

# The Gospel Project® for Adults

## Daily Discipleship Guide CSB, Unit 15, Session 5

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### God Disciplines a Rebellious People

Session in a Sentence: God's wrath is just, yet it is not without the promise of grace and mercy to those who repent of their rebellion against Him.

Background Passage: 2 Chronicles 36

In 1981, Rabbi Harold Kushner penned his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, raising important theological questions about the existence of God, His goodness, and His authority over evil in the world. Kushner, having experienced the death of his teenage son after a lifelong illness, addresses these questions in a winsome and personal manner, making it easy for readers to resonate with his conclusions.

While Kushner is to be lauded for writing a candid book asking readers to wrestle with such important questions related to God and the problem of evil, unfortunately, his theological conclusions are less than biblical. Essentially he concludes that while God is good and just, the random chaos in the universe is outside His power. The wrongs of life, whether occurring to a "good" or "bad" person, are simply a result of chance and *completely* unrelated to personal behavior.

What are some explanations you have heard for why bad things happen to good people?

### Group Time

#### Point 1: Rebellion against God results when the heart is hardened (2 Chron. 36:11-14).

**11** Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. **12** He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah at the LORD's command. **13** He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. He became obstinate and hardened his heart against returning to the LORD, the God of Israel. **14** All the leaders of the priests and the people multiplied their unfaithful deeds, imitating all the detestable practices of the nations, and they defiled the LORD's temple that he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

Zedekiah was a **prideful ruler** who refused to listen to God's prophet. As the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah counseled Zedekiah to surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar in hopes of saving the city and the people (Jer. 21:8-10; 27:8-15; 38:1-3, 17-18). Instead of obeying, he allowed Jeremiah to be imprisoned (Jer. 37-38). Over time, Zedekiah's pride resulted in a hardening of his heart toward the Lord. He thought he knew best, and as a result, he failed to grasp his dependency on the Lord's counsel and soon witnessed the consequences of his pride.

What are some ways we demonstrate pride in our lives?

"Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay," as the saying goes. Zedekiah most certainly experienced this reality in his life. And worse, the ramifications of his actions seeped down from the king's palace to the home of the common peasant. Even the priests, those commissioned with maintaining the temple's purity, were involved in revolting acts. Zedekiah and his people, therefore, paid a steep price for their sin and hardened hearts—Judah and Jerusalem's utter destruction.

#### Voices from the Church

"Pride can sometimes be seen in a hidden desire for the praise and admiration of men, an insistence on being 'right,' the desire to be noticed and appreciated, fear of rejection, or just preoccupation with myself—my feelings, my needs, my circumstances, my burdens, my desires, my successes, my failures. These are all fruits of that deadly root of pride." 1

—Nancy Leigh DeMoss

#### Point 2: Rebellion against God results when God's Word is rejected (2 Chron. 36:15-16a).

**15 But the LORD, the God of their ancestors sent word against them by the hand of his messengers, sending them time and time again, for he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. 16a But they kept ridiculing God's messengers, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets,**

In 2 Chronicles 36:15, the author highlights God's **familial love** for the people of Judah, displayed in His compassion and patience. God longs for His people to repent without the use of discipline, so He granted them a season of mercy to respond to His loving appeals through the prophets. We shouldn't pass over this without considering our own lives and how God does the same for us. Sometimes God's compassion comes in the form of a friend who comes to rebuke us because of sin they perceive in our lives. The word of correction may sting, but sometimes it takes a sting to grab our attention.

What are some ways we might respond to a word of correction, and what might those responses reveal about a person's heart?

Zedekiah surely did not take the crown desiring for his kingdom's demise. His intentions for his reign likely were good; unfortunately, good intentions devoid of godly character never end well. Zedekiah's pride bears its fruit in verse 16 as he and the people reject God's word through His prophets. Zedekiah lacked the ears to hear God's counsel and lacked the eyes to see God's imminent judgment.

**Sin as Rebellion:** Because the Bible portrays people as \_\_\_\_\_ beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of \_\_\_\_\_ and rebellion toward God the King.

What are some ways we might disdain or reject God's Word because of our pride?

