



Session 11: The Babylonian Exile

Introduction

[Watch](#) Rachel Ray, a daytime TV host, describe the emotions of seeing her house burn to the ground.

Judah under Zedekiah

2 Kings 24:18–20

Historical Background

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah and ruled from 597–586 B.C. Babylon had already invaded and deported people from Judah twice: the first under Jehoiakim in 605 B.C. and the second under Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. (see last session). Zedekiah was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar after Jehoiachin was imprisoned in Babylon, and Zedekiah took an oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 17:13). In 589 B.C., Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt came to power and tried to convince Judah and other smaller states around them to rebel against Babylon (see Jeremiah 27:3).¹ So Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, which spelled Jerusalem's disaster. Nebuchadnezzar then came to lay siege to Jerusalem and destroy it.

Skim Jeremiah 37. **List clues** in the historical background, the book of 2 Kings, or the book of Jeremiah that portray Zedekiah as an indecisive leader in Jerusalem, as it is consumed by pro-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian factions in its final days.

Despite all the political factors noted above, the Bible states that the ultimate reason for Jerusalem's demise was a religious one (24:20a). **Pick one doctrinal explanation and defend it:**

1. "God's patience will eventually run out, because he will always punish sin."
2. "God's patience will never run out, because he will always forgive sin."

¹ See *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, Robert Hoerber, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia), 574.

The Fall of Jerusalem

2 Kings 25:1–26

Historical Background

After Zedekiah's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar's siege against Jerusalem began on January 15, 588 B.C. The siege lasted two years. Nebuchadnezzar's military commander, Nebuzaradan, came on August 14, 586 B.C., to burn Jerusalem to the ground. This would prevent any further rebellions for good. Nebuchadnezzar's final act against Zedekiah was brutal psychological warfare. Before he was blinded, Zedekiah saw his sons killed in front of his eyes in Riblah (Babylon's military headquarters in the region, located in Aram/Syria). Then he was imprisoned in Babylon, where he would eventually die. Now Judah is no longer a vassal state but part of the Babylonian empire. Gedaliah was the Babylonian-appointed governor, but after his assassination the remaining Jews (including Jeremiah) fled to Egypt, where apparently Jeremiah eventually died (see Jeremiah 42–43). The Babylonian exile effectively ended Israelite independence. Except for a brief period of independence in the intertestamental period (the Maccabean revolt), the land of Israel will be under foreign domination from now until the end of the New Testament (and essentially until the founding of modern Israel in the twentieth century).

Learning Activity: Word Cloud

The book of Lamentations is a series of lament poems, ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah, who witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem with his own eyes. **Read** Lamentations 1, an acrostic poem (with each verse beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet). If you were a resident of ancient Jerusalem, **pick one word to describe your emotions** as you go from experiencing starvation during the siege, to fleeing your house once the Babylonian army broke through the city walls, to seeing your beloved city, temple, and home burn to the ground. **Be prepared to explain** why your word is so powerful. We will combine all these emotive words into one big word cloud.

Conclusion

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile is arguably the saddest and lowest part of the whole Old Testament. **Apply** the importance of this part of the Bible to today. **Respond** to someone who says, "I don't care for topics like sin, destruction, or judgment. The only God and the only religion I want is one that is all about love, acceptance, and convenience."