

# OpenTheo

## November 11th: 2 Kings 24 & Acts 13:44—14:7

November 10, 2020



### Alastair Roberts

Nebuchadnezzar comes against Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas at Pisidian Antioch and Iconium.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

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

And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by his servants the prophets. Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed. For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord would not pardon.

Now the rest of the deeds of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and

Jehoiakim his son reigned in his place. And the king of Egypt did not come again out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt, from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates. Jehoiakim was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem.

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

And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to the city while his servants were besieging it. And Jehoiakim the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself and his mother and his servants and his officials and his palace officials. The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign, and carried off all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the Lord, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the Lord had foretold.

He carried away all Jerusalem, and all the officials, and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained, except the poorest people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiakim to Babylon, the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the chief men of the land, he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon.

And the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the metal workers, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war. And the king of Babylon made Mataniah, Jehoiakim's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

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

In 2 Kings chapter 24, Israel finally goes over the precipice and tumbles down into exile in Babylon. Jehoiakim had been placed on the throne of Judah by Pharaoh Necho after he had removed his predecessor Jehoahaz and brought him into exile in Egypt. The whole region was in turmoil.

The great powers in the north and the south, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, are coming into direct conflict, and the minor nations that formerly functioned as buffers between them are being removed from play. The outcome of this is far from certain. Assyria and Egypt are decisively beaten by Babylon at Carchemish in 605 BC, leading to a few years

of Babylonian dominance, during which time Jehoiakim, who had been a tributary of Egypt, becomes a Babylonian vassal.

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

Judah is attacked by raiders on all sides, from nations under Babylonian rule, yet in a way orchestrated by the Lord in judgment upon their sins and in fulfilment of the words of the prophets. In particular, this is a consequence of the idolatrous abominations of Manasseh and his violence and his shedding of innocent blood. Jehoiakim dies after his 11-year reign, and he is replaced by Jehoiachin, his son.

Babylon, unlike Egypt, had the reserve power to recover from the earlier failed attempt at conquest. By the end of Jehoiakim's reign, the tide has turned decisively in Babylon's favour. Egypt is a spent force, and Babylon now controls the entire territory between Egypt and the Euphrates.

The attentive hearer of the text should recognise that this is the territory that used to be ruled by Solomon at the height of the Kingdom of Israel. It now all rests under the power of Babylon, and the doom of Judah is set. The finishing blows come in stages, beginning in the reign of Jehoiakim, the throne name of Jeconiah or Caniah.

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

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

Assyria deported populations and replaced them with different populations, cutting off the connection between people and the land in which they belonged and flourished. This can be one of the most devastating ways to break down a people's nationhood, peoplehood and selfhood. In much more recent history, we can see this in the impact of the European powers transporting African slaves to the Americas.

Babylon's approach was different. They sought to remove the head of the nations that they conquered, stripping them of the people of skill and power who could grant them nationhood and effective collective agency by their leadership. There were 10,000 deportees, 7,000 of the men of valour, 1,000 craftsmen and metal workers.

Presumably the remaining 2,000 were members of the ruling classes. Stripped of these people in 597 BC, Judah is left powerless and leaderless. There would be a further deportation later in 586 BC, but while that deportation is more final, this earlier deportation is the greater of the two.

Jehoiachin is carried away to Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar replaces him with his uncle, Mataniah, the third son of Josiah, whose name he changes to Zedekiah, meaning the righteousness of the Lord. The irony of this should not be missed. This is all the fulfilment of the Lord's righteous judgement upon Judah.

Zedekiah, like Jehoiachin, reigns for 11 years before rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. He repeats the error of his predecessor and he suffers the same consequences. Peter Lighthouse, following Robert Cone, observes that there is a close parallel between two different sections here.

2 Kings 23.21-24.2 is paralleled closely with 2 Kings 24.8-25.1. Jehoiachin reigns for 3 months. Jehoiachin is imprisoned by Nebuchadnezzar. Pharaoh places Eliakim on the throne and changes his name.

