

All the King's Horses

II Kings 23-25; II Chronicles 36

Introduction

There is a popular nursery rhyme that we have all repeated. It is usually accompanied with a drawing of a chubby little man in the shape of an egg. The words are,

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,

*All the king's horses and all the king's men
couldn't put Humpty together again.*

Many believe that that nursery rhyme had political significance in Europe when it was first penned. It is believed to have been a reference to the fall of the political power at the time. The fall was so dramatic in fact, that all of their own forces could not put that power back together again.

We have been studying the life and times of a great political power – a nation called Israel. We have studied it while it was united under the reigns of David and Solomon. Then we followed it through its divided kingdom era, with northern and southern kingdoms. We have studied one king after another and most, it seemed, were ungodly. The kings had names like Ahab, Jereboam, and Manasseh. We observed that the grace of God was incredibly longsuffering, however, there comes a point to the grace and longsuffering of God in which stubborn people and stubborn nations eat the fruit of their own hands.

Robert Louis Stevenson worded this fact in a memorable way, when he wrote, "Every man shall one day feast at a table of consequences."

For the southern kingdom, the fall and the feast is about to begin. There are only twenty-three years left in the life of this kingdom, called Judah, before it collapses and begins its rather bitter feast. It seems that both Jeremiah and Ezra, in their accounts, begin to put events in "fast forward". They go from a slow walk, as we have walked with them, to a fast sprint. They will tell us, briefly, one tragic story after another in the final chapter.

One of my commentators said that this account is almost like a series of video clips of car crashes; like

the videos we were subjected to in high school health class for the purpose of scaring us away from driving recklessly or under the influence. Ezra will show us one collision, one fall, one crash after another. And once these men have fallen, all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put their lives back together again.

We have much to learn in the last chapter. Let me invite your attention to the closing chapter of Ezra's inspired account in II Chronicles.

Review of King Josiah

As you are turning to chapter 36 of II Chronicles, you may remember the history of this scene that was set with the godly reign of Josiah. He died in battle after refusing to heed the warning of God that came from the lips of an ungodly man. The enemy shot arrows into this king, who was disguised as a warrior, and he died. Josiah's death sent the country reeling in shock, no doubt. They mourned his death for months. Jeremiah preached the funeral, lamenting a chant that he had probably composed himself for the funeral service.

The nation loved Josiah. It had enjoyed, under his reign, growth, privilege, and prosperity. The people had even instituted a national day of remembrance of his death. They would have a King Josiah Day and would take a holiday and remember one of their favorite kings.

Josiah was the last good king. He was the last ray of sunshine before the darkness of God's judgment falls on this stubborn nation. We will carefully look at why this occurred, as we make our way through chapter 36, and thus, conclude our own study of the books of Kings and Chronicles.

All the King's . . . Couldn't Put Israel Together Again

King Joahaz

Look at verses 1 and 2 of II Chronicles, chapter 36.

Then the people of the land took Joahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in place of his father in Jerusalem. Joahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem.

Three months is not a long reign. You need to know that Joahaz was not the oldest son of Josiah, but a middle boy. You might wonder why the firstborn did not ascend to the throne, as was the usual custom. According to Ezekiel, Joahaz was the favorite because he hated Egypt the most. So, he ran for political office on the platform of anti-Egypt. All the little buttons and banners would say, "Down with Egypt! No foreign oppression!" And, that did it, he won the election with no contest.

King Jehoiakim

The reign of King Joahaz did not last very long, however, as three months later, according to verses 3 and 4,

Then the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem, and imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. The king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Joahaz his brother and brought him to Egypt.

Now, the Egyptian pharaoh is taking Joahaz hostage. He is taking him back to Egypt where he will eventually die. He then puts another son of Josiah on the throne.

As I studied this, I found it ironic. The people in the earlier Old Testament days were subjected to a hard taskmaster known as Egypt. Egypt would force them to serve. You may remember the stories of them making the bricks without straw. Eventually, the redeemer came, in the form of Moses. Moses led the people out of Egypt into liberty because they obeyed God and followed Him. Now, hundreds of years later, because they are disobeying God, guess who opens the door to their ultimate downfall? Egypt – once again.

That is a good lesson for us, as believers. The enemies of our souls are *never* conquered. They may be subdued temporarily, as new attacks come in different ways, but they are there until we stand complete in Him.

Verse 5, tells us,

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God.

Jehoiakim is a completely different person than his father. You would expect that at least one of the boys would follow after the Lord, the God of Israel, but none of them did. Jehoiakim is totally different from his dad. The only similarity between Jehoiakim and his godly father Josiah, is that both of their names start with the letter "J". Apart from that, there is absolutely no similarity.

There is nothing wrong with differences, as long as you are working on them. This reminds me of the story a man in our church told some time ago. He had been married fifty years and his wife was there, nodding in agreement, as he told this story to me. He said, "Stephen, it was not long after we were married that we discovered the only thing we had in common was that we were married on the same day."

That couple is an illustration that a dual can become, with the right amount of perseverance and patience, a duet.

Jehoiakim, even though he was in the family, wanted no harmony between his reign and his father's reign. That is also a lesson that we could preach a sermon on. You and I, as parents, as much as we pray and hope, cannot guarantee the spiritual future of our children. Our children will and must make their own decision and ultimately, they will. It keeps us from pride, if they turn out well, and from total defeat, if they do not.

Jehoiakim reigns and his reign is a wicked reign. In fact, according to Jeremiah, chapter 36, verse 23, this was the king who was so infuriated with the message of Jeremiah that,

. . . the king cut it with the scribe's knife and threw it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier.

Jehoiakim wanted nothing to do with the word from God. Compare that to his father who discovered, if you remember, the book of the Law, and revered it, treasured it, and obeyed it. This boy cuts it up and throws it into the fire to burn. It would bring the nation of Judah one step closer to its ultimate downfall.

Look at verses 6 and 7 of II Chronicles, chapter 36.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze chains to take him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also brought some of the articles of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon.

You may remember that name Nebuchadnezzar. Continue to verse 8.

Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and the abominations which he did, and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son became king in his place.

King Jehoiachin

Now, we are rapidly moving, in a few verses, through more than eleven years. Jehoiachin is the third monarch to reign. Look at verses 9 and 10.

Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, . . .

(II Kings, chapter 24, verse 8, says Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, which is more likely the correct age),

. . . and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord. At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the valuable articles of the house of the Lord, and he made his kinsman Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.

King Zedekiah

Now, the fourth and final king of Judah, this last remaining nation in the land of Israel, is, according to verse 10, Zedekiah. Look at verses 11 through 14 of II Chronicles, chapter 36.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the Lord. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to

the Lord God of Israel. Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the Lord which He had sanctified in Jerusalem.

It would be under Zedekiah's reign that Jeremiah would face the worst treatment. Historians record an event that Jeremiah himself records. Jeremiah was thrown into a pit, where, Josephus writes, he sank up to his neck in mud. They were hoping that he would sink completely out of sight and suffocate. He could have died, but as Jeremiah records in chapter 38 of the book of Jeremiah, an Ethiopian came and rescued him.

Israel Had a Great Fall

The longsuffering of God

Now, the key verses that summarize the longsuffering of God toward His people over the entire books of Kings and Chronicles are verses 15 and 16 of II Chronicles, chapter 36.

The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, . . .

(notice these tragic words),

. . . until there was no remedy.

Think of these words for a moment and let them sink in. There was "no remedy," no cure, no hope. These are words that we, as human beings, do not like. We do not like them because they place God in His sovereign role and us in a rather frail human role. We would like to reverse the charges.

I like the way C. S. Lewis worded this when he wrote, "We may not know when in life there is no more remedy for the stubborn heart, but Omniscience knows when."

Omniscience is the best place to leave that knowledge. We are told in these verses that Judah and its people had reached that point as a nation and as individuals as they rebelled against the Lord. The Jewish nation, in effect, sat on a wall, the Jewish people had a great fall, and all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put Israel together again.

No remedy for Israel

Continue to verses 17 through 19a.

Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand. All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God . . .

Isn't that sad? You and I have studied the rebuilding and the repair of this building, as well as all the love poured into it. Now, it is burned. Continue to verses 19b through 21.

