonian religions.

Verse 9 in the New King James Version says, “Give wings to Moab, that she may flee and get away; for her cities shall be desolate, without any to dwell in them” (compare KJV). If the translation of the first part of this verse is accurate, the prophecy itself would seem to be the wings of escape—if the Moabites would heed it. However, other versions translate the verse differently. For example: “Oh, for wings for Moab that she could fly away [implying that she can’t], for her cities shall be left without a living soul” (Living Bible). Still other translations are even more different: “Put salt on Moab, for she will be laid waste; her towns will become desolate, with no one to live in them” (NIV, compare NRSV). This seems to make the most sense, considering that God appears to be speaking to the forces of Moab’s destruction in verses 9-10.

Verse 10 is apparently mistranslated in the King James and New King James Versions. In context, the word rendered “deceitfully” actually has to do with being slack or negligent. “To represent how entirely this is God’s will, a curse is pronounced on the Chaldeans, the instrument, if they do it *negligently* (Margin) or by halves” (note on verse 10). Notice the NIV rendering: “A curse on him who is lax in doing the LORD’s work! A curse on him who keeps his sword from bloodshed!” (compare NRSV, which translates the verse similarly).

Verse 11 declares that Moab is “settled on his dregs” (or “lees” in the King James Version), not having been “emptied from vessel to vessel.” The *JFB Commentary* states: “As wine left to settle on its own lees retains its flavor and strength (which it would lose by being poured from one vessel into another), so Moab, owing to its never having been dislodged from its settlements, retains its pride of strength unimpaired” (note on verse 11). But this was going to change (verse 12). “The image was clear to Jeremiah’s first readers. Wine was poured gently from the storage jar to serving jars so as not to disturb the dregs, impurities which had settled at the bottom. Similarly, God had treated Moab gently. But now the nation’s experience will be like that of jars violently shaken and smashed” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, 1991, note on verse 11).

Dibon (verse 18) was the Moabite capital from which King Mesha had ruled (2 Kings 3:4-27). It is clear that all of Moab’s strongholds are being destroyed—utterly humiliating this haughty people.

In verse 19 of Jeremiah 48, Aroer, “on the north bank of the Arnon [the river between Moab and Ammon], [is] a city of Ammon (Deut. 2:36; 3:12). As it was on ‘the way’ of the Moabites who fled into the desert, its inhabitants ‘ask’ what is the occasion of Moab’s flight, and so learn the lot that awaits themselves” (*JFB*, note on Jeremiah 48:19). Indeed, Ammon was next on the list for destruction, as chapter 49 shows.

Verses 20-25 of Jeremiah 48 give the answer to the question of what happened in verse 19—and that answer is from God (verse 25). Judgment is to come on the countryside (verse 21) and on “all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near” (verse 24). “He enumerates the Moabite cities at length.... Many of them were assigned to the Levites, while Israel stood” (note on verse 20). Bozrah in verse 24 “refers not to the capital of Edom, but to Bezer, one of the cities of refuge (see Josh. 20:8)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Jeremiah 48:21-25). “The piling up of name after name is designed to drive home the message of total judgment” (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verses 21-24). The “horn” and “arm” of Moab—symbols of power and strength—are to be broken.

The Moabites are to be made “drunk”—that is, “intoxicated with the cup of divine wrath, so as to be in helpless distraction” (*JFB*, note on verse 26). They are to be objects of scorn, just as they scorned the Israelites. God asks Moab, “Was she [Israel] caught among thieves, that you shake your head in scorn whenever you speak of her?” (verse 27, NIV). This is “proverbial. What did Israel do to deserve such derision? Was he detected in theft, that thou didst so exult over him in speaking of him? Though guilty before God, Israel was guiltless toward thee” (note on verse 27). No doubt, the

Palestinians of today would disagree—wrongly. Of course, it should be understood that the retribution on Moab is not mere “payback” for mistreating God’s favored nation, but rather God’s fair and equal treatment of all nations. No peoples will remain stiff-necked or arrogant before Him when He intervenes to judge the nations.

Verse 28 is a directive for those who “dwell in Moab” to leave the cities and dwell in “the rock.” Is this referring only to Moabites, or is it referring to non-Moabites in the region, possibly some of God’s people in the end time? Perhaps it refers to both—the directive being aimed at whoever will respond. The mention of “rock,” or *sela* in Hebrew, is no surprise since the nation of Jordan is certainly rocky terrain. And in the southern part of Jordan, in the area once occupied by Edomites, is the ancient abandoned *city* of Sela. Its Greek name Petra, by which it is still known, means the same thing—“Rock”—since dwellings, tombs and temples were carved out of the rock cliffs. Some have speculated, based on an interpretation of certain scriptures, about the possibility of Petra being the place of safety in the end time prophesied in Revelation 12:6. Yet at this time we can’t know for sure. Some possible interpretations and scenarios were covered in the commentary with Isaiah 16, where it appears to say that Moab will refuse to give refuge to God’s outcasts (though, as noted before, the wording there is somewhat ambiguous). In any case, God will undoubtedly show those of His people whom He intends to protect in the end time the way to safety at the right time.

The downside of even mentioning a place of future temporary refuge is that God’s people can be tempted to trust in getting to the *place*. The trust should only be in *God*, who, by His supernatural protection and provision, makes one place safer than others for a particular period of time. And a Christian’s focus should not be on physically saving his own neck, but on doing the work of God—“for in doing *this* you will [spiritually] save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:11-16; compare Matthew 16:24-27).

Returning to Jeremiah 48, we see the pride of Moab addressed in strong terms in verse 29—six times in this one verse. In verse 30, God speaks of Moab’s unjust wrath—and even lies. Therefore punishment must come. But this is no pleasure for God—He mourns over having to take such action (verse 31).

Kir Heres, “also called Kir Haraseth, (see 2 Kin. 3:25; Is. 16:11), may be a name for the capital city of Moab (Kir of Moab; see Is. 15:1)” (note on Jeremiah 48:30-33). Sibmah and Jazer (verse 32) are other Moabite cities built by the Israelites, as mentioned earlier. Verse 32 has been translated and interpreted in various ways, some seeing Jazer as a literal sea, perhaps the Dead Sea or Mediterranean, and some seeing it as a figurative sea of tears formed from the great weeping mentioned.

The cry from Heshbon to Elealeh and Jahaz (Jeremiah 48:34) is mentioned in Isaiah 15:4. The three-year-old heifer is mentioned in verse 5 (see previous Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 14:28–16:14). “My heart shall wail like flutes for Moab...for the men of Kir Heres” (Jeremiah 48:35) parallels “my heart shall resound like a harp for Moab...for Kir Heres” (Isaiah 16:11).

In Jeremiah 48:40 we see one flying like an eagle to overspread Moab—“not to bear them ‘on eagles’ wings’ (Exod. 19:4; Deut. 32:11, 12), as God does His people, but to pounce on them as a prey ([Jeremiah] 49:22; Deut. 28:49; Hab. 1:8)” (note on Jeremiah 48:40).

Verse 44 mentions “the year of their punishment.” Considering the related punishments of Ammon, Moab and Edom, this seems to tie very clearly to “the day of the LORD’S vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isaiah 34:8; compare 63:4). As already mentioned, this year of punishment is a reference to the end-time Day of the Lord, which culminates in the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

“In the shadow of Heshbon, the [Moabite] fugitives stand helpless” (Jeremiah 48:45, NIV). Indeed, it is all to no avail. The land will be devoured by fire. Again, while this may have had some application to the ancient Babylonian invasion, it is primarily speaking of the end time. Yet it should be noted that the end-time invader of Moab is not the final Babylon—for Ammon, Moab and Edom will escape from the hands of that imperialistic power (see Daniel 11:41).

Rather, the eagle who will pounce on Moab and destroy it is the returning Jesus Christ and a resurgent Israel. The “fire out of Heshbon” and “flame from the midst of Sihon” (Jeremiah 48:45) is a quote from Numbers 21:28 concerning the ancient Israelite destruction of Moab. Verse 46 of Jeremiah 48 is quoted from Numbers 21:29, regarding Israel’s ancient subjugation of Moab. Yet in Jeremiah these things are prophesied to happen in the future (compare also Isaiah 11:11-14). Making it even clearer, the devouring of the “brow of Moab, the crown of the head of the sons of tumult” (verse 45) is essentially quoted from the messianic prophecy God gave through Balaam: “A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the

sons of tumult” (Numbers 24:17). This unmistakably refers to the coming of the Messiah in mighty power—and provides a clear marker that these prophecies extend to the time of Christ’s return.

But that is not the ultimate end for Moab. While there is a seeming contradiction between verse 42 and verse 47, it is easily resolved. “Moab shall be destroyed as a people” (verse 42), “yet I [God] will bring back the captives of Moab in the latter days” (verse 47). Verse 42 must mean “a people” as a whole—a nation—and not every last person. Otherwise there would be no one to take into captivity (see verse 46). It is thus evident that when Moab is destroyed, there will be some survivors. This is consistent with what we have sometimes witnessed in modern warfare. Even in the horrific “ethnic cleansing” wars of late, some people survive.

Besides Isaiah 15–16, other prophecies concerning Moab may be found in Amos 2:1-3, Zephaniah 2:8-11, Isaiah 25:10-12 and Ezekiel 25:8-11.

### **Prophecy Against Ammon (Jeremiah 49:1-33)**

**July 14-15**

Continuing on from the prophecy against Moab in our previous reading, we move to Jeremiah’s prophecy against Moab’s brother nation, Ammon, which immediately follows in verses 1-6 of chapter 49.

The Ammonites lived just north of the ancient Moabites on the east side of the Jordan River. Today their descendants live primarily in the same area, the nation of Jordan and surroundings. Their ancient capital, “Rabbah of the Ammonites” (verse 2), is now the site of Jordan’s modern capital, Amman.

When Gad and the other Israelite tribes east of the Jordan were deported by the Assyrians, the Ammonites took over Gadite territory. God speaks in verse 1 of Milcom inheriting Gad. Milcom (Hebrew *Malcam*, “their king,” KJV) was the god of the Ammonites—another form of the name Molech (meaning “King”)—“essentially identical with the Moabite Chemosh” (“Molech,” *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, 1986). Thus, the comments regarding Chemosh in the highlights from our previous reading would also apply here. Indeed, Milcom is to suffer the exact same fate as Chemosh (compare Jeremiah 48:7; 49:3). To be sure, they are one and the same.

We see then that the Ammonites encroached on Israelite territory and set up their worship throughout it. Yet they were not Israel’s rightful heirs, as God points out in verse 1. “Judah was by the right of kindred the heir, not Ammon; but Ammon joined with Nebuchadnezzar against Judah and Jerusalem (II Kings 24:2) and exulted over its fall (Ps. 83:4-7, 8; Zeph. 2:8, 9)” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on Jeremiah 49:1).

So Ammon, like Moab in the previous chapter, will suffer destruction as punishment. While ancient invasion under Nebuchadnezzar may have been intended in part by the prophecy, it is clear that the primary fulfillment, as with the prophecy of the previous chapter, will occur during the Day of the Lord. Notice verse 2: “the days are coming...desolate...then Israel shall take possession of his inheritance” (not only the land originally given to Israel, but the land inhabited by the Ammonites). This certainly did not occur in the days of Nebuchadnezzar for Judah was then taken into captivity—and Israel, the northern 10 tribes, remained scattered. This prophecy will not be fulfilled until all the tribes of Israel are led back to the Promised Land (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more).

Heshbon in verse 3 “was at one time possessed by the Ammonites, but later lost to the Moabites” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 3). Today, as part of the Kingdom of Jordan, the area of Heshbon is under the dominion of Amman, the Jordanian capital. “Ai is not the Israelite city of the same name” (note on verse 3). “Since the word Ai means ‘ruin’ in Hebrew, the reference may be to Rabbah” (*The HarperCollins Study Bible*, 1993, note on verse 3).

Rather than the Ammonites boasting of “valleys,” verse 4 may be translated: “Why do you boast in your strength? Your strength is ebbing” (NRSV; see explanation in *The New Bible Commentary*, note on verse 4). And their vaunted “treasures” may simply be their “resources for resisting the foe” (*JFB*, note on verse 4). Certainly their trust is misplaced. God calls Ammon a “backsliding daughter” (verse 4), as the nation had departed from the faith of its forefather Lot, who worshiped the true God.

Despite the terrible destruction the Ammonites will suffer, God will not make a complete end of them. Rather, as with the Moabites, He will ultimately “bring back the captives of the people of Ammon” (verse 6; compare 48:47).

Other prophecies concerning Ammon may be found in Amos 1:13-15, Zephaniah 2:8-11, Ezekiel 21:28-32, and 25:1-7 and verse 10.

**Prophecy Against Edom (Jeremiah 49:1-33)****July 14-15 Cont'd**

Verses 7-22 of Jeremiah 49 are directed “against Edom,” the descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau who dwelt in the mountainous area south of Moab and Judah (see Genesis 25:30; 36:8). Sections of this passage are clearly adapted from the prophecy of Obadiah—which you may wish to reread at this point. Edom, the perennial enemy of Israel, will at last suffer judgment.

Commentaries generally explain that this prophecy of Edom in Jeremiah 49 (along with the prophecies against Moab, Ammon and Damascus) was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar’s armies invaded Judah and its neighbors around 586 B.C. Yet while Edom and other tribal nations were invaded and subjugated then, the main fulfillment of the prophecy will be “in that day” (verse 22)—language that consistently refers to the future Day of the Lord. Like Obadiah, this chapter concerns ultimate national punishment on Edom. God calls it “the calamity of Esau...*the time* that I will punish him” (Jeremiah 49:8). And that time is clearly revealed elsewhere, God declaring: “For My sword...shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse, for judgment.... For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah [the capital of Edom], and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.... For it is the day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isaiah 34:5-8; compare 63:1, 4). Thus, the time frame is the year that ends with the return of Jesus Christ.

God is going to repay the people of Edom for the evil way they have historically treated Israel (see Obadiah 10). Today, as mentioned in the Bible Reading Program commentary on Obadiah, Edomites continue to dwell in various parts of the Middle East, including Jordan and Turkey. It is likely that many of today’s Palestinians are Edomites in whole or in part. Furthermore, there is apparently a growing Edomite presence in many nations of Europe due to Muslim immigration from the Middle East and North Africa while Turkey is actively seeking membership in the European Union, which ultimately may help to explain some similarities between prophecies against end-time Edom and end-time Babylon.

