

JEREMIAH

THE WEEPING PROPHET

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in the 13th year of Josiah, ruler of the southern kingdom of Judah. Historians date this year 622 BC.

More than 300 years had passed since Solomon ruled over a united kingdom. A full century had gone by since the tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel were carried away by the Assyrians. That land was now overrun by the foreigners and strangers who came to be known as Samaritans.

2 Kings 17:24

²⁴ And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel:
and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.



The initial years of Jeremiah's ministry must have been encouraging, for Josiah was a noble king.* In fact, in the year prior to Jeremiah's call, Josiah had begun to purge Judah of the idolatry that had become her norm.

* See 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35

2 Chronicles 34:3

- ³ For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he [Josiah] began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images.



In Jeremiah's 5th year of ministry (which was Josiah's 18th year as king), Josiah repaired the temple and reinstated the Passover observances.

2 Chronicles 35:18-19

- ¹⁸ And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹ In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.



Josiah came into power at a time when the word of the Lord had been long forgotten. Incredibly, he first learned of God's law when a sacred scroll was recovered during the temple repairs! Josiah was overwhelmed by what he read, and sent inquiry to a prophetess named Huldah.

2 Kings 22:15-17

- ¹⁵ And she said unto them,
Thus saith the LORD God of Israel,
Tell the man that sent you to me,
- ¹⁶ Thus saith the LORD,
Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon
the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the
book which the king of Judah hath read:
- ¹⁷ Because they have forsaken me,
and have burned incense unto other gods,
that they might provoke me to anger with all the
works of their hands;
therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this
place, and shall not be quenched.

As the prophecy continued,
God promised to show
mercy to the penitent king.

2 Kings 22:18-20a

- ¹⁸ But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him,
Thus saith the LORD God of Israel,
As touching the words which thou hast heard;
- ¹⁹ Because thine heart was tender,
and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD,
when thou heardest what I spake against this place,
and against the inhabitants thereof,
that they should become a desolation and a curse,
and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me;
I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.
- ²⁰ Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers,
and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace;
and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will
bring upon this place...

Some people are *spared*
from the toils of a long life!

Isaiah 57:1-2

- ¹ The righteous perisheth,
and no man layeth *it* to
heart: and merciful men
are taken away,
none considering that the
righteous is taken away
from the evil *to come*.
- ² He shall enter into peace:
they shall rest in their
beds, *each one* walking in
his uprightness.

2 Kings 22:18-20a

- ¹⁸ But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire
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bring upon this place...

The years of Josiah marked the last great spiritual revival of the southern kingdom.

2 Kings 23:25

²⁵ And like unto him
was there no king before him,
that turned to the LORD with all
his heart, and with all his soul,
and with all his might,
according to all the law of Moses;
neither after him arose there
any like him.



For once, the foreign powers around Judah were consumed with fighting each other, and Judah was left in peace. But when Josiah ignored a warning from God and tried to stop an advancement by the Egyptians against the Assyrians, he lost his life.

2 Kings 23:29-30a

- ²⁹ In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him.
- ³⁰ And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre.





Jeremiah's mourning for Josiah was deepened by his understanding of what lay in store for Judah. God had granted Judah a respite for Josiah's sake. That era was over. The biblical report that "neither after him arose there any like him," could well be reckoned an understatement.



Of the next (and last) four kings of Judah, we read:



And he [*Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah*] did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. (2 Kings 23:32)

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And he [*Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim*] did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. (2 Kings 24:9)

And he [*Mattaniah, son of Josiah, made king by Nebuchadnezzar and renamed Zedekiah*] did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. (2 Kings 24:19)

Throughout Jeremiah's ministry, the greatest threat to Judah's welfare was not the foreigners outside her walls.

The greatest threat came from within, from those deemed her protectors:

Jeremiah 5:31a

³¹ The prophets prophesy falsely,
and the priests bear rule by their
means;
and my people love to have it so:



God's rebuke of the Jewish nation could be directed at many so-called Christian nations today.

Jeremiah 5:21-25

- ²¹ Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:
- ²² Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?
- ²³ But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.
- ²⁴ Neither say they in their heart,
Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain,
both the former and the latter, in his season:
he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.
- ²⁵ Your iniquities have turned away these *things*,
and your sins have withholden good *things* from you.

The men of Judah were
deceived by their wealth.
But not all prosperity is of
the Lord.

Jeremiah 5:26-29

- ²⁶ For among my people are found wicked men:
they lay wait, as he that setteth snares;
they set a trap, they catch men.
- ²⁷ As a cage is full of birds,
so are their houses full of deceit:
therefore they are become great, and waxen rich.
- ²⁸ They are waxen fat, they shine:
yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked:
they judge not the cause, the cause of the
fatherless, yet they prosper;
and the right of the needy do they not judge.
- ²⁹ Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD:
shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as
this?

“Shall I not visit for these things?”

Righteous judgment is one of the great themes of the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 5:7-9

- ⁷ How shall I pardon thee for this?
thy children have forsaken me,
and sworn by them that are no gods:
when I had fed them to the full,
they then committed adultery, and assembled
themselves by troops in the harlots' houses.
- ⁸ They were as fed horses in the morning:
every one neighed after his neighbour's wife.
- ⁹ Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD:
and shall not my soul be avenged on such a
nation as this?

