

# **Jeremiah**

## **The Crisis (Within and Without)**

Lesson #2 for October 10, 2015

Scriptures: Judges 2:1-15; 1 Kings 12:26-31; 2 Chronicles 33:9-10; Jeremiah 2:1-28; 5:2-3.

1. The history of ancient Israel from the exodus to the exile is a very sad one. They seemed to go from one crisis to another, starting almost at Mount Sinai. And the general trend was downward—separating themselves further and further from God. In our lesson for today, Jeremiah was at the bitter end of that story. Babylon was about to conquer Jerusalem for the first time. But, none of that would have happened if Israel/Judah had remained faithful to God. By what mechanism could Israel/Judah have avoided the flood of invading troops from Babylon—and Assyria earlier? Would Israel/Judah have been a major war power, able to resist those forces? Or, would the “hornets” and angels have kept the other nations away? Or, would Israel/Judah have converted the world to follow God and there would have been no war? So, what was it that led Judah down that terrible path of sin and degradation? No doubt, there were several factors; but, even at the end, they were not willing to admit that they had any problems at all!
2. Read Judges 2:1-15. If they had remained faithful to God after leaving Egypt, they could have entered the land of Canaan in a little more than one year, soon after building the sanctuary at the foot of Mount Sinai. But, as a result of their terrible rebellion, they ended up wandering 40 years in the wilderness until one complete generation had died. And in the book of Judges, we see that the process of rebellion continued even after they were in the land of Canaan. A careful reading of Judges 2 & 3 is one of the best descriptions in the entire Bible of how God responded to Satan—sometimes called God’s wrath. For a more detailed discussion of *God’s wrath* and its consequences—separation from God and the ultimate death—see “The Final End of Sin and Sinners,” pp. 31-40 on our website: [www.theox.org](http://www.theox.org). Go to “New & Resources” then “Sources / Authors” then “Ellen White” and look for “The Final End of Sin and Sinners.”
3. After the children of Israel had rebelliously demanded a king, God appointed for them the kind of king they wanted—Saul. He deteriorated from the time of becoming king until in a desperate state of depression, he consulted the Devil, masquerading as Samuel the night before his death on Mount Gilboa. Then, God placed David on the throne, and there was a period of relative prosperity. Solomon began his reign on a glorious note, building the beautiful temple in Jerusalem. But, with his demand for more and more money, gold, and silver, and his hundreds of wives and concubines, things deteriorated once again. When Solomon died, the northern tribes refused to remain loyal to his son, Rehoboam.

The tribes had long suffered grievous wrongs under the oppressive measures of their former ruler. The extravagance of Solomon’s reign during his apostasy had led him to tax the people heavily and to require of them much menial service.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 88.3-89.0.
4. From that point on, it seems that they could only rebel against the Lord. What was going on in that history? Rehoboam lost most of his kingdom to Jeroboam. Was the Devil really just incredibly more persuasive with his false religions than God was with the truth? Were the Israelites just incredibly unsuccessful at convincing their children to be faithful to God? How successful have we been at convincing our children to remain faithful to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Why are we still here more than 170 years after the Great Disappointment of 1844? The Israelites whom we criticize so much were in the wilderness for “only” 40 years. Is that a fair comparison/contrast? How committed are our children to

the truths that started our church and especially to the teachings of Ellen G. White?

5. As we know, King Jeroboam the new king of the northern kingdom of Israel was afraid that if his citizens continued to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, they might return their loyalty to the descendants of David. So, he decided to build two places of worship: one in Dan and one in Bethel where he set up golden bull calves, telling his people that those were the gods that had brought them out of Egypt! (1 Kings 12:28) Isn't that what Aaron said about the golden calves he made? All Jeroboam cared about was his own reputation.

The apostasy introduced during Jeroboam's reign became more and more marked, until finally it resulted in the utter ruin of the kingdom of Israel.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 107.3.

