# The Last Five Kings of Judah

## Jeremiah 22: 16.

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“He judged the cause of
the poor and needy;
Then it was well.
Was not this knowing
Me?” says the LORD.”
Jeremiah 22: 16.

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# I. Introduction

The Biblical prophets are champions of the social justice. They protect the poor, the broken-hearted, the despairing, the sick, the marginalized and the orphans, while defending those who are victims of the corruption. They speak on behalf of God, promoting equality, peace, and unity.

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“Hebrew Prophets were not mere seers, fortune-tellers, or prognosticators, but rather served as the mouthpieces of Yahweh, the vehicles that carried His word to Israel. One of the theological themes of the prophetic writings deals with reminding the Jews to worship Yahweh alone... However, there is an unprecedented emergence of the theme of social justice in the Prophets that is mainly due to the violation of certain statutes in the Mosaic Torah on the part of the Jews that dealt with loving one’s neighbor (Lev. 19:18) and fair treatment of the poor (Lev 23:35-37, Deut. 15:1-2, 16:19). As a result, as one reads through the Prophetic books, it becomes evident that the Prophets question the validity of following only the Torah’s statutes that are concerned with rituals and sacrifices while violating the Mosaic principles dealing with the fair and ethical treatment of one another.”
Katerina Ivanovna, The Later Prophets and Social Justice, 2007.

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“There are... two traditions in Jewish life and history. There is the tradition of the Hebrew prophets and the tradition of those who stoned the prophets...”
Morris U. Schappes

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“The prophets in the Hebrew scriptures were people chosen by God to speak for God to the people of God, calling them back to fidelity to their "covenant" with God when they had gone astray and reminding them of God's promise when they were discouraged. They were the bearers of the vision God wanted the people of God to have. They were constantly reminding the people to "do justice" and not lose hope in God's promise of a Kingdom or realm or community of "peace". James McGinnis

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“Prophets, by contrast, believe that the urgency and magnitude of the evils they see admit of no delay, no calm and patient dialogue... Jeremiah didn’t write a theory of justice, nor did Isaiah address the Israelites with Socratic dialectic.
Suppose Jeremiah had said, ‘The heart of Israel is corrupt utterly, but on the other hand there are some very nice people there.’ To prophets, philosophical patience looks like collaboration with evil.”
Martha C. Nussbaum

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“Israel’s prophets regularly condemn the predatory powerful who “plunder” and “grind the faces of the poor” (Isaiah 3:14-15). Yahweh rejects Israel’s worship because their hands are filled with the blood of undefended orphans and widows (Isaiah 1:10-17, 21-23). Isaiah calls Israel to a fast that includes dividing bread with the hungry, housing the homeless, and covering the naked (Isaiah 58:7). For the prophets, care of the poor is a matter of righteousness or justice, not mercy. Yahweh Himself maintains “justice for the poor” (Psalm 140:12), and rulers (Isaiah 10:2) and people (Ezekiel 22:29) are expected to do the same. Filled with the Spirit, the Messianic Branch will judge the poor with righteousness and act for the afflicted (Isaiah 11:4).”
Peter J. Leithart

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“The prophets are not only speaking against the king, but also against the entire population, especially against those who abuse of their position and privileges.”
Amsler S; Asurmendi J; Auneau J; Martin-Archard R.

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The book of Jeremiah is concerned with justice, to be exercised by rulers, to be sure, but also by all people. Importantly, then and now, survival in a time of crisis, according to the prophet, depends not on wisdom, might, and wealth, but on doing justice for those on the social margins. Second, it identifies the substance of justice to be the protection of the weaker members of society from oppression by those more powerful. There is a particular emphasis upon economic exploitation."

John. M. Bracke, Justice in the Book of Jeremiah, Word and World, vol. 22, #4, 2002, p. 387. 388.

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# II. Context

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The names of the last five kings of Judah are very similar. They all have God as part of their names.

The first four kings have the reference to God at the beginning of their name. For Zedekiah this is the last part (Zedek = righteousness; iah = Yahweh).

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How fantastic would be to see the king Zedekiah (the meaning of his name is ‘God is righteousness’), contributing to more righteousness in the society.

