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THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2021

UNIT: History of Israel (1–2 Kings & 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

OVERVIEW:

Sometimes common sense is not so common. The kings of Israel and Judah often jettisoned God’s common sense. A few good kings and godly prophets called for reforms in God’s troubled kingdom. Students will learn to embrace God’s wisdom, pray earnestly for revival, witness God’s miracles, and avoid the heartache of disobedience.

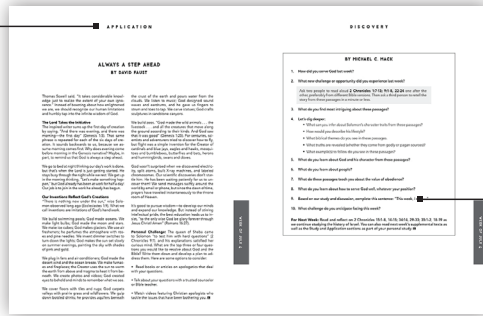
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Arrows point to the lesson aim and lesson text boxes. A vertical tab on the right side of the page is labeled '1 KINGS'.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Arrows point to the Application and Discovery sections. A vertical tab on the right side of the page is labeled '1 KINGS'.

WEEK OF JULY 25, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Seek the Lord with
all your heart, and
you will find him.**

UNIT: History of Israel (1-2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

LESSON TEXT: 2 Chronicles 36:11-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Jeremiah 29:10-14

DOWN BUT NOT DEFEATED

BY MARK SCOTT

The apostle Paul listed challenges he faced in ministry in more than one letter (1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:4-5; 11:24-29; 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5). But in 2 Corinthians 4:9 he used the phrase, “struck down, but not destroyed.” The writer of 2 Chronicles could say a similar thing about the nation of Israel (the Southern Kingdom) when they were taken away to Babylonian captivity. This pre-exilic historical book ends on a very sour note. The last king of Judah (Zedekiah) was horribly corrupt, and Nebuchadnezzar came and burned the city and the temple. But offstage a note of hope was being played that would allow God to fulfill his promise to save the world through Jesus (Genesis 12:3).

The Last King*2 Chronicles 36:11-14*

Josiah was the last great king of Judah, but his sons (Jehoahaz and Eliakim) did not follow in the ways of their father. The first was deported to Egypt, and the second (whose name was changed to Jehoiakim) was deported to Babylon. Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, reigned just beyond three months, and then his brother Zedekiah became the last king of Judah. During his reign of *eleven years*, Zedekiah had a hot and cold relationship with Nebuchadnezzar. Ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar killed him.

Zedekiah *did evil* and did not *humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet* (Jeremiah 21:3-7; 32:1-5). Even though Jeremiah spoke the *word of the Lord* to him, Zedekiah *would not turn to the Lord*. Even worse, Zedekiah led the *leaders of the priests and the people* also to be unfaithful to God by enjoining the *practices of the nations*. He also defiled (to pollute or to profane) the *temple of the Lord*. And, as if that were not enough, Zedekiah *rebelled* against the king of Babylon who had empowered him. The last king of Judah was a really bad man.

The Last Straw*2 Chronicles 36:15-21*

God cannot be faulted for his patience. Time and again God sent *messengers* (ambassadors or maybe even angels) and *prophets* because he had *pity* (compassion) on his people. But God (and his messengers) cannot be *mocked* (Galatians 6:7) or *scoffed at*. God's *wrath* (anger, indignation, or fury) is nothing to be tested. When it kicks in, there is no *remedy* (healing).

The stunning truth in all of this is how God used a nation worse than Israel to punish Israel (see the book of Habakkuk). Nebuchadnezzar killed *young men* even in the temple; his death rampage was indiscriminate—age, gender, and health mattered not. The temple was burned, the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and the treasures of the temple and the leaders were plundered. The people of Jerusalem who escaped death were hauled to captivity and became servants of the current and future empires.

Even in the midst of all this, one can see the mercy of God. Since God's people were either dead or captured, there was no one to work the land. Therefore, in a twisted way, the land experienced an extended Sabbath of sorts. Jeremiah had predicted that this Sabbath would essentially last *seventy years* (Jeremiah 29:10-14; Daniel 9:2; Ezra 1:1). God's people should not presume on the kindness of God (Romans 2:4).

The New Hope*2 Chronicles 36:22-23*

The chronicler made a final historical note (538 BC). Babylon imploded (Daniel 5:30-31), and the Persians came to power. Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were replaced by the likes of Cyrus, Darius, and Ahasuerus. Cyrus clearly was an unusual potentate. The text told us why. *The Lord moved the heart of Cyrus*. Even more than this, God called Cyrus his “anointed” (the word for Messiah in Isaiah 45:1). To what extent Cyrus realized Yahweh used him we do not know. But his generous nature of allowing conquered peoples to return to their homeland is well attested in a great archaeological artifact called the Cyrus Cylinder. While the writing on the clay cylinder does not mention Israel by name, it refers to Cyrus's uncharacteristic benevolent ways.

