

### 2ND KINGS

#### Week 38, Chapter 24

Although we're going to start a new chapter today in 2nd Kings, chapter 24, we're going to continue in what amounts to a heavy-duty bible history lesson, along with an equally heavy dose of application.

Last time we ended with the death of righteous King Josiah at the hands of the Egyptian army. Recall that for some ill-fated reason, likely that he felt he needed to bolster Babylon's cause in order to counter the Assyrian-Egyptian alliance, he took his Judahite army out to Megiddo to face Pharaoh Neco's forces as they sought to do no more than march through Judah and the former territory of the 10 tribes on their way to do battle at Carchemish. Yoshiyahu was shot by an Egyptian archer and died on his way back to Jerusalem.

Josiah's son Y'ho'achaz replaced his father. But he stepped into a hornet's nest of problems mostly due to Josiah attacking Egypt's army (without any real provocation), which resulted in Pharaoh Neco deciding to subjugate Judah in retribution. And Neco also decided that he wanted to put his own man on Judah's throne. So Y'ho'achaz lasted a mere 3 months as Judah's king and then his brother Elyakim was given the throne in his place. Neco gave Elyakim a new name, a royal name, Y'hoyakim (Jehoiakim).

During Jehoiakim's 11 year reign, he spent the first 3 as a vassal to Egypt and Neco. But then in 605 B.C. a seismic shift in the region's power structure occurred as Nabopolassar, King of Babylon, pushed Egypt back to the Sinai, thus taking over the region formerly known as Judah and Israel. Overnight Y'hoyakim became a vassal to Babylon. In that same year Nabopolassar died and his son Nebuchadnezzar took his place.

In that same year the age of the Assyrian Empire also came to an end with most of it taken over by what historians call the Neo (or New) Babylonian Empire. But there was also another regional power in the making, that of the Medes. Media occupied an enormous expanse of territory that stretched from modern day Iran all the way to India. They made an alliance with Babylon, and together they formed a seemingly unconquerable superpower.

Y'hoyakim quickly grew tired of Nebuchadnezzar's heavy hand and rebelled. What does "rebellion" mean in this case? Likely it meant, as it did in most vassal relationships, that he stopped sending the required tribute and taxes to Babylon and through messengers let it be known that he considered himself no longer under Babylon's control.

In the 601/600 B.C. time frame Nebuchadnezzar again faced an Egyptian army. The battle is reported in the Babylonian Chronicles and it took place mostly in the Sinai. There the two armies met in fierce battle with heavy losses inflicted on both sides. There does not appear to

have been a clear victor. The outcome was so uncertain that towards the end of the battle King Nebuchadnezzar fled and returned to Babylon. On the other hand there is a kind of cryptic mention not of the battle itself, but of the result, that we'll read about shortly in 2nd Kings 24:

CJB 2 Kings 24:7 The king of Egypt did not leave his own land any more, because the king of Babel had captured all the territory of the king of Egypt between the Vadi of Egypt and the Euphrates River.

The result of the war with Babylon so decimated the Egyptian army that they didn't dare chance doing anymore than defending their own national borders. The Babylonian army was also severely wounded and limped home to regroup and to be rearmed. In those days, that took considerable time, perhaps a couple of years. But especially considering that this Babylonian-Egyptian war took place just below Judah's southern border, Melech Y'hoyakim (King Jehoiakim) no doubt observed it carefully and with glee. He must have determined that Babylon came away from it so weakened that it gave him an opportunity to escape their subjection. He badly miscalculated and it seems to have eventually cost him his life.

Historically, the last days of any nation, kingdom or empire are usually the most documented because they're so important and so telling. They hand down to posterity the how and why that a formerly strong nation shockingly declined into irrelevance or even into extinction. It's no different with Israel and now Judah, except that we see that this was all at God's direct hand. We find much information on the matter recorded in a number of sources in the bible in 2nd Kings, 2nd Chronicles, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel and Daniel. We'll be examining several of those biblical sources to try and get the best handle on what happened to Judah.

