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Day 215 - August 3

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## **Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)**

### ***Assyria Falls and Babylon Emerges***

### ***Jeremiah Faces Charges***

**Readings: *2 Kings 23:29-37; 2 Chronicles 35:20-25; 36:1-5; Jeremiah 22:10-17; 26:1-24***

### ***Reflections:***

- During this period, we see in historical records that the prophecies of Israel's prophets were coming true. Assyria, Babylon and Egypt are the three superpowers waging war for control of the region and little Israel is trapped in the midst of this conflict. Most scholars place Jeremiah's ministry as beginning sometime near 626 BCE when Nabopolassar establishes the Babylonian empire and rebels against Assyria. 14 years later Ninevah falls by the joint effort of the armies of the Babylonians, Medes and Scythians and the prophecies of Nahum are fulfilled. As Babylon begins its rise to power in that region, it must still deal with Egypt. The Pharaoh's of that time were Psammetichus I and Neco. In one battle where Neco aligns with some of the remaining forces of Assyria and attempts an attack against Babylon, its armies must pass through Canaan. Josiah decides to attack for no apparent reason and is killed in battle. Neco ultimately decides to make Israel a buffer region between Egypt and Babylon and so we see again how vulnerable and small Israel really is.
- The lack of explanation about Josiah's reason for attacking leaves it open for speculation. Did he think because of his reforms, he was invulnerable? Was this a foolish act of a king that should have known better? In any case, in the story of "what doesn't work" it reminds us again that unless the human heart is truly changed from the inside-out, even the best leaders can not really be trusted. After all the good Josiah did, his life ends tragically.
- The people choose Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, as king. Notice that it is the people, and not God who chose him. He was 23 years old and what does this young king do with his power? "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord just as his fathers (or ancestors) had done."
- When Egypt takes over, Jehoahaz's brother, Eliakim who Pharaoh called Jehoiakim, is made into a puppet king and Jehoahaz is locked away in chains. Jehoiakim is also young at 25 years old and also does evil in the eyes of the Lord. Egypt places a heavy taxation burden on Israel and we see their sin has resulted in its first forms of bondage. The first form of bondage is a spiritual bondage (idolatry), the second is financial (taxation), and the third that will come is

relational and physical (actual captivity). Here we see that progression of bondage follows the same course as liberation: starts on the inside and works its way out. If your heart is changed, then you start to make different personal decisions. These different personal decisions end up transforming your relationships and life situation around you. The question is: is your heart being changed by God or by self-centeredness?

- In Jeremiah 22:10-17 we read Jeremiah's lament for Jehoahaz (called Shallum) in this text. His lament can be summarized this way: Is it the externals of wealth, power and prestige that make you a king before God? No, it is your heart to defend the cause of the poor and needy. Jeremiah asks a profound question then: "Is that not what it means to know me?" To know God is to know his heart for the poor, broken and needy. What is fascinating is that when Jesus came, his heart was completely set on healing, restoring and freeing the poor and broken. Yet, the religious leaders of this day could not see that he was revealing God's heart. They didn't know God because they were only concerned about their own form of self-righteousness and had no compassion for those in need.
- Jeremiah now speaking for God in the midst of a spiritually declining nation under Jehoiakim, confronts the temple worshippers and leadership. The resulting story is dramatic. Basically, Jeremiah stands his ground under the threat of death but God delivers him as some of the officials actually stand up for him. Jeremiah demonstrates an incredible faith in God that really looks like pure fearlessness. When being held by the religious leaders and being threatened with execution, he says: "As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing." Wow! Talk about fearlessness. Actually, Jeremiah may well have been very afraid but his faith in God enabled him to still speak and do what God had asked him to do.
- Jeremiah's faith-filled words will find a very close parallel in the final days of Jesus' life. Jesus will be killed in complete and perfect innocence, even as the people cry out for his blood to be on their own heads and their children's heads. In 70 CE, we see the horrible outcome of a people and a city falling under this judgment as Jerusalem is completely destroyed as Jesus' predicted. This reminds us that the gravest of sins can have a generational ripple effect, from parent to child to grandchild. The God's power through Jesus though can stop that generational impact of sin. That is great news for anyone with a messed up family background.
- The deliverance of Jeremiah is contrasted with the story of Uriah, who basically prophesies the same things but when the threat of death comes, runs for his life and in the end is killed. Here we see that when things got tough, he did not trust God but rather sought to save himself. His own self-saving actions though actually led to his death where Jeremiah trusted God completely and in the end, God delivered him. This is a good reminder: doing what God wants is the best way to live life. Even when it looks crazy and dangerous and hopeless, when God is on your side he can do what is humanly impossible and implausible to

accomplish his will. What looks like the safe way out, if it is not based on trusting God and serving him wholeheartedly, is actually the more dangerous approach to follow.