

2ND KINGS

Week 40, Chapter 25 END OF BOOK

Today concludes our nearly one-year study of the Book of 2nd Kings. It ends with the inevitable exile of Judah to Babylon. I say inevitable because the downward spiritual death-spiral that first enveloped the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel also infected the southern kingdom of Judah. Thus the final results of scores of years idolatry and apostasy could hardly be expected to be different for Judah than for Israel, since ours is a God who establishes patterns. And this is because His justice is not whimsical or random, but instead is even-handed and measured. His justice is also not dispensational; it does not change with different eras.

Zedekiah, *Tzidkiyahu*, was the current (and last) Jewish King of Israel. He, like all the other recent kings of Judah, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and now was in the midst of paying the consequences. These consequences not only had the full support of God, but God directly intervened to cause them because for now He was siding with Babylon in order that His redeemed people would be severely punished for their unfaithfulness.

I want to point out that Yehoveh's judgment on Judah was NOT meant to necessarily result in exile; with but minimal obedience exile could have been avoided. Rather it was that God would put Judah under submission to Babylon and their King Nebuchadnezzar. This subjugation did NOT involve the people of Judah being removed from their land. It did NOT involve the people of Judah no longer having their own Jewish King, even one from the line of David. The only reason that subjugation under Babylon escalated to an exile to Babylon, was because the government of Judah refused to accept God's just verdict and punishment of being placed under the yoke of Babylon.

God told Judah and their kings that if they would simply accept their divine punishment that they would live, and they would be allowed to remain in Judah. But if they rebelled against Babylon, then they were essentially rebelling against God. And the punishment for this would be exile.

We read all of 2nd Kings 25 last week. Let's read the parallel account that is contained in Jeremiah 52 to begin today's lesson.

READ JEREMIAH 52 all

Verse 3 is key, so I am going to remind us of it again.

^{CJB} *Jeremiah 52:3 And it was because of ADONAI's anger that all these things happened to Yerushalayim and Y'hudah, until he had thrown them out of his presence. Tzidkiyahu rebelled against the king of Bavel;*

Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar were God's earthly agents carrying out His will. The Lord had **had-it** with Judah. His patience ended and His anger erupted. Babylon was not to be blamed, nor counted as wicked as most of the Rabbis try to do to this day for subjugating Judah. Now in time, Babylon would be dealt with by the Lord for their wickedness of heathenism; but not for subjugating God's people, because He intended for this to happen.

King Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to Zedekiah's rebellion was quite natural; he sent his army to take back control of Jerusalem and Judah. It was in winter, on the 10th day of the 10th month of the year, **Tevet**, that Jerusalem was surrounded and put under siege. A siege is different than an all-out attack. Rather than having an ongoing, day to day battle, the purpose of a siege is to try and starve the residents who have elected to hunker down behind the massive defensive city walls. The city is sealed off, and no one can get in or get out. The hope is that at some point the people will get desperate enough to open the gates and surrender. The alternative is that so many die and the remainder are so weakened, that an attack is easier to pull off.

Jerusalem was surrounded on January 10th 588 B.C., and the city finally fell on the 9th day of the 4th month of 586 B.C. On the surface, it was an 18 month siege. But, we find in Jeremiah 37 that there was a brief interruption of the siege that gave the city residents an opportunity to restock their food supplies and armaments before it started up again.

Jeremiah 37:5-10 CJB

⁵ At the same time Pharaoh's army marched out of Egypt; and when the Kasdim besieging Yerushalayim heard about them, they lifted the siege from Yerushalayim.

⁶ Then this word of ADONAI came to the prophet Yirmeyahu:

⁷ "ADONAI the God of Isra'el says to tell the king of Y'hudah, who sent you to me to consult me: 'Pharaoh's army has marched out to assist you; but they will return to Egypt, to their own country.

⁸ The Kasdim will return, attack this city, capture it and burn it to the ground.'

⁹ Here is what ADONAI says: 'Don't deceive yourselves by thinking that the Kasdim must withdraw from you, because they will not withdraw.

