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## Chapter 19

# THE DIVINE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE BABYLONIAN DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

*Bruce Satterfield*

In January 588 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, laid siege against Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah 52). For over a year, the Jews suffered the effects of the siege. As famine set in, morale among the Jews sank. Because of their weakened condition, plagues of one kind or another began to afflict the people (Jeremiah 14:12; 27:8, 13). Eventually, the food supply was depleted, and many resorted to cannibalism (Jeremiah 19:9; Lamentations 2:20; 4:10; Ezekiel 5:10). Finally, in July 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!” (Lamentations 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., Jeremiah 36:31; Ezekiel 8–9; 22–23; 1 Nephi 1:13; 3:17). But why does the Lord destroy wicked people? At least one reason is offered 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 Nephi 26:11).

This study seeks to identify the spiritual symptoms that accompany the loss of the Spirit of the Lord (or the Light of Christ)<sup>1</sup> and that justify the destruction of a wicked society. After reviewing the teachings of past and present prophets regarding the causes and consequences of losing the Spirit of the Lord, I will show from the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel how the people of Jerusalem jeopardized their access to the Light of Christ, thus justifying their destruction.

## **Accountability and the Loss of the Spirit**

### **Agency of Man**

In order to understand why the Lord justifies the destruction of societies who have lost the Light of Christ, one must first understand the relationship between the Light of Christ and agency. The principle of agency is an eternal one essential to all the activities of God regarding his children. In fact, the war in heaven was fought over the issue of agency. The Book of Moses records: “Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, . . . I caused that he should be cast down” (Moses 4:3). Elder Bruce R. McConkie

explained, “Agency underlies all things—all advancement, all progression, even existence itself.”<sup>2</sup> 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.*”<sup>3</sup>

Lehi set out the conditions that must exist before agency can be exercised. First, there must be opposing choices (2 Nephi 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 Nephi 2:16). As Elder Harold B. Lee commented, “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.*”<sup>4</sup>

The Book of Mormon teaches that on the one hand the Spirit of Christ is the agent that entices men and women to do good (Moroni 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 Nephi 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, the Light of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, or the Spirit of God? President 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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. President 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.)”<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost are thought to be the same. This is not so. Elder 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.<sup>8</sup>

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. As President 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.”<sup>9</sup>

### **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 the effects of sin. The difference between losing the influence 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."<sup>10</sup> 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.)."<sup>11</sup>

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).

### **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; cf. Genesis 6:3; 2 Nephi 26:11; Ether 2:15; Moses 8:17). 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 it, then it is "ripe for destruction." As stated earlier, "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 Nephi 26:11).

Such was the condition of the people in the days of Noah (Moses 8:17–30) and apparently the inhabitants 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.”<sup>12</sup> “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.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, John Taylor, then an apostle of the church, reasoned:

Because in forsaking God, they lose sight of their eternal existence, corrupt themselves, and entail misery on their posterity. Hence it was better to destroy a few individuals, than to entail misery on many. And hence the inhabitants of the old world, and of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, because it was better for them to die, and thus be deprived of their agency, which they abused, than entail so much misery on their posterity, and bring ruin upon millions of unborn persons.<sup>14</sup>

### **Characteristics 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. However, 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:

1. *Repetition of sin, making it difficult to repent.* As one continues to rationalize sin, it becomes nearly impossible to repent. President Spencer W. 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.)”<sup>15</sup> This is the most damnable aspect of continuing in sin. “Free agency,” declared President 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.<sup>16</sup>

2. *Rationalization of sin.* 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.”<sup>17</sup> Such rationalization is due to an individual’s unresponsiveness to the things of God.

3. *State of rebellion.* Additionally, the attitude of the sinner toward 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.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, President 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*.”<sup>19</sup>

4. *Seared conscience.* Those who continually defy the Light of Christ and commit sin sear “their conscience as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2 JST). Speaking of the Light of Christ, Elder McConkie wrote: “All men receive this Spirit, 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.”<sup>20</sup> The scriptures refer to those who, through seared consciences, have reached this point as “past feeling” (Ephesians 4:19; 1 Nephi 17:45; Moroni 9:20). This is a dangerous position to be in, for the sinner is no longer aware that he is sinning. Elder 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.’”<sup>21</sup>

5. *Rejection of the prophets.* Those who will not heed 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.”<sup>22</sup> 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 Nephi 7:14).

6. *Continual sin.* 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” (Ether 2:15).

### **Lehi’s Jerusalem and the Loss of the Spirit**

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” (Helaman 13:38) because “the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers” (Mormon 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 father’s reform policies (see 2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 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 Chronicles 33:9, emphasis added). Some years after Manasseh’s death, his grandson, Josiah

(ca. 642–609 B.C.), initiated a second reform (see 2 Kings 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 beneficially 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 Chronicles 32), Hezekiah's people found themselves in the Lord's good graces after they had eradicated idolatry and refocused their attention toward 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 punishment. 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" (Alma 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 (for example, when the prophet Jeremiah taught in the temple that the recently cleansed temple would not preserve them unless they repented of their many sins; Jeremiah 7 and 26). 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 Kings 23:26–27).

### **The Witness of Jeremiah**

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 Chronicles 34:3 and Jeremiah 1:2).<sup>23</sup>

In an early prophecy uttered “in the ears of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 2:1; cf. 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:

1. *Repetition of sin, making it difficult to repent.* In Jeremiah 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.<sup>24</sup> 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 were 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 repen-

tance, a change of heart and new patterns of behaviour, would seem to be ruled out.”<sup>25</sup> This seems to be 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.

2. *Rationalization of sin.* Some justified their actions, feeling it was impossible to get out of the rut they had made, exclaiming, “There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers [i.e., foreign religious practices], and after them will I go” (Jeremiah 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. *radnu*, ‘we wander or roam restlessly’],” they said. “We will come no more unto thee?” (Jeremiah 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. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart” (Jeremiah 4:3–4). More evidence that the people were losing the Light of Christ is found in another prophecy (Jeremiah 5–6) pronounced probably towards the end of Josiah’s reign.

3. *State of 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. *sorer*, ‘stubborn’] and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone” (Jeremiah 5:23).

4. *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” (Jeremiah 6:15).

5. *Rejection of the prophets.* Since Josiah’s religious reforms had little effect on 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 trusted], with the sword” (Jeremiah 5:15, 17). This was a prophecy of the Babylonian siege of 598–597 B.C. (around 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” (Jeremiah 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. The offer of repentance reveals that though entrenched in sin, there was still hope for the people of Jerusalem. 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; speaking in the name of the Lord, he deliv-

ered a sermon denouncing the wickedness of the Jews and offering them a chance to repent (Jeremiah 7 and 26).<sup>26</sup> 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?" (Jeremiah 7:9–10).

He then reminded them what happened to the tabernacle at Shiloh in the days of Eli, whose sons, 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 (see 1 Samuel 4) and Shiloh, where the tabernacle was erected, was destroyed. 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" (Jeremiah 7:12; cf. Psalm 78:60–64).

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" (Jeremiah 7:3).

The initial response of the leaders to Jeremiah's denunciation was to sentence Jeremiah to death, "for he hath prophesied against this city" (Jeremiah 26:11). However, Jeremiah immediately 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" (Jeremiah 26:13 JST). 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” (Jeremiah 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 Chronicles 36:5; also 2 Kings 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” (Jeremiah 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 publicly proclaim to the people: “Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them” (Jeremiah 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” (Jeremiah 11:7–8). Therefore, the Lord said, the curses specified in the covenant (Deuteronomy 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” (Jeremiah 11:9–10). This apostasy was not limited to the rulers, 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” (Jeremiah 11:13).

6. *Continual sin.* Finally, an incident happened in Jehoiakim’s reign that sealed his fate and that of his people.<sup>27</sup> 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” (Jeremiah 36:3).

Jeremiah had his scribe Baruch go to the temple and read the scroll to the people who had gathered to fast. But there is no evidence that this had any effect 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 small knife 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” (Jeremiah 36:23–24). Jehoiakim then sent a guard to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch, “but the Lord hid them” (Jeremiah 36:26).

This was a telling point. Jehoiakim and the other rulers had become past feeling and calloused, paying no head 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 tell 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” (Jeremiah 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.”<sup>28</sup>

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 carcasses

shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. (Jeremiah 16:2–4)

As prophesied, the Babylonians besieged 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 Nephi 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.<sup>29</sup> Though Jerusalem would be destroyed, repentance by 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 was still striving with the people there. 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 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 an 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. (Jeremiah 29:17–19)

### **Ezekiel as Another Witness of Jerusalem's Apostasy**

About this same time, Jeremiah was shown a vision of two baskets, one full of good figs and the other full of poor figs (Jeremiah 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” (Jeremiah 24:10). 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 the Lord did in order to prepare a people to return to Jerusalem. He 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” (Jeremiah 24:7).

