

The LORD of the covenant decrees corporate punishment for his people’s unrepentant sins, especially for rebellion and the innocent blood shed by their kings, but because of his promise to David, God also gives extravagant mercy to those who humbly and fearfully surrender to his word. For this, “exiles” can hope.

Introduction – Evangelist Ray Comfort’s bestselling and polarizing book “Hell’s Best Kept Secret”. To convert people to faith in Jesus Christ, you must first preach the law to convict of sin before preaching the gospel if it will be heard and received as good news. First law, then gospel. Are you surprised?

I. Reasons for Exile

A. Unforgivable rebellion (vv. 23:36-24:2, 8-9, 18-20)

Covenant disloyalty is fundamentally spiritual adultery (Ezek 8:7-13), expressed in rebellion (Jer 22:13-19; 26:20-24; 36:20-32). The book of Kings records many instances when the LORD commissioned his servants the prophets to call his kings and rulers back to covenant faithfulness. But most of them ignored the prophets (2 Kgs 17:13-14) so God began to fulfill the curses of the covenant, namely exile (cf. 1 Kgs 8:46; Dt 29:28). King Jehoiakim rebelled. His son Jehoiachin also rebelled—he reigned only three months. In that short amount of time, he did what was evil in the LORD’s eyes, according to all his father Jehoiakim had done. In other words, he carried on in the same evil direction that his father had gone. Jehoiachin’s uncle Zedekiah was the next king—his reign was characterized by idolatry and judgment, mirroring the sins of Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:36-37; cf. 2 Chr 36:12-14; Jer 32:1-5; 34; 37-38). Here we are not treated to a list all the evil deeds Zedekiah committed because the kingdom is already sliding into apostasy and oblivion (2 Kgs 20:17-18; 21:12-15; 22:16-17; 23:26-27). “For because of the anger of the LORD it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence” (2 Kgs 24:20a).

B. Unforgivable bloodshed (vv. 24:3-4; cf. 21:16)

Led by the dreadful example of Manasseh, the kings and people of Judah committed heinous, even unspeakable sins (Jer 7:6; 22:3, 17, Ezek 22:6-31). Oppression, persecution, extortion, sexual predation, hired assassination, and deadly violence against the innocent and most vulnerable: the foreigner, the orphan, the widow, the poor. Tradition holds that Manasseh killed the prophet Isaiah by sawing him in two (cf. Heb 11:37). God’s people’s repeated, flagrant, and debased violations of the covenant were so reprehensible that the LORD would not pardon. However the most terrifying part of verse 4 is that the LORD did not want to forgive. Yahweh, the God who loves to forgive, was *unwilling* to forgive his people this time because their little repentance was only external and rang hollow, and it was now too late.

II. Horrors of Exile

A. A God-forsaken nation (vv. 25:1-10, 18-21)

God removes his protection, then decrees deprivation, deportation, death, and desolation. In chapter 25 we have an extended narrative of the leveling and pillaging of Jerusalem that focuses on the LORD’s people (Judah) and the LORD’s house (the temple). Under God’s curse in the law (Dt 28:15-68), the people starve, the army scatters, and the king flees (25:1-6). The rest are deported or executed (25:7-12, 18-21). Gedaliah is appointed governor of Judea by the Babylonians, but surviving rebels assassinate him (25:22-25). Then all the remaining people in Judea flee to Egypt after Gedaliah’s assassination (25:26). The implication is clear. Judah as a nation has completely collapsed. The kingdom of God under the old covenant has failed, and the people return to Egypt—their former house of bondage. What a devastating end for the covenant nation!

B. A God-forsaken faith (vv. 25:13-17)

God abandons his temple, then decrees its total destruction (Ezek 10; 12; cf. Mk 13:1-8, 24-33). The details are in the center of chapter 25's five paragraphs narrating the horrors of exile regarding the temple. Only so much of value remained in God's house after the first and second waves of deportation. But what remained was glorious! This time the Babylonians carried away all the bronze valuable pieces (particularly from the temple) that remained from previous deportations. The bronze temple pillars commissioned by king Solomon and crafted by Hiram of Syria, the bronze sea, and the magnificent stands were all smashed and the raw materials carted off for profane use (1 Kgs 7:15-39). By placing it in the center of the story of destruction, Scripture gives primary importance to the temple rather than the king's palace or the rest of the city because the temple was the purpose of it all—the LORD dwelling among his people. With the loss of the temple, the atoning sacrifices cease and corporate worship is shut down. But most tragically, God's gracious, loving, and forgiving presence is gone (Ex 33:1-6).

III. Hope in Exile

A. Jehoiachin, the son of David who surrendered, is exalted (vv. 24:10-15; 25:27-30)

Indicating a shift in the history of Kings, Jehoiachin's surrender is the first event dated according to the reign of a foreign ruler. The signal is Judah has lost its sovereign nation status at this point. Jehoiachin surrendered to the king of Babylon, probably at the instruction of Jeremiah because surrendering was his only hope for survival (Jer 27:17). In these last two chapters of the book of Kings, Jehoiachin is contrasted with the other kings of Judah. From a worldly standpoint, he looks like an utter failure, a coward for surrendering and not fighting for his people. If America had a president who surrendered to a foreign power after three months from being sworn in, we'd erase him from the history books. If our church had a pastor who gave up after only three months on the job, we'd purposely forget about him. Insignificant. Not worth remembering. But from God's perspective, he is the only king who heeded the prophetic warning. And God eventually blessed and exalted him for his repentance, faith, and obedient suffering. The king of Babylon, Evil-merodach son of Nebuchadnezzar, graciously lifts up the head of Jehoiachin and exalts him above all his deposed client kings. But the LORD is really the one responsible for exalting Jehoiachin. The book of Kings ends with a glimmer of hope. With Jehoiachin's survival, God's covenant with David to give him a greater son to bless, to save, to rule, to reign, is still alive. Just barely, but there is hope in the midst of exile. Jehoiachin is not that hope, but God exalted him to give reason to hope in exile.

B. Jesus, the Son of David who surrendered, is forever exalted

The rest of the OT testifies that, despite the Jews returning to the promised land 70 years after the Babylonian exile to first rebuild the temple under Ezra's leadership and later the city walls under Nehemiah, God's people still found themselves in an exile of sorts. No son of David reigned in Jerusalem over a restored kingdom of God. No presence of God filled the temple. Yes, the outer shells of kingdom and temple were rebuilt, but the spiritual substance of exile continued until Jesus Christ, the greater Son of David, arrived bringing hope for exiles. As the royal sinless son of David, Jesus alone brings hope as the representative of God's people who will live perfectly righteous before God. As the divine Son of God who is also man, Jesus alone brings hope as he himself is the restored temple, the dwelling place of God who lives among us. And as the perfect and final atoning sacrifice for sins offered up in the temple of his body, Jesus was lifted up for the world to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, even sins that consign violent rebels to exile.

Conclusion – Thus we conclude our study of 1 and 2 Kings. Did you learn the main lesson of the book? The apostle Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells the church that all the OT stories are written down as Scripture for us (1 Cor 10:11-12). Take heed, lest you fall. Like Jehoiachin, surrender your throne and your kingdom, because Jesus is your only hope in exile, and your only way out.