



THE FALL OF A GREAT NATION

Course 3, *The People of Destiny*, Lesson 11

The Problem: The history of ancient Israel is a testament to a cycle of prosperity and calamity, shaped by its relationship with God. Over centuries, the nation faced repeated invasions from neighboring powers, often resulting in subjugation and the displacement of its people. This raises a profound question: If Israel was God's chosen nation, entrusted with proclaiming His name, why did it endure such suffering? Shouldn't divine favor have shielded it from the tribulations faced by other nations?

The explanation is straightforward. God's promises of protection and prosperity were always conditional—dependent on Israel's unwavering loyalty to Him. When the Israelites enjoyed peace and abundance, they often grew complacent, relying on their own strength rather than seeking God. Only in times of crisis did they turn back to Him in repentance. Yet, the nation never fully grasped the invaluable blessings of steadfast faithfulness and failed to learn the lesson that straying from God inevitably led to decline.

Throughout history, Israel's leaders elevated their own desires above divine will, leading their people into turmoil and suffering as God withdrew His guidance and protection. This pattern ultimately culminated in the nation's greatest rejection—its refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

What greater gift could God bestow upon a nation than to send His Son to live among them, embody perfect righteousness, and offer salvation? And yet, Israel did not receive Him. Preferring their own interpretations of divine law, they rejected Christ and condemned Him to the cross. This marked the turning point in Israel's spiritual history. No longer was one nation designated as the bearer of God's message; instead, the Gospel was entrusted to the international Christian Church, open to all believers, regardless of nationality.

Christ's love remains boundless—He redeems and saves Jews as He does all people. However, the privilege of being God's chosen messengers now belongs to His followers worldwide.

The downfall of ancient Israel highlights a sobering truth: prosperity is far more perilous to faithfulness than adversity. Hardship often awakens human dependence on God, while abundance tempts people to trust in wealth, social status, and personal achievements—forgetting their spiritual poverty before God. As Revelation 3:17 warns, *"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked."*

True peace, both personal and national, comes only through seeking Christ and aligning with His will. When His love inspires spiritual, moral, and ethical integrity, people can stand firm against darkness and fulfill their divine purpose.

Objectives:

- I. We analyze the division of Israel into two kingdoms following Solomon's reign, assessing its impact on the nation's stability and spiritual trajectory.
- II. We investigate the Assyrian captivity, exploring the fall of the northern ten tribes to the Assyrians, identifying the causes and consequences of their conquest and exile.
- III. We evaluate Judah's spiritual decline and Babylonian captivity, assessing Judah's repeated apostasies and the eventual divine judgment that led to its conquest by the Neo-Babylonians.
- IV. We examine Israel's Rejection of Jesus Christ, investigating the spiritual and historical significance of Israel's rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, and considering its impact on the nation's divine calling.

- V. We assess the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as the final consequence of Israel's national apostasy, marking the transition of God's message to the international Christian Church.

I. THE DIVISION OF THE NATION

Due to Solomon's departure from the Lord and his role in leading the nation into apostasy, God foretold that Israel would be divided during the reign of his son (1 Kings 11:11-13). True to His word, this prophecy was fulfilled, marking a pivotal moment in Israel's history.

The Word:

1. What promise did the Lord make to Jeroboam, a servant of Solomon? 1 Kings 11:30-33
2. What harsh attitude did Solomon's son, Rehoboam, adopt toward the people at the commencement of his reign? 1 Kings 12:12-15
3. How did the people react to Rehoboam's stated policy? 1 Kings 12:16-17
4. Who was made king by the northern 10 tribes? 1 Kings 12:20
5. How did Jeroboam introduce apostasy into the 10 northern tribes of Israel? 1 Kings 12:26-33

Explanation: After the division of Israel, the tribe that remained under Rehoboam's rule consisted of Judah and Benjamin (1 Kings 12:21-24). Additionally, the priests and Levites, whom Jeroboam had replaced in religious service, migrated to Judah and Jerusalem, where they continued to worship the true God (2 Chronicles 11:12-17).

While God had promised Jeroboam kingship over the ten northern tribes, He bore no responsibility for Rehoboam's unwise and oppressive treatment of his people. God's omniscience allowed Him to foresee the events that would unfold early in Rehoboam's reign. As 1 Kings 12:15 illustrates, Scripture often attributes to God the things He permits rather than directly causes. However, God does not lead anyone into sin (James 1:13), nor does He dictate human actions. His predetermination is always based on His foreknowledge of human choices (Romans 8:29).

