

Aug 20-26

Week 34

We will begin this week with additional accounts of the fall of Jerusalem. These accounts make it clear that Jerusalem's destruction came about because the people of Judah had abandoned the law of the Lord and their covenant commitments. Even after their defeat, destruction, and deportation, many of the leaders continued to follow the counsel of their own wicked hearts rather than trusting the word of the Lord through Jeremiah.

Much of the rest of the week will concern God's judgments on the nations of the ancient Near East. These judgments will culminate in an extensive word of prophecy against Babylon, the great nation that dominated this part of the world in Jeremiah's day.

Notice important key themes as you read. God is the true God, in contrast to the idols of the nations. As the Creator of all people and nations, he is sovereign over the nations, having the ability and righteous perspective to bring them to judgment for their wickedness.

Day 1

Read 2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36:1-21; Jeremiah 52

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 3

Second Kings ends with a helpful overview of the reigns of Judah's last few kings, summing up this critical moment in the nation's history with "Judah went into exile from its land" (25:21). We find the fall of Jerusalem repeated at the end of Jeremiah, in chapter 52, to underscore that Jeremiah was a real prophet, and his prophecies came true.

Second Chronicles offers a poignant interpretation of what happened when Jerusalem fell in 586 BC: "The land enjoyed its Sabbath rest all the days of the desolation until seventy years were fulfilled" (36:21). In the law God had commanded that his people allow the land to rest from farming one year out of every seven (see Leviticus 25:1-4). He also said if this law was ignored, the land would be given rest by the Lord himself, who would remove his people to the land of their enemies (see Leviticus 26:34-35,43). This is what happened with the exile.

God's Word is not to be trifled with. The neglect of the Sabbath laws was one manifestation of the neglect of God's law in general.

The exile presents us with a picture of the consequences of sin. Allow that picture to sink into your heart today.

Day 2

Read Jeremiah 41-44

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 4

In the chaos following the Babylonians' destruction of Judah, several groups of leaders emerged. Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Gedaliah to govern the land of Judah under the rule of the Babylonians. But Ishmael, who was of the royal family of the kings of Judah, assassinated Gedaliah and, with his followers, captured many of the remnant of God's people. Johanan and the commanders of the army, who had escaped the Babylonians, rescued these people. Johanan and company planned to flee to Egypt, reasoning that Nebuchadnezzar would retaliate against the remaining Judeans for the assassination of Gedaliah. This remnant and their leaders asked Jeremiah what they should do, promising to follow the Lord's words. Jeremiah told them to settle in the land and not to fear the king of Babylon. Having already made up their minds, they arrogantly rejected the prophet's words, fleeing to Egypt and taking Jeremiah with them. In Egypt Jeremiah prophesied about the destruction of that nation as well by the king of Babylon.

At times people say they are committed to the Lord's words, only to reject those words when circumstances dictate. How deep is your commitment to God's Word? To what extent do your circumstances govern your spiritual walk?

Day 3

Read Obadiah; Psalm 82-83

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 5

Blink and you might miss the little book of Obadiah, situated between Amos and Jonah among the Prophets. Yet this small book, written about 586 BC, shortly after the Babylonians had destroyed the land of Judah, carries a powerful punch. Obadiah proclaimed judgment against the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. Edom, instead of supporting their relatives, had gloated over Judah's demise and had even taken advantage of it. God proclaimed that Edom, therefore, would be judged and Judah restored. When God is shown to be King, the evil will face consequences for their sin, and the righteous will be saved.

Psalms 82–83 plead with God to bring about justice on earth, to manifest his rule on earth by rising up and judging those who are evil.

Pray, asking God to bring justice to places in the world where evil and oppression reign.

Day 4

Read Jeremiah 45-48

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 6

In Jeremiah 45 we have an unusual glimpse into the ministry of the prophet: a word from the Lord to Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch. In the ancient world professional scribes were employed to do the tedious work of writing clearly on a scroll. Like Jeremiah, Baruch was devastated by the destruction of the nation. God's word to Baruch was essentially, "Things are going to get worse." Yet God would reward Baruch's faithfulness by sparing his life. Some people are born into very hard times, and the key for those people is to be faithful to the Lord in the midst of great challenges.

Notice that Jeremiah 46–48 begins a series of prophecies against the nations surrounding Judah. Here we have successive prophecies against Egypt, Philistia, and Moab. Find these nations on a map at the back of your Bible. The central message is that God works behind the scenes of world events.

In our world today there is turmoil among the nations. What is your understanding of ways God might be working to bring about his glory among the nations?

What role does the gospel play in God's plans for the nations?

Day 5

Read Jeremiah 49-50

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 7

The judgments against the nations surrounding Judah continue in our reading today, culminating in an extensive prophecy against Babylon. Notice the reasons for their downfall. It is also interesting to note the nations the Lord would restore and those that would be utterly devastated, never to rise again.

Watch for the use of figurative language, graphic word pictures that add emotional punch to the words of woe. At the back of your Bible you can probably find Ammon, Edom, and Damascus on a map of the Old Testament era. The people of Kedar and Hazor were nomads who lived in the desert. Elam was a fierce nation located to the east of Babylon. Their warriors were famous for their skill in archery.

Meditate again today on God's power over the nations. When his time of judgment arrives, no evil nation will be able to stand against him. What nations today are aligned against God?

Day 6

Read Jeremiah 51; Psalm 137

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 8

Jeremiah 51 continues Jeremiah's extensive prophecies against the nation of Babylon. The length of this discourse is in proportion to the importance of Babylon on the world stage and the massive destruction God would bring on the Babylonians at the hands of the Persians. God, the true Creator of the whole earth (see Jeremiah 51:15-16), would judge Babylon for its wickedness.

Jeremiah wrote these words on a scroll and commanded Seraiah, who was about to travel to Babylon in the last of the deportations, to read these words in Babylon, tie a rock to the scroll, and then throw the scroll into the Euphrates River. This action symbolized that Babylon would sink and never rise again (see Jeremiah 51:59-64).

Think today about God as judge. What national sins today will merit his judgment?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 34

The last kings of Judah were unable to halt the expansion of Babylon. Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (thus preserving the Davidic dynastic line). In a later invasion, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The exile had begun. Yet these readings from the Prophets as well as the psalm texts have shown God's sovereignty over all nations. Obadiah foretold the fall of Judah's neighbor Edom. Jeremiah 41–52 recorded events in the prophet's later life and his prophecies against surrounding nations, including Babylon's collapse.

Prayer/Meditation

Dear God, in a world of evil and turmoil, I thank you that you ultimately are in control and are bringing world history to your desired ends. I praise you, O God, that you are just and will hold wicked people accountable, for they cause so much damage and heartache in the world. You also discipline your people to turn their hearts away from idols and back to you. O God, may my heart be yours always. Amen.
