

引言 INTRODUCTION

“I would have done it differently if I had known the outcome earlier.” Sometimes we regret about a decision we made. We wish we could turn back the clock and pick a different option. Denmark philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once said: “Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.” A good example is the time you see your credit card statement. But it is too late to return the stuff you have bought. You have to live forward and pay the bill. You learn that you have to spend money more wisely. But some decisions have far-reaching consequence. God exercised judgment on Judah when His people kept ignoring His warnings. We will look at the last four kings today. They ruled for a total of twenty-three years. Let us sort out their relationship first. Jehoahaz (AZ) succeeded his father Josiah to the throne. AZ later died in Egypt. Pharaoh Neco picked AZ’s older brother Jehoiakim (Kim) as the next king. After Kim rested in peace, his son Jehoiachin (A-Chin) was installed. By then Babylon grew stronger, and it laid siege to Jerusalem. A-Chin and many people surrendered. Another son of Josiah, Zedekiah (Kai) was made a puppet king. Sometime later, Babylon attacked again and conquered Jerusalem. Judah then ceased to exist. Kai and his people were sent into exile. There is an eternal truth even in this series of sad stories: God is the light when light is most needed.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 盼望的破滅 Hope Was Lost

The history of Judah closed with one tragedy after another. Hope was lost due some recurring problems. None of the last four Judah kings walked with the Lord. The author gives them the same comments: this king “**did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as [previous king(s)] had done.**” (2 Kings 23:32, 37; 24: 9, 19) It did not matter what great works they had done. Ultimately God will examine if there is any eternal value in what they did. Those four kings lived only for themselves but not for the Lord. We will examine them one by one.

A. 約哈斯 Jehoahaz (AZ)

AZ was on the throne for only three short months. He completely reversed the spiritual reform his father Josiah did, and went back the wicked way. AZ followed the anti-Egypt policy of Josiah. Pharaoh Neco later attacked Jerusalem, and he took AZ to Egypt. Neco then took a lot of treasure from Judah as a penalty. Subsequently, Neco appointed Kim, the older brother of AZ, as a replacement. AZ eventually died in Egypt.

B. 約雅敬 Jehoiakim (Kim)

Kim continued to pay tribute to Egypt to ensure peace. He got the money by imposing heavy tax on his people. In his book, prophet Jeremiah records other bad things Kim did. He lived in luxury while oppressing the poor. He also persecuted the prophets God sent to convict him. Therefore, God sent judgment to Judah just like He did before. This time, God used Babylon. This rising

Empire successfully conquered Assyria and later prevailed over Egypt. Babylon then superseded Egypt as the new master of Judah. We see a familiar name in 2 Chronicles 36:6-7 – **6 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked him and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon. 7 Nebuchadnezzar also took to Babylon articles from the temple of the Lord and put them in his temple there.** That was 605 BC. It marked the beginning of the 70 years of Babylonian exile as Jeremiah prophesied. That was the first of the three waves of Exile. Daniel and his three friends were among the people being captured. They later served in the Babylonian palace. After Kim was imprisoned for three years, he was allowed to go home. About that time, Pharaoh Neco resisted an invasion from Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar then returned home to regroup. Kim seized the opportunity to align with Egypt, a previous enemy, to fight off Babylon's control. It turned out to be an unwise plan. Nebuchadnezzar later dispatched his troop, along with soldiers from colonies in the region to punish Judah. Eventually, Kim rested in peace. His son A-Chin was picked as the next king.

C. 約雅斤 Jehoiachin (A-Chin)

Just like AZ did, A-Chin reigned for only three months. Babylon surrounded Jerusalem again to retaliate for the betrayal of Kim. A-Chin reasoned that he could no longer count on Egypt. The only option would be to surrender. Nebuchadnezzar easily capture A-Chin and the royal family. He also rewarded himself in the same trip. Look at 2 Kings 24:13-14 – **13 As the Lord had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed all the treasures from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace, and took away all the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the Lord. 14 He carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans – a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.** Besides treasures, Nebuchadnezzar also took away prominent and skillful people. This was the second exile. Historians told us that the Babylonians gave war slaves opportunities to serve in their country to win their loyalty. With A-Chin gone, Nebuchadnezzar installed Kai, the remaining son of AZ, as the last Judah king.

