

Judah After Solomon: From the Divided Kingdom to the Babylonian Exile

Overview

After Solomon’s death, Rehoboam’s refusal to ease the people’s burdens precipitated the division of the united monarchy: the northern tribes followed Jeroboam, while Rehoboam retained Judah and ruled from Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:1–24). The southern kingdom endured from approximately 931/930 to 586 BC, nearly 150 years longer than the northern kingdom of Israel.^{[1][2]}

The biblical history evaluates Judah’s rulers primarily by covenant faithfulness: whether they worshiped the LORD exclusively, removed idolatry and high places, respected the temple and God’s law, and listened to the prophets. Judah experienced important reforms under Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and especially Josiah, but these reforms did not permanently reverse the nation’s recurring idolatry, injustice, and rejection of prophetic warnings.^{[3][1]}

The dates below follow one widely used chronology. Ancient regnal systems, accession-year reckoning, and overlapping coregencies produce minor variations among chronologies, especially before the seventh century BC; Jerusalem’s final fall is commonly dated to either 587 or 586 BC.^{[4][5]}

Kings of Judah

Date (BC)	Biblical citation	King	Notable event or evaluation
931/930–915/914	1 Kings 12:1–24; 14:21–31; 2 Chronicles 10–12	Rehoboam	Solomon’s son. His harsh answer helped divide the kingdom. Judah practiced idolatry; Shishak of Egypt invaded Jerusalem and removed temple and royal treasures. He later humbled himself, but his reign remained spiritually mixed.
915/914–912/911	1 Kings 15:1–8; 2 Chronicles 13	Abijah (Abijam)	Continued in his father’s sins according to Kings, although Chronicles records his appeal to the Davidic covenant and victory over Jeroboam.
912/911–871/870	1 Kings 15:9–24; 2 Chronicles 14–16	Asa	Generally did what was right, removed many idols, and initiated reform. Late in life he relied on Syria rather than the LORD and oppressed some of his people.
871/870–849/848	1 Kings 22:41–50; 2 Chronicles 17–20	Jehoshaphat	A good king who promoted instruction in God’s law and judicial reform. His alliances with Ahab’s dynasty brought rebuke and danger.
849/848–842	2 Kings 8:16–24; 2 Chronicles 21	Jehoram (Joram)	Married into Ahab’s house and followed its idolatrous pattern. He murdered his brothers; Edom revolted; his reign ended under divine judgment.

Date (BC)	Biblical citation	King	Notable event or evaluation
842–841	2 Kings 8:25–29; 9:21–28; 2 Chronicles 22:1–9	Ahaziah	Followed Ahab's house under Athaliah's influence. He was killed during Jehu's purge.[^4]
841–835	2 Kings 11:1–20; 2 Chronicles 22:10–23:21	Athaliah (queen/usurper)	Attempted to destroy the Davidic royal family and ruled for six years. The infant Joash was hidden; the priest Jehoiada later installed him and Athaliah was executed. [^4]
835–796/795	2 Kings 11:21–12:21; 2 Chronicles 24	Joash (Jehoash)	Repaired the temple and did right while Jehoiada guided him. After Jehoiada's death he turned to idolatry and permitted the killing of Zechariah; his servants assassinated him.
796/795–767	2 Kings 14:1–22; 2 Chronicles 25	Amaziah	Did right, but not wholeheartedly. After defeating Edom he adopted Edomite gods, challenged Israel, and suffered defeat; conspirators later killed him.
767–740/739	2 Kings 15:1–7; 2 Chronicles 26	Uzziah (Azariah)	A capable king whose kingdom prospered and grew strong. Pride led him to usurp priestly duties; he was struck with leprosy and lived in isolation.
750–735/730	2 Kings 15:32–38; 2 Chronicles 27	Jotham	Did what was right and strengthened Judah, although the people continued corrupt practices. His reign overlapped Uzziah's incapacity.[^4]
735/730–715	2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28; Isaiah 7	Ahaz	An exceptionally unfaithful king who practiced idolatry and child sacrifice. He appealed to Assyria for help, altered the temple furnishings, and made Judah dependent on Assyria.
715–687/686	2 Kings 18–20; 2 Chronicles 29–32; Isaiah 36–39	Hezekiah	A major reformer who reopened and purified the temple, opposed idolatry, and trusted God during Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion. His later pride and display of treasures to Babylon drew prophetic warning.
687/686–642	2 Kings 21:1–18; 2 Chronicles 33:1–20	Manasseh	Reversed Hezekiah's reforms, promoted extensive idolatry and occult practices, shed innocent blood, and desecrated the temple. Chronicles also records his later humiliation, repentance, and partial reform.
642–640	2 Kings 21:19–26; 2 Chronicles 33:21–25	Amon	Continued Manasseh's earlier idolatry without sharing his repentance. His servants assassinated him after two years.
640–609	2 Kings 22:1–23:30; 2 Chronicles 34–35	Josiah	Judah's greatest late reformer. The Book of the Law was found during temple repairs; he renewed the covenant, removed idolatry, and celebrated Passover. He was killed confronting Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo.[^4]
609 (three months)	2 Kings 23:31–34; 2 Chronicles 36:1–4	Jehoahaz (Shallum)	Did evil. Pharaoh Neco deposed him after three months and took him to Egypt, placing Judah under Egyptian control.[^4]
609–598	2 Kings 23:34–24:7; 2 Chronicles 36:5–8; Jeremiah 22:13–23; 26; 36	Jehoiakim (Eliakim)	Installed by Pharaoh Neco; ruled unjustly and rejected Jeremiah's warnings. He became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal and then rebelled, bringing Babylonian pressure upon Judah.

