



## STORY

The Babylonian Captivity - 2 Kings 22-25; 2 Chronicles 34-36; Jeremiah 34-39

## TEACHER PRAYER

Dear Lord, I thank You for all the comforting promises that I find in Your Word. Surely despair would have engulfed me long ago had You not comforted me with Your promises. I thank you especially this day for the assurance that You not only create faith, You also preserve it. Direct me in this lesson to impart the same comfort to Your children. May the message of this lesson give them confidence and peace as they grow up facing the many enemies on every hand. Amen.

## VOCABULARY

*Josiah* - The last righteous king of Judah before the Babylonian Captivity. He was the great grandson of Hezekiah and began ruling when he was eight years old. Of all the kings in Israel, Josiah was the most zealous in keeping the Lord's commandments and ordinances.

*Bethel* - One of the two cities of Israel (along with Dan) where Jeroboam set up his golden calves for worship. Josiah recognized the abomination in Israel and was able to desecrate the pagan worship areas there while Assyria was preoccupied with the rising Babylonian Empire.

*Brook Kidron* - A usually dry riverbed that flows only with the runoff waters of spring, emptying eventually into the Dead Sea. By Josiah's time it had become the receptacle for all manner of unclean things, swept clean each spring by the torrential runoff.

*Perverted persons* - Temple prostitutes, both men and women, who performed all manner of sinful acts in the name of their pagan religions.

*Topheth* - The site somewhere to the south and west of Jerusalem where worshippers of Molech made their children pass through the fire (burning them alive). Topheth was located in the Valley of Hinnom, known later by the Hebrew name of Gehenna. The place was destroyed and desecrated so thoroughly by Josiah that its exact location is not known. The entire area became a pit for every kind of waste and carrion. Funeral pyres were common there, as were all of the vermin generally found around decaying flesh. Jesus later used the place as a graphic portrayal of hell - "*where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.*" (Mark 9:44 ff).

*Mount of Corruption* - A hill, believed to have been located south of the Mount of Olives, where Solomon erected worship sites to the pagan gods Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom.

*Nebuchadnezzar* - King of the Babylonian Empire for over 42 years (604-562 BC). He was probably of mixed Chaldean and Babylonian ancestry, and is known as much for his building and beautification projects as for his military campaigns.

*Nebuzaradan* - The Babylonian Officer ("Chief of the Slaughterers") who served under Nebuchadnezzar during the deportation of Judah. His name means "*Nebo has given offspring.*" He seems to have been civil in his dealings with the conquered Jews of Judah.

*Riblah in Hamath* - Located over 200 miles NNE of Jerusalem, the area was occupied by the Egyptian Necho after the defeat of Judah under King Josiah. It was here that Josiah's son, King Jehoahaz, was imprisoned after he succeeded his father. Later the area was taken from Egypt and used as a staging area

by the Babylonian invaders during their conquest of Judah and Phoenicia. It was to this place that Nebuzaradan led many of the leaders from Jerusalem after that city's destruction, where they were executed by Nebuchadnezzar. Hamath is the name of both a city and the region in which it is located.

*Chaldeans* - A race of people from the Kurdistan Mountains known for their military aggression and their study of astronomy and astrology. The Chaldeans were in large part responsible for the destruction of the Assyrian Empire and the establishment of the Babylonian Empire. The Babylonian Empire is also rightly called the Chaldean Empire, although Babylonia was made up of many ethnic peoples. It is probably fair to say that every Chaldean became a Babylonian, but not every Babylonian was a Chaldean. Abram (Abraham) was originally called from Ur of the Chaldees.

## **OUTER AIM**

Because of her idolatry and perversion, Judah is delivered over to her enemies; but a faithful remnant is preserved, both in Judah and in Babylonia.

## **INNER AIM**

Though God punishes those who reject Him, He preserves His children and keeps His promises.

## **BACKGROUND** (*Rupprecht Volume 1, pages 389-395*)

Though the reforms brought by Josiah were indeed God-pleasing, the evil wrought in the early part of Manasseh's reign was not easily undone. The Jews had broken the conditional covenant God had made with them as a nation (Exodus 19-24) and therefore God no longer acted as their national defender. However the covenant that God would send a Savior from the Jews was an unconditional covenant, therefore God preserved a remnant in Babylon to fulfill His promise.

## **Chapter 23**

Josiah's reforms were both thorough and genuine. He not only destroyed all of the pagan worship sites in Judah and reestablished the correct celebration of the Passover, he also desecrated all of the pagan worship sites in what had been Northern Israel (Samaria) - including the destruction of the infamous 300 year old alternate worship site erected in Bethel by Jeroboam. He was able to do this because of the power vacuum that existed during this time. Assyria was fast declining on all fronts. Egypt was opportunistically just beginning to occupy weakened Assyrian territories in the west, and the Chaldeans were chipping away at the Assyrian Empire in the east.

For background on "the tomb of the man of God" mentioned in 23:17-18, and for the prophecies made by that man of God concerning Josiah's acts, see 1 Kings 13.

Though the Passover was celebrated under King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30) that is not in conflict with 2 Kings 23:22 in this section, since "*such* a Passover" referred to a ceremonially correct Passover, which was not celebrated until the time of Josiah.

While Hezekiah's greatness lay in his unparalleled trust in the Lord (2 Kings 18:5) Josiah's greatness lay in his unparalleled zeal for the Mosaic Law which was rediscovered during his reign (2 Kings 23:25). 2 Kings 18:5 and 23:25 are therefore not in conflict.

Note the shift in power evident from Egypt's alliance with Assyria (23:29). Egypt, once mightily threatened by Assyria, now allies itself with its old enemy because Babylonia has become the greater threat.

