

The End of Judah

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[0 : 00] Well, I think it was T.S. Eliot who wrote, this is how the world ends, not with a bang, but a whimper. I'm not sure whether that's how the world will end or whether I'll be here to see it.

But for Jerusalem, it's a bit of both. It sort of whimpers out in a way. And we've seen that, I think, over this series, that from a fairly high point of King Josiah's reign, which was from 640 to 609 B.C., and a 30-year reign roughly, that Jerusalem, Judah was the kingdom, Judah, Jerusalem, the city, had expanded and grown, not in an international sort of heavyweight standard, but was recovering its prestige.

But in 22 years, it whimpers away fairly quickly, although in some sense, the end comes with a bang. So as we go through these verses, think, is this a whimper or a bang?

Not that that's an important question, but it might keep you awake. The death of Josiah, remember, ends the independence of Judah. So even though there are kings that follow, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and so on, they are not independent.

And indeed, a couple of them try to exert independence, and it's quashed fairly quickly. Egypt was in control. Josiah's death was at the hands of the Egyptians, and Egypt exercised influence then over Judah for some years.

[1 : 35] And Egypt at the time was in alliance with Assyria that was on the way down as the world empire, and Babylon was on the way up. So in the middle of the period that we've been looking at, Babylon sort of overtakes Egypt as the world power, going on as we've seen in the last couple of weeks.

And just 22 years after Josiah's death, when Judah was still relatively strong, it is utterly no more. Some say that history repeats itself, and that we never learn from the mistakes of history. And so we find ourselves in situations that are similar to previous situations.

We don't learn from them, and history repeats itself in mistakes. Certainly there are patterns in these chapters. In one sense, they just help us sort of remember a bit and get a framework.

So at Josiah's death, he succeeded by four kings who reigned three months and 11 years, and then again, three months, 11 years. So that element of pattern.

[2 : 39] He succeeded by a son, another son, a grandson, and back to another son. And we've seen most of that over the last couple of weeks as well. There's a pattern too, because the first son of, well, not the eldest, but the first one who succeeds Josiah, who reigns three months, is removed by Egypt into exile back in Egypt, Egypt's dominant at the time.

And Egypt then places a different son on the throne to be the puppet king. And the same happens later when Babylon takes control.

Jehoiah Kim dies, Jehoiah Chin, three months, taken away to Babylon, replaced by a puppet king, in effect. And the two puppet kings, one under Egypt, the second one under Babylon, both rebelled. And that's what we get at the very beginning of the reading, the last sentence of chapter 24. Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon, like his brother had done some years before, rebelling against Egypt as well.

However, history is not circular, and history does not merely repeat itself. But actually, certainly as Christians, as God's worldview is paraded before us in scripture, we realise that history is heading towards a destination, a climax, a culmination of history with the Lord's return.

[4 : 04] And history, until then, is also heading in a direction, even if there are repeated patterns and some circular bits or repeats here and there through the history.

The book of Judges shows cycles, a downward spiral really, but it's not merely circles. It's also heading down in a direction. And so here, whilst there's repetition of periods of time and rebellions and sons and so on, it doesn't just go on endlessly and meaninglessly.

It's heading for its own destination. We've also seen that there are three different, well, we've seen two, the third one really today, deportations into exile.

So back in 605 BC, the Babylonians took a few people off to exile. And then when Jerusalem was besieged, but not conquered, or at least not destroyed, another major group was taken into exile. We saw that last week. That was in 598. And tonight we see the third deportation, the final one in many respects. Remember that in that first one of 605, which isn't even mentioned in Kings, that's when Daniel was taken into exile.

[5 : 19] The second one, which we saw last week, when Ezekiel the prophet went into exile. And then the third one is coming to us tonight. We also see two sieges, but different.

The first one last week, Jerusalem was besieged, and in a way surrendered and capitulated. The Babylonians sort of didn't destroy the city. They left it standing.

