

CHAPTER 24

Things are here ripening for, and hastening towards, the utter destruction of Jerusalem. We left Jehoiakim on the throne, placed there by the king of Egypt: now here we have,

I. The troubles of his reign, how he was brought into subjection by the king of Babylon, and severely chastised for attempting to shake off the yoke (v. 1-6), and how Egypt also was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar (v. 7).

II. The desolations of his son's reign, which continued but three months; and then he and all his great men, being forced to surrender at discretion, were carried captives to Babylon (v. 8-16).

III. The preparatives of the next reign (which was the last of all) for the utter ruin of Jerusalem, which the next chapter will give us an account of (v. 17-20).

~~1241~~ 2 KINGS 24:1-7

JEHOIAKIM SUBDUED BY NEBUCHADNEZZAR

We have here the first mention of a name which makes a great figure both in the histories and in the prophecies of the Old Testament; it is that of *Nebuchadnezzar*, king of Babylon (v. 1), that head of gold. He was a potent prince, and one that was the terror of the mighty in the land of the living; and yet his name would not have been known in sacred writ if he had not been employed in the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews.

I. He made Jehoiakim his tributary and kept him in subjection three years, v. 1. Nebuchadnezzar began his reign in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. In his eighth year he made him his prisoner, but restored him upon his promise of faithfulness to him. That promise he kept about three years, but then rebelled, probably in hopes of assistance from the king of Egypt. If Jehoiakim had served his God as he should have done, he would not have been servant to the king of Babylon; but God would thus make him know

the difference between his service and *the service of the kings of the countries*, ^{<4138>}2 Chronicles 12:8. If he had been content with his servitude, and true to his word, his condition would have been no worse; but, rebelling against the king of Babylon, he plunged himself into more trouble.

II. When he rebelled Nebuchadnezzar sent his forces against him to destroy his country, bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, who were all now in the service and pay of the king of Babylon (v. 2), and withal retained, and now showed, their ancient enmity to the Israel of God. Yet no mention is here made of their commission from the king of Babylon, but only of that from the King of kings: *The Lord sent against him all these bands*; and again (v. 3), *Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah*, else the commandment of Nebuchadnezzar could not have brought it. Many are serving God's purposes who are not aware of it. Two things God intended in suffering Judah to be thus harassed: —

1. The punishment of the sins of Manasseh, which God now visited upon *the third and fourth generation*. So long he waited before he visited them, to see if the nation would repent; but they continued impenitent, notwithstanding Josiah's endeavours to reform them, and ready to relapse, upon the first turn, into their former idolatries. Now that the old bond was put in suit they were called up upon the former judgment; that was revived which God had *laid up in store*, and *sealed among his treasures* (^{<4834>}Deuteronomy 32:34; ^{<4847>}Job 14:17), and in remembrance of that he removed Judah out of his sight, and let the world know that *time will not wear out the guilt of sin* and that reprieves are not pardons. All that Manasseh did was called to mind, but especially the *innocent blood that he shed*, much of which, we may suppose, was the blood of God's witnesses and worshippers, *which the Lord would not pardon*. Is there then any unpardonable sin but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? This is meant of the remitting of the temporal punishment. Though Manasseh repented, and we have reason to think even the persecutions and murders he was guilty of were pardoned, so that he was delivered from the wrath to come; yet, as they were national sins, they lay still charged upon the land, crying for national judgments. Perhaps some were now living who were aiding and abetting; and the present king was guilty of innocent blood, as appears ^{<4927>}Jeremiah 22:17. See what a provoking sin murder is, how loud it cries, and how long. See what need nations have to lament the sins of their fathers, lest they smart for them. God intended hereby the accomplishment

of the prophecies; it was *according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servants the prophets*. Rather shall Judah be *removed out of his sight*, nay, rather shall *heaven and earth pass away*, than any word of God fall to the ground. Threatenings will be fulfilled as certainly as promises, if the sinner's repentance prevent not.

III. The king of Egypt was likewise subdued by the king of Babylon, and a great part of his country taken from him, v. 7. It was but lately that he had oppressed Israel, ^{<1233>}2 Kings 23:33. Now he is himself brought down and disabled to attempt any thing for the recovery of his losses or the assistance of his allies. He dares not *come any more out of his land*. Afterwards he attempted to give Zedekiah some relief, but was obliged to retire, ^{<267>}Jeremiah 37:7.

IV. Jehoiakim, seeing his country laid waste and himself ready to fall into the enemy's hand, as it should seem, died of a broken heart, in the midst of his days (v. 6). So *Jehoiakim slept with his fathers*; but it is not said that he was *buried with them*, for no doubt the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled, that he should not be lamented, as his father was, but *buried with the burial of an ass* (^{<1228>}Jeremiah 22:18, 19), and his dead body cast out, ^{<283>}Jeremiah 36:30.

^{<1248>}2 KINGS 24:8-20

JEHOIACHIN CARRIED CAPTIVE TO BABYLON

This should have been the history of king Jehoiachin's *reign*, but, alas! it is only the history of king Jehoiachin's *captivity*, as it is called, ^{<300>}Ezekiel 1:2. He came to the crown, not to have the honour of wearing it, but the shame of losing it. *Ideo tantum venerat, ut exiret* — *He came in only to go out*.

