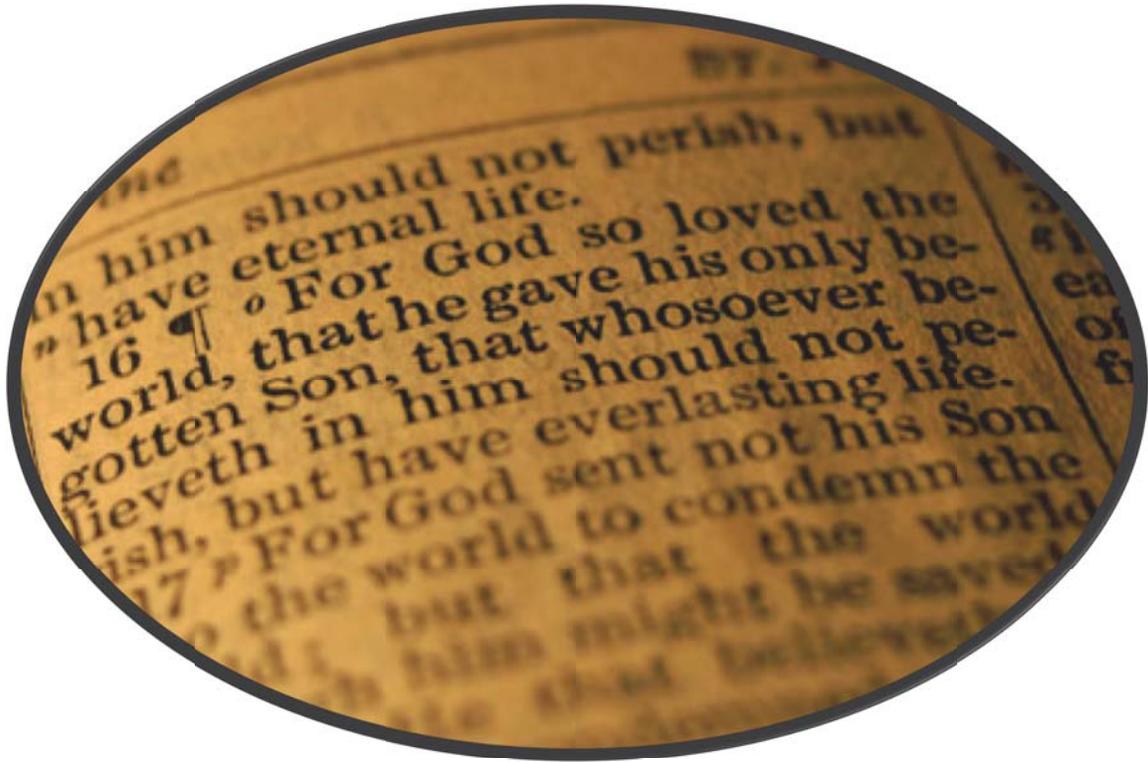


THE HEART OF GOD  
THE DECLINE OF JUDAH



T. M. Moore

*A Scriptorium Study*

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,*

*He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27*

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Heart of God: The Decline of Judah  
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## Introduction to *The Decline of Judah*

Judah, the southern kingdom, was not immune to the corrosive power of sin and self-interest. It would take a bit longer for that nation to succumb, and its fall would not be total, as was the fall of Israel. Nevertheless, in spite of knowing some godly leaders, Judah would ultimately collapse under the weight of its disobedience to God and His covenant.

But God remained faithful to His Word and promises. He provided godly kings to lead the nation, sent prophets to guide and support those kings, and dealt decisively with Judah's enemies from time to time.

But no temporal kingdom can prevail to overcome the law of sin and the corruption it spreads throughout. Judah's demise was as certain as Israel's, and God finally brought judgment against His people, just as He had promised.

But in the midst of that judgment, God continued to hold out hope for a coming glorious Kingdom and King.