They took away Jehoiachin, and they put in their own puppet king. And then, but today we see another siege, and a siege that destroys the place.

I suspect that after that first siege, even though the Babylonians were clearly in control, it probably fueled the thinking of the Judah, Jewish people, the Judahites, that Jerusalem would never fall.

So that even though in practical terms, they'd lost to the Babylonians, because the temple still stood, and the wall still stood, and the city still stood, the feeling of this temple is irrevocably going, it's going to be here forever.

[6 : 27] It'll never be destroyed. And that sentiment, we find Jeremiah, in Jeremiah's book of prophecy, chapter seven, disagreeing with that sentiment, saying your false hope is in the temple, rather than actually in the God of the temple.

It's also perhaps fueled by things like Psalm 46. There is a city of God, whose streams make glad, and it shall never be moved. That sort of idea. But of course, what we see tonight, is that it is destroyed.

So Zedekiah rebelled, in chapter 24, the last sentence, as we, the beginning of our reading. Like his brother Jehoiakim, had done earlier against Egypt, it was folly.

Both acts were folly. Political folly, I should say, at least. I don't even think there was theological sensibility. Actually, there's no theological comment here. In fact, there's no obvious thought about, is this a good thing to do with God or not?

It's almost as though God is absent. He's hardly mentioned in this chapter at all. And it's interesting, actually, in the Old Testament, whenever you read the narrative, and of course, most of the Old Testament is narrative, the absence of God, or the rare occasions of the word God, or Yahweh, or Lord, in the text, often is a way that the narrator shows, how utterly godless the people were.

[7 : 51] So he sort of does it in a subtle way. We don't, we saw last week about God sending, and God actually acting, in a way, over, you know, Nebuchadnezzar. God sent the Babylonians, even if Nebuchadnezzar thought he did.

But now God's almost not in the narrative, I think deliberately withdrawn, to help us sense the, almost the, the godlessness of God's people, left, in a way, to their own judgment, and left to their own devices.

So in the ninth year, Zedekiah's rebellion does not go unnoticed, even though Jerusalem and Judah is relatively small in a Babylonian empire that now is vast, Jerusalem has always been regarded as a sort of prize asset.

So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, marched against Jerusalem with his whole army.

He camped outside the city, he built siege works all around it. Now this is not a minor action. That is, for Nebuchadnezzar to come here is a long distance.

[9 : 01] You go from Babylon up and over the desert, so the fertile crescent, through the, we're afraid he's Tigris sort of valleys, and so on, and then down through what is modern day Syria, rather than the desert in between.

This is a long journey. This is a major activity. And to besiege Jerusalem, which is on a ridge and a hill, is no small feat either. Now remember that in a siege, the idea is you camp around the city so that people can't get out and they can't get food.

Often when people know the enemy is coming, they shut up the walls and the people who live around the city all flock inside the city. So it's probably overpopulated in a siege. Is there enough food?

Are they going to survive? As I said, I think last week, Hezekiah, a hundred or so years before, had built a water tunnel under the city wall and then a sort of shaft down to it in a way at the end of the ridge.

So there was at least natural water in Jerusalem. That had been a major effort when the Assyrians besieged the city. The idea is that you slowly starve them out and meanwhile, as they get weaker, you get a bit stronger and begin to try and find the weak points of the walls and the gates.

[10:15] This siege, we're told from the dates here, took 18 months. That's a lot of investment in people in an army, in supplying for your army and all that sort of stuff.

That shows us how absolutely committed Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian leader, was to destroy Jerusalem. It's a major thing. Jerusalem itself was a fairly safe city, probably why David had made it his capital and why Joshua didn't conquer it in the first place in the book of Joshua either.

But finally, the food runs out. So it's kept under siege for 18 months as it happens into the two years later nearly. And by the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat.

The dates here add solemnity to it. They're of course showing that this is factual. In fact, Babylonian archaeologists have found Babylonian archives of things to do with Nebuchadnezzar and the siege of Jerusalem as well.