6. Finally, in 722 B.C., Shalmaneser and Sargon II, kings of Assyria, put an end to the country of Israel and scattered its inhabitants throughout their empire. And what problems led to that result? Read 2 Kings 17:7-23. It is hard to image such corruption!
7. Did the southern kingdom of Judah learn anything from the demise of the northern kingdom of Israel? Read 2 Chronicles 33:9-10,21-23; 2 Kings 24:8-9,18-19. During the times of those kings in both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, God sent multiple prophets to try to warn them of what was coming. That was especially true just before they were conquered—the northern kingdom by Assyria and the southern kingdom by Babylon. As we mentioned in our last lesson, seven different prophets were trying to convince the people of Judah not to rebel against God and go into Babylonian exile.
8. Why is it that as one reads the stories of those two nations, people never seemed to think for themselves? The king would be evil, and all the people followed his example. Of course, we know that there were a few who remained faithful.
9. Read Jeremiah 2:1-28, especially verses 4-5, and 8. What do these verses tell us about this sad history? At the beginning, God treated them like His very own bride. He gave them every possible religious advantage when bringing them out of Egypt—teaching them how to worship Him faithfully at Mount Sinai; but, then the rebellion began. And the results are summarized in verse 5: “They worshiped worthless idols and became worthless themselves.” Even the priests who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders and the “prophets,” as well, turned to the worship of Baal. What did they think Baal would do for them? What did Baal do for them?
10. The nations are pictured as hopelessly attracted to foreign leaders and foreign gods. In the southern kingdom of Judah, the situation improved temporarily under Hezekiah and later under Josiah. But, very quickly, the people reverted to even worse apostasy.
11. Read Jeremiah 2:13. What is implied by this metaphor of broken cisterns? God has always tried to provide His people with plenteous supplies of “living water”; but, so often, they have made for themselves “broken cisterns” that could not hold any water at all.
12. What actually happens when people worship worthless things? The word translated *worthlessness* in Jeremiah 2:5 is also translated as *vanity*, *a vapor*, or even *breath*—things which have very temporary existence and fade into nothingness. So, what was really happening in this process?

**It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence.** Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly

sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, p. 555.1. [Bold type is added.]

13. We do not have very much detail about what was going on in those nations just before their demise. But, with the help of archaeology, we can put together a general picture.
14. Read Jeremiah 27:6. Why would God call Nebuchadnezzar, *His servant*? Was it that Nebuchadnezzar and his nation were more faithful to God than Judah? Or, Israel? Not at all! But, God could no longer protect Israel, and later Judah, because of their sins against Him. Earlier in history, Egypt had been the predominant power. As Egypt's power was waning, Assyria rose to be the dominant power. Then, as Assyria was waning, Egypt sought to regain its dominance. However, at the famous Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., Egypt was crushed, and Babylon became the new world power. Almost immediately after the Carchemish battle, Nebuchadnezzar and his troops marched down into Judah and conquered it, carrying off Daniel and his friends. Nebuchadnezzar told Jehoiakim, then king of Judah (609-598 B.C.), that if he would remain faithful and pay tribute, things would go well. But, the citizens of Judah were not only rebellious against God who told them to remain faithful to Babylon, but also they were rebellious against Babylon.
15. Read Jeremiah 25:8-12 and 29:10. The country of Judah was given those two clear prophecies that they would be servants to the Babylonians for 70 years. But, that, of course, was a very unpopular message. Other people arose, pretending to be prophets, saying that Judah would regain its freedom in as little as two years. (Jeremiah 28:3)
16. In light of what we know so far, what do you think was the response of the people to those two different messages? Of course, they chose to believe what they wanted to believe. Why do people choose to believe what they want to believe, sometimes despite mounting evidence against it? How should we decide who to believe? And why?
17. How often do we choose to believe something that we want to believe, even something that is contrary to the teachings of the Bible and has been proven to be false? Read Jeremiah 5:1-3. Had things really deteriorated to the point where God could not find a single person in Jerusalem who wanted to do what was right? Even a priest? Or, prophet? That might remind us of the story of Diogenes who in the 4<sup>th</sup> century walked around the marketplace in Greece, looking for an honest man! It should also remind us of Abraham negotiating with God over Sodom and Gomorrah as recorded in Genesis 18. Try to imagine what kind of thinking was going on in Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day.
18. Read Jeremiah 7:1-4,19. The people of Judah were very proud of their beautiful Temple of Solomon. They believed that since God had helped and guided in the construction of that beautiful building, God would never allow it to be destroyed. So, they believed that if they remained close to that temple and at least pretended to worship there, they would be safe!
19. We as the Seventh-day Adventist Church have been enormously blessed by God. We not only had pioneers who carefully and prayerfully studied the Bible with the one goal of making sure they were following the truths in the Bible as they established their new church, but we also have the wonderful advice and counsel of Ellen White to guide us. But, are we making the same mistake that the ancient Israelites did?
20. Read Judges 17:6 and 21:25. Are we doing what is right in our own eyes? Contrast Deuteronomy 13:18. Are we willing to give up our selfish ways and not only admit but also actually live according to God's plan for our lives? As we are beginning to study the story of Jeremiah, do you think the people of Judah in his day actually thought they were doing

