

OpenTheo

2 Kings 25



2 Kings - Steve Gregg

In this historical account, Steve Gregg wraps up the history of Judah prior to the Babylonian exile. The destruction of Jerusalem is described, and the famine becomes so severe that people resort to burning their own homes for fuel. The Babylonians capture and bring King Jehoiachin to Ribla, while Gedaliah is made governor of Mizpah instead of Jerusalem, which was too destroyed to serve as the capital city. Later, King Meridok of Babylon released Jehoiachin from prison, and even gave a budget to rebuild the temple.

Transcript

In 2 Kings 25, we have the wrapping up of the history of Judah prior to the Babylonian exile. The judgments that God said he would bring on them because of the sins of Manasseh. Now, Manasseh was not the first king in Judah to sin, obviously.

There were bad kings before him. But, he was the worst, and he was the one that institutionalized Moloch worship, and Baal worship, and every kind of pagan worship you can imagine. And did so in view of the fact that only shortly before he came to power, God had destroyed Israel, the northern kingdom, for the very same behaviors.

It's like he did not get a clue. He saw that Israel fell because of all these things, but apparently he didn't realize it was because of all these things. He was not a godly man, so he didn't understand what God was doing.

He probably just thought it was a political disaster. It was like when we hear about wars today in Afghanistan, or Iraq, or whatever, we just assume, well, that's too bad. That, you know, these forces are stronger than those forces, and this happens, and these people get killed.

And he probably thought that about Israel because he wasn't listening to the prophets. If he'd listened to the prophets, he would have known that they were continually saying, Israel's going down because of their idolatry. And then when Israel did go down, even Isaiah, the prophet, said, you know, Israel went down because of their idolatry, and now Judah needs to be careful not to succumb to the same.

But Manasseh did not listen, and he killed prophets. He probably even killed Isaiah. And his wickedness and all the innocent blood he shed was that which is commemorated later as the real reason that God destroyed Judah.

Although, there was one little uptick in the moral goodness of the nation in the time of Josiah, but it was too brief, too shallow, and it didn't really change anything permanently. So that the kings after Josiah, including his own sons, went back to wickedness. Perhaps not the wickedness as great as Manasseh's wickedness, but enough to be apostate from God.

And therefore, God had them taken into Babylon. We read of the final stage of that Babylonian captivity in chapter 25 of 2 Kings. We've already seen two times that we might say God fired a warning shot over their heads to get them to pay attention.

Because in chapter 25, we're looking at the year 586 B.C. But already, twice earlier, once as early as 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, the newly ascended king of Babylon, had come against Judah. And he had not been resisted by Jehoiakim, the king of Judah. And he captured some of the leading citizens of Jerusalem back into Babylon.

This was not a cruel action on his part, but it was certainly an exercise of his supreme authority over Judah. And the loss of this cream of their youth should have been a warning to them. There's a big new power in the area, a new bully on the block, and he's already exerted power over us.

If we don't have God on our side, we're going to probably suffer more at his hands. And sure enough, they did, but they didn't anticipate that. They were just wrapped up in their own lives and their own sins, and so they kept offending God.

And so later, when Jehoiakim was king, or Jeconiah, Nebuchadnezzar came back in 597 B.C. So this was like eight years or so after the first time. And he took 10,000 of the people of Judah into captivity, including the king. And he set another king up in his place.

And so when we come to chapter 25, we have the last of the kings of Judah sitting, and his name is Zedekiah. His original name was Madaniah, but Nebuchadnezzar gave him a new name, just as an emblem of Nebuchadnezzar's authority to do such things. And he called him Zedekiah.

And it says in chapter 25, Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, that is, Zedekiah's reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it. Now this is because Zedekiah had rebelled against him. That's the last thing we read in chapter 24.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. And so Nebuchadnezzar comes down one final time and besieges Jerusalem. So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of

king Zedekiah.

I think it was eighteen months was the siege. And so there was starvation going on in the city, of course, and they finally succumbed. By the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled at night by way of the gate between the two walls, which was the king's garden, or by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans were still encamped all around against the city. And the king went by the way of the plain. So they were starving in there.

