

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 30, Part 2

2 Kings 24-25, Part 2

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So, in 601, as I said a moment ago, the Babylonians suffered a setback at the borders of Egypt. And Jehoiakim thought he saw his chance. He could break free of the Babylonians and unquestionably the large tribute that they required every year.

We're told, interestingly, and again, I think it's fascinating how accurate the scripture can be. In verse 2, the Lord sent Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite, and Ammonite raiders against him to destroy Judah. So, Nebuchadnezzar has pulled back, but in the interim, you've got warlords who are loose.

And so, those warlords, for a year or so, are just running wild over the countryside, and Jerusalem is suffering. But eventually, probably in about 599, Nebuchadnezzar has got himself back together. It's interesting that one of the authors says that Egypt won that battle but had no strength left to recover from it.

Babylon lost the battle, but they had great strength to draw on for recovery. And so, in fact, Jehoiakim realized he had been on the wrong horse. And in 599 or thereabouts, the Babylonian army is back, besieging the city.

Now, I mentioned he made a covenant with Babylon in 605. That's when Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were taken into captivity as hostages. You will keep your covenant, or these people that I took will die a horrible death.

Well, fortunately, even though he broke his covenant, Daniel and the three men didn't die and we have their story now. So, in 598, Jehoiakim died and became king. It's easy to get those two names mixed up, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin.

Jehoiachin is the son and at this point, he saw the wisdom of surrendering and did. And as I said, he and the whole royal family were taken into captivity and many of the other leaders as well. And this is when Ezekiel went into captivity.

He's about 27 or 28 years old. He has been preparing for the priesthood all his life, and now it will never happen. He's been taken out of the holy land into unclean Babylon, and his life as a priest is over.

That's very interesting that in his 30th year when he would have started his priestly activities, that was the year God called him to be a prophet. He gave him a new calling. I think that's touching.

So, notice that Jehoiachin is simply taken into captivity. Verse 12, in the 8th year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. And verse 14, he carried all Jerusalem, that's not everybody, but everybody that counts, into exile.

It's verse 14, the officers, fighting men, skilled workers, and artisans. Why were those people taken? They had value. He could use them in Babylon as he did Daniel, for example, others.

That's the positive side. What's the negative side? Yes, the poor people were not going to be in a position to reestablish the strength of the nation. Get the leaders out, but why leave the poor people? That's right.

They could not afford them. They could not feed them. And somebody's got to be left behind to make sure that the nation just doesn't, the countryside just doesn't go to the wilderness again.

You got to have somebody left behind to grow grain to sell for tribute to Babylon. So, it's a very nicely calibrated situation. The leaders are gone and the poor people are left behind to kind of maintain the place.

Now, compare the treatment that Jehoiachin gets. He's simply taken into exile with what happened 12 years later to Zedekiah. Look at it in verse 25, verse 6. He was captured.

He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah where a sentence was pronounced on him. This is, for me, one of the most terrible fates I can think of. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes.

Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles, and took him to Babylon. The last thing he would ever see was the death of his sons. Now, why is Zedekiah treated so much more harshly than Jehoiachin is? Well, who put him on the throne? Nebuchadnezzar did.

After he took Jehoiachin into captivity, he chose one of Jehoiachin's uncles and put him on the throne as a lackey of the Babylonians. Here's how Ezekiel says it. Remember, Ezekiel's in Babylon.

He's writing back home to the people in Jerusalem. The people who are saying Jerusalem is never going to fall. Everything's going to be fine.

God's going to protect us because we're his favorites. Ezekiel says, say to these rebels of Israel, don't you understand the meaning of this riddle of the eagles? He's just told a very complex parable. Now he's explaining it.

The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took away her king and princes, and brought them to Babylon. He made a treaty with a member of the royal family and forced him to take an oath of loyalty. He also exiled Israel's most influential leaders.

So Israel would not become strong again and revolt. Only by keeping her treaty with Babylon could Israel survive. Nevertheless, this man, that's Zedekiah of Israel's royal family, rebelled against Babylon, sending ambassadors to Egypt to request a great army and many horses.

Can Israel break her sworn, and you can read covenants here, can Israel break her sworn covenants like that and get away with it? No, for surely as I live, says the Sovereign Yahweh, the king of Israel, will die in Babylon, the land of the king who put him in power and whose treaty he disregarded and broke. Jeremiah says much the same thing. I repeated this same message to King Zedekiah of Judah.

