



DISCOVERY

2 Kings, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Lamentations

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Discovery is a Bible study course for the high school and adult levels. Bible references are taken from the King James Version. The companion to these Sunday school lessons is Daybreak, a daily devotional and personal Bible study continuum. All of the material is available on our website, as well as in printed form. The print version is designed to be stored in a binder; subsequent modules can then be easily inserted. Discovery is an official publication of the Apostolic Faith Church. All rights are reserved.

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SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 1:1 through 8:15

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.” (2 Kings 2:9)

BACKGROUND

The Book of 1 Kings closes with a brief introduction of the reign of Ahaziah, who succeeded his father Ahab as king of Israel. The Book of 2 Kings resumes the narrative of Israel as a whole, relating the histories of twelve kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and sixteen kings of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The events in the first eight chapters take place during the reigns of Ahaziah of Israel, and his successor, his brother Jehoram. However, rather than focusing on the kings themselves, as is typical in the rest of the two books, these chapters give special emphasis to the ministry of the Prophet Elisha.

Elisha's ministry began by divine call (1 Kings 19:16, 19-21) and he first served as an apprentice to the Prophet Elijah. His prophetic role as Elijah's successor began in approximately 848 B.C. after King Ahaziah's death and Elijah's departure to Heaven in a whirlwind. While Elijah's focus had been primarily matters of state, Elisha more typically concentrated his efforts on the common people of the land. His ministry was approximately sixty-three years in length (including his time of service as Elijah's apprentice) and touched six kings of Israel, whose reigns spanned ninety-seven years: Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash. This was one of the most wicked times in the Northern Kingdom's history, and also the worst time politically and economically. In his prophetic role, Elisha had a major impact on four nations: Israel, Judah, Moab, and Syria. The prophet died in approximately 797 B.C. (2 Kings 13).

QUESTIONS

1. In chapter 2 of our text, what spiritual attributes do you think were necessary for Elisha to see Elijah be taken up into Heaven, and thereby receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit?

2. When Elijah ascended in a whirlwind, his mantle fell from him. What did Elisha do with that mantle, and what was the significance of his action? 2 Kings 2:13-14

3. Jehoram, king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, joined forces with the king of Edom in an alliance against Moab. When the water supply for their combined armies ran low and the fear of defeat intensified, the kings appealed to the Prophet Elisha concerning their plight. Why did Elisha show regard for King Jehoshaphat but not for King Jehoram? (2 Kings 3:1-3; 2 Chronicles 17:3-6). What lesson can we learn from this?

4. The first seven verses of chapter 4 describe one of Elisha's miracles. What occurred in this passage, and what lessons can we learn from it?

5. Chapter 4 goes on to record several other miracles performed by Elisha. List these miracles and describe what they have in common. 2 Kings 4:16-17, 34-35, 38-41, 42-44

6. Chapter 5 gives the account of the healing of Naaman, a Syrian captain who was afflicted with leprosy. Give a one- or two-word description of each of the main characters who were involved in this event.

Israelite maid

King of Syria

King of Israel

Elisha

Naaman's servants

Gehazi

7. What four miracles were involved in the capture of the Syrian army, as related in 2 Kings 6:8-23?

8. How is God's wonderful timing for those who trust in Him seen in the case of the Shunammite woman whose dead son had been raised to life through Elisha? 2 Kings 8:1-6

9. As you review these eight chapters which focus on the miracles of the Prophet Elisha, what lesson from his life and ministry stands out the most to you?

CONCLUSION

Elisha's longing and persistent desire for a double portion of his master's spirit was granted, and during Israel's darkest times, he brought help, hope, and instruction to those who were faithful to the Lord.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 8:16 through 17:41

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.”

(2 Kings 17:38-39)

BACKGROUND

These chapters in the Book of 2 Kings cover a span of about 135 years (approximately 850 B.C. to 715 B.C.). The nation of Israel had been divided around 931 B.C. into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah), and the narrative moves back and forth between the history of these two fragmented nations, recording the kings of both.

A total of twenty-one rulers are mentioned in these chapters: twelve kings of Israel and nine of Judah. Along with listing some of the exploits of the kings, an assessment of their devotion to God is given. They were described as righteous kings (in terms of religious leadership or reforms), evil kings (either as political or religious leaders), and kings who were overthrown or assassinated. The designation of “righteous” or “evil” was very important, for as the king went, so did the nation.

This was a tumultuous time for the divided kingdom, with many political conspiracies taking place. Yet, even in a time laced with violence, chaos, and selfish ambitions, the Lord was faithful to His people. He providentially raised up individuals to accomplish His purpose, while reminding the people that His promises to them were still valid if they would only choose to follow His statutes.

QUESTIONS

1. After co-reigning for a number of years with his father Jehoshaphat, Jehoram assumed full leadership of the nation of Judah when his father died. Who was Jehoram’s wife? What affect did her background have upon Jehoram, and thus upon the nation? 2 Kings 8:18

2. In 2 Kings 9:30-37, we find the fulfillment of a prophecy that was given to Elijah twenty years earlier (1 Kings 21:17-24) when Jezebel had Naboth the Jezreelite murdered so that Ahab could acquire his vineyard for a garden. Name at least one spiritual truth that can be derived from this account.

3. In chapter 10, Jehu was commended for his obedience to God in destroying the worship of Baal in Israel (see verses 28, 30). However, in spite of his apparent zeal to wipe out the worship of Baal, he allowed the Israelites to continue the worship of the golden calves in the cities of Bethel and Dan. How does verse 31 describe his spiritual condition?

4. Jehoram’s son Ahaziah succeeded his father on the throne of Judah, but he was soon killed by Jehu, king of Israel. Ahaziah’s son Joash, the next true heir to the throne, was then hidden for his safety as Jehoram’s wife Athaliah attempted to destroy all the royal seed so she could usurp the government and rule Judah. At the age of seven, Joash was brought out of hiding and placed on the throne. Given his young age, to what can we attribute his commitment to God? 2 Kings 11:4, 17-18

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Although human acts may not reap immediate retribution, these chapters in 2 Kings clearly point out that whatever a man sows, he will also reap. God is merciful, but divine justice will ultimately be satisfied. As we study these Scriptures, may we learn from Israel's hard lessons!

[illegible]



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 18:1 through 20:21

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.” (2 Kings 18:5)

BACKGROUND

The importance of the account of Hezekiah’s reign as king of Judah is evidenced by its nearly identical mention in three separate places: 2 Kings 18-20, 2 Chronicles 29-32, and Isaiah 36-39. Some scholars suggest that the relationship of Hezekiah with the Prophet Isaiah is the reason for this extensive history. While the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings record the history of the rulers of Israel and Judah from its inception through the Babylonian exile, they are much more than history alone. The account conveys spiritual and moral truths to the reader through the vehicle of objective political history. Specific kings are evaluated by a simple moral code—they either did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, or they did evil in His sight.

