

## *The Downfall of David's Kingdom – The Southern Kingdom of Judah*

### **I. Introduction**

1. Unlike Israel's perpetual apostasy, Judah was marked by periods of relative faithfulness and spiritual reform associated with some of its kings, notably Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah.
2. And yet, as Jeroboam had done in the north, Rehoboam set the overall tone for Judah as the remnant of David's kingdom (1 Kings 14:21-24), and Judah, too, followed the same path of apostasy and idolatry that culminated with its conquest and destruction.
3. In the end, the Lord condemned Judah as more vile and guilty than Israel, especially in light of its greater privilege (Ezek. 16:44-52, 23:1-11). *Judah had witnessed Israel's corruption and brutal destruction at Yahweh's hand, and yet it shamelessly walked the same path.*

### **II. The Downfall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 11 - 2 Kings 25)**

#### **A. The General Pattern of the Kingdom**

*The general pattern of the southern kingdom of Judah was overall progressive decline interrupted by occasional periods of spiritual repentance and revival.*

1. **Rehoboam** laid the foundation for Judah's apostasy (1 Kings 14:21-24), and the Lord responded by bringing Egypt against Jerusalem. *Jeroboam openly renounced Yahweh's temple and Rehoboam effectively despised it, leaving it to be desecrated by the Egyptians.*
2. **Asa** dismantled the idolatrous structures and practices his grandfather Rehoboam established. He eliminated the images and cult prostitution, and even stripped his mother of her royal status because of her idolatry. He did leave Judah's various "high places" intact, but the text records that his heart was sincerely devoted to Yahweh all his days. \* 1 Kings 15:9-15
3. **Jehoshaphat** continued the devotion of his father Asa, but, like him, his reign was not without blemish. In particular, he formed a marriage alliance with Ahab, the most notorious of Israel's kings (2 Kings 8:16-18). This marital connection established a resilient alliance that endured beyond Ahab's death and brought disastrous consequences to David's kingdom.

*By taking Ahab's daughter Athaliah to be his son's wife, Jehoshaphat effectively introduced Jezebel's pagan and wicked influence into Judah. For Athaliah was her mother's daughter, controlled by the same evil passions, devoted to the same godless and self-serving agenda, and able to wield the same perverse influence over her husband. \* 2 Chronicles 21:4-6*

- a. When Athaliah's son Ahaziah was assassinated, she saw her opportunity to take the throne of Judah and proceeded to execute everyone – including her grandchildren – who could possibly challenge her claim. The Lord saw to it that her grandson Joash was providentially hidden away in the temple (the one place Athaliah ignored), and he survived as the only member of the royal Davidic line. \* 2 Chron. 22:1-12
- b. Jezebel had attempted to eliminate the knowledge of Yahweh in Israel, and her daughter was determined to destroy His kingdom by destroying the Davidic kingship.

*Jehoshaphat may well have believed that his alliance with Ahab and his house would honor David by helping to reunite the twelve tribes as he had done, but in the end it only polluted David's royal house and nearly destroyed David's dynasty and kingdom.*

4. In the seventh year of Athaliah's rule, **Joash** was brought out of hiding and crowned king of Judah. Athaliah decried this as treason, but the high priest Jehoiada commanded that she and all who were devoted to her be executed away from the temple, underscoring the illegitimacy of her claim to David's throne and rule over Yahweh's kingdom. \* 2 Kings 11:1-16
  - a. The temple had been neglected during the apostate reigns of Jehoram, Ahaziah and Athaliah, and Joash undertook its renovation – *not for the sake of the physical structure as such, but out of faithfulness to the covenant Jehoiada made between Yahweh, Judah and himself as the new king.* This covenant rededicated David's house – his dynasty and nation – to Yahweh, and the people responded by destroying the temple to Baal, its altars and images, and its ministering priest. \* 2 Kings 11:17-21; 2 Chron. 23:16-21
  - b. Joash became king when he was still a young boy, and his faithful actions reflected the leadership and guidance of the priest Jehoiada, who was his father figure and mentor. When Jehoiada died, Joash was left rudderless and began to seek other counselors who led him astray, even convincing him to execute Jehoiada's son. *That murder resulted in Joash's assassination at the hands of his own servants.* \* 2 Chron. 24:15-25
5. Joash's inconsistent reign was subsequently duplicated in those of his son **Amaziah** and grandson **Uzziah**. \* 2 Chronicles 25-26
  - a. The Chronicler states of Amaziah that "*he did right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a whole heart.*" So for instance, after Yahweh granted him victory over Edom, Amaziah responded by bringing the Edomite idols back to Jerusalem and making them his own (25:1-14). In turn, the Lord used Amaziah's pride of conquest to incite a war with Israel, ending the second era of Israelite-Judean alliance. Judah was roundly defeated, and the Israelite king tore down part of the wall surrounding Jerusalem and took the precious articles of the temple and Amaziah's palace back to Samaria (25:17-24)
  - b. Uzziah brought greatness to Judah, but his reign was also marred by sin (26:1-23). Notably, his pride led him to assume the priestly right to burn incense on the altar. He usurped the priesthood, and then became enraged when the priests confronted him. Yahweh responded by striking Uzziah with leprosy, leaving him isolated in his house until the day of his death with his son Jotham administering his reign on his behalf.
6. Uzziah's son **Jotham** ruled as a faithful son of David, but was unable to reverse Judah's growing apostasy, which his son Ahaz greatly advanced.
7. **Ahaz** followed in the ways of the kings of Israel, even following Jezebel's example in leading Judah to worship Baal. But the outrage of his idolatry went far beyond that. *Ahaz, the Davidic king presiding over Yahweh's kingdom, followed his regal ancestor Solomon by reintroducing in Judah the worship of the abhorrent Canaanite deity Molech. Even more, he personally set an example for his people by offering his own sons on the altar he had constructed for Molech outside Jerusalem.* \* 2 Chron. 28:1-4; cf. 1 Kings 11:7
  - a. Ahaz was an open idolater, yet he pretended loyalty to Yahweh when Isaiah confronted him with his plan to defend his throne against the allied forces of Israel and Aramea.