The wall was broken through. It was clear that Babylon was going to come pouring in. So many of the Jews, to save their lives, went pouring out, even though they were still surrounded.

There must have been some gaps in the siege. There must have been some areas that were not well guarded because people came out and thought they could get away. And Zedekiah almost did get away, but didn't.

But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, which is up in Syria, where apparently he was conducting the battle through his agents and his generals from that remote location.

And they pronounced judgment on him, on Zedekiah, and that was that he had rebelled against the king, Nebuchadnezzar. Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon. This was an obviously intentionally very cruel thing to do.

They were going to put his eyes out so he wouldn't see anything, but the last thing he got to see was his sons killed before his eyes. That would be the last image that would be engraved in his brain when he would see nothing else after that. And he was carried away into Babylon.

Now in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great men, he burned with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around.

So this is the end of Jerusalem, at least until later. Later on, some remnant would return with Zerubbabel, and would rebuild the walls in the temple. And we'll read about that in Ezra and Nehemiah.

But this is going to be the beginning of a captivity that, measured several different ways, can be said to be seventy years. Now, we don't read about it here, but in the book of Jeremiah, we find that Jeremiah, at this time, had been put in prison. And this Babylonian official actually released him, and treated him well.

Because he was obviously seen as an enemy of the ruling administration in Jerusalem, who were now being punished. And so, the political prisoners, like Jeremiah, were released, and he was given the opportunity to go wherever he wished to go. Unfortunately, there were people who forced Jeremiah to go where he didn't want to go, and this comes up later on.

Verse 11, Then Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, carried away captive the rest of the people who remained in the city, and the defectors, who had deserted to the king of Babylon, with the rest of the multitude. But the captain of the guard left some of the poor of the land as vinedressers and farmers. So, the poor people, he had pity on, and just let them stay on their farms, and they didn't have any power, they couldn't ever rise up against Babylon, rather than just deliver the land over to wild beasts, or to do what Assyria would have done.

See, the Assyrians would have taken the Jews out and brought in foreigners to repopulate the land. Nebuchadnezzar's policies were different, he simply left the poorest, the most harmless people in the land, and took away the powerful people. At those times, those rare occasions, it's really desirable to be one of the peasants, instead of one of the rulers of the country.

The bronze pillars that were in the house of the Lord, and the carts in the bronze sea that were in the house of the Lord, which Solomon, of course, had made, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried their bronze to Babylon. They also took away the pots, the shovels, the trimmers, the spoons, and all the bronze utensils with which the priests ministered. The firepans and the basins, the things made of solid gold and solid silver, the captain of the guard took away.

The two pillars, one sea, and the carts which Solomon had made for the house of the Lord, the bronze of all these articles was beyond measure. The height of one pillar was 18 cubits, and the capital on it was bronze. The height of the capital was 3 cubits.

Remember, these two pillars were built by Solomon. They didn't apparently support anything in particular. They seemed to be freestanding pillars out in the front of the temple.

They were described, of course, back in 1 Kings. The height of the capital was 3 cubits. The network of pomegranates all around the capital were all of bronze.

The second pillar was the same with a network. That is its ornamentation it's describing

there. And the captain of the guard took Saria, the chief priest, Zephaniah, the second priest, and the three doorkeepers.

He also took out of the city an officer who had charge of the men of war, five men of the king's close associates who were found in the city, the principal scribe of the army who mustered the people of the land, and 60 men of the people of the land who were found in the city. These were mostly important people that were taken into captivity. So Nebuchadnezzar and the captain of the guard took these and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and then the king of Babylon struck them and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Haman.

Thus Judah was carried away captive from its own land. Now since there were some of the poor of the land still left, they were left under the leadership of a governor named Gedaliah. It says that Nebuchadnezzar or Nebuchadnezzar in one of these two made Gedaliah, the son of Ahicham, the son of Shaphan, governor over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had left.