Hezekiah began to reign in Judah as co-regent with his father Ahaz at the age of twenty-five, around 729 B.C., and he reigned for twenty-nine years. He was identified as a good king, and took steps to eliminate idolatry in his kingdom, destroying altars, idols, and pagan temples. He cleaned out and restored the Temple in Jerusalem, and reinstated observance of the Passover.

His administration was, however, vexed with the pressures of politics. The neighboring Northern Kingdom (Israel) was conquered by Assyria during his reign and Hezekiah broke the treaty his father had forged with the Assyrians. Hezekiah attempted to bribe the Assyrian King Sennacherib, possibly in an attempt to avoid what was later to become an invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem.

There is also some evidence that Hezekiah made an attempt to secure a political alliance with Egypt in order to thwart the Assyrian invasion. In “The Annals of Sennacherib,” a translation of the historical record written by the Assyrian king, Sennacherib claims to have destroyed in Judah “forty-six of his [Hezekiah’s] strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area which were without number.” His description of Hezekiah is, “Like a caged bird shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city.”¹ While this account does

not acknowledge God’s miraculous deliverance, it does verify that Sennacherib was unable to conquer Jerusalem. Hezekiah agreed to pay a tribute (2 Kings 18:14), yet, Sennacherib treacherously invaded Judah again—a move which resulted in the divine destruction of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib retreated to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, and was later assassinated by his own sons.

Most Bible scholars agree that the 2 Kings 20 account of Hezekiah’s sickness and his reception of Babylonian diplomats actually took place prior to the Assyrian invasion. The shift in chronology matches that found in Isaiah, and possibly was used there for literary reasons and then was followed in 2 Kings.

QUESTIONS

1. All the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deemed evil. Among the kings of Judah, both good and evil, only Hezekiah and Josiah gained the praise, “And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did” (2 Kings 18:3; 2 Kings 22:2). What actions resulted in this assessment of Hezekiah’s reign? 2 Kings 18:4-6

2. Scripture records that Hezekiah trusted the Lord, clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him (2 Kings 18:6). He apparently did this in the midst of extreme political, military, and economic pressure to do just the opposite. Name some ways in which we also are pressured to depart from the Lord and explain how our trust in God can help us resist.

3. What was the Assyrian King Sennacherib’s perspective on Hezekiah’s God? How did he try to influence the inhabitants of Jerusalem? 2 Kings 18:19-22

4. How did Hezekiah respond to the threats brought first by the Assyrian diplomats and then by a letter sent directly from Sennacherib? 2 Kings 19:1

5. God sent word to Hezekiah to “set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). Since we do not know when we will step into eternity, how can we “set our houses in order”?

6. Hezekiah received from God what many have wished for—knowledge of the specific time of his death. How did Hezekiah respond to this information, and what was the end result? 2 Kings 20:2-3, 6

7. An amazing miracle is recorded in 2 Kings 20:9-11. What was it and why was it given?

8. Apparently during his rejoicing over a crisis passed, Hezekiah received diplomatic letters and gifts from Babylon. He proceeded to make Judah vulnerable by exposing the nation’s wealth and military assets to visiting Babylonian diplomats. As a result, God declared that all would be taken away by the enemy. What are some ways that we as Christians might make ourselves vulnerable to Satan’s snares? How can we avoid them?

9. In our lesson we learned that King Hezekiah faced three different crises: impending invasion/destruction, illness/impending death, and espionage by spies from Babylon. We also will face a variety of crises in our Christian walks. Identify what some of these might be and indicate some ways we can overcome them with God’s help.

CONCLUSION

There are several lessons to be learned from King Hezekiah’s life history. When a crisis appears, we need to humbly “spread it before the Lord” and ask Him to undertake for us. Our lives are on God’s timetable and we should “set our houses in order” to be ready either for death or for the coming of the Lord. We are each entrusted with precious things from the Lord and we must be careful to guard them so we can not only finish well personally, but also pass the precious things on to those who follow us.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 21:1 through 23:30

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.” (2 Kings 23:25)

BACKGROUND

This portion of text covers three kings of Judah over a span of eighty-eight years.

The first eighteen verses of chapter 21 are the account of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, who was born after Hezekiah’s life had been extended by God for fifteen years. Hezekiah had been responsible for a spiritual revival that swept the entire nation during his reign, and had done away with the idolatry that his father, Ahaz, had established.

Manasseh came to the throne when he was twelve years old, and reigned for a total of fifty-five years. After the death of Hezekiah, he reversed the religious reforms instituted by his godly father, and reinstituted pagan worship. One of Judah’s most evil kings, he practiced sorcery and witchcraft, and even sacrificed his own son in idol worship. He took idols into the Jerusalem Temple, rebuilt the high places that his father had destroyed, and erected altars for Baal. He made an image of Asherah (a female goddess of sex and fertility), and worshiped the sun, moon, planets, and stars.

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 33:11-19 indicates that late in Manasseh’s reign, Assyria overthrew Jerusalem and captured the king. He was imprisoned in Babylon, and there, humiliated and powerless, he “humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers” (2 Chronicles 33:12). God heard his repentant prayer and extended mercy. Manasseh was not only freed from his confinement, but was returned to his throne in Jerusalem. Back in power, Manasseh destroyed the idol shrines he had built, did away with his desecrations of the Temple, and restored the Temple worship. However, a decisive turn into idolatry had already been made by the nation. Manasseh’s conversion seemed to have no lasting impact, for when Judah ultimately fell, God attributed it to the sins of Manasseh.

Verses 19 through 26 of chapter 21 concern the reign of Manasseh’s son Amon, who became king at

the age of twenty-two. Sadly, Amon apparently was not influenced by his father’s repentance, for it is recorded that he “did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did” (2 Kings 21:20). He served idols and forsook God. After just two years of rule, his servants conspired against him and he was assassinated in his own home.

Chapter 22 begins the account of Josiah. This ruler, commended in Scripture as a godly leader who “turned to the LORD with all his heart” (2 Kings 23:25), ascended to the throne at eight years of age, when his father, Amon, was assassinated. In contrast to his father, Josiah had an interest in the true God. The account of his life in 2 Chronicles records that he began seeking God in the eighth year of his reign, and four years later undertook reforms to stop idol worship in the nation (see 2 Chronicles 34:3-7).

