

Well, let's open our Bibles tonight to 2 Kings 21. We're actually biting off a big chunk today, which is why we've been asking you to read ahead some of these reports - the narrative from the LORD. They're really hard to break up and to stop on just one spot, so we've decided we're going to try to take the rest of 2 Kings today. In fact, we're going to cover 110½ years of history in about 45 or 50 minutes. So it is important that you read ahead, and especially when we get to the Chronicles as well, there'll be portions that we won't be reading; we'll have studied in great detail, but they will be helpful to us if we just kind of read ahead and pick out those things that we haven't covered very much that the LORD has for us in those books.

Last week we started with, in chapter 17, the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. They were taken out by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and God gives us very clearly, in chapter 17, the reasons for their demise or for their stumble, for their fall. You know the history that after the death of Solomon, the nation of Israel broke into two parts - the north and the south. Most of the tribes went north. They never did have a good king. They changed everything that God had given to His people to know Him by, and they lived in defiance for 209 years - from 931 to 722. And then the LORD allowed the Assyrians, after warning and prophets and His grace and His patience, to come in and to really wipe out that organization, never to be really put back together as the northern kingdom. But we read last week that the LORD said that one of the greatest problems for the nation in the north was that they feared other gods rather than the God who had made them and delivered them; that they compromised and followed the rules of the land in the sense they adopted the ways of the world rather than the ways of the LORD. The very same things that had brought God's judgment to their enemies they began to practice themselves. He mentioned, in chapter 17, that as sin progressed in the north, the shame of idolatry that had been practiced in secret had gone public, and pretty soon people were no longer ashamed of the lives that they were living. They ignored God's warnings for generations; ended up completely walking away from the LORD, and God then removed them from His presence. The land was filled with idolatry.

In chapters 18, 19 and 20 last week, God gave us a look at the ministry of Isaiah and then of Hezekiah, who was the king in the southern kingdom of Judah. As the Assyrians wiped out the north, they also turned against God's people in the south. The LORD came to their defense, to their deliverance. Hezekiah was a young man who walked with God, suffered a lot of difficulty early on. The attack of the Assyrians was frightening for a young, godly man, and he handled it well in prayer and let God have it with the prophet Isaiah speaking to him from the LORD. He then got sick, and it looked like he was probably going to die, and again, he turned to the LORD who gave him fifteen more years of life. And we ended last week with his death and the coming to the throne of his son, Manasseh, who was born during those fifteen years of extra life that God gave him.

So tonight we will pick up from Manasseh forward. There are only seven more kings, and some of them are just there for a month or two in the south. The south had done well. They had eight good kings; there'll be one more that we'll see tonight in the life of Josiah. But we start tonight with Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, who was no doubt probably the most horrible king that the south faced, the most ungodly man that is in that lineage, if you will. There's lots for us to learn, but by the time we finish tonight in chapter 25, we will have come to the end of the southern kingdom of Judah. They will be headed for Babylon into captivity in 586 B.C. The onslaught began actually in 606, and they will be there for seventy years as the LORD said through the prophets before. In 536 they're allowed to go back to the land and to build again that which God had done through Ezra and Nehemiah and others. So that's where we're at.

Next week we will have a night of worship. It's communion night. We wanted to just spend some time worshipping the Lord together as a body, praying as well. So we won't be broadcasting live next week. That's going to be hard to film and send out to you. But the following week we'll start out with Chronicles and continue as God fills in the gaps of things that we've already learned, and we get more information before we then finally turn to Revelation, which is our plan towards the end of this year - to start the book in-depth.

So, tonight the fall of the south, the graciousness of God in waiting for His people but also not allowing His people to continue in sin. At some point, the Lord, in His love, will shake your life to the core in the hopes that you will turn back to Him. The north did not; most of them did not. The south took a little longer to stew in their rebellion, but it seemed to still continue. Hopefully for some, as the Lord will

deal with them, they turned their hearts to the Lord. God sent them all the opportunities that they certainly deserved and then some.

If you've been with us in church here or been online, we've handed out to you the list of the kings of Israel and Judah, their reigns and where you can find them in these historical books. If you don't have one, you can find one in the Archive section of our website, and you can follow along. But we'll cover them for you.

So tonight no northern kingdom; just the southern kingdom left. And let's begin in verse 1. We read there, "Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel."