¹⁰ Even if you were to strike the entire army of the Kasdim fighting against you, to the degree that only their wounded were left, they would still rise up every man from his tent and burn this city to the ground.'"

Zedekiah turned to Egypt for their help, violating God's instructions that (since the time of their exodus) they were never to seek Egypt for their aid or deliverance.

Deuteronomy 17:14-16 CJB

14 *"When you have entered the land ADONAI your God is giving you, have taken possession of it and are living there, you may say, 'I want to have a king over me, like all the other nations around me.'*

15 *In that event, you must appoint as king the one whom ADONAI your God will choose. He must be one of your kinsmen, this king you appoint over you- you are forbidden to appoint a foreigner over you who is not your kinsman.*

16 *However, he is not to acquire many horses for himself or have the people return to Egypt to obtain more horses, inasmuch as ADONAI told you never to go back that way again.*

So the short time-out of the siege of Jerusalem caused by the Egyptians requiring Nebuchadnezzar's attention did little more than to prolong the event. The end result remained the same.

Now I want to briefly detour to discuss a word that I said a couple of lessons ago that we would: Chaldeans. Chaldeans is but an English translation of the Hebrew word **Kasdim**. And **Kasdim** is but a Hebrew-ized form the Assyrian word mat-Kaldi. This word will be used throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, but it also has special significance in the New Testament as it identifies the Magi coming to worship the infant Yeshua as being **Kasdim**, Chaldeans. Who are the Chaldeans?

Chaldea was the name of Mesopotamian country that was at one time independent. It was located on the lower Tigris and Euphrates and spread along the northern edge of the Persian Gulf. For most of biblical history it was part of Babylonia, sometimes as a vassal kingdom, until it was finally fully absorbed as merely a district of Babylonia. So it is not unlike Israel during David's day, when there were 12 individually named tribal districts that had some autonomy, but yet were part of a national federation called Israel. So while a person might call themselves a Judahite, they would also see themselves as an Israelite. And yet they were too proud of their personal tribal heritage to necessarily want to be lumped in with the other 11 tribes.

The Chaldeans, interestingly, were descended from Shem. They were Semites, cousins of the Hebrews. They had a strong enough culture that they maintained a separate identity and separate language for centuries, even after they were assimilated into the Kingdom of Babylonia. However by the time we get to the Book of 2nd Kings, all of Babylon was speaking a common language: Aramean, or as we call it today: Aramaic. However due to the immense popularity of the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, which chose to call the language of Babylonia "Chaldean", it has confused the matter. Rather so-called biblical Chaldean is actually Aramaic.

What we find is that people who lived in the Chaldea district of Babylonia tended to identify

themselves as Chaldeans, as opposed to Babylonians. But in general, that was only a social/political viewpoint at that time. It is fine, from a general sense, for a bible student to understand that except for special instances Babylonian and Chaldean means the same thing. On the other hand, the people of the district of Chaldea maintained a proud heritage. It's not unlike French people who live in Paris prefer to identify themselves more as Parisians than Frenchmen, but of course understand that they are part of France. Even so, it is well known that Parisians speak a more formal form of French with certain nuances in pronouncing words that identifies them as Parisians. In fact, I have personally witnessed a Belgian person whose native language was French, get snubbed by a Parisian because they looked down on the Belgian as speaking (what was for them) an improper and hackneyed form of French.

But over time the issue of what is a Chaldean transformed in the bible. When the Babylonian empire was absorbed into the Persian Empire (and this of course included the district of Chaldea), the name Chaldean lost its meaning as the name of a somewhat distinct group of people and came to be applied to a class of society. The Persians found the Chaldeans to be masters of reading and writing, and especially versed in all forms of incantation, in sorcery, witchcraft, and all the magical arts. The Chaldean religion revolved around worship of the sun, moon and stars. So the Persians quite naturally spoke of astrologists and astronomers as Chaldeans. It therefore resulted that Chaldean came to mean astrologist, and thus THAT is the sense that it is meant in Jesus' day and why the Magi who came to follow the star and find the "new king", were called Chaldeans. It was just a common term of the times to identify people from the area of Babylon who were known as professional expert astrologers.