Open your bibles to 2nd Kings 24.

READ 2ND KINGS 24 all

It is typical of the way that history, secular or biblical, is taught that it seems to the student as though one can pinpoint a day or date when some event happened that caused nations and kingdoms to end or change hands, or when mass population migrations, deportations, or genocides occurred. But in reality, these things rolled out in stages over many years, and the date given is only recognizing some tipping point, or traditional day set aside for remembrance of the national tragedy (or triumph depending on which side you were on).

Thus even though the date of the coming fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar is usually given as 586 B.C. (give or take a year), and that's when the Jews were hauled off to Babylon, that gives us the wrong impression. In fact that date was not when the holy city was conquered, but rather when it (along with the Temple) was destroyed. And this is because Jerusalem was first taken over by Babylon, intact, during Y'hoyakim's reign as 2nd Kings 24 explains. Judah would go through 2 more kings after Jehoiakim before Nebuchadnezzar would finally be provoked into the extreme action of actually destroying the Temple and razing the city and the end of Judah as a kingdom would thus be declared.

Verse 1 explains that Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and this caused the King of Babylon to react violently. No doubt this is not what King Y'hoyakim anticipated, due to what he thought was a much too weakened and demoralized Babylonian army that was still smarting from its beat-down by the Egyptian army a year or so earlier in the Sinai. One wonders why Y'hoyakim waited so long between the Babylonian-Egyptian conflict before he decided to rebel. But nothing we've read says that Jehoiakim was inept, so more than likely he rebelled immediately following that war, but it took many months before Nebuchadnezzar's army could be re-stocked with weapons and new soldiers and was then finally able to respond to the rebellion. It is quite interesting that the writer/editor of 2nd Kings says in verse 2 that it was Yehoveh, God of Israel, who sent troops from Aram, Moab, and Amon, along with the Chaldeans (meaning Babylonians) to attack Jerusalem.

There are two points here: 1st notice that what was sent were mercenaries from some of the conquered kingdoms of Amon, Aram, and Moab. More and more we're going to encounter the term Chaldeans. For now just equate it to the Babylonians and I'll explain it more later on. The Chaldean contingency made up only a part of the army, but they represented the command and control element of the total force. The troops from Amon, Aram and Moab provided the bulk of the foot soldiers. The reality is that Nebuchadnezzar didn't feel confident yet that he was ready to send his full army out for battle and no doubt hoped that this modest multi-national force would be sufficient to put down Judah's rebellion.

The 2nd point is a bit more challenging to deal with, and it's the one that I closed with in the previous lesson whereby I said that a goodly portion of modern Christianity says that either God would never do what is reported in the bible about siding with Judah's enemies, or He might have done it in the past but has changed and would not do it now. And that is predicated on the rather standard Roman Christian doctrine that God does not punish Believers for our bad attitudes or even for our sinful actions if we declare salvation in Christ. Thus we're going to detour a bit and deal with this issue of God Himself intentionally inciting Judah's enemies to come and destroy Judah. And please notice that this is totally unlike what we hear about in the End Times prophecies when God incites Israel's enemies from the north to come to Armageddon to fight Israel and Messiah. Because in Babylon's case, God is on their side and wants Judah to be severely punished by Babylon. But in the End Times' case, God is against the people from the north and is only luring them into battle so that they can be gathered in one place and destroyed in mass for their wickedness.

2nd Kings verse 3 expands a little about what God's intentions were in drawing the forces from 4 nations to attack Jerusalem. It was that He wanted to use this foreign army to remove His chosen people from His sight. The Promised Land was the Kingdom land. And the Kingdom land was that which God oversaw. Now in one sense the thought is wrapped up in ancient cultural belief and superstition that a god only had visibility, control and jurisdiction over his own territory. Thus the god of Amon only had power in Amon, the god of Moab only had power in Moab, and so on. So if the God of Israel only had visibility and power in the Promised Land, then if the people were removed to another nation, then they were out of His sight (which is something God wanted). In the end this is just meaning for Judah to be exiled.

