

ZEDEKIAH AND JEREMIAH

II Kings 24; 25:1-12; Jeremiah 21

In all the classes try to impress the names of the two nations which conquered Israel and Judah and the fact that the people of Israel were replaced and never returned, whereas the people of Judah were not all carried away, and some returned. Call attention to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and mention their rebuilding later.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord cannot save a person against his will.

The books of the prophets often help us to understand the historical books of the Word.

We cannot turn to the Lord and expect Him to save us if we are not willing to obey Him.

When the mind turns from truth to falsity, goodness in the heart cannot long survive.

Notes for Parents

The kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria and all its people were carried away captive, never to return. Foreigners were brought in to take their places, and the descendants of these people were the Samaritans of Gospel days. We shall hear more about them later when we study the Gospel.

The king of Assyria tried to conquer the kingdom of Judah also and besieged Jerusalem, but the good king Hezekiah asked the Lord's help, and the Lord by a miracle destroyed a large part of the besieging army and caused the rest to go back to their own land. But Hezekiah afterward made a serious mistake. He received some emissaries of the king of Babylon and showed them all his treasures. The prophet Isaiah was then sent to tell him that the king of Babylon would eventually carry off all these treasures and

that Hezekiah's own descendants would some day be servants in the court of Babylon.

Our lesson for today tells us about the fulfillment over a hundred years later of this prophecy. Babylon had increased in power and had absorbed Assyria and extended its control even to Egypt. Only one of the kings who descended from Hezekiah—Josiah—was a good king. The others were idolatrous and evil, and so the Lord could no longer save Judah. The Lord will not force us to serve Him, and He cannot save us if we refuse to heed His Word and to obey the commandments.

The great prophet Jeremiah lived in the last days of Judah, and Zedekiah, the last king, even went so far as to consult him, but Jeremiah told him that the end of Judah was at hand. There always is an end to our opportunity to reform, although many people do not like to think so. The results of a bad life cannot be wiped out in a moment, and when we go into the other world, we remain what we have made ourselves by our daily choices here.

Judah was conquered by Babylon, and its royal household and all its able men were carried away, and Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. But the “poor of the land”—who represent those who are humble in heart and recognize their own weakness and need of the Lord—were allowed to remain in their homes in the Holy Land.



Primary

Even the little children should get the idea that the Lord cannot prosper people who turn against Him and refuse to obey Him. Teach the name *Jeremiah* as well as the names of the two kingdoms, Judah and Israel, and try to tell the story in such a way that Assyria will be connected in their minds with Israel and Babylon with Judah. The carrying off of the people and the fate of the great city of Jerusalem and of the temple should interest them. Tell the children who the Samaritans of Gospel days were.

Do you remember the names of the two great prophets whom the Lord sent to warn the people of Israel? They were Elijah and Elisha. Elisha cured a Syrian captain named Naaman of a terrible

disease by telling him to wash seven times in the Jordan River. You would think that the people of Israel would have listened to the warnings of such a great prophet as Elisha, but they didn't. They went right on worshiping the golden calves and doing all sorts of wicked things, and so the Lord could not help them against their enemies. These enemies became more and more powerful, and finally the king of Assyria conquered Israel and carried all the people away captive and brought foreigners in to settle the land in their place.

The kingdom of Judah lasted longer than the kingdom of Israel.

This was because some of them worshiped the Lord in the temple.

But many of them worshiped idols instead.

Finally Judah, too, became so wicked that the Lord could not save it.

Who was the last king of Judah?

What nation had gained control there?

The great prophet Jeremiah tried to turn the people back to the worship of the Lord, but they would not listen.

What happened to most of the people?

Who were left in the land?

What happened to Jerusalem and the temple?

Junior

Give this class as clear and detailed a view as possible of the story of the divided kingdom, dwelling on the individuals and nations concerned, their relation to each other and to earlier and later history, and the underlying causes of events. Our lessons on the prophets will be helped by this background. Show the class the location of Syria, Assyria, and Babylon on a map.

