

The Decline and Fall of Judah

Year 2, Quarter 3

In this study, Judah will follow Israel down the same path of decline and destruction. The time span from Israel's fall to Judah's is 120-140 years. We will study the historical accounts of the last kings of Judah along with the "minor" prophets Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk. We will conclude with the life of Jeremiah and his Lamentations over Judah's demise.

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Day 1: The Fall and Rise of Manasseh

Most of Judah's remaining history is under the rule of Manasseh, Amon and Josiah, whose combined reigns totaled 88 years. Manasseh's life is the mirror-image of his great-great grandfather, Uzziah, who was faithful early in life but proud and rebellious later. Manasseh's youthful wickedness surpassed even that of the Canaanites before him (2 Kgs 21:1-9, 16). God sent prophets to correct him but to no avail (2 Kgs 21:10-15). Finally, God provoked the Assyrians to take Manasseh captive to Babylon where he came to his senses and repented (2 Chr 33:10-13). Biblical history indicates that Manasseh remained faithful to God throughout his later years (2 Chr 33:14-17).

1. What sin of Manasseh's would God not pardon (comp. 2 Kgs 21:16 and 24:4)?
2. How did Manasseh demonstrate his repentance after returning to Jerusalem?
3. What is the significance of a measuring line and plummet and the wiping of a dish?

Day 2: Amon's Short Reign

Amon learned nothing from his father's trials and tribulations, for he reverted to the wickedness of Manasseh's early days (2 Chr 33:21-25). He was assassinated by his servants who were in turn executed for their treason.

4. Discuss how our mistakes may continue to have an effect even after our repentance.

Day 3: Josiah: A Zealous Reformer

Josiah's reign is significant for several reasons. First, during this period the Assyrian empire declines and is supplanted by the Babylonian kingdom. Further, Jeremiah was commissioned during the thirteenth year of Josiah's rule (Jer 1:2). Finally, Josiah engages in a mighty but vain attempt to restore the nation to faithfulness.

Josiah begins his reforms at a young age (16 years), cleansing the land of the idolatrous images, altars and priestly cemeteries (2 Chr 34:1-7). He then set about restoring the temple which had fallen into disrepair during the reign of Manasseh. Amid the debris of the temple a copy of the Law of Moses is found (2 Chr 34:14-21). Evidently, Josiah had been operating on the basis of oral teaching and a general knowledge of the Law, but now he is horrified to learn of the many details of the written covenant which had been long neglected and disobeyed. Fearing the worst, and rightfully so, Josiah seeks out guidance from a prophetess in Jerusalem named Huldah (2 Chr 34:22-28). Her response acknowledges both Josiah's personal righteousness and Judah's national corruption. The

news is not good: *“Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah, because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place, and not be quenched”* (2 Chr 34:24-25).

5. How does a godly man react when God’s Law convicts him of sin (2 Chr 34:27)?
6. Why had the copy of the Law been out of public view? Where was it found?
7. T/F Because the Law had been lost, God excused the ignorance of the people.

Day 4: Josiah’s Further Reforms

How does a righteous man respond when God states His unpleasant intentions? Josiah does not retreat from his reforms to hide within the comfortable confines of his palace; instead, he works with all his might to destroy sin and foster the knowledge of God. As the Ninevites had reasoned: *“Who can tell if God will ... turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?”* (Jon 3:9). Two reformation events receive special notice. After reading the Law to the assembled prophets, priests and general population, Josiah commences to clean up Jerusalem and the towns of Judah and then Bethel and the cities of Samaria (2 Kgs 23:1-20). Apparently, part of the Law which was read to Josiah included the prophecy which mentioned him by name some 300 years previously (comp. 2 Kgs 23:16-17 and 1 Kgs 13:2). The second noteworthy event included the restoration of the Passover (2 Chr 35:1-19).

8. Whose bones did Josiah leave untouched?
9. What was Josiah careful to do (2 Chr 35:4, 6, 12, 15)?
10. What example was set by the leaders of the people (2 Chr 35:7-8)?

Day 5: Josiah’s Untimely Death

The two accounts of Josiah’s death (2 Kgs 23:28-29; 2 Chr 35:20-24) leave the circumstances a bit uncertain. The most likely scenario is that Babylon has grown stronger and has become a threat to Assyria, which has enlisted the aid of the Egyptians. Josiah is pro-Babylonian (or at least anti-Assyrian) and, therefore, attempts to intercept the Egyptian force. Josiah dies at 39, leaving Judah bereft of his much-needed influence.

11. Upon what battlefield is Josiah mortally wounded?
12. Who especially lamented the death of Josiah (2 Chr 35:25)?
13. Comp. 2 Kgs 23:25 and 18:5. What suggests that such a saying was proverbial?

Day 1: Coming Punishment of Judah and Jerusalem

Zephaniah prophesies during the reign of Josiah, the great reforming king of Judah (640-609 B.C.; Zph 1:1). However, no mention is made of Josiah's reforms by Zephaniah. It may be that Zephaniah wrote before Josiah's reforms began in earnest (about 622-621 B.C.; see 2 Chr 34:8), or that Zephaniah knew that they would be ineffective in changing the hearts of the people. Zephaniah begins by warning Judah and Jerusalem of the coming day of the Lord (Zph 1:1-18). It will be a day of wrath, trouble, and distress (Zph 1:14-17), on account of Judah's idolatry, violence, deceit and foreign alliances.

1. What was the attitude of the people toward God (Zph 1:12)?
2. What did Zephaniah call the meek of the earth to do (2:3)?

Day 2: Judgment upon the Nations

Though He has a special relationship with Israel, God is ruler of all the nations as well. He has taken note of their wickedness and treachery and now threatens to punish them all with the scourge of the Babylonians (Zph 2:4-15). The Philistine cities - Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron - have long been a thorn in Israel's side. The Moabites and Ammonites have also reviled and opposed God's people. The Ethiopians and Assyrians are also added to the "hit list" of God's wrath.

3. What future hope is alluded to in Zph 2:7?
4. What attitude did Nineveh have about itself?
5. Describe what Nineveh would be like when God got through with it.

Day 3: Jerusalem, the Rebellious City

Zephaniah has little good to say about Jerusalem and the condition into which the city has fallen (Zph 3:1-7). The corruption begins at the top; wickedness infected princes, judges, prophets and priests alike. God had made every effort to influence the people with His righteousness, "*but the unjust knows no shame*" (3:5).

6. The princes and judges are likened to what animals? What does this suggest?
7. What did God hope His judgment against other nations would do (Zph 3:6-7)?
8. The people "*rose early and _____*."

Day 4: The Remnant of Israel: “A Meek and Humble People”

God now speaks beyond punishment and wrath to a future time of restoration and blessing (Zph 3:8-13). While such passages may allude to the literal restoration of a Jewish remnant to the land of promise, which was fulfilled in 536 B.C. and the years following, they ultimately point to a spiritual restoration to be accomplished in the Messiah. Zephaniah, however, emphasizes not the Messiah but the altered conditions among God’s people when these blessings are realized. Spiritual unity and a focus upon God will replace idolatry (Zph 3:9; comp. Rom 10:11-13; 1 Cor 1:10). Haughtiness and pride will give way to a meek and humble people who trust in God (Zph 3:11-12; comp. Mt 5:5; Jas 4:6-10). Sinful behavior will no longer characterize the people of God; instead, they will diligently seek to erase sin from their lives (Rom 6:6, 11-14; 1 Jn 3:6-9). The pastoral scene of tending sheep, dwelling in God’s holy mountain, calling on the name of the Lord and moral uprightness are all indicative of life in the Messianic kingdom.

