

## *The Power of the Prophets*

Worksheet for Week 5

### *The Death of Judah and Jerusalem*

Last week, we looked at the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722BC. The Assyrians laid siege to Samaria,<sup>1</sup> Israel's capital city, for three years. After sacking the city, the Assyrians sent nearly 30,000 Israelites into exile. Never again would the ten Israelite tribes in the north be an independent political or religious entity. They were lost forever!

This week, we turn our attention to the south, to Judah and to its capital city, Jerusalem.

#### *Judah struggles on*

After the destruction of Israel, King Hezekiah of Judah led a rebellion against the Assyrians but had limited success. Though, with God's help (2 Kings 19:35-36), Jerusalem stayed independent of the Assyrians, Hezekiah lost control of Philistine territory on the coast.

Hezekiah was succeeded by his son, Manasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years but returned to pagan ways. Altars to Baal were rebuilt. Even the practice of human sacrifice returned to Jerusalem (2 Kings 21:1-17)! Manasseh chose the course of staying a loyal vassal of the Assyrians as did his son, Amon, who also embraced the pagan ways. However, in about 630BC, at the age of eight, Amon's son, Josiah, took the throne. Josiah would get a rare, good report card from God!

When Josiah was 26 years old, the high priest Hilkiah found the books of the Law (2 Kings 22). Josiah wept for Judah's abandonment of God (after all, the books had to be found!) and convened the Jews for the reading of the Law. Josiah swept out all the pagan practices (as best he could) and reinstated the observance of the Passover. However, at the age of forty-one, he was killed in battle and succeeded by kings who did evil in God's sight.

Josiah's reign saw the rapid decline of the Assyrian and the rise of the Babylonians, who sought to control fully the nation of Judah. In 588BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, tired of half-way measures with Judah, ordered the siege and sacking of Jerusalem. In 587, the city fell. Solomon's temple was burned to the ground. The Ark of the Covenant was lost forever. Presumably, it was carried to the city of Babylon where it was melted down. Thousands of inhabitants of Jerusalem were exiled to Babylonia. Only the poorest classes in Jerusalem were left in the city.

Like the kingdom of Israel, the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem were dead.

#### *Jeremiah*

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry continued throughout the final decades of Judah's life. We know more about Jeremiah and his life than any of the other writing prophets because he tells us much of his own story in his prophetic messages. Jeremiah was from Anathoth, a small town about two miles north of Jerusalem in the lands of the tribe of Benjamin. He prophesied from about 627BC to beyond the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. His ministry began during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah's successors, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, rebelled against Babylonia, to whom Judah was a vassal state. Jeremiah believed that Babylonia was God's instrument of judgment upon Judah and that Judah's kings should accept the 'yoke' of Babylon (Jeremiah 27). He was branded a traitor and was imprisoned. A tribal priest himself, Jeremiah would also preach hard words against the temple establishment. Centuries later, Jesus would invoke the words and actions of Jeremiah in his own confrontation with the temple priests.

Nonetheless, during and after the final siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah would bring words of comfort and hope, promising a day when Israel would be restored and God's covenant would not be written on tablets of stone but upon his people's hearts (Jer. 30-33). After the burning of Jerusalem, Jeremiah went into exile like thousands of other Jews.

In summary, Jeremiah was the greatest spiritual personality among God's people during a time of great chaos and decline. Though by temperament he was gentle and compassionate, Jeremiah never softened his warnings about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews. He brought them God's call to stay faithful to God and his law, rather than trust in the outward trappings of the temple system. And he brought them words of comfort about the "life-after-death" to come.

---

<sup>1</sup>In Jesus' day, Samaria was the name of the region that lay between the Roman province of Judea in the south and the Jewish region of Galilee in the north.

## Bible Readings for Week 5

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Jeremiah 1:4-19 The call of Jeremiah</p>	<p>Day 2 Jeremiah 7:1-8:3 A sermon in the temple. Notice verse 11! (see Matthew 21:12-17)</p>
<p>Day 3 Jeremiah 11:1-17 The broken covenant</p>	<p>Day 4 Jeremiah 18 The potter and the clay</p>
<p>Day 5 Jeremiah 31:33-34 God will make a new covenant; Trusting God, Jeremiah buys a plot of land in the city that the Babylonians are about to crush! One day, the exiles will return to this land. This is the prophetic action that follows the prophetic words.</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>