

Pentwater Bible Church

Book of Ezekiel

Message 35

May 8, 2016



Funeral Procession by Moritz von Schwind cir 1855

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Ezekiel

Message Thirty-Five

Take Up a Lamentation for Israel's Princes

May 8, 2016

Daniel E. Woodhead

TAKE UP A FUNERAL DIRGE FOR ISRAEL'S KINGS

Ezekiel 19:1-14

¹ Moreover, take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, ² and say, What was thy mother? A lioness: she couched among lions, in the midst of the young lions she nourished her whelps. ³ And she brought up one of her whelps: he became a young lion, and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men. ⁴ The nations also heard of him; he was taken in their pit; and they brought him with hooks unto the land of Egypt. ⁵ Now when she saw that she had waited, and her hope was lost, then she took another of her whelps, and made him a young lion. ⁶ And he went up and down among the lions; he became a young lion, and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men. ⁷ And he knew their palaces, and laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and the fulness thereof, because of the noise of his roaring. ⁸ Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces; and they spread their net over him; he was taken in their pit. ⁹ And they put him in a cage with hooks, and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds, that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel.

¹⁰ Thy mother was like a vine, in thy blood, planted by the waters: it was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters. ¹¹ And it had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule, and their stature was exalted among the thick boughs, and they were seen in their height with the multitude of their branches. ¹² But it was plucked up in fury, it was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit: its strong rods were broken off and withered; the fire consumed them. ¹³ And now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. ¹⁴ And fire is gone out of the rods of its branches, it hath devoured its fruit, so that there is in it no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation (ASV, 1901).

TAKE UP A FUNERAL DIRGE FOR ISRAEL'S KINGS

Ezekiel 19:1-2

¹ Moreover, take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, ² and say, What was thy mother? A lioness: she couched among lions, in the midst of the young lions she nourished her whelps (ASV, 1901).

The Lord tells Ezekiel that he is to lift up or carry a funeral song (Hebrew *keannah*) for the princes of Israel. From chapter two verse ten the scroll the Lord made Ezekiel eat

contained “*written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.*” Therefore this chapter may be viewed as a conclusion to entire first part of the book. In this chapter there two allegorical dirges in poetical form. One is for the kings in verses 1-9 and the second is for the people of Judah in verses 10-14. Even though the present king of Judah was Zedekiah, this dirge or funeral song was being required God over the last kings of the crumbling Davidic dynasty. The use of the word prince is a reference to a king. Daniel is given this word by Gabriel the angel in reference to the Lord Jesus (Daniel 9:25). He calls Him *Mashiach Nagid* or Messiah the Prince. The complete dirge traces the fate of the two proceeding kings of Judah, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. Other examples of dirges are the entire book of Lamentation by Jeremiah of Jerusalem’s destruction and Amos 8:9-10 where Amos prophecies that Israel’s sun will set at midday and all its songs will change to dirges. This dirge shows the last of the kings that followed Josiah the great king after his death. Much of Israel’s hope centered on him as he enacted many reforms but died an early death on the battlefield of Megiddo battling pharaoh Neco (II Kings 23:29; II Chronicles 35:20-27).