So they were leaving only the poor peasants in the land, but they didn't leave them without any kind of leadership. They appointed not a king this time. They had appointed Zedekiah as king earlier, but now they just appoint a man to be a governor, a low political official.

Let's see, verse 23. Now when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. Apparently Jerusalem was so destroyed and burned up that he made his capital city at Mizpah instead.

Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan the son of Kereah, Sariah the son of Tenumeth the Netothithite, and Jeaziah the son of Amalekithite, they and their men, and Gedaliah took an oath before them and their men, and said to them, Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. Now apparently these men were men who had lived far enough away that they didn't come under the troubles that Babylon inflicted upon Jerusalem.

And they lived out of the country, and they heard that now the country had been left abandoned by Nebuchadnezzar under the leadership of this Gedaliah. And this party apparently was loyal to Egypt. They were thinking that they should team up with Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar.

And Gedaliah was not favorable toward that. He said, No, we should serve the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, and things would go well with us. Well, they weren't satisfied with that position.

In verse 25, Now it happened in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah,

the son of Elishema of the royal family, came with ten men and struck and killed Gedaliah, the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. So anyone who is supportive of Babylon, they killed them. And all the people, small and great, and the captains of the armies arose and went to Egypt, for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

Now they only had reason to be afraid of the Chaldeans because they just assassinated the Chaldean appointee and the Chaldean people favorable to Chaldea. But they fled to Egypt. Apparently that was their plan from the beginning.

They thought it would be safer to be alive with Egypt than with the Babylonians. So they killed Gedaliah, but not so that they could replace him with somebody more to their liking, but just apparently they thought of him as a traitor. They apparently saw him as one who caved in to the enemy.

And so they killed him and then they fled to Egypt. Now we don't read of it here, but in the book of Jeremiah we find that the people who went to Egypt on this occasion first came to Jeremiah. And they said, inquired the Lord whether we should go to Egypt or not.

And they said, you know, whatever you say, we'll do it. And he said, you won't listen to me. Why should I prophesy in the name of the Lord? You won't listen to me.

They said, oh no, we'll do whatever you say, whatever the Lord tells you, we'll do. So he sought the Lord and the Lord said, don't go to Egypt. Serve the king of Babylon here.

And the people, when Jeremiah heard it, they thought that he was not giving them the true word of the Lord, at least they denied it. And so they went to Egypt anyway, and they forced him to go along too. So against his will, Jeremiah was kind of dragged down to Egypt.

I don't know if they put him in chains or whatever to keep him from staying behind. But they forcibly took him to Egypt against his wishes. And we never hear of him returning from Egypt.

So it is believed he died there. Jewish tradition is that some of his countrymen there in Egypt actually killed him there. Most of the prophets died at the hands of their countrymen.

Whether this actually happened to Jeremiah or not, we don't know. We do know that he did go off into Egypt as a captive of these people. So they went to Egypt to escape the retribution that would come upon them from the Babylonians.

Now, it came to pass in the 37th year of the captivity of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, in the 12th month, on the 27th day of the month, that evil Merodot, king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, from prison. He spoke

kindly to him and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon. Why he did this, we do not know.

Why it is recorded, we can only guess. It would appear that the author is trying to point out that the Babylonians, who were ranked pagans, actually were more civil and more merciful to their enemies, or at least to Jehoiakim, than Israel and their kings were. I mean, these people who didn't know Yahweh actually had some civility about them.

And so Jehoiakim changed from his prison garments and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. And as for the provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life. So, the books of kings end with a great tragedy, the slaughter and the destruction of the people and the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

And yet, the very last note is more or less kind of an upbeat thing. You know, in the middle of the period of time of the captivity, at least Jehoiakim got released from prison. He was still in captivity.

He never really ruled in Jerusalem again. Jerusalem was devastated. And so it remained for a period of time until the Babylonians fell to the Persians.

And we don't read about that here, but we read about that in Daniel, chapter 5. Because in Daniel, Daniel was one of the Jews who was taken from Jerusalem into captivity in Babylon in the first incursion of Babylon into Jerusalem in 605 BC. Daniel and his friends were treated with deference and with respect because of their abilities. And Daniel rose to power because of his wisdom and because of his ability to interpret dreams, so that he had a good position in Babylon himself.