. . . and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

We will discuss the meaning of the final paragraph of II Chronicles in a separate study of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Now, however, we will take a closer look at the fall; the ultimate and final collapse of Jerusalem. These were the people of God's choosing; the people He loved; the people to whom He repeatedly sent messenger after messenger, message after message, prophet after prophet. Ultimately, we read the words that these people refused to repent. Are we any better?

Josephus wrote, with insight in the first century, many of the stories passed to him. He writes of the final acts in the fall of Jerusalem. Let me read a paragraph to you.

When Jerusalem was taken about midnight, and the enemy's generals were entered into the temple, when Zedekiah was sensitive of it, he took his wives and his children and his captives and friends and with them, fled out of

the city through the fortified ditch and through the desert. And when certain of the deserters had informed the Babylonians of this at break of day, they made haste to pursue after Zedekiah and overtook him not far from Jericho and encompassed him about. But for those friends and captains of Zedekiah who had fled out of the city with him, when they saw their enemies near them, they left him and dispersed themselves, some one way and some another, and everyone resolved to save himself.

Can you read from this, between the lines, the panic, the tragedy, the death, the screams, the fear, as they are racing in the night for their lives?

So the enemy took Zedekiah alive. And, when he was deserted by all but a few, with his children and his wives, they brought him to the king. When he was come, Nebuchadnezzar began to call him a wicked wretch; a covenant breaker; one that had forgotten his former word when he had promised to keep Jerusalem for him. When he had used these words to Zedekiah, he commanded Zedekiah's sons to be slain while Zedekiah looked on. After which, he put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him and carried him away to Babylon.

This is the brief exposé of four men. They were real; as real as you and me, with hopes and dreams, and yet, in their hearts, there was stubbornness against the messengers of God. What can we learn?

Application

Let me give four different thoughts that come from our study not only of this chapter, but from the entire study of these books.

When God's message is rejected, the depravity in a person's heart is unbelievable

1. First, when God's message is rejected, the depravity in a person's heart is unbelievable.

I read in the newspaper about the bombing at the Olympics in Atlanta. The husband of the woman who was killed had gone out to do some things that he needed to do. While he was away, a neighbor broke into their home, taking advantage of the situation, and stole all of their valuables.

Pick up the newspaper on any day, and it is nothing more than the cataloging of human depravity played out on the stage of our human contemporary society. Why? Because, ultimately, the message of God is in the process, and has been for many decades, of being rejected from the societal scene.

Listen carefully to the words of a man who wrote two hundred years ago. An American man, named Noah Webster, wrote, “The moral principles and precepts contained in the scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws. All the miseries and evil of men proceed from their despising and neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible.”

If Webster had written that today, his works would not be in print.

Such advice concerning the word of God is something that should be followed. It has, of course, been forced out of the institutional and societal scene. In our school system now, a teacher cannot influence the students with the word of God, but yet, can give, and it is even welcomed, a Bible to a criminal when he enters the penitentiary. That makes a lot of sense, doesn't it? This is saying, “Don't give a Bible to a child. Wait until depravity has played itself out and then give him a copy.”

When God's desires are ignored, the despair in a person's life is inescapable

2. Secondly, when God's desires are ignored, the despair in a person's life is inescapable.

I do not know about your life, but I do know about mine, and as I follow the Bible, it has a way of taking care of despair. The world system will tell you to pursue depravity; to pursue whatever you would like to do; to go wherever you would like to go; to live wherever you would like to live, and to live it up. The Bible says that that leads to despair.

I re-read some of *Pilgrim's Progress* recently. If you have not read that book by John Bunyan, you should. I read the section on the main character Christian, and Hopeful. They had been captured by the Giant Despair and placed in a prison house deep in a dungeon. The Giant Despair came and beat them unmercifully and they barely survived. The next night, he intended to come back and finish them off. But, as Christian and Hopeful talked and prayed, they discovered that they had a key to their dungeon cell. The key's name was Promise. It is an allusion to the

Bible; it is the promise of this Book that allows escape from the dungeon of despair.

