

GOD'S JUDGMENT THROUGH THE NATIONS

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Obstinate people refuse God's ways (2 Chron. 36:11-14).
2. Obstinate people reject God's word (2 Chron. 36:15-16).
3. Obstinate people experience God's judgment (2 Chron. 36:17-21).

Background Passage: 2 Chronicles 36

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God sends judgment upon all who are obstinate against Him.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

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

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because the punishment of our sin has been taken from us and paid by Christ, we listen to God's Word with softened hearts as we proclaim God's patience and righteousness to others while there is still time for them to repent.

GROUP TIME

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: In 586 BC, Nineveh and Assyria have been destroyed and the nation of Judah has fallen under Babylonian control for about two decades. The northern kingdom of Israel is long gone, and the kings of southern Judah have been a mixed bag. Some have followed God, but most have not. God has given Judah a very long leash with ample opportunities to repent of their unfaithfulness. Yet they have broken their covenant with Yahweh, and God's wrath has been stirred—this time against His own rebellious, obstinate people. In His righteousness, God removes His protective hand. Judah's time is up, and destruction comes swiftly through the hands of the Babylonians.

DISCUSS: What are some reasons for the suffering we see and experience in the world? (the sin of others against us; the general effects of sin in the world that result in natural disasters and hardships in life; the consequences of our own personal sin; God's general and specific judgment against sin and sinners; persecution that befalls believers for their proclamation of the gospel; people dismiss the dignity of every human being as made in the image of God and choose to act against them)

TRANSITION: God is all-merciful, and He is also all-righteous. In His great plan, He has allowed human beings to choose whom and what they will worship and follow. His patience withholds His wrath for a time as He gives people opportunity to turn and return to Him, but if they do not, they have chosen judgment for themselves. Only those who recognize their need for God and place their faith in the work of Christ will escape the eternal wrath and judgment of God.

POINT 1

OBSTINATE PEOPLE REFUSE GOD'S WAYS

(2 CHRON. 36:11-14).

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.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **2 Chronicles 36:11-14** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use **PACK ITEM 3: THE DIVIDED KINGDOM** and the **VERSES 11-13** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Zedekiah's **pride** led him to doing **evil** in God's sight. His lack of **humility** kept him from returning to God and finding forgiveness.

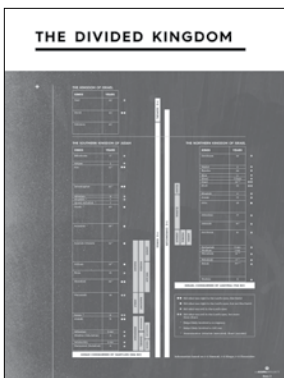
EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 14** commentary to emphasize how easy it is to fall into the trappings of the world (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #46: The World Opposed to God: There are times in Scripture where the term "world" refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under **Satan's** control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same **self**-centeredness and **deceit** that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by **faith** in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

DISCUSS: What are some detestable practices of the nations that tempt believers today? (pornography; sex before marriage; homosexuality; drugs; tax evasion; money laundering; fraud; hatred of others; violence; murder)

TRANSITION: Pride and obstinacy is a refusal to follow God's ways, which is a rejection of God Himself. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit can we stay steadfast with God that we may experience God's love and forgiveness.

NOTES



ZEDEKIAH

Zedekiah was the son of King Josiah and the brother of Kings Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. Josiah was a good king, walking in the ways of the Lord, like David, but his sons walked in the ways of evil, and as a result, the throne was taken from each one of them. Even though Zedekiah saw what happened to his brothers, he chose poorly and walked in the ways of evil as well.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 11-13 / Beginning with 2 Chronicles 36, the last chapter of the book, the author of 1–2 Chronicles shifted in the way he treated the remaining kings. In a very short passage, we encounter the last four kings of Judah. Compared to the treatment of the kings before them, the movement is swift and details are sparse. This is meant to communicate the rapid fall of Judah after centuries of God’s patient warnings. When judgment comes, it comes swiftly and decidedly.¹

The defeat of Nineveh in 612 BC dealt a mortal blow to the nation of Assyria. The nation of Babylon soon conquered and took over Assyrian territory. Thus, the nation of Judah came under Babylonian occupation and was subject to Babylon’s concerns for governance. In accordance with his appointment as king eleven years earlier, Zedekiah had submitted to an agreement with the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (ruled 605-582 BC). But King Zedekiah later **“rebelled.”**

From our vantage point, rebelling against a foreign power, especially in the scenario of Judah rebelling against a pagan nation, seems like a right and faithful step for a king in the line of David. But Zedekiah was judged otherwise—**“He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.”** Why this designation? The chronicler framed the issue as pride. Doing right in God’s sight requires humility. Ultimately, Zedekiah and all the wicked kings before him who received the same label did what was evil because they did not believe that God’s plan and commands were good. They thought they could do better.

