

## The Bitterness of Rebellion

2 Chronicles 36:1–14

Last week we finished considering the life of King Josiah, the last good king of Judah. This was certainly a high point in Israel's history. Josiah was a godly man. "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left"—an admirable record. But at the end of his life he foolishly went to war against Necho, king of Egypt. This war was contrary to God's command. Necho was not threatening Israel; his real target was the king of Assyria. But "Josiah went out against him" anyway. This was not a just war—a *defensive* war—but an unjust war, picking a fight against a nation that was not threatening Israel. God desires "peace on earth, good will toward men." His gospel is not spread through force, but by appealing to the mind and conscience and heart of the hearers. Lasting peace will never be realized until there is universal recognition of Christ, the Prince of Peace, which is why the world so sorely needs the preaching of the Gospel. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

After Josiah's death, we read that "the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem." Here is succession by heredity, crowning a king's son in the place of his father. This is a feature of governance through monarchies. When a king has wise and godly heirs, it works out. But when a king or queen has wicked, irreligious progeny, things do *not* work out. Monarchy does not usually have a mechanism for removing evil rulers; once a man is in power, it is awfully hard to remove him.

In the case of Jehoahaz, time would soon show that this was not a wise choice. According to 2 Kings 23:32, Jehoahaz "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done." Here was God's assessment of the character and life of the man whom the people of the land had made king.

The Bible says, "He that ruleth over men must be *just*, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. 23:3). Such did *not* characterize the reign of Jehoahaz. He was not a man of good character. So it was probably a mercy that he was deposed after a reign of only three months. No doubt the faithful saints of that time breathed a sigh of relief—"Good riddance!"—but the way that Jehoahaz was deposed was an affront to patriotic Jews. The chronicler records that "the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Then the king of Egypt made Jehoahaz's brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz his brother and carried him off to Egypt." We've heard of "election interference," but here was a foreign nation—Egypt, under which God's people were enslaved for hundreds of years—not only interfering in Israel's internal politics but imposing on Israel annual tribute money that was a heavy

burden, and also a painful reminder that Israel was no longer a free nation. This was a fulfillment of Leviticus 25, where God had warned his people, “if you despise My statutes [and] break My covenant . . . I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you.”

At this point, because of their disobedience, Israel was not a free people. The same thing might be happening to us. For too long Americans have excluded God from government. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (Ps. 33:12)—but at this point in history God is *not* our Lord. The slogan “In God we trust” is not only untrue, it is a constant reminder of the heights from which we have fallen.

After Jehoahaz came three other kings. First, Jehoiakim. He was “twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God.” This time, it was not Egypt but Babylon that interfered in Israel’s internal affairs. “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him, and bound him in bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon.” Not only was the state humiliated, but so was the church: “Nebuchadnezzar also carried off some of the articles from the house of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon.” Here is *sacrilege*, taking the sacred utensils used in God’s holy worship—the vessels of the altar, the pots, the shovels, the basins, the fleshhooks, the firepans, the pure candlestick, with its lamps, and all the vessels thereof (cf. Ex. 38). Many of these items were made of pure gold, and were very valuable. Any Israelite who stole them out of the temple would be cut off from the people of God. But here came a Babylonian king and did it by force, and the priests and Levites did not have the power to overcome him.

Next came Jehoiachin. He was only eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem “three months and ten days.” The chronicler kept good records! Again, the nation that interfered was Babylon. Babylon removed him and carried him into exile. How terrifying this must have been to an eight-year-old boy! Imagine being carried off to a foreign land, ripped away from home and family. How this must have been a grief to Jehoichin’s mother! It is not pleasant to review this history, but it is true, and God wants us to learn from it. Such is the bitterness of rebellion. Rebellion bears its bitter fruit.

Jehoichin’s mother is identified in 2 Kings 23:31 as “Hamutal [חַמּוּטָל], the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah,” who was also the mother of King Zedekiah (2 Kgs. 24:18).

The last king of Judah (by this time the remnant of Israel) was Zedekiah. He was 21 years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. He rebelled against

King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear an oath by God; but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel.

What a sad account! Here is a man who was so spiritually blinded that he could not see the handwriting on the wall: a turnover of three kings in a little over eleven years—the three kings immediately preceding him each carried away against his will to a foreign land. Here is a man with all the wisdom of 21 years, whose heart was filled with pride. He refused to turn to the LORD God of Israel.