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- The meaning of Jehoahaz is ‘Yahwe has grasped’. It will be a fantastic reality to see that during the reign of Jehoahaz God was able to grasp Jerusalem.
- Jehoiakim means ‘Raised by Yahweh’. If the king were able to show by his own example the important place that God has in his life, everything will be different.
- Jehoiachin means ‘Yahwe Establishes’. It is also the message of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1). Obviously, God sends Jeremiah because of the fact that the leadership of his time are far from God.
- Josiah means Given Of The Lord, or Dispair of the Lord, or Yahwe heals. It was still time for Jerusalem to come back to the Lord and to be healed.

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# Chronology of the last five kings of Judah before the Exile

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 640 – 609 BC | King Josiah |
| 2 | 609 BC | King Jehoahaz |
| 3 | 609 – 598 BC | King Jehoiakim |
| 4 | 598 – 597 BC | King Jehoiakin |
| 5 | 597 – 587 BC | King Zedekiah |

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# The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Structure

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Ch. 1 | Prologue: Vocation of Jeremiah and prediction about Babylon |
| B | Ch. 2 - 10 | Prophecies regarding Judah |
| C | Ch. 11 - 20 | Confessions of Jeremiah |
| D | Ch. 21 - 29 | Nebuchadnezzar punishing the king Zedekiah and Jerusalem |
| E | Ch. 30 - 33 | The New Covenant and the new Consolation |
| D’ | Ch. 34 - 35 | Sin of the king Zedekiah |
| C’ | Ch. 36 - 45 | Suffering of Jeremiah |
| B’ | Ch. 46 - 51 | Prophecies regarding the Nations |
| A | Ch. 52 | Epilogue: Fall of Jerusalem and fulfillment of the prophecy about Babylon |

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III. Through the study of the Prophet Jeremiah we discover the desire of God to communicate His love to His people. Also, it is obvious that God is willing to see His children showing the same love to each and every one.

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# 1. The king Josiah did what the Lord considered as right, by fostering justice in the country

"He judged the cause of the poor".

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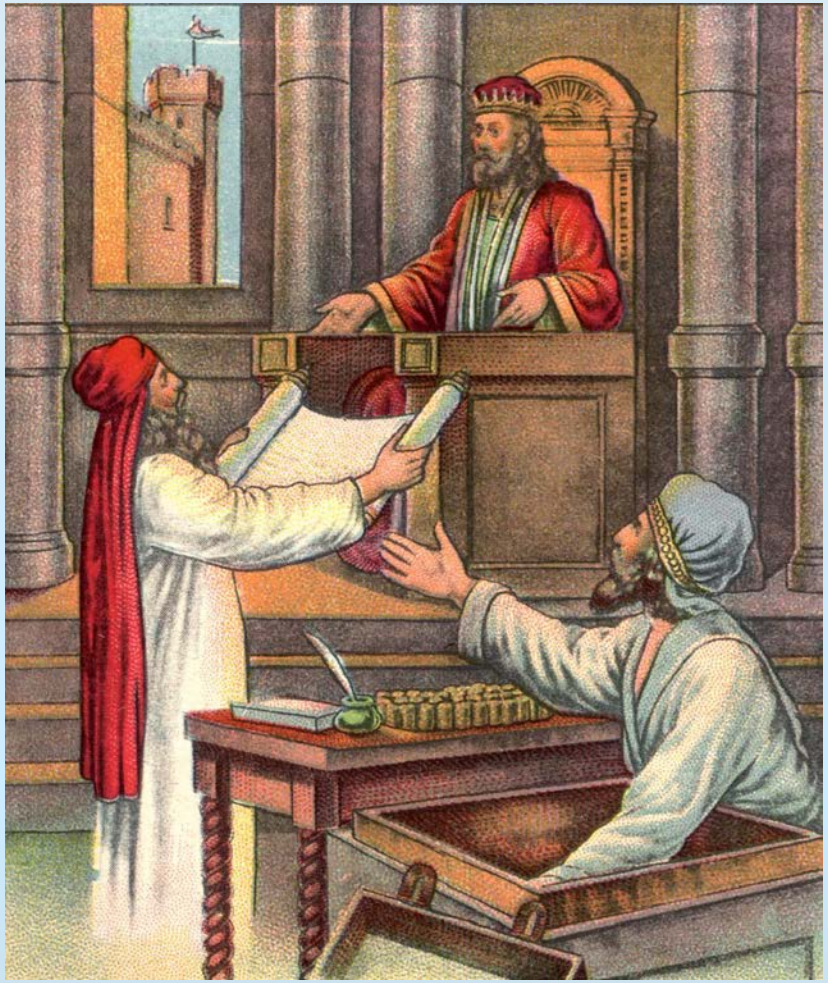
“God’s self-identification, as we see in the first of the Ten Commandments, is as the One Who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Social justice, then, is not a goal that humans decide to strive for; it is the commandment of the Just God. God commanded the Israelites to create a society based on the values embodied in laws designed to ensure equality and fairness for all.”
Benjamin Scolnic



