The Divine Justification for
the Babylonian Destruction of Jerusalem

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PART ONE

In January of 588 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, laid siege against Jerusalem (see 2 Ki. 25; 2 Chron. 36; Jer. 52). For over a year, the Jews suffered the effects of the siege. As famine set in, morale among the Jews sank. Due to their weakened condition, plagues of one kind or another began to afflict the people (Jer. 14:12; 27:8,13). Eventually the food supply was depleted and misery soared high as many were reduced to cannibalism (Jer. 19:9; Lam. 2:20; 4:10; Ezek. 5:10). Finally, in July of 587 B.C., the Babylonians broke through the walls and began pillaging and looting the city. Many Jews were slaughtered. The city, temple, and walls, were razed to the ground. Those not killed were taken captive to Babylon, except for some of the peasantry. All that was left of Jerusalem was ash and rubble. Sadly, the prophet Jeremiah, who had witnessed the destruction, wrote, “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!” (Lam. 1:1)

Why did God allow such horrible misery and destruction to come upon his chosen people? The answer given in the scriptures is because of the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem (e.g., Jer. 36:31; Ezek. 8-9; 22-23; 1 Ne. 1:13; 3:17). But why does the Lord destroy wicked people? At least one purpose is stated in the scriptures. Nephi observed: “For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction, and this grieveth my soul” (2 Ne. 26:11).

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, to show the relationship between wickedness, the loss of the Spirit of the Lord or the light of Christ, and the Lord’s justification for destroying a wicked society. To accomplish this, it will be necessary to review the teachings of past and present prophets regarding the Spirit of the Lord and how it can be lost. Second, in light of these teachings, an examination of the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel will be provided giving evidence that the people of Jerusalem had jeopardized their access to the light of Christ, thus justifying their destruction.

Agency of Man

In order to understand why the Lord justifies the destruction of a societies who have lost the light of Christ, we must understand the relationship between the light of Christ and agency. The principle of agency is an eternal principle essential to all the activities of God regarding His children. Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated, “Agency underlies all things—all advancement, all progression, even existence itself.” Agency is basic to God’s plan of salvation, including the creation of the earth, the fall of Adam, the mortal probation of man, and the atonement of Jesus Christ, all designed to make possible the exaltation of God’s children. “Inherent in the whole system of salvation,” Elder McConkie taught, “is the eternal law of agency. All of the terms and conditions of the Lord’s eternal plan operate because man has his agency, and none of it would have efficacy, virtue, or force if there were no agency.”

Lehi taught that certain conditions must exist before agency can be exercised. First, there must be opposing choices (2 Ne. 2:15). Second, both choices must be enticing. Said he, “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Ne. 2:16). Commenting on this, President Harold B. Lee taught, “Father Lehi explained to his son that in order to accomplish that eternal purpose there must be opposition in all things, and that to every individual upon the earth there had to be given the right of free agency and also that there must be in the world the power to entice to do evil and the power to entice to do good.”
The Book of Mormon teaches that “the Spirit of Christ is the agent that entices men and women to do good (Moro. 7:16-17). On the other hand, it is the “the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate” that entices men and women to do evil (2 Ne. 2:29). Without the Spirit of Christ there would be no opposing enticements and, therefore, no agency! With evil as the only enticement, man would forever become evil with no hope of change.

An Immanent Power

What is the “Spirit of Christ”? To answer this, we must first understand that the Spirit of Christ, the light of Christ, Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of God, are all interchangeable terms. Harold B. Lee taught that every man born into this world is given “an endowment of that first light which is called the Light of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, or the Spirit of God.”

What is the nature of this light? This is not easily answered. Elder McConkie wrote: “There is a spirit—the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Christ, the light of truth, the light of Christ—that defies description and is beyond mortal comprehension. It is in us and in all things; it is around us and around all things; it fills the earth and the heavens and the universe. It is everywhere, in all immensity, without exception; it is an indwelling, immanent, ever-present, never-absent spirit. It has neither shape nor form nor personality. It is not an entity nor a person nor a personage. It has no agency, does not act independently, and exists not to act but to be acted upon.” From the scriptures we learn that this light “proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things” (D&C 88:12-13). Thus the light of Christ is an all encompassing power that emanates from God. Joseph F. Smith explained that the light of Christ “proceeds from the source of intelligence, which permeates all nature, which lighteth every man and fills the immensity of space. You may call it the Spirit of God, you may call it the influence of God’s intelligence, you may call it the substance of his power, no matter what it is called, it is the spirit of intelligence that permeates the universe and gives to the spirits of men understanding, just as Job has said. (Job 32:8; Doc. and Cov. 88:3-13.)”

Sometimes, the light of Christ and the Holy Ghost are thought of as the same thing. This is not so. Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “The Holy Ghost, as we are taught in our modern revelation, is the third member in the Godhead and a personage of Spirit. These terms are used synonymously: Spirit of God, Spirit of the Lord, Spirit of Truth, Holy Spirit, Comforter; all having reference to the Holy Ghost. The same terms largely are used in relation to the Spirit of Jesus Christ, also called the Light of Truth, Light of Christ, Spirit of God, and Spirit of the Lord; and yet they are separate and distinct things.” Perhaps the reason for the confusion is that the Holy Ghost uses the medium of the light of Christ to carry out his divine mission. Marion G. Romney taught: “There are three phases of the light of Christ that I want to mention. The first one is the light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world; The second phase is the gift of the Holy Ghost; And the third is the more sure word of prophecy.”

