

# JERUSALEM'S FALL

Kyla looked at her husband and saw tears gathering at the corners of his eyes. They were at the kitchen table, telling their son and daughter that they would no longer be attending True Vine Assembly.

The family had been at True Vine, led by Pastor Evans since their daughter was two years old. Kyla and Aaron had been a faithful couple, and two years ago, Aaron had become a deacon. The pastor had put Aaron in charge of recording the tithes, offerings, and “gifts” to the pastor.

Aaron discovered that the minister hadn’t worked in more than ten years, supposedly so that he could “rightly pastor” the church of seventy-five people. The members, many of whom had high paying jobs, paid the pastor’s mortgage on a large house, two cars, tailored clothes, and many other high-end amenities. Aaron had grown even more concerned when he learned several members were going without necessities to give more toward “the kingdom of God.”

Both he and Kyla prayed and fasted about the matter. They had come to an agreement. Aaron would speak to Pastor Evans.

The pastor accused the couple of rejecting God’s instructions, even though they had not stopped giving to the church. He relieved Aaron of his duties, and told him to not bother returning.

“I expected so much more from him,” Aaron had said.

“He’s just a man who seems to have gotten carried away with silver and gold,” said Kyla. “Let God work on him. We’re going to keep our trust and faith in the Lord.”

**1 Why do human leaders often disappoint us?**

**2 Why do the moral failures of leaders result in harm to those they lead?**

**3 How is Jesus different from other leaders?**

<sup>18</sup> Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. <sup>19</sup> And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. <sup>20</sup> For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

<sup>1</sup> And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about. <sup>2</sup> And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

<sup>18</sup> Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah; she was from Libnah. <sup>19</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. <sup>20</sup> It was because of the LORD's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence.

Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

<sup>1</sup> So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He encamped outside the city and built siege works all around it. <sup>2</sup> The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

## No Escape

Zedekiah became king in place of his nephew, who had ruled only three months. Zedekiah's mother, Hamutal, was also the mother of the former king of Judah who was taken captive by Pharaoh Necho. Hamutal herself was the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah (2 Kings 24:18), not to be confused with Jeremiah the prophet.

Zedekiah did evil in the sight of God “just as Jehoiakim had done” (2 Kings 24:19). Jehoiakim went as far as burning a scroll from Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 36:22–26). He unwisely rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (2 Kings 24:1).

Zedekiah—the same king who permitted Jeremiah's attempted murder in last week's lesson—paid no attention to the word of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah (Jer. 37:2). Zedekiah learned nothing

from his brother's failed rebellion, and he rebels against the king of Babylon again (2 Kings 24:20). Instead of seeking God's protection, he forms an anti-Babylonian alliance with Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon (Jer. 27:3).

But God warns Zedekiah against such rebellion: "Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live" (Jer. 27:12). The Lord warns of famine, plague, banishment, and peril for not submitting to this rule; going as far as to refer to Nebuchadnezzar as "my servant" (Jer. 27:6, 13–15). Thus, Zedekiah's rebellion amounts to additional disobedience to God and disregard for His message. What happens next is a result of God's anger: God shall look at Jerusalem and Judah and shall "thrust them from his presence" (2 Kings 24:20). As king, Zedekiah has done evil in the sight of God and rejected all hope of restoration. The people of Judah have become habitually unfaithful, following the behaviors of other nations and defiling the temple (see 2 Chron. 36:14).

As expected, the king of Babylon does not take kindly to another rebellion from Judah and from a king sworn to him. Nebuchadnezzar marches back to Jerusalem and lays siege to the city in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:1). Nebuchadnezzar brings his "whole army" with him this time, showing how desperate the situation has become. The Babylonians surround Jerusalem and build siege works to attack the city. These would include ramps and wall-like structures, so that soldiers could eventually climb over the walls and breach the defenses. At this time, some residents apparently go over to the Babylonians, meaning that people are able to leave but not to reenter (Jer. 38:19; 39:9). The siege lasts until the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:2), because the Babylonians are patient and intent to finish the job.

**1 How does Zedekiah do evil in the eyes of God?**

**2 Why was disaster coming to Jerusalem and Judah?**

**3 How would the situation have been different, had leaders obeyed God?**

<sup>3</sup> And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. <sup>4</sup> And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. <sup>5</sup> And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. <sup>6</sup> So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. <sup>7</sup> And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

<sup>8</sup> And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: <sup>9</sup> And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

<sup>3</sup> By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. <sup>4</sup> Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. They fled toward the Arabah, <sup>5</sup> but the Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, <sup>6</sup> and he was captured.

He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. <sup>7</sup> They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.

<sup>8</sup> On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup> He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down.