Nebuchadnezzar sets Mataniah on the throne and changes his name. Pharaoh takes Jehoiachin to Egypt. Jehoiachin dies in Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar takes Jehoiachin to Babylon. But Jehoiachin does not die in Babylon. Jehoiachin reigns for 11 years.

Zedekiah reigns for 11 years. Jehoiachin rebels against Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar.

God brings attackers upon Jehoiachin. The Lord rejects Judah in the reign of Zedekiah. Lighthouse proceeds to remark, Comparing these sequences, we can see that Judah's dealings with Egypt foreshadow its dealings with Babylon.

And this suggests that the writer of 1 and 2 Kings is operating within Isaiah's notion of a second exodus from Babylon that recapitulates the exodus from Egypt. The final chapters of 1 and 2 Kings also complete a larger pattern of sevens that run through the history of Judah. Six kings and then Athaliah interrupts the dynasty.

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

In Ezekiel chapter 17 verses 11 to 21, for instance, Then the word of the Lord came to me, Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean? Tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and took her king and her princes

and brought them to him in Babylon. And he took one of the royal offspring and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath, the chief men of the land he had taken away, that the kingdom might be humble and not lift itself up and keep his covenant that it might stand. But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and a large army.

Will he thrive? Can one escape who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape? As I live, declares the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die. Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in war, when mounds are cast up and siege walls built to cut off many lives. He despised the oath in breaking the covenant, and behold, he gave his hand and did all these things, he shall not escape.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, as I live, surely it is my oath that he despised and my covenant that he broke. I will return it upon his head, I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and enter into judgment with him there for the treachery he has committed against me. And all the pick of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered to every wind, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

I have spoken. A question to consider. Reading Jeremiah chapters 27 and 28, what light do they shed upon this chapter? Acts chapter 13 verse 44 to chapter 14 verse 7. The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord, but when the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you, since you thrust it aside and judge yourself unworthy of eternal life. Behold, we are turning to the Gentiles, for so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium, and the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace,

granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

But the people of the city were divided, some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel. At the end of Acts chapter 13 we see that the message of Paul and Barnabas has an impact on all levels of society in Antioch and Pisidia.

The whole city, Jews and Gentiles, gathers together to hear them the next Sabbath. Despite the fact that they are gathering to hear the word of the Lord, the reaction of the Jews is not joy at the receptivity of their Gentile neighbours, but jealousy. They dislike the fact that Paul is receiving such a response, and they try to slander Paul and to close people's ears to his message.

Their concern is ultimately a selfish one, driven by their personal desire for influence and power, unwilling to allow this newcomer to receive such attention. Likely an important part of this jealousy comes from their conviction that the covenant gives them an exclusive status, preaching to Gentiles that they can become recipients of the promise of Abraham in the way that Paul and Barnabas are doing, undermines their privileged status, and lowers their standing relative to proselytes and God-fearers. Paul and Barnabas' message implies that Gentiles can enjoy equal standing in the people of God.

Note the way that Jesus had also received an extremely hostile reaction when he had spoken about God's grace to the Gentiles, and the failure of the people of Israel to receive it, in Luke chapter 4, in his first sermon in Nazareth. Paul had earlier concluded his sermon by quoting the prophetic warning, Look you scoffers, be astounded and perish, for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you. This word of warning very directly applies to the Jewish opponents in this situation.

As the Jews reject the message of Paul and Barnabas, they declare that they will bring the word to the Gentiles. The Jews have cast judgment upon themselves by their failure to accept the message. They have judged themselves to be unworthy.

Paul and Barnabas will now turn their attention to the Gentiles. This is not yet a complete turn to the Gentiles, just a more local one. When they move on to Iconium, Paul will again begin in a Jewish synagogue.

One of the Davidic promises associated with the Messianic servant is found in Isaiah chapter 49 verse 6, which Paul cites here. Paul and Barnabas are fulfilling Israel's calling to be a light for the blind nations. This statement, though connected first and foremost with the servant of Isaiah, Paul and Barnabas take as an instruction for their own ministry.