9. What is the significance of the phrase “*in My holy mountain*”? Where have we seen it before?

10. Who is the remnant of Israel (Zph 3:13; comp. Rom 11:5)?

Day 5: Coming Days of Joy

Zephaniah’s prophecy began on a low note but ends on a high one (Zph 3:14-20). The joy and gladness to come upon Israel is a direct result of their intimate fellowship with God: “*The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more ... The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing*” (Zph 3:15, 17). There is mutual gladness between God and His faithful people, for they share mutual love, fellowship and purpose. Christians live with the confidence and joy of knowing that God will protect them, provide for them and promote their righteous activities for His sake. They revel in their association with God upon this earth and expectantly anticipate eternal togetherness with God and His righteous family. What grace is shown by God in His willingness to look beyond Judah’s present wickedness and provide a kingdom of righteousness for all who may desire to enter it.

11. What response does God desire from Israel’s scattering (Zph 3:18)?

12. What would be done to those who had afflicted and humiliated Israel?

13. Describe the pleasure God gets from His association with His people today. Do you see yourself as one in whom God delights?

Day 1: Jehoahaz' Short Reign

After the sudden and tragic death of Josiah, the people appoint his son Jehoahaz to succeed him (2 Kgs 23:31-34; 2 Chr 36:1-4). Pharaoh Necho, now the dominant foreign force in Judah, does not approve of this choice and deposes Jehoahaz after only three months. The prophet Jeremiah tells of Jehoahaz' (also known as Shallum) demise (Jer 22:11-12). Jehoahaz reigned in 609 B.C.

1. The prophecy of Jer 22:11-12 was fulfilled in what land?

Day 2: The Reign of Jehoiakim

Jehoiakim, the half-brother of Jehoahaz, is enthroned by Pharaoh Necho as his vassal and receives tribute from him (2 Kgs 23:34-35). However, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeats Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish in 605 B.C., takes control of Judah, and receives tribute from Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 24:1-7; 2 Chr 36:5-8). After three years, Jehoiakim rebels against Babylonian rule resulting in a siege against Jerusalem and his own captivity and death. Jehoiakim reigns from 609-597 B.C., during which time Daniel is taken to Babylon (Dan 1:1ff). Jehoiakim is also the king who cuts up Jeremiah's scroll and burns it in the fire (Jer 36).

2. According to Jeremiah, what was Jehoiakim's main interest (Jer 22:13-17)?
3. What had been Jehoiakim's manner from his youth (Jer 22:21)?
4. What did God declare upon Jehoiakim because of his attitude (Jer 36:30-31)?

Day 3: The Short Reign of Jehoiachin

Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah or Coniah) only reigns three months and ten days before Nebuchadnezzar takes him captive to Babylon in 597 B.C. (2 Kgs 24:8-12; 2 Chr 36:9-10). At this time most of what remained in the temple of any value was taken to Babylon as well a large contingency of captives (2 Kgs 24:13-16). The prophet Ezekiel was taken to Babylon at this time (Ezek 1:2; 33:21).

5. What kind of people were taken captive? Who did this leave in Judah?

Day 4: The Reign of Zedekiah and the Fall of Jerusalem

Zedekiah, the third son of Josiah and the uncle of Jehoiachin, is the last king of Judah. Fittingly, he is appointed not by God but Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:17-20). Zedekiah has little to work with; the country has been decimated and the people with the most

ability and potential have already been removed from the land. Still, Zedekiah has the counsel of Jeremiah at his disposal, but he *“did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD”* (2 Chr 36:12). We will learn more of this weak and vacillating king during our study of Jeremiah, including his imprisonment of the great prophet and his eventual release, both owing to political pressure.

At the end of his eleven year reign, Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar inciting the final siege against the city of God. For a year and a half Jerusalem suffers the sub-human conditions produced by such an affair (2 Kgs 25:1-3). Finally, the walls of Jerusalem are breached in its final death-shudder (2 Kgs 25:4-21; 2 Chr 36:15-21; Jer 39:1-10). The city’s walls are razed; the temple is looted and torched; all significant structures are burned; the inhabitants - young and old, men and women - are slaughtered without pity or remorse. Zedekiah, himself, seeks to escape but is captured and subjected to a horrendous fate.

Finally, the end which so long seemed inevitable has come. God had born patiently with His stiff-necked and wicked people until they were beyond salvage. The only way forward is to go backward, to punish them and remove them from the land for the purpose of retrieving a future faithful remnant. What a sad ending, what a waste of potential, what misery and wretchedness the people had brought upon themselves. Surely obedience to God is better than the consequences of disobedience. Unfortunately, many realize this truth all too late.

6. What was Zedekiah forced to watch? What then happened to him?
7. How did the people respond to the prophets sent to correct them (2 Chr 36:15-16)?
8. How long was the land of Canaan to observe this “Sabbath” according to Jeremiah?

Day 5: Gedaliah, Governor of the Wreckage

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor over what remained of Judah, and surviving remnants of the population began to filter back into the land (2 Kgs 25:22-26; Jer 40:7-12). Soon, however, rumors of an assassination plot against Gedaliah begin to circulate, but Gedaliah refuses to heed them (Jer 40:13-16). After two months of rule, Gedaliah is murdered along with an entourage of Jews and Chaldean soldiers (Jer 41:1-7). This action effectively removes the last vestiges of Jewish occupation of Canaan as the remnant flees to Egypt in fear of Nebuchadnezzar’s retribution.

9. Who is Johanan and how does he propose to stop the assassination attempt?
10. Upon whose orders was Ishmael of Nethaniah acting?

Day 1: Introduction

The prophecy of Nahum addresses the coming destruction of Nineveh, the great capital city of the Assyrian empire. Already by the seventh century B.C., the time of Nahum's prophecy, Nineveh was a city of great antiquity. Evidence of settlement reaches back to about 5000 B.C.; Nineveh was a political and social influence for thousands of years.

“Building inscriptions ... and archeological evidence show that thirteen kings who ruled Assyria from the middle of the 2nd millennium to the end of the 7th century B.C. built palaces in Nineveh. Although Nineveh shared the splendor of other royal cities of Assyria - Asshur, Nimrûd (Calah), and Khorsabad - throughout the centuries, not until the days of Sennacherib (705-681) did it become the capital of the land and one of the architectural wonders of the world.” (**ISBE**, Vol. 3, p. 539)

The name “Nineveh” had long produced fear in Israel. Through Nahum God now promises to avenge the extreme wickedness and cruelty for which Nineveh was notorious.