Let's return from our detour back to 2nd Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52. Here when the Chaldeans are spoken of it means a certain district of Babylon where the people prefer to be called Chaldeans.

The timeline of the Chaldeans besieging Jerusalem is that on the 9th day of the 4th month of year 586 B.C., starvation had finally set in, and due to the weakened condition of the city's inhabitants the Babylonian troops attacked and were able to get in side the city walls. The king of Judah and his personal guard fled, heading towards the Arabah (the lower end of the Jordon rift valley). But as they approached Jericho, the Babylonian troops caught up with them; Zedekiah found himself alone as his royal bodyguard deserted him and fled for their lives.

Melech Tzidkiyahu (Zedekiah) was arrested and taken to Rivlah, where his sons were executed in front of him, and then he was blinded.

The siege of Yerushalayim was terrible. The Book of Lamentations makes comment on the inhuman conditions the residents faced. For instance:

Lamentations 2:17-22 CJB

17 *ADONAI has done what he planned, he has fulfilled his promise, which he decreed in ancient times. He has destroyed without pity, he has let the enemy gloat over you and filled your foes with pride.*

18 Their hearts cried out to Adonai, "Wall of the daughter of Tziyon! Let your tears stream down like a torrent, day and night! Give yourself no respite, give your eyes no rest!"

19 "Get up! Cry out in the night, at the beginning of every watch! Pour your heart out like water before the face of Adonai! Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your babies, who are fainting away from hunger at every street corner."

20 ADONAI, look and see who it is you have thus tormented! Should women eat the fruit of their wombs, the children they have held in their hands? Should cohanim and prophets be slaughtered in the sanctuary of Adonai?

21 Youths and old men are lying on the ground in the streets, my unmarried women and young men have fallen by the sword. You killed them on the day of your anger, you slaughtered them without pity.

22 You have summoned my terrors from every direction, as on a festival day. On the day of Adonai's anger, not one escaped; not one survived- the children I held in my arms and raised, my enemy has destroyed.

And this in chapter 4.

Lamentations 4:9-13 CJB

9 Those slain by the sword are better off than those who are dying from hunger; since these waste away as if pierced through, for lack of food from the fields.

10 With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children; their children became their food when the daughter of my people was destroyed.

11 ADONAI has finished with his fury, he has poured out his blazing wrath; he kindled a fire in Tziyon that consumed its very foundations.

12 The kings of the earth could not believe, neither could anyone living in the world, that enemy or foe would ever enter the gates of Yerushalayim.

13 It happened because of the sins of her prophets and the offenses of her cohanim, who, within her walls, shed the blood of the righteous.

After capturing Zedekiah and killing his sons and blinding him, on the 10th day of Av (the 5th month of the year 586 B.C.), the commander of the Babylonian forces, N'vuzar'adan, destroyed the Holy Temple and the city walls of Jerusalem that had remained intact up until

now. Most of the remaining people were sent to Babylon, however many were allowed to stay in order to care for the fields, orchards, vineyards and to keep the mines operating.

The enormous brass columns that ordained the entry to the Temple were chopped up in pieces and taken to Babylon, as were every last Temple object of value. Even the famous bronze Sea, that huge laver of water that sat outside the Temple doors for ritual use by the priests, was cut up and taken away.

The chief priest, **S'rayah**, his second in command **Z'kharyah**, and 3 doorkeepers, along with the head commander of the city's soldiers, 7 members of King Zedekiah's government, and a number of others were executed in reprisal and to dissolve the social fabric of the community.

And thus in verse 21 are but a handful of words that bring us to an end to an era: **“Thus Judah was carried away captive out of his land”**. What a sad, inglorious day. God's Kingdom was now emptied of the Kingdom people. From the Negev in the south to Mt. Hermon in the north, the Promised Land went into dormancy because God's people had abandoned Him and He reacted in wrath.

