

# The Righteous Judge

## FOCUS THOUGHT

God loves us enough to judge our rebellion.

## FOCUS VERSES

### II Chronicles 36:15–16

And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

## LESSON TEXT

### II Chronicles 36:11–21

11 Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

12 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD.

13 And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.

14 Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.

15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:

16 But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

17 Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.

18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon.

19 And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia:

21 To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.



## THE DANGER OF NO DISCIPLINE

Doctors and nurses scurried around the emergency cubical as a young mother attempted to calm her toddler. The child sobbed uncontrollably as nurses carefully removed the first-aid bandage from her charred and blistered hand. The damage was so severe, amputation would have to be considered. At best there would be permanent nerve damage that would be a reminder of the incident for as long as she lived.

As the staff wheeled the frightened child off to the operating room, the responding officer began asking the mother for additional information. The mother said her daughter had been electrocuted when she inserted a metal rod into the electrical junction box on the side of the warehouse where her husband worked. The mother and daughter were waiting for the father to get off work when the toddler found the piece of metal and began trying to pry the electrical cover open.

“Do you mean you just watched your daughter playing around the high-voltage box?” asked the officer.

“Yes,” answered the mother defensively, “I had warned her twice, but she was being stubborn. I don’t believe in nagging or spanking, so all I did was watch.”



### OUTLINE

#### I. Zeedekiah Became King of Judah

- A. He Did Evil in the Eyes of the Lord and His Heart Was Hardened
- B. He Defiled the Temple of the Lord
- C. Hardened Hearts Lead to Rebellion

#### II. THE LORD SENT MESSENGERS

- A. The People Mocked God’s Messengers
- B. The People Despised God’s Word
- C. God Will Compassionately Reach for Those Who Have Rebelled against Him

#### III. GOD JUDGED JUDAH’S REBELLION

- A. The Lord Sent the Babylonians
- B. The Babylonians Destroyed the Temple and Broke Down Jerusalem’s Wall
- C. God Will Judge Those Who Rebel against Him

#### IV. THOUGH GOD WILL JUDGE, HE ALSO WANTS TO PARDON

- A. He Loves Us Enough to Judge Us
- B. He Desires for Us to Turn from Our Rebellion and Receive His Pardon



### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

We tend to criticize the rebellious attitude or actions of others while brushing off our own sin as a mistake or a moment of weakness. Our sinful nature leads us along the path of sin, justification of certain behaviors, and the internal delineating of our value of the sin versus its consequences. The desire to do things our own way and the belief that we know best is a result of sin. Realizing this tendency is an important step in identifying the rebellious nature that resides in each of us. God “calls out” our sin not to shame us or punish us, but to bring us to repentance so we can be restored to Him.

## **I. ZEDEKIAH BECAME KING OF JUDAH**

Second Chronicles 36 contains the account of the heartbreaking demise of a nation. It is an iconic warning to humanity, the story of a nation and a king who disregarded God and blundered into oblivion. The king was twenty-year-old Zedekiah. While his tender age and inexperience may have contributed to his ultimate destruction, the Bible clearly delineates the core reasons for this king's failure. The account also explains why God felt the need to respond with righteous judgment. He would not stand by as His people disobeyed.

### **A. He Did Evil in the Eyes of the Lord and His Heart Was Hardened**

Second Chronicles 36:12 tells us that Zedekiah “did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself.” One translation says “he was a stubborn man.” The hardening of a heart is a frightening thing. It is like the deadening of nerve endings. People who begin down that path actually convince themselves to believe their own lies. This does almost irreparable damage. According to Proverbs 29:1, “He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

Zedekiah's “stiffened neck” and hard heart (II Chronicles 36:13) caused him to resist the prophet Jeremiah and even King Nebuchadnezzar. The result was complete chaos among all of the nation's leaders.

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» *How do God's rules serve as a protection against evil?*

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### **B. He Defiled the Temple of the Lord**

As can often be observed not only in Bible stories, but also in contemporary life, evil always takes people beyond innocent mistakes to an in-your-face kind of bad behavior. It was not enough to do what he wanted; Zedekiah had to do it in a way that showed disrespect toward God and His Word. Once the evil was set in motion, it eventually polluted the most important things in their lives. “All the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem” (II Chronicles 36:14).

### **C. Hardened Hearts Lead to Rebellion**

Satan, flesh, and sin are never content to simply do wrong; they are intent on being in charge. Thus, rebellion always follows unrepentance. Rebellion has often been glamorized, but when one rebels against benevolent leaders, the result is never good for the rebel. Like the toddler in our opening story, those who rebel will experience dire outcomes. But unlike the parent in our opening story, God will do something to salvage His people.

