



Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin: Despise not the Chastening of the Lord

Lesson 21

...My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

Hebrews 12:5-6

The child about to be spanked for wrongdoing normally goes into fight or flight mode as the impending punishment approaches. They seek to run, resist, or bargain their way out of what is about to happen. They often fight it with every known trick in the book, and we all can understand why. No one wants to be punished. Punishment is, by its very design, unpleasant. That is why when Scripture comes to the believer and encourages them to embrace the chastening or the discipline of the Lord, it seems strange to us. And yet we ought to embrace God's discipline because God's discipline is for our good!

But there is another reason we should embrace God's discipline. Just as the child who resists the discipline their parents give them will often find that discipline even more unpleasant, when we resist God's punishment, we find ourselves facing even more pain and misery than we would otherwise need. It's counterintuitive, but when we are disciplined by the Lord we ought to humbly accept whatever is coming our way from His

hand. When we do so, we are learning what He wants us to learn and are actually making things easier on ourselves.

What does it look like for a believer to accept God's discipline?

In the lesson we are studying today, we find a nation that refused to accept God's discipline. A prophet warns them to accept the yoke of Babylon, but instead they rebel against God's sovereignly appointed punishment. As we study this lesson and next lesson, we will see what disastrous effects this will have on the people. This lesson will cover the first three kings after Josiah, but before we begin with them we need to get a little bit of historical background.

Historical Background: The balance of international powers was shifting again. For a long time, Egypt and Assyria had vied for power, but now they found themselves working together against a new common enemy: the nation of Babylon. In 609 B.C. Pharaoh Necho went to join the king of Assyria to battle Babylon at the battle of Carchemish. On the way, King Josiah foolishly opposes him, only to be defeated and killed in the ill-fated battle. Egypt and Assyria were victorious this time, and on the way back Pharaoh deposes Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, and installs a king loyal to him, Eliakim (renamed Jehoiakim).

Unfortunately for Egypt (and Judah), Babylon came back a few years later in 605 B.C., and this time the battle went very differently. Babylon won and in doing so became the new world superpower and the de facto ruler of Judah. It is during these confusing, tumultuous times that we begin our lesson today.

God uses the events of international history to move forward His agenda. Why doesn't God simply allow the good guys to win all the time? What is accomplished by giving wicked nations like Babylon or Assyria success?

Jehoahaz – The Prelude to Captivity

Judah had constantly sought to fight off bigger empires, but they had not always had great success. Rehoboam had paid off Egypt (1 Kings 14:25-31), Hezekiah had attempted to pay off Assyria (2 Kings 18:13-16), and Manasseh had been captured by Assyria (2 Chronicles 33:10-13), but things are about to get a whole lot worse.

The final downward spiral begins with the Egypt's capture of Jehoahaz after an abysmally short reign of three months (2 Kings 23:31-35). As penalty for Josiah's rebellion, Pharaoh removed his son on his way back home and replaced him with someone who promised to remain loyal to Egypt and who was willing to pay the tax that Egypt imposed. Jehoahaz's short reign was regarded as wicked by Scripture despite his godly father. Although his wicked reign was cut short, his brother Eliakim, whose name was changed to Jehoiakim, was just as wicked.

Jehoiakim – The First Babylonian Wave

We come now to the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. God had warned that this day was coming, and now finally Judah found itself under the rule of Babylon as punishment for her sins. God had predicted that this situation would last seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11-12). Judah refused to accept the discipline of the Lord, however, and because they rebelled twice against Babylon, the attacks of Babylon came in three waves. In this lesson, we will look at the first two waves, and in the next lesson we will look at the final wave.

I. Jehoiakim and Pharaoh

A. Pharaoh establishes Jehoiakim.

Once Jehoahaz is deposed, Pharaoh sets up his brother as king. Likely this was done under a pledge of loyalty, Pharaoh would make Jehoiakim king and Jehoiakim would send taxes to Pharaoh. As part of this appointment, Pharaoh changed Eliakim's name (which means something like "God establishes") to Jehoiakim (which means "Yahweh establishes").

Why would a pagan king give his puppet king a name with a clearer tie to God's personal name? What might his motivation have been?

B. Pharaoh taxes Jehoiakim.

Once Pharaoh leaves, Jehoiakim makes sure to tax the people so that Pharaoh gets the money that he has demanded. Dr. Whitcomb points out that things have deteriorated pretty far in Judah based on how much is sent. Hezekiah had paid 300 talents of silver and 30 of gold (2 Kings 18:14). Now the king is paying 100 talents of silver and 1 talent of gold (2 Kings 23:33). Dr. Whitcomb also notes that during this time Jehoiakim was building a very nice home and not paying the workers for it (Jeremiah 22:13-14).