God hoped his “divorce” of the northern tribes of Israel would serve as a warning to Judah. Instead, it hardened her even more.

Jeremiah 3:8-10

- ⁸ And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.
- ⁹ And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.
- ¹⁰ And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD.



Judah was governed by the royal House of David. Israel had been ruled by a succession of generals and politicians, people like Ahab and Jezebel.

God's greater expectation – and disappointment – was with Judah.

Jeremiah 3:11

¹¹ And the LORD said unto me,
The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more
than treacherous Judah.

When Jeremiah cried out for repentance, the false prophets shut him down. They said that because the Judeans were the people of God, and Jerusalem housed the temple of God, God would never allow them to be defeated.

Jeremiah could not convince them otherwise.

Jeremiah 7:4

⁴ Trust ye not in lying words, saying,
The temple of the LORD,
The temple of the LORD,
The temple of the LORD, are these.



So hardened was the heart of the people that God told Jeremiah not to waste his time praying for them.

Jeremiah 7:16

¹⁶ Therefore pray not thou for this people,
neither lift up cry
nor prayer for them,
neither make intercession to me:
for I will not hear thee.



This was not because of any lack on the part of Jeremiah as an intercessor.

Jeremiah 15:1

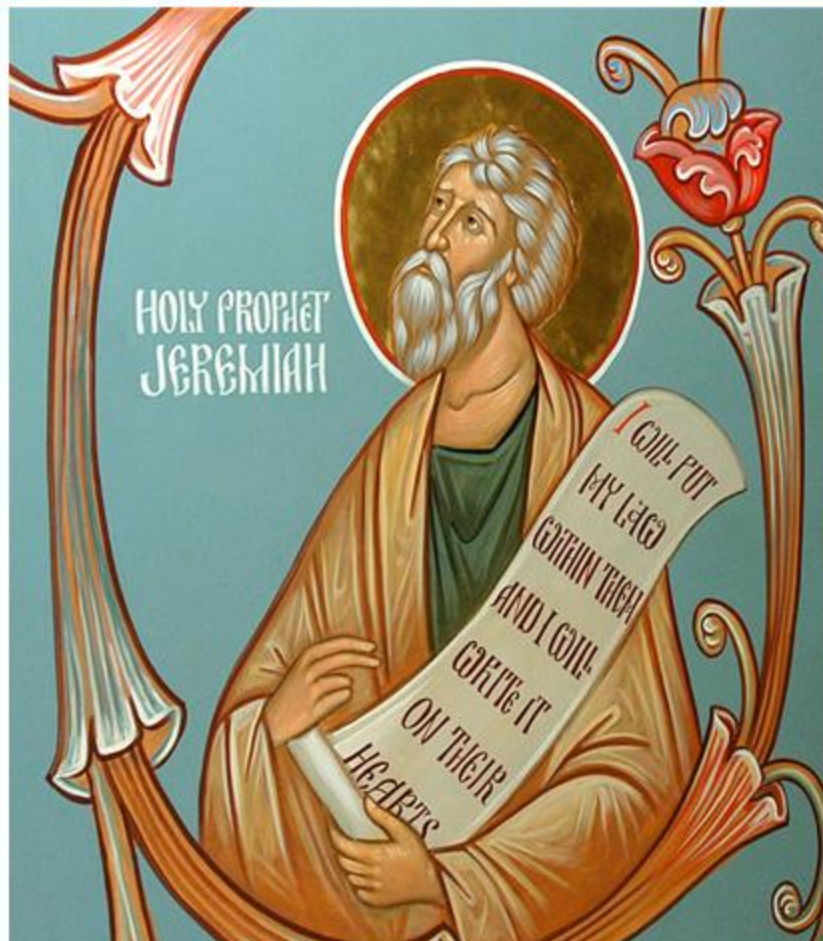
- ¹ Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth.