When God's authority is continually denied, the destruction of a person's life is irrevocable

3. Thirdly, when God's authority is continually denied, the destruction of a person's life is irrevocable.

Follow this progression: first you have depravity, then despair, then destruction. This truth applies not only personally, but nationally. The nation of Judah was spiraling downward in immorality and idolatry, until Josiah discovered the book of the Law. At that time, he measured his life by that and went through a process of radical personal and national change. And God's destruction was postponed as long as they followed God's revealed will.

What about our nation? We pride ourselves today on pluralism and the acceptance of any god of any religion. We are supposedly proud of that openness, but are paying the price for turning our backs on this promise. America now leads the world in divorce. America now leads the world in teenage pregnancy, and in abortion, and in the use of illegal drugs. America now leads the world in violent crime – and we think we are civilized.

There is only one hope individually, nationally, ecclesiastically – and it is this Bible.

When God's word is received, the difference in a person's life is unmistakable

4. Fourthly, when God's word is received, the difference in a person's life is unmistakable.

The classic verse in II Chronicles, chapter 7, verse 14, reads,

And My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

As we have studied one life after another in these books, it has become very apparent that the message has remained the same – those who will follow the dictates of this promise, lead a life that not only pleases the Lord, but brings fulfillment to them; those who do not, follow the path of depravity, despair, and ultimately, destruction.

I was in the home of a dear family in our church. The man that I had gone to visit has been a dear gentleman friend and encourager. He is now riddled with three different kinds of cancer, which are inoperable and incurable. He told me, at best, he would expect a few months of life yet. He is thin and his hair is gone.

We talked late into the night, much later than we anticipated. We laughed together and he showed me pictures of his dear wife and family and different events that his family had encountered. We wept together and prayed together. Soon, he got out his Bible, the Bible that I promised to preach from at his funeral. It was well marked and much loved. He leafed through it and would point out different principles and outlines. With clear eyes of joy, he proved all over again that the difference in his life is unmistakable.

The King of Kings . . . Can Put the Pieces Together Again

This is a rather cloudy ending to four books that we have studied. These are hard lessons. I want to end our study by taking you to another book that references many of these men that should, by now, seem familiar. Turn to Matthew, chapter 1. All of these men appeared in Kings and Chronicles. I will not test your memory to see how familiar they seem to you! Let us read, beginning at verse 6 and ending at verse 11.

*Jesse was the father of David the king.
David was the father of Solomon by
Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.*

*Solomon was the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah
the father of Asa.*

*Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram
the father of Uzziah.*

*Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham
the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of
Hezekiah.*

*Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon
the father of Josiah.*

*Josiah became the father of Jeconiah
and his brothers, at the time of the
deportation to Babylon.*

Does it make a little more sense now? I hope it does.

Imagine this truth – this is the legal lineage of Jesus Christ! The Messiah would adopt, as His family tree, men like these. He would call *them* His forefathers – men like Manasseh, and Amon, and Jeconiah and his brothers, this wicked lot of ungrateful, ungodly men. This is Jesus' family tree!

That is good news because Jesus will allow us to be a part of His family tree as well. As John, chapter 1, verse 12, tells us,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name

This truth is available to those who have received the word; who have accepted His remedy while remedy was available; who took the message that He delivered by His messengers and His prophets that is now in written form; who took the antidote to eternal death that is found in that fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins, that allows sinners plunged beneath that flood to lose all their guilty stains.

What have we learned from Kings and Chronicles? We have learned that men and women are unfaithful, but God is faithful. We have learned that men and women, apart from obedience to God, will stray down endless paths that ultimately lead to despair and destruction. Like Humpty Dumpties, they all sit on their wall and ultimately, they have a great fall, and no one and nothing can put the pieces back together again.

We have also learned that those in these books who followed the living word that they had, discovered that God could do what king's men could not; that God alone was able to put the pieces together. God alone is capable of picking up the broken people and the hopeless people and the guilty people and cleansing them from every sin and setting their feet upon a solid rock. Only He does it differently – He does it supernaturally; He does it permanently.

From the books of the kings to the believers in our town, the message is the same – He is the only true and living God; He is the faithful One that will allow you to be a part of the family of God if you have taken the remedy. We have learned that nations will rise and fall, kingdoms will come and go, but the kingdom of our God endures forever.