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Hope in the Darkness

II Kings 25:1-30

Intro: We're looking at the final chapter in the history of the kingdom of Judah. Last time we noted that it was a boring history – the same ole, same ole sin and rebellion was practiced by each of her last 4 monarchs. It was also a doomed history and since Yahweh had declared that it would happen, He was faithful to bring it to pass. Thus, it was not only an irreversible doom; it was a compounded doom because of the evil leaders Yahweh gave to Judah during this time. We also noted that it was a sad history and that sadness is even more palpable in our text today.

1-12 – Well, that sounds horrible. If you recall, what brought on this new wave of disaster is that King Zedekiah, appointed and installed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, decided to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar (**24:20**). His nephew Jehoiachin reigned for only 3 months when he was exiled to Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar's first excursion into the kingdom of Judah. Zedekiah would reign for 11 yrs and do evil in the sight of the Lord but unlike his brother Jehoiakim, whose was a stubbornly rigid evil, Zedekiah's was a spineless evil. We see evidence of Zedekiah's weak character in **Jer 21:2-10**. He inquires to hear the word of the Lord but refuses to accept it and follow it. His evil character (and that of Judah) is further revealed in **II Chron 36:11-17**.

In order to become king, Zedekiah was required to take an oath in the name of the Lord that he would be faithful to the king of Babylon. He was careful to maintain diplomatic contact with Babylon and even visited Nebuchadnezzar's court. But all that time, he merely pretended to submit to Babylon while courting Egypt and listening to the pro-Egypt leaders in his own government. He also sent envoys to Egypt to request the assistance of Pharaoh Hophra. The king and his advisors were convinced that Egypt could help them in their rebellion against Babylon so they did.

Nebuchadnezzar responds to Zedekiah's revolt by marching his army to Jerusalem to begin the process of laying siege to the city but when the Egyptians army moved up to help Judah, the Babylonians withdrew temporarily to face them. Nebuchadnezzar knew it was unwise to fight a war

on 2 fronts and Jerusalem wasn't going anywhere. Yahweh graciously sent Jeremiah the prophet to warn Zedekiah that Nebuchadnezzar would return but the king's faith was in Egypt, not Yahweh ([Jer 37](#)). Yahweh had warned Zedekiah that he had given the land over to Babylon and that the king and Judah should accept and submit to Babylon's God-given authority ([Jer 27:6-8, 12-13](#)). And just in case Zedekiah thought Judah got off easy in Babylon's first invasion, please be advised that whatever Nebuchadnezzar failed to carry off the first time, will be carried off the next time ([27:19-22](#)). Babylon effectively stopped Egypt and then returned to Jerusalem and the punishment of Zedekiah.

The siege of Jerusalem began in January of 588B.C. and continued until July of 586B.C. – 18 months. 18 months of nothing entering the city. Towards the end, the famine became so severe that people began cooking and eating their own children ([Lam 4:9-10](#)). Our text says (4) the Babylonian invaders broke through the wall and took the city, looting and destroying the houses and finally burning the city and the temple. Jeremiah had counseled Zedekiah and his officers to surrender to Babylon, thereby saving the city and the temple, but they refused to obey God's Word and even had Jeremiah arrested as a traitor. The hypocritical and weak Zedekiah told Jeremiah to ask the Lord what he should do ([Jer 21](#)) then refused to accept the prophet's answer because it didn't fit with his desires. The king asked Jeremiah to pray for him ([Jer 37:3](#)) but he was a proud man who refused to humble himself and pray for himself.

When Babylonian soldiers finally entered the city, King Zedekiah fled with his family and officers but they were all captured in the plains of Jericho and taken into custody. This was a considerable distance from Jerusalem so the king probably thought his strategy was successful and that he had escaped the judgment that prophets like Jeremiah had promised. Yet Yahweh's word was demonstrated to be true again and he was captured in the plains of Jericho. It's ironic that here, at the very spot where Israel first set foot in the Promise Land, the last reigning Davidic king was captured and his monarchy shattered. Here, where Israel experienced her first victory as the impenetrable walls of Jericho fell before men armed with nothing but trumpets and faith in Yahweh; was the scene of her final defeat.

Jeremiah's prophecies had come to pass ([Jer 34:3](#)). Zedekiah faced Nebuchadnezzar at his headquarters in Riblah where he was found guilty of

rebellion and sentenced to be exiled to Babylon. But first, to give the king one last tormenting memory, the Babylonians killed his sons before his eyes – then put out his eyes! They made certain that the last sight King Zedekiah saw was the murder of his own sons before he spent the rest of his life in darkness. While already in Babylon, Ezekiel prophesied that the king would attempt to escape and be captured and taken to Babylon, but would not see the city! How could Zedekiah see the king of Babylon but not the city of Babylon? The answer is: after he saw the king of Babylon, Zedekiah was blinded by his enemies.