D. 西底家 Zedekiah (Kai)

Kai ruled in the final eleven years of Judah. He was weak and indecisive. He asked Jeremiah to consult God, hoping that the Lord would rescue his country. God gave Kai two choices: resist Babylon and perish, or surrender and live. Kai did not like the message, so much so that he put Jeremiah in prison and tortured him. Kai listened to his officials instead. Just then a new Pharaoh came with his army and the Babylonians retreated. The people of Judah thought help had arrived. But Nebuchadnezzar returned with a full force. The troop eventually breached the wall of Jerusalem. Kai ran for his life, but failed. 2 Kings 25:6-7 tell us: **6 and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. 7 They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.** What a horrific treatment! The soldiers completed the invasion with looting, killing, deporting and burning. 2 Chronicles 36:18-20 add: **18 He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. 19 They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. 20 He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the**

sword, and they became servants to him and his sons... Many accessories in the temple were made of precious metals. They became plunders of the enemies. A magnificent building became a ruin. Everything was either stolen or destroyed.

2. 盼望在於神 Hope Is in The Lord

Now Judah was erased from history. Hope was lost. But that was not the end in God's plan. Very often, God messages to the prophets contain two parts. First, it was a warning of judgment. But the second part was a message of hope. One day, God would bring His people back. Their hope was not in their leaders, their resources or foreign nations. Their hope was in the Lord.

A. 神的應許 God's Promises

There is hope because God always fulfills His promises. He is mighty to save, but He is also mighty to slay. God's people suffered because they ignored His warning. Look at 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 – **15 The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.** If anyone has the right to say: "I told you so!" that will be God. After the northern kingdom lost to Assyria, the people of Judah had about 120 years to avoid the same destiny. But they did not learn the lesson. Eventually time ran out. God asked Jeremiah to write down a final call for repentance. King Zedekiah was the king at that time. He disliked the message that he cut the scroll with a knife and burned it in a fire. But that would not alter God's plan. The Bible says Jesus will return. It will surely happen. People either accept Jesus' forgiveness, or they will have to bear the eternal consequence. Are you ready? Are your family members and friends ready? As we make plans, we should always keep in mind that Jesus can come back at any moment. This world is not our heaven.

God gave people hope even in the midst of judgment. He is always gracious to forgive when His people confess their sins. Back then when Solomon dedicated the temple, he prayed in 1 Kings 8:48-49 – **48 "and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; 49 then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause."** Solomon predicted that some of his descendants would become slaves in foreign land. But he might not expect a massive exile, and that his nation and God's temple would lay in ruin. Solomon begged God to give His people an opportunity to repent. The same message echoes in various prophetic books. God's forgiving grace is always there. There is no sin big enough that Jesus cannot pardon. There is no sinner too wicked that Jesus' blood cannot cleanse. God calls us to preach this message of hope. God condemns sins but He welcomes sinners. So should we.

B. 神的護佑 God's Providence

God's promises give us hope. He will complete everything He said. Sometimes, God carries out His plan through His providence. In a narrow sense, God's providence happens when He intervenes with His supernatural power. We see many miracles in the Bible. God divided the Red

Sea to allow His people to walk on dry ground. God killed the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night and healed Hezekiah's terminal disease. We see God's providence in play even in the final page of Judah's history. It says in 2 Kings 24:2 that "The Lord sent Babylonians (and their allies) ... to destroy Judah." Verse 20 of the same chapter reads: It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence... Also, 2 Chronicles 36:17 says Babylon could easily defeat Judah because: "...God handed them all over to Nebuchadnezzar." God accomplished His plans through human means. The Bible is more than a historical record of Israel. It is a testimony of God's work among His people. We can get depressed when we watch the news. We see the Delta variant, inflation, violence, natural disasters and threats from foreign enemies. Fear not, for God is still in full control of our world. A few historical events come to mind: the survival of the Pilgrims when they arrived in America in 1620, the two World Wars and other major battles, the re-establishment of the country of Israel in 1948, etc. God is still working even today. He rules over the universe from eternity to eternity. Our hope is in Him.

God gave us signs of His providence even when Judah came to an end. Read 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 – 22 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: 23 "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you – may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up." There are a few fascinating things here. Cyrus (another name for him is Darius) was the Persian king who conquered Babylon in 539 BC. Who would have thought that the mighty Empire of Babylon came to an end just a few decades after it defeated Judah? It so happened that Cyrus adopted a policy of religious tolerance. He allowed refugees to go back to their home country and practiced their religions. Therefore, he encouraged the Israelites to head back. He also returned the articles Nebuchadnezzar seized from the temple. Cyrus even praised Jehovah for giving him success. All that occurred right at seventy years after the first Babylonian exile. Was everything coincidental? Of course not! It was because "the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus." There was a spiritual cause behind the scene. God can orchestrate leaders and nations, and He can bypass natural laws to fulfill His plans.

