

The Aftermath of Josiah

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[0 : 00] My fear tonight is that you will feel like Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany. You may remember that a bit over a year ago at the G20 summit, she had a piece of paper on which were notes and a photograph of the then or new Prime Minister of Australia, whose name is Scott Morrison.

She couldn't keep up with the Prime Ministers of Australia. She's been 13 or 14 years as Chancellor of Germany and in that time we've had countless Prime Ministers.

And my fear tonight is that you will be in the same boat as she because tonight we have five kings. We've had five Prime Ministers in a few years in Australia. And in the background there are three different world powers tonight as well.

And we at least live in a world in which I think there are probably three major world powers floating around and jostling each other for influence in our world.

The United States, Russia and China, I guess. So I'll do it best to make it clear. The advantage is there's no exam at the end. If you read the Old Testament, you might be excused for thinking that long life is a blessing and a reward.

[1 : 19] And so when somebody dies young, clearly it's an element of God's judgment on them in some way or other. There are passages like you will live long in the land if you're obedient and so on.

And the blessing of long life, three score years and ten, four score if you're strong. We think of the long years of Abraham and Moses and other characters in the Old Testament as well.

But Josiah's death at the age of 39 is not quite so simple as an equation of good people live long lives. Manasseh, his grandfather, had been king for 50 years and was the most evil of kings.

So we can't really judge. It's one of those peculiarities in a way. We want to be able to say, oh, well, a bad king, God gets rid of them and then comes a good one for a long time. But it doesn't work like that. And in a way, it seems strange.

Why doesn't God give Manasseh some coronavirus or something and get rid of him and then bring on the good ones? But God doesn't work like that.

[2 : 25] Often. The danger of that view, then, is that you think that God's hands off and just sort of the deism view of winding up the watch and letting it tick according to its own devices and just watching from afar.

And that's not true either. So we have to be careful and nuanced and not read too much into some things. But nonetheless, given the praise that's given to Josiah in the previous two chapters or the early part of chapter 23 and the previous chapter 22, it does come as a shock that he dies at the age of 39.

He doesn't die of an illness as some other kings do. He does die in a way in battle, but it's not a battle that he needed to fight. That's also strange.

His death is, in a way, so totally unnecessary, it seems to me. Really an act of folly. Last week, I didn't quite get to these verses, and that's not because I just ran out of time.

I decided it should fit with tonight better. So that's why we had the verse 28 onwards, the death of Josiah. At first, it looks like a statement about all other kings.

[3 : 36] As for the other events of his reign, all he did, are they not written in the book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah, verse 28, chapter 23? And that's a similar statement to most of the other kings that you read about elsewhere in the book.

Clearly, who's ever put this together, written it, edited, compiled it, has used different records and annals and so on, none of which are extant today.

However, then we get what is different, the account of his death. So that's verses 29 and 30.

Egypt has a new king, King Necho. And Egypt, with Necho, was in alliance with the very waning world power of Assyria.

Assyria is no more today, and it's nothing to do with Syria. That's a bit of a complication. Sounds similar, totally different. Assyria was in the north part of modern Iraq.

[4 : 37] It had different capitals at different times. That's a little bit complicated as well. We don't need that detail tonight. But the rising world power was Babylon. And so Egypt was wanting to join with Assyria to present a united front against the rising power of Babylon.

And so Necho, the pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was going up with his army, presumably, to join with Assyria to fight against Babylon. The year that we're talking about here is 609 BC.

For 20 years, Assyria has been declining in its influence. That began back in 631, when the great Ashurbanipal died. And there was sort of a quick sequence of different weaker emperors to follow him.

And Assyria, who had been the world power very clearly for a longish time, was now quickly beginning to lose its grip on its empire. Babylon, which is further to the east, a bit further south in Iraq, down the Fertile Crescent, was now the rising power.

It had a major victory over Assyria at a city called Nippur in 620. And then it conquered the former capital Nineveh in 612.

[5 : 55] Remember, Josiah dies in 609. The Egyptian guy is coming up to join them in 609. So already Nineveh is gone. And in 609, the Babylonians destroy Haran as well.

So that's the wider political context that's going on here. Now, as you know, in recent weeks, various airlines have said they'll no longer fly over Iraqi or Iranian airspace.

Because we're all anxious about missiles coming from Iran, shooting down planes like the one that was heading to the Ukraine. And the Emirates and other airlines don't fly over Israeli airspace.

The year before last, I went on holidays and I flew through Dubai to go to Beirut. And we basically had to go down and up to avoid Israel, basically, and not fly over Syria either.