*The Heart of God* studies provide a road map through the Scriptures, unfolding key unifying threads and following the development of those matters closest to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Genesis to Revelation. Through all our study we'll see how the Scriptures lead us to Jesus, and how He, in turn, brings into the presence of our heavenly Father and His Kingdom. There, as we encounter God and His glory, the Spirit can transform us increasingly in to the very image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

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## 1 Covenant Conscious

*Read and meditate on 2 Chronicles 12-17, 20.*

Paralleling the events in Israel is the story of Judah, the southern kingdom. The two tribes that primarily comprised this nation started fairly well. Unlike Israel, Judah knew periods of revival. However, her destiny was to be as tragic as that of Israel, and for the same reason: disobedience to God and His covenant.

*For reflection*

1. How do you see in these early kings of Judah that they were mindful of God's covenant and trying to lead the nation accordingly? How does this contrast with what we saw on the part of the kings of Israel?
2. Nevertheless, warning signs suggest that Judah is headed for trouble. Small compromises are in evidence that will lead to big problems down the road. Explain. What role do the prophets play during this early period?
3. What appears to have been the work of the prophets in Israel during this time, as we see that work embodied in Elijah? What does it say about God and His heart for His people, that He continued sending these messengers to a rebellious nation?
4. How did Judah's faithfulness play out with respect to the surrounding nations?
5. An effort was made on the part of the kings, not only to rule from within God's covenant, but to make sure the people understood their place within that covenant as well. How do you see this? What does this suggest about the duty of leaders in leading God's people for revival and renewal?

*Summary*

We are encouraged by these early kings, especially Asa, Abijah, and Jehoshaphat. Aided by faithful prophets, they seem determined to follow the Lord and rule within the covenant framework He has declared. How would describe the relationship between these leaders, the prophets and people, and the Spirit of God? Is this the same kind of relationship as we see beginning in Acts 2?

*Closing Prayer*

The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness,  
The world and those who dwell therein.  
For He has founded it upon the seas,  
And established it upon the waters.  
Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?  
Or who may stand in His holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,  
Nor sworn deceitfully.  
He shall receive blessing from the LORD,  
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.  
This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him,  
Who seek Your face.  
Selah  
Lift up your heads, O you gates!  
And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!  
And the King of glory shall come in.

Who *is* this King of glory?  
The LORD strong and mighty,  
The LORD mighty in battle.  
Lift up your heads, O you gates!  
Lift up, you everlasting doors!  
And the King of glory shall come in.  
Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD of hosts,  
He *is* the King of glory.  
Selah

Psalm 24

## 2 Jehoram to Uzziah

*Read and meditate on 2 Chronicles 21-26 and Isaiah 1.*

Consciousness of God and His covenant continued in Judah, for the most part, throughout the next several generations of kings. There is evidence of slippage, but decline is followed by revival, at least for now.

*For reflection*

1. The period did not begin well. Jehoram seemed set on following in the steps of the kings of Israel (2 Chron. 21). What steps did God take to keep Judah within the framework of His covenant? How do you see both the grace and justice of God at work here?
2. Ahaziah was not an improvement, and Athaliah – Judah’s only reigning queen – was worse. But God worked through the faithfulness of two people to bring His people to revival (chs. 22, 23). Explain. How should their faithfulness encourage us?
3. How do the prophets function during this period? Are they *merely* preachers? Explain.
4. Review 2 Chronicles 24.15-17. How do you explain what happened here? What warning is there to us from Joash’s example (cf. 1 Cor. 10.13)?
5. Isaiah began his work as a prophet during the final days of King Uzziah. From what you see in Isaiah 1, how would you describe the spiritual condition of Judah at this time? How do you see this epitomized in Uzziah’s transgression (2 Chron. 26.16ff)?

*Summary*

The temptation to turn away from the Lord and to follow the temper of the times is always present, and always strong. Only the Word and Spirit of God (the prophets) can keep us safe within the framework of God’s covenant. If we put our trust in *men*, even if they appear outwardly to be faithful, wise, and strong, we will always end up disappointed. How do you see this borne out in the lives of Joash and Uzziah?