Presumably as the body of Christ, they extend and continue Christ's ministry by his spirit. Even when the gospel message of Paul faces harsh rejection, God remains in control. Verse 48 speaks of as many as were appointed to eternal life believing.

God makes the word of the gospel effective in the hearts of hearers. The word of God is described as if it had a life and vitality of its own. God's word acts and brings about new situations and here it is spreading throughout the whole region.

However, the Jewish leadership in the city is determined to stamp out Paul and Barnabas' influence. They achieve this by inciting the devout God-fearing women and the leading men of the city against Paul and Barnabas so that they will be driven out. It's most likely, as Ben Witherington notes, that the high status women among the God-fearers were the means by which the Jews influenced the leading men of the city.

It's important to appreciate some of the considerations that might have driven the Jews here. If Paul and Barnabas were to be successful, especially in gaining a large number of God-fearers, they stood to lose a great deal of their own social influence and status within the city, which would have depended in large measure upon groups such as the well-connected women, who would have been very effective at influencing the most powerful people in the city on their behalf, as they seem to have been here. Considering that women were typically much less educated than men in ancient society, yet could nonetheless enjoy considerable influence within their households, Jews and various other sects might have especially targeted women as they were more open to conversion, less able to be critical of their teaching, and much more apt to spread it and to increase the social influence of the religious teachers who taught it.

In 2 Timothy, Paul warns Timothy about false teachers who would target weak women in such a fashion. Richard Hooker makes similar observations about the behaviour of certain sectarian Christian teachers in his own day. The following passage is from a modernised version of his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

He speaks here about the way that some radical Christian teachers particularly aimed at women. This eagerness to proselytise them, it would seem, arises from the fact that they are more apt helpers of the cause than men. They are more apt because, regardless of which side they are on, their great eagerness of affection makes them diligently draw in their husbands, children, servants, friends, and allies after them.

They are more apt because of their natural inclination to pity, which makes them readier than men to be generous to their preachers when they suffer want. They are more apt because they have many opportunities to bring encouragement to the brethren. Finally, they are more apt because they especially enjoy sharing news with one another about where all of their friends and neighbours stand when it comes to the cause.

False teachers and religious leaders will often prey upon the virtues of the more

vulnerable, whether the trusting innocence of children, the generosity of poor widows, the whole-hearted passion of youths, the receptivity of new converts, the greater empathy of women, or the religious devotion of the devout yet unlearned. One of the tasks of faithful pastors is to guard the goodness of these traits, protecting such persons from those who would prey upon them, also over time to equip such persons with the means by which to protect themselves without hardening them. Jesus had instructed his disciples when he sent them out.

In Matthew 10 verses 11-23, And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it, and if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.

Truly I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.

When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak, or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents, and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake, but the one who endures to the end will be saved.

When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. For truly I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. Paul and Barnabas are then following this pattern as they leave Pisidian Antioch, putting the dust off their feet and moving on to Iconium.

However, they leave behind them a community of faithful new disciples who are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. The mission now moves east, continuing in the inland regions of Asia Minor, modern day central Turkey, in Iconium, then later moving southeast onto Lystra and Derbe. Once again in Iconium they have an initially very positive response to their message, with many Jewish and Greek converts.

Once again, however, unbelieving Jews oppose them and stir up the Gentiles against them. This new doctrine that Paul and Barnabas are bringing threatens to overturn the status quo and undermine the standing of the Jews in society. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas remain a long time, courageously speaking concerning the Lord, and their message is confirmed by signs and wonders by which the Lord bore witness to his word.



The people are divided by their message, into people for and against the missionaries. Gentiles and Jews join together with their rulers in an attempt to stone them. We see here a sort of false Jew-Gentile community emerging as the opposing shadow of the true Jew-Gentile community that has been formed through the message of the Gospel in the Church.

Hearing of the plot, they flee to Lystra and Derbe, where they continue to proclaim the Gospel. A question to consider. Comparing verses 46 and 48 of chapter 13, what are some of the lessons that we might learn about divine sovereignty and human responsibility?