So we're used to that sort of idea. In order to get from Egypt to join Assyria and even to go to Babylon, the ancient M1, if you can imagine that, goes through Judah territory, basically ancient Israel.

[7 : 04] It comes up the Mediterranean coast, which is flat and easy to travel through. That's why the road is there. But halfway up Judah, where it becomes Samaria or thereabouts, roughly speaking, there's a line of hills.

Jerusalem's on it, but it gets lower hills, but they're jut out into the Mediterranean. Mount Carmel is on the edge of that range. So to keep traveling, you have to go through a pass. And the main pass for the M1 was past the town of Megiddo on the north of that little mountain range or hill range, really.

Megiddo looks over a Jezreel valley. And once you get into that valley, you either go back to the coast and up to, say, Lebanon, or you go down the valley up through Galilee, heading towards Damascus and then on to Assyria and on to Babylon.

So the Egyptians are passing through Israel territory. But that's not new. That's been the M1 for centuries. People would have come up and down that line all the time in ancient Israel's territory, not quite as guarded as we're used to these days.

And for some reason that is never given to us, Josiah goes to Megiddo to intercept the Egyptian king and his army. So the pass is the place to do it.

[8 : 15] Megiddo, interestingly, is the name Armageddon. Armageddon's the hill of Megiddo. Significant battles are being fought there in Old Testament times, in Roman times, Napoleonic times, World War I.

There was a battle there as well. It's a very strategic place. And this is where Josiah goes to stop the Egyptians. Why? We don't know. Did he have a sort of inflated view of his own strength?

He has expanded the territory, after all, in his time as king. So did he think he wanted to flex a bit of muscle? Was he anxious about Egypt joining with Assyria, thinking, no, we don't want that.

We prefer the Babylonians. We're not sure. Either way, really, it is an act of folly, political folly, and in the end, costly because he lost his life at this point.

As Monty Python would say, it's a senseless waste of human life. And so this good king, the best king, dies tragically young. A result of his own stupidity, his body is then taken in a chariot all the way back to Jerusalem and buried there.

[9 : 20] It's a reminder to us, of course, Josiah is not perfect. He makes an error of judgment at best here, it seems. No one's perfect, of course.

One of our dangers, I think, reading the Bible, and I think it's our danger in life, is that we want to lift up the goodies as clothed in absolute white, the heroes.

But actually, nobody's like that. If you think about it, every hero in the books of Kings, but every hero in Scripture other than Jesus, is a mixture. Fifty shades of grey, really, between the white and the black.

And so it is with Josiah, even this best of kings fails at this point. And of course, as I've said, long life is not a simple reward from God either.

Now, how do we interpret this death? Interpreting world events is fraught with difficulty. You may remember back to Black Saturday, February 2009.

[10 : 24] And there were some Christian leaders who said this has happened because it's God's judgment against the state of Victoria for its lax social ethical laws like abortion and sexuality.

Similar words were said by similar church leaders after the earthquake that destroyed Christchurch a couple of years later. But none of that was new because after 9-11 in New York in 2001, there were some Christians who said this is because of America's liberal laws and so on.

Strange when there are earthquakes seem to happen so randomly around our world, as do fires and floods and other natural disasters. I think it's very hard to interpret those for specific events.

And I think Jesus indicates that elsewhere in the New Testament as well. Well, the text here makes no explicit comment about Josiah's attempt to intercept the Egyptians, whether it was a good thing or a bad thing.

My guess is that as a result of his death, many of the people of his country thought here is God's judgment on this king because he's tried to change us.

[11 : 32] He's got rid of what his grandfather and father had done. He's tried to change us and God obviously doesn't like it. His grandfather ruled for 50 years. Now, I can't be sure about that, but that's what I would surmise, that people would have done that.

It certainly seems that after Josiah dies, the country reverses things fairly quickly, it seems to me, and devastatingly as well.

Well, Josiah is succeeded by a son, not his eldest son. 1 Chronicles 3 talks about Jehoahaz as his fourth son. We're not sure why he is succeeding first.

He's chosen, we're told, in verse 30, by the people of the land. We might just sort of say, oh, the people of the land, people in general, but that little phrase, people of the land, does come a few times in Kings and elsewhere in the Old Testament as though it's sort of potentially the landed gentry or maybe some particular status group within society.

People of the land occur in Ezra as well, opposing, or with Nehemiah as well and Ezra. So they choose him, it seems, and that's the same group who, back in chapter 21, at the death of Ammon, chose Josiah to be king or made Josiah to be king.