At the age of twenty-five, Josiah instituted the rebuilding of the Temple, which had deteriorated and been left in a state of disrepair during the periods of idol worship in the land. While the workers were making these repairs, they found the Book of the Law. When Josiah heard the book read, he recognized with horror that his people had neglected the commandments of God, and thus stood in danger of judgment. Rending his clothes as a sign of grief and repentance, Josiah immediately set out on a campaign to obey the Lord’s instructions and to lead the people of Judah in a return to the God of their fathers.

Josiah died in battle after a reign of thirty-one years in Jerusalem. In spite of his efforts toward reform, Judah reverted again to idolatry after his death.

QUESTIONS

1. King Manasseh was raised by a godly father, Hezekiah. However, he rejected his spiritual heritage and did “that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.” What specific sins are attributed to Manasseh in 2 Kings 21:3-7?

2. What spiritual concept is illustrated by the fact that Hezekiah, one of the godliest kings in the history of Judah, had a son who was one of the most wicked?

3. In 2 Kings 21:10-15, we find a prophetic utterance announcing the coming desolation of Jerusalem and Judah because of Manasseh's sin. What word pictures are used in verse 13 to describe the judgment that would come upon Judah?

4. Amon succeeded his father Manasseh as ruler in Judah. What descriptive phrases indicate the kind of man Amon was? 2 Kings 21:20-22

5. Josiah's father, King Amon, was very wicked, as was his grandfather, King Manasseh. In spite of being raised in an ungodly home, what did Josiah choose to do? 2 Kings 22:2

6. During his eighteenth year as king, Josiah instructed that the Temple in Jerusalem be repaired, after many years of neglect. While those repairs were being carried out, the Book of the Law was found in the Temple. How did Josiah respond when the Word of God was read to him? What was the significance of his reaction? 2 Kings 22:11

7. Josiah sent emissaries to Huldah, a prophetess of Jerusalem, to "inquire of the LORD" concerning the fate of himself, his people, and his nation in light of the transgressions of their fathers. Briefly summarize in your own words the answer the prophetess gave. 2 Kings 22:15-20

8. What did Josiah do after hearing the response of the prophetess? 2 Kings 23:1-8

9. Josiah took steps to remove all idols from the nation. What idols could be in a person's life in our day?

CONCLUSION

It is important to learn from the Biblical examples given to us. The lives of these three kings illustrate that God will have mercy upon the wicked when there is sincere repentance, that He will ultimately judge the wicked, and that He always responds to repentant and humble hearts. We learn that our actions impact others, and that this impact can last for generations. Finally, we recognize that even sweeping national reforms are of no lasting value unless there is genuine repentance and ongoing obedience to God.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 23:31 through 25:30

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon.” (2 Kings 24:3-4)

BACKGROUND

These chapters review the events during the reigns of the final four kings of Judah and its last, chaotic years as an independent nation. The text begins with Jehoahaz’s ascent to the throne of Judah, following the death of his father, righteous King Josiah, who was killed in battle. In spite of having a godly father, Jehoahaz immediately reverted to the evil practices of Manasseh, Amon, and other wicked kings of Judah. After just three months, he was forcibly removed from the throne by Pharaoh-necho of Egypt, who had gained control of Judah when he defeated King Josiah.

Pharaoh-necho replaced Jehoahaz with another son of King Josiah, Eliakim, who Pharaoh-necho renamed Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned in Judah for eleven years, and was also ungodly. During his reign, Babylon became the new world power after overthrowing Assyria in 612 B.C. and Egypt in 605 B.C.

Today’s lesson describes the captivity of Judah, which took place in three stages. The first invasion (2 Kings 24:1) took place in 605 B.C. Many people were taken captive to Babylon at this time, including Daniel and the three Hebrew children.

Three years later, King Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonian control. Judah was left vulnerable to bands of soldiers from the Chaldees, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, who attacked the weakened nation as a judgment from God for the sins of Manasseh. Jehoiakim died, and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin.

In just three months, Nebuchadnezzar again laid siege to Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, being young and inexperienced, responded to the Babylonian assault by surrendering. This second invasion of Judah (2 Kings 24:10) took place in 597 B.C. At this time thousands of people, including the prophet Ezekiel, craftsmen and artisans, strong men of war, and royal personnel were taken captive. Many of the Temple treasures

were also confiscated and taken to Babylon, and King Jehoiachin was bound and taken to Babylon as well.

Nebuchadnezzar established Mattaniah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, as king of Judah, and changed his name to Zedekiah. This final king of Judah reigned for eleven years, and continued the evil of his direct predecessors. During his ninth year, the third invasion of Judah took place (2 Kings 25:1-3). Beginning in 588 B.C., the city of Jerusalem was under siege for eighteen months and a severe famine devastated the land. One third of the people died from hunger and plague, and one third died by the sword. In 586 B.C., the city was invaded and all but the very poor were taken captive. King Zedekiah was captured, and he witnessed the slaying of his sons before his eyes were gouged out and he was taken to Babylon in chains. Jerusalem and the Temple were broken down and burned. “The anger of the LORD” (2 Kings 24:20), evoked by the terrible sins of the people, was poured out upon the people of Judah. Their continued refusal to humble themselves before God resulted in their ultimate destruction as a nation.

QUESTIONS

1. God sent enemy troops to defeat Judah because He wanted the inhabitants of Judah removed from His sight. According to our key verse, why was the Lord so angry with Judah? 2 Kings 24:3-4

2. For many years the people of Judah had been warned to turn from their sinful ways. Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah had pled with them, warning them of impending destruction. Yet the people ignored the warnings and continued to live as they pleased. What spiritual warnings are people ignoring today?

3. What common phrase is used to describe each of the four kings in our lesson text? What spiritual truth can we derive from this phrase? 2 Kings 23:32, 37; 24:9, 19

4. King Jehoiachin was treated well at the end of his life. Evil-merodach, Nebuchadnezzar's son, liberated him from prison and was kind to him, giving him clothing, food to eat, and a daily allowance. On the other hand, King Zedekiah was made to witness the slaughter of his sons before he lost his eyes, and then was taken to Babylon in chains. There was a difference in the way each of these kings reacted to the takeover of the Babylonians, which may account for why they were treated differently. How did they respond to the Babylonian assaults? 2 Kings 24:12, 20

5. What happened to Jerusalem when the Babylonian forces entered it for the third and final invasion of Judah? 2 Kings 25:8-13

6. After Jerusalem's fall, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah to govern Judah. Gedaliah was from a prominent and seemingly God-fearing family. His father had influenced Jehoiachin to save Jeremiah from death (Jeremiah 26:24), and his grandfather Shaphan had been secretary to King Josiah and participated in the king's efforts to turn Judah back to God (2 Kings 22). Gedaliah was the one who returned Jeremiah back to his home after the fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39:14). What message did Gedaliah give to the remnant left in Jerusalem? 2 Kings 25:24

7. What lessons can we learn from the final years of the nation of Judah?

[illegible]

CONCLUSION

God's great desire was for the people of Judah to return to Him, but they persisted in their idolatry and rebellion against Him. Because of that, God's judgment was ultimately poured out and they were overthrown as a nation.

