

HOPE INTHE RUBBLE

A Series in 2 Kings

COMMUNITY GROUP STUDIES

HOPE IN THE RUBBLE

After spending a few years journeying through the books of Samuel and Kings as a church, this is the end of the stories in the kings of Israel. And in many ways, this is the note that the Old Testament finishes on: The appearance of hopelessness, and the lingering question of hope. For a sinful people, led by wicked kings who refused to obey God's words, who were cast out of the promised land because of their sin, where can they look for hope?

2 Kings is a sweeping story, summarizing the lives of nearly 30 kings. The vast majority of the kings turn away from God, and even two of the iconic "good kings", Hezekiah and Josiah, still can't turn the

"The people of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day." 2 Kings 17:22-23

tides. We see the pattern play out repeatedly: Those who listen to God's word are embraced by God, but those who neglect God's word are judged and distanced from God. So because of God's people turning away from him, God exiles his people into foreign lands. So where do they find hope? When God's people feel far away from God, where can they find answers? These are questions that 2 Kings is trying to answer for Israel, but also for us, as we see the shadows of Christ all over the book—the one who would allow all of God's people to draw near to Godour king who leads us faithfully, without sin.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WEEK 1 // APR 23-29	
2 KINGS 1-2 PROPHETS OF FIRE	PAGE 4
WEEK 2 // APR 30-MAY 6	
2 KINGS 4-5 HEALING AND HUMBLING	PAGE 8
WEEK 3 // MAY 7 -13	
2 KINGS 9-10 JUDGMENT FROM JEHU	PAGE 12
WEEK 4 // MAY 14-20	
2 KINGS 17 IN EXILE	PAGE 16
WEEK 5 // MAY 21-27	
2 KINGS 18-20 HEZEKIAH: FAITHFULNESS AND FOLLY	PAGE 20
WEEK 6 // MAY 28-JUNE 3	
2 KINGS 22-23 JOSIAH: TEENAGE REVIVAL	PAGE 24
WEEK 7 // JUNE 4-10	
2 KINGS 24-25 HOPE IN THE RUBBLE	PAGE 28

PREVIOUSLY, IN THE BIBLE



God chooses the shepherd-boy David, from the tribe of Judah, to become his anointed king.

"David was the son of Jesse, from Bethlehem of Judah." 1 Samuel 17:12



God promises David that an eternal kingdom will come from his descendant.

"Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever." 2 Samuel 7:16



David's son, Solomon, builds God a temple. Solomon also builds himself a luxurious palace.

"All the work King Solomon did in the Lord's temple was completed." 1 Kings 7:51



Solomon is unfaithful in every way imaginable: marrying foreign wives, worshipping foreign gods, and disobeying the word of God. God tells Solomon that because of his divided heart, his kingdom will be divided.

"He was not wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord his God, as his father David had been." 1 Kings 11:4



After Solomon dies, the kings after him follow in his path, by spiralling away from faithfulness to God.

"Ahab did more to anger the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him." 1 Kings 16:33

Throughout the studies, there will be four repeated questions, which call us back to the major themes of the book:

How are they called to listen to God's words here?



How well do they listen to God's words?



How does God judge those who refuse to listen to his words?



Where can we see hope in this story?



Feel free to read the passage together and think through these questions every week, if you think that would be helpful for your group. But if they are too broad, feel free to just work through the more specific study questions.

WEEK ONE



Prophets of Fire

2 Kings 1-2

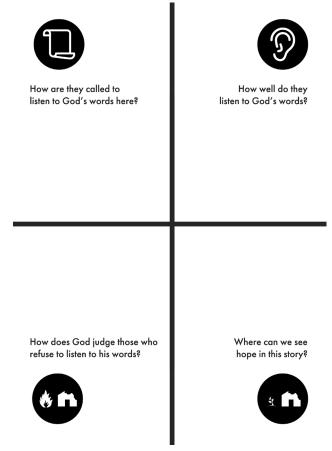
1:1 After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel. 2 Ahaziah had fallen through the latticed window of his upstairs room in Samaria and was injured. So he sent messengers, instructing them, "Go inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will recover from this injury."