Teman (Jeremiah 49:7) was a principal descendant of Esau (see Genesis 36:9-11) and is believed to be “the name of a town in Edom, sometimes used as the name of the northern half of the nation of Edom; here it probably stands for the whole nation” (*Word in Life Bible*, 1998, note on Jeremiah 49:7). The “wisdom” (or cunning, as the Hebrew could also be translated) for which Teman (or Edom) is known will quickly evaporate (verse 7; compare Obadiah 8).

The inhabitants of Dedan will be put to flight (Jeremiah 49:8)—Dedan being “the name of a town in northwest Arabia, also used of the northwest region of Arabia along the Red Sea” (note on verse 8).

Verse 9 is adapted from Obadiah 5. Those gathering grapes or even thieves would take their fill. But God would go way beyond this. Edom would be utterly laid bare, completely plundered of everything and everyone (Jeremiah 49:10; Obadiah 6).

There is some confusion as to whether anyone will even be left alive of Edom. Many Bible versions have God telling Esau in verse 11 that He will preserve the children and widows. Yet Obadiah 18 says, “The house of Edom shall be stubble...and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau.” If Jeremiah 49:11 means that children and widows will survive, then Obadiah 18 would only be referring to the men being killed. But the verse doesn’t appear to read that way. Furthermore, while God promises to return the captives of Moab and Ammon (Jeremiah 48:47; 49:6), no such provision is made for Edom. And other versions, it should be considered, translate Jeremiah 49:11 differently. In the Revised English Bible, God is shown *asking*, “Am I to keep alive your fatherless children? Are your widows to depend on me?” The implicit answer in this rendering is no. And, for another possibility, notice the end of verse 10 and verse 11 in the Jerusalem Bible: “His race is destroyed: it is no more! Of his neighbors, not one will say, ‘Leave your orphans, I will keep them alive, your widows can rely on me.’”

Verse 12 concerns the cup of divine wrath, imagery that is also used in 25:15-29. Going to this other passage, we can see more clearly what God means in 49:12. He is declaring that if His own people Israel and Judah, and His holy city Jerusalem in particular, had to drink from the cup of wrath—that is, suffer divine judgment—then Edom, who was even guiltier, would *certainly* have to (compare 25:28-29).

Verses 14-16 of Jeremiah 49 are adapted from Obadiah 1-4. Note Jeremiah 49:16: “O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill,” with a “nest as high as the eagle.” The “clefts of the rock” may refer to Petra, mentioned in the highlights for our previous reading, and perhaps other rock fortresses. High above Petra and on other mountains of Edom were high places for worship, lookouts and refuge. “Some of the mountain peaks of Edom reach over six

thousand feet; Jerusalem [by comparison] is about 2,300 feet above sea level” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Obadiah 3). Yet the Edomites would be brought down—not just physically, but figuratively from their exalted prideful arrogance (Obadiah 4; Jeremiah 49:16).

Indeed, Edom will be devastated—“all its cities shall be perpetual wastes.... as in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities” (verses 13, 18). The same is prophesied elsewhere of Moab and Ammon (Zephaniah 2:9). Interestingly, the territory of Ammon, Moab and Edom—modern Jordan—is believed to be where these ancient cities were located.

The translation of Jeremiah 49:19 is uncertain, as there is widespread disagreement among commentaries and Bible versions as to exactly what is meant. The prophecy against Babylon in the next chapter contains almost the exact same statement (50:44), again perhaps demonstrating some kind of tie between end-time Edom and end-time Babylon. In both prophecies, it is not clear who is doing what and who is speaking. Look again at the New King James rendering in chapter 49. Contrast that with the Moffatt Translation, which has God saying, “Like shepherds when the lion leaves the jungle of Jordan for the pasture, I will chase them [the Edomites in this case] away suddenly, and seize their rarest rams. Who can match me? Who dare challenge me? What shepherd can face me?” On the other hand, the Ferrar Fenton Translation presents this as a boast of, in this instance, Edom: “See he [Edom] was like a lion coming up from the swelling of Jordan to the permanent meadows: ‘I will be sly with them,’ he says, ‘I will assail from behind them—what hero can defend them? For who is equal to me, and who expects me? And what shepherd can stand before me?’”

Whatever the case, God is going to bring ruin on Edom: “The young of the flock will be dragged off, and their pasture will be aghast at their fate” (verse 20, REB). A great earthquake will accompany Edom’s fall (verse 21), parallel with other prophecies of Christ’s return (compare Isaiah 24:17-21; Zechariah 14:4-5; Revelation 16:18-20). The “He” who comes up “like the eagle” to “spread His wings over Bozrah” (Jeremiah 49:22) is the returning Jesus Christ coming to strike—just as in 48:40, as explained in the comments on our previous reading.

Of course, as was noted in the Bible Reading Program highlights on Obadiah, even if Edom is totally wiped out at Christ’s second coming, as appears likely, the Edomites will be raised to physical life and opportunity for salvation in the second resurrection, 1,000 years later (see Revelation 20:5, 11-12; Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-42). All of God’s actions, we must keep in mind, work toward the ultimate good of all mankind. Even His punishment of the Edomites will work toward *their* eventual repentance, whenever that may be.

Besides Obadiah, other prophecies concerning Edom may be found in Amos 1:11-12, Isaiah 21:11-12, 34:1-17, 63:1-6, Ezekiel 25:12-14 and 35:1-15.

### **Prophecies Against Damascus and Arabia (Jeremiah 49:1-33)**

**July 14-15 Cont’d**

Jeremiah 49:23-33 is directed “against Damascus,” the metropolitan capital of Syria representing the nation as a whole. Syria, north of the land of Israel, was usually a hostile neighbor to ancient Israel and Judah, and today *remains* a hostile neighbor to the modern Jewish state of Israel.

The Assyrians had destroyed the Aramaean kingdom of Damascus around the same time the northern kingdom of Israel fell—and the Syrians were taken captive to the north. But the resettled city survived—and it is the city, along with the territory under its control, that Jeremiah addresses.

Hamath and Arpad “were major towns located west and north of the capital of Damascus” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 23-25). They are still under the rule of Damascus, which remains the capital of Syria.

“Trouble on the sea,” which “cannot be quiet,” may refer to an invasion of Syria’s Mediterranean coast from the sea. This did not happen in Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion, which came from the east. It may even be a direct end-time reference: “And there will be...on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectations of those things which are coming on the earth” (Luke 21:25-26). Yet some read Jeremiah 49:23 as simply meaning that those on the seacoast—or “at the sea” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on verse 23)—are, like those in other listed parts of Syria, experiencing unrest over the prospect of imminent invasion. In any case, the once-mighty Syria will be paralyzed with fear and anguish (verse 24).

Damascus, formerly “the city of praise” (verse 25), will be destroyed “in that day” (verse 26)—referring, we may reasonably conclude, to the Day of the Lord. This is even more clearly seen in verse 27. It is adapted from Amos 1:4, which appears to be part of an end-time prophecy (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Amos 1 and 2). “Ben-Hadad,” it should be recalled, was a title used by a number of Syrian rulers.

Besides Amos 1:3-5, other prophecies of Syria are found in Isaiah 17:1-3 and Zechariah 9:1-4.

The message of Jeremiah 49:28-33 is “against Kedar [son of Ishmael, father of the Arabs] and against the kingdoms of Hazor...[who are] men of the East” (verse 28). These are people who dwell in tents, shepherd flocks and ride camels. Hazor here is not the more famous city of this name in northern Israel. Meaning “Enclosure,” this name was given to a number of towns (e.g., see Joshua 15:21-25). The *JFB Commentary* explains that the Hazor of Jeremiah 49 was “not the city in Palestine, but a district in Arabia Petraea. ‘Kingdoms’ refer to the several combinations of clans, each under its own sheikh” (note on verse 28). The same commentary note says “the Kedarenes led a wandering predatory life in Arabia Petraea, as the Bedouin Arabs.” As was mentioned in the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 21:13-17, the entry on “Kedar” in *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* states, “The tribe seems to have been one of the most conspicuous of all the Ishmaelite tribes, and hence the rabbis call the Arabians universally by this name.”

In verses 28 and 30 of Jeremiah 49, specific mention is made of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon as the instrument of punishment. This is a major reason many Bible scholars and commentators think that attacks by Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled all the prophecies from Jeremiah 47:1–49:33—prophecies against the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Syrians and Arabians. However, as has been explained, most of the prophecies in this section have not yet been ultimately fulfilled. In that context, it may even be that while the prophecy against the Arabians definitely applied to Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion, as that is clearly stated, it may also be dual. That is, Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion may be presented here as a forerunner of latter-day events to be ultimately fulfilled, as with the other prophecies, in the direct intervention of Jesus Christ during the Day of the Lord.

Interestingly, the concept of a modern day “Nebuchadnezzar” is still very much alive in the minds of Muslims. Saddam Hussein portrayed himself as such a leader. Before him, the Shah of Iran attempted to reestablish the ancient Persian Empire through modern military might. While neither man fulfilled his personal vision, this kind of thinking should remind us that while ancient biblical prophecies may seem anachronistic and in no way pertinent to our time, they contain much that is still quite relevant in the present-day Middle East.

The Arabian sheiks are described as wealthy and secure (49:31)—yet without gates or bars (probably referring to the fact that the waterless desert provides a barrier of protection). Yet God will bring “fear on every side” (see verse 29)—a common theme in Jeremiah’s prophecies (see 6:25; 20:3 margin, verse 10; 46:5; 49:5)—and then actual “*calamity* from all its sides” (49:32).

What do all the ethnic groups addressed in Jeremiah 47:1–49:33 have in common? Historically they have usually been aggressively anti-Israel, often fighting the Israelites to destroy them and steal the land God gave His people—and the same is true today. Furthermore, in their fervor for the Islamic faith, they oppose the religion of the Bible and its adherents—often violently. God will eventually take action against the enemies of Israel (i.e., of the physical descendants of Israel and of spiritual Israel, the Church), and against all those who oppose His Word.

### Message Regarding the New King

**(2 Chronicles 36:9; 2 Kings 24:8-9; Jeremiah 22:24–23:40)**

**July 16-17**

When Josiah’s son Jehoiakim died in 598 B.C. after an evil reign of 11 years (2 Kings 23:36-37; 2 Chronicles 36:5), Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin—also known as Jeconiah (1 Chronicles 3:16-17; Jeremiah 28:4; 29:2; Matthew 1:11-12) or simply Coniah (Jeremiah 22:24, 28)—was crowned king of Judah.

But here we encounter what appears to be a contradiction. The Chronicles version of the story says that Jeconiah was eight years old when he began to reign, whereas the 2 Kings version says eighteen. Which was it? The archaeological and biblical evidence proves that he had to be much older than eight at the time he took over the rule of Judah and reigned for three months (from December 598 through March 597 B.C.). For he had at least five children while a captive in Babylon only five years later, as mentioned on a Babylonian ration receipt (see *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, notes on 2 Chronicles 36:7, 9). And “the scriptural descriptions of Jehoiachin seem to represent him as a mature young man (Jer. 22:24-30; Ezek. 19:6)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 2 Kings 24:8).

The answer is probably fairly simple. Jeconiah was no doubt 18 when he succeeded his father in 598 B.C. Ten years earlier, at the age of 8 in 608 B.C., his father must have installed him as coregent—probably just in name rather than critical function, so as to perpetuate the dynasty in the event the whirlwind of events removed Jehoiakim from the throne (as Jehoiakim’s brother Jehoahaz had been removed the previous year, 609 B.C.). A coregency of Jehoiakim and Jeconiah could explain why Jeremiah addresses the “kings” of Judah in Jeremiah 17:19-20. But as Jeconiah likely

assumed no actual power until his father died, he is credited with a reign of only the three months rather than 10 years.

As king, Jeconiah follows in the footsteps of his father—continuing in evil rather than turning to God (even though Nebuchadnezzar is in the process of mobilizing his forces against Jerusalem during Jeconiah’s entire three-month reign, as we will later see). Since Jeconiah’s mother Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem, is mentioned prominently, including the fact that she would and later did suffer deportation with her son (2 Kings 24:8, 12; Jeremiah 22:26-27; 29:2; 13:18), it seems likely that she wields considerable influence over the young ruler. As earlier noted, Nehushta’s father is probably the same Elnathan mentioned elsewhere as the son of Achbor, the official in the administration of Jehoiakim who apprehended Urijah the prophet but later tried to talk Jehoiakim out of burning the scroll of Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 26:21-23; 36:12, 25).

In Jeremiah 22, God’s message regarding Jeconiah quickly moves from third person (verse 24a) to second person—addressing the king directly (verses 24b-26). God tells Jeconiah that even if he were the signet ring on God’s right hand, “the most important private possession bearing the owner’s mark and authority” (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verses 24-30), God would still pluck him off and hand him over to others. Continued rebellion against God by Judah’s rulers would be tolerated no longer. Jeconiah and his mother would soon be carried captive to Babylon (verses 25-26). Switching back to third person in verse 27, we are told that “they”—Jeconiah and his mother—will not return to the land of Judah.

In verse 28, Jeconiah is described as a “broken idol.” The Jews idolized their Davidic ruler, likely expecting him to save them from the Babylonians. Yet Jeconiah himself would be taken captive to Babylon. In verse 30, God declares him “childless”—which is qualified by what follows, as Jeconiah actually had seven sons (1 Chronicles 3:17-18; compare Matthew 1:12). Indeed, in the same verse God says Jeconiah would have “descendants” (Jeremiah 22:30). But they, like him, would not “prosper” as a king. They were, in effect, banned from the throne of David. Thus, it was only in regard to the throne that Jeconiah was to be regarded as childless.

It should be mentioned that though Jesus Christ, the ultimate heir of David’s throne, “was lineally descended from Jeconiah [see Matthew 1], it was only through Joseph, who, though His legal, was not His real father. Matthew gives the legal pedigree through Solomon down to Joseph; Luke the real pedigree, from Mary, the real parent, through Nathan, brother of Solomon, upwards (Luke 3:31)” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on Jeremiah 22:29-30). We will look more closely at these genealogies later in the Bible Reading Program.