But, if you think about it, the eyes of Zedekiah's mind had been put out long before or else he might have foreseen and prevented this tragedy. Prevision is the best means of prevention and an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It's not like he hadn't been warned over and over but he was blind to all of this because his heart was dead set against following Yahweh's will and hearing Yahweh's word. You can lead a man to ponder, but you can't make him think! If he had only listened to the prophet's words he could have saved both Jerusalem and himself but now he would die in Babylon – far away from the Promise land.

Solomon's magnificent temple – the spiritual security of the city - was now a smoking ruin. This was exactly 424 yrs, 3 months and 8 days from the time Solomon laid the first foundation stone. The walls of Jerusalem – the physical security of the city - were completely torn down and destroyed. Nebuzaradan (chief executioner) methodically set about destroying this once beautiful city. And, in the 3rd wave of deportations, some of those who had remained in the city and all of those who had defected to the Babylonians were carried off to exile in Babylon. Only the poorest of Judeans were left to tend to the crops and vineyards. Only 2 prominent citizens were left behind – Gedaliah (as governor) and Jeremiah the prophet.

13-17 – Just as the remaining people were carried off to Babylon, so were the remaining treasures of the temple – just as Jeremiah had prophesied (27). Jerusalem was left desolate and completely plundered under God's judgment.

18-21 – The Babylonian officers also captured the religious leaders of the city as well as members of the king's staff, the very people who had

opposed Jeremiah and had given King Zedekiah poor counsel. These all were executed before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. The priest had polluted God's house with idols and encouraged the people to break their covenant with Yahweh. The leaders of the nation had refused to listen to God's servants so God sent judgment. By all indications, the king of Babylon now seemed to hold complete authority over the former kingdom of Judah. This was the land Yahweh had given to His people, the tribes of Israel. They had possessed the land for some 860 years; they had taken it by faith and obedience but they lost it by idolatry and sin.

The history of Judah is indeed a sad history, even more so because it could have been avoided. But her history is not just sad, there's a bit of stupidity here as well.

22-26 – There are 3 egregious acts of stupidity in these last 2 chapters of **II Kings**. There's Jehoiakim's original revolt against Babylon (**24:1**); then Zedekiah's brainless rebellion against the same in **24:20**. Here we have the last of the trifecta of stupidity in Ishmael's slaughter of Gedaliah and everyone else that happened to be in Mizpah on that day. The text doesn't say why he took such drastic and senseless measures or what he hoped to gain from it. Babylon had set up a sort of provisional government under the governorship of Gedaliah who assured the remaining Jews and the 4 military leaders who had recently arrived, that they could live safely under the authority of the Babylonians.

It seems those left in Judah could finally enjoy a little breathing space and establish some consistency in their lives.

But no! Ishmael and his cohorts butcher Gedaliah and all the Jews and Babylonians living in Mizpah. Everyone else that had been left in Judah hightail it to Egypt, rightfully fearing Babylon's merciless reprisals. One wonders why Ishmael did this. Surely, by this time no one in their right mind would imagine a revolt against Babylon could be successful. It's possible that Ishmael, as a royal descendent, had a vendetta against those he saw as collaborators and thought his trail of blood would make a statement. I guess it did but not in the way he figured.

Living under Babylonian authority may have seemed unpatriotic and even ungodly but it was the right thing to do. The best they could do under this situation of deserved and unstoppable judgment was to simply accept it

from the hand of God and do the right thing under the Babylonians. It was the right thing to do because although it was hard to accept, it was true that the Babylonians were doing the work of Yahweh in bringing judgment upon the deserving kingdom of Judah. In this situation, to resist Babylon was to resist God. It was better to humble one's self and submit to God's judgment as it was brought by Babylon. So we have these 3: Jehoiakim, Zedekiah and Ishmael – the 3 stooges of Judah - doing every thing they can to make a bad situation even worse.

But for all the destruction, death and deportation shown here in Judah's last gasp; despite all the stupidity and sadness in her final history, the most depressing thing from this entire scene is found there in [v26](#) – And all the people...went to Egypt. This may seem like the only logical move for a people who have offended the only super power in the region but there's more to it than just survival. The act of "returning to Egypt" carries with it some heavy theological meaning. From the very beginning of Israel's existence, returning to Egypt was a very real possibility that was to be avoided at all costs. As soon as Israel was delivered from Egypt by the miraculous power of Yahweh, God had them travel the long way around to get to Mt. Sinai. He wouldn't let them go the short way because He knew as soon as they faced any sort of conflict with the Philistines; they'd want to head back to bondage in Egypt ([Ex 13:17](#)).