*Closing Prayer*

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!  
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.  
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;  
*With* flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.  
May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,  
And the tongue that speaks proud things,  
Who have said,  
“With our tongue we will prevail;  
Our lips *are* our own;  
Who *is* lord over us?”  
“For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy,  
Now I will arise,” says the LORD;  
“I will set him in the safety for which he yearns.”  
The words of the LORD *are* pure words,  
*Like* silver tried in a furnace of earth,  
Purified seven times.  
You shall keep them, O LORD,  
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

The wicked prowl on every side,  
When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

Psalm 12

### 3 Hezekiah

*Read and meditate on 2 Chronicles 29-32, 2 Kings 20, and Isaiah 36-39.*

It seems God raised up faithful rulers like Hezekiah to remind His people of His promise to David, and to help them remain within His covenant. But without Isaiah, Hezekiah would not likely have trusted the Lord, for even he seemed to have a bit of an “I” problem, not unlike Solomon.

*For reflection*

1. Hezekiah got off to a great start (2 Chron. 29). How do you see that he was determined to restore the nation to a proper covenant footing? What steps did he take to that end?
2. We note that Hezekiah’s chosen path to renewal was not, in the first instance, *political and military*, but *spiritual and liturgical*. What significance should we attach to this? Notice also Hezekiah’s specific instruction to sing and pray psalms as part of this (2 Chron. 29.30).
3. It seems as if the actions Hezekiah took in chapters 29-31 were like sails hoisted into the wind of God’s Spirit. Explain.
4. Then, just when everything was going so well, Sennacherib invaded. Why would God allow such a trial at a time when His people were demonstrating such covenant faithfulness? How did God use Isaiah to help keep Hezekiah and the people on course with the Lord?
5. Like Joash and Uzziah before him, Hezekiah proved that, when we take our eyes off the Lord and start thinking about “what’s in it for me,” we’re bound to run into the discipline of the Lord (Heb. 12.3-11). How does this fit in with the three unifying threads of revelation – God’s glory, God’s people, and God’s redemption?

*Summary*

The lesson of men like Hezekiah is that God can cause His blessings to abound, even though we have feet of clay, if only we will do things His way. This section begins with a lengthy description of the work of priests and Levites. Revival and renewal begin in prayer, worship, and sacrifice to the Lord, not in fortifications, armies, or public policy. And certainly not in mere self-interest. What’s the most important lesson for you from the story of Hezekiah?

*Closing Prayer*

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—  
From whence comes my help?  
My help *comes* from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth.  
He will not allow your foot to be moved;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.  
Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.  
The LORD *is* your keeper;  
The LORD *is* your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.  
The Lord shall preserve you from all evil;  
He shall preserve your soul.  
The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in

From this time forth, and even forevermore.

Psalm 121

## 4 Done, but not without Hope

*Read and meditate on 2 Chronicles 34-36 and Micah 6, 7.*

Judah's end is as inglorious as that of Israel. The revival under King Josiah, following a period of decline, was sincere, but shallow. Upon his death, the nation began its final slide down the watershed of unbelief, disobedience, and destruction.

*For reflection*

1. How would you describe the role of the Word of God, including the prophetess, in the revival initiated by Josiah? Can revival occur without a return to the Word of God? Explain.
2. We note that, as with Solomon and Hezekiah, the revival under Josiah began with a spiritual focus (2 Chron. 34-36). Meditate on 2 Chronicles 35.7-9. What's wrong with this picture, and what does this portend?
3. Review 2 Chronicles 35.20-27. What's wrong here? What was Josiah thinking? How do you see Josiah repeating the same mistake of Solomon, Uzziah, and Hezekiah?
4. Summarize the final days of Judah. Why did this happen? But the period ends on a hopeful note (2 Chron. 36.22, 23). Explain.
5. Micah's words to Israel in chapters 6 and 7 of his book appear to be to Israel *as a whole*, that is, both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom). His words are both *descriptive* and *prescriptive*. Explain. Pay attention especially to Micah 7.18-20. Comment on the covenant connection implied here between Abraham, David, and Christ.