[12 : 59] Now, this Jehoahaz, only 23 at the time he became king, only lasted three months, we're told, in verse 31. But he rejected his father's activities because basically the only statement we're given about him is he did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

Remember, that's what most kings were like. All the kings of the northern kingdom, Israel, which had been destroyed nearly 100 years earlier, and all but eight of the kings of Judah in the south did evil in the eyes of the Lord, or a phrase like that.

He's only king for three months. So in just that short time, he's obviously done enough evil for such an assessment to be made.

That is, the author doesn't say, oh, he was only king for three months, it's too early to make a judgment. Hasn't even got to his hundred days mark that often prime ministers sort of celebrate their hundred days and so on.

The death of Josiah ends Judah's independence. So what we need to keep in mind that is because the Egyptian king and his army killed Josiah, that now Judah, even though it's been growing and expanding under Josiah, is now in effect under the influence of Egypt.

[14 : 20] And Egypt's sway is quite significant. So we go on then to read that Pharaoh put Jehoahaz in chains. So clearly the Egyptian king is now overseeing the politics of Judah straight after Josiah's death.

Takes him to Riblah, which is further north, actually, towards Assyrian territory. But we're told then in verse 34 that then he takes him and takes him off to Egypt where he later died.

And that's all we know of Jehoahaz. To be taken off into Egypt is not particularly a good sign when Israel had been rescued from Egypt and now a king is taken back.

So Jehoahaz is done away with. Why the Egyptians got rid of him were unclear. They may have thought that he would be resistant to Egypt and therefore they want to get rid of him.

They replace him with his older brother Jehoiakim. The names are very similar. It's quite complex. The J-E at the beginning of many Old Testament names comes out of the word Yahweh.

[15:25] So the people's names link to the name of the God. And therefore we get lots of names that sound sort of similar. So please pay attention and don't end up like Angela Merkel at the end of tonight.

Jehoiakim is basically a puppet king of Egypt. They're the ones who choose him, an older brother of Jehoahaz to be king, another son of Josiah. They rename him Eliakim, renamed Jehoiakim by the Egyptians.

We might think that's strange that an Egyptian pagan country would name a Judah king after Judah's God. I've wondered if the reason for that, Eliakim, means the general word God.

So I wonder whether the Egyptians change the name because they don't want to link him to God.

Well, they would have had many gods anyway. But to sort of limit him as, oh, that's just the Jehovah Yahweh God of that place, sort of diminishing him, maybe.

Hard to know for sure. But he's a puppet king. And so the first thing about him is that he's paying off stacks of money. Basically, a big tax is paid. Egypt needs to pay its bills somehow.

[16:39] And so Jehoiakim, in verse 35, paid Pharaoh Necho the silver and gold he demanded. And the demand of that comes in the earlier verse as well, in verse 33.

It's not a huge amount. It's much less than Sennacherib had levied on Hezekiah when Sennacherib, the Assyrian emperor, had besieged Jerusalem in the time of Hezekiah.

That was a much higher demand that they were wanting then and others. But it's still not insignificant. So we're told that Jehoiakim taxed the land and exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land.

That is the same group of people, it seems, who had appointed Jehoahaz, the younger brother. So reading between the lines, we could say, well, it looks like a bit of revenge, perhaps, on this group of people that overlook Jehoiakim going for Jehoahaz.

And now they're the ones who've got to pay the bill that Egypt has levied on Judah. Well, like his younger brother, unlike their father, Jehoiakim, we're told, did evil.

[17:47] That's in verse 37. So the general statement of verse 36, 37, typical of all the kings through the books of kings, basically the assessment is not political or economic.

It's they did evil in the eyes of the Lord. And often that's tied to religion and worship, as we commented on last week as well. So Jehoiakim is no different from his brother Jehoahaz, who's just been deposed by the Egyptians at all.

We know more about Jehoiakim, in fact, from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah the prophet, a book I never preached on when I was vicar at Doncaster. I'd have had to be here 25 years to get to Jeremiah.

That would have been last on my list. I don't I struggle with Jeremiah because it's not in order.

Things scatter all over the place. And I'm a very ordered person, as some of you may guess. And and so it was always going to be pushed to the bottom of my list.

Anyway, Andrew, you could do Jeremiah sometime if it hasn't been done since I finished here 10 years ago. And you can all hold into account, I'm sure. And I'll look forward to listening to the sermons online or something like that.

[18:54] But Jeremiah at different times intersects with Jehoiakim, Jeremiah the prophet. The reign like prophesied through the reigns of all these five kings we're dealing with tonight and and out the other end in a way as well.

So this is the king Jehoiakim reigns for 11 years, 609 to 598. He's the one who burns Jeremiah's scroll. We don't want this words of prophecy.