3 But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Go and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? 4 Therefore, this is what the Lord says: You will not get up from your sickbed; you will certainly die.'" Then Elijah left. 5 The messengers returned to the king, who asked them, "Why have you come back?" 6 They replied, "A man came to meet us and said, 'Go back to the king who sent you and declare to him, "This is what the Lord says: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you're sending these men to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore, you will not get up from your sickbed; you will certainly die."" 7 The king asked them, "What sort of man came up to meet you and spoke those words to you?" 8 They replied, "A hairy man with a leather belt around his waist." He said, "It's Elijah the Tishbite."

9 So King Ahaziah sent a captain with his fifty men to Elijah. When the captain went up to him, he was sitting on top of the hill. He announced, "Man of God, the king declares, 'Come down!'" 10 Elijah responded to the captain, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men. 11 So the king sent another captain with his fifty men to Elijah. He took in the situation and announced, "Man of God, this is what the king says: 'Come down immediately!'" 12 Elijah responded, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." So a divine fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men. 13 Then the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. The third captain went up and fell on his knees in front of Elijah and begged him, "Man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious to you. 14 Already fire has come down from heaven and consumed the first two captains with their companies, but this time let my life be precious to you." 15 The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, "Go down with him. Don't be afraid of him." So he got up and went down with him to the king. 16 Then Elijah said to King Ahaziah, "This is what the Lord says: 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron—is it because there is no God in Israel for you to inquire of his will?—you will not get up from your sickbed; you will certainly die.""

What (if anything) do you remember about our study of 1 Kings last year?

Read 2 Kings 1:1-18.



Read 2 Kings 2:1-14.

Go back and read 1 Kings 19:15-18. God's words here are fulfilled throughout the first ten chapters of 2 Kings. How are they starting to be fulfilled in 2 Kings 2?

Elijah is most famous for being the prophet who called down fire from heaven (in the prophetic battle on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18, and in 2 Kings 1). What do you think is the significance of Elijah being lifted up by fire into heaven? Elisha asks Elijah for what an eldest son would expect of a father in Israel: a double portion of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). How does this help us understand 2 Kings 2:9?

In verses 12-13, Elisha dramatically tears his clothes in two. Why do you think that he does this?

Elisha immediately parts the waters of the Jordan. How is this reminiscent of:

Elijah (2 Kings 8): Joshua (Joshua 3:14-17): Moses (Exodus 14:26-29):

What are these echoes meant to suggest to us about Elisha's ministry?

In the last words of the Old Testament, we read that: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:5-6). So for hundreds of years, Israel was waiting for God to fulfill this promise, to send Elijah again. Why do you think that many people thought that Jesus was Elijah (Mark 6:15, 8:28)?

Read Matthew 17:1-13. How does Jesus' answer in verses 11-12 help us to understand who Elijah was?

How does this story show us that Jesus is greater than Elijah (or Elisha)?

WEEK TWO



Healing and Humbling

2 Kings 4-5

5:1 Naaman, commander of the army for the king of Aram, was a man important to his master and highly regarded because through him, the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was a valiant warrior, but he had a skin disease. 2 Aram had gone on raids and brought back from the land of Israel a young girl who served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his skin disease."

4 So Naaman went and told his master what the girl from the land of Israel had said. 5 Therefore, the king of Aram said, "Go, and I will send a letter with you to the king of Israel." So he went and took with him 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. 6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, and it read: When this letter comes to you, note that I have sent you my servant Naaman for you to cure him of his skin disease. 7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and asked, "Am I God, killing and giving life, that this man expects me to cure a man of his skin disease? Recognize that he is only picking a fight with me." 8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king: "Why have you torn your clothes? Have him come to me, and he will know there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. 10 Then Elisha sent him a messenger, who said, "Go wash seven times in the Jordan and your skin will be restored and you will be clean." 11 But Naaman got angry and left, saying, "I was telling myself: He will surely come out, stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the skin disease. 12 Aren't Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and left in a rage. 13 But his servants approached and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more should you do it when he only tells you, 'Wash and be clean'?" 14 So Naaman went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the command of the man of God. Then his skin was restored and became like the skin of a small boy, and he was clean.

