

## God Judges Judah

### Lesson Scope: [2 Chronicles 36](#)

*References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise*

#### Lesson Focus

Josiah's revival came to a swift end at his death. Jeremiah and the people made great lamentation over him. At least in part, the Book of Lamentations seems to have been inspired by this calamity.

The next twenty-two years were a swift slide into final judgment and destruction for Judah. Three of Josiah's sons—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah—along with his grandson Jehoiachin, served as kings and led Judah into gross idolatry. Jeremiah prophesied boldly against this wickedness. He wept many tears for Judah. But Jehoiakim lightly threw into the fire the pages Jeremiah had Baruch write. But that did not destroy God's Word. He had it written again, this time with many more words of judgment like to the first. The princes demanded Jeremiah's death. He was cast into a dungeon and there languished for a time.

In Ezekiel 8, God reveals the depravity of the hearts of the leaders. No wonder the spiritual temperature was near freezing. Judah's persistent wickedness made her ripe for judgment. God's Spirit will not always strive with man. God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed and Judah to be carried into captivity.

God graciously works with an apostate people to awaken them to repentance. But if they persist in disobedience, God will pour out His wrath upon them.

Jeremiah prophesied during this time. He is sometimes called the weeping prophet. He wrote the Book of Lamentations as he pondered the times. When we consider what could have been, it certainly was a sad time. But the lesson ends with a message of hope. Do not miss it. God is long-suffering and merciful. But Judgment Day will come quite suddenly. Be ready.

**Lesson Aim:** To evaluate a people's departure from truth and God's dealings with them.

**Theme Verse:** [Revelation 2:5](#). Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

## Lesson Text

### National Decline

[2 Chronicles 36:1-4](#) <sup>(KJV)</sup> **Then** the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Jehoahaz *was* twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. <sup>4</sup> And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt. [2 Chronicles 36:8-10](#) Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they *are* written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. <sup>9</sup> Jehoiachin *was* eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD. <sup>10</sup> And when the year was expired, king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem.

### Increased Transgression

[2 Chronicles 36:11-15](#) Zedekiah *was* one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. <sup>12</sup> And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD his God, *and* humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet *speaking* from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>13</sup> And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. <sup>14</sup> Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:

## **Utter Destruction**

**2 Chronicles 36:17-21** Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave *them* all into his hand. <sup>18</sup> And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all *these* he brought to Babylon. <sup>19</sup> And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. <sup>20</sup> And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: <sup>21</sup> To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: *for* as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

## **Questions for Study**

### **National Decline**

1. How could Judah tum again to idolatry so quickly?
2. Why did God allow Judah's troubles to multiply? Was it His justice or His mercy?

### **Increased Transgression**

3. What stirred up God's wrath?
4. Why was there no remedy for their sin?
5. How are men's hearts hardened?

### **Utter Destruction**

6. How did Judah's judgments reflect her sins?
7. What losses can we expect if we depart from God?

## **Analysing the Passage**

Both Egypt and Babylon sought to dominate Judah by choosing its kings. The power vacuum left by Josiah's death allowed for this to happen. Both countries imposed taxation upon the land. Judah seemed to prefer Egypt over Babylon. Much of this was because they rejected God's direction through the prophet Jeremiah to submit to Babylon.

During these years the people of Judah sinned more and more against the God of heaven. They followed the abominations of the wicked. God

rose up betimes (36:15), early and often sending warnings and messengers. But He could only withhold judgment so long. A remedy could not be found (36:16).

Chaldees (36:17) were from Chaldea, where Abraham had come out of. It is somewhat ironic that his descendants were now forcibly returned to the place that he had left. This happened because they had degenerated to a similar level of heathendom or maybe worse than the Chaldeans. Because of this, they forfeited God's kindness for Abraham's sake.

Sabbaths (36:21) refer to its desolation for seventy years. Judah was not colonized by strangers but was left unoccupied, ready for God's chosen people to reoccupy at the end of the seventy years.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **National Decline**

1. God uses defeat and discouraging circumstances to convince people of their true condition (36:3-4, 10). The disappointments of life are not all caused by sin, but often they are. God uses the troubles of life to draw us closer to Him if we allow them to. God was trying to get Judah's attention. Romans 8:28 tells us, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

2. Man's wickedness and rebellion will be revealed (36:8). "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). People give sin many fancy names today. They make excuses by declaring sin to be an illness. They refuse to acknowledge that many of these things can be controlled through the power of God Spirit within as one crucifies the flesh. But finally, sin is sin and God will deal with it. There will be no escaping the consequences.

3. Departure from truth brings a loss of godly blessings and leads to greater bondage (36:9-10). God's blessing has always been conditional upon our obedience. We have only two masters. If we are not sewing God, we are in bondage to Satan. The gift of God is eternal life (His blessing), but the wages of sin is death (bondage).

