

THE STORY

FINDING YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY.

Synopsis & Context – Session #17 The Kingdoms' Fall

Legacies are fragile things. Hezekiah had been King of Judah for nearly three decades. His reforms were sweeping, his achievements notable, his accolades many. He is listed among the few who “did *what was right before the LORD His God.*” After his death, his son Manasseh ascended to the throne and unraveled his father’s spiritual heritage. Manasseh’s reign marked a spiritual relapse from which the kingdom of Judah would not recover. He made a mockery of Hezekiah’s faithful reign and did more evil.

King Manasseh set up altars in the LORD’s temple where worshipping the stars accompanied worship of Jehovah. He filled Jerusalem with the blood of innocents and turned his own heart and his people’s hearts away from God. Manasseh was eventually captured by the Assyrian king and led off to Babylon in utter humiliation. At last, he turned to the LORD, who had compassion on him and eventually allowed him to return to Jerusalem. God re-enters to give ultimate forgiveness even to what seems to be the worst yet of the kings.

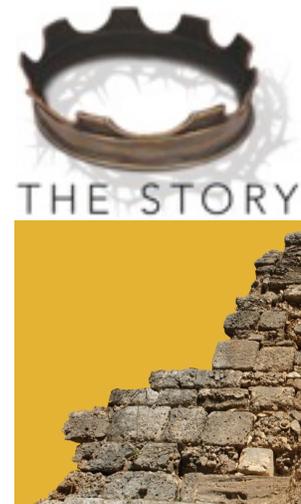
But the People of God would not return. Deial is powerful thing and more than a river in Egypt! The People ignore the prophet’s warnings. We need recall that above all else, this historical section of the Old Testament (what has been called “the period of national self-determination”) reveals God’s faithfulness: what God promises, God fulfills – both positively as well as negatively. So God did what He said He would do—He sent foreign armies to raid Judah. Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar laid three sieges against Judah and Jerusalem. The first came against King Jehoiakim and the second against King Jehoiachin. Nearly 10,000 Judeans were captured and taken away to Babylon. The king and the prophet Ezekiel were among their prisoners.

Change perspective – Ezekiel’s visions are some of the most colorful in all ancient literature and foretold of Jerusalem’s certain doom. God commissioned Ezekiel to speak truth to the exiles who continued the path of denial, even when faced with such stern judgment. Ezekiel refused to give up. He called Jeremiah to alert the People to face-up to what has them estranged from God and God’s sovereignty... or else.

Zedekiah was Judah’s last and most pitiful king – a puppet of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon; and he and the people rejected God, and defiled His temple. God promised and God fulfilled: the time for judgment had come. God arranged the final battle: King Nebuchadnezzar vs. King Zedekiah. The outcome was certain. An 18-month blockade left Jerusalem’s inhabitants weakened by famine. Zedekiah made a last ditch plea for help from the prophet Jeremiah, but no one much cared for Jeremiah’s response. He reported that Jerusalem would not be saved and he urged surrender as their only hope of survival. Most regarded his claims as treasonous – denial pervades.

In 586 BC, the Babylonian army broke through the walls of Jerusalem. They demolished the city, looted the temple, and led the people away to Babylon. Jeremiah was among the few who were left behind. He grieved the loss of his beloved city and mourned the sin of God’s people. He knew that Judah could have been saved, but even in his sorrow, this weeping prophet stood firm on the sure promises of God. He trusted that God would have compassion on the remnant who remained in Jerusalem.

It had been eight centuries since God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt. Now they were exiles in Babylon. Hope vanished – the People fall into despair. God tells Ezekiel that all is not lost. He reminds the People that God would one day cleanse and restore them. She speaks of their restoration and reminds them of the original promise. To illustrate His point, God showed Ezekiel a valley of dry bones and asked, “Can these bones live?” When Ezekiel spoke God’s message to the bones, they came to life and stood like a vast army. A vivid depiction of a faithful God.



Chapter #17: *The Kingdoms' Fall* is 'woven' from selections from *The Second Book of Kings, Second Chronicles, Lamentations, as well as the Books of the Prophet Jeremiah and Ezekiel* .

2 Kings 21, 23—25; 2 Chronicles 33, 36; Jeremiah 1—2, 4—5, 13, 21; Lamentations 1—3, 5; Ezekiel 1—2, 6—7, 36—37

Plot Points for Chapter 17: The Kingdoms' Fall

God will not tolerate a wicked nation indefinitely. God's people, who had been brought into the Promised Land because the former occupants were so wicked, were now even more evil than the Canaanites had been. Even though it seems as if hope is dead, the Lord can breathe new life into dry bones.

In the beginning God created a perfect home for humans, a garden named Eden. He asked them to trust and obey him by not eating the fruit of a certain tree. When they disobeyed and ate the fruit they were expelled from their garden home. Sin spread throughout the world and infected the descendants of Adam and Eve so thoroughly that the only answer was annihilation, yet God saved one family. Setting them down in a world scraped clean, he asked them to spread out and once again fill the earth. Yet again they disobeyed, and the Lord struck confusion in their midst, confounding their communication and multiplying their languages. By the time of Abraham, no one was serving the Creator God any longer.

But in calling Abraham, the Lord made a covenant with a chosen people. He made promises to Abraham and his children forever. In 1 Kings 4:20 we read that the people of Abraham grew "as numerous as the sand on the seashore." God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled as his descendants grew and inherited the Promised Land.

Unfortunately, after receiving the promises of God, the pattern of sin repeated once again. Just as it happened in the garden, and after the days of the flood, it was happening again. God had made a good place for his people, but his people did not trust his guidelines or accept his direction. Once again, God would have to clean out his house and start again.

Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.

God's Story – YOUR story!

- Which do you feel is worse, to be a people of *denial* or a people of *despair*?
- Which do you feel was more rampant for the Kingdoms' at this time that we read about?
- So much trouble seems to come out of worship (what is true and proper). Are there lessons that you see / feel for a culture that seems so ready to be called "spiritual but not religious?"
- Can you relate to Jeremiah's role and message, who felt the burden of the people's estrangement from God?
- What to you is the main point of God's promise given to His people in captivity?
- How does God's promise of 'restoration' still give hope? How do these words impact you / our times that we live in?