The Light of Christ and Man’s Conscience

What must be clear is that any degree of the light of Christ manifested to man can be nullified through effects of sin. The difference between losing the effects of the Holy Ghost as opposed to the light of Christ is this: the Holy Ghost is easily offended whereas the light of Christ, though sinned against, will continue to strive with man until totally and consistently ignored.

The reason for the persistence of the light of Christ is that without it there is no agency. In part, the first phase of the light of Christ manifests itself as man’s conscience. According to President Joseph F. Smith, it is by means of this Spirit that “every man is enlightened, the wicked as well as the good, the intelligent and the ignorant, the high and the low, each in accordance with his capacity to receive the light; and this Spirit or influence which emanates from God may be said to constitute man’s consciousness.” In line with this, Elder McConkie wrote, “By virtue of this endowment all men automatically and intuitively know right from wrong and are encouraged and enticed to do what is right (Moro. 7:16.).”
Without the light of Christ there would be no agency. With no enticement for good, man would naturally give way to the enticement for evil. Therefore, the scriptures teach that the light of Christ “strives” to be with man (D&C 1:33; Gen. 6:3; Moses 8:17; 2 Ne. 26:11; Eth. 2:15).

The Loss of the Spirit Brings Destruction

The scriptures teach that it is possible to lose the light of Christ. The Lord has repeatedly said, “my Spirit shall not always strive with man” (D&C 1:33; Genesis 6:3; Moses 8:17; 2 Nephi 26:11; Ether 2:15). It follows that when the Spirit is lost there is a loss of agency. In such a condition, man is unable to act for himself, a condition that violates the plans of God. When a society as a whole reaches the point that the light of Christ no longer strives with them, then they are “ripe for destruction.” As stated earlier, “For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man until ye are fully ripe ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Eth. 2:15).

Such was the condition of the people in the days of Noah (Moses 8:17-30) and apparently the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained: “Being a loving Father, though deeply devoted to our free agency, there are times in human history when He simply could not continue to send spirits to this earth who would have had virtually no chance. This was the case with Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plains.” Thus the children born into these cities had no choice at all left to them. Such was the conformity in wickedness that babes could be born free, but not remain agents unto themselves.

Characterization of Those Who Have Lost Light

It is pertinent to this study to formalize at least a partial list of features that characterize those who have placed themselves in the position of losing the light of Christ. In so doing, I am cognizant of the fact that the Lord has not made a full disclosure of this subject. But the scriptures and the prophets have taught enough to formalize a partial list that can be utilized in examining the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The following can be deduced:

- **Continually sinning.** Men lose the light of Christ when they continually sin against the light. Speaking to the brother of Jared, the Lord said: “ye shall remember that my Spirit will not always strive with man; wherefore, if ye will sin until ye are fully ripe ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Eth. 2:15).
- **In a state of rebellion, refusing to do what is right.** Additionally, the attitude of the sinner towards sin plays a major role in the loss of the Spirit. George Albert Smith said: “The spirit of God continues to strive with men everywhere, as long as they make the effort to keep his commandments. When men abandon the truth, refuse to do the right, the Lord of necessity withdraws his spirit and men are left to the buffetings of the adversary.” Likewise, Spencer W. Kimball cautioned: “Conscience warns but does not govern. Conscience tells the individual when he is entering forbidden worlds, and it continues to prick until silenced by the will or by sin’s repetition.”
- **Sin is rationalized or excused.** “The will” of the sinner is often manifested in rationalizing or excusing sin. President Kimball observed: “When people know right from wrong and find themselves in the broad way to destruction, they have two ways to go. They may repent and cleanse themselves and obtain eventual peace and joy, or they may rationalize and excuse themselves and try the escape road. Those who follow the latter road sometimes so completely rationalize that they become calloused and lose the desire to repent, until the Spirit of God ceases to strive with them.” Such rationalization is due to an individual’s unresponsiveness to the things of God.
- **Repetition of sin cuts a deep grove making it difficult for the sinner to repent.** As one continues to
rationalize sin, it becomes nearly impossible to repent. President Kimball wrote, “A man may rationalize and excuse himself till the groove is so deep he cannot get out without great difficulty. . . And if the yielding person continues to give way he may finally reach the point of ‘no return.’ The Spirit will ‘not always strive with man.’” D&C 1:33.” This is the most damnable aspect of continuing in sin. “Free agency,” declared Marion G. Romney, “possessed by any one person is increased or diminished by the use to which he puts it. Every wrong decision one makes restricts the area in which he can thereafter exercise his agency. The further one goes in the making of wrong decisions in the exercise of free agency, the more difficult it is for him to recover the lost ground. One can, by persisting long enough, reach the point of no return. He then becomes an abject slave. By the exercise of his free agency, he has decreased the area in which he can act, almost to the vanishing point.”