If you want to live, submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon and his people. Why do you insist on dying, you and your people? Why should you choose war, famine, and disease, which the Lord will bring against every nation that refuses to submit to Babylon's king? Do not listen to the false prophets who keep telling you the king of Babylon will not conquer you. They are liars.

This is what the Lord says. I've not sent these prophets. They're telling you lies in my name.

So, I'll drive you from this land. You will all die. You and all these prophets, too.

So, we're talking covenant here. Whether it was a good covenant or not, Zedekiah made a covenant with the king of Babylon. I will serve you.

If you'll put me on the throne, I'll serve you. And now, listening to the polls, the people don't want to be Babylonians anymore. He's decided to revolt, to break his covenant.

And Ezekiel from Babylon is saying it. Jeremiah at home is saying it. You cannot break your covenant and get away with it.

Covenants are really important to God. And so that's what's going on. Jehoiakim was never in a covenant of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, but Zedekiah was.

And so, the results are tragically different. Now, once again, here's the speculative question. 2419.

Zedekiah did evil in the eyes of the Lord just as Jehoiakim had done. Why did Zedekiah model himself on his brother and not his father? I don't know whether

you've seen this or not, but I've seen it where the little brother follows the big brother.

And oftentimes, the big brother can have a lot more influence than the father, especially if the father, as in that situation, is removed from direct day-to-day contact with his sons.

Much more contact with the brother. So, I think it's very interesting that whereas Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, it is said, they followed the way of their fathers. Zedekiah followed Jehoiakim.

Now again, who's following you? You say, well, nobody. I don't have any influence. Don't be too sure.

Don't be too sure. What example are you setting? That somebody is walking in. I've never forgotten.

I was walking in the snow. And Andrew, who was about, I don't know, six or seven, was behind me. He said, Daddy, take shorter steps.

I turned around and said, why? Because I've got to get in your footsteps. Is somebody watching your footsteps? Every once in a while, I meet somebody who says, oh, you said or did such and such years ago. And that made such an impression on me.

And I'm grateful. And then I think, oh, dear God, how many missteps have I made? And somebody was hurt or led off the path. Who's following you? Yes? Isn't it tough to follow in the footsteps of Jehoiakim? Absolutely.

And if that's the case? Yes. Yes. And whether you all heard that or not, isn't it possible that Zedekiah was taking the path of least resistance? To follow Josiah would have been hard.

Following Jehoiakim was not so hard. And that's then the next point, that we need to be careful that we don't take the path of least resistance. Years ago, George Barna said, religious practice in the United States is defined by three words, easy, simple, convenient.

I don't think it has changed. Yes. The road is narrow and it's steep.

And let's stay on it. Let's stay on it. Now, notice a little glimmer, I think, of Zedekiah's character.

By the ninth, this is 25, verse 3. 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. It's amazing that the city held out for two and a half years with a siege army around it. So, no food was coming in.

So, they're finally down, and there's nothing, no food. Then the city wall was broken through, 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. They fled toward the Araba, which is the valley that the Jordan runs in.

But the Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, and he was captured. What does that little incident tell us about the character of Zedekiah? Exactly, exactly.

Rather than stand in the last hour with those that he had led, who had led into this mess, he runs. And what about the realism of what he tried to do? Notice what it says? They broke through at night even though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. Did they really think they were going to get away? So again, it seems to me that we, and perhaps I'm too hard on him, but I think we see a cowardly person who is not really very in touch with reality.

And what about his army? What does it say about them? Exactly right. They had learned their lesson very well. They were no more loyal to him than he was to his people and to God.

Again, there's a lesson in there. Am I? Are you the kind of person who breeds loyalty to us because we are loyal to God and to those in authority over us? Again, this is one of my original thoughts from C.S. Lewis. He says Adam and Eve were misled.

They thought that nature was subject to them merely because of their authority. They did not realize that nature was in subjection to them because they were in subjection to God. And when they broke their subjection to God, nature broke its subjection to us.

As he says it, and I don't know how far I agree with this, but as he says it, before the fall, they decided when to sleep and when to eat. After the fall, our bodies decide for us when we will eat and when we will sleep. So yes, I think in that little vignette, we see an awful lot about Zedekiah and his leadership.