結論 CONCLUSION

God is the light when light is most needed. Even in the darkest moment, God can still be found. As we wrap up our studies of the kings, let us recap a few spiritual lessons we have learned. First, God is sovereign. He achieves His plans despite our circumstances and people's disobedience. Second, God is faithful. He will fulfill His promises no matter how our world may change. Third, God is righteous. Sins have to be accounted for, either in this life or in eternity. Fourth, God is merciful. He gives us opportunities to repent even in His judgment. Fifth, God is glorious. He would not allow anyone to blemish His name. Sixth, humans are sinful. We can easily become prideful and stumble in our sins. Seventh, humans are weak. That is why we need constant reminder from God's Word. We must make up our mind to follow God.

引言 INTRODUCTION

「早知今日，何必當初。」有時我們會為之前所做的決定感到後悔。我們真希望可以時光倒流並選擇不同的路。丹麥哲學家齊克果曾說過：「生命只能從回顧中領悟，但必須在前瞻中展開。」一個很好的例子是當你看到信用卡帳單的時候。但是買回來的東西已經無法退回去了。你只好支付賬單，並提醒自己不能亂花錢。但有些決定卻有深遠的影響。當神的子民一直無視祂的警告時，神便執行對猶大的審判。今天我們來看看最後的四位君王。他們共統治了二十三年。我們先搞清楚他們的關係。約哈斯繼承了他父親約西亞的王位。約哈斯後來在埃及去世。法老尼哥挑擇了約哈斯的哥哥約雅敬作為下一任的王。約雅敬安息後，他的兒子約雅斤繼位。那時巴比倫變得更強大，它包圍了耶路撒冷。約雅斤和很多人選擇投降。約西亞的另一個兒子西底家被立為傀儡王。過了一段時間，巴比倫再次進攻並征服了耶路撒冷。猶大國從此不復存在。西底家和他的人民被擄。即使在這一連串悲慘的事情中，我們看到一個永恆的真理：當世界最需要光的時候，神就是那光。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 盼望的破滅 Hope Was Lost

猶大的歷史以一場又一場的悲劇結束。由於一些反復出現的問題，盼望破滅了。猶大的最後四位君王都沒有與主同行。作者給了他們同樣的評語：**[這個王]「行耶和華眼中看為惡的事，效法 [前王] 一切所行的。」**（列王記下 23:32, 37；24:9, 19）無論他們做了什麼偉大的事，最終神會評價他們所做的事是否有永恆的價值。那四個王只為自己而活，不是為神而活。我們將逐一看看他們的事跡。

A. 約哈斯 Jehoahaz

約哈斯在位僅短短三個月。他徹底扭轉了他父親約西亞所做的靈命更新，走回了邪惡的道路。約哈斯延續了約西亞的反埃及政策。法老尼哥後來攻擊耶路撒冷，並把約哈斯帶去埃及。尼哥從猶大拿了很多財寶作為懲罰。隨後，尼哥任命約哈斯的哥哥約雅敬成為王。約哈斯最終死於埃及。

B. 約雅敬 Jehoiakim

約雅敬繼續向埃及進貢以確保太平。他通過對人民徵收重稅來獲得這筆錢。在耶利米記中，先知耶利米記錄了約雅敬所做的其他壞事。他壓迫窮人，但自己卻過著奢

華的生活。他還迫害神派來責備他的先知。因此，像以前一樣，神向猶大發出審判。這一次，神使用了巴比倫。這個崛起的帝國成功征服了亞述，後來又控制了埃及。於是巴比倫取代了埃及成為猶大的新主人。我們在歷代志下 36:6-7 中看到一個熟悉的名字：**6 巴比倫王尼布甲尼撒上來攻擊他，用銅鍊鎖著他，要將他帶到巴比倫去。7 尼布甲尼撒又將耶和華殿裡的器皿帶到巴比倫，放在他神的廟裡。**那是公元前 605 年。正如耶利米所預言的，它標誌著巴比倫流亡 70 年的開始。那是被擄的三波浪潮中的第一波。但以理和他的三個朋友都在被抓的人之中。他們後來在巴比倫宮廷中服事。約雅敬被監禁三年後，他被允許回家。大約在那個時候，法老尼哥成功地抵抗巴比倫的入侵。尼布甲尼撒然後回家重整兵力。約雅敬抓住機會與以前的敵人埃及結盟，以對抗巴比倫。結果證明這是一個不明智的行動。尼布甲尼撒後來派遣他的軍隊和附近殖民地的士兵懲罰猶大。最終，約雅敬安息了。他的兒子約雅斤被選為下一任的王。