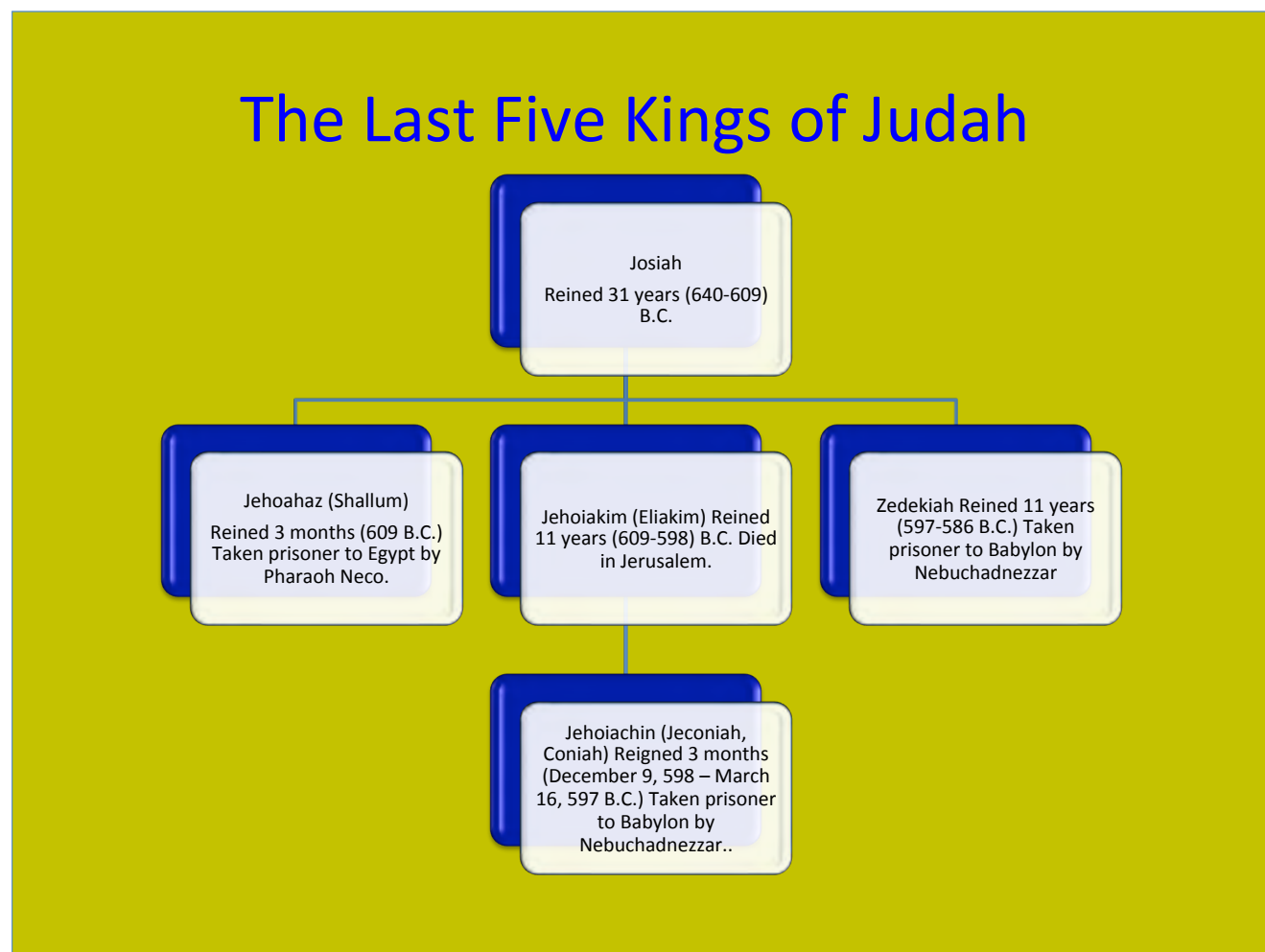


Chart by Daniel Woodhead

The question the Lord asks is, “*What was thy mother? A lioness?*” This is a reference in a personification to the tribe of Judah which descended from Jacob’s son Judah. When Jacob was on his deathbed he prophesied about the fate of Judah’s descendants and said to Judah, “*Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, thou art gone up: He stooped*

down, he couched as a lion,” (Genesis 49:9). He went on to say that the Messiah would come through the line of Judah. But here he clearly states that Judah is a lion’s cub. Other verses affirming the identification of the tribe of Judah to a lion are Numbers 23:24; 24:9; Revelation 5:5 and Isaiah 29:1 (used of Jerusalem). The last vestiges of the tribe of Judah was the southern kingdom whose capital was at Jerusalem before the final deportation by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. The text here in verse two describes Judah as, *A lioness: she couched among lions, in the midst of the young lions she nourished her whelps*. Lions were common in ancient Jerusalem hence the easy reference to them throughout the Bible. They are referenced as being in the Jordan (Jeremiah 49:19; 50:44; Zechariah 11:3), at Mount Hermon (Song of Songs 4:8 and in the Judean desert (Isaiah 30:6). This is a reference to the southern kingdom Judah and the female gender is characteristic of the Hebrew gender assigned to the city of Jerusalem. All Hebrew nouns have gender with cities given female gender. The whelps were the descendants of the House of David who became corrupt by the neighboring nations. The first poem presents a lioness’ cubs, representing King Jehoahaz, who was captured and brought to Egypt (vv. 3–4). Jehoahaz, succeeding his father Josiah in 609 B.C., reigned only three months and then was taken to Egypt (II Kings 23:31–34).

