

## Jeremiah Chapter 22 John Karmelich

1. Let's start with my title: "God and Politics". First this isn't a lecture about any current politician. I simply want us to realize what God expects of our leaders. Yes it can apply to church or business leader as well. The short version is Jeremiah uses this section to address the some of the last kings in Israel before that place got completely wiped out for a seventy-year period. The essential idea is to grasp that if we're called to any sort of leadership role, not only would we be accountable to those we serve, but to God Himself. So if you're curious as to what God has to say about what it is God expects of leaders I encourage you to read through this lesson.
  - a) The first thing you should realize is that since Israel's inception, leadership was separated into political leaders and religious ones. It's only through Jesus that they merge. Through the entire Old Testament those offices rarely merged. Sometimes the judges did both, but it wasn't a positive thing. Through all the periods of kings, there were "high priests" who were separate people from the political leaders. For what it's worth I've heard a number of renown Christian preachers look back at their involvement in politics as a mistake as they realized "God was right" to separate those offices.
  - b) The second thing to consider is that even though Jeremiah is going to focus on the last of the Israelite kings, the principals behind this can apply to any leadership role. So if you've got no desire to enter politics, this lesson has personal applications in whatever role we're leading. At the least it can help us to realize how we should be pray for our leaders, even the one's we're not crazy about. For what it's worth, Romans 13 as an example, tells us we are to pray for our political leaders, so this isn't just an "Old Testament" thing!
  - c) This lesson is going to get into "Israel politics" shortly before that nation came to an end. I am not here to make us an expert on Middle East History around 600BC. I'm only telling us those facts to understand some of the background that Jeremiah had to deal with as he preached to these groups.
  - d) Finally let me give one more "why should we care" speech before I get into the specifics of these chapters. The underlying issue is what God expects of our leaders. One of the main things I've been preaching through Jeremiah is if we're saved, that also means He expects to be a witness for Him. I would add that certain positions come with extra accountability. For example God holds bible teachers to a accountability as God expects accurate teaching and practice of what we teach. (See James 3:1). The same concept applies to our leaders. If we have such a role, the good news is we've got authority and power. The bad news is we are held accountable for it. So if we're not crazy about our leaders, just remember that He holds them accountable. While we must live with their decisions, ultimately it's God who they have to deal with. I bring all that up, because this chapter focuses on some of the last Israel kings has applications that apply to all of us as Christians.
2. With that said, it's time for a "scorecard of the players". First keep in mind what can be confusing to a newcomer is the fact that Israel split into two kingdoms after Solomon. The one to the North was called "Israel". The one to the south was called "Judah" named after its main tribe. When this book was written "Israel" was long dead and all the kings here are part of "Judah". All the kings I'm about to list here were direct descendants of King David (Solomon's father). Realize that none of David's descendants ruled over the "North" kingdom. If all that isn't confusing enough some of the kings listed in these chapters have more than one name. OK, here's the scorecard:
  - a) Joash: The last good king. Died in battle. Reigned 31 years.
  - b) Jehoahaz: One of Joash's sons. Only ruled three months. Also called Shallum.
  - c) Jehoiakim: Brother of Jehochin. Ruled eleven years.
  - d) Jehoiachin: Son of Jehoiakim. Also called Coniah elsewhere. Cursed by God (next page).
  - e) Zedekiah. Brother of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. Final king before the captivity. Ruled for eleven years. He's "not in the picture" as Jeremiah preached this section before his rule.

3. I stated on the last page that the second to last king was cursed by God. He had seven sons. God said in effect that none of his sons would ever rule over Judah and that happened. The curse was worse in the sense that it prevented the Messianic line from continuing. My point is God made a promise to King David around 1,000 BC that one of his sons would rule over Israel forever. That prediction ties to Jesus, who was a descendant of King David both from Mary and Joseph. That curse required the necessity of the virgin birth. Let me explain this fairly quickly.
- a) Mary was not a descendant of these kings. King David had other sons who obviously did not rule in Israel. Mary was a descendant of David's son Nathan (a different Nathan than the one mentioned as a prophet in David's day). Mary's genealogy is in Luke Chapter 3.
  - b) Joseph was a direct descendant of the cursed king. Matthew 1 gives Joseph's genealogy.