But the last king in Babylon, who was Belshazzar, made a big mistake and he took the articles that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. And Belshazzar took them as an act of deliberately insulting Yahweh. He took the cups and bowls and so forth from Yahweh's temple and he used them to drink and propose a toast to the gods of the sun and the moon and the stars of wood and gold and so forth.

To false gods. But when he did that, the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote in the plaster of the wall in the room where he was having this big celebration. And he was unable to read the words and so Daniel ultimately was called in and he read the words and he gave the interpretation.

Basically the message was that Belshazzar and the kingdom of Babylon had been weighed in the balances by God and had been found wanting and their kingdom was now being divided to the Medes and the Persians. And at that very time, at that very night, the Medes and the Persians were actually invading the city. But Belshazzar and his generals were all together drinking and drunk and they were very secure, they felt.

Babylon had walls around it that were, according to Herodotus, I think 300 feet tall. That's like a 30 story building all around the city. And very thick walls that could not be penetrated.

They were so thick that the top of the wall was as wide as an eight lane highway. They say eight chariots could race abreast on top of the walls of Babylon. So it was a really huge, huge wall.

Such a wall as there was no military technology at the time that could ever scale it or break it down. So the Babylonians felt very confident that they would never be defeated by any of the armies around them. They knew that the Medes and the Persians were causing trouble around the region, but they just were almost arrogantly ignoring them as if, well, what can they do to us? We've got these great walls.

But, in fact, they were breached. Cyrus, the Persian, leading the armies of the Medes and the Persians, actually went under the wall because the Euphrates River ran under the wall. There were bronze gates in the riverbed to prevent invasions, but those gates happened to be open on the occasion that Cyrus marched his people through.

He redirected the river so that the riverbed was dry under the wall and the gates were open. So he marched in and he took the city without a fight because the king and all the generals were drunk having a party. And so that very night, when Daniel read the writing on the wall for Belshazzar and said, your kingdom is taken from you and given to the Medes and the Persians, probably within minutes of that announcement, the Medes and the Persians appeared in the room and killed them, killed the Babylonian officials, and the kingdom passed from Babylon to Persia, Medo-Persia.

It was Cyrus, the king of the Medo-Persian empire, that told the Jews and all other captive peoples they could go back to their lands that Nebuchadnezzar had taken them from. And he actually gave them even a budget from the treasuries to rebuild the temple. And that's what happens when we next pick up the historical books in Ezra.

It begins with Cyrus making that decree and the Jews, and some of them, about 50,000, go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and they get another lease on life. They never do very well. They never have the glory of the old kingdom again.

And they long for the time when the Messiah will come and restore Israel to the glories of the divinic era. But it was really just a remnant of the Jews that actually ever lived back in Israel. In the days when Jesus came, hundreds of years later, still probably at least two-thirds of the Jewish population of the world lived outside of Palestine and lived in the Roman Empire and elsewhere.

Because they just never went back. Judea was never restored to what it once was. So this was the end of what had been a great empire earlier in David's time.

It had been a literal empire because he had conquered all the surrounding territories and made them vassals of himself. It remained an empire in the time of Solomon, but Solomon's sins brought ultimately these disasters on both the northern and the southern kingdom. So God basically shows that he means business when he warns the nation that they need to turn from their evil ways or else he'll lower the boom.

He doesn't do it quickly, but he does it. In fact, Solomon himself said in Ecclesiastes 8.13, because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil. And because God didn't execute speedily, people just thought they were going to get away with it.

They kept going and going until some rather horrible things happened. Probably the most horrible thing that happened to any of the kings of Judah was that which happened to the last one, Zedekiah, to see his sons murdered in front of him and then his eyes put out. That was a punishment that they deserved for a long time and that God didn't bring on them very quickly.

Well, it didn't take us very long to go over that chapter, predictably, so this is going to remain a short session. Next time we come to the historical books, we'll be looking at the end of the Babylonian captivity.