Ahaz sought an alliance with Assyria and bribed Tiglath-Pileser (Assyria's king) with gold and silver taken from Yahweh's temple. He even went so far as to replicate an Assyrian altar on the temple grounds to demonstrate his solidarity with the Assyrians.

- b. As with Jeroboam in Israel, Ahaz' high-handed idolatry – and particularly his abominable worship of Molech – set a precedent that came to epitomize Judah's apostasy and underscored the justness of its destruction at Yahweh's hand. \* cf. Lev. 20:1-5 with 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 33:1-9; Jer. 7:1-34, 19:1-13, 32:26-35

## **B. The Destruction of David's House and Kingdom**

1. Ahaz lived to see the Lord deliver Jerusalem from the Syrian-Israelite alliance (ref. 2 Kings 16:5-17:6), but His promised deliverance from the Assyrians would not occur until the reign of his son **Hezekiah**. Hezekiah departed from his father's abominable ways and brought many reforms to Judah, even welcoming the remaining Israelite remnant in the north. Yet he, too, fell short in his moment of decision. \* 2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chron. 29-32; cf. Isa. 36-37
  - a. Yahweh gave David's house a reprieve from destruction despite its growing apostasy and the magnitude of its offense against Him. This reprieve was symbolized in Hezekiah's own recovery from fatal illness, and his response in relation to the Babylonians was a foretaste of what Judah's reprieve was going to accomplish. \* 2 Kings 20:12-19
  - b. The Davidic king used his lease on life to reveal his kingdom's wealth to Babylon, and so it would be with the Davidic kingdom: *Reprieve from conquest would culminate with Babylonian forces seizing all of the precious things of Jerusalem and its temple.*
2. After Judah endured the corrupt and defiling reigns of **Manasseh** and **Amon**, Hezekiah's great-grandson **Josiah** resumed and extended his reforms. But even his zealous faithfulness couldn't reverse Judah's downward spiral and save David's kingdom (2 Chron. 34-35; cf. 1 Kings 13:1-2); in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, initiated Judah's destruction. The Egyptian pharaoh had already deposed **Jehoahaz** and set his pro-Egypt brother **Jehoiakim** (Eliakim) on Judah's throne as an Egyptian vassal. Nebuchadnezzar allowed Jehoiakim to continue on Judah's throne after he conquered Egypt, but then exiled his son **Jehoiachin** three months after he succeeded his father and crowned Jehoiachin's uncle **Zedekiah** (Mattaniah) as his vassal king. *Though unknown to Nebuchadnezzar, this fulfilled the Lord's word to Jeremiah that He was bringing an end to David's royal line; Jehoiachin was to be the last man in that line to sit on the throne of David's kingdom.* \* Jer. 22:24-30
  - a. David's royal dynasty was now severed and the end of his kingdom was at hand. Though warned to yield himself to Babylon's yoke (Jer. 27), Zedekiah revolted after nine years, and Nebuchadnezzar responded by laying siege to Jerusalem and cutting off its supplies.
  - b. In the second year of the siege, with Jerusalem weakened with starvation and disease as Yahweh had threatened from the beginning (cf. Deut. 28:45ff; Jer. 19:1-9; Ezek. 5:1-12), Babylon breached the city walls and burned Jerusalem and its temple to the ground. *The sword promised against David's house had finally completed its work.* \* 2 Chron. 35-36

*The Lord had kept His word to David regarding His sword, but He would also keep His oath regarding the perpetuity of David's house and kingdom. Circumstances seemed to preclude this, but believing their God to be true to His word was Israel's enduring obligation of faith across the ensuing centuries, until at last that faith was vindicated when the word became flesh.*