Assyria extended its power farther and farther westward, and Israel, because of its own wickedness, could not stand against it. The Lord cannot help us if we refuse to obey Him. So finally Israel was conquered and all its people were carried away into captivity. They never came back, and no one knows what became of their descendants. They are sometimes referred to as "the lost tribes of Israel." The king of Assyria brought in other people from the east to take their places. The descendants of these people were still living in the Holy Land when the Lord came on earth hundreds of

years later. We know them as the Samaritans.

Judah, the southern kingdom, lasted longer than Israel. Some of the kings and many of the people followed the bad example of Solomon and worshiped idols as well as the Lord, but they did still have Jerusalem and the temple to remind them of what they ought to do, and several of their kings were good and tried hard to bring them back to obedience to the Lord. We have had lessons about three of these good kings: Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Several great prophets also lived in Judah, notably Isaiah and Jeremiah.

But gradually idolatry and evil practices began to prevail in Judah also. The eastern nations, Assyria and Babylon, gained more and more control. Judah saved itself for a time by an alliance with Egypt and by paying tribute and giving up the treasures of the palace and then of the temple. But after the people of Israel were carried away, there was no protection on the north, and then Egypt became of no more help. See if you can find early in our first chapter for today the reason for this.

Who was the next to the last king of Judah?

Where was he taken when he was carried away?

What great nation finally took possession of the land?

Who was the last king of Judah?

To whom did he send messengers to inquire of the Lord?

What did the Lord tell them?

What happened to Zedekiah?

What classes of people were carried away with him?

Who were left in the land?

Why were they left?

What happened to the temple?

What happened to Jerusalem?

The prophet Jeremiah had advised the king to submit to Babylon. For this reason the king of Babylon allowed Jeremiah to remain in his home. After Jerusalem was destroyed, Jeremiah tried to persuade all the people who were left to settle down quietly and obey the king of Babylon. But some of them were afraid and decided to flee to Egypt, and they forced Jeremiah to go with them. So Jeremiah died in Egypt. The prophecies recorded in the book of

Lamentations are believed to have been given through him in Egypt before he died, as well as the last few chapters of the book of Jeremiah.

The last few verses of II Kings 25 tell how the king of Babylon finally took pity on Jehoiachin, Zedekiah's predecessor, in his captivity. From that time on the exiles had an easier time, and after seventy years the Lord "put it in the heart" of the king of Babylon to allow all who wanted to return to the Holy Land and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. So the Jews who lived in the Holy Land when the Lord came on earth were descendants of the people of Judah.

Intermediate

Stress the correspondence of Assyria and Babylon in connection with that of Israel and Judah, and point out Jeremiah's connection with the final decline and fall of Judah. The danger of trying to compromise with worldly ambitions is an important lesson for the Intermediates.

In time Syria was absorbed by Assyria, the great nation further east whose capital was Nineveh. Syria represents knowledges of good and truth. Assyria represents reasoning or the rational mind. In Isaiah 19:23-24 we read: "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land." Egypt represents the natural plane of the mind in which memory-knowledges are stored up. Israel represents the mind of the spiritual person, the person of the church who has become to some extent at least regenerate. So the quotation from Isaiah shows us what our minds ought to be like, with our reasoning power acting freely in connection with our memory knowledge, but both enlightened and controlled by the spiritual understanding—Israel a blessing in the midst. When Israel ceased to worship the Lord, it surrendered its proper function and finally was captured by Assyria. That is, when

the mind of a person of the church stops looking to the Word for its light and guidance, that person's reasoning power actually becomes an enemy of his spiritual life and eventually takes away his spiritual understanding and his freedom altogether. The people of Israel were carried away captive to Assyria and never came back. Foreigners were brought in from the east to take their places. Later, when we study the Gospel, we shall learn something about the descendants of these foreigners, who came to be called the Samaritans.

