

TRUTH LESSONS—LEVEL ONE
LESSON TWELVE
A KEY VIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT
(6)
FROM THE CAPTIVITY TO THE RETURN
(1)

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 - 3. Speaking lies, deceiving others, and committing iniquity.
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 - 3. God’s people as the dry bones being revived and formed into God’s army in chapter thirty-seven.
 - 4. The rebuilding of the holy city and holy temple in chapters forty through forty-eight.

TEXT

In this lesson, we will see Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, the prophets during the captivity of Israel.

I. THE PROPHET DURING THE CAPTIVITY AND IN CAPTIVITY—JEREMIAH

Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah the priest, was born in Anathoth (Jer. 1:1). He was born as a priest and was called to be a prophet in the thirteenth year of King Josiah. He spoke for the Lord until the captivity of Israel (Jer. 1:2-3, 5-7). Among all the prophets, he was the one who suffered the most persecution. Except for a few of the kings, leaders, priests, and people, everyone was against him and hated him. The false prophets, who assumed to speak in God's name, especially lied about and contradicted his prophecy. Finally, Azariah and Johanan and those who were close to Egypt forced him to go to Egypt (Jer. 43:2-7). In Jeremiah's ministry, he rebuked the kings and the people for their sins and warned them that unless they repented they would be carried into captivity and their nation would be destroyed. He wept for God's people when he saw that they refused in their stiff-neckedness to repent and that they eventually lost their country. His writings include Jeremiah and Lamentations.

A. Rebuking the Kings and the People for Their Sins

1. Forsaking God and Disobeying His Word

Jeremiah 2:13 says, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns." God's people forsook God, the fountain of the living water. This was not only a loss to them but also a great sin which became the main factor of their fall.

Jeremiah 9:13 says, "They have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein." Because the people forsook God, they also disobeyed His word.

2. Worshipping Idols and Committing Fornication

Jeremiah 1:16 says, "Touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands." Having forsaken God and having disobeyed His voice, they burned incense unto other gods, who actually were not God, and worshipped the works of their own hands, making the idols their gods.

Jeremiah 11:13 says, "For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal." God's people had truly fallen into a very wicked situation. Their false gods were as many as their cities; the shameful altars of Baal were as many as the streets in Jerusalem.

The people of Israel were holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of His increase. In the beginning they also had the kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals unto God (Jer. 2:2-3). But they backslid, forsook God, and turned to the false gods; thus, they committed spiritual fornication. They committed adultery in every high mountain and

under every green tree, with stones and with stocks, so that even the land was defiled (Jer. 3:6-9).

3. Speaking Lies, Deceiving Others, and Committing Iniquity

When God's people fell into the condition of forsaking God, disobeying God's word, and committing adultery in worshipping idols, they spontaneously spoke lies, deceived others, and committed iniquity. They bent their tongues like their bow for lies. They taught their tongue to speak lies, and wearied themselves to commit iniquity (Jer. 9:3, 5). They were turned back to the iniquity of their forefathers, who refused to hear the words of God (Jer. 11:10).

4. The Kings Scattering God's People and Not Caring for Them

The kings of Israel not only took the lead to do such evil, but also scattered the people and did not care for them. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them" (Jer. 23:2).

B. Warning concerning Captivity and Destruction

Jeremiah, on one hand, rebuked the kings and the people for their sins and wanted them to repent; on the other hand, he warned them that they would be taken into captivity, that their nation would be destroyed, and that the cities of Judah and Jerusalem would become desolate.

In chapter one Jeremiah began to warn the backsliding people of the evil that would be coming upon them, saying, "Then the Lord said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the Lord...they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah" (vv. 14-15).

The coming evil was like a spoiler who would suddenly come upon them. The enemies would thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine (Jer. 6:9, 26), and the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness would cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem, for the land would be desolate (Jer. 7:34).

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the first year of Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, Jeremiah spoke to all the people of Judah, "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the Lord hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you...but ye have not hearkened....Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and

Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof...and will utterly destroy them...and make them... perpetual desolations” (Jer. 25:3, 8-9).

Finally, in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city. Zedekiah was captured, and his sons and the nobles of Judah were slain. The walls of the city were broken down, the houses in the city were burned, and the remnant was carried away to Babylon (Jer. 39:2-9).

C. Weeping for the Stiff-necked and Unrepentant People

Jerusalem fell and the people were taken captive. All the warnings of Jeremiah were fulfilled. But because he loved God and God’s people, Jeremiah could not bear to see the fall of Israel and the loss of God’s glory due to the degradation of the people of Israel. Thus Jeremiah wrote Lamentations and wept for them.

Lamentations, composed of five chapters which are five songs, may be divided into five sections: suffering, lamenting, hope, confessing, and prayer. Except for the fifth, each song speaks first of the tragic destruction of Jerusalem and then of the righteousness of God’s severe judgment. “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations” (1:1). “How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel” (2:1). “The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment” (1:18). “Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people” (2:11). “Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (5:21).