NOTES

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The Prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Nahum 1:1 through 3:19
Zephaniah 1:1 through 3:20

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’s anger.” (Zephaniah 2:3)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Nahum deals with God’s punishment of the enemies of Judah, and the consequent good news for the people of God. The prophecy is fairly narrow in scope, focusing on the destruction of Nineveh that would occur in the year 612 B.C. The exact date is difficult to determine, but the prophecy was given sometime after the year 663 B.C., when the Egyptian city of Thebes fell to the Assyrians. Nahum compared Nineveh to Thebes (the city of No mentioned in Nahum 3:8-10). He recounted the seeming invincibility and sad destruction of that city and then predicted that a similar fate awaited Nineveh. The first chapter describes the holy character of God the Judge; the second chapter describes Nineveh’s fall; and the third chapter explains why the city would fall.

Zephaniah prophesied sometime during the reign of a good king of Judah, Josiah, probably between 640 and 621 B.C. (Zephaniah 1:1). However, Josiah followed two of the most wicked kings of Judah (Manasseh and Amon), so the nation of Judah was in a low moral state when Zephaniah prophesied. His prophecy may have played a crucial role in the moral reforms that King Josiah implemented, although after Josiah was killed in battle, Judah lapsed once more into sinful behavior. In chapter 1, the prophet declared that judgment would come to Judah and, in chapter 2, to the Gentile nations surrounding it. Chapter 3 brings out that God will extend mercy and restoration in the last days, and there will be a time of rejoicing.

The destruction of Nineveh that both Nahum and Zephaniah predicted was so complete that many modern people doubted the existence of the city until archeologists discovered its ruins, with great difficulty, in the 19th century.

QUESTIONS

1. The two original primary audiences for Nahum’s prophecy were the nation of Assyria (whose capital city was Nineveh), and the nation of Judah, which had

been oppressed by the Assyrians. Nahum prophesied the destruction of the great city of Nineveh, which was utterly destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Read chapter 1 of Nahum’s prophecy. How would you feel if you were an Assyrian hearing this prophecy? How would you feel if you were a person from the land of Judah?

2. Nahum began his prophecy with a description of God in Nahum 1:2-7. What can we learn about God’s nature and attributes from these verses? How should knowing these attributes impact our behavior and attitude toward Him?

3. What were God’s intentions for Assyria, and why? Nahum 1:9,14; 2:13; 3:19

4. In chapter 3, Nahum spelled out a number of the specific sins of the Ninevites that were the reason for the judgment pronounced upon them. What were these sins? (Nahum 3:1, 4, 19) In what ways are the sins of the Ninevites evident in our society today?

5. Unlike Nahum's prophecy, which focused almost exclusively on the destruction of Nineveh, the prophecy of Zephaniah foretold the destruction of Judah (Zephaniah 1) and the Gentile nations surrounding Judah (Zephaniah 2). What Gentile nations were named? (Zephaniah 2:4-15) What do you think is indicated by the fact that nations to the west, east, south, and north of Judah were all mentioned?

6. In Zephaniah 1:12-13 the prophet said that God would punish those who were "settled on their lees," a phrase which meant they were at ease, or apathetic. Why was this attitude worthy of God's punishment?

7. Although Zephaniah's prophecy of destruction was much broader than Nahum's prophecy, it also held out more hope for the redemption of the Gentile nations. What does God promise in Zephaniah 2:3, 3:9, and 3:13?

8. Zephaniah 3:14 commands, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem." Why would the prophet ask the people of Judah to rejoice after pronouncing the coming wrath of God upon Judah and all the nations? (Zephaniah 3:15)

9. What do the prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah teach us about the way we should live our lives?

CONCLUSION

The prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah were fulfilled in part when Nineveh was ransacked in the year 612 B.C. and when Judah fell to Babylon in the year 586 B.C. However, the ominous world-wide "day of the LORD" prophesied by Zephaniah, and the universal worship of the Lord which is to follow this time of trouble, has not yet come to pass.

NOTES



Call of the Prophet and First Pronouncements of Judgments

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 1:1 through 15:21

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.” (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

BACKGROUND

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest who lived in Anathoth, which was a city of priests located three miles northeast of Jerusalem. At the time of his birth, Judah was ruled by its most wicked king, Manasseh. When Manasseh died, his son Amon continued his idolatrous practices. Thus, Jeremiah grew to adulthood at a time when idolatry flourished in the land.

In 640 B.C., Amon’s own servants assassinated him. Josiah, Amon’s son, became king and through godly counsel sought the Lord, purged the land of idolatry, repaired the Temple, and called his nation to repentance. Josiah led the nation into revival. It was during the thirteenth year of Josiah’s good reign that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet.

Jeremiah’s ministry as a prophet included the time between the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of Babylon. Judah’s geographical position placed the country in the middle of traffic between the three great powers of that time: Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. The hostilities between these nations were used to magnify God’s call to repentance and bring judgment on Judah for her sins.

The Book of Jeremiah opens with his call from God to be a prophet, and a prophecy of destruction that would come on the nation of Judah from the north (Babylon). The first chapter closes with God’s promise to be with Jeremiah and to deliver him.

Chapter 2 begins a series of discourses directed to Judah. Chapters 2 through 8 are an appraisal of Judah’s apostasy, depravity, and rebellion, combined with prophecies of judgment—destruction and desolation for the people and land because of their failure to repent and return to serving God.

Chapters 9 through 15 begin with Jeremiah deeply sorrowing in vain for a people who had totally abandoned themselves to everything vile. God lamented for His chosen people who had utterly rejected their inheritance by breaking their covenant with God.

The Lord often commanded Jeremiah to use objects as symbols to graphically illustrate His message to the people. In chapter 13, the prophet was instructed to wear a linen girdle (like those worn by the priests to secure their outer clothing). Later, he was told to hide the girdle in a hole. When God told Jeremiah to retrieve it, it was marred and “profitable for nothing.” God used this to demonstrate how good it was when Judah walked with Him. However, when the people turned to other gods, they became defiled and worse than the marred girdle.

All the pleadings of the Lord and intercession for the people by Jeremiah did not cause Judah to cry out to God for mercy. Chapter 15 ends with another promise from God that if they would return to Him, He would deliver them from their enemies.

QUESTIONS

1. How did Jeremiah respond to God calling him to be a prophet, and why? Jeremiah 1:4-6

2. Seven verses in the first two chapters of the Book of Jeremiah contain the phrase “the word of the LORD.” What is the significance of this statement in these Scriptures?

