

# THE FALL OF JUDAH

## *Lesson 51*

### Judah's Fall – Part Four (The End)

During American election years, we frequently hear the term “flip-flopper.” This term applies to people who hold a position, but then change the position at a later time. The implication is that the person changed their views, not out of a true conversion of heart, but rather out of political expediency. In other words, a candidate might not genuinely hold the view being espoused, but has flipped to endorsing such a view for political gain (*i.e.*, to get votes).

This term seems to have heightened popularity in the last few presidential elections. When I was younger, a “flip-flopper” would more likely have meant someone with a penchant for wearing sandals! The term likely has some staying power, though, both because it sounds good (rolls easily off the tongue) and it labels a dangerous and repugnant attribute. No one likes to be duped. Everyone wants a representative (which is what an elected politician is *supposed* to be) to be honest in proclaiming his or her views. That is how voters make informed decisions.

Ultimately, this is a question of character and reliability. Undoubtedly, some people want positions of power to distort and twist their own views in order to garner votes. These politicians are what I call weather barometers rather than weather makers. They simply reflect current conditions and political winds, rather than stand strong on principal in the face of opposing storms and pressures. In fairness we should add that others may genuinely change from one position to another, either as circumstances change or life experiences change. For these, the change is not deception, but, hopefully, growth. Which is at point boils down to priorities and values. Whatever is one's really driving force will dictate one's choices. People rarely make decisions and policy based upon chance.

Even though the term flip-flopper is relatively new, the character trait goes way back. As we follow through the Biblical narrative on the fall of Judah, we see this political trait front and center. The trait proceeded from multiple kings who were evil in the sight of God, and who lived lives without regard to God's teaching or instruction. These evil kings flip-flopped on key issues and were major triggers to the fall of Judah. Scripture records the flip flops, but adding in the information of history puts the decisions into historical context. Once we do that, an interesting thing becomes apparent. The politicians (kings) were making decisions that in historical context make sense. It is the word of the Lord expressed through his speakers (the prophets) that was calling the kings into godliness. Instead of

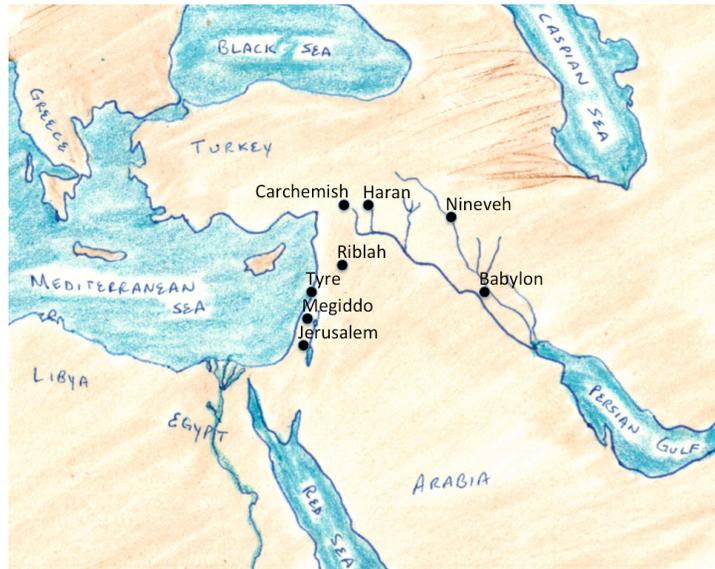
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walking in godliness, however, these kings chose political expediency. Using prevailing political winds as their compass rather than right and wrong, Judah was sent into captivity, ending the southern kingdom.

The first flip-flopper we consider is a king named Jehoiakim. His story and the others follow, but our considerations must place them into context, both within the Biblical narrative and within their history.