Get rid of them. Burn them all. He's the one who opposed other prophets in Jeremiah 26 and so on. So it seems that like a breath, Josiah's reforms are blown away.

We're not told explicitly that all those centers, Josiah closed down, started up again. But it's clear that that all his reforms are sort of hit a brick wall.

And now we have evil king and another evil king, sons of Josiah now on the throne. And maybe what it reminds us, I suppose, is that reform doesn't always last for a long time.

[19 : 55] King Edward VIII, VI, sorry, when he became king after Henry VIII's death in 1546, was eight years old, the same age as Josiah. People called him the new Josiah.

They thought the Reformation would bloom and blossom in the UK. But, of course, he died quite young at the age of 16, was succeeded by his Roman Catholic sister Mary, who got rid of all the reforming bishops and so on.

I'm glad she's not queen today. And so the reform at the end of Henry VIII's life and Edward VI's life didn't last very long. Josiah's doesn't last very long. And in a way, it is a reminder to us that reforms that are imposed might be good and the king praised by God for them.

But there's something more that's needed. That is, in effect, reform under God, what he looks for, is something that in the end will come out of the hearts of the people.

Comes out of the heart of Josiah, no doubt about that. But it needs to come out of the hearts of the people. And no king, no governor can control the hearts of people. We've seen that time and again in world history.

[21 : 01] Mao tried to stop the Christian gospel in China, but he couldn't close people's hearts to the gospel. In the years that he ruled. And Xi Jinping, if he lives long enough, will see the same, I'm sure, in the end.

So reform doesn't change. And, of course, the other issue is that God's judgment because of the sins of the grandfather of Josiah, Manasseh, which you looked at two weeks ago.

The judgment's inevitable. All the best reforms of Josiah, we're not going to overturn that. We saw that last week as well. And so what we see tonight is the flowing out of that, the rolling out of this judgment.

It doesn't happen as a sort of sudden thing, but it happens quickly. Josiah dies in 609 and Jerusalem and Judah are gone entirely, obliterated, in effect, in 22 years.

Which is not that long a time if you think back to the year 1998, which seems like yesterday to me. So that's sort of an assessment, if you like, of Josiah and the weakness ultimately of his reforms.

[22 : 09] Now we need to stand back a bit and remember this world picture that's going on around. Egypt had been allied with Assyria, but Babylon was the rising world power.

And it has basically defeated Assyria at the time of Josiah's death. The main cities have gone. Nineveh is gone. Nimrud is gone. Haran is gone. By 609, 608.

It's gone. Assyria is virtually no more. Now the two world powers are Egypt, number two, and number one is Babylon. And they're enemies.

And Egypt, of course, has got Judah under its control. Therefore, Judah is the enemy of Babylon because Egypt's controlling Judah. I remember reading or hearing the history, a little bit of history of Indonesia when I lived overseas.

And discovering that the reason why Indonesians drive on the same side of the road as we do is because for five years in the 1810s, Britain ruled Indonesia.

[23 : 16] They didn't even have cars then. It's bizarre, isn't it? Anyway, because the Netherlands had been conquered by Napoleon, they went from being an ally of Britain to an enemy.

Even though the Dutch people would have liked to be a friend of Britain. So as soon as Napoleon conquered the Netherlands, Britain invaded Indonesia, ruled it for five years when Napoleon was gotten rid of after Waterloo, gave it back to the Dutch again.

That's sort of the situation here that we need to think. Judah, in one sense, is a non-entity. Because Egypt's over it, they're an enemy of Babylon.

Now, and Babylon is a military expansionist, basically. Its military ruler and then emperor is Nebuchadnezzar, famous name, one of the great, as in military figures, of the ancient world.

So Babylon now comes at the beginning of chapter 24, in effect, to Judah and Jerusalem. And Babylon makes Jehoiakim his, their vassal, that is.

[24 : 26] He's been a puppet king of Egypt. Now he becomes a puppet king of Babylon. Maybe has no choice in the matter, other than losing his head, I would suspect. So now Babylon is in control.

The year probably is 605 or 4. Egypt had lost in a big battle to the Babylonians in Carchemish in 605. So probably this is flowing on from that.

Egypt being weak. Babylon expanding, coming into Judah, spreading its wings, heading towards Egypt, which is a bit further away. And now takes over Judah politically.

Doesn't destroy it yet. At this point, though it doesn't mention this in the text here, Babylon took some of the leaders away from Jerusalem and Judah to Babylon.