Conscience is seared. Those who continually defy the light of Christ and commit sin sear “their conscience as with a hot iron” (JST 1 Tim. 4:2). “All men receive this Spirit,” wrote Elder McConkie, “but not all hearken to its voice. Many choose to walk in carnal paths and go contrary to the enticings of the Spirit. It is possible to sear one’s conscience to the point that the Spirit will withdraw its influence and men will no longer know or care about anything that is decent and edifying.” The scriptures refer to those who, through seared consciences, have reached this point as “past feeling” (Eph. 4:19; 1 Ne. 17:45; Moro. 9:20). This is a dangerous position to be in for the sinner is no longer aware that he is a sinning. Neal A. Maxwell noted, “The more coarse and crude people become, the less they are aware of it. . . A predator does not know he is a predator, for he is ‘past feeling.’”

Will not follow the Lord’s prophets. Those who will not feel the warning voice of their own conscience will likewise not listen to the warning voice of God’s prophets who are sent to stall their downward fall. Being “past feeling,” declared Elder Maxwell, they cannot “‘feel’ the words of God or his prophets.” Indeed, rejecting the Lord’s prophets is an indicator that the light of Christ is nearly gone out or has ceased altogether within a person or society. Nephi observed of the Jews in his day, “For behold, the Spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them; for behold, they have rejected the prophets” (1 Ne. 7:14).

PART TWO

The Witness of Jeremiah

The writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel witness that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were “ripe for destruction.” They reveal that, generally speaking, the Jews exhibited all the characteristics of those who have jeopardized their access to the light of Christ. As a consequence, they refused all enticement for good. Therefore, like the Nephites whose “destruction [was] made sure” (Hel. 13:38) because “the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers” (Morm. 5:16), the Lord allowed their destruction.

The century before the prophet Jeremiah began his ministry saw two major religious reforms instituted by the kings of Judah involving the removal of “high places” of worship (whether to Jehovah or pagan deities), the eradication of both foreign and domestic idol worship, a refurbishing of the temple built by Solomon, and a reemphasis of the observance of the Mosaic code. The first was initiated by Hezekiah (ca.715-687 B.C.) as recorded in 2 Kings 18 and 2 Chronicles 29-31. However, Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh (ca. 687-642 B.C) reversed his fathers reform policies (see 2 Ki. 31; 2 Chron. 33). This had the effect of causing “Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Chron. 33:9; emphasis added). Some years after Manasseh’s death, his grandson, Josiah (ca. 642-609 B.C.), initiated a second reform (see 2 Ki. 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34-35).

Though Josiah’s reforms were more aggressive and further reaching than Hezekiah’s, their ultimate effects upon the people of Jerusalem were not lasting. This was so because the reversal of Hezekiah’s reforms by Manasseh proved disastrous for Judah. As evidenced by the Lord’s intervention against the
Assyrians (2 Chron. 32), Hezekiah’s people found themselves in the Lord’s good graces after they had eradicated idolatry and refocused their attention towards the law of Moses. But with Manasseh’s reversal of his father’s religious reforms, Judah’s former sins returned. This placed the Jews in a spiritually dangerous position. The Lord has said, “go your ways and sin no more; but unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return” (D&C 82:7). With the return of sins comes a return of punishments. Even worse, a greater darkness envelopes the sinner than experienced before his repentance. Mormon observed, “after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things” (Al. 24:30). Consequently, Josiah’s reforms were not able to dislodge the sinful nature of the people of Judah. The reformation made by Josiah’s people was outward only, little inward transformation had taken place. This is why the writer of 2 Kings informs the reader that in spite of Josiah’s religious reforms, “the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there” (2 Ki. 23:26-27).

The Light of Christ Diminishes Among the Jews

Living in the aftermath of Josiah’s reform, Jeremiah witnessed the sinful nature and rebellious heart of Judah. He could see that unless true reform was made, Judah would fall prey to the wrath of Jehovah and would be destroyed. The Lord called Jeremiah to warn the Jews of their eventual destruction if they did not repent. His call came about a year after King Josiah began his reform (compare 2 Chron. 34:3 and Jer. 1:2).

In an early prophecy uttered “in the ears of Jerusalem” (Jer. 2:1-4:4), Jeremiah levied several charges against the people. This prophecy reveals that the Jews were exhibiting some of the characteristics of those whose actions have minimized the effects of the light of Christ in their lives. Note the following:

- **Repetition of sin making it difficult to repent.** In Jer. 2:20-22, Jeremiah stated that early in Israel’s history, all Israel broke the yoke (covenant) they made with Jehovah and said they would not serve God. Israel, including the Jews of Jerusalem, was compared to a harlot “upon every high hill and under every green tree”; a “noble vine . . . turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine”; and a person who had washed themselves with “much soap” to remove a deep rooted stain but unable to do so. William McKane has noted that these verses “agree in their estimate of the deep-seated character of Israel’s sinfulness and express a scepticism about the possibility of reformation. . . Deeply ingrained habits have brought about an inner perversion so fundamental that repentance, a change of heart and new patterns of behaviour, would seem to be ruled out.” An apt description of perhaps one of the most damnable characteristics of a society losing the light of Christ. The metaphor of washing with soap but remaining spiritually unclean was an accurate portrayal of the Jew’s response to Josiah’s reforms. Through Jeremiah, the Lord said, “Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 3:10). Though outward changes had been made, the inner struggle to return to former practices was too great.

