

# Concerning Eliakim, Otherwise Known as King Jehoiakim Jeremiah 22:13-19 and Second Kings 23:36 to 24:4

**DIG:** After his brother was deposed, Jehoiakim became king. What did he use slave labor for? What was his father, Josiah, like? How did Jehoiakim compare with his father? How could such a good king have such an evil and wicked son? What arrogant and selfish behavior on the part of Jehoiakim angered God. How did YHVH feel about the notion that displays of wealth indicated greatness in a ruler? How did Ha'Shem judge Eliakim's heart? What did the LORD say would become of Jehoiakim's "greatness" at the end of his life?

**REFLECT:** Which leader (religious, civic or world) has made a great impact, positively or negatively, on you by their life? By their death? Explain. How are believers supposed to react to governing authorities today (Romans 13)? What if the government commands you to do something that is contrary to the Scriptures?

**609 BC during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim**

Yirmeyahu presents the picture of a wicked, selfish, vain, cruel, greedy ruler; a man lacking every quality sought in a king, yet immensely proud of his achievements. The rabbis teach that Jehoiakim was a godless tyrant who committed atrocious sins and crimes. He is portrayed as living in incestuous relations with his mother, daughter-in-law, and stepmother, and was in the habit of murdering men, whose wives he then violated and whose property he seized. He also had tattooed his body (Leviticus 19:28).

Jeremiah condemned Jehoiakim more severely than any other king. Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old (two years older than his brother Jehoahaz) when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. Eliakim was his personal name, and Jehoiakim was his throne name. His mother's name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah, she was from Rumah. And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and chose the path of idolatry and self-reliance just as his predecessors had done (2 Kings 23:36-37). Jehoiakim was a weak ruler. This can be deduced by the fact that even though he was the eldest son of Josiah he was not chosen by the people of Y'hudah to succeed his father. Also Pharaoh Necho sensed that Eliakim would be easier to control than his younger brother.<sup>109</sup>

Woe to him who builds his place by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. **Forced labor was common among the Oriental kings. Such slavery was an offense against the Torah (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14-15); not even the king had the right to demand unpaid services from his subjects.** He said: I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms. Yirmeyahu describes Jehoiakim's great claims and plans. **So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red (22:13-14).** The interiors of Oriental homes of the better class were often splendid. Special pains were taken to decorate the ceilings. The ceilings, panels, and the doors were richly painted and gilded. The tasteful interlaced patterns were brilliant colors, **red** being one of the favorites.<sup>10</sup> This **palace** was discovered just south of **Jerusalem** and just north of **Bethlehem** in the mid 1960s.

**Jeremiah** now draws a comparison between **Jehoiakim** and his father **King Josiah** (see **Ca - Jehoiakim Ruled For 11 Years from 609/608 to 598 BC**). Trying to outdo either Solomon or the neighboring monarchs in luxury, **Jehoiakim** felt that the means of displaying true royalty was by excessive lavishness and outward display. As a result, **Jeremiah** asked a bitter, biting rhetorical question: **Did you become king because you are competing (Hebrew: *charah*) in cedar (22:15a)?** The same verb occurs in **12:5 run/compete with the horses**. In one respect it did equal other kings, in the cruel suppression and exploitation of his subjects.

But the basis of his father's royalty was different. **Did not your father have food and drink? Josiah enjoyed the material comforts of his regal status, but he also understood and performed the duties of a king. He did what was right and just, so, as a result, all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well (see Ai - Josiah Ruled For 31 Years from 640 to 609 BC). The practical aim of religion cannot be defined more succinctly.** The purpose of **Josiah's** royalty was to know **ADONAI** better and love Him more. **Is that not what it means to know Me?** declares the **LORD (22:15b-16)**. This was in great contrast to the contemptible **Jehoiakim** who followed a consistent pattern of injustice. **The prophet** asserts, along with John Calvin's judgment, that right knowledge of **God** comes through obedience.

But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood (**Jeremiah 26:20-23; Second Kings 24:4**) and on oppression and extortion (**22:17**). **One led to the other. The people were condemned so that the king might confiscate their estates.** He was exposed as one who imagines he is autonomous and does not need the Torah. He oppressed the very ones he was supposed to protect. And as a result of **Eliakim's** brazen wickedness, he would meet with an especially shameful end (see below).

During Jehoiakim's reign, in 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. But then he turned against Nebuchadnezzar, rebelled and unsuccessfully turned to Egypt for help. ADONAI sent Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite raiders and took advantage of Y'hudah's weakened condition later in Jehoiakim's reign. God sent these enemies against him to destroy Judah, in accordance with the word of the LORD proclaimed by His servants and prophets Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk. YHVH was removing the people from His presence (17:18, 20 and 23, 23:27) because of the sins of Manasseh and all that he had done, including the shedding of innocent blood, and Ha'Shem was not willing to forgive because they had not listened (Second Kings 24:1-4; Jeremiah 36:30-31).

This is what ADONAI says about Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: They will not mourn for him in his death, "Alas, my brother! Alas, my sister!" They will not mourn for him, no one will miss his passing, "Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor was good for nothing" (22:18)!

As the Babylonians were approaching to besiege Yerushalayim in 598 BC Jehoiakim conveniently died. We don't know exactly how it happened, but since he was rebelling against powerful Babylon he might have been assassinated in the hope that Judah might be disciplined lightly. Perhaps she was, for Yerushalayim and the Temple were not destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar only wanted to teach Judah and other vassal nations the awful consequences of rebellion against Babylon. Therefore, in **the second deportation** (see **Gt - In the Thirty-Seventh Year of the Exile Jehoiachin was Released from Prison**), the Babylonian king took 3,023 Jews as a warning against further rebellion.

Instead of the lavish funeral normally given a monarch, Jehoiakim, Jeremiah prophesied, would have the burial of a donkey - dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem, exposed to the heat of the day and the frost at night (22:19). The king was to be treated in death as any other worthless animal carcass, simply disposed of in order not to disrupt the City. To be deprived of burial was considered by the Jews one of the greatest dishonors that could be inflicted on a human being. It is interesting that **Second Kings 24:6 ASV** merely records that he slept with his fathers, without the usual mention of a burial. If Jeremiah did not have God's protection there is no way he could have gotten away with statements like this. ADONAI's prophet was dealing with the kings of Isra'el here, several of them, and he wasn't very tactful either.