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“The outcast, the disadvantaged, and the exploited, are to be cared for in a special way, especially those with no voice on their own.”
John Piper

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“Love exists only among equals.”
Gustavo Gutierrez.

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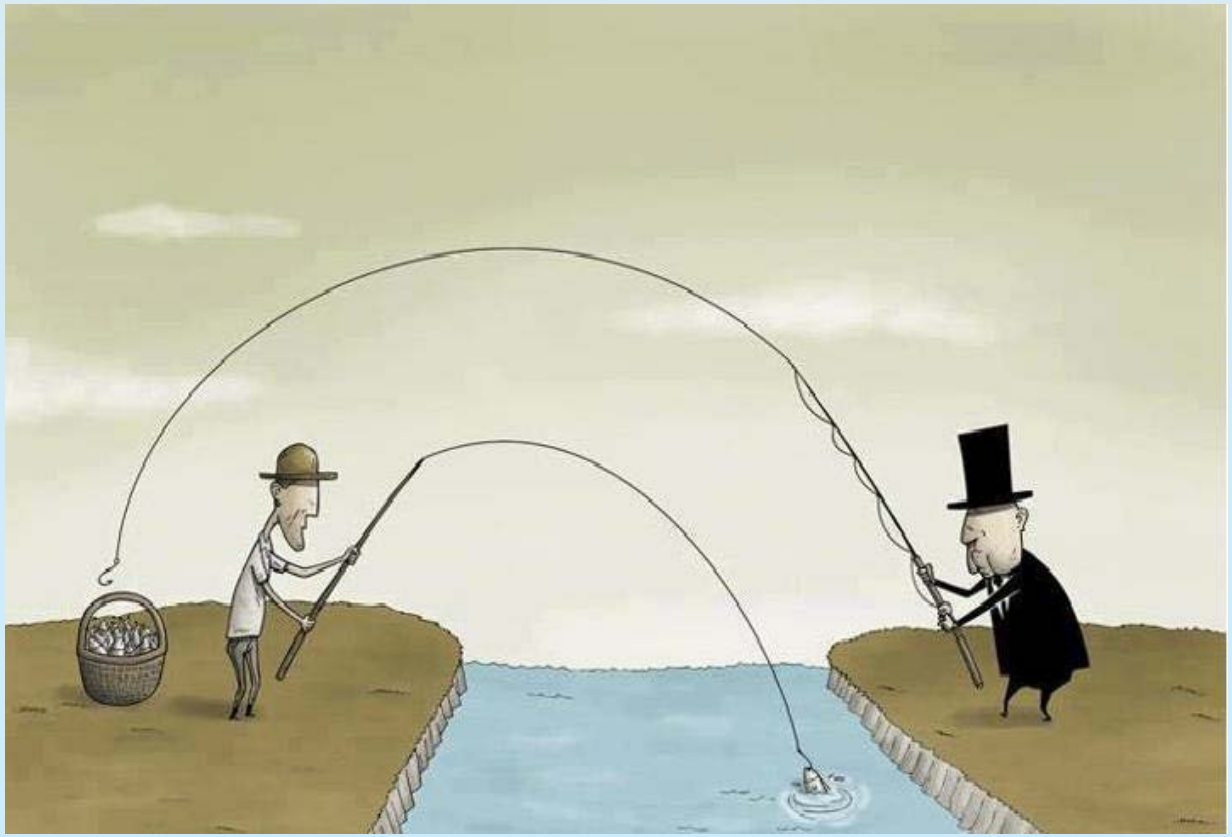
“Teach a man to fish so that you may take endlessly from his bounty, behind his back and throughout his entire lifetime, and you teach him that his efforts are meaningless, that he is worthless, and that the world is an unjust and evil place from which there is no escape except into helplessness.”
Matthew Rosario



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“There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up.”
John Holmes

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# 2. The king Josiah took care of the lowest class in the society

"He judged the cause of the needy. Then it was well."