  - c) That's one reason why the virgin birth was necessary to get around that curse!
  - d) The other thing to realize is when a virgin gets married, all she owns legally will belong to her husband. That was true both in Jewish and Roman law. So Jesus "legal father" became Joseph, and that's how Jesus became a legal descendant of those kings. It also fulfills the promise made to David that one of his sons would rule forever.
  - e) OK enough of that. I mention it all here because the curse on Jehoiachin is in this chapter.
  - f) It also fits my theme because we're dealing with the consequences of being a bad leader!
4. So is that it? These guys messed up and God cursed them out? Can we go now? No, it's a lot more than that! Let me quickly go over this chapter and that'll be it for the introduction:
- a) The first five verses is the "overview of the chapter". This is where Jeremiah explains why Israel's leaders were messing up. He mentions such concepts of caring for those who can't care for themselves (uses widows and foreigners as examples). No that doesn't mean God expects the government to solve all our problems. It just means we should help those who are less fortunate, through charity efforts. Jeremiah also condemns robbery and murder in the sense that leaders are in charge and injustice shouldn't be tolerated. Jeremiah then is making a promise if the leaders do what's right, they'd rule forever. If they don't, they will not. Obviously there's an element of "it's too late" in the text, as the next few verses imply.
  - b) Verses 6-10 are poetry style as they condemn the leaders for failing to lead properly.
  - c) By Verse 11, Jeremiah gets personal. He's saying in effect, "Yes your highness I'm talking about you right now!" Just to prove that Jeremiah is a prophet of God, he says to the first of the sons of Joash that he'll be dragged away as a captive never to come back. Then we'll read why God's so "ticked off" at this king. The short version is he turned many Israelites into slave labor in order to build the king's palace. I'll just add that the Old Testament has laws that forbid such things. Again, the idea is to lead fairly and "do the right thing".
  - d) Then we get about ten verses dealing with his brother, the next king. Let's just say it's not a lot prettier for him as well. The short version is Jeremiah predicts nobody will miss that king when he's gone.
  - e) Finally Jeremiah has some choice words for "the uncle" who's the next of the kings. This is the king who's so bad, God throws a curse on his family. The 1st Chronicles 3 indicates he had seven children, so the curse wasn't that he wouldn't have any kids. The curse is the fact that none of his children would rule as descendants. That starts the whole, "this leads to the virgin birth" requirement for Jesus, but I've beaten that point to death already!
  - f) Jeremiah finishes this section by getting more "general" again. He's saying that it's not just these particular kings who are in big trouble. It applies to anyone in a leadership capacity. In fact he mentions priests and prophets as if to say, "If you're going to teach about Me, I'll just say you better do it right (i.e., nothing to contract the written word) or you too, will be in big trouble. Does that make me nervous? Yes it does, and it makes me want to do a lot of research before writing these studies. Anyway, I wanted to take on this chapters as one lesson to discuss what God expects of leaders. With that said, I hope you'll read the rest of the lesson as we discuss what God expects of those in power using a few Israelite kings as examples. With that said, let's get started on this chapter.

5. Verse 1: This is what the LORD says: "Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there: <sup>2</sup> `Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, you who sit on David's throne--you, your officials and your people who come through these gates.
- a) Let's start with the reminder that there were no chapter breaks in the original text. We left the end of Chapter 21 with Jeremiah throwing a curse on the city of Jerusalem because the people and the leaders of that city had turned from God to false gods. With that said, it is time for Jeremiah to "go straight to the top of the food chain". Jeremiah was told to preach at the leader's house. Does that mean he invited himself in unwanted? Does it mean he is standing out front in ear shot of the residence? Don't know, all I do know is that whoever were the top officials someone got word of this as I doubt Jeremiah was just preaching to himself at the point.
  - b) Notice the message isn't just to the king and no one else. It's to the all the officials who're running that city. This is God saying, "It's judgment time and you can't use the excuse of the fact you didn't know any better!" It's in effect a not so subtle reminder that God judges all people, believers included. So if we're "saved by grace", what are we judged about? It is a matter of what we did with what information we knew about God. Jesus talks about rewards in heaven and that ties to what we did what the information we had about Him.