### **Point 3: Rebellion against God results in God's wrath being stirred (2 Chron. 36:16b-21).**

**16b until the LORD's wrath was so stirred up against his people that there was no remedy. 17 So he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their fit young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary. He had no pity on young men or young women, elderly or aged; he handed them all over to him. 18 He took everything to Babylon—all the articles of God's temple, large and small, the treasures of the LORD's temple, and the treasures of the king and his officials. 19 Then the Chaldeans burned God's temple. They tore down Jerusalem's wall, burned all its palaces, and destroyed all its valuable articles.**

**20 He deported those who escaped from the sword to Babylon, and they became servants to him and his sons until the rise of the Persian kingdom. 21 This fulfilled the word of the LORD through Jeremiah, and the land enjoyed its Sabbath rest all the days of the desolation until seventy years were fulfilled.**

For too long, the kings, priests, and people of Judah rejected God's word through His prophets. God's wrath was finally stirred up against Judah, with her stiffened neck and hardened heart, and "no remedy" remained. The Lord's ax of judgment was now set in motion with no recourse for stopping it. Like a tool in the hand of God, Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans obliterated Jerusalem.

What problems arise if we downplay God's wrath in our theology?

It's counterintuitive to think God's wrath against Judah was for her good, but God always accomplishes His good purposes through His actions. Proclaiming the faithfulness and grace of God, the chronicler stated that Judah's purification and restoration from her waywardness would come through *temporary* judgment—a remnant survived the destruction and a seventy-year exile and received a promise to return home. These promises were communicated through the prophet Jeremiah, the one King Zedekiah refused to listen to (Jer. 29:10; 33:7-8).

God's judgment for the sin of \_\_\_\_\_ has already fallen upon Christ on the cross; therefore, God's \_\_\_\_\_ no longer remains for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1). Instead, God uses only faithful, loving \_\_\_\_\_ to correct His beloved children in their sin and guide them on the path of holiness.

## **My Mission**

Because the punishment of our sin has been taken from us and paid by Christ, we listen to God's Word with softened hearts as we proclaim God's patience and righteousness to others while there is still time for them to repent.

- **How will you respond in faith and repentance because of who God is?**

- What are some ways your group can use God's Word for correction and encouragement in the faith?
- With whom will you share God's call to repentance and faith in Christ this week because of the reality of God's mercy and justice?

### Voices from the Church

"God relentlessly offers his grace to people who do not deserve it, or seek it, or even appreciate it after they have been saved by it." 2

—Timothy Keller

## Daily Study

### Day 1: Read 2 Chronicles 36:1-14

Humanity is getting faster, at least some of us. The world record for the 100-meter dash was 10.6 seconds in 1912, 10.2 seconds in 1936, and 9.90 seconds in 1991. The current world recorder holder is Usain Bolt. He crossed the finish line in a blazing 9.58 seconds in 2009.3 Despite this progression in speed, humanity will never be able to outrun the consequences of sin.

One man who attempted to do such was King Zedekiah. He was a proud man who refused to humble himself before the Lord. When the consequences of Zedekiah's sin finally arrived at Jerusalem's gates in the form of Babylonian soldiers, he fled with his family. The Babylonians, however, intercepted them in the plains of Jericho. Nebuchadnezzar deported Zedekiah to Babylon, but first, he left the deposed king with one last tormenting memory by executing his sons before his eyes, which were then gouged out (2 Kings 25:4-7). This fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy that the king would not see the city of Babylon (Ezek. 12:1-13).

Zedekiah's prideful solution for absolution from God's judgment was to run from it. The Bible's solution for absolution, however, is found in running to the foot of the cross. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

What sinful behavior do you need to repent of and run to Christ for forgiveness?

### Voices from Church History

"The thing that ruined Zedekiah, was, not only that he *turned not to the Lord God of Israel*, but that he *stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning to him*, that is, he was obstinately resolved not to return to him, would not lay his neck under God's yoke, nor his heart under the impressions of his word, and so, in effect, he *would not be healed, he would not live*." 4

—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

### Day 2: Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-16

The Book of 2 Chronicles closes out with God flexing His divine muscle against Judah. God's wrath was stirred up, and with righteous indignation, He judicially directed His fury against the people of God. Knowing our own propensity toward sin, it's hard to imagine being filled with anger without losing some measure of self-control. Yet God's wrath is never less than perfect. Revealed to us in 2 Chronicles 36:15 is the posture of God's heart toward sinners—it's a posture marked by compassion and patience.