Back in the days of King Solomon, after the momentous dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, God made a promise to forgive, deliver, and heal His people if they “humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways” (2 Chron. 7:14). This was a continuation of the covenant between Yahweh and the nation of Israel. Both before and after

that promise, again and again God’s people forsook this work of humility, prayer, seeking God’s face, and repenting of sin. Instead, they chose self-reliance, rebellion, and arrogance. Zedekiah was merely the last stop in a long line of pride-filled people.

The pride of Zedekiah is described in three ways. First, he was unwilling to listen to instruction. Specifically, the Lord’s prophet **“Jeremiah”** had commanded Zedekiah to submit and surrender to Nebuchadnezzar’s siege and conquest, but he refused (see Jer. 21; 27; 37–38). Second, Zedekiah **“rebelled”** against Babylon, even though he had sworn allegiance **“by God.”** In essence, he took the name of the Lord in vain (see Ex. 20:7). Third, he **“stiffened his neck”** and **“hardened his heart,”** refusing to return to the Lord. He chose to go his own path to try to resist the righteous judgment of God for the cumulative sins of the people of God, including his own.

VERSE 14 / The problems in Judah were not only with the king. The chronicler made sure we knew that both the leaders and the people **“were exceedingly unfaithful.”** He gave two specifics of these reprehensible actions: 1) they imitated the practices of the nations, and 2) they defiled the Lord’s temple. Both were serious violations against the holiness of God and the covenantal call for God’s people to be holy as He is holy (see Lev. 19:2; 20:7,26). God’s people were to be set apart from the world in their worship and their communal life so that the nations could look at the Israelites and see God’s holy presence and influence among them. The Israelites were meant to be a mirror of God’s holiness.

God’s people failed miserably to uphold the requirements of the covenant made with Yahweh. These were not new indictments but had been chronicled again and again. This was but a summary and capstone of the wickedness and obstinacy that had been demonstrated for centuries by people who were called to bear God’s name (2 Chron. 7:14).

POINT 2

OBSTINATE PEOPLE REJECT GOD'S WORD

(2 CHRON. 36:15-16).

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.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **2 Chronicles 36:15-16** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 15** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

For the Israelites, disobedience reigned for generations, but time and time again, God showed **compassion** and gave His people opportunities to **repent** through the message of His **word**.

DISCUSS: What are some means God uses to speak to us and direct us back to Him? (the reading of Scripture; a sermon; a Christian friend, mentor, pastor, or leader; the loving care of the church; prayer; natural consequences; the conviction of the Holy Spirit in us as believers in Jesus Christ)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 16** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

God's **mercy** cannot be exhausted. But when people choose to be obstinate in their sin, God will bring **discipline** and **judgment**.

TRANSITION: Hard hearts often need hard circumstances to achieve a breakthrough. God's patience is limitless. However, in His great love, omniscience, and sovereignty, He eventually must withhold mercy and allow His wrath to be poured out on those who refuse to repent of their wickedness. It's up to each person to decide if they will respond to the mercy of God and repent before it's too late.

NOTES

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."²

—Leslie Newbigin
(1909-1998)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 15 / Verses 15-16 serve as a transition from the time of the kings to the period of the exile, which will begin with verse 17. The nation of Israel, which had split into Israel and Judah, had promised to listen to God's word and follow God's ways, but the people had proven themselves unfaithful. Therefore, the promised withdrawal of God's favor was coming.

King after king had failed to follow God, and the people of the nation followed their kings away from God. Along the way, there were a few bright spots where ruler and nation obeyed and experienced periods of blessing and fruitfulness. But by and large, disobedience reigned. Yet time and time again, God gave them opportunities to repent. He pursued them through the prophets, **"his messengers,"** the mouthpieces of God. These men spoke specific rebukes and detailed prophecies of what was to come if the kings and the people refused to return to God and His ways. So the people could not feign ignorance.