Now all of this, we need to remember, was long predicted in the Old Testament. A passage that I think is quite significant here comes from, you won't be surprised, is Deuteronomy.

[11:36] So in Deuteronomy 28, as part of the curses of the covenant, let me read for you a few verses. This is part of, if you like, the warning that if you do not obey God, these are the things that will happen.

Now at this point, where I'm picking up the reading, there have already been nearly 40 verses of things that are going to happen. Droughts and famines and enemy attacks and this and that and the other. But now it's reaching the sort of climax, if you like.

And this is what Moses preaches to them. The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away from the ends of the earth like an eagle swooping down. A nation whose language you will not understand.

A fierce looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you're destroyed. They'll leave you no grain, wine, olive oil, calves for your herds, lambs for your flocks, etc.

Till you're ruined. They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They'll besiege all the cities throughout the land the Lord your God is giving you.

[12:47] Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, and this is the gruesome bit, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you.

Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he's eating.

And it'll be the same actually for the sensitive, gentle women. That's awful. What that's saying is that as the food runs out, they become cannibals. The only food left is the fruit of your womb.

They're children. The babies maybe. And that's actually what happened. It's not an idle threat. The food runs out as Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem.

And that's something like 800 years after Deuteronomy was spoken by Moses. And here it comes out. It happens in history. As far as we know, they were cannibal, or some at least were cannibals.

[13:55] They began eating their children and fighting with their brothers and their wives and husbands because they don't want to share the food because they know that if they share it, eventually they will be hungry and they will die.

The detail of that's not in two kings, but from other records seems to have been exactly what did happen. So at this point, the city wall was broken through, but not by the Babylonians, but by Zedekiah.

And this shows something of his cowardice, I think, and his weakness as a person and king. The city wall was broken through in verse 4, going back to chapter 25, and the whole army fled at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were

surrounding the city and they fled towards the Aravar.

So here is the king fleeing, the army fleeing with him, but they scatter. Jerusalem's about 40 kilometres by road to Jericho. That's the Aravar, is the valley of Jericho, the Dead Sea, the Jordan River.

So it's a reasonable distance away, but it's a downhill distance. And that's where they fled towards. But the Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho.

[15:11] All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered. They don't defend the king. They run for their lives. And the king was captured. And here it all happens at Jericho.

Maybe ironically the first victory for Joshua. And here it is the last battle lost before Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians.

He's taken to Riblah, which had been the earlier capital of the Egyptians, or at least major fort of the Egyptians, further north in what is modern day, I think, Syria or Lebanon.

And that's where Jehoahaz had been taken. He was the one who succeeded Josiah for just three months. And then he's taken there. Their sentence was pronounced.

The sons of Zedekiah were killed before his very eyes. I guess that's to get rid of the dynasty so that no son might rise up in threat and claim a throne and be a nuisance to the Babylonians.

[16:13] But then they put out his own eyes, made him blind, and they took him away in bronze shackles to exile in Babylon. That's how verse seven ends.

And no more is known of him. It's now the second king in exile. Jehoiachin was taken there earlier. Now it's Zedekiah. Still alive, though blinded.

And a month later, on the seventh day of the fifth month in the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar, notice now how the dates change. Up till now, all the way through the kings, the dates have been set by the reign of a king, whether in Israel or in Judah.

But now it's in the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Because there is, in effect, the writer saying, no more king over God's people Judah.

Zedekiah has not been replaced by a king. And Nebuchadnezzar, the commander, the king of Babylon is Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, the commander of the army, the imperial guard, he came to Jerusalem.

[17:23] So this is within a month now of Zedekiah fleeing. And he set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace, all the houses of Jerusalem, every important building he burned down.

The whole Babylonian army under the command of the imperial guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. The temple destroyed, the palace destroyed, the walls destroyed, basically the city destroyed. It's not a massive city.

