

# Sermon 71, God's Enduring Promise, 2 Kings 25:22-30

Read 2 Samuel 7

- I. Epilogue I: The Failure of the Judean Rump State, vv. 22-26
  - A. The Question Raised: Can Judah Exist Subservient to Babylon?, vv. 22-24
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**Proposition:** The fate of God's people depends on the fate of David's line — and David's line will have its head lifted up.

## Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we sped last week through two chapters plus of this book of Kings. Tonight, we come indeed to the bitter end, to part II of the epilogue. The book proper ended at v. 21 of the present chapter; land, and its loss, was the last word in the story of God's people in the Promised Land. So tonight, we're going to look briefly at the double epilogue with which the story closes. We see first of all the fate of the Judean state. But then we fast forward twenty-five years and see the 55-year-old Jehoiachin released from a Babylonian dungeon and given a seat at the table. What does this mean? Well, we already know that the fate of God's people depends on the fate of David's line. And we see very clearly, in history, even in the midst of exile, that David's line has its head lifted up. Those are the very words of the Hebrew text, though they are paraphrased beyond recognition in most of the English versions. Let's see what this lifting up the head of David's line meant for the exiles who first read this book, and what it means for us today, the people of God on pilgrimage who are still looking for a better country.

### I. Epilogue I: The Failure of the Judean Rump State, vv. 22-26

The first part of the epilogue recounts an attempt to have life go on in Judah.

#### A. The Question Raised: Can Judah Exist Subservient to Babylon?, vv. 22-24

This attempt was actually Babylon's idea. Rather than directly subject Judah to Babylonian administration, Nebuchadnezzar appoints a prominent Judean as governor of what is now the

Babylonian province of Judah. This man is a good man; his father supported Jeremiah. “Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death” (Jer 26:24 NKJ). And his regime quickly achieves broad legitimacy with the remaining elites in Judah. All the military came and swore their allegiance to Gedaliah, and Gedaliah made them a promise. Did you notice the breathtaking scope of this promise? It amounts to a complete reformulation of the traditional Israelite/Judean ideal of sovereignty. Instead of the idea that Israel is “a people dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations,” a nation whose existence and defense is directly guaranteed by God Himself, Gedaliah postulates the idea that Israel can continue to be Israel while serving the king of Babylon. “Dwell in the land” — that’s the traditional Israelite idea, to dwell in the land according to God’s promise. But then he adds “and serve the king of Babylon” — that’s the radical new idea that he’s added to the mix. Can Israel/Judah maintain its separate character, its unique identity as the people of God, while living in the land of promise but doing so under the aegis of Babylon? Gedaliah says “Yes.” Gedaliah says that it will be well with those who try to remain Judeans in Babylonian Judah.

Now, brothers and sisters, there is no doubt that Gedaliah’s basic idea was on the right track here. Since 586 B.C. God’s people have indeed had to live within the world system. In the Babylonian exile, the idea that God is a God of one nation and one people only was decisively rejected. Now there is no uniquely God-favored nation to which one can move, no place that is God’s holy place on earth. Neither the present Jerusalem, nor Vatican City, nor cities of the American “Bible Belt” (places like Grand Rapids, Michigan; Greenville, South Carolina; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Sioux Center, Iowa) are the city of God in the sense that Jerusalem was in the days of the Davidic monarchy. You can be a Christian and have a qualified loyalty to the President of the United States. You can be a Christian and have a qualified loyalty to the prime minister of Israel, or of Great Britain. But was the world ready for Gedaliah’s idea? Could the Judeans transition, however violently, from an independent life as a religious-political commonwealth to life under Babylonian politics while maintaining their core identity as citizens of God’s chosen nation on earth? That was the question. Gedaliah believed it could be done.

#### **B. The Question Answered: No, vv. 25-26**

But it couldn’t be done, not then. It would take seventy years of exile, and the work of Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophets who worked with them, to forge a new understanding of what it might mean to be the people of God while under the rule of a secular or overtly pagan political system. For centuries, God’s people had believed that either they would live in the land with Yahweh Himself as their king, or that they would not live at all. Now, though, Gedaliah has proposed that they could serve God by serving the king of Babylon, the pagan Nebuchadnezzar, and that under those terms they would be able to remain in the land.

But Ishmael ben Nethaniah had other ideas. With his trusty weapons he struck down Gedaliah and his allies, Judean and Babylonian alike. Ishmael rejected this compromise position. He would not submit to the reality that God had given His city and His people into the hand of

Nebuchadnezzar. And so he murdered Gedaliah, and with him the last hope for any sense of Judean national survival. Judah's history is over. From 586 B.C. to A.D. 1948, its history is simply the history of one small province within a series of non-Jewish empires. The future of the people of God does not lie in having a physical, political territory ruled in the name of God by a man of God's choosing. Even the Roman Catholic Church, which makes a claim similar to this, does not view Vatican City as the Promised Land or encourage faithful Catholics to move there to experience the fullness of God's blessing. No. Life in the land, in Mosaic-Levitical terms, is over. Judah remains carried away captive out of its own land.

## **II. Epilogue II: The Success of God's Promise to David's Son, vv. 27-30**

Yet that failure of Gedaliah's attempt to salvage something of a Judean identity is not the failure of God's promise. God had promised David that He would not take away His steadfast love from David's descendants, as He took it away from Saul. He promised that "your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2Sa 7:15-16 NKJ). Yes, God had chastened David's son with the rod of men, and the stripes of the sons of men. But His steadfast love remained with David's seed. The author thus fast-forwards 25 years to close his book with a brief but very suggestive incident.