- **Sin is rationalized.** Some justified their actions feeling it was impossible to get out of the rut they had made. They exclaimed, “There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers [i.e., foreign religious practices], and after them will I go” (Jer. 2:25). Others did not believe that what they were doing was wrong: “Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me” (Jeremiah 2:35). Generally, the Jews had lost their desire to follow God. “We are lords [Heb. rawd, to wander or roam restlessly],” they said, “we will come no more unto thee?” (Jer. 2:31)

These statements of justification reflect a lack of conscience showing that the Spirit of the Lord was being ignored. Therefore, Jeremiah ended his prophecy with a call for repentance: “Break up your fallow
ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumscribe yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart” (Jer. 4:3-4).

More evidence that the people were losing the light of Christ is found in another prophecy (Jer. 5-6) pronounced probably towards the end of Josiah’s reign.

- **State if Rebellion.** Jeremiah berated the wickedness that had saturated Jerusalem saying, “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it [i.e., forgive Jerusalem]” (Jeremiah 5:1). Any real attempt to do this would have been futile for “this people hath a revolting [Heb. sarar, stubborn] and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.” (Jer. 5:23).

- **Seared Conscience.** Neither were they conscience-stricken. “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination?” the Lord asked. “Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush” (Jer. 6:15).

Since Josiah’s religious reforms had little effect upon the spiritual nature of his people, Jeremiah warned that the Lord would “bring a nation upon [them] from far” that would “impoverish [their] fenced cities, wherein [they] trustedst, with the sword.” (Jer. 5:15-17). This was a prophecy of the Babylonian siege of 598-597 B.C. (600 B.C. in Book of Mormon chronology), the year before Lehi was called to be a prophet. The siege, however, would not render Jerusalem completely destroyed: “Nevertheless in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make a full end with you” (Jer. 5:18). This would prove two things. First, Jeremiah’s prophecies were true. Second, the Lord still loved his people for he would allow them one more opportunity to repent. This chance for repentance reveals that though entrenched in sin, there was still hope for the people of Jerusalem.

**The Light of Christ is Almost Extinguished**

As Josiah’s reign came to an end, the light of Christ was flickering in the winds of sin. Yet, the Spirit was still striving with the Jews. But during the reign of Josiah’s son, Jehoiakim, who reigned from 609-598 B.C., the light was all but blown out. Under Jehoiakim, Josiah’s reform policies came to an end. Immediately, things went from bad to worse.

In the first year of Jehoiakim’s reign, Jeremiah stood in the gate of the Temple and speaking in the name of the Lord, he delivered a sermon denouncing the wickedness of the Jews and offering them a chance to repent (Jer. 7 and 26). The Jews had come to believe that their pretended reforms were enough to turn away Jehovah’s wrath. Therefore, they believed they could continue in sin without consequence. Through Jeremiah, the Lord said: “Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?” (Jer. 7:8-10)

He then reminded them what happened to the tabernacle at Shiloh in the days of Eli, who’s son’s, as well as all Israel, continually committed sin. Though sinning against Jehovah, they believed that by carrying the Ark of the Covenant into battle, the Lord would fight in their behalf anyway. Instead, they lost the battle. Additionally, the Ark was captured and the tabernacle was destroyed (see 1 Sam. 3-4). Thus the Lord said, “But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel” (Jer. 7:12).

Yet, for all this, the Jews had not passed the point of no return! The Lord offered hope: “Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place” (Jer. 7:3).

The initial response of the leaders to Jeremiah’s denunciation was to have Jeremiah put to death, “for he hath prophesied against this city” (Jer. 26:11). Immediately Jeremiah rebuked them, saying, “amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and repent, and the Lord will turn away the evil that he hath pronounced against you” (JST Jer. 26:13). This unnerved some of the leaders. “This man is not worthy to die,” they said, “for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God” (Jer. 26:16).

This incident demonstrates that early in the reign of Jehoiakim, there still was some respect for God’s
prophets among the people. There was still hope!

But hope was diminishing. The Chronicler tells us that Jehoiakim “did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God” (2 Chron. 36:5; also 2 Ki. 23:37). The LORD sent prophets, including Jeremiah, warning him to repent. But he refused to hear them. Therefore, Jeremiah said to him: “I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened. And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear” (Jer. 25:3-4). Refusal to heed the Lord’s prophets is another sign that the light of Christ was nearly extinguished in the life of the king.

As the king went, so went the people. They became more stubborn, refusing to follow any of the commands of Jehovah through the prophets. Further, they disregarded the law of Moses, the basis of the covenant made between God and Israel. In response, the Lord told Jeremiah to publically proclaim to the people: “Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them” (Jer. 11:6). Continuing: “For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart” (Jer. 11:7-8). Therefore, the Lord said, the curses specified in the covenant (Deut. 28) would be levied against them.