    - i) The reason I pound that point, is I don't want you to read this lesson and think, "O, those poor kings who lived 2,500 years ago. When we read how God judged them keep in mind we'll be facing His judgment as well one day.
    - ii) With that tough thought rolling through our brain, back to Jeremiah!
6. Verse 3: This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.
- a) Here we get to the heart of the issue. What God expects of our leaders is to do what is just and right. The idea is to govern according to His laws. Does that mean God expects those who govern to eat Kosher? Of course not. It means as much as possible to not steal, make decisions that are as fair as possible, don't cheat people and do what's best for those we're in charge of. The issue here has nothing to do with one's personal life. God will judge us on that separately. The issue here is strictly our roles as leaders.
    - i) What if I don't like the decisions my leader is making and assuming I can't do any significant thing to change that? Then remember that leader is accountable to God and He'll deal with that leader His way on His timing. Have there been leaders in my country I don't like, lots of them. However, I can't change what I can't change, so I pray for them and remember that they're accountable to God for their actions.
  - b) From there, Jeremiah gives examples of what's right and just: "Do no wrong, nothing that is violent to an alien fatherless (think children), or widow (no one to protect them). Finally a plea to not shed blood in a place.
    - i) Let me try to use a recent political example. In the United States a big issue here is lots of people trying to get into this country illegally. I believe that every country's right to sovereignty in terms of having borders and deciding who can and can't go into that country. Many people want to come here just for the opportunities we've got here. The reality is a country only has so many resources and it's acceptable to limit the number of people who come into a country let alone do one's best to find out people's background before letting them in. Tough decisions have to be made. One can't simply have an open border policy due to safety and again all places we can live would have limited resources so tough choices have to be made.
    - ii) My simple point is when it comes to making tough decisions, we should always be praying for God's guidance and then make the best decisions we can given what is the information in front of us. Decisions that don't violate God's will, we're free to make the best decisions we can in such cases.

- c) All of that leads back to this verse. The reason Jeremiah was being so hard on Israel's top guys is they were failing to do this. Not talking about controversial decisions that are not in any violation of God's Word. We're talking about stealing to benefit themselves or say, being cruel to the less fortunate of the world. That's the issue here.
  - i) So if God's going to judge them for what they've done, why is Jeremiah at this time coming down so hard on them? Won't they be judged eternally for this? Maybe, it is also a matter of the fact God cares for His people. He often finds ways to bring a form of injustice to an end. To use a fairly famous example, God used people both in the United States and England to end slavery. Yes many died to do that, but it's still a matter of history that the right thing got done over time.
- d) OK, enough of the big picture. Let's get back to Jeremiah himself:
 

7. Verse 4: For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people. <sup>5</sup> But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.' "

  - a) Verse 4 is a biblical "what if" statement. It's saying that "if" you did this, then God will do "that" and "Life will be good". Obviously after about twenty chapters of Jeremiah giving us his "doom and gloom" for Israel's short term future, he's either not serious or what I'm suspecting he's saying is "If only you acted like "this" then God would act like that". Yes, we have gotten to a point where it doesn't matter as this chapter alone will make clear by the end of it, the kings of this chapter are facing undeniable "doom and gloom".
    - i) OK then, so why preach it? Why preach that the Israel kings would get the kingly type of pomp and praise that comes with the job? Why through the temptation in their faces with Verse 4? I suspect it's a message to future kings. It's in the bible so we can realize that if we're pleasing to God in our leadership role we can get what blessings come with that role.
    - ii) John, what if you're wrong? What if God is really trying to tell these kings to only change their ways, they'd be blessed? What if this message is for them? It is. I am sure God's being sincere here that they could have long term benefits of being the king over His people if they would just live as He desired. Since we know that the kings listed here didn't repent, in a sense it doesn't matter. Verses 4 and 5 are listed to show what "could have been" if they listened and "what will happen" since they refused to listen.
  - b) That naturally leads to Verse 5. Because the Israelite kings refused to do "Verse 4", Verse 5 is the natural consequence. The short version of Verse 5 is God Himself is going to let His city (in the sense it's the place where He unconditionally promised King David that when the Messiah comes, He will rule the world from that city) is going down for the count! It's because of the unconditional Messiah promise that the destruction of Jerusalem can't ever be a permanent thing, but a necessary one.