3. What two “evils” had the people of Judah committed, as recorded in Jeremiah 2:13? In your own words, explain the examples used in this verse.

4. Why did God consider Judah's sin to be greater than the sin of Israel? Jeremiah 3:6-8

5. During Jeremiah's ministry, other prophets prophesied falsely, and the priests ruled over the people by following the directions of these false prophets. According to Jeremiah 5:31, why did the people tolerate this?

6. During Josiah's reign, God told the people of Judah, through the Prophet Jeremiah, that He would allow them to continue to inhabit their country if they would "amend" their ways and their "doings." (See Jeremiah 7:1-3.) Define the word *amend*. What is meant by "amend your ways and your doings?"

7. Jeremiah 9:23-24 indicates that the Jewish people trusted in their own wisdom, might, and riches. In our day, too, people tend to trust in human wisdom, power, and wealth. If we are sincerely trusting God, how will that trust be evidenced in our lives?

8. Why did God lament over forsaking His house and His heritage? Jeremiah 12:7-13

9. The prophet lived through an evil and difficult time in his country's history, and in Jeremiah 15:10, he cried out in bitter anguish of soul, feeling himself pitted against the whole world. What promise was given to him in Jeremiah 15:11? What promises give us encouragement as we face difficulties in our lives?

CONCLUSION

Jeremiah was given the enormous task of calling an idolatrous nation back to God, knowing the people would not respond favorably. He witnessed firsthand God's longsuffering and love for His people as He pled with them to repent. We can draw comfort in knowing that we, like Jeremiah, serve a loving and merciful God.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 16:1 through 25:38

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.” (Jeremiah 18:6)

BACKGROUND

As Jeremiah gave the six discourses recorded in these ten chapters, he faced many challenges. Not only were the messages delivered to an unresponsive and rebellious people, but he also dealt with personal agony, pain, and discouragement.

The domestic lives of the prophets were often used by God as examples to the people. Chapter 16 opens with several of God’s commandments to the prophet regarding aspects of his personal life. Obedience brought loneliness, and Jeremiah became a social outcast.

In chapter 17, the prophet described Judah’s sins, and presented a series of meditations built around the theme of the heart. After appealing to God as his place of refuge, the prophet warned the people that disregard for the Sabbath was a sign of their rebellious and idolatrous spirit.

Chapter 18 begins a three-chapter discourse centered on the sovereignty of God. Jeremiah was commanded to go to the potter’s house for a spiritual lesson. God’s message was that if the people would repent, He would deliver them. However, the rejection of the prophet’s message was immediate, and the people formed a conspiracy against Jeremiah. Their hostility drove the prophet to the Lord, where he poured out his soul in what some writers describe as the bitterest prayer for vengeance recorded in the whole book.

In chapter 19, Jeremiah was commanded to shatter an earthen bottle to demonstrate the coming judgment and destruction. This was a sign that Jerusalem and its people would be broken because they had forsaken God, worshiped idols, desecrated the Temple, murdered the innocent, and offered their children to altar fires dedicated to Baal.

The reaction to Jeremiah’s pronouncement is recorded in chapter 20. Pashur, chief governor of the Temple, was so enraged at Jeremiah’s words that he had the prophet beaten and put in stocks until the next day. That night God met with Jeremiah and gave him

a special message and a new name for Pashur — Magormissabib, which meant “terror on every side.” This was descriptive of the fear that would ultimately overtake Judah.

In chapters 21 and 22, the prophet gave a discourse directed against Judah’s rulers, addressing one king after another with dire pronouncements. In chapter 23, he denounced the false prophets whom he likened to shepherds that scattered the sheep. In verses 5 through 8 of this chapter, he contrasted the corrupt leaders of that day with the coming Messiah, giving one of the great Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

The prophet was commanded to offer another visual sign through the two baskets of figs, a vision described in chapter 24. The exiles in Babylon, who would receive God’s blessing, were represented by the good figs, while the rotten figs portrayed those who would remain with Zedekiah in Jerusalem.

The message contained in chapter 25 was a prediction of the Babylonian invasion and the captivity of the people of Judah.

QUESTIONS

1. What three otherwise acceptable activities did God forbid Jeremiah from participating in? (Jeremiah 16:2,5,8) What was the spiritual message portrayed by each restriction?

2. Jeremiah used the metaphors of fishing and hunting (Jeremiah 16:16-18) to describe how God would violently punish the iniquity of His people. However, in the same pronouncement, the prophet gave a ray of hope. What was Jeremiah’s message of condolence? Jeremiah 16:14-15

3. Jeremiah faithfully and courageously delivered his messages about Judah's sins, yet the people only hardened their hearts and stubbornly resisted God's truth. Name at least three sins that the prophet pointed out to the people in Jeremiah 17.

4. God had a special message for Jeremiah as he viewed the potter molding the clay. What two scenarios did the Lord present in Jeremiah 18:7-10? How could we apply these lessons today?

5. In Jeremiah 19:10, the prophet was instructed to go once again to the potter's house, this time to acquire an earthen bottle. What was he told to do with the bottle and what did his action illustrate? Jeremiah 19:10-13

6. The assistant to the high priest, Pashur, was angered by Jeremiah's words, so he had Jeremiah arrested, beaten, and put into stocks until the next day. How would you summarize Jeremiah's lament, as recorded in Jeremiah 20:7-16? When difficult circumstances come our way, how should we respond?

7. When King Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah to inquire whether God would grant deliverance from the king of Babylon, one could assume that a return to God was imminent. Instead of offering hope, however, the prophet made three pronouncements—one to King Zedekiah (chapter 21 verses 3-7), one to the people

(verses 8-10), and another to the house of David (verses 11-14). What were these pronouncements?

8. Chapter 22 relates the fate of four wicked kings: Zedekiah (verses 1-9); Jehoahaz, referred to here as Shallum (verses 10-12); Jehoiakim (verses 13-23); and Jehoiachin (verses 24-28). After Jeremiah had denounced all the leaders for the ruthless way they treated the helpless people, he introduced a King who would save Judah (see Jeremiah 23:5-8). Who was this King, and how would He reign?

9. In chapter 24, God showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One basket contained very good figs and the other "naughty," or rotten figs. What was the meaning of this vision?

10. After hearing Jeremiah's message for twenty-three years, the leaders and common people of Judah had the same response: resistance and rebellion. What did Jeremiah say would be the result? Jeremiah 25:11-14

CONCLUSION

Through the words of Jeremiah and other prophets, God had given His people repeated opportunities to admit their guilt and repent, but they refused. At this point in Judah's history, it was too late.