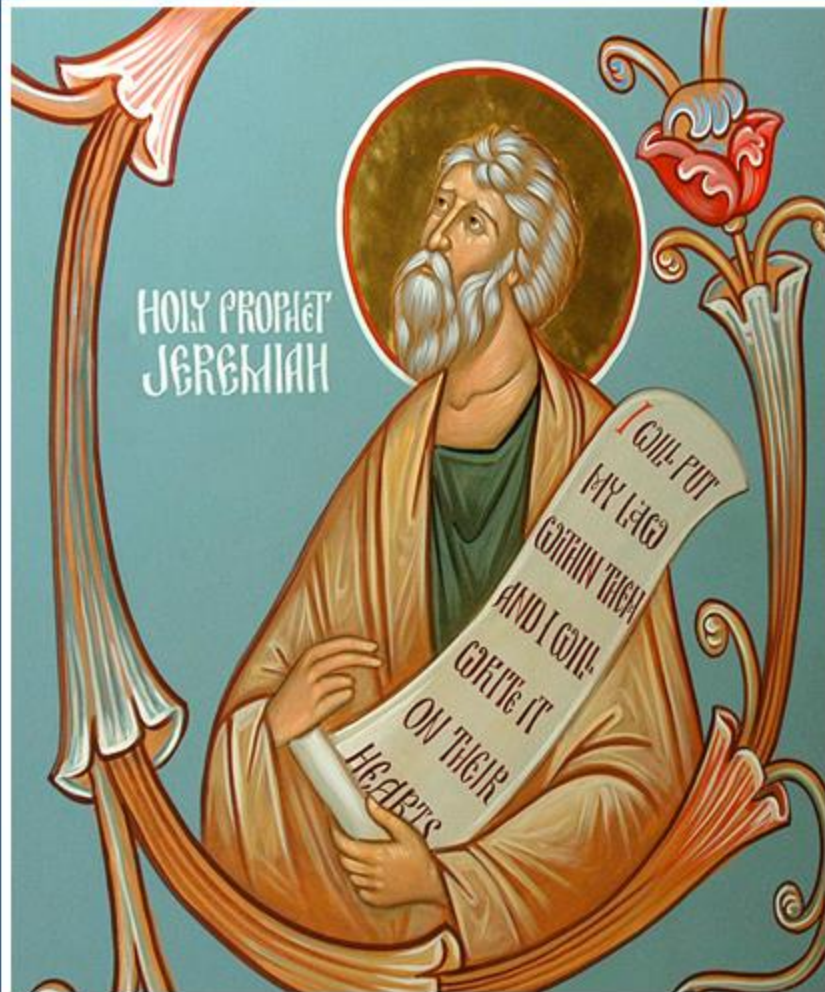
After the death of Josiah, his son Jehoahaz was crowned king. He reigned for only 3 months before being replaced by his brother, now called Jehoiakim.

2 Kings 23:34

³⁴ And Pharaoh-nechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there.



In the first year of Jehoiakim, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah foretelling the rise of the Babylonian Empire. God said he had “given all these lands unto the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant” (Jer. 27:6).



All nations that resisted the king of Babylon would be punished, “with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand” (Jer. 27:8).

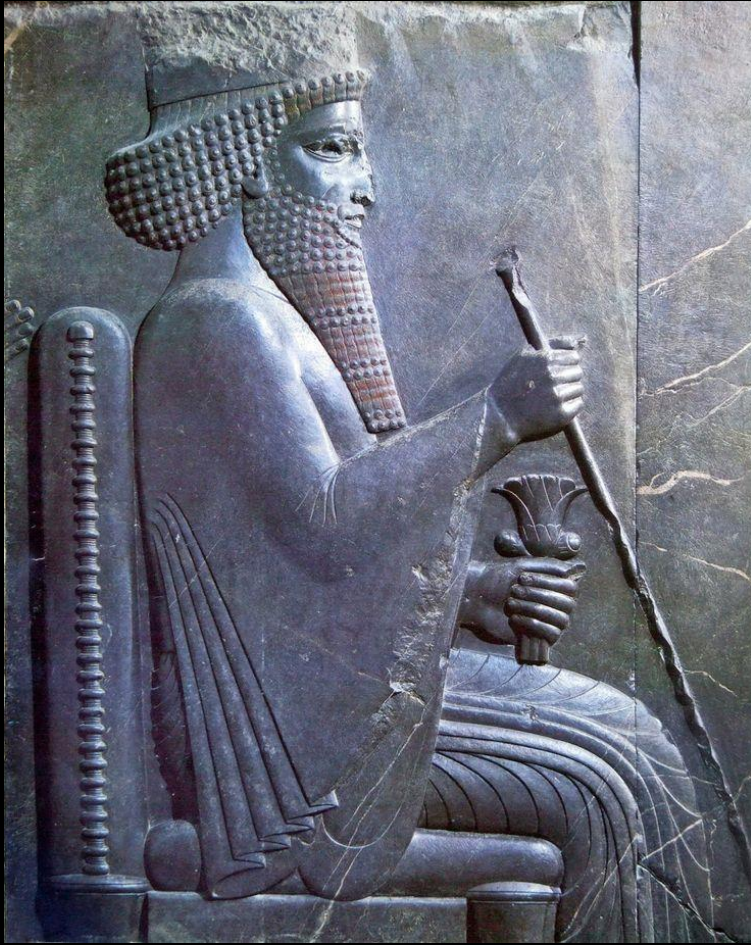
But as for those who would submit to his yoke and serve him, “those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein” (v. 11).

Within this prophecy was another warning to the people to beware of false prophets.

Jeremiah 27:9-10

- ⁹ Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon:
- ¹⁰ For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish.





In 612 BC, soon after this prophecy was given, the army of Babylon captured Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Nebuchadnezzar then turned his sights to the conquest of Judah.

