

Who was King Jehoiakim in the Bible?

Jehoiakim (named Eliakim at birth, 2 Chronicles 36:4) was one of the last kings of Judah before the Babylonian Captivity. Jehoiakim was a son of good King Josiah (Jeremiah 26:1) of Judah. His mother's name was Zebidah (2 Kings 23:36). Jehoiakim's father, King Josiah, had returned Judah to the Lord by tearing down idol shrines and restoring obedience to God's Law (2 Kings 23:19-25). After Josiah's death, his son Jehoahaz was chosen king by the people. But, as often happened in those days, Jehoahaz did not follow in the footsteps of his father but "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 23:32). Jehoahaz only reigned three months before he was taken into captivity by the king of Egypt, who replaced Jehoahaz with his brother Eliakim (2 Kings 23:26; 2 Chronicles 36:5). The Egyptian king renamed the 25-year-old Eliakim "Jehoiakim."

Jehoiakim also did evil in the Lord's sight (2 Kings 23:37). Because of the ongoing, unrepentant sin of the nation of Judah, God sent invading armies to capture and enslave them. Jehoiakim was taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar, who put him in chains and carted him off to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chronicles 36:6;). It was at this time that Daniel and his three friends were also taken to Babylon (Daniel 1:1-2). Jehoiakim was later returned to Jerusalem, although he had to act as Nebuchadnezzar's servant for three years and pay tribute to him.

During the time King Jehoiakim reigned as a vassal of Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah preached in Jerusalem. God's message was that the Babylonian invasion was God's punishment for Judah's sin and that the Hebrews should repent. Jehoiakim called for Jeremiah's scroll to be read in his court. But, as every three or four columns of the scroll were read, "the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. The king and all his attendants

who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes” (Jeremiah 36:23-24). Rather than heed God’s warning, Jehoiakim hardened his heart and tried to destroy God’s Word (see Jeremiah 25:1-4). Earlier, Jehoiakim had murdered the godly prophet Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23).

Jehoiakim reigned eleven years (2 Kings 23:36; 2 Chronicles 36:5). Jeremiah rewrote the scroll that Jehoiakim had burned, and God pronounced judgment on the king: “Therefore this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night” (Jeremiah 36:30). “He will be buried like a dead donkey—dragged out of Jerusalem and dumped outside the gates!” (Jeremiah 22:19, NLT). This prophecy was fulfilled when, in the eleventh year of Jehoiakim’s reign, he stopped paying tribute to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar responded by besieging Jerusalem. According to Josephus, Jehoiakim was killed during the siege, and his body was thrown over the city wall.

After Jehoiakim’s ignoble death, his son Jehoiachin succeeded him as the new king in Judah. Jehoiachin reigned only three months and ten days (2 Chronicles 36:9) before he, too, was taken to Babylon while the foreign king appointed his successor (2 Chronicles 36:10). This appointment of kings by the people or by invading armies was a far cry from the holy anointing of God’s chosen ones by His prophets in days gone by. The removal of God from Judah’s political process was another indication of just how far the Jewish people had fallen away from their God.

From King Jehoiakim’s life, we can learn that godly parentage does not necessarily guarantee godly children. Many times in Israel’s and Judah’s history, the Bible records that the children of good kings and prophets “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (2

Kings 21:1-2; 1 Samuel 8:3) and did not follow the paths of their fathers. God holds each individual responsible for his or her obedience to His direction (Deuteronomy 24:16). King Jehoiakim's willful rejection of God's Word and his subsequent fate are a perfect illustration of the folly of disobedience. "Whoever remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1).