And we're talking here about the city that's within the walls, which are different walls from what you walk around today, but some of them are in the same position, but not massive as a city.

The idea is that it's utterly destroyed. The walls, the temple, the palace, gone. Verse 11, thousands are exiled to Babylon.

And as we saw last week in the second deportation, though the first that's mentioned in Kings, this is the third, but the second that's mentioned in Kings, I know that sounds complicated, the leaders get taken away.

[18:21] The priests, prophets, kings, army officials, public servants, people who are educated, anybody who might represent a threat to be a claimant to rule or rebel against Babylon.

That is, you leave behind the poor and the uneducated because they will be weak. They will be less able to gather people around them to rise up against the empire. That was a standard procedure for Babylon and all the countries that they conquered back in their heyday, really.

And so verse 12 says that only the poor are left. That is, you leave Judah so weak that it is unable to harness its forces to rebel.

And Jerusalem was so utterly destroyed that it seems that it was virtually no longer inhabitable. And from archaeological records, that seems to be right. It was underpopulated for the next century, undernourished.

People had no infrastructure left basically in the city and as we'll see in a few minutes, the sort of pseudo capital is another town because Jerusalem can't even function anymore as a capital.

[19:29] Now in a way, it could simply end there basically with the story at the end of verse 12. But I think the writer goes on because he wants to underscore this and show the completeness of this destruction.

He wants to anchor home the solemnity and utter shock of what's gone on. So he goes on then to talk about the destruction of all the paraphernalia from the temple.

Bronze pillars, movable stands, the bronze sea, which is a great big basin of water. All of these things in verse 13 onwards are broken up, smashed up, and taken away.

Now again, that was ancient practice because these things would be made of precious metal. So you take them away and you can reuse the metal for idols of Marduk or Nebo or other gods of the Babylonians basically, although it seems that not all of them were remodelled in the end.

Interestingly, the list of things in these verses is exactly the list that you find when Solomon is building the temple. So I think the writer is deliberately using the same list to show the complete undoing of what Solomon built 400 years before and that's back in 1 Kings chapter 7.

[20 : 44] And then after all of those things in verses 13 to 17, then we're told in verse 18, the commander of the guard took as prisoners and here come a few of the names, the priest, chief priest, Saraiah, and Zephaniah, the priest, next in rank.

So here are leaders within the country being taken off, not now to exile, but will see to execution. Of those still in the city who took the officer in charge of the fighting men, five royal advisors, the secretary.

So these are people who for some reason have been left behind from the deportation, probably, but now are going to be executed. Nebuchadnezzar, the commander, in verse 20, took them all and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah, same place where he'd taken Zedekiah before and where the Egyptians had a base much earlier and there at Riblah in the land of Hamat, the king had them executed.

They're not taken into exile. They're king. Notice in that verse how at the end, or not quite the end of verse, what is it, 21, the king had them executed.

It doesn't say the king of Babylon now, it doesn't say Nebuchadnezzar by name, it just says the king. Who is the king? There's no king in Judah anymore. That's what the writer is sort of highlighting for us. See, every other time when a king's killed or assassinated or dies, another king comes.

[22 : 16] When Josiah was killed by the Egyptians, there's Jehoahaz. When Jehoahaz is taken into exile, there's Jehoiakim. When he dies, there's Jehoiachin. When he's taken into exile, it's Zedekiah. And then it stops.

So no more king. That's part of the shock, the seriousness of what the narrator is trying to draw out. And so Judah went into captivity away from her land in verse 41.

As was predicted, as you saw three weeks ago in chapter 22 by Huldah, as was warned way back in Moses' time in the covenant curses, some of which I just read for you, and the verses that follow on from that in Deuteronomy 28 go on to speak then of the exile that indeed would come.

Now we need to just appreciate some of the significance of this. For this is not merely military defeat. That is, all through human history, armies have conquered other armies.

