

LESSON

9 Judgment and
Captivity

We have studied the purpose of God as it has been shown in the history of His people. From a small beginning—one man of faith—they had grown into a powerful nation. But then, they had become a divided house. Now we study a series of disasters which God allowed to come upon them because of their sins. Both kingdoms fell, and the captives spent many years in a foreign land.

The captivity of His people brought great sorrow to the heart of God. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches us that the Lord corrects everyone He loves, “and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son” (Hebrews 12:6). If God must ever deal with us in a drastic manner to turn us away from sin, He does so with a heart of love. In love God must often draw those who wander away back into fellowship with himself through severe trial.

As you study this period in the history of God’s people, you will discover some of the lessons they learned through their bitter experiences. Some of these lessons brought them lasting spiritual benefits. And you will find in them truths that you can apply to your own life.

lesson outline

The Rod of Judgment

The Experience of Captivity

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- List in order the events before and during the fall of the northern and southern kingdoms.
- Give details on the captivity, the leaders that God raised up during it, and the lessons God's people learned from it.

learning activities

1. Study the lesson development; answer the study question. and complete the self-test as you have done in previous lessons. Read from the Bible as you are directed to by the lesson and study questions.
2. Pay close attention to the maps given in the lesson and be sure you understand them.

key words

Assyria
Babylon
exile

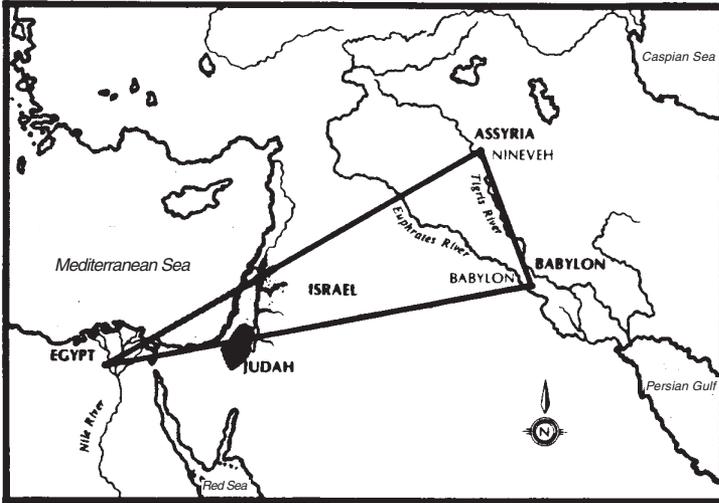
intervention
siege
supremacy

synagogue
vassal

lesson development**THE ROD OF JUDGMENT**

Objective 1. List in order the events before and during the fall of the northern and southern kingdoms.

We have become familiar with the warnings God gave to His people through the prophets. These warnings said that unfaithfulness to God had one result: disaster. God is patient, and judgment may be postponed, but ultimately unrighteousness would be judged. The Lord had tried to save His people, but they would not listen. Sometimes they responded with outward reforms, but there was no change in their inward life. Let us study the dark events of these years, however, in the light of one important understanding of the purpose God continued to have: He judged and purified His people, but He did not destroy them.

**The Fall of the Northern Kingdom**

We have seen how the nation of Israel was surrounded by three great powers: Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria. Each of these was trying to become the world's most powerful nation. Notice

the location of these nations in the preceding map. Israel and Judah were located in the middle of this triangle. When the people of God walked by faith, He protected them from these political pressures. But when they forsook Him, God used these nations first to warn, and finally to bring judgment upon them.

Application

- 1** Refer to the preceding map. Circle the letter in front of each TRUE statement.
- a)** Assyria is northwest of Judah and northeast of Babylon.
 - b)** Israel and Judah are located at about the same distance from both Assyria and Babylon.
 - c)** Egypt is closer to Assyria than to Judah and Israel.
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During the 16th year of the reign of king Ahab of Israel, a great king came to the throne of Assyria. This was Shalmaneser III. He frequently came into contact with the borders of Israel because he was building a great empire. Before his death, the gains he made were lost because of conflict within Assyria itself. However, the rulers who followed him—Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, and Sargon II—made Assyria the most important military and economic power in the area. This took them only 40 years. Ultimately, Israel was made a vassal state, paying tribute to Assyria for its existence. The prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah had warned that this would happen. But Israel had continued in sin.