### “Woe to the Shepherds”

#### (2 Chronicles 36:9; 2 Kings 24:8-9; Jeremiah 22:24–23:40)

July 16-17 Cont’d

While Jeremiah 23 may constitute a separate prophecy, it is also possible that it follows right on from chapter 22. Chapter 22 decried the three failed Davidic rulers who followed Josiah, ending with Jeconiah. Chapter 23 begins with a message of “woe to the shepherds,” the *leaders*, of God’s “sheep,” His people (verse 1), and then speaks of the future King of the line of David who finally *will* save Judah and set things right (verses 5-8).

In verses 1-2 the leaders, both civil and religious, bear a huge responsibility for driving God’s people away from Him, which is why the people are driven from the land and scattered into distant parts. The leaders have failed to “attend to” or take care of the people—so God will take care of *them* (that is, in an altogether different sense). The prophet Ezekiel would later convey a very similar message from God concerning the wayward shepherds of His people (see Ezekiel 34).

Verses 3-8 of Jeremiah 23 are parallel with 3:14-18. Eventually, God would gather a “remnant” of His flock, bringing them “back to their folds,” and appoint new, caring shepherds for them (verses 3-4). This would be fulfilled in part when a small remnant of the Jewish people later returned from Babylonian captivity—the shepherds being Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel and others. There would be a later fulfillment through the Church of God as the “remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5)—the shepherds being Jesus Christ and His true ministers (the word “pastor” actually means shepherd). And, of course, the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy is when Jesus Christ takes over the world at His return, when all people—including a regathered Israel—will be governed and taught by Him, His glorified saints and spiritually converted human leaders.

In Jeremiah 23:5, the “Branch” from David’s genealogical tree is the Messiah, Jesus Christ (see also 33:14-16; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1-5; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12). The mention of both Judah and Israel in Jeremiah 23:6-7 makes it clear that this is an end-time prophecy—referring exclusively to the return of Christ in power and glory to rule all nations. Verses 7-8 explain that the great “Second Exodus” of

the house of Israel (compare 3:18; Isaiah 11:11-16) will surpass even the ancient Exodus from Egypt (compare Jeremiah 16:14-15). This is certainly not referring to the small Jewish return from Babylonian captivity in the sixth century B.C. Instead, it is clearly speaking of a great and awesome return that is yet future.

The rest of Jeremiah 23 contains a scathing denunciation of the religious shepherds of God's people: "For both prophet and priest are profane" (verse 11). The same is true today. The word "prophet," it should be pointed out, can simply mean preacher, especially in the New Testament. In other words, "prophet" refers to those who *foretell* the future and those who *forthtell* God's truth—that is, who preach and teach it according to His direction. Yet not all who claim to represent God actually do—in fact, most don't.

There is one true God, who reveals divine truth, and calls a relatively few to be His followers, prophets and ministers. But the world has always been filled with many counterfeit and alternative religions and religious leaders. If a false religion teaches some good values and good works, it is still damaging in an overall sense because any false religion ultimately deprives its followers of a genuinely committed and close relationship with God and the *one* path that leads to eternal life. Compounding the evil is the utter blasphemy and disgrace of leaders who claim to represent God while setting examples of corrupt and immoral behavior, implying that such conduct is *God's* nature or that it is acceptable to Him. God is outraged when people claim to be His spokesmen when they are anything but—living and preaching totally contrary to His will (compare Matthew 15:1-9).

Beginning with Jeremiah 23:9, Jeremiah's conscientious character and compassionate personality are shown. He reels in shock and misery as if drunk at the harmful message of the false prophets and because of the judgment God has proclaimed for his countrymen. Terrible droughts continue (compare verse 10; 12:4; 14:1-6) because the land, Jeremiah says, "is full of adulterers" (verse 10). And no wonder, for the spiritual leaders themselves "commit adultery" (verse 14). "This term could apply to those who practiced immoral sexual behavior, those who committed spiritual adultery by pursuing other gods, and those who were involved in cultic prostitution" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 9-10).

The deplorable situation God addresses here through Jeremiah certainly existed in the prophet's day—and the message was clearly applicable to that time. But there are indications that the message was also, even primarily, for the end time. While "the year of their punishment" (verse 12) may have referred in part to the year of ancient Jerusalem's fall, 586 B.C., the primary fulfillment, we may ascertain from verse 20, was to come in "the latter days." Surprisingly, the end-time *year* of punishment usually refers to the final Day of the Lord, *after* the time of "Jacob's trouble" (30:7), when God punishes the *enemies* of Israel. Perhaps God views the false prophets in Jeremiah 23, who represent spiritual Babylon, as Israel's enemies. Verse 12 may mean that they will suffer through the darkness of the Great Tribulation to meet with final disaster in the Day of the Lord. In verse 20, God says that we would understand all of this *perfectly* in the latter days (other translations say "clearly"). But *do* we—even though it appears we are in the latter days? Verse 20 seems more likely to mean that after these things are actually *fulfilled* in the latter days, *then* we will understand perfectly.

Part of Jeremiah 23:15 is a reiteration of 9:15, where God decreed punishment for following false religion (see verses 13-14). And the false prophets are the *source* of this abomination.

The false prophets basically told the people what they wanted to hear, which was, "You shall have peace" (verse 17). The people did not appreciate Jeremiah telling them otherwise—and people still don't want to hear what God actually says. Ironically, this runs counter to the main reason for prophecy. Verse 22 highlights an important truth: the primary purpose of a prophet of God was not to merely foretell the future, but to *turn the hearers "from their evil way and from the evil of their doings."* Instead, these prophets shamefully "cause [God's] people to err by their lies and by their recklessness" (verse 32)—shrugging off any damage they may be doing. Rather than delivering God's messages, they "steal [God's] words every one from his neighbor" (verse 30). That is, they plagiarize each other and often take God's actual words (those in Scripture being the prime example) and twist them to suit their own messages.

From verse 33 to the end of the chapter, God is warning them not to mock Jeremiah, sarcastically asking him, "What is the sad news from God today?" Jeremiah's experiences are sobering because they give us insight into the hostile resistance God's Church can anticipate as its end-time warning message becomes stronger and more and more people become aware of it.

**The Waistband and the Wine Jugs (Jeremiah 13)****July 18**

We turn back now to chapter 13 of Jeremiah, as most of what it describes—starting in verse 6 and continuing to the end of the chapter—appears to fall during the three-month reign of the 18-year-old Jeconiah, who was apparently heavily guided in his rule by his mother Nehushta (compare verse 18; 22:24-27; 29:2; 2 Kings 24:8, 12). The events of the first five verses of Jeremiah 13, however, likely happened during the reign of Jeconiah's father Jehoiakim, as we will see—perhaps soon after the events of chapters 11 and 12.

God starts out telling Jeremiah to obtain a linen “girdle” (13:1, KJV). There is a difference of opinion as to exactly what this piece of clothing was. Many say the Hebrew here should be translated belt. Some say sash. Others contend that a waistcloth, or loincloth, is meant. Still others argue for a skirt or kilt, or even shorts. It is not clear whether the girdle was decorative outerwear or an undergarment. What is clear is that it was worn around the waist (verses 2, 4, 11). This was to symbolize Israel and Judah, which God had bound to Himself by covenant—and which relied on clinging to God's very being to be “held up,” so to speak (compare verse 11).

The waistband would also have been valuable. All of this was fitting symbolism for Israel and Judah. “Linen was a costly material (Is 3.23, 24), often imported from Egypt (Pr 7.16). The Israelites generally reserved its use for making exquisite furnishings, such as those in the sacred tent [the tabernacle] (Ex 26.1, 31, 13), and fine garments, such as those worn by the priests (28.39) or a favored person (Es 8.15; Ez 16.10.13)” (“A Waste of Fine Material,” *The Word in Life Bible*, sidebar on Jeremiah 13:1-11). Israel, rescued from Egypt and supported by God, was to be a special treasure and chosen priesthood. The waistband was not supposed to get wet (verse 1), as this would cause it to begin deteriorating.

God then instructs Jeremiah to take the waistband to the River Euphrates (Hebrew *Perath*) far to the north and hide it in a hole. “This would have meant a round-trip journey of some seven hundred miles—a trip that would have taken two to three months” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 3-5). And Jeremiah ends up going twice. Not believing that the prophet would have left his responsibilities in Judah for so long, some commentators argue that *Perath* should in this instance be rendered Ephrathah (another name for Bethlehem) or Parah (a town of Benjamin, Joshua 18:23), both of which were quite near Jerusalem. Yet the Euphrates seems far more likely.

First of all, *Perath* normally denotes the Euphrates in Scripture. The objection that Jeremiah would not have left his duties for so long is improper reasoning since his duty would always be to go where God told him. Consider also that Jeremiah preached for many, many years in Judah—so an absence of a few months is not at all unreasonable. God could even have supernaturally sped up Jeremiah's journey if time was a factor.

Most important, however, is the *symbolism* of the Euphrates. The land promised to Israel actually extended all the way to the Euphrates (Exodus 23:31; Deuteronomy 11:24)—and reached as far in the days of David and Solomon (2 Samuel 8:3, 6; 1 Kings 4:21, 24). *Beyond* the Euphrates was the territory of the Mesopotamian powers—previously Assyria and now Babylon. The Euphrates itself was the crossing point. The “hiding” of the waistband there would seem to imply God's people seeking refuge and help from the powers of Mesopotamia. This was true of their national alliances. It was also true religiously, since the false gods the people worshiped originated in Babylon. The people of Israel were ultimately taken beyond the Euphrates themselves—in captivity. And the same would soon befall the people of Judah.

(Interestingly, the Euphrates continues to play a part in Bible prophecy right to the end of the age of mankind—see Revelation 16:12-14.)

The expression “after many days” in Jeremiah 13:6 could actually mean that Jeremiah didn't return to the Euphrates until years later. If a few months of travel were required for the journey, the events of the first part of the chapter must have happened prior to Jeconiah's three-month reign—thus sometime during his father's reign.

Spending years in a hole by a river—far away from its owner—there was no way the waistband would not get wet and dirty and thus suffer damage. Indeed, Jeremiah finds it rotted and worthless. This parallels what happened to Israel and Judah: “Rather than clinging to the Lord, the people chose to worship idols (13:10). They became as useless to God as Jeremiah's rotten linen belt was to him. The processes in [the physical realm of] creation often parallel the realities of the spiritual realm. Spiritual decay may not be as obvious as the damage of moisture to buried cloth, but the results are even worse.... Jeremiah's ruined belt still paints a vivid picture of our ruined condition [when we fail

to cling to God and His ways]" ("INDepth: Jeremiah's Symbolic Acts, *Nelson Study Bible*, sidebar on Jeremiah 13).

God then tells Jeremiah to say to the people, "Every wine jug is to be filled with wine"—to which the people basically respond, "Of course they are" (compare verse 12). Commentators believe the statement Jeremiah made was a proverb of the time. Some think it meant "good times ahead"—and that the complacent Jews were saying they already knew this (indeed, the false prophets had told them so). Yet it may also be that the statement was a proverb denoting a truism—that wine jugs were made to hold wine. Either way, the common understanding of this proverb was not what God meant by it. He meant that the people, as the wine jugs, were going to be filled with His wrath until they reeled as if drunk: "As wine intoxicates, so God's wrath and judgments shall reduce them to that state of helpless distraction that they shall rush on to their own ruin (ch. 25:15; 49:12; Isa. 51:17, 21, 22; 63:6)" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on Jeremiah 13:12).

In verse 17, we again see Jeremiah's tremendous heart of feeling. As bold as his pronouncements have been, he knows he will deeply lament with weeping when his countrymen are carried away captive.

We then see a message for the king and queen mother (verse 18)—again, most likely Jeconiah and Nehushta. They would be exiled to Babylon very soon. The mention of the "cities of the South" in Judah (verse 19) is evidently to point out that even these—though located the farthest away from northern invasion (see verse 20)—will be shut up in a siege that no one will break. And *all* Judah—the whole land—will be taken captive.

The nation will be stripped of her people and violated (verses 20-22, 26). God depicts the sins of Jerusalem as a prostitute that has no shame—sentenced for adultery and immorality, having forgotten Him to whom they were bound by covenant and trusting in false idols (verses 25, 27).

God speaks a now-famous proverb in verse 23—concerning Ethiopian skin color and leopard spots—that implies people cannot change their character and live rightly. "Habit is second nature...it is morally impossible that the Jews can alter their inveterate habits of sin" (*JFB*, note on verse 23). Yet notice God's remarkable statement at the end of the chapter: "Woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?" (verse 27). The fact is, while the Jews were incapable of transforming themselves into people of right character, they actually could "*be made clean*"—through the miraculous power of God. Yet they had to respond to Him and cling to Him for this to happen. But alas, they did not.

The same situation remains true for everyone. While the normal human mind is hostile against God and cannot be subject to His law (Romans 8:7), through the transforming power of God we can be changed. Indeed, we *must* be changed. That is the message of the whole Bible.

## **The Second Babylonian Deportation and the Reign of Zedekiah**

**(2 Kings 24:10-20; 2 Chronicles 36:10-16; Jeremiah 52:1-3; 24:1-10)**

**July 19-20**

Nebuchadnezzar returns to Jerusalem "at the turn of the year" (2 Chronicles 36:10), near the spring equinox, "in the eighth year of his reign" (2 Kings 24:12)—that is, in March of 597 B.C. (his first year according to Jewish reckoning being September 605–September 604 B.C.). Jeconiah's time as king of Judah is up.

"After replacing his father on the throne of David, Jehoiachin [Jeconiah] evidently maintained an anti-Babylonian posture that immediately brought Nebuchadnezzar's stern reaction. After only three months in power Jehoiachin found his city surrounded by the Babylonian hosts and he quickly capitulated. This time the royal family was deported along with other leading citizens including Ezekiel the prophet. The cream of Judah's military force and her most skillful craftsmen also had to abandon their land and homes to go into exile. Finally, Nebuchadnezzar helped himself once more to the temple treasures and carried them back to Babylon as a sign of his complete success" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 452).

The Babylonians were prolific recorders of their accomplishments. Among some 300 cuneiform tablets unearthed near modern Baghdad, one Babylonian chronicle was found paralleling the biblical account of Nebuchadnezzar's sacking of Jerusalem and capture of its monarch in 2 Kings 24:10-17.