The act of sending His word through the prophets was a great act of **"compassion."** The intended result of God's covenant with Israel was clear: I will be your God, and you will be My people (see Ex. 6:7; Jer. 7:23; 11:4). The law spelled out in detail the divine promises made and the specific stipulations expected by the recipients of those promises (see Deut. 28). From a legal standpoint, there was nothing God had withheld from Israel, but the people had forsaken their vows to God. Therefore, the Lord had every right to forsake them. Yet here we see that God extended His compassion on both His people and His dwelling place, the city of Jerusalem and the temple in particular—the symbol of His glory among the nations.

The Hebrew word for "compassion" in this verse holds the meaning of having pity and showing mercy.³ For centuries, God withheld the punishment Israel and Judah rightly deserved. Indeed, "the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Ps. 145:8).

VERSE 16 / Verse 15 contrasts the wicked disobedience of the people with the compassionate acts of God—the sending of His word through the prophets. But then in verse 16, the chronicler contrasts God's continual acts of compassion with the people's perpetual choice of disobedience. Their obstinacy was on full display. Though God's mercy was long and deep and wide, the people's disobedience continued as they rejected the Lord's offer of a way out of certain doom.

So often the history of God's people in the Old Testament provides a sense of perpetual movement downward. Again and again and again, the kings and the people continued to choose disobedience. The author of Chronicles spelled out their three-fold treachery: the people **"kept mocking," "despising,"** and **"scoffing"** at the Lord's prophets, who proclaimed His compassionate words of warning.

The resulting portrait is bleak. The people hated God's words until it was too late—**"there was no remedy."** This does not imply that God's patience and mercy can be exhausted; they are infinite as He is. However, like a good father, God recognizes when enough is enough, when withholding punishment is enabling even more wickedness. The last straw was not their initial transgression but their rejection of God's call to repentance. The fatal mistake was not their failure to keep the law. Jesus Himself would point out that no mere mortal could fully keep the law (see Matt. 5:17-48). The problem was their continual rejection of God's offer of mercy.⁴

These actions unleashed the storm of God's **"wrath,"** which had been brewing for quite a while. But without repentance, God's wrath cannot be appeased and healing cannot be ushered in. A wound cannot be healed if the patient refuses to accept the doctor's offer of the cure. Judah's cure required repentance of sin and a return to God's ways. But the obstinate did not listen to God's warning and promise of pardon.⁵

POINT 3

OBSTINATE PEOPLE EXPERIENCE GOD'S JUDGMENT (2 CHRON. 36:17-21).

NOTES

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.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **2 Chronicles 36:17-21** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 17-20** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The destruction the Lord brought upon Judah and Jerusalem was **brutal** and **complete**, leaving no king, no people, no city, and no temple.

DISCUSS: How might the destruction of the temple have been interpreted by the remaining people of Judah? (God's presence was no longer with them; God's glory had been violated by His people; the hope for atonement to cover their sins was gone; God didn't exist or was weaker than Babylon's gods)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 21** commentary to explain the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Even after God's promised discipline and judgment, there was hope. **Exile** had come, but God promised that one day there would be a **return** and **restoration** for the remnant of His people.

DISCUSS: How should God's promise of a remnant for Judah bring hope to us in our darkest days? (we see God is faithful in spite of our faithlessness; we see that God can redeem even disobedience; we know God has a plan that cannot be thwarted by sin; we can't see the whole picture sometimes, but we know God does and will bring it to fruition; God's plan to send His Son remained on track through the exile, and similarly, His plan for the Son to return for His church will be fulfilled)

SABBATH

Just as the Sabbath day was to be a day of rest to the Lord, the Sabbath year was to do the same; God's people were not to plant their crops every seventh year (Lev. 25:3-5). They also were to forgive all debts and free all slaves (Deut. 15). This was to be a sign of trust in the Lord for their provision. Sadly, they did not observe these laws for the Sabbath year. When judgment came, the land was able to rest for seventy years (ten terms of seven years, symbolizing completeness) while God's people were exiled.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 17-20 / Second Kings 24:20 says, “Because of the anger of the LORD it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence.” When God removed His presence from His people, His covenantal grace and promised protection evacuated with it, and the dam of wrath burst. With the removal of God’s presence came a rush of Chaldean, or Babylonian, fury, which previously had been tempered by the powerful residence of Yahweh among His people.

The chronicler’s account of this significant event gives the primary details, more of a view from a distance when compared to the 2 Kings account. In 2 Chronicles, Judah’s defeat seems to happen instantly. However, the process of conquering Jerusalem took about two horrible years. After the city and its inhabitants ran out of food on account of a siege, the Chaldean army finally breached the city walls and took over. Beyond the details declared in 2 Chronicles, 2 Kings provides additional information: Zedekiah’s army split and scattered. In his sight, the Babylonian army slaughtered Zedekiah’s sons. Then Zedekiah himself was blinded, bound in chains, and carried to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25:1-7).

Though the 2 Chronicles passage is brief, we learn Jerusalem’s destruction was complete. The Hebrew word for **“all”** is used five times in verses 17-19. Both the men and the women, from the young to the elderly, were handed over to be killed or deported. The city wall was torn down, all palaces were burned, and all valuable articles destroyed. This was complete and utter destruction.

The expulsion of the people from Jerusalem was not the only concern. Babylon plundered the contents of the temple. Once they stripped everything of value, the temple itself was burned down. They reduced God’s dwelling place to ashes. They defamed the symbol of God’s glory. But be sure to note this was not out of God’s control. He was not passive—**“he brought”** the Chaldeans.

VERSE 21 / God had proclaimed through the prophet **“Jeremiah”** that there would be seventy years of desolation and Babylonian oppression for Jerusalem and Judah (see Jer. 25:11). The prophets often warned of destruction “in real time,” but in the Mosaic covenant, which Moses communicated to Israel almost nine hundred years before, God gave the people His original warning. He told them that if they were disobedient, He would destroy their cities and scatter them from the land, and the land would rest (Lev. 26:27-28,31,33-34). Now centuries later, the promised judgment fulfilled **“the word of the LORD”** for those who broke their covenant with Yahweh.

Yet even in this seeming dead end, there was hope. Though this promised retribution looked to be the final straw, there was more that had been guaranteed. The Lord promised a return and a restoration for the remnant of Israel after **“seventy years,”** when Babylon was conquered by the Persian kingdom (see Jer. 29:10).

For the chronicler, the enforced **“Sabbaths”** for the land had elapsed and Persia now ruled. The Persian king Cyrus had even issued an edict at the Lord’s direction that the people of Judah should return home and rebuild the temple (2 Chron. 36:22-23).

Interestingly, the exile is the backdrop for the well-known promise of Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope . . . I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (Jer. 29:11,14). Even amidst the destruction, God already had a restoration plan. The original audience of 1–2 Chronicles was smack dab in the middle of this promise and understood it in the context of being restored to God’s good graces, coming out of a time of disobedience and judgment into a time of obedience and renewal. Restoration is always around the corner for the person who will draw near to God through repentance and faith.

MY RESPONSE

PACK ITEM 14: RELINQUISH CONTROL: Hand out copies of this bookmark to help remind your group to reject the foolishness of obstinacy.

Because the punishment of our sin has been taken from us and paid by Christ, we listen to God's Word with softened hearts as we proclaim God's patience and righteousness to others while there is still time for them to repent.

HEAD:

Obstinacy always leads a sinner to destruction. God can save every person, body and soul, from judgment, but He will not do so for the unrepentant, those who have chosen to go their own way. Obstinacy screams: "I don't need God. I refuse to follow His ways." Because of our sin, each one of us deserves God's wrath. For the repentant, that wrath has been appeased by the sacrifice of Christ. For the obstinate, God's wrath will be received in full.

What place does the warning of judgment need to have in our sharing of the gospel of Jesus with others?

HEART:

Obstinacy is such a big problem because it is an obstacle to admission of sin. Repentance is the only catalyst for experiencing God's mercy and grace. Hard-heartedness is incongruent with a Christ-follower. Though we cannot lose our salvation, seasons of having a calloused heart can cause us to lose our intimacy with God as well as our witness and may indicate a heart that has never trusted in Christ in the first place. Through the intentional seeking of God's words and careful following of His ways, we can cultivate a tender heart. Soft-heartedness will keep us close to God. As a result, our lives will declare His goodness to those around us.

What are some ways you need to address the obstinacy and sin in your own heart?

HANDS:

Beyond continually cultivating tenderness within our hearts, we can also be a part of God's work in the lives of others. Foremost, we need to pray for soft hearts for the lost. This is a supernatural work that can only be accomplished by the grace of God. Additionally, we can be a portrait of God's love through holy living. It is God's kindness that leads us to repentance. As we live out the kindness of Christ before the lost people around us, we can be a part of dispensing God's tenderizing grace to those who need it the most.

What will you do this week to show the kindness of Christ to the hard-hearted?

NOTES



VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Pride can sometimes be seen in a hidden desire for the praise and admiration of men, an insistence on being 'right,' the desire to be noticed and appreciated, fear of rejection, or just preoccupation with myself—my feelings, my needs, my circumstances, my burdens, my desires, my successes, my failures. These are all fruits of that deadly root of pride. A heart filled with itself will be unable to behold the loveliness of Jesus and will cease to reflect His light."⁶

—Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

POINT 1: OBSTINATE PEOPLE REFUSE GOD'S WAYS

(2 CHRON. 36:11-14).

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COMMENTARY

“Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on Jerusalem and replacement of Jehoiachin with Zedekiah is recorded in a Babylonian source and dated to 597 BC. It claims that in the seventh year of his reign Nebuchadnezzar marched to ‘the city of Judah’ (Ya-a-hu-du; i.e., Jerusalem), and on the second of Adar, he captured the city and its king, appointed ‘a king of his choosing,’ and received heavy tribute (COS 1.468) . . . As was true with Jehoiakim, the one who was placed on the throne by a foreign power had an opportunity to elongate his reign as long as he was satisfied with his submissive posture. Zedekiah matched Jehoiakim’s longevity, reigning for 11 years (cf. Jer 27:1–28:17; 34:1-22; 37:1–38:28). As with his two predecessors, Zedekiah was evaluated negatively, although the comparison to Jehoiakim found in his source in 2 Kings 24:19b is not mentioned. In its place, the Chronicler describes Zedekiah’s defiance of the prophetic voice of Jeremiah, not surprising in light of the Chronicler’s penchant for portrayals of the prophets in his work as a whole. As with Neco in the account of Josiah’s death, so now the Chronicler intertwines a foreign king (here Nebuchadnezzar) with Yahweh, narrating that Zedekiah had sworn loyalty by God and then had rebelled. The terms that follow—‘he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart’ (NLT, ‘was a hard and stubborn man’)—are associated with the refusal to listen to God’s prophets who called the people to repent. Zedekiah’s rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar became an expression of rebellion against Yahweh.”⁷

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ILLUSTRATION

To the novice, all citrus trees look alike. They have the same green leaves and typical low-growing, rounded orbs. But a grapefruit tree is not an orange tree. Beyond sending a part of each tree off for DNA testing, the main way we can tell if one is a grapefruit tree or an orange tree is by its fruit. A tree’s produce is the proof of its identity. So too are our outward deeds proof of our inward identity. Though no one person is one hundred percent good or one hundred percent bad, the chronicler sorted each king into one of two categories: 1) he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, or 2) he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Each king would have known God. Each king was part of God’s corporate group of people. Each king may have even done some seemingly godly deeds during his life. Yet not all were known as ones who truly loved, followed, and worshiped God. The declaration was that they either did evil or did good. This was a heart-level evaluation based on the fruit they produced.

EXTRA

In whom do you trust? If we trust in anything apart from the Lord, our fruit can only ultimately be evil because it comes from a corrupted identity. If our trust is in the Lord, then our identity corresponds to what we've been given through Christ, leading to the production of fruit that comes from His righteousness.

POINT 2: OBSTINATE PEOPLE REJECT GOD'S WORD

(2 CHRON. 36:15-16).