Date (BC)	Biblical citation	King	Notable event or evaluation
598–597 (three months)	2 Kings 24:8–17; 25:27–30; 2 Chronicles 36:9–10; Jeremiah 22:24–30	Jehoiachin (Jeconiah/Coniah)	Surrendered when Babylon besieged Jerusalem in 597 BC. Nebuchadnezzar deported the king, court, soldiers, artisans, and temple treasures; Jehoiachin was later released and honored in Babylon. ^{[4][5]}
597–586	2 Kings 24:18–25:21; 2 Chronicles 36:11–21; Jeremiah 21; 27–29; 32–39; 52	Zedekiah (Mattaniah)	Installed by Nebuchadnezzar but later rebelled. He rejected Jeremiah’s counsel; Babylon besieged and captured Jerusalem, blinded and deported Zedekiah, burned the temple and city, broke down the walls, and carried many survivors into exile. ^{[6][7][8]}

The dates and primary Kings references in this table follow the ESV Global Study Bible chronology. The fuller Chronicles references supply additional theological interpretation and details about reform, apostasy, repentance, and judgment.^[4]

Historical Summary

Judah began as the southern remnant of David and Solomon’s kingdom, centered on Jerusalem, the temple, and the Davidic dynasty. Unlike the northern kingdom, Judah maintained one ruling family—with Athaliah’s interruption—and survived the Assyrian destruction of Israel in 722 BC. Nevertheless, its history followed a repeated pattern: reform under a faithful ruler, relapse into idolatry and injustice, prophetic warning, and political crisis.^{[1][4]}

Foreign powers increasingly shaped Judah’s fate. Egypt intervened under Rehoboam and again after Josiah’s death; Assyria dominated Judah in the days of Ahaz and threatened Jerusalem under Hezekiah; Babylon then replaced Egypt and Assyria as the decisive regional power. The final kings repeatedly sought security through alliances and rebellion rather than heeding prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Babylon’s conquest unfolded in stages rather than in one isolated event. Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar’s vassal and rebelled (2 Kings 24:1–7); Jerusalem surrendered in 597 BC under Jehoiachin, when the king and many leaders, soldiers, craftsmen, and treasures were deported (2 Kings 24:8–17); after Zedekiah rebelled, Babylon’s final siege ended with Jerusalem and the temple destroyed in 587/586 BC and another deportation (2 Kings 25:1–21).^{[6][5][7]}

Biblically, the exile is presented not merely as Babylonian military success but as covenant judgment after generations of rebellion. Second Chronicles emphasizes that God repeatedly sent messengers because of compassion, but the people mocked the prophets until judgment became unavoidable; it also connects the land’s desolation with Jeremiah’s prophecy of seventy years (2 Chronicles 36:15–21; compare Jeremiah 25:8–12; 29:10).^{[9][10]}

Invasion Passages

The fullest narrative of Babylon’s invasion and Jerusalem’s fall appears in these passages:

- **2 Kings 24–25** — The principal historical account: Jehoiakim’s rebellion, the 597 BC siege and deportation under Jehoiachin, Zedekiah’s rebellion, the final siege, Jerusalem’s destruction, the exile, Gedaliah’s governorship, and Jehoiachin’s later release.^[6]

- **2 Chronicles 36:5–21** — A condensed account with explicit theological interpretation: rejection of God’s messengers, destruction of the temple and walls, exile, and fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy.[^10]
- **Jeremiah 39:1–10** — An eyewitness-era account of the city’s breach, Zedekiah’s capture and punishment, Jerusalem’s burning, and the deportation.[^8]
- **Jeremiah 52:1–30** — A detailed historical appendix paralleling 2 Kings 24–25, including the siege, famine, destruction, temple furnishings, executions, and deportation totals.[^11]

Additional passages illuminate particular stages or perspectives:

- **Daniel 1:1–7** describes an early Babylonian incursion associated with Jehoiakim and the removal of temple vessels and selected Judean youths.
- **Ezekiel 24:1–2** dates the beginning of the final siege, while **Ezekiel 33:21** reports news of Jerusalem’s fall.
- **Jeremiah 21; 32; 34; 37–38** records Jeremiah’s warnings and experiences during the siege.
- **Lamentations 1–5** poetically mourns Jerusalem’s devastation and interprets its suffering through grief, confession, and hope.

For a single continuous reading, **2 Kings 24–25** is the best starting point. Reading it alongside **2 Chronicles 36** and **Jeremiah 39** and **52** provides the clearest combined historical and theological picture.

References

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3. [Evaluating Kings of Israel and Judah in 1–2 Kings | ESV.org](#) - Evaluating Kings of Israel and Judah in 1–2 Kings ; Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25–33), Rehoboam (1 Kings 1...
4. [The Divided Kingdom: Kings of Judah \(all dates B.C.\)](#)
5. [Babylonian Captivity | Definition, History, Judaism, & ...](#) - Babylonian Captivity, the forced detention of Jews in Babylonia following the latter's conquest of t...
6. [2 Kings 24–25; 2 Chronicles 36](#) - In his days, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant for three year...
7. [Zedekiah | Babylonian Exile, Prophecy & Blindness](#) - Zedekiah was the king of Judah (597–587/586 bc) whose reign ended in the Babylonian destruction of J...
8. [Jeremiah 39 ESV - The Fall of Jerusalem - In the ninth - Bible Gateway](#) - The Fall of Jerusalem - In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezz...
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10. [2 Chronicles 36:9–21 - Jehoiachin King of Judah - Jehoiachin ...](#) - Jehoiachin King of Judah - Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in ...

11. [Jeremiah 52 - Pett's Commentary on the Bible - Bible Commentaries - StudyLight.org](#) - Jeremiah 52, Pett's Commentary on the Bible, Pett's Commentary on the Bible offers Christians profou...