Since Elisha took over from Elijah's ministry, he's been performing the same kind of miracles that Elijah did: purifying bad water, replenishing a widow's oil, bringing a boy back to life, purifying a deadly stew and feeding multitudes. Since chapter 2, Elisha's been busy!

Read 2 Kings 5:1-27.

In verses 1-5, what do we learn about:

Naaman:

Naaman's wife:

Israelite girl:

Which of the three characters do you like the most, after reading the first five verses? Why?

Naaman clearly expected that Elisha would personally attend to his needs. Why do you think Elisha only sent a messenger to him?

Why do you think Naaman becomes angry at Elisha's instructions (v. 12)? Given Naaman's status as commander of the army, how do you think this was different to how he was usually treated?

There's an irony in this story: The "little girl" helps a "great man", and in the end he becomes like a "little child". Read Matthew 18:3. How does Jesus show this as the pattern of our lives, as well?



What did Naaman do to be healed?



How does Gehazi try to cash in on Elisha's miracle?

What do you think his motivation was?

At the end of the story, Gehazi is like Naaman was at the start: as "a leper, like snow." Why was Gehazi punished like this?



"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Tim. 6:10). Throughout the Bible, there are many examples of people trying to greedily take from God's work, and are judged for it (Achan, Ananias and Saphira, Judas). How can we learn from these warnings? How can we be fighting against greed in our own lives?

Naaman trusted in the words of a little girl, to lead him to the healing of God's prophet. In the same way, the Gospel might seem like a humble message, but trusting in it will bring healing, and bring change to our lives. How do you need to be trusting in the promises of the Gospel this week?

WEEK THREE



Judgment from Jehu 2 Kings 9-10 9:1 The prophet Elisha called one of the sons of the prophets and said, "Tuck your mantle under your belt, take this flask of oil with you, and go to Ramoth-gilead. 2 When you get there, look for Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. Go in, get him away from his colleagues, and take him to an inner room. 3 Then take the flask of oil, pour it on his head, and say, 'This is what the Lord says: "I anoint you king over Israel."' Open the door and escape. Don't wait."

4 So the young prophet went to Ramoth-gilead. 5 When he arrived, the army commanders were sitting there, so he said, "I have a message for you, commander." Jehu asked, "For which one of us?" He answered, "For you, commander." 6 So Jehu got up and went into the house. The young prophet poured the oil on his head and said, "This is what the Lord God of Israel says: 'I anoint you king over the Lord's people, Israel. 7 You are to strike down the house of your master Ahab so that I may avenge the blood shed by the hand of Jezebel—the blood of my servants the prophets and of all the servants of the Lord. 8 The whole house of Ahab will perish, and I will wipe out all of Ahab's males, both slave and free, in Israel. 9 I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah. 10 The dogs will eat Jezebel in the plot of land at Jezreel—no one will bury her." Then the young prophet opened the door and escaped.

11 When Jehu came out to his master's servants, they asked, "Is everything all right? Why did this crazy person come to you?" Then he said to them, "You know the sort and their ranting." 12 But they replied, "That's a lie! Tell us!" So Jehu said, "He talked to me about this and that and said, 'This is what the Lord says: I anoint you king over Israel.'" 13 Each man quickly took his garment and put it under Jehu on the bare steps. They blew the ram's horn and proclaimed, "Jehu is king!"

Read 2 Kings 9:1-13.

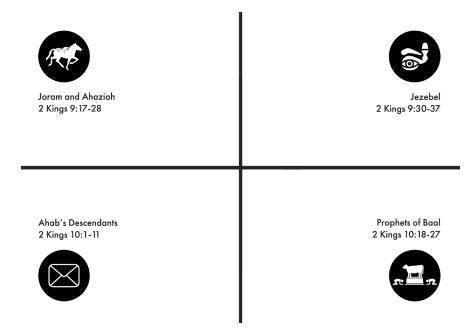
In 9:1–13, one of the prophets under Elisha's leadership anoints Jehu as king of Israel. What do they ask Jehu to do?