Jeroboam had undeniable proof of God's favor and approval. The prophet Ahijah revealed God's plan to grant him kingship over the northern ten tribes. One might assume such a divine endorsement would compel Jeroboam to serve the Lord faithfully and guide his people in righteousness. However, rather than honoring God's covenant, Jeroboam established idolatrous worship and appointed non-Levitical priests, leading Israel into deepening apostasy. Over time, this spiritual decline intensified, ultimately resulting in Israel's subjugation by foreign enemies (1 Kings 14:4-16).

Relevance: Leaders wield significant influence over their followers. The actions of Solomon, Rehoboam, and Jeroboam set dangerous precedents, leading the nation into a destructive path from which it never fully recovered. Their choices serve as a sobering reminder that before embracing wrongdoing, we should consider the impact of our actions on others and seek divine guidance to set a righteous example.

II. ISRAEL TAKEN CAPTIVE BY ASSYRIA

The northern ten tribes, centered in Samaria, became known as Israel, while the remaining two tribes, centered in Jerusalem, formed the kingdom of Judah. Israel never recovered from the apostasy introduced by Jeroboam I, whose influence set a precedent for continued spiritual decline. Biblical records frequently compare the sins of subsequent kings to the transgressions of Jeroboam (2 Kings 9:9; 13:6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28). Few rulers of Israel were described as doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Instead, most led the nation further from true worship, deepening its moral and spiritual decay. Many of these kings ultimately met violent ends, falling to assassination as political instability and corruption took hold.

The Word:

6. Through Moses, what had the Lord warned would be the result of apostasy? Deuteronomy 28:15, 36-37
7. What nation did the prophets predict would take the northern 10 tribes captive unless they repented? 1 Kings 14:15; Isaiah 8:4, 7; Hosea 8:5-9; 10:5-8; Amos 7:11
8. How were the prophecies fulfilled regarding the fall of Israel to the Assyrians? 2 Kings 15:17-20, 29-30, 17:1-6
9. What reason does the Bible give for the 10 tribes of Israel being taken captive by the Assyrians? 2 Kings 17:7-15

Explanation: Deuteronomy 28 outlines the blessings Israel would receive for faithfulness to God, as well as the curses that would follow if the nation turned to sin. Throughout the history of the northern ten tribes, the Lord repeatedly warned that unless the king and his people repented, He would allow the Assyrians to invade and take them captive. It is one of history's great tragedies that a nation so richly blessed with evidence of God's love and guidance chose instead to embrace immorality, idolatry, and materialism. As Hosea 11:8 poignantly asks, what more could God have done to redeem His wayward people?

The final years of Israel's northern kingdom tell a grim tale of political instability and deepening apostasy. In 752 B.C., Shallum assassinated Zechariah, only to be killed by Menahem after reigning for just one month. Menahem (752-742 B.C.) heavily taxed the people to pay off Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (also known as Pul in 2 Kings 15:19). His son Pekahiah ruled briefly (742-740 B.C.) before being assassinated by Pekah (740-732 B.C.). During Pekah's reign, Tiglath-Pileser invaded again, annexing Israel's northern and eastern territories (2 Kings 15:29). Pekah, in turn, was assassinated by Hoshea (732-722 B.C.), Israel's last king. Seeking refuge in an alliance with Egypt's So, Hoshea was ultimately unable to prevent the Assyrians, led by Shalmaneser V and later Sargon II, from invading in 723/722 B.C. and carrying the majority of Israel's people into captivity (2 Kings 17:1-6).

Following Israel's downfall, the Assyrian king repopulated its cities with people from Babylonia, northern Mesopotamia, and Hamath in Syria (2 Kings 17:24). These settlers brought their own religions but also adopted elements of Israel's worship, blending practices over time. Through intermarriage with the remaining Israelites, they became known as the Samaritans—a community that has persisted into modern history.

Relevance: The dissolution of Israel's northern kingdom remains one of history's greatest tragedies. At its core, the cause was not military weakness or poor governance, but apostasy—the nation's abandonment of the worship of the one true God. The lesson for us is clear: only through faithfulness to Christ can we hope for His guidance and blessing, both individually and nationally.

III THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH

Judah's Decline and Apostasy: Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and just over a century later, Judah faced its first invasion by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Compared to Israel, Judah's kings had a slightly better spiritual record. Of the twenty kings who reigned from Rehoboam to Zedekiah, eight were described as doing right in the sight of the Lord, while twelve led the nation into evil.

From the reign of Manasseh (c. 696–c. 641 B.C.) to Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.), Judah experienced nearly uninterrupted apostasy. The only significant exception was the reign of King Josiah (2 Kings 22), who passionately sought to restore the nation's fading spiritual vitality.