It is the sins of Manasseh that are being blamed for Judah's wicked condition, but again this

statement is mostly bound up in Hebrew cultural thought. Manasseh is remembered as the worst, the most evil king that Judah ever had. Recall now that like the 4 Gospels (and especially the 3 Synoptic Gospels) we get somewhat different viewpoints of the same events, and thus some information is included in one account but not another. The writer/editor of 2nd Kings for some reason chose to only recall the worst of King Manasseh, but to ignore the final 6 years of his 55 year reign in which he thoroughly repented and changed dramatically into a good king (that change is recorded in some detail in 2nd Chronicles 33). Thus what we need to grasp is that the people of Judah during Jehoiakim's reign are said to embody all the worst sins and abominations of Manasseh, and that is why God is going to inflict wholesale punishment of a horrific degree upon Judah. In other words, yes, Y'hoyakim was a bad king and led his people poorly; but the reason YHWH was doing all the things He was in process of doing to the Jews of Judah was not laid at Y'hoyakim's doorstep. It was the PEOPLE, the common citizens of Judah, who were to blame.

And this might be a good time to comment that especially in the Western world, those citizens (including Christians and Jews) who see and are disgusted at our moral and economic decline, have a tendency to want to point to our governmental leaders as the culprits. And I'm here to tell you that it isn't them, it's us. And Holy Scripture makes it clear that God sees it that way. Our governments didn't create the gay and lesbian movements and their recent demand to be seen as good and wholesome. Our governments didn't create the desire for abortion on demand. Our governments didn't create our lust for immoral sex of every kind. And our governments didn't replace the biblical truth with humanistic doctrines and philosophies that dominate our churches. We, the people, did that or at least demanded it to satisfy us. And we, the people, will justifiably bear the divine consequences, just as the people of Judah did.

So before we go any further, to help us understand just what God was up to by virtually siding with the Babylonians and using them to punish Judah, let's go to Jeremiah 27 to get a much needed perspective not only historically as concerns the Jews of Judah, but to people of modern times as well.

READ JEREMIAH 27 all

We'll not go through this verse by verse, but I will highlight certain statements and sum up the matter.

The issue of the yokes on the necks of these various nations, including Judah, is to indicate subjugation. And the straightforward intent is to make it clear that while on earth it is Babylon that is attaching the yokes, and thus in Babylon's hands that the reins to the yokes are given, in Heaven it is happening by God's direction. And His purpose is NOT to highlight any kind of wickedness in Babylon or in Nebuchadnezzar, but rather to highlight the wickedness of God's own people, Judah.

God has decided to turn over Judah and these other nations to Babylon for awhile. So God is going to side with Babylon for awhile. In fact Babylon is going to be shown great favor by the Lord. Why? Because as it says in verse 5:

CJB Jeremiah 27:5 ""I made the earth, humankind, and the animals on the earth by my great power and my outstretched arm; and I give it to whom it seems right to me.

God says (without apology) that He made everything and everybody and therefore it all belongs to Him. And so He as the sole right to decide what to do with everybody and everything and He has decided that He wants to turn all these people and nations and their resources over to Babylon. Now in retrospect we have been reading about the circumstances that caused God to react in such a way. And yet, is this the ONLY possible reaction He could have had? Couldn't He have done something else than to turn Judah over to Babylon? Couldn't He just do what so many modern Believers honestly, but foolishly, thinks He does now, in our time; just wink and nod at our sin like a kindly grandfather? In other words, rather than punish and discipline, why not simply show unlimited mercy no matter what?

It's peculiar how the same modern Believers who hold that viewpoint can read what we've been lately studying and agree with God about how just He was in terrorizing Judah and then deporting them to Babylon for their many sins against Him. Why don't we feel that God wronged Judah, because He could have just as easily looked the other way and showed them mercy? You know, like we think He ought to do for us?