But let's be clear (and I will be covering this in detail in a special 5 part series starting next Sunday for the local congregation, but it will NOT appear on the Torah Class website), the Promised Land was NOT now, nor would it ever be, completely devoid of Hebrews. A remnant of Jews was intentionally left in Judah by the Babylonians. And a remnant of the 10 tribes of the north also managed to evade the much earlier Assyrian exile for various reasons. In both cases these were relatively small numbers of people, but exactly how many is not known. There was some intermarriage between these remnants of the various Israelite tribes, but also intermarriage between them and foreigners who moved into the largely vacated towns and cities. But the vast bulk of all 12 tribes, easily 90% and probably over 95%, were exiled to foreign lands and there they remained.

It is vital to understand that in the bible while God's principles and His moral code are absolute, the historical narratives concerning Israel are not. For instance the word “all” only in the rarest instances ever means “100%”. The bible speaks of the exiles and in the movements of people in generalities, not in absolutes.

Thus we read in 2nd Kings 25:22 that because Nebuchadnezzar left behind a remnant of Jews that we could probably characterize as caretakers of the land, then there needed to be someone in charge of them. And he appointed a fellow named **G'dalyahu** as that person. **G'dalyahu** was certainly already an influential member of the government of Judah and a devout Jew; however equally certainly he must have expressed a sincere willingness to be subservient to Babylon. By all accounts, this subservience was because He believed the Prophet Jeremiah that God had ordered Judah to submit to Babylon. But notice he was given the title of governor, and not king. He worked directly for Nebuchadnezzar. Judah was no longer a vassal state with a vassal king that had some measure of independence. It was a conquered and decimated province that would have a caretaker government to simply be sure that the land was worked so that Babylon would gain some good out of the fertile fields and mature orchards.

G'dalyahu was from a prominent family; his father was part of the embassy that was sent to inquire of the prophetess **Huldah**, and his grandfather was a scribe for King Josiah. But this aristocratic family was not royalty; and this would soon prove to be a problem. Interestingly we find that the prophet Jeremiah was a big supporter of **G'dalyahu**. Some of it was no doubt because **G'dalyahu's** father had saved Jeremiah from a mob who wanted to kill him because of his prophetic warnings of doom for Judah.

Jeremiah 26:22-24 CJB

22 Y'hoyakim the king sent men to Egypt- Elnatan the son of 'Akhbor and some others.

23 They brought Uriyahu back from Egypt and took him to Y'hoyakim the king, who put him to the sword and threw his corpse into the burial-ground of the common people.

24 But in this situation concerning Yirmeyahu, Achikam the son of Shafan used his influence to help him, so that he was not handed over to the people to be put to death.

2nd Kings 25:23 introduces us to two groups of people: the first is of soldiers and officers of the Jewish armies that had escaped the Babylonian forces and were in hiding. There was also another group led by a fellow named Ishmael. As we'll soon see, the military people were willing to accept **G'dalyahu's** leadership and Babylon's domination, but Ishmael and his people were not. The reason is quite simple: Ishmael was a member of David's royal dynasty and he felt that he and not **G'dalyahu** had the right to rule over the remaining Jews in the land. For him, **G'dalyahu** was a disloyal usurper of the throne of Judah.

A meeting was held in Mitzpah of the various factions of Jewish leadership that returned to the land once the war was over. There were a number of places named Mitzpah but this Mitzpah was about 8 miles north of Jerusalem and it was to be **G'dalyahu's** seat of government since Jerusalem was uninhabitable. The military men, Ishmael, and some other leaders came along with their followers to pow-wow with **G'dalyahu**. He made an oath to them that as long as they would not rebel or cause trouble for Babylon, they would not be harmed. In fact, they were free to re-settle in Judah. There was so much abandoned land that these men could have prospered.

