

7. Four kings on divine judgment

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Even an unbeliever can say this: "Pride goes before a fall." They think that it is from the Bible. Actually, it is not. But we get the meaning. It is from Proverbs 16:

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

We see so many individuals on the TV news who thought that they could do whatever they want and get away with it because in their own minds they were untouchables. Then, a hammer of the law comes down on them.

A good example was Aaron Hernandez, the former tight end for the New England Patriots who was sentenced to life in prison without parole with first-degree murder verdict. Hernandez was making \$10 million a year. He thought that he was too smart to get caught and too good to go to prison.

The kings of Judah and Israel thought that they were above God's laws. They thought that they could do whatever they wanted and get away with. They'd never thought that Jehovah God was holy and righteous and gutsy enough to judge them and let alone punish them. There were four ungodly kings of Judah who thought the same things. They were Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Their ends were anything but good due to divine judgment.

A. THE LORD AGAINST THE LEADERS OF JUDAH

Jeremiah 21:3-7 Then Jeremiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah, 4 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who besiege you outside the walls; and I will assemble them in the midst of this city. 5 I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and fury and great wrath. 6 I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they shall die of a great pestilence. 7 And afterward," says the Lord, "I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, his servants and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence and the sword and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and he shall strike them with the edge of the sword. He shall not spare them, or have pity or mercy."

These events probably happened around 588 to 586 B.C., a period of over 30 months, when the Babylonian force built siege mounts around Jerusalem. The king of Judah Zedekiah, instead of repenting from his sins and trusting the Lord, was hoping that Egypt would save his kingdom and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar by refusing to pay tribute.

In their desperation, the king asked Jeremiah to get counsel from the Lord. He was hoping that the Lord would do the same thing that He did for king Hezekiah. The big difference was that Hezekiah was a good and godly king, but Zedekiah wasn't.

It is not just Zedekiah. People, in the 21st century, somehow think that God owes blessings to them. In their minds, they can do whatever they want even if what they do is against Him. But when trouble comes to them, they presume that the Lord is obligated to rescue, protect, and bless them. Newsflash, God owes us NOTHING. We owe Him everything, including the very life we have and the air we breathe.

Those who look for contradictions in the Bible say that Jeremiah 21:7 is contradicting Ezekiel 12:13. Here Jeremiah prophesied that Zedekiah would be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, but in Ezekiel, Zedekiah would not see Babylon. There is a simple explanation from 2 Kings:

2 Kings 25:5-7 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. 6 So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. 7 Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon.

Zedekiah literally didn't see Babylon because he was blind when he was delivered to Nebuchadnezzar.

Since there are four kings' names that might confuse us, let's talk about them before we go any further. Godly King Josiah reigned for 31 years and he did his best to lead the people back to God. But the last four kings of Judah were ungodly and wicked men, even though three of them were Josiah's sons and one was his grandson, Jehoiachin.

1) Jehoahaz, or Shallum, succeeded Josiah and reigned only three months – 2 Kings 23:30-33. Pharaoh Necho deported him to Egypt, where he died.

2) Jehoiakim, also called Eliakim, reigned for 11 years – 2 Kings 23:34-24:6 and died in Jerusalem.

3) Jehoiachin, also called Jeconiah and Coniah reigned only three months – 2 Kings 24:6-12. Nebuchadnezzar took him to Babylon, where eventually he died.

4) Zedekiah was the last king of Judah who reigned eleven years and saw the kingdom and the holy city destroyed by Babylon – 2 Kings 24:17-25:21. He was blinded and taken to Babylon to die.

B. NO PLEASURE

Jeremiah 22:28 "Is this man Coniah a despised, broken idol-- A vessel in which is no pleasure? Why are they cast out, he and his descendants, And cast into a land which they do not know?"

When you read this verse, did you ask yourself a question or two:

What kind of pleasure and for whose pleasure? Obviously it is not talking about physical pleasure in context. But whose pleasure? Of course, God's pleasure.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Many people rebel against this truth because of their self-centered mindset. To them, it is not fair for God would create them for His pleasure. Since they don't like that fact, they can always create themselves in somewhere outside of this universe which also belongs to the Lord since He created it. The Lord has every right to do whatever He chooses to do since He created all things and everything belongs to Him.

C. WOE TO THE SHEPHERDS

Jeremiah 23:1 "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the Lord.

