



This week at Magdalen Road church we finished our series through the books of Chronicles. In 2 Chronicles 36 we sadly see much of what has been previously built falling apart, and yet as we saw at the end we are not left without hope.

We noted initially three things that unites these final four Kings:

1. United in false worship.

It is explicitly stated for three of them that they did evil in the eyes of the Lord and implied for the first one. This is a technical term speaking of false worship-taking false gods into the temple.

2. United in being political pawns

Rather than being a distinct light to the nations they are ruled over by the current global superpower. Israel looks remarkably insignificant and so, we might think, God looks remarkably insignificant too. Rather than the nations seeing what God is like, it simply looks like God is absent.

3. United in temple plundering

The temple is progressively destroyed as articles are carted into exile. Targeting the temple is a deliberate tactic to destroy the hearts of the people such that it looks like that their God has departed or is non-existent.

We then quickly looked at each of the 4 kings, noting salient points from each:

- a) Jehohaz** - the key thing to note is from here Israel essentially becomes a vassal state - ruled over by another nation. It is as if they're back in slavery to Egypt again and back to square 1.
- b) Jehoiakim** - the first bout of temple desecration happens as articles are plundered.
- c) Jehoiachin** - the first big deportation of people as an exile becomes a reality for the South.
- d) Zedekiah** - the Chronicler slows down and highlights some aspects for us to note, esp v12-14. He does not listen to God's word through Jeremiah, but rather becomes like the Pharaoh back in the Exodus - stiff-necked and hard-hearted. The king of God's people becomes like the archetypal-enemy of God's people.

We noted as well that we saw this denial of God's word being seen in both (a) rebellion but also then specifically in (b) rest. The land has not been allowed to thrive because God's words have been ignored and so it has to later enjoy the rest it needs to be fruitful. We noted the parallel in creation with how God made us and the need to live wisely and rest well. We can sleep because God does not. He is in charge and at work. We can rest.

Why hope?

We noted three timeless causes for hope from within the passage and then one as we considered the bigger picture and God's big over-arching story in the scriptures.

1. God will always keep a people for himself (v20)

The concept of 'remnant' is a theological term for the fact that God will always keep a people for himself. Because he's a God who makes covenant promises to his people, so he will always, however messy it looks, sustain a remnant to whom those promises are true. It's helpful for us in our time to remember this when the media love to point out that the church is shrinking etc, we must not to catastrophise!

Firstly gospel churches who are rooted on God's word are growing, but also secondly we can have a humble confidence that God's story is bigger than us and he will preserve a people for himself.

2. God's word is always trustworthy (v21)

It is striking that the prophecy to Jeremiah (Jer 25v11) is the basis upon which the people have confidence. God tells Jeremiah that the exile will last for 70 years and that is true- we can always trust what he says.

For each generation the challenge is to believe the word of God and build upon it. There will always be other things that we are tempted to trust in, that will make us look less weird or naive and perhaps a bit more popular but each generation must hold its nerve and trust what God says, rather than on the shifting sands of our culture.

3. God is always sovereign and powerful (v22-23)

Cyrus was almost certainly the most important and powerful man on the planet at the time and yet even his heart is in the hands of the Lord (Prov 21v1). God's sovereignty extends even to political leaders. However messy looks we can still trust that he is in charge and has his plans and purposes.

This gives us hope and encouragement to continue to pray for political leaders for example-that God would work in and through them.

4. The cross of Jesus

The People do return to the land and the story continues-remember the last couple of verses in Chronicles are then repeated in the book of Ezra. And in the land rebuilding happens the temple in Jerusalem is repaired but the old man cry because this was not as good as it was.

Turns out good plan of restoration is much more than simply to deal with earthly enemies like the Babylonians or the Romans... His plan is to deal with eternal enemies of sin and suffering and death. And so his plan culminates on a cross outside of Jerusalem as a man dies in the place of his people.

And it's here we see that he perfectly preserves a remnant from self, his word can always be trusted, and despite circumstances he is sovereign and powerful. It's in Jesus and his death and resurrection in our place that we can have true hope. And it's in Jesus that we see the land in Chronicles pointing ahead to the better land of the new heaven and the new earth. That is a hope to keep pressing on.

Here are some questions start your group off...

- What is hope? Do you agree that our culture currently feels pretty hopeless? Where do you look for hope? What keeps you going?
- How do we see much of what has been built in the book of Chronicles being dismantled in this chapter? Why is this allowed to happen?
- Look up the parable of the tenants in the vineyard. How do we see Jesus' story worked out under King Zedekiah? How do we in our treatment of Gods word parallel his at times?
- What three elements of hope can we see in the last few verses? How does each of these apply to us in our context?