"Here is the Babylonian version: 'Year 7 {of Nebuchadnezzar [according to Babylonian reckoning]}. In the month of Kislev {December 598}, the king of Babylonia mobilized his troops and marched to the west [showing that he began his assault as soon as Jeconiah assumed the throne]. He encamped against the city of Judah {Jerusalem}, and on the second of Adar {March 16, 597}, he captured the city and seized {its} king. A king of his choice he appointed there; he to{ok} its heavy tribute and carried it off to Babylon.

“The corroboration of the biblical text by the records of Israel’s ancient foe is unmistakable, and a bit ironic,” writes *U.S. News & World Report* religion writer Jeffery Sheler. “Until a century ago, it was commonly claimed by skeptics in the biblical academy that Nebuchadnezzar had never existed—that he was yet another of the Bible’s legendary figures invented for propaganda purposes. But then the German archaeologist Robert Koldewey, excavating in Iraq beginning in 1899, came upon the ruins of Nebuchadnezzar’s magnificent palace complex, the famed temple of Marduk, and the remains of the Ishtar gate [now in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin]—as well as numerous inscriptions, statues, and stelae from the ancient Babylonian empire. At once, Nebuchadnezzar ceased to be a fictional foil in a supposed Hebrew mythology; archaeology had affirmed him as a true historical figure. And now the royal records of this ancient enemy of the Israelites are adding testimony to the accuracy of the Bible as it relates this important chapter of Israel’s history. This reversal once again shows the capacity of archaeology to turn the skeptical suppositions of biblical scholarship upside down” (*Is the Bible True?*, 1999, p. 137).

Returning to the scriptural account, it is clear that Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion is a devastating blow to the nation. While the first deportation of Jews to Babylon, which included Daniel and his friends, was quite small, this one is major—involving a substantial portion of Jerusalem. The Babylonian emperor, we are told, takes all but the poor captive (2 Kings 24:14; compare Jeremiah 27:20; 29:2). “This method of eliminating leaders and leaving the peasant population to pay taxes to the kingdom was learned from the Assyrians and was designed to reduce the likelihood of rebellion” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 2). The beginning of 2 Kings 24:20 sums up this episode and all that would soon transpire: “It was because of the LORD’s anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence” (NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar removes Jeconiah and his mother from power and places Josiah’s remaining son Mattaniah—Jeconiah’s uncle—on the throne, renaming him Zedekiah as a demonstration of the emperor’s supremacy. As with Necho’s replacement of Jehoahaz with Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar keeps the Jewish kingship within the royal family of David rather than introducing a new dynasty. This was a smart move on both occasions, as the people would not have accepted a non-Davidic ruler and it maintained the façade of Jewish self-rule, which helped to prevent uprising. More importantly, of course, God’s overseeing direction in keeping His promise to David was certainly a factor.

Mattaniah’s new name Zedekiah meant “Yahweh Is Righteousness.” *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary* says, “This being a purely Hebrew name, it seems that [Nebuchadnezzar] allowed the puppet king to choose his own name, which was confirmed” (note on 2 Kings 24:17). If that’s so, it’s interesting to recall that Jeremiah had prophesied that, after Jeconiah (Jeremiah 22:24-30), a “Branch of righteousness” would come from David’s house to save Judah (23:5-6) called “Yahweh Our Righteousness” (see verse 6). Could it be that Mattaniah, probably with the help of advisers, intentionally chose a name meaning something very close to that? In other words, might Mattaniah have co-opted Jeremiah’s prophecy to set himself up as a messianic figure to inspire popular support? It is certainly a possibility.

But the people had difficulty accepting him as the true king, much less anything beyond that. “Though ‘he reigned in Jerusalem,’ the fact that seals have been discovered with the inscription ‘Eliakim steward of Yaukin [Jehoiachin or Jeconiah]’ indicates that, at the least, his nephew Jehoiakin continued to wield influence as a recognized possessor, even if an absentee one, of royal property and, at the most, that Zedekiah may have ruled to some extent as a regent for his exiled predecessor” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on 2 Chronicles 36:11).

“Though Zedekiah, Jehoiachin’s uncle and Josiah’s son, was left as puppet ruler of Judah, it is clear that the Jewish people regarded Jehoiachin as the true scion of David until the day of his death. He never returned to Jerusalem, it is true, but after long years as a political prisoner in Babylon he was placed on a government pension and apparently was treated more as an honored guest of Babylon than as her prisoner (2 Kings 25:27-30). It must have seemed to the exilic Jewish community that the time would surely come when Jehoiachin would lead them back triumphantly to Jerusalem and restore the former glory of the house of David” (Merrill, p. 452). Yet this was utterly foolish, considering that God had banned Jeconiah and his descendants from inheriting David’s throne (Jeremiah 22:24-30).

In any event Zedekiah was “king *de facto* of whatever was left of Judah in 597” (Merrill, p. 452). Indeed, he was more than that, for God’s decree against Jeconiah made Zedekiah the legitimate successor of David *despite* what the people thought or desired. Yet the stubborn and faithless Zedekiah does not heed God, propagating 11 more years of wicked rule. “Evil like his brothers, he paid no attention to the admonishings of Jeremiah the prophet to accept Babylonian suzerainty as

the will of God [as we will see in upcoming readings]. Rather, he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, thus inviting sure and swift disaster. The date of this rebellion cannot be determined” (Merrill, p. 452)—but it was sometime between 593 and 588 B.C., as we will see. The Jewish king’s rebellion is utter defiance, not merely against the Babylonian king, but also against God and His prophet (2 Chronicles 36:12)—doubly so since Zedekiah took an *oath in God’s name* that he would *not* rebel against Babylon (verse 13).

This all spells disaster for the king—and for the Jewish nation. The end would come soon.

## **The Two Baskets of Figs (2 Kings 24:10-20;**

### **2 Chronicles 36:10-16; Jeremiah 52:1-3; 24:1-10)**

**July 19-20 Cont’d**

God had a plan in allowing some of the Jews to go into exile while allowing others to remain in Jerusalem. To make clear to Jeremiah and others what He was doing, God gave the prophet a vision of two baskets of figs (Jeremiah 24), one filled with good, ripe figs and the other with foul, rotten ones.

Through the image of the good figs, God explained to Jeremiah that He was providing a place of refuge for those who would later be able to return to Him with a right heart. As we’ll later read, the exiles were given the opportunity to prosper in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:4-7). At the time of the second deportation, Daniel had already been in Babylonian exile for eight years and was by now entrusted with enormous responsibility in the empire. No doubt he was able to wield considerable influence with regard to the Jewish exiles—including their treatment, settlement, employment, education, etc. An important lesson for us here is that God doesn’t just act impulsively, but *plans* for the future—in this case placing Daniel in Babylon first and promoting him to a position of high authority ahead of the arrival of the remaining exiles.

The bad figs represented those such as Zedekiah and the other leaders of Judah who were rebellious and stubborn. Left behind in Jerusalem (or in Egypt), they would ultimately be destroyed. Concerning those who “dwell in the land of Egypt” (24:8) there is some debate. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* contends: “To understand them as those involved in the events of chapters 43 and 44 [when a sizable remnant of Judah later flees to Egypt following Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Judah in 586 B.C.] is to leap too far ahead in the narrative of the book” (note on 24:8). Yet the statement could certainly mean this, as it was a prophecy. However, there are other possibilities.

*Expositor’s* continues: “A number of scholars suggest that those living in Egypt were Jews who were deported with Jehoahaz to Egypt by Pharaoh Neco (cf. 2 Kings 23:31-34). Others suggest that they were emigrants who were opposed to the Babylonian domination of Judah or fled to Egypt at the first approach of Nebuchadnezzar. Another proposal is that they were fugitives from Judah who went to Egypt during various wars. Since details are lacking, it is impossible to rule out those probabilities. Archaeological research does, however, reveal that those who remained in Egypt set up a rival temple later on” (same note). Perhaps God intended all of these groups.

Jeremiah 24 concludes with a warning of the ominous cycle of sword, famine and pestilence also mentioned elsewhere (verse 10; see Jeremiah 14:12; 27:8, 13; 29:17-18; 1 Kings 8:33-39; Ezekiel 14:21; compare Revelation 6:3-8). Indeed, tying in directly with this chapter, Jeremiah 29:18 says, “Behold, I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like rotten figs that cannot be eaten, they are so bad.”

## **The Yoke of Babylon (Jeremiah 27–28)**

**July 21-22**

Jeremiah 27:1 says, “In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah...” Most commentators take “Jehoiakim” to be an ancient copyist error in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, believing it should actually say “Zedekiah,” as in some other early manuscripts. It is true that chapter 27 is clearly set in the early part of Zedekiah’s reign, his fourth year to be exact, and not Jehoiakim’s (compare verses 3, 12; 28:1).

However, another explanation could be that the chapter break between Jeremiah 26 and 27 occurs in the wrong place. Jeremiah 26 *is* set “in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah” (26:1). Perhaps the last verse of chapter 26 should read, “Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah.” The first verse of chapter 27 would then read, “This word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying...” While this may seem unlikely to some, we cannot rule it out as a possibility.

Moving into the substance of the chapter, we encounter a hotbed of political plotting during this fourth year of Zedekiah (594-593 B.C.). “Emissaries from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon

met in Jerusalem to plan revolution [against Babylon]. In the Jewish court, pro-Egyptian conspirators probably looked to Egypt for help, especially with the accession of the new king, Psammetichus II (594-589 B.C.E.). Jeremiah [according to God's direction] opposed rebellion, arguing that Judah's only hope was to remain a vassal to the Babylonians" (*HarperCollins Study Bible*, note on 27:1-28:17).

God here again gives Jeremiah a seemingly strange, but dramatic, task to perform. The prophet is to make and then don "bonds and yokes"—and to give these to the gathered envoys for delivery to their national leaders as part of God's message to them that they were all to submit to Babylon. "The yoke is that used by two oxen to pull a heavy load. Normally, yokes consisted of a crossbar with leather or rope nooses or rods of wood that would be placed around the animals' necks. Attached to the crossbar was a wooden shaft for pulling the load (see Deut 21.3; 1 Sam 6.7; 11.5; 1 Kings 19.19). For the yoke as a symbol of servitude [Jeremiah 27:8, 12], see also 1 Kings 12.1-11" (note on Jeremiah 27:2).

"The task assigned to Jeremiah required great faith, as it was sure to provoke alike his own countrymen and the foreign ambassadors and their kings, by a seeming insult, at the very time that all were full of confident hopes grounded on the confederacy" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on verse 3).

God's message through His prophet is intended to make it plain to the leaders of the surrounding nations that they wield power only so long as He allows it. He would promote Nebuchadnezzar and subjugate these leaders and their peoples under him. Yet in this exaltation of the Babylonian emperor, it is clear that God remains ultimately supreme. He even calls Nebuchadnezzar "My Servant" (verse 6). "With all of his military might and conquests, the king of Babylon was still a servant of the God of Israel, carrying out the Lord's purposes—namely the judgment of Judah [and these other nations]" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 6-7).

In verse 8, the yoke symbol is explained to the emissaries: submit to Babylon or else, the alternative being punishment through the dreadful three-fold cycle of sword, famine and pestilence. Jeremiah then delivers to them a serious warning not to listen to prophets or various occult practitioners who were saying the opposite (verses 9-11). He then proclaims the same message to King Zedekiah, the priests and all the people he encounters as he wanders about wearing the yoke (verses 12-16).

Jeremiah then issues a challenge to the false prophets. Nebuchadnezzar had taken much of the temple furnishings in his prior invasions of Jerusalem (see Daniel 1:1-2; 2 Kings 24:11-13). The false prophets were claiming these would soon be brought back. But Jeremiah says "the vessels which are left" in the temple would *also* be taken to Babylon in the coming destruction of the city (Jeremiah 27:16-22). Jeremiah challenges the false prophets to intercede with God to try to stop his words from coming to pass and to bring to pass the things *they* have announced. This would prove who spoke for God.

It may not be quickly noticed but Jeremiah does offer words of hope and encouragement in the midst of this challenge and pronouncement of calamity. In verse 22, he says that Babylon would ultimately be punished and that the temple furnishings would then be brought back as part of Judah's restoration. Surprisingly, these items were apparently well accounted for in Babylon, being returned in specific numbers when the Persians later took over (see Ezra 1:7-11). It is likely that Daniel played a part in the care and cataloging of them.

### **Haniah's Lies (Jeremiah 27-28)**

**July 21-22 Cont'd**

Jeremiah 28 introduces the prophet Haniah, who contradicts Jeremiah, falsely claiming that *he* speaks for God. "Haniah had the temerity to use the same introductory formula as Jeremiah, implying a claim for inspiration similar to his. The form of the Hebrew verb *sabarti* ('I will break') in v[erse] 2 is the prophetic perfect, which emphasizes the certainty of a future event or promise. The yoke refers to the one Jeremiah had just made. Flatly contradicting Jeremiah's God-given counsel of submission, Haniah predicted a return of the captives and the temple vessels within two years, emphasizing the time element by putting it first (v. 3)" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on Jeremiah 28:3) This was unbelievably bold—and utterly foolish.

Jeremiah responds to Haniah's message of Judah's imminent national restoration by essentially saying, "Would that it were true!" (compare verses 5-6). But, he continues, this theme of immediate peace and prosperity runs contrary to the long tradition of the messages of God's prophets (compare verses 7-8). If a purported prophet of God comes along saying everything's just

fine and predicting “smooth sailing,” the reaction should be as Jeremiah’s: “We’ll have to see it to believe it” (compare verse 9; Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

(We experience a similar situation today, with false ministers speaking a different message from that of God’s true servants. Only those close to God can determine who His ministers are. Thankfully, most people today have access to His Word and can check what religious teachers say against the Bible—see Acts 17:11.)

Hananiah, angry at the rebuke, breaks Jeremiah’s yoke and blasphemously makes his own “sign” out of it, issuing another false prophecy in God’s name. His announcement “reversed every statement by Jeremiah and advanced the cause of rebellion against Babylon by Judah and the surrounding nations, something King Zedekiah had desired all along” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 10-11). But Hananiah and those who trust in him soon learn an important lesson about pretending to represent the great Creator God. Hananiah might have broken the wooden yoke on Jeremiah’s neck, but those who embraced his message would soon suffer under a figurative yoke of “iron,” which is unbreakable (verses 13-15). Hananiah, in fact, learns that he won’t even be around long enough to have a yoke on his own neck—except the yoke of death (verse 16).

