

A TALE OF TWO FOURSOMES  
2 CHRONICLES 36

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

I grew up in a family of four brothers. My mom had four boys in the space of six years. I am the oldest, and Rob is the youngest. As is common among many boys, we were competitive. In competitions of various sorts Rob and I tended to team up against the middle two brothers. We had, and have, our own unique personalities. But we share certain commonalities. We have similar worldviews and values. We had good parents, and we grew up with a church foundation. So two of us went to seminary. A third served as a missionary for a time. The fourth is probably the best evangelist of us all.

We are going to consider two Biblical foursomes this morning. The members of each foursome are likewise related, and they likewise share similar commonalities. They have similar worldviews and values. Their behavior and God's response to them have lessons to teach us about our relationship with the One who will ultimately be our Judge.

(PROJECTOR ON--- DIVIDED KINGDOM CHART 3) We have come to the end of our study of the kings of Judah as described in the Book of 2 Chronicles. Judah was separated from the northern ten tribes during most of this time. The northern kingdom of Israel was overrun and absorbed by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. Judah was slower than Israel to experience a spiritual decline. We saw in #34 and #35 that King Josiah sought to stem the spiritual corruption of his country. Jeremiah and Zephaniah were prophets who called upon the people to repent during King Josiah's time and during the reign of his sons who followed him. But the spiritual rot in Judah had become entrenched during the reign of the bad kings who preceded Josiah.

(DIVIDED KINGDOM TIMELINE) We saw in #34 that in the midst of Josiah's effort to renovate the temple, a copy of the Old Testament law was discovered. That produced further repentance. Inquiry was made of the prophetess Huldah about God's view of their circumstances in light of the realization about what God's law said about the nation's recent behavior. Huldah conveyed a divine message that the injustice and waywardness of Judah required judgment, but that judgment would be delayed beyond the time of good King Josiah.

(FOUR KINGS TIMELINE) So in #36 we are going to look at the last 23 years of Judah's existence before its people are wiped out or taken into captivity in Babylon. The four kings who rule are all descendants of Josiah. They are all evil. We shall see how God deals with this evil foursome.

I.

So in vv. 1-21 of 2 Chronicles #36 (which is found on p. 387 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) we will find that GOD'S JUDGMENT IS DISPLAYED UPON JUDAH'S LAST ROYAL FOURSOME WHO REFLECT JUDAH'S WAYWARDNESS. (I. GOD'S JUDGMENT IS DISPLAYED...) We saw at the end of #35 last Sunday that King Josiah decided to intervene when an Egyptian army led by Pharaoh Neco headed north to assist the Assyrians in defending against the growing Babylonian Empire. That was a wrong move. It went against the will of God. King Josiah was killed in battle as a result of that inappropriate intervention by the army of Judah.

A.

So in the first three verses of #36 we find a summary of what happened with Josiah's son JEHOAHAZ who succeeded him. The reign of Jehoahaz is summarized in the first three verses. The year in which Josiah dies and his son Jehoahaz takes over is 609 BC.

We read then in vv. 1-3, **"The people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem. 2 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. 3 Then the king of Egypt deposed him in Jerusalem and laid on the land a tribute of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold."**

The death of King Josiah was unexpected. Apparently there was no solid succession plan in place. Normally the oldest son replaced his father as king. For some reason not provided to us the power brokers chose a younger son whose name was Jehoahaz. Maybe he had stronger anti-Egyptian views than his brothers. With the defeat of the army of Judah by the Egyptians there was probably a strong resentment toward the Egyptians.

Jehoahaz was a young guy. He ruled only for three months. While Pharaoh Neco and his army were defeated by the Babylonians at Carchemish to the north, they were not totally wiped out. As the pharaoh returned to the south, he stopped in Jerusalem and displayed his authority over the Judeans. He disapproved of the choice of Jehoahaz to be king. Pharaoh Neco carried him off to Egypt.

In a parallel passage in 2 Kings #23 v. 32 (2 KINGS 23:32) we are told this about King Jehoahaz: **"And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done."** The prophet Jeremiah in his Old Testament book says that Jehoahaz was guilty of injustice and pride. A couple of verses later in 2 Kings #23 the text says that Pharaoh Neco brought Jehoahaz to Egypt, and he died there.

In v. 3 of our text we learn that Pharaoh Neco imposed a fine of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold upon Judah. This would amount to 3 ¾ tons of silver and 75 pounds of gold. Probably this helped to fund Egypt's war effort.

Thus the evil behavior of Jehoahaz met with quick judgment from God and severe consequences for him and for Judah as a whole.

B.

