

God's Patience, Justice, and Hope

2 Kings 21:1-25:30

Key Verse: 21:25-26

“Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did - with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses. Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger.”

Today's passage is about a most tragic event in Israel's history: the fall of Judah and the destruction of the temple. The people of Judah thought that they would never be destroyed because they were chosen people. They also thought that the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem would last forever. However, when they became idol worshipers, God judged them with his fierce anger. God is the God of love, and at the same time, he is the God of judgment. Many people misunderstand God, thinking that he is like a good-minded old grandfather. God is holy. Still, God is patient--not just for one or two years, but for decades and even centuries. Yet finally God judges man's sin without fail when it reaches its full measure. But even in God's righteous judgment, there is God's hope. Through today's passage we can learn God's patient love, his righteous judgment, and his undying hope for his people.

I. Manasseh provoked the Lord to anger (21:1-26)

Look at verses 1-7. Manasseh became king at the age of twelve. He was born during the third year of Hezekiah's extended life, and he reigned over Judah for fifty-five years (20:6). Hezekiah was a wonderful, godly king. However, Manasseh was a terribly evil king. Verse 2 says, "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites." Here we learn that faith is very personal. There is no guarantee that children will inherit their parents' faith. Also, parents cannot control their children. So we must pray for them. Manasseh rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed. He also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them, even building altars for them in the temple. He even sacrificed his own sons in the fire. He practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He put an Asherah pole in the temple. He desecrated the temple, in which the Lord had put his Name. People were influenced by Manasseh and did not listen

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to the Lord. As a result, they did more evil than the Gentile nations the Lord had driven out before them. (8-9)

Verse 16a says, "Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end...." He executed many prophets and righteous men, who did not bow down to Baal. According to tradition, he killed the prophet Isaiah by sawing him in two. (Heb 11:37a) In this way he committed so much sin that he provoked the Lord to anger. He completely destroyed the spiritual order among the Israelites, which his father Hezekiah had established. The author of Chronicles tells us that Manasseh repented his sin and was changed at the end of his life. (2 Chr 33:10-17) However, the author of Kings does not mention this because he wants to focus on God's righteous judgment due to Manasseh's sin. (23:26) James 1:15 says that after desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Sin grows. The result of sin is death. Sin started from the forefathers and it finally bore fruit in Manasseh's time. When it was full grown, the Lord's righteous judgment came.

Verses 10-15 are the Lord's judgment against Jerusalem and Judah. When Manasseh did evil in the eyes of the Lord, the Lord sent many prophets and warned him. Manasseh did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than the Amorites who preceded him and led Judah into sin. Therefore, God would bring such a disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who heard of it would tingle. People hear many bits of information every day that they ignore without consideration. But the news of the Lord's judgment against Judah would make people's ears tingle so that they would stop and think about the seriousness of sin and judgment. Though Judah was God's chosen nation, God did not show favoritism. God applied the same standard of judgment to Jerusalem that he had applied to Israel. (13a)

Look at 21:13b. "I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down." The Lord said he would wipe the dish, but he would not break the dish in his fierce anger. When ordinary human beings become angry, they smash the dish into pieces; they do not just wipe it. But the Lord is different. The purpose of the Lord's judgment was to clean the dish. The Lord wants to remove all the dirty things inside and wipe it clean and turn it upside down. It means he wanted to use it again later. In verses 14-15 the Lord revealed his plan. For a time, the Lord allowed their enemies to plunder them. They would be looted, but not all killed. Ultimately this refers to God's plan to send them to Babylon for exile for 70 years in order to purify them. The prophets declared the Lord's

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judgment against the Israelites and the evil kings at the cost of their lives. Then many of them became martyrs. (16)

After the death of Manasseh, his son Amon became king. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done. He repeated the same mistakes that his father had made. Then his officials conspired against him and assassinated him in his palace. Perhaps Amon's officials wanted to put someone else on the throne. But the people killed all who plotted against King Amon and made Josiah his son king in his place.

II. Josiah's spiritual reformation (22:1-23:30)

Josiah was one of the best kings in Judah's history. Even though his grandfather Manasseh and his father Amon were the most evil kings, he was not influenced by them. He learned a lesson from history. Especially he led a spiritual reformation according to the word of God. Let's see how this happened.

First, repairing the temple and finding the book of the law (22:1-20). Look at verses 1-2. Josiah was only eight years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left. Among the kings of Judah, only three kings were credited as those who walked in the ways of their father David. They are Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah. (1 Ki 15:22; 2 Ki 18:3; 2 Ki 22:2)

According to 2 Chronicles 34:3, when Josiah was in the eighth year of his reign, at age 16, he began to seek the God of his father David. Then, at age 20, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images. Then, when he was 26 years old, he began to restore the temple of the Lord. He managed the offering from people well and used it for repairing the temple. (4-6) The repairers were so faithful that no account needed to be made of the money entrusted to them. They were like Missionary Elijah Park. In the course of repairing the temple, they discovered a great treasure: the Book of the Law. Look at verse 8. "Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord.' He gave it to Shaphan who read it." Hilkiah found the Book of the Law of the Lord which had been given through Moses. (2 Chr 34:14) Most likely, this refers to what we call the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. In Deuteronomy 17:18,19, the Lord instructed kings to write down the Law of the Lord and to keep it with them all the days of their lives so that they would revere the Lord and reign over their nations

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based on the truth of God. Apparently, this had not been done for a long time. Perhaps in the time of Manasseh, people had burned the scrolls with the word of God. They abandoned the word of the Lord. Not only kings, but also the priests were not interested in the Book of the Law. But someone had hidden a copy in the temple. It might have been in a corner covered by dust. This shows the spiritual condition of the people of Judah. But in the course of repairing the temple, Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law. He was so happy that he could have shouted, "I have found the Book of the Law! I have found the greatest treasure!" Those who find the Bible are those who find the greatest treasure on earth because in the Bible all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. (Col 2:3)

Why is it important to find the Scriptures? What are the Scriptures? 2 Timothy 3:15-17 say, "...and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Scriptures are the very words of God which teach us the way of salvation. When we allow the word of God to teach us, rebuke us, correct us and train us, we can be saved and equipped to do good works. On the other hand, when the word of God is rare, people lose the direction of their lives and wander around. They end up following futile idols and money. If a man does not have the words of God, he lives according to the cravings of his sinful desire--the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does. (1 Jn 2:16) When there are no words of God, there is no hope or vision, only despair. However, the words of God give a man vision and hope even in the time of crisis. That is why the devil tries to take away the words of God from us. We have to find the Bible. It is not enough to have the Bible. We have to find it. When we find it, our lives will change, our families will change, our country will change. In his book, "The Heavenly Man," Brother