

Lesson 5

October 4, 2026

Demise of the Kingdom of Judah:

Abandoning God leads to destruction.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson explores the final days of Judah under King Zedekiah. Beginning with the invasion of Judah, the focus shifts to the siege of Jerusalem, the capture and judgment of Zedekiah, and then the destruction of the Temple. Both the fall of the city and its aftermath are examined. Finally, the lesson delves into the reasons behind Judah's downfall, focusing on the nation's sinful rebellion and the inevitable results of their disobedience to God. This overview offers insight into Judah's tragic defeat by Babylon, which led to the seventy-year exile of the nobles. These events are a warning to any nation that rejects God.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The fall of Judah to Babylon in 586 BC was a momentous event. Under King Nebuchadnezzar II, the Babylonian Empire rose to power, making Judah a vassal state after Assyria's decline. Repeated rebellions, particularly under Zedekiah, provoked Babylon's response, leading to the siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the exile of many inhabitants. This event influenced Jewish thought, inspiring various Biblical texts that reflect themes of despair, repentance, and hope. It also reshaped Jewish identity around the themes of covenant, divine justice, and restoration, which establish a connection between historical events and Biblical texts.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. ZEDEKIAH: JUDAH'S LAST KING: 2 Kings 24:18 – 25:7.**
 - A. The Fall of Judah, (24:18 – 25:2)
 - B. The Capture and Judgment of Zedekiah, (25:3-7)
- 2. THE TEMPLE AND JERUSALEM DESTROYED: 2 Kings 25:8-21.**
 - A. The Fall of Jerusalem, (8-12)
 - B. The Aftermath and Consequences, (13-21)
- 3. WHY JUDAH FELL: 2 Chronicles 36:14-21.**
 - A. The Sinful Rebellion of Judah, (14-16)
 - B. The Consequences of Disobedience, (17-21)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. ZEDAKIAH: JUDAH'S LAST KING: 2 Kings 24:18 – 25:7.

A. The Fall of Judah, 2 Kings 24: - 25:2.

Zedekiah became king of Judah at the age of twenty-one. In the previous three months, under the reign of Jehoiachin, Babylon had plundered the valuables from Jerusalem's palace and the Temple (2 Kings 24:13). Verse 14 adds, "King Nebuchadnezzar took all of Jerusalem captive, including all the commanders and the best of the soldiers, craftsman, and artisans – 10,000 in all. Only the poorest people were left in the land" (NLT). Nebuchadnezzar then installed Zedekiah as his vassal king (v. 17).

Zedekiah continued the sinful behavior of his predecessors, disregarding both God's commands and prophetic warnings: He "did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 36:12 NKJV). His stubborn resistance to divine correction reached a peak when he foolishly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, ignoring wise counsel and God's guidance. In retaliation, Nebuchadnezzar initiated a ruthless siege on Jerusalem, dragging the city into a two-year ordeal of starvation, anguish, and humiliating defeat. This somber episode stands as a powerful reminder of the inevitable results of ongoing disobedience and the refusal to honor God's covenant relationship.

Zedekiah "stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel" (2 Chronicles 36:13). The people of Judah were just like him: "But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, nor hear, nor receive instruction" (Jeremiah 17:23). Despite numerous warnings and opportunities for repentance, the people persisted in spiritual rebellion, leading to physical and spiritual devastation.

B. The Capture and Judgment of Zedekiah, 2 Kings 25:3-7.

Verses 3-7 describe the tragic final days of Zedekiah's reign and the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. After two years, the famine in the city became so severe that all the food was gone (v. 3). This situation fulfilled prophetic warnings from Jeremiah and other prophets, who had repeatedly called for repentance and submission to Babylon as God's ordained instrument of judgment. Zedekiah's refusal to heed these warnings led to devastating judgment for himself and Judah. As the Babylonians breached the city walls of Jerusalem, Zedekiah and his soldiers attempted to flee by night. However, their escape was short-lived, as they were overtaken on the plains of Jericho (vv. 4-5).

Zedekiah's judgment at the hands of the Babylonians is highly symbolic revealing the foolishness of defying God. Captured and brought before Nebuchadnezzar, he was forced to endure the sight of his sons being executed – a merciless act designed to extinguish any hope for his lineage. Afterward, Zedekiah's eyes were gouged out, leaving his son's deaths as the last image he saw. Bound in chains, he was later exiled to Babylon. These events fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy that Zedekiah would see Nebuchadnezzar but also illustrated the spiritual blindness of his reign. This account stands as a stark reminder of the certainty of divine justice and the peril of rejecting God's Word. It challenges us to embrace humility, repent, and submit to God's will, where true hope and restoration can be found.