The Psalmist testified that “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 124:8). Yes, it’s true. Our *only* help is in the name of the LORD. He alone knows the end from the beginning. He alone can deliver us from danger. How foolish to turn away from the Lord! No matter where we are in the walk of life, our only hope is to turn (or return) to the LORD with all our heart. He alone is our hope and salvation!

But Zedekiah was not alone in his wickedness. “Moreover all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord which He had consecrated in Jerusalem.”

This was a portent of things to come, for we are fast moving toward the Babylonian Captivity.

Such was the unhappy state of Israel just before it went into captivity and ceased to be a sovereign nation. Did Zedekiah have any sense of how short was his time? Within 11 years he and most of Israel would be taken into captivity. Look what happened to Israel when it disobeyed. Consider three things, first,

### **1. Humiliation**

Here was a once free and independent people with peace, prosperity and happiness within their borders. But when they disobeyed God, they became subject to foreign domination. Nations that did not worship the true God—that did not have the Lord on their side—would dominate them. Godliness is strength, but when Israel ceased to worship God in truth, God withdrew his hand of blessing. Israel’s king became a mere figurehead, ruling only at the will of Israel’s captors. Israel was humiliated before its enemies.

And prophecy was fulfilled. Moses had clearly warned the people that if Israel rebelled against the Lord, “The Lord will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the Lord will drive you” (Deut. 28:36–37). All this happened to the letter, proving for all time that Moses was indeed a true prophet of the Lord. Second,

### **2. Bondage**

God created Israel to be a free people, not under foreign domination. Consider the promises of God's word.

"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance" (Ps. 89:15).

Psalm 144 goes into greater detail: "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as pillars, sculptured in palace style; that our barns may be full, supplying all kinds of produce; that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; that our oxen may be well laden; that there be no breaking in or going out; that there be no outcry in our streets. Happy are the people who are in such a state; happy are the people whose God is the Lord!" (Ps. 144:12–15).

But when Israel was unfaithful to God, God allowed them to go into bondage. As in Egypt centuries before, God's people would be made to serve with rigor. They would learn that it is better to serve the Lord than to serve godless taskmasters. Israel had once been under Egyptian bondage; now, they would experience captivity in Babylon. The lengths to which God would go to convince his people that there is safety only in him!

Look at what's happening to America. We've got people in charge who don't believe in moral absolutes. Who imagine that there is a whole range of sexes, not just two. Who fancy that a person might have been born into the wrong body. Who convince impressionable children to have supposed sex-change operations. Who are OK with doctors mutilating the bodies of children when they are not even old enough to give legal consent.

This kind of madness doesn't happen in Communist China, but in the USA it is considered "healthcare"! Taxpayers are expected to pay for it. The USA is going to great lengths to throw off centuries of moral capital.

For years our military-industrial complex has sought to rule the world, to dominate other nations, but foreign nations are starting to push back, to enter into agreements and treaties independently of the US. China is now partnering with Saudi Arabia.

Israel was under "cruel bondage" in Egypt, but because of spiritual blindness, they would not hearken unto Moses (Ex. 6:9). We, too, are going into bondage—bondage to sin, and maybe to the bondage of foreign domination. After all, God's blessings and curses are still in force.

In John chapter 8 Jesus taught a lesson on freedom and bondage:

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a

slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore *if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.* (John 8:31–36).

The Jews showed their spiritual blindness when they asserted, “We were never in bondage to any man.” This is seeing the past with rose-colored glasses!

Thirdly,

### **3. Instability**

Look at the instability that resulted when Judah disobeyed. Losing their last good king, Josiah, in a senseless war. Being hassled and harassed by two different foreign powers. Four different kings in a little more than a decade.

Israel rejected the only one who could give them stability: our unchanging, promise-keeping God. And what did they get in return? Tyranny, subservience, subjection, shame, loss of freedom, loss of sovereignty, enslavement, foreign domination, humiliation, servitude, bondage. All these things happen to a nation that doesn't want to submit to God. Such is the bitterness of rebellion!

As Bob Dylan famously sang, “You gotta serve somebody. It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody.” I'm not sure if he's born again or not, but in this case he's onto something. If we choose to rebel against the benign rule of Christ, we will experience human bondage. Escaping from the Lord doesn't bring freedom. If you disobey God, it will not go well for you.

God sent his only Son into the world to take on our humanity. He voluntarily undertook the assignment of going to the cross, taking our sin upon himself, so that he might bring us to God. If we become the servants of Christ, we will experience true freedom eternally. Only in Christ can we escape the bitterness of rebellion. Amen.