

CHAPTER ONE World Judgment

The Coming Destruction of Jerusalem

Joel 2:30-32 And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, when the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Contrary to the fond expectations of both Jews and Christians, Jerusalem, and the modern state of Israel, will be blasted from the face of the earth. Great Babylon, the Great Harlot of the nations, will bring this event. In turn she will receive God's judgment.

The images invoked by the Joel passage are awesome. The sun turning to darkness, and the moon looking like blood, denote cataclysmic events. Until the year 1960, and the advent of nuclear missiles, with sufficient numbers of warheads, the possibility of humankind creating such earth-shaking events was not in the conceptual range of theologians, material scientists, or social engineers. Prior to that decade explanation of this passage, and similar passages elsewhere in the Bible, was based on purely traditional images.

Carl Sagan was one of our most eloquent and brilliant scientists. He collaborated with a group of other scientists to estimate the damage to our planet from a nuclear war. In an article entitled *The Nuclear Winter*, published in Parade Magazine, Oct 30, 1983, Sagan described the results of their calculations. They believed enough dust and debris would be lifted into the atmosphere to screen sunlight from the surface of the earth. They estimated that the sunlight would be reduced sufficiently to freeze all living things upon the planet, even for a small nuclear exchange. Their results were based on models drawn from astronomical observation of the planet Mars, not strictly applicable to the earth's atmosphere. But those scientists invoked the same images of clouds and thick darkness. They concluded that if those days are not shortened, if a nuclear exchange is not severely limited, no human being will survive. The sun will indeed be darkened. The moon will look like it has turned to blood. And the stars will not shine.

Jesus described the same earth condition:

Matt 24:21-22 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

Is anyone foolish enough to not understand? Can such vivid statements escape any intelligent person?

Faith in the current social system, and confidence in the present world order, prevents most individuals from coming to grips with such dramatic pronouncements of judgment, doom, and terror. But that faith and that confidence is about to be broken in a great spiritual judgment now coming down upon us.

A few here and there will recognize the significance of such warnings and will take appropriate action. They will be the ones whom the LORD calls.

In order to provide enhanced understanding I shall tabulate statements from the Bible which show the nature of the coming material judgment. I shall limit my discussion. We no longer have time for academic debates or philosophical dissertations. Each individual must decide for himself.

A Global Event

Isa 24:6 Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.

Jeremiah 25 also describes the global nature of the coming judgment.

30-33: You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: "The LORD will roar from on high, and from his holy habitation utter his voice; he will roar mightily against his fold, and shout, like those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. "The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against the nations; he is entering into judgment with all flesh, and the wicked he will put to the sword, says the LORD." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Behold, evil is going forth from nation to nation, and a great tempest is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth! And those slain by the LORD on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground."

God spoke to his people, those who will choose for him, those who will make the correct decisions, those who will have the courage to act in the face of gloval disaster.

Jer 30:11 For I am with you to save you, says the LORD; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will chasten you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.

Many believe this means the Jews, but it truly means all of God's people, both the literal and spiritual children of Israel.

Warnings to God's People

Time and time again God spoke to us. But how many truly turned their hearts to him?

Isa 10:22 For though your people Israel be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.

The statement is directed to all of Israel, not merely the Jews.

Isa 13:6-16 Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every man's heart will melt, and they will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in travail. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless. I will make men more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. And like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with none to gather them, every man will turn to his own people, and every man will flee to his own land. Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

The prophet did not mean that each would find security in his native land, or among kindred people. He meant that each shall flee according to the dictates of his heart, and that they shall share with one another in these decisions.

Ezek 6:7-11 And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and you shall know that I am the LORD. Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, when I have broken their wanton heart which has departed from me, and blinded their eyes which turn wantonly after their idols; and they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations. And they shall know that I am the LORD; I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.

Jeremiah's Indictment

Circulating among many Jewish and Christian groups today is a popular belief that Jerusalem will be safe from harm in the coming tribulations. This belief is based largely on the prophecies of Ezekiel 38 and 39. Closer examination of biblical prophecy shows that this view is in grievous error and that Jerusalem and the modern state of Israel will be destroyed.

In Chapter 25 Jeremiah gave the word which came to him concerning the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The LORD said he would take all the families of the north, including Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and bring them against the land of Judah and against all the nations round about. They would be utterly destroyed. The statement in Jer 25:12 is clear: the LORD would make the land an everlasting waste. God would make them an astonishment, a hissing, and a desolation. They were to serve the king of Babylon seventy years. At the end of seventy years the king of Babylon and that nation would also be punished. Many nations and great kings would make slaves even of them and they would become an everlasting waste.

This passage has received close attention by countless scholars and biblical students. Most everyone believes it refers to the Babylonian captivity of the sixth century BC. This belief is based on several factors:

1) The context of events in the days of Jeremiah leads to such conclusion. It is natural to assume that Jeremiah was speaking to his people about their coming destruction.

2) The mention of King Nebuchadnezzar is specific for Jeremiah's day.

3) The seventy years have always been understood to mean the period of Babylonian captivity. The tradition is strong; it goes back to Old Testament writers: Zechariah 1:12, II Chron 36:21, Daniel 9:2. The seventy years is an important criterion for establishing the time of the prophecy.

4) Babylon was later conquered by Cyrus the Great, King of Persia. In this manner the king and Babylon were punished.

More careful thought shows serious difficulties with this view.

1) What did Jeremiah mean by "all the families of the north?" This phrase parallels that of Gen 10:5, the families of the nations from which the coastlands people spread, recognized as the vast country north of Palestine in Asia Minor and

Europe. Most commentators understand Jeremiah's "families" as political subunits of ancient Babylon, ethnic tribes who contributed military forces to the attacking armies of Nebuchadnezzar. II Kings 24:2 lists "bands of the Chaldees," "bands of the Syrians," "bands of the Moabites," and "bands of the children of Ammon," although only the Chaldeans and Syrians would be from the north. However, if the phrase refers to the coastlands of the far north the passage takes on a different cast. Jeremiah may have intended something other than an immediate warning to his people. The historical view might be merely an attempt to fit the prophecy into a contemporary context, when actually Jeremiah used that context as a framework to conceal God's words for future revelation.

2) The exact dates of the seventy-year period have always been subject to debate. Historically we know that Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho, Pharaoh of Egypt, in 606 BC. According to Jeremiah 52:28-30 Nebuchadnezzar carried away captives from Judah three different times, coinciding with the surrender of Jehoiachin in 597, the suppression of Zedekiah's revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in 587, and the reprisals for Gedaliah's assassination in 582. Gobryas, one of Nebuchadnezzar's generals, revolted in 546, gave his allegiance to Cyrus the Great, and marched unopposed into the city of Babylon in 539. He handed rulership to Cyrus a fortnight later. The following year Cyrus issued the edict that permitted the Jews to return to their homeland. The first group to return began reconstruction of the temple, which was completed in 515. The wall of the city was completed about 439 BC under Nehemiah. These various dates provide great latitude in assigning the 70 years. For example:

a) From the defeat of Egypt in 606 to the edict of Cyrus in 538, 68 years. This period would mark the era of Babylonian empire.

b) From the surrender of Jehoiachin in 597 to the edict of Cyrus in 538, 59 years, short of the 70 years, but understood symbolically.

c) From the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 to the edict of Cyrus in 538, 49 years, but again understood symbolically.

d) From the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 to the rebuilding of the temple in 515, 72 years. This period would mark the loss of the temple until its restoration.

From this list we see that we can assign the seventy years arbitrarily. The statement in 25:11 that these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years might follow a) or d) above. Unfortunately, Judah was in forced bondage only 59 years. Furthermore, the destruction of Babylon as predicted by Jeremiah did not take place; Babylon was not destroyed. The conquest by Cyrus the Great was a peaceful one. The phrase "many nations and great kings" in 25:14 suffers from similar literal faults. Were Persia and Cyrus the Great "many nations and great kings?"

3) The list of nations does not correspond exactly with the historical record. Jeremiah gave the following:

a) Jerusalem and the cities of Judah,

b) Egypt,

c) The Gaza strip (the Philistines, Ashkelon, Azzah, Ekron, Ashdod),

- d) Jordan (Uz, Edom, Moab, Ammon),
- e) Lebanon (Tyre, Sidon),
- f) Arabia (Dedan, Tema, Buz),
- g) Syria,
- h) Iraq and Iran (Zimri, Elam, Media),
- i) All the kings of the north and all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth.

The New Babylonian empire consisted of those lands which today are Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. It also included the conquest of Egypt, Cilicia in Asia Minor, (south Turkey), and Elam, (western Iran). But Nebuchadnezzar did not conquer Media, nor “all the kings of the north and the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth” unless we again understand Jeremiah symbolically assuming that he intended merely to portray great conquering power.

4) Most importantly, the passage is strikingly cosmic: it does not seem suited to conditions, nor limited to the geography, of the ancient Near East.

In considering all the families of the north, the seventy years, and the list of nations we must ask if God’s holy prophet was taking liberty with the facts? We achieve far better understanding if view Jeremiah as not speaking of the events of his day but using those events as a context for prophecies of the far future. Then the name Nebuchadnezzar was symbolic for a different ruler to come at some later time in world history. Was the name Babylon also symbolic of a nation to appear at the end of the age? Is the seventy years true more by tradition than by actual fact? Is there another period of seventy years that specifies a time of great planetary crisis? If so, how would we calculate the dates? If the punishment comes as part of a great planetary judgment then we are forced to find a current context.

Indeed, the passage plainly indicates the cosmic nature of the events.

Jer 25:15-17 Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword which I am sending among them.”