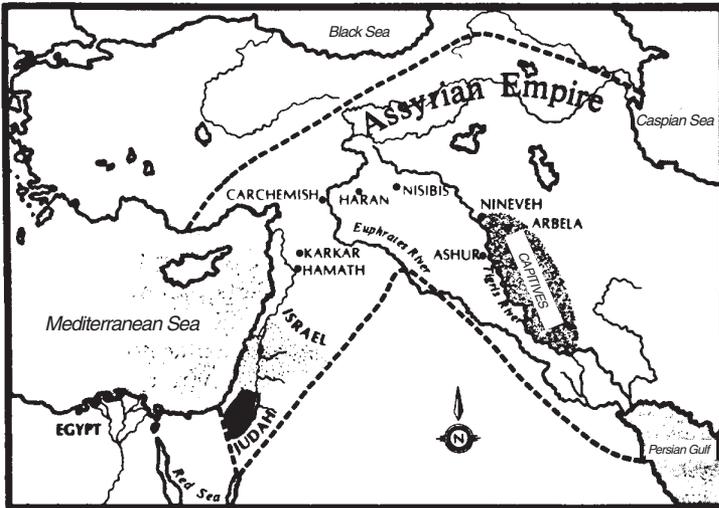
Application

- 2** Read 2 Kings 17:1–18. In your notebook, write the reasons why judgment came upon the northern kingdom.
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The northern kingdom was not only guilty of the list of sins with which God had charged them, but also of rejecting the messages of the prophets. The nation could have been saved if it had listened. God's warnings to and patience with them

should have produced righteousness. But finally, their repeated sin and rebellion brought judgment.

Because there was no genuine repentance, and because of the pride of Israel's leaders, God allowed Assyria to defeat them. Assyria laid a three-year siege to Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom. Then in 722 B.C. Sargon II captured the city and took the inhabitants of the northern kingdom into captivity. He resettled other captive tribes in the place where God's people had been (2 Kings 17:24). The descendants of these tribes are the Samaritans we read about in the Bible, such as in John 4. Notice on the following map where the captives of Israel were taken.



Application

3 Study the preceding map carefully. You can see how tremendous the Assyrian Empire was when compared to little Israel and Judah. The map shows that the captives were taken to a place

- a) south of Nineveh and east of the Tigris river.
- b) between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.
- c) located on the west side of the Persian Gulf.



But though we know where the ten tribes were taken, no account tells us what became of them after that. They simply disappear from history, never returning to their native land. Remember, however, that righteous members of every tribe had fled to Judah when the northern kingdom's first ruler, Jeroboam, had introduced idolatry. And probably some individuals who had been part of the northern kingdom returned to Jerusalem in the restoration we will study in Lesson 10.

Application

4 List in order the events of the fall of the northern kingdom. Write 1 before the one that happened first, 2 before the one that happened next, and so forth.

- ... **a** Shalmaneser III extended Assyria's kingdom.
- ... **b** The ten tribes were taken to Assyria.
- ... **c** Assyria became the most powerful nation of the area.
- ... **d** Sargon II captured Samaria.
- ... **e** A three-year siege was made against Samaria.



The Fall of the Southern Kingdom

The fall of their northern brothers was a tremendous warning and message from God to Judah. And for a variety of reasons, including God's intervention, Judah did not fall to Assyria at this time.

Application

5 Read 2 Kings 19:32–36 and Isaiah 36–37. How did God intervene to keep Judah from falling to the Assyrians?

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In time, however, Assyria itself fell to Babylon, who took over all its area. The prophet Nahum had predicted this. Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria and the place where Jonah had preached, was destroyed by Babylon in 612 B.C. Then Egypt challenged Babylon for possession of the western area of the fallen Assyrian empire. This included the territory in which little Judah, the southern kingdom, then stood alone. But Babylon remained supreme. God raised up strong prophetic voices such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah during this period.