    - i) The underlying implication of these Verses is that a future king will emerge who'll be the one who rules like "Verse 4" desires. Sometimes we Christians tend to forget the fact that Jesus will return not to smile and kiss the children, but to rule over the world as king. He will be the ultimate "Verse 4 king" in that He will rule the way a king is supposed to rule. One of the concepts of the return of Jesus is to teach us of the proper way a ruler will rule.
    - ii) OK John, all that "pie in the sky" stuff may be true and I guess we believe it. What about all the horrid rules of the world? Why hasn't God struck them down? One of the things I always preach is this world is a very unfair place to live. If there's no next life, then yes, this world is very unfair and a lot of cruel leaders exist. What it is we must remember is God didn't call us to fix the world, but be witnesses to if of the injustices that occur. We're called to be "Jeremiah's" not God Himself!

8. Verse 6: For this is what the LORD says about the palace of the king of Judah: "Though you are like Gilead to me, like the summit of Lebanon, I will surely make you like a desert, like towns not inhabited.<sup>7</sup> I will send destroyers against you, each man with his weapons, and they will cut up your fine cedar beams and throw them into the fire.
- a) The bad news of Chapter 22 is we haven't even gotten to the verses yet where Jeremiah is going to go down the list of the "kings of the moment" to list what they've done wrong. I'd say the good news is this chapter is that it teaches us what God expects of our leaders.
  - b) Want to pause for a second to comment on something a friend from my bible study group stated. She said, "My friend said to me, that she can't be a Christian. It's too hard. There is too much to do in order to please God". The one making that statement wasn't a Christian. My response was in effect, "If I'm a Christian, I'm free to do whatever I want to do, even if it leads to a bad life. The issue isn't what can I do, the issue is what do I want to do". That concept leads perfectly to this idea of God's chosen leaders. He gives us the freedom to do whatever we want to do. The point is if we're called to lead and we believe the Bible is the Word of God, then whether we like it or not, we need to live by what it teaches and do the right thing in as many situations as possible. Does that mean perfection? Of course not. It does mean we acknowledge God as the authority over our lives and when we mess up it's a matter of realizing "God was right we were wrong" and doing our best from there. That in effect is what repentance is, realizing God was right and changing because of it.
  - c) Meanwhile, back to Jeremiah. The point here is that God thought of kings of Judah (those who descended from David) as being something special. Let's face it, we're talking about those were in the Messianic line. Despite all the "screw up's" of these kings, they were all descendants of David and relatives of Jesus! The reason God thought of them as special is because they will lead to Jesus ruling over the world. It doesn't mean they're better people than you and me. It means they were chosen to rule over His people at that time.
    - i) It seems strange to our ears that they would be compared to "Gilead to me, like the summit of Lebanon". One has to read this in context. Think of it as saying, when I see you I see a forest of tall, beautiful trees. The area of Gilead (in Lebanon) is and was a forested area with tall cedar trees. Unfortunately, God said He has to "mow you down". The idea of a forest being wiped out is the word picture here is meant as a comparison to how the Israelites will get wiped out.
    - ii) Jeremiah is still preaching against the Israelite kings. The idea here is "You know the army you're counting upon to protect you? They're going to get mowed down like grass being cut is the idea here.
    - iii) It may help to remember that in ancient warfare, cut down trees are used to build a siege against a city. The reason Jeremiah used the "tree reference" is because the Babylonian army did wipe out that forest for wood on the way to Jerusalem. One also has to remember that "Egypt" was the big prize of Babylon with Israel located in the way. OK, you get the point, let's move on.
9. Verse 8: "People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, `Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?'<sup>9</sup> And the answer will be: `Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods.' "
- a) In my studies of Jeremiah to date, every now and then I ponder the question, "If God was so ticked off at the Israelites, why not just wipe them out with one big swoop?" Why have the survivors transferred all the way to Babylon as slaves after wiping many of them out? Realize that one reason is God wanted the "Land of Israel" to be a witness to the nations in that area of what the Israelites did do. Every now and then I also like to remind everyone of the fact "Israel is where it is (the land) because it's a natural land bridge between Africa traveling to and from Europe/Asia. There's an ancient route (called the Kings highway). It is just east of the Jordan River. The point is travelers on that road can look over at Israel and ponder why is it empty? Verse 9 (read it above) answers that question!