Scriptural history records that these curses often caused Israel to return to the Lord, albeit briefly. In the days of Josiah, the return to the Lord was emphasized through covenant renewal where the people swore they would obey Jehovah (see 2 Kings 23:3). But in the days of Jehoiakim, the covenant was purposefully rejected. Therefore, the Lord said, “A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them” (Jer. 11:9-10). This apostasy was not limited to the rulers, or the aristocracy, or the priesthood. Rather, it was widespread among all the people of Judah. “For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal” (Jer. 11:13).

Jerusalem’s Destruction Made Sure

Finally, an incident happened in Jehoiakim’s reign that sealed the fate of he and his people:27 The Lord had Jeremiah write on a scroll all the prophecies and warnings that had been given him. He then wanted the scroll read to all the people. “It may be,” the Lord said to Jeremiah, “that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin” (Jer. 36:1-3).

Jeremiah had his scribe, Baruch, go to the temple, where the people had gathered to fast, and read the scroll. But there is no evidence that this had any effect upon the people whatsoever. In fact, the Jewish officials who were present reported the incident to Jehoiakim who demanded to hear what was written on the scroll. As the scroll was being read, Jehoiakim took a penknife and cut each column that had been read and threw it in the fire. This he did “until all the roll was consumed in the fire.” “Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words” (Jer. 26:20-24). Jehoiakim then sent a guard to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch “but the LORD hid them.” (Jer. 26:26).

This was a telling point! Jehoiakim and the other rulers had become past feeling and calloused, paying no heed to the light of Christ. They had no regard for the Lord nor his prophet. Further, there was no evidence that this situation would change. As a consequence, the Lord told Jeremiah to say to the king, “He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not” (Jer. 36:30-31).

Jerusalem’s destruction was now sure! Jehovah’s “words of judgments against the people were no longer simply scenarios for warning, but rather plans to be carried out: repentance was no longer to be expected, and the people stood under irrevocable judgment.”28

Jerusalem being doomed by her wickedness, the Lord commanded Jeremiah, “Thou shalt not take thee
a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place. For thus saith the LORD concerning the sons
and concerning the daughters that are born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bare them, and
concerning their fathers that begat them in this land; They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be
lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall
be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for
the beasts of the earth” (Jer. 16:2-4).

**Last Chance?**

As prophesied, the Babylonians sieged Jerusalem in December, 597 B.C. That same month, Jehoiakim
died. His son, Jehoiachin, reigned in his place. However, after three months of siege, Jerusalem surrendered.
Many Jews, including Jehoiachin, were taken to Babylon. Jehoiachin’s brother, Zedekiah was placed on the
throne by Nebuchadnezzar. During the reign of Zedekiah, the Jews were given one more chance for
repentance. Like Mormon, who, knowing that “the day of grace was passed” for his people (Mormon 2:15),
continued to preach repentance (Mormon 3:2-3), prophets were sent throughout Jerusalem “prophesying unto
the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed” (1 Ne. 1:4).

It may seem strange that the Lord offered the Jews another chance for repentance when their fate was
already sealed. However, the fate of the whole is not necessarily the destiny of each individual. Though
Jerusalem would be destroyed, repentance among individuals was still possible. This was so because the
light of Christ was not all together extinguished. Evidence of this is found in the Book of Mormon. Many
who had survived the Babylonian siege, such as Lehi, had not rebelled against God but had remained faithful.
Even after Lehi and his family fled Jerusalem, the light of Christ still was striving with the people. Speaking
of those living in Jerusalem at this time, Nephi said, “the Spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them”
(1 Nephi 7:14), suggesting that the light of Christ was still there to some degree. And where the light of
Christ exists, there is hope.

But the chance for repentance was refused and hope was vanquished. The people rejected the warnings
of the prophets and continued in their wickedness. Therefore, in a letter written during the reign of Zedekiah
to the Jews who had been exiled in Babylon after the siege of 597 B.C., Jeremiah wrote the word of the Lord
concerning the those who remained in Jerusalem: “Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and
the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. And I will persecute
them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the
kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach, among all the
nations whither I have driven them: Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which
I sent unto them by my servants the prophets” (Jer 29:17-19).

**Ezekiel’s Witness**

About this same time, Jeremiah was shown a vision of two baskets of figs, one full of good figs and the
other full of poor figs (Jer. 24). He was told that the basket of poor figs represented Zedekiah and all the
Jews who remained in Jerusalem. Again, the Lord promised that because they continued in wickedness,
“they [would] be consumed from off the land” (vs. 10). On the other hand, the basket of good figs
represented those who had been exiled to Babylon in 597 B.C. It seems that the Lord allowed these Jews
to be exiled to protect them from the further wickedness that would bring about Jerusalem’s destruction.
This he did so that he could prepare a people to return to Jerusalem. Therefore, the Lord promised that he
would give the exiled “an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be
their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart” (vs. 7).