Day 2: A Jealous, Avenging God

Nahum begins by describing the vengeance of God upon His enemies (Nah 1:1-11). While he acknowledges that God is slow to anger, and therefore generous in providing opportunity to repent, “*He will not at all acquit the wicked*” (v 3). Note the descriptive terms of God in this section: jealous, furious, vengeance, wrath, indignation, fierceness, anger, etc. These are reserved for His enemies. On the other hand, “*The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him*” (v 7; comp. 2 Tim 2:19). All of nature is under God's control, either for retribution upon His enemies or blessing upon His people. God ultimately sees Nineveh's opposition to Israel as opposition to Him. This He will avenge.

1. Why does it sometimes seem that the wicked get away with their evil (Nah 1:3)?
2. What is the answer to the questions in Nah 1:6? Comp. Rev 6:16-17.

Day 3: Good Tidings

As Nahum writes, Assyria is in full strength and splendor as an earthly kingdom. Nevertheless, God declares the end of the idolatrous, vile nation (Nah 1:12-15). Nahum repeats a phrase used 100 years earlier by Isaiah: “*Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!*” (see Is 52:7; Rom 10:15). The context of Isaiah also mentions the afflictions by the Assyrians and other persecutions by uncircumcised and unclean nations (Is 52:1-6). The passage is Messianic and speaks of the ulti-

mate deliverance and freedom from bondage to come in the Messiah. Nahum does not seem to have such Messianic thoughts in mind. He merely proclaims the good news that Nineveh, the dreaded and cruel enemy of Israel, has finally been judged and punished.

3. Who had actually afflicted Judah and Israel by the Assyrians?
4. What would the defeat of the Assyrians allow Judah to do (Nah 1:15)?

Day 4: The Sound of Battle

Nahum envisions the sights and sounds of war in chapter 2. The invading army comes against Nineveh with spears, shields, chariots, torches - like a raging river which has dissolved the dam holding it back (2:3-6). The shouts of defense can be heard within the great city - *“Man the fort! Watch the road! Strengthen your flanks!”* - but to no avail: *“She is empty, desolate, and waste! The heart melts, and the knees shake; much pain is in every side, and all their faces are drained of color”* (2:1, 10). The defeat of Nineveh is decreed by God: *“Behold, I am against you,” says the LORD of hosts ...*” (2:13; 3:5). These scenes come true in 612 B.C. when Nineveh is destroyed by the combined forces of the Babylonians under Nabopolassar and the Medes under Cyaxares. Details of this battle have been preserved in the Babylonian Chronicle.

5. In what way had Nineveh been like a pool of water (Nah 2:8)?
6. To what had Nineveh and the Assyrians been compared (Nah 2:11-12)?
7. What two nations together destroyed Nineveh? In what year?

Day 5: “Woe to the Bloody City!”

The scenes of destruction continue through chapter 3. One can almost hear the clapping of hooves and clatter of chariots through the city streets, the shrieks of horror as men, women and children are indiscriminately thrust through with lances and swords. The dead bodies clog alleys and doorways, hindering panic-stricken mobs from fleeing to nooks and crannies of safety within the city. Everything which has given Nineveh a sense of invincibility melts before the invading army: the strongholds, gates, water storage, construction crews, merchants, nobles and army commanders all fail. It would be done to Nineveh what the Assyrians themselves had done to the great Egyptian city No-Amon (or Thebes) in 663 B.C. “What goes around comes around,” and it is all coming back upon Assyria.

8. Why must Nahum’s prophecy be between 663 B.C. and 612 B.C.?
9. How would people respond to the news of Nineveh’s downfall (Nah 3:7, 19)?
10. How does God describe the humiliation and humbling of a people (Nah 3:5)?

Day 1: Introduction

Habakkuk is a hidden jewel in the Old Testament, a small and often overlooked book which provides a solid foundation for faith in the midst of perplexity and adversity. The events of the book provide a narrow time-frame for the prophecy: the Chaldeans (or Babylonians) have supplanted the Assyrians as the dominant world power and are moving westward, swallowing up everything in their path. But they have not yet reached Judah. This restricts the date of the prophecy to somewhere between 612 and 606 B.C. Note Homer Hailey's overview of Habakkuk:

"The book of Habakkuk differs from other books of prophecy in one special aspect. Instead of taking Jehovah's message directly to the people, he takes the complaint of the people to Jehovah, representing them in the complaint ... The book opens with a cry to Jehovah because of the wickedness, injustice, and disregard for law in Judah. In response, Jehovah points to the rising Chaldean power as His instrument of judgment against Judah's sins. This only heightens the prophet's perplexity. How could Jehovah punish Judah by using a nation more wicked than it? Jehovah points out that the righteous man will live by his faith; and as Habakkuk and the few righteous live by their faith, they must wait for Jehovah ... (Habakkuk) looks back over Israel's history and sees Jehovah coming to assist His people at all times of their need. His judgments are for the salvation of His people. With this realization in mind, he can now see that this judgment will also serve this purpose ... The growth of faith from perplexity and doubt to the height of absolute trust is one of the beautiful aspects of the book. Its lesson is for all time." (**A Commentary on the Minor Prophets**, pp. 272-274)

1. What significant things happened on the dates 612 B.C. and 606 B.C.?

Day 2: Habakkuk's First Question

Habakkuk, a great prophet of God, is troubled by the same feelings that plague all people at one time or another (Hab 1:1-4). Habakkuk is a righteous man and is therefore troubled by the wickedness of his countrymen. It seems to Habakkuk that evil men have the upper hand and take advantage of the godly. The presence and especially the *success* of evil in the world can be a great source of distress. This is a matter that Habakkuk has presented to God, but God seems to have neither listened nor cared. With Habakkuk, we sometimes wonder, "*Why doesn't God **do** something?*"

2. What seems powerless to the prophet?
3. Discuss how you feel when God doesn't answer your prayers when you expect Him to.
4. What is the atmosphere like in Judah during the latter stages of its existence?

Day 3: God's Answer

God's answer to Habakkuk's first question illustrates the quip, "Be careful what you ask for; you might just get it." Habakkuk wants something done about the evil, and God replies, "I am sending the Chaldeans to punish the evildoers." The people rejoiced at Nahum's prophecy of Nineveh's destruction, but that joy is turned into mourning as the people hear of the approaching Chaldeans (Hab 1:5-11). This powerful, fearsome and cruel people will be God's instrument of judgment upon Judah, sweeping them away from the land in accordance with the covenant of Moses which had been broken.

5. How is this turn of events and the rise of the Chaldeans described (Hab 1:5)?
6. What does Hab 1:7 say about the Chaldeans?
7. What great mistake do the Chaldeans make which will eventually destroy them?

Day 4: Habakkuk's Second Question

God's use of the Chaldeans against Judah only serves to raise another question: How can a righteous and pure God have anything to do with wicked and vile people like the Chaldeans (Hab 1:12-2:1)? This, to Habakkuk, seems to be another form of injustice, for he sees Judah (or possibly the few righteous people left) as better than the very ones who are to execute God's wrath (Hab 1:13). What about the Chaldeans' **own** wickedness? What will be done about that?

8. To what activity does Habakkuk refer to describe the conquest of the Chaldeans?
9. What does Habakkuk determine to do after asking his second question?

