

GOD'S JUDGMENT THROUGH THE NATIONS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God sends judgment upon all who are obstinate against Him.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

2 Chronicles 36

+ 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.

DAY 1

READ:

2 Chronicles 36:1-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Chronicles 36:13

NOTES

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.*"¹

-Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. Though there are many procedures that can help, such as bypasses and valve replacements, hope for those with a failing, diseased heart is solely in a heart transplant.

The heart of King Zedekiah was evil, rebellious, full of pride, and obstinate. So were the hearts of the people of Judah. The message of God through the prophets came with a dire warning against their hard-heartedness. Their obstinacy would only lead to ruin. It needed to be taken seriously.

Graciously, God not only spoke of the coming judgment, He also made promises for a new covenant because God knew the efforts of humankind can only come up short. We cannot overcome our obstinacy. There is no human remedy for hardness of heart. The diagnosis is in and it's not good—we need a heart transplant.

A new heart is precisely what God guaranteed. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel proclaimed this promise. A pledge to give us a new heart and put a new spirit within us. A vow to remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26), and a vow to write His teaching on our hearts (Jer. 31:31,33).

Obstinacy is the mortal disease that no soul can cure on its own. Only a new heart, a soft one, filled with the very words of God can enable us to follow God. Through faith in Christ, we undergo this life-saving heart transplant and receive a new heart of flesh that is able to love and worship God in a way no heart of stone could ever do.

What evidence of a spiritual heart transplant have you experienced? Spend some time praising God for this life-saving gift.

DAY 2

READ:

Hebrews 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Hebrews 3:12-15

NOTES

It can be difficult to read the Old Testament accounts of the past and find immediate application to our modern lives. Of course, there is always the character of God to observe to help rightly shape our view of God. But talk of kings, far-off countries, city walls, and fighting with swords might lose our attention when it comes to application.

The people of the Old Testament frequently exemplified obstinacy. Though we may be far removed from the specifics of their situations, hard-heartedness is not primarily a problem of the past.

The writer of Hebrews makes this clear. Using the example of those who wandered in the wilderness after witnessing the incredible deliverance of God from Egypt, he warns us against obstinacy, going astray, and forgetting the Lord's faithfulness, all of which stem from unbelief.

Beyond the heart transplant, we are given another remedy to fight off spiritual heart disease: the encouragement of our spiritual family. Our brothers and sisters in Christ have a role to play in our pursuit of tender-heartedness. The deceit of sin wreaks havoc on our new hearts. We need continual reminders to depend on the Donor to keep our hearts going. That Donor is the living God, who gives hope and peace in a world full of wickedness that threatens to dampen our spiritual vigor and steal our hope.

Hebrews exhorts us to keep a firm hold on the gospel. In this, we all need continual reminders, which is why the local body of Christ is a need for every believer. Through regular fellowship with our spiritual family, we can point each other to the good news so that we can each keep our eyes on Jesus, the perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

How can you encourage another believer this week to keep his or her heart tender toward the Lord?

DAY 3

READ:

Proverbs 4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Proverbs 4:23

NOTES

In Proverb 4:23, we are encouraged to protect and guard our hearts. Many use this as a charge for teens and young adults to pay attention to their affections when it comes to romantic relationships and not let their emotions rule the roost. But a deeper dive into this passage provides additional details.

King Solomon wrote Proverbs to administer direction and protection to God's people through collected teachings of wisdom. Throughout, there is a connection with attention to that wisdom and the heart. In the Old Testament, one's heart represents the inner self, who we are at the core of our being. It is where our thought processes and conscience reside, where we make judgments, think critically, and hold beliefs.² So, while emotions may certainly become involved, to guard one's heart is a much deeper idea than simply avoiding the pain of a bad break-up.

As we consider the danger of obstinacy, this passage provides vital instruction for cultivating softness of heart. First up is a call to embrace wisdom, which will lead to flourishing for the one who does so (Prov. 4:20-22). A subsequent command to guard the heart then echoes this idea (4:23). To pay attention to God's words, to listen closely to them, is to guard the heart. Not losing sight of His sayings, keeping a tight grip on them, is to guard the heart. In doing so, wholeness, life, and health will abound.