Daniel, the prophet or the leader, he was one of them, though it doesn't mention that in this text. We know that from the book of Daniel, for example. This is the sort of the first deportation, if you like, though it's not in this text.

[25 : 27] Jehoiakim under Babylon now, having been under Egypt. But then we're told at the end of verse 1, he turned against Nebuchadnezzar and rebelled.

There's another act of political folly. It looks like he was under him, well, verse 1 says for three years. In 601, probably the end of the three-year mark, there was a stalemate battle between Egypt and Babylon.

And maybe now Jehoiakim decides this is the time to rebel, get my independence, because Babylon was stalemated by Egypt.

But Nebuchadnezzar returns with a vengeance. He's not very happy with this. And, well, he goes back to Babylon firstly, in effect, after the battle with Egypt and so on.

But he doesn't ignore little Judah. It's one of the intriguing things. Judah's very small. We're talking about a tiny country. Some of you have been to Israel. You know how small this place is.

[26 : 28] And yet in history, people who conquer it or rule it or regard it sort of lift it up in high value, basically. And that's what it seems Nebuchadnezzar does either.

He doesn't just ignore it as inconsequential. It's pretty critical to him. Notice then in verse 2, the Lord sent Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite raiders against Jehoiakim to destroy Judah.

Notice who did that. Not Nebuchadnezzar. Humanly speaking, Nebuchadnezzar rallied all these other nations. These Arameans, that's Syria, Moab and Ammon, they're all neighbours of Israel.

They've all been at enmity with Israel on and off through the centuries, through the books of Kings and earlier as well. And he gets them with the Babylonians to come against Judah.

He could have ignored it because it's weak. But he's not prepared to do that. And so, but it's the Lord who does that. The Babylon's obviously controlling the neighbours of Judah at this time.

[27 : 34] And verses 3 and 4 sort of reiterate this again. Surely these things happened to Judah according to the Lord's command. That is, the writer here is pausing in a way and stressing this is God's work.

Now, knowing the prophecy of Huldah and knowing that the judgment will inevitably come because of Manasseh's sin, this is what it's saying. God is keeping his word. The judgment is coming through these Babylonians.

But it's also, I think, trying to get the readers, including us today, to make sure that we don't merely look at things politically. The political way of regarding this would be to say, oh, Babylon's strong, Judah's weak, no wonder Babylon will win.

But there's more to it than that. God's involved in this. And it's actually God who sends them all. And in a way, that downplays, I think, Nebuchadnezzar. It's sort of like saying, oh, you, Nebuchadnezzar, you think you're in control, but actually it's God.

It's God who sent you. You didn't know that, but that God did it. So this idea of God in control of the nations comes through. And the writer here, I think, in verse 2, 3, 4, sort of pauses to stress that.

[28 : 43] Surely these things happened to Judah according to the Lord's command in order to remove them from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh and all that he'd done, etc., in verse 4 as well.

So Yahweh God is faithful, not just in promising mercy, redemption, salvation and good things and blessings, but he's faithful in keeping his word of judgment as well.

And as we see that coming into play, we see that actually he rules the world, not Babylon or Egypt or Assyria or indeed Jerusalem either.

And I think he's forcing the readers who are probably in exile to actually read this with a mixture of grief and hope.

That is, by stressing the Lord's sovereignty, and here they are in exile, because that's where the book ends, we'll see next week. It's written for the exiles. It's telling them you might think you've got

no hope.

[29 : 45] Here you are in Babylon, not maybe literally in chains, but exiled. How can we worship the Lord in a strange land? Babylon rules the world? No, actually God does.

He's actually drawing them back to God in a subtle way, I think. Well, the end of verse 4 is tragic. The end of verse 4 says about the sins of Manasseh, And the Lord was not willing to pardon or forgive in this translation.

Not willing to. He could have done. He's done it for decades, centuries before. But finally now his patience has expired. And I suppose in God's mind, if I can express it humanly, he would say, well, there's no more point in sending prophets.

They've had dozens of prophets, and they've ignored them. Why should I bother raising up another king like Josiah, or Hezekiah, or even David? They've had a few good ones. It's pointless.

Why should I send them a few more droughts and storms and all those sorts of things that I said I would send them as punishment, but yet also as provocation to repent?

[30 : 56] They've had all of them, and they didn't turn to God, as how Amos 4 puts it. What's the point? My patience runs out with them. And I think we need to read the history like that.

God who is slow to judge, slow to anger. And Israel's history matches that. They've had, what, 400 years of kings since David?

Before that, there were 300 or 400 years of judges and other leaders from the time of Moses' death. What more can God do? His patience expires.