- b) Keep in mind the underlying message is the destruction of the Israelites still living in that land. The focus of this chapter is on the kings and their roles in being bad leaders. What's the implication for us is the danger of bad leadership (failing to live as God desires) can be the downfall of those under that leadership as well as the leaders themselves.
  - c) That thought leads surprisingly well to the next verse:
10. Verse 10: Do not weep for the dead king or mourn his loss; rather, weep bitterly for him who is exiled, because he will never return nor see his native land again.
- a) One of the things I pondered is when did Jeremiah write this section. After all he writes about three of the kings. Was it predictions before any of them ruled? Was he just giving a "scorecard" of what happened to each one? Was it predictions about each one combined here in one section? If it was all written before the first one came into power, why tell the Israelites about the succession? Nobody knows as it was about 2,500 years ago. My guess is Jeremiah preached to each of these guys then organized his notes later. Nobody knows, so it's all speculation.
  - b) I bring that up here, because from Verse 11 to the end of the chapter addresses three of the final four kings of "Judah" (i.e., what was left of Israel in Israel). Verse 10 is the final verse of the "overview" of this theme. So if Jeremiah is speaking to the leaders, why should they feel more sorry for the survivors than those who are about to die? It's not that surviving is a better fate. It's the idea that even those who survive (with the exception of maybe some of the children won't live long enough to ever return to that land again.
  - c) Let me explain it another way: What God desires is not only that we use our lives to make a difference for Him but that we're gathered together to be with Him? Jesus stated that in Matthew 23:37. So does that mean we have to move to Israel to be a Christian? No. What I suspect the idea is when we're saved in heaven, we'll all somehow be close to God. No I don't know how that will work, but that's why I've always argued that in heaven, we exist in more than three dimensions.
  - d) Anyway, enough "weirdness". The point here is simply the fact that the land of Israel will be empty and that's a problem because it's God's desire His people be gathered there as to be His witnesses to the world. The reason Jeremiah tells them to weep for the survivors is they won't get the opportunity to be His witnesses in that land as God desires!
  - e) All this ties back to the main theme that destruction is coming and the leaders are going to have to accept all of this. So if those leaders are in big trouble (as the chapter implies) why should they worry about the survivors? To be a leader is to care about those you lead. It's a matter of thinking how "God thinks". His desire is for those who trust in Him to be close to Him through prayer time in His word and time with fellow believers. That's why it is a big deal to God to gather believers together in one place as stated in Matthew 23:37.
  - f) With that said, time for individual king condemnation!
11. Verse 11: For this is what the LORD says about Shallum son of Josiah, who succeeded his father as king of Judah but has gone from this place: "He will never return. <sup>12</sup> He will die in the place where they have led him captive; he will not see this land again."
- a) Time for a little recall about the last few kings of Israel. The last good one was Josiah. He had a few sons and a grandson who were kings there before the final destruction. The text here focuses on the first of his sons, called Shallum. He's better known as Jehoahaz in 2nd Kings (23:31-34) and 1st Chronicles (3:15). He reigned for seventeen years.
  - b) Also keep in mind that before Israel's fall, the leaders looked to Egypt for help against the Babylonians. So this guy went to Egypt to beg for help. Jeremiah predicts he isn't coming back, but will die there (which is Egypt). That's how his reign ended, being in Egypt.
  - c) By the way as I discuss dates and cross references, realize God's not going to look at us on Judgment day and ask, "Ok, name the bible references to King Jehoahaz." If you desire to learn about this king, I encourage you to read it. However, the important thing is that we do use our lives for Jesus. The rest is for learning purposes.

- d) So did Jeremiah predict this or just stating it as a matter of fact after it happened? We don't know. I don't think that question is as important as the fact that this king didn't rule in the way God wanted him to rule (with justice). The bottom line is he didn't rule very long and in that sense he was a failure as a leader over Israel. Speaking of his failure:
12. Verse 13: "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. <sup>14</sup> He says, 'I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.' So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red.
