

## December 31

**Scriptures:** Read 2 Kings 24 & 25

**Key Verse:** “Surely at the commandment of the Lord this came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh...”. (2 Kings 24:3)

### Overview

After Josiah’s death at the hands of Pharaoh Necho, Judah became subjected as vassals of Egypt (23:35). When the Babylonians exerted their power, Judah became Babylon’s vassal in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim (Josiah’s son). From other sources, we know that at this time Babylon carried off as captives some of the choicest young men, among them Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. They also took some articles from the Temple (Daniel 1:1-7).

After three years of paying tribute to Babylon, Jehoiakim unwisely rebelled against the super-power. He and his brother Jehoahaz, who had been carried off to Egypt (23:31-34), did evil in the sight of the Lord. God had suspended His punishment for a time under the reign of godly Josiah; yet, however hard Josiah tried, his spiritual reformation did not take root in the hearts of the majority of the people nor in the hearts of his sons. It is no wonder God began to bring judgment upon Judah for all their provocation, especially under Manasseh, because of much sin and the “innocent blood that he had shed” (24:3-4). God took upon Himself the role of blood avenger.

God sent many different bands of raiders as punishment upon Judah and Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 22:18-19; comp. Jeremiah 36:30). When Jehoiakim’s son Jehoiachin inherited the throne, he reaped the consequences of his father’s rebellion against Babylon. Before he had any children, he was carried away as a captive, along with many others, to Babylon. The powerful king Nebuchadnezzar exerted his authority by appointing Jehoiakim’s uncle, Zedekiah (another son of godly Josiah) as his vassal king, but he, too, did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Zedekiah was the last of the Davidic kings to rule in Judah. Because he rebelled against Babylon, the city of Jerusalem met with disaster. For one and a half years it underwent a terrible siege and suffered a great famine (25:3; Lamentations 2:11 4:3-6). At this time God raised up prophets, including Jeremiah, but Zedekiah never heeded his warnings and treated him badly (2 Chronicles 36:15-16; Jeremiah 37, 38). When the battering-rams finally broke through the wall, Zedekiah fled but was caught near Jericho, blinded, and taken prisoner to Babylon, along with thousands of other captives. The remainder of the treasures in the Temple were carried away, and the Temple itself, as well as walls and major buildings of Jerusalem, were all destroyed. The reason for all these calamities was not only Zedekiah’s rebellion against Babylon, but there was one main reason: sin.

Jeremiah realized this was a punishment from God. He tried to convince others of the same so they would stop the fight and accept the will of God. Evidently Gedaliah, whom the Babylonians had appointed governor of Judah, followed Jeremiah’s views (25:24; Jeremiah 40:5-6), but he was killed when conspirators rose up against him. Out of fear of Babylonian retaliation, many fled for safety to Egypt.

This sad story ends on an interesting note. In the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's imprisonment, when he was fifty-five years old, the new king of Babylon, Evil-Merodach, showed him kindness. It may well be that Jehoiachin received this favour as a mercy from God for repenting, humbling himself, and turning to God while in prison. The Second Book of Kings therefore ends on a note of hope, for some light has been shed on the seemingly hopeless situation of Judah in exile.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, we read how some of the kings and some of the people refused to listen to Your prophets. Help us to listen very carefully to Your Prophet, Priest, and King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and give us grace to repent and live as You would have us live. Amen.