Read 1 Kings 19:15–18. How do these words help us to understand what happens in this scene?

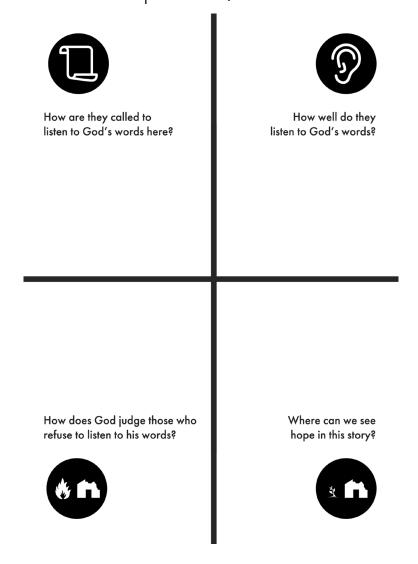
Here, and many other times in 1–2 Kings, God's promises take longer to come about than we might expect. Why do you think God's judgments against evil are sometimes delayed?

Read 2 Peter 3:8-9. How does this help us understand God's judgement?

After being appointed as king of Israel, Jehu seems to turn into Uma Thurman in Kill Bill, moving from one assassination to another. Quickly read through each of these passages, and write down a sentence to describe each event:



What's the common thread? What do all of these people have in common, that God brought judgment on them, through Jehu? Fill in these four questions, from the four stories:



A theme throughout these chapters is God's judgment against evil. The cross of Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of divine judgment: Jesus triumphed over the author of evil, Satan himself (Col. 2:14–15), and bore God's judgment in the place of his people, so that they no longer live under divine judgment but enjoy divine favor and mercy (Rom. 5:1; 8:1). How does that change how we as Christians read about these stories of God's judgement?

WEEK FOUR



In Exile

2 Kings 15-17

17:1 In the twelfth year of Judah's King Ahaz, Hoshea son of Elah became king over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years. 2 He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, but not like the kings of Israel who preceded him. 3 King Shalmaneser of Assyria attacked him, and Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute. 4 But the king of Assyria caught Hoshea in a conspiracy: He had sent envoys to So king of Egypt and had not paid tribute to the king of Assyria as in previous years. Therefore the king of Assyria arrested him and put him in prison. 5 The king of Assyria invaded the whole land, marched up to Samaria, and besieged it for three years.

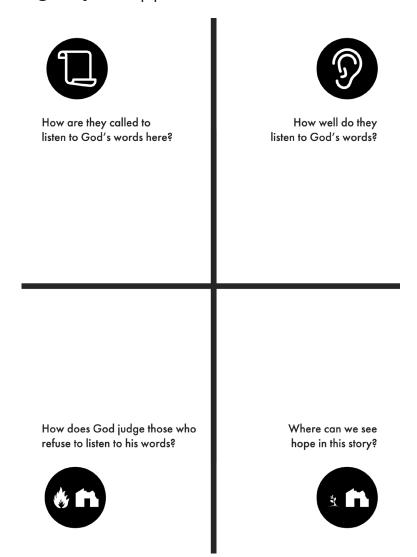
6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria. He deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them in Halah, along the Habor (Gozan's river), and in the cities of the Medes. 7 This disaster happened because the people of Israel sinned against the Lord their God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt and because they worshiped other gods. 8 They lived according to the customs of the nations that the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites and according to what the kings of Israel did. 9 The Israelites secretly did things against the Lord their God that were not right. They built high places in all their towns from watchtower to fortified city. 10 They set up for themselves sacred pillars and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree. 11 They burned incense there on all the high places just like the nations that the Lord had driven out before them had done. They did evil things, angering the Lord. 12 They served idols, although the Lord had told them, "You must not do this." 13 Still, the Lord warned Israel and Judah through every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commands and statutes according to the whole law I commanded your ancestors and sent to you through my servants the prophets."

Read 2 Kings 17:1-6.

Based on these six verses alone, why would you assume that Samaria was captured?

Read 2 Kings 17:7-23.

This is one of those rare passages in Kings where there's a moment of exposition-not just describing what happened, but explaining why it happened.