Day 5: God's Further Reply

God recognizes two different categories of men, the proud and self-willed, whose souls are not upright, and the faithful and just, who will find life (Hab 2:2-4). He will elaborate on the former category throughout the rest of chapter 2, but the latter observation seems deceptively simple for the complex questions posed by Habakkuk. Whatever we may or may not understand about this life, if we know that continued faith in God will produce ultimate peace, protection and prosperity, then we have the secret to eternal life. Yes, Habakkuk and Jeremiah and other righteous people will experience residual suffering along with the wicked, but the suffering is for a different reason. To the wicked it is God's punishment and disfavor; to the godly it suggests unfortunate circumstances which will not affect one's standing with God. Remember, God "*knows those who trust in Him*" (Nah 1:7). As simple as it sounds, this is the ultimate answer to managing the wickedness and injustice that we will inevitably experience in this world.

10. Discuss the use of Hab 2:4 in Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, and Heb 10:37-39.

Day 1: Woe #1

God gives Habakkuk assurance that the Chaldeans will themselves one day be destroyed by virtue of their pride and rebellion. Though the wicked may enjoy temporary “success” and justify their evil practices, God promises their eventual destruction. In the first woe to the Chaldeans (Hab 2:5-8), warning is given to any nation which overextends itself by conquering more lands and people than it can administer. In their greed for more land and the confiscated riches of foreigners, the internal strength of the conquering nation lies neglected. Eventually, their treachery and violence will cause revolt among those they have afflicted and they will be too weak to control their vast frontiers. A perfect example of these principles in modern times was Nazi Germany.

1. How were the Chaldeans like death and Sheol (Hab 2:5)?
2. Does the principle of the first woe apply only to nations or to individuals as well?

Day 2: Woe #2 and #3

The second and third woes highlight the futility of trying to achieve one’s goals on the basis of injustice (Hab 2:9-14). Houses, towns or cities which are built upon bloodshed and iniquity are doomed, *“for the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the timbers will answer it.”* Wickedness will not ultimately prosper; God will see to it.

3. Compare Hab 2:11 and Lk 19:40. What would the stones cry out about Jesus?
4. What will be fed to the fire? Who will cause it?
5. Will knowledge of God ever be completely removed from the earth?

Day 3: Woe #4 and #5

Some governments and ruling powers use their position to oppress and dispirit their subjects in order to control and sap them of their labor and goods. Political delusions, deceitful promises, propaganda and other devious devices are used to drunken the souls of men (Hab 2:15-17). Such behavior will be reversed and recompensed by God. The last woe (Hab 2:18-20) is reserved for people who carve, chisel and mold images into gods which are then used to justify the evils previously mentioned. This is the attraction to idols, not the wood or stone itself but the attraction of self-approval.

6. From whose cup will unrighteous nations be made to drink (Hab 2:16)?
7. What is God’s last word to calm His agitated prophet (Hab 2:20)?

Day 4: “In Wrath Remember Mercy”

Habakkuk is satisfied with God’s answer to his complaints and now expresses his reverence and awe through a psalm (Hab 3:1-16). Looking back over the history of his people, Habakkuk can see the many times in which Jehovah fought for Israel against their enemies. Many had been the occasions when the earth trembled at His presence and the forces of nature suspended or magnified to the benefit of His people. The effect upon Habakkuk is seen in 3:16. Though he trembles before and dreads the approach of the army he knows must come, he finds peace and rest in the knowledge of God’s care for the faithful. Such trustful resignation is reminiscent of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He dreaded what lay ahead but entrusted Himself to God’s care and protection. Such an outlook in the midst of danger and distress is the mark of spiritual maturity, and it is a characteristic for which all Christians should strive.

8. For what purpose had God gone forth in His awesome displays of power (Hab 3:13)?

9. What does the faithful child of God find in the day of trouble (Hab 3:16)?

Day 5: “I Will Rejoice in the Lord”

Habakkuk closes with a beautiful sentiment of resignation and constant faith which is deserving of prayerful meditation (Hab 3:17-19). Our faith in God must rise above the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Whether or not we can understand all the “whys”, grief and sorrow, pain and anguish, mistreatment and injustice will come to all. God has assured to the righteous His favor and the assurance of everlasting life; He protects and provides and comforts according to our true (not always *felt*) needs. God’s purposes are often hidden to the present; we must trust that they are being realized whether we understand them or not.

“The battle of faith has been fought and won in the prophet’s heart; the experience for which it was wrought is yet ahead. From perplexity and doubt he has passed through the school of God’s revelation to him, and now he can look to whatever may come and meet it with quiet dignity and confidence” (**ibid, p. 295**).

When all is said and done, all the questions of life will not be directly answered. But faith carries on regardless. Many will doubt, fear, rebel and despair, *“but the just shall live by his faith.”*

10. Can you put Hab 3:17 into more modern language? Use illustrations that would reflect the times in which we live.

Day 1: The Commission of Jeremiah

Jeremiah is commissioned by God in the thirteenth year of King Josiah (about 627 B.C.) and prophesies through the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Jer 1:1-3). One year before Jeremiah's call, Josiah, at the tender age of twenty, had initiated a reformation project of enormous proportions (2 Chr 34:3). Jeremiah, when appointed to assist the king in the reform, is likewise a young man (Jer 1:4-6). For the next eighteen years these two youthful leaders will spearhead the last-ditch attempt to save Judah, Josiah wielding civil authority and Jeremiah announcing the revelations of Jehovah. The prophet is intimidated by the task put before him (Jer 1:7-8), but God assures him of divine protection and strength (Jer 1:17-19).

1. What does God indicate about the effectiveness of Josiah's reforms (Jer 1:14-16)?
2. Upon what basis did Jeremiah feel himself to be unqualified for prophetic office?
3. How will the people react to Jeremiah's rebukes (Jer 1:19)?
4. What does God forbid Jeremiah to do (Jer 16:1-2, 5, 8)? Why?

Day 2: A Review of Judah's Sins

Chapters 2-6 of Jeremiah give an overview of how Judah has reached the brink of destruction. Rejection of God in favor of idols is the root cause of Judah's wickedness (Jer 2:8-13, 26-28; 5:7-9). In this Judah has followed in the footsteps of Israel, and God declares the apparent repentance of the people through Josiah's reforms to be hollow (Jer 3:6-10). For all their unfaithfulness, destruction is coming from the north (Jer 4:5-9, 19-22; 5:15-17; 6:1-9, 22-26). Even while declaring their punishment, God still pleads for their return to Him (Jer 3:12-15, 21-22).

5. Of what did the people have no knowledge (Jer 4:22)?
6. How did the people react to the approaching threat (Jer 5:12-13)?
7. T/F God would completely destroy Judah as He did Israel (Jer 4:27; 5:10).
8. What kind of heart do the people of Judah have (Jer 5:23-25)?

Day 3: False Trust in the Temple

The people of Judah justified their wickedness on account of the temple of Jehovah that was in their midst. They had apparently convinced themselves that as long as the temple

was standing they enjoyed God's approval and protection. God instructs Jeremiah to go directly to the temple and rebuke such hypocritical notions (Jer 7:1-11). The history of Shiloh is called to their attention (Jer 7:12-15). Shiloh was where the ark was kept before its capture by the Philistines and by implication it was now in ruins (see 1 Sam 4:3-4, 10-11). It is a mistake to substitute things of no consequence for personal righteousness, a common fault of religious people.