- a) A little background is helpful here. Apparently this king built himself a nice big palace. It is not an issue if one can afford it. The problem is he used forced Israelites in to slavery to build this thing. That brings up the issue of the bible and slavery. Two key thoughts:
- i) The first has to do with Israelites themselves. It was forbidden for the Israelites to make slaves out of their fellow Israelites (See Leviticus 25:44-46 as an example). It is what this king did to build his palace so that alone is an example of this king not doing what was "just and right".
- ii) The second was the issue of foreign slaves. Yes the Old Testament permitted it, but I'd say the rules were so strict, the idea was to get the Israelites away from it. That is why the Old Testament had a bunch of rules on how slaves were to be treated. For example, a limit was imposed on how long someone can be a slave. The main reason it was used was to pay off debts. It's like saying, "You owe me a \$1,000? If you can't afford work for me to pay it off". No it wasn't perfect. It was still better than how the surrounding nations treated slaves. By the time the Greeks then the Romans ruled that area, slavery did exist, but it was rare for Israelites to own them as such. My point here is that the Bible made the rules undesirable to old slaves as it eventually lead to the end of that practice by religious Jewish people.
- b) Bottom line here is God's ticked off at this king for making Israelites slaves. So if this king didn't steal or murder, why is this crime so bad? He did steal in the sense he stole the time away from his fellow Israelites in order to enrich himself. It's one example how God does expect us to be "just" leaders as in doing the right thing. OK, let's continue:
13. Verse 15: "Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. <sup>16</sup> He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD.
- a) This is Jeremiah saying, "You want to know how a king should act? Look at your father! He had a nice place to live, but that's not what made him a good king. He did what was right and helped the poor and needy and he is in heaven now as he did the right thing as taught in Scripture. So is Jeremiah trying to put a guilt complex on the son saying in effect "You're not the man your father was?" Yes. It's not that God didn't love the son less. It's a case of wanting the leaders to do what's the right thing. Since the son knew his father, it is using an example he could relate to.
- b) I have to admit, it's always tough for a young man to be compared to his father. Most of us want to be like our father if they were a good man. I see Jeremiah trying to encourage the king by giving him an example to live up to. The current king thought all I have to do to be a great king is build a big palace. Jeremiah is setting him straight on that issue.
- c) Notice the last part of Verse 16 says, "Is that not what it means to know me". This is a not so subtle reference to the fact that if we study God's word and take it seriously, then even if we make mistakes, we will lead or (do whatever) by trying to live as God desires.
- i) Keep in mind the issue isn't salvation but being a good witness to God. Living by God's rules makes us a good witness for Him, and that's the issue. Obviously the New Testament is our guide for interpreting Old Testament laws and that's a big subject, but the underlying principal is our purpose for living is to be His witness!

14. Verse 17: "But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion."
- This is the last verse we get on Jehoahaz. Realize the guy only ruled three months before he died. Apparently all he focused on in that time was building his house.
  - Still it was enough time for God to judge him. The fact he made slaves out of Israelites is the reason we get the references to, "dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion". Bottom line is this guy was bad news.
  - Here's a question, why does God allow some "bad eggs" to live a long time and others get a few months? The bible doesn't have any correlation between length of ruling time vs. a time where God calls them home. Why is that? We don't know. Nobody but God knows how long we get to live. We simply judge by the evidence we see. God judges our hearts and knows our actions. It's not the total length of time we get to live, it's what we do with it, that counts. On that sobering thought, it's time to move on the next king, the brother of the one who is "dead in Verse 17".
15. Verse 18: Therefore this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: "They will not mourn for him: `Alas, my brother! Alas, my sister!' They will not mourn for him: `Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor!' <sup>19</sup> He will have the burial of a donkey-- dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem."
- Anyway, this is Joash's "son #2". He gets to rule for eleven years. This was the turbulent time when Babylon was fighting Egypt for control of the Middle East with Israel being in the way between those two great powers. There's a historical debate about his death. It is written in 2 Kings 24:5-6 that he died "in peace and was buried". However one version of 2 Chronicles 36:6 says he was exiled to Babylon. It's a complicated issue. Most scholars' suspect he died in Jerusalem but was hated by his people and therefore did not get a great burial. It's a minor issue, but if the bible says this king didn't die well, I'll take that as "the truth" and leave it at that.