Josiah ruled over Judah from 639 to 609/608 B.C., and in the thirteenth year of his reign (626 B.C.), God called Jeremiah to the prophetic office. Recognizing the deep spiritual decline left by Manasseh and Amon, Josiah became a committed religious reformer. According to 2 Chronicles 34, he destroyed the high places of Baal, dismantled altars built for false gods, and led Israel back to true worship. During this time, Hilkiah the High Priest discovered *the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses* (2 Chronicles 34:14). Josiah read it publicly, sparking a nationwide revival.

Despite his dedication to spiritual renewal, Josiah was killed at the Battle of Megiddo in 609/608 B.C., and his son Jehoahaz took the throne. He ruled for only three months (2 Kings 23:30-34) before being replaced by Jehoiakim, who reigned from 609/608 to 597 B.C. (1 Chronicles 3:15; 2 Kings 23:34). Under Jehoiakim's rule, Judah fell into severe spiritual decline, setting the stage for its eventual captivity.

The Word:

10. What plea and warning did Jeremiah give to apostate Judah? Jeremiah 4:1-2, 5-6
11. Why did the Lord say He would have allowed to invade Judah if the people did not repent? Jeremiah 25:1-11
12. Briefly describe Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion of Palestine. 2 Kings 23:26 – 24:1; Daniel 1:1-3
13. Describe Nebuchadnezzar's second invasion. 2 Kings 24:8-17
14. Describe Nebuchadnezzar's third and final invasion of Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Kings 24:20 – 25:1-12

Explanation: For years, Jeremiah pleaded with the people of Judah to renew their covenant with the Lord. Despite his relentless appeals, they refused to turn from their sinful ways. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Jeremiah warned that Nebuchadnezzar would invade the land, destroy its cities, and take its people captive to Babylon.

The first invasion came in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, plundered the temple treasures, and deported members of the royal family and nobility to Babylon. Among these captives were Daniel and his companions (Daniel 1:1-3). Yet the people remained unrepentant, and in 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar returned. This time, he exiled Jehoiachin, who had ruled for only three months, and installed his uncle Zedekiah as king.

Zedekiah proved disloyal both to God and to Nebuchadnezzar. His rebellion led to the third and most devastating invasion in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem for 30 months (Jan. 15, 588 – July 19, 586), ultimately destroying the city, including Solomon's magnificent temple. Zedekiah and the majority of the population were taken to Babylon, leaving only a small remnant behind in Judah.

Relevance: Jeremiah, often called the weeping prophet, pleaded earnestly for Judah to turn back to God, but the people refused to listen. As a result, the Lord withdrew His protection, and the nation fell, enduring 70 years of exile (Jeremiah 25:17). This solemn history reminds us that God extends His love and mercy, always willing to forgive and restore. However, when we reject His call, He allows us to experience the consequences of our rebellion. May we choose to heed His voice while there is still time.

III. ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

The Neo-Babylonian Empire (605–539 B.C.) eventually fell to the Persians, who issued decrees allowing the Jews to return to their homeland (Ezra 1–7). With renewed opportunity, Israel once again turned to the Lord and followed His precepts—for a time. However, as centuries passed, the nation's loyalty to God steadily waned.

Throughout this period, Israel remained under foreign rule. The Persians were succeeded by the Greeks, followed by the Egyptians, the Syrians, and ultimately the Romans. Rarely did the Jews experience true independence. In 63 B.C., Syria and Judea were absorbed into the growing Roman Empire, making Israel a subject of Rome by the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

God had promised that Israel's prosperity and national sovereignty depended on its faithfulness to Him (Deuteronomy 28). However, the nation's ultimate downfall came with its rejection of Jesus Christ. This marked the decisive end of Israel's status as God's chosen vessel for proclaiming His message to the world.

The Word:

15. According to the Apostle John, what was the attitude of the Jews to Jesus? John 1:11
16. How did Jesus express His sorrow at being rejected by His own people? John 5:43; Luke 19:41-42
17. What was the final insult that doomed the nation Israel to rejection as the chosen nation of God? John 19:15-18

Explanation: Had Jesus come as a worldly king, leading Israel to military victory over its enemies, the people would have gladly crowned Him as their ruler (John 6:15). However, Jesus made the nature of His kingdom unmistakably clear: "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here*" John 18:36.

This presents a striking paradox: Jesus did not choose Israel to establish one nation as superior among others but to entrust them with His saving truth for the world (John 18:37). When they failed in that divine mission, their national independence and prominence no longer carried significance in heaven's plan. God cannot use as messengers of His truth those who reject the truth themselves. The rejection of Christ was the ultimate rejection of truth, leaving God no choice but to withdraw His presence and allow the nation to follow its own path.