### **Increased Transgression**

4. Pride, rebellion, and unfaithfulness to one's commitments accompany one's departure from truth (36:12-14). The independent spirit of our day has caused many to rebel against the direction of the church. One individual may go to the right and another to the left. Either way, striv-

ing for independence is still rebellion. Though it is possible that the church could be wrong, the collective direction of a group of God's people deserves careful consideration. If our personal conviction exceeds the group, there is nothing keeping us from living it. Because of the danger of harming the young and innocent, we should be very careful in resisting the church and forcing our way. All of us will need to learn to submit on some issues.

5. God mercifully warns people as they depart from truth (36:15).

Think of Nathan speaking to King David, Ananias to the apostle Paul, Paul to Simon the sorcerer, and the Book of Jude to the church then and now. God in His mercy warns us and leads us to repentance, but He never forces us.

6. Mocking and resisting God's warnings finally seal one's doom (36:16). Church leaders are human and will not always do things the best way, but we respect them for what they are striving to do and respect them because God placed them as He saw fit. When they speak truth and administer discipline and we try to excuse ourselves because of how it was said or done, we tread on dangerous ground. God intends their leadership for our good, and our pride and stubbornness may seal our doom.

### **Utter Destruction**

7. Death and destruction are the punishment for those who depart from truth (36:17-19). Achan is an Old Testament example. Ananias and Sapphira are a New Testament example. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4) is no less true today than when it was penned. God in His mercy often withholds judgment for a time, but that does not make His Word any less sure. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

8. Departure from truth brings one into bondage of the enemy (36:20).

The devil presents a mirage. He makes sin look inviting. He says it is freedom. But the net result is bondage. By the time we understand that, we may be so entangled in his net that we can hardly get out. Only by the grace of God can we live free of his control.

9. God both keeps His Word and offers hope to His people (36:21).

God's blessed promises are sure, but they are always conditional on obedience. Judah's punishment ended after seventy years, as God said it would. Our lives contain enough pain and sorrow for us to desire a bet-

ter place. We know that if we are faithful, pain and sorrow will cease at death.

### **Important Teachings**

1. God uses defeat and discouraging circumstances to convince people of their true condition (36:3-4, 10).
2. Man's wickedness and rebellion will be revealed (36:8).
3. Departure from truth brings a loss of godly blessings and leads to greater bondage (36:9-10).
4. Pride, rebellion, and unfaithfulness to one's commitments accompany one's departure from truth (36:12-14).
5. God mercifully warns people as they depart from truth (36:15).
6. Mocking and resisting God's warnings finally seals one's doom (36:16).
7. Death and destruction are the punishment for those who depart from truth (36:17-19).
8. Departure from truth brings one into bondage of the enemy (36:20).
9. God both keeps His Word and offers hope to His people (36:21).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. How could Judah turn again to idolatry so quickly?

This is so very human. Instead of thinking for themselves, they followed the last person who impressed them. Sometimes we define this as the mob spirit. It is likely that some of the mob who welcomed Jesus at the triumphal entry were in the crowd crying, "Crucify him, crucify him" less than a week later.

2. Why did God allow Judah's troubles to multiply? Was it His justice or His mercy?

He allowed their troubles to multiply to call them to stop and think, to consider their ways. His justice is evident in that they got what they deserved. His mercy is evident in that He gave them less than they deserved. His mercy is also evident in that He gave them warning and opportunity to repent.

3. What stirred up God's wrath?

The people's pride brought God's wrath. Zedekiah and his people rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, whom God had sent to punish them.

They refused to turn to God. They polluted the house of the Lord. They despised and mocked His messengers and abused His prophets.

4. Why was there no remedy for their sin?

The people rejected the remedy God provided. Also there is a line that is crossed where God allows men to believe a lie. We do not reach this place easily. God gives many warnings and sets many barriers in place. But if we insist on turning away from God's remedy, we will eventually cross that line and become deceived.

5. How are men's hearts hardened?

Men's hearts are hardened when they go against their conscience.

Truth demands a response. God has a way of making men face truth.

Since God sends these circumstances, we sometimes say that God hardened the heart. But when men refuse to respond, it is their choice; so it seems more correct to say that men hardened their own heart.

6. How did Judah's judgments reflect her sins?

They polluted God's house—it was burned to purge it. They despised His word, Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled. They slew the young men, among the abominations of the heathen was the sacrifice of children. Their treasure was carried away, it was given to the gods they now worshiped. They refused to be servants of God—therefore they were taken into slavery by their enemies.

7. What losses can we expect if we depart from God?

We can expect to lose our children. It may be to materialism, to politics, or to a luxurious lifestyle. Some may join the army; others may turn to drugs. Many churches today wonder why their young people do not stay. Many of us have accumulated considerable wealth. If we are selfish with it and begin to trust in it, we will likely lose it. Ultimately, we will lose our home in heaven.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

It is sad how quickly truth can be lost. Passing it from one generation to the next can be difficult. But there is always a remnant. In Judah there was Jeremiah. In Babylon there was Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Quite likely, there were other unnamed heroes of faith who did not worship the idols. God always offers a place of blessing to those who are faithful. "Be not faithless, but believing."

**Research Guide:** Read Jeremiah Chapters 26 to 39 and 52.