In vv. 4-8 we learn about the reign of King JEHOIAKIM. (I. GOD'S JUDGMENT... A. B. JEHOIAKIM) According to v. 4, **"And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Jehoahaz his brother and carried him to Egypt."** The change of name shows the authority of the name changer. "Eliakim" means "God raises up." "Jehoiakim" means "YHWH raises up." Pharaoh Neco is tolerating worship of what is regarded as the local God in Judah. Neco is the one who correctly explained the will of God to King Josiah when he warned the king of Judah not to intervene in his march northward. Perhaps Neco has a certain respect for the God of Judah.

Verses 5-8 tell us: **"Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. 6 Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon. 7 Nebuchadnezzar also carried part of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon. 8 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and the abominations that 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 reigned in his place."**

Jehoiakim was evil like his brother. He was put into office by the Egyptians, but the Babylonians soon pushed the Egyptians out of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar was now ruler of Babylon. According to 2 Kings #24 v. 1 (2 KINGS 24:1), **"In his days, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant for three years. Then he turned and rebelled against him."** This proved to be an unwise move on Jehoiakim's part. Our text says that Jehoiakim was bound and taken off to Babylon in chains.

The suspicion of many Bible scholars is that Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon and forced to participate in a victory parade there, but then he was sent back to Jerusalem. There he served as a vassal king in subjection to Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 5 in our text says that Jehoiakim ruled over Judah for a total of 11 years.

Verse 7 says that valuable temple articles were also taken off to Babylon. In the passage from Daniel #1 which Mick read, we learned that other members of the royal household were also deported to Babylon. The year is 605 BC.

In 597 BC Jehoiakim rebelled again. Nebuchadnezzar came back and imposed his will. Archaeologists discovered something called the Babylonian Chronicle. At one point it says this: **"In the seventh year [of Nebuchadnezzar], the month Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land and encamped against the city of Judah, and on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there the king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent them to Babylon."** (Wiseman, *Chronicles*, 73)

The first century Jewish historian Josephus says that Nebuchadnezzar executed Jehoiakim. Other traditions say that fellow Jews assassinated him, hoping to get more favorable treatment from the conquering Babylonians. Thus another evil king bites the dust. The people of Judah also suffer in the midst of this conflict. The prophet Jeremiah in his Old Testament book declares that the people suffer because generally they have turned from worship of the true God.

C.

In vv. 9 & 10 in our passage we have a short summary of the brief career of King JEHOIACHIN. (I. A. B. C. JEHOIACHIN) Those two verses read: **“Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. 10 In the spring of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon, with the precious vessels of the house of the Lord, and made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.”** Some translations have it that Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king. Most scholars think that is the result of an error by early scribes.

Most Bible scholars think that Jewish power brokers installed Jehoiachin as king when Jehoiakim died, or was killed, as Nebuchadnezzar approached Jerusalem. The year was 597 BC. Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem and wants his own choice for king in Judah. Thus Jehoiachin has only a three month rule.

(JOASH'S KIDS' CHART) It is getting a little difficult to keep these kings straight. This chart provides a simple description of this royal foursome. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah are all brothers. Jehoiachin is the son of Jehoiakim. The numbers in parentheses show the order in which the four served as king.

Verses 12-14 of 2 Kings #24 (2 KINGS 24:12) provide a more detailed description of what happened with Jehoiachin: **“...and Jehoiachin the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself and his mother and his servants and his officials and his palace officials. The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign (2 KINGS 24:13) and carried off all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the Lord, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the Lord had foretold. (2 KINGS 24:14) He carried away all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor, 10,000 captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained, except the poorest people of the land.”** Divine judgment is thus being imposed on Judah's evil kings and Judah's wayward citizens.

D.

In vv. 11-21 we encounter the fourth member of this royal foursome: ZEDEKIAH. (I. A. B. C. D. ZEDEKIAH) According to vv. 11 & 12, **“Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12 He did**

**what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord.”**

The year is 597 BC when Zedekiah is placed upon the throne. He is the brother of the first two members of the royal foursome. He is the uncle of younger King Jehoiachin. The prophet Jeremiah has many encounters with this king. He tells Zedekiah that he needs to submit to Nebuchadnezzar. But he rebels. Jeremiah tells the king and his people that they need to repent of their sinful deeds and turn to the true God.

An example of Jeremiah’s prophetic warnings is found in Jeremiah #26 vv. 12 & 13. (JEREMIAH 26:12) There we find these words: **“Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, ‘The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. (JEREMIAH 26:13) 13 Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you.”** Zedekiah and his people do not mend their ways and listen to the voice of the Lord.

The story continues back in vv. 13-16 of our text: (PROJECTOR OFF) **“He [Zedekiah] also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel. 14 All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the Lord that he had made holy in Jerusalem. 15 The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy.”**

**“...until there was no remedy.”** In 588 BC King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army come to Jerusalem and lay siege to the city. Second Kings #25 and Jeremiah #39 describe the desperation that pervades the city.