He was replaced by Jehoiakim, who reigned as a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiakim is not made referenced to in the dirges, since he was not exiled. He was deposed, however, for rebellion in 598 and replaced by his son Jehoiachin, who is referenced as the second cub in the dirge (vv. 5–9). Like Jehoahaz, he reigned only three months until he was taken to Babylon by king Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 24:8–17). The second dirge looks at the people of Judah during the reign of Zedekiah the last king. He was Jehoiachin’s uncle, a brother of Jehoahaz and son of Josiah. Gifted the throne by Nebuchadnezzar he rebelled against Babylon that caused the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

The LION’S WHELP JEHOAHAZ

Ezekiel 19:3-4

³And she brought up one of her whelps: he became a young lion, and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men. ⁴The nations also heard of him; he was taken in their pit; and they brought him with hooks unto the land of Egypt (ASV, 1901).

These verses describe Jehoahaz the first successor to Josiah after his untimely death. He was taken captive to Egypt in 609 B.C. by Pharaoh Neco and died there (II Kings 23:31–34). Since he was a wicked king the Lord makes reference to him as devouring men. His wickedness caught the attention of the adjacent nations and they sought to curb him. They brought him to Egypt in a humiliating manner characteristic of deposed kings. The *pit* was a camouflaged hole designed to trap animals. Sometimes the Bible references this in a figurative manner (Psalms 9:15–16; 35:7; Proverbs 26:27). *Hooks* were used to lead captives into exile (cf. Ezekiel 29:4; 38:4; Isaiah 37:29). An Assyrian king boasted of how he treated a captive vassal:

I pierced his cheeks with the sharp-edged spear, my personal weapon, by laying the very hands on him which I had received to conquer opposition against me; I put the ring to his jaw, placed a dog collar around his neck and made him guard the bar of the east gate of Nineveh which is called *Nîrib-*

masnaq-adnāte. (Later) I had mercy upon him and granted him life in order to praise the glory of Ashur, Ishtar (and) the great gods, my lords.¹

So Jehoahaz was taken captive to Egypt in a most humiliating manner. All the while it was actually the Lord God conducted these demeaning efforts toward Jehoahaz for the sins of the nation and his evil rule. The people of Judah had a false hope that he might return but Jeremiah dispelled that hope (Jeremiah 22:10-12). King Jehoiakim is passed over in this dirge and Jehoiachin is presented next. When the false hope did not materialize regarding the restoration of Jehoahaz from Egypt, Jehoiachin succeeded Jehoiakim upon his death in 598 B.C.

JEHOIACHIN BECOMES KING

Ezekiel 19:5-6

⁵Now when she saw that she had waited, and her hope was lost, then she took another of her whelps, and made him a young lion. ⁶And he went up and down among the lions; he became a young lion, and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men (ASV, 1901).

Pharaoh appointed Jehoiakim to the throne with the approval of the people. So the mother lioness (Judah) affirmed the ascension of Jehoiakim to the throne after realizing that Jehoahaz was not going to return. Upon his removal from office by Nebuchadnezzar Jehoiachin succeeded Jehoiakim. He continued the same wicked manners of his predecessor. He gained stature from a cub to a young lion in the allegory by becoming king. He never achieved the status of a full grown lion because he only reigned for three months. Going up and down among the lions is representative of his fluctuating loyalties to the adjacent nations. The Hebrew verb form representing “*went up and down*” is a reflexive verb (*heetpaal*) meaning the person doing the action is also receiving the results of the action. This provides insight into Jehoiachin’s self driven free roaming against God pursuing his own whims. The phrase *and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men* is a reference to his wickedness in shedding blood throughout the kingdom.

JEHOIACHIN ENDS POORLY

Ezekiel 19:7-9

⁷And he knew their palaces, and laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and the fulness thereof, because of the noise of his roaring. ⁸Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces; and they spread their net over him; he was taken in their pit. ⁹And they put him in a cage with hooks, and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds, that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel (ASV, 1901).

