

Daniel's Six Kings: King Zedekiah

Mattaniah, meaning *gift from Jehovah*, who was later known as Zedekiah, meaning *righteousness of Jehovah*, was the third son of King Josiah of Judah; his mother was Hamutal, which made him a brother of King Jehoahaz of Judah.

Zedekiah was born into a life of privilege, and with privilege comes responsibility.

Sadly, Zedekiah did not live up to his responsibilities as king of Judah.

King Zedekiah was the last King of the Southern Kingdom. Historians tell us he reigned from 597 – 586 BC.

In 586 B.C. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by the Babylonians.

The fall of Judah came gradually, over a period of years, in which the Babylonians killed or exiled leading members of society, while leaving behind others who they thought that they could more easily control, in what became a subordinate kingdom.

Zedekiah was the son of good King Josiah but the righteous heart of his father was not present in him.

We read in 2 Kings 24:15-18, "... Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah."

As Zedekiah was leading the nation down the path of complete destruction, a young Jewish teenager by the name of Daniel was being prepared by the Lord to serve in Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar.

By far the most important written record regarding the troubled reign of Zedekiah is in the Book of Jeremiah. In its various passages we learn of significant incidents not recorded in either II Kings or II Chronicles, while personal encounters between King and Jeremiah offer us insights into the personality of Zedekiah.

In Jeremiah chapter 24:8 we note some contempt for Zedekiah and his advisers in Jeremiah's vision of the *good and bad figs*, "And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt."

King Zedekiah spurned his godly privileges. He had a godly father and a godly prophet. But these godly influences had little affect on Zedekiah. The title of my message is **Spurning Godly Privileges**. We must not spurn the privileges that we enjoy as the people of God. What were some of the privileges Zedekiah spurned in his life?

1. Zedekiah spurned the privileges of being raised in a home that practiced true religion.

King Josiah was the father of Zedekiah.

We read in 2 Kings 23:25 perhaps the greatest commendation about Josiah, "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him."

Josiah was the “Reformer King.” He was the King of Sacred Truth.

We read in 2 Kings 23:25, “And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD.”

Just imagine the spiritual declension in Jerusalem at this time. The book of the covenant was found in the house of the Lord?

King Josiah read to the people from the book of the covenant. King Josiah was a man of the Book.

We read in verse 4, “And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel.” King Josiah was against religious apostasy.

We read in verse 7, “And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove.” King Josiah was an holy man.

We read in verses 21-23. “And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem.” King Josiah was a redeemed man.

But 2 Kings 24:19 says about Zedekiah, “...he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.”

From the history of Zedekiah found in the Book of Jeremiah it can be learned that Zedekiah practiced a “passive evil” and not an “active evil.”

Zedekiah was a very weak King! He was fearful of the princes left in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 38:24), of those who had surrendered to the Babylonians (Jeremiah 38:19), and of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 37:3).

He was so fearful that he did not take a stand for anything. Consequently he allowed everything to be practiced! He allowed the people to continue their “pollutions” and “abomination” (2 Chronicles 36:14). He allowed the princes to do whatever they desired (Jeremiah 38:5). He was a weak, spineless Monarch. However, his “weakness” is called “wickedness” by Jeremiah!

The great “evil” that Zedekiah committed was not the aggressive idolatry of Manasseh or the overt persecution of Jehoiakim. It was the great “wickedness” of keeping silent, of allowing compromises, of remaining “neutral” in religious matters.

We read in 2 Chronicles 36:16, “But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

King Zedekiah “stiffened his neck and hardened his heart” against the Lord.

When one refuses to stand up for God’s will and speak out for righteous religion, the only option left is the tragic destiny of Zedekiah!

Zedekiah did not have the backbone to stand up against those in his country who were doing wrong BUT he would stand up against the powerful Babylonian King whose armies had already taken two groups captive from Jerusalem. He would stand up against the Lord God Almighty whose power was unquestioned and whose commands had been clearly revealed by Jeremiah.

Why would he do such folly? He did it for the same reason many today will defy God's commands and yield to mortal opinions and allow a wide latitude where God has restricted! Such have a greater respect for those around them than for the Almighty God!

Zedekiah KNEW what was right but he refused to submit to the right. He allowed those surrounding him to have greater influence than God had! Tragedy struck King Zedekiah because of this attitude.

What was the real root of Zedekiah's "evil"? He showed no zeal for the Lord's will, urged no restoration of reform in beliefs and practices. In essence he did NOTHING to discourage Judah's apostasy. They were committing great sins but the King did nothing.

Zedekiah spurned the religion of his father Josiah.

2. Zedekiah spurned the privileges of hearing the truth from God's prophet.

King Zedekiah, it seems, had three options on how to cope with the turbulent situation facing him.

Installed by Nebuchadnezzar as vassal king, he could continue in this status. This was the course of action advocated over and over again by the prophet Jeremiah.

