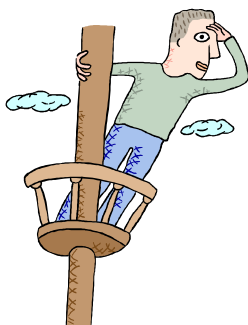


What did Nebuchadnezzar Destroy?

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On the Watch

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Preface: The Purpose of this Study

The millions who call themselves "Jehovah's witnesses" place their faith in an organisation that claims to be the sole representative on earth of God's Heavenly Kingdom.

These people believe that God's earthly representative organisation had been removed from earth 2520 years previously by Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar when he destroyed Jerusalem and Judah. The mantle of being God's sole earthly representative was supposedly passed on to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in 1914.

Much has been written about date of the Destruction of Jerusalem, Absolute Dates, neo-Babylonian chronology, the Witnesses' systems for arriving at the date of 1914 CE for the return of God's sole earthly organisation, and so on.

This Study takes a close look at the history recorded by the Hebrews in their Scriptures.

What and whom did Babylon destroy? Did Nebuchadnezzar attack and defeat the true and only representative on earth of God's Kingdom?

Did God wait 70 years before he started to undo the wanton destruction wrought on his temple by the king of Babylon? Did God wait 2520 years before he fully avenged the actions taken by this Gentile leader on his city, temple and land?

Did God allow Nebuchadnezzar to do as he wished? What was going on?

I was once told that "a text without a context is a pretext". This study considers the overall picture of the destruction of God's City, Temple and land, thereby placing that event in its proper context.

This is a fascinating journey, one that has deep lessons for us all.

Please send me your comments, corrections, advice and so on.

Doug

Comments on Revision 2 (July 2001)

I would like to thank friends who have pointed out grammatical errors I had failed to pick up, as well as a footnote reference that gave an incorrect chapter number in Jeremiah.

Doug

Comments on Revision 3 (July 2001)

I added the piece "Postscript: The Final Chapter".

Doug

The Dominant Powers

By the time Manasseh began ruling the kingdom of Judah, Assyria had conquered the Syro-Palestinian area and it had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel.

Assyria, Babylon and Egypt were the region's super powers. To survive, the lesser powers such as Palestine formed an allegiance with one or other of the major powers.

Gradually, Assyria crumbled under the blows from Babylon, and when Babylon combined with the Medes to take the Assyrian capital Ninevah, this reduced the major powers to two, Egypt and Babylon.

Totally Corrupt Kings

The kingdom of Judah became thoroughly corrupt during the long and evil reign of Manasseh. As a result, God decreed that Jerusalem and Judah would suffer the same fate as had befallen Israel. God would wipe out Jerusalem and Judah, and he would forsake the people.

The LORD said through his servants the prophets: "Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their foes, because they have done evil in my eyes and have provoked me to anger from the day their forefathers came out of Egypt until this day."

Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end--besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the LORD.¹

Amon, who succeeded his father Manasseh, was equally as evil.

Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years. . . . He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. He walked in all the ways of his father; he worshiped the idols his father had worshiped, and bowed down to them. He forsook the LORD, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD.²

Reformist King Josiah

Josiah, who succeeded Amon to the throne of Judah, was a reformist King.

¹ 2 Kings 21: 10 – 16 (NIV)

² 2 Kings 21: 19 – 22 (NIV)

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. . . He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.³

A catalog of his actions at rectifying the evils of his predecessors is recorded at 2 Kings 23: 4 – 24. The passage shows the total depravity that Judah sank to under Manasseh and his son, Amon.

Destruction Delayed

King Josiah's reformation brought the concession from God that the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem would be delayed and Josiah would not have to live to see it happen.

She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, `This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.' Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, `This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.' "⁴

Despite Josiah's reforms, God was still not pleased with his people:

Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger. So the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, `There shall my Name be'. "⁵

Jeremiah Receives His Call

Jeremiah received his call from God in the 13th year of Josiah⁶. Jeremiah supported Josiah's reforms but required even more, with emphasis on the inner spiritual character that true religion demands.

"The time is coming," declares the LORD,

³ 2 Kings 22: 1 – 2 (NIV); See also 2 Chronicles 34: 3 – 8, 33

⁴ 2 Kings 22: 15 – 20 (NIV)

⁵ 2 Kings 23: 26 – 27 (NIV)

⁶ Jeremiah 1:2

"when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant
I made with their forefathers
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them, "
declares the LORD.

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel
after that time," declares the LORD.

"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.⁷

The Death of Josiah

Josiah met his death when he went forth to meet the army of Necho, Pharaoh of Egypt. Josiah's actions indicate his allegiance to super-power Babylon.

After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah marched out to meet him in battle. But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What quarrel is there between you and me, O king of Judah? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you."

Josiah, however, would not turn away from him, but disguised himself to engage him in battle. He would not listen to what Neco had said at God's command but went to fight him on the plain of Megiddo.

Archers shot King Josiah, and he told his officers, "Take me away; I am badly wounded." So they took him out of his chariot, put him in the other chariot he had and brought him to Jerusalem, where he died. He was buried in the tombs of his fathers, and all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him.⁸

Upon hearing of Josiah's death Jeremiah mourned him as a good king.

Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the

⁷ Jeremiah 31: 31 - 34

⁸ 2 Chronicles 35: 20 – 24 (NIV)

laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments.⁹

Necho Intervenes

Jehoahaz followed his father Josiah to the throne of Judah. But after only three months, he was deported to Egypt. Necho, king of Egypt, put Jehoahaz's brother Eliakim on the throne and renamed him Jehoiakim.

Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah and changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz and carried him off to Egypt, and there he died. Jehoiakim paid Pharaoh Neco the silver and gold he demanded. In order to do so, he taxed the land and exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land according to their assessments.¹⁰

By doing this, Necho expected Judah's allegiance to Egypt. Necho had seen Josiah, the previous king of Judah, demonstrate his allegiance to Babylon. By having his person on the throne of Judah, Necho provided himself with a buffer between himself and Babylon.

Jehoiakim

Jehoiakim was a strong and evil king.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. . . . And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his fathers had done.¹¹

The Examples of Shiloh and Israel

Following the conquest of Canaan, the tabernacle had been set up in Shiloh. It was still there at the end of the period of the judges. Despite God's presence ("name") at Shiloh, he had it destroyed. God also had the northern kingdom of Israel destroyed.

When God heard them, he was very angry;
he rejected Israel completely.
He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh,
the tent he had set up among men.¹²

Pointing to these examples, God warned that the same would happen with those who trusted in the temple that bore his name at Jerusalem.

"Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. . . . Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers. I will **thrust you from my presence**, just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim."¹³

⁹ 2 Chronicles 35: 25 (NIV); See also 2 Chronicles 34: 26 - 28

¹⁰ 2 Kings 23: 34 - 35 (NIV)

¹¹ 2 Kings 23: 36 - 37 (NIV)

¹² Psalm 78: 59 - 60 (NIV)

¹³ Jeremiah 7: 12, 14 - 15 (NIV), emphasis supplied

Necho Crushed

Early in Jehoiakim's reign¹⁴, Nebuchadnezzar crushed the Egyptians, under Necho, at Carchemish on the Euphrates. He was the gifted general who succeeded his father Nabopolassar as ruler of Babylon later that same year.

Necho returned to Egypt with heavy losses and Babylon was given a virtually free hand in western Asia for the next 70 years. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, humiliating Jehoiakim¹⁵ and carried Daniel and his three companions to Babylon¹⁶.