¹ Pritchard, J. B. (Ed.). (1969). *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* Princeton: Princeton University Press. (3rd ed. with Supplement., p. 300).

After having killed many men in Judah he violated their widows. Then he destroyed the cities which caused the disintegration of the societies within them. Because of his fluctuating loyalties to the nations around him they joined together against him. The narrative of how the adjacent nations came together to defeat Jehoiachin's father Jehoiakim is found in II Kings 24:2. They were Babylonians, Moabites, Ammonites and Syrians. Like the first cub, he is said to have been trapped in a pit and led away with hooks, but the second was put in a "cage." This may refer to neckstocks or to an animal cage used by Assyrians to display and humiliate captured rulers. He was finally placed in this restraint and taken to Babylon. At the age of fifty-five he was released (II Kings 25:27-30; Jeremiah 52:31-32). He had no chance of being restored to the throne in Jerusalem. He also had no possibility of installing any of his children on the throne to threaten the Babylonians (Jeremiah 22:29-30). He never returned to Jerusalem and as the text states *that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel.*

JUDAH DURING ZEDEKIAH'S REIGN

Ezekiel 19:10-11

¹⁰Thy mother was like a vine, in thy blood, planted by the waters: it was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters. ¹¹And it had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule, and their stature was exalted among the thick boughs, and they were seen in their height with the multitude of their branches (ASV, 1901).

Now the allegory moves from the lion to them being branches on a vine. The theme of the entire lamentation is how the princes (the lion cubs) have turned away from God and by wickedly running Jerusalem's government, God will cause the Davidic dynasty, to come to an end (19:14). To make his point that this is the end, Ezekiel changes his metaphor from a lioness and her cubs to a *vine* (19:10) and *its strongest stem* (19:11). The vine is represented as their mother and it is planted by *many waters*. It is flourishing because it has been planted by many waters which was God's blessing. The structure of the vine is strong and it has thick boughs growing high with many branches. The vine metaphor was used by the Lord in previous passages in 15:1-8 and 17:5-10 (Isaiah 24:7; Jeremiah 2:21; 6:9). The Psalmist describes this vine as Israel too.

Psalm 80:8-11

⁸Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt: Thou didst drive out the nations, and plantedst it. ⁹Thou preparedst room before it, And it took deep root, and filled the land. ¹⁰The mountains were covered with the shadow of it, And the boughs thereof were like cedars of God. ¹¹It sent out its branches unto the sea, And its shoots unto the River (ASV, 1901).

The vine now is a reference to the decline and fall of Judah's people and her kings. It had the potential to be good. The healthy vine is also represented as Josiah the good king who was Zedekiah's father and provided a fine example of what a good God fearing man was. He had the potential to be his equal. He instead became wicked.

THE VINE IS FINALLY DESTROYED

Ezekiel 19:12-14

¹²But it was plucked up in fury, it was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit: its strong rods were broken off and withered; the fire consumed them. ¹³And now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. ¹⁴And fire is gone out of the rods of its branches, it hath devoured its fruit, so that there is in it no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation (ASV, 1901).

Contrasted to the earlier generation of Josiah the present generation was cast down from its prideful heights as predicted in Deuteronomy 29:27. Nebuchadnezzar came to Israel slaughtered the royal children which was the fruit of the vine which withered the fruit of the vine/house of Josiah and the kingdom of Israel. Now it is planted in the desert where there is no water which is the goodness of the Lord which it had. The cause of the vine's final destruction was the sins of the leaders of the country and Zedekiah's rebellion against God and His servant Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah delivered this final message to Zedekiah.

Jeremiah 34:1-5

The word which came unto Jeremiah from Jehovah, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth that were under his dominion, and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem, and against all the cities thereof, saying: ²Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Go, and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah, and tell him, Thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire: ³and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. ⁴Yet hear the word of Jehovah, O Zedekiah king of Judah: thus saith Jehovah concerning thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword; ⁵thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they make a burning for thee; and they shall lament thee, saying, Ah Lord! for I have spoken the word, saith Jehovah (ASV, 1901).

NEXT MESSAGE: ISRAEL'S PAST REBELLION AND RESTORATION

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