

The Great Fall of Jerusalem

Summary and Goal

One of the most important events in the Old Testament era was the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of God's people. Due to the hard-heartedness of the people and their leaders, including the despising of His Word, God displayed His justice and wrath through His punishment of His people. Yet even here, in this display of God's justice, we see how God preserves a remnant of people who will carry the hope of His promise to make all things new through a Messiah.

Main Passages

2 Chronicles 36:11-21

Jeremiah 38:14-18,24-28

Session Outline

1. Spiritual downfall begins with hardened hearts (2 Chron. 36:11-14).
2. Spiritual downfall leads to despising God's Word (Jer. 38:14-18,24-28).
3. Spiritual downfall brings God's wrath (2 Chron. 36:15-21).

Theological Theme

God patiently pursues sinners, but His patience will one day come to an end.

Christ Connection

God righteously punished His people for their sin, but He remained faithful to them and kept the promise He made to David to preserve a remnant and provide a king. Ultimately, God punished our sin through His Son, Jesus, and made Him our King forever.

Missional Application

God calls us to listen to His Word and proclaim His patience and righteousness to others while there is still time.

The Great Fall of Jerusalem

Session 12

Introduction Option

Ask groups of 3-4 to discuss their experiences of “going home”: What do they most look forward to about arriving at their respective homes at the end of a work day or trip out of town?

After a few moments, reconvene and call for some responses from individuals among each group.

? For Further Discussion

What are some ways the church may be too indistinct from the surrounding culture?

Introduction

Open with a detailed account about going home from work (share the writer’s, your own, or ask a volunteer) (leader p. 142; PSG p. 110).

- ? What makes your home truly “home” for you? What aspects most strongly communicate that your home is yours and not anyone else’s?

Next, ask group members to imagine the familiarity of home being destroyed. Then summarize the session (leader pp. 142-143; PSG pp. 110-111).

1. Spiritual downfall begins with hardened hearts (2 Chron. 36:11-14).

Using **Pack Item 8: Jeremiah’s Life** and the leader content, recount the history of Judah leading up to the fall of Jerusalem (leader p. 143). Then ask a volunteer to read 2 Chronicles 36:11-14. Note that Zedekiah’s actions stemmed from his hardened heart (leader p. 143; PSG p. 111).

- ? What, in your own words, is *hardness of heart*?

Identify and comment about the warning signs that should alert us to a heart potentially growing hard to God’s will (leader pp. 144-145; PSG pp. 112-113):

- **Pride**

- ? Why do you think pride comes along with hardness of heart?

- **Lack of repentance**

- **Lack of distinction**

- ? Why is our behavior a checkpoint for hardness of heart?

2. Spiritual downfall leads to despising God’s Word (Jer. 38:14-18,24-28).

Read and explain Jeremiah 38:14-18. Say that the truth of God’s Word means we must come to it in humility, trusting God to expose our offensive ways that we might be free of them (leader pp. 145-146; PSG pp. 113-114).

? What is the most difficult part to you about trusting God to tell you the truth?

? When has God confronted you with some uncomfortable truth through His Word? What was your response, and why?

Show how the church should live in light of the honesty of God—we should be honest with one another in order to challenge self-deception and confront sin (leader pp. 146-147; PSG pp. 114-115).

? Why is honesty one of the measures of love?

Emphasize that the Word of God calls us to repentance, but the question is how will we respond: with humble acceptance or hardness of heart. Then read Jeremiah 38:24-28 for Zedekiah's choice (leader p. 147; PSG p. 115).

3. Spiritual downfall brings God's wrath (2 Chron. 36:15-21).

Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-21, detailing the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the deportation. But highlight God's patience in exercising judgment that people would come to repentance (leader p. 148; PSG p. 116).

? How does it motivate us to know that God desires none to perish?

? How does it change the way we see the judgment of God?

Point out how the normal flow of life can lead some to believe judgment for sin will never come, but the reality is God is showing patience. We must be faithful, like the prophets of the Old Testament, to proclaim that Jesus is coming again and He will judge the earth (leader p. 149; PSG pp. 116-117).