Manasseh, who was Hezekiah's son (the one that he didn't have when he got sick and he asked the LORD for more time), was only twelve years old when he was given the responsibility to co-rule with his father. And he would rule for fifty-five years, which would mean that he would finish in his rulership about 643 B.C. So thirty-seven years after he dies would be the first onslaught from the Babylonians. When you realize that Manasseh was not born yet when Hezekiah became sick and the LORD said he was going to die, and yet God, in answer to Hezekiah's prayer, gave him these fifteen years, you want to say to yourself, "Well, if he had died fifteen years earlier, this wicked and most wicked of kings would not have been born." And yet God always has a plan. God is very faithful, and so we can't question those things. But it always comes to mind that in those fifteen years of God's grace came this very wicked king.

We read of him, very clearly here in verse 3, "For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done" (the guy in the north that had introduced this Baal worship); "and he worshipped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, 'In Jerusalem I will put My name.' And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. Also he made his son to pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. He even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD had said to David and to Solomon his son, 'In this house and in Jerusalem,

which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers - only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them.' But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel."

So just imagine all that Hezekiah, in his twenty-nine years, had done; everything that we read last week, how good of a king he was. In short order his son, Manasseh, began to undo them. And from the descriptions that we read here I don't think there was one religious degradation that he missed. He seemed to just have devoted his life to it. He followed the ways of this wicked King Ahab who was certainly the most instrumental and wicked leader in the north. He introduced the worship of Baal, he rebuilt the high places which were sites, a lot of them, for sexual perversion and the worship of the goddess Ashtoreth or Ashtart, whichever language that you remember. He worshipped the host of heaven. He didn't consider at all God's dealing with the northern kingdom and all of their sins and what the prophets had said even though that overthrow of the northern kingdom happened just a few years before he was born. In other words, that was current history, and yet that didn't seem to move him at all. He built an idol to this female deity, Ashtoreth, in that very Temple that Solomon had built in Jerusalem to worship the LORD. And he got personally involved in the worship of Baal; he even put his child, sacrificing his child to Molech; practicing the occult. Despicable practices. Can you imagine, after this very good and godly leadership of his father, that this guy just comes to the scene, and he is just hell-bent on bringing destruction to God's people every day of his life?

God's conditional promise, verse 8, that the LORD had made, that He would never take the people out of the land again if they would just walk with Him - that didn't matter to anyone at this time, and they were taken in by Manasseh's wicked leadership. For the next fifty years, fifty-five to be exact, God would patiently wait, would patiently reach out, would send prophet after prophet. And though He did and though He waited, the people's hearts didn't change. In fact, those very telling words in verse 9 said they just didn't pay any attention. But, look, when the Word of God is not heeded - you set that aside - you can be seduced, you can be led astray. And the people not already very strong and certainly the legacy of Hezekiah was his generation did well, but that which followed had this man to lead them, and it was destructive to everyone.

So we read, in verse 10, "And the LORD spoke by His servants the prophets, saying, 'Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab;" ' " (or literally, they're going to face the same kind of judgment) " ' "I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day." ' Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD." And then we read, "Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh - all that he did, and the sin that he committed - are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" And after fifty-five years - so God covers it very quickly - "Manasseh rested with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza. Then his son" (wicked son) "Amon reigned in his place."

So, the LORD took and said of the nation itself, but using Manasseh as the example, "This has been going on way too long, and it just is getting worse, and it's not getting better." They'd had seven very good kings and had years of godly influence, and the people, for the most part, were blessed because of the leadership being godly. But they didn't turn back to the LORD, certainly, and they didn't stay with the LORD once that leader disappeared. And so God's judgment against Judah was filled now, and Manasseh, I guess, is the reflection of that. There was no turning back after this man's leadership; the judgment was going to fall. The sin of Manasseh, in verse 10 and again in verse 15, was in many ways the crown of years of national lukewarmness. It had been almost 900 years now since the children of Israel had been brought out of Egypt. Much of that time, though, if you go back and add the numbers up, was spent in rebellion. And here's this guy, after all of those years, who's kind of filling up that judgment. Like I said, eight good kings. They led in the ways of the LORD. Amon, his son, would be a wicked guy; he would only last for two years. But then his son, Josiah, would be an extremely godly king. It would be their last one. He'd reign for just over three decades. So God would teach them to need Him, but they were going to learn to