## JEHOIAKIM

As we approach the reign of Jehoiakim, we need to remember that Judah has seen a topsy-turvy world in the previous decades. For centuries, Judah paid tribute to the Assyrians as imperial overlords. That bondage finally broke during the reign of Judah's good and faithful king Josiah, as the Assyrian Empire crumbled before the Babylonians and Medes. Egypt tried to come to Assyria's rescue at Harran in 609BC, but those efforts were fruitless, and Assyria was finished. In 605BC, at Carchemish, the Babylonians then defeated the Egyptian army that was still seeking to exert itself north of its borders. Several years before, when Egypt first marched north to Assyria's aid, Josiah tried to stop the Egyptian assistance and intercepted Pharaoh's march at Megiddo. This was where Josiah was killed in battle, as the Judahites lost to the Egyptian army. As a result of Josiah's interference, not only was Josiah killed, but Judah also fell under Egypt's control.<sup>1</sup>



The death of Josiah left his son, Jehoahaz, on the throne. Jehoahaz did not stay on the throne long, however, because Pharaoh Neco captured him in Riblah, dethroned him, and replaced him with his brother Eliakim. Further asserting his sovereignty, Pharaoh Neco had Eliakim change his name and rule under the name Jehoiakim. Neither Jehoahaz nor Jehoiakim ruled in righteousness like their father Josiah. Instead, the Prophet Historian writing Kings denoted them both as “evil”

<sup>1</sup> This information with sources is available in the prior lessons located on the class website, [www.Biblical-literacy.com](http://www.Biblical-literacy.com).

rulers. Pharaoh Neco levied heavy taxes on Judah, and Jehoiakim exacted the payments from the people of the land.

The Kings narrative then recounts Jehoiakim's first flip-flop. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar "came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant" (2 Kings 24:1). This time of tribute to Babylon lasted only three years. After that, Jehoiakim flip-flopped again and rebelled against Babylon. The Prophet Historian writing Kings is pointed in the punishment that resulted:

And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldeans and bands of the Syrians and bands of the Moabites and bands of the Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by his servants the prophets (2 Ki. 24:2).

The Chaldeans are the Babylonians. The Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites are historical enemies of Judah from nearby tribes who were allied (subservient) to Babylon. Jehoiakim died, and his 18-year-old son Jehoiachin took the throne. Before we turn to Jehoiachin, we need to examine Jehoiakim's reign in a bit more detail.

What was behind this flip-flopping? Jehoiakim begins obedient and pledged to Egypt. He then flips his allegiance to Babylon. He then flips his allegiance either back to Egypt, or tries his hand at full independence. Scripture does not give us that detail, but rather notes the rebellion against Babylon with a side note that "the king of Egypt did not come out of his land" (2 Ki. 24:7), which might imply that Jehoiakim in his Babylonian rebellion mode had sought help from Egypt. Either way, history gives us more details that make a bit of political sense of what Jehoiakim was trying to do.

After the Egyptians failed to defeat Babylon at Carchemish, Pharaoh Neco fled south, stopping at his encampment in Riblah. Riblah was on the road from Carchemish back toward Judah and Egypt. It was here that Neco deposed Jehoahaz and put Jehoiakim on the throne (2 Kings 23:33-34). While Neco held sway over Judah, the loyalty of Jehoiakim flowed south to Egypt. Babylon was not satisfied with the initial defeats of Egypt, however, and soon resumed their battles. The king of Babylon during the defeat of Assyria and the initial routs of Egypt was Nabopolassar. In his last days, Nabopolassar stayed home, and had his crown prince son as general spearheading the fighting – soon to be king, the Biblical Nebuchadnezzar (also spelled "Nebuchadrezzar"<sup>2</sup>). The first flip from

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<sup>2</sup> Both spellings are in the Old Testament, although Nebuchadnezzar is used more frequently. Some scholars believe that this is a later corruption of the name, however, that assertion is not borne out by the evidence. See discussion at Wiseman, D. J., *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, (Oxford 1985), at 2ff.

Egypt to Babylon happened because of Nebuchadnezzar's actions after assuming the throne.

In understanding this history, we have what scholars have labeled *The Babylonian Chronicles*. These cuneiform tablets on display at The British Museum contain the records of Babylon. For the times at issue in our study, the tablets recite the activities each year, even during years where there was little happening! We can go to these chronicles to see the history that gives further definition to the Biblical accounts. These Chronicles kept track of the Babylonian monarch's moves<sup>3</sup>:

In the twenty-first year, the king of Babylon stayed in his own country while the crown-prince Nebuchadrezzar, his eldest son, took personal command of his troops and marched to Carchemish... He crossed the river (to go) against the Egyptian army which was situated in Carchemish and...they fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He defeated them (smashing) them out of existence [An exaggeration!]. As for the remnant of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so (hastily) that no weapon had touched them, the Babylonian army overtook and defeated them in the district of Hamath [the area around Riblah], so that not a single man [escaped] to his own country [Another exaggeration!]... For twenty-one years Nabopolassar had been the king of Babylonia. On the eight of Ab [August 16, 605] he died...

In the accession-year Nebuchadrezzar went back again to the Hatti-land [the land between the Euphrates and Sinai, including Judah and Philistia] and marched victoriously through it... All the kings of the Hatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute<sup>4</sup>... He marched to the city of Ashkelon and captured it.<sup>5</sup>

Archaeologists have uncovered the destruction that Nebuchadnezzar wrought upon the Philistine city of Ashkelon. This city was on the coastal plain of Philistia and

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<sup>3</sup> We should add that Israel and Judah also had similar court records. These are the records used by the Prophet Historians in compiling parts of the histories in Kings, for example. Hence we read repeatedly passages like 1 Kings 15:7, "The rest of the acts of Abijam and all that he did, are they not written in *the Book of the Chronicles* of the Kings of Judah?"

<sup>4</sup> This might be a time when Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiakim in chains to take him off to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6), instead of leaving him in place to rule and pay tribute.

<sup>5</sup> This text is from British Museum Tablet No. 21946, lines 1-18 with the translation of D. J. Wiseman as set forth in Thomas, D. Winton, *Documents from Old Testament Times*, (Thomas Nelson and Sons 1958), at 78-79.

was a gateway into the hills of Jerusalem. The invader would have felt it necessary to secure the regions around Judah before making a drive for its heartland. The Assyrians followed the same approach to Jerusalem, as did the Romans in later history. Without a doubt, this defeat of Egypt, Philistia, and others quickly caused Jehoiakim to change his allegiance from Egypt to Babylon.

The next flip came three years later when Jehoiakim quit paying his tribute to Babylon. Here again, history unfolds additional details that add data to the Biblical narrative. Late in 601, Nebuchadnezzar marched against Egypt, taking the fight to the Egyptian borders. The Babylonian Chronicles record the march through Judah's territory (part of "Hatti-land") and the ultimate devastation Babylon and Egypt wrought upon each other:

In the fourth year [601BC] the king of Akkad [Nebuchadnezzar] mustered his army and marched to the Hatti-land. In the Hatti-land they marched unopposed. In the month of Kislev [Nov./Dec.] he took the lead of his army and marched to Egypt. The king of Egypt heard (it) and mustered his army. In open battle they smote the breast (of) each other and inflicted great havoc on each other. The king of Akkad and his troops turned back and returned to Babylon.<sup>6</sup>

After Nebuchadnezzar's stalemate with Egypt, his army was no doubt depleted significantly. Nebuchadnezzar retreated home. This aligns precisely with the time when Jehoiakim quit paying his tribute to Nebuchadnezzar. We might note that the prophet Jeremiah repeatedly warned Jehoiakim that Babylon would desolate Judah and take the people captive (*see, e.g.,* Jeremiah 25). In spite of such warnings, however, Jehoiakim had no trouble provoking the Babylonians and aligning against them. Nebuchadnezzar did not simply go home and contemplate his loss against Egypt. He immediately began rebuilding his army. The Babylonian Chronicles explain that the next year,

The king of Akkad (stayed) in his own land and gathered together his chariots and horses in great numbers.<sup>7</sup>

The following year Nebuchadnezzar marched back toward Judah and defeated neighboring tribes. Then in the next year, Nebuchadnezzar came up against the rebellious Judah, but by this time, even though its fate was sealed, it was not Jehoiakim who faced the fate.

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<sup>6</sup> British Museum Tablet 21946, r. 5-7, Wiseman, D. J., *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in The British Museum*, (British Museum 1961), at 71.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, at r. 8.