Assyria tried to capture Judah also, but was driven off by the power of the Lord. Because Judah continued the worship of the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem its history was different from that of Israel, even though many of its people and most of its kings also worshiped idols. Judah represents the heart or will. The heart of a person who has reached a state of regeneration clings to its good intentions even when the thinking has become worldly and the motives mixed. Mere worldly reasoning cannot change these good intentions. Assyria could not conquer Judah. We have had lessons about several of the good kings of Judah, individuals who tried to bring the people back to the sole worship of the Lord. A person who sees his good character slipping away may try again and again to "turn over a new leaf." But temptations continue, and without the support and protection of true spiritual principles in the mind the good will cannot hold its ground. After the people of Israel were carried away by Assyria, Judah was greatly weakened. Even its good kings were reduced to "buying off" their enemies with the treasures first of the king's house and finally of the temple itself. In the same way, one may compromise with falsity and evil little by little until he has nothing left.

During the latter years of its existence Judah relied on the support of Egypt. Our memory-knowledge of the truth seems to sustain us for a time. But finally a new and more powerful enemy took over Assyria and then Egypt, and Judah could no longer stand. This enemy was Babylon. Babylon represents the "love of dominion," which means the desire to be first and to make other

people do what we want. We all know from our own experience how natural this desire is to us and how strong it is.

The history of the last years of Judah shows us how this selfish desire to have our own way gradually takes over in the heart, once we have let worldly reasoning take the place of the guidance of the Word in our minds. Notice that this very thing had been prophesied by Isaiah in the days of king Hezekiah (II Kings 20:16-18) not long after Israel was carried away captive by Assyria. You remember that Hezekiah had showed the messengers from the king of Babylon—who came to him ostensibly on a friendly mission—all his treasures. Now these treasures are gradually carried away to Babylon. The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, did not immediately destroy Judah. First he took away to Babylon some of the most promising of the young princes, among whom was Daniel. Then he surrounded Judah by getting control of Egypt. Then he besieged Jerusalem, and king Jehoiachin and his family gave themselves up voluntarily and were carried away to Babylon along with the “mighty men of valor” and the craftsmen and smiths. Nebuchadnezzar spared Jerusalem and the kingdom at this time and set up as puppet king an uncle of Jehoiachin, whose name—Mattaniah—he changed to Zedekiah. But when Zedekiah rebelled, Jerusalem was taken and burned and the temple destroyed. Zedekiah’s eyes were put out, his sons were all killed, and all the remaining people were carried away to Babylon except the “poor of the land,” who were left to be vinedressers and husbandmen. This teaches us how the heart gradually gives way to selfishness until it stops worshipping the Lord at all or trying to do right. The poor of the land are those who are humble and conscious of their own weakness and need of the Lord. If once we have started on the regenerate life, there are always some of these “poor” remnants left deep in our hearts to keep our spiritual life from being entirely destroyed.

This is where the prophet Jeremiah comes into the story. He of course represents the Word of the Lord trying to reach and guide us in this difficult state. Jeremiah had perhaps the hardest life of any of the prophets. When selfishness is getting control of our

hearts, we do not like to listen to the teachings of the Word. Jeremiah was despised, plotted against, thrown into prison and into a pit partly full of water, beaten, put in the stocks, and almost starved to death; and finally he was carried away to Egypt against his will by some of the fugitives. Yet he spoke the Word of the Lord faithfully and boldly through it all. We learn all this from the book of Jeremiah and from Lamentations—believed to have been written through Jeremiah in Egypt—rather than from the books of Kings. We have assigned a chapter in Jeremiah with our lesson today to show how the books of the prophets often fill out the details of the historical story as well as point up the reason for what happened. Even in the last days of Judah, Zedekiah recognized Jeremiah as a prophet and sent messengers to him to inquire of the Lord. But even the Lord cannot help us against our will. If we persist in disregarding His commandments, He must let justice take its course. We notice, however, that the poor were left in the land, and we know that after seventy years some of the captives were allowed to come back and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

Basic Correspondences

Assyria = reasoning, or the rational mind

Babylon = the love of dominion from the love
of self

the poor = the humble

Senior

The gradual taking over of Judah by Babylon, and the connection of the two great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah with this period is the important study for the Seniors. The teacher should be prepared to give more details about Jeremiah than are given in the Senior notes. The Intermediate notes will be found helpful here.

