

The Decline and Captivity of Judah

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References: **2 Kings 24**, Genesis 15:18; 2 Kings 11:1; 2 Chronicles 14:8-9; Jeremiah 22:8-9; Jeremiah 22:18-19; Jeremiah 22:24; Jeremiah 22:28-30; Jeremiah 26:20-23; Jeremiah 36:25; Jeremiah 36:29-30; Jeremiah 52:31-34; Daniel 1:1-2; Daniel 10:13-21; Zephaniah 1:1; Luke 3:31; Luke 3:38; 2 Timothy 4:2; Revelation 9:20; Revelation 16:8-11

The Forfeited Promise

Very good. Well, I think tonight we probably are looking initially at some verses in 2 Kings chapter 24. Last week we got down to the end of verse 6. We talked about the end of Jehoiakim and the beginning of the reign of Jehoiachin.

[2 Kings 24:6 NKJV]

So Jehoiakim rested with his fathers. Then Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place.

So again, for those who would like to take part—because this subject matter is dealt with in so many different places: Kings, Chronicles, and in the Prophets—we're not going to stay rigorously lockstep one verse at a time, but we'll sort of take concepts as they come, but we'll lead through the verses in 2 Kings. So I'm going to read verse 7 now, 2 Kings chapter 24, verse 7.

[2 Kings 24:7 NKJV]

And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates.

So we're basically looking at what's happening in Israel. But instead of Israel and Judah being in charge of this land, it's the king of Egypt that is in the land. And the phrasing is interesting. The king of Egypt had been in an area from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates, all that pertain to the king of Egypt. Well, that's the land that was **promised** to the people of Israel.

[Genesis 15:18 NKJV]

On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates--

All the way up to the Euphrates, down to the river of Egypt. We don't really read of any of the kings taking all of that land. Under the days of David, they probably came closer than any other time. But they never took it all. But here's the king of Egypt, and he took much of it. It doesn't say he took it all, but he took much of it.

And so we often compare Egypt to the world. It's a good picture of the world. And very often we'll find in history, in the history of the church, in individual lives, that that which is promised to the believer, to the assembly, to the church, is often **forfeited** to the world. And the world ended up getting what God intended us to get.

And I guess that's the theme that goes through much of what I'm going to say tonight. There's been a terrible erosion of what God planned for his people and what they got. The enemies of the Lord are extremely powerful. And over time, instead of conquering more and more and more, the people of God often end up with less and less and less.

And that's certainly what we're witnessing here. We read of one situation and we say, "That's terrible." And then you read a little further and it's worse. And then you read a little further and it's worse. And it's going to get a lot worse than what it is right now. But here's the king of Egypt. And he had conquered this land. And the king of Babylon comes along and takes all that from him. So, yeah, sort of a distressing background there.

The Siege of Jerusalem

Verse 8 says Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he began to reign and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months. His mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father had done. And at that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came up against Jerusalem and the city was besieged and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came against the city and his servants did besiege it.

[2 Kings 24:8-11 NKJV]

⁸ Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in

Jerusalem three months. His mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. ⁹ And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.

¹⁰ At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. ¹¹ And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, as his servants were besieging it.

So Josiah had died, his sons came in, they behaved most foolishly and the king of Egypt grew a little for a short time and then the king of Babylon comes in. We understand the truth of that verse probably more in the context of the introductory verses of the book of Daniel than anywhere else. We know what happened. Daniel was taken. We probably should turn there just to read it. Daniel chapter 1. And you know these verses, but it doesn't do us any harm to see them again. Daniel 1:1.

[Daniel 1:1-2 NKJV]

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

So Daniel was taken. And his friends were taken: Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael. And interesting verse 2: part of the vessels of the house of God were also carried away. They were taken into the land of Shinar to the house of Nebuchadnezzar's god; he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. So it wasn't just that they took people, but they took the **wealth**.