Here's another consideration: did these people cease to be His chosen? Was Judah no longer redeemed? Was their redemption revoked? Nothing indicates that their redeemed status has changed. What we have learned is that God has, does, and will always at times choose mercy and at other times punishment, and we won't necessarily know what His criteria is for choosing. No Pope, no minister, no priest, no bible teacher and no layperson knows where that cosmic line in the sand is. God does what "seems to be right in His own eyes", without regard as to what we think is fair or what He ought to do.

So; God intends for Judah to be under the yoke of Babylon. In fact the people of Judah are to accept this as their fate, and they should NOT fight against it. Why? Because unlike other situations in the past when nations and kingdoms attacked Judah and they were enemies of God and of the Israelites, in this case Babylon is essentially a friend of God and God intends to have Judah suffer.

CJB Jeremiah 27:8 The nation and kingdom that refuses to serve this N'vukhadnetzar king of Bavel, that will not put their necks under the yoke of the king of Bavel, I will punish," says ADONAI "with sword, famine and plague, until I have put an end to them through him.

God warns that the unwise nation (including Judah) who fights against Babylon and refuses to submit to Babylon is actually fighting against Him. Please put this in your memory banks because this explains why it was wrong for Jehoiakim to rebel against the King of Babylon. And it explains why as a result of Judah's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar deported thousands of Jews to Babylon. Jeremiah warned King Jehoiakim that not only was Judah to submit, but that if they didn't God would intervene on Babylon's behalf. The Lord says, "I will punish" and even put an end to those who rebel against Babylon. God will punish Judah even more harshly if they do not submit to Babylon, because this subjugation is God's will for His redeemed, chosen people. I don't know about you, but this is a side of God that I wish wasn't there; I don't like it

very much. I'd much rather that God is love....only love. Or that God is mercy.....only mercy. But the truth is that a god like that is unknown in the bible. A god can only be known to humans by 2 things: his name and his attributes. The God of the bible, our God, Yehoveh, has many attributes; and besides His love and mercy, salvation and healing, is His wrath and judgment. And if you think that while that may have been in times past but it's not the case since the advent of Christ and the New Testament, then answer this: who is that God at Armageddon that will kill so many millions of people in His wrath, fury, and judgment?

Rev 19:11-18 CJB

11 Next I saw heaven opened, and there before me was a white horse. Sitting on it was the one called Faithful and True, and it is in righteousness that he passes judgment and goes to battle.

12 His eyes were like a fiery flame, and on his head were many royal crowns. And he had a name written which no one knew but himself.

13 He was wearing a robe that had been soaked in blood, and the name by which he is called is, "THE WORD OF GOD."

14 The armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

15 And out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down nations- "He will rule them with a staff of iron." It is he who treads the winepress from which flows the wine of the furious rage of ADONAI, God of heaven's armies.

16 And on his robe and on his thigh he has a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out in a loud voice to all the birds that fly about in mid-heaven, "Come, gather together for the great feast God is giving,

18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of generals, the flesh of important men, the flesh of horses and their riders and the flesh of all kinds of people, free and slave, small and great!"

Notice that beginning in Jeremiah 27:9 the Lord warns that prophets, diviners, dreamers, magicians and sorcerers will tell the people of Judah that none of this is true. They'll tell you that your loving God won't punish you, won't banish you, and won't allow Babylon to win. Who are these prophets, diviners and seers? Are they pagans, or foreigners? Some might be but mostly they are Hebrews from Judah. They are the same ones the Jews of Judah have been going to for "a word from the Lord" for a long time. But, says Yehoveh, don't listen to them because they are liars. Rather if the conquered nations (including Judah) will bow down to God's will of subjugation to Babylon (as His divine punishment), then they will live, and they will even be allowed to stay on their own soil (they won't be deported to Babylon). If we were to spend a lot of time in the Book of Jeremiah we'd find Jeremiah railing against other prophets of



Judah. These were the common prophets who attended and graduated from the several Prophets Academies that we have read about in earlier lessons even going back to the time of Samuel. And because of their training, and because the people certainly accepted their station and position as prophets of the God YHWH, the population of Judah paid attention to what they had to say. But God says, no, these guys aren't telling you the truth no matter how they might represent themselves as speaking for God.