Israel was finally conquered by Assyria—which represents worldly reasoning—and its people had been carried away captive, never to return. Assyria then threatened Judah, but Hezekiah, who had served the Lord faithfully, asked His help, and the Assyrian army

was dispersed by a miracle and Judah saved for the time being. The heart of the person who has entered upon the regenerate life cannot be overcome by mere worldly ideas. But behind these worldly ideas there is a more powerful enemy which can overcome the good intentions of the heart. You remember that the king of Babylon sent messengers to Hezekiah, ostensibly to inquire as to his health, and that Hezekiah received them as friends and showed them all his treasures. Babylon represents the selfish love of dominion—that feeling that everyone ought to do what we want them to do. Isaiah told Hezekiah just what the result would be. Read II Kings 20:16-18. His prophecy was fulfilled. The king of Babylon, once Hezekiah had shown him the treasures of Jerusalem, did not rest until he made them his own. In our lesson for today he has captured all the countries surrounding Judah even as far as Egypt and is ready for the final attack.

This is characteristic of the selfish love of dominion. It creeps into the life by degrees until it reaches the heart. Deprived of a true understanding of the Lord and the Word, the heart has no stability. In its “well-meaning” states it still tries to do right, but when these states recede, it easily falls prey to selfishness, which has already invaded the mind and the daily life.

There was one good king in Judah after Hezekiah. This was his great-grandson Josiah, about whose sweeping reforms we recently learned. But Josiah’s reforms did not last. The three kings who followed him were all evil. Josiah’s son Jehoahaz was taken captive and carried into Egypt, and his brother Eliakim, called by the Egyptians Jehoiakim, was set up in his stead, paying tribute to Egypt. Presently he rebelled against Egypt, which had been driven back at this time by the king of Babylon. Jehoiakim’s reign of eleven years was troubled by constant raids, and his son Jehoiachin held his throne only three months before Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem and carried away to Babylon “all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths,” and the king, his family, and his officers, together with the treasures of the temple and of

the king's house, leaving only the poorest of the people to care for the land.

Nebuchadnezzar set up Zedekiah, the king's uncle, as a puppet ruler, but after he had reigned nine years, he too rebelled. Then Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and two years later captured and destroyed it. The punishment of Zedekiah is described in verses 6 and 7 of chapter 25. It pictures the destruction of all ability to see the genuine truth or to produce any spiritual development. Again Nebuchadnezzar set up a puppet ruler, a grandson of Josiah's scribe Shaphan, not as king this time but as governor. The people left behind finally overthrew him, and then, afraid to face the wrath of Babylon, they emigrated for refuge to Egypt.

This history is a picture of what may happen to anyone who once permits worldliness to enter his heart. Take, for example, the case of a young person brought up in any church today. When he leaves home and is separated from the associations of his home church, he still means to remain Christian. But many conditions surround him which make it easy for him to stop going to church on Sunday. If he has gone before just as a matter of habit and does not really understand what his church means and its importance in his life, he will make less and less effort to attend worship. Without regular worship, the duties and pleasures of his external life will gradually fill his mind. He will, however, still think of himself as a good person and a Christian, and what he wants to do will consequently seem to him to be right. His own will finally comes to be ruler in his heart in place of the Lord's will. "Babylon" has captured "Judah." The final step is the complete blinding of his mind to spiritual truth and the destruction of spiritual character with all its beauties. He has become a slave of worldly and selfish principles.

From the book of Jeremiah we learn how the Lord through the Word continues to warn and tries to guide such a person to a humbler state of mind. But the Lord cannot save anyone against his will. Justice must take its course if we refuse to obey the Lord. It is interesting that the original name of Zedekiah—*Mattaniah*—means "God's gift," and that *Zedekiah* means "the justice of God."