And we're going to see as we go through the passages this evening, we're going to see that the wealth again was taken and eroded and taken and taken and taken. I marvel that there was so much wealth there, because each king who came in seemed to find some more to take, and he kept taking and taking and taking, all of which is a parallel. The parallel is that's what happened to them as a nation. What happens to us as an assembly, as a Christian church, as individuals, could be very, very similar. And very often in an assembly, things go from bad to worse. And very often in individual lives, people say, "I can depart from the Lord and I'll lose a little." But over time, the loss can be extremely great and it keeps on getting

worse and worse and worse. So, those are my introductory comments and I'll leave them there for this point.

The Character of Jehoiakim

I'd like to maybe back up just a little and review Jehoiakim. We introduced a number of things last week, but we kind of closed off just before we finalized his actual death, which is very interesting, because there seems to be contradictory accounts of his death. We don't read a lot in either the Kings or the Chronicles concerning this man Jehoiakim, just that he was an evil man. But Jeremiah had a lot of personal encounters with Jehoiakim and was really in the strength of his prophecy during his reign. Because it was immediately before the invasion of the kingdom of the Babylonians and the end of the kingdom, and when the times of the Gentiles would begin, when God would finally give up Judah as prisoners and captives to the Gentile authorities and kings.

And so Jehoiakim was a man that extremely **hardened** his heart against all the warnings of not only Jeremiah, but also Habakkuk and Zephaniah at the same time. There were godly people like Daniel. There were others, of course, there—a remnant—but the king completely ignored this remnant and the warnings from the Lord himself and truly hardened his heart.

We read that in Jeremiah chapter 36 first. We have a whole account there, which we commented on last week regarding the scroll that Jeremiah wrote almost as a final warning to this man. And it was read in the presence of Jehoiakim. But as he read the scroll, he would cut up a piece as it had been read and throw it into the fire that was burning before him—complete disregard, even from some of his counselors not to do this. We read in verse 25:

[Jeremiah 36:25 NKJV]

Nevertheless Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah implored the king not to burn the scroll; but he would not listen to them.

And then he goes to lay hands upon Jeremiah, but he was hidden. And then in verse 29 of chapter 36, we read:

[Jeremiah 36:29-30 NKJV]

²⁹ And you shall say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, "Thus says the LORD: "You have burned this scroll, saying, "Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and cause man and beast to cease from

here?"³⁰ Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: "He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night.

So He pronounces now that the end of Jehoiakim would be in a very dishonorable way. Cast out the body, not buried. But we read, when we go back to 2 Kings 24 and verse 6, we read a short account that says:

[2 Kings 24:6 NKJV]

So Jehoiakim rested with his fathers. Then Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place.

Of course, the reason that the Lord had pronounced this judgment on him was that he had killed the prophet Urijah and had cast Urijah's bodies out without a proper burial. And as a result, God said, "I'm going to do the like to you." We read that in Jeremiah chapter 26, verse 20:

[Jeremiah 26:20-23 NKJV]

²⁰ Now there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath Jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah. ²¹ And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid and fled, and went to Egypt. ²² Then Jehoiakim the king sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor, and other men who went with him to Egypt. ²³ And they brought Urijah from Egypt and brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who killed him with the sword and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.

He was just thrown into a grave with a very dishonorable end. And so the Lord says, "Your end is going to be the same as you have done to the prophet of the Lord." But here it says that he rested with his fathers. It doesn't say he was **buried** with his fathers. So there is no real discrepancy if you read those lines carefully. He wasn't buried with his fathers, as is often said, but instead he rested with his fathers. No details given as to his death. But his end—Jeremiah chapter 22 and verse 18—we read:

[Jeremiah 22:18-19 NKJV]

¹⁸ Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:

"They shall not lament for him,
Saying, "Alas, my brother!" or "Alas, my sister!"
They shall not lament for him,
Saying, "Alas, master!" or "Alas, his glory!"

¹⁹ He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey,
Dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

But scripture is silent as to that. It just says he rested with his fathers. I'll close the chapter without saying very much. But Josephus, not always to be trusted, but he records that Nebuchadnezzar, when he finally came back to Jerusalem, he slew Jehoiakim. You recall that he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in his third year or so. But later when he came back, he slew him. And it says his bodies were thrown out between the walls by the gate, between the walls—the double walls that they had in some of those places. And that his burial then was according to what he had done to Urijah, who was cast out as well.