How do these verses help us to understand why Samaria was captured?

Second Kings 17:7–23 is a significant passage in 1–2 Kings. These verses describe the exile as the result of idolatry. This idea of the destructive nature of idols is all throughout the Bible, and links to a larger pattern throughout Scripture.

Read Psalm 115. How does this Psalm help us to understand the result of idolatry in 2 Kings 17?

How is this true in your own life?

What is the spiritual result of the Assyrian resettlement of Samaria, from 2 Kings 17:24–41?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

How did the Thessalonian church avoid the same sins (and judgment) as the people in 2 Kings 17?

How do you need to "turn from idols to serve the living and true God"?

WEEK FIVE



Hezekiah: Faithfulness and Folly

2 Kings 18-20

18:1 In the third year of Israel's King Hoshea son of Elah, Hezekiah son of Ahaz became king of Judah. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. 3 He did what was right in the Lord's sight just as his ancestor David had done. 4 He removed the high places, shattered the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake that Moses made, for until then the Israelites were burning incense to it. It was called Nehushtan. 5 Hezekiah relied on the Lord God of Israel; not one of the kings of Judah was like him, either before him or after him. 6 He remained faithful to the Lord and did not turn from following him but kept the commands the Lord had commanded Moses.

7 The Lord was with him, and wherever he went he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. 8 He defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its borders, from watchtower to fortified city. 9 In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Israel's King Hoshea son of Elah, Assyria's King Shalmaneser marched against Samaria and besieged it. 10 The Assyrians captured it at the end of three years. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Israel's King Hoshea, Samaria was captured. 11 The king of Assyria deported the Israelites to Assyria and put them in Halah, along the Habor (Gozan's river), and in the cities of the Medes, 12 because they did not listen to the Lord their God but violated his covenant—all he had commanded Moses the servant of the Lord. They did not listen, and they did not obey.

Read 2 Kings 18:1-8.

Hezekiah is described as a righteous king who does what is right in the eyes of the Lord, "according to all that David his father had done" (18:3). In what ways do you see Hezekiah surpassing the other good kings of Judah?

Read 2 Kings 20:1-11.

How would you describe the tone of Hezekiah's prayer, in verse 3?

Why does the Lord answer Hezekiah's prayer?



Does Hezekiah seem to trust in God's word here?

Read 2 Kings 20:12-21.

What do you think was Hezekiah's motivation for his showand-tell time?

How did Isaiah confront Hezekiah?



What does the difference between Hezekiah's words and thoughts suggest to us, from verse 19?



Why do you think this is the last story that we get of Hezekiah's life?

In chapter 18, we read that: "Hezekiah relied on the Lord God of Israel; not one of the kings of Judah was like him, either before him or after him. He remained faithful to the Lord and did not turn from following him but kept the commands the Lord had commanded Moses". How do these two stories, and Hezekiah's mixed motivations, square with this assessment?

Read Matthew 6:19-21. How do you think Hezekiah would have heard these words?

We can't know what was really going on in Hezekiah's heart, and whether he stayed faithful through to the end of his reign (though we assume so, in spite of these concerning moments, because of the Bible's assessment of him). But Hebrews 13:8 says that: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." We can have assurance that our king will never change, or waver—he will always be a faithful, loving king to us. How is that a comfort to you at the moment?

WEEK SIX



Josiah: Teenage Revival 2 Kings 22-23

22:1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. 2 He did what was right in the Lord's sight and walked in all the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn to the right or the left.

3 In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent the court secretary Shaphan son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, to the Lord's temple, saying, 4 "Go up to the high priest Hilkiah so that he may total up the silver brought into the Lord's temple—the silver the doorkeepers have collected from the people. 5 It is to be given to those doing the work—those who oversee the Lord's temple. They in turn are to give it to the workmen in the Lord's temple to repair the damage. 6 They are to give it to the carpenters, builders, and masons to buy timber and quarried stone to repair the temple. 7 But no accounting is to be required from them for the silver given to them since they work with integrity."