Countries have taken cities and kings and captured people. And this is what's happening here. But there's something much deeper going on here. It's not merely that another country has defeated Judah.

[23 : 29] Because so much is anchored in Judah by the promises of God. So you see, when you don't have that anchor, if for example, Tasmania came and conquered Victoria later this week, then in the end we might say, oh, they're more powerful.

They're more organized. Their military is better than ours. That is, you weigh it up, you assess it, you understand it on the grounds of military power or clever intelligence and all that, the combination of all of those things.

But in the ancient world, countries were connected to their gods. Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuchadnezzar, their names begin in the same sort of way because one of the main gods was Nebo.

Another one was Marduk from Babylon. People are named often, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and indeed Josiah, all have names that relate to Yahweh, Jehovah, the name of the Lord.

So, in the ancient world in particular, nations, it's not merely the strongest nation defeating another, though often you could understand that politically and militarily, but there's something about gods that is going on when countries conquer other countries.

[24 : 46] And the carting away from Jerusalem of all that bronze and silver and gold and all those precious things smashed up from the temple is part of demonstrating the conquest of our god is

better than your god.

Our gods have won the victory. Now, especially that happened for other countries where their gods were represented in physical form, in idols and statues and all of that. At this point, in Josiah's time, that was not the case for God.

It was in Manasseh's time, but not for him. So, they're taking away the instruments. There's no idols of God, but the Babylonians wouldn't have necessarily appreciated that. They think, we've conquered their god.

A bit like Samson destroying the temple of Dagon back in the book of Judges, for example. It's interesting later when the Babylonians do get conquered by the Persians in 539, Cyrus, the Persian emperor, comes into Babylon in conquest and he styles himself as a Babylonian king.

Marduk has given me your kingdom. He honors their god, which is a bit surprising in the ancient world. So here, the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem is a complicated thing to understand for an ancient Jew or Judahite because what does it say about your God?

[26 : 04] Has God been defeated? Has God abandoned us? Now, if you read the book of Kings and the book of Kings is 1 and 2 Kings, if you read it through, in the light of the books that precede, including Deuteronomy and Leviticus and Exodus, you've got to say, no way has God been defeated.

This is actually God's judgment even if Nebuchadnezzar doesn't recognize the God of Israel. But of course, God had also made promises to Abraham that you'll be a great nation, that I'll give you this land, the land that was promised to Israel, conquered by Joshua, for example, a land delineated geographically in as early as the time of Abraham in Genesis 15.

So, what's happening here with the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem and the carting away into exile of so many is challenging where do God's promises stand?

God's promises look to have crashed to nothing. He promised land, a great nation, it's gone. He promised us blessing, there's no blessing here. The land, of course, was in particular the focus of divine dwelling.

So, the temple in the land was a crucial thing and the Jews, as I said, thought the temple would never fall because God lived there, the Lord lived there but here it's destroyed and so that shatters, if you like, their theological understanding.

[27 : 31] How on earth could we worship the Lord in a strange land without a temple? We can't make sacrifices in such a place. So, this exile was a deep catastrophe and we see that reflected, if you read the book of Lamentations, five chapters of really rather exquisite and moving poetry that lament the fall of Jerusalem.

It doesn't lament it as though, oh God, you've abandoned us. It recognises that God is faithful and that this destruction of Jerusalem, though a grievous thing and a lamentful thing, nonetheless, God is still sovereign.

But it's nonetheless a significant lament. We see this event interpreted in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zephaniah and Habakkuk who are prophets around this time of the destruction of Jerusalem or soon after or through this time, basically.

We recognise that this should not be a surprise. Because of the sins of Manasseh in particular, the grandfather of Josiah, but the sins of so many kings preceding him and the judges before that, we recognise that the warnings of God way back in Sinai in the book of Deuteronomy and Leviticus have now come into play.

