

## Sabbath School Lesson #10 – The Destruction of Jerusalem – 28 Nov-4 Dec 2015

**C**hrist was merciful to ancient Jews even in their rebellion against Him. Through the prophet Jeremiah, He warned Judah against false prophets who sought to persuade them to resist captivity. Insurrection on their part would awaken restriction of liberties from their captors. He warned them against making their own fate worse. His counsel was: “And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace” (Jeremiah 29:7).

The destruction of Jerusalem was the result of Jewish leaders not walking in the light that the Lord had flashed upon their pathway. Before the Babylonian captivity, the king of Egypt had deposed Jehoahaz, king of Judah, and placed Eliakim, whom he named Jehoiakim, on the throne (2 Chronicles 36:2-4). In the third year of his reign (Daniel 1:1), Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The city was taken, Jehoiakim was bound with fetters, and some of the vessels of the house of God (2 Chronicles 36:7; Daniel 1:2) were carried to Babylon. Some of the people, also, among whom were Daniel and his fellows, were carried to Babylon at this time (Daniel 1:3-7). Jehoiakim, king of Judah, however, was allowed to remain in Jerusalem, where he reigned eight years longer (2 Chronicles 36:5). Jehoiakim was then succeeded by Jehoiachin, his son, who, after a reign of three months, was taken by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:9-10). With him were also taken all the royal family, the wealthy people, and the artisans, so that only the poorest people of the land were left in Judah (2 Kings 24:8-16). This was about BC 599. Nebuchadnezzar then placed Mattaniah on the throne of Judah, and changed his name to Zedekiah. After a few years’ reign Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who again came to Jerusalem, and in the eleventh year of Zedekiah’s reign (about BC 588) he succeeded in capturing the city. And Zedekiah was carried to Babylon, and with him all the people who had before been left, and the walls and palaces of Jerusalem were burned to the ground (2 Chronicles 36:11-21). This fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah 17:27, and completed the overthrow of the Jewish nation.

It will be well to notice at this point the fulfilment of a prophecy concerning Zedekiah. The prophet Ezekiel, who was then in Babylon, was directed to bring his stuff out of his house, in the day-time, in the presence of the people, and to dig through the wall and carry his stuff through at evening, covering his face at the same time, so that he should not see the ground (Ezekiel 12:3-6). Then he was directed to say to the people of Israel: “I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity. And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there” (Ezekiel 12:11-13). Four years afterward, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and besieged it. For nearly two years the siege was carried on, until “the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king’s garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon” (2 Kings 25:3-7). Thus was Ezekiel’s prophecy literally fulfilled, and Jerusalem was left in ruins.

Clearly, prophecy cannot be broken. In Jeremiah 37:1-10, the Lord gave instructions for King Zedekiah that his attempt to ally with Egypt for their assistance against the Chaldean’s siege would fail and they would be captured. Jeremiah was called a traitor and thrown into prison. Zedekiah rejected prophecies, and refused to put his neck under a yoke of Babylon. We read: “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:3-4).

The context of the verses is predicting the Babylonian captivity of Judah. But the language is broad enough to encompass much of human history, even to the end of time. Often God spoke in conditional terms. Although centuries of conditional warnings to repent have been given, they have each been ridiculed, explained away, the messengers discredited or simply ignored. But once judgment has occurred, execution follows. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Just like the vision, once judgment has been made, it will be executed, it will come, "though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

What is the point of reviewing the history leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and what lesson does this sad time in Judah's history have for us today? If we see it simply as detail to embellish the historical record we miss a vital blessing. Judah's march into apostasy was completely unjustified and avoidable. The plain instructions and warnings for centuries seem, from our vantage point, curious and inexplicable, yet our history reveals the same.

Let us review our Seventh-day Adventist history. At the 1901 General Conference, Elder Prescott compared his time with that of destruction of Jerusalem: "And now we are passing the same circumstances over again. Here is Jerusalem threatened with destruction. And why? – For the very same reason as in the olden time, – because they had refused the truth, because they had refused the message of God, because they had turned away from heart service, and had accepted form and ceremony in place of that working of God's life in the heart and soul. Now we stand facing those same circumstances again, and he sounds that warning again, 'Beware lest that same thing come upon you.'" {GCB 17 April 1901, p 304.7}.

Referring to the 1901 General Conference session, whether she meant only the medical work or general leadership, Ellen White said: "The result of the last General Conference has been the greatest, the most terrible, sorrow of my life. No change was made. The spirit that should have been brought into the whole work as the result of that meeting was not brought in because men did not receive the testimonies of the Spirit of God. As they went to their several fields of labor, they did not walk in the light that the Lord had flashed upon their pathway, but carried into their work the wrong principles that had been prevailing in the work at Battle Creek" {13MR 122.3}. "So today upon those who have had light and evidence, but who have refused to heed the Lord's warnings and entreaties, heaven's woe is pronounced" {13MR 123.2}. On 18 February 1902, judgment was executed, and the main Battle Creek Sanitarium building – our Seventh-day Adventist hospital – burned down. Less than a year, on 30 December 1902, the *Review and Herald* – our publishing house – also burned down.

After the destruction, Ellen White wrote: "We have been made very sad by the news of the terrible loss that has come to the cause in the burning of the Review and Herald Office. In one year two of our largest institutions have been destroyed by fire. The news of this recent calamity has made us feel very sad, but it was suffered by the Lord to come upon us, and we feel that we should make no complaints, but learn if possible the lesson that the Lord would teach us. The destruction of this institution should not be passed by as something in which there is no meaning. Every one connected with the Review and Herald Office should ask himself, Wherein do I deserve this lesson? Wherein have I walked contrary to a 'Thus saith the Lord,' that he should send this lesson to me? Have I heeded the warnings and reproofs that he has sent, or have I walked in my own way?" {RH 27 January 1903, Par 1}.

"I pray that those who have resisted light and evidence, refusing to listen to God's warnings, will see in the destruction of the Review and Herald Office an appeal to them from God to turn to him with full purpose of heart. Will they not see that God is in earnest with them? He is not seeking to destroy life, but to save life. In the recent destruction, the lives of the workers were graciously preserved, that all might have opportunity to see that God was correcting them by a message coming not from a human source, but from heaven. God's people have departed from him; they have not followed his instruction, and he has come near to them in correction, but he has not brought extinction of life. Not one soul has been taken by death. All have been left alive to recognize the Power that no man can gainsay" {RH January 27, 1903 Par. 3}. "Today God is watching His people. We should seek to find out what He means when He sweeps away our sanitarium and our publishing house. Let us not move along as if there were nothing wrong" {GCB April 1, 1903 Par. 20}