

## *The Last Days of Judah*

It can be difficult to keep track of the events of the last few kings of Judah. The decline of the Assyrian empire left a power vacuum, into which the Egyptians and Babylonians stepped. While they were sorting out their diplomatic situation, **Josiah** was able to reassert Judahite control over most of what had been the northern kingdom. He purged the Canaanite religious sites early in his reign, and then he renovated the Jerusalem temple. His priests found a scroll of the Torah (probably the Book of Deuteronomy), and this became the basis of a massive program of revival. This culminated in a nationwide observance of the Passover (2 Kgs 23:21–27; 2 Chr 35:1–19).

In 609 BC, however, Josiah felt obligated to resist the attempt of Pharaoh Neco II to assert Egyptian power over the region. Neco had

launched a campaign to stop the Babylonians, who were marching west from Mesopotamia. Josiah marched to meet him at Megiddo, a city on the western edge of the Jezreel Valley. Although the details in Kings and Chronicles differ a bit, Josiah was killed there and carried back to Jerusalem.

Josiah was not yet forty years old, and it appears the people of Jerusalem rushed to place his second son, Jehoahaz, on the throne. It is likely that his oldest son, Eliakim, was a hostage in the Egyptian court at the time. Jehoahaz ruled for only three months, and Eliakim was installed in his place, taking the name Jehoiakim. He ruled as an Egyptian puppet for eleven years, and according to the Book of Kings, he stripped Judah bare to make annual tribute payments to the pharaoh (2 Kgs 23:33, 35).

In 605 BC, the Babylonians led by their soon-to-be king Nebuchadnezzar, soundly defeated Neco and the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish. The Egyptians had allied themselves with the Assyrians, probably hoping to take over their sphere of influence after the upstart Babylonians were defeated, but instead, Nebuchadnezzar swept them before him. The Egyptians became only an occasional nuisance to the Babylonians after that (Jer 37:5–16).

When Jehoiakim died in 598 BC, it appears that the Judahite people again tried to place a king of their choosing on the throne. They chose Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin, but the Babylonians swept down and removed him. In his place, they elevated Josiah's youngest son Mattaniah, who took the name Zedekiah. This happened in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and so can be dated to 597 BC with confidence (2 Kgs 24:12).

Near the end of his ninth year as king, Zedekiah attempted to throw off the Babylonian yoke. This prompted Nebuchadnezzar to hurl a final assault against Jerusalem. The siege of Jerusalem lasted 30 months, from the winter of 589 BC until the summer of 586 BC. The Book of Jeremiah reports the events of this prolonged siege as well as the period prior to it.

Since Zedekiah was placed on the throne by the Babylonians and then was taken prisoner after all of his sons were executed (2 Kgs 25:7), the line of David passed through Jehoiachin to his son Shealtiel, and then to Zerubbabel, who eventually was sent back to Jerusalem as the Persian governor (Ezra 2:2; Hagg 1:1). According to the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Zerubbabel was actually the inheritor of two lines of descent from David, the royal line through Solomon (Matt 2:6–13) and another line through another of David's sons, Nathan (Luke 3:23–31).

King	BC	Reg	Age	Events
Josiah	640	1	8	Becomes king (2 Kgs 22:1–2; 2 Chr 34:1–2)
	634	6	14	First son Eliakim is born/adopted (2 Kgs 23:36)
	632	8	16	Begins to seek after YHWH (2 Chr 34:3)
				Jehoahaz is born (2 Kgs 23:31)
	628	12	20	Purges Judah and northern areas of cultic sites (2 Chr 34:37)
	629	13	21	Jeremiah begins his prophetic ministry (Jer 1:2)
	622	18	26	Torah found in the temple (2 Kgs 22:8–14; 2 Chr 34:14–21)
				Passover is observed (2 Kgs 23:21–27; 2 Chr 35:14)
	619	21	29	Mattaniah (Zedekiah) is born (2 Kgs 24:18)
	609	31	39	Dies at Megiddo (2 Kgs 23:28–30; 2 Chr 35:20–24)
Shallum/Jehoahaz	609	1	23	Assumes the throne (2 Kgs 23:31–35; 2 Chr 36:1–4; Jer 22:11)
Eliakim/Jehoiakim	609	1	25	Made king by the Egyptians (2 Kgs 23:36, 2 Chr 36:4)
	605	4	28	Nebuchadnezzar II becomes King of Babylon (Jer 25:1)
	601	8	33	First attack on Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:1–2; 2 Chr 36:6–7)
Jehoiachin	598	1	18	Claims throne (2 Kgs 24:8, 2 Chr 36:9)
	597			Second attack on Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:10–16, 2 Chr 36:10)
Mattaniah/Zedekiah	597	1	21	Made king by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 24:18, 2 Chr 36:11)
	589	9	29	Jerusalem besieged (2 Kgs 25:1–7; 2 Chr 36:17–21; Jer 39)
	586	11		The temple is destroyed (2 Kgs 25:8–21)