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Definition of the needy: “Someone who is in want, chiefly poor, subject to oppression and abuse, needing help, deliverance from trouble, especially as delivered by God. General reference to lowest class.” Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon.

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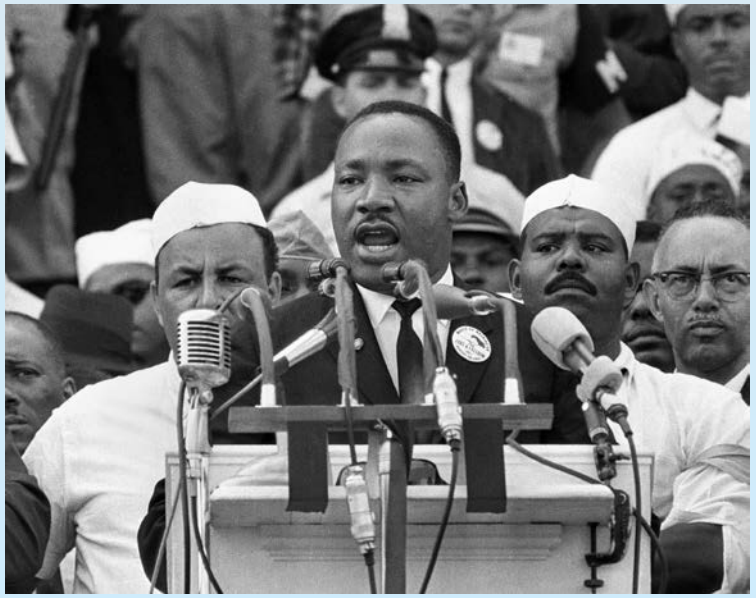
“One of the great influences on the social justice traditions of Christians and Jews are the Old Testament Prophets. The Old Testament prophets had a strong sense of social justice for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the marginalized. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Ezekiel, and the great prophets of Israel inspired later day human rights activists like Martin Luther King Jr., Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, William Sloane Coffin, Ralph Abernathy, Pauli Murray, Bayard Rustin, Cesar Chavez, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and countless others to fight for the poor and the marginalized in society.”
Angelo Lopez



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“The Prophets do not have a different message from the rest of the Bible; they just packaged their writing differently... The Prophets reveal God’s character in a different context, and we see how He interacts with His people and how He reveals His love through the covenant of relationship.”
Stephane Beaulieu

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# 3. Taking care of people in their needs is the best approach to a deep knowledge of the Divine

"Was not this knowing Me?" says the LORD."

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“Was not this to know me?” The prophet, as a true witness of the law of righteousness, proclaims that the religious fame of Josiah rested not on his restoration of the Temple worship, nor on his suppression of idolatry, but much more on his faithfulness in his kingly work to the cause of righteousness and mercy. They only could know Him who, in this respect, strove to be like Him (1 John 3:2).” Charles Ellicott

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“They only truly know God who obey him; men vainly pretend to piety who are defective in justice and charity.”
John Wesley

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“Where a real knowledge of God exists, men must necessarily have regard to uprightness and moderation. He then who thus acts cruelly towards his neighbors, clearly shows that every thought of religion and every care for it is rooted out of his heart...

Piety leads men to all the duties of love. Where God then is known, kindness to man also appears. So also on the other hand we may conclude, that all regard for God is extinguished, and all fear of him is abolished, when men wilfully do wrong to one another, and when they seek to oppress or defraud one another. There is therefore no doubt but that gross impiety will be found where the offices of love are neglected.”