need Him because of what they would suffer. During these fifty-five years of Manasseh's reign, before he passed away, God sent them Joel, sent them Nahum, sent them Habbakuk; Isaiah continued his ministry then; even the prophet Hosea had spoken of God's reasoning and had said that the LORD was going to turn against Judah. "Like a young lion, he was going to be torn and have no place to turn. I'm going to bring them back to the place of offense," the LORD says, "and then they're going to seek My face. And in their afflictions, they're earnestly going to seek Me" (Hosea 5:14-15). But it's going to take this kind of pressure, suffering, hardship, the hand of strength from the LORD against His own people to turn their hearts. So, horrible. Horrible time.

We read, in verse 16, of the innocent blood that was shed in Jerusalem by Manasseh. We read in Hebrews 11:37, that said (of the prophets), some of them "were stoned, they were sawn in two....." And we are told from tradition, as well as some indicators from a historical standpoint, that Isaiah might very well have suffered that fate at the hand of this fellow Manasseh. So more bloodshed, the more warning; the greater the light that came, the darker the sin becomes. And here's this murderous king in the south who shed much innocent blood.

Now, if you're taking notes, I want to have you write in your margin 2 Chronicles 33. Because when we get there - and we don't have it here - when we get to that story, which is the LORD's reporting of all that we've learned, His viewpoint, we are told that Manasseh, in the battle with the Assyrians who had already overthrown the north, had been taken captive in battle. And that he ended up near Babylon where he was cured of his idolatry in the city of idols. In fact, in captivity this fellow Manasseh, in his older age, cried out to the LORD in repentance, and God answered him, had him released from captivity as a POW, had him returned to Jerusalem where he spent the last few years of his life trying to undo all of the damage that he'd caused. He is a man that is probably the best argument you can have for when you say to yourself, "Boy, I know a guy that I don't think'll ever get saved, he's just horrible." And then you just have to remind yourself Manasseh probably did. Because everything that we will read in 2 Chronicles 33 would tell us that the LORD looked upon him, God watched over him. In fact, I'll read to you out of 2 Chronicles 33 for a minute. I know we're reading a lot of verses tonight. But it says, verse 10, "And the LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. Therefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon. Now when he was in affliction, he implored the

LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God." His heart was converted. And so he went out, and he began to fortify the places that he had destroyed. He had begun to remove the high places. He didn't allow things to continue. But a lot of people weren't listening to him because he had led them so astray that now his efforts were futile. And so we see his repentance at the end of his life. As horrible as this man was, you need to know that I think you'll meet him in heaven one day because of the grace of God.

But, needless to say, he died not having been able to do much except destroy. And unfortunately, his son Amon - that's all that he could remember. In fact, we read, notice in verse 17, "All the sins that he committed are written down." So I think the record of him, though his repentance is recorded, is pretty much the destruction that he brought to life and to the people around him. And, like I said, his succeeding son seemed to just remember that as well.

And so we read, in verse 19, "Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. So he walked in all the ways that his father had walked; and he served the idols that his father had served, and worshipped them. He forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD. Then the servants of Amon" (after two years of rulership) "conspired against him, and killed the king in his own house. But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Amon. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place. Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And he was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza. Then Josiah his son reigned in his place."

So twenty-two-year-old son of Manasseh follows his dad's footsteps. As you can imagine, he wasn't moved, apparently, by his dad's late-life repentance and attempts to reform things. There's that saying that says, "As the twig is bent, so the tree grows." So I guess for us, as parents, you should be careful. The quicker you can walk with God, the better your example to your children will be. Because this guy came around late. He's in. God saved and delivered. But it was hard to eradicate all of his earlier influence upon his kids. So two years this fellow is able to rule, Amon. He is killed by his own servants who are then killed by the people

who then take his son, Josiah, who would be a very godly king. Which is interesting. So maybe he is more influenced by the grandfather Manasseh, and he just knew him in his later years. But he would be the last good king that Israel would have, and after his thirty-one years of reign, there would only be about $22\frac{1}{2}$ years until the overthrow of the southern kingdom completely. So, he's kind of going to take us down towards the end.

Chapter 22 we read, in verse 1, that "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left." He was just a faithful guy. Can you imagine, as an outstanding king, God put the brakes on - the judgment that He declared during the life of Manasseh. "Because he had done these things, this is what I'm going to do," the LORD says. But, again, here comes a season of godliness, and the LORD used him mightily.