Despite habitual rebellion by Judah, God still longed for her to repent and gave her many opportunities to do so. Examining God's response, we learn something about how we are to engage unsaved people in our lives. It is easy for us to lose compassion and patience with individuals who have rejected the gospel time and time again. Maybe you have someone in your life whom you've labeled "hopeless" after years of such rejection. If you've fallen into this snare, take a minute and remember God's compassionate response to His wayward people.

In what ways have your attitudes toward people differed from God's compassionate and patient attitude toward Judah?

### Day 3: Read 2 Chronicles 36:17-21

The sad truth is that life, for almost all of history, has been unfair. This is simply a reality of living in a world corrupted by sin. It's also a reality experienced firsthand by a remnant of godly people living in Judah at the time of Jerusalem's fall. We are told by prophets like Habakkuk that a contingency of faithful followers still resided in Judah at the time. Unfortunately, the righteous would suffer along with the unrighteous. Despite the unfairness of the situation, the godly remnant was encouraged to

live by faith with joy in the midst of suffering.

The Bible is clear that believers will face suffering (see John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-14). The question then becomes for us, “How will we respond to suffering?” Our sinful nature desires to respond with anger, bitterness, and cynicism. But in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are given strength to respond with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

When life deals you an unfair hand, how can you continue walking by faith with joy in the midst of suffering?

## **Day 4: Read Lamentations 1:1–2:22**

Grief is a universal human experience. The Bible tells us that grief exists because something is wrong. While there is good in the world, brokenness pervades it all. The Book of Lamentations is a collection of five sorrowful poems lamenting the fall of Judah. Seeping from these poems are the raw emotions of a confused and hurting people processing their circumstances and attempting to express the inexpressible.

Grief was a part of life for the Judeans, and it’s a part of our lives today. Fortunately, God’s Word gives us instruction on how we should face grief. First, we don’t grieve alone because we have a Savior who is acquainted with grief and understands our own grief (Isa. 53:3). Second, we grieve knowing it is a natural response to injustice, whether it leads us to cry out to God (Ps. 22:1) or to sit in silence (Job 2:13). Third, we grieve believing in a future hope. In the midst of heartache, Job made a beautiful confession: “But I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the end he will stand on the dust. Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet I will see God in my flesh” (Job 19:25-26).<sup>5</sup> These truths help us in our grief and remind us that a day is coming when our temporary afflictions will be replaced with an eternal glory.

How are you challenged in your grief by these instructions from Scripture?

## **Day 5: Read Lamentations 3:1–5:22**

In the midst of darkest despair, a break in the black clouds hovering over Lamentations opens up and the brightest of lights shines down. Following sixty-five verses of gloom and doom over Jerusalem’s fall, the author turns the script toward God’s mercy: “Because of the LORD’s faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!” (Lam. 3:22-23).

God appoints every aspect of every day. He appoints the day’s troubles. He appoints the day’s mercies. Sometimes we wonder if we will be able to withstand the troubles of our day. But we can rest assured knowing every morning God’s mercy will be there waiting for us. We might be tempted to store up God’s mercy for a rainy day, but like Israel with the manna in the wilderness, there is no storing up. Instead, we are called to the daily exercise of declaring our dependency upon God and His mercy.

What practical steps can you take to remind yourself that God’s mercies are new every morning?

## **Encourage One Another**

*Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.*

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Rebellion against God results when the heart is hardened (2 Chron. 36:11-14).
- Rebellion against God results when God’s Word is rejected (2 Chron. 36:15-16a).
- Rebellion against God results in God’s wrath being stirred (2 Chron. 36:16b-21).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

What are some ways you can encourage one another to have soft hearts toward God and to heed His Word?

How should the reality of God’s wrath against sin impact our evangelism and our discipleship?

## References

1. Nancy Leigh DeMoss, "Nothing Between," excerpted from *Revival Commentary*, vol. 2, no. 2, January 29, 2019, <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/media/uploads/pdf/articles/NothingBetween.pdf>.
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4. Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, vol. 1 (London: Joseph Ogle Robinson, 1828), 1112.
5. Adapted from "Why Grief Is Evidence for God," by Sharon Dirckx, The Gospel Coalition, May, 10, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-grief-is-evidence-for-god>.