The reforms of Josiah were insufficient and Yahweh is not defeated and even though Yahweh is almost absent in this final chapter, nonetheless, the previous chapters make it clear that this is God's doing.

[29 : 05] It's God who's using Nebuchadnezzar even though Nebuchadnezzar doesn't even know that. It's God who's sovereign bringing his judgment, serious judgment, catastrophic judgment, indeed against his own people.

I think one of the mistakes of the 20th century and mistake generally of the Enlightenment and Western civilisation is our over-inflated view of the capacity of humanity.

We love to be amazed at the glorious capacity and ability of humanity when we watch Rafael Nadal fabulously be curious, sorry to say that for some of you, and we see it when we marvel at the sort of sporting achievements of amazing people and great achievements of science.

We probably think that a bit, how great, isn't it, that we've got some identification of this virus in Melbourne of all places by the scientists in this last day or two and so on.

But the trouble is with that inflated view as we esteem the great achievements of humanity, not least in the 20th century and into the 21st, is that we fail sometimes to appreciate the lack of brilliance of human morality, that we are no better than our predecessors and they were no better than theirs and so on.

[30 : 25] We're all captive ultimately to sin, not meaning that everything we do is bad. We often do very good and virtuous things, often though for mixed motives as well.

And I think as we reflect on the destruction of Judah, we see the depth of their sinfulness or their persistence in sin.

That is, for something like 800 years since the law was given at Sinai with its warnings associated in them in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Israelites should know what God will do in response.

Those warnings were in effect echoed by various prophets through the history of ancient Israel, not least in the time of the 8th century with Amos, Hosea, Micah and the first part of Isaiah in particular, warning the people again and again.

But we see it also with some of those curses of the covenant coming through that history, droughts and famines and enemy attacks and so on. And God said, if these things come, that's a sign of my judgment because you are failing to obey me.

[31 : 35] And yet they did not see that. We see it with other people who proclaim God's word, occasionally good kings who reform and so on, not least Josiah. But all through this catalogue of history, repeated warnings, echoes going back to these covenant curses of Deuteronomy and Leviticus and people don't heed it.

They're blind, they're deaf to the word of God. It's a terrible indictment, I think, of God's people. They fail to turn.

They fail to repent. They fail to understand and get it right. And I think a temptation for us who live in Western civilization post-enlightenment is to think, oh, we're better than them.

We know it better. We've got God's word better. And maybe to a degree we have, but actually I think the warnings here still apply to us as well.

Deuteronomy ends, sorry, two kings ends really bleakly, in a way. They're in exile. There's no king. There's no land. There's no nation.

[32 : 48] The promises of Abraham appear to have withered away entirely. Nebuchadnezzar appoints a governor, Gedaliah, in verse 22. No longer a Davidic king.

Those promises to David have gone. Gedaliah is the grandson of Josiah's former secretary, Shaphan, but that doesn't seem to do him any good.

His capital, we're told in verse 23, is now at Mizpah. Jerusalem is virtually uninhabitable. The temple's gone, the city's gone, the walls have gone. Some remaining Jewish leaders come to him in verse 24, and he says to them in verse 24, do not be afraid of the Babylonian officials.

Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon and it will go well with you. Hard to know what to make of those words. They're sane words. They're probably quite sensible.

They might remind us of Jeremiah saying to the exile, settle down, seek the welfare of the city in Jeremiah 29. And here it's served the king of Babylon and it will go well with you.

[34 : 00] But I wonder if there's a deliberate echo here. Because so often back in earlier parts of the Old Testament in its laws, if you keep this law, if you obey these statutes and commandments from God, it will go well with you.

You will live long in the land. Here is a godless advice in a way. Now to serve the king of Babylon and there's no mention of God at all.

But a few months later he's killed. He's assassinated in verse 25 and 6. His killers flee to Egypt. They've after all killed the Babylonian appointed governor.