Again, we're not in Chronicles now, but if you read 2 Chronicles 34, you will read that at sixteen years old, this young man began to seek the LORD in earnest (is how the LORD describes it); that at the age of twenty, he began to carry forth these remarkable reforms to restore everything his grandfather had destroyed (Manasseh); that by the time he was twenty-six, which would be the eighteenth year of his rule, he began to repair the Temple and to bring reforms to the religious life, if you will. But he was just a guy that was devoted to seeing God's will be done in a country that just nobody cared, and very few people wanted to walk with God. He ruled for thirty-one years. When he died, it was 609 B.C. The first onslaught from the Babylonians (of three) would be in 606, three years later; then in 597, then 586 they would be completely destroyed. So, by the time he dies, it's only three years away from the Babylonians making their will and their threats known to the southern kingdom. Notice that although Josiah did right with tremendous zeal, the people, for the most part, were still lost in sin. In fact, Jeremiah, the prophet who prophesied during the times of Josiah, said that the people were coming to the LORD in worship, but they were just trusting in lying vanities; that they went through the motions - they were church people, not God's people; they were religious people, not God's people. And unfortunately their religious activities without a personal relationship with God wouldn't sustain them beyond the leadership of a godly man like Josiah. In the timeframe that we are reading now, you might want to put Jeremiah in your notes in the margin; or even

better yet, go read the book of Jeremiah, knowing that he fits right here. In fact, the book of Lamentations (which Jeremiah will also write, you have) was written in 586 during the last carrying away of the people, the last final destruction of the Temple, and God's last job for Jeremiah after preaching all those years to them was to sit down and record the death of the south and the suffering that they faced because they weren't willing to listen to the LORD. So Isaiah and Jeremiah fit very importantly into these things. If you spend a half an hour a day for the next two weeks, you could read through all of them, and you'd have a much better understanding, I think, of this time.

Well, let's read the report here so that we can take it in. We'll read the rest of the chapter and then look at a couple of verses. "Now it came to pass," verse 3, "in the eighteenth year of King Josiah," (so he was twenty-six) "that the king sent Shaphan the scribe, the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the house of the LORD, saying: 'Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may count the money which has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. And let them deliver it into the hand of those doing the work, who are the overseers in the house of the LORD; let them give it to those who are in the house of the LORD doing the work, to repair the damages of the house - to carpenters and builders and masons - and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. However there need be no accounting made with them of the money delivered into their hand, because they deal faithfully.' Then Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.' And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, 'Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the LORD.' Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, 'Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it before the king. Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, 'Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.' So Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in

Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her. Then she said to them, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Tell the man who sent you to me, 'Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants - all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read - because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched." ' ' " But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, in this manner you shall speak to him, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Concerning the words which you have heard - because your heart' " (to Josiah, now) " 'was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,' says the LORD. 'Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.' " ' " So they brought back word to the king."

So a couple of things. Number one - as Josiah is in full swing, he's now in his twenties, he wants to make sure that the administration of the funds that were to take care of the operation of the Temple were being used properly; gave orders to that effect. Interesting he said, in verse 7, "You don't even need to give an account. We trust these guys." So he had surrounded himself with people who had faithful reputations. "I don't need a receipt. I'll trust you." In the process of the remodeling, if you will, they found a priest's copy of the Torah, the Pentateuch; possibly it was hidden during the reigns of Manasseh and his son, Amon, who were so against anything from the LORD. But whatever the case may be, the real lesson is: as young Josiah began to hear the words read to him by the scribe, the Word of God, it touched his heart. He tore his clothes. He repented. "Boy, we are in big trouble! We have gone way in the wrong direction! We're not doing anything that God requires." And he saw it as something that was imposed upon his heart. "We should be doing what God wants." And, "What do we do from here?"