C. 約雅斤 Jehoiachin

就像約哈斯一樣，約雅斤只做了三個月的王。巴比倫再次包圍耶路撒冷以報復約雅敬的背叛。約雅斤估計埃及已經靠不住了，唯一的選擇便是投降。尼布甲尼撒輕而易舉地俘擄了約雅斤和王室人員。他也在同一次的軍事行動中順便拿了一大筆財富。看列王紀下 24:13-14：**13 巴比倫王將耶和華殿和王宮裡的寶物都拿去了，將以色列王所羅門所造耶和華殿裡的金器都毀壞了，正如耶和華所說的；14 又將耶路撒冷的眾民和眾首領，並所有大能的勇士，共一萬人，連一切木匠、鐵匠都擄了去；除了國中極貧窮的人以外，沒有剩下的。**除了財寶，尼布甲尼撒還帶走了一些有名望的人和技工。這是第二次的被擄。歷史學家告訴我們，巴比倫人給戰俘在他們的國家中服務以收買人心。約雅斤被帶走後，尼布甲尼撒將約哈斯剩下的兒子西底家立為猶大的最後一位君王。約西亞

D. 西底家 Zedekiah

西底家統治了猶大國的最後十一年。他軟弱而且優柔寡斷。他請耶利米求問神，希望神拯救他的國家。神給了西底家兩個選擇：抵抗巴比倫而滅亡，或者投降而生存。西底家不喜歡這個信息，他甚至把耶利米關進監獄並折磨他。西底家反而聽從了他的官員。就在這時，一個新的法老帶著他的軍隊來了，巴比倫人暫時撤退。猶大人以為救星來了。但是尼布甲尼撒重整旗鼓。軍隊最終攻破了耶路撒冷的城牆。西底家逃命，但後來被抓。25:6-7 告訴我們：**6 迦勒底人就抓住王，帶他到在利比拉的巴比倫王那裡審判他。7 在西底家眼前殺了他的眾子，並且剗了西底家的眼睛，用銅鍊鎖著他，帶到巴比倫去。**多麼殘忍的待遇！士兵們隨後進行搶掠、殺戮、驅逐和焚燒。歷代志下 36:18-20 補充：**18 迦勒底王將神殿裡的大小器皿與耶和華殿裡的財寶，並王和眾首領的財寶，都帶到巴比倫去了。19 迦勒底人焚燒神**

的殿，拆毀耶路撒冷的城牆，用火燒了城裡的宮殿，毀壞了城裡寶貴的器皿。**20** 凡脫離刀劍的，迦勒底王都擄到巴比倫去，作他和他子孫的僕婢…。聖殿裡有許多用貴重金屬做的裝飾。所有東西都成為敵人的戰利品。一座宏偉的建築物變成了廢墟。一切不是被搶光就是被毀壞。

2. 盼望在於神 Hope Is in The Lord

猶大國從歷史中消失。盼望破滅了。但神的計劃還沒有結束。很多時候，神給先知的信息包含兩個部份。第一部份是有關審判的警告。但是第二部份是盼望的信息。有一天，神會把祂的子民帶回來。他們的盼望不是在於他們的領袖、他們的資源或外國勢力。他們的盼望是在於神。

A. 神的應許 God's Promises

盼望依然存在，因為神一定會實現祂的應許。祂有能力拯救，祂也有能力毀滅。神的百姓受苦是因為他們忽視了祂的警告。看 歷代志下 36:15-16：**15** 耶和華他們列祖的神因為愛惜自己的民和他的居所，從早起來差遣使者去警戒他們。**16** 他們卻嘻笑神的使者，藐視他的言語，譏誚他的先知，以致耶和華的忿怒向他的百姓發作，無法可救。如果任何人有權利說：「我不是跟你講過嘛！」那就是神。北國被亞述打敗後，猶大國有大約 120 年的時間避免同樣的命運。但他們沒有汲取教訓。神的時間終於臨到了。神要求耶利米寫下悔改的最後通牒。約雅敬是當時的王。他不喜歡那個信息，於是他用刀割破書卷並丟在火中。但這不會改變神的計劃。聖經說耶穌會再來。這事情必然會發生。人們要不然接受耶穌赦罪的恩典，要不然就要獨自承擔永恆的後果。你準備好了嗎？你的家人和朋友準備好了嗎？當我們制定計劃時，應該時刻牢記耶穌可能隨時會回來。這個世界並不是我們的天堂。