Remarkably, though Jeremiah said Hananiah would die “this year” (same verse), God doesn’t wait the whole year to fulfill the decree. Instead, the false prophet dies just two months later (compare verses 1, 17). “There was no way the people and priests of Judah, who witnessed the confrontation that took place (28:1), could avoid linking Jeremiah’s prediction with Hananiah’s demise. God shouts out His warnings” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verse 17). Yet the stubborn leaders and wayward populace refused to face reality—that all of Jeremiah’s other prophecies were true—and humbly repent.

The false prophets of Jeremiah’s day were powerful and influential, as we can see. Again, even today we need to be wary of false prophets—false preachers—who appear to be true servants of God (Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 11:13; 1 John 4:1). The apostle Peter warns the Church of God: “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways.... By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction will not slumber” (2 Peter 2:1-3). The Bible even foretells the rise of a great false prophet who will deceive the world at the end of the present age (see Revelation 19:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12).

### **Letter to the Exiles (Jeremiah 29)**

**July 23**

Jeremiah 29 appears to fall in the same time frame as chapters 27–28—the fourth year of King Zedekiah (see 28:1). Though chapter 27 contained rumblings and plotting of rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, it is evident that Zedekiah has not yet actually revolted—for we see him sending a delegation to the emperor in Babylon (29:3). Later in his fourth year, Zedekiah himself travels with others to Babylon (see Jeremiah 51:59). The reason for these journeys is not given, “but it is altogether possible that they had to do with the annual presentation of tribute” (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 463). Regarding the second journey, *The HarperCollins Study Bible* alternatively suggests, “It may be that Zedekiah made such a trip in order to explain his participation in the conspiracy mentioned in ch[apter] 27” (note on 51:59-64). The same could be true of this earlier delegation.

Jeremiah sent messages from God with key individuals in both delegations—the first message being a letter to the Jews in captivity. He entrusts the letter to Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah. They are clearly important dignitaries. Elasah was evidently the brother of Ahikam, who defended Jeremiah (26:24), and brother of the Gemariah who allowed the use of his room at the temple for the proclamation of Jeremiah’s prophecies (36:10)—all three being sons of Shaphan, who reported the finding of the Book of the Law by the high priest Hilkiyah to King Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-13). The Gemariah of Jeremiah 29 may have been the son of Hilkiyah the high priest. “If so, Jeremiah was supported by two very powerful families in Judah who had been involved in Josiah’s reform” (verse 3).

In the letter, God tells the exiles through Jeremiah that they will be there for a long time and that they should make the most of it by settling down, building houses, growing food, expanding their families and being good citizens of Babylon, even *praying* for it: “For in its peace you will have peace” (verse 7). This parallels the responsibility of God’s Church today, which dwells in the “Babylon” of this world. Besides telling us to obey the governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7), the apostle Paul writes: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and

giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Indication of Judah’s integration into Babylonian society is confirmed by archaeology. Over the course of excavations in 1889, 1900 and 1948 at Nippur, southeast of Babylon, 700 inscribed tablets known as the Murashu Archives were uncovered. “These tablets record contracts, certificates and receipts for payments, in documents belonging to a Jewish family living in Babylon in the fifth century B.C. The names of the individuals mentioned there are both Hebrew and non-Hebrew names, perhaps indicating that the family was integrating into Babylonian society” (Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?*, 2001, p. 163 ).

In general, “the Jews experienced economic well-being, and some found opportunities to rise high in the government, just as Daniel did. There is evidence that they were able to form their own council of elders and to have the advantage of prophets and priests in their midst as well, for Jeremiah addressed all three groups when he wrote to the captives (Jer. 29:1)” (Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 1998, p. 414). Yet Jeremiah warns the people against listening to the prophets among them (Jeremiah 29:8-9). For these prophets were preaching the same message the false prophets in Judah were propagating—that the captivity would be over shortly, with the people soon resettled in the Jewish homeland.

Yet Jeremiah reaffirms the time as 70 years, as in chapter 25 (see 29:10). He also reaffirms the wonderful fact that God’s people actually *would* go free and return to Judah—but that they had to wait a while. Verses 11-14 “are undoubtedly among the most comforting in Scripture. The exiles in Babylon are to settle down and wait, for God knows the plans He has for them, plans to give them a hope and a future. In the O[ld] T[estament] ‘hope,’ either *miqweh/tiqwah* or *yahal* invites us to look ahead in confident expectation. Each assumes a time of waiting. But the latter especially reminds us that our future is guaranteed by our personal relationship with God. Because He is our God, He has plans for us [too]. And those plans are good—both beautiful and beneficial. Like the exiles, we may have to wait for God’s plans for us to bear fruit. But we can wait confidently, because our hope is in Him” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on 29:11-14).

The point of verses 15-20 can be a little confusing. In essence, God seems to be saying: “Because you think these false prophets are telling you the truth—that you’ll be going back to Judah soon—let me tell you what’s going to happen to the land of Judah and the people who remain there....” “He informs them that their hopes of returning soon are fruitless, for Zedekiah, the present occupant of Judah’s throne, will shortly be unseated and the last vestiges of the kingdom will be cruelly eroded away” (Merrill, p. 463). The imagery of cyclical punishment and rotten figs is again used (verses 17-18; compare Jeremiah 24). So the exiles just needed to wait it out—keeping their hopes and trust on God’s true message.

In Jeremiah 29:21-23, two prophets were singled out for speaking lies in God’s name. As punishment, Nebuchadnezzar would have them “roasted in the fire,” a form of execution that was certainly used in Babylon (see Daniel 3).

Next Jeremiah sends instruction to proclaim a message to another false leader in the exile, Shemaiah (Jeremiah 29:24), who went on a letter-writing campaign to the people and priests of Jerusalem to have Jeremiah reprimanded or locked up for his prophecies. One important recipient was Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah (compare 21:1-2; 34:3-4; 2 Kings 25:18), who read aloud the letter he received to Jeremiah. The prophet then received God’s judgment against Shemaiah. His treachery would be paid back in his having no descendants and being prevented from seeing the blessings God had promised to the exiles.

### **Deliverance From Jacob’s Trouble (Jeremiah 30:1–31:26)**

**July 24-25**

It is not known specifically when chapters 30 and 31 of Jeremiah were written. Since they follow our previous reading, chapter 29, which contains the letter sent to the captives in Babylon, we are reading these chapters now. Indeed, there is a thematic continuity here. In the letter, Jeremiah delivered God’s message that the people would later be brought back from captivity. The message of this section, communicated to Jeremiah in a dream (31:26) is *also* one of return from captivity—yet clearly in the end time. “In the latter days,” God says, “you will consider it” (30:24). This ties in with “Behold, the days are coming...” in verse 3. We will see more about this phrase in our next reading.

In no way can the return of this section refer to merely the Jewish return from the ancient Babylonian captivity. Notice that this is a return of Judah *and* Israel to the Promised Land (verses 3, 10). This has never happened. However, some who recognize that this section is a prophecy of

events in modern times have argued that it refers to the Jewish return to establish the state of Israel in the 1900s. Yet it is only a low percentage of Jews in the world who have returned to live in the land of Israel. Moreover, only a very small percentage of Jews are ethnically descended from Israelites of the northern tribes. Most are descended from the southern tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi. Moreover, most of the people in the world today who are descended from the northern tribes of Israel are not Jews at all—rather, they are largely people of northwest European heritage (as northwest Europe is the area to which the “lost tribes” eventually migrated following their ancient captivity). The United States and Britain are the preeminent nations descended from ancient Israel (download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more).

Also noteworthy is the great joy described in Jeremiah’s account of the return from captivity. When some of the Jews under Zerubbabel returned from Babylonian captivity, they apparently were not feeling relieved and liberated, since they had not suffered an oppressive slavery prior to this. They had mixed feelings when they arrived at Jerusalem, saw the ruins and realized they would not be able to restore the temple to its former glory (Ezra 3:11-13; Haggai 2:1-3). Shortly before Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, he “wept and mourned for many days” at the pitiful state of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:3-4). So the description in Jeremiah 30–31 of miraculous interventions, huge masses of people and great excitement, joy and thanksgiving just does not fit the return of Jews from Persian-ruled Babylon.

We should also observe that the release from captivity described here follows a period of greatest suffering for both Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 30:4-7). The greatest suffering the people of the northern kingdom had experienced so far was the Assyrian conquest of their nation and their subsequent deportations. Yet God could not here be referring to those events, as He gave Jeremiah this prophecy of Israel’s suffering more than a century later. So to what was He referring?

Notice verse 8: “Alas! For that day is great, *so that none is like it*; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it”—that is, after suffering through it, not that Israel would never have to go through it at all. This is parallel with other passages of Scripture. The end of Daniel 11 describes events “at the time of the end” (verse 40). Of the same period, the Jewish prophet Daniel was told, “At that time...there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered” (12:1). The next verses show that this refers to the time of the resurrection at Christ’s return. We see this here in Jeremiah 30 as well. God says He will “raise up” King David after this terrible time (verse 9), so there should really be no question that we are dealing with future events.

Matthew 24:21-22 says of the time preceding Christ’s second coming, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [preserved alive]; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.” Clearly, there is not more than one worst time ever. These verses are all describing the same period. Jeremiah 30:12-15, regarding Israel’s incurable affliction and wound, abandonment by allies and severe chastisement from God is obviously parallel to Hosea 5:12-15, which was previously explained in the Bible Reading Program to be a prophecy of this same period of the Great Tribulation.

This will be a time of terrible calamity for the American people, other nations of British heredity, certain peoples of northwest Europe and the Jews—to soon be followed by the entire world suffering the greatest catastrophes imaginable. All the dreadful events of human history will pale before the awful and horrific events that are coming. But each scriptural announcement of this worst time that is yet to happen is accompanied by a message of hope: “but he shall be saved out of it”; “your people shall be delivered”; “those days will be shortened.”

In fact, as we have elsewhere noted, God offers a promise of protection even *during* this terrible time to those who will repent and seek Him. In Luke 21:36, Jesus said: “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” And He tells true Christians who remain faithful in this age: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10). This should not be viewed as a guarantee against death or even martyrdom, as death itself can be a “place of safety” until the resurrection (see Isaiah 57:1-2). Nevertheless, it does appear that God will give His faithful servants protection from the kind of suffering the rest of the world will experience—and in general will hide His faithful people from what is coming (see Revelation 12:13-16; Zephaniah 2:3).

On the other hand, as for Christians who have spiritually drifted from God, it appears that they will have to experience the terrible times ahead in severe measure to be shaken into taking a stand for Him and His truth (see Revelation 12:17; 3:14-21).

### **A Dream That Ends Sweet (Jeremiah 30:1–31:26)**

**July 24-25 Cont'd**

After the awful calamities at the end of this age, Jesus Christ will return and a new age will commence. Notice again the mention of King David being resurrected. This is repeated in Ezekiel 37:24-25). Some think “David” in both places is a reference to Christ, David’s descendant, since it is Christ who inherits the throne of David to reign as King over Israel (see Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:32-33). Yet notice that Jeremiah 30:9 says the Israelites will serve “the LORD their God, *and* David their king.” The “LORD” in this context is Jesus Christ. Consider that even when David ruled over Israel 3,000 years ago, the ultimate King of Israel was Jesus Christ, as David and then Solomon “sat on the throne of the LORD” (compare 1 Chronicles 29:23; 2 Chronicles 9:6-8). Even so, Christ promises that in His coming Kingdom, His servants will share His throne with Him (Revelation 3:21). Yet they will have specialized administrative duties, being given particular rule, under Him, over different responsibilities, such as different numbers of cities (compare Luke 19:11-19). The 12 apostles, resurrected in glory, will each rule over one of the 12 tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). And a resurrected David will serve as king, under Christ, over all of *them*.

Humbled and repentant, the Israelites will be restored to a position of honor and glory in the world (Jeremiah 30:18-20). Foreigners will no longer be their masters (verse 8). In fact, the nations that enslaved them will be destroyed (verse 11)—that is, the political entities, not all the people in them, since we also see that these enemy nations will themselves be put into captivity for a time (verse 16). At long last, Israel will have peace and no longer need to fear (verse 10).

The beginning of Jeremiah 31 contains what *The Expositors Bible Commentary* describes as “one of the most beautiful poems in [Jeremiah’s] book” (1998, note on verses 3-4). It is a continuation of the magnificent prophecy about Israel and Judah’s future in the previous chapter. God’s love won’t be just a nice platitude—He will demonstrate it with action. He will bring Israel’s people home, the land will be fertile, producing plenty of food, and there will be peace and abundance.

God says in verse 8, “Behold, I will bring them from the north country [primarily Europe], and gather them from the ends of the earth”—wherever they have been scattered. A proclamation is issued to the nations and to the remnant of Israel “in the isles afar off” (verse 10) that God is the one who has humbled, freed and now amazingly blessed Israel. The scattered Israelites will come “streaming to the goodness of the LORD” (verse 12). And eventually, the rest of mankind will follow their example.

We then see a sad picture of Rachel weeping inconsolably for the loss of her children, which is heard at Ramah in the territory of Benjamin, five miles north of Jerusalem. Rachel, wife of Jacob, was the mother of Joseph and thus of the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh that descended from him. She was also the mother of the southern tribe of Benjamin, so she is representative of both kingdoms. Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin and was buried not too far to the north of Bethlehem, which itself is five miles to the south of Jerusalem (Genesis 35:19; 48:7). The location of her tomb was later referred to as Zelzah, which in Samuel’s day was within the territory of Benjamin (see 1 Samuel 10:2-3). The traditional spot is about a mile north of Bethlehem, and thus around nine miles from Ramah. The image of Rachel weeping from the grave is not to be understood literally. Like the image of Abel’s blood crying out to God from the ground (see Genesis 4:10), it is figurative—especially considering that this is a prophetic dream.