Egypt ruled Palestine until the power struggle between Assyria and Babylon was settled.

## **Chapter 24**

Nebuchadnezzar was the second king of the Babylonian Empire. He succeeded in subduing most of the territory that had once been held by the Assyrians. It is clear that God raised up Nebuchadnezzar as a punishment to Judah for the evil of its kings and people.

Jehoiakim, the grandson of Josiah, became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal. After his rebellion he was replaced by his son, Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin was king in Jerusalem when the city was plundered and the cream of the Jewish people carried off into exile. Jerusalem was not destroyed until Jehoiachin's Uncle, Zedekiah, became king and rebelled against Babylon.

## **Chapter 25**

The city walls were both the blessing and the curse of ancient cities under siege. Starvation often accomplished what enemy armies could not. So it was in Jerusalem during the 1½-year siege of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar often demonstrated mercy toward those who surrendered to him, but he demonstrated harshest cruelty to those who refused. It is hard to imagine the horror to which Zedekiah was subjected - forced to witness the execution of his sons before being blinded. Yet so the prophecy of Ezekiel 12:13 was fulfilled, *"I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there."*

As the Lord had now withdrawn from the nation of Judah, so also he allowed the temple that had once borne his Name to be destroyed by the pagan Babylonians. Yet He did not forget His promise, His unconditional covenant to send a Savior. Therefore now He resided in the hearts of the remnant of Israel.

As the gold and silver had been carried off during the first plunder of Jerusalem a decade earlier, so now also all of the bronze articles are carried off to Babylon - a quantity beyond measure. Many of these articles had been made by Solomon over 350 years earlier.

Once again we see that while Nebuchadnezzar offered life in exile to those who surrendered to him, those who did not faced dire consequences. So in verses 18-21 we read of the execution of many of the officials who occupied positions of authority during the last rebellion.

Even after the destruction of Jerusalem those who remain demonstrate that they have learned nothing. The military leaders who had escaped the Babylonians assassinated their own governor, Gedaliah, as well as their Chaldean overseers. In a panic (and contrary to the command of the Lord through Jeremiah) those that are left flee in fear to Egypt. Thus, for them, the Exodus was reversed.

Refer to the sections in Jeremiah 34-39 for the relationship between the Prophet Jeremiah and the various rulers of Judah during this period. Note that the rulers, from first to last, were always given fair warning by the Lord through His prophets. They refused to hear and heed the Lord's commands, and their folly proved to be fatal in the end.

Rupprecht gives the following list of Nebuchadnezzar's deportation of Judah: *"In the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign: Daniel and a few others; in his eighth year: 10,000 persons; in his seventeenth year: 3,023; in his eighteenth year: 832; in his twenty-third year: 745. Total, ca. 14,600."*

## **STUDENT PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, with every year I become more aware of the dangers that are all around me, including my own sinful flesh. It makes me so happy to learn that You have promised to take care of me, just as You preserved the nation of Judah. I am comforted that You will not leave me, and I pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to live in me, that I might always remain faithful to You. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.

## **PRESENTATION**

This account is obviously too long to read in class. Although the teacher should read all of the material from 2 Kings and Jeremiah as a preparation toward mastering the material, only the upper grades should be expected to do the same. The teacher will need to draw up an outline of the points to be covered in the telling of the story. In studying and presenting this material, note that those who obeyed the word and will of the Lord were spared. Note also, however, that even the righteous prophet Jeremiah suffered terribly for a time. God has never promised us a life of ease when we follow Him, but He has promised to make all things work for our spiritual good.

## **APPLICATION**

1. Sin has consequences. Though King Manasseh turned away from his evil during the latter part of his reign, and though Josiah brought many reforms in Judah, the perversion and idolatry was too engrained in the people of Judah. They quickly turned again to their evil ways after the passing of Josiah, and eventually the Lord drove them from His sight. Emphasize to the students that God does not tolerate sin and rebellion indefinitely. No one "gets away with" sin.
2. Use the gruesome account of Zedekiah's punishment as evidence of how fearful a thing it would be to be abandoned by God. (May be suitable only for the older students.)
3. The history of the Jewish nation is a history of great tragedy. Though God preserved a remnant for the sake of His promise, Israel again rejected her God and Savior, and Jerusalem was again destroyed in 70 AD, this time by the Romans. Even today the Jewish nation is either scattered around the world, or lives embattled in Palestine, surrounded by enemies and rejected by God. God did not just reject Judah for a time. He rejected the nation of Israel for all time, preserving a remnant only for the sake of His promise. Today's "Israel" is the Christian Church.
4. Demonstrate to the students how obedience to the Word of the Lord does not always exempt us from suffering. Jeremiah was faithful, yet he suffered terribly. To suffer for the sake of the Word of God, however, has positive eternal consequences. To turn from Him in the face of hardship has dire, eternal consequences. Have the children give examples of how they might have to suffer in their day for speaking the Word of God (unpopular in school, subjected to ridicule, thought of as odd or old fashioned, etc.).
5. Discuss with the students some of the evil practices in our own country today. How do they compare with the evil in Israel and Judah? What can we do to help? Why does God preserve America?

## **PASSAGES**

**These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.**

### Lower

Psalms 124:8 - Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.

2 Timothy 2:19 - The Lord knows those who are His.

1 Peter 1:5 - [You] are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

### Middle

Luke 22:32 - But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.

Romans 11:5 - Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

### Upper

1 Peter 5:10 - But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

John 10:27-28 - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. {28} "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

## **HYMN CHOICES**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty - TLH #39:3-5

O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe - TLH #263

Lord Jesus, Thou the Church's Head - TLH #477