9. What had the temple of God become to them (Jer 7:11)?

10. What does God prohibit Jeremiah from doing (Jer 7:16)?

11. What will the people not do with Jeremiah's words?

Day 4: Symbols of Destruction

God frequently had His prophets provide visual demonstrations of the truths they were teaching. In one instance, Jeremiah is given elaborate instructions concerning a linen sash or skirt, an article of clothing worn about the waist down to the thighs (Jer 13:1-2). Jeremiah is told to wear it but not wash it, then take it all the way to the Euphrates River and bury it under a rock (Jer 13:3-5). A long time later, he is then commanded to retrieve the ruined sash which is then used as a symbol of what is to become of Judah (Jer 13:6-11). Jeremiah also makes reference to bottles of wine which symbolize the drunkenness which will befall Judah (Jer 13:12-14). It will not be alcoholic drunkenness but the inability to reason, to use good judgment and defend themselves against attack.

12. In what way did the sash represent Judah?

13. What would burial at the Euphrates signify?

Day 5: Jeremiah's Frustrations

The sins of others will always grieve the souls of righteous men. Jeremiah is burdened beyond comfort and wishes to "get away from it all" (Jer 8:18-9:2). He is so hated for his prophetic rebukes that those of his own hometown plot against his life (Jer 11:18-23). When Jeremiah cries out to God about the evil and injustice about him, God responds with a shocking message: "*If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?*" (Jer 12:5). In other words, it is only going to get worse. Jeremiah's dejection reaches a peak in 15:10-21. He has served God faithfully but is lonely, persecuted and despondent. He looks to God for reassurance and is not disappointed. Jeremiah is a great example of perseverance in the midst of trial.

14. Describe Jeremiah's feelings from Jer 8:18-9:2.

15. What did Jeremiah's sufferings make him wonder about God (Jer 15:18)?

Day 1: The Potter and the Clay

Jeremiah is directed to a potter's house where God gives him another revelation concerning the fate of Judah (Jer 18:1-12). God declares His sovereign right to do whatever He chooses with nations, yet His actions are affected by their response to Him. God is not a harsh autocrat who rules arbitrarily and without consideration of the free will of His creatures. Note the degree of God's interaction with this world: nations rise and fall at His bidding.

1. What is the element of comparison between the potter and Jehovah?
2. For what reason does God destroy nations? How can they avoid such a fate?

Day 2: Growing Persecution of Jeremiah

Jeremiah is increasingly threatened as Judah continues to unravel (Jer 17:14-18). Further plots are laid against his life, and the prophet constantly relies upon Jehovah's awareness of what is happening and His promise of protection (Jer 18:18-23). At the instigation of Pashhur, the chief governor of the temple, Jeremiah is arrested, beaten and put in stocks for prophesying against Judah (Jer 20:1-6). Jeremiah, however, is undaunted; upon his release, his message remains unchanged. We are again given valuable insight into the thoughts and feelings of this great prophet. No man is above the occasional discouragement spawned by rejection and mistreatment. Jeremiah entertains the idea of forsaking his assignment (Jer 20:7-11), but he realizes that he cannot keep silent no matter the consequences. All of God's great servants through the ages were men and women of similar conviction.

3. What attitude did Judah have toward Jeremiah's prophecies (Jer 17:15)?
4. What fate awaits Pashhur?
5. How did Jeremiah feel when he refrained from saying what was right (Jer 20:9)?

Day 3: The Burning of the Scroll

During the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.), an interesting incident occurs which reveals how Jeremiah's prophecies were recorded as well as the attitudes with which they were received (Jer 36). Baruch is Jeremiah's assistant and records in a scroll all the prophecies given to date. He is then instructed by Jeremiah to read the scroll aloud in the temple (Jer 36:5-10). The words frighten the princes, as well they should. These events take place in 604 B.C., two years after Nebuchadnezzar has come upon Jerusalem and taken away both articles from the temple and captives - including Daniel (Dan 1:1-3, 6).

King Jehoiakim, however, remains obstinate and contemptuously cuts up the scroll and burns it in the fire (Jer 36:22-25). Such is indicative of the hardness of Judah's heart; they were unwilling to recognize the terminal danger confronting them even after the Babylonians had made crippling incursions into the land.

6. What did Jeremiah and Baruch do after the scroll was read to the princes?
7. What particular prophecies made Jehoiakim irate (Jer 36:29)?
8. What order did Jehoiakim give concerning Baruch and Jeremiah?
9. T/F Destroying copies of God's word changes what God has said.

Day 4: Messages to the Sons of Josiah

An important aspect of Jeremiah's prophecies has to do with the future of the throne of David. In accordance with His covenant, God promises to preserve David's descendants upon the throne if faithfulness is found within them (Jer 22:1-5). Such faith, however, is not to be found. Jehoahaz, or Shallum, would die in Egyptian captivity (Jer 22:11-12; 2 Kgs 23:33-34). Jehoiakim, as previously noted, would die in dishonor (Jer 22:18-19, 21). The most significant prophecy concerns Coniah (or Jehoiachin - 2 Kgs 24:6, or Jeconiah - 1 Chr 3:16; Mt 1:11) in Jer 22:24-30. With this king, who reigns only three months, God brings to an end the Davidic line of **earthly** kings. Of Coniah God said, *"Write this man down as childless ... for none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore **in Judah**"* (Jer 22:30). Coniah was not literally childless, for he is an ancestor of Jesus (see 1 Chr 3:17; Mt 1:11-12). But in regard to the covenant of David, God declares that no descendant of Coniah's will ever reign on the throne **in Judah**. Therefore, if the coming Messiah is a descendant of Coniah and is promised the throne of David (Is 23:5-6), **he cannot rule in Jerusalem!** This prophecy completely destroys millennial theory which states that Jesus will come back to the earth and rule for 1000 years in Jerusalem.

10. If Jesus is now ruling but He cannot rule in Jerusalem, where is His throne?

Day 5: Jerusalem Is Doomed; Judah Must Surrender

In the final days of Jerusalem's existence, Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to intercede on behalf of the nation in the hope that the siege of Nebuchadnezzar would be lifted (Jer 21:1-2). God's response removes all hope; He declares the city irrevocably lost and counsel is given to surrender to the Babylonians. This brands Jeremiah as a traitor.

11. What conditions did Jeremiah have to face in Jerusalem's downfall (Jer 21:7)?
12. What was the way of life and death (Jer 21:8)?