Rachel’s northern children had in one sense been lost in the Assyrian conquest and deportation more than a century earlier. Many of her southern children had been lost to the Assyrians not long afterward. And many more were lost in the stages of Babylonian conquest, the final stage of which was coming soon. Ramah was “the very place where exiles were gathered before deportation to Babylon (cf. [Jeremiah] 40:1)... Jeremiah himself was in a camp for exiles in Ramah (cf. 40:1)” (*Expositor’s*, note on 31:15). So the prophecy apparently had some application to Jeremiah’s day. However, in context, it should be clear that the primary meaning here relates to what we have already seen in this prophetic dream—the terrible time of Jacob’s trouble, when Rachel loses more children than ever before. In verses 16-17, the weeping is to stop because the children will be brought back. In fact, *Ephraim* is specifically mentioned as returning in the next few verses, making the end-time context plain—since Ephraim will not return in the repentant way described until after the Great Tribulation.

It may seem strange, then, that the New Testament book of Matthew applies the verse about Rachel weeping for her children to King Herod's massacre of the innocent children in the region of Bethlehem in his attempt to kill the infant Messiah (Matthew 2:16-18). *Expositor's* comments: "How can this prophecy be fulfilled in Matthew's reference? First, it must be stressed that Matthew's method of quoting an O[ld] T[estament] reference does not automatically imply a direct fulfillment.... For proof see the immediate context in Matthew 2:15, where Hosea 11:1 in its original context unmistakably speaks of the nation Israel but by analogy and higher fulfillment (called by some 'compenetration') refers to Christ. Similarly, that which related to Israel in original revelation (v. 15) is by analogy ('typological fulfillment'...) used in speaking of Herod's atrocities. In both cases God will overrule the nation's sorrow for her ultimate joy" (note on Jeremiah 31:16-17; see also *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on verse 15). Indeed, though children were lost to Rachel in Herod's massacre, they will ultimately be restored in a future resurrection (see Ezekiel 37:1-14).

It should be pointed out that though we have spent time exploring the meaning of Rachel's weeping, that's not really the main focus of the dream. The main focus of the dream, and why it is so positive at this point, is that the time for weeping has ceased. The mention of the weeping itself was in fact very brief. It is God's declaration concerning the wonderful time that follows that filled most of Jeremiah's present vision.

In Jeremiah 31:21, Israel is directed back to God. In verse 22, God intends to bring Israel's gadding about to an end. "For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth—a woman shall encompass a man." This is one of the most disputed sentences in the book of Jeremiah. Many interpretations have been suggested. A tradition going back to early Catholic theologians is that it refers to Jesus in Mary's womb. But most modern interpreters reject this view. Indeed, just to say that a male child is inside a mother's womb does not seem that unique.

Interestingly, rabbis have used verse 22 to explain the custom of a bride walking in circles around the bridegroom seven times at a traditional Jewish wedding. This is also related to the encirclement of Jericho seven times, whereby the city wall was brought down. The idea with bride and groom seems to be one of collapsing any wall or barrier between them—and in Jeremiah would imply collapsing the wall that has been built up between the woman Israel and her Husband the Lord. However, if the interpretation does relate to God and Israel, perhaps it is much simpler. In the beginning of the verse, God asked Israel how long she would gad about. And now the new thing He has brought about is that she encircles her Husband *with her arms*—embracing and clinging to Him rather than continuing to wander. The New Living Translation renders the verse: "For the LORD will cause something new and different to happen—Israel will embrace her God." This seems most reasonable. Nevertheless, we cannot be certain as to what is meant. We do know that Israel returns to God—and that is sufficient.

Verses 23-25 show Judah, Jeremiah's beloved homeland, ultimately restored with great blessings. The prophet had been afforded a marvelous picture. After all the warnings and the people's continuing rebellion, beyond the sin and punishment of Israel and Judah, he sees through God's vivid testimony that they would ultimately turn back to God and be gloriously restored to such blessings as he could only imagine. It was such a change for Jeremiah from the sadness of so many previous visions, and the frightening images at the beginning of this one, that he woke up in the middle of it feeling on top of the world—or, as he put it, "my sleep was sweet to me" (verse 26). Greatly comforted, he was able to rest easy—for he saw with clarity what the future would ultimately bring.

### **A New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:27-40; 49:34-39)**

**July 26-27**

At the end of our previous reading, Jeremiah awoke from a prophetic dream that had become peaceful and even blissful regarding the future of Israel and Judah. Comforted, he fell soundly back asleep. And it appears that he went right back into the dream.

This final part of the prophecy is divided into three sections, each beginning with the same words we read in Jeremiah 30:3, "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD..." (31:27, 31, 38). "This expression introduces a new era in the history of God's dealing with His people" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 38-40). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* says it is "an eschatological formula that places the prophecy in messianic times in the Day of the Lord, the consummation period of the nation's history" (note on verse 31).

The first section continues the millennial picture of the prophetic dream. Though the population of Israel and Judah will be greatly diminished due to the calamities they will suffer in the end time, God will begin to multiply them once again when He returns them to the Promised Land. He will also multiply the animals of the nation—bringing back the livestock and general wildlife

(verse 27). As God has overseen the destruction of the nation, He will now oversee its building and planting—here using the same words as those describing Jeremiah’s commission (see 1:10).

In God’s just society, children will not be made to pay for their parents’ sins, as happens in various ways in the present age (31:29-30). The New Living Translation paraphrases the thought this way: “The people will no longer quote this proverb: ‘The parents eat sour grapes, but their children’s mouths pucker at the taste.’ All people will die for their own sins—those who eat the sour grapes will be the ones whose mouths will pucker.” (The discontinued proverb is also mentioned in Ezekiel 18:2; see verses 1-20 there for a fuller exposition).

We then come to the second section here (Jeremiah 31:31-37). God says He will make a “new covenant” with Israel and Judah (verse 31). “This mountain-peak O[ld] T[estament] passage stands in a real sense as the climax of Jeremiah’s teaching” (*Expositor’s*, note on verse 31). Indeed, in Jeremiah 17:9 God proclaimed that the human heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Here, we see how this is going to change.

In describing this *New Covenant* in contrast to the one He made with Israel when He brought them out of Egypt, God is, by implication, declaring the previous one *old*. Thus the term “Old Covenant” for the Sinai Covenant. The Old Covenant was, as we see here, essentially a “marriage” covenant—by which God was a Husband to Israel (verse 32). In this covenant, Israel, the wife, had agreed to submit to God and obey His laws. But she did not. The people never had the right heart and mind to obey (Deuteronomy 5:29; Romans 8:7). This fault of the people, the book of Hebrews explains, was the problem with the Old Covenant—and the reason the New Covenant was necessitated (8:7-8). The book of Hebrews actually quotes this important passage from Jeremiah twice (verses 8-13; 10:16-17).

What, then, is the New Covenant? It is basically a new marriage contract God lays out with Israel and Judah. Does it negate God’s laws, as many today claim? By no means. First of all, remember that God’s commandments were in effect long before the Sinai Covenant was entered into (compare Genesis 26:5). Thus, Old Covenant or no, God’s law was still binding. Certainly, obedience to God’s law was part of the obligation of the Old Covenant. But man has that obligation even without the specific terms of the Old Covenant. When the Old Covenant ended, the law remained. It remains still under the New Covenant, as we will see.

Bear in mind that just because God has drawn up a “new” covenant, this does not mean that it is such a radical break with the past that there is no similarity between the Old and New Covenants whatsoever. Consider contracts today. The parties to a contract may decide to void it and draw up a replacement contract. There may be many aspects of the former contract that are made part of the new. Moreover, the law of the land upon which the contracts are based remains unchanged. So it is with God’s contracts. The end of the Old Covenant does not mean the end of the law upon which the covenant is based. And neither does the introduction of the New Covenant.

Moreover, under the terms of the New Covenant, the laws of God (i.e., those that were His laws at the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy, when the *Old Covenant* was in force!) are to be written *in the hearts and minds of God’s people*—engraving them into their very character and making it possible for them to truly obey. God says that all will *know Him* under this new arrangement (Jeremiah 31:34). And how do people really know God—developing an intimate, loving relationship with Him? The New Testament answers: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4). That should be pretty clear—God’s law is still required under the New Covenant. Of course, God desires and expects more than mere grudging compliance. That’s not at all what God’s laws and covenant are all about. He wants our hearts to be in the covenant and the covenant to be in our hearts. This is the spirit and intent of God’s commandments.

Notice what else God says in Jeremiah 31:34: “For I will forgive their iniquity [lawlessness], and their sin [lawbreaking] I will remember no more” (compare 50:20). If lawbreaking were constantly before God’s face, how would He ever forget it? Is God saying that He will eliminate lawbreaking by doing away with His laws? Clearly not, as He will write His laws in the hearts and minds of His people. So what God must be talking about is putting an end to lawbreaking—an end to sin—*through enabling people to obey*. Yet as other biblical passages explain, this is a growth process. People do not become perfect overnight. With help from God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit He gives them, they *grow* in obedience—God’s laws being written into their character gradually. But eventually, as Scripture shows, people are to be transformed into perfect spirit beings who will never sin again. This is how sin will ultimately one day be remembered no more—it will no longer exist.

Yet there must still be a provision for dealing with sin in the meantime—both sins committed before this process has begun and sins that occur during the growth period. And indeed there is—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. On the eve before His death, during the last Passover meal at which He ate with His disciples, Jesus introduced the symbols of broken bread to represent the sacrifice of His broken body and wine to symbolize His shed blood—His death. Notice: “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins’” (Matthew 26:27-28). Christ was explaining that the shedding of His blood as a sacrifice for sin was required to make the New Covenant possible. Without it, there was no way to atone for the sins of all who would participate in the covenant. Also, it was Christ’s death that brought the Old Covenant marriage to an end—thus enabling a new marriage contract to be entered into.

Notice further that Jesus was here *initiating* the New Covenant with His disciples. This can be confusing since Jeremiah’s prophecy of the New Covenant made with Israel and Judah is definitely millennial in setting. Furthermore, the “marriage of the Lamb” does not occur until Christ’s return (Revelation 19:7-9)—and this is clearly referring to Christ’s marriage to the Church. It helps when we understand that the Church of God is *spiritual* Israel—a pioneer in the relationship God announced through Jeremiah. However, this does not explain why the Church seems to be under the New Covenant marriage today even though the marriage does not take place until Christ’s return.

To understand, we must know something about the nature of Jewish marriage in biblical times. Couples initially became engaged or betrothed with a customary shared cup of wine. This betrothal was not like engagements today, which can easily be broken off. A Jewish betrothal (Hebrew *eyrusin*) was a binding contract. It required a divorce to break it. The couple during this *kiddushin* or “sanctification” period was considered essentially married—and already considered husband and wife—except that they did not live together or have conjugal relations (compare Matthew 1:18-20, where Joseph and Mary are “betrothed” yet already called husband and wife). The betrothal period was one of preparation. Later, at the time of the actual marriage ceremony (*nissuin*), another cup of wine was shared to confirm the covenant and a wedding feast commenced. (In modern Jewish practice, the *eyrusin* and *nissuin* are combined into the same wedding ceremony—the contractual engagement period having been removed, according to some scholars, during the dangerous times of the Middle Ages due to fear that bride or groom would not survive until the wedding.)

With all of this as background, we can better understand the New Covenant relationship. Jesus initiated the New Covenant—proposed marriage we might say—to a group He saw as the remnant of Israel and Judah who were as yet married to Him under the Old Covenant arrangement. As we’ve seen, the Old Covenant arrangement was not good enough. Even Christ’s disciples, the most faithful people of His day, were still carnal and condemned because of their sins. They needed to be freed from the Old Covenant marriage and then changed into new spiritual people to enter into the new relationship with Christ. This was accomplished through Christ’s death and resurrection and their receiving the Holy Spirit (see Romans 7:1-4; 1 Corinthians 7:39; Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 5:16-17; Romans 8:5-10), thus making them the Church of God, the true “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16)—that is, the faithful remnant of Israel according to God’s grace (compare Romans 11:1-5).

Having agreed to the New Covenant, the Church is now betrothed and sanctified to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2)—under the terms of the New Covenant but still awaiting the coming *fullness* of the New Covenant marriage. The Church has grown to include more people ever since. Yet to be part of it still requires partaking of the cup of the New Covenant each year, reaffirming agreement to the terms of the marriage contract—a repentant commitment to obey and the acceptance of Christ’s shed blood to atone for any *failure* to obey. Those who accept these terms and follow through on them become part of the true Israel, *spiritual* Israel. Gentiles, and even all those who make up the physical nations of Israel and Judah, must actually become spiritual Israelites, through repentance and spiritual conversion, to participate in the New Covenant. And a small number of physical Israelites and gentiles have become part of spiritual Israel, the Church, since the Church began.

At Christ’s return, those who are betrothed to him prior to that time will then go through an actual wedding ceremony and feast wherein the New Covenant will be ratified. Glorified with spirit bodies, they will be perfect and will never sin again, having God’s laws ingrained perfectly into their character—continuing in unbroken oneness with Christ thereafter. This is the culmination and fullness of the New Covenant marriage—yet God intends to thereafter extend the marriage relationship to all human beings, that is, to all who will ultimately agree to be changed in the same way.

When Christ returns and joins into the fullness of marriage with the Church, He will then also extend His engagement proposal to all those of physical Israel and Judah who are then left in the world—and later to all Israel and Judah of all ages in the resurrection of Ezekiel 37. Yet, as mentioned, all of these, too, must become *spiritual* Israelites. Christ will also extend His proposal to all mankind—yet the covenant is still with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 37:11, 19) since all must become spiritual Israelites to participate in it. Eventually, all who ultimately choose to serve God and continue in His covenant will be changed into spirit to enter into the fullness of the New Covenant. And, in the end, sin will at last be no more.

Yet even before that, when Israel and Judah as a whole repent and embrace the way of God at Christ's return—and become spiritual Israelites betrothed under the New Covenant—peace and harmony will begin to reign among them as God transforms them on the inside to develop His character. And as all of mankind is brought into this relationship, peace will extend to encompass the earth—all under the rule of Christ and His perfected saints, the glorified spiritual Israel.

What we see, then, is that the offering of the New Covenant to Israel and Judah at large, as described in Jeremiah 31, will happen in an ultimate sense after Christ's return. It is parallel to other passages foretelling the general outpouring of God's Spirit in the latter days. However, He has already initiated the New Covenant with a forerunner of Israel, His Church, to whom He has given the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Romans 8:23) to begin the process of transformation now (to learn more, download or request our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*).