And so they asked the LORD. In fact, in verse 14, Ahikam was a friend (according to Jeremiah 26). Zephaniah was too young yet to be a prophet of use. Jeremiah, we are told in Jeremiah, was not here at the time, and yet the king, Josiah, wanted to hear from the LORD. "LORD, what are we supposed to do?" And so they turned to a woman in the area named Huldah. She was known for her prophetic skills, if you will, or her gifts. God had used her. And she delivers a pretty absolutely

accurate word from the LORD, but it was bittersweet. The LORD said, "I'm going to bring calamity because of what they've done," and He lays out what had been going on for generations. But Manasseh had kind of pushed it over the end; that was as far as the LORD was going to go, and so it was time for judgment. It did not slow Josiah down from doing the right thing. He was told his faithfulness would push down the road this judgment. There would be a respite because of his faithfulness. Imagine one life saving a nation for a generation. Amazing what God can do through hearts that are turned to Him. And so he kept seeking to implement all that God had ordained in the Book. But notice the nation is just kind of following along. But look at the impact upon God's people. And maybe that's a good question to ask yourself tonight as you're sitting at home listening to the Bible study. How convicting is God's Word to your heart? Can you just kind of take it and leave it? Or does it move you? Is it heartfelt, or is it just in-one-ear-out-the-other? Does it drive you to church, or does it keep you away from church? Can you not wait to hear, or do you just want to hear more? I love that Huldah, the prophetess, this lady brought forth God's Word. And it was pretty bitter, but also it was pretty informative because the LORD's heart and understanding of Josiah was very clear. "I've seen your reaction to My Word. I've seen the tears in your eyes. I've seen you tear your clothes in repentance. I've seen the humbleness of your heart, and I'm going to reward you, give you peace in your generation, in your life. You're not going to have to see the fall of the nation. You're not going to have to see the judgment that is coming. So, in the midst of a nation that is so close to judgment - like three years away by the time he dies (of it taking place) - there is this soft-hearted, repentant man who is heard on high and cared for all of his days. That's pretty important. Because you might wonder sometimes - where is the Lord in all of these things that we're going through? Well, I trust that God will get you to that place of peace and rest; and hopefully use you in delay because if our nation continues down this road, judgment's coming for sure. Maybe it's already here. But God has a way of just, for the sake of a few, the faithful, delaying, waiting even longer than He is normally waiting. And Josiah's certainly a good example of that.

Well chapter 23, as we read through it, is just his reforms. What is this young man who loves the LORD doing that just moved the heart of God? So, having heard from the prophet, we read, in verse 1, "Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. The king went up to the house of the LORD with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem - the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in

their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD. Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant."

So, Josiah's been told his life is going to be fairly easy, but he wants the LORD's will. And so his next step as the king is to gather everybody together, the leadership and the not-so-much, and he just read to them out of the Book. And there, standing in the Temple by the pillar, he committed himself to wholeheartedly "We're just going to do things Your.....God, my life is going to be to do things Your way." And you notice, in verse 3, that all of the people agreed. Now they agreed in word, but many of them didn't agree in heart. You know, you can see a church filled with people, but then there are those who are filled with the Lord. And certainly, in many ways, looking at this from outside looking in, there was at least one guy who was on fire for the LORD and a bunch of people who didn't and wouldn't have made these decisions without his leadership.

We read, in verse 4, "And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the articles that" (his grandfather had put in there) "were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel" (all the way to the north where this kind of religion had been born under the life of the northern kingdom, especially with Ahab). "Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the wooden image from the house of the LORD, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground it to ashes, and threw its ashes on the graves of the common people." (Just desecrated the place.) "Then he tore down the ritual booths of the perverted persons that were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image. And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; also he broke down the high places at the gates which were at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were to the left of the city gate. Nevertheless the priests of

the high places did not come up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brethren. And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech. Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. The altars that were on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, the king broke down and pulverized there, and threw their dust into the Brook Kidron. Then the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, which were on the south of the Mount of Corruption, which Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images, and filled their places with the bones of men."

So, with great zeal and with absolute purpose, Josiah decided he would get rid in the land, in his generation, of these idolatrous images; got rid of the priests who were leading the people astray; took the ashes of Baal worship back up to the north. "Hey, this wasn't supposed to be in God's land." And even the ashes he didn't want to keep in the land. He, in verses 7 and 8, destroyed the area of the Sodomites, which is what that word "perverted persons" meant; close to the Temple, where the articles were used as worship in the groves. It was sexual perversion at its finest under the guise of religion. Ashtoreth means "star." She was the female goddess of fertility, sometimes known as Ashtart or Ishtar. Chemosh, we read in verse 13, is the word that means "subduer." Most of the gods of the Ammonites and the Moabites worship this god. This god is also called Baal-Peor sometimes or Mars, if you will, or Saturn; all kind of the same gods. Milcom, verse 13, was the Phoenician god that they sacrificed children to. So everything that said God's not involved with this, this is abomination, this young man went out and destroyed, and he turned these pornographic areas of idolatry into graveyards. It's amazing how much needed to be done and destroyed. All of this, by the way, left by Amon, his father, and Manasseh, his grandfather. This was all the result of fifty-seven years of bad leadership because Hezekiah had pretty much restored everything in a way that the LORD was honored. But what followed was twice the years of horror.