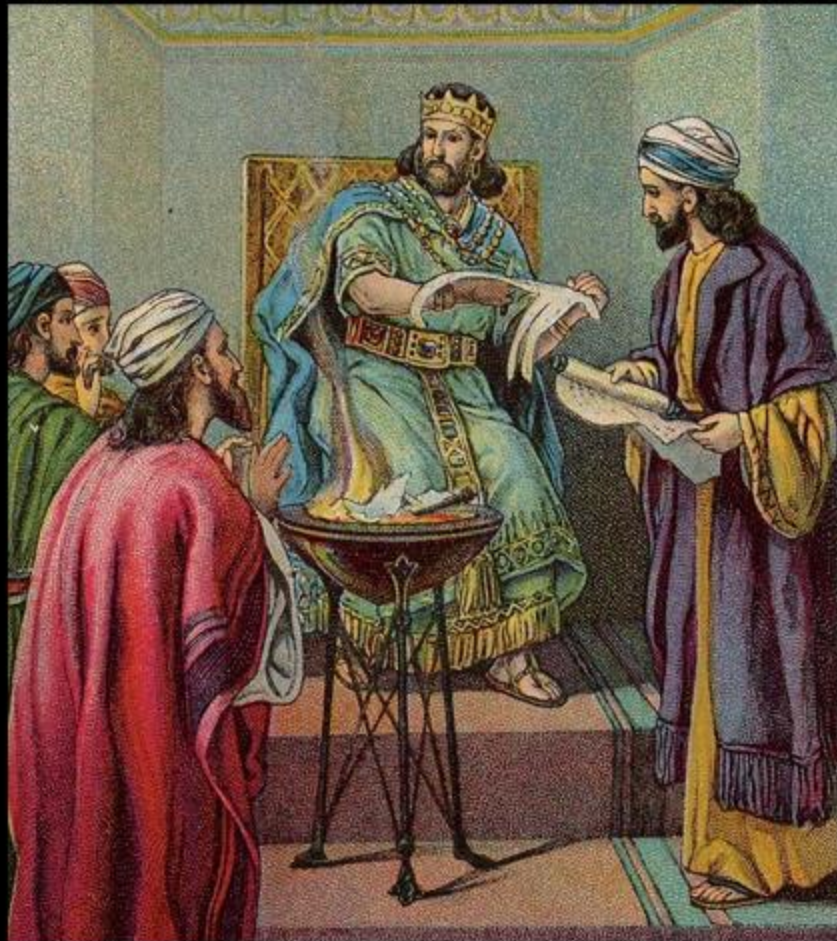
In 605 BC, in the first of three major assaults, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim” (Dan. 1:1), Daniel and three other young men later known by their Babylonian names, *Shadrach*, *Meshach*, and *Abednego*, were taken captive to Babylon.



The following year, the word of the Lord again came to Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 36:1-2

- ¹ And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, *that* this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,
- ² Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day.



The high priest Jehudi brought the roll to the king.

Jeremiah 36:22-24

- ²² Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and *there was a fire on the hearth burning before him.*
- ²³ And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.
- ²⁴ Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, *neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.*



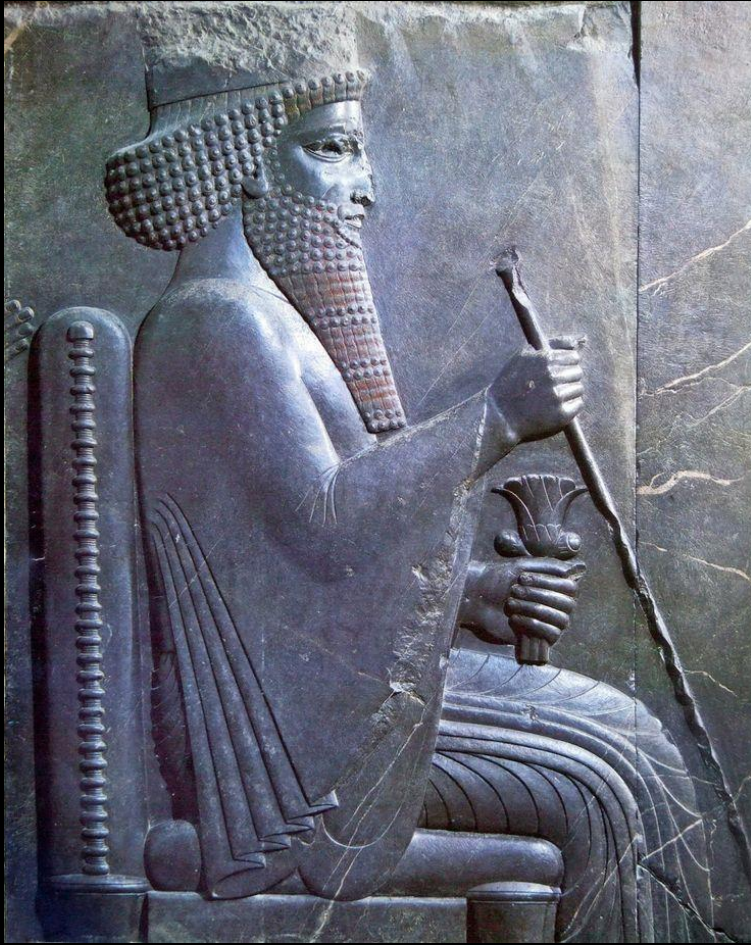
God instructed Jeremiah to write a second copy.

Jeremiah 36:28-30

- ²⁸ Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned.
- ²⁹ And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim the king of Judah, 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?
- ³⁰ 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.