Finally, we come to the third section of Jeremiah 31 (verses 38-40). With the New Covenant will come a rebuilt Jerusalem. "The rebuilding of the city will encompass the four corners of the capital (cf. Zech 14:10). The Tower of Hananel was the northeast corner of the city (cf. Neh 3:1; 12:39; Zech 14:10). The Corner Gate probably refers to the one at the northwest corner of the city wall (cf. 2 Kings 14:13; 2 Chron 26:9). The locations of Gareb and Goah are unknown (v. 39); conjecture places Gareb on the western side of Jerusalem and Goah towards the Valley of Hinnom on the south. There are no clues to the sites. The valley of the corpses and ashes (v. 40) is generally understood to be the Valley of Hinnom (cf. 7:31). It has been suggested that the fields are quarries. The Kidron flows east of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 15:23). The Horse Gate is apparently at the southeast corner of the temple courts (...cf. Neh 3:28 with 2 Kings 11:16; 2 Chron 23:15). Thus even the polluted areas would be sanctified to the Lord" (*Expositor's*, note on Jeremiah 31:38-40).

### **Prophecy Against Elam (Jeremiah 31:27-40; 49:34-39)**

**July 26-27 Cont'd**

The prophecy against Elam (49:34-39) apparently came to Jeremiah at a later time than the several prophecies immediately preceding it in chapters 46-49. Yet they are all grouped together in his book, along with chapters 50-51, as these are prophecies against other nations. This one was given to Jeremiah "in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah." This would date the prophecy to some time in the first half of Zedekiah's reign, from 597-593 B.C.

Elam was a son of Shem (Genesis 10:22). As we have seen previously in the Bible Reading Program, the ancient territory of the descendants of Elam eventually came to be called Persia (known today as Iran). Western Persia was called Elymais by the Greeks. During the day of Assyrian rule, some of the Elamites were evidently pressed into Assyrian military service and may have participated in assaults on Israel and Judah. This may be partly what is meant in Isaiah 22:6, which states that "Elam bore the quiver with chariots of men and horsemen" (though, as was explained in the Bible Reading Program commentary on this verse, it may well be an end-time prophecy). Yet the Elamites, along with the nearby Medes, actually *opposed* Assyrian rule in the main. They allied with the Chaldean Babylonians in *overthrowing* the Assyrians. Following that, they also "helped Nebuchadnezzar against Judea" (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary*, note on Jeremiah 49:34)—at least in the initial incursions.

For the Elamites' actions and pride in their strength, God pronounces punishment on them. He would break their "bow"—the implement of their power (again compare Isaiah 22:6). "God often orders it so that that which we most trust to [at] first [later] fails us, and that which was the chief of our might proves the least of our help" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, note on verses 34-39). The "four winds from the four quarters of heaven" (verse 36) represent a mustering of power by God (compare Ezekiel 37:9; Daniel 8:8)—evidently military forces under His direction in this case.

Interestingly, "the last exploit of Nebuchadnezzar which is recorded in the Babylonian Chronicle is a campaign against the Elamites...594-593 [B.C.]" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 452). Once Babylon was secure as the imperial successor to Assyria, the Elamites and Medes were no longer needed as allies. So they were conquered and became subjects

of the Chaldeans. Some see this as the prophesied destruction on Elam. In this context, the Lord setting His throne in Elam (Jeremiah 49:38) is said to be Nebuchadnezzar's conquest, as this is by God's doing (compare 27:4-8; 43:10), and the Elamite return from captivity (49:39) is considered to be the later conquest of Babylon by the Persians and Medes under Cyrus in 539 B.C. Still others identify the destruction of Elam as the Persian Empire falling to the Greek forces of Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.—this later episode seeming to fit better since *it* was the great destruction of the Elamites in ancient times and the prophecy states that recuperation from the foretold loss does not occur until “the latter days” (verse 39).

Yet while verses 35-37 may refer to ancient destruction, perhaps they actually refer to end-time calamity—or it could be that they are *dual* in meaning, applying to past history *and* events yet to be. In any case, verses 38-39 are probably exclusively for the end time—which would seem to give some latter-day context to the previous verses as well. The Lord setting His throne in Elam (verse 38) most likely refers to the establishment of the Kingdom of God over all nations following Christ's return—and this will be accompanied by great destruction, as the nations of the world will attempt to fight Him.

Recall from the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 21 that the Elamites today are apparently to be found in Eastern Europe as well as their ancient homeland of Iran (with a few in western India). When the kings “of the whole world” gather to fight the returning Christ (Revelation 16:14), it is evident that a representation of Elamite forces will be present and thus destroyed. Soon afterward, forces of Persia are part of a great military host that will be destroyed for attempting to invade a reestablished Israel under Christ's rule (see Ezekiel 38–39, especially 38:5). Either or both of these events would well fit Jeremiah's prophecy.

Apparently, those Elamites who are scattered and taken into captivity will eventually be brought back to reconstitute a nation during the reign of Christ. This demonstrates God's great mercy. In fact, even those who die without a full realization of what they are doing—which will be the case with the vast majority of those fighting Christ at His return—will be brought back to life after the first 1,000 years of Christ's reign (see Revelation 20:5) and then given their first real opportunity to serve or reject God. (See our booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* for an explanation of this little understood truth of the second resurrection.)

### **Seraiah's Mission (Jeremiah 51:59-61; 50:1-46)**

**July 28-29**

Jeremiah 50–51 is a long prophecy against Babylon. At the end of the prophecy is an account of the context in which it was first delivered (51:59-64). Though obviously written down after the prophecy itself, our reading starts with part of this account (verses 59-61) to give us that context up front.

The time frame is the fourth year of Zedekiah, 593 B.C. The Jewish king, we are informed, traveled to Babylon at this time. As was suggested in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 29, Zedekiah may have made this trip to allay Nebuchadnezzar's concerns over his involvement in the international plotting addressed in chapter 27. Whatever the reason for the journey, we are told that Zedekiah is accompanied by Seraiah the son of Neriah (51:59), apparently the brother of Jeremiah's scribe Baruch. Seraiah was serving as the “quartermaster” or, as the Contemporary English Version translates the term, “the officer in charge of arranging for places to stay overnight” (“quiet prince” in the King James Version is evidently a mistranslation).

Prior to the departure of the entourage, Jeremiah writes on a scroll what God has revealed to him about the future downfall of Babylon—the words recorded in Jeremiah 50:1–51:58. The prophet sends the scroll with Seraiah to read aloud when he gets to Babylon. No doubt, God intends that a representative number of Babylonians hear this message, as there are numerous statements in it addressed directly to Babylon. However, His main purpose in directing Jeremiah to send the message to Babylon is probably to console the Jewish captives there.

### **“Move From the Midst of Babylon” (Jeremiah 51:59-61; 50:1-46)**

**July 28-29 Cont'd**

The Neo-Babylonian Empire of the Chaldeans would be destroyed. Repeated reference is made to an assembly of nations invading Babylon from the north (50:3, 9, 41; 51:48). In the next chapter we will see that one of the principal nations involved in this invasion is that of the Medes (51:11, 28), who were located to the northeast of Babylon in ancient times. This must surely refer in part to what happened 54 years later, in 539 B.C., when Cyrus of Persia, in alliance with the Medes, defeated the Chaldeans and took over their empire.

However, while these two chapters of Jeremiah portray a violent overthrow of the city of Babylon, “the Nabonidus Chronicle, a text describing the fall of Babylon, reports that ‘Cyrus entered

Babylon without a battle” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 51:29-32). *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* states: “It has troubled some scholars that chapters 50-51 predict the violent destruction of Babylon, whereas its defeat by Cyrus in 539 B.C. took place without a battle and with no damage to the city. But as with other predictive prophecies, if a fulfillment does not occur in one period, it is to be sought for in another and future one” (introductory notes on chap. 50).

Indeed, these two chapters also show that Babylon would be left desolate and perpetually uninhabited (50:39-40; 51:43). And yet the Persians made it their winter capital. Some, therefore, look to events that followed. “Cyrus took away its supremacy. Darius Hystaspes [a later successor of Cyrus] deprived it, when it rebelled, of its fortifications” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on 50:39). His successor, Xerxes, sacked Babylon in 497 B.C. This best fits the picture of Jeremiah 50–51 in an ancient context. Still, Alexander later resurrected the city as an Asian capital. His successor in the region, Seleucus, made it his capital for a while but soon relocated. “Seleucus Nicanor removed its citizens and wealth to Seleucia, which he founded in the neighborhood; and the Parthians [later] removed all that was left to Ctesiphon. Nothing but its walls was left under the Roman emperor [H]adrian” (*JFB Commentary*, note on 50:39).

Yet even this does not *fully* fit the *utter* destruction and sense of desolation that is prophesied. We should compare Jeremiah’s prophecy with what we saw earlier in Isaiah 13. The mention of wild animals living at the site is found in both Jeremiah 50:39 and Isaiah 13:21-22. Now note the verse that follows in Jeremiah: “‘As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors,’ says the LORD, ‘So no one shall reside there, nor son of man dwell in it’” (verse 40). Compare that with Isaiah 13:19-20: “And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation...” And notice particularly the end of the verse: “...nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there.” This just has not come to pass on the site of ancient Babylon. Bedouins have ranged over the area for centuries. People involved in archaeological excavation have lived at the site in more recent times. Moreover, in the past several years, Saddam Hussein of Iraq began a monumental restoration project at ancient Babylon, even though Jeremiah prophesied that none of the city’s stones would be used for rebuilding (Jeremiah 51:26). And certainly people have been living at the site to carry this out.

How do we explain this? As was pointed out in the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 13, the prophecy there was primarily referring to the fall of *end-time* Babylon—the coming European-centered economic, politico-military and religious world power bloc called the “Beast” and “Babylon” in the book of Revelation. So it is with these chapters of Jeremiah as well. Notice the phrase “daughter of Babylon” (50:42), wording that indicates an end-time counterpart to the original (compare Isaiah 47:1, 5). The expression “Behold, the days are coming,” points to events that are yet future (Jeremiah 51:47; 52). We can especially see the latter-day context here in the references to the return and restoration of both Judah *and* Israel (50:4-5, 19-20; 51:5)—which has never happened.

Thus, while much of Jeremiah 50–51 is applicable to ancient times—as is clear from the references to Nebuchadnezzar (50:17; 51:34) and the fact that Jeremiah sent Seraiah to read the prophecy to people of that time—these chapters also point to events that are yet future. “Babylon was employed as the rod in God’s hand for the chastising of all the other nations, and now at length that rod shall be thrown into the fire. The destruction of Babylon by Cyrus was foretold, long before it came to its height, by Isaiah, and now again, when it has come to its height, by Jeremiah.... And as [with] Isaiah’s prophecies...Jeremiah’s prophecies of the same events seem designed to point at the apocalyptic triumphs...over the New-Testament Babylon, many passages in the Revelation being borrowed hence” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, introductory notes on Jeremiah 50).

With this in mind, let us notice some of the particulars in the first part of the prophecy, chapter 50. (We will go through the rest of the prophecy in our next reading.)

Verse 2 mentions the Babylonian deity names Bel (which, like Baal, means “Lord”) and Merodach (the Hebraic form of Marduk, chief god of Babylon). These names referred to the same deity—often styled Bel-Marduk. It and the other false gods of Babylon are referred to using a word translated “images” (NKJV) or “idols” (NIV), but which actually denotes “dung pellets” or “animal droppings” (*Expositor’s*, note and footnote on verse 2; *Nelson*, note on verses 2-3). Idols are utterly revolting to the true God and should be to everyone else as well. God actually refers to the worship of idols as “insane” (verse 38)—completely irrational.

Interestingly, the humiliation and shame foretold for Babylon’s gods in verse 2 (compare 51:44, 47, 52) did not come with Cyrus’ takeover—except in the sense that they were powerless to prevent

it. For Cyrus allowed their temples and priests to continue unmolested. But the idols *were* “broken in pieces,” as it says, by Xerxes, whose attack was directed at the Babylonian religious establishment. In a modern context, Bel-Marduk or Baal has come down to us as the false “Lord” of the Babylonian counterfeit Christianity (see Revelation 17). This religious system still worships powerless idols. But these idols will be utterly destroyed at the coming of the *true* Lord to rule all nations.

God issues warnings to His people to leave Babylon so as not to be corrupted by it and suffer its destruction (verse 8; 51:6, 45; compare Isaiah 48:20). This was not meant in a literal sense for the time Jeremiah’s prophecy was given. We can be sure of that because he had already written to the captives instructing them to settle down where they were (Jeremiah 29:4-7). Furthermore, they could not leave until they were later freed. Certainly the message would still have applied in a figurative, spiritual sense—that is, though they dwelt in Babylon, they were to come out of its *ways*. On the other hand, the instruction to leave would have applied literally once the Jews were eventually freed. That is, they needed to leave Babylon before it was afterward sacked. Most significantly, the same warning is issued regarding *end-time* Babylon in Revelation 18:4: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”

As mentioned, God would bring great forces against the Babylonians. They are pictured as archers (Jeremiah 50:9, 14, 29, 42; 51:3)—though sword, lance and ax are also mentioned. The shooting of arrows may relate to Persian forces elsewhere described with bow and quiver (49:35; Isaiah 22:6). This probably meant literal bows and arrows in the ancient application of this prophecy. But what about an end-time fulfillment? Perhaps the image is simply one of dealing destruction from afar. The “arrows” or “missiles” used in *today’s* warfare are mechanical ones. Note this statement: “Their arrows shall be like those of an expert warrior; none shall return in vain” (Jeremiah 50:9). This almost sounds like modern smart missiles.

Verse 17 says that Israel has been partially devoured and scattered by the king of Assyria and is being finished off, so to speak, by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. This definitely applied to Jeremiah’s day. “Therefore,” God says in the next verse, “...I will punish the king of Babylon and his land.” This seems to still be referring to Nebuchadnezzar. And indeed, God did punish him by causing him to go crazy for seven years (see Daniel 4). However, God then restored him to sanity and glory—and Nebuchadnezzar never saw the fall of Babylon. So perhaps a successor ruler is meant. Belshazzar was killed at the time of the Medo-Persian takeover for his arrogant defiance (Daniel 5).