And so this guy was on a march. Not satisfied with cleansing Judah, Josiah then traveled to the north because he wanted to stamp out any vestiges of things that were close to his borders or associated with him that would be an abomination to the LORD. And so he went to Bethel. He went throughout Samaria. He threw down the high places. He even took the bones out of graveyards and ground them to powder. It's kind of like, "I'm going to kill you with death." But you're dead already. He just had had enough. He carried forth, in great zeal, obedience to the LORD.

And so we read, in verse 15, "Moreover the altar that was at Bethel," (that's in the north) "and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat," (who had founded the northern kingdom), "who had made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place and crushed it to powder, and burned the wooden image. As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar, and defiled it" as well because this was God's country, if you will. "Then he said," in verse 17, " 'What gravestone is this that I see?' So the men of the city told him, 'It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel.' And he said, 'Let him alone; let no one move his bones.' So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria." And then we read, "Now Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel" (the northern kingdom) "had made to provoke the LORD to anger; and he did to them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel." And so we read, in verse 20, "He executed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned men's bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem."

So, by the way, if you read the book of Hosea and the book of Amos, you will find that, in this chapter, many of what you read in this chapter are the fulfillment of what these two prophets said was coming. There's an interesting reference in verse 17 that you should probably know about. Back in 1 Kings 13, which would take you 350 years back in time, there was a prophet of God who came to this very place of worship, and he declared there that, in the future, a man would come whose name was Josiah. And when this fellow Josiah would come, born of the house of David, he would come and, "This'll be your sign. The ashes will be spilled out of this place. He'll take this altar apart." And so that was 350 years earlier. Notice that those in the area that were aware of that prophecy still kept that

truth alive. And when Josiah showed up there in the north to carry out God's anger against what had happened there, they said, "He said someone was coming with your name who did exactly what you've done." And so Josiah, I don't know if he was aware of that prophecy or not; he was made aware of it. He just said, "Well, leave this thing alone then," left the grave of that man undisturbed, and finally, satisfied, he went back to Jerusalem.

So we read, in verse 21, "Then the king" (back in town) "commanded all the people, saying, 'Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.' Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah" (he was twenty-six years old) "this Passover was held before the LORD in Jerusalem."

So, as Hezekiah had done, Josiah reinstated the Passover Feast. But this one was so elaborate that it kind of stood on its own in terms of the recorder's memory. In fact, if you go to 2 Chronicles 35, we are told that there were the offerings of lambs and goats numbered 30,000. I mean, this was way over the top, kind of making up for lost time. It was attended, we are told there, not just by Judah but by many of the ten tribes that now, overthrown in the north, were returning in portions and bits and pieces to the south from their dispersion. So, just kind of mentioned in passing here, mentioned in great detail two books down in your Bible in the Old Testament.

So we read, in verse 24, "Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols," (got rid of all those) "all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him."

Now that's quite a testimony, that the LORD said of him there was no one in the kingly line that showed such devotion and commitment to do as God said as he did. He was a doer. Not a hearer. And boy, did he do!

"Nevertheless," verse 26, "the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the

provocations with which Manasseh" (the grandfather) "had provoked Him. And the LORD said, 'I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.' Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went to the aid of the king of Assyria, to the River Euphrates; and King Josiah went against him. And Pharaoh Necho killed him at Megiddo when he confronted him. Then his servants moved his body in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in his father's place."