### **A. The Date: 560 B.C., v. 27a**

It's 560 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar has died, and his son Amul-Marduk (or Evil-Merodach in Hebrew) has assumed the throne. It appears that as part of his accession he offered clemency to Jehoiachin.

### **B. The Event: Jehoiachin's Head Lifted, vv. 27b-30**

This is described by the author as Jehoiachin's head being lifted, language reminiscent of both Elisha's words in 2 Kings 3 (indicating that he honored Jehoshaphat) and of Joseph's encounter with the cupbearer and baker in Genesis 49. I believe that we are to take these words in the widest signification. Jesus told us to lift our heads when we see the signs of the end of the age. He indicated that He would be lifted up on the cross. And He is the glorious head of the church. All of these realities are foreshadowed in this act of lifting the head. Evil-Merodach, the agent of God, lifted up the head of David's line. And Christ, the real head of that line, would someday be lifted up and highly exalted.

What form did the lifting up of Jehoiachin's head take? Notice first of all that he's called the king of Judah two times in verse 27. Though Judah is gone, its king endures. No matter how long Judah vanishes from the historical map, hope remains, because the king of Judah, the descendant of David who rules God's people, remains. Brothers and sisters, that is the message of this final epilogue. That is the reality of this final detail recorded in the book of Kings. God's people have left the land, have been cast out of His presence, but God's promise to the seed of David is still in effect.

#### **1. Release from Prison**

And so, we see first of all that Jehoiachin is released from prison. He is lifted out of the dungeon. What is this but a foreshadowing of the fact that Judah, too, will someday be released from

exile? The fate of the nation mirrors the fate of the king. This means that Judah once again has a chance. Judah will not remain in exile forever.

## **2. Kind Words**

Evil-Merodach speaks good things, kind words, to Jehoiachin. Rather than the wanton cruelty shown to Zedekiah, this is a welcome development. Again, the overarching reality is that God's people will once again be treated well — in God's good time.

## **3. The Highest Seat**

Jehoiachin is given the best seat in the house, the most honored position among all the captive royalty in Babylon. The people of God will once again be honored.

## **4. New Clothes**

The new clothes symbolize a changed condition. Like Joseph, Jehoiachin no longer belongs in prison. Isaiah had used this clothing symbolism a century before, speaking of the garments of salvation with which God would clothe His people during the second exodus. Brothers and sisters, each additional detail only highlights the deeper reality that God will act to lift His people's head.

## **5. A Place at the Table**

Jehoiachin is also given a place at the table, eating before the king. He is not an equal with the king of Babylon, of course, but he is recognized as dwelling in the same social orbit. No longer is he scum beneath the boot heels of the Babylonian monarch.

## **6. Lifelong Provision**

And finally, the last verse repeats the fact that this provision was for the rest of Jehoiachin's life. This favor was not fickle or changing; it was stable and enduring.

### **C. The Significance: God Will Keep His Promise**

The comparison with Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul is obvious. He too was received kindly and ate at David's table. This was simultaneously a sign of David's mercy and of the reality that Saul's line was finished and that no monarch would ever come from it again. And many commentators see exactly the same point here. Just as Saul's house would never rise again, so the fact that Jehoiachin is royally entertained at the king of Babylon's table is proof positive that David's line is finished and that no monarch will ever come from it again.

This is half true, of course. No earthly monarch ever did come from David's line again. The highest any of Jehoiachin's descendants rose, in earthly terms, was to being governor in the days of the Persian empire (e.g., Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel). And yet, though the comparison with Saul is obvious, God headed that comparison off at the pass. The key difference lies not in the relative position at a greater king's table, but rather in God's promise to never remove His steadfast love from David's line. David's ultimate descendant, Jesus the Messiah, was chosen by God, plucked from obscurity in Nazareth. He was the Savior of the World, and He was a carpenter. He was not a king by birth, but an artisan. Yet God highly exalted Him to a greater than earthly dominion.

Brothers and sisters, the end of Kings leaves open the possibility for God to fulfill His promise to David in some as-yet-undreamed-of way. It hints broadly that David's line will have its head raised, and that God's people will be raised along with that rising. But it is not the book of Revelation, nor even Daniel. It deals with the past, not the future. It tells us about how God dealt with His people of old so that we can see who He is and how faithful He is. It leaves us with only a hint — a hint that better things are coming for God's anointed king and for God's scattered, suffering people. But all of that is yet future. Those things are hidden in the plan and purpose of the God who directs history and human life, and who rules all things for the sake of His people.

Can you trust God, even in the darkness? Can you believe that He will keep His promise to Christ and therefore to all those who are in Christ? Can you trust that the lifting up of Jehoiachin's head was a foreshadowing of the greater exaltation of Jesus, and that it is therefore a promise that your head will be lifted someday as well?

Brothers and sisters, let's leave the book of Kings rejoicing in God's faithfulness to His people. Remember how we saw at the very beginning, in the first chapter of First Kings, that God acts to preserve His Kingdom through the faithfulness of His people? David was too weak to rule, too weak to penetrate Abishag, and the kingdom was falling apart around him. That was the beginning of the story! By the end, of course, the kingdom really did fall apart, and nothing was left. Even the puppet government under Gedaliah was destroyed in mere weeks. But nothing can shake God's promise: Not Babylonian armies, not the cold steel of Jewish fanatics, not the reality that everything Judah held dear had been destroyed. The message of the book of Kings from first to last is that God preserves His Kingdom. He may change its form; He may judge its leaders and people. But He Himself is the same, and He rules from everlasting to everlasting. His Kingdom is forever. Amen.

Sing "A Mighty Fortress."