

2 Kings 24: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Kings chapter 24 In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant for three years. Then he turned and rebelled against him.

And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by his servants the prophets.

Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed.

For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord would not pardon. Now the rest of the deeds of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and Jehoiakim his son reigned in his place. And the king of Egypt did not come again out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt.

[1 : 00] From the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates. Jehoiakim was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Nehushtah, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem.

And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done. At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged.

And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to the city while his servants were besieging it. And Jehoiakim the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself and his mother and his servants and his officials and his palace officials.

The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign, and carried off all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the Lord, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the Lord had foretold.

He carried away all Jerusalem, and all the officials, and all the mighty men of valour, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

[2 : 05] And he carried away Jehoiakim to Babylon. The king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the chief men of the land he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valour, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the metal workers, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war.

And the king of Babylon made Mataniah, Jehoiakim's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Hermutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libna, and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For because of the anger of the Lord, it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence.

And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. In 2 Kings chapter 24, Israel finally goes over the precipice and tumbles down into exile in Babylon.

Jehoiakim had been placed on the throne of Judah by Pharaoh Necho after he had removed his predecessor Jehoahaz and brought him into exile in Egypt. The whole region was in turmoil.

[3 : 18] The great powers in the north and the south, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, are coming into direct conflict, and the minor nations that formerly functioned as buffers between them are being removed from play.

The outcome of this is far from certain. Assyria and Egypt are decisively beaten by Babylon at Carchemish in 605 BC, leading to a few years of Babylonian dominance, during which time Jehoiakim, who had been a tributary of Egypt, becomes a Babylonian vassal.

Yet a few years later, in 601 BC, Babylon suffered a serious setback in a failed attempt to conquer Egypt. This was likely the point when Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon, presuming that they were no longer in the ascendancy.

And his rebellion fails terribly. Judah is attacked by raiders on all sides, from nations under Babylonian rule, yet in a way orchestrated by the Lord in judgment upon their sins and in fulfillment of the words of the prophets.

In particular, this is a consequence of the idolatrous abominations of Manasseh, and his violence and his shedding of innocent blood. Jehoiakim dies after his 11-year reign, and he is replaced by Jehoiachin, his son.

[4 : 27] Babylon, unlike Egypt, had the reserve power to recover from the earlier failed attempt at conquest. By the end of Jehoiakim's reign, the tide has turned decisively in Babylon's favour.

Egypt is a spent force, and Babylon now controls the entire territory between Egypt and the Euphrates. The attentive hearer of the text should recognise that this is the territory that used to be ruled by Solomon at the height of the kingdom of Israel.

It now all rests under the power of Babylon, and the doom of Judah is set. The finishing blows come in stages, beginning in the reign of Jehoiakim, the throne name of Jeconiah or Kaniah.

Jehoiakim continues in the wickedness of his father. About three years after Jehoiakim's rebellion against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem. It isn't often that we have a reference to the regnal year of a pagan king, but here we see that Nebuchadnezzar takes Jehoiakim captive after his surrender in the eighth year of his reign.

He takes the treasures of the king's house and the temple, and exiles the royal family and the officials, the artisans and the trained military men, leaving only the poor of the land. The nation has its head and its might cut off.

[5 : 39] Babylon's approach to deportation was different from Assyria's. Assyria deported populations and replaced them with different populations, cutting off the connection between people and the land in which they belonged and flourished.

This can be one of the most devastating ways to break down a people's nationhood, peoplehood and selfhood. In much more recent history, we can see this in the impact of the European powers, transporting African slaves to the Americas.

Babylon's approach was different. They sought to remove the head of the nations that they conquered, stripping them of the people of skill and power, who could grant them nationhood and effective collective agency by their leadership.

There were 10,000 deportees, 7,000 of the men of valor, 1,000 craftsmen and metal workers. Presumably the remaining 2,000 were members of the ruling classes.

Stripped of these people in 597 BC, Judah is left powerless and leaderless. There would be a further deportation later in 586 BC, but while that deportation is more final, this earlier deportation is the greater of the two.

[6 : 47] Jehoiakim is carried away to Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar replaces him with his uncle, Mataniah, the third son of Josiah, whose name he changes to Zedekiah, meaning the righteousness of the Lord.

The irony of this should not be missed. This is all the fulfilment of the Lord's righteous judgment upon Judah. Zedekiah, like Jehoiakim, reigns for 11 years before rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar.

He repeats the error of his predecessor, and he suffers the same consequences. Peter Lighthouse, following Robert Cohn, observes that there is a close parallel between two different sections here.

2 Kings 23, 21-24, 2 is paralleled closely with 2 Kings 24, 8-25, 1. 2 Kings 24, 8-25, 1.

Zedekiah reigns for 11 years. Jehoiakim rebels against Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar. God brings attackers upon Jehoiakim, and then the Lord rejects Judah in the reign of Zedekiah.

[8 : 15] Lighthouse proceeds to remark, Comparing these sequences, we can see that Judah's dealings with Egypt foreshadow its dealings with Babylon, and this suggests that the writer of 1 and 2 Kings is operating within Isaiah's notion of a second exodus from Babylon that recapitulates the exodus from Egypt.

The final chapters of 1 and 2 Kings also complete a larger pattern of sevens that run through the history of Judah. Six kings, and then Athaliah interrupts the dynasty.

Six kings, and then Manasseh reigns as the worst Davidic king ever. Six kings, and then Nebuchadnezzar destroys the city and the temple. The events of the final years of Judah are also discussed in the prophets in such places as the book of Jeremiah and the book of Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel chapter 17 verses 11 to 21, for instance, Then the word of the Lord came to me, Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean?

Tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took her king and her princes, and brought them to him in Babylon. And he took one of the royal offspring, and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath, the chief men of the land he had taken away, that the kingdom might be humble, and not lift itself up, and keep his covenant that it might stand.

[9 : 33] But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and a large army. Will he thrive? Can one escape who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape?

As I live, declares the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die.

Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company, will not help him in war, when mounds are cast up, and siege walls built to cut off many lives. He despised the oath in breaking the covenant, and behold, he gave his hand and did all these things, he shall not escape.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, as I live, surely it is my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke. I will return it upon his head. I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and enter into judgment with him there, for the treachery he has committed against me.

And all the pick of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered to every wind, and you shall know that I am the Lord. I have spoken. A question to consider.

[10 : 49] Reading Jeremiah chapters 27 and 28, what light do they shed upon this chapter?