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 26:1 through 29:32

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

BACKGROUND

It was common for Hebrew writers of this era to arrange the record of historical events under a theme, rather than in chronological sequence. These chapters are a collection of incidents and oracles from different periods of Jeremiah’s life, and show the reactions of the false prophets, the people, and leaders during Jeremiah’s ministry.

The leaders of Judah resisted the prophecies of Jeremiah because he brought bad news to them. His bitterest foes were the religious leaders of the nation. God reminded Jeremiah that he must preach the entire message from God, and to “diminish not a word” (Jeremiah 26:2). It would have been much easier for Jeremiah to soften his pronouncements. The pure message from God made Jeremiah sound like a traitor to Judah, for God had told the prophet to warn the people to submit to King Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon. God had ordained that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Judah as judgment for sin.

False prophets were telling the leaders of Judah to resist captivity, and to join with other nations to fight against Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter 26 records how Jeremiah’s warning made the leaders of Judah so angry that they apprehended the prophet with the intent of killing him. However, certain of the elders intervened, and after the rehearsal of two historical examples, Jeremiah was spared.

In chapter 27, the prophet continued to urge the people to submit to Babylon. At God’s instruction, he used a yoke to portray the God-ordained captivity of Judah and her allies by Nebuchadnezzar. In chapter 28, the false prophet Hananiah contradicted Jeremiah’s words. However, God led Jeremiah to tell Hananiah that because he had taught rebellion against the Lord, he would die. Two months later, this prophecy was fulfilled—another demonstration of God’s judgment.

In the last chapter of our lesson, Jeremiah prophesied that God would bring the exiles back to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity. This event took place shortly after Daniel was delivered from the lion’s den in 537 B.C.

Jeremiah was a faithful prophet. Instead of preaching what the people wanted to hear, he preached the truth, offering the only hope for Judah. The false prophets offered temporary comfort, with the consequence of long-term punishment. Jeremiah offered temporary correction but long-term benefit. Tragically, the people failed to heed Jeremiah’s warning.

QUESTIONS

1. The first six verses of our text begin a message the Prophet Jeremiah was instructed to deliver to King Jehoiakim of Judah. What was the response to this message? (Jeremiah 26:7-9) What are some ways people today respond to warnings from God’s Word?

2. In Jeremiah 26:18-24, the elders relayed historical accounts of two prophets of God. A number of years before, Micah had prophesied a similar message of destruction. Instead of harming Micah, King Hezekiah had called upon God for help and judgment was withheld. However, God’s Prophet Urijah prophesied destruction and he was put to death. What can we learn from these two accounts?

3. In Jeremiah 27:2-3, what did God tell Jeremiah to do as an object lesson for the people? What did his actions signify? Jeremiah 27:8,11

4. God alone sets up and brings down those in authority. In Jeremiah 27:5-7, He made it plain that He had ordained for Nebuchadnezzar to rule over Judah, and instructed the people to submit to his authority. In what ways should we submit to those God has placed in authority over us?

5. The false prophet Hananiah resisted Jeremiah's proclamation regarding Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon. He deceitfully told the priests and the people that the yoke of the king of Babylon would be broken, and that the exiles would return within just two years. What did Jeremiah say would happen to Hananiah as a result and why? Jeremiah 28:16-17

6. What specific commands did God tell Jeremiah to put in his letter to those in exile? (Jeremiah 29:4-6) How would these commands apply to us?

7. In Jeremiah 29:11, God offered a message of hope, directing the prophet to announce that He had good plans for Israel and Judah, who would one day seek Him. What were God's good plans for Judah? How can we apply that promise in our lives? Jeremiah 29:10-14

8. There is a key for answered prayer in Jeremiah 29:13. How do we search for the Lord with all of our hearts? What will happen as a result?

CONCLUSION

As God instructed Jeremiah to not deviate from His words in spite of the opposition he faced, we also must never diminish or ignore what God has instructed us to do. It may not be easy or popular, but if we are faithful, we will receive God's richest blessing.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 30:1 through 33:26

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.” (Jeremiah 30:3)

BACKGROUND

In this lesson’s text, the sequence of messages telling of impending destruction is interrupted. These four chapters, a message of comfort and future hope, are frequently called “The Book of Consolation” by Bible scholars. Although Jeremiah typically announced judgment and punishment for the sins of the Jewish people, in these chapters he proclaimed God’s promise of restoration. God revealed through the prophet that the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah would one day return to their land and be reunited.

Although chapters 30 and 31 are not dated, it is probable that Jeremiah wrote some of this prophecy of restoration either while Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians or shortly thereafter. Chapters 32 and 33 took place during the siege—the tenth year of Zedekiah’s reign, while Jeremiah was imprisoned in the court of the guard. Although the Jews would shortly be led into captivity by the Chaldeans, God wanted the people of Judah to know that He still loved them and cared for them. In a merciful revelation of events to come, the Lord foretold a future time of peace and prosperity.

Most commentators agree that the prophecies of Jeremiah 30-33 refer not only to the restoration of Jerusalem after the seventy years of captivity, but also to the regathering of the Jews from all the nations in the end times. Therefore, besides bringing hope to the Jews of Jeremiah’s time, these chapters should encourage all those who are looking for the coming of the Lord. In this “Book of Consolation,” Christians can find promises of the coming of their King and Priest, Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. According to Jeremiah 30:14-15 and Jeremiah 32:28-35, why was God allowing His people to be taken into captivity and to experience such pain and suffering?

2. Even as the people of Judah were being punished for their sins by God through the Chaldeans, God sent Jeremiah to encourage their hearts. Name at least four aspects of Jeremiah’s prophetic utterance in chapter 30 that would have brought encouragement to the people.

3. In chapter 31, God continued the theme of the glorious days ahead for Israel and Judah by describing a future time of dancing (verses 4 and 13), planting (verses 5 and 28), and singing (verses 7 and 12). However, in Jeremiah 31:2, God reminded them of an incident from their past. Why would the historical reference in this verse be of encouragement to the Jews?

4. Jeremiah was careful to repudiate the proverb, “The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Jeremiah 31:29-30). What is the meaning of this proverb, and why does God reject it?

5. In Jeremiah 31:31, God announced through the prophet that the day would come when He would institute a new covenant with His people. What is the core difference between the old Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant? Jeremiah 31:32-34

6. In Jeremiah 32:6-15, God told Jeremiah that his cousin Hanameel would come and ask him to buy land in Anathoth, an area that had already been seized by the Chaldeans. Given that Jeremiah was in prison and that he knew the captivity would last for seventy years, the command on the surface would seem illogical. How did Jeremiah receive assurance that he was supposed to do as Hanameel suggested?

