

# The Last Five Kings of Judah

**Memory Text:** “He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Was not this knowing Me?” says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 22:16)

**Setting The Stage:** The question was asked, What do you call a person who thinks there is always right, and any other opinion is wrong? The answers came flooding in – narcissist, a know-it-all, bigoted, snob, narrow-minded, my wife, and ego-maniac. Could any of these words describe the last five kings of pre-exilic Judah (with exception of Josiah)? There’s a question that comes from ancient times, and it’s very fitting to today’s review of the lesson: “If it rains on a rock, would that rock absorb water?” We’ll be reviewing the lives of the last five kings of Judah and we’ll find out which kings were “rocks” and which weren’t.

## Sunday – Under The Rule of Josiah

2 Kings 22 – 23:30; 2 Chronicles 34, 35

Josiah was only eight years old when he was crowned king. He reigned for thirty-one years. His father was Anon, who reigned for two years and then was killed by his own servants, and his grandfather was the infamous Manasseh whom it is said, “So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.” (2 Chron. 33:9). Manasseh was carried off by a band of Assyrian soldiers who took him to Babylon. It was under some very trying circumstances that he saw the depths to which he has morally sunk, and remarkably, turned his life over to God.

**2 Kings 22:2.** Josiah did what was right in the sight of God, and he did not turn aside to the right hand neither to the left. This phrase was used frequently at the time of Moses and Joshua, and seldom used later. This is significant when we consider what lost writings were recovered that lay at the foundation for the tremendous spiritual revival and reformation that was occur during his reign.

When he was sixteen he sought the Lord. When he was twenty he began to remove idolatry from the land (2 Chron. 34:3). His work extended beyond Judah as far south as the land of Simeon (west of the southern part of the Dead Sea – Bethsheba), and as far north as the land of Nephtali (north of the Sea of Galilee – Dan).

**2 Kings 22:3-7.** When he was twenty-six he began the much-needed repairs on the temple after conducting a successful fundraising campaign. This is the same year that Hilkiyah, the high priest, finds the temple copy of the Book of the Law that perhaps was carelessly lost during Manasseh’s reign, or hidden by a faithful priest during Manasseh’s persecution (v. 8).

Hilkiah delivered it to Shaphan, who was on the king's errand to ensure the proper payment of the workers, and Shaphan, after having reported to the king about the money and the workers, read the Book of the Law to King Josiah.

The Book of the Law primarily carried the book of the covenant in Deuteronomy that had to do with the blessings and curses (Deut. 32-34). Upon hearing the Book of the Law being read, Josiah rent his clothes as an act of remorse and horror for the impending judgments about to fall on Judah because of its sins.

So concerned was Josiah that he sent Shaphan, Hilkiah, and a couple of other close subjects to inquire of the Lord at the hand of Huldah the prophetess whether what the Book of the Law had prophesied was going to come to pass on Judah during his reign (2 Chron. 34:14-22). Huldah confirmed that it would happen, however Josiah, because of God's mercy wouldn't live to see it.

**2 Kings 22:19, 20. What was the reason God saw fit to keep Josiah from seeing the downfall of Judah?** He had an impressionable heart that responded to the Holy Spirit's pleas in tears of penitence and faith. Do you think God responds to His children in the same way today? Yes! "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit." (Isa. 34:18)

The messages of the prophets – Jeremiah, Habbakuk, and Zephaniah – warning about the coming Babylonian captivity, prepared the way for the wonderful revival that was to follow after the reading of the law. Josiah called all of Jerusalem to the court of the temple and there first consecrated himself to the Lord. The people followed their leader (2 Chron. 34:29-32). Then he acted – he sought to remove idolatry and he also consecrated himself to obey the Lord.

Josiah had removed all the articles made for Baal out of the temple to have them burned outside of Jerusalem and ashes removed to Bethel. Why Bethel? This was the place where God provided the assurance of His presence in the dream about the ladder, and it was here that Jacob dedicated himself to God (Gen. 28:10-22). He also removed all of the compromised priests from their posts had many of them killed (2 Kings 23:20).

**2 Kings 23:15.** Here Josiah meets the fulfillment of the 1 Kings 13:2, 3 when Jereboam set up counterfeit centers of worship in Dan and Bethel 300 years before. Josiah also left the "man of God's" tomb alone, but "defiled" the other tombs by removing the bones of the deceased and burning them on altar's. This act would have been highly offensive, but Josiah did this to show contempt for the form of worship Jeroboam had set up in the place of true worship.