The above is a predictable pattern: (1) people do evil, (2) harden their heart, (3) disrespect spiritual authority, and (4) eventually rebel against God. Since the end of this pattern is self-deception and destruction, every believer would be wise to notice the early signs of unrepentant sin and then pay special attention when they begin to feel a rift between them and their local church or someone in leadership. These are red flags that, if ignored, mark the point at which the enemy begins to gain the upper hand and soon separates the sheep from the flock.

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» *What are some safety nets to help us avoid developing a hard heart?*

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## II. THE LORD SENT MESSENGERS

### A. The People Mocked God's Messengers

Since God is loving and merciful, He continually reaches for people who are caught in this downward spiral. His primary means of saving them is through words of warning sent through willing vessels. Second Chronicles 36:15–16 points out that “the LORD God of their fathers sent to them . . . messengers . . . but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” God sends messages until people stop listening. When people stop listening, there is no remedy. The only remedy is to heed God's warnings. This point underscores the importance of preaching and of having a teachable spirit.

Scripture is replete with stories that expose the arrogance and stubbornness of human nature. Noah's contemporaries laughed at the idea of judgment. David was ridiculed when he offered to kill Goliath. Children made fun of Elijah. Paul evidently had full-time detractors who followed him all over the world opposing him. And Jesus' ministry was plagued with accusers, questioners, and mockers. Ultimately, God in flesh was mocked while He was in the process of saving the world.

### B. The People Despised God's Word

Mocking messengers quickly leads to a disrespect for higher authority, and Judah was no exception; they “despised His words.” Just as a parent must help a child who despises their words to learn the value of respect, God had to do something to teach His people respect for His Word.

The United States has been “Exhibit A” in this arena. America was founded on biblical principles and has enjoyed incredible prosperity as a result. Many of those principles are etched into the stone on federal and state buildings. However, as culture began to reject biblical morals and values, educators, politicians, and courts began to systematically attack the Word of God. It has been challenged in the Pledge of Allegiance, on US currency, and on federal buildings. Many have even demanded that the Ten Commandments be removed from all public buildings. The Bible has been banned from being taught in public schools and even barred from some public venues.

And it is plain to those with any discernment that the results have been devastating. America is experiencing the rise of rebellion. The rule of law is diminishing. Flesh is running wild. Truth has been defined as relative, and our culture has been weakened on every level, all because a nation despised the Word of God.

The good news is that our churches and our personal lives need not follow the same deadly path. We can preserve our personal integrity and the integrity of our families and churches by maintaining high respect for the Word of God. Disregard for His Word will bring righteous judgment in a very organic way even if God does not choose to send specific judgment.

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» *Can you think of a contemporary example of someone who demonstrated a high regard for God's Word both in word and in deed?*

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### **C. God Will Compassionately Reach for Those Who Have Rebelled against Him**

Hebrews 12:6 (NLT) declares, "For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child." In the case of Zedekiah and Judah, we see how God used prophets, kings, and circumstances to reach for them. But as their stubbornness escalated, so did God's response. God is often trashed for taking action, but according to stories like this one, He is merciful and patient. In this case, He loved them and reached for them for over a decade.

A single mother was struggling to make ends meet and live a holy life. She had been baptized, filled with the Holy Ghost, and delivered from a number of destructive habits. From time to time this woman allowed her church attendance to lag, and before long she found herself re-captured by one or more of the things from which she had been delivered. In one of those vulnerable times, she became involved with an unsaved man and allowed him to move into her apartment. She knew this was wrong and soon began to reap the fruit of her choices. The man began mistreating her, became very demanding, and refused to move out.

One day she encountered her pastor in a grocery store parking lot. She confessed her situation and expressed her regrets, and they prayed together that God would forgive her and provide a solution. Upon her return to her apartment, she found the man for whom she had prayed very angry. He proceeded to chide her and then informed her that he was leaving and would not be persuaded otherwise. God had provided a way of escape even though it was her poor choices that put her in that situation. God is longsuffering and forgiving, always ready to forgive and restore those who approach Him with repentant hearts.

### **III. GOD JUDGED JUDAH'S REBELLION**

Because of Zedekiah's stubbornness, God used a heathen nation to discipline the nation of Judah. Their rebellion had to be dealt with. They had to be saved from themselves. It was a merciful God who reluctantly used Babylon to bring His own people back to their senses.