Shift in Allegiance

The defeat of Necho by Babylon brought about a dramatic shift of allegiance by Judah. Necho, king of Egypt, had put Jehoiakim on the throne, so his allegiance was naturally towards Egypt. The crushing defeat inflicted by Nebuchadnezzar on Necho's army meant that Judah and the other nations came under Babylon's control. Judah and the surrounding nations were now serving Babylon

Jeremiah's Reaction to the Babylonian Victory

Jeremiah saw the servitude to Babylon by all of the nations as God's judgment being meted out for their sinful ways.

The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first¹⁷ year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. . .

And though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. They said, "Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the LORD gave to you and your fathers for ever and ever. Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you."

"But you did not listen to me," declares the LORD, "and you have provoked me with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves."¹⁸

¹⁴ Third year according to the Hebrew Nisan Calendar (Dan 1:1) and the fourth year according to the Babylonian Tishri calendar (Jeremiah 46:2).

¹⁵ Daniel 1: 1 - 2

¹⁶ Daniel 1: 3 - 6

¹⁷ "The phrase in Jer 25:1 probably also means the 'beginning year', that is, his accession year of Nebuchadnezzar." *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (1964), Jack Finegan, page 202. He also points out that the phrase used here is not used anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures. See also Hayim Tadmor, *JNES* XV (1956) page 228 and *JBL* LI (1932) page 102. E. R. Theile in *BASOR* 143, page 24 suggests that Jeremiah might have counted Nebuchadnezzar's years according to the Egyptian Calendar. Judah had been under the heel of Egypt until Nebuchadnezzar defeated them at Carchemish, winning mastery as the sole World Power. [I am indebted to Max Hatton's *Touchstone of the Watchtower*, page 13 for this information. I refer to Max in more detail later in this Paper.]

¹⁸ Jeremiah 25: 1, 4 – 7 (NIV)

God had already decided the he was going to destroy Judah, just as he had earlier destroyed Israel.

All Nations to be Ruined

Jeremiah made it clear to Judah what would be the result of their sinfulness. God's anger at Judah, so clearly stated during Manasseh's rule, had not lessened. The whole country would become a "wasteland".

God's condemnation is aimed not only at Judah but to the surrounding nations as well. He was intent in completely destroying them all, using Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument.

Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them **against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.** I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp."¹⁹

All Nations to Serve Babylon

God's anger was directed not only at the kingdom of Judah, it included "all the surrounding nations". All the "nations" were to serve Babylon for "seventy years". The word for "nations" is *gowy*, a term usually referring to non-Hebrew people. In the *Watchtower* article on the "Times of the Gentiles", the Watchtower Society states that "Goyim" refers to the "Gentiles":

The Gentiles, the Goyim, as the Jews today call them. . . .
Goyim, "infidels" as Christendom used to call them.²⁰

Jeremiah was thus telling the "nations", the Gentiles, that they would serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.

This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.²¹

The Nations that were to Serve Babylon

In case people thought that Jeremiah's warnings were meant for only the people of Judah, he lists the nations that were to "serve the king of Babylon" for seventy years. Even the super power Egypt was commanded to serve Babylon.

So I took the cup from the LORD's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it: **Jerusalem and the towns of Judah**, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today; **Pharaoh king of Egypt**, his attendants, his officials and all his people, and all the foreign people there; all the kings of **Uz**; all the kings of the **Philistines** (those

¹⁹ Jeremiah 25: 8 – 10 (NIV), emphasis supplied

²⁰ *The Watchtower*, page 17, August 1, 1983

²¹ Jeremiah 25: 11 (NIV), emphasis supplied

of **Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron**, and the people left at **Ashdod**; **Edom, Moab and Ammon**; all the kings of **Tyre and Sidon**; the kings of the coastlands across the sea; **Dedan, Tema, Buz** and all who are in distant places; all the kings of **Arabia** and all the **kings of the foreign people who live in the desert**; all the kings of **Zimri, Elam and Media**; and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other--**all the kingdoms on the face of the earth**. And after all of them, the king of **Sheshach**²² will drink it too.²³

Jerusalem's condition provides proof

Jeremiah pointed out to the nations that if God is prepared to punish the city that bears his Name, there can be no doubt that he will punish them all.

But **if they refuse** to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, `This is what the LORD Almighty says: **You must drink it!** See, I am **beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name**, and will you indeed go unpunished? **You will not go unpunished**, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the LORD Almighty.²⁴

Babylon to Receive its Punishment

Jeremiah stated that after the Seventy Years of servitude were completed, God would punish the king of Babylon.

"But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever."²⁵

Babylon was to receive the punishment that Jeremiah had written against all the nations.

I will bring upon that land [Babylon] all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against **all the nations**. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands."²⁶

²² **SHESHACH** (Heb. *sheshakh*). In the opinion of many, a cryptogram from "Babel" formed by reversing the letters of the alphabet. When the prophet first used this device (Jer 25:26), it was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, and it would have been folly openly to predict the doom of Babylon. When he later used it (51:41), Israel was in captivity, Jerusalem had long been in ruins, and the use of the word with its explanation as Babylon could do no harm. (NIV footnote to Jeremiah 25:26)

²³ Jeremiah 25: 17 – 26 (NIV), emphasis supplied

²⁴ Jeremiah 25: 28 – 29 (NIV), emphasis supplied

²⁵ Jeremiah 25: 12 (NIV)

²⁶ Jeremiah 25: 13 – 14 (NIV), emphases supplied

Evil, Rebellious and Disobedient People

The reign of the evil king Manasseh caused God to decree that Judah and Jerusalem would be wiped away, just as the northern tribes of Israel had been. God's anger was ameliorated by the reign of the reformist king Josiah but the succeeding kings were evil, rekindling God's anger and his determination to deal harshly with Judah and Jerusalem.

With each succeeding king, God kept punishing his people. The prophets sounded God's warnings, loudly and clearly, yet the people did not repent.

When Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho and took control of Judah and Jerusalem, Jeremiah saw the King of Babylon as being God's *servant*.

And though the LORD has sent all his **servants** the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. . . . "But you did not listen to me," declares the LORD, "and you have provoked me Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my **servant** Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon." ²⁷

Jeremiah calls Nebuchadnezzar "God's servant" on each occasion that the king attacked the evil and disobedient land of Judah and streets of Jerusalem. Thus he is called "servant" at Jeremiah 27:6, early in Zedekiah's reign and again at Jeremiah 43:10 when, following the destruction of Jerusalem, the remnant was instructed by God to remain in the land of Judah.

The Decree on the Nations

When the super-power Babylon under Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar defeated the only other super-power Egypt, Jeremiah declared that all the surrounding nations, including the former super-power Egypt, were to serve Babylon for 70 years.

The nations were told that if they accepted God's decree, they could stay in their land. Of the nations, only the weak Judah, the one nation that should have heeded the True God, defied his command. Judah remained defiant, even as it was weakened by further onslaughts by Babylon.

Judah could have lived out the seventy years of servitude to Babylon while it remained in its own land, but under a succession of evil kings, it was brought to its knees and finally wiped out as a sovereign nation.

The Babylonians had taken the cream of Judah to Babylon, where many took positions of high office. Only the poorest were left in the land, under the control of a foreign nation.

Outcome in the People's Hands

In Jeremiah, acts are often performed as parables, to illustrate the message.

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter

²⁷ Jeremiah 25: 4, 7 – 9 (NIV), emphases supplied

formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.²⁸

In this situation, the potter symbolises God's handling of his people.

Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."²⁹

God says that the outcome of a condemnation or a promise can be altered if the recipients change their behaviour. He continues:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.³⁰

In view of this, God pleads to his people of Judah, repent. The outcome of the condemnation is in the hands of the people, but God knows that their evil hearts are stubborn.

"Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.' But they will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.'"³¹

Nebuchadnezzar, World Power by his Second Year

In the second year of his reign³², Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that Daniel's God was the only one able to tell Nebuchadnezzar what the dream was, and its meaning³³.

"You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue--an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The **head of the statue was made of pure gold**, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay."³⁴

²⁸ Jeremiah 18: 1 – 4 (NIV)

²⁹ Jeremiah 18: 5 – 6 (NIV)

³⁰ Jeremiah 18: 7 – 10 (NIV)

³¹ Jeremiah 18: 11 - 12 (NIV)

³² Daniel 2:1. To state, as the Society does, that the words "second year" in Daniel do not refer to Nebuchadnezzar's second regnal year but to his second year after Jerusalem's destruction, is just prejudicial exegesis.

³³ Daniel 2:28

³⁴ Daniel 2: 31 – 33 (NIV), emphasis supplied

Daniel's God provided Nebuchadnezzar with the interpretation:

"This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. **You, O king, are the king of kings.** The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. **Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.**³⁵

By the time of his second year, Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the rulers of the region; he was the king of the kings. By his second year, Nebuchadnezzar was the "head of gold", the world dominating power.

Nebuchadnezzar built a statue of the image he had seen in his dream, except that it was made completely of gold.

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.³⁶

Whereas Daniel had said that the "gold" would be followed by "iron", an inferior world dominating power, by making the statue completely of gold, Nebuchadnezzar was saying that his world-dominating kingdom would continue without end.

Nebuchadnezzar had another dream.

I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; **it was visible to the ends of the earth.** Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was **food for all.** Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; **from it every creature was fed.**³⁷

Daniel, named Belteshazzar by the Babylonians³⁸, interpreted the dream for Nebuchadnezzar.

The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, **with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth,** with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, **providing food for all,** giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air -- **you, O king, are that tree!** You have become great and strong; your **greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.**³⁹

Throughout this sequence of dreams and dramas, Nebuchadnezzar is consistently portrayed as being the supreme world super power.

³⁵ Daniel 2: 36 – 38 (NIV), emphasis supplied

³⁶ Daniel 3: 1 (NIV)

³⁷ Daniel 4: 10 – 12 (NIV), emphasis supplied

³⁸ Daniel 1: 6

³⁹ Daniel 4: 20 – 22 (NIV), emphasis supplied

A Consistent Theme

In Chapter 2, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that in the second year of his reign:

In your hands, [God] has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air.⁴⁰

In Daniel Chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar is able to command obedience from people of all nations and tongues:

Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, **all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped** the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.⁴¹

In Chapter 4, Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that his greatness had reached the sky and his dominion reached to the distant parts of the earth.

The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air -- you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.⁴²

When Babylon's final hour arrived, Daniel told king Belshazzar that Nebuchadnezzar had the dread and fear of all peoples, nations and men:

"O king (Belshazzar), the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him.⁴³

Jehoiakim Serves Babylon for his first three years

At the start of his servitude to Babylon, Jehoiakim did as he was required, and he served Nebuchadnezzar. But this did not last.

During Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. But then he changed his mind and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.⁴⁴

The ancient Babylonian historical tablets reveal that Necho and Nebuchadnezzar fought an indecisive battle, a "draw". Following this, Nebuchadnezzar did not venture out during the following year. Jehoiakim, who naturally supported Egypt, drew strength from this and no longer served Babylon, despite God's command.

Unfortunately for Jehoiakim, Necho did not venture out again.

⁴⁰ Daniel 2: 28 (NIV)

⁴¹ Daniel 3: 7 (NIV)

⁴² Daniel 4: 20 – 22 (NIV)

⁴³ Daniel 5: 18 – 19 (NIV)

⁴⁴ 2 Kings 24:1 (NIV)

The king of Egypt did not march out from his own country again, because the king of Babylon had taken all his territory, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River.⁴⁵

Babylon was the sole super power. It was required of the nations to respect God's decision that this should be so, and they should continue serving Babylon for the seventy years that God had decreed.

God not Willing to Forgive

Because of God's continued anger at Manasseh's actions, God sent raiders in to destroy Judah.

The LORD sent Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite raiders against [Jehoiakim]. He sent them to destroy Judah, in accordance with the word of the LORD proclaimed by his servants the prophets. Surely these things happened to Judah according to the LORD's command, in order to remove them from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh and all he had done, including the shedding of innocent blood. For he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD was not willing to forgive.⁴⁶

The Reason for God's Anger

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees".

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you".⁴⁷

God Will Not Spare

"Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations.

Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. Therefore in your midst fathers will eat their children, and children will eat their fathers. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds.

Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will withdraw my favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you.

⁴⁵ 2 Kings 24: 7 (NIV)

⁴⁶ 2 Kings 24: 2 – 4 (NIV)

⁴⁷ Ezekiel 5: 5 – 7 (NIV)

A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword. . .

"I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by. You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you when I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath and with stinging rebuke. I the LORD have spoken.

When I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine, I will shoot to destroy you. I will bring more and more famine upon you and cut off your supply of food. I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will leave you childless. Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I the LORD have spoken." ⁴⁸

God Spoke in His Pure Zeal

"Then my anger will cease and my wrath against them will subside, and I will be avenged. And when I have spent my wrath upon them, they will know that I the LORD have spoken in my zeal."⁴⁹

But God Could Still Relent

Early in Jehoiakim's reign⁵⁰, while under the threat of death⁵¹, Jeremiah told the priests, the prophets and all the people that he had been sent to prophesy⁵².

He told them that there was still time to turn from their evil way and then God would relent from doing the harm he had warned them of.

Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.⁵³

Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.⁵⁴

Jeremiah's Life Constantly at Risk

Jeremiah contrasted the moral integrity of King Josiah with the evil ways of his son, Jehoiakim.

To Jehoiakim he said:

⁴⁸ Ezekiel 5: 8 –12, 14 – 17 (NIV)

⁴⁹ Ezekiel 5: 13 (NIV)

⁵⁰ Jeremiah 26: 1

⁵¹ Jeremiah 26: 11

⁵² Jeremiah 26: 12

⁵³ Jeremiah 26: 3 (NIV)

⁵⁴ Jeremiah 26: 13 (NIV)

Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness,
his upper rooms by injustice,
making his countrymen work for nothing,
not paying them for their labor.

He says, 'I will build myself a great palace
with spacious upper rooms.'
So he makes large windows in it,
panels it with cedar
and decorates it in red.

"Does it make you a king
to have more and more cedar?"⁵⁵

"But your eyes and your heart
are set only on dishonest gain,
on shedding innocent blood
and on oppression and extortion."⁵⁶

In the same passage, Jeremiah said of Josiah:

Did not your father have food and drink?
He did what was right and just,
so all went well with him.

He defended the cause of the poor and needy,
and so all went well.
Is that not what it means to know me?"
declares the LORD.⁵⁷

Not surprisingly, Jeremiah's constant antagonism towards Jehoiakim placed his life at risk. Yahweh said to Jehoiakim through Jeremiah:

I warned you when you felt secure,
but you said, 'I will not listen!'
This has been your way from your youth;
you have not obeyed me.⁵⁸

Jehoiachin

Jehoiachin succeeded his father Jehoiakim, and was equally as evil.

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king,
and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. . . . He did evil
in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father had done.⁵⁹

Jeremiah continued his warnings.

