

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON

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The Old Testament is full of prophecies about how God would punish His people Israel for forsaking Him. Even at the time He first gave Israel His law through the prophet Moses, the Lord promised them that they would face many curses if they did not obey Him (Deut 28:15). Among these curses is found this prophecy in verses 63-65: “And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; *and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other*; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind.” When Israel did indeed rebel against Jehovah, many prophets were sent who repeated Moses’ warning in great detail. Sadly, Israel did not listen. As a result, in 722 B.C., the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel went into captivity to Assyria, never to return to the land of Israel (2 Kgs 17:1-23). In spite of this vivid example, the Southern Kingdom of Judah learned nothing from had happened to their brethren (Jer 3:6-11; Ezek 23). As a result, all but a remnant of Judah was destroyed, and those who were left were taken into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. Yet this captivity did not begin as a single event, but rather occurred in three distinct waves over a period of 19 years.

The king’s seed (605 B.C.)

Around a hundred years beforehand, God foretold the first wave of the Babylonian captivity. He did this at the time when King Hezekiah had showed everything in his kingdom to the Babylonian king Berodachbaladan (2 Kgs 20:12-15). Through Isaiah the prophet, the Lord said to Hezekiah, “*And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon*” (2 Kgs 20:18). This prophecy specifically referred to the captivity of the royal seed, and that they would serve as eunuchs in the palace of Babylon. The great king Nebuchadnezzar first came against Jerusalem in 605 B.C., during the first year of his reign as king of Babylon (Dan 1:1-4; 2 Kgs 23:36-24:1). At that time, Jehoiakim king of Judah was brought under tribute (2 Kgs 24:1), and Nebuchadnezzar took captive “*certain of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans*” (Dan 1:3-4). Daniel the prophet, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were among these first captives (Dan 1:6-7). They were under the care of “the prince of the eunuchs” (Dan 1:6-21). Thus, Isaiah’s prophecy was

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(continued)

completely fulfilled.

Jehoiachin, Ezekiel, and the largest number of captives (597 B.C.)

Jehoiakim king of Judah did not like being under tribute to Nebuchadnezzar, and finally rebelled against him (2 Kgs 24:1). This provoked Nebuchadnezzar to come against Jerusalem for a second time in 598/97 B.C. At that time, Jehoiakim was removed from the throne and placed in chains to be taken captive to Babylon (2 Chr 36:5-6). We do not have all the details, but Jehoiakim never made it to Babylon. In Jeremiah 22:19, it was prophesied that he would have the burial of a donkey, "*drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.*" After he cut up the scroll of scripture and casting it into the fire, God said to Jehoiakim, "Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and *his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost*" (Jer 36:29-30). After that, Jehoiachin, the young son of Jehoiakim, became king, but only three months later, he too was removed from the throne by Nebuchadnezzar and taken captive to Babylon, where he remained for the rest of his life (2 Kgs 24:10-16; 2 Chr 36:5-10; Jer 24:1; 27:20; 39:1-2; 52:28). Many captives were taken from Judah to Babylon at this time (2 Kgs 24:14-16; Jer 52:28), including the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-3).

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (586 B.C.)

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah on the throne of Judah (2 Kgs 24:17; 2 Chr 36:10; Jer 37:1). But Zedekiah too eventually rebelled against the king of Babylon (2 Kgs 24:20; 2 Chr 36:13; Jer 52:3) provoking him to return to Jerusalem for the final time in 588-586 B.C. when Jerusalem was besieged and then destroyed. God had forewarned Zedekiah to avoid this outcome by giving himself up to the Babylonians instead of resisting him. In Jeremiah 38:17-18, "Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; *If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: but if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.*" Zedekiah did not obey the Lord, the city was destroyed, and the king was taken captive to Babylon along with the remainder of Judah, except for the poorest of the people and Jeremiah the prophet (2 Kgs 25:1-21; 2 Chr 36:11-21; Jer 39:1-40:3; 52:4-27,29). For the next seven decades, the captives had the opportunity to sit and weep by the waters of Babylon, remembering how and why they got there, until they finally repented (Psa 137).