? In what ways should believers today be like Jeremiah, weeping over the state of our world while delivering God's message to the people?

? In what ways are believers today different than Jeremiah?

Conclusion

Recap the session, emphasizing that God's patience is not indifference. In response to this grace, we are to warn unbelievers of the judgment to come that they might be saved, and we are to encourage one another so we aren't hardened by sin's deception (leader p. 149; PSG p. 117). *Apply the truths of this session with "His Mission, Your Mission"* (PSG p. 118).

Revisit Pack Item 6: My Father's World and discuss the quote here in light of the judgment and destruction of Jerusalem.

? For Further Discussion

How is it more loving and respectful to tell someone a difficult truth rather than obscure it?

What is the difference between saying something *offensive* and saying something *offensively*?

Point 3 Option

Ask groups of 2-3 to revisit Jonah 4:1-3 together and to discuss the following questions (consider writing them on a board or sheet of paper for groups to have; also available on the DVD in *The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack*):

- How do the prophets Jeremiah and Jonah differ from one another?
- Under what circumstances might you identify more with Jeremiah or Jonah? Why?

After a couple of minutes, reconvene and allow a brief time to share responses, but don't require any.

Christ Connection: God righteously punished His people for their sin, but He remained faithful to them and kept the promise He made to David to preserve a remnant and provide a king. Ultimately, God punished our sin through His Son, Jesus, and made Him our King forever.

.....
Missional Application: God calls us to listen to His Word and proclaim His patience and righteousness to others while there is still time.

Expanded Session Content

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Session 12



Voices from Church History

“The prophets had to speak against the spirit of their times, against popular opinion, against all the political powers—and to bear the consequences. [They] were able to interpret the disasters which befall God’s people not as a defeat for God but as the manifestation of God’s righteous judgment.”¹

—Leslie Newbigin
(1909-1998)

Introduction

Do you have a long commute home from work? If so, then you know the routine. You leave the workplace and begin the fight with traffic to go home. At first, you’re thinking about what you left behind—a to-do list that only seemed to grow, responsibilities that will be there in the morning, boxes to be checked, meetings to be had, and calls to be made. You’re thinking about these things as the miles start to click by on the odometer, and then, at some point, your focus changes from where you’ve left to where you’re going.

You’re going home. The road is familiar; you’ve driven it a thousand times before. One turn, and then another. Finally, you’re in your neighborhood. Your street. And then, there out your window is your driveway. There’s the crack in the retaining wall you’ve been thinking about fixing; there’s the yard that always seems to have a few more weeds than it should; there’s the left-out frisbees and scooters that, again, those kids have failed to put away.

You smile because you’re home. When you open the door, depending on the season, it’s a blast of either pleasantly cool or warm air. It’s the sight of the same place where you hang up your keys so you won’t forget them (again) tomorrow. And the smell. It’s a smell that reminds you that humans live here, and not just any humans—they’re your humans. This is the smell of your home, and it’s unique to your home. You’re home. And it is glorious.



What makes your home truly “home” for you? What aspects most strongly communicate that your home is yours and not anyone else’s?

Take everything that just came to mind—that glorious familiarity with your home—and imagine it all being ripped apart. You are forced to leave. Your neighborhood is destroyed, and your home is gone. Home is no more, and everyone is disoriented and confused. This was the situation the remaining people of Israel found themselves in when, at long last, the patience of God ran out.

Session Summary

In this session, we will study one of the most important events in the Old Testament era—the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of God’s people. Due to the hard-heartedness of the people and their leaders, including the despising of His Word, God displayed His justice and wrath through His punishment of His people. Yet even here, in this display of God’s justice, we see how God preserves a remnant of people who will carry the hope of His promise to make all things new through a Messiah.

1. Spiritual downfall begins with hardened hearts (2 Chron. 36:11-14).

King Josiah was the one bright spot in the final kings of Judah. He was the last ruler who dedicated himself to the rule and reign of God, and as such, he tried every way he knew to return the people to their spiritual heritage. But after his death came a string of kings marked by war, exile, and eventually the death blow to the nation of Israel as they knew it.