### **A. The Lord Sent the Babylonians**

It is always sad to watch the disciplinary action of God. When the Babylonian soldiers descended on Jerusalem, Zedekiah and his family tried to escape, but they were captured near Jericho. That is when the king witnessed the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy: he was brought before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah and sentenced to exile in Babylon. But before having his own eyes gouged out, he was forced to watch as his sons were executed. Their execution was the last thing he would ever see.

It would have been better if King Zedekiah would have listened when God tried to correct him through the prophets. We would do well to pay close attention to this cautionary tale. How much easier our lives will be if we are the first to respond to conviction and visit an altar of repentance when the Word of God goes forth. Paul asked, "Do you not know that the goodness of God leads to repentance?" (See Romans 2:4.)

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» *Can you remember a story or sermon God used to redirect your life? Explain.*

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### **B. The Babylonians Destroyed the Temple and Broke Down Jerusalem's Wall**

Not only was the king's family judged, but the Babylonians removed all the valuables from the Temple in Jerusalem. They broke down the walls and set fire to it all. The holy city lay in ruins. The sacred Temple was desecrated, and the nation ceased to be a nation because God's people insisted on doing things their way. Such is the nature of unrestrained flesh.

### **C. God Will Judge Those Who Rebel against Him**

This story stands as a testament to the righteousness of God. He will not cheat, even for His own people. Many other Bible stories attest to this character trait, such as the judgment that came to Samson, the people of Noah's day, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God will judge those who rebel against Him because His righteousness demands it. Sometimes His judgment is delayed. Sometimes it is not recognized. Sometimes it is reserved for eternity. But judgment is inevitable. Although this may be a sobering thought to some, it is also a reassurance to those who believe in a just God.

If God did not judge, how could we be confident that He will eventually be fair in His treatment of Satan and those who stand before Him in judgment?

## **IV. THOUGH GOD WILL JUDGE, HE ALSO WANTS TO PARDON**

### **A. He Loves Us Enough to Judge Us**

Although God will judge us, His ultimate goal is to lead us to repentance and restoration. His discipline is meant to teach us a lesson. A pre-teen boy experienced this same kind of loving correction from a favorite uncle. The uncle was welding in the shop on his small farm. Although the boy had been instructed to wear welding glasses, his uncle caught him peeking, so he put down his welding rod

and proceeded to scold the boy for his indiscretion. The correction was not all that painful, but the boy cried, devastated that he had disappointed his uncle. The uncle was protecting his nephew from potential blisters on his eyes. He loved his nephew enough to discipline him. And the boy never looked at a welding arc again without eye protection.

### **B. He Desires for Us to Turn from Our Rebellion and Receive His Pardon**

God's judgment is discipline, not retribution. He is not getting even or settling a score when He judges. His goal is always pardon and restoration. He is a loving, forgiving, and righteous heavenly Father.

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» *Can you think of some biblical characters who were pardoned and restored because they responded properly to God's judgment?*

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## **»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE**

He lived a Huck Finn existence, coming and going as he pleased. The rest of us kids in the neighborhood considered him lucky. His parents did not nag him or set boundaries. Every time our mothers called us in for dinner, we secretly wished we had his life. He was roaming the streets late at night, going home to eat whenever he felt like it, and experimenting with whatever he wished. How lucky could a young man be?

From where I stood, my friend lived an exotic life. Once he showed up at our house with an owl on his arm. I mean, how many kids get to have a pet owl? Admittedly, he did a few excessively adventurous things, such as putting a water snake in his mouth, so when he opened his mouth it would stick its head out and flash its tongue. Of course, his unsupervised escapades led to more devious deeds, such as tying cats' tails together and hanging them over a clothesline to watch them fight.

As we grew up and entered high school our paths diverged, and I was aware that he was experimenting with drugs and alcohol. He was still doing whatever he wanted without anyone standing in his way. It was a few years later, while away at college, that someone gave me the tragic update. My lucky friend had been shot and killed in a drug deal gone bad. He did not even make it into his mid-twenties. He never knew the joys of marriage or parenthood. He never even got to grow up.

Suppose someone had cared enough to discipline my friend. Suppose they had loved him enough to teach him to discipline himself. Observing the end of a life that had been lived without anyone caring enough to hold him accountable gave me a fresh appreciation for our heavenly Father who loves us enough to judge us and hold us accountable.

To embrace God is to embrace His discipline. If we trust His character, we will eagerly count on His discipline and be grateful that He loves us enough to save us from ourselves.