John Calvin

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# V. Conclusion

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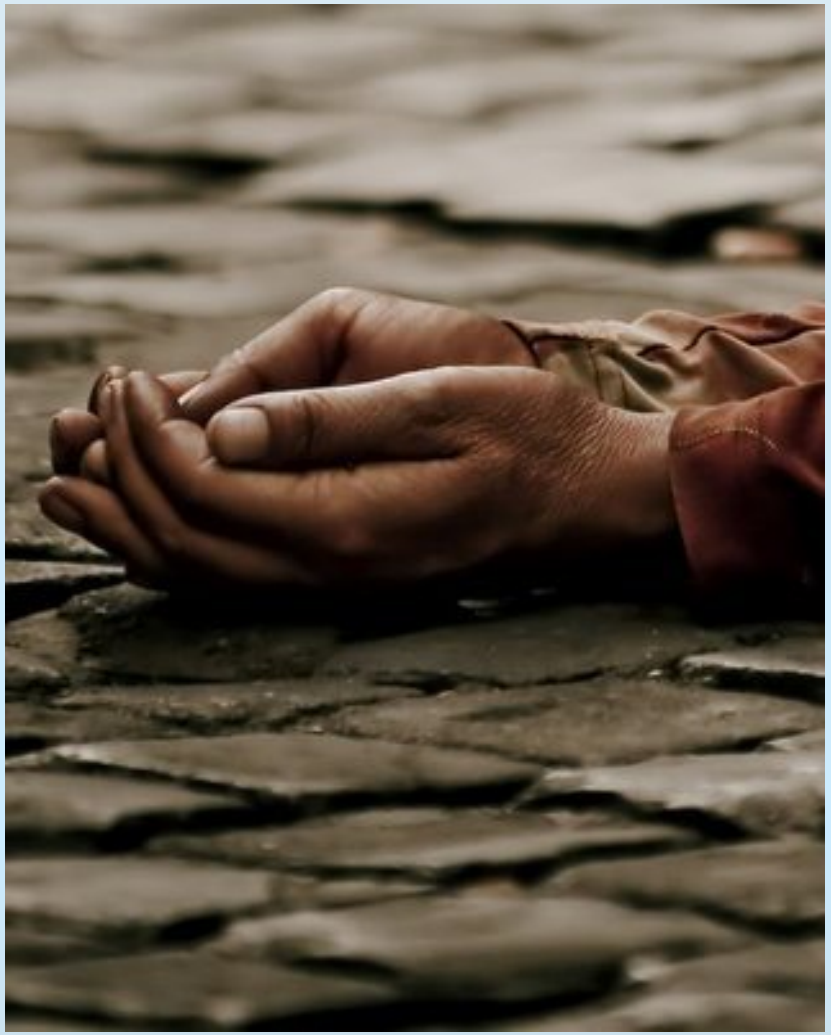
"The social ethics of the prophets was thoroughly grounded theologically in Israel's historical experience of God. It was also grounded in the ongoing struggle to come to terms with how that experience should work out in the life of the people. For Israel, social ethics was related to their understanding of what it meant to be God's people and how they should live in the world as God's people. Both for the Prophets and for the *torah* traditions, that understanding was theological anchored in the exodus."
Dennis Bratcher



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“There is nothing, after their recognition of the claims of God, that more distinguishes the laws given by Moses than the liberal, tender, and hospitable spirit enjoined toward the poor. Although God had promised greatly to bless His people, it was not His design that poverty should be wholly unknown among them. He declared that the poor should never cease out of the land. There would ever be those among His people who would call into exercise their sympathy, tenderness, and benevolence. Then, as now, persons were subject to misfortune, sickness, and loss of property; yet so long as they followed the instruction given by God, there were no beggars among them, neither any who suffered for food.”
Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 530, 531.

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“Against the marked oppression, the flagrant injustice, the unwonted luxury and extravagance, the shameless feasting and drunkenness, the gross licentiousness and debauchery, of their age, the prophets lifted their voices.”
Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, p. 282.

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“The Church risks irrelevance when it makes central God's preference for the poor and not His universal favor toward the poor in spirit.”
Gilbert Mylender

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“There is no long term solution for poor people outside of their encounter with Christ. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the Saviour for all. Everybody needs him. Our help to those in need is essential. However, our generosity cannot replace the good news of salvation.”
(DS)

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