

God Disciplines a Rebellious People

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God's wrath is just, yet it is not without the promise of grace and mercy to those who repent of their rebellion against Him.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: 2 Chronicles 36

In 1981, Rabbi Harold Kushner penned his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, raising important theological questions about the existence of God, His goodness, and His authority over evil in the world. Kushner, having experienced the death of his teenage son after a lifelong illness, addresses these questions in a winsome and personal manner, making it easy for readers to resonate with his conclusions.

While Kushner is to be lauded for writing a candid book asking readers to wrestle with such important questions related to God and the problem of evil, unfortunately, his theological conclusions are less than biblical. Essentially he concludes that while God is good and just, the random chaos in the universe is outside His power. The wrongs of life, whether occurring to a “good” or “bad” person, are simply a result of chance and *completely* unrelated to personal behavior.



What are some explanations you have heard for why bad things happen to good people?

Group Time

Point 1: Rebellion against God results when the heart is hardened (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.

Zedekiah was a **prideful ruler** who refused to listen to God's prophet. As the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah counseled Zedekiah to surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar in hopes of saving the city and the people (Jer. 21:8-10; 27:8-15; 38:1-3,17-18). Instead of obeying, he allowed Jeremiah to be imprisoned (Jer. 37-38). Over time, Zedekiah's pride resulted in a hardening of his heart toward the Lord. He thought he knew best, and as a result, he failed to grasp his dependency on the Lord's counsel and soon witnessed the consequences of his pride.



What are some ways we demonstrate pride in our lives?

“Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay,” as the saying goes. Zedekiah most certainly experienced this reality in his life. And worse, the ramifications of his actions seeped down from the king's palace to the home of the common peasant. Even the priests, those commissioned with maintaining the temple's purity, were involved in revolting acts. Zedekiah and his people, therefore, paid a steep price for their sin and hardened hearts—Judah and Jerusalem's utter destruction.



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.”¹

—Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Point 2: Rebellion against God results when God's Word is rejected (2 Chron. 36:15-16a).

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.
^{16a} But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets,

In 2 Chronicles 36:15, the author highlights God's **familial love** for the people of Judah, displayed in His compassion and patience. God longs for His people to repent without the use of discipline, so He granted them a season of mercy to respond to His loving appeals through the prophets. We shouldn't pass over this without considering our own lives and how God does the same for us. Sometimes God's compassion comes in the form of a friend who comes to rebuke us because of sin they perceive in our lives. The word of correction may sting, but sometimes it takes a sting to grab our attention.



What are some ways we might respond to a word of correction, and what might those responses reveal about a person's heart?

Zedekiah surely did not take the crown desiring for his kingdom's demise. His intentions for his reign likely were good; unfortunately, good intentions devoid of godly character never end well. Zedekiah's pride bears its fruit in verse 16 as he and the people reject God's word through His prophets. Zedekiah lacked the ears to hear God's counsel and lacked the eyes to see God's imminent judgment.

Sin as Rebellion: Because the Bible portrays people as _____ beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of _____ and rebellion toward God the King.



What are some ways we might disdain or reject God's Word because of our pride?

Point 3: Rebellion against God results in God's wrath being stirred (2 Chron. 36:16b-21).

^{16b} 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.

For too long, the kings, priests, and people of Judah rejected God's word through His prophets. God's wrath was finally stirred up against Judah, with her stiffened neck and hardened heart, and "no remedy" remained. The Lord's ax of judgment was now set in motion with no recourse for stopping it. Like a tool in the hand of God, Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans obliterated Jerusalem.



What problems arise if we downplay God's wrath in our theology?

It's counterintuitive to think God's wrath against Judah was for her good, but God always accomplishes His good purposes through His actions. Proclaiming the faithfulness and grace of God, the chronicler stated that Judah's purification and restoration from her waywardness would come through *temporary* judgment—a remnant survived the destruction and a seventy-year exile and received a promise to return home. These promises were communicated through the prophet Jeremiah, the one King Zedekiah refused to listen to (Jer. 29:10; 33:7-8).

God's judgment for the sin of _____ has already fallen upon Christ on the cross; therefore, God's _____ no longer remains for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1). Instead, God uses only faithful, loving _____ to correct His beloved children in their sin and guide them on the path of holiness.

Daily Study

Day 1: Read 2 Chronicles 36:1-14

Humanity is getting faster, at least some of us. The world record for the 100-meter dash was 10.6 seconds in 1912, 10.2 seconds in 1936, and 9.90 seconds in 1991. The current world recorder holder is Usain Bolt. He crossed the finish line in a blazing 9.58 seconds in 2009.³ Despite this progression in speed, humanity will never be able to outrun the consequences of sin.