Verses 17-19 in our passage provide a brief description of the gruesome outcome: **“Therefore he [the Lord] brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels 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 princes, all these he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.”** In 586 BC the city of Jerusalem is captured and completely destroyed.

Jeremiah #39 describes how King Zedekiah escaped from Jerusalem just before its capture. He fled to the east toward the Jordan River. The Babylonians, however,

captured him. They brought him before King Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah's sons were killed in front of him. Then Zedekiah was blinded. Thus the last visual memory he had was the murder of his sons. Zedekiah was then brought to prison in Babylon.

Verses 20 & 21: **“He [King Nebuchadnezzar] took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”** Thus begins the 70 year captivity of the Jews in Babylon.

In Leviticus #25 vv. 1-7 God's law declared that in every seventh year the land was to remain uncultivated. The Jews had failed to follow this command for many years, perhaps for 490 years. This was one of the evidences of rebellion and disobedience among God's people. Thus the divine judgment upon the royal foursome and their people is complete.

II.

We are going to move over to the Book of Daniel as we find that GOD'S GRACE IS DISPLAYED UPON A ROYAL FOURSOME WHO REFLECT THE FAITHFULNESS OF A REMNANT. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. GOD'S GRACE IS DISPLAYED...) Daniel is found on p. 737 in the black Bibles. Verses 1 & 2 of #1 say, **“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.”**

(JOSIAH'S KIDS' CHART) Jehoiakim, king #2, ruled for eleven years. During that reign in 605 BC King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was put into chains and brought to Babylon. My interpretation is that he was then returned to Jerusalem and forced to serve the Babylonians. Temple vessels from Jerusalem were also brought to Babylon. (BABYLONIAN EMPIRE)

Verses 3 & 4 describe what else was brought to Babylon: **“Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.”**

So Nebuchadnezzar is taking a foursome from Jerusalem who are connected to the royal family of Judah and who are probably related to each other in some fashion. These would be among the best educated and most cultured young men in Judah. Their forced exile accomplishes two purposes. These four serve as hostages. Rebellion by the royal family in Judah is less likely with the realization that members of the royal

family are in Babylon. Secondly, the Babylonians intend to indoctrinate these young men so that they will help rule over their former lands, perhaps, only with a new loyalty to the Babylonians.

The story continues in vv. 5-7: **“The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.”** Thus this royal foursome was placed in a three year training program.

These young men were probably in their teens. They had been torn away from their families. Probably they saw some of their family members killed by the Babylonians. They were forced into a new culture where they had to learn a new language and new ways of being. This was the perfect setting for the development of depression and bitterness. Where was the God of Judah? The Babylonian gods appeared to be superior. Yet these four had somehow developed spiritual roots in the God of the Bible. Instead of being compromised by this new culture, they left a mark for YHWH upon it.

In #1 they resisted compromise with the dietary laws of the Babylonians, and they were blessed for their insistence upon a kosher diet. They studied hard. At the end of their three year training program, they proved to be superior to all of the other students. When they entered the king’s service, they faced continuing challenges. In #3 they are forced to worship an idol of Nebuchadnezzar. The earlier royal foursome promoted idolatry. These four resist it. For their efforts three of them are thrown into a fiery furnace. But the Lord miraculously intervenes, and they are saved and promoted. All four prove to be a faithful remnant who provide hope for their own people.

III.

We return then to vv. 22 & 23 of 2 Chronicles #36. There we find that **GOD PROVIDES HOPE IN THE MIDST OF DIVINE JUDGMENT.** (III. GOD PROVIDES HOPE IN...)

According to vv. 22 & 23, **“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: 23 ‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up.””**”

In the years that follow the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah in 586 BC the Persians overtake the Babylonians and become the dominant power. Cyrus the Great adopts a different policy than the Babylonians. He encourages subjugated people to return to their homelands and to rebuild their temples and to pray to their gods for Cyrus and the Persian administration. The Jews are specifically included. Thus the prophecy made by Jeremiah is fulfilled.

In the Book of Jeremiah (JEREMIAH 29: 10) in #29 vv. 10 & 11, we find these words: **“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. (JEREMIAH 29:11) For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”**

There is hope in the midst of judgment. Some among us have been guilty of major screwups. (PROJECTOR OFF) We have seen the consequences of our wrongdoing. We recognize the hand of discipline or judgment from God. But we also deal with a God of grace who gives us reason for hope.

