

The Fall of Jerusalem

2 Chronicles 36:15–21

We are coming to the end of 2 Chronicles. Throughout this study we have considered Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, the usurper Athaliah, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim (יְהוֹיָקִים), Jehoiachin (יְהוֹיָכִין) and Zedekiah.

That list of kings sounds like the genealogies of the Bible. It reminds me of the statement in Hebrews 7, “Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.” There was a long line of priests in ancient Israel. Each one kept succeeding his predecessor, because he died. Moreover, remember the recurring phrase in Genesis 5, “and he died (וַיָּמָת)” (eight times in all): “all the days that *Adam* lived were 930 years, and he died . . . all the days of *Seth* were 912 years, and he died . . . all the days of *Enosh* were 905 years, and he died . . . all the days of *Kenan* (Cainan) were 910 years, and he died . . . all the days of *Mahalalel* were 895 years, and he died . . . all the days of *Jared* were 962 years, and he died . . . all the days of *Methuselah* were 969 years, and he died . . . all the days of *Lamech* were 777 years, and he died.”

One of the most important purposes of the Bible is to remind us of our own mortality. Just two days ago a former deacon of this church died. I will conduct his funeral this Tuesday. His death was not unexpected. He had been diagnosed with cancer seven months ago. He had a large cancerous mass in his lower abdomen. Watching him waste away was not a pretty sight. Other people die quite unexpectedly, seemingly in the prime of life, and it is a shock to people around them. The Bible plainly says, “it is appointed unto men once to die.” All of us are going to die, and we need to prepare for that. The Bible not only teaches us the *fact* of human death but shows us what follows death: “It is appointed unto men once to die, *but after this the judgment*” (Heb. 9:27). All of us are going to die. Some of us may die in old age; others of us may die young; but the fact remains that all of us are going to die, and we ought to prepare for it. Solomon wrote: “A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth” (Eccl. 7:1). He seems to be saying that the day of death is more precious than the day of one’s birth. How so? Isn’t the God of heaven the Lord and giver of life? Yes, indeed! Life itself is a gift. So how can the Preacher say that the day of death is better than the day of one’s birth? Perhaps, as Gill succinctly puts it, “it is more happy to be freed from trouble than to enter into it.” Life in a sinful world is full of trouble. “The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.” Who can deny this? Every human being is going to experience trouble. That is bad news. We need to learn that. That is a biblical doctrine. But God wants us to learn it in context. In the greater context of the Bible we learn that God *overcomes* trouble. He is victorious over trouble. Satan causes trouble, but in the end, Satan—also called

Apollyon, the destroyer—is destroyed. The kingdoms of this world will surely become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ. Christ the Lord—not Satan—will reign forever and ever!

Each of the ancient patriarchs before the flood died, and in the biblical account we have the recurring phrase, “and he died.” The priests of Israel—to a man—all died. The kings of Israel and Judah all died. The apostles all died. And we, too, will die. The Lord Jesus Christ also died, but he rose again! He rose again on the third day, never to die again! “He arose a victor from the dark domain, and he lives forever with his saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!”¹ Christian, you serve a living Savior! Moses died. Buddha died. Confucius died. Muhammad died. The founding fathers of our country all died. But Christ is alive! He is alive today, sitting at the right hand of the Father, interceding for his church. Christ is alive!

All the kings of Israel and Judah are dead. We have the record of their lives in the book of 2 Chronicles. We are coming to the end of the book. We are going to get into these verses more in depth when we continue next time. But I want you to notice now that God doesn’t just give us the facts of history: this or that individual lived and died; he was so many years and months old when he died. God doesn’t just give us the facts. He gives us the interpretation. That is what we are coming to this afternoon. What we have read for our Scripture reading this afternoon is the divine perspective on the life of these kings. More than that, it is the divine perspective on the history of Israel and Judah. It came to an end. The last four kings of Judah went into captivity. Jehoahaz went into captivity in Egypt. Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin went into captivity in Babylon. Zedekiah also went into captivity in Babylon. He had a very tragic end. The story is given in 2 Kings 25, beginning at verse six: “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.”