One man who attempted to do such was King Zedekiah. He was a proud man who refused to humble himself before the Lord. When the consequences of Zedekiah's sin finally arrived at Jerusalem's gates in the form of Babylonian soldiers, he fled with his family. The Babylonians, however, intercepted them in the plains of Jericho. Nebuchadnezzar deported Zedekiah to Babylon, but first, he left the deposed king with one last tormenting memory by executing his sons before his eyes, which were then gouged out (2 Kings 25:4-7). This fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy that the king would not see the city of Babylon (Ezek. 12:1-13).

Zedekiah's prideful solution for absolution from God's judgment was to run from it. The Bible's solution for absolution, however, is found in running to the foot of the cross. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).



What sinful behavior do you need to repent of and run to Christ for forgiveness?



Voices from Church History

"The thing that ruined Zedekiah, was, not only that he *turned not to the Lord God of Israel, but that he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning to him*, that is, he was obstinately resolved not to return to him, would not lay his neck under God's yoke, nor his heart under the impressions of his word, and so, in effect, *he would not be healed, he would not live.*"⁴

—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

Day 2: Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-16

The Book of 2 Chronicles closes out with God flexing His divine muscle against Judah. God's wrath was stirred up, and with righteous indignation, He judicially directed His fury against the people of God. Knowing our own propensity toward sin, it's hard to imagine being filled with anger without losing some measure of self-control. Yet God's wrath is never less than perfect. Revealed to us in 2 Chronicles 36:15 is the posture of God's heart toward sinners—it's a posture marked by compassion and patience.

Despite habitual rebellion by Judah, God still longed for her to repent and gave her many opportunities to do so. Examining God's response, we learn something about how we are to engage unsaved people in our lives. It is easy for us to lose compassion and patience with individuals who have rejected the gospel time and time again. Maybe you have someone in your life whom you've labeled "hopeless" after years of such rejection. If you've fallen into this snare, take a minute and remember God's compassionate response to His wayward people.



In what ways have your attitudes toward people differed from God's compassionate and patient attitude toward Judah?

Day 3: Read 2 Chronicles 36:17-21

The sad truth is that life, for almost all of history, has been unfair. This is simply a reality of living in a world corrupted by sin. It's also a reality experienced firsthand by a remnant of godly people living in Judah at the time of Jerusalem's fall. We are told by prophets like Habakkuk that a contingency of faithful followers still resided in Judah at the time. Unfortunately, the righteous would suffer along with the unrighteous. Despite the unfairness of the situation, the godly remnant was encouraged to live by faith with joy in the midst of suffering.

The Bible is clear that believers will face suffering (see John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-14). The question then becomes for us, "How will we respond to suffering?" Our sinful nature desires to respond with anger, bitterness, and cynicism. But in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are given strength to respond with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).



When life deals you an unfair hand, how can you continue walking by faith with joy in the midst of suffering?

Day 4: Read Lamentations 1:1–2:22

Grief is a universal human experience. The Bible tells us that grief exists because something is wrong. While there is good in the world, brokenness pervades it all. The Book of Lamentations is a collection of five sorrowful poems lamenting the fall of Judah. Seeping from these poems are the raw emotions of a confused and hurting people processing their circumstances and attempting to express the inexpressible.

Grief was a part of life for the Judeans, and it's a part of our lives today. Fortunately, God's Word gives us instruction on how we should face grief. First, we don't grieve alone because we have a Savior who is acquainted with grief and understands our own grief (Isa. 53:3). Second, we grieve knowing it is a natural response to injustice, whether it leads us to cry out to God (Ps. 22:1) or to sit in silence (Job 2:13). Third, we grieve believing in a future hope. In the midst of heartache, Job made a beautiful confession: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26).⁵ These truths help us in our grief and remind us that a day is coming when our temporary afflictions will be replaced with an eternal glory.



How are you challenged in your grief by these instructions from Scripture?

Day 5: Read Lamentations 3:1–5:22

In the midst of darkest despair, a break in the black clouds hovering over Lamentations opens up and the brightest of lights shines down. Following sixty-five verses of gloom and doom over Jerusalem's fall, the author turns the script toward God's mercy: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

God appoints every aspect of every day. He appoints the day's troubles. He appoints the day's mercies. Sometimes we wonder if we will be able to withstand the troubles of our day. But we can rest assured knowing every morning God's mercy will be there waiting for us. We might be tempted to store up God's mercy for a rainy day, but like Israel with the manna in the wilderness, there is no storing up. Instead, we are called to the daily exercise of declaring our dependency upon God and His mercy.



What practical steps can you take to remind yourself that God's mercies are new every morning?

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A Word from the Editor



Trevin Wax

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader.

Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of *The Gospel Project* is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God's people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God's extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.

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