即使在審判中，神也給人盼望。當神的子民承認他們的罪時，祂總是願意饒恕。當所羅門奉獻聖殿時，他在列王紀上 8:48-49 中禱告：**48** 「他們若在擄到之地盡心盡性歸服你，又向自己的地，就是你賜給他們列祖之地和你所選擇的城，並我為你名所建造的殿禱告，**49** 求你在天上你的居所垂聽他們的禱告祈求，為他們伸冤。」所羅門預言他的一些後裔會成為異國的奴隸。但他可能無法想像到大規模的被擄，與他的國家和神的聖殿會被毀滅。所羅門懇求神給祂的子民悔改的機會。同樣的信息也出現在不同的先知書。神饒恕的恩典一直存在。沒有大到耶穌不能赦免的罪。也沒有任何罪人邪惡到一個地步，是耶穌的寶血不能洗淨的。神呼召我們傳揚這個盼望的信息。神恨惡罪惡，但祂接納罪人。我們也應該如此。

B. 神的護佑 God's Providence

神的應許給我們盼望。神會完成祂所說的一切。有時，神會通過祂的護佑來成就祂的計劃。狹義上，神的護佑是指神以超自然的方式介入歷史。我們在聖經中看到許多神蹟。神將紅海分開，讓祂的子民在乾地上行走。神在一夜之間殺死了 185,000 名亞述士兵，並治癒了希西家的絕症。即使在猶大歷史的最後一頁，我們也看到神的護佑。列王紀下 24:2 說：「**耶和華使迦勒底軍（和他們的盟友）來... 毀滅猶大**」迦勒底是巴比倫的另一個稱呼。同一章的第 20 節寫道：**因此耶和華的怒氣在耶路撒冷和猶大發作，以致將人民從自己面前趕出**。此外，歷代志下 36:17 說巴比倫可以輕鬆擊敗猶大，因為：「**...耶和華將他們都交在迦勒底王手裡**。」神藉著人來完成祂的計劃。聖經不僅僅是以色列的歷史記錄，而且是神在祂子民中作工的見證。當我們看新聞時，我們可能會感到沮喪。我們看到了 新冠病毒的 Delta 變種、通貨膨脹、暴力、自然災害和來自外敵的威脅。不要害怕，因為神仍然完全掌管一切。我想到了幾個歷史上例子：1620 年清教徒抵達美國時神奇地生還，兩次世界大戰和其他重要的戰役，1948 年以色列國被重建等等。直到今天，神仍在作工。祂從永恆到永恆治理整個宇宙。我們的盼望是在於神。

即使在猶大亡國之時，神也讓我們看到祂護佑的跡象。閱讀歷代志下 36:22-23：**22 波斯王古列元年，耶和華為要應驗藉耶利米口所說的話，就激動波斯王古列的心，使他下詔通告全國，說：23 「波斯王古列如此說：耶和華天上的神已將天下萬國賜給我，又囑咐我在猶大的耶路撒冷為他建造殿宇。你們中間凡作他子民的，可以上去，願耶和華他的神與他同在**。」這裡有一些很令人驚訝的事情。古列（他的另一個名字是大利烏）是公元前 539 年征服巴比倫的波斯國王。誰能想到強大的巴比倫帝國在擊敗猶大 70 年後就結束了？恰巧古列採取了宗教寬容政策。他允許難民返回他們的故鄉並信奉他們的宗教。因此，他鼓勵以色列人回家。他還歸還了尼布甲尼撒從聖殿中奪取的物品。古列甚至把他的成就歸功給耶和華。這一切都發生在第一次巴比倫擄走猶大人七十年之後。所有事情都是巧合嗎？當然不是！這是因為耶和華「激動波斯王古列的心」。這背後有一個屬靈的原因。神可以使用不同的領袖和國家，祂也可以超越自然法則來實現祂的計劃。

結論 CONCLUSION

當世界最需要光的時候，神就是那光。即使在最黑暗的時刻，我們仍然可以尋找到神。當我們結束學習君王的生平時，我們可以回顧一下所學到的一些屬靈教訓。首先，神有主權。不論環境如何，人們是否順服，神還是會完成祂的計劃。第二，神是信實的。無論我們的世界怎樣變化，神都會實現祂的應許。第三，神是公義的。祂會追討人的罪，不是在今生便是在永恆。第四，神是恩慈的。縱然在審判之中，祂也給我們悔改的機會。第五，神是榮耀的。祂不會容忍任何人羞辱祂的名。第六，人是有罪性的。我們很容易被驕傲所勝並在罪中跌倒。第七，人是軟弱的。這就是為什麼我們需要經常被神的話語提醒。我們必須下定決心跟隨神。