"As surely as I live," declares the LORD, "even if you,
Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet
ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. I will hand
you over to those who seek your life, those you fear--to
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians. I
will hurl you and the mother who gave you birth into

⁵⁵ Jeremiah 22: 13 – 15a (NIV)

⁵⁶ Jeremiah 22: 17 (NIV)

⁵⁷ Jeremiah 22: 15b – 16 (NIV)

⁵⁸ Jeremiah 22:21 (NIV)

⁵⁹ 2 Kings 24: 8 – 9 (NIV)

another country, where neither of you was born, and there you both will die. You will never come back to the land you long to return to."⁶⁰

Nebuchadnezzar Retakes Jerusalem

When Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, Jehoiakim had been succeeded by Jehoiachin. The king of Babylon took the new king captive.

At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it, and Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to the city while his officers were besieging it. Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him. In the eighth year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner.⁶¹

All of the Treasures Removed from the Temple

As the LORD had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed all the treasures from the temple of the LORD and from the royal palace, and took away all the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the LORD.⁶²

Nebuchadnezzar Leaves only the Poorest People

He carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans--a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land. The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand craftsmen and artisans.⁶³

Nebuchadnezzar Installs his Puppet King

Zedekiah was installed by Babylon as the king of Judah with the intent of having a supporter of Babylon there.

[Nebuchadnezzar] made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Jeremiah 22: 24 – 27 (NIV)

⁶¹ 2 Kings 24: 10 – 12 (NIV)

⁶² 2 Kings 24: 13 (NIV)

⁶³ 2 Kings 24: 14 – 16 (NIV)

⁶⁴ 2 Kings 24: 17 (NIV)

Jeremiah's Assessment of the Situation

Exiles Told to Prosper in Babylon

Jeremiah wrote from Jerusalem to the captives in Babylon, telling them to submit to life in Babylon and not to expect swift release. Seventy years of servitude to Babylon had already been decreed by God, it had commenced and the full servitude would certainly be completed.

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'⁶⁵

Not to Listen to the False Prophets

Jeremiah had to restate the position, as false prophets in Babylon were promising swift release.

"Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,' declares the LORD.⁶⁶

70 Years for Babylon

Whereas God had previously declared that he would wipe them away as one wipes out a dirty dish, he now makes a gracious promise, that they would be able to return to Jerusalem after the seventy years are completed.

"This is what the LORD says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.'⁶⁷

Whether the Seventy Years were "for" Babylon, as the majority of translations prefer, or "at" Babylon as the King James Version puts it, it is true that captives were located there from the time of the first seizure of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar during his accession year.

It is also true that there were exiles "at" Babylon for many years and decades after Babylon fell. Even the exiled prophet Daniel remained there.

Most exiles did not live through the full period, being either born there, dying during the period or being brought there after the servitude had commenced, such as Ezekiel and Jehoiachin.

The "seventy year" period is expressed in terms of Babylon, not in terms of the exiles from the various nations who were living there.

⁶⁵ Jeremiah 29: 4 – 7 (NIV)

⁶⁶ Jeremiah 29: 8 – 9 (NIV)

⁶⁷ Jeremiah 29: 10 (NIV)

God's Promise to the Exiles

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."⁶⁸

The Promise is to Both Kingdoms

The promise is to the northern kingdom (family) of Israel as well as to the southern kingdom (family) of Judah.

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: . . . The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess,' says the LORD."⁶⁹

Zedekiah Rebels

But Zedekiah did evil, thus continuing God's condemnation of Judah for the evil ways of Manasseh.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. . . He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. **It was because of the LORD's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah**, and in the end he **thrust them from his presence**. Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.⁷⁰

"(Zedekiah) rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. . . He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel. Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, **following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD**, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem."⁷¹

The nation continued in its evil ways. In addition, Zedekiah rebelled against God's instruction to serve Babylon. Judah was doubly condemned!

The False Prophet Hananiah

The false prophet Hananiah confronted Jeremiah, saying that although the king of Babylon already held Judah in his power, this yoke would be broken within two years, allowing the exiles to return.

⁶⁸ Jeremiah 29: 11 – 14 (NIV)

⁶⁹ Jeremiah 30: 1, 3 (NIV)

⁷⁰ 2 Kings 24: 18 – 20 (NIV), emphasis supplied

⁷¹ 2 Chronicles 36: 13 – 14 (NIV), emphases supplied

" 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `I will **break the yoke of the king of Babylon**. Within two years **I will bring back** to this place all the articles of the LORD's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. **I will also bring back** to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon', declares the LORD, `for **I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.**' "⁷²

Hananiah Rebuked by Jeremiah

To which Jeremiah, symbolically wearing a yoke around his neck, replied that after Hananiah's two years it would be seen who was prophesying truthfully.

This caused Hananiah, in his rage, to break Jeremiah's yoke, saying:

"This is what the LORD says: `In the same way will I **break the yoke** of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years.' "⁷³

This shows that Judah's prophets recognised that they were serving Babylon. Hananiah said that this was about to end, whereas Jeremiah has stated that the servitude they were already experiencing would last for 70 years.

Increased Servitude Possible

Jeremiah went his way until the word of the Lord came upon him, saying:

"Go and tell Hananiah, `This is what the LORD says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a **yoke of iron**. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of **all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar** king of Babylon, and they will **serve** him."⁷⁴

The yoke of servitude related to "all these nations". Their response to God's decree determined the strength of their servitude.

Jeremiah thus demonstrated that the servitude was in place and that rebellion to it would see its severity increased. The servitude had been decreed to continue until the 70 years had elapsed. The only control in the hands of the Jews and of the nations was its severity. Things would worsen if they did not serve Babylon willingly.

Jeremiah's Plea to All Nations

Early in the reign of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: . . . Send word to the kings of **Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon** through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. Give them a message for their masters and say, `This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Tell this to your masters: With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its

⁷² Jeremiah 28:2 – 4 (NIV), emphasis supplied

⁷³ Jeremiah 28:11 (NIV)

⁷⁴ Jeremiah 28:13 - 14 (NIV), emphasis supplied

people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will hand **all your countries** over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. **All nations will serve** him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will **subjugate** him.⁷⁵

God's Warning and Promise to All Nations

"If, however, any nation or kingdom will not **serve** Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the LORD, until I destroy it by his hand. So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, 'You will not **serve** the king of Babylon'. They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish. But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and **serve** him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the LORD."⁷⁶

The Same Message to Zedekiah

I [Jeremiah] gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, "**Bow your neck** under the yoke of the king of Babylon; **serve** him and his people, and you will live. Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the LORD has threatened any nation that will not **serve** the king of Babylon? Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, 'You will not **serve** the king of Babylon,' for they are prophesying lies to you. 'I have not sent them,' declares the LORD. 'They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you.' "

Then I said to the priests and all these people, "This is what the LORD says: Do not listen to the prophets who say, 'Very soon now the articles from the LORD's house will be brought back from Babylon.' They are prophesying lies to you. Do not listen to them. **Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin?**"⁷⁷

Jeremiah's Final Plea: Spare the City

Zedekiah's obstinacy continued and Jeremiah made one final plea.

This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "If you **surrender** to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared **and this city will not be**

⁷⁵ Jeremiah 27: 1, 3 – 7 (NIV), emphases supplied

⁷⁶ Jeremiah 27: 8 – 11 (NIV), emphases supplied

⁷⁷ Jeremiah 27 : 12 – 17 (NIV), emphases supplied

burned down; you and your family will live. **But** if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down".⁷⁸

They did not Respond to God's Warnings

It is clear that the destruction of Jerusalem is the direct result of God's anger at his people's disobedience and evil ways. He had given them ample time and many warnings, but to no avail. God had warned his people for a very long time, like a loving parent, but they did not heed him.

