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Zedekiah Ruled For 11 Years from 598/597 to 586 BC



Nebuchadnezzar looted the city of **Yerushalayim** and removed the leaders of the Israelites. **Jehoiakim**, after a three-month reign, was taken into captivity with **the second deportation of exiles** to Babylon in 597 BC (**Second Kings 24:13-15**). His uncle **Zedekiah** was installed as Judah's vassal king, but there was little left over which to rule.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Tziyon for eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah (Second Kings 24:18). She was from Libnah. Second Kings 23:31 also mentions she was the mother of Jehoahaz, making them full brothers and the sons of Hamutal and Josiah. The other sons of Josiah had different mothers and were half brothers. He did evil in the eyes of ADONAI, just as Jehoiakim had done (52:1-2). Zedekiah learned nothing of Ha'Shem's judgment from any of his brothers and suffered accordingly.

It was because of Ha'Shem's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end God thrust Zion and Judah from His presence (52:3). The persistence of Zedekiah in his evil ways brought down upon his kingdom the manifestation of Ha'Shem's anger. From a human perspective, the thing that brought about destruction of the Temple, **Jerusalem, Judah** and resulting exile was **Zedekiah's** rebellion against the king of Babylon. From a divine perspective all this came because of **Zedekiah's** wickedness and rebellion against **YHVH**. But in reality, both of these worked in the providence of **God**.

The final scene in this tragedy was enacted in the reign of the ill-fated **Zedekiah** (his throne

name) or **Mattaniah** (**his** personal name), who ruled from 597 to 586 BC (**Second Kings 24:17 to 25:7; Second Chronicles 36:11-21**). **His eleven-year** rule was marked by continual social and political unrest. The die had been cast for Judah's unavoidable fall. **He** was **Josiah's** third son and was only 21 years old when Nebuchadnezzar appointed him. An evil king, **his** reign was marred by spiritual decline and political instability. **Zedekiah** was too weak to control **his** nobles and too fearful of public opinion. It seems clear that many in Judah still regarded Jehoiachin as the rightful king and hoped for his speedy return. **He** allowed **his** nobles to take control of events that brought about Judah's destruction.

Zedekiah's reign proved that Judah had not learned her lesson about submission to Nebuchadnezzar and within eleven years she was demolished. **He** rebelled against Babylon, was captured, forced to watch the execution of **his** sons, blinded, then **bound in shackles** and taken into captivity in **the third deportation of exiles** where **he** died **in prison**.

Back in **Yerushalayim**, after each of the first three deportations, the pro-Egypt party was hard at work. They always seemed to think that if they could just align Judah with Egypt that they would be protected. This never materialized, but they kept trying. It was the pro-Egypt party that kept **Zedekiah** off balance for much of **his** reign. And it was the pro-Egypt party that was eventually responsible for taking **Jeremiah** and **Baruch** hostage and forcibly took them down to Egypt against their will after the assassination of Gedaliah.

In 594/593 BC **Zedekiah's** trip to **Babylon (51:59)** may have been to explain away the plots against **Babylon (27:2-3)** and disguise **his** loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar. Afterwards **Zedekiah** was allowed to return to Judah and reign, only later to rebel more overtly.

We now turn to the cluster of events in **Jeremiah's** ministry that took place in 594 BC. The prelude to these events took place in Babylon in December 595 or January 594 BC. At the time there was an attempted uprising against Nebuchadnezzar by some of the Babylonian military units. Nebuchadnezzar got word of it and put it down brutally. He boasted that he executed the ringleader with his own hands. But in the next few months a report of the attempt must have gotten back to **Jerusalem**, raising the hope that if the little states there in the west could combine forces, they might be able to throw off the domination of Nebuchadnezzar. There may also have hope for help from Egypt because a new pharaoh, Psammetichus II, had just come to the throne.²⁴⁵

That same year plans for revolt were discussed among Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon and Judah in **Zedekiah's** fourth year. False prophets both in **Judah** and in these small countries were encouraging revolt.

In 588 BC with the enthronement of another Pharaoh (Hophra) in Egypt, Judah was again enticed to revolt against Babylon. A coalition of vassal states (Judah, Tyre and Ammon) refused to pay tribute and remain under Babylon's control (**Jeremiah 52:3; Second Kings 24:20**). Nebuchadnezzar's response was swift and harsh. Therefore, the Babylonian army did not attack **Jerusalem** at once, but slowly eliminated the fortified cities throughout Judah to put down resistance for good (**34:6-7** and **38:4**).

In 587 BC hope came when the Egyptian army entered the Land. At Jerusalem, the Babylonians temporarily lifted the siege in order to meet the Egyptian threat (**37:5**). One senses in **Jeremiah** that hopes were high that the Egyptians would prevail (**34:8-11; 37:3-10**). **Yirmeyahu**, however, warned the people against undue optimism since the City of David was doomed. It was a very brief time, perhaps only a few weeks, when the Egyptians were defeated and the siege was resumed. Tziyon hung on for about another year. **Jeremiah** urged surrender and **Zedekiah** seemed willing (**38:14-23**) but feared to do so.

By 586 BC it was the third year of the siege and Nebuchadnezzar had returned to Jerusalem to finish the job. On the ninth of Tammuz, **in the nineteenth year of his reign (Second Kings 25:8)**, the walls of Yerushalayim were finally breached just as the supply of food ran out. **Zedekiah** and his family with some Judean troops managed to flee by night toward the Jericho plains, but were captured near Jericho and taken to Nebuchadnezzar's military headquarters in Riblah in central Syria. There, **Zedekiah's** sons were slain before his eyes, then he was blinded and taken in chains to Babylon where he died.

A month later Nebuzaradan, the commander of the royal bodyguard and acting under Nebuchadnezzar's orders, burned **the City** and broke down her walls. At the same time he rounded up many priests, military personnel and state officials, as well as some of the most prominent citizens. Some were taken to Nebuchadnezzar and executed at Riblah, while others were deported to Babylon. **Jerusalem** and the walled cities of Judah were left in ruins and nationhood for Judah had come to an end.