Power shifted for several years between Egypt and Babylon, and so did the allegiances of the various kings of Judah. Kings came and went, none reigning with any integrity or longevity, until Zedekiah was installed on the throne by the Babylonians. He was intended to be a puppet ruler, but he was weak-willed. Eventually Zedekiah succumbed to the nationalism of Judah and listened to the advisors around him who told him he could indeed rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of mighty Babylon:

¹¹ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹² He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. ¹³ He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹⁴ All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem.

The last downfall of Judah had been set in motion through the hardened heart of their ruler, which was a reflection of the hardened hearts of the people. This text tells us the true source of Zedekiah’s actions: He was not acting out of a sense of national pride or noble desire for independence; instead, he was living out the natural way of his hardened heart.



What, in your own words, is *hardness of heart*?

Further Commentary

“It was Zedekiah who accompanied Judah into exile. The Book of Jeremiah provides a valuable insight into the character of Zedekiah. The prophet repeatedly urged Zedekiah to submit to Babylonia rather than look to Egypt for help during the latter part of his eleven-year reign. Zedekiah is given a bad assessment. The Chronicler turns again to terms he used often to express his theology. The first of these is that Zedekiah did not ‘humble’ himself before the prophet Jeremiah, God’s messenger (cf. 7:14). But it was not only Zedekiah who failed to humble himself. The whole nation behaved in the same way (vv. 15-16; cf. Jer. 37:2). Zedekiah’s rebellion was no doubt encouraged by some of his political advisers in this respect. The oath of allegiance that he swore to Nebuchadnezzar in the name of his God was normal in political treaties, but his breaking of the oath only serves to reinforce the portrait of him as an apostate (cf. Ezek. 17:11-21). Not only did Zedekiah display disloyal and unfaithful attitudes and responses, but all the leaders of the priests and the people behaved in the same way. In Zedekiah the people had the kind of king they deserved.”²

—J. A. Thompson

Voices from the Church

“The imperial self overrules all. Inquiring into the causes of sin takes us back, again and again, to the intractable human will and to the heart’s desire that stiffens the will against all competing considerations.”³

—Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

Voices from Church History

“The sinner mocks and scorns, When offered the love of God. This will be his undoing, For God will not be deceived.”⁴

—George Blaurock (circa 1492-1529)

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

36. *Sin as Transgression*

The word *transgression* means “to cross over” or “to pass by” and is often used in reference to transgressing God’s explicit commands. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is disobeyed, transgression has taken place (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14). In this sense, sin is law-breaking.

All spiritual downfalls begin as a progression rather than a free fall. And the first step of descent is hardness of heart to the will of God. In the hardness of Zedekiah’s heart, we can see some of the warning signs that might alert us—and should have alerted him—to our own hearts potentially growing hard to God’s will.

One of the sure signs of a hardening of one’s heart is **pride**. In this text we see Zedekiah’s pride running out of control, symptomatic of his hardness of heart. In retrospect, we can look at the situation he found himself in. He was a puppet king installed by the Babylonians. His army was not large enough to counter the Egyptians, much less the Babylonians. Despite these clear signs, Zedekiah’s pride spoke the lie that’s so detrimental to anyone whose heart is beginning to harden: “It can’t happen to me.”

This king never believed that judgment would come, that his actions would actually have consequences. He “did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD.” Similarly, we might find ourselves in a pattern of behavior that because it’s gone on for so long, we think it has no consequence. “Sure,” we might tell ourselves, “I know what happened to so-and-so. But that will never happen to me.” When our hearts begin to harden, we forge for ourselves a suit of false armor, tricking ourselves into believing in our own righteousness.

As Zedekiah found out, it actually could happen to him. Anyone with a hardened heart will find the same. Beware the kind of attitude that makes you think highly of yourself, that you are immune to consequence and judgment! Such an attitude is symptomatic of a heart that has begun to petrify.

 Why do you think pride comes along with hardness of heart?