*Summary*

Unlike the fall and utter destruction of Israel, Judah entered into a period of decline. As we see at the end of 2 Chronicles – written *after* the period of exile, to reconnect the people with their covenant heritage – Judah would be restored. But, as we shall see, that restoration will be much less pronounced than what they knew under such kings as Solomon, Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Yet it would abound with types and prophecies pointing to an even greater period of covenant blessing to come. What would you say is the most important message to take away from Israel's experience as a kingdom?

*Closing Prayer*

Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;  
Look down from heaven and see,  
And visit this vine  
And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,  
And the branch *that* You made strong for Yourself.  
*It is* burned with fire, it is cut down;  
They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.  
Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,  
Upon the son of man *whom* You made strong for Yourself.  
Then we will not turn back from You;  
Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.  
Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;  
Cause Your face to shine,  
And we shall be saved!

Psalm 80.14-19

## 5 Jeremiah (1)

*Read and meditate on Jeremiah 1-3, 7, and 11.*

Jeremiah served during the final days of the nation of Judah, which he refers to as *Israel*. His words to the people of Israel were not exactly “seeker-friendly.” But they *were* the Word of God.

*For reflection*

1. Summarize God’s Word to His people in Jeremiah 1-3. Given their obviously shallow spiritual condition during this time, how would you expect them to have received these words? How would you have counseled Jeremiah concerning his ministry?
2. In what specific ways does Jeremiah remind the people of God’s covenant faithfulness? Why was this important?
3. Explain God’s charge to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1.7-19. What did God expect him to say to His people? In what sense should preachers be ready to “root out and pull down,” “destroy and throw down,” and “build and plant” in their own ministries?
4. What seems to have been the state of the people of Jerusalem as we see it revealed in Jeremiah 7? Were they “good church-going folk”? But what else was going on in their lives? What “lying words” (v. 8) were they listening to, instead of the Word of God?
5. Summarize God’s charge against His people concerning His covenant in chapter 11. How did the people of his own home town respond to Jeremiah? To what does this situation point forward?

*Summary*

Jeremiah was one of the most courageous of God’s prophets. He did not fail to speak the Word of God to the people of Jerusalem, to point out their ingratitude and disobedience, to call them to repentance and faith, and to warn them of judgment to come if they refused to obey. He was hated by leaders and people alike, and much of his life was spent in misery. He shows us that we should expect that not everyone will be thrilled as we live and speak the Word of God to them. Does Jeremiah encourage or discourage you? Explain.

*Closing Prayer*

Unless the LORD builds the house,  
They labor in vain who build it;  
Unless the LORD guards the city,  
The watchman stays awake in vain.  
*It is vain* for you to rise up early,  
To sit up late,  
To eat the bread of sorrows;  
*For* so He gives His beloved sleep.  
Behold, children *are* a heritage from the LORD,  
The fruit of the womb *is* a reward.  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,  
So are the children of one’s youth.  
Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them;  
They shall not be ashamed,  
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Psalm 127

## 6 Jeremiah (2)

*Read and meditate on the book of Lamentations.*

Lamentations is a carefully crafted poem weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem and longing for the day of God's renewing grace. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 have 22 verses, each verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 follows this same pattern, but changes the lead letter every three verses. This way of writing was designed to aid hearers in *remembering* the message. Why does God want us to remember to weep for the judgment of His people?

*For reflection*

1. According to Jeremiah, why did Jerusalem come to judgment? What were her sins, and how is it apparent she did not remain faithful to God's covenant?
2. What was the role of kings, elders, priests, and prophets in the downfall of Jerusalem? How should this counsel leaders of God's covenant people today?
3. Meditate on Lamentations 3.22-33. These verses appear smack in the middle of Lamentations. What is their message, and why do you suppose Jeremiah inserted them just here?
4. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 4.7-18. How do you see that Paul is picking up on Lamentations 4.1-6, identifying with it, yet showing us how to go on through this situation?
5. Notice how Lamentations ends (5.19-22). What is Israel's – and our – only hope? Is it in our ability to keep covenant with God, or God's determination to keep covenant with us? Explain.