It is from this place, with God's Word held dear, that we move forward in obedience (4:24-27), which flows naturally out of the guarded heart because the guarded heart is soft to God's words. It is actively listening, closely attentive, and intentionally guided by the life-giving sayings of the Source of all life.

How will you better embrace God's Word this week that you may guard your heart?

DAY 4

READ:

2 Chronicles 36:11-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Chronicles 36:11-17

NOTES



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).

The focal point of 1 and 2 Chronicles is on the monarchy, recording the deeds of each king. These records are not comprehensive but do provide a fly-over of the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with a view toward calling God’s exiled people—His remnant—to return and rebuild what was lost.

Beyond the day-to-day running of the nation, the king’s role was to provide spiritual guidance to the people. Each monarch was responsible for the rise or fall of his nation. As for those who did evil, whether they intended to or not, they led their people to do evil. For those who did what was right in the sight of the Lord, repentance and revival followed. Leaders always influence people—either toward health or decay.

Unfortunately, so many of these kings failed to point their people to God and His ways. However, though many of these kings missed an incredible opportunity to use their power and influence for the good of the people, God still held individuals responsible for their actions. Here we see the last of the monarchs, Zedekiah, judged for his rebellion. But we also see that the people piled on their unfaithful deeds (2 Chron. 36:14), and thus, they too encountered the punishment of God.

Regardless of the leadership we find ourselves under—whether it is godly and good or blasphemous and base—every person will receive judgment for their actions and inactions. We may find ourselves in an unhealthy workplace environment, a tense political situation, or under a disobedient pastor, but we are still to pursue individual integrity and intimacy with God even when our leaders fail us. Whether it is an uphill battle or a synergistic movement toward righteousness and gospel work, we must each make the personal choice to live our lives in obedient worship.

When it comes to your behavior, have you been making excuses because of bad leaders? What can you change to make a shift toward personal responsibility for your actions?

DAY 5

READ:

Isaiah 11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 11:10-12

NOTES

Second Chronicles largely ends on a dark note and is not far removed from the start of a four-hundred-year period of silence from God. Though some of God's people returned to Jerusalem after the exile to rebuild the temple and restore the walls, it would never be restored to its former glory. Only a small Jewish remnant with a tiny bit of fractured hope remained in Jerusalem. Where there once was plenty and splendor, there was now destruction and despair.

Though they could not see it, this was not the end of the story. God promised to raise up a shoot from this stump (Isa. 11:1). When all seemed lost, there was hope to be found. In the fullness of time, God would send His Son to rule in faithful righteousness and perfect justice. He will bring a peace and safety never seen. He will rule over all, collect the scattered of God's people, and recover the remnant (11:10-12).

Yet this spark of hope—the shoot of Jesse—would return as King and restore the monarchy in an unexpected way. Instead of coming in majesty, He would come in humility. Rather than installing a new physical province, He would inaugurate a new spiritual kingdom. For a time, He would relinquish His power so that He could pour out His life for all humankind. This King Jesus will rule completely and eternally. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Him as Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

When all around us seems lost and we are tempted to despair, we must remember that King Jesus is our victor. He is always faithfully working His plan that was set forth before the foundations of this earth (Eph. 1:4-6). He knows all, sees all, and controls all. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16), regardless of what our situations seem to scream.

How does knowing that God did not leave His people hopeless and instead fulfilled His promise of a Savior give you hope for the future?

GROUP

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."³

—Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998)

POINT 1: Obstinate people refuse God's ways (2 Chron. 36:11-14).

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

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 _____ control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same _____-centeredness and _____ that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by _____ in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).



What are some detestable practices of the nations that tempt believers today?

POINT 2: Obstinate people reject God's word (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

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



What are some means God uses to speak to us and direct us back to Him?

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

NOTES

POINT 3: Obstinate people experience God's judgment (2 Chron. 36:17-21).

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



How might the destruction of the temple have been interpreted by the remaining people of Judah?

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



How should God's promise of a remnant for Judah bring hope to us in our darkest days?

MY RESPONSE

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:** What place does the warning of judgment need to have in our sharing of the gospel of Jesus with others?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you need to address the obstinacy and sin in your own heart?
- **HANDS:** What will you do this week to show the kindness of Christ to the hard-hearted?

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."⁴

—Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth