

208—THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

(2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 39–40)

In the ninth year of the reign of King Zedekiah in the kingdom of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia came against Jerusalem with all his army.¹ The city was under siege until the eleventh year and, because of the siege, there was sore famine in the land and great suffering due to the scarcity of food.

When the Babylonians finally broke into the city, King Zedekiah, along with Judah's men of war, fled during the night by way of the king's garden and the gate between the two walls. They were pursued by the Chaldeans,² however, and Zedekiah was overtaken on the plains of Jericho. Upon his capture, he was taken before King Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah to be judged. This judgment did not go well for him; his eyes were put out and he was taken to Babylon in brass chains. Zedekiah's sons were slain, with the exception of Mulek, who escaped with several others and was brought by the hand of Jehovah to the Americas, where his people eventually became part of the Nephite nation.³

When Nebuzar-adan, the captain of the Babylonian guard, came into Jerusalem, he burned the temple and the entire city.⁴ The army of Chaldeans that was with him also broke down the city walls. The brass pillars of the temple, as well as the ornate bases for the lavers, and the brazen

baptismal font were all broken into pieces. The pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the spoons, and the vessels of brass used for the temple rites were all taken away. The devastation was great, and all who were left in the city surrendered and were taken to Babylon. Only the poor were left behind to be vinedressers and husbandmen of the land. And Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah to be governor over those who remained.

The prophet Jeremiah, because he was in prison in Jerusalem, was among those taken captive. But the king gave Nebuzar-adan a special charge concerning Jeremiah's welfare. "Take him and look well to him," said King Nebuchadnezzar. "You must do with him as he shall tell you."

Jeremiah was taken in chains with the other captives on their way to Babylon. When they came to Ramah, however, Nebuzar-adan said to him, "I will loose you this day from your chains and you may go wherever you like. If you choose to come with me to Babylon, I will take good care of you. But if that does not suit you, you may stay here. Or you may go back to Gedaliah, whom the king has made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him if that is what you choose. You are free to go wherever it is convenient for you."

When Nebuzar-adan had given Jeremiah food and money to sustain him, Jeremiah went to Mizpah, where he dwelt with the Jews who were under the care of Gedaliah.

Gedaliah sent out messengers to tell the Jews who had been scattered that they were welcome to return to the land of Judah. "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans," he told them. "If you come here to dwell in the land and are willing to serve the king of Babylonia, it will be well with you. As for me," he said, "I must dwell at Mizpah to serve those Chaldeans who will come to us, but you will be free to go wherever you choose. And you may also gather wine, summer fruits, and oil and put them in your vessels."

When the Jews who were among the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, and all other countries learned that the king of Babylonia had left a remnant of Judah and had made Gedaliah governor, many of them returned to the land and gathered wine and summer fruits in abundance.

¹ The Babylonians, under Nabopolassar, had overthrown the Assyrian Empire in 625 BC and had become the most powerful force in the area. That position was solidified when the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in 605 BC in a battle at Carchemish. Nabopolassar's son Nebuchadnezzar, who led the battle against the Egyptians, succeeded to the throne upon his father's death in 604 BC. For background, see story "211—The Babylonian and Persian Empires."

² The Chaldeans (or Chaldees) were the most prominent tribe in the country of Babylonia at the time of the captivity. This title was generally used in the scriptures to refer to the people of Babylonia.

³ Pertinent references from the Book of Mormon relating to Mulek and his people include Omni 1:14–15; Mosiah 25:2; and Helaman 6:10, 8:21.

⁴ Some wonder how the temple could burn inasmuch as the walls were made of stone. With intense heat, limestone is able to burn. And some have suggested that the intense heat would also have caused the water in the stones to expand and the stones to explode.