  - OK, John why should we care about this stuff? The issue isn't about ancient Middle East history. The issue is still about ruling as God desires. Wait a second, if the great invasion by Babylon was due to the whole country being corrupt beyond repair, why blame is the blame focused on the king here? What could he do if he was far outnumbered by enemies of Israel? If you recall from the last chapter, God told the Israelites to surrender as then it is a matter of sparing their lives. Therefore, from the king down, people didn't listen to all of Jeremiah's preaching in terms of believing God's word.
  - Shorter version, they're all guilty and suffered for it.
16. Verse 20: "Go up to Lebanon and cry out, let your voice be heard in Bashan, cry out from Abarim, for all your allies are crushed. <sup>21</sup> I warned you when you felt secure, but you said, `I will not listen!' This has been your way from your youth; you have not obeyed me. <sup>22</sup> The wind will drive all your shepherds away, and your allies will go into exile. Then you will be ashamed and disgraced because of all your wickedness.
- John's loose translation: "King, no matter where you run too, there's no escaping the fact you'll be judged by God." The verses imply the fact he has rebelled against God since the days of his youth.
  - As you read this section, keep in mind other small nations around there were also scared of the Babylonian invasion. The Israelites had allies, but they were all outnumbered and a major end to many of the nations around there (for example the Philistines came to an end who were around since the days of Samuel). Bottom line this king was accountable and it is not a pretty picture.
  - While the text was describing "rebellious since youth", let me ask, when does the parents liability end versus the children? Obviously it varies from person to person. The Jewish ceremony of Bar mitzvah, is just that to celebrate that the parents are no longer liable for the sins of their children. It's traditionally around age 13 or 14.



- d) Anyway, the main purpose of this section is to state that there's nowhere for the king to run to for safety. That's the reference to the other foreign places in the area.
- e) That leads to one more verse on this king before we get to my favorite part of the lesson:
17. Verse 23: You who live in `Lebanon, ' who are nestled in cedar buildings, how you will groan when pangs come upon you, pain like that of a woman in labor!
- a) Keep in mind that when the Babylonians destroyed Israel, it wasn't just that country, they also destroyed what was and is known as Lebanon (just north of Israel) as well as other of the smaller nations in the area. The Babylonians started a major empire that was vast in its territory. So why give this warning to Lebanon here in this section about the Israel kings? I suspect like Egypt, it was one of the places the leaders ran to, thinking they'd be safer in the buildings in the forest made out of cedar. Think of it as a "log cabin hid away". I'd bet it's here to say in effect, "You think you can avoid God's judgment by running away, think again buddy!"
- b) OK enough of all of that. Hang in there, the interesting stuff is next!
18. Verse 24: "As surely as I live," declares the LORD, "even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. <sup>25</sup> I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear--to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians. <sup>26</sup> I will hurl you and the mother who gave you birth into another country, where neither of you was born, and there you both will die. <sup>27</sup> You will never come back to the land you long to return to."
- a) The big picture idea is all of these kings (two brothers and one son of one of the brothers) were bad news in God's eyes. Here we get Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim. First the good news, God's not going to quiz us on this. I get the names confused and I've been at this a long time myself! All we need to remember is that God holds us accountable for how we lead as these kings are examples of how to not live as God desires!
- b) By the time this guy came on the throne, the Babylonians were really dominating as they conquered most of the Middle East. Instead of doing what Jeremiah told them to do, that is, surrender to the Babylonians, this king fought it out and suffered for it.
- c) Jeremiah correctly predicted that both this king and his mother would not die in Israel. In 2nd Kings 24:8 we learn he was taken to Babylon never to return. Remember that Babylon did three separate attacks on Jerusalem. It was the second one where this king was taken away and the final king (that we'll read about in a few chapters) was taken away.
- d) So why is his mother mentioned? The Israelite kings often mentioned the mothers who're the one's who raised them. Often they had their own thrones next to the king. It was their way of honoring their mothers. Anyway when Nebuchadnezzar who was the Babylonian king at that time, lead the army to attack Jerusalem, he was tired of this king who rebelled against him and he and "mom" got exiled to Babylon.