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”<sup>30</sup> to warn them of their wicked ways (Ezekiel 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 Samuel 14:16; 2 Samuel 18:24; 2 Kings 9:17; Jeremiah 51:12).<sup>31</sup> 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” (Ezekiel 33:14). Ezekiel’s writings add a second witness to Jeremiah’s testimony of the wickedness of those living in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel began to receive revelations and visions midway between the 597 B.C. exile (see Ezekiel 1:1–3) and the final siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 588–587 B.C. His first revelations warned of Jerusalem’s impending destruction. In 593 B.C., he dramatized the siege and destruction of Jerusalem through a series of symbolic acts (Ezekiel 4–5). Then, in word, he made clear that Jerusalem’s destruction was sure: “Thus saith the Lord God . . . Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols” (Ezekiel 6:3–4). The hearts of the people of Jerusalem had turned from serving Jehovah to serving the images of the nations around them. Only through their destruction would they know that Jehovah was their god. In language similar to that used of the people living in the days of Noah before the flood (Genesis 6:13), the Lord said of Judah and Jerusalem: “The end is come upon the four corners of the land [of Judah] . . . for the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city [of Jerusalem] is full of violence” (Ezekiel 7:2, 23). The people of Jerusalem had become like the people in the days of Noah and would therefore experience a similar fate.

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 (Ezekiel 8–11).<sup>32</sup> The vision was given to Ezekiel in the presence of the elders of Judah, who, after the vision was over, were told all that he, Ezekiel, had seen.

The vision commenced with Ezekiel seeing through successive stages “increasingly greater acts of apostasy.”<sup>33</sup> At first he was taken to a gate on the northern wall of the city,<sup>34</sup> where he saw an altar with “the image of jealousy” (Ezekiel 8:3, 5).<sup>35</sup> High places with the images of pagan deities were often placed near the gates of cities (see 2 Kings 23:8), as can be seen, for example, at the Iron Age gates of Tel Dan<sup>36</sup> and at Bethsaida (et-Tel).<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

Next, Ezekiel was shown a secret chamber in the wall near a gate leading into the inner court directly surrounding the temple.<sup>39</sup> 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, portrayed upon the wall round about” (Ezekiel 8:10). In an attempt to justify their actions, the men said, “The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth” (Ezekiel 8:12). Instead of repenting of their actions and pleading that the Lord would return, the people used Jehovah’s absence 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 or worshipped. 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” (Ezekiel 8:14), a Mesopotamian fertility deity, whose annual death and resurrection rites were accompanied by weeping mourners.<sup>40</sup>

After gazing on 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.<sup>41</sup> 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. *shahah*, ‘to bow down’]<sup>42</sup> the sun toward the east” (Ezekiel 8:16). Whether these men were involved in pagan solar worship, such as was found in Egypt or Mesopotamia, or a form of solarized Jehovah worship, as some have suggested,<sup>43</sup> what is clear is that their actions were seen by the Lord as abominable (Ezekiel 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 back sides toward the temple of Jehovah.

Ezekiel was told that these contemptible cultic actions were superseded 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. *hamas*, ‘violence, wrong, injustice’],<sup>44</sup> and have returned to provoke me to anger” (Ezekiel 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 on 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” (Genesis 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” (Ezekiel 8:18).

As he had seen the wickedness of the Jews in successive degrees, Ezekiel witnessed the withdrawal of the Light of Christ in successive steps. 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 from which the Babylonian army would come) and stood by the altar, each one holding “a slaughter weapon in his hand” (Ezekiel 9:2). Added to them was a seventh man “clothed with linen, which had the writer’s inkhorn by his side” (Ezekiel 9:3).

Then “the glory of the Lord,” which had filled the house of the Lord at the time of Solomon’s dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:11) and presumably had remained there, moved from the holy of holies to the threshold of the temple. Remember that those who were worshipping in the hidden chamber justified their actions by claiming that the Lord had abandoned them (see Ezekiel 8:12). But the truth was, the Lord had *not* abandoned 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.”<sup>45</sup> 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 (Ezekiel 9:4). We are not told whether he found any or not. The other six men were told to follow him and destroy all who 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” (Ezekiel 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 (Ezekiel 10:18–19). Ezekiel was taken by the Spirit to the same place (Ezekiel 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 (Ezekiel 11:2–3). Their being left behind, however, was not intended to justify their wicked actions, but rather their wickedness would justify 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” (Ezekiel 11:9–10, 12).

Ezekiel asked the Lord, “wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?” (Ezekiel 11:13). The answer 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” (Ezekiel 11:16). 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.<sup>46</sup> 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” (Ezekiel 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 (Ezekiel 40–48). Perhaps to symbolize this, the vision ended with the glory of the Lord making a third movement eastward, to the Mount of Olives (Ezekiel 11:22–23). The Mount 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 Mount of Olives represented the location of the exiled Jews. There the Lord rested until the return of Israel (see Ezekiel 43).

### **Conclusion**

Sometime between one and 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 Nephi 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 Nephi 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, both enticing and entreating them to repent of their wicked actions and to make reformatations 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 and worshipped 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. There was no enticement for good. Sin prevailed in the hearts of all the people. In this condition, the Jews became ripe for destruction.

## NOTES

1. The prophets have taught that the Spirit of the Lord has reference to the Light of Christ. For example, see *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 1:50–51; Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places: Selected Sermons and Writings of President Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 117–18; Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 343; and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 446, 752.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 90.
3. *Ibid.*, 89, emphasis added.

4. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1945, 46, emphasis added.
5. Lee, *Stand Ye In Holy Places*, 115.
6. McConkie, *New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 257.
7. *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 61.
8. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 50.
9. Marion G. Romney, "The Light of Christ," *Ensign*, May 1977, 43. For other descriptions on the Light of Christ, see C. Kent Dunford, "Light of Christ," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:835; Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 49–54; McConkie, *New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 257–58; and B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy's Course in Theology*, Fifth Year. Divine Immanence and the Holy Ghost (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 1–10.
10. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 61.
11. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 156, emphasis added.
12. Neal A. Maxwell, *Sermons Not Spoken* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 91.
13. Neal A. Maxwell, *Look Back at Sodom: A Timely Account from Imaginary Sodom Scrolls* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 13–14.
14. John Taylor, *The Government of God* (Liverpool: Richards, 1852), 53.
15. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 86.
16. Marion G. Romney, "The Perfect Law of Liberty," *Ensign*, November 1981, 45.
17. *Ibid.*, 82, emphasis added. President Kimball often mentioned this point. For example: "The Spirit of God ceases to strive with the man who *excuses himself in wrong-doing*" (*ibid.*, 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 wrongdoing*.” Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 234, emphasis added.

18. George Albert Smith, *Sharing the Gospel with Others*, comp. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 29; also in Conference Report, October 1916, 48, emphasis added.

19. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 162, emphasis deleted and added.

20. McConkie, *New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 260.

21. Neal A. Maxwell, *Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 15.

22. Neal A. Maxwell, *For the Power Is in Them . . . : Mormon Musings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 43.

23. I am following the generally accepted chronology of the life of Jeremiah. It should be noted that William Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 24–35, has made a compelling argument for a different chronology.

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.”

25. William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1986), 43.

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. Jeremiah 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, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 4–5, argues convincingly for the later date.

28. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 5.

29. The concept that the whole does not necessarily reflect each

individual is seen in the Doctrine and Covenants where the Lord speaks of being pleased with the Church, “speaking unto the church collectively and not individually” (D&C 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” (Ezekiel 3:11).

31. C. U. Wolf, “Watchman,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4:806.

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, Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 257, sees no reason for this being “an originally independent vision,” while Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 66, views this as a “separate vision.” Admittedly, 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 I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 272, 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).” In this paper, Ezekiel 11 will be considered as a continuation of the vision since the content thematically continues with Ezekiel 8–10.

33. Carley, *Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 51.

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 are Solomon Fisch, *Ezekiel* (London: Soncino, 1985), 42; Carley, *Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 52; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 238. But others,



such as Block, *Book of Ezekiel*, 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, *Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 53; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 168; Fisch, *Ezekiel*, 42. But Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 238–39, does not think so.

36. See Avraham Biran, “Dan,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 1:323–32; also Avraham Biran, “Sacred Spaces of Standing Stones, High Places and Cult Objects at Tel Dan,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24/5 (1998): 38–45, 70.

37. See Rami Arav et al., “Bethsaida Rediscovered,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26/1 (2000): 45–56.

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

39. For an excellent discussion of the layout of Solomon’s temple, including surrounding courts, see Victor V. Hurowitz, “Inside Solomon’s Temple,” *Bible Review* (April 1994): 24–37, 50. For other discussions, see Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 2:312–22; Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 189–94. Also helpful is Leslie C. Allen’s discussion of Ezekiel’s movements within the temple complex, including diagrams, in *Ezekiel 1–19* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1994), 139–41.

40. There is scholarly debate as to the exact nature of Tammuz (Dumuzi) worship. See Oliver R. Gurney, “Tammuz Reconsidered: Some Recent Developments,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7/2 (1962): 147–60; Thorkild Jacobsen, “Toward the Image of Tammuz,” in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, ed. William L. Moran (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 73–103; Samuel N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 107–33; Edwin

M. Yamauchi, "Tammuz and the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 283–90.

41. Later rabbis 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 Mishnah *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 Mishnah *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).

42. The form of *shahah* found in this verse is *mishtahawithem*, which is unusual. It appears to be a participle with a second masculine singular perfect sufformative. Some scholars, such as Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1, 221, and Block, *Book of Ezekiel*, 296 n. 70, assign this to scribal error, feeling the word should be written *mishtahawim*, the normal rendering of worship. However, the rabbis traditionally explained this unusual form as a compound of *mashhithim* (they destroy) and *mishtahawim* (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*, 45.

43. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1, 243–44.

44. The primary use of *hamas* in the Old Testament is in societal contexts: oppression, injustice, and false accusation based upon greed. But *hamas* 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 Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 4:478–87.

45. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 162.

46. Recall that 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, the second comforter obtained through the “more sure word of prophecy” when one’s calling and election is made sure; see Romney, “Light of Christ,” 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.