## The Fall of Jerusalem

The Babylonian siege of Jerusalem lasted for approximately eighteen months. 2 Kings 25:3 reveals the devastating result: “There was no food for the people to eat.” They were cut off from help.

The city wall is broken in approximately 586 BC, prompting Judah's army to flee (2 Kings 25:4). Probably the northern wall was breached, since Judah's army flees through a gate by the king's garden. This indicates a southeastern escape, perhaps by way of the Fountain Gate described in Nehemiah 3:15. Those who flee head toward "the Arabah," traveling along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The Babylonians who surround Jerusalem prepare a pursuit.

The dishonored King Zedekiah is overtaken by the Babylonians near the city of Jericho (2 Kings 25:5–6). Zedekiah and his family are captured, Judah's army scattered. Zedekiah is taken to Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah, some three hundred miles from Jerusalem in modern-day Syria (2 Kings 25:6). This is the Babylonian military headquarters in the region. Zedekiah receives a brutal sentence for his rebellion. Babylon wants to make an example, in case others might would contemplate treachery. His sons are slain before his eyes. It becomes the last thing he sees, for immediately he is blinded, bound, and taken as a prisoner to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7). This puts an end to Zedekiah's rule and extinguishes the possibility of any heir. Zedekiah eventually dies alone in prison (Jer. 52:11).

In 2 Kings 25:8, dates start being counted by the years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule, instead of Zedekiah's (compare 2 Kings 25:1, 3). There is no longer a king in Judah. About a month after the siege, Nebuzaradan, a high ranking Babylonian official and commander of Babylon's army, lays waste to the city. He burns the temple, the palace, the houses, and every important building (2 Kings 25:9). The temple, which symbolizes God's presence with His people, is gone. With the temple utterly destroyed, what can that mean for the people of God now sent into exile?

**1 What did the brutal sentence carried out against Zedekiah mean for the kingdom of Judah?**

**2 Why is destruction of the temple especially jarring?**



## **The Right and Wrong Kind of Leaders**

It seems like everyone is looking for a savior—something or someone to make the world right. To lift up a neighborhood. To rescue the country. To drive back the darkness that fills the news. Longing for a better world is part of the human experience. But how do we get there?

One of the ways people try is by attaching their hopes to human leaders: business executives, public figures, politicians. They all get put on a pedestal from time to time, assigned savior status by their most ardent supporters. But human leaders often disappoint. The business executive commits fraud. The public figure cheats on his wife. The politician breaks her campaign promises. And the headlines are still full of darkness.

To make matters worse, people tend to reflect the character of whoever they're following. After all, leaders lead, even if they're heading in the wrong direction. The people of Judah followed kings like Zedekiah into detestable idolatry, which led to ruin. Today, businesspeople adopt the shady practices of their bosses, if it means advancement. Fans take up the values of their favorite cultural icon, if it means fitting in. And constituents follow the example of politicians who demean their dissenters. Sometimes, Christians stop loving their enemies. Surely that command can't apply during an election season, can it?

When all that clamoring doesn't result in a better world, what then? When Jerusalem lies in ruins, what follows?

What we need is a better king—a leader who is always trustworthy, always faithful, and always keeps His promises. A leader like that isn't found on a ballot or list of influencers, but in the pages of Scripture. Jesus is that leader. He's the rightful king who can make the world new. He's the one whose message and example is worth following, because it leads us to the kingdom of God. Will we follow Jesus, or attach hope to someone else? Who will you choose today?

**1 What are examples of would-be saviors to whom people attach their hopes?**

**2 What happens when people follow the wrong kind of leader?**

**3 What happens to those who follow Jesus above all else?**

## Following King Jesus

For every weakness that we spot in human leaders, there is an example of someone who has exhibited perfect leadership. When we face unavoidable situations and see the harms of human leaders, we can pray for God's kingdom to come soon.

**In your own words, what would you say are three clear and timely reasons to follow Jesus as your king?**

### Key Text

For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. —2 Kings 24:20 KJV

It was because of the LORD's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence. Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. —2 Kings 24:20 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of November 10 through November 15

- Mon.** 1 Peter 3:8–17—With Righteousness Comes Suffering.
- Tue.** 1 Peter 3:18–22—Christ Exalted through Suffering.
- Wed.** Psalm 34:6–19—God Rescues Us from Our Afflictions.
- Thu.** Matthew 5:3–12—Comfort for the Brokenhearted.
- Fri.** Ezekiel 3:4–11—Speak If People Listen or Not.
- Sat.** 2 Thessalonians 1:1–4—Steadfastness and Faith amid Persecution.

**Next Week:** Ezekiel 3:10–11; 24:15–24, 27

*We will continue the story by hearing that God speaks to His grieving people in exile. This week, can you name a time that God turned your grief into joy?*