Day 1: Seventy Years of Captivity

Chapters 25-29 of Jeremiah speak in some detail concerning the certainty and duration of the Babylonian captivity. These prophecies were widely published for Daniel refers to Jeremiah's predictions: *"I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD, given through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem"* (Dan 9:2). The first such prophecy is found in Jer 25:1-14. The prophecy is given in 605 B.C., during the reign of Jehoiakim:

"That year marked a notable turning point for Judah. It was the year Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt at Carchemish in a decisive battle which determined the destiny of the near eastern world for the next seventy years (Jer 46:2). That battle ended Egypt's hopes of empire (cf. 2 Kgs 23:29-24:7) and established Babylon as the master of the ancient world. In the aftermath, the Babylonians swept south and came down upon Judah for the first time, taking Daniel and some others to Babylon as hostages" (Dan 1:1-7). (L.A. Mott, **Notebook on Jeremiah**)

1. How many years has Jeremiah now been prophesying?
2. What would happen to Babylon and its king at the end of the seventy year captivity?

Day 2: Jeremiah's Fate Debated

The warning of Jerusalem's destruction in Jer 26 also comes in the reign of Jehoiakim. The priests and (false) prophets are incensed at Jeremiah's pronouncements of doom and have him arrested (Jer 26:8-11). At his trial, two precedents are cited concerning Jeremiah's possible fate. The first concerned the prophet Micah and his similar pronouncements during the days of Hezekiah (Jer 26:17-19; Mic 3:12). Hezekiah was a righteous king and repented at such preaching. The second precedent was set by Jehoiakim himself (Jer 26:20-23), who had killed the prophet Urijah for speaking against Jerusalem. The influence of Ahikam held sway and Jeremiah's life was spared.

3. What did God command Jeremiah (Jer 26:2)? Why might he need this admonition?
4. What did Urijah do which probably aggravated his situation?
5. Where have we seen Ahikam before (2 Kgs 22:12-14)?

Day 3: The Symbol of the Bonds and Yokes

Jeremiah 27 clearly shows the two political views of the day: 1) Jeremiah declares that Babylon is a secure and stable kingdom and will rule over all the nations. Self-preserva-

tion demands that Judah surrender to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 27:1-11). 2) Jeremiah's opponents deny Babylonian domination (Jer 27:12-18); they hold out the false hope that *"the vessels of the LORD's house will now shortly be brought back from Babylon"* (Jer 27:16). Their counsel is resistance to the heathens, which is a death sentence for Judah.

6. What was Jeremiah to do with the bonds and yokes he had made?
7. Who was Judah listening to instead of God's approved prophets (Jer 27:9)?
8. Why should the people believe Jeremiah? (Comp. Jer 27:20 and 28:8-9)

Day 4: Hananiah's False Prophecy

A specific example of false prophecy is given in Jer 28. This prophecy is remarkable for its degree of total fabrication. Hananiah, claiming *"Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel ..."*, predicts that Jeconiah, all the captives and the articles of the temple will be returned within two years (Jer 28:2-4). This is complete fabrication. Should we be surprised, then, when men today speak bald-faced lies "in the name of the Lord"? Jeremiah condemns Hananiah as a false prophet, whereupon Hananiah takes the yoke off Jeremiah's neck and breaks it, again asserting that Nebuchadnezzar's power will soon end (Jer 28:7-11). This brings the wrath of God upon him (28:12-16).

9. Those who believed Hananiah were trusting in what (Jer 28:15)?
10. What kind of yoke had Hananiah made for Judah and the surrounding nations?
11. How soon did Hananiah die after his arrogant display (comp. Jer 28:1 and 17)?

Day 5: Letter to the Captives

Not only was Judah plagued by false prophets but the Babylonian captives were as well. Jeremiah writes the captives and again affirms the seventy year duration, encouraging the people to cooperate with the Babylonian government and make peaceful and productive lives for themselves (Jer 29:4-14). He attacks the false prophets who encourage restlessness and rebellion with their message of swift return to the land (Jer 29:15-23). Such false teaching circumvents the reflection and repentance which must precede restoration to the land and incites the wrath of the Babylonian government. God's people in all ages must contend with those who oppose the truth and substitute their own self-serving doctrines. Such false doctrines are always hurtful in spite of the superficial or temporary good they may seem to accomplish. Devotion to truth obligates Christians to defend it in a spirit of love and humility against all perversion and corruption.

12. What does God hope will come from this punishment (Jer 29:12-14)?
13. What fate would befall the false prophets Ahab and Zedekiah?

Day 1: The Return of Jacob

Chapters 30-33 of Jeremiah contain various prophecies of restoration. As with most restoration passages in the OT there is a heavy Messianic element, for the physical return of Israel to Canaan never completely satisfied the promises of God. Restoration from physical captivity coincides in principle with spiritual restoration and a return from the bondage of sin. It is this spiritual restoration that the apostles and prophets of the NT emphasize when citing OT prophecies. Jer 30:1-11 speaks of Israel serving God and David their king, whom God will raise up (v 9). Compare this with Jer 23:5 and the earlier prophecies of Isaiah (9:6-7; 11:1-5) and Hosea (3:5). The Messiah would be of the spirit and stature of the ideal king, David, even as John was of the spirit and stature of the ideal prophet, Elijah (Mt 17:10-13).

1. What was Jeremiah to do with the words of prophecy?
2. Of whom would God make a full end? Of whom would He not?
3. When should Israel look for these things to be fulfilled (Jer 30:24)?

Day 2: “There Is Hope in Your Future”

Jeremiah further pursues the “latter days” theme in ch 31 and stresses future blessing and unity for God’s people: *“I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people”* (Jer 31:1). Mt. Ephraim stands in contrast with Mt. Zion (Jer 31:6); Jacob contrasts with Ephraim (Jer 31:7, 9, 18-20); the house of Israel contrasts with the house of Judah (Jer 31:27). But note the descriptive terms throughout Jer 31:1-30: grace, rest, everlasting love, lovingkindness, singing with gladness, redemption, ransom, goodness, joy, abundance, hope, mercy, etc. God promises the return of joy, happiness and unity among Israel and Judah which will be found in the Messiah.

4. To what event is Jer 31:15 applied (see Mt 2:16-18)? What does this horrible event say about God’s determination to keep His promises?
5. What proverb had arisen because of God’s punishment of the nation (Jer 31:29)? How would this change under the new covenant?

Day 3: A New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34 is one of the most crucial and defining prophecies of the OT, for herein God plainly declares a wholesale change of the covenant made at Sinai. The passage speaks of a “new covenant” which would be unlike the former. The former covenant encompassed a whole nation of people who afterward had to be taught to love and

respect God and His law. Unfortunately, this process failed and the chosen people came to regard idols more highly than God. Under the new covenant, however, people would come to know God first and then enter a relationship with Him. Thus there would always be a pure, godly nation belonging unto God, a remnant of faithful people amid an unbelieving majority. This universal body of believers is the church which Jesus later promised to build.

6. What justification is given for this change of covenants (Jer 31:32b)?
7. What is the key for members of the new covenant to love God (Jer 31: 34b)?
8. Give the NT book and chapter which refers to this prophecy at length.

Day 4: Jeremiah's Property

God's promise of future restoration to the land is reiterated in Jerusalem's darkest hour (Jer 32). The city is now under siege by and will shortly fall to Nebuchadnezzar (comp. Jer 32:1; 39:1), and Jeremiah is imprisoned by Zedekiah (Jer 32:1-5). This makes God's command to Jeremiah all the more peculiar (Jer 32:6-15). The significance of the land purchase is revealed by Jeremiah (Jer 32:15), but even the great prophet is uncertain as to how everything would unfold. He thus asks God for an explanation (Jer 32:16-25). God responds by acknowledging that Jerusalem will indeed fall to the Chaldeans, but this will not ultimately terminate Israel's occupation of Canaan (Jer 32:26-44). At least eight promises of future return are given (Jer 32:15, 37, 41-42, 44; 33:7, 11, 26).

