

February 11

Scriptures: Read 2 Chronicles 36

Key Verse: “And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers... because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words... until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.” (2 Chronicles 36:15, 16)

Overview

After the death of good king Josiah, the throne of Judah was occupied by his two sons, and finally by two grandsons. Unfortunately for Judah, they were all wicked and idolatrous. The severe judgments and punishments of the Lord came without delay. Under the reign of Jehoahaz (Josiah’s successor), the kingdom of Judah lost its independence and became subjected to Necho, king of Egypt. This was probably a retaliation for Josiah’s mistake in attacking Necho when he attempted to pass through Josiah’s territory (35:20-22). Egypt imposed a heavy tribute on Judah, and Necho exerted his authority by displacing and deporting Jehoahaz, after a reign of only three months, and appointing his brother Jehoiakim to be “puppet” king in his place. During Jehoiakim’s oppressive eleven-year reign (cf. Jeremiah 22:13, 17), Babylon defeated Egypt and gained Judah as their vassal state. To show who was boss, King Nebuchadnezzar chained Jehoiakim and threatened to take him captive into Babylon, but this never actually happened. He did, however, take the holy articles from the Temple and, as we learn from the book of Daniel, he also took a select group of hostages, including Daniel (Daniel 1:1-3).

A second deportation of hostages to Babylon occurred during the reign of Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin. His age of succession should read “eighteen years old” (36:9), as is found in other manuscripts, as well as 2 Kings 24:8. Like his uncle Jehoahaz (36:2), Jehoiachin only reigned a short time (three months) before his oppressors took him captive to Babylon along with his family and many mighty men (cf. 2 Kings 24:8-16).

Nebuchadnezzar then appointed his own puppet king over Judah. This was Jehoahaz’s brother Zedekiah, who had taken an oath of allegiance to the Babylonian king. Zedekiah’s reign was full of wickedness, like the heathens who had occupied Canaan before God brought the children of Israel to dwell there. The Lord sent the prophet Jeremiah to try to turn Zedekiah to Himself, but he scorned Jeremiah’s words from the Lord, as well as his advice to submit to Zedekiah, (cf. Jeremiah 37-38). As the chronicler records, Zedekiah did not humble himself but “stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel” (36:12-13).

Ever since Josiah’s death, God had graciously sent His prophets to warn the people of Judah to repent of their sin and turn to Him so they might experience His salvation. However, it was to no avail; the people continued sinning against the Lord, mocking and spurning His words. Even the priests became corrupt and defiled God’s House (the Temple) with idols. God had called them to shepherd the people, but instead they led the flock astray (cf. Jeremiah 50:6-7; Ezekiel 34). Rather than accepting God’s mercy and choosing life by following Him (accompanied by His blessings), the children of Israel chose death and curses by worshipping worthless idols, just as Moses had feared and forewarned (cf. Deuteronomy 28; 30:17-20).

When their cup of iniquity was full, the Lord, who is Holy and Just, had to punish their sin. He sent judgment through yet another and greater Babylonian captivity. As well as carrying away a multitude of captives, Nebuchadnezzar killed many people, burned much of Jerusalem, and tore down the city walls (cf. a more detailed account is given in 2 Kings 25). Moses had prophetically forewarned that disobedience to God would lead to this very thing. While the children of Israel were in exile, the desolate land would be compensated for the many years that they had been unfaithful in observing the sabbath rest for the land (Leviticus 25:4-5; 26:33-35).

The book of Chronicles ends on a note of hope however, not in disaster. There was still a faithful remnant of the children of Israel, and God's plan of redemption would not be stopped. The Lord was preparing the events of history for the coming Messiah, our Lord Jesus.

In fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, the length of the Exile was seventy years (Jeremiah 25:12). The Lord raised up Cyrus, king of Persia, who overthrew the Babylonian ruler. In the providence of God, Cyrus' policy was to restore the exiles to their native lands and allow them religious freedom. His encouragement for the faithful remnant to return was directed by God for their restoration and the restoration of His House. He told them, "Who is there among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!"

Prayer

Lord, the words of Your prophets always come to pass. May we pay the closest possible attention to the words of Your prophets as recorded in Scripture. Even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ministered as a prophet. Thank You for Your representatives to us.