Lack of repentance walks hand in hand with pride. Zedekiah had every opportunity to “return to the Lord,” the definition of *repentance*. He could have listened to the counsel of Jeremiah, humbly acknowledged the word of the Lord, and demonstrated that acknowledgment by turning away from his own wisdom and coming back to the Lord. But Zedekiah was convinced his way was right, and because it was, he had no need to turn away from it.

We can acknowledge the Word of the Lord, and we can acknowledge our own sin, but we must carry that acknowledgment into repentance. We must turn from our own way, from our own sense of self-lordship, and place ourselves under the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ.

The temptation here is to acknowledge sin, even feel remorse, yet not take active steps to turn from it. Those who are unwilling to repent are those whose hearts have grown hard to the things of God.

We see one other sign of hardness of heart in Zedekiah—it was his **lack of distinction** between his people and the rest of the nations. From its very inception, God planned that the people of Israel would be a people of distinction on the earth. They alone would shine forth His glory as a kingdom of priests set apart specifically for the Lord. But in the days of Zedekiah, “All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations.” In other words, they abandoned their distinction as God’s people and instead began to follow the ways of everyone around them.

As Christians, we should take a good look at our lives. Does your life look any different than people who don’t claim the name of Jesus Christ? Is there anything distinct in your own behavior that marks you as one of the people of God? If not, then beware. Take the temperature of your heart, for it might be growing dangerously cold.

 Why is our behavior a checkpoint for hardness of heart?

2. Spiritual downfall leads to despising God’s Word (Jer. 38:14-18,24-28).

Despite his hardness of heart, Zedekiah still had the sense to speak to Jeremiah the prophet of God. He evidently still realized at this point that God might have something to say about the trajectory of the nation. But when he approached God’s prophet, he received a message of judgment:

¹⁴ King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, “I will ask you a question; hide nothing from me.” ¹⁵ Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I tell you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me.” ¹⁶ Then King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah, “As the LORD lives, who made our souls, I will not put you to death or deliver you into the hand of these men who seek your life.”

¹⁷ Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If you will surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. ¹⁸ But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.”

Further Commentary

“The desperate Zedekiah turns to the very man whom he and his people have rejected for so long, and swears that Jeremiah will not be killed for giving frank answers to questions. The oath begins (38:16), ‘as the Lord lives, who gave us our lives...’ God takes life just as he gives it, and hence he may be expected to take Zedekiah’s life if he proves false to his oath. Being thus assured, Jeremiah sets out the frightening alternatives. The ‘total’ nature of ancient war should be noted again. Rebel kings who surrendered were usually mutilated and put to death, so the prospects for Zedekiah were anything but pleasant. However, he is urged to listen carefully to God’s message through Jeremiah, that his life may be spared...If word of the interview were to leak out, Zedekiah’s position would be even more intolerable than at present, and he would be powerless to save Jeremiah’s life. The excuse (v. 26), should one be needed, was that Jeremiah was begging the king not to be returned to the dungeon where he had nearly died (37:15). This precaution was timely, since Jeremiah was subsequently (38:27) interrogated by several of the rulers about the interview with the king. Until Jerusalem fell, Jeremiah was kept in the stockade, where he could be under continual observation.”⁵

—R. K. Harrison

Voices from the Church

“Unbelief abuses truth through a deliberate act of deception that ends in its own self-deception. Unbelief seizes God’s truth, twists it away from God’s purposes and toward its own, and is therefore forced to deny the full reality of the truth it knows.”⁶

—Os Guinness



In this passage, we see God’s righteous judgment coming to bear on His own people. We also see His great mercy, for even here God was offering Zedekiah a way to prevent even greater judgment and destruction. In that, we see God’s incredible patience, for He had offered opportunity after opportunity for the rulers and the people to return to Him.

Still, there is another characteristic of God that we see displayed in these verses—His absolute honesty. God will tell us the truth in His Word. And He will tell us the truth even if we don’t want to hear it. The honesty of God is a mercy to us because we have an amazing aptitude for self-deception. We cannot trust our own hearts apart from the Spirit’s work within us.