Here is the miserable end of all those who rebel against God. It is a picture and illustration of what is going to happen to all God’s enemies: “these shall go into everlasting punishment.” That is not a pleasant thought to contemplate. Those who don’t believe it are called annihilationists. They speak smooth, soothing words to entice the gullible. They hold that believers go to heaven, but unbelievers cease to exist. Seventh-day Adventists, Christadelphians and the various Advent Christian churches hold to this false doctrine. Additionally, the Church of England’s Doctrine Commission reported in 1995 that “hell is not eternal torment,” but “non-being.”²

¹ <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/up-from-the-grave-he-arose/> accessed 2-17-24

² <https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/25793/what-denominations-subscribe-to-or-accommodate-the-annihilationist-doctrine-of> accessed 2-18-24

Now a lot of people would love to believe that, but it is not true. It is false. It is a major heresy. It is a monstrous lie. It is an affront to the pure and unsullied reputation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who plainly says to those on his left hand at the final day: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,” to which the inspired apostle adds, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”³ Notice the words “everlasting fire” and “everlasting punishment.” The wicked dead do not cease to exist. They do not fade away into non-being. They are not simply canceled. No! They go to “everlasting punishment.” Some people are incredulous. They ask, “How can a good God send anyone to everlasting punishment?” But the apostle Paul gives the answer in Romans 9: “Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory”

God makes threats and imparts promises. His threats are not empty threats, and his promises are not empty promises. God keeps his word. Out of all humanity—all equally undeserving—God chose a people for himself and gave them to Christ. In the Bible these are called the elect, the vessels of mercy. None of us deserve his mercy. All of us deserved wrath. At the final day God is going to infallibly bring the vessels of mercy to heaven, where we will behold the face of Christ—what is called the beatific (blessed) vision. At the same time “the wicked shall be turned into hell,⁴ and all the nations that forget God” (Ps. 9:17). If, at the final day, God were suddenly to say, “I changed my mind. I fooled you! I made an empty threat that I had no intention of carrying out. I’m not going to send the wicked Christ-rejectors to hell”—if God said that, then he would be denying himself. He would make himself a liar. Since God cannot lie,⁵ he would cease to be God—a most horrifying thought! For the believer, the existence of God is a most comforting truth, and if God lied to us, there would be no comfort at all.

But there’s more! If God saved everybody in the end, then we would not truly appreciate heaven. Would we not think that everybody *deserved* heaven—after all, everybody went there (in that hypothetical scenario).

Jesus forewarned us: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). If those who refuse to believe are not damned, then Jesus is a liar!

³ Matt. 25:41–46

⁴ Heb. גֵּהֶנְמוֹת

⁵ Tit. 1:2

I want you to notice in this section that God *teaches* us! As Paul would later say, “Whatever things were written before were *written for our learning*, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). In 1 Corinthians 10 the apostle Paul goes into more detail, and says that the stories of the Old Testament were “written for our admonition”:

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were *written for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:1–11).

Both the Romans 15 and 1 Corinthians 10 texts use the word “written”:
“Written for our admonition.” The word “written” is γράφω, from which we get our words *graphic*, *graph* paper, *graphite*, *photograph*, etc.). A “graphic” novel contains cartoon-like pictures that try to get a juvenile reader’s attention. Note well: the Bible is not a graphic novel. God did *not* use pictures. It isn’t as though the technology did not exist back in the day. God does not lack for using methods and means. It is intentional. He gave us the Bible using *words*. He did not make a picture of himself. There are no pictures of Christ in the Bible. That is intentional. We are not to make pictures of God, and Jesus is God! To try to make a graphic novel out of the Bible is a very bad idea. When we read the words of Scripture, ideas and images form in our minds. When God calls himself a Father, do we not have a specific image of a father in our minds? What does he look like? Is he Caucasian? Negro? Hispanic? Bedouin? Asian? Does he have long hair or short hair? Is he wrinkly faced, or does he have smooth skin? The Bible does not tell us. When the Bible uses the words “as a father pities his children,” we might picture him as a middle-aged man with young children at home. When he says he is the “Ancient of Days,” we might picture him as an old man. But we are not to make actual pictures of God. That is idolatry. It is specifically forbidden in the Bible. It is said in plain language that anyone could understand, if they try: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” That is about as plain as you can get! But some churches deliberately try to obfuscate what is actually very plain. They want to

justify filling their church buildings with either two-dimensional (flat) or three-dimensional (statuary) images. When you visit churches like that, you think, I have to have pictures and statues in order to worship God. That idea is very false! God considers worshiping him with images as abominable. He is not only *not* pleased with such worship, he actually abominates it. Christian, please listen. Do you want to offer *acceptable* worship to God—worship with which your heavenly Father is pleased? Or do you want to offer worship with which *you* are pleased, but which actually infuriates our wise and loving heavenly Father? Many people in our day choose a church based upon whether the worship pleases them. Whether it pleases God or not is not something that they think about.

God says that the Holy Scriptures were *written* for our admonition. God did not give us a graphic novel. He gave us the holy Scriptures in ordinary human language—letters and words on a page, a piece of vellum or papyrus that could be rolled up and carried from place to place, and which could be read using human eyes and spoken with the human voice, and could be communicated to listeners. The Hebrew word for *read* means *to call out*. The Scriptures were written to be read out loud, to be read in worship. Paul tells a young preacher, “do not neglect the public reading of the scriptures.”⁶ The Greek word for *read* literally means *to know again*—something that is written down can be known again and again and again. The written word is durable.

Graphic novels teach impressionable children that the only thing worth reading is a graphic novel, that if a text doesn't hold our attention, it's not worth our time. Graphic novels are the literary equivalent of a cartoon. When I was a little boy our family did not have a television. That was a deliberate choice made by my father. Perhaps he chose not to have a TV set in our home because he judged that there was a lot of objectionable content on TV. But a more fundamental reason for not having a TV is because—consciously or unconsciously—it teaches us to have short attention spans. It teaches us that only ideas that grab our attention in a few seconds are worth paying attention to. Have you ever noticed how older books have longer, more complex sentences? Does reading such sentences bore us, confuse us, leave us unable to understand what is being written? Illiteracy is a huge problem among modern men and women. Conspiracy theorists argue that illiteracy plays into the hands of people who want to control us. Such people do not want a literate society. They don't want people who can think for themselves. Such people are harder to rule; they are a threat to would-be dictators. God wants his people free. He wants to bring us into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He doesn't want his people captive to tyrants—narcissists who want to control and use the plebs for their own ends. God wants preachers of his word to be skilled in

⁶ 1 Tim. 4:13, “Till I come, give attention to reading”

both written and oral communication. He wants *all* his children to be skilled in both written and oral communication. These are skills that all of us need to develop.

What we have in our text this afternoon is a sermon—a divinely-inspired sermon. Here is a written sermon to be read and meditated on by all God's people. It is written in plain human language that can be understood by adults of average intelligence. God wants us to use our minds to try to understand this sermon.

In the 1 Corinthians 10 text I cited a moment ago Paul writes that the Holy Scriptures were written for our “admonition.” Paul uses the word *νουθεσία* (*admonition, instruction, warning*), literally a *setting into the mind*. It is related to the word *νουθετέω* (*admonish, warn, instruct*). In Romans 15:14 Paul writes: “I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to *admonish* one another.” As we are admonished by God in the Scriptures, we are able also to admonish one another. Preachers do this as they preach, but all Christians are called to do this. We are not naturally gifted to do this; it is something that we have to learn. It is something that we get better at as we practice. Practice makes perfect.

As we come to 2 Chronicles 36:15 the tone of the text changes dramatically. It has been pretty much a historical account of the kings of Judah. Now, the inspired writer inserts a sermon.

The Bible contains various kinds of literature: narrative, law, precept, proverb, poetic (actually *hymnodic*, consisting of hymns and songs which are expressions of praise to God, teaching us how man is to worship God). The Psalms of the Bible are to be used not only *as is*, but as examples and paradigms showing us how we can compose our own hymns of praise to God. God is pleased when his children worship him using their own words and voices.

The Bible is not made up of meaningless stories. It is not a book of fables, written to entertain us. In a certain sense the whole Bible is sermonic in character. God wants to instruct his people. He is a wise heavenly Father who wants to instruct his children in right living. He doesn't give us bare principles. He gives us interesting stories that capture our attention. God illustrates his sermons for us! A good preacher uses illustrations that drive home the point that he's trying to make. God is a master preacher! Christian, our God is a wise and loving heavenly Father. Our 2 Chronicles text makes this abundantly clear. Here is our heavenly Father trying to teach us. All through this text we hear our heavenly Father's voice! Are we listening?

Some students find history boring. All this talk about kings and queens and wars—all the dates we have to commit to memory. Now we have a historian in our congregation. I for one am very glad that God gives certain people gifts to understand history, and to share their wisdom with the body of Christ. But God

uses the book of 2 Chronicles to equip his people for every good work. And let us remember, this is *our* history. We, today, in 2024, are part of the covenant people. There are only two kinds of people in the world: the elect and the reprobate, the saved and the lost. The history of Israel is the history of the church. The people we have been reading about in second Chronicles are our predecessors in the faith. This is *our* history. God recounts this history for us. He intends for us to profit from it.

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11). As we will see next week, in this text we have (1) warnings, (2) judgment, (3) Sabbath.

In our text this afternoon we read that “the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.” Many Israelites perished and went to Sheol, awaiting their final destination, the lake of fire. Only those that look to the promised Messiah escape punishment. And so it is for us, as we look to the Messiah who has come, we, too, will escape punishment. We will be saved forever in a glorious presence of him who died for us and reigns eternally. Amen.