

Who was King Jehoiachin in the Bible?

King Jehoiachin, also referred to as Jeconiah and Coniah, ruled in Judah for three months and ten days (2 Chronicles 36:9) in 597 BC before he was taken captive to Babylon. He was eighteen years old when he began to rule and did evil in the eyes of the Lord (2 Chronicles 36:9; 2 Kings 24:8–9).

Jehoiachin's father, Jehoiakim (formerly named Eliakim), was a son of the good king Josiah. Pharaoh Neco had taken Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah who initially succeeded him, captive and placed Eliakim, whose name he changed to Jehoiakim, on the throne instead. Pharaoh Neco also imposed a levy on Judah, which Jehoiakim paid by taxing the people heavily. King Jehoiakim reigned for eleven years and did evil in God's eyes (2 Kings 24:36–37; 2 Chronicles 36:5). During Jehoiakim's reign, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Jerusalem. Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal for three years, but then he rebelled. In response, the Babylonians proceeded to attack Judah, and God sent Aramean, Moabite, and Ammonite raiders against Judah as well (2 Kings 24:2). Babylon took over, and Egypt stood down (2 Kings 24:7).

Jehoiachin succeeded his father, Jehoiakim, in Jerusalem, but his rule was short-lived as King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege against Jerusalem and the young king along with the queen mother and the royal officials surrendered to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10–12). All this happened in accordance with the things prophesied against

Judah due to the sins of Manasseh (2 Kings 24:2–4; 2 Chronicles 36:15–21). In this second deportation of Jews from Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin prisoner along with his mother, his wives, his officials, and the leading men in Judah (2 Kings 24:16). Nebuchadnezzar also took ten thousand others into exile, leaving only the poorest behind, and he raided the temple (2 Kings 24:13–14; 2 Chronicles 36:10).

With Jehoiachin imprisoned in Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar installed Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, on the throne. Zedekiah was rebellious against God and against King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chronicles 36:12–13). After eleven years of Zedekiah's rule, Jerusalem fully fell to Nebuchadnezzar. More exiles were carried off, and the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem's walls and burned the temple and the palaces (2 Kings 25:9–10; 2 Chronicles 36:19; Jeremiah 52:13–14). Jerusalem was destroyed.

Thirty-seven years after his deportation, Jehoiachin was given some freedom in Babylon. Evil-Merodach had become king of Babylon (2 Kings 25:27; Jeremiah 52:31), and he “spoke kindly” to Jehoiachin and gave the imprisoned king a seat of honor at his table and a daily allowance (2 Kings 25:28–30; Jeremiah 52:32–34). “So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table” (2 Kings 25:29).

The tragedy that befell Jehoiachin was predicted by the prophet Jeremiah. God said that Jehoiachin would be removed from the throne (Jeremiah 22:24) and be taken to Babylon, where he would die (verses 26–27). But the curse upon Jehoiachin went deeper than just his deposition and exile: “This is what the Lord says: ‘Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah’” (Jeremiah 22:30). Thus, the line of kings from David's family ended with Jehoiachin

—a fact that had ramifications for the Messiah, who was to be the Son of David (2 Samuel 7:12–16).

Jehoiachin's is a strange tale—son of a puppet king of Egypt, imprisoned by the king of Babylon to make room for another puppet king, taken in the second wave of exiles, yet released from prison and given a gracious end to his life. Jehoiachin seems to be a man stuck in the middle of history. We do not know what happened during his years in prison or why Evil-Merodach was so kind to him. What is evident in the story of Jehoiachin is God's righteous judgment as well as His merciful grace.