Zedekiah's futile efforts to avoid capture and judgment remind us that true freedom comes through obedience. This narrative encourages us to let go of pride and trust in God's wisdom, even when it challenges us. We find comfort in knowing that His mercy outweighs our failures because God is always willing to restore those who humbly repent.

2. THE TEMPLE AND JERUSALEM DESTROYED: 2 Kings 25:8-21.

A. The Fall of Jerusalem, 2 Kings 25:8-12.

During the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, his captain of the guard, Nebuzaradan, laid siege to Jerusalem (v. 8) and executed systematic destruction of the city. The Temple of the Lord, central to Israel's worship and identity, was burned to the ground along with the royal palace and all significant buildings within Jerusalem (v. 9). This act symbolized not only the physical ruin of the city but also the spiritual desolation of God's people, who had repeatedly turned away from His covenant. The destruction of the Temple served as a judgment against Judah's persistent idolatry and disobedience, illustrating the consequences of forsaking God's commands.

Verses 11 and 12 highlight the human toll of this catastrophe. Nebuzaradan exiled most of the population, leaving only the poorest in the land to serve as vineyard workers and farmers. This stark division reflects both the humiliation of Judah and its vulnerability under foreign rule. The deportation of leaders and skilled individuals signified a dismantling of societal structure, leaving the nation without its political, religious, and cultural leaders. From a Biblical perspective, this passage calls for reflection on the gravity of sin and its far-reaching impact. It also serves as a reminder of God's sovereignty in history. His justice is unyielding, yet His promises remain steadfast even in judgment. For Christians today, it is a solemn call to faithfulness, repentance, and trust in God's redemptive plan amid trials and failures.

B. The Aftermath and Consequences, 2 Kings 25:13-21.

This passage recounts the aftermath of Judah's judgment, namely the destruction and desolation that followed their rebellion against God. The Babylonians dismantled the Temple, stripping it of its remaining sacred treasures and reducing it to ruins. The bronze pillars, the sea, and other valuable items were taken to Babylon as spoils of war (vv. 13-17). This scene illustrates the disturbing effects of disobedience and idolatry. Judah's failure to hear through His prophets led to the loss of the Temple, their sacred city, national identity, and freedom. The destruction of the Temple, a symbol of God's presence among His people, is a sobering reminder of how sin separates humanity from God and brings devastating results.

Furthermore, the passage details the fate of key leaders and officials. These individuals included the chief priest, the priest who served closest to him, three Temple doorkeepers, the lead military officer, and five royal advisors (vv. 18-19). The capture of these men symbolizes the complete collapse of their government and self-rule. Rather than being judged in Jerusalem, they were taken to Babylon, where they were executed before Nebuchadnezzar. This was an intentional act to reflect Nebuchadnezzar's authority.

In reflecting on our responsibility to God's role as Judge, consider an event from May 19, 1780. "The place was Hartford, Connecticut. The day has gone down in New England history as a terrible foretaste of Judgment Day. For at noon the skies turned from blue to grey and by mid-afternoon had blackened over so densely that, in that religious age, men fell on their knees and begged a final blessing before the end came. The Connecticut House of Representatives was in session. And as some of the men fell down and others clamored for an immediate adjournment, the speaker of the House, one Colonel Davenport, came to his feet. He silenced them and said these words: "The day of judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore, that candles may be brought.'" – Alistair Cooke.

3. WHY JUDAH FELL: 2 Chronicles 36:14-21.

A. The Sinful Rebellion of Judah, 2 Chronicles 36:14-16.

This passage presents a sobering account of Judah's rebellion against God, resulting in the nation's spiritual decline and the consequences of unrepentant disobedience. Verse 14 describe how all the leaders, priests, and people of Judah became increasingly unfaithful as they followed the detestable practices of surrounding nations and defiled the Temple of the Lord. This verse underscores the persistence of their rebellion, as even those in positions of spiritual leadership abandoned their responsibilities. Their actions demonstrate a willful disregard for God's holiness and a shameless embrace of idolatry, which corrupted both their worship and their moral integrity. The text serves as a reminder that sin is not confined to individual actions but can permeate an entire community when leaders fail to uphold God's standards.

In verses 15-16, we see God's patient and merciful response to Judah's rebellion. The Lord repeatedly sent His messengers to warn the people out of compassion and a desire to restore them to Himself. However, Judah mocked these messengers, despised God's Word, and scoffed at His prophets. This rejection of divine warnings ultimately led to God's judgment, as their hearts had become hardened beyond a hint of repentance. These verses reveal both the depth of God's mercy and the severity of His justice. While He extends grace and opportunities for repentance, persistent rebellion inevitably results in God's judgment. This passage warns us to consider the dangers of ignoring God's Word and the importance of humbly responding to His call with obedience. It reminds us that God's patience is not to be taken for granted but should lead to repentance and faithful living.