We can be masters of self-deception, tricking ourselves into thinking the best of ourselves in virtually any situation. Jeremiah the prophet knew this. That’s why, as we saw in the previous session, he recorded for us that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). It’s also why David had to pray and ask the Lord to diagnose his own heart for him: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Ps. 139:23-24).

The heart is deceitful, and even the new-covenant heart of a Christian struggles with sin, but God is truthful. Our own hearts may deceive us, but God will not withhold honesty. Our own hearts might seek to make us comfortable, but God will grant us the gift of brutal truth. Though we cannot trust ourselves, we can trust that God will tell us even what we don’t want to hear.


When we come to the Word of God today, then, we must come not assuming we know what God has to say to us. Rather, we must assume that we come with blinders on. We must assume we are blinded by our own feelings, our own opinions, and our own presuppositions, humbly asking God to show us what is actually true. We must trust that God will move past our own self-deluded attempts to comfort ourselves, knowing that the truth, no matter how uncomfortable, is better than lies.

-  What is the most difficult part to you about trusting God to tell you the truth?
-  When has God confronted you with some uncomfortable truth through His Word? What was your response, and why?

Zedekiah thought he wanted to know the truth, and so he asked Jeremiah to hold nothing back from him. Jeremiah did as he was asked, and in so doing, he gave Zedekiah a better gift than comfort. He gave him honesty. Just as Jeremiah served Zedekiah in this way, so we can serve each other in the church by reminding each other of the truth of God.

In His grace, God has given us the medicine for the disease of self-deception, and that medicine is the church grounded on the Word of God. It's in the church where we are meant to live so closely with each other that we can actually pull each other aside and speak good, hard truth to one another. It's no wonder that Proverbs 27:6 tells us that "faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy."


How, then, do we know who our true friends are? How can we cut through the fluff and know whom to trust? We look to those people in our lives who are willing, even when it's difficult, to be honest with us. Similarly, we have a responsibility to do what Jeremiah did for Zedekiah. We must love each other enough to be honest with each other, even when that honesty causes a wound.

 Why is honesty one of the measures of love?

Jeremiah told the king the truth, but the question remained: How would Zedekiah respond to God's truth? Would he persist in his hard-heartedness, or would he return humbly to the Lord, accepting the word of God from the prophet?

If spiritual downfall begins with hard-heartedness, then the next step on this downward spiral involves our reaction to God's Word. When God's Word calls us to repentance, we can either humbly accept this word or ignore it and continue on our own path. Zedekiah chose the latter for both himself and the nation under his care:

²⁴ Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Let no one know of these words, and you shall not die. ²⁵ If the officials hear that I have spoken with you and come to you and say to you, 'Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; hide nothing from us and we will not put you to death,' ²⁶ then you shall say to them, 'I made a humble plea to the king that he would not send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there.'" ²⁷ Then all the officials came to Jeremiah and asked him, and he answered them as the king had instructed him. So they stopped speaking with him, for the conversation had not been overheard. ²⁸ And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken.

 The end had finally come. Jeremiah had been a faithful prophet though the word of the Lord was despised. This prophet, who often spoke God's word through tears, bore witness to the siege of the city and its eventual destruction. The text makes it clear—Jeremiah was there when it finally happened. He saw the judgment of God come to pass.

Voices from Church History

"If [we] do not correct our impressions by the Word of God, the human heart is prone to fall into fanaticisms, and idiosyncrasies, and foolishness."⁷

—W. A. Criswell (1909-2002)

Further Commentary

“The New Testament is clear in its assessment of the Old Testament (Mosaic) covenant—namely, that it was a shadow of a better reality, something designed to pass away (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). Nevertheless, God’s character does not change, and we observe here the long-suffering compassion of a father working to provide every opportunity for repentance through the prophetic word. Having sent his servants the prophets to no avail, it would soon be time to send his one and only Son (Matt. 21:33–41). And though they would kill the Son as they did the prophets (Acts 7:52), this death would turn out to be the means by which God would bring true and lasting forgiveness to his people, forever breaking the cycles of temporary fidelity with his provision of everlasting righteousness.”⁸