Of course, no sooner had they made it into the desert and got hungry were they ready to revolt against Moses and go back to the flesh pots (and bondage) of Egypt ([Ex 16:3](#)). Later, after Yahweh miraculously provided them with manna to eat and water to drink, they rebelled against the menu, remembering all they had to eat in Egypt ([Num 11:5-6](#)). Later, at Kadesh-Barnea, when they were instructed to enter and possess the Promise Land, they protested that it was impossible because of the giants that lived there. Again, they wanted to lynch Moses and pick a new leader who would march them right back to the safety and bondage of Egypt. That rebellion cost them 40 yrs of wandering in the wilderness until that rebellious generation died off and a new generation would enter the land. In each of these instances, a return to Egypt was seen as a sign of fear and distrust in God's provision and protection.

Before entering the Promise Land, Moses warned Israel and her future kings against returning to Egypt even for the simple purpose of acquiring

horses and chariots. Yahweh didn't want His people to rely on Egypt, He wanted them to trust and rely on Him. Later, in the prophetic books, the act or attitude of returning to Egypt was seen as spiritual backsliding and a rejection of God's will and Word. Hosea even classified it as a sign of sin and rejection of God's Law (**Hos 8:13**). Sadly, for both Israel and Judah, Egypt became their go-to alternative against all Assyrian and Babylonian advances but they could never really rely on Egypt's assistance. Even when Egypt made an effort, it wasn't enough to thwart God's judgment or change the inevitable outcomes of their collective demises. They couldn't trust in Egypt's help no more than believers today can rely on the arm of flesh. We will not and cannot succeed in the Christian life or ministry by relying on our own strength.

Just as Lot's wife was turned to a pillar of salt because she deserted God's provision of grace and salvation; so a return to Egypt by God's people, whether literal or spiritual, means that the covenant deliverance Yahweh had accomplished for them would be cancelled and they will return to a bondage similar to that in Egypt of old. Don't get me wrong – everyone was now out of the Promise Land but those in exile in Babylon were there by God's hand and would enjoy His blessing for submitting to His will. But those who escaped back to Egypt did so by their own hand in opposition to God's will and as such, they'd never prosper and they'd never experience rest in the land ever again.

27-30 – What's going on here? Why does the author feel it is important to include this as an epilogue, something that occurs some 26 years after the fall of Jerusalem? Clearly, he must credit this event with great significance. It's also clearly quite a turn-around from the foolishness of the Zedekiah and Ishmael disasters. It certainly serves as a deliberate contrast to the bleak episodes in the preceding text: Zedekiah's blindness and captivity. Jehoiachin's treatment here is remarkably different. Jehoiachin's situation also stands as a positive scenario against the Ishmael fiasco and Judah's escape to Egypt. On the one hand, you have an entire group of Jews whose final exile finds them in a pre-exodus location while Jehoiachin lives well in Babylon, from which the next exodus will take place.

It seems that the text implies a ray of hope in this kindness done to the exiled Davidic king. Even though it is just a glimmer of hope, that small ray shines all the way through to the Christmas sermon in Matt's gospel, where

it becomes a shining beacon of hope. **Mt 1:12-16** picks up the story where **II Kings 25** leaves off. Who would think that any sure hope from God could be hidden under this failed, dilapidated and captive people? At the time of the events recorded in Matt, Israel had lost the land (Abrahamic promise) and the kingship (Davidic promise). Judah was still under foreign domination; life is hard. The earth is mostly brown, the sky is gray, the leaves are pale and the wind is cold. But it is precisely in this time, this darkest, bleakest period of Israel's history that the Messiah is given!

It's when this people was trampled, beaten down and teetering between faith and compromise that the Sun of righteousness began to blaze. It's not our righteousness that brings redemption, it's Yahweh's stubbornness. The God of power and fury turns from His fury in Jehoiachin's descendant – Jesus Christ! We should have more than a little hope.

We may scoff and look at Judah's sad history in disbelief but the truth is, we are so much like the Israelites during their march to the Promised Land. They rebelled against God's ways at almost every conceivable stage of their trip.

They rebelled against God's counsel in everything and at every turn. But God kept at them so they would eventually learn that nothing matters but the purposes of God and so they would determine to do His will even though they did not naturally want to do it. So it is with us. We are not paragons of faith or faithfulness. Left to ourselves we too would go back to Egypt. But we must learn that. And we must determine for this reason to pursue God's will in spite of our natural inclinations.

Messiah has come, Jesus lived, died was buried and rose again. We don't just have the hope of prophecy – we have the reality of salvation! That salvation was not meant just to save us from the penalty of sin in hell but to deliver us from the power of sin in our lives here on earth. But that can't be done in the flesh – in fact, the flesh is what makes that work so difficult in our lives. It can only be accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit and our daily submission and cooperation with that work.

Like Judah, we can either submit to and pursue God's will for our lives, even if it goes against all our hopes and dreams or we can go back to Egypt. Only one of those choices will bring God's blessings and satisfaction to a true servant's heart. 😊