I. His reign was short and inconsiderable. He reigned but three months, and then was removed and carried captive to Babylon, as his father, it is likely, would have been if he had lived but so much longer. What an unhappy young prince was this, that was thrust into a falling house, a sinking throne! What an unnatural father had he, who begat him to suffer for him, and by his own sin and folly had left himself nothing to bequeath to his son but his own miseries! Yet this young prince reigned long enough

to show that he justly smarted for his fathers' sins, for he trod in their steps (v. 9): *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, as they had done; he did nothing to cut off the entail of the curse, to discharge the incumbrances of his crown, and therefore (*transit cum onere — the incumbrance descends with the crown*) with his own iniquity that of his fathers shall come into the account.

II. The calamities that came upon him, and his family, and people, in the very beginning of his reign, were very grievous.

1. Jerusalem was besieged by the king of Babylon, v. 10, 11. He had sent his forces to ravage the country, v. 2. Now he came himself, and laid siege to the city. Now the word of God was fulfilled (^{<63B>}Deuteronomy 28:49, etc.), *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, of fierce countenance, that shall first eat of the fruit of thy land and then besiege thee in all thy gates.*

2. Jehoiachin immediately surrendered at discretion. As soon as he heard the king of Babylon had come in person against the city, his name having at this time become very formidable, he beat a parley and went out to him, v. 12. Had he made his peace with God, and taken the method that Hezekiah did in the like case, he needed not to have feared the king of Babylon, but might have held out with courage, honour, and success (one should have chased a thousand); but, wanting the faith and piety of an Israelite, he had not the resolution of a man, of a soldier, of a prince. He and his royal family, his mother and wives, his servants and princes, delivered themselves up prisoners of war; this was the consequence of their being servants of sin.

3. Nebuchadnezzar rifled the treasures both of the church and of the state, and carried away the silver and gold of both, v. 13. Now the word of God by Isaiah was fulfilled (^{<20F>}2 Kings 20:17), *All that is in thy house shall be carried to Babylon.* Even the vessels of the temple which Solomon had made, and laid up in store to be used as the old ones were worn out, he cut off from the temple, and began to cut them in pieces, but, upon second thoughts, reserved them for his own use, for we find Belshazzar drinking wine in them, ^{<78D>}Daniel 5:2, 3.

4. He carried away a great part of Jerusalem into captivity, to weaken it, that he might effectually secure to himself the dominion of it and prevent its revolt, and to enrich himself with the wealth or service of those he took

away. There had been some carried away eight years before this, in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar and the third of Jehoiakim, among whom were Daniel and his fellows. See ^{<2000>}Daniel 1:1, 6. They had approved themselves so well that this politic prince coveted more of them. Now he carried off,

(1.) The young king himself and his family (v. 15), and we find (^{<1257>}2 Kings 25:27-29) that for thirty-seven years he continued a close prisoner.

(2.) All the great men, the princes and officers, whose riches were *kept for the owners thereof to their hurt* (^{<2063>}Ecclesiastes 5:13), tempting the enemies to make a prey of them first.

(3.) All the military men, the *mighty men of valour* (v. 14), *the mighty of the land* (v. 15), *the men of might, even all that were strong and apt for war*, v. 16. These could not defend themselves, and the conqueror would not leave them to defend their country, but took them away, to be employed in his service.

(4.) All the craftsmen and smiths who made weapons of war; in taking them he did, in effect, disarm the city, according to the Philistines' policy, ^{<0939>}1 Samuel 13:19. In this captivity Ezekiel the prophet was carried away (^{<3100>}Ezekiel 1:1, 2) and Mordecai, ^{<1706>}Esther 2:6. This Jehoiachin was also called *Jeconiah* (^{<1316>}1 Chronicles 3:16), and in contempt (^{<2024>}Jeremiah 22:24, where his captivity is foretold) *Coniah*.

III. The successor whom the king of Babylon appointed in the room of Jehoiachin. God had written him childless (^{<2020>}Jeremiah 22:30) and therefore his uncle was entrusted with the government. The king of Babylon made Mattaniah king, the son of Josiah; and to remind him, and let all the world know, that he was his creature, he changed his name and called him *Zedekiah*, v. 17. God had sometimes charged it upon his people, *They have set up kings, but not by me* (^{<3004>}Hosea 8:4), and now, to punish them for that, the king of Babylon shall have the setting up of their kings. Those are justly deprived of their liberty that use it, and insist upon it, against God's authority. This Zedekiah was the last of the kings of Judah. The name which the king of Babylon gave him signifies *The justice of the Lord*, and was a presage of the glorifying of God's justice in his ruin.

1. See how impious this Zedekiah was. Though the judgments of God upon his three immediate predecessors might have been a warning to him

not to tread in their steps, yet *he did that which was evil*, like all the rest, v. 19.

2. See how impolitic he was. As his predecessor lost his courage, so he his wisdom, with his religion, for he *rebelled against the king of Babylon* (v. 20), whose tributary he was, and so provoked him whom he was utterly unable to contend with, and who, if he had continued true to him, would have protected him. This was the most foolish thing he could do, and hastened the ruin of his kingdom. This came to pass *through the anger of the Lord, that he might cast them out from his presence*. Note, When those that are entrusted with the counsels of a nation act unwisely, and against their true interest, we ought to take notice of the displeasure of God in it. It is for the sins of a people that God *removes the speech of the trusty and takes away the understanding of the aged, and hides from their eyes the things that belong to the public peace*. Whom God will destroy he infatuates.