9. What message got Jeremiah in trouble?
10. When we do not understand our circumstances, what should we remember (32:27)?

Day 5: The Priest/King to Come

Note the words of anticipation: "*Behold, the days are coming ...*" (Jer 33:14; see 31:27, 31). Note also the profuse declarations by God of "*I will ...*" throughout this whole section (Jer 32:28, 31, 37-42, 44; 33:3, 5-8, etc.). More is now given on the Branch of David but now in conjunction with a perpetual priesthood (Jer 33:14-18). Under the old covenant, the offices of priest and king were separate, as Uzziah painfully learned. But the Messiah would fulfill both roles, thus necessitating a change of covenants. God promises to multiply the descendants of David and Levi which He fulfills in Christ (Jer 33:19-26). Jesus now functions as everlasting Priest and King, and all Christians reign with Him and offer spiritual sacrifices to God continually. This concept of perpetual priesthood is developed more fully in Hebrews 7 and 10:1-18.

11. How does God stress the unchangeableness of His covenant with David (33:20, 25)?
12. T/F Jesus is the only king the Jews will ever have. (See Jer 33:17)

Day 1: The Chaldeans Withdraw: A False Hope

During the reign of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem as well as Lachish and Azekah, the only fortified cities remaining in Judah (Jer 37:1-5; 34:1-7). Zedekiah continues to seek God through Jeremiah but not out of a penitent and submissive heart (Jer 37:2-3). Consequently, the message from God to Zedekiah remains unchanged: Jerusalem will be destroyed; Zedekiah will be humbled before Nebuchadnezzar, taken captive and die in peace in a foreign land. However, during the siege, the Egyptians threaten from the southwest causing the Chaldeans to withdraw from Jerusalem. This, of course, fans the flame of false hope still burning brightly amid the ruins of Judah, but Jeremiah extinguishes it with the news that the interruption of the siege is only temporary (Jer 37:6-10). The Chaldeans will soon be back to finish the job.

1. What request does Zedekiah make of Jeremiah (Jer 37:3)?
2. Who had originally destroyed the fortified cities of Judah (see Is 36:1)?

Day 2: Judah's Short-Lived Repentance

Fear is a powerful short-term emotion with weak long-term effect. One of the reasons God had been angry with Judah concerned the mistreatment of their brethren as slaves. During the siege, Zedekiah had determined to correct this and made a covenant to free the slaves (Jer 34:8-11). However, when the siege temporarily lifted, the slave owners reneged. Does this sound familiar? Have not the Israelites switched places with the Egyptians? God reaffirms His intent to punish such wickedness (Jer 34:12-22).

3. What would result from God's setting Judah at liberty (Jer 34:17)?

Day 3: Jeremiah's Imprisonment and House Arrest

The lull during the siege is also the occasion for harsh treatment against Jeremiah. While traveling to his hometown in Benjamin to take care of a family property matter, Jeremiah is falsely accused of trying to defect to the Chaldeans (Jer 37:11-15). Zedekiah, abandoned by his false prophets and in desperate need of guidance and reassurance, rescues Jeremiah in order to inquire of further messages from God (Jer 37:16-21). Jeremiah's bold and truthful answer to the very one who controlled his fate is an inspiring example of courage (Jer 37:17). Jeremiah remains imprisoned though apparently in better accommodations than the makeshift prison in Jonathan's house.

Jeremiah's troubles worsen, however, when further charges are made against him by the high officials in Jerusalem (Jer 38:1-4). The charges are understandable from a human point of view, but Jeremiah's message is not a lack of courage or patriotism but the

revealed will of God. Zedekiah confesses with his own mouth his weakness and vacillation as he turns Jeremiah over to his enemies (Jer 38:5-6). Jeremiah, however, has an ally in Ebed-Melech, who receives permission from Zedekiah to rescue Jeremiah yet again (Jer 38:7-13). Zedekiah seems to follow the advice of the last person to see him.

The fate of Jerusalem and Zedekiah's own family hangs in the balance during the last conversation between the prophet and the king (Jer 38:14-23). One last chance is given to avert the worst of the disaster; Jeremiah begs the king to surrender, promising him that God would protect him from those whom he feared. Sadly, Zedekiah lacks the faith to meet the challenge.

4. What does Zedekiah ask Jeremiah secretly?
5. T/F The Israelite eunuch, Ebed-Melech, delivered Jeremiah from the dungeon.
6. Which specific charge against Jeremiah was false (Jer 38:4)?
7. What blessings would come if Zedekiah would surrender to Nebuchadnezzar?

Day 4: Jeremiah During Jerusalem's Fall

The Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar had more respect for Jeremiah than did the kings and princes of Judah for he commanded Jeremiah's freedom and safety (Jer 39:11-14). God had kept His promise to His faithful prophet and protected him through murderous plots, beatings, imprisonment, hunger and an invading army. Note similar blessings to befall other faithful men, Ebed-Melech (Jer 39:15-18) and Baruch (Jer 45:1-5).

8. What was all God promised to Baruch, Jeremiah's faithful assistant?

Day 5: Jeremiah's Journey to Egypt

It is somehow fitting that this chapter of Jerusalem's history closes where it all began some 1000 years previously - in Egypt (Jer 42-43). The "remnant of Judah" (Jer 42:2, 15, 19) does what faithless, self-willed people do: they make up their mind to return to Egypt and then seek God's approval for their decision. Jeremiah, true to form, condemns their hypocrisy and pronounces judgment upon them. Ironically, Jeremiah is now telling them the very thing they always wanted to hear - stay in Judah and all will be well - but they still reject the command of God. This remnant is not the faithful remnant from which God will repopulate the land (see Jer 42:10-12); such a remnant will only come from the purifying fire of the seventy-year captivity. The rebels reject the words of Jeremiah and go to Egypt, taking the aged prophet with them.

9. Out of what attitude did the people ask Jeremiah to pray for them (Jer 42:20)?
10. Who would eventually slay these rebellious Jews in Egypt (Jer 43:10-12)?

Day 1: A Supplemental Listing of Judah's Last Kings

(Refer to earlier listings in Y2/Q1/W8 and Y2/Q2/W3. All dates B.C.):

Hezekiah (715-686): Reformer; Jerusalem saved from Assyrians; life extended by God.

Manasseh (695-642): Extremely wicked; taken captive to Babylon; later repented.

Amon (642-640): Wicked like father Manasseh; assassinated by servants.

Josiah (640-609): Zealous reformer; Babylon defeats Assyria; Jeremiah began work.

Jehoahaz (aka Shallum) (609): Deposed by Pharaoh-Necho after three months.

Jehoiakim (609-597): Rebelled against Babylon; burned Jeremiah's scroll; taken captive.

Jehoiachin (aka Coniah) (597): Reigned 3 mos.; last of David's line on throne in Jerusalem.