Chapter 25 marks the end of that portion of the consecutive history of the Old Testament which has an inner sense. But just at the close of a chapter we see the beginning of a development which was to lead to the return of a part of Judah to the Holy Land some seventy years later. For it is recorded there that Evil-merodach king of Babylon “did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison,” changed his prison garments, and thereafter treated him as a favored ward.

We recognize in general that the taking captive of Judah by Babylon pictures the invasion of the heart of a well-intentioned person by selfishness and the love of dominion. This does not happen at once. The will to good reasserts itself many times before it is finally overcome. And even then the possibility of return is preserved by the Lord.



Adult

The major discussion topic is the nature of the love of dominion and the insidious way in which it can enter the heart and gain control of it—particularly its manifestation in people of the church.

Because the Scriptures everywhere apply to us, the story of the fall of Israel and Judah should bring us some very sobering thoughts. Israel was conquered by Assyria. Its people were carried away captive and never returned, foreigners being brought in to take their places. Assyria was not allowed to extend its conquest to Judah, although for a time in Hezekiah’s reign the Assyrian army threatened Jerusalem. But a century or more later Babylon came into control of both Assyria and Egypt and was able to destroy Jerusalem and carry off all the royal household and the men of might and ability, leaving only the poor of the land to tend the fields and vineyards. Seventy years later some of the people of Judah—all who so desired—were allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, but the Jewish nation never again served as the representative of the Lord’s church among men. We may note in passing that it was the descendants of the returned captives

of Judah and the descendants of the “poor of the land” not carried away who were the Jews in the Holy Land when the Lord was born, and that the Samaritans of the Gospels were the descendants of the foreigners brought in to take the place of the people of Israel.

Israel and Judah represent, respectively, the intellect and the will of the person of the church. Assyria represents the rational mind or reasoning in general, and Egypt represents the natural mind or the plane of memory-knowledge. The proper relationship of Israel to Egypt and Assyria is described in Isaiah 19:23-24: “In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land.” That is, in the properly ordered mind there should be free interplay of reasoning and memory-knowledge, but the spiritual should stand as “a blessing in the midst.” Israel sacrificed her opportunity to be such a blessing when she separated herself from Judah and substituted the worship of the golden calves for the worship of the Lord. Once the person of the church begins to entertain the thought that outward good works constitute religion, he is separated from the divine source of all power to do good. His intellect and reasoning are used more and more to exalt worldly learning above revelation, and his mind is finally carried away captive by the world outside the church.

Judah—the heart—also worshiped idols; but it maintained at the same time the worship of the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem. Consequently its people were kept reminded of their true God, and some of them remained faithful. Even several of the kings, as we have learned in other lessons, were true followers of the Lord and made strenuous efforts to destroy the idols and reform the people. The heart which has once experienced the happiness and peace of regenerate life cannot be subverted by worldly reasoning alone. Assyria could not conquer Judah.

There existed, however, another enemy which had been gathering strength over the centuries and now rose to take over Assyria

and all the land tributary to Assyria. This was Babylon, “the land of Shinar,” the land of the Chaldees, from which Abraham had been called so long before. Babylon represents the love of dominion, the old natural selfish will which prompts us to feel that what we want is right and that everyone and everything should be made to serve us. Swedenborg applies the meaning of Babylon specifically to the love of dominion through the misuse of religion, the setting up of the fiat of men above the Word of God as the authority for the church.

Shortly after the fall of Israel the king of Babylon sent messengers to Hezekiah king of Judah ostensibly to inquire for his health. Hezekiah was deceived, received the messengers as friends, and showed them all his treasures. Then Isaiah came to Hezekiah and told him that Babylon would one day carry off all the treasures of Judah and that Hezekiah’s descendants would be servants in the court of Babylon. Our chapters for today describe the fulfillment of this prophecy. Once the insidious love of rule is admitted into the inner chambers of the heart of the person of the church, its control of his life follows. There is nothing which the Word and the writings more clearly and positively condemn than arrogance and the love of rule.