In vv. 27-30 of 2 Kings #25 (which is on p. 333 in the black Bibles) we have another version of the verses which we have just read from 2 Chronicles 36. There we read, **“And in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. 28 And he spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. 29 So Jehoiachin put off his prison garments. And every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table, 30 and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, according to his daily needs, as long as he lived.”**

Evil-merodach was the son of King Nebuchadnezzar. He was the crown prince. (JOSIAH'S KIDS' CHART) Jehoiachin was king #3. He was the grandson of Josiah who ruled for only three months in 597 BC when he was carted off to Babylon and put in prison.

So why is he treated so nicely now by the new king, Evil-Merodach? It is the work of the grace of God. But what was his human motivation? In the nineteenth century explorers discovered something that has become known as the Istanbul Prism of Nebuchadnezzar. (ISTANBUL PRISM OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR) This clay prism, inscribed in cuneiform letters, contains a list of officials from the administration of King Nebuchadnezzar.

One of the officials is Ardi-Nabu. (ARDI-NABU) He is listed as Secretary of the Crown Prince. Who is the crown prince? Evil-merodach. Ardi-Nabu (ARDI-NABU [AKKADIAN]) is Akkadian, the language of ancient Babylon, for “Servant of Nabu.” Nabu was a Babylonian god who was regarded as son of the chief god Marduk. He was supposedly the patron god of scribes, literacy, and wisdom.

One of the royal foursome described in the Book of Daniel was Azariah. (AZARIAH ABED-NEGO) His name was changed to Abed-nego. “Abed” is Hebrew for “servant.” His new name meant “Servant of Nego.” The problem is that there is no known Babylonian god of that name. But the religious Hebrews had a habit of corrupting, or changing, the names of pagan gods when they appeared in the name of Jews. The

suspicion of some Biblical scholars is that the author of Daniel changed Azariah's new name by one letter. (Ancient Semitic languages had no vowels in their written languages.) Abed-nego was Ardi-Nabu, secretary of the crown prince of Babylon, Evil-merodach.

Do you see how the grace and sovereignty of God used the faithfulness of a committed believer to change the course of history? Abed-nego was a witness for the true God to the crown prince. When Evil-merodach came to power he was moved to release the Hebrew king from imprisonment and to treat him well. Thus he provided hope to the people of Judah in the midst of divine judgment. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Japan deserved the judgment of God in World War II. The Japanese military had a reputation for terrible brutality. They treated the Chinese and the Koreans terribly. There is still resentment in those countries today toward Japan. They also treated US and Allied POWs horribly. But judgment came. It came at the Battle of Midway. It came in the US campaign in the western Pacific. It came at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yet there was evidence of grace.

Mitsuo Fuchida (PROJECTOR ON--- MITSUOU FUCHIDA) was the naval air officer who led the evil attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He dropped two bombs on the USS Maryland. His plane was severely damaged with flak. Upon his return to his aircraft carrier he counted 21 holes in his plane. When he returned to Tokyo, he was treated as a national hero and had an audience with the emperor. Mitsuo Fuchida later led air attacks at Darwin, Australia, and upon the island of Ceylon. At the Battle of Midway he had an attack of appendicitis and could not participate in the air attack. His carrier was sunk, and Fuchida barely escaped with his life. Of the 73 naval air officers who participated in the attack at Pearl Harbor he was the only one to survive the war.

In August of 1945 he was sent to an army conference in Hiroshima. On August 5 he received a phone call from Navy headquarters, ordering him to return immediately to Tokyo. On the next day an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The city was obliterated. On August 7 Fuchida was sent with several other military officials to survey the damage. Everyone in that group suffered from radiation poisoning and eventually died---- except for one man. Mitsuo Fuchida never suffered any ill effects at all.

After the war Fuchida met up with several friends who had been imprisoned by the Americans. He was shocked to discover that they had been treated well. He was further amazed to learn about an American woman whose missionary parents had been killed by the Japanese. She had shown many acts of kindness to the Japanese captives. Fuchida was confused. He grew up in an honor and shame culture which taught that duty required one to seek revenge upon enemies and upon those who had hurt one's people.

A couple of years later Mitsuo was at a train station when someone handed him a tract which contained the story of an American POW flier who had suffered in the Japanese POW camps. He had been filled with hatred toward his captors. But when he developed

a relationship with Jesus, he discovered the ability to forgive. Fuchida was intrigued. He sought out a Bible and learned about Jesus. Eventually he became convinced that Jesus was the Son of God who had come to earth to die for his sins. He put his trust in this Jesus and became a Christian.

(FUCHIDA AND DESHAZER) Fuchida sought out that American airman, Jacob DeShazer, who had been one of Doolittle's Raiders. The two became friends. In the next twenty years they participated in a number of evangelistic meetings in both the US and Japan.

God provides hope in the midst of judgment. That same grace and hope is available to us today. The only issue is whether we will claim that grace and that hope.