Jer 25:27-32 Then you shall say to them, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel. Drink, be drunk and vomit, fall and rise no more, because of the sword which I am sending among you.” And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: You must drink! For behold, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by my name, and shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, says the LORD of hosts.”

The words in Jeremiah are definitely not historical.

The LORD will roar from on high; he will utter his voice from his holy habitation. He will give a shout as one who treads grapes.

God begins to work evil at the city which is called by his name. Will the nations go unpunished?

The noise will resound to the ends of the earth.

God has an indictment against the nations; he is entering into judgment with all flesh.

Evil will go forth from nation to nation.

A great tempest is stirring from the ends of the earth.

The slain shall be from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, nor gathered, nor buried; they shall be as dung upon the ground.

Can anyone fail to grasp the cosmic sense of this prophecy? What would cause the slain, literally, to be from one end of the earth to the other? Why will they remain unlamented and unburied?

God is bringing a worldwide judgment. He is using Jerusalem, modern Israel, and the nations round about as vehicles for his action. Jeremiah’s prophecy was indeed for the future with the events of his day serving as a context for the presentation of that future forecast. God could use that context because of the parallels to our own day. For more than seventy years Jerusalem and Judea have been subservient to modern Babylon and the “families of the north.”

The symbolic specification of seventy years should not be a literal criterion to determine our acceptance of the truth of Jeremiah’s warnings. Without the economic and political support of the “western” nations contemporary Judea could not have survived. Since the Balfour declaration in 1917 the Jews have been subject to the will of those nations, including England and especially the United States. Now the end of her time has come.

Calculation of 70 years from 1917 yields 1987, a date that has now come and gone. 70 years from 1948 and the establishment of the modern state of Israel would yield 2018, too far into the future to be realistic. Therefore, we cannot establish a precise date from Jeremiah’s specification. But such modern calculations are not any farther from a literal 70 years than calculations based on ancient events.

A passage in Daniel confirms that modern Israel will be destroyed.

Dan 12:7 The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven; and I heard him swear by him who lives for ever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time; and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be accomplished.

The “holy people” are understood by many as the modern Jews living in Palestine. When their shattering comes to an end all these things will be accomplished. God’s great punishment of the nations will then be finished.

False Prophets

Many preachers and many Rabbis teach that modern Jerusalem will be safe from harm. They prophesy illusions for all those who wish to believe that God will not bring judgment.

Such false prophecy is based on gross misunderstanding of God's power, and confusion of different episodes of God's plans. God did, indeed, say that Jerusalem would be turned into a jewel in his crown, but he did not mean modern secular Jerusalem. A city of great beauty will be rebuilt but that day is in the future. Such promises will not be fulfilled for this wicked and perverse generation. As stated so clearly

Dan 11:13-14 For the king of the north shall again raise a multitude, greater than the former; and at the end-of-age years he shall come on with a great army and abundant supplies. In those times many shall rise against the king of the south; and the men of violence among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfil the vision; but they shall fail.

Jerusalem and the modern state of Israel are filled with violence. One group contests against another: Jew against Arab, Arab against Jew, and Jew against Jew. Murder and bloodshed and enmity rule the hearts. Does anyone really believe they will escape judgment?

How many leaders and kings and princes and Rabbis and prophets tell their people that all shall be well with them?

Jer 4:9-10 In that day, says the LORD, courage shall fail both king and princes; the priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded." Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD, surely thou hast utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem," saying, "It shall be well with you"; whereas the sword has reached their very life.

Again and again God told us how he felt about those who prophesy falsely, and those who turn to their idols: the hope of secular nations, the pride of godless institutions, and the security of material power. They were the stumbling blocks of iniquity, that men should stumble and fall, and not be found.

Jer 23:16-32 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to every one who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'" For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to perceive and to hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened? Behold, the storm of the LORD!

Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." "Am I a God at hand," says the LORD, "and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?" says the LORD. "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the LORD. "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Ba'al? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat?" says the LORD. "Is not my word like fire," says the LORD, "and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets," says the LORD, "who steal my words from one another." "Behold, I am against the prophets," says the LORD, "who use their tongues and say, 'Says the LORD.' Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams," says the LORD, "and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all," says the LORD.

Do any of us fail to understand these words from God?

Ezek 14:6-21 And the word of the LORD came to me: "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols; turn away your faces from all your abominations. For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to inquire for himself of me I the LORD will answer him myself. I will set my face against that man, I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people and you shall know that I am the LORD. And if the prophet be deceived and speak a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear their punishment the punishment of the prophet and the punishment of the inquirer shall be alike that the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, nor defile themselves any more with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, says the Lord GOD."

And the word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord GOD. If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no man may pass through because of the beasts; even if these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; they alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate. Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, ‘Let a sword go through the land; and I cut off from it man and beast; though these three men were in it, as I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered.’ Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast; even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.”

For thus says the Lord GOD: “How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four sore acts of judgment, sword, famine, evil beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast . . .!”