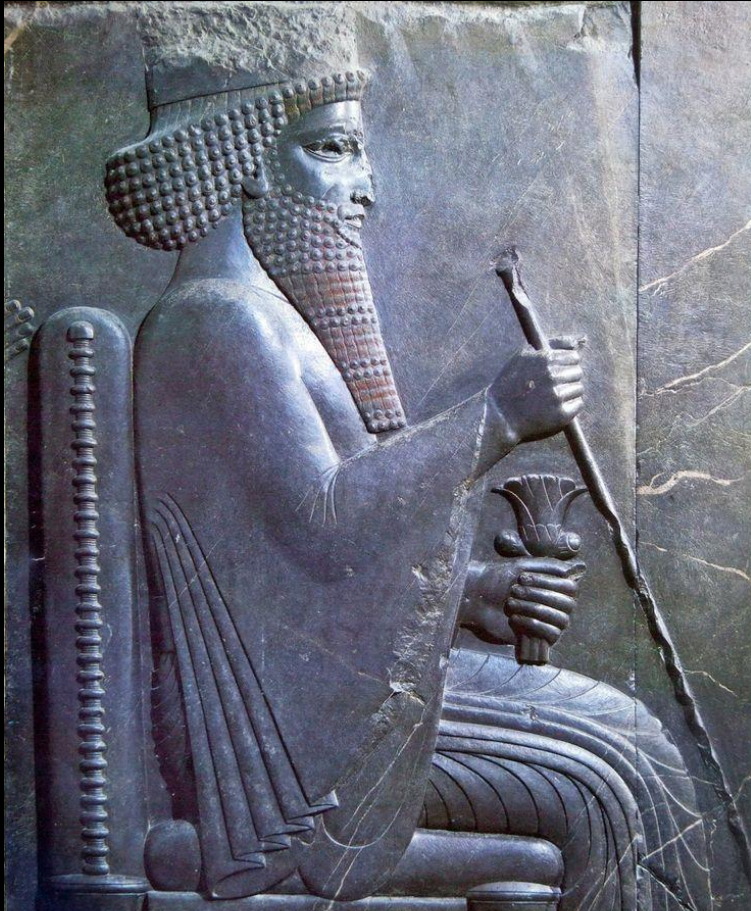
Jehoiakim ignored Jeremiah and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, he was killed during the siege and his body was thrown over the city wall.

His son Jehoiachin became the new king.



In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem a second time. Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon along with “all the treasures of the house of the LORD... and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths” (2 Kings 24:13-14).

The prophet Ezekiel was among those taken to Babylon.



At this time, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah the new king of Judah.

JOSIAH – JEHOAHAZ – JEHOIAKIM – JEHOIACHIN – **ZEDEKIAH**



Soon after Nebuchadnezzar's second assault on Jerusalem, God showed Jeremiah a vision of two baskets of figs:

Jeremiah 24:3

³ Then said the LORD unto me,
What seest thou, Jeremiah?

And I said, Figs;
the good figs, very good;
and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten,
they are so evil.



The good figs represented the Judeans who willfully submitted to their captors.

Jeremiah 24:4-7

- 4 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,
- 5 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel;
Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.
- 6 For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up.
- 7 And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.



The bad figs were the Judeans who resisted God's command.

Jeremiah 24:8-10

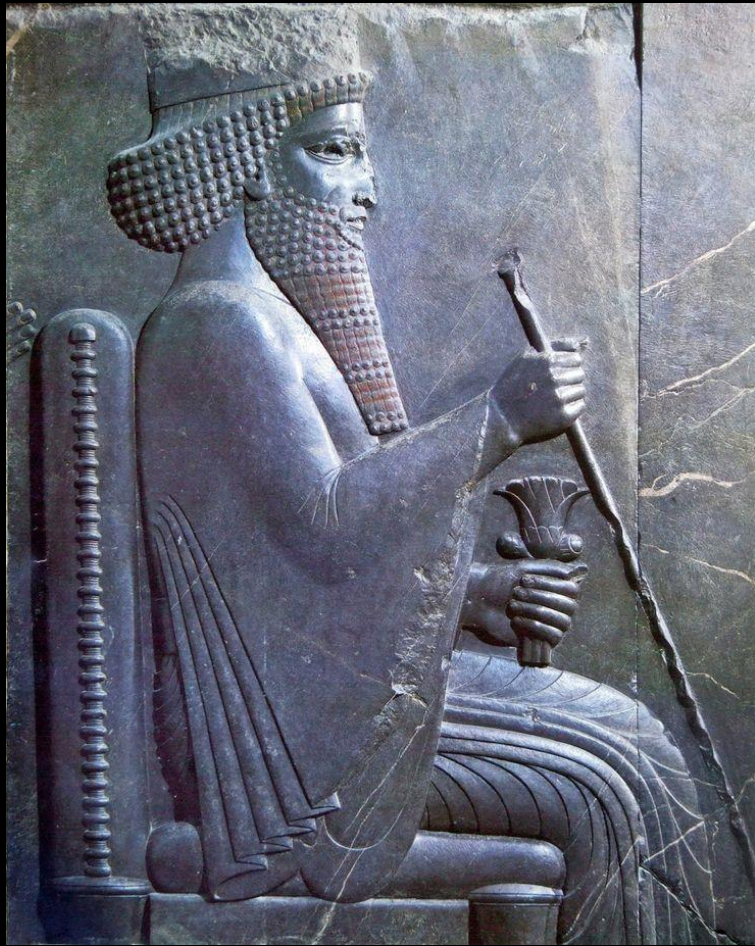
- ⁸ And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD,
So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt:
- ⁹ And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them.
- ¹⁰ And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.