These warnings to obey God were not prophecies, let alone conditional or unconditional. Rather, they comprised a series of warnings. The people's response determined the consequences, whether for support from God or for destruction.

God had used the Babylonian king as his instrument to punish Judah. When he did, he warned the people of Judah and all the surrounding nations to willingly serve Babylon, for a period lasting 70 years. This was happening; it had started.

As Nebuchadnezzar was preparing to take Jerusalem for the last time, Jeremiah again explained that this was happening because the people had continued to be evil for a long time, and they would not change their ways.

Ah, Sovereign LORD, . . . you show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers' sins into the laps of their children after them. . .

You brought your people Israel out of Egypt with signs and wonders, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror. You gave them this land you had sworn to give their forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey. They came in and took possession of it, **but they did not obey you or follow your law; they did not do what you commanded them to do. So you brought all this disaster upon them.**⁷⁹

A Promise Displayed

Jeremiah came from a priestly family of Anathoth.

Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.⁸⁰

While Jerusalem was being besieged during Zedekiah's rule⁸¹, Jeremiah received a message from God to purchase a field at Anathoth because it was his by right.⁸²

Jeremiah records the process in some detail.

⁷⁸ Jeremiah 38: 17 – 18, emphases supplied; See also Jeremiah 28:8 - 10

⁷⁹ Jeremiah 32: 17 - 18, 21 – 23 (NIV), emphasis supplied.

⁸⁰ Jeremiah 1: 1 (NIV)

⁸¹ Jeremiah 32:24

⁸² Jeremiah 32: 6 - 8

"I knew that this was the word of the LORD; so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him **seventeen shekels of silver**. I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. I took the **deed of purchase--the sealed copy** containing the terms and conditions, as well as the **unsealed copy** -- and I gave this deed to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard.

"In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions: `This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar **so they will last a long time**. For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: **Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.**" ⁸³

As is so common in Jeremiah, everyday events are recorded because they are parables.

Jeremiah was told to buy this land to show that God had made out a deed of purchase on his land and that after a long time, houses, fields and vineyards would once more return to the land. The purchase of the land by Jeremiah was a picture of God's promise of future prosperity.

"This is what the LORD says: As I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them. Once more **fields will be bought** in this land of which you say, `It is a desolate waste, without men or animals, for it has been handed over to the Babylonians.' **Fields will be bought for silver, and deeds will be signed, sealed and witnessed in the territory of Benjamin**, in the villages around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, because **I will restore their fortunes**, declares the LORD." ⁸⁴

Even in this darkest hour, God held out his promise, and showed it through Jeremiah paying the price for land in his own home town, signing, sealing and witnessing deeds, and then storing them where they would keep.

Through Jeremiah's actions, God was showing that he owned and would replenish the land that was rightfully his. In a spiritual sense, this is God's promise to the disobedient heart that repents.

Jerusalem Destroyed

Jeremiah's plea was made in vain and after a lengthy siege Nebuchadnezzar, again as God's instrument, took the city once more.

⁸³ Jeremiah 32: 8 – 15 (NIV), emphases supplied

⁸⁴ Jeremiah 32: 42 – 44 (NIV)

A Lengthy Siege

So in the **ninth** year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He encamped outside the city and built siege works all around it. The city was kept under siege until the **eleventh** year of King Zedekiah.⁸⁵

The City Broken Through; Zedekiah Captured

By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. They fled toward the Arabah, but the Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.⁸⁶

The City and Temple Destroyed

Again Nebuchadnezzar removed a king, but this time he made no replacement. Instead, he destroyed the city and the sanctuary, and removed the last of its great men.

On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. The whole Babylonian army, under the commander of the imperial guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem.⁸⁷

The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the movable stands and the bronze Sea that were at the temple of the LORD and they carried the bronze to Babylon. They also took away the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, dishes and all the bronze articles used in the temple service. The commander of the imperial guard took away the censers and sprinkling bowls--all that were made of pure gold or silver.

The bronze from the two pillars, the Sea and the movable stands, which Solomon had made for the temple of the LORD, was more than could be weighed. Each pillar was twenty-seven feet high. The bronze capital on top of one pillar was four and a half feet high and was decorated with

⁸⁵ 2 Kings 25: 1 – 2 (NIV); see also Jeremiah 52: 4 - 5

⁸⁶ 2 Kings 25: 3 – 7 (NIV) ; see also Jeremiah 52: 8 - 11

⁸⁷ 2 Kings 25: 8 – 10 (NIV) ; see also Jeremiah 52: 12 - 14

a network and pomegranates of bronze all around. The other pillar, with its network, was similar.⁸⁸

People Taken into Exile; Some Left Behind

Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile the people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon. But **the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields.**⁸⁹

It was not Babylon's intention to leave the land depopulated or the land untended.

The commander of the guard took as prisoners Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank and the three doorkeepers. Of those still in the city, he took the officer in charge of the fighting men and five royal advisers. He also took the secretary who was chief officer in charge of conscripting the people of the land and sixty of his men who were found in the city. Nebuzaradan the commander took them all and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them executed.

So Judah went into captivity, away from her land.⁹⁰

God Expected People to Remain Behind

Some of the people left behind disobeyed God and left the land of Judah.

So Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers and all the people **disobeyed the LORD's command to stay in the land of Judah.**

Instead, Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers led away **all the remnant of Judah who had come back** to live in the land of Judah from all the nations where they had been scattered.

They also led away all the men, women and children and the king's daughters whom Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had **left with Gedaliah** son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and **Jeremiah the prophet** and Baruch son of Neriah.

So they entered Egypt in disobedience to the LORD and went as far as Tahpanhes.⁹¹

People Still Living in the Ruins

People were left on the land and God commanded them to remain. They were to care for and tend the land, but under the control and jurisdiction of a foreign king.

⁸⁸ 2 Kings 25: 13 – 17 (NIV) ; see also Jeremiah 52: 17 - 23

⁸⁹ 2 Kings 25: 11 – 12 (NIV), emphasis supplied; see also Jeremiah 52: 15 - 16

⁹⁰ 2 Kings 25: 18 – 21 (NIV) ; see also Jeremiah 52: 27

⁹¹ Jeremiah 43: 4 – 7 (NIV), emphasis supplied

Then the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, **the people living in those ruins in the land** of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession.'⁹²

No Longer a Functional Nation

With the destruction of the authoritative rule of Jerusalem and its walled cities, Judah ceased operating with a systematic functional infrastructure. It ceased to be a functional nation. People no longer considered the kingdoms of Israel and Judah to be nations, and doubted they ever would be again.

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "Have you not noticed that these people are saying, 'The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms he chose'? So they despise my people and no longer regard them as a nation."⁹³

Ezekiel Hears that the City has Fallen

Ezekiel was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar at the time he installed Zedekiah.

Jerusalem fell in the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year⁹⁴. Ezekiel records that a man came to him in the tenth month, six months after the city had fallen.

In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen!"⁹⁵

The People were Still Evil

When Jerusalem was destroyed, God told people to remain and tend the land. He expected them to reform their ways, but they did not.

Six months after being punished by Babylon and having their cities and land desolated, the people still living in them were as evil as ever, eating meat while it still contained blood and committing idolatry, murder and adultery.

Therefore say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Since you **eat meat with the blood** still in it and look to your **idols and shed blood**, should you then possess the land? You rely on your **sword**, you do detestable things, and each of you **defiles his neighbor's wife**. Should you then possess the land?'⁹⁶

It is of more than passing interest to notice the similarities between this passage in Ezekiel and the statement by James several centuries later⁹⁷.