They flee off to Egypt. It possibly is with them that Jeremiah is taken captive. Jeremiah doesn't want to go to Egypt if you read his book. But he's taken there in Jeremiah 40 to 43.

An unwilling exile to Egypt. As far as we know from history, Jews lived in Egypt thereafter. There's records of Jewish enclaves in a place called Elephantine in the 400s BC.

[35 : 05] There are certainly Jews there in the 1st century BC. A lot of the Old Testament is being translated into Greek there and so on. They never come back it seems. Judah now is an inconsequential province of a vast empire based in Babylon in what is modern day Iraq.

A bleak history a history that seems to be just an unhappy ending. I don't particularly like stories like that. I sometimes read crime novels where they can't find the murderer.

That makes me really angry that I've read so many hundreds of pages and there's no solution let me tell you. And sometimes I read novels where it ends sadly.

the hero dies the people are in love with each other one of them dies or something like that and I cry often if it's a good novel. But I feel a bit frustrated and so sad at the end of a novel.

I read Mohintan Mystery on the way home from holidays last year in the plane A Balanced Life I think it's called. It's a very moving novel. It may be furious and angry at Indira Gandhi's India at its injustice and I had tears flowing because it is so sad.

[36 : 21] I thought I wish I was reading a happy book. I'm sort of glad that I read sad books but unhappy endings can be frustrating make us angry and make us sad and I think we're meant to feel sad here and think this is terrible and this is it.

No king no land no city no walls it's exile it's destruction this is how Jerusalem ends is it a bang or is it a whimper but then we jump many years it's strange in a way but verse 27 says in the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah this takes us to 562 BC the events of the destruction of Jerusalem are 586 so this is 24 years later and you add on the years from when Jehoiachin went earlier into exile as well and he's still alive this grandson of Josiah the third one to succeed Josiah Jehoahaz Jehoiachin then Jehoiachin son Jehoiachin three months reigning taken off to exile still alive and what do we know about him evil Merodach or Arvel

Arvel Merodach it says in this translation but evil Merodach in most I think he's succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king and he releases Jehoiachin from prison he did it on a particular day the 27th day of the 12th month not just after Christmas it's not a Christmas present the months are dated a bit differently from us and he spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honour higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon now that implies that perhaps some other kings have also been released from prison but certainly that there's something special about Jehoiachin now we don't know what's going on here there's no record of why evil Merodach raised him up above others why he esteemed him was it just a personal thing was God behind this nothing really is said about that and so Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life whatever that is he ate regularly at the king's table and day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived well here is a

Davidic king descended from David grandson of Josiah still alive so here at this unhappy ending is something that I think is slightly more optimistic and hopeful although to a degree a little bit ambiguous let me say his allowance that's mentioned in the last verse has actually been found by archaeologists in records in Babylon amazingly how do we read this last paragraph I suspect it is meant to be a sign of hope the Davidic dynasty is not died out entirely Solomon had prayed at the dedication of the temple back in 1 Kings 8 that even in Babylon sorry not in Babylon but in exile people God might hear people as they pray he's favoured above other kings why is Judah Jerusalem the Davidic king so special not said here but is it a sign of hope there's little echoes also of the book of Genesis when Joseph comes out of prison in Pharaoh's prison few words the same that maybe suggests that the writer has deliberately brought that little whisper of an echo as Joseph released from prison and esteemed in the court of Pharaoh that eventually leads to reconciliation with his brothers and fathers and so on is that being hinted at here

Jehoiachin is different from Zedekiah in exile even though Zedekiah was his uncle and a son of Josiah no more mentions made of him he might already be dead by now and whoever has written this or maybe somebody added on the paragraph at the end implies that they write it at the after he's died because for the rest of his life he ate at the table and it seems like a sign of hope I think it is but it is qualified it's got a little bit of ambiguity about it because he eats at the king's table do you remember another person not wanting to eat at a king's table a Babylonian king's table Daniel who basically wants to eat only kosher food so when you contrast this you think hang on a minute here's a king who's alive he's eating at the Babylonian king's table but he doesn't seem to care what he eats he's abandoned the food laws of the Old Testament perhaps whereas Daniel upholds them and is miraculously rescued and saved by God a couple of times so it's a bit ambiguous here there's nothing necessarily good about Jehoiachin and yet perhaps by God's grace holding on to the promises in some way in 2 Samuel 7