So just some details of the prophesied end of Jehoiakim. He was, as I say, there wasn't much detail given in the Chronicles and Kings. But there was because of the close encounters that he had with Jeremiah, who records the end of this king. And it takes some searching back and forth to pull all these details out. But I guess that's what the Lord wants us to do. In doing so, you stumble across little gems here and there as you're going blindly down one path. And suddenly you find a little gem or a little gold vein here and there. And so I think that's why the Lord has designed some of these things for our benefit as we search the scriptures. That's just a little aside going back to Jehoiakim.

The Confusion of Decline

Again, all very confusing. The names are similar. The details are here and there and so on. And you say, "How can you possibly figure out what's going on?" And there's a sense in which that's true of much of the Christian life. We don't understand everything, especially in days of decline like we're in now. We don't really know where the Lord is working, where he's not working, what's going on. The fence posts and the guide posts that we used to rely on seem to be confusing. And the whole thing is the **confusion of disruption**.

And our responsibility is to go back to the Lord and to the truth of what he's doing and say, "All these things can be going on out there, but by the grace of God, we're not going to be going through days of decline. By the grace of God we're going to preach the word; we're going to live for Christ." I'd rather be like Josiah than like his sons. And so we say, "All right, Lord, we're going to start living lives like that in the days that are so difficult."

I'm thinking of David. David knew something of the difficulties of court life and the ambitions of men around him and the smooth tongues of those that sometimes rise to these positions of authority. And he said, "Lord, lead me in a **plain path** because of my enemies," because of the different plots in places of power and authority.

Spiritual Warfare in High Places

But there's another thought here that I think that we perhaps oversee, and that is that the enemy himself, the devil, certainly has his servants in these high places. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. And you recall Daniel with his vision there with Gabriel coming and talking about the spiritual warfare that they were engaged in—he and Michael—and the very heads of nations, the prince of Persia, the prince of Greece.

[Daniel 10:13-21 NKJV]

¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. ¹⁴ Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come." ¹⁵ When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. ¹⁶ And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, "My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. ¹⁷ For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me." ¹⁸ Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. ¹⁹ And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!" So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me." ²⁰ Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. ²¹

But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince.

These were high spiritual powers that were militating against the truth of God and the people of God and the purposes of God. So here we don't really see Satan working overtly, openly, but we see him, I think, working to destroy the kingly line, which hung by a thread a few times. Athaliah killed all but one of the line of David.

[2 Kings 11:1 NKJV]

When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs.

And a number of times the succession of the promise of the coming King of kings was threatened by Satan's plans himself to undo the works of God, to destroy the people of God, and to discourage them wherever he could. And so I think we see him here working these men like Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—these four men in the last days after Josiah—they were each one of them led by the evil one to try and thwart the purposes of God wherever they could.

The last thing, of course, is that I would just mention on this, Jehoiakim himself not only was under the direction of the evil one, but he leaned on the **flesh**. Remember, Egypt has always been a picture of the world. His eyes were on the world. It seemed to him that Babylon was really not that powerful, in other words, by itself. They were supported by the Medes, who were a very powerful nation at that time. But he weighted it in the balance, and with his worldly eyes he figured Egypt would be the stronger power, and so he allied himself with the world.

So in times of difficulty, we really need to be able to close our eyes to what the world might have to say—the world's wisdom. Even though the circumstances may not seem to be in favor, as the prophets had foretold that God was going to raise up the Babylonians, and he did, and he didn't believe them, nor did others. They thought that the Egyptians were the great power and that they would never have to bend to the Babylonians. Well, the year before this happened was the Battle of Carchemish, which decided once and for all that Egypt then would not be a power. The Egyptian army was defeated and Nebuchadnezzar then took over all the dominion that Egypt had held and then came up to Jerusalem. I guess

he left Jehoiakim as a vassal who then, in his stubbornness, continued to trust in Egypt, and he revolted against the Babylonians because they had to pull back, you recall.

But the Lord continued the pressure on them by sending these bands of Chaldeans and so on in chapter 24, verse 2, to keep the pressure on the king of Judah.

[2 Kings 24:2 NKJV]

And the LORD sent against him raiding bands of Chaldeans, bands of Syrians, bands of Moabites, and bands of the people of Ammon; He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken by His servants the prophets.

But he would not listen. Burning the scroll—that's the same time that the scroll was burned when he had made that decision to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. And so then Nebuchadnezzar comes up and takes him and kills him. So those are some of the gleanings that I see from this. The man completely blind. Blinded to the spiritual powers in the heavenly places.

But Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Urijah, and Habakkuk, and others prophesied. There was a wealth of, you might call, righteous preaching going on in that time. And it must have been a great encouragement to the remnant there: Daniel and his three companions. I wonder, because they'd be very young, as they would probably have heard the preaching of one or more of those prophets. And it must have been a great encouragement to them when they were carried off captive in 606 B.C. And they carried that spiritual message in their hearts there to that land of captivity.

So I've often wondered about those early years of Daniel's life before he went down to Babylon. And it's interesting that Daniel was one of the royal family. He was related to royalty somehow, as I believe his three friends were. But also Zephaniah, if you read the detail there, was related to Hezekiah.

[Zephaniah 1:1 NKJV]

The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

His heritage goes back to Hezekiah. And so I've surmised and said, I just wonder if Zephaniah didn't have a Bible study in the palace, and said to Daniel and a few other teenagers, "Why don't you come along, we'll study the word together." Was Daniel acquainted with some of the other prophets? And the answer is quite possibly. Somehow, the truth of God got deep into the life of those teenagers before they got down to Babylon. And I just wonder if those prophets didn't have some good times. I can imagine a Bible study in the palace—Zephaniah, and possibly others, teaching Daniel and his friends. Probably many others. There were good things going on in these very, very difficult days.

The Numerical Decline

So back to verse 10, relating to the summary of what happened, and we read about it in Daniel. But there's detail now given to us in verses 12 down through 16. I'm going to read those, and this sort of gives us more insight into what was going on in those difficult days.

[2 Kings 24:12-16 NKJV]

¹² Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner.

¹³ And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said.

¹⁴ Also he carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

¹⁵ And he carried Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. The king's mother, the king's wives, his officers, and the mighty of the land he carried into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. ¹⁶ All the valiant men, seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths, one thousand, all who were strong and fit for war, these the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.

So more detail as to precisely how Nebuchadnezzar got the people up to Babylon. I guess the central theme that comes out of this for me is "10,000." The line is, "all the princes, all the mighty men of valor, even 10,000." And I say, that's not a very big number. And then there were some soldiers, even 7,000, in verse 16. And craftsmen, 1,000. Add them all together,

18,000. What happened to all the rest of the population? What was left, we're going to find out later, were just the poor.

Try to put these numbers into perspective. Just a little bit of mathematics for you now. How many Israelites were there in the days of David? And frankly, I can't remember. But we do know that in the days of Asa, he went out to war against the Ethiopians.

[2 Chronicles 14:8-9 NKJV]

⁸ And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah who carried shields and spears, and from Benjamin two hundred and eighty thousand men who carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty men of valor. ⁹ Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and he came to Mareshah.

We're told that there were 300,000 soldiers who were with him from Judah. There were 280,000 from Benjamin. All together, that's 580,000—let's say 600,000 for easy mathematics. If there were that many soldiers, how many women would there be? Probably 600,000 women. And how many children would there be? In those days, families tended to be rather large. So let's assume that there were just as many younger as there were in that mature age, plus many of the very, very old. So I would tend to double that number again. So we've gone from 300,000 to 600,000, and then you double that to one million two. And how many tribes were there? Well, there were Benjamin and Judah, and then there were the other ten tribes. If there were the same number in the other ten tribes, then you'd multiply all those numbers by six again, wouldn't you? And when you add it all up, you could say, well, there were probably somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 million people in the days of Asa. Frankly, I think other indications were that there were even more.

But let's say there were only 10 million people in the days of Asa. And there were 10,000 people carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar. What happened to all those other people? Some of them were probably left in Judah, in other towns. Some of them, many of them, taken captive into Syria. But I say, we're talking about many orders of magnitude difference: 10 million and 10,000. What happened?

And I believe over the years of decline, as we've been going through 2 Kings, we've seen decline and decline and decline and war. Over the years of decline, the nation, which you would have expected would have grown in size and in population, instead of going up, it's going down. And so I asked myself the question: "Why?" And the answer is because they

turned from the Lord. They came back a little and down again, back a little and down again. But they came down a long way—from 10 million to 10,000 of the prime to go to Babylon.

All of which says, it's a warning. The work of God doesn't always go ahead. I went back to when I knew of the assemblies in Vancouver, 60 or 70 years ago. And what's happened basically is that the number of assemblies that are active today are about one half of the number of assemblies that were active then. And most of those assemblies are smaller than they were then. What's happened? The work of God doesn't always go ahead. Often it goes down.

But I say to myself, "Harold, what are we doing as an assembly here? What is our conviction? Are we going to fall into the land of complacency and keep going down? Or are we going to heed the word of Paul to Timothy and preach the word?"

[2 Timothy 4:2 NKJV]

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

We've got to get in there and get going **forward** rather than going downward. So that's one of the themes that I think comes out of these verses, and it's a distressing thing. Again, the numbers that came back from Babylon under Ezra—how many were they? 50,000. That's a far cry from 10 million. Big challenge for us. Big responsibility for us. Don't allow the truth of God to erode in our life, in our generation. **Preach the word.** Be instant, in season, out of season.

Three Deportations

Now, there were three carrying-aways, too. It wasn't just the one. The first was Daniel and his friends. He scooped off the riches of the land, took them back to Babylon, and he took some of the princes—the best. The purpose we find is that he wanted to teach them the literature and the culture of Babylon and to reorganize these provinces that he had come into power by.

So that took place in the time of Jehoiakim, and then eight to nine years later, Jehoiakim died—was killed by Nebuchadnezzar—and Jehoiachin was put in power, but he only lasted for three months. And then there was a second deportation there. So you had the captivity. The first captivity was actually when the "times of the Gentiles" began. The 70-year captivity

began. The difference in chronology is only about a year or so, but about 606 B.C. was the first carrying away. Seventy years later, they came back in 536 B.C. So the captivity was over.

Then there was a second carrying away, which happened with the time that Jehoiachin was taken captive. Sir Robert Anderson pointed out that the first one was like an actual servitude, and the second one was a captivity where they took away this 10,000 or 18,000. And then there was the destruction of Jerusalem, which initiated the 70 years of desolations. That desolation never ended until the temple was completed in Haggai's time. Haggai prophesied and said, "I want you to mark this date for the desolations of the land." Mark this date from now on. He said, "Previous to this, you went to your storehouse; there wasn't any food there. You sowed lots, and you didn't reap anything back." But watch this date—the day that the temple foundation was laid. From this time on, there would be blessing. The desolations had been completed, and they began to rebuild Jerusalem, rebuild the temple. And then later under Nehemiah, the city itself. So there were three carrying-aways, or three captivities: the servitude, the captivity, and the desolations.

The Line to the Messiah

Just a couple of little tidbits. It was at this time that the line to the Messiah changed. Because up to this time, it had come through Solomon. And because God, in judgment, said that there would be no more children from this man to sit on the throne, the line of succession was changed through a custom that was in place at the time. The line changed to Nathan, who would have been a brother of Solomon. And so you see that in the genealogy in the book of Luke, in chapter 3. And, of course, the genealogy in Luke goes backwards from Joseph right back to God himself.

[Luke 3:31 NKJV]

the son of Melea, the son of Menan, the son of Mattathah, the son of Nathan, the son of David,

[Luke 3:38 NKJV]

the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Amen. Even though Satan in his work worked very hard to extinguish the line to the Messiah so that the Messiah would not come, God was not taken by surprise. Literally at that

moment, it could have all gone completely west, but the Lord didn't allow it to. There was a custom in place that allowed the line to change to Nathan rather than Solomon.

The other little thing regarding the declining numbers: I think it's true not only in the church, but as you look at demographics of Western countries, they are all declining. And why? Because most of the Western countries have, in one way or another, or to one extent or another, excluded God. And so even though the demographics have been declining—birth rates have been declining—yet in pure numbers they are somewhat kept up because of all of the immigration into the various Western countries. We're not getting into politics or anything like that, but that kind of has kept up the numbers. But in the countries themselves, with their natural populations, they have been declining over many years right now.

Jehoiachin in Babylon

There is another thing of interest right at the end of Jeremiah chapter 52. We have the fact that Jehoiachin was somewhat favored, and he was allowed a certain freedom, even in his captivity.

[Jeremiah 52:31-34 NKJV]

³¹ Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison. ³² And he spoke kindly to him and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon. ³³ So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. ³⁴ And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king of Babylon, a portion for each day until the day of his death, all the days of his life.

Now, when we come to the scriptures, we take the scriptures as truth so we know what's true; but it's always interesting when archaeology kind of backs up what the scripture says. And so in Babylon and the excavations in that area, there has been a tablet found. This is how they kept their cards: on a little clay tablet, they would put marks, and that's how they kept records. And the record of Jehoiachin's diet has been found. Archaeology has found it. So while we don't need that to tell us that the Bible is true, it's just interesting that archaeology, again and again, always comes up with things that absolutely prove the Bible to be true.

Just a little addendum to that: there is a historical record saying that the reason Evil-Merodach, the king of Babylon, raised up Jehoiachin out of prison was that his father Nebuchadnezzar had thrown him into prison and he had met him there. And so they had, I guess, struck up some kind of friendship during that. Now, whether that's true or not, I don't know, but it's a little bit humorous, and it does explain why perhaps he favored him above other conquered kings.

I guess the other thing that strikes me about those verses in Jeremiah is that before all this good stuff happened to Jehoiachin, he was in prison for **37 years**. And you sit back and you say, "I don't think I would like those 37 years." Why didn't he trust the Lord way back at the beginning, rather than wait for Evil-Merodach to be gracious to him? Thirty-seven years in a foreign prison. Who knows what he ate during those years? His diet must have been quite different.

It's interesting that people, regardless of what they know about the Lord or what they know about the gospel, refuse it. We find these men who had the benefits of the prophets' preaching, of Josiah who had repented before the Lord, and all of the advantages that they had from a spiritual point of view, and yet they still went their own way. And it's not an explanation, but sometimes it could be a comfort, especially for parents who have children who go their own way, that it's not because of them. This is the **heart** before the Lord. Boys and girls, when they grow up, they will follow their own path. Sometimes you can trace it to things that happened, sometimes you can't, and it's simply the bent of the heart without the Lord.

The Resistance of the Heart

I think you see it most obviously in the book of Revelation, where mankind at that time during the Tribulation is undergoing very obvious, extremely heavy indications of the wrath of God. In all of the things that were falling on the earth, all that God was sending on the earth, it says it a couple of times, but just one time for illustration is chapter 16 in Revelation. Here we have the fourth bowl judgment.

[Revelation 16:8-11 NKJV]

⁸ Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. ⁹ And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. ¹⁰ Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed

their tongues because of the pain. ¹¹ They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

And we have it again in chapter 9 as well, in verse 20:

[Revelation 9:20 NKJV]

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

And so the bent of man's heart is against the Lord and unless they respond to the convicting work of the Spirit—which is going on in all unbelievers at all times—then there is still this resistance, even under the evidence of the wrath of God that we see in the Tribulation and under the great destruction that there was under Nebuchadnezzar at the time of these kings. So we need to pray again and ask the Lord that he would truly move in conviction in the hearts of men and women who have known, like these knew. With the revelation they have, they know who it is that's doing this to the earth. We need to pray that those who have up to this point refused the Lord will come under such conviction that they repent and they come to know Him.

It's interesting that even when Jerusalem was destroyed, God still had a testimony. Jeremiah 22, verse 8: even after the judgment and the smoke was just still rising from that city and the blackened stones, it says:

[Jeremiah 22:8-9 NKJV]

⁸ And many nations will pass by this city; and everyone will say to his neighbor, "Why has the LORD done so to this great city?" ⁹ Then they will answer, "Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods and served them."

Many nations would pass by: the Moabite, the Edomite, the Philistine, the Syrian. "Why has Jehovah done so to this great city?"—that great city that had been such a terror to the Canaanites and to the surrounding countrysides under its powerful kings like David and Solomon. They will answer, "Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God and worshipped other gods and served them." Those nations that were right around

Jerusalem would have known the testimony of the living God and experienced the power of the living God—when, for example, 10,000 Edomites were slain in one valley in a day. And the Philistines, they understood the power when the Israelites were walking with their God—that there was no king, there was no power that could be against the God they called **Jehovah**. And they said now, seeing this city with smoke coming up from its burnt rubble, they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God. So there's a continued testimony even though for that 70 years of exile; still there was a testimony even in the judgment itself.

The Preservation of the Vessels

Back then to 2 Kings 24. Verse 13 says Nebuchadnezzar carried out thence 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 which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said.

[2 Kings 24:12-16 NKJV]

¹² Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner.

¹³ And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said.

¹⁴ Also he carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

¹⁵ And he carried Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. The king's mother, the king's wives, his officers, and the mighty of the land he carried into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. ¹⁶ All the valiant men, seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths, one thousand, all who were strong and fit for war, these the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.

You noted it when we were reading in Daniel—it wasn't just that Daniel and his friends were carried to Babylon, but the vessels were carried. And so here we have an indication in the life of Jehoiachin that he carried away all these vessels. And I sit back and I try to put that in perspective. How often in the history of the kings did the kings go into the temple of the

Lord and get some gold and stuff in order to pay off a foreign king? Even Asa did that. And since then, over and over and over and over. And my problem is I say, "How come there's anything left?" Surely it's all taken.

But it seems Josiah put a lot back because Manasseh had basically cleaned the place out. So I keep asking: what happened to all these vessels? Number one, the money that was put into the building of the temple in the days of Solomon was an absolutely **astronomic** number. There has never been a building erected that cost as much as Solomon's temple. It was absolutely amazing. And there was gold here, there, everywhere. And so Nebuchadnezzar now cleans the place out, with the exception when you get to chapter 25 that he takes more.

All of which says that the temple was very, very valuable. All of which in a spiritual sense says that **we**, as the temple of the Lord, are very, very valuable. Don't underestimate yourself. The book of Proverbs talks about the wicked woman who sees the godly man and he's precious. Other men aren't like godly men, the men of God. Other buildings weren't like the temple. It was extremely valuable.

What happened to those vessels that were taken? Well, among other things, I think a lot of it went into Nebuchadnezzar's back pocket. But a lot of it, we're told, went into the house of his god in Shinar. And it stayed there until along came the Persians. And when Ezra was going back to the land, he took the vessels—Ezra took the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple. They go all the way around and come back again. All of which says that when Ezra came back to Jerusalem, the building wasn't there, but at least some of the valuable items associated with the worship of the Lord were there; they came back to them.

What would have happened to those vessels that Ezra and his people enjoyed and used for the glory of God if Nebuchadnezzar hadn't taken them? The answer is everybody who went through the city would find another and another, and they would have all disappeared. And by taking those vessels to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar **preserved** them for the work and glory of God into the future.

All of which says we often don't understand what the Lord is doing in the Christian life. And He will often do something that looks to be very, very wrong. He will allow it because His plan is to take it full circle and bring it back to something that is very, very good. Be very, very slow to condemn God for doing what He's doing. Because He may very well be doing something today that we don't understand that will be a great blessing to grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Our God has a far longer time perspective than we do. Don't judge Him if you don't understand what He did when taking these vessels. It was a wonderful way of preserving them for His glory. And I just felt that very, very reassuring. I said, "Harold, quit

judging God." He knows what He's doing. And if He does something that looks to be wrong, then say, "Lord, You turn it to good." And you rest in that.

The Rebellion of Zedekiah

Let's go down to verse 17.

[2 Kings 24:17-20 NKJV]

¹⁷ Then the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. ¹⁸ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ¹⁹ He also did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. ²⁰ For because of the anger of the LORD this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, that He finally cast them out from His presence. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

Which of these kings would you trust? Zedekiah—he's serving the king of Babylon, everything's fine, and then he rebels. I guess I've mentioned it before, but we read what's going on in the news. And if you were to sit down with some ambassadors from either side in the wars that we've got going on in the world today, which of those ambassadors would you trust? They would say, "This is our final position." Then in the morning they say, "Well, we had to change our minds." You don't trust them.

The fact is that the devil was a liar from the beginning, and you don't trust him. And the fact is that God's people tell the truth, and you trust them. Jeremiah, in spite of all that he went through, he was trustworthy to the end. What a contrast. You can't trust anything of the others. And God's men, you can trust. Zedekiah, I don't trust you.

The Curse on Coniah

Just going back to Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, or Coniah. There was a curse on this man.

[Jeremiah 22:24 NKJV]

"As I live," says the LORD, "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off;

The signet, of course, is the symbol of authority—the signet that Pharaoh gave to Joseph as the ruler. And He said, "I would pluck it off." Therefore, what He was going to do later on:

[Jeremiah 22:28-30 NKJV]

²⁸ "Is this man Coniah a despised, broken idol--

A vessel in which is no pleasure?

Why are they cast out, he and his descendants,

And cast into a land which they do not know?

²⁹ O earth, earth, earth,

Hear the word of the LORD!

³⁰ Thus says the LORD:

"Write this man down as childless,

A man who shall not prosper in his days;

For none of his descendants shall prosper,

Sitting on the throne of David,

And ruling anymore in Judah."

He was once idolized; that's why he was made king. He was a popular choice, probably. But he's a vessel in which is no pleasure. Now, actually, he had six sons. Some think seven, but the expositors think it's six. But it says, "Write this man down childless." But when we trace the genealogy of our Lord Jesus, it goes back to Jeconiah. But he was not childless in fact. What is implied there is "as though." Write this man down as though he is childless. For none of his seed shall prosper sitting on the throne of David.

The phrase "sitting on the throne" doesn't mean just for a moment, because he sat on the throne for three months. However, he wasn't settled on his throne. The word there, "to sit on the throne," means to dwell, to settle, to remain. That was a very temporary thing, and he was taken right off that throne by Nebuchadnezzar, and Zedekiah was deposed immediately by Nebuchadnezzar.

So there was a curse on this man, and our brother told us how the Lord went around that curse. The actual legal succession was through the line of Coniah, but the actual seed was through a different son of David. God is amazing. There's no other man ever on earth that could claim to be the Messiah of Israel. And besides that, all the records of succession were destroyed at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. So the only one that has a genealogy to prove that he is the Messiah of Israel is the Lord Jesus Christ.

I might point that out to Jews sometime. You know, if they're expecting the Messiah, you can say, "Where is his genealogy?" He doesn't have one. None. There's only one. And you can point to our New Testament, which they probably detest, but there you have it. In those two genealogies, locked up, are the rights of our Savior and His claim, as far as the earth is concerned, to the throne of Israel and of the world.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You for Your faithfulness. We thank You for this time that we can spend in Your word and just see all the depth of it and all that You have for us in it. And we just ask that You be with us this week. As we go, we praise You for Charlie, who came and has joined us and has a heart to seek You. We ask that You work every day in his life this week and burn the word that he has heard of You in his heart and bring him to salvation. Save him, Lord, as well as his father who he brought.

We thank You. We thank You for all that You bring through the weeks and surprise us. We just ask that You keep doing the great work that You're doing even more and more. We ask that You put Your hand upon Amir this week, and we ask, if it's Your will, that You would open the door for this new job for him and that it would provide the things that he needs to make his situation better. We just ask that You continue to protect his family in Iran and continue to show Yourself to them in it. Save them.

We thank You, Lord, that You have brought Barb into recovery from the pneumonia. We thank You for the increased health that she's had already, and we ask that You just restore her to full health and strength. Restore her to the enjoyment of the ministries that You've given her. We ask, Lord, if this can be the week that You allow Chew to have that operation—open that door for his hernia—especially as the summer approaches and the time for them to go.

We thank You for all Your goodness to us. And we ask that You just be with us and give us the enjoyment of You this week. And as we heard, no matter what it looks like, help us to rest in You, rest in the faith that You are doing a greater work. You're doing the proper work. You're doing Your will. So let it be Your will this week. Your will, Your way. We thank You in Jesus' name. Amen.