⁹² Ezekiel 33: 23 - 24 (NIV), emphasis supplied

⁹³ Jeremiah 33: 23 - 24 (NIV)

⁹⁴ 2 Kings 25: 2 - 3

⁹⁵ Ezekiel 33: 21 (NIV)

⁹⁶ Ezekiel 33: 25 - 26 (NIV), emphases supplied

⁹⁷ The experience of the Jews at the time of the Exile left them with a deep collective memory over the succeeding centuries. The issue before the assembly recorded at Acts 15 concerned the understanding between the Christians of Jewish background and those of Gentile background. This was being illustrated through the issue of the need for circumcision. James, in his summing up,

You are to abstain from **food sacrificed to idols** [*"idols and shed blood"*], from **blood** [*"sword"*], from the **meat of strangled animals** [*"meat with the blood"*] and from **sexual immorality** [*"defiles his neighbor's wife"*]. You will do well to avoid these things. ⁹⁸

God's Judgment on the People Still Living in the Cities and on the Land

Six months after the cities had been destroyed and the countryside desolated, Ezekiel declared that God had not finished punishing this evil people, who were still living in the destroyed cities, the ruined countryside and in caves.

Say this to them: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: As surely as I live, **those who are left in the ruins** will fall by the sword, **those out in the country** I will give to the wild animals to be devoured, and those in **strongholds and caves** will die of a plague". ⁹⁹

God's Judgment on Judah and on Israel

Speaking on behalf of God six months after Jerusalem was destroyed, Ezekiel told the people that the ruined condition was to see even more devastation. All this happened because of the detestable things the people kept on doing.

"I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done." ¹⁰⁰

The people and the nation could have completed the 70 years servitude to Babylon while they remained in their own land. But the people chose to disobey God, even after he kept punishing them for their evil ways. They disobeyed him even after they had seen their evil ways cause God's city, temple and land to be destroyed. It was all so unnecessary.

pointed the Gentile Christians to a passage that if they understood the meaning it had for the Jews, would help them see the importance that circumcision had for the Jews. The response by James does not correspond with the wording of the submissions made before the assembly. James appears to say that if you do not commit adultery (etc.) "you are doing well" (!!!), which is an understatement, if taken literally. Rather, I think he is saying that if you understand what this passage means to those who had been Jews, you will understand them better ("do well").

The points of contact between the passages in Ezekiel and Acts show that "blood" in Acts does mean "murder", as we have consistently said.

⁹⁸ Acts 15: 29 (NIV), emphases supplied

⁹⁹ Ezekiel 33: 27 (NIV)

¹⁰⁰ Ezekiel 33: 28 - 29 (NIV)

Nebuchadnezzar Returns in his Twenty-Third Year

True to his word, God kept punishing the people. In his twenty-third year, four years after he took Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, Nebuchadnezzar took further captives from the land.

This is the number of the people Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile: in the seventh year, 3,023 Jews; in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year, 832 people from Jerusalem; in his twenty-third year, 745 Jews taken into exile by Nebuzaradan the commander of the imperial guard. There were 4,600 people in all.¹⁰¹

Daniel "Understands"

Daniel gets his "Understanding" from Jeremiah

Daniel was taken captive during Nebuchadnezzar's accession year, when the king first took control of Judah. By the time Babylon was defeated by the Medes and Persians, Daniel was 90 years old. He had lived his full adult life as a captive in a foreign land.

Daniel says that when Babylon had been defeated, he understood the "seventy years" from reading Jeremiah's books and letters.

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom-- in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.¹⁰²

Daniel says that his understanding of the "seventy years" comes from Jeremiah. Since Daniel does not explain the "seventy years", our understanding must come from Jeremiah as well. Daniel does not use the expression "without man or beast", so he does not provide the understanding of that expression either.

As Jeremiah's writings show, he applied the "seventy years" in terms of serving Babylon and when it would be Babylon's turn to be punished. It does not speak of the length of Judah's "desolation".

Daniel's consequent depth of confession of the sins of the people and supplication to God shows that Jeremiah's writings showed Daniel the reason for God's actions.

The "Seventy Years" in Jeremiah

Nebuchadnezzar took control of Judah when he defeated the Egyptian army at Carchemish. When that happened, Jeremiah wrote that the "nations" were to serve Babylon for 70 years. He did not state that Jerusalem was to be desolated for "seventy years". It was an issue of *servicing* the king of Babylon.

¹⁰¹ Jeremiah 52: 28 – 30 (NIV)

¹⁰² Daniel 9: 1 – 3 (NIV)

This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and **these nations will serve the king of Babylon** seventy years.¹⁰³

With the command to serve Babylon came the promise that in turn, when the seventy years had been completed ("fulfilled"), the king of Babylon would be punished.

"But **when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation**, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt", declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever."¹⁰⁴

When Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem once more and took the new king Jehoiachin captive, Jeremiah wrote that **after** the 70 years had been completed, then God would come to fulfill his promise to them. God did not say that the 70 Years ended at the same moment that his promise of their return was fulfilled.

This is what the LORD says: "**When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you** and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place".¹⁰⁵

A Rendering that is Unique for Daniel

The word rendered "desolation" at Daniel 9:2 is *chorbah*, and this is the only time that Daniel uses the word.¹⁰⁶

[Daniel] *understood by books* that seventy years was the time fixed for the continuance of *the desolations of Jerusalem*. v. 2. The *book* by which he understood this was the book of the prophecies of Jeremiah, in which he found it expressly foretold (Jer. 29:10), *After seventy years be accomplished in Babylon* (and therefore they must be reckoned from the first captivity, in the *third year* of Jehoiakim, which Daniel had reason to remember by a good token, for it was in that captivity that he was carried away himself, ch. 1:1), *I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you*. It was likewise said (Jer. 25:11), *This whole land shall be seventy years a desolation (chorbath)*, the same word that Daniel here uses for the *desolations of Jerusalem*, which shows that he had that prophecy before him when he wrote this.¹⁰⁷

Since this is the only time that Daniel uses *Chorbah* (desolation), the word is foreign to his use¹⁰⁸. *Chorbah* is the word used by Jeremiah at 25:10 of the desolation but it does not refer to the "70 years". *Chorbah* indicates the level of desolation that Judah had just entered into with the defeat of Necho and the servitude to God's instrument, Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁰³ Jeremiah 25: 11 (NIV), emphasis supplied

¹⁰⁴ Jeremiah 25: 12 (NIV), emphasis supplied

¹⁰⁵ Jeremiah 29: 10 (NIV), emphasis supplied

¹⁰⁶ This Chapter is the only time in Daniel that the Tetragram (YHWH) is used. It appears seven times in the Chapter.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible: Daniel 9

¹⁰⁸ See Daniel's use of "desolation" at Daniel 9:18,27; 11:31; 12:11

Chorbah and Shamem

When he saw God punishing Judah through Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah used the words "chorbah" and "shamem" to describe the "devastation".

Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, indicates there are differences in shade between Chorbah and Shamem.¹⁰⁹ Speaking at least five months after Jerusalem's destruction, Ezekiel wrote:

"Those who are left in the ruins (CHORBAH) will fall . . . I will make the land a desolate waste (SHAMAMAH) . . . and the mountains of Israel will become desolate (SHAMEM)"¹¹⁰.

The land was thus still inhabited several months ("left in the ruins [chorbah]") after the city had been left in ruins.

Judah's "desolation" would have remained as "Chorbah" had it chosen to willingly serve Babylon. There was no need for the city to be destroyed.

Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin?¹¹¹

70 years of "chorbah", but the City is "shamem"

At Chapter 9:2, Daniel described the 70 years as a state of "chorbah", but shortly afterwards in his prayer in the same Chapter, he describes the state of the temple and the state of Jerusalem as being "shamem".

Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your **desolate** [shamem] sanctuary. Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the **desolation** [shamem] of the city that bears your Name.¹¹²

The "shamem" condition of the sanctuary and the city was only part of the seventy years of "chorbah", and an unnecessary condition. Some translations, such as the *New World Translation*, render "chorbah" at Daniel 9:2 by the plural "devastations", thereby indicating a series of events during that period.

What is the source?

The expression "seventy years of desolation" written by Daniel does not come from Jeremiah. What then is the source?

¹⁰⁹ When they describe desolation that is worse than CHORBAH and SHAMEM, the prophets use qualifiers such as "much", "most", "wholly" and "utterly". See for example Isaiah 6:11; Jeremiah 49:2, 50:13; Ezekiel 35:3. Even further degrees of desolation are indicated by totally different words such as:

SHAMAD - "destroy", Ezekiel 14:9.

KALAH - "consumed", Ezra 9:14.

CUWPH - "consume", Jeremiah 8:13; Daniel 2:44; Zephaniah 1:2,3
and ultimately:

BOHUN - "void", Jeremiah 4:23, (Compare Gen. 1:2).

¹¹⁰ Ezekiel 33: 27 - 28

¹¹¹ Jeremiah 27 : 12 – 17 (NIV)

¹¹² Daniel 9: 17 - 18 (NIV)

As a suggestion, it is possible that the expression came from the exiles in Babylon, and was used by them. It is not uncommon to see Jeremiah and Daniel picking up and making use of "sayings" employed by the exiles. Jesus did the same thing centuries later.

The exiles were in the middle of the events and they did not understand it, and were confounded by the voices of many conflicting false prophets. Daniel says that during that period, he did not understand what was happening to them. He had to wait until after Babylon's fall before he understood the letters that Jeremiah had written.

The End of the Seventy Years

Jeremiah prophesied that the nations (gowsy) would serve Babylon until it came to the time for him to be punished. When Babylon fell, that is when the seventy years of servitude to Babylon finished.

"But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt", declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever."¹¹³

God had declared that the evil ways of kings such as Manasseh made him determined to wipe Judah out like a dirty dish. Since the people steadfastly refused to heed his warnings, God used Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument of punishment. The condition was that Judah, along with the nations who had led her astray, had to accept God's use of Nebuchadnezzar and serve Babylon for 70 years. Things would only get worse if they refused this command.

It is only natural, therefore, that the undoing of the exile and destruction did not commence until after the end of the 70 years had been completed.

The Jews Return

God's Promise that Israel and Judah would Return

God said that he would pay attention to the return of his people after the seventy years had been completed.

This is what the LORD says: **"When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place"**.¹¹⁴

This was in fulfillment of the promises he had made while he was warning the people of his intentions. It took a long time before the Jews were able to once more worship in a dedicated building in Jerusalem.

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about the houses in this city and the royal palaces of Judah that have been torn down to be used against the siege ramps and the sword in the fight with the Babylonians: "They will be filled with the dead bodies of the men I will slay in my anger and wrath. I will hide my face from this city because of all its wickedness.

¹¹³ Jeremiah 25: 12 (NIV), emphasis supplied

¹¹⁴ Jeremiah 29: 10 (NIV), emphasis supplied. Compare Jer. 27: 22 and Ezra 1: 7

"Nevertheless, **I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people** and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring **Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before.** I will **cleanse them** from all the sin they have committed against me and will **forgive** all their sins of rebellion against me. Then this city will bring me **renown, joy, praise and honor** before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant **prosperity and peace** I provide for it." ¹¹⁵

God Continued Working Through His People

There is no indication that the punishment of Israel, Judah and Jerusalem marked the end of God's direct intervention by people on his behalf. Jeremiah continued working, just as he had before the Destruction of Jerusalem, as did Ezekiel and Daniel.

Their mantle was taken up by those who followed in their footsteps, such as Ezra, John the Baptist, Jesus and his followers.

Instead of indicating that the destruction and exile marked an end of God's direct involvement with people, it is quite clear that God said that they would return. And they did return, carrying on as God's chosen people, from whom the seed of David was to arise.

Date of the Return is not known

We do not know the year that the Jews returned to Jerusalem, and there is no indication that this event marked the end of the "70 years". Both Jeremiah and Ezra indicate that the defeat of Babylon at the hands of the Medes and Persians marked the end of that period.

Physically, some Jews made the trek back following Cyrus' decree. We do not know the year that they made the return home. It was most likely in 536 BCE, but nobody knows for certain.

Spiritually, Jews returned to their God through the confession of Daniel.¹¹⁶ Not all exiles returned. Many, including Ezra, remained in Babylon despite Cyrus' decree.

The Sequence of Events

Writing 70 years before Babylon fell, Jeremiah wrote that the Seventy Years would come to its end when Babylon's rule came to its end.

But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation"¹¹⁷

Jeremiah did not say that the return to Jerusalem marked the end of the Seventy Years; instead, he said that after the Seventy Years were fulfilled (completed), then the king would of Babylon would be punished, following which he would turn his favour towards his people once more. This is the Scriptural sequence of events.

¹¹⁵ Jeremiah 33: 3 – 9 (NIV), emphases supplied

¹¹⁶ Daniel 9: 4 - 19

¹¹⁷ Jeremiah 25:12 (NIV)

This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place."¹¹⁸

Writing some 100 years after the Fall of Babylon, Ezra also indicated that the Fall of Babylon marked the end of the Seventy Years. The desolated land, says Ezra, enjoyed its spiritual renewal until the Seventy Years were completed.

[Nebuchadnezzar] carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons **until the kingdom of Persia came to power**. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, **until the seventy years were completed** in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.¹¹⁹

Seventy Years of Zechariah

The seventy years of Zechariah 1:12 are not necessarily the same as those Jeremiah 25:11-12 or 29:10. They possibly represent the period from the destruction of Solomon's temple by Nebuchadnezzar to the completion of Zerubbabel's temple.¹²⁰

Josephus: "Jerusalem in Obscurity for 50 Years"

Josephus, the respected Jewish historian who is quoted by the Watchtower Society, accepted the "recognised" chronology and states that Jerusalem lay in its obscure state for fifty (50) years:

Nabuchodonosor, after he had begun to build the aforementioned wall, fell sick, and departed this life, when he had reigned **43 years**; whereupon his son **Evilmerodach** obtained the kingdom. He governed public affairs after an illegal and impure manner, and had a plot laid against him by Neriglissor, his sister's husband, and was slain by him when he had reigned but **two years**. After he was slain, **Neriglissor**, the person who plotted against him, succeeded him in the kingdom, and reigned **four years**; his son **Laborosoarchod** obtained the kingdom, though he was but a child, and kept it **nine months**; but by reason of the very ill-temper and ill practices he exhibited to the world, a plot was laid against him also by his friends, and he was tormented to death. After his death, the conspirators got together, and by common consent put the crown upon the head of **Nabonnedus**, a man of Babylon, and one who belonged to that insurrection. In his reign it was that the walls of the city of Babylon were curiously built with burnt brick and bitumen; but when he was come to the **seventeenth year** of his reign, Cyrus came out of Persia with a great army; and having already conquered all the rest of Asia, he came hastily to Babylonia. When Nabonnedus perceived he was coming to attack him, he met him with his forces, and

¹¹⁸ Jeremiah 29:10 (NIV)

¹¹⁹ 2 Chronicles 36: 20 – 21 (NIV), emphases supplied

¹²⁰ Zechariah 7:5

joining battle with him, was beaten; and fled away with a few of his troops with him, and was shut up within the city Borsippus. Hereupon Cyrus took Babylon, and gave order that the outer walls of the city should be demolished, because the city had proved very troublesome to him . . .