[41 : 22] David when he was king was promised an everlasting dynasty the book of kings ends with at least that dynasty still alive even if not reigning anymore and it is astonishing I think as you

read kings that over Judah not Israel in the north but over Judah despite several assassinations every king is descended from David for 400 years a bit over I think that's remarkable in the northern kingdom of Israel none of them is Davidic descent and there are numerous dynasties dynasties don't last more than about four kings in the north but they keep going in the south and here is Jehoiachin still alive is there a future for a Davidic king is the promise of 2 Samuel 7 still possible the temple is gone but is there still a possibility for God with his people is the ambiguity of this last paragraph suggesting that somehow God is at work preserving a

Davidic king even though God is not named the land is lost nationhood is gone in fact nationhood will never come back again on earth because after they do come back from exile they're not a nation they're a province of Persia and then Greece and then Rome and then nothing but the answer of course is not found in the Old Testament whilst there's a hint of people coming back from exile there's no king no nation no great blessing but the answer is found in the New Testament of course you know that where one descended from David is the king on the cross and the king in victorious resurrection and the temple is not of stone though there was another one built in the time of Haggai the prophet but it was destroyed in 70 AD and Jesus foretold that when he said destroy this temple and I'll raise it in three days my goodness three days not even the Chinese can build a hospital in three days but he was talking about his risen body the living temple into which you and I as people of faith are built as living stones and no more is that the land on earth surrounded by the med dead red and Galilee seas but a heavenly land and the descendants of Abraham the New Testament tells us astonishingly are not by race but by faith for Jesus says to Jewish people descended from Abraham you don't believe in me your children are the devil my goodness I'm not even as rude as that and those who are children of Abraham are believers in Jesus you and I see the promises of Abraham are not lost the promises of David are not lost and it looks bleak but there's just this little whisper a candle light of hope at the end of the book that's a little bit compromised by a king eating non-kosher food probably but even in the midst of this ruin in what looks to be utter hopelessness

God brings astonishing hope through Jesus Christ the son of David the living temple the one in whom we believe to be children of Abraham who promises an eternal and heavenly kingdom but one more thing the intransigence of ancient Israel their refusal to heed God's law and the repeated warnings of prophet after prophet after prophet where does that find its solution again it finds it in the New Testament it finds it in the greatest sacrifice a sacrifice that is not merely for forgiveness of sins the Old Testament had that in animal sacrifices you could be forgiven but unchanged but the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is powerful not merely to forgive us but here's the difference to change our hearts

Moses when he spoke the words of Deuteronomy his final sermon before he died warned the people in chapters 28 and 29 about the exile to come because of their sin but in words of glittering hope that are so astonishing and surprising in Deuteronomy 30 that so many scholars think they can't have been said by Moses but they were I'm sure he says but God will change your heart circumcise your heart he said and it doesn't happen when they come back from exile in 538 it doesn't come back when they rebuild the temple in 515 it doesn't come back yet changed when they rebuild the walls in Nehemiah's time in 450s but it comes when Jesus dies and when we're identified in his death as Paul says in Colossians 2 or Romans 2 our hearts are circumcised they're changed transformed so the failure the utter failure of the Old Testament is deliberate I think it doesn't just end and some plan B starts with

[46 : 56] Jesus it exposes to us the gaping chasm of our moral need and the giant fulfillment of it in the glorious greater son of David the living temple the child of Abraham the one whose death not merely forgives but transforms our hearts as well Amen Oh and the these things lose anything like