+ COMMENTARY

“Being unfaithful (Heb. *ma'al*) is about failing to give God what is due to him and taking it for oneself. It is regarded throughout Chronicles (e.g. 1 Chr. 2:7; 5:25; 10:13; 2 Chr. 12:2; 28:19; 33:17) as one of the chief underlying causes of exile (cf. 1 Chr. 5:25-26; 9:1; 2 Chr. 29:6; 30:7). A particularly close connection exists with 1 Chronicles 5:25-26, since in both passages unfaithfulness is characterized by idolatry and is punished by God's sending an invading army to take his people into exile. Unfaithfulness is also often associated with unholiness. Here it involves defiling the temple which God has consecrated (v. 14), of which a good example from Zedekiah's time is found in Ezekiel 8. Such behaviour, however, was an invitation for God to invoke the promised judgment of 2 Chronicles 7:19-22 and destroy the temple . . . Eventually, however, the end must come when God's wrath is finally poured out (v. 16). The cataclysm which has been threatened since Ahaz (2 Chr. 28:9,13,25; 29:8,10; 30:8) has been held back only because of the faith and repentance of individual leaders (cf. 2 Chr. 29:10; 30:8-9; 32:25-26; 33:6; 34:21,25). Now there is no remedy, a chilling phrase meaning literally 'no healing.' It implies the cancellation of God's promise to heal his land and that therefore even prayer will be utterly useless (2 Chr. 7:14; cf. 30:20). The saddest thing is that all this has happened because they have turned their backs on God's love, neither recognizing nor listening to the messengers of God's 'compassion' (v. 15, NRSV; pity, NIV, REB, NEB). In the end, the exile came about not because Israel sinned, but because they spurned God's offers of reconciliation (cf. Deut. 7:7-8; Hos. 11:1-4).”⁸

+ ILLUSTRATION

The effects of our fallen world prove true in the tale of many friendships, marriages, and family relationships. We all know of examples where someone lied, cheated, stole, or otherwise brought harm to a relationship. Wrongdoing fractures trust, which breaks the relationship. Some might seek reconciliation, but it can only happen if both parties are willing to do what it takes to bring healing to the relationship. If one party is unwilling, there is no remedy available.

Because of our sin, every person is born into a broken relationship with God. Though God has gone to great lengths to make peace with us, it takes the participation of both parties to reconcile. Christ has done the work to pave the way. The original problem which kept us from God has been fixed. The penalty due because of our sin has been paid for. There is nothing left between man and God, except admission of sin and trusting in His provision for that sin. But God can't make that step for us. Many continue in an unreconciled state with God, not because God is unwilling or unable to make reconciliation happen but because of the unwillingness of humans to receive the offer God has given.

POINT 3: OBSTINATE PEOPLE EXPERIENCE GOD'S JUDGMENT (2 CHRON. 36:17-21).

+ COMMENTARY

“The Chronicler finished his story with many Judahites in exile in Babylon. However, there is some hope of restoration. The exiles would be servants of the ruler in Babylon ‘until the kingdom of Persia came to power’ . . . The end point of the land’s desolation would be reached when the seventy years spoken of by Jeremiah were fulfilled. Jeremiah’s ‘seventy years’ have been variously understood, and a considerable literature has grown up around the issue. The biblical text itself has been understood in various ways. At least three possibilities have been proposed: (1) the exile ran from the first deportation (605/604 B.C.) until the decree of Cyrus in 539 B.C. This period is not exactly seventy years but close enough. The Chronicler marked the end of the period with the decree of Cyrus. (2) The exile ran from the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. to the dedication of the second temple in 516 B.C. (3) It is possible that the seventy years is not intended to be literal but symbolic for some less defined period of judgment. Jeremiah’s original intention may have been a general period of judgment based on an individual’s life-span or on three generations, as in some Old Testament as well as extrabiblical usages. In fact, the exile itself in most respects lasted only some fifty years. However, reckoning from the Babylonian victory at Carchemish (605 B.C.), the time of servitude was quite close to seventy years.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

The 1990s film *Jurassic Park* takes place on a remote island that housed a new, experimental theme park full of living, breathing dinosaurs. The story goes that from minuscule particles of dinosaur DNA—a remnant of their previous existence found within the blood of a fossilized mosquito—they were able to bring back these once extinct ancient creatures. Though the premise is far-fetched, the power of a tiny remnant, a microscopic speck, birthed a small shred of new life. From a place of seeming irreversible loss, new possibilities were born.

Throughout Scripture, God has promised to keep a remnant of His people. Where utter destruction seemed to take place, there was always a bit of hope that remained. In 2 Chronicles, God preserved a remnant. Even in our darkest of nights, the Lord is always working to restore His people.

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