7. Jeremiah stepped out in obedience to God and purchased the occupied field. However, he still recognized how illogical the purchase was, so he prayed to God (Jeremiah 32:16-25) and received an assurance (Jeremiah 32:27-44). Review this prayer communication between Jeremiah and God. What did Jeremiah do right in his prayer? How did God's answer encourage Jeremiah?

8. In Jeremiah 33, God promised to make Jesus Christ the King and Priest of Israel (verses 15-18). In verses 20-21, what assurance did He offer of this covenant?

CONCLUSION

Even as God fulfilled His promise of punishment, He consoled His people with a promise of restoration and prosperity. We, too, can be assured that God will do what He says He will do. He is the Lord, the God of all flesh—is there any thing too hard for Him?

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 34:1 through 45:5

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.” (Jeremiah 36:3)

BACKGROUND

Following the message of consolation contained in chapters 30-33, the Book of Jeremiah resumes the biographical narrative of the prophet. Proclamations are woven around the circumstances of the prophet during a span of time from approximately 607 B.C. to 586 B.C. This text covers Jeremiah’s experiences just prior to the fall of Jerusalem (chapters 34-36), during the fall (chapters 37-39), and after the fall (chapters 40-45), although events are not presented in a strictly chronological order.

Judah had continued in a state of rebellion against God, with idolatry and heathen practices taking place in the land in spite of repeated warnings from God’s prophets. God had been faithful and patient with His people, but the time for mercy had expired. The city of Jerusalem had twice been invaded by the Chaldean army, and a majority of the people had been taken captive to Babylon, along with many of the Temple treasures. As these chapters begin, the final collapse of the nation of Judah was imminent. The last two fortified cities of Judah, Lachish and Azekah, were about to fall (Jeremiah 34:7). The terrible penalty for sin that the prophet Jeremiah had foretold was coming upon the people.

QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 35 gives an account of the Rechabites, a nomadic people related to the Kenites and Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law. More than two hundred years earlier, their ancestor Jonadab had commanded his sons to stay away from any type of wine. How did God tell Jeremiah to test the Rechabites’s resolve to keep that instruction? How did they respond to this test? Jeremiah 35:2, 5-6

2. In Chapter 36, God commanded Jeremiah to write down all the prophetic messages he had given, thus providing Judah with a written document that would reinforce his spoken words. In obedience, he dictated his pronouncements, and these were transcribed by Baruch, his faithful scribe. When King Jehoiakim heard the words of the book, he cut up the scroll and burned it. Yet he could not destroy God’s Word and God commanded Jeremiah to rewrite his words (see Jeremiah 36:27-28). What are some ways people may try to nullify or destroy God’s Word today?

3. King Zedekiah sent word to Jeremiah asking the prophet to pray to the Lord for the land. What information contained in Jeremiah 37:1-3 reveals the reason why God would not bestow His blessing upon the people, even though it was requested? What spiritual truth can we derive from this?

4. Jeremiah’s message of coming destruction angered the princes of Judah, and he was put into a dungeon—likely a narrow cistern designed to catch rain water. He would have died except for the intervention of Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian. This man was willing to risk his life by asking for Jeremiah’s removal from the dungeon. (See Jeremiah 38:7-13.) What are ways we may have to take a stand that will not be popular

or may cause us damage to some degree? What will be the results of taking that stand?

5. God had not forgotten His promise to the prophet (see Jeremiah 1:8), and Jeremiah was freed from his bonds when the Babylonians overthrew Jerusalem. He was allowed to choose to go to Babylon with the exiles, or to stay in Jerusalem to care for the remnant there. What did Jeremiah choose, and why do you think he made that choice? Jeremiah 40:2-6

6. Johanan was leading the remnant after the assassination of Gedaliah, the governor in Judah. He, the captains, and the people came to Jeremiah and begged for the prophet to find the will of the Lord concerning their plans for the future. (See Jeremiah 42:1-3.) Yet God knew they were asking with deceitful hearts and had no intention of following His way. After Jeremiah told them God's will, they went ahead and fled to Egypt against the Word of the Lord. What were the consequences of their action? Jeremiah 44:7-12

7. In chapter 44, Jeremiah made a final plea to the Jews in Egypt, but the people responded by saying they would do as they pleased (Jeremiah 44:17). They went so far as to say it was the heathen goddess they were serving who had blessed their lives with good in

the past. These people were not ignorant of the God of Israel and His words to them. Based on this passage, do you think spiritual light can become darkness? If so, what causes that to happen?

8. Jeremiah is referred to as the weeping prophet because of his sorrow over the people's rejection of God and the punishment that was coming upon the land. In the course of his prophetic ministry, he was beaten, ridiculed, starved, imprisoned, and forced to leave his homeland. Yet he was faithful to proclaim the word of the Lord. The people refused to listen or heed, yet Jeremiah kept on with his mission. What lesson can we learn from his life?

CONCLUSION

Jeremiah faithfully warned the people to turn to the Lord and obey Him. We can be encouraged to faithfully fulfill our call from God and leave the results to Him. That is all He asks from us.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 46:1 through 52:34

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria.” (Jeremiah 50:18)

BACKGROUND

God had called Jeremiah to be a “prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). For more than forty years he had ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In chapters 46 through 51, Jeremiah pronounced God’s judgment on the pagan nations of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, and Babylon.

In chapter 46, Jeremiah declared God’s judgment on Egypt. The text begins with a graphic description of Pharaoh-necho’s defeat by Nebuchadnezzar in the Battle of Carchemish. Pharaoh-necho was the second ruler of the twenty-sixth dynasty in Egypt. He was considered one of their greatest kings, and had killed Judah’s King Josiah at Megiddo in 608 B.C. Jeremiah described the army of Pharaoh-necho as very large and confident (verse 8). However, just as God had revealed, they were utterly defeated.

Philistia was the next nation to receive a pronouncement. Chapter 47 employs very descriptive imagery to declare the judgments that would come to this long-time contender with God’s people. Many scholars believe the Philistines originally came from Crete (called Caphtor in verse 4). They were primarily sea merchants, with most of their major cities located on the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Jeremiah described Babylon’s army as an “overflowing flood” that would overtake their land (verse 2). The noise of the advancing army would be so terrifying that the “fathers shall not look back to their children,” indicating that in their attempt to flee, they would leave their children behind (verse 3). The word “baldness” used in verse 5 indicates a funeral-like mourning for the judgment and destruction of their cities.

God’s judgment of the nations continues in chapter 48, and is directed in this passage against Moab. The Moabites were descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his eldest daughter. Moab had a confrontational relationship with the Children of Israel; however, Judah formed an alliance with Moab

and Ammon in an ill-conceived attempt to defeat Nebuchadnezzar’s army. This nation was condemned for pride (verse 29). Moab had been famous for vineyards and wine production. Jeremiah’s prophecy gives imagery of the nation as a winemaker sitting on a stock of wine, allowing it to sit and age without being poured from vessel to vessel, which would cause it to lose value. Because of their pride and contentment in their own accomplishments, destruction would come to the Moabites by way of Babylon and their wine would be emptied from vessel to vessel. Then the vessels would be broken.