Yet this verse, Jeremiah 50:17, may also have an end-time application—and it does seem to, given its juxtaposition with the verses that follow concerning Israel’s future return. “Nebuchadnezzar” could denote not just the ruler with that name in Jeremiah’s day, but also an *end-time* Babylonian ruler of any name (for just as a prophecy of a future Elijah in Malachi 4 did not refer to Elijah himself, but simply to one in the same spirit, so it could be in this case). In fact, the name itself could have broader application. Consider that, according to some scholars, “the *-ezzar* of Nebuchadnezzar means Assyria, and appears in such words as Nabonassar, Bel-ch-azzar, Nebo-pol-assar, Tiglath-Pil-eser, Esar-haden, and so on.... Nebuchadnezzar is *Nebo-chah-adun-Assar* (Nebo, royal prince-of Assyria)” (E. Cobham Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 1898, “Nebuchadnezzar”). Nebo was a god whose name meant prophet or spokesman, thus equating him with the Greek Hermes or Roman Mercury, messenger of the gods. So Nebuchadnezzar (“Spokesman for the god of this world, royal prince of Assyria”) could conceivably be a general descriptor for the end-time Assyro-Babylonian “Beast” dictator. Even if not, the original Nebuchadnezzar was certainly a *precursor* of this future ruler. Just as Nebuchadnezzar’s pride brought God’s punishment on him, once again we see pride and haughtiness as a major reason the wrath of God will be unleashed on the end-time Babylon (verses 29-32).

In verse 21, Merathaim, “i.e., ‘double rebellion’—signifies Babylon. Southern Babylon was known as *mat marrati* (‘Land of the Bitter River’). ‘Pekod’ means ‘visitation’ or ‘punishment.’ An eastern Babylonian tribe was named Puqudu” (*Expositor’s*, note on verse 21). The *JFB Commentary* says Pekod was “a chief province of Assyria, in which Nineveh, now overthrown, once lay.... The visitation on Babylon was a following up of that on Assyria” (note on verse 21).

Babylon is to receive “the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of His temple,” which the Babylonians destroyed (verse 28). The end-time Babylonians will also defile the temple through the setting up within it of the future “abomination of desolation” (see Matthew 24:15). Jeremiah 51 mentions the shame suffered by the Jews because “strangers have come into the sanctuaries of the LORD’s house” (verse 51). As this provokes divine vengeance on Babylon’s “carved images” (verse 52), perhaps such images will be set up in God’s temple.

The drying up of waters in Jeremiah 50:38 refers, at least in part, to the diversion of the River Euphrates by Cyrus as a means of access into Babylon. This was explained in the Bible Reading Program's comments on Isaiah 45:1. As was further explained there, the Euphrates will also be dried up in the end time in preparation for the final destruction of Babylon (see Revelation 16:12).

As already stated, Babylon will be left wasted and desolate. In an end-time context, this would appear to refer to the capital of the future empire, probably Rome. Notice again the description of wild animals dwelling there (Jeremiah 50:39; compare 51:37; Isaiah 13:21-22; 14:23). While probably literal on one level, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* reports that at least one scholar "attempts to render the assonance of tsiim 'eth 'yim (*siyyim et- iyyim*, 'desert creatures and hyenas') by 'goblins and ghouls'.... [Another scholar] considered them, not as animals, but probably demons of the desert" (footnote on Jeremiah 50:39). This is certainly interesting given the parallel—as mentioned in the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 14:23—with Revelation 18:2, which mentions the future Babylon becoming "a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" (the latter also apparently referring to demons). This parallels the abyss or bottomless pit where Satan and his demons are confined after they are bound at Christ's return (Revelation 20:1-3).

Jeremiah 50:44-46 is adapted from the prophecy against Edom in 49:19-21, substituting Babylon for Edom (Review the Bible Reading Program comments on this other passage for alternative suggestions regarding its meaning.)

### **The Prophecy Against Babylon Continues (Jeremiah 51:1-58, 61-64)**

**July 30-31**

Chapter 51 begins with a reference to "Babylon...those who dwell in Leb Kamai" (verse 1). The King James Version renders Leb Kamai as "the midst of them that rise up against me." The Hebrew expression literally means "the heart of my enemy." Many argue that this is the first of two cryptograms in this chapter. The explanation is that a code is used wherein the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is expressed by the last, and so forth, so that *Leb Kamai* corresponds to *Chasdim*, the Hebrew word for Chaldeans. The other possible cryptogram in the chapter is Sheshach in verse 41, where, as mentioned in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 25:26 (the other place where this expression occurs), using the same letter substitution system would produce the word Babel. However, as in chapter 25, it is clear in both cases here in chapter 51 who is being described anyway—so it is not apparent why such a code would be needed. The word Sheshach, as explained in previous comments, has been interpreted variously by scholars, with perhaps the most likely meaning being, as noted before, "thy fine linen," which, again, would seem to tie in with the description of end-time Babylon in Revelation 18:16: "that great city that was *clothed in fine linen*, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls."

Babylon is going to be punished. God is going to rescue Israel and Judah—again showing an end-time context. The Lord has not forsaken His people "though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel" (Jeremiah 51:5). God has always intended Israel to be a godly, model nation for the world. And He will not be thwarted from His purpose. Despite the failings of the Israelites, the omnipotent God will yet confront them and lead them to repentance. (This does not mean that all Israelites will ultimately respond in a right way to God—but undoubtedly the vast majority will.)

Verse 7 uses the imagery of Babylon as a cup of wine being poured out on the nations by God. This is a symbol of divine wrath taken from 25:15-29. The nations are made drunk (to reel and stagger) through suffering conquest. Also, we can see this as God giving the nations over to Babylon's *spiritual* wine, thus making them drunk with false religion (compare Revelation 17:2). Yet now God will break the cup of Babylon. "Babylon has suddenly fallen" (verse 8; compare Isaiah 21:9; Revelation 18:2).

Jeremiah 51:9 states: "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed.... Let us go everyone to his own country." From the next verse we can see that it is God's people who are pictured speaking here. "The people of God that were captives among the Babylonians endeavoured, according to the instructions given them (Jer. 10:11), to convince them of the folly of their idolatry, but they could not do it; still [the Babylonians] doted as much as ever upon their graven images, and therefore the Israelites resolved to quit them and go to their own country" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, note on 51:9).

Verse 10 states, "The LORD has revealed our righteousness." This may just mean that, through punishing Babylon, God has shown the Israelites to be the ones *in the right* in the present circumstances. Babylon's treatment of them has been unjust. And the Israelites' abandonment of the Babylonians to suffer destruction is appropriate. However, the wording could also perhaps refer to

the Israelites being reconciled to God through repentance—and God making this manifest through His deliverance of them.

Verses 11 and 28 identify the forces that would invade Babylon from the north as those of the Medes. And the Medes, as was noted in the previous highlights, did invade ancient Babylon in 539 B.C. under the Persian king Cyrus the Great. Verse 27 mentions other nations that are joined with the Medes in the invasion—Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. In the sixth century B.C. these peoples lived in northwestern Iran and contiguous areas. “The first are the Urartu of the Assyrian inscriptions, practically Armenia, north of Lake Van. The second are the Mannaeans of the Assyrian records, who lived south of Lake Urmia. The last, the Ashguzai of the Assyrian inscriptions, were nomads living east of Lake Urmia (cf. Gen. 10:3 [where Ashkenaz is listed as a nation descended from Noah’s son Japheth, see verse 2])” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, note on Jeremiah 51:27-33).

While the ancient invasion was no doubt intended by the prophecy, we should also look beyond that. For given the clear latter-day context of much of this chapter and the previous one, it is evident that the modern descendants of these same peoples will play a part in the fall of end-time Babylon. As was pointed out in the Bible Reading Program comments on a parallel prophecy concerning Babylon’s downfall, Isaiah 21, while some of the Medes probably still live in their ancient homeland, many today may be found north of the Black Sea in what is now the Ukraine. Concerning the Urartians and Mannaeans, today’s Armenians and neighboring peoples would seem to be indicated.

Ashkenaz is commonly identified with the Scythians—though it should be understood that various nomadic groups near the Caspian Sea were known as Scythians, including the Israelites who came out of Assyrian captivity (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*). The people of Ashkenaz appear to have ranged eastward, becoming scattered throughout East Asia. One source explains that many of those who live today in “south-east Asia, Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, southern China and a few of the population of Japan are descendants of Ashkenaz” (“The Origin of the Nations of South-East Asia,” [cgca.net/coglinks/origin/oon2.1/vol2\\_1p4.html](http://cgca.net/coglinks/origin/oon2.1/vol2_1p4.html)). The book of Revelation describes a 200-million-man army from beyond the Euphrates River that will inflict great destruction on all mankind, including end-time Babylon, shortly before the return of Christ (see 9:13-19). Later, as referred to in the previous highlights, the Euphrates is “dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (16:12). As mentioned, Cyrus dried up the Euphrates to enable Babylon’s invasion in his day. Both events seem to be indicated by Jeremiah 50:38.

Babylon is said to “dwell by many waters” and to have a “sea” with “waves” (51:13, 36, 42, 55). Recall from Isaiah 21:1 that Babylon was there referred to as the “Wilderness of the Sea.” This was apparently a reference to the lakes and great marshes surrounding the Euphrates to the south of Babylon—the region bordering the Persian Gulf known as the Sealands. However, this could also be a reference to the later Babylon, Rome, which sat beside the Mediterranean, calling it Mare Nostrum (“Our Sea”), as the Roman Empire encompassed it. A similar situation may exist in the end time. The image is also quite likely a figurative one. The Romano-Babylonian Beast power is described as rising from the “sea” and as one that “sits on many waters” (see Daniel 7; 13; 17), these waters representing “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (verse 15).

Jeremiah 51:15-19 contrasts the omnipotent God with powerless idols and the foolishness of worshipping them. The words here are taken from an earlier prophecy God gave Jeremiah in 10:12-16. Both sections end by describing God as the “Portion” of His people—their livelihood and reward.

Then notice the next section. God says, “You are My battle-ax and weapons of war...” (verse 20). And He goes on to show how He would use this battle-ax to do great damage (verses 20-23). But just whom is He talking to and about? Verse 24 answers, “And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all the evil they have done in Zion in your sight.” Clearly, Babylon is the one being broken and destroyed—and, surprisingly, the Jews are the ones being used to accomplish this (and probably all Israel since Jacob is the last people referenced just prior to this section—verse 19). This did not happen in ancient times. Israelite Scythian forces did help to bring down ancient Assyria and its capital of Nineveh, but there was no parallel with the fall of ancient Babylon.

However, we do have other indications that such a resurgence of Israel and Judah will happen in the *end time*. For instance, Zechariah 14:14 says that at the time of Christ’s return, “Judah also will fight at Jerusalem.” Isaiah 41:14-15 says: “Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel.... You shall thresh the mountains [kingdoms] and beat them small, and make the hills [smaller nations] like chaff.” (Babylon is described in Jeremiah 51 as a mountain that will be threshed—verses 25, 33).

Micah 4:13 says, “Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion...you shall beat in pieces many peoples.” This last reference is likely dual, as it could also refer to spiritual Israel, the Church of God, glorified at Christ’s return and executing God’s judgment on the nations.

Yet we might wonder how physical Israel and Judah, enslaved and decimated peoples, could become resurgent prior to Christ’s return. Realize that this does not mean restoration to greatness. That will not come until after Christ establishes His Kingdom on this earth. Rather, resurgence simply implies a slight regaining of strength—and probably in pockets rather than all Israel. As we saw from Hosea 6:1-2, the time of Jacob’s trouble will apparently last about two and a half years, to be followed by the “day of the LORD’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isaiah 34:8)—the final year prior to Christ’s return. According to the book of Revelation, “the great day of His wrath” (6:17), which follows the Great Tribulation (compare verses 9-11), will encompass the great calamities of the seven trumpets (see Revelation 8–9).

Consider then: The people of end-time Babylon will be preoccupied by the catastrophic events of that final year, which may direct their attention away from their slaves to some degree. This could allow many Israelites scattered throughout Europe and other places to escape and pockets of resistance to form (think of the French resistance of World War II). These pockets of resistance may secure weapons with which to fight. When forces from the East—apparently including the latter-day Medes—come to wreak havoc on Europe (Revelation 9:13-21), this would likely free up even more Israelites. And the Israelite resistance forces would then be able to help in the destruction of end-time Babylon. Perhaps they will, in particular, help destroy the Babylonian capital of the last days, probably Rome. (Again, such Israelite participation would parallel the fall not of ancient Babylon, but of ancient Nineveh—which still makes sense when we realize that end-time Babylon will be fused together with end-time Assyria in the same power bloc.) Whether or not events turn out exactly this way, we should be able to see that a somewhat resurgent Israel can well fit in the panorama of end-time events laid out in Bible prophecy. And indeed, we are told here in Jeremiah 51 that it will help to bring about the final Babylon’s downfall.

Babylon stands guilty of great evil. The “slain of Israel” (verse 49) may refer also to “the blood of the saints...and of the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6). For all she has done, swift punishment is coming. “Babylon is compared to lions’ cubs (v. 38). She will be given a feast, followed not by the usual drunken sleep, but by a perpetual sleep of death (vv. 39-40)” (*Expositor’s*, note on verses 34-44). We see this specifically applying to Babylon’s leaders and prominent people in verse 57. It should be clarified that the statement “They shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake” does not mean they will never be resurrected, as they surely will be. Again, the point is simply that their “sleep” is death—long and ongoing. They will not awake from it as from typical slumber.

In part, this seems to be a reference to Belshazzar’s drunken feast (Daniel 5), which facilitated the downfall of the city of Babylon that very night. Of course, as with the rest of the prophecy, a greater fulfillment will come at the end of this age, during the Day of the Lord.

“The broad walls of Babylon” (Jeremiah 51:58) refers to the literal massive walls of the ancient city of Babylon, as well as to the exalted confidence in the strength and security of “Babylon the great” of the last days. She will think she “will not see sorrow” (Revelation 18:7), but “her plagues will come in one day” (verse 8).

After reading the prophecy, Seraiah is to visually enact the symbolism of Babylon’s fall by throwing the scroll, with a stone tied to it, into the Euphrates (Jeremiah 51:63). Babylon will sink to never rise again (verse 64; see also verse 42).

The section ends with the statement, “Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.” The Good News Bible renders this, “The words of Jeremiah end here.” This is because the next chapter of the book, Jeremiah 52, the last chapter, was evidently added by a later editor. However, we are not yet finished reading other parts of the book of Jeremiah.