what was right?

21. As you review the history from the exodus to the exile, what do you think about God's gracious and repeated forgiveness of His children? Is God having to do that today as well? Review the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as you know it. Review your personal history and the history of your local church. What can we learn from doing that? How do you think God felt after the people of Israel and Judah disappointed Him time and again? What do you think God would say about the Seventh-day Adventist Church today if we had a Jeremiah in our midst? How did we treat the prophet we did have?

We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*, January 29, 1893 par. 5; *General Conference Bulletin*, February 20, 1899 par. 16; *Life Sketches*, p. 196; *RH*, October 12, 1905 par. 22; *TM* 31.1; *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 162.3; *LDE* 72.1; *YRP* 229.4.

22. The problem with this passage is that it is not the leading of God that has caused us problems, but rather, our failure to follow God's leading! Sometimes, it is useful to contrast how God views things with the way the world views them. The history of King Omri (885-874 B.C.) is a useful example. It is told in the Bible in a few short verses (1 Kings 16:21-28) and clearly points out how evil he was. But, by contrast, if you look at the history of Omri as reconstructed from archaeology and extra-biblical literature, the name of Omri was associated with the northern kingdom of Israel for 150 years. Omri was still recognized as the ancestral and spiritual leader of the nation of Israel by the nations around Israel as documented in: 1) the Mesha Stele also known as the Moabite Stone (840 B.C.) which was reassembled and is on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris; 2) the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (827 B.C.) found in northern Iraq and on display in the British Museum in London; and 3) even later in two other inscriptions from Assyrian kings.
23. We sometimes suggest that Ellen White is our spiritual leader. Is that still true? Or, are we following a different group of leaders just as the children of Israel did? If you have not had a chance to do so yet, review the story of Israel's demise as recorded in 2 Kings 17:7-23. How could people with all the guidance God had given them end up sacrificing their own children to pagan idols? Why did the sins of Jeroboam in establishing those two worship sites with golden bull calves have such a lasting effect on the northern tribes of Israel? Remember that Jeroboam was rebuked by God and that Judean prophet at the establishment of those worship sites. See 1 Kings 13.
24. Finally, in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah, the rebellion of God's people was described as if they were "playing the harlot" and becoming prostitutes. They were acting very shamefully, even described as going around naked.
25. Read Jeremiah 2:26-27. How could they have reached the place where they would say to a tree, "You are my father"? Or, to a stone, "You gave birth to me"?
26. Did any of those false gods help them at all in times of crisis? Where will our help come from as we face our future impending crisis?

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