Herein lies a great lesson in trusting God:

Concerning those taken captive, God said, “I have sent [them] out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.”

How could a people’s enslavement be to their good? We shall soon see!



As for Zedekiah the new king of Judah, “Neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the LORD, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah” (Jer. 37:2).

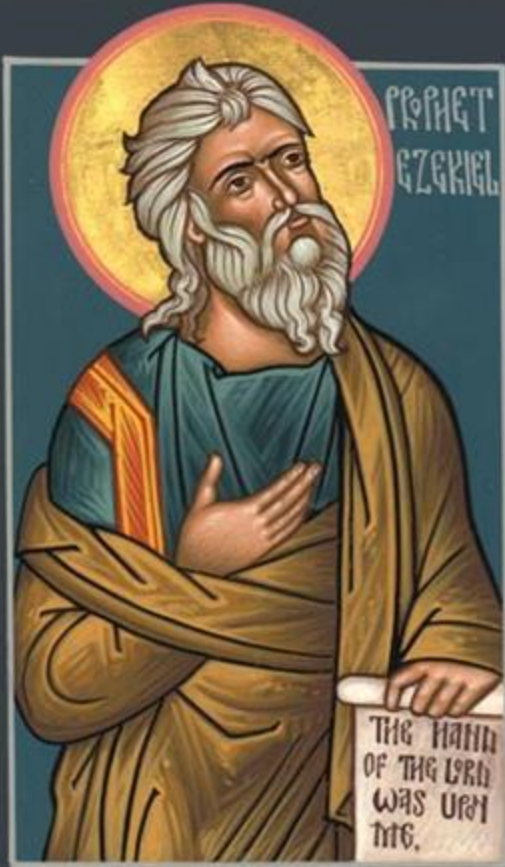
Taking the advice of his counselors, Zedekiah imprisoned Jeremiah for insurrection.

Then came the third and final assault on Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 39:1

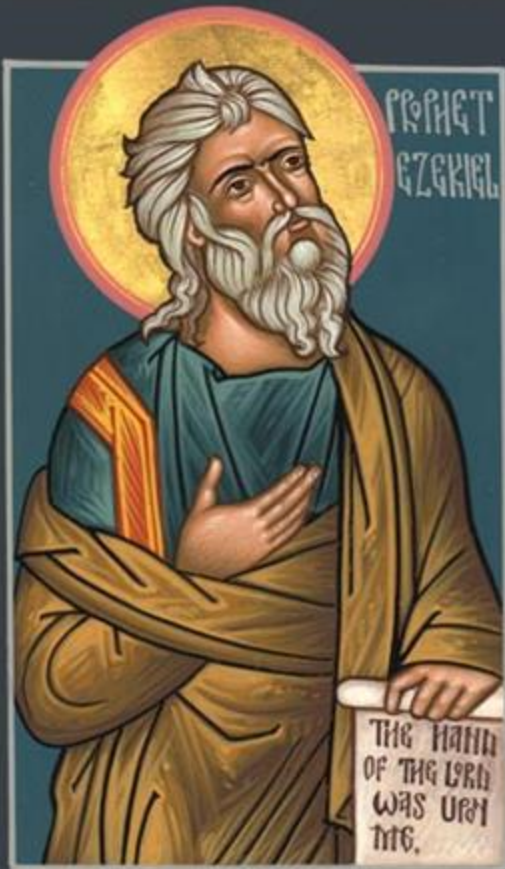
- ¹ In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it.





Meanwhile in the land of the Chaldeans, God had been showing his prophet Ezekiel great visions concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In a vision, Ezekiel was taken behind the walls of the temple in Jerusalem to see Judah's hidden abominations. He saw in a vision as the glory of God departed from the temple in Jerusalem. He was shown a vision of the resurrection of fallen Israel, as dead bones made alive.



By the mouth of Ezekiel, the Lord had said concerning this king, “I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there” (Ezek. 12:13).

The mystery of this prophecy was resolved when Nebuchadnezzar “put out Zedekiah’s eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon” (Jer. 39:7).



The Vision of the Two Baskets of Figs Fulfilled

The 3rd wave of Nebuchadnezzar's assault on Jerusalem lasted three years. Her walls fell and the house of God was burned to the ground. The book of Lamentations records Jeremiah's anguish at the fall of the City of David.

Everything God's prophets had foretold had come to pass. Still, the heart of the people was hardened.

After the fall of Jerusalem, many fled to Egypt for safety. Jeremiah pleaded with them to repent of their wickedness and submit to the will of God. Their response to God's prophet is horrifying.

Jeremiah 44:15-17a

- ¹⁵ Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying,
- ¹⁶ As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee.
- ¹⁷ But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem:

Look to what they
attributed the end of their
days of prosperity!

