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### The Prophets of the Exile

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Source: *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*

Published: Salt Lake City; Cornerstone Publishing, 1999 (1st Edition)

Page(s): 56–58

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## Chapter 8

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*In the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed. (1 Nephi 1:4)*

Who are the prophets of the time of Lehi? Some of them are known to us from the Bible, and all of them follow in the footsteps of Isaiah, who prophesied a century earlier that the kingdom of Judah would be conquered by the Babylonians and many of its people deported to Babylon.

The most notable prophet of Zedekiah's time was Jeremiah, whose ministry began in 628 B.C., in the time of Josiah and lasted until 587 B.C., when the Babylonians laid waste to Jerusalem (Jeremiah 1:2-3). He is mentioned twice by Nephi (1 Nephi 5:13; 7:14). Among Jeremiah's early contemporaries were the prophets Zephaniah and Obadiah, whose books are also found in the Bible. In 605 B.C., when Jehoiakim was king of Judah, the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar (sometimes called Nebuchadnezzar) attacked the kingdom of Judah and took members of the royal family captive to Babylon, among them a young man named Daniel who later became a prophet and left us the book that bears his name (Daniel 1:1-6).

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally published in the *Orem Daily Journal*, November 29, 1998.

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Urijah, who also prophesied that the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem. When king Jehoiakim sought to kill him, he fled into Egypt, but was brought back by the king's men and put to death (Jeremiah 26:20-23).

In 598 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar sent an army of foreigners to Jerusalem to slay Jehoiakim, who was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, also called Jeconiah or Coniah (2 Kings 24:1-6). After a short time, the Babylonians came and took the new king and other members of the royal family and government officials captive to Babylon and appointed Zedekiah king of Judah (2 Kings 24:10-17; Jeremiah 24:1; 27:20).

Among the captives was a young priest named Ezekiel. Five years later, at the age of thirty, following requirements of the law of Moses (Numbers 4:34, 47), he entered into his priestly service and received a vision from God (Ezekiel 1:1-3). Another prophet who began his ministry around this time was Habakkuk, whose book is also known from the Bible.

In the days of Zedekiah, "the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers . . . but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets" (2 Chronicles 36:15-16). One of these prophets was Lehi, who went forth to warn the people that Jerusalem would be destroyed because of wickedness. But "they were angry with him . . . and they also sought his life, that they might take it away" (1 Nephi 1:18-20). As a result, the Lord told Lehi to leave his homeland and brought him to the New World.

Meanwhile, Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem and suffered great persecution. He wrote a letter to those who had been taken captive to Babylon (Jeremiah 29:1-2), instructing them to build houses, plant gardens, and live normal lives (Jeremiah 29:4-7). He also promised that after seventy years of captivity, God would restore them to their land (Jeremiah 29:10). In the letter, he warned the people of false prophets who had risen up in Babylon and condemned them by name. Significantly, he did not name Ezekiel who, though living in Babylonia, was also speaking out

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against the wickedness of the people in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel lived in the town of Tel-Abib, after which the modern Israeli city of Tel-Aviv is named (Ezekiel 3:15). Some scholars believe the name reflects Babylonian Tel-Abubi, "mound of the deluge," situated near Nippur, south of Babylon. Nippur is where the Jewish Murashu family lived. For some 150 years, the Murashus operated their banking/insurance/legal firm. The official records of "Murashu and Sons" were discovered during archaeological excavations on the site. Included were a large number of deeds, found in clay jars sealed with asphalt, in the pattern described in Jeremiah 32:8-14. Thus, archaeology has confirmed that the Jews in Babylonian exile followed Jeremiah's advice about carrying on normal lives.

Back in Jerusalem, things grew worse. In 587 B.C., the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and took most of its inhabitants captive (2 Kings 25:8-21). A Jewish official named Gedaliah became governor of the new Babylonian province, but he was soon assassinated by a man named Ishmael, a member of the Jewish royal family (Jeremiah 41). Fearing Babylonian reprisals for the death of Gedaliah, many of the Jews decided to flee to Egypt. Jeremiah tried to dissuade them, but they forced him and others to go with them (Jeremiah 41-43). Some of Jeremiah's last prophecies were recorded in the Egyptian city of Tahpenhes (Jeremiah 43:8; 44:1).

### *CONCLUSION*

In the end, none of the prophets of the exile remained in Jerusalem. Urijah had been brought back from Egypt and slain. Ezekiel and Daniel were in Babylon. Jeremiah lived out his life in Egypt. Lehi brought his family and a few others to the New World. Jerusalem, whose inhabitants had rejected the prophets, lay desolate for the next few generations.