## JEHOIACHIN

After the death of Jehoiakim, his eighteen-year old son Jehoiachin was left having to deal with a revived Babylonian army headed by the king who had brought Assyria to its final demise. A battle hardened veteran of wars with Egypt, as well as numerous smaller nations and tribes, Nebuchadnezzar was marching against the rebellious Judahites. As the Babylonian Chronicles puts it rather plainly:

In the seventh year, the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, and encamped against (i.e. besieged) the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Adar [March 15/16, 597BC] he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent (them) to Babylon.<sup>8</sup>

The Prophet Historian responsible for Kings sets out greater detail, explaining that Judah's young king reigned only three months when Nebuchadnezzar's siege began. Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to Jerusalem, and Jehoiachin decided to surrender himself. Kings does let us know that Jehoiachin was following in his father's evil footsteps, not turning to YHWH for deliverance and help. Scripture also details the tribute and captives that Nebuchadnezzar took off to Babylon. He took the treasure of the temple, the king and his family, the officials, the craftsmen and smiths that could work, the king's guard, and the land's nobility (10,000 people). He left only the "poorest people of the land." The Bible also confirms the Babylonian account that Nebuchadnezzar left his own person in charge as "king":

And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17).

Reading through more of Scripture, we learn that among those who were deported into Babylon was the prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 1:1-2, we read of his inaugural vision where he received his prophetic commission. It occurred in Babylon (country, not city) at a time that most scholars equate to five years after this initial deportation of Judahites. While we will consider Ezekiel in more depth, he confirmed what the other prophets had declared. There is an exciting contrast in play. The great kingdoms of the world (historically Assyria and Egypt, now Babylon) ascend into power changing the world map. With Babylon, the world saw the destruction of the last remnant of God's tangible gifting of the land to Abraham's descendants. Yet the true reality was that YHWH was on his throne

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, at 73, r. 11-13.

and even the great empire of Babylon was simply another tool in his toolbox to bring about his purposes long-term. Both Kings and Jeremiah recorded that Jehoiachin lived as a prisoner in exile for thirty-seven years. Finally as a man of about fifty-five, Jehoiachin was released as a prisoner and allowed to live as a king in exile with a regular allowance and opportunities to eat at the king's table (2 Ki. 25:27-30; Jer. 52:31-34).

More information about the intervening thirty-seven years was uncovered in excavations of ancient Babylon by R. Koldewey from 1899-1917. Koldewey discovered a large number of cuneiform tablets including what are now called the "Jehoiachin Tablets." These texts were actually written during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and date themselves to 595-570BC. The texts were likely records of officials in charge of rations for prisoners and foreigners of note residing in Babylon. Among the recounted rations are those to Jehoiachin (written in cuneiform as "Ya'ukinu" also labeled "king of the land of Yahudu." The texts show provisions for Jehoiachin and also his family (five sons he likely had in exile).<sup>9</sup>

## ZEDEKIAH

As referenced earlier, while carting Jehoiachin off to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar left his uncle Mattaniah as "king," changing his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was a young uncle, only twenty-one at the time. Noted British Assyriologist and archaeologist Donald Wiseman affirmed the ancient Jewish historian Josephus's (37-c.100 AD) comment on the name change:

This change also served as a public testimony to the subservient position held by Zedekiah on oath to Nebuchadnezzar "that he would certainly keep the kingdom for him and make no innovation, nor have any league of friendship with the Egyptians."<sup>10</sup>

In spite of this pledge to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah soon joined the ranks of ancient political flip-floppers! We are told in Kings that Zedekiah "did what is evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done" (2 Ki. 24:19). Kings then moves to inform us that nine years into his reign, "Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon" (2 Kings 24:20). The results were beyond devastating. In addition to the Biblical record of the devastation, we have a group of letters that were written in ink on clay pottery fragments that date from this critical time. The letters are commonly called the "Lachish Letters," and were

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<sup>9</sup> Winton at 84ff.

