

Decline in Judah

Judah lasted longer than Israel before destruction, but that time of judgment would also come for Judah. Men like Hezekiah and Josiah, due to their reformation efforts, were able to put it off a while, but decline in Judah would,

nevertheless, come. The sad truth of this is seen in what Isaiah says:

Now go, write it on a tablet before them
And inscribe it on a scroll,
That it may serve in the time to come
As a witness forever.
For this is a rebellious people, false sons,
Sons who refuse to listen
To the instruction of the Lord;
Who say to the seers, "You must not see
visions";
And to the prophets, "You must not
prophesy to us what is right,
Speak to us pleasant words,
Prophesy illusions.
"Get out of the way, turn aside from the
path,
Let us hear no more about the Holy One of
Israel." (Isa. 30:8-11)

The same attitude toward God's message and messengers found in Israel prior to its destruction would also be found Judah. The only question would be when judgment would come.

Even though Hezekiah did right and demonstrated faith in Yahweh, one mistake that showed his pride was recorded in 2



Kings 20 and Isaiah 39. After Hezekiah's illness and recovery, envoys from Babylon came to visit. "Hezekiah was pleased, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and his whole armory and all

that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them" (Isa. 39:2). Isaiah asked Hezekiah what these men had seen. Hezekiah essentially told Isaiah that they saw everything, to which Isaiah replied, "Hear the word of the Lord of hosts, 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the Lord" (Isa. 39:5-6). In other words, here was the prophecy that Babylon would be the nation that would come to Jerusalem and carry everything away. However, this would not happen during Hezekiah's reign.

Sadly, Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, would not have the same godly attitude as his father. When Manasseh became king, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel" (2 Kings 21:2). He rebuilt the idolatrous high places that Hezekiah had destroyed, erected altars for Baal and Asherah, and put idolatrous altars in the temple of Yahweh. Like the pagans, he "made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums

and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord provoking Him to anger” (2 Kings 21:6). The text says that Manasseh seduced Judah “to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel” (vs. 9).

Manasseh’s wickedness over 55 years set Judah on a course from which they would not recover. Because of the sins of Manasseh, God promised that He would bring judgment upon Judah. “Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they will become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies; because they have done evil in My sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day.” (2 Kings 21:12-15) Manasseh personally repented at the end, but the damage was done.

Amon, Manasseh’s son, was not any better, but he didn’t last very long. Fortunately, the next in line, Josiah, was righteous and tried to turn the people back to Yahweh. However, these reforms were short-lived and quickly disappeared after Josiah was gone. Josiah served God with all his heart, but, again, the earlier damage was too great: “However, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. The Lord said, ‘I will remove Judah also from My sight, as I have removed Israel. And I will cast off Jerusalem, this city which I have chosen, and the temple of

which I said, ‘My name shall be there.’” (2 Kings 23:26-27).

Even so, prophets like Isaiah still looked ahead past the downfall of Jerusalem to a future restoration. This restoration would happen in Jerusalem first, but ultimately he was pointing to the Messiah. Isaiah told the future generations:

“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.

“Speak kindly to Jerusalem;

And call out to her, that her warfare has ended,

That her iniquity has been removed,

That she has received of the Lord’s hand
Double for all her sins.” (Isa. 40:1-2)

More to follow.

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