8 The high priest Hilkiah told the court secretary Shaphan, "I have found the book of the law in the Lord's temple," and he gave the book to Shaphan, who read it. 9 Then the court secretary Shaphan went to the king and reported, "Your servants have emptied out the silver that was found in the temple and have given it to those doing the work—those who oversee the Lord's temple." 10 Then the court secretary Shaphan told the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book," and Shaphan read it in the presence of the king.

11 When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. 12 Then he commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, the court secretary Shaphan, and the king's servant Asaiah, 13 "Go and inquire of the Lord for me, for the people, and for all Judah about the words in this book that has been found. For great is the Lord's wrath that is kindled against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words of this book in order to do everything written about us."

Read 2 Kings 22:1-13.

How would you summarise Josiah's reign, based on these verses?

How is the Book of the Law discovered during Josiah's reign? Why does its discovery provoke the reaction that it does from Josiah?



What does the Lord's response to Josiah in 22:14–20 reveal about Josiah's character?

Despite all of Josiah's reforms, God declares that exile is still ordained for Judah (23:26–27). According to these verses, why are Josiah's reforms insufficient to avert this disaster?

Here, as throughout the Bible, God's Word is the initiating spark that leads to renewal. In the New Testament, God's kingdom is advanced as the Word of God is proclaimed (e.g., Acts 6:7, "The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem").

How do you need to "re-discover" the word of God and its call on your life at the moment?

Read 2 Kings 23:21-27.

In what ways was Israel a spiritual mess?



How was Josiah being a faithful king here?

In 2 Kings 23, a number of Josiah's reforms are listed. We hear about a covenant renewal ceremony, the purging of idols, and the first Passover since the time of the judges. What strikes you as the greatest of Josiah's accomplishments in this chapter? Why?

What hope can you see in these verses?



Read Hebrews 4:9-16. What does this say to us about why we should value the word of God?

WEEK SEVEN



Hope in the Rubble 2 Kings 24-25

25:1 In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon advanced against Jerusalem with his entire army. They laid siege to the city and built a siege wall against it all around. 2 The city was under siege until King Zedekiah's eleventh year. 3 By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that the common people had no food. 4 Then the city was broken into, and all the warriors fled at night by way of the city gate between the two walls near the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans surrounded the city. As the king made his way along the route to the Arabah, 5 the Chaldean army pursued him and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. Zedekiah's entire army left him and scattered. 6 The Chaldeans seized the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. 7 They slaughtered Zedekiah's sons before his eyes. Finally, the king of Babylon blinded Zedekiah, bound him in bronze chains, and took him to Babylon.

8 On the seventh day of the fifth month—which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guards, a servant of the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. 9 He burned the Lord's temple, the king's palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem; he burned down all the great houses. 10 The whole Chaldean army with the captain of the guards tore down the walls surrounding Jerusalem. 11 Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guards, deported the rest of the people who remained in the city, the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the population. 12 But the captain of the guards left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and farmers.

This is the judgment that the whole book has been leading towards: Jerusalem and Judah being taken captive into exile.

Read 2 Kings 25:1-21.

For Israel, these would have been some of the darkest and most hopeless words they could imagine. What are some of the specific words and images that you think would have hit them the hardest?

How does verse 24:20 help us understand why this happened?

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"So Judah was taken into exile out of its land" (25:21). What do you think it would have been like if you'd lived through this horrific time?

25:21 is a final summary statement, where almost all hope seems to have been removed: "So Judah went into exile from its land." But what hope could there be, even in the fact that it's still called "its land"?

Read 2 Kings 25:27-30.

How do we see the words of 2 Samuel 7:15-16 still at play here?



Why do you think that the book finishes with this story?

How does this coda give us a subtle note of hope, after all that's gone before?



Since God has promised that his presence will reside in the temple, what message is sent when the temple is destroyed?

The destruction of the temple seemed to be the end of any hope that God would dwell among his people, initially represented by the garden of Eden and the tabernacle. But that was never going to be the end of the story.

How do John 1:14 and Revelation 21:3 help us to see where all of this story was heading, and how God would dwell with his people?

What's one thing you've learned or been challenged by from your study of 2 Kings, that you want to take away with you?

PRAYER POINTS