So, great testimony, great legacy. Unfortunately the LORD had said He was going to judge the nation. The judgment had been made. God is waiting, but there's no way to turn away God's judgment at this point. You might remember Isaiah, and especially Jeremiah, counseling the people before this time, "If you give up, you won't get killed. But they're coming, and there's nothing you can do about it." For years the LORD said, "Repent, and this won't happen." By the time Manasseh came, "This is going to happen, but because of Josiah, I'm going to wait. But it's coming." "So, what can I do?" "Well, you can surrender." And that message, can you imagine, surrender to a foreign power left such a bad taste in the people's mouths that they turned against the prophets, wanted to kill and lock them up. "Don't you tell us to do that!" And yet it was the only way they could have survived because God's mind and His day of judgment was set, and nothing could be turned away. So though he is a godly man, verse 25-verse 26 are the contrast. "Nevertheless" the LORD was going to bring judgment. It was too little too late, and this seventy-year captivity to the Babylonians was going to continue.

We have, in verse 28, 29 and 30, the very short history of Josiah's death. Again, 2 Chronicles 35 much more in-depth. Pharaoh Necho, who ruled in Egypt from 609 (so this was his first year of rulership) to 593, Josiah saw the movements as a threat to Judah, so he went out to war with the Egyptian king who was helping the Assyrians to conquer the world. Sadly, he didn't survive the battle. He was killed there in the battle at Megiddo. He was transported back to Jerusalem for burial. With his death, with his burial, any spiritual hope for the nation was gone. The last four kings would come in very quick succession, all of them evil. We read, in verse 30, that his son, Jehoahaz, would come to the throne. He was only going to last three months before we are told (in the last portion of the chapter) he was taken

by Pharaoh to Egypt where he would die. Jeremiah, in chapter 22 of his book, laments his coming and going. Yet in three months, he had already developed a terrible reputation; not for doing good like his dad but for being an evil guy.

So verse 31, "Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers" (not his father, but his fathers) "had done. Now Pharaoh Necho" (who had killed his father) "put him in prison at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Then Pharaoh Necho made Eliakim" (who was a brother to him) "the son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Pharaoh took Jehoahaz and went to Egypt, and he died there" (apparently a natural death, we aren't really told that he was killed).

So the Pharaoh comes. He replaces one son with another. Eliakim means "God has set us up." The name Jehoiakim means "Jehovah has set us up." Egypt used the title "El" for their gods. So it's kind of a slam to change their name; took the "El" away from him because that's the God, right? The God that we know. And so it's not so apparent in English, but the change of names would have been an offense to the God of Israel, if you will.

Chapter 23, right at the end there, verse 35, "So Jehoiakim gave the silver and gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give money according to the command of Pharaoh; he exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land, from every one according to his assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Necho. Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebudah the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD according to all that his fathers had done." And so not a very helpful guy.

We read, in chapter 24:1, "In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" (he's the one that's going to be overthrowing the southern kingdom) "came up, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. Then he turned and rebelled against him" (Nebuchadnezzar). "And the LORD sent against him raiding bands of Chaldeans, bands of Syrians, bands of Moabites, and bands of the people of Ammon; He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD which He had

spoken by His servants the prophets. Surely at the commandment of the LORD this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the LORD would not pardon. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Jehoiakim rested with his fathers. Then Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place" (another three-month reign). "And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates." Or, if you will, the Babylonians were now in complete control of world power.

So Jehoiakim lasted eleven years as a puppet of Egypt, paid through the nose. Egypt, however, would lose their power to Babylon in a very famous battle - historical battle - called Carchemish. It happened in late 605 B.C. It's mentioned in Jeremiah 46. So, Nebuchadnezzar now turned away from dealing with Egypt to turning to Judah herself. Jehoiakim would serve him three years before rebelling against him; 2 Chronicles 36 mentions the fight, and we can't know whether he died in Egypt because he just was taken there or if he died in the skirmish. But one way or the other, he lost his life. Then we read that Jehoiakim's eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin, would come to the throne. He would only last three months as well. He's called Coniah in the Bible as well. Wicked guy.