- e) OK John, this is all boring ancient history. Why should we care? I'll also admit, this hasn't been the easiest lesson to get through as it required a lot of background research. Yes, we get the idea that we're supposed to govern by the principals taught in the bible. We get it that these guys are all a bunch of "losers". Yes it shows that people are human and there's bad leaders then as there was now. The one thing to grasp is people may get away with a lot of stuff in this lifetime, but there is a God who judges people. So even if we have to be living with bad leaders, take comfort in the fact there is a God who judges fairly not only how we live, but also how we rule over others.
- f) All that leads to what I consider the fun part of the lesson. Here goes:
19. Verse 28: Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants? Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know? <sup>29</sup> O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD! <sup>30</sup> This is what the LORD says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."

- a) Let me begin by saying the bible records he had seven children. (1st Chronicles 3: 7-18.) So how is that the text says he is "childless" in Verse 30? The answer's to read "the fine print" so to speak. The text says "As if he was childless". If he was so bad, why does his kids have to suffer? For all we know the children lived "normal" lives in Babylon. This isn't an issue about death as it is rulership.
- b) Keep in mind that God promised King David that one of his sons (descendants) would be the Messiah. Therefore, when a curse was put on the descendants of the current king, the joke is Satan threw a party as he thought "he won the war". The answer of course is that a virgin birth was necessary to get around that curse. My point is to realize the virgin birth isn't just a cute miracle God pulled off. It was necessary to get around that curse. But John you said in the introduction that Mary wasn't a descendant of the kings, just of David. It's a true statement. To explain further, I need to tell one more Old Testament story.
  - i) In Chapter 27 of the book of Numbers there was a man named Zelophehad. In the story he had five daughters. He knew the land of Israel would be divided by tribe. His fear was the daughters would be married off to members of other tribes, as so to make the inheritance less for one tribe when such marriages occur. To solve this God told Moses that a man should marry within his tribe and therefore whatever's "hers is now his". It's on the basis of that story that Joseph became the legal father of Jesus due to that principle of adoption. That's how Jesus was the son of all those kings and got around the curse placed on this king.
  - ii) If nothing else, it's a good story to share at Christmas time!
  - iii) If you need further proof, do a study of the genealogy in Matthew Chapter 3. That focuses on Joseph's family line and mentions "Coniah" the nickname of this cursed king. My point is simply that God gets around this curse in order to bring Jesus in the world.
- c) Meanwhile back to the story itself. Why was God so hard on this guy versus the previous kings of Israel? I think it's God's way of saying, "This is the end of the road". Yes there was one more king who's the uncle of the cursed guy. The reason his uncle was put in charge, is simply because that's who Nebuchadnezzar picked to succeed him. Since "Nebbie" was the real power in charge at this point, what he says goes. I'm convinced that the reason a strong curse like this was invoked, including using God's name was simply to get a point to realize that God needed to "intervene in history" in order to bring the Messiah into the world.
- d) So what do Jewish commentators say about this? Simply that the curse means none of his sons will rule and none of them did. They also argue that when the Messiah appears, he's not to die for our sins, but just to rule over the world. Obviously I disagree with that view but I wanted to present it while I was in the neighborhood.
- e) In fact, since we're discussing the "Messiah, realize Chapter 23 (next time) will include the fact that the Messiah is still to come in spite of the curse placed on this family line. I'll save the details of that story for next time.
- f) For now, be grateful we made it through this lesson on God and leadership. I know it will not solve a lot of current political debate, but it does show God's standard for leadership. I will also remind us that the New Testament calls on us to pray for our leaders especially a leader we're not crazy about. When someone gets elected I don't like I then remind myself of the fact that as a Christian, "I'm neither a Democrat or Republican, but a monarch". All that means is I choose to live with Jesus as my king and He's the true ruler over my life. I keep that in mind when the politicians I'm not crazy about impose laws I disagree with. I also try to keep in mind that God will judge them as well as me.
- g) Finally keep in mind we can complain all day long about politics but other than voting, it is still a case of obeying who God places over us, for better or worse. So while we all take a deep breath to accept our political leaders, let's close in prayer:

20. Heavenly Father, We thank You that You've taught us what it is You expect of our leaders. Help us to lead and follow as Your witnesses to the world around us. While we can't fix all things, You did call on us to be a living witness for You. So help us to let go of the things we can't control and with the Holy Spirit's guidance, make wise decisions that please You by how we live out our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen