



Second Kings - Chapter Twenty Five

XII 2 Kings 23:31-25:30 - The End of Judah **(continues/concludes)**

Summary of Chapter Twenty Five

A two and a half year siege of Jerusalem followed, and the city eventually fell in 586 BC. Towards the end, famine became very severe causing great suffering to those who remained. As the city wall was being breached on the northern side, Zedekiah managed to escape by night with his troops through an exit in the south eastern wall that is probably to be identified with the Fountain Gate of Nehemiah 3:15. He was captured while fleeing to the Arabah by way of the Wadi Kelt in the vicinity of Jericho and was taken to King Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah's sons were executed in his presence, he was blinded and taken bound to Babylon.

Jerusalem was virtually destroyed, including its outer walls, the temple and its palaces. Apart from a few poor people, everyone remaining alive was taken into captivity except for the key officials and priests who were executed. All the precious metals, including gold, silver and the great bronze pillars and baths from the temple, were taken away to Babylon.

Gedaliah was made governor to oversee the community that was left to care for the vines and soil, but he was killed by Ishmael, a captain of the guard who had also remained in the land. Fearing reprisals from the Babylonians, he then led the remnant of people including Jeremiah into exile in Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar was eventually succeeded by King Evil-merodach who, after thirty seven years of captivity, released King Jehoiachin and allowed him to eat at the kings table for his remaining days in Babylon.



Babylon Attacks Judah in 597 and 586 BC

The final years of the kingdom of Judah were marked by a power struggle between the Egyptians and the Babylonians, the rising power that had overtaken the Assyrian Empire. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon eventually won out and seized control of the Mediterranean coastal lands. When Zedekiah, who had been placed on the throne of Judah by the Babylonians, rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and captured the city. Zedekiah fled toward the east but was captured near Jericho and sent to Riblah to be judged.

^{24:20b} Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

2 Kings 24:20b

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. Jeremiah reveals that there were many false prophets in those days who preached a message of victory and triumph to Zedekiah, and he believed them instead of Jeremiah and other godly prophets like him. Therefore, he rebelled against the king of Babylon. For example, Jeremiah 32:1-5 states that Jeremiah clearly told Zedekiah that he would not succeed in his rebellion against Babylon. Zedekiah arrested Jeremiah and imprisoned him for this, but the prophet steadfastly stayed faithful to the message God had given him.

^{25:1} And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; they built siege-works against it all round. ² So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. ³ On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

2 Kings 25:1-3

In the ninth year of his reign is a reference to Zedekiah and thus dates the start of the siege in 589 BC.

They built siege-works against it all round. Nebuchadnezzar used the common method of attack in those days of securely walled cities - a siege wall. A siege was intended to surround a city, prevent all business and trade from entering or leaving the city, and to eventually starve the population into surrender.

The famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. This was the intended goal of a siege. This indicates that Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were at the point of victory over Jerusalem.

Although lengthy sieges were common tactics in ancient warfare there are two additional reasons to consider why Jerusalem was not immediately attacked:

1. Nebuchadnezzar's absence at Riblah and concern with containing the Phœnician seaports.
2. His watchfulness against Egypt's potential intervention on behalf of Zedekiah: <<Meanwhile, the army of Pharaoh had come out of Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they withdrew from Jerusalem>> (Jeremiah 37:5).

⁴ Then a breach was made in the city wall; the king with all the soldiers fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all round the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah. ⁵ But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; all his army was scattered, deserting him. ⁶ Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence on him. ⁷ They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon.

2 Kings 25:4-7

Then a breach was made in the city wall. At this desperate point for Judah with the siege of Jerusalem, Zedekiah made a last chance effort to escape the grip of the nearly completely successful siege. They planned a secret break through the city walls and the siege lines of the Babylonians, using a diversionary tactic. It seems that the army scattered to avoid capture; the prophecy of Obadiah 2-14 about Edom is linked to this time.

The army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. This was a considerable distance from Jerusalem. Zedekiah probably thought that his strategy was successful, and that he had escaped the judgement that prophets such as Jeremiah had promised. Yet God's word was demonstrated to be true and he was captured in the plains of Jericho. It seems ironic that here, at the very spot where Israel first set foot in the Promised Land, the last of the Davidic kings was captured and his monarchy shattered. Here, where Israel experienced its first victory as the walls of Jericho fell before men who trusted God, was the scene of its final defeat.

They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah. The Babylonians were not known to be as cruel as the Assyrians who conquered the northern kingdom of Israel some 150 years earlier, but they were still experts in cruelty in their own right. They made certain that the last sight King Zedekiah saw was the execution of his own sons, and then he spent the rest of his life in darkness. This fulfilled the mysterious promise God made through Ezekiel

regarding Zedekiah shortly before the fall of Jerusalem: <<*I will scatter to every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops; and I will unsheathe the sword behind them*>> (Ezekiel 12:14). Blinding prisoners was a rare occurrence, Samson being one exception: <<*So the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles; and he ground at the mill in the prison*>> (Judges 16:21), for most were put to work, even as the blinded Samson was. If Zedekiah had heeded the prophet's word he would have saved both Jerusalem and himself in accordance with Jeremiah 38:14-28, but he was to die in Babylon: <<*I will spread my net over him, and he shall be caught in my snare; and I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it; and he shall die there*>> (Ezekiel 12:13).

⁸ In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month – which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon – Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ⁹ He burned the house of the Lord, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. ¹⁰ All the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem.

2 Kings 25:8-10

Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard. That title in Hebrew is literally, 'the chief executioner' or 'the slaughterer.' Methodically, he set about the demolition of the beautiful city, burning the palace and the major buildings, breaking down the walls, and wrecking the temple.

He burned the house of the Lord, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem. A few weeks after the fall of Jerusalem, the full vengeance of the Babylonian king was visited upon the city. Every important building was burned down; the walls around Jerusalem were broken down; and a further section of the population was exiled, with some being executed.

Solomon's great temple was now a ruin. It would stay a ruin for many years, until it was humbly rebuilt by the returning exiles in the days of Ezra. The Talmud declares that when the Babylonians entered the temple, they held a two day festival there to desecrate it; then, on the third day, they set fire to the building. The Talmud adds that the fire burned throughout that day and the next.

The captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem - the physical security of the city - were now destroyed. Jerusalem was

no longer a place of safety and security. The walls would remain a ruin until they were rebuilt by the returning exiles in the days of Nehemiah.

Evidence has been found for Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, including Babylonian arrowheads of iron and bronze. Excavations on the Ophel hill in Jerusalem have revealed some domestic structures belonging to Judæans just before Nebuchadnezzar's destruction in 586 BC. One four room house sits at the base of the massive stone-stepped structure. It is called the 'house of Ahiel' because an inscription with his name was found in the house.

¹¹ Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon – all the rest of the population. ¹² But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land to be vine-dressers and tillers of the soil.

2 Kings 25:11-12

Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city. This was the third major wave of captivity, taking the remaining people all except for the poor of the land. Of the prominent men of Jerusalem, only Jeremiah (Jeremiah 39:11-14) and Gedaliah (v.22) were left behind. Jeremiah's stand on the Babylonian issue was doubtless well-known.

In Hebrew, the first twelve verses of the chapter are one long sentence; each verse beginning with 'and.' Clause is heaped upon clause providing a rhythmic cadence, as if each one were another tick of the clock counting down Jerusalem's final hours.

¹³ The bronze pillars that were in the house of the Lord, as well as the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried the bronze to Babylon. ¹⁴ They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the dishes for incense, and all the bronze vessels used in the temple service, ¹⁵ as well as the firepans and the basins. What was made of gold the captain of the guard took away for the gold, and what was made of silver, for the silver. ¹⁶ As for the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands, which Solomon had made for the house of the Lord, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weighing. ¹⁷ The height of one pillar was eighteen cubits, and on it was a bronze capital; the height of the capital was three cubits; lattice-work and pomegranates, all of bronze, were on

the capital all round. The second pillar had the same, with the lattice-work.

2 Kings 25:13-17

The bronze pillars that were in the house of the Lord begins a detailed list of temple furnishings (vv.13-17) carried off by the Babylonians for the value of their metal. The bronze items were the work of Hiram and are recorded in detail in 1 Kings 7:13-51. Much of it was only now scrap metal.

The pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the dishes for incense, and all the bronze vessels were beautiful instruments used to worship the Lord of heaven and earth; refer to the comments made on 1 Kings 7:15-21 and 7:23-47. As the remaining people were taken captive to Babylon, so also the remaining valuables from the temple were taken. Jerusalem was left desolate, completely plundered under the judgement of God. Since the Lord has abandoned this temple, its outward beauty has become a deceptive illusion of his presence. Its destruction is a fitting end to the nation. No mention is made of the Ark of the Covenant; presumably that also was taken: *<<And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the Lord, they shall no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made>>* (Jeremiah 3:16). Jeremiah laments over his beloved city: *<<How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal>>* (Lamentations 1:1).

Jewish tradition has it that Jeremiah hid the Ark of the Covenant so that it could not be taken away and desecrated. Its whereabouts are not disclosed again until John receives his revelation from Jesus: *<<Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple>>* (Revelation 11:19a).

¹⁸ The captain of the guard took the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest Zephaniah, and the three guardians of the threshold; ¹⁹ from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the soldiers, and five men of the king's council who were found in the city; the secretary who was the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. ²⁰ Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²¹ The king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile out of its land.

2 Kings 25:18-21

The king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death. These last leaders and key priests of Jerusalem and Judah were also captured and put to death. The king of Babylon had what seemed to be complete rule over the former kingdom of Judah.

Almost all hope is gone in the summary statement: So Judah went into exile out of its land. However, the land is still its land, holding out the promise of a future return. This was the land God had given to his people, the tribes of Israel. They had possessed this land for some 860 years; they took it by faith and obedience but they lost it through idolatry and sin. The reader cannot help but be struck by the passionless tone of the narrative in this chapter. Not once does the author show his feelings, even though he is describing the tragic downfall of his country. It is the Book of Lamentations that describes the weeping and groaning, and the Psalms for the realisation of the exiles as they arrive in their new land: <<*By the rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion*>> (Psalm 137:1).

And thus was Judah carried away out of her own land four hundred and sixty-eight years after David began to reign over it; from the division of the ten tribes three hundred and eighty-eight years; and from the destruction of the kingdom of Israel, one hundred and thirty-four years; and there was just under six hundred years to go to the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

It appears that three separate deportations of Judæans to Babylon took place under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, confirmed by an eye witness: <<*This is the number of the people whom Nebuchadnezzar took into exile: in the seventh year, three thousand and twenty-three Judæans; in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he took into exile from Jerusalem eight hundred and thirty-two persons; in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took into exile of the Judæans seven hundred and forty-five persons; all the people were four thousand six hundred*>> (Jeremiah 52:28-30). The first came during the reign of Jehoiachin, when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and carried away many of the treasures of the temple and the royal palace. The second occurred after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, when the walls of the city were levelled and the temple was completely destroyed. The third appears to have occurred around 582 BC, the twenty-third year according to Jeremiah, while King Nebuchadnezzar was reasserting his control over the general region of Palestine.



Exile to Babylon 597, 586, and 582 BC

XII.h 2 Kings 25:22-26 - Gedaliah Made Governor of Judah

To oversee the remnant that remained in Judah and to ensure they remained faithful to Babylon, Gedaliah was made governor of the region. However, a captain of the guard named Ishmael and his men assassinated Gedaliah and, fearing reprisals from the Babylonians, they led the remaining people to safety in Egypt.

²² He appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan as governor over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had left. ²³ Now when all the captains of the forces and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah as governor, they came with their men to Gedaliah at Mizpah, namely, Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite.

²⁴ Gedaliah swore to them and their men, saying, 'Do not be afraid because of the Chaldean officials; live in the land, serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you.'

2 Kings 25:22-24

He appointed Gedaliah as governor. Gedaliah, the new governor of the territory, was the grandson of King Josiah's secretary Shaphan. His subsequent assassination precipitated a general flight to Egypt. It seems that Gedaliah was a good and godly man, who was a friend of the prophet Jeremiah: *<<But the hand of Ahikam son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over into the hands of the people to be put to death>>* (Jeremiah 26:24). Gedaliah had the reputation of being gentle and generous according to Josephus in Jewish Antiquities 10.9.1, and his enemies played on this.