Jeremiah 23:21 "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

I know that v1 'the shepherds' are referring to the political and religious leaders of Judah. Since it has a connection to their false prophets who misled them, I chose to bring v21 into the same place.

We have modern day false prophets and shepherds who fleece their sheep for their own benefits and lead them away from the Lord. I am going to give you guys a few examples:

1) Creflo Dollar, the televangelist and founder of World Changers International Church just outside of Atlanta. Dollar and his staff made a brazen and narcissistic plea in March 13, this year, "The mission of Project G650 is to acquire a Gulfstream G650 airplane so that Pastors Creflo and Taffi and World Changers Church International can continue to blanket the globe with the Gospel of grace. We are believing for 200,000 people to give contributions of \$300 or more to turn this dream into a reality – and allow us to retire the aircraft that served us well for many years."

In the name of... GREED. But the scary part in all this: Dollar probably will raise the money and he will get his jet.

2) In 2005 the London Times reported that a new "teaching document" issued by the Roman Catholic bishops of England, Wales and Scotland warns that Catholics should not take the Bible literally – that it's not infallible. "We should not expect to find in Scripture full scientific accuracy or complete historical precision," they say in the booklet, "The Gift of Scripture." So what sorts of things aren't accurate? Creation, for one. "Genesis," they note, "has two different, and sometimes conflicting, creation stories and cannot be considered 'historical.'" Rather, the bishops say, it simply contains "historical traces."

3) In early 1990s, Bill Hybels' Willow Creek Church in Chicago and Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in California began experimenting with ways of drawing non-Christians into church by offering a brand-new, contemporary kind of church experience. This break from traditional formats of church services in order to appeal to non-Christians is called the "seeker-sensitive movement." A lot of churches across the United States began to implement the strategies that Warren and Hybels were practicing and promoting. Joel Osteen of Lakewood Church in Texas also joined in this movement.

Though they brought a lot of new people into church who otherwise would've never darkened the door of a church. But it is one thing to bring them into the church once, but it is another thing to keep them coming back. To make that happen, pastors are dishing out "watered-down gospel" in short sermonets, not hard hitting Bible Truths.

4) The emergent church movement goes much further than the seeker sensitive church to the realm of cult. Here are some of things they teach:

- Since the world is changing, the church must embrace change and change with it.
- We cannot know absolute truth and it's arrogant to think we can.
- We can only experience what is "true" for our communities. (Relativism)
- We cannot be dogmatic about doctrine or moral standards.
- Dogmatic sermons or preaching must give way to "conversation" between people of all belief systems.
- Since truth is uncertain, spiritual feeling and social action replace doctrine and orthodoxy and make up the only reliable substance of Christianity.

- Ultimately, the goal is to make the world a better place by creating a hybrid, all inclusive religion - this is the answer for the Emerging Church. Tell me if these things are right to you.

D. THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Jeremiah 23:5-6 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 6 In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Of course, Jeremiah was prophesying about Jesus as "the Lord our Righteousness", a.k.a. "Yahweh Tsidkenu". This brings up other names of God that describe His characters:

- Yahweh Jireh: "The Lord will provide."
Stresses God's provision for His people (Genesis 22:14).
- Yahweh Nissi: "The Lord is my Banner."
Stresses that God is our rallying point and our means of victory; the one who fights for His people (Exodus 17:15).
- Yahweh Shalom: "The Lord is Peace."
Points to the Lord as the means of our peace and rest (Judges 6:24).
- Yahweh Sabaoth: "The Lord of Hosts."
A military figure portraying the Lord as the commander of the armies of heaven (1 Samuel 1:3; 17:45).
- Yahweh Maccaddeshcem: "The Lord your Sanctifier."
Portrays the Lord as our means of sanctification or as the one who sets believers apart for His purposes (Exodus 31:13).
- Yahweh Ro'i: "The Lord my Shepherd."
Portrays the Lord as the Shepherd who cares for His people as a shepherd cares for the sheep of his pasture (Psalm 23:1).
- Yahweh Shammah: "The Lord is there."
Portrays the Lord's personal presence in the millennial kingdom (Ezekiel 48:35).
- Yahweh Elohim Israel: "The Lord, the God of Israel."
Identifies Yahweh as the God of Israel in contrast to the false gods of the nations (Judges 5:3.; Isaiah 17:6).

As God's people today, we need to realize that the only safe and sane response to God's chastening hand is submission.

E. APPLICATION

With God, we must decide one way or the other. It's not possible to be neutral or our own way.