Chapter 49 records the judgments against Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam. The Ammonites descended from Benammi, a son of Lot conceived through incest with his youngest daughter. The Ammonites inhabited an area east of the Jordan River, having moved into the Northern Kingdom of Israel after Assyria took Israel away captive in 722 B.C. The Ammonites had placed their trust in their god, Molech, and the natural protection of the surrounding mountains. Jeremiah prophesied that their trust would turn to fear and they would be driven out.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau. During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem they supported Nebuchadnezzar and rejoiced when the city eventually fell. Teman and Dedan (verses 7 and 8) were at opposite ends of the country, so these verses show the completeness of the promised destruction.

The final four judgments in chapter 49 were against Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam. Syria’s capital was the city of Damascus. Kedar and Selam were two nomadic Arabian tribes. Elam was a neighbor east of Babylon that bordered Assyria and Media.

Chapters 50 and 51 contain the judgments against Babylon. God had used Babylon as an instrument to chasten His people, Judah, and to execute His judgment on other nations. However, the Babylonians had celebrated the destruction of God’s people and His Temple (Jeremiah 50:11), and Jeremiah prophesied that the destruction of Babylon would be complete and final. Not even one stone from Babylon’s buildings would be taken and used to build somewhere else, but the city would remain desolate forever. Jeremiah underscored the finality of this judgment by instructing Seraiah, the son of Neriah, to read the judgments against Babylon when he arrived there. When the reading was complete, Seraiah was told to “bind a stone” to the book and cast it into the Euphrates River as an object lesson to the people, symbolizing that Babylon, too, would sink.

The last chapter of this book corresponds with Jeremiah 39, 2 Kings 25, and 2 Chronicles 36. These chapters record the fall of Jerusalem, its destruction, the captivity of the people of Judah, and the deportation to Babylon.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think God had Jeremiah prophesy judgment against Judah's neighboring countries?

2. In Jeremiah 46:25, whom did God direct the prophet to say would be punished? Why do you think God identified each entity separately rather than simply grouping them as a nation?

3. Philistia was located in a portion of the Promised Land west of Judah, along the southeastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. Chapter 47 prophesies of its final destruction at the time when Judah would go into captivity. What lesson can we learn from the fact that Israel never removed that nation from the Promised Land after their conquest of it?

4. Although judgment was proclaimed against both Moab and Ammon, they, like Israel, were told that someday there would be a return to their lands (see Jeremiah 48:47 and 49:6). These prophecies may relate in part to an end-time restoration. However, some of the Moabites and Ammonites were allowed to return to their lands under the edict of Cyrus. What does this indicate to us about God's use of judgment?

5. Read Jeremiah 49:7 and 13-17. What was to be the final state of the country of Edom? How did this differ from Moab and Ammon?

6. God had used Babylon as an instrument of justice in pouring out divine retribution upon Judah and the nations identified in this lesson. However, chapters 50 and 51 describe in detail the pronouncement of doom upon this once-mighty nation. Bel and Merodach, mentioned in Jeremiah 50:2, are names referring to a single deity, the chief god of Babylon. What did the Prophet Jeremiah say would happen to this god, and to the other idols of Babylon? What spiritual truth is revealed by this pronouncement?

7. Jeremiah 52:2 says that Zedekiah, Judah's last king, "did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD." His leadership resulted in the siege of Jerusalem, the spoiling of the city and Temple, and the killing and enslavement of the people of Judah. What was God's punishment upon Zedekiah? Jeremiah 52:10-11

8. What qualities in the life and ministry of Jeremiah might help us as we attempt to live for God in a spiritually challenging society?

CONCLUSION

God judged the nations along with His own people for rebelling against Him and not heeding His Word. As we purpose to live righteously and obediently before God, we can avoid facing the judgment of God that will certainly fall upon those who persist in refusing His mercy and rebelling against Him.



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Lamentations 1:1 through 5:22

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23)

BACKGROUND

Lamentations is the anguished outpouring of a prophet mourning the degradation of a once great nation. This book, a collection of five poems, was written by Jeremiah shortly after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, about 586 B.C. The Babylonian conqueror Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to the city for eighteen long months and when the city was finally taken, it was a heartbreaking time for the Jewish people. This set of poems, the first four composed in the form of ancient funeral songs or dirges, and the final one, a prayer, describe the terrifying calamity that had befallen the land. They acknowledge that the people were being punished severely for disobeying God.

At one time the people of Judah had obeyed and loved their God. Now they were physically, emotionally, and spiritually broken. Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple had been destroyed, and the people put to shame before their oppressors. But the greatest loss was the knowledge that God had turned away from them because of their rejection of Him.

In spite of the excruciating pain of the situation they were in, Jeremiah voiced his hope that God would turn His anger away if only the people would repent. Lamentations concludes with a prayer designed to be the penitent outpouring of a broken nation—a nation that had finally realized the cost of angering God. With desperate longing, the prophet verbalized a plea intended to guide the people to a position of humility and repentance, asking God to remember them and turn away the fierceness of His great wrath.

QUESTIONS

1. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. What circumstances caused his anguish? Lamentations 1:3,6,8,15-17

2. Lamentations 2:6-10 describes the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem. What significance did this destruction have to the people of Judah?

3. In spite of all the pain and sorrow inflicted upon Israel by God, what was Jeremiah’s hope? Lamentations 3:31-32

4. Lamentations 4:17-20 alludes to the fact that Judah had asked Egypt for help in fighting the Babylonian army. What one word is used to describe the nature of that help? What lesson can we derive from this?

5. What was the condition of the sacred grounds on the Temple mount? Lamentations 5:18

6. What miseries, as recited in chapter 5, had been sent by God to bring the people to a position of humility and repentance?

Lamentations 5:3

Lamentations 5:4

Lamentations 5:6

Lamentations 5:11

Lamentations 5:12

Lamentations 5:13

Lamentations 5:14-15

Lamentations 5:18

7. What attitude or condition was the prophet encouraging in the people, as indicated by his prayer at the end of chapter 5?

8. How would you describe the Prophet Jeremiah after reading the Book of Lamentations?

CONCLUSION

We live in an age when people and nations are forgetting and forsaking God. We also know that there is a time of tribulation coming soon upon this earth—a time of trouble of a magnitude that has never been seen before. Let us learn a lesson from the failure of the people of Judah, and stay true to God, that we might escape that terrible time!

NOTES