He could ally himself with other minor nations in an attempt to shake off Babylonian rule. Indeed, such an attempt is recorded by Jeremiah in Chapter 27. The kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Sidon, and Tyre sent envoys to Zedekiah.

On hearing of it, Jeremiah said, (Jeremiah 27:2-4)
“Thus saith the LORD to me; Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck, And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah;

And command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say unto your masters.”

Jeremiah 27:11-12, “But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein. I spake also to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live.”

The third option was to ally himself with Egypt. Both the accounts in II Kings and II Chronicles agree that Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.

Only in Jeremiah is it recorded that this occurred when Zedekiah allied himself with Egypt.

Historians tell us that in the years 590/589 Hophra became the pharaoh of Egypt. Intent on regaining a stronghold in Judah, he induced Zedekiah to join forces with him.

Infuriated by the defection of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar sent an army to besiege Jerusalem.

Apparently Hophra sent an army to the assistance of Zedekiah, leading to a temporary retreat of the Babylonians.

This temporary retreat, which occurred in 588, may have sealed the fate of Judah. The false prophets and inexperienced leaders in Judah were jubilant, but Jeremiah warned: *Behold, Pharaoh's army . . . shall return to Egypt . . . and the Chaldeans shall return . . . and they shall take it and burn it (37:7,8).*

His warnings were ignored by the weak King and his advisers, leading to the final disaster.

In three direct encounters between King and prophet, Zedekiah emerges as a weak, vacillating, almost pathetic man. In the 10th year of Zedekiah's reign, when Jerusalem was already under siege, Jeremiah was shut up in the court of guards by the King's orders.

The reason for Jeremiah's imprisonment: "*Wherefore do you prophesy . . . "I will give this city into the hands of Babylon"*" (32:4).

It is not stated whether Jeremiah was released from custody, but a short time after, when the siege of Jerusalem was temporarily lifted due to Hophra's intercession, Zedekiah sent a delegation to Jeremiah with the request: *'Pray now unto the Lord our God for us'* (37:9).

However, Jeremiah sent word back to the King that Pharaoh's army will retreat to Egypt and the Chaldeans will burn the city. In Chapter 37:12-21 the following incident is recorded: Jeremiah, leaving Jerusalem for Anatot, his hometown, was stopped at the gate and arrested on the charge of defecting to the Chaldeans and was put in prison.

Then king Zedekiah sent for him and the king questioned him secretly in his palace: 'Is there any word from the Lord?' (37:17).

In spite of the truthful response: *'Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylonia,'* the King gave instructions to have Jeremiah removed from the dungeon and to be lodged in the prison compound, where he was given a daily ration of bread.

However, the officials, declaring that Jeremiah was demoralizing the people, requested the King to have Jeremiah executed for treason. This is the fickle King's response: *'Behold, he is in your hands, for the king can do nothing against you'* (38:5); whereupon, Jeremiah was cast into a pit full of mire.

When Eved-melech, an Ethiopian, heard of it he petitioned the King to save Jeremiah, who was likely to die of hunger. Again, by orders of the King, Jeremiah was taken out of the pit and brought to a special chamber near the Temple for a secret meeting with Zedekiah.

There, he asked Jeremiah to hide nothing from him. Only when Zedekiah swore that he would not kill the prophet or turn him over to those who sought his life, Jeremiah told him the bitter truth, yet advising: *'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city won't be burned down'* (38:17).

Zedekiah's final words with Jeremiah reveal much of the vacillating relationship between King and prophet.

He advises that, should Jeremiah be questioned by officials wanting to know what had transpired at their meeting, he should pretend that he had merely petitioned the King to be held in custody in the prison compound.

King Zedekiah spurned the privilege of hearing the truth from God's prophet.

3. Zedekiah spurned his godly privileges and this led to his tragic end.

The last days of King Zedekiah are recorded in 2

Kings 25:1-7, “And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about. And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

Life thus ended for Zedekiah when he was yet a young man of little over thirty years of age. His sons must have been mere boys, and their pitiable death would be a pang in his heart greater even than the pain of the iron which pierced his eyes.

The joy of life was lost to him.

The dreary living death of the prison was all that was left to him.

Miserable man, how bitterly he had to live with his sin, and mourn over past errors and self-willed courses!

Will it be otherwise with those who stand at the last before the judgment-seat of God, if their lives are spent in disobedience?

If it was hard to face Nebuchadnezzar when he 'was full of fury and the form of his visage was changed' (Dan 3:19), how shall men endure 'the wrath of the Lamb in Revelation 4:16?

The last king of Judah failed miserably. But God raises up another king from a foreign nation (King Cyrus) who will seek to restore Judah, rebuild the temple, and pave the way for the coming of Jesus Christ.

In closing, King Zedekiah spurned godly privileges. He spurned the privilege of being raised in a home that practiced true religion. He spurned the privilege of hearing the truth from God's prophet. He spurned his godly privileges and this led to his tragic end. We must not spurn our godly privileges in Christ. May the Lord help us to live in the reality of our godly privileges. Let us pray.