Ezekiel, a priest who had been among those exiled, was called of God to help the Jews undergo the
change of heart that would prepare them for their eventual return. He was made “a watchman unto the house
of Israel” to warn them of their wicked ways (Ezek. 3:17). A watchman was a guard or sentry who was to
call out the safety of the city from the wall or gate (1 Sam. 14:16; 2 Sam. 18:24; 2 Ki. 9:17; Jer. 51:12). It
was hoped that if Ezekiel warned “the wicked” of the impending consequences of their wickedness, they
would “turn from [their] sin, and do that which is lawful and right” (Ezek. 33:14). Ezekiel’s writings add
Ezekiel Witnesses the Apostasy of Jerusalem

In 592 B.C., Ezekiel was taken in vision to Jerusalem where he witnessed the extent to which wickedness had consumed the hearts of the Jews. He also witnessed that their corruption caused the “glory of the Lord”—certainly an aspect of the light of Christ—to withdraw from the city (Ezek. 8:11). The vision was given to Ezekiel in the presence of the elders of Judah, whom, after the vision was over, were told all that he Ezekiel seen.

The vision commenced with Ezekiel seeing through successive stages “increasingly greater acts of apostasy.” At first he was taken to a gate on the northern wall of the city, where he saw an altar with “the image of jealousy” (Ezek. 8:3,5). Just as the northern kingdom saw an increase in the number of altars throughout the land before its destruction (Hosea 8:11; 10:1), Ezekiel witnessed the same proliferation among the Jews in Jerusalem.

Next, Ezekiel was shown a secret chamber in the wall near a gate leading into the inner court directly surrounding the temple. Within the chamber he saw men practicing secret rites associated with images of “every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about.” In an attempt to justify their actions, the men said, “The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth” (Ezek. 8:7-12). Instead of repenting of their actions and pleading that the Lord would return, Jehovah’s absence is used as a justification for their worship of pagan deities.

From the secret chamber, Ezekiel was brought within the northern gate of the inner court immediately surrounding the temple. The inner court and the temple were designed to be the central place of Jehovah worship. But Ezekiel witnessed that Jehovah was no longer honored nor worshiped. Immediately upon his entrance into the inner court, his attention was drawn to the sound of several women sitting near where he stood, who were “weeping for Tammuz” (Ezek. 8:13-14), a Mesopotamian fertility deity, whose annual death and resurrection rites were accompanied by mourners weeping upon his death.

After gazing upon this scene, the Lord told Ezekiel to focus his attention on the area between the altar and the porch of the temple, an area of great sanctity. Only the temple itself was more sacred. In this place of holiness, Ezekiel saw twenty-five men “with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped [Heb. shachah, to bow down] the sun toward the east” (Ezek. 8:16). Whether these men were involved in pagan solar worship, such as was found in Egypt or Mesopotamia, or a form a solarized Jehovah worship as some have suggested, what it is clear is that their actions were seen by the Lord as abominable (Ezek. 8:17). It was a deliberate affront to true Jehovah worship. In the area where priests would pray to Jehovah in behalf of Israel (see Joel 2:17), these men were bowing to the sun rising in the east with their backsides directed towards the temple of Jehovah.

Ezekiel was told that these contemptible cultic actions were superceded only by the general social corruption of the people. The Lord said: “Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here [in the temple]? for they have filled the land with violence [Heb.
chamas, violence, wrong, injustice], and have returned to provoke me to anger” (Ezek. 8:17).

As in Ezekiel 7:23, the language of their social corruptions is reminiscent of the people in the days of Noah. Having turned their backs upon the light of Christ, as represented by the twenty-five men bowing to the rising sun, the people had given themselves over to the “will of the flesh and the evil which is therein” (2 Nephi 2:29). Following the desires of the natural man, like those in the days of Noah, “every imagination of the thoughts of [their] heart[s] was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5; cf. Moses 8:22). Ignoring the light of Christ, the Jews gave up their agency. The Lord, therefore, was forced to destroy them for their own good and the good of their children. “Therefore,” the Lord told Ezekiel, “will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them” (Ezek. 8:18).

The Withdrawal of the Light of Christ

As he had seen the wickedness of the Jews in successive degrees, Ezekiel witnessed the withdrawal of the light of Christ in successive stages. While in the inner court, Ezekiel heard the Lord call for the servants whose assignment was to destroy Jerusalem. Six men came from the north (the direction the Babylonian army would come) and stood by the altar, each one holding “a slaughter weapon in his hand” (Ezek. 9:2-3). Added to them was a seventh man “clothed with linen, with a writer’s inkhorn by his side” (Ezek. 9:3).

Then “the glory of the God of Israel,” which had filled the house of the Lord at the time of Solomon’s dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), and presumably had remained there, moved from the holy of holies to the threshold of the temple. Remember that those who were worshiping in the hidden chamber justified their actions claiming that the Lord had abandoned them (see Ezek. 8:12). But the truth was, the Lord had not abandon them. His glory or light was still there. This is startling in light of the wickedness of the people. But recall what President Kimball taught: “when a person pushes the Spirit away and ignores and puts out the ‘unwelcome sign,’ eventually the Spirit of the Lord ceases to strive. He does not move away from the individual; it is the person who moves away from the Lord.” Ezekiel saw that the spirit of the Lord remained in Jerusalem until after it was destroyed.

