



JUDGMENT DAY FOR JUDAH

2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36:6-23

The last days of the kingdom of Judah reveal the power of sin and an eternal principle: we reap what we sow. The tragic events recorded in the final chapters of Kings and Chronicles also highlight the righteousness of God and the hope He offers to all who will trust Him.

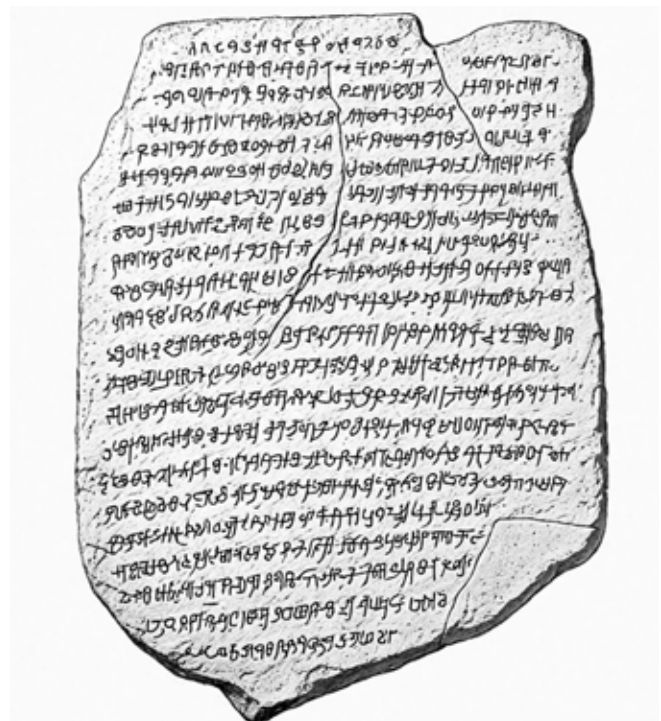
Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, “Sooner or later everyone sits down to a banquet table of consequences.” He was simply putting into different words a biblical principle: “Whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

As we arrive at the conclusion of 2 Kings in chapters 24 and 25 and the parallel account over in 2 Chronicles 36, that banquet table is set and the kingdom of Judah is about to be seated.

Josiah was Judah’s last godly king. His efforts to turn the nation back to the Lord were admirable, but they did not break through the bedrock of unbelief. The nation continued down the path of sin and self-destruction, and frankly, it only accelerated with the kings who followed Josiah. First was Jehoahaz, and he was followed by Jehoiakim.

Aside from the statement in 2 Kings 23:37 that he “did evil in the sight of the LORD,” little is said in either 2 Kings or 2 Chronicles about Jehoiakim’s reign. The book of Jeremiah, however, informs us that Jehoiakim hated the word of God. In fact, when Jeremiah’s prophetic message was read to Jehoiakim, he cut up the scroll and threw the pieces into a fire (Jeremiah 36:23).

Now it’s during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim that the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar forces



Babylonian Chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar’s early years, 605–595, recording both the fall of Carchemish in 605 and the attack on Jerusalem in 597

Judah to pay tribute. This is described in 2 Kings 24:1, which tells us, “Jehoiakim became his [Nebuchadnezzar’s] servant.” At this time, around 605 BC, the Babylonians take some treasures from the temple back to Babylon. They also take some outstanding Jewish



young people back as well, four of whom are Daniel and his three friends (Daniel 1:1-7).

Three years into his reign, Jehoiakim decides to rebel against Babylonian rule, and for the rest of his reign he is occupied with defending Judah from enemy raids.

Following the death of Jehoiakim, we are told in 2 Kings 24:8 that his son Jehoiachin takes the throne. The Bible says here, “Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king.” Verse 9 tells us, “He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done.”

You would think he would be smarter than that, but he isn't. And his reign lasts only three months before the Babylonian army shows up and demands his surrender. Jehoiachin surrenders and is taken captive to Babylon, and verse 13 informs us that the Babylonians “carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house.” In addition, some 10,000 Jewish captives are deported to Babylon. These, verse 14 tells us, include “all the officials and all the mighty men of valor . . . all the craftsmen and the smiths,” and, by the way, the prophet Ezekiel.

King Nebuchadnezzar places Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah on the throne of Judah and changes his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah reigns for eleven years. You would think he would get the message that God was bringing judgment on Judah and repent, but instead, verse 19 tells us he too “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.”

How foolish can you get? Well, he is foolish enough to repeat the mistake of Jehoiakim. In the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 36, we are told in verse 13:

He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar . . . He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel.

The book of 2 Chronicles then inserts this tragic summary statement in verses 15 and 16, explaining to us the rebellion, not only of the king of Judah but also of the people of Judah:

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

Let me tell you, they are finally seated at the banquet table of consequences. God's judgment arrives and it comes in the form of the mighty Babylonian army (sometimes called the Chaldeans), and they now surround and besiege the city of Jerusalem to starve it into submission.

Back in 2 Kings 25, we are told, “The famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land” (verse 3). King Zedekiah tries to sneak out of Jerusalem during the night, but he is captured. Verse 7 records that his sons are executed before his eyes; then he is blinded and taken to Babylon.

The fall of Jerusalem is also described in 2 Chronicles 36:

Therefore [God] brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the



king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. (verses 17-19)

Jerusalem is completely destroyed. The temple is leveled to the ground. The majority of the people of Judah are taken away from their land and into exile. Only the “poorest of the land” are left in Judah (2 Kings 25:12).

Second Kings 25 describes what happens to the few people who are left behind in the land of Judah, and it is not a very pretty picture. They continue to rebel against Babylon by assassinating the governor the Babylonians appointed over them (verse 25). After the murder of the governor, all these remaining people, in fear, flee to Egypt.

Although Jehoiachin is treated favorably in Babylon, the narrative ends on a tragic note with the kingdom of Judah devastated and the people deported to a foreign land.

Now as the books of Kings and Chronicles come to an end, an interesting glimmer of hope appears. The last two verses of 2 Chronicles 36 actually fast-forward the tape, so to speak, to the end of Judah’s seventy-year exile in Babylon. We are introduced to a Persian king named Cyrus, the conqueror of the Babylonian Empire. And Cyrus is the man God moves to allow the Jewish people to return to their homeland once again.

We are going to see that happen as we continue our Wisdom Journey through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

But before we wrap up this study, let’s consider what we can learn from the tragic downfall of Judah. Well, one thing we should learn is how firmly sin can grip

our heart—so that we hang on to it even to the point of self-destruction. Listen, the only way to escape the bondage of sin is to walk in humility and obedience to God’s Word.

We also learn here that God is the God of justice, and He tells the truth when He says people will reap what they sow.

But we also learn from this sad history that God is the God of hope. Despite Judah’s past, the Lord would offer them the hope of returning again to the land of promise.

And we who know God through faith in Jesus Christ always have hope, as we look to His gracious promises—promises of forgiveness, eternal life, and peace.

How has the LORD used your “banquet table of consequences” to get your attention? As you sat at that table, did you see the “food” on that table as punishment or nourishment? What kind of heart in a believer sees God’s consequences as nourishment? What kind of God gives consequences as nourishment?

If a struggling believer asked you how you manage to keep a humble heart and why God’s word was important to your walk with God, how would you answer? If a curious unbeliever asked you the same question, how would your answer differ?

Read Hebrews 6:19. What is this hope according to verses 13-18? How is this hope an anchor to your soul? Who in your life needs to hear about this anchor?

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