Zedekiah (597-586): Weak king; Jeremiah begged his surrender; sons killed before him.

Day 2: A City in Ruins

It is difficult to fully appreciate the significance of Jerusalem lying in smoldering ruin. The tragedy runs deeper than the human toll, which alone was unspeakably horrible. Jerusalem, especially the temple, represented God's presence upon the earth. Israel was the specially chosen covenant people who, by their adherence to divine law, were to showcase God's power, glory, love, and wisdom to the heathen nations. The smoke rising from Jerusalem carried the stench of obstinate rebellion, suicidal addiction to sin, murderous rejection of prophecy and arrogant self-justification for idol-worshipping nations. The smoking ruins also say that it will be a long time before the city regains any sense of normalcy. The smoke still rises and traces the lessons of God's wrath across the sky. The book of Lamentations grieves over the waste and loss of Israel's downfall. It is traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah. Lam 1:1-10 surveys the broken city.

1. Why do the roads to Zion mourn?
2. When did Jerusalem remember all the blessings of the past (Lam 1:7)?
3. Who had entered the sanctuary?

Day 3: Jerusalem Speaks of Her Demise

In Lam 1:12-22 the pronouns are first person instead of third person; Jerusalem is personified and speaking of her downfall. She groans and sighs over the youthful strength which has been broken, the gloating of her enemies and the lack of comfort to be found.

4. What does Jerusalem admit about its present situation (Lam 1:14, 18)?

5. For what did the people seek and give their valuable possessions (Lam 1:11, 19)?

Day 4: God's Anger Against Jerusalem

The theme turns from Jerusalem's mourning for itself to the anger of Jehovah which has been outpoured (Lam 2:1-10). There is a lesson here which must not be overlooked: God's love and mercy does not preclude punishment upon the rebellious and disobedient. The Scriptures describe both sides of God. Look at the various phrases in this passage: "in His anger" (anger, wrath, fury and indignation are referred to a total of six times); "has not pitied"; "He has thrown down"; "He has profaned"; "He has cut off"; "He has blazed ... like a flaming fire"; "He has slain"; "He has destroyed"; "He has done violence"; "He has abandoned". These are aspects of God's nature which some do not like to think about, but they ignore or deny them to their own peril.

6. Who had God spurned "in His burning indignation"?

7. What does it mean, "The Law is no more"?

Day 5: "Let Tears Run Down Like A River"

Jerusalem in its final days was surely a wretched and miserable place. Lamentation is made over the children who begged food from their parents, who staggered and stumbled through the streets, who finally died of starvation in their mother's arms (Lam 2:11-22). The bodies of the slaughtered, young and old alike, litter the streets. The enemies of Israel are gleeful at the sight of Jerusalem's ruin, for they had long hated these favored people. It is acknowledged that what had befallen Jerusalem was exactly what God had promised (v 17).

8. Who had failed Israel (Lam 2:14)?

9. What was called "The perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth"?

10. What happened when invading Babylonians entered the temple (Lam 2:20)?

Day 1: The Prophet's Distress and Hope

Proceeding upon the assumption that Jeremiah is the author of Lamentations (in accordance with ancient Jewish tradition), we are offered a glimpse of the prophet's inward struggle in Lam 3:1-30. The sentiments in the early section (Lam 3:1-18) show the severe strain under which Jeremiah has labored. Persecution and oppression was so great that he felt God *"has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day"* (3:3). Fleshly deterioration has resulted from both the physical effort and mental challenge which Jeremiah's work demanded (Lam 3:4). In his darker hours, the prophet feels that peace, prosperity and hope have all been taken away (Lam 3:17-18). Some of these sentiments are similar to Job's - and ours at times. When things get unbearably difficult, we are tempted to think that God doesn't care, has abandoned us or is asking too much from us. But Jeremiah rebounds; in 3:19-30 he realizes that God is, in fact, his **only** hope, the only one upon whom he can truly depend. Therefore, *"It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."*

1. What did the prophet experience according to Lam 3:14?
2. What is good for a man in his youth (Lam 3:27)? How had Jeremiah done this?
3. In the midst of trial, what qualities of God did Jeremiah remember (Lam 3:22)?

Day 2: Confession of Sin

The only basis of hope for Israel's national reconstitution, and the only basis of hope for every individual sinner, is an honest self-appraisal and confession of sin. God took such drastic measures against Israel and Judah because that was the only course which would soften their hardened hearts. In Lam 3:31-51 Jeremiah acknowledges the sin which has brought such great wrath from God. There is a clear conception that the events which have befallen the nation were not by chance or injustice but due punishment for transgression. This awareness of sin will mature for another fifty years before the first groups of Jews are restored to the land. In Lam 3:52-66 the prophet returns to the theme of his mistreatment in the faithful discharge of his prophetic duty. The pain runs so deep that his thoughts keep returning to it.

4. In what should a man not complain (Lam 3:39)?
5. What did God not hear in the midst of His anger against Israel (Lam 3:44)?
6. How did God respond to Jeremiah's cries for help?

Day 3: Reflection upon Jerusalem's Horrible End

Lamentations 4 reviews the miserable conditions that attended Jerusalem's fall. Severe hunger tortured the people until parents saw their children as objects of nourishment rather than nurturing; the nobles (Nazirites in NKJ) and those steeped in luxury and refinement wandered the streets aimlessly and sat in ash heaps; the prophets and priests who had enjoyed the respect and admiration of the people were defiled and avoided as unclean. The unthinkable had happened: *"The kings of the earth, and all inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem"* (Lam 4:12). But they did, even as God said they would.

7. When in trouble, to whom had Israel looked for help (Lam 4:17)?
8. Those slain by the sword were better off than whom?
9. What had the people said of God (Lam 4:20)?

Day 4: "Why Do You Forget Us Forever?"

The prophet speaks representatively for the exiled people in Lam 5. They have been returned to the hardships of servitude; the maidens, princes and elders were treated harshly and without respect; the ruins of Jerusalem were now prowled by foxes. Again, there is the acknowledgment of sin (Lam 5:16); the heart of the people is faint (Lam 5:17). Herein lies the delicate line: punishment must be severe enough to cause reflection and correction without demoralizing. God's wisdom in punishment will be vindicated when the exiles come to their senses and repent, thus laying the foundation for their return.

10. What would the next generation feel about their present circumstances (Lam 5:7)?
11. What would the seventy years of captivity seem like to the Israelites (Lam 5:20)?

Day 5: Some Dates to Remember

Many people find memorizing dates to be a tedious and boring task, but it is of great benefit to have a few dates in mind for reference purposes:

- 931 B.C.** - Judah and Israel divide into two kingdoms.
- 745 B.C.** - Tiglath-pileser comes to power in Assyria.
- 721 B.C.** - Samaria falls to Sargon II.
- 612 B.C.** - Chaldeans and Medes under Nebuchadnezzar destroy Nineveh.
- 605 B.C.** - First captives taken from Judah to Babylon, including Daniel.
- 586 B.C.** - Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonians.
- 536 B.C.** - First group of exiles return.

12. How long did Israel last as an independent nation? How long did Judah last?