The moving of the glory of the Lord to the threshold of the temple was the first stage of the Lord’s abandonment of his people. But he would not abandon them to their destruction until all the righteous had been removed. He commanded the man with the writer’s inkwell attached to his side to go throughout Jerusalem and place a mark (Heb., taw, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet written in the old Hebrew script as an X) on the foreheads of everyone who found the abominations of the people shameful (Ezek. 9:4). We are not told whether he found any or not. The other six men were told to follow him and destroy all whom had no mark. When the man with the inkhorn returned from his assignment, he was told to get coals from between the cherubim, which acted as the throne where the glory of the Lord rested, and “scatter them over the city” (Ezek. 10:2). The city would now be destroyed by fire.

As the man did so, the glory of the Lord moved from the threshold to the east gate of the temple (Ezek. 10:18-19). Ezekiel was taken by the Spirit to the same place (Ezek. 11:1) where he witnessed further apostasy of the people of Jerusalem further justifying the Lord’s destruction of the city. They had come to believe that because they had not been exiled to Babylon in 597 B.C., no further calamities would come upon them (Ezek. 11:2-3). Their being left behind however was not intended to justify their wicked actions. But rather their wickedness would justifly their destruction. Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy against them, saying, “And I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you. Ye shall fall by the sword. . . And ye shall know that I am the LORD; for ye have not walked in my statutes, neither executed my judgments, but have done after the manners of the heathen that are round about you” (Ezek. 11:9-10, 12).

Ezekiel asked the Lord, “wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?” (Ezek. 11:13). The answer of the Lord was, No! “Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come” (Ezek. 8:16). This is a key verse. Though Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed, the Lord would still be a little sanctuary or temple to Israel. The temple was a symbol of the fulness of the divine presence
of God. But though the fulness of God’s presence would be lost for a time, the Lord would still be a small sanctuary to Israel in their scattered condition through the ever present light of Christ that fills “the immensity of space—the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne” (D&C 88:12-13). If Israel would respond to the light of Christ and come unto the Lord, the Lord would “give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek. 11:19-20).

Ezekiel was later shown that the remnant of Israel who hearken to the light of Christ, would eventually be able to return to Jerusalem with a holy temple wherein the fulness of the glory of the Lord would be found (Ezek. 40-48). Perhaps to symbolize this, the vision ended with the glory of the Lord making a third movement eastward, to the Mt. of Olives (Ezek. 11:22-23). The Mt. of Olives formed Jerusalem’s eastern horizon. Babylon, where the exiled Jews were taken, lay to the east of Jerusalem. It may be that the Mt. of Olives represented the location of the exiled Jews. There the Lord rested until the return of Israel (see Ezek. 43).

Conclusion

Somewhere between a year to two years before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, in the land called Bountiful by Lehi and his family, a heated debate took place between Nephi and his rebellious brothers dealing, in part, with the righteousness of the people of Jerusalem whom they had left behind. The brothers claimed: “we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people” (1 Ne. 17:22). Nephi countered by reviewing Israel’s history showing that “they did harden their hearts from time to time.” “And now,” he declared, “after all these things, the time has come that they have become wicked, yea, nearly unto ripeness; and I know not but they are at this day about to be destroyed; for I know that the day must surely come that they must be destroyed, save a few only, who shall be led away into captivity” (1 Ne. 17:43).

The writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel bear out Nephi’s assertion. We have seen that the light of Christ strove with the people of Jerusalem enticing them to repent of their wicked actions and make reformation in their religious practices in the days of Hezekiah and Josiah. But we also have seen that the changes made by the people were outward only. Inwardly, the draw to sin and idolatry was stronger than their will to follow the Lord. In this condition, the people became rebellious, delighting in that which was evil. Their apostasy included a rejection of the Lord’s warnings through his prophets. They justified their sinful actions by claiming that what they were doing was not wrong. Some suggested that Jehovah had abandoned them and therefore did not know what they were doing. In the end, they completely rejected Jehovah worship for the pagan deities.

Their utter rejection of Jehovah left them without the influence of the light of Christ. Though, as Ezekiel saw, the light of Christ remained until Jerusalem was destroyed, it no longer strove with the people. Their was no enticement for good. Sin prevailed in the hearts of all the people. In this condition, the Jews became ripe for destruction.

References

1. The prophets have taught that the Spirit of the Lord has reference to the light of Christ. For example, see: Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of*


3. McConkie, A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, p.89; emphasis added.


5. Lee, Stand Ye In Holy, p.115


10. Smith, Gospel Doctrine, p.61.

11. Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p.156; emphasis added.


15. George Albert Smith, Sharing the Gospel With Others (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), p.29; also, Conference Report, Oct. 1916, p.48; emphasis added


17. Kimball, The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.82; emphasis added. President Kimball often mentioned this point. For example, he stated, “the Spirit of God ceases to strive with the
man who *excuses himself in wrong-doing*” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.86; emphasis added.). Again, “Self-justification is the enemy of repentance. God’s Spirit continues with the honest in heart to strengthen, to help, and to save, but invariably the Spirit of God ceases to strive with the man who *excuses himself in his wrong doing*.” (*Faith Precedes the Miracle* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972], p.234; emphasis added).