These accounts **agree with true history in our books**, for in them it is written that **Nebuchadnezzar**, in the **nineteenth** year of his reign, laid our temple **desolate**, and so it **lay in that state of obscurity for fifty years**; but that in the second year of the reign of Cyrus, its foundations were laid and it was finished in the second year of Darius.¹²¹

Seventy Years is a "round number"

The Jews of the time approached numbers and periods quite differently from the way we approach them. For example, they used inclusive reckoning, in which part of a year was reckoned as a whole year (the same applies for other periods, such as a "day").

They saw the period "seventy years" as being a round number, as is shown in Psalm 90:10 and in Isaiah 23:15. The approximation intended by the statement "seventy years" is demonstrated in:

All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.¹²²

The "seventy years" is the same as three generations -- "him (Nebuchadnezzar) and his son and his grandson", even though this is technically incorrect.

"Without men or animals"

The expression "without man or beast" should be understood in the way that the ancients meant it to be understood.

Writing before Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem¹²³, the people said that it was already "without men or animals" - because the land had been "handed over to the Babylonians".

Once more fields will be bought in this land of which you say, "It is a desolate waste, without men or animals, for it has been handed over to the Babylonians".¹²⁴

"This is what the LORD says: `You say about this place, "It is a desolate waste, without men or animals." . . . The towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither men nor animals'.¹²⁵

This form of poetic exaggeration is today termed "hyperbole".

¹²¹ Against Apion 1: 20 – 21, Flavius Josephus, Whiston's edition (emphases supplied)

¹²² Jeremiah 27: 1, 3–7 (NIV)

¹²³ Jeremiah 32:28,36; 33:4-5

¹²⁴ Jeremiah 32: 43 (NIV)

¹²⁵ Jeremiah 33: 10 (NIV)

The kingdom lacked order and discipline, organised society and structure. It was devastated in that God's people no longer had organised control over it, and it now belonged to the Babylonians. There were no pastures where shepherds could rest their flocks.¹²⁶

What God Destroyed

Because of God's anger, the city of Jerusalem and the country were wiped out. The people were wicked to the core. The writings of Jeremiah contain numerous assertions. The following is just one of these.

From the day it was built until now, this city has so aroused my anger and wrath that I must remove it from my sight.¹²⁷

God used Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument of punishment. The whole episode tells of a continuously evil and defiant people, and of a deeply hurt God.

Judah was no longer showing the nations how to live; rather, Judah was following the evil practices of their heathen neighbours. They were not representing God's message to the world. God destroyed a kingdom that was vile and wicked. It was not his kingdom representative.

Faithful Individuals Remained

Although he removed a wicked nation, God was able to keep using faithful individuals to keep proclaiming his message. While he was passing judgment on evil kings and people, God spoke through his prophets Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel, to faithfully represent his requirements.

It is not as if God was removing the representatives of his Kingdom when he punished the nation. He was punishing everything that failed to represent him. But God continued to have faithful followers during that dark period, and following it.

The Watchtower Society states that the earthly representative of God's kingdom was removed from the face of the earth, to be replaced by itself about 2500 years later. But the organisation that God had to destroy was enveloped in wickedness. His kingdom continued in its earthward concern, expressing itself through his faithful people.

Conclusion

Because of their wickedness, God had used Assyria to destroy Israel. Although the southern kingdom of Judah had seen this happen, it remained decidedly wicked and evil too.

The wickedness of Judah's king Manasseh caused God to declare that he would destroy Judah as well. Manasseh's son was as evil as his father.

King Josiah, however, was a reformist king, undoing the evil ways of his predecessors and destroying their idols, removing the male prostitutes, and so on. Because of Josiah's goodness, God held back on the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem.

Jeremiah began his ministry during Josiah's reign, and demanded even greater reforms – from within the heart.

¹²⁶ Jeremiah 33: 12

¹²⁷ Jeremiah 32: 31 (NIV)

Josiah was killed by Necho, Pharaoh of Egypt, who replaced him with a king of his own choosing, Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was evil. When Necho was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim had to change his allegiance from Egypt to Babylon.

Jeremiah declared that God would destroy the land, as he had already determined. God declared that their destiny was in their own hands; although he had declared that Judah would be wiped out, he would relent if they changed their ways.

Jeremiah also stated that all of the nations (*gowy*) were going to serve Babylon for the next 70 years. But Jehoiakim served Babylon for only the next three years. When Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem, the evil king Jehoiachin was replaced by a man of Babylon's choosing, Zedekiah. He was an evil king too.

Jeremiah warned the people to serve Babylon, as God had decreed. But the people of Judah were set in their evil ways, and were swayed by false prophets in Jerusalem and in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar was forced to come up against Jerusalem again. He besieged it for a long time. Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah to serve Babylon, thereby saving the city. But the king and the people were set in their evil ways and the city was destroyed, unnecessarily. God would have preserved Jerusalem if the people had changed their ways. The seventy years of servitude could have been completed without the city being destroyed or the land decimated.

God commanded them to remain behind and not to go into Egypt, but the people remained disobedient. Even five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, the people were still not listening to God, and Nebuchadnezzar had to go in and take more people off the land.

An evil and wicked nation sealed their own fate. But God is both merciful as well as just, and as he promised, he allowed the people to return to the land and to rebuild the city and the temple.

No doubt the constancy and genuine faith displayed by people such as Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel caused God to allow his people and his city to be restored.

The Watchtower Society's position is that the "Seventy Years" could not begin until the city was destroyed and the land depopulated. This is not correct.

Postscript: The Final Chapter

Although God caused the temple, city and land to be destroyed, and caused the people to be taken into captivity, he made a promise that the people would return after Babylon was itself defeated. I presume that the lives of Daniel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel played no small part in God's decision to let the people return.

Centuries later, Jesus said that Jerusalem would be taken once more. This time, instead of Babylonians, God was using the Romans as his instrument of punishment:

"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near." ¹²⁸

This time the punishment was in fulfillment of the warnings made not only by Jeremiah, but it was meted out in fulfillment of ALL that had been written, such as by Isaiah (63:4, during Manasseh's long and most evil reign) and Hosea (9:7, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam):

¹²⁸ Luke 21:20 (NIV)

"For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of ALL that has been written." (Luke 21:22)

This time, instead of God's people being held in Babylon, they would be dispersed throughout all of the nations (gentiles):

"They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to ALL the nations." (Luke 21:24)

This time, instead of being trampled on by one nation, Babylon, Jerusalem was going to be trampled on by many gentile nations:

"Jerusalem will be trampled on by the GENTILES until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Luke 21:24)

The expression "times of the Gentiles" refers to an event that was future when it was spoken of. It does not provide an explanation of a past event or of a situation that was in place when Jesus spoke them.

The whole context of the passage is:

"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." ¹²⁹

This time, instead of God's people being released from captivity in Babylon, following its Fall, the release is far, far greater! Lest anyone think that the release refers to a return of the Jews to a Jerusalem that was destroyed by the Romans, the context explicitly states that the release refers to the coming of Christ:

"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." ¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Luke 21:20-24 (NIV)

¹³⁰ Luke 21:27 – 28 (NIV)