Relevance: Today, Christ continues His work through individuals, churches, and nations that willingly accept Him as "*the way, the truth, and the life*" John 14:6. Rejecting His truth inevitably leads to spiritual decline and the loss of His guiding presence. However, embracing Jesus and His message opens the door to a life of great purpose, fulfillment, and service in His name.

IV. THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (A.D. 70) AND THE REJECTION OF ISRAEL AS THE CHOSEN NATION

Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah sealed its fate, making the fulfillment of His prophecies of calamity and destruction unavoidable.

The Word:

18. What did Jesus say would happen to Jerusalem? Luke 19:43-44; Matthew 24:1-2, 15-22
19. Who have now taken Israel's place as the chosen people? Romans 9:6-8, 24-26
20. Even though the Lord rejected Israel as the chosen nation, is there still hope for Jews to be saved? Romans 10:1, 11-13; 11:1-7, 20-21

Explanation: In the spring of A.D. 66, a Jewish revolt erupted against Roman rule. The final Roman procurator at the time, Gessius Florus, oversaw a period of escalating violence in which Jews and Gentiles slaughtered one another. That autumn, Cestius Gallus, the Roman legate of Syria, led a military campaign against Jerusalem. Although his forces penetrated as far as the northern temple wall, he inexplicably withdrew. Christians in the city recognized this as the sign Jesus had foretold, urging them to flee (Matthew 24:15-20). Many found refuge in Pella, located in Perea.

Jerusalem remained free from direct Roman assault from A.D. 66 to 70. In A.D. 67, General Vespasian arrived, systematically conquering the surrounding regions while allowing internal Jewish factions in the city to weaken one another. By A.D. 69, Vespasian had ascended to the throne as Roman emperor, leaving his son, Titus, to command the army in Palestine.

In April A.D. 70, Titus besieged Jerusalem. Inside the city, three rival Jewish factions were embroiled in bitter conflict. The combination of civil strife, starvation, and a grueling five-month siege led to staggering casualties—over 100,000 perished. In August, Roman forces stormed and destroyed the temple, reducing it to ashes. Shortly afterward, the entire

city was left in ruins. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the siege and subsequent devastation claimed the lives of more than a million Jews, with 97,000 taken prisoner by the Romans.

God's Sovereign Plan and Love for All People: The fall of Israel as a chosen nation marked a profound turning point in biblical history. Though the Lord withdrew His divine commission from the nation that had rejected and crucified Him, His love for the Jewish people remains as deep and enduring as His love for all humanity.

In Romans 9–11, the Apostle Paul presents two key truths regarding the Jewish people. First, the spiritual heritage of Israel is now extended to the entire body of Christian believers, transcending all racial and national distinctions. With the rejection of Israel as the exclusive bearer of God's message, the Gospel commission was entrusted to all who follow Christ, uniting His people worldwide.

Second, God's love for the Jewish people remains unwavering. As individuals, they are just as precious in His sight as any other nation or group. His desire is that, through faith in Jesus and the acceptance of His grace, they will be grafted into the Christian Church—joining all believers in the triumphant journey toward the heavenly Zion.

Relevance: Israel's history serves as a powerful lesson for all generations:

- 1) Material prosperity can threaten spiritual devotion. When Israel flourished, it often forgot God, exchanging faith for worldly pursuits. Wealth and success, while not inherently wrong, become dangerous when they lead to spiritual complacency.
- 2) God's purpose for choosing Israel was entirely spiritual. His selection was never about national superiority or political dominance but about entrusting Israel with His truth to share with the world (Isaiah 43:8-10). Their calling was evangelistic, meant to radiate divine knowledge beyond their borders.
- 3) Blessings follow obedience, while rejection leads to loss. God's favor rests upon individuals and nations that serve Him. When they turn away, He withdraws His blessings, and calamity inevitably follows.

Dear student of His Word, know that Jesus loves you with a boundless love beyond human comprehension (Jeremiah 31:3). He longs for you to respond to His Spirit's call—to step out of darkness and into the peace, joy, and salvation He freely offers. Only through Christ can true fulfillment be found in this life and a secure place in His eternal Kingdom.

With all sincerity, we appeal to you: embrace the love of Christ, accept Him as your Savior and Lord, and walk in His truth.

Will you take that step today?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The nation of Israel was divided after the reign of Solomon because of apostasy.
 - b. The Israelites would never have been taken captive if they had remained true to God.
 - c. God used the Assyrians and Babylonians to attack His people because these nations were more righteous than Israel
 - d. The Lord would have rejected Israel as the chosen nation even if they had accepted Jesus as the Messiah.
2. How does the role of churches today in sharing God's truth compare to Israel's responsibility as the chosen nation? In what ways can modern believers ensure they fulfill this mission faithfully?