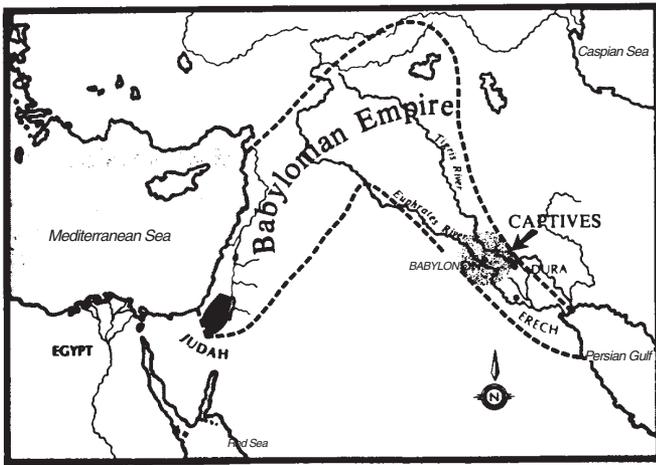
The southern kingdom failed to completely repent, although there were some bright spots of revival. Finally, the Lord used the Babylonians against Judah as He had used the Assyrians against Israel. The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah tell the reasons for God's judgment. Judah's struggle against Babylon lasted about 20 years. Then the southern kingdom was taken captive to Babylon in three sections:

1. 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar captured king Jehoiakim, the princes (Daniel and his companions) and the mighty men (2 Chronicles 36:5–6; Daniel 1:1–6). This is sometimes called the first captivity.
2. 598 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar took king Jehoiachin and 10,000 leading citizens to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14–16). The prophet Ezekiel and the great-grandfather of Mordecai, Esther's cousin, were also taken captive at this time.
3. 586 B.C. Jerusalem and the temple were burned and destroyed. Most of the remaining people were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7–9).

Application

- 6** Study the following map. This time, the captives were taken to a place
- a)** on the northern border of the Babylonian empire.
 - b)** in the area of the Tigris-Euphrates river valley.
 - c)** near the southern shore of the Caspian sea.
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The southern kingdom had a better fate than the northern. It was punished by trouble and exile, yet later a remnant did return and Jerusalem was rebuilt. (We will study this restoration in Lesson 10.) But the nation would never again have the glory and power it did during the days of David and Solomon; never again, that is, until Jesus Christ returns to establish His glorious, lasting kingdom. Of His government there will be no end (Revelation 11:15)!

Application

7 List in order the events of the fall of the southern kingdom. Write 1 before the one that happened first, 2 before the one that happened next, and so forth.

- ... **a** Daniel and his companions were taken to Babylon.
- ... **b** Jerusalem and the temple were burned and destroyed.
- ... **c** The southern kingdom was warned by the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria.
- ... **d** King Jehoiachin and Ezekiel were taken captive to Babylon.
- ... **e** Nineveh fell to the Babylonians.

THE EXPERIENCE OF CAPTIVITY

Objective 2. *Give details on the captivity, the leaders that God raised up during it, and the lessons God’s people learned from it.*

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple must have seemed like the end of the world to devout Jews. It was the ruin of all their hopes and the apparent triumph of the ungodly. Perhaps they felt that God had forgotten His people. But He had not!

Descriptions of Captivity

Four main writings in the Old Testament are closely associated with the years of the Babylonian captivity: Esther, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. These books help us understand what happened during those years.

The Jewish captives were settled in colonies at various points of the Babylonian empire. The previous map shows where the general area of settlement was. One group, with whom Ezekiel lived, was by the Chebar river (Ezekiel 1:1). Other groups formed special sections in larger towns, even in Babylon itself! The Jewish captives married, cultivated the ground, and became traders and business people. They eventually even owned houses and seemed to enjoy as much liberty as the other people of the country.

Application

8 Read Jeremiah 29:4–7. Notice what God told the captives to do. Why do you think God wanted them to do these things?

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In fact, from the stories of Daniel and Esther we discover that some Jewish captives rose to positions of great authority within both the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires. Such good treatment did not make most of them happy, though. They were captives in a foreign land. Their nation, their home, and

their temple were desolate. Psalm 137 is a moving description of their feelings at this time.

Application

9 Read Psalm 137 once silently; then read it aloud. This is a song of lament. What special place did the captives vow to never forget?

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Leaders During Captivity

God did not leave His scattered people without a message during their captivity. He raised up strong leaders among them. Daniel and Ezekiel are two examples of these. Both were from Judah, and both were taken captive to Babylon. Daniel was taken in the first group, and Ezekiel in the second.