Chapter 24:8, here, "Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, as his servants were besieging it. Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner." (So arrested him, if you will.) "And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. Also he carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land. And he carried Jehoiachin

captive to Babylon. The king's mother, the king's wives, his officers, and the mighty of the land he carried into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. All the valiant men, seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths, one thousand, all who were strong and fit for war, these the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon." So you get a quick report of some of the sieges upon Jerusalem, many of them taking place kind of in a staggered way. During the brief reign of Jehoiachin, verse 12, which began in 606 B.C., the enemy began to come. He came in waves. God began counting seventy years of captivity in 606 when that first wave came in. In that first wave we know that they took - in the first deportation, according to Daniel 1 - Daniel as well as a lot of the rich kids and the very talented kids. And I guess Nebuchadnezzar wanted to get a bunch of Hebrew speaking young men that he could trust and train to be the intermediaries between him and the people that he would eventually take as captive. He came back in 597 when there was a rebellion to not pay taxes and all, and then finally he came back in 586, and the place was destroyed. Most people died. Only left in the land were the poor and the lame and all that Nebuchadnezzar had no interest in. So, Jehoiachin gets deposed to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar will eventually make his uncle Mattaniah king, changed his name to Zedekiah, and he would rule the last eleven years, from 597-586, kind of as a vassal king. And then, when that final judgment is laid out, it is really the end of the southern kingdom of Judah. So you can read about Zedekiah there in chapter 24, just the last three or four verses, and then in the last chapter we come to the summation, the siege.

Verse 1 of chapter 25 says, "Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign," (Zedekiah's reign; the siege began in 588, would last eighteen months to 586) "in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around. So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah" (so eighteen months). "By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled at night by the way of the gate between two walls, which was by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans were still encamped all around against the city. And the king went by way of the plain. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze

fetters, and took him to Babylon. And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around. Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the rest of the people who remained in the city and the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, with the rest of the multitude. But the captain of the guard left some of the poor of the land as vinedressers and farmers. The bronze pillars that were in the house of the LORD, and the carts and the bronze Sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried their bronze to Babylon. They also took away the pots, the shovels," and all that was used there in the Temple to carry them away.

Verse 18, "And the captain" and all, they just came in and they took the city; they took the people, and they took it over. So we read, down in verse 21, "Then the king of Babylon struck them and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive from its own land."

Eighteen months of siege. Final destruction of Jerusalem. And it will be fifty years before the people would be allowed to return. Notice that Zedekiah's fate was horrible. He watched his own sons killed, and then, as a lasting reminder, his eyes were put out; that was the last thing that he was able to see. And he, too, was taken to Babylon. And, again, the prophets - Jeremiah and even Ezekiel - spoke about the time of the seventy years where they would be taken to the land of the Chaldeans where they would die, they would be ensnared and entrapped because they had refused to serve the LORD. Notice what we just read, that very little was left behind - just the poorest.

We'll end with verse 22 that, after having overthrown the land and really destroyed everything in it, Nebuchadnezzar "made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, governor over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left. Now when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. And Gedaliah," verse 24, "took an oath before them and their men, and said to them, 'Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well

with you.' " (In other words, "Surrender, man!") "But it happened in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck and killed Gedaliah," (this fellow who was trying to deliver God's Word) "the Jews, as well as the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. And all the people, small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans. Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life."

So, with little left behind, God brought judgment upon the people. And now they find themselves in misery. The kingdom is ended. The nation is scattered. The people are in captivity. Jerusalem has been leveled. It won't be the last time that God's people find themselves in this position. In fact, in 70 A.D., Titus and the Roman legions will come and again drive the nation out of its capital and away from that place where God had chosen to put His name. In 1948, they were allowed to come back into the land, again reoccupying the land that God has for them. They will be scattered one more time. When the Church Age is over and the Lord gathers the church together in the rapture, an Antichrist will come, and three-and-a-half years into his seven-year reign, he'll be known for who he truly is, and Israel will scatter and, for the last time, be driven from their land. But the Lord has more to the story, and then Jesus will come to rule and to reign.

So, it's an important history to know, especially what we've gone through tonight. I know it's a lot to receive and take in. But, at the same time, most all the prophets fit right into the store here. And so when you're reading your Bible, especially those last seventeen books of the Old Testament, they find themselves, for the most part, in this very short history that we've gone through the last couple of months.

So next week, worship night. We're looking forward to just praying for our country. We've got an election coming up, got a pandemic to deal with. We've got folks, even from church, that have yet to make their way back to church out of

fear or maybe just out of caution. So we have a lot to pray for. We're going to get together in the tent outside or under the canopies, and then we're going to have communion as well. And, Lord be willing, in two weeks we'll start Chronicles, and there's a good opportunity, a good chance, that we will be able to move our services into our new building in a couple of weeks. So that's something to be praying for as well.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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