

THE HOLY LAND DESOLATED.

– DEC. 18. – JER. 52:1-11. –

"Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your hearts." – Jer. 29:13.

MORE than a thousand years had elapsed from the time God led Israel out of Egypt to be his covenanted people, and during that entire period they had been rebellious. While manifesting toward them his favor, it had been accompanied with chastisements, defeats in battle, captivity to surrounding nations, pestilence and drouth, intermingled. God had faithfully kept his part of the covenant during all that time, chastising them for unfaithfulness, nevertheless in great mercy hearkening to their repentance and promise of reform, and delivering them, and blessing them. Now the time had come to give them a more severe lesson than they had ever previously had, and to take away their national independence completely.

The Lord's determination, as expressed through the Prophet Jeremiah, was that he would deliver them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and that the land should lie desolate for seventy years, and that their King Zedekiah should be the last one who would sit upon the typical throne of the Lord. The prophecy concerning these matters was most explicit, declaring, "Thou profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord God, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low [humble] and abase him that is high [proud]. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." – Ezek. 21:25.

The Lord dealt with Israel tenderly, carefully, giving them every opportunity to learn the needed lessons: (1) In the separation of the kingdom into two parts, and the object lesson furnished to Judah (the

loyal remnant) to notice the works of idolatry in Ephraim (the disloyal ten-tribe kingdom). To a certain extent this for a time was beneficial to Judah. (2) When they witnessed the captivity and dispersion of the ten-tribe kingdom because of disloyalty to Jehovah, the lesson should have been deeply impressed.

Judah represented those Israelites who were faithful to the Lord, those who trusted in the promises, all of which centered in Judah: and, as we have seen, into their territory many of the *faithful* of the ten tribes removed. Yet with all these lessons, and with the instructions of the prophets, the history of the nation was one of unfaithfulness to their great King, Jehovah. Now the time for the change which God saw best to bring upon them had come, and nothing could avert it, as we saw in the last lesson. Nevertheless, they were given a hope that at the end of a certain period of seventy years' chastisement the Lord would graciously bring back those who revered him. And it is worthy of note that only those who had respect unto the Lord and to the promises made to their fathers would find any inducement to return; for the Land of Promise meanwhile had become a veritable wilderness, while seventy years residence in a new land would root and attach to it all who had not considerable faith in God's promises. And altho the edict of Cyrus gave permission to *all* of the multitudes of the entire twelve tribes then in captivity in his dominion to return to Palestine, less than fifty-five thousand persons availed themselves of it and returned. The others were faithless, better pleased to remain in Babylon. The whole number of the children of Israel at that time must have been at least two millions "scattered abroad."

Thus did the Lord sift out from that nation all except the more faithful families; to give them a better opportunity of profiting by his instructions and disciplines, and to the intent that, if possible, a sufficient number of that people should be brought to a condition of heart-readiness to receive Messiah at his first advent, and to be received by him as his joint-heirs, his elect Bride. God's dealings with that nation did develop, as we know, a considerable number who

received the Lord, and to whom he gave liberty to become "sons" and of the Kingdom class. (John 1:12.) Nevertheless, these were but a "remnant" selected out of that nation, after it had been sifted, as we have seen, several times. And these, fortunately for us Gentiles, were ***not enough to complete the elect number***, and hence the call to joint-heirship with Christ has been extended also to us. [R2401 : page 360] By Israel's failure to develop a sufficient number to complete the elect Body of Christ, this great privilege and blessing has come to the Gentiles; – "to take out of them a people ***for his name,***" to complete the elect number of the Seed of Abraham which is to bless all the families of the earth. – Gal. 3:29.

Another thought: there has been a parallel between the experiences of Fleshly Israel and Spiritual Israel. During the period of Moses and Joshua and the Elders that outlived Joshua, Fleshly Israel prospered, because obedient to the Lord: so the Church, Spiritual Israel, prospered during the days of our Lord and his apostles. By and by, neglecting the Lord, they became worldlike, and the result was the splitting off of the ten tribes: so the Christian Church, becoming worldly through neglect of the Word of the Lord, suffered the loss of the great majority in the "falling away" of Papacy, which substituted the mass for the ransom and worships the creature ("saints," relics, the Virgin, etc.) instead of the Creator. As the Lord sifted the faithful of the ten tribes into the two tribes (Judah), so he gathered the faithful out of Papacy. And as he sifted Judah, so he has been sifting Protestants to gather out the "jewels." As only a remnant of the whole of nominal Fleshly Israel was found ***worthy*** in the Jewish "harvest," so only a remnant of nominal Spiritual Israel will be found ***worthy*** of the Kingdom in the present "harvest." But how glad we are to know from the Lord's Word that neither those ***sifted out*** during the Jewish age, nor those ***sifted out*** during the Gospel age as ***non-elect***, were sifted into eternal torment: and that, altho they will be caused to suffer "stripes" in proportion as they knew to do well and did it not, yet they were all redeemed and are all to be brought into the clearer light of the Millennial Kingdom and thus be blessed with

opportunity for restitution and eternal life through the *elect* Church – the Christ, Head and Body.

The captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar was in two parts: (1) He carried captive the chief of the warriors and craftsmen, and noble people of the land, about eighteen thousand being specified – Daniel and his companions being of this number. (2 Kings 24:12-18.) He left the poor and less capable people in the land, appointing over them as under-king the uncle of Jehoiachin, *viz.*, Zedekiah, whom he compelled to take an oath of allegiance to the Kingdom of Babylon. (2) [R2402 : page 360] The second captivity was eleven years later, and was the result of Zedekiah's unfaithfulness to his oath of allegiance, for he attempted to throw off the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar.

This is one of the points at which chronologists in general blunder. They begin to count the seventy years mentioned by the prophet from the captivity of Jehoiachin, instead of eleven years later, at the captivity of Zedekiah. They very generally fail to notice an important item; *viz.*, that the Lord does not specify through Jeremiah's prophecy, seventy years of *captivity*, but seventy years of *desolation of the land* without an inhabitant. – See chapter on Chronology in MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. II.

The fulfilment of two very remarkable prophecies is noted in the concluding verses of this lesson. The Prophet Ezekiel had explicitly declared (1) that King Zedekiah should be led into Babylon a captive, should live there and die there, and nevertheless never see the city. (Ezek. 12:10-13.) (2) Apparently to the contrary of this was Jeremiah's prophecy, while he was in a dungeon in Jerusalem during the siege; he declared that Zedekiah should speak with Nebuchadnezzar mouth to mouth, and see his eyes. Our lesson shows how both of these predictions were fulfilled: Zedekiah did indeed see the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar and did talk with him; then, his eyes being put out, he was carried a prisoner to Babylon, in which city he

lived without seeing it. Thus sometimes the Lord speaks to us through his prophets matters which seem contradictory and require considerable faith; yet subsequently, when we note the fulfilment of the predictions, these peculiarities of statement and fulfilment serve to strengthen faith, and to convince us that the affairs about us are not occurring haphazard or by chance, but so far as God's people are concerned (spiritual as well as natural Israel), they are all under the divine supervision and guidance.

In Ezekiel's prophecy of the dispersion of the Jews the Lord intimates that he would pursue them even in foreign countries with the sword and famine and pestilence, so that the worst characters amongst that people should be cut off, and thus the sifting be the more complete. If there were anything in the Scriptures to indicate that the Israelites, in coming under the terms of the Law Covenant at Mount Sinai, became liable to a penalty of eternal torment if unfaithful to it, it would be indeed a terrible thought; but there is no such intimation anywhere. The highest penalty of their Law was death: "He that violated Moses' law *died* without mercy." Consequently, even if our Lord Jesus had not come, or if at his coming he had accomplished nothing for those who were under the Law, the worst penalty they could be subjected to was death. Hence, if the death of Christ had effected nothing as respects the Jews under the Law Covenant, but had affected the Gentiles only, bringing them forgiveness and the possibility of a reconciliation to God and the attainment of eternal life, it would but prove that Israel according to the flesh was disadvantaged by the Law Covenant entered into at Mount Sinai. But the Apostle, divinely guided, points out to us explicitly that our Lord's death not only redeemed those who were not under the Law Covenant, but also that those who were under the Law Covenant were "redeemed from the curse of the Law." – Gal. 3:13.

Accordingly, we have the good hope that not only the living Gentiles shall come to the light and blessing of the Millennial Kingdom (Isa. 60:3), but also the living Jews at that time; and that

eventually that Light shall be manifested to all the families of the earth (Isa. 40:5; Luke 3:6) – the dead as well as the living – and it is to this end that the Lord has promised that the hour is coming, in the which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and come forth (John 5:29) – that all may have a trial, a judgment, under the favorable and righteous conditions which his Kingdom will inaugurate.

This future hope, as respects Israel, is expressed in our Golden Text, "Ye shall seek me, and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart." The Apostle Paul assures us that during the present Gospel age natural Israel has been nationally "*blinded*," so as not to have been able to discern the Lord; but he also shows us that when the Gospel Church shall have been completed from amongst the Gentiles, favor shall return to Israel, they shall be saved from their blindness, and obtain mercy at the hands of the glorified Spiritual Israel: and then, through Spiritual Israel and reclaimed Natural Israel, the blessings of the Lord, the knowledge of his grace, shall be extended, with all the blessed opportunities that implies, to all the families of the earth. – Rom. 11:25-32.