Daniel was a princely young man who rose quickly into favor with Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. The book which records Daniel's experiences is rich in both history and prophecy. God allowed Daniel to predict the future kingdoms of the earth and to see the coming of the Messiah both to suffer and ultimately to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Application

10 Read Daniel, chapters 1–3, and 9. Then answer the following questions in your notebook.

- a)** What plan did Daniel propose to Ashpenaz so that he could be faithful to God's will concerning food and drink?
 - b)** How did Daniel show his faith in God when Nebuchadnezzar tested the wise men concerning his dream?
 - c)** What was the result of the experience Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had in the blazing furnace?
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Ezekiel was a young priest. God raised him up to witness to the captives that there was more judgment to come. When he began his ministry, Jerusalem and the temple had not yet been completely destroyed. For four and one-half years he preached the message of coming judgment. Then he retired to rest for two years until Jerusalem was destroyed. This fulfillment of his prophecy showed him to be a man of God. Later, God allowed Ezekiel to have the privilege of receiving marvelous visions of the ultimate reign of the Messiah and of the glorious future for all the true people of God. Read Ezekiel chapters 3–5, 7, 11, 33, 37, and 47 before continuing. Make a check mark here when you have completed your reading:

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Application

- 11** Answer the following questions in your notebook.
- a)** According to chapters 3–5, how did God have Ezekiel give the message of the destruction of Jerusalem to the captives?
 - b)** According to chapter 37, what vision did God give Ezekiel to show him that He would bring His people back to their land?
 - c)** Compare Ezekiel 47 to Revelation 22:1–3. What do you think is represented by the river that Ezekiel saw?
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Jeremiah continued to write and prophesy during this period. He was a greatly honored man, now that his prophecies had come true. For some reason he was allowed to remain in Judah and later went with the Israelites who fled into Egypt. His message also contained encouragement and hope for restoration; as we have seen, he predicted the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. Review and read Jeremiah chapters 29–31, 42, 50–52 before continuing. Make a check mark here when you have completed your reading:

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Esther was another person of the captivity period. The Babylonian empire was defeated by the Persians, and Esther lived during the time following this defeat. The Persian king Xerxes (also called Ahasuerus) was the ruler. She became his queen and because of her obedience to God and her courage, the Jews of her day were spared from destruction. Her story, like that of Ruth, is one showing God’s providence.

Application

12 Read Esther chapters 1–10. Especially notice 4:12–14. Can you make a comparison between your situation and Esther’s? In your notebook, write down any lessons you can learn from her experience.

13
Match each statement (left side) to the name of the prophet or person it describes (right side).

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|-----|----------|---|-------------|
| ... | a | Saw a vision of a statue which represented the future of the world’s kingdoms | 1) Daniel |
| ... | b | Helped save the Jews from being killed because of Haman’s plan | 2) Ezekiel |
| ... | c | Was a priest and prophet who preached the downfall of Jerusalem for four and one-half years | 3) Jeremiah |
| ... | d | Was a high official in the court of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon | 4) Esther |
| ... | e | Asked the Persian king, Xerxes, to stop the plan to kill the Jews | |
| ... | f | Sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon | |

Results of Captivity

Although the years of captivity were bitter and difficult, there were many good results that came from them. Among these results were the following five benefits.

Purification from idolatry. God had judged His people for their idolatry by allowing them to be taken into captivity. But during their exile, they became aware of His presence in a new way. Unlike the gods of Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt, who ceased to exist when their nations fell, the God of Israel was as powerful as ever. God's people saw His prophecies come to pass and experienced His distinct blessing on their lives. Their judgment actually became a spiritual victory; they never again showed a tendency to worship idols.

A new form of worship. Because there was no temple or tabernacle in the land of their captivity, the Israelites began holding meetings to read and discuss the Scriptures they possessed. This was the birth of the synagogue, a meeting place for worship. In the synagogue, people experienced a kind of teaching which led to closer relationships among them. This new form of worship was maintained even later when the temple had been restored. It greatly strengthened the faith of God's people.

A greater idea of God. Because they had been exiled from Palestine, the Israelites no longer thought of their land and temple as the only dwelling place of God. Their idea of God was enlarged. They began to receive God's message of a coming messiah! The idea that God would rule over the whole earth became more real to them.

A miraculous preservation. God supernaturally preserved a remnant of His people for the return to Jerusalem. This preservation was a miracle. They were not absorbed among the people of their land of captivity, as conquered nations had been before.

An effort to preserve the Scriptures. Another significant result of the captivity was that it produced an effort to gather together and preserve the sacred writings of the men whom God had inspired. This result has certainly brought great benefits to us today!

Application

14Read 2 Kings 19:31. In this prophecy God promised that

- a) there would be a group of survivors from Jerusalem.
- b) all the captives of Judah would return to Zion.
- c) more people would return to Jerusalem than had left it.