These are just desserts for persistent sin. I think there is a lesson here for us not to presume upon the patience of God. Not to presume on His mercy, as Paul puts it in Romans.

And for us, we know that at a time coming, Jesus is coming to bring judgment on this world. We'll only stand on that day by the mercy of God that's manifest to us in Christ.

[32 : 02] But nonetheless, it's a day of judgment, finality of judgment. God's patience will expire. For the time being, God is patient with this world, with humanity, with you and me, so that we are ready for Christ's return.

But we cannot presume upon that patience, indeed, I think, forever. Later in exile, the people of Judah will complain.

It's recorded both in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That the father's sins are why we're suffering. Our fathers ate sour grapes, but we're the ones whose teeth are set on edge, is how it was put in a proverb.

That is, we're suffering because of our parents. And you could get that out of here. That is, oh, we're suffering because of Manasseh's sins. But actually, it's clear enough that the next kings, other than Josiah, they also did evil, as did the people.

It's not merely because of Manasseh's sins. We'll actually see that added to later in this chapter as well. Well, Jehoiakim's reign, not much is said of 11 years. It's pretty pathetic, actually.

[33 : 08] And in verses 5 and 6, the standard end of reign statement. We're not told how he died, whether he was assassinated, whether he just died naturally. Nothing much of that.

It's fairly irrelevant in a way. The king of Egypt did not march out from his own country again in verse 7, because the king of Babylon had taken all his territory.

There was still an Egyptian territory, but from the wadi of Egypt, basically, say, the Egypt-Sinai border, all the way to the Euphrates River, up as far as into Assyria, what is now Turkey, Syria, Iraq. That expression from the wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River was back in 1 Kings 4, as the description of Solomon's territory. It's all gone, basically.

There's no more independence left for the people of God. Humanly, Babylon rules the world, but this writer wants us to see, in fact, it's God.

[34 : 09] So, 598. Jehoiakim dies, possibly with the Babylonians around him because he rebelled and under pressure, but we're not sure why he died.

Succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, grandson of Josiah, he only reigns three months. Slightly neat numbers here.

So, after Josiah's death, we have four kings, three months, 11 years, three months, 11 years. And Jehoiachin, only three months. Enough time, verse 9, tells us to do evil.

But now what happens is that Babylon besieges and attacks Jerusalem, 598 BC. So, they've come to Jerusalem earlier and taken people away, but not done any damage or siege.

Jehoiakim dies, maybe under siege. We're not sure exactly how he dies. Jehoiachin becomes king for three months. He did evil, in verse 9.

[35 : 08] Not long to do evil, but he did it. He'll come back to us at the end of next week as well. But now we're told that the officers of Nebuchadnezzar advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it.

The siege actually takes 18 months. We know about this from Nebuchadnezzar's own annals, in fact, as well. But this siege does not destroy it. So, one of the complications as we read this Old Testament history, and we'll come to the second bit next week, is that there are actually two sieges of Jerusalem.

The first one didn't destroy the city. The second one did. That's next week. So, come back for a destruction. Nebuchadnezzar himself came up. So, here's the great military emperor determined to conquer Jerusalem.

So significant is this city regarded. A siege is an expensive thing. Jerusalem's on a highish hill, as you may know. And there's no natural water in Jerusalem, the old city of Jerusalem.

When Hezekiah was besieged by Assyria 100 years earlier, he built a tunnel of water. You can walk through it today, as I've done a couple of times, Hezekiah's tunnel. The water is channeled from outside the wall underneath in a tunnel so that you've got water supply.

[36 : 19] No water. The siege doesn't need to last very long. People die very quickly. So, there's still a water supply. The siege lasts for some time. It reminds us of the siege of a Sennacherib, which is back in the earlier part of Kings.

But at that time, Hezekiah was king. And at that time, Hezekiah led the people, praying to God in repentance, sackcloth ashes, beseeching God to save them, etc. He defied the people of the Assyrians who were besieged around him.

There's a long story about that. It's also repeated in Isaiah the prophet. But here, there's nothing. No repentance. No turning to God at all. I think we're meant to see the contrast.

I think we're meant to see here the sort of utter godlessness, really, of ancient Judah at this time. There's no mention of calling upon God. Well, Babylon, like Egypt had done getting rid of Jehoahazim, putting Jehoiakim on the throne.

Babylon does the same. They get rid of this three-month king, Jehoiachin. They take him off to exile in Babylon. That's in verse 12. We'll come to him again at the end of next week. His mother and all sorts of other people are taken off with him.

[37 : 31] And this is now the second but a bigger deportation or exile to Babylon. Smaller group first. Daniel was included in that. Not mentioned here. This is a bigger one. And so we have detail of that.