*Summary*

Both the message and form (acrostic poem) of Lamentation show us that God thinks it is important that His people express awareness of and regret for their sins, even as they rejoice in the hope of their salvation. Why don't we do this in our churches these days?

*Closing Prayer*

“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth,”

Let Israel now say—

“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth;

Yet they have not prevailed against me.

The plowers plowed on my back;

They made their furrows long.”

The LORD *is* righteous;

He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked.

Let all those who hate Zion

Be put to shame and turned back.

Let them be as the grass on the housetops,

Which withers before it grows up,

With which the reaper does not fill his hand,

Nor he who binds sheaves, his arms.

Neither let those who pass by them say,

“The blessing of the LORD *be* upon you;

We bless you in the name of the LORD!”

Psalm 129

## 7 Hope!

*Read and meditate on Isaiah 7.10-16, 9.1-7, 11.1-10, 40.1-8, 53.4-16, and Jeremiah 30, 31.*

Even as Judah began descending the slope of decline, prophetic words of hope resounded from Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah. God does not give up on His people or His promises.

*For reflection*

1. God promised His people that a new day was coming for His Kingdom. What would that Kingdom be like, when it finally came?
2. God also promised to send a King to rule this Kingdom. What do we learn about Him from Isaiah 7 and 9? How do these prophecies of a Kingdom and a King connect to and build on what God promised through Jacob (Gen. 49.8-11), Moses (Deut. 17.14-20), and David (2 Sam. 7.1-17)? What does this suggest about the place of God's Kingdom in the fulfillment of His covenant promises?
3. Explain the prophecies of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 40 and 53. Relate these prophecies to the three unifying threads of Scripture, as we have been tracing them through this study: God's glory, God's people, God's redemption.
4. Jeremiah points forward to the coming of a *new* covenant. What will be "new" about this covenant? How does it represent a further development of the existing covenant?
5. The failure of the "old" covenant was not in the covenant – God's promises and His faithfulness – but in the people. Explain.

*Summary*

Because God's Word cannot fail, and God will not deny Himself, His promises cannot fail, though they may take a different *form* as His covenant unfolds. Israel and Judah had shown themselves incapable of keeping covenant with God. But He was not incapable of keeping covenant with them. Summarize the state of God's plan for His people as we see them heading off to exile in Babylon.

*Closing Prayer*

My praise *shall be* of You in the great assembly;  
I will pay My vows before those who fear Him.  
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
Those who seek Him will praise the LORD.  
Let your heart live forever!  
All the ends of the world  
Shall remember and turn to the LORD,  
And all the families of the nations  
Shall worship before You.  
For the kingdom is the LORD's,  
And He rules over the nations.  
All the prosperous of the earth  
Shall eat and worship;  
All those who go down to the dust  
Shall bow before Him,  
Even he who cannot keep himself alive.  
A posterity shall serve Him.  
It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation,

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They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born,  
That He has done *this*.

Psalm 22.25-31

*The Heart of God: The Decline of Judah*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What was the role of the leaders of Judah in helping the people of Judah to keep covenant with God for so long after the fall of Israel?
2. What were the main points of the message of God's prophets during this period? Do God's covenant people still need to hear these points in our day? Explain.
3. The curtain goes down on Judah with cries of despair and sighs of hope. Should we expect this to be in any way a *normal* part of life in God's covenant? Explain.
4. What do we learn about the power of sin from the experience of Judah, the southern kingdom?
5. What are the most important lessons to emerge from this period of the Old Testament?

*Glory to Glory*

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word *to* the way we live for His glory in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God's glory in our reading and meditations in this week's studies? That is, how has He shown Himself *to* you more clearly?

How do you expect this *experience* of God's glory to help you *live more consistently for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from this week's study to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom? To equip you for serving Christ in your [Personal Mission Field](#)?

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Thank you.