<sup>10</sup> Wiseman, at 33-34, quoting Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 10:7 (102).

discovered by J. L. Starkey in 1935, and are now in the British Museum. The letters are considered to be written shortly before Lachish fell to the Babylonians in 588/586BC. A military officer defending Judah wrote the letters to his superior. The fourth letter references the attempts to see the fire signals communicating the conditions of Lachish and Azeqah, Judah's other two major cities behind Jerusalem. Letter four reads, in part,

May YHWH cause my [lord] to hear, this very day, tidings of good... May [my lord] be apprised that we are watching for the fire signals of Lachish according to all the signs which my lord has given, because we cannot see Azeqah.<sup>11</sup>

This letter mirrors closely Jeremiah's record of the Babylonian's progression:

The army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah, for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained (Jer. 34:7).

Nebuchadnezzar returned "with all his army against Jerusalem" (2 Ki. 25:1). The Babylonians set up siegeworks and waited around the walls for over a year. The city reached a point of absolute starvation with no food at all for the people. At that point, there was a breach in the wall and Zedekiah tried to escape along with most of his army. The escape attempt was futile and the Babylonians caught up with Zedekiah at Jericho. Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah's sons slaughtered before his eyes, and then had his eyes gouged out so that his sight of his sons slaughtered was his last thing seen. Jerusalem was razed and the temple burned.<sup>12</sup> The city's walls were broken down, key leaders were captured and killed before Nebuchadnezzar, and those left were taken into exile. This was the second deportation of the Judahites, and it occurred in 586BC. (A third occurred a few years later likely in response to the assassination of the Babylonian-appointed governor over Judah).

Zedekiah's flip-flopping is even more appalling in light of the instructions he was receiving from the prophet Jeremiah. Beginning in Jeremiah 37, we read the narrative of the prophet telling Zedekiah not to believe that the Egyptians would rescue Judah from the Babylonians. At one point, the Egyptian army came out of Egypt toward Jerusalem and caused the Babylonians to retreat, but this retreat was

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<sup>11</sup> Translation from Ahituv, Shmuel, *Echoes from the Past*, (Carta 2008), at 70.

<sup>12</sup> The destruction of the temple occurred on the ninth of *Ab*, which generally falls in July or August in the Western calendar. It is still commemorated by many Jews today as a day of fasting. Interestingly, this was the same day that the second temple was destroyed 655 years later.

temporary. Jeremiah told Zedekiah so, quoting the LORD as his source of knowledge:

“Thus says the LORD, God of Israel: Thus shall you say to the king of Judah who sent you to me to inquire of me, ‘Behold, Pharaoh’s army that came to help you is about to return to Egypt, to its own land. And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city. They shall capture it and burn it with fire. Thus says the LORD, Do not deceive yourselves, saying, “The Chaldeans will surely go away from us,” for they will not go away (Jer. 37:7-9).

In spite of this information, Zedekiah flipped his allegiance to Egypt and paid the price. (Jeremiah paid a price as well, but that is for another lesson!) The Chronicler added to his commentary about Zedekiah’s evil choices, “He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD,” then adding that he “rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, *who had made him swear by God*”! (2 Chron. 36:12-13). In other words, not only did Zedekiah flip-flop on Nebuchadnezzar, but he also went back on his oath to God, even in the face of God warning him and instructing him otherwise. Old Testament scholar John Monson is fond of saying that the latter Judean kings never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity! In his commentary on this passage, House words it well:

Clearly, he lacks the moral fiber to be more than what he is, a man who gauges each situation by how long its results can keep him in power.<sup>13</sup>

The Old Testament book of Lamentations lays out in sad but clear pictures the devastation of Jerusalem and the sins of the people when starving during the siege. The women who were “compassionate” were boiling their own children for food (Lam. 4:10). The false prophets and deceiving priests “who shed in the midst of her [Jerusalem] the blood of the righteous” were wandering through the streets, blinded and bloody (Lam. 4:14). Judah and Jerusalem lay devastated. The false idea that God would never allow Jerusalem to be taken was proven false. Israel’s status as God’s “chosen” did not merit unqualified protection. In fact, God was true to his prophetic word declared plainly in Deuteronomy 28:15-63:

But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake

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<sup>13</sup> House, P.R., *The New American Commentary: 1 and 2 Kings*, (Holman 2001), at 395.

you... The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies... The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known... All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you. They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young... They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you. And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you... The most tender and refined woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because she is so delicate and tender, will begrudge to the husband she embraces, to her son and to her daughter, her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears, because lacking everything she will eat them secretly, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns.