II. Jehoiakim and Jeremiah

Jehoiakim was king during the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. We have seen kings and prophets not get along before, but Jehoiakim seemed especially wicked in his response to God's warnings.

A. Jehoiakim kills a prophet of the Lord (Jeremiah 26:20-23).

Jeremiah wasn't the only voice warning about the impending judgment of God. Another prophet named Uriah gave the same message, but sadly paid for his ministry with his life. King Jehoiakim's ruthlessness led to him chasing this poor prophet down to Egypt and personally killing and dishonoring his dead body.

B. Jehoiakim destroys Jeremiah's message (Jeremiah 36:20-26).

This story is especially dark. Baruch gives a message in the temple for Jeremiah since Jeremiah has been permanently banned from the temple. Those who are sympathetic to Jeremiah and Baruch tell Baruch to flee and eventually bring the message before the king. As the king is listening to the warnings of God, he takes the scroll from the reader, cuts it up, and throws it on the fire. One would be hard pressed to think of a more drastic example of someone saying, "I don't care what God has to say!"

Hopefully you have not tried to burn a verse you didn't like, but how do Christians show their disdain for what God's Word says?

C. Jehoiakim tries to kill Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:24; 36:19, 26).

In both instances, the killing of Uriah and the burning of Jeremiah's scroll, King Jehoiakim seeks to locate Jeremiah. In both instances, God preserves His prophet

from the harm that an ungodly king would seek to inflict upon him.

Jehoiakim is a man who fought against the Word of the Lord. He sought to kill the prophets and to burn their messages. But he didn't get away with it. God brought the first wave of justice on the nation during this wicked man's rule.

These are pretty dramatic ways of rejecting the Lord's discipline! What are some ways that believers today reject God's warnings and His discipline?

III. Jehoiakim and Babylon

A. God brings chastening to Judah (2 Kings 24:1-2).

During his reign Nebuchadnezzar fights against Egypt again in the year 605 B.C. and this time is victorious. He comes to Judah and informs them that they are now his vassal, fulfilling the warning that Jeremiah had given to the nation beforehand (Jeremiah 25:1-14). Nebuchadnezzar had to return home quickly, however, after finding out that his father had died and he needed to take the throne. During this time Jehoiakim decided to rebel, a decision which led to more suffering and pain and ultimately had to be handled by his son when Jehoiakim died.

B. God's reasons for bringing chastening to Judah (2 Kings 24:3-4).

The writer of kings gives us a bit of insight into why God brought Babylon against Judah. Not surprisingly, it's tied back to the sins of Manasseh, specifically the injustice of his reign. God takes the abuse of the innocent and

injustice very seriously. It was the murder of Naboth that led to God's pronouncement of judgment on Ahab, and it was the innocent lives of many who brought God's judgment upon Judah.

Why would God bring judgment against the land for Manasseh's sins when Manasseh had repented?

What about the reforms of Josiah? Why were those insufficient to stop God's discipline?

Jehoiachin – The Second Babylonian Wave

I. An overview of Jehoiachin's reign (2 Kings 24:8-9).

Jehoiachin becomes king while the land is under attack from Babylon. Like his grandfather, we have here a ruler who only rules for three months and yet somehow still manages to go down in Scripture as a wicked ruler.

II. Jehoiachin and Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:10-17).

Nebuchadnezzar shows up in person after solidifying his rule in Babylon, and Jehoiachin makes the wise move and surrenders. More exiles are deported, and more of the land's wealth is robbed. Jehoiachin himself goes into exile and is taken into Babylon. Judah is further decimated and we are told that only the very poorest are left to run things in Judah. One would think that this is as low as the nation could get, but we are going to see them foolishly try to resist God's chastening one more disastrous time next week.

God's chastening is not fun or enjoyable. We naturally flinch, but we dare not run. Those who refuse to accept God's chastening in their life will find themselves in a much worse state than those who mournfully, soberly accept God's loving correction. Judah didn't do that, and they paid a terrible price. Many believers today refuse to do that, and likewise pay a terrible price. But some are willing to submit to God's chastening, and find holiness and restoration on the other side.

What would have happened in Israel if they had accepted God's chastening rather than fighting against it?

Read Hebrews 12:5-11. What does this passage have to say to believers today about God's discipline?