Verses 14 to 16. He carried all Jerusalem into exile. All the officers and fighting men. All the skilled workers and artisans. The word all actually occurs, I think, five times there in the original.

No one was left except the poor people. Five times in those verses a word of exile or a related word of exile. That is, the writer is emphasizing this, stressing it a bit like a sort of solemn drumbeat.

All these people. All these people. All these people. Taken off, taken off, etc. To exile. That is, it slows down. It's solemn and somber and serious.

And Judah is now thoroughly weak. Babylon's political strategy with all its conquered people was to take the cream back to Babylon. Keep them close to you.

[38 : 35] Keep them under your wing. They're not less likely to have an uprising. If you leave the poor and the weak and so on, they don't know how to organize themselves out of a brown paper bag. I'm sure that was a Babylonian proverb.

And so, you know, they're safe. You know, they're not going to rise up against us. The Assyrians earlier had done the same, but they'd actually done it two ways. They take away the cream and they put some other people there to mix them all up so they all lose their identity and therefore nobody will rebel either.

This is Babylon's practice. So what's going on? This writer is stressing this. It's all because of the sins of Judah. So the people in exile are not blaming their fathers.

They recognize their own sins. And in a way, a bit like today's weather, sin has been building on the horizon like a darker and darker cloud until this storm breaks.

And it breaks in two parts, this part and next week, the final part as well. And implicit, therefore, in the author's hope is that the readers in exile will recognize their sin and repent, will recognize that they are at fault.

[39 : 38] That's why this is written. To see that God, though, is sovereign over the nations. And yes, we should have repented long ago. But maybe now even in exile, there's an opportunity to repent.

In a way, the destruction of Jerusalem, which is building here, is like a precursor of the final judgment that awaits human history.

We shouldn't just look at this as a historical record. It's written to urge God's people to salvation. Do we heed the warnings? Are we ready for the judgment day?

Well, Babylon replaced Jehoiachin with a guy called Zedekiah, another son of Josiah. So Josiah's third son on the throne. There was also a grandson.

So he's fourth descendant. All four of them are evil. He's age 21. He's now a puppet king of Babylon. Bit like Jehoiachin was a puppet king of Egypt.

[40 : 39] Similarities abound in all of this. He's also evil in verses 18 and 19. His sins are reflected more at length in the book of Jeremiah.

He's a particularly weak king. He's indecisive. He doesn't have any moral backbone to him, it seems, from Jeremiah 37 and 38. Ironically, his name means the righteousness of Yahweh.

But he's thoroughly evil. And even though Jehoiachin stays alive, normally a new king comes when the previous one dies, we now have in effect two kings.

One in exile and a puppet king in Jerusalem. And he reigns for 11 years again. So 598 to 587. We'll get to 587 next week.

But in verse 20, at the end of all of this chapter, it was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah.

[41 : 35] And in the end, he thrust them from his presence. But when it says that, it sounds not simply referring to Manasseh's sins.

It's a broader statement basically being made here. It may be indeed implying that the evil of Jehoiachin and Jehoiakim before him and Zedekiah now on the throne, in fact, adds to God's wrath and judgment.

Well, how do we draw this to a conclusion tonight? The writer stresses through this chapter four times, in fact, that this is according to the word of the Lord.

So in that verse 20, it was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened, not because of Nebuchadnezzar's might, not because of political power plays between other nations.

It's the Lord's doing. It was back in verse 13 and at the beginning, as we saw earlier as well. God's in control. God's in control of the nations, even though Nebuchadnezzar would have refuted that, I'm sure.

[42 : 39] So politics doesn't rule the day. Military might doesn't rule the day. The Lord reigns. And even today over nations, he reigns. I think for us it's harder because we don't have the prophets explaining the international events.

And it's harder because the people of God is not a nation like ancient Israel, Judah were. And so as we look at nations in our world, it's much more ambiguous in a way.

But what we can be sure of is that God remains sovereign in charge. He doesn't have a favored nation like Israel or Judah. But their place is taken by the church, which, of course, exists in every nation of the world.

And so we should be taking confidence from this, that even as we see the rise of China or the rise of Russia or Iran or nuclear threats here, there or everywhere and the stupidity of some presidents in our world and so on, that actually above and over all of that is the sovereignty of God.

And even if this country plunges into persecution against the church or even if we end up in some war or whatever may happen, tragic, terrible, terrifying, though those things may be.

[43 : 49] God remains sovereign over all. And the principles by which we're meant to live are abundantly clear through both testaments. I think we're also being urged here to not presume upon the patience of God.

