

# Why Jerusalem Fell: God's Perspective

2 Chronicles 36:15–21

This 36th chapter of 2 Chronicles, read a moment ago, records the reigns of the four last kings of Israel: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. As we saw two weeks ago, our present text is a commentary on Judah's fall—essentially a sermon. The chronicler, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, doesn't just give bare facts; he gives the inspired interpretation of those facts. He doesn't just mention that “so-and-so, son of so-and-so, reigned as king, and here is what happened during his reign—wars, building projects, and so on.” No! He gives the inspired commentary—God's interpretation of those facts. This is what makes the present account so valuable. It is not just bare history. This is God's perspective on the truth. This is what God is going to hold us responsible to act upon. It is vital that we understand it and carefully consider our own actions.

As we look at this divine commentary we will consider three topics: (1) our fathers' promise, (2) our plea, and (3) our God's perspective.

## 1. Our fathers' promise

Our text begins: “The LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.” (The phrase “rising up early and sending them” means something like “sending word to them again and again by his messengers.”<sup>1</sup> It means God didn't tell them just once or twice, but repeatedly.)

Don't miss the significance of the key phrase “the LORD God of their fathers” (v. 15). Israel was a people that knew the truth. God had revealed himself to them. He gave to them his laws, his prophets, his tabernacle, his worship. Israel had the Levites, who went around from city to city teaching God's law. No one could say he never knew. Here is the principle: “To whom much was given, of him much will be required.”<sup>2</sup> Israel had greater spiritual privileges, therefore, greater responsibility. If God's people reject the LORD, worship idols and pursue a life of sin, their guilt is all the greater. The same principle applies to us as well. It is a universal principle.

In 2 Chronicles the phrase “the LORD *his* God” is applied not only to good kings like Solomon, Asa, Jotham, Uzziah and Hezekiah but to wicked kings like Ahaz, Manasseh and Jehoiakim. This is very telling. Even though Ahaz, Manasseh and Jehoiakim were wicked kings—idolaters who led God's people astray—they are regarded as *in covenant* with the God of Israel. Their fathers had committed the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. NASB

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:48 ESV

nation to God; therefore, their sons had greater responsibility. If you have been raised in a Christian home, if you have heard the gospel in a faithful Christian church, you are more responsible. You have heard the truth; therefore, God requires you to adhere to it. It is one thing to sin unknowingly. It is an aggravated offense to sin against knowledge. Hear the holy Scriptures: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” “To whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”<sup>3</sup> Those who commit an offense, knowing that it is evil, knowing that God is watching, knowing that they are responsible for their actions, are guilty of greater sin.

Lysander Spooner was a nineteenth-century American abolitionist, legal theorist and Unitarian, that is, a person who denies the Trinity. Lysander Spooner contended that the U.S. Constitution is not a contract and that citizens should not be bound to it. He argued that people should rule themselves and decide their own fate. It does not matter that the founding fathers signed the Constitution. It is not binding upon us. He was very strong and insistent on this opinion.

Spooner is not the only one with this opinion. Lots of Americans have imbibed the spirit of rugged individualism. They advocate personal liberty, self-reliance and independence. It seems unfair to them that individuals should be legally represented by an ancestor whom they have never met. And yet this is what the Bible teaches. All human beings are represented by our covenant head, Adam, the first man. When Adam sinned, the whole human race fell in him. All human beings inherit Adam’s sin. It is not just a few disconnected individuals that hold this opinion. The Eastern Orthodox churches reject this doctrine. They speak of “*ancestral* sin,” not original sin. They are very outspoken about this. Here’s a sample: “When it comes to the details regarding the Fall and sin, the Roman West takes a different view than the Orthodox East.”<sup>4</sup>

But the Bible is very clear: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”<sup>5</sup> Adam was the covenant head of the old race; Christ is the covenant head of the redeemed race. Every human being alive has inherited the guilt of Adam’s first sin. And the good news of the gospel is that those who look to Jesus Christ in true faith inherit his perfect righteousness. There is no other way to be saved and go to heaven apart from the perfect righteousness of Christ. “What saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). If you and I believe God’s Word and look to Christ for salvation, we are saved. Our eternal destiny depends on it! Some might say that’s

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<sup>3</sup> Jas. 4:17, Luke 12:48, Rom. 1:32

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.saintjohnchurch.org/original-sin-vs-ancestral-sin/> accessed 1-24-24

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 15:22

too simple, but remember what Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” The only way to be saved is to believe in Jesus Christ, and by believing in Jesus Christ you are not only saving yourself, you are also committing your whole family to Christ. You are establishing a Christian family, a covenant household. You are, as it were, declaring, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Of course this is what you want for your family. You believe in Christ, you want your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren to believe in him too. Christ is the way, the truth and the life. “Neither is there salvation in any other.” You want your children and grandchildren to believe this. You know that it is best for them. You know that there are great promises promised to them in the gospel. You know that growing up in a Christian home in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation is a great advantage to a child. The Bible promises, “train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” That is God’s promise to your children through you. It is their spiritual birthright, as it were. They may not realize the full significance of this when they are young, but eventually they will. And if they go astray, if they do not remain in the faith, if they apostatize—heaven forbid!—and deny the faith, it will not go well for them. As the apostle Peter clearly states, “it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Pet. 2:21). The same applies to you: it would have been better for you if you had never confessed Christ, than to confess him and then betray him. It would be better never to take membership vows than to promise, “I believe in Christ as my Lord and Savior, and I profess that I will submit in the Lord to the government of this church,” and then later to walk away, saying, “I just don’t want to be a church member anymore.” Joining the church is a lot more significant than joining a social club. If you join the local flower club, then later decide that you are just too busy, that does not make a whole lot of difference. You can just pay your remaining dues and walk away. You can convince your fellow flower club members that you just don’t have time for flowers anymore. No one will be offended. Being a member of the flower club is not for everyone. You once were interested in flowers, now you want to devote your time to something else. What is the big deal? But with the church, it is a different matter. When you join the church, you are committing your life to Christ. You are acknowledging that he is the only Savior. To decide that you just do not want to be a member of the church anymore, that you just want to pursue something else, is a betrayal of Christ. It is akin to saying, “I don’t want to be saved anymore. I don’t want to spend eternity in heaven. I am having too much fun enjoying earthly pleasures.” Listen to the warnings in the book of Numbers:

“But the man who *is* clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person *shall be cut off from among his people*, because he did not bring the offering of the Lord at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.”

“But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and *he shall be cut off from among his people*. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, *that person shall be completely cut off*; his guilt shall be upon him.”<sup>6</sup>

When you play with the Lord, you play for keeps!

So what we see in 2 Chronicles is covenantal continuity. Those who become part of the covenant community are held to the commitments made by our spiritual fathers. Our fathers committed the covenant people to the Lord. It is the Lord’s church! They have said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” The Lord heard that vow, and he holds the whole church to it. It is not *our* church, to do with it whatever we want. It is the Lord’s church. Make sure you understand that before you commit yourself to the church. If you are part of the church, there are great rewards, but if you turn your back on it, you are turning your back on Christ. Here, then, is our fathers’ promise. Secondly, consider

## **2. Our plea**

Look at the words in verse 15, “because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.” We most assuredly believe that God is a God of compassion! We appeal to this fact during public worship in the assurance of pardon. God is merciful and compassionate. What a reassuring truth!

“Jesus, thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress; ’midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head. Bold shall I stand in thy great day; for who aught to my charge shall lay? Fully absolved through these I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.”<sup>7</sup>

For the Christian, the blood and righteousness of Christ are our only plea. We cannot say, “*I* am perfect. I have a good record. I have flawlessly kept the law of God in every respect. If anyone deserves to be saved, then surely me.”

I remember a funeral that I conducted a number of years ago. It was for a neighbor. He was a young man, and there was a large crowd in attendance. The deceased did not attend church, but he prayed every night with his two boys. He wanted them to know about Christ. At his funeral I clearly gave the gospel. I said that God is merciful. None of us is good, none of us is good enough to go to heaven. The deceased was not good enough to go to heaven. Neither are any of us. When I finished the sermon, a few members of the audience rose to share their

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<sup>6</sup> Num. 9:13, 15:30–31

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/jesus-thy-blood-and-righteousness/>

memories. The first to stand up was the deceased's grandmother. Let's call the young man Bill. She said, "Bill *was* good enough. He was a good boy."

Of course she loved her grandson. Her perspective was skewed. She was thinking, *this man has just debased the memory of my grandson. I have got to correct the record. I must say something.*"

Yes, Bill was a good neighbor. He did kind things. He took care of his property. He was devoted to his family. All of these are good things. But the goodness that *we* do does not qualify us to go to heaven. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." God's standard is absolute perfection. The only one who measures up to that perfect standard is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' blood and righteousness will be our only plea on the day of judgment. Is that true for you? Do you know that you are a sinner, that you have broken God's holy law, that there is no hope for you apart from Christ? The blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ is our only plea. Thirdly, consider

### **3. Our God's perspective**

The church is in covenant with God. The God of heaven is our God. He is "the LORD God of our fathers." That is the truth, and it is inescapable. The history of the covenant people is *our* history. This is how God looks at us. You and I are in covenant with God.

What we have in our text this afternoon is God's covenantal lawsuit, his case against Israel. Listen to the charges: (1) They mocked the messengers of God. (2) They despised God's words. (3) They scoffed at His prophets. (4) They failed to keep the Sabbath.

So what happened? They kept provoking God until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; he gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God—the treasures of the house of the LORD—all these he took to Babylon. Then they burned the holy temple, the symbol of God's presence in the midst of his people. They broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. Here are two relevant texts from the book of Jeremiah:

"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against

this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them” (Jer. 25:8–9).

A few chapters later we read, “For thus says the LORD: After *seventy years* are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place” (Jer. 29:10).

From Israel’s perspective, they might have been thinking, *hasn’t God been unduly harsh on us? After all, we are the covenant people, we are the recipients of God’s promises.* But God is a God of justice. Israel had provoked God over and over for many years. God’s patience had run out. He must destroy his beloved city Jerusalem to teach his people a lesson. God is a God who keeps both his promises and his threats. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.<sup>8</sup>

God does not make empty threats. He keeps his word. If he had not brought upon Jerusalem what he had long threatened, he would make himself a liar.

God is *not* a liar. He keeps his promises and he keeps his threats. We, the covenant people, can take encouragement from that. Our God is a God who keeps his word. Let us fear him, and let us imitate him. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Heb. 10:31 NASB