15 Which statement gives the most complete description of the benefits God's people gained from their years of bondage and captivity?

- a) After their years of captivity, the Israelites did not worship idols as they had done before. They realized that though their nation had fallen, the God of Israel was still their God and had not been defeated.
- b) Though they had been taken captive into a foreign nation they were miraculously preserved by God from losing their identity as a distinct people. This preservation made it possible for them to one day return to Jerusalem.
- c) They turned away from idolatry and their ideas about God were enlarged. They began new ways of worship and were preserved by God so they could return to their land. They began collecting and preserving the Scriptures.



As the years went by, the people of God became aware of the great purposes God had in allowing them to undergo judgment and endure captivity. They no longer had doubts about God's majesty and supremacy. They had learned a wonderful but costly lesson.

self-test

- 1** Of the three great world powers during the years of God's judgment on Israel, the one located south and west of Palestine was
- a) Assyria.
 - b) Babylon.
 - c) Egypt.
- 2** Circle the letter in front of each TRUE statement.
- a) Samaria was captured after being besieged by Babylon for 3 years.
 - b) Jerusalem fell to the Assyrians in 586 B.C.
 - c) The Assyrian empire was taken over by the Babylonian empire.
 - d) The Babylonian empire was not as large as the Assyrian.
- 3** Arrange the following events in their correct order. Write 1 before the one which occurred first, 2 before the one which occurred next, and so forth.
- ... a) Babylon was defeated by the Persians.
 - ... b) Jerusalem fell to king Nebuchadnezzar.
 - ... c) God intervened to keep Jerusalem from falling to the Assyrians.
 - ... d) Sargon II conquered Samaria.
 - ... e) The prophet Ezekiel was taken captive.
 - ... f) Esther persuaded king Xerxes to let the Jews defend themselves.
- 4** Suppose you were teaching a group of people that it is important for us to obey God's will in matters concerning the care of our bodies. Which of the following would provide the best example?
- a) Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones
 - b) Daniel's explanation of king Nebuchadnezzar's dream
 - c) Daniel's success with Ashpenaz
 - d) Esther's influence on king Xerxes

5 Read each statement concerning the years of judgment and captivity (left side). Then decide whether it represents a description of a *reason* for judgment, a *means* God used in bringing judgment, or a *benefit* that was a result of judgment (right side).

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|-----|----------|---|------------|
| ... | a | The Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed it. | 1) Reason |
| | | | 2) Means |
| ... | b | The southern kingdom did not fully repent even after the northern kingdom fell. | 3) Benefit |
| ... | c | Idolatry was widespread among both the kings and the people. | |
| ... | d | Synagogues were started where Jews discussed the Scriptures. | |
| ... | e | God's people gained a new understanding of His power and supremacy. | |

answers to study questions

8 Because He wanted them to be strong and able to return to their land when the years of captivity were over (or a similar answer)

- 1 a)** False
- b)** True
- c)** False

9 Jerusalem

2 Judgment came because they worshipped other gods, followed the customs of the Canaanites, and did things God disliked (or a similar answer).

- 10 a)** That he be allowed to follow God's command for ten days so as to prove to Ashpenaz that it brought health.
- b)** He asked for time to find out about the dream and prayed to God to reveal its mystery to him.
- c)** The king praised the God of Israel and forbade people to speak disrespectfully of Him.

(Your answers should be similar.)

3 a) south of Nineveh and east of the Tigris river.

- 11 a)** He had him act out the siege using various objects and motions.
- b)** He had a vision of a valley of dry bones which were revived.
- c)** It could represent the presence of God in giving life and healing.

(These are suggested answers. Yours may be similar or slightly different.)

- 4 a)** 1
- b)** 5
- c)** 2
- d)** 4
- e)** 3

12 Your answer. Sometimes God allows us to have a position of favor or authority so we can be a special influence for good. This was true of Esther's life.

5 An angel of the Lord killed the Assyrian soldiers.

- 13 a** 1) Daniel
b 4) Esther
c 2) Ezekiel
d 1) Daniel
e 4) Esther
f 3) Jeremiah

6 b) in the area of the Tigris-Euphrates river valley.

14 a) there would be a group of survivors from Jerusalem.

- 7 a** 3
b 5
c 1
d 4
e 2

15 c) They turned away from idolatry (The other two answers each mention only one of the benefits.)