To put this in more modern terms, it was **G'dalyahu's** assignment to get Judah to be economically viable again. This would benefit Babylon. But it also meant that Judah could remain predominately Jewish if enough of the refugees returned and started a new life there. However not everyone shared **G'dalyahu's** vision and passion to restore the land under the control of a foreign king.

So in the 7th month (only 2 months after the fall of Jerusalem) Ishmael came and assassinated

G'dalyahu. Let's read about this in Jeremiah 41.

READ JEREMIAH 41 all

In addition to murdering **G'dalyahu**, Ishmael killed all the Judahites who were serving with **G'dalyahu**, plus a garrison of Babylonian soldiers stationed there. This was not an attempt to gain power; this was about shame and honor. This was about Ishmael feeling he had been wronged since he was a descendant of David. It was also that Ishmael and his men felt that **G'dalyahu** was betraying the Jewish people by being a loyal servant to Nebuchadnezzar the destroyer of Judah. And so all who sided with **G'dalyahu** were also killed.

But then we hear of more atrocity. Some other Jews who had fled the war came as mourners with offerings to be presented at the Temple in Jerusalem. They were mourning the exile and the destruction. But they seem to have not known that the Temple was destroyed and the priests killed. Yishma'el pretended to join them in their mournful procession, and once he got them near to Mitzpah, he slaughtered them too, figuring them as collaborators. 10 survived because they promised to give Yishma'el and his raiders a hidden cache of food.

The people who remained alive and in Judah were caught between a rock and a hard place. Would Nebuchadnezzar blame them for killing his governor and that garrison of Babylonian soldiers? Would Yishma'el find them and finish the job? So they went to the prophet Jeremiah and asked him to beseech God for them that they might receive direction to be delivered. They promised Jeremiah that whatever God instructed them they would do, whether it sounded good or bad.

READ JEREMIAH 42:1 – 16

The plan of the survivors was to flee to Egypt and seek their protection. God told them through Jeremiah that it would be the worst mistake they ever made. That everything they sought to escape in Judah they would experience in Egypt. Rather the Lord put them to the test: trust Me and despite all your fears I will assure that you will live and not die. Stay here in Judah; do NOT go to Egypt.

And what did they do? When Jeremiah told them of God's response this is what happened:

CJB *Jeremiah 43:1 When Yirmeyahu had finished telling all the people everything ADONAI their God had said, which ADONAI their God had sent him to tell them, the entire speech cited above,*

² *then 'Azaryah the son of Hosha'yah, Yochanan the son of Kareach and all the men with him had the effrontery to say to Yirmeyahu, "You are lying! ADONAI our God did not send you to say, 'Don't go to Egypt and live there!'"*

They didn't hear what they expected to hear, so they called Jeremiah a liar and made it clear that they were going to take matters into their own hands and deliver themselves by seeking asylum in Egypt.

I wonder how often we pray for God to give us an answer to a desire or a challenge, but when we don't like the answer we do what we always intended on doing anyway. Or we seek council from a Pastor or an Elder and we walk away pretty perturbed because they told us the very thing we didn't want to hear. So we get angry with them and go to someone else until we get permission to do what we want to do.

I must say that at this point in 2nd Kings, it's almost as if the writer/editor felt like it was time for some good news. Everything has been so dark and hopeless. So in verse 27 we hear that King **Y'hoyakhin** who had been held in a Babylonian prison for 37 years was released by a new king in Babylon, Evil-Merodach. No motive for this mercy is stated. He gave him good quarters, and supplied him food that was fit for the royal table. In fact, of all the kings of the conquered nations who were required to live in Babylon, Jehoiachin was given the highest status.

The Rabbis say that this was an encouragement from God. It was a message of hope for all exiles of Israel and Judah, in whatever era, and wherever they may have been scattered. I second the motion.

I'd like to close the book on our study of 2nd Kings with such a message from the Book of Deuteronomy. It is a message of hope for all Hebrews, and a message to repent for all followers of Christ who have believed the erroneous manmade doctrine that God is through with Israel, and instead that He has given all of His promises and blessings to the gentile Church.

READ DEUTERONOMY 4:25-40