So completely was this prophetic word fulfilled, that the cynics among the scholars believe it to have been written *after* the fall of Jerusalem!

## CONCLUSION

The politics that are evident from both the Old Testament and from other historical documents set up an interesting view. They allow one to consider the actions of these kings both from the perspective of the world and from the perspective of the prophets of God. Some might see good political reasons for some choices made,

even if history unfolded in ways that indicated the chosen course failed, yet the cry of the prophets says otherwise. The prophets cried for the kings to hear the LORD and respond affirmatively. However, the kings chose repeatedly their politics devoid of God's insight, both to their detriment and the detriment of Judah.

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. "*Jehoiakim ...turned and rebelled*" (2 Ki. 24:1).

This lesson speaks of politics and flip-flops, but the lesson is not really about politics. Politics serve as an example, but the lesson is much more personal. Everyone is faced with choices. In looking at those choices, we will make our decisions based upon our values and our moral compass. What are our top values – happiness? Money? Popularity? The drive to get ahead? Peace? Safety? Comfort? Convenience? Family? Friends? Jesus put all of these values into a secondary status compared with following the Lord. When we make following the Lord the top choice, seeking his will becomes paramount and then we are never in danger of any flip-flop. Our stability is found on the rock, and we stay with him. If he moves, then we move. If he turns, then we turn. If we find ourselves off course, we certainly adjust, but then we are just returning to where we are meant to be.

Think of the constant flip-flopping, and contrast it to the Lord. The Lord is the constant. He is always reliable and he is unchanging. He was the same yesterday as he is today, and he will be the same tomorrow. He is the apex of consistency and justice. His character reflects unchanging perfection. He is the one source for constancy in our ever changing world.

Here is why this makes a difference. We see things dimly at best, being bound in time and limited in understanding. When we look to God for direction, we are proclaiming *in real life expression* that we believe and trust in him. This is the true kernel of faith in life, not simply in a salvation experience. We see in Christ, not only a sacrifice that makes us right with God, but also a promised indwelling of the Spirit that leads and teaches us. This needs to be our goal.

2. "*Jehoiachin...gave himself up*" (2 Ki. 24:12).

Jehoiachin seemed to be in a no-win situation. His father left him in the lurch. The most powerful man in the world with the world's strongest army was in attack mode. Jehoiachin gave up without much of a fight. He was carted off where he lived his life in a foreign land.

This is a sad commentary on life. There are lost people who do not know God, who live in “evil,” alienated from God, even as they live normally. Their lives go on, for some a short time, for others a long time. Then, their lives are over.

I do not want this to happen to me or to anyone else. I want my life to count for something. I want God to use me in his plan. I want to share his love and compassion, not simply by what I say, but by what I do. I want the world to see me living, not in resignation to the apparent whims of life, but constantly seeking out the good works that a loving God has prepared me to accomplish. Join me!

3. “*Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon*” (2 Ki. 24:20).

Can you think of anything more tragic than having your last sight being one of seeing your sons slaughtered? If there is one, it must be what happened to Zedekiah before the slaughter. Jeremiah warned Zedekiah what was to come. What is more, Jeremiah showed Zedekiah the way out!

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If you will surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.” (Jer. 38:17-18).

Not only did Zedekiah see the holy city fall, see monstrous deeds occur while under siege, and see his own children slaughtered, but Zedekiah also had to live with the memory that *he was warned and he was offered a way out*. How tragic.

Don't ever let any fear or earthly concern keep you from following God's instructions. It is simply not worth it. Sin brings tragedy and death, in spite of what might be advertised! Even in suffering, obedience brings joy and ultimate life. Let us renew a promise to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Mt. 6:33).

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