Some would accuse Josiah of being extreme in tearing down and burning up every trace of idolatry in Judah, but it is more extreme to sacrifice children during pagan worship services (2 Kings 23:10). To not destroy these false centers of worship was to invite the continuation of the evil practices that were the fruit of idolatry.

The writers of Kings and Chronicles reveal that Josiah called for the celebration of the Passover and that no Passover had been observed that was so great since the days of the judges (2 Kings 23:21-23; 2 Chron. 35). Josiah also removed the spirit-mediums out of the land, seeking to eradicate all vestiges of spiritualism.

What commendation was given to Josiah for all that he did to stay the tide of idolatry? **2 Kings 23:25**. No other king applied himself so vigorously to enforce Mosaic law. Josiah wasn't just interested in external compliance of the law, but also sought to embrace its spirit (Deut. 6:5; Jer. 22:15, 16)

**Although Josiah knew that judgment was going to come upon Judah no matter what, why did he still promote revival and reformation?** According to Prophets & Kings, p. 400 Josiah seeing that God had given opportunity for repentance and reformation he discerned in this God's willingness to temper his judgments with mercy. Josiah didn't bring about decided reform to bring an end to the judgments of God, but because it was the right thing to do and he had compassion for his people.

Unfortunately, at the age of thirty-nine, Josiah died in a battle that he should have been avoided (2 Chron. 35:20-25). Assyria and Egypt were in alliance against Babylon, the new world power. Necho II was on his way to the Euphrates to engage with Babylon and against Necho's counsel Josiah rose up to fight him. In this battle, he was severely wounded and died. Josiah essentially died for being self-confident and failing to listen to the word of God. God speaks to us through various instrumentalities: prophets, angels, Bible, nature, and even common sense at times.

**2 Chron. 35:24, 25**. Josiah's death was severely mourned by the people and prophets. However, there would be no weeping at the death of his wicked sons (Jer. 22:10, 18). What legacy do you wish to leave if you must die before the Lord comes?

### **Monday – Jehoahaz & Jehoiakim: Another Descent**

2 Kings 23:31-24:5; 2 Chronicles 36:1-8

**2 Kings 23:31**. Jehoahaz (Shallum – 1 Chron. 3:15) was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and only reigned three months. He was the youngest son of Josiah and was chosen by the people ahead of Jehoiakim the oldest of Josiah. It is assumed that Jehoahaz was chosen because he was of the anti-Egyptian party. It is also assumed that this is the reason he was swiftly replaced by Necho II of Egypt. Sadly he did evil in the sight of the Lord unlike his father.

Jehoahaz was imprisoned in Riblah, 200 miles north of Judah, so Necho could come and assess the situation. Necho put the land under tribute (or made Judah a vassal state of Egypt) and removed Jehoahaz from the throne and placed Jehoiakim on it in his place (2 Kings 23:34). Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt where he eventually died.

**2 Kings 23:34.** Jehoiakim's (Eliakim) new name reminded him that he owed his sovereignty to Egypt. It is assumed he was of the pro-Egyptian party. He was twenty-five when he began to reign. He reigned eleven years. He, like his brother, did evil in the sight of the Lord. Jehoiakim was the first of the last three kings of Judah to be vassal's Babylon and to rebel against them. He enacted a tax on all the people in order to return the tribute to Necho II.

According to Jeremiah what were some of the less than favorable attributes of Jehoiakim? See **Jer. 22:13-17; 26:20-23** (cp. Jer. 22:18, 19 where Jehoiakim would be given the burial of a donkey – reap what you sow); **36:23**. He was extravagant, covetous, oppressive, unjust, impious, and blood thirsty.

With Babylon's decisive victories at Carchimesh and Hamath in 605 B.C., exposing Syria and Palestine to Babylon, Jehoiakim became a vassal and surrendered hostages, thus beginning the predicted seventy-year captivity of Judah. Daniel was among these first captives.

**2 Kings 24:1.** Three years later Jehoiakim switched his loyalty back to Egypt, which appeared like a good move for a while, but it came back to bite him. God allowed various marauders to frustrate Judah. See 2 Kings 24:2, cp. Jer. 4:20-29.

Predictions of OT prophets can be divided into four sections: 1. That which was related to the time of the writing; 2. That which related to the coming of the Messiah; 3. That which was to relate to the future and the coming of the Messiah's eternal kingdom; 4. Dual prophecy's. Jer. 4:20-29 applied to the present and also to the future. We know it that parts of it relates to the future because later inspired writers tell us so (see Rev. 20 – bottomless pit, for example)

Eventually Jehoiakim was bound in bronze chains and carried off to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6). Verse 7 set the stage for our understanding of Daniel chapters 1 & 5.

## **Tuesday – The Short Reign of King Jehoiachin of Judah**

2 Kings 24:8-16; 25:27-30; 2 Chronicles 36:9, 10

**2 Chronicles 36:9.** Jehoiachin (also known as Coniah and Jeconiah) began to rule when he was eighteen years old (not eight as is stated in Chronicles; cp. Jer. 22:28 – he had children when he was taken to Babylon). He reigned for three months and ten days. Like his father Jehoiakim, he also did evil in the sight of the Lord.

His downfall was prophesied (see Jer. 22:24-30). How would this affect your life if you knew this? Wouldn't it cause you to change your ways? Arms manufacturer Alfred Nobel was given a premature obituary. It condemned him as a "merchant of death." This may have been the reason behind his creating the Nobel Prize.

Jehoiachin also rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, so he besieged the city again. At this time Jehoiachin was taken prisoner, along with his mom, children, servants, princes, and officers (2 Kings 24:10, 12). Nebuchadnezzar took the king's treasurers, cut the gold out of the temple, took all the captains and heroes of war, 10,000 captives, craftsmen and smiths, leaving only the poor (v. 13, 14). No one was left to manufacture any weapons to fight against Babylon, instead all the craftsmen were led off to Babylon to build up their military weapons. Ezekiel was also taken in this captivity. The year was 597 B.C.

Interestingly, Jehoiachin was eventually released from prison at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar's son and lived out the remainder of his days in relative comfort. The seed of David was not entirely forgotten. This is best seen however in a letter written by Jeremiah to the captives after Jehoiachin and his family were carried off to Babylon.

**Jeremiah 29:1-14 (esp. v. 11).** Even in the midst of despair, brought about by the people's own actions, God speaks words of hope, letting them know He still loves them despite the fact that had turned their back on Him. Does God mean what He says? How can we experience this hope even in the midst of difficult circumstances? We can only trust God implicitly when we get to know Him, and we get to know Him by spending time in His Word, in prayer, and service to Him.

### **Wednesday – At The End of the Dead End**

2 Kings 24:17 – 25:21; 2 Chronicles 36:11-21

**2 Kings 24:17.** Zedekiah (Mattaniah), Jehoiachin's uncle (brother of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah) reigned in his stead. He was twenty-one years old and reigned eleven years. Despite that his name meant "Jehovah is righteousness," he also did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord and rebelled about Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:20).

Jeremiah had warned the kings of believing false prophets. See **Jer. 27:12-16; 28:1-4, 10, 11.** However, because the people listened to the false prophets in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem for the last time until Zedekiah's 11<sup>th</sup> year. Zedekiah escaped but was captured shortly afterward. All of his sons were killed before his eyes, then he had his own eyes were put out, chained, and taken to Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-7). Nebuchadnezzar decimated Jerusalem and burned the temple, the king's house, and all the homes in Jerusalem (v. 9, cp. Jer. 39:8, 9)

### **Thursday – The Dark Years**

Jeremiah 23:2-8

The abominations being performed in Jerusalem were highlighted by Ezekiel in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah. **Read Ezekiel 8:1-18.** 1. Image of jealousy, or idol worship in

inner court; 2. Idolatry among the elders; 3. Women mourning for Tammuz, the son God; 4. Twenty-five men worshipping the sun between the porch and altar.

Yet God had not cast off His people still. Through the Babylonian captivity He hoped to achieve what He could not achieve through appeals and entreaties. The end of Judah was not at hand. **Jer. 23:2-8**. Christ our righteousness is the answer to idolatry, worldliness, Laodeceanism, legalism, and sentimentalism.

**Appeal:** There is no doubt that there is big difference between Judah's last good king and the remaining four who were responsible for the ultimate demise of Judah. It was through political maneuvering, idolatry, and social injustice that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet, God wasn't finished with His people yet. He still desired to give them an expected end.