—Miles Van Pelt,
Gospel Transformation Bible

3. Spiritual downfall brings God’s wrath (2 Chron. 36:15–21).

No doubt the weeping prophet’s reaction was different than Jonah, for example. Jonah so earnestly desired God’s judgment to come on Nineveh that he said he would rather die than see the Ninevites come to repentance, so he would shed no tears over God’s judgment. But Jeremiah embodied the heart of the Lord. Time and time again, even up to the end with Zedekiah, Jeremiah offered a way to postpone the wrath of God. He repeatedly called out for the people to return to the Lord until it was too late:

¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

¹⁷ Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸ And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. ¹⁹ And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. ²⁰ He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

The spiritual downfall of the people had brought about the wrath of God. Even so, Jeremiah’s tears stand as a reminder that God takes no pleasure in exercising His righteous judgment. In the New Testament, Peter reminds us:

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Pet. 3:8–9)



How does it motivate us to know that God desires none to perish?



How does it change the way we see the judgment of God?

The people of Judah never thought the end would come. Day after day, life went on as normal. The voices of the prophets, constantly warning about the judgment of God, faded into the background. Similarly, people during Peter's day looked around at their lives and failed to see evidence of God's judgment. Though Peter promised that Jesus would return, the people of his day saw no evidence of that second coming and continued to live as if it would never happen.

So today, Christians herald the consummation of the new kingdom along with the new heaven and new earth. We warn that eventually the end will come, and we live in light of the inevitable return of Jesus. And yet, there are still those who, based on circumstantial evidence, claim there is no God and certainly no grand plan to judge the earth in righteousness. But God's judgment did come upon Israel. And Jesus will return. And God will judge the earth.

? In what ways should believers today be like Jeremiah, weeping over the state of our world while delivering God's message to the people?

? In what ways are believers today different than Jeremiah?

Conclusion

In this session, we have seen that God is patient with His people, persistently calling them to repentance. We have also seen why we must not mistake God's patience for indifference. In our daily routines, it is easy to lose sight of the truth that God's Word reveals to us—there is a day of judgment coming, and we should be prepared. The long-awaited return of Jesus, like the long-promised judgment of Judah, highlights God's patience, not His indifference. God desires all to come to repentance, then as now, and every day that life continues as we know it is a tangible example of this gracious patience. It's an opportunity for one more to hear and believe the gospel of Jesus and flee to Him to escape the wrath that's coming.

So let us take seriously the warning from the Book of Hebrews that reminds us of the reality of spiritual downfall and emphasizes the urgency before us: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12-13).

CHRIST CONNECTION: God righteously punished His people for their sin, but He remained faithful to them and kept the promise He made to David to preserve a remnant and provide a king. Ultimately, God punished our sin through His Son, Jesus, and made Him our King forever.

Further Commentary

"When [Babylon's King] Nabopolassar died in 605 B.C., his son Nebuchadnezzar became the king of this revitalized Babylonian Empire. Shortly thereafter he subjugated the small nations of ancient Canaan, forcing them to pay tribute money and taking their best citizens into Babylonian exile. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were taken into captivity at this time. Eight years later, Nebuchadnezzar, responding to Judah's King Jehoiakim withholding tribute money, attacked Jerusalem, 'the city of Judah' mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicle. Jehoiakim died before the Babylonians broke through the city's defenses on March 16, 597 B.C., but his son Jehoiachin and approximately 10,000 people of Judah were taken into exile in Babylon. Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle and last remaining son of Josiah, was elevated to ruler of the remaining truncated kingdom of Judah...Zekeiah rebelled against Babylon (likely by withholding tribute money), a fateful decision that brought the full force of Babylon's army against Jerusalem. In 586 B.C., the city fell. The Babylonians tore down Jerusalem's walls and destroyed the major buildings including Solomon's temple. The Babylonians took a third wave of captives into exile."⁹

—W. Wayne VanHorn,
Biblical Illustrator