To bring that understanding forward to our time; sometimes we'll see a courageous pastor propose that a certain horrific catastrophe can only be God's hand of justice considering the terrible backslidden state of our nation and rampant apostasy in our churches. But in response a whole host of other pastors will stand up and chastise the first for saying something that to them is too judgmental and unloving. The point is that while admittedly none of us have direct insight on the source of any of these terrible events, the reality is that the bible makes it clear that God does NOT have limitless patience upon His people or upon wicked nations. And that He doesn't let things go, and let things go, and let things go and then BAM! All at once, without warning, judgment. Rather the pattern is that as His followers get off track, just like for Judah, He begins to send a few of the faithful with a message: stop sinning, repent, change, and get back to the truth; let go of the weak and tired doctrines and traditions of man that have become so infiltrated with paganism. And as we refuse to listen and instead harden ourselves to His voice, then more bad things start to happen; and it escalates. At first it is things we can usually recover from. But at some point, if there is no substantial repentance and heartfelt change, the brunt of His wrath finally comes and from it there is no respite.

Let me ask you directly: what direction do you see the world in general, and the Western world in particular, going? Is it more moral and more godly than it was 40 years ago, or 20 years ago or even 10; or is it sinking lower every day? Are our Christian and Jewish institutions more faithful, and more interested in promoting God's Word now than 40 years ago, or 20 years ago or even 10; or do the people demand more messages of tolerance, material prosperity, and happiness and want only to hear that God is here to fulfill our personal hopes and dreams? Judah went down this same path 2700 years ago. It chose to prefer false messages of hope, peace and prosperity over and against the true messages of coming disaster unless big changes were made in their lives. And we're reading just how it is that God reacts to willful disobedience and unfaithfulness. Why should we open our ears to this message? A message that I don't like giving, and one you'd probably rather not be subjected to? Because perhaps if we will take it to heart we can push back the clock, just a little, if our generation will repent and change. Or at least we'll know how to prepare for what is coming, and see it in the spiritual light that we ought to, rather than being shocked, in denial, and perhaps having a crisis of faith because we don't understand how it could be that God would allow such bad things to happen to His people who call upon His name.

Bottom line: through Jeremiah the Lord said to Judah don't listen to those who say everything is fine; or that God would never harm His Believers and He certainly wouldn't allow exile to Babylon. The Lord says not to listen to those who say, "don't worry"; things are getting better and God's people are becoming more faithful and the world is becoming more godly, and God will deliver us from what seems like certain calamity even if it's the result of sin.

And finally, starting in Jeremiah 27:16, the Lord sends a message directly to Judah's religious establishment: serve the King of Babel because it is the Lord who has willed this. Don't listen to anyone who says otherwise and don't incite resistance. And yes, all these furnishing and implements of the Temple that have been so valuable and important to you for so many years will get hauled off to Babylon and desecrated. But someday, when the Lord ordains it, the people of Judah and these sacred items will return to the land. So God's wrath won't go on forever.

And there it is: HOPE! There is always hope in the Lord. But sometimes the hope isn't for us, it's for others; perhaps the hope is for the next generation, or the one after that. And that is because there is a biblical principle that is first stated in the Torah:

CJB Deuteronomy 24:16 "Fathers are not to be executed for the children, nor are children to be executed for the fathers; every person will be executed for his own sin.

The present generation of Judah was doomed. They had gone too far, for too long. There was no hope for them in the sense of escaping God's justice; the matter was decided. However, after what would prove to be 70 years in exile, the generation who committed all these terrible sins would be dead and gone. They had paid the price. But God gave those who came after them a hope of someday returning from Babylon to their homeland. This is a God-pattern we saw with the exodus from Egypt. The first exodus generation sinned so terribly in the wilderness that God refused to let them into the Promised Land. They wandered in exile (so to speak) until that generation died off. But the next generation bore no responsibility for the sins of their parents so God allowed them to enter, with a clean slate.