He's told us that judgment is coming. We don't know the day, but it's coming. We can't be complacent. Are we ready for that day? This functions as an explanation for those in exile about why they're in exile.

God's judgment against sins. Theirs and Manasseh's and others over decades and centuries, in fact. There's an implicit, therefore, call to repent.

We weren't part of ancient Israel, but some of their sins are ours. We share in the fallen, sinful nature of humanity. This is to remind or provoke us.

Are you right with God? The New Testament is punctuated by warnings of Jesus' return to judge. And so this is urging us to be ready for his day when he returns as the triumphant king to judge the living and the dead.

[45 : 03] Amen. Amen. So if you do have a question, just please raise your hand. I'll come around to you with the microphone so we can all hear.

I noted in the scripture passages there are four queen mothers mentioned. And I'm just wondering if that's, we can't actually tell, but it's about influence over their younger sons.

Yes? Yeah, possibly. Nothing much is made of them explicitly, but it happens for the kings of Judah, but not the kings of Israel, is my recollection. It does often show and reflect, I think, that sometimes kings married pagans or others like Solomon had done.

But not always is that the case. It is possibly just simply part of the formula of announcing the king. But it applies in Judah less so in Israel because it's not a dynasty from David.

So I think it's part of the Davidic dynasty promise as well. So by naming the king, they name who the mother was, along with, of course, the father implied. I was given a couple of questions from last week.

[46 : 22] So Hezekiah and Josiah were named in the same sort of way. No one better before him or after him. So why is Josiah thought to be better than Hezekiah?

That is a bit tricky. I think Josiah is a better king. I think that is stressed in the text. And the description of him is greater than what you find for Hezekiah.

It does seem that a couple of ideas that come out of the law about the king in Deuteronomy 17 fit Josiah, but are not mentioned for Hezekiah.

His reforms were stronger and better than him. So some might say that the comment about Hezekiah might have been written before Josiah. And the book of Kings is not just simply one author's work, but something that's been compiled over time.

That could in some ways be true. Other than that, I'm not sure what I want to say further. And the other question I was given was about the Passover 400 years.

[47 : 27] In Hezekiah, there was a Passover, although it was later than the right date. The text does say in 2 Kings 23-22 that we saw last week, there had not been any such Passover.

So it doesn't simply say any Passover. So maybe I didn't stress that clearly enough last week. It does seem that basically Israel had not celebrated Passovers.

The fact that Hezekiah did, although late, shows it was significant. And with Josiah, it seems that he did do it on the right, we assume, on the right date, in the right way.

So maybe Hezekiah was sort of catching up or something. But that's my understanding. And in effect, the 400 years that I mentioned last week is roughly the time back into the judges that that verse we looked at last week refers to.

Any other questions? It's good. I say to my classes, if there are no questions, it means you're all asleep. Every question's been answered. Or it's so confusing that you can't even make a question.

[48 : 29] And when I lived in Malaysia, I realized there was a fourth reason. Because Malaysians idolize food, they don't want to ask questions because they want to get out and eat. Paul, in last week as well, when Josiah destroyed the altars of the various gods, in some cases he actually burned bones on those altars.

Was that a Jewish abomination or an abomination of the nations around that they wouldn't reuse it? What was the cause? I haven't investigated if it was a particularly Jewish thing to do.

But you could understand that burning bones and defiling it would be a way of making sure people don't go back to it to restore the place. Whether it was a general defilement that other nations would have accepted or not, I'm not certain about that.

Sorry. Yeah, exactly. So it might just be a Jewish thing. But the point is that he's defiling it so that people don't go back. So in the alternative account of Josiah's death in 2 Chronicles 35, I believe.

Yeah. So Necho told Josiah that it is God who has told him for Josiah to not oppose Necho.

[49 : 41] So was Josiah meant to have known that it appears that God is truly speaking through Necho at that point in time?

And he was at fault for not realizing that? I'm not sure. I haven't done a recent study on these verses. I'm not sure that Necho's words are necessarily words to be believed to be true.

But they could simply be a political ploy. You know, God has told me to hurry, so stop opposing God could simply be his own rhetoric to get Josiah to back off, I suspect.

But that would be my default way of thinking about those words, rather than Necho being a legitimate prophet of Yahweh. I guess there are enough people through Kings and Samuel and so on who do speak lies about what God has told them to do, like the false prophet in 1 Kings 13.

And so for me to say that he's speaking lies of deceit to stop Josiah attacking him or whatever, that makes sense to me. Thanks so much, Paul.

[50 : 53] Thank you.