

## The Last Kings of Judah

Judah had an opportunity beyond Israel to continue in the land. Sadly, Judah watched her sister Israel plunge into destruction, and then she followed suit (Jer. 3:6-10). Consequently, Jeremiah prophesied that there would be period of 70 years in which Judah would go into Babylonian captivity (Jer. 25:8-11). In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took the first group of captives from Judah to Babylon. Jerusalem itself would fall to destruction in 586 B.C., an event described by Jeremiah (ch. 52).

After Hezekiah reigned and set in order the reforms to help Judah, his wicked son Manasseh took over and destroyed everything that had been gained. For several decades, Manasseh practiced idolatry, including the evil of passing his children through the fire (child sacrifice). Because he plunged Judah so deeply into evil, they would not recover before being destroyed. Manasseh's son, Amon, was no better; he just didn't reign very long.

Then came Josiah. As previously seen, Josiah initiated a series of reforms that should have helped the nation. Sadly, it was only temporary. Though Josiah personally was righteous, the reforms did not ultimately penetrate the hearts of the people. As Jeremiah put it, "Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception" (Jer. 3:10). God spared



Josiah the pain of seeing what would happen next, but very soon after Josiah's death in 609 B.C., Judah would be going into captivity.

Josiah had three sons and one grandson who reigned in Jerusalem. First, Jehoahaz reigned for only 3 months. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done" (2 Kings 23:32). He was imprisoned by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (who also killed Josiah). Neco then put Josiah's second son, Jehoiakim (a.k.a. Eliakim), on the throne, and Jehoiakim paid tribute to Egypt. He would reign for 11 years, but he, too, did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Jehoiakim was one of the kings who gave Jeremiah a difficult time. His attitude toward Jeremiah and the word of God is seen in Jeremiah 36. Jeremiah had his scribe, Baruch, write on a scroll the prophecies about Judah and take it to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim's officials took it to him to read, but the king cut the scroll up and cast it into a fire (Jer. 36). The scroll was replaced, but the attitude of Jehoiakim toward God's message was clearly one of contempt.

Before Jehoiakim's reign ended, the Babylonians gained control of Judah, forcing Jehoiakim to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, though he tried to rebel. When he died, his son, Jehoiachin was

made king. He also did evil, and he only lasted three months before he was taken as a captive into Babylon in 597 B.C. One interesting note about Jehoiachin is that he was later treated with some kindness, and there is record of his being on the rations list of Babylonian captives. The very end of Jeremiah records that he took his meals in the king's presence and was given an allowance.

When Jehoiachin was taken, Nebuchadnezzar set Zedekiah (a.k.a. Mattaniah) on the throne as a vassal. Zedekiah was Jehoiachin's uncle, Jehoiakim's brother, and Josiah's son. He reigned 11 years in Jerusalem, but was under the thumb of Babylon. The text tells us, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of the Lord this came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence" (2 Kings 24:19-20). Zedekiah then tried to rebel against Babylon, and what happened next was not pretty. 2 Kings 25:1-7 describes the scenario:

"Now in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it and built a siege wall all around it. So the city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled by night by way of the gate between the two walls beside the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. And they went by way of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans

pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and he passed sentence on him. They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon" (NASB).

Subsequently, the city of Jerusalem was burned to the ground, as was the temple, the king's house, and all the great houses. All that the prophets had predicted concerning Jerusalem happened. Jeremiah wrote about the fallen city in Lamentations. After this, Gedaliah was made governor, but was soon assassinated. Jeremiah was taken to Egypt into exile. Judah was indeed fallen. Even so, there was still hope. Restoration would be coming.

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