II. THE PROPHETS IN THE LAND OF CAPTIVITY

Daniel and Ezekiel were the prophets in the land of captivity.

A. Daniel

1. *With His Three Friends Being Overcomers in Captivity from Their Youth*

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and carried away Daniel and his three friends (Dan. 1:1-6). They were chosen to be taught in the palace and prepared to serve the king, for they were well favored, skillful in all wisdom, and gifted in knowledge and the understanding of science.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Daniel requested that they be tested ten days by being given only vegetables to eat and water to drink, after which their countenances would be judged. At the end of ten days, their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in

flesh than all the rest. Hence, the prince of the eunuchs allowed them to take vegetables and water only (Dan. 1:8-16).

At that time, God's people were carried away, the house of God was destroyed, and the vessels of the house were taken to the house of the false gods (Dan. 1:2; 2 Chron. 36:7). The dominion and glory of God on the earth were completely gone. The people were under the rule of the king of Babylon and were associated with demons, because even the food they ate and the wine they drank, being sacrificed to demons, were defiled and unclean. In such a time, God gained Daniel and his three friends, some who cared for the dominion and glory of God. They were determined that, by refraining from eating the royal food and drinking the royal wine, they would not be defiled. Hence, they were the overcomers in captivity.

2. Praying for the Holy City and the Holy Temple of God until They Were Recovered

In the first year of Darius, Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem (Dan. 9:1-2; Jer. 25:11). Daniel prayed and made confession unto the Lord with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes concerning his sins and those of his nation. He presented his supplication before the Lord concerning the holy mountain, Jerusalem (Dan. 9:1-20). Then God heard the prayers made by His people. According to His promise, in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to make a proclamation allowing the people of Israel to go to Jerusalem of Judah and to rebuild the holy temple of the God of Israel (Ezra 1:1-3). Finally, Daniel saw the fulfillment of his prayer concerning Jerusalem (Dan. 1:21).

3. Interpreting the Image in Chapter Two and Seeing the Visions in Chapters Seven through Twelve of His Book

God gave Daniel extraordinary wisdom to interpret the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This was a great image. Its head was of fine gold; its breast and its arms, of silver; its belly and its thighs, of bronze; its legs, of iron; and its feet, part iron and part clay. This was a prophecy concerning the nations of the earth. The head of gold symbolizes Babylon; the breast and arms of silver, Medo-Persia; the belly of bronze, Greece; the two legs of iron, the eastern and western Roman Empires; and the feet of iron mixed with clay, the nations, which in the period after the fall of Rome and before the second coming of Christ, would be part democracy and part autocracy. The prophecy concerning the nations represented by the image has been fulfilled in history. At the end of the dream, a stone, cut out without hands, smote the image upon its feet, which were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together...that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (vv. 34-35). This is a prophecy concerning Christ. He is the stone, cut without human hands, which will come down from heaven to smite the image, the kingdoms of the earth, and break them into pieces. Then He will become a great mountain, the kingdom of God, which will fill the whole earth (Rev. 11:15).

Chapter seven presents the first series of visions seen by Daniel, that is, the visions of the four beasts, the ten horns, the little horn, the Ancient of Days, and the Son of Man. Chapter eight presents the second series of visions seen by Daniel, that is, the visions of the ram, the he-goat, the great horn, the four notable horns, and the little horn. The second half of chapter nine presents Daniel's third vision, the vision of the seventy weeks. Chapters ten through twelve present the fourth series of visions seen by Daniel.

Of all these visions, the most important are those of the four beasts in chapter seven and of the seventy weeks in chapter nine. These two visions, plus the image in chapter two, are the crucial points of Bible prophecy from the time of Israel's return from captivity until eternity.

The four beasts in chapter seven correspond to the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The fact that they are signified by beasts indicates that these empires were cruel, merciless, and inhuman.

The seventy weeks in chapter nine can be divided into three stages of seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week (vv. 24-27). Seven weeks are forty-nine years, that is, from the proclamation of Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, to rebuild the city of Jerusalem until the completion of the rebuilding. Sixty-two weeks are 434 years, that is, the exact period of time from the completion of the rebuilding of the holy city to the cutting off, the crucifixion, of the anointed One (Christ). After that, the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary (v. 26). This refers to Titus, the prince of Rome who destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Following this, there is an interim period, that is, the age of the mystery of the church. Then at the end of the church age, the final week of seven years will come. In the beginning of those seven years, Antichrist will confirm the covenant with many people. At the middle of the seven years Antichrist will break the covenant, persecute God's people, carry out destruction in the holy city and sanctuary, and do evil things. At the end of the seven years, Christ will defeat Antichrist at Armageddon (Rev. 16:16; 19:19-21). Thus, Christ will be the King on the earth, and the nations on earth will become the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11:15).

B. Ezekiel Seeing the Visions in the Land of Captivity concerning the Spiritual Recovery of God's People

Ezekiel was also a prophet in captivity. His visions were concerning the spiritual recovery of God's people.

1. The Vision of the Wind, the Cloud, the Fire, and the Electrum in Chapter One of His Book Signifying the Spiritual Revival of God's People

Verse 4 says, "And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire."

This verse mentions four things: wind, cloud, fire, and amber or electrum. God uses physical things to illustrate spiritual things. The strong wind signifies the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out as a rushing violent wind (Acts 2:1-4). The whirlwind brought in a great cloud, which also signifies the Spirit. When the Spirit stirs up people, He is like the wind. When the Spirit visits people and overshadows people, He is like a great cloud. The great cloud was covered with a fire. God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Therefore, fire signifies God's burning and sanctifying power, which performs a shining and purifying work in man. Out of the fire comes the glowing electrum. Electrum signifies the divine nature in glory and honor.

Whenever there is a spiritual revival, there is the rushing wind of the Spirit followed by the covering of man by the Spirit. There is the burning of the consuming fire in man, shining and purifying. Thus man becomes like the electrum, shining with glory and honor.

*2. God Reviving His People and Giving Them
a New Heart and a New Spirit
in Chapter Thirty-six*

Verses 26 and 27 say, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you...And I will put my Spirit within you." Before a person is saved, his heart is an old heart. But after a person is saved, his heart becomes a new heart. Furthermore, man's heart is renewed in every revival. The heart is man's loving organ. The old heart does not love God but rather things outside of God. When God comes in to visit and revive man, He not only cleanses his defilement, but also renews his heart and softens it to love God.

God also gives man a new spirit. The spirit of man was deadened because of the fall. The new spirit is a living spirit. God revives man's old and deadened spirit and makes it a new spirit. He gives the spirit of man a new function that man may be able to contact God and fellowship with Him.

Furthermore, God puts His own Spirit within man. When God puts His Spirit within man, God Himself enters into man, so that within man, there is God. At such a time, man is completely renewed within and becomes a renewed man.

*3. God's People as the Dry Bones
Being Revived and Formed into God's Army
in Chapter Thirty-seven*

Verses 1, 5, 6, and 10 say, "...in the midst of the valley which was full of bones;...thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin....So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

After their degradation, the children of Israel were not only sinners but also dead people. They were surely dead to the uttermost. What was left was just a pile of white bones. God caused Ezekiel to prophesy twice. When he prophesied the first time, there was a noise and a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to bone. Then sinews and the flesh

came up upon them, and the skin covered them from above. When Ezekiel prophesied the second time, breath came into them and they lived; then they stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. This was the prophecy that God would revive His people and make them one.

*4. The Rebuilding
of the Holy City and the Holy Temple
in Chapters Forty through Forty-eight*

Ezekiel 40:1-2 says, “The hand of the Lord was upon me....In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain, by which was as the frame of a city on the south.”

Ezekiel 40 through 48 are concerned with the rebuilding of the holy city and the holy temple. He saw the holy city and the holy temple in this vision. Here, all the items and their measurements have their spiritual significance.

There are forty-eight chapters in Ezekiel. At the end God obtains a holy temple and a holy city in the Holy Land. The holy temple is for God’s presence, fellowship, and service, whereas the holy city is for God’s ruling, administration, and government. The building of the holy city and the holy temple are the issue of the enjoyment of God by His people in their living in the Holy Land. When God’s people have an abundant and full enjoyment of God, He obtains from them an expression in fullness—God’s house and God’s city. Here God can fellowship with man and rule through man; man can enjoy God, and God can also enjoy man. Man can be filled to the uttermost with God and can express God.

SUMMARY

After the degradation of the priesthood, God raised up Samuel as a prophet to bring in the kingship. After the degradation of the kingship, God still used the prophets to care for the people He had judged and sent into captivity by speaking to them constantly, either by rebuking their evil deeds or by promising them that they would return to the Holy Land. Jeremiah, a prophet at the time of the carrying away, who was taken into captivity, rebuked the king and the people for their sins, warned them of the captivity and the loss of the kingdom, and lamented over the stiff-necked and unrepentant people. Daniel and his three friends were among the prophets in the land of captivity. They were God’s overcomers in the captivity. Daniel prayed for God’s holy city and His holy temple until the holy city and temple were recovered. There was also Ezekiel who saw visions in the land of captivity. He spoke of God’s coming to His people in their recovery to revive them and give them a new heart and a new spirit, making them as dry bones revitalized to become His army and eventually to rebuild His holy city and holy temple in their midst.

QUESTIONS

1. What were the sins for which the prophet Jeremiah rebuked the kings and the people?
2. What was the situation of God’s people when they were in captivity? In such a situation, could God still gain a group of overcomers?

3. What is the significance of the great image in Daniel 2? What is its ending?
4. What is the meaning of the “seventy weeks” in Daniel 9?
5. What is the significance of the vision of the wind, the cloud, the fire, and the electrum in Ezekiel?
6. In Ezekiel 36 and 37, how did God revive His people?