23. I am following the generally accepted chronology of the life of Jeremiah. It should be noted that William Holladay has made a compelling argument for a different chronology. See his work in the Hermeneia Series, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 24-35.

24. The phrase translated in the KJV, “I will not transgress,” should be rendered, “I will not serve.” The Hebrew word *avad*, translated “transgress”, means “to work or serve”.


26. It is assumed by most scholars that Jeremiah chapters 7 and 26 are about the same event.

27. There is some debate as to the exact date of this incident. Jer. 36:1 places this in the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign (604 B.C.). However, the Septuagint (43:9) places it in the eighth year (601 B.C.). William Holladay argues convincingly for the later date. See *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 4-5).


29. The concept that the whole does not necessarily reflect each individual is seen in the D&C where the Lord speaks of being pleased with the Church, “speaking unto the church collectively and not individually.” (1:30)

30. Though Ezekiel’s message was generally to the house of Israel, his immediate assignment was specifically to warn “them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them” (Ezek. 3:11).

32. Scholarship is divided as to whether Ezekiel 11 is a continuation of the vision found in Ezekiel 8-10 or a separate vision. For example, Zimmerli sees no reason for this being “an originally independent vision” (Ezekiel 1, p. 257) while Keith W. Carley views this a “separate vision” (The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974], p. 66). It is admitted that there are problems with the present placement of the scene portrayed in Ezekiel 11 (it would logically fit better before Jerusalem’s destruction). However, Daniel Block has noted: “The editor of Ezekiel’s prophecies evidently intended 8:1-11:25 to be treated as a single composition. The boundaries of this literary unit are set by a formal introduction (8:1-4) and a corresponding conclusion (11:22-25)” (The Book of Ezekiel; Chapters 1-24 [Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1997], p. 272). In this paper, Ezekiel 11 will be considered as a continuation of the vision since the content thematically continues with Ezekiel 8-10.


34. The Hebrew text of Ezekiel 8:3,5 is difficult lending itself to various possible translations. The text however seems to suggest that the altar and image of jealousy were located next to the northern city gate which would have been north of the northern gate of the inner court where Ezekiel was first set down. Among those who hold to this view, see: S. Fish, Ezekiel (London: Soncino, 1985), p. 42; Carley, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, p. 52; Walther Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 238. But others (such as Daniel I. Block, The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24 [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997], p. 280) see this gate as the northern gate of the inner court.

35. Many have suggested that the image was the Canaanite fertility goddess, Asherah [see Carley, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, p. 53; Moshe Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), p. 168; Fisch, Ezekiel, p. 42]. But Zimmerli does not think so (Ezekiel 1, pp. 238-239).


37. This corroborates Jeremiah’s testimony wherein he said, “according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing” (Jer. 11:13).


40. Later Rabbi’s considered the area between the altar and the porch of the temple one of the most sacred areas in the land. The Mishnah describes “ten degrees of holiness” beginning with the land of Israel and ending with the Holy of Holies, with each degree more holy than the next (see Kelim 1:6-9). In this list, only the holy place and the holy of holies within the temple itself were more holy than the space between the altar and the temple. According to the Mishnah, it was in this area that the priests blessed the people after performing the daily offering (see Tamid 7:2). This also was the place where the priests in the days of the Maccabees petitioned the Lord (1 Maccabees 7:36-38).

41. The form *shachah* is found this verse is *mishtachawithem*, which is unusual. It appears to be a participle with a second masculine singular perfect sufformative. Some scholars (such as Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I*, pp. 221 and Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p. 296, n. 70) assign this to scribal error feeling the word should be written *mishtachawim*, the normal rendering of worship. However, the Rabbis traditionally explained this unusual form as a compound of *mashchithim* (they destroy) and *mishtachawim* (they worship). They see in the word as it is presently rendered the dual nature of the abomination being acted out before the Lord: the worship of the sun god would bring about the destruction of the temple (see Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 45).

42. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I*, pp. 243-244

43. The primary use of *chamas* in the Old Testament is in societal contexts: oppression, injustice, and false accusation based upon greed. But *chamas* can be taken to the point of physical violence and destruction. For a greater understanding of this word, see H. Haag, “Chamas,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testmanet*. Presently 10 vols. Edited By G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1980), 4: 478-487.


45. President Marion G. Romney taught that the light of Christ may be experienced in three phases: first, the light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world; second, the gift of the Holy Ghost; and third, is the second comforter obtained through the more sure word of prophecy when one’s calling and election is made sure (see “The Light of Christ,” *Ensign* [May 1977], pp. 43-45). In order to obtain the fulness of the light of Christ one must experience all three phases. These three phases are central to temple worship and are represented in modern temples through various stages of the endowment. These three phases can also be seen in the
layout of Solomon’s temple. The first phase may be represented by the area outside of the
temple including both outer and inner courts. The second phase may be represented by the holy
place that housed, among other things, the seven branched candelabra. The third phase may be
represented by the holy of holies with its ark of the covenant.