Cyrus admitted as much in his decree (v. 23; cf. Ezra 1:2-3). He recognized that God had given him his reign and even *appointed* (charged) him to *build a temple* in Jerusalem. He allowed the Jews to return home, helped them financially, and gave them governmental protection. They returned home in three waves under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. These leaders were assisted by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The new hope was that once the remnant was back in the land of Israel, God could send a savior so that the good news could come out of Zion. In that savior the nations could have a new hope. ■

APPLICATION

WHEN IT ALL COMES CRASHING DOWN

BY DAVID FAUST

I visited a church in Alaska during late winter. Hard-packed ice covered the roads and two feet of snow covered the ground. The congregation had a pitch-in dinner following the worship service that Sunday. While the adults ate and talked, the children went outside to enjoy dogsled rides provided by a local musher. None of the adults participated, but I figured, *What are the odds I will ever get another chance to ride on a dogsled?* So, I swallowed my pride and got in line with the kids. When my turn came, I climbed onto the dogsled and laughed as the team of huskies whisked me around the church grounds.

Later that day, my host took me to see an ice-sculpting display. We walked around looking at statues carved from thick blocks of ice harvested from a nearby lake. The sculptures—several feet tall and skillfully carved—included a replica of the Statue of Liberty, a gigantic elephant, a crystal palace, and a child's playground complete with a slide carved from the ice. I asked my host, "What happens to these sculptures when spring comes?" He shrugged and said, "They all just melt away." It was sad to realize that after all the effort it took to craft those ice sculptures, they would simply melt to the ground with the spring thaw.

The Law of Entropy

Isn't that the way things are in this world? Eventually everything comes crashing down or slowly melts away. We admire the towering redwoods and other tall trees, but in time they will fall to the ground. We build elaborate houses, stadiums, office towers, and cathedrals, but will those structures still exist 500 years from now? The Pyramids in Egypt, the Colosseum in Rome, and the Parthenon in Greece still generate awe centuries after ancient artisans constructed them, but they are crumbling replicas of their former glory.

A basic principle in physics is the law of entropy or disintegration: things tend toward disorder and decay. To see the law of entropy at work, look at your own face in the mirror. Our bodies decline with age. Today's glamorous stars of stage and screen will fade into insignificance, replaced by tomorrow's trendy celebrities enjoying their 15 minutes of fame. Once-agile athletes succumb to arthritis and cancer. Once-brilliant minds drift into the sad fog of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The Bible doesn't whitewash all of this bad news. It tells us the unvarnished truth about sin's devastating effects: physical pain, emotional sorrow, relational disruption, spiritual death. Adam and Eve got kicked out of the Garden. The fickle Jewish people saw their precious temple destroyed by the Babylonians.

The Hope of Eternity

We must keep reading. And when we do, we discover that for the faithful, the story doesn't end with devastation and despair. God's story leads to redemption, reconciliation, and rebuilding. It climaxes in the final chapters of Revelation, where instead of entropy on a dying planet, there's eternity on a new heaven and earth where a tree of life always bears fruit, and where there's no more pain or tears, no more physical and mental decline, no more death.

Human achievements eventually melt to the ground, but God has in store for us "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade" (1 Peter 1:4). The bad news? "The world and its desires pass away." The good news? "Whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17).

Personal Challenge: Look over your calendar for the coming week. How many items on your to-do list will have lasting impact, and how many of them deal with temporary things that eventually will pass away? **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you live your faith as God's ambassador last week, helping someone know that the Lord is God?
2. What new challenge did you face over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Chronicles 36:11-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passage in one minute or less.

3. What words or phrases from verses 11-21 express to you the general mood of this passage?
 - How would you describe the mood of verses 22-23?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - In your own words, how would you describe King Zedekiah?
 - What influence did Zedekiah have on the people?
 - In what ways was God patient and loving with the people even as they became increasingly unfaithful to him?
 - What consequences did the people eventually have to face?
 - How do you reconcile the fact that Cyrus the Great, a pagan king, freed the Jewish exiles, allowed them to return to Judah, and rebuilt their temple?
5. What do you learn about God's nature, especially his sovereignty (his supreme control over all), from this passage?
6. What do you learn about the nature of humans?
7. What connections do you see between humility and obeying God?
8. How will you be a godly influence with the people closest to you this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge or opportunity do you anticipate this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Galatians 1:6-12; 2:1-10** as we begin a new study of the book of Galatians. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■