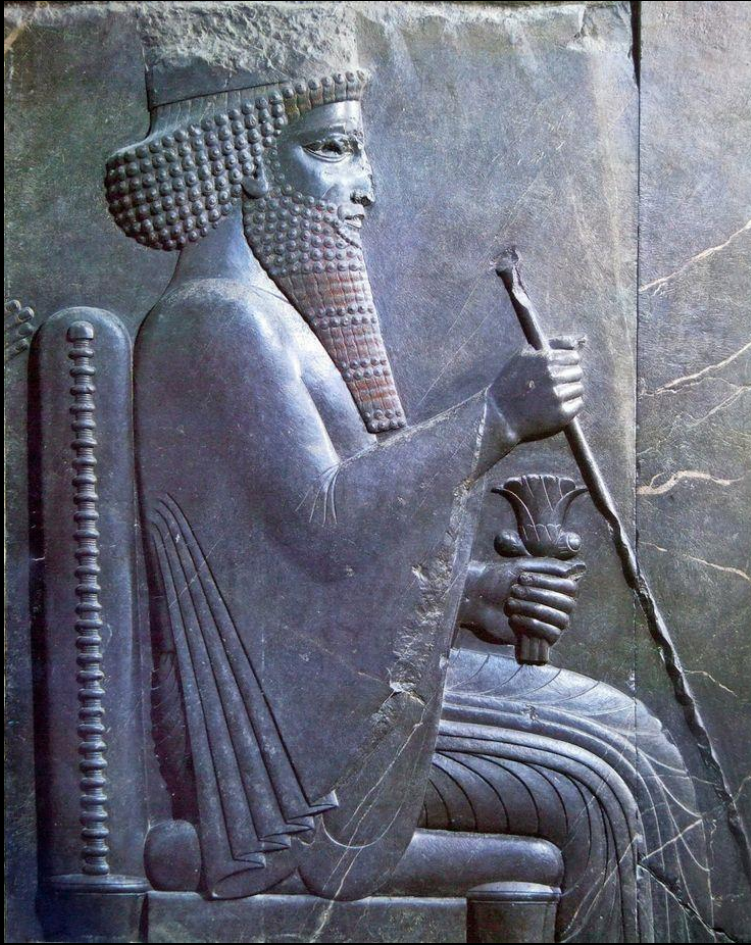
Jeremiah 44:17b-18

- ¹⁷ ... for then had we plenty of victuals,
and were well, and saw no evil.
- ¹⁸ But since we left off to burn incense to the queen
of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her,
we have wanted all things, and have been
consumed by the sword and by the famine.

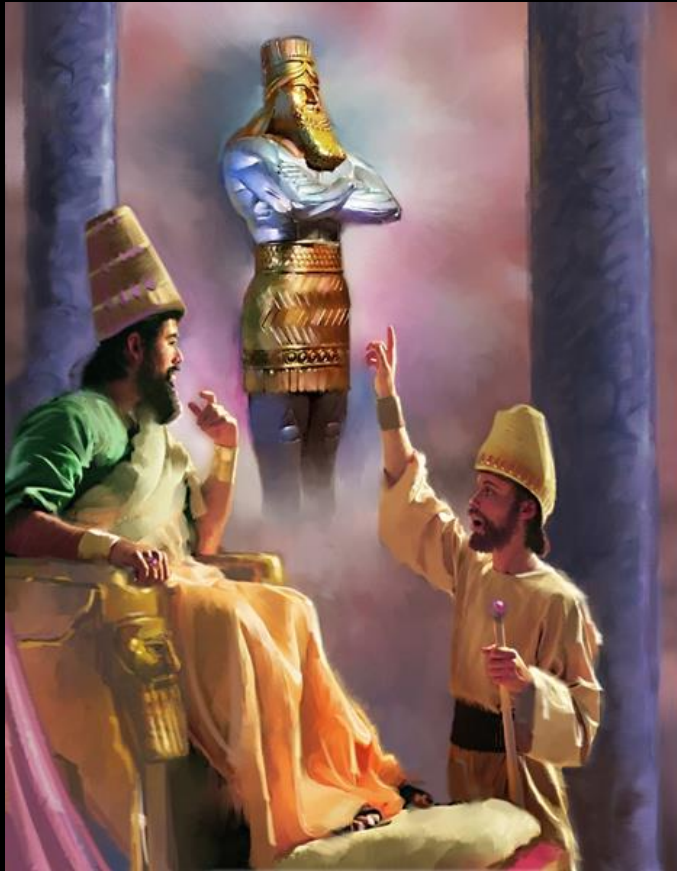
God had asked Jeremiah, “Shall I not visit for these things?” Of the Judean refugees in Egypt, all but a few would die a horrific death.

Jeremiah 44:27-28

- ²⁷ Behold, I will watch over them for evil, and not for good:
and all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until there be an end of them.
- ²⁸ Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine, or theirs.



And what about God's promise to the those who submitted themselves to the yoke of the king of Babylon?



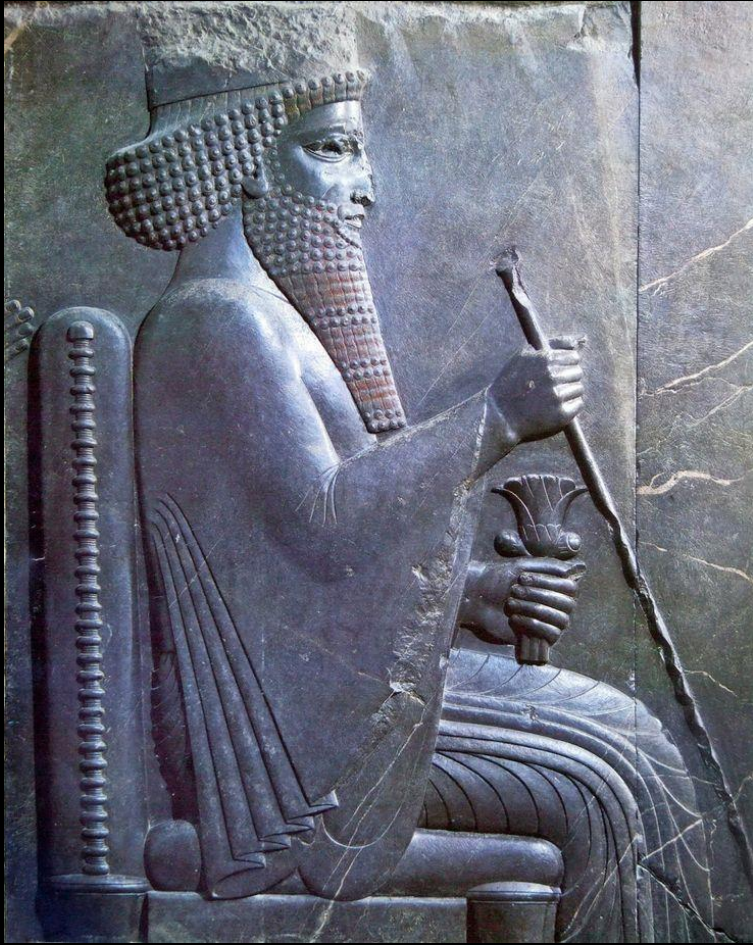
Only two years after being taken to Babylon, Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's mysterious dream of the image whose "head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay" (Dan. 2:32-33). In reward, Daniel was made "ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon" (v. 48).



When Daniel's three friends miraculously survived the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar decreed "that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (Dan. 3:29).



And in the chapter of the Bible written by the emperor of Babylon himself, he said,
“Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase” (Dan. 4:37).



For all who rebelled against God, Babylon was their worst nightmare. But for those who obeyed, there was no safer place on earth.



The last chapter of 2 Chronicles and the first chapter of Ezra record the proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, “that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished” (2 Chron. 36:22).

The emperor declared that “the LORD God of heaven ... hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up” (v. 23).

As promised, God’s people returned home.

Jeremiah is often called “the weeping prophet” on account of his agonizing over Judah’s fallen condition.

Jeremiah 9:1

- ¹ Oh that my head were waters,
and mine eyes a fountain of tears,
that I might weep day and night
for the slain of the daughter of
my people!



This was a man who took up his cross and bore it in the face of the worst kind of opposition – from his own people. His courageous example continues to fortify God’s people centuries after his death.

This does not mean he was never discouraged or dismayed. The burden he was asked to bear sometimes felt far too heavy.

Jeremiah 20:7b-9

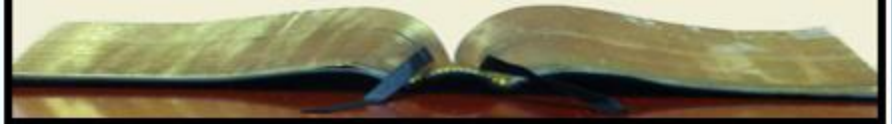
- 7 ... I am in derision daily,
every one mocketh me.
- 8 For since I spake, I cried out, I cried
violence and spoil; because the word
of the LORD was made a reproach
unto me, and a derision, daily.
- 9 Then I said, I will not make mention of
him, nor speak any more in his name.



But he could not resist the Spirit of God welling up inside him.

Jeremiah 20:7b-9

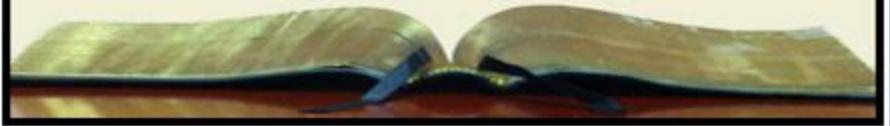
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- 9 Then I said, I will not make mention of
him, nor speak any more in his name.
But his word was in mine heart as a
burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing,
and I could not stay.



May we never allow our own setbacks – so terribly small in comparison – to deter us from honoring and serving the Lord God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 20:7b-9

- 7 ... I am in derision daily,
every one mocketh me.
- 8 For since I spake, I cried out, I cried
violence and spoil; because the word
of the LORD was made a reproach
unto me, and a derision, daily.
- 9 Then I said, I will not make mention of
him, nor speak any more in his name.
But his word was in mine heart as a
burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing,
and I could not stay.





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