Do not be afraid because of the Chaldean officials; live in the land, serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. It seemed unpatriotic and perhaps ungodly to do this, but it was the right thing to do. The best they could do under this situation of deserved and unstoppable judgement was to simply accept it from the hand of God and do the right thing under the Babylonians. It was the right thing to do because, although it was hard to accept, it was true that the Babylonians were doing the work of God in bringing this judgement upon the deserving Kingdom of Judah. In this situation, to resist the Babylonians was to resist God. It was better to humble one's self and to submit to the judgement of God brought through the Babylonians.

This was the question that bothered the prophet Habakkuk so much: Even though Judah was wicked and deserved judgement, how could God use an even more wicked kingdom like Babylon to bring judgement? These difficult questions are dealt with in Habakkuk 1:5-2:8.

²⁵ But in the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men; they struck down Gedaliah so that he died, along with the Judæans and Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. ²⁶ Then all the people, high and low, and the captains of the forces, set out and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

2 Kings 25:25-26

Ishmael came with ten men; they struck down Gedaliah so that he died. Because Gedaliah led the remaining people of Judah to submit to the Babylonians, also here called the Chaldeans, he was assassinated as a traitor to the resistance movement against the Babylonians.

Then all the people, set out and went to Egypt. They did this because they were afraid of what the Babylonians would do to them in light of the assassination of Gedaliah the governor. In this case, going to Egypt was a worse thing than submitting to the judgement of God brought through the Babylonians.

Jeremiah went with this group against his will, clearly making them aware that they should not leave the land: <<*But if you continue to say, “We will not stay in this land”, thus disobeying the voice of the Lord your God and saying, “No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and there we will stay”, then hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: If you are determined to enter Egypt and go to settle there, then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there, in the land of Egypt; and the famine that you dread shall follow close after you into Egypt; and there you shall die*>> (Jeremiah 42:13-16).

The existence of the Jews in Egypt in the 5th Century BC is now illustrated by the Elephantine Papyri. The Elephantine Papyri consist of 175 documents from the Egyptian border fortresses of Elephantine and Syene or Aswan, which yielded hundreds of papyri in hieratic, Demotic, Aramaic, Greek, Latin and Coptic, spanning a period of 2000 years. The documents include letters and legal contracts from family and other archives, and are thus an invaluable source of knowledge for scholars of varied disciplines such as epistolography, law, society, religion, language and onomastics. They are a collection of ancient Jewish manuscripts dating from the 5th Century BC. They come from a Jewish community at Elephantine, then called Yeb, the island in the Nile at the border of Nubia, which was probably founded as a military installation in about 650 BC during Manasseh's reign to assist Pharaoh Psammetichus I in his Nubian campaign.

XII.i 2 Kings 25:27-30 - Jehoiachin Released from Prison

Nebuchadnezzar's successor released Jehoiachin from prison and allowed him to spend the rest of his life in relative freedom, dining in the Babylonian king's presence and receiving an allowance so that he could live independently.

²⁷ In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison; ²⁸ he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. ²⁹ So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king's presence. ³⁰ For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion every day, as long as he lived.

2 Kings 25:27-30

King Evil-merodach of Babylon released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison.

Evil-merodach, in Akkadian Amel-Marduk, was Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor, ruling between 562-560 BC. King Jehoiachin was not the last king of Judah; Zedekiah came after him. However, he was taken away to Babylon in bronze fetters; refer to 2 Kings 24:10-12. These last events of the Book of 2 Kings came when Jehoiachin had been a captive for many years. His release of the Judæan king from prison in 561 BC gives the reader some hope that there is still a future for the Davidic line – that the words of God concerning the Davidic line are still true: **<<But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever>>** (2 Samuel 7:15-16). Cuneiform texts found in the excavations of Babylon throw light on the treatment of the Judahite king Jehoiachin after he went into captivity in 597 BC. The texts are ration receipts, probably of an officer in charge of delivering supplies to prisoners or foreigners in Babylon. Jehoiachin is mentioned by name as receiving oil.

The final words of the Book of Second Kings describe small kindness and blessings given in the worst circumstances. Judah was still depopulated; the people of God were still exiled; and the king of Judah was still a prisoner in Babylon. Yet, looking for even small notes of grace and mercy as evidence of the returning favour of God, the divine historian noted that King Jehoiachin began to receive better treatment in Babylon. This was small, but evidence nevertheless that God was not finished with blessing and restoring his people, foreshadowing even greater blessing and restoration yet to come.