B. The Consequences of Disobedience, 2 Chronicles 36:17-21.

The passage recounts how Judah, despite numerous warnings from prophets, persisted in their rebellion against God's commands. As a result, God allowed the Babylonian invasion, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem, the burning of the Temple, and the exile of His people. This tragic outcome serves as a stark reminder that disobedience to God's will carries severe repercussions. When we ignore His guidance and stubbornly choose our own path, we not only invite personal repercussions but also risk impacting our communities and future generations.

Judah's refusal to heed God's warnings eventually led to their exile, cost them their freedom, and resulted in the destruction of the sacred temple, which represented God's presence among them.

This passage also expresses the balance between God's justice and mercy. While the Israelites faced judgment for their disobedience, the text concludes with a glimmer of hope, stating that the land was given rest during the seventy years of exile, fulfilling God's command for Sabbath rest (v. 21). This highlights that even in judgment, God remains faithful to His promises and His plan for restoration.

Jeremiah 29:11 is one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. It reads, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (NKJV). However, it is usually quoted without the context, which is established in the previous verse: "For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you and cause you to return to this place" (KKJV). Even though God's people would be exiled in Babylon, God had a good plan for their future. How could they experience this future? The Lord promised, "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (v. 13). This is still God's message to His people: Even if we are stuck in "Babylon," we can find God if we will seek Him with all our being.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

We cannot be disciples if we are not willing to walk in the ways of the Lord, Jesus Christ. We should greet each day by renewing our commitment to remain faithful to the Word of our Lord.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

The goal of the church is not to judge or condemn sinners but to lead them to repentance and restoration through faith in Jesus. We should carefully consider how our ministries facilitate this goal.

The Kingdom of Judah and the Jews

After the demise of the northern kingdom of Israel (722 BC), the southern kingdom of Judah continued for another 136 years (until 586 BC). During this time, the terms Jew and Jews came into usage to identify people descended from the ancient Israelites (the twelve tribes descended from Jacob, the grandson of Abraham).

It is believed that the term Jews is a corruption of the word Judah. It is likely that outsiders began referring to the citizens of Judah as Judes, and this eventually contracted to Jews.

The first occurrence of the word Jews in the Old Testament is in 2 Kings 16:6 (KJV). In the Old Testament, the words Jew, Jews, Jew's, or Jewish are found 90 times: 10 times in the Book of Jeremiah, and most of the rest in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. This shows that, by the end of their captivity/exile (537 BC), the term Jew had been fully embraced by the Jews to identify themselves.

Today, it is commonly understood that the term Israel (in the Bible) refers to the ancient nation descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, while the term Hebrew identifies their native language, and the term Jew can mean their ethnic origin or their religion. In contemporary terms, citizens of the modern nation of Israel are called Israelis, and the religion of the Jews is called Judaism.

As of 2025, according to The World Almanac, the total worldwide population of Jews is 15,357,000. Of these, about 7 million live in Israel, and about 6 million live in the United States of America.

The strong link between Israel and the USA is based on the two nations' shared values regarding democracy, freedom, and human dignity, which are, in fact, Judeo-Christian (Biblical) values, shared by Jews and Christians.

While Jews and Christians have distinctive differences, Jesus and all of the first Christians were Jews. While the Jews have for their Bible The Tanakh (the Old Testament), Christians have for their Bible both the Old and New Testaments.

WORKSHEET

Good and Evil

What do Americans believe about evil? According to a 2021 Pew Research study:

- **48% say most things in society can be clearly divided into good and evil.**
- **50% say most things are too complicated to be divided into good and evil.**
- **Among Christians, 54% say most thing can be pretty clearly divided into good and evil; 44% say they cannot.**

Fill in the blanks of the phrase repeated regarding three successive kings of Judah:

“He did that which was _____ in the _____ of the _____.” – 2 Chronicles 36:5, 9, 12 (KJV)

According to 2 Chronicles 36:14-21, why was there “no remedy” for “the wrath of the Lord” against the people of Judah?

Logos.com says, “**Evil** is the corruption of creational and relational goodness. Evil consists of thoughts, actions, or forces that dimmish life. Evil takes what God planned for the good of all His creation and distorts or defiles it.”

- According to 1 Peter 3:17, why is it essential to differentiate between good and evil?
- Why is Solomon’s request in 1 Kings 3:9 appropriate for us today?