The great prophet of the last years of Judah was Jeremiah. The story of these last years is told very briefly in II Kings, but in much more fullness in the book of Jeremiah. For Jeremiah was recognized as the Lord’s prophet by the last kings of Judah and was consulted by them even though they had no intention of obeying the Lord. Because of their wickedness they rejected Jeremiah’s counsel again and again, and he himself was shamefully mistreated. People may and do go to the Word and study it in the hope of finding confirmation of their own will and opinion, but when they find that it obviously condemns them, they disparage and reject it.

When the Lord came into the world, He had to come in the Holy Land because of the correspondence of all its parts and places, long established by the letter of the Word. And He had to come where the Word was, since He was to fulfill it. Therefore some of

the Jews, with the Word, had to be brought back to the Holy Land, and the temple had to be rebuilt. And there were a few good Jews left—the poor of the land, the humble—who would receive the Lord when He came. But, as we have pointed out, the Hebrew nation as a nation ceased to represent the Lord’s church on earth when Judah was taken captive. The connection of the Lord with mankind was maintained for a time by the prophets of the captivity and restoration, and then for some four hundred years only by the few humble souls who still believed and obeyed the Law and the Prophets in simplicity. When this connection was threatened by the perverted teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, the Lord had to come into the world to restore it.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 1029: “From these passages in Daniel [parts of chapters 2-7] it can be seen that ‘Babylon or Babel’ means in the Word the love of dominion over the entire globe, likewise over heaven and over the Lord Himself; and that the church of the Lord successively becomes Babylon; and that as it becomes Babylon so it is devastated as to all the good of love and all the truth of faith; and that this is its end, that is, it is no longer a church; and when it is no longer a church it is reckoned among the idolatrous nations, except those in it who worship the Lord, regard the Word as holy, and admit instruction from it. . . . When, therefore, the sons of Israel wholly departed from the statutes which were representative of the spiritual things of the church, through which they had communication with heaven, they were all given into the hands of the king of Assyria . . . The same thing happened to the Jews [those of Judah]. When they had adulterated and profaned all the statutes, judgments, and laws that represented good and truth of faith, to the extent that there was no longer anything of good and truth left, and when their church thus became Babylon, then not only their kings and princes and the whole people, but also all the treasures of the house of Jehovah, and afterwards all its golden vessels, were given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; and moreover the temple itself was burned . . . But since the Lord was to be born in that nation and make Himself manifest where the church then was and where His Word was, so that nation after a captivity of seventy years was brought back from Babylon, and the temple was rebuilt. And yet no other church remained with them except a church like that called

Babylon, as can be seen from many things which the Lord Himself said about that nation, and from the way they received Him; and for this reason Jerusalem was again destroyed, and the temple burnt with fire.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What nation finally conquered Israel? *Assyria*
- J. What happened to the people? *taken away forever*
- J. Why was Judah able to hold out longer against its enemies? *faithful to David's line*
- J. What did its good kings try to do? *reform*
- P. What great nation finally conquered Judah? *Babylon*
- J. What king of Judah first allowed messengers of Babylon to spy out the land? *Hezekiah*
- J. What great prophet foretold what the result would be? *Isaiah*
- P. Who was the last king of Judah? *Zedekiah*
- P. To what prophet did he send to inquire of the Lord? *Jeremiah*
- J. What did Jeremiah tell him? *Jerusalem would be destroyed*
- J. What happened to Zedekiah? *blinded, taken to Babylon*
- J. Who were carried away to Babylon? *princes, mighty men, craftsmen*
- P. Who were left in the land? *the poor*
- I. What do Israel and Judah represent? *mind and heart divided*
- S. What does Assyria represent? *worldly reasoning*
- I. What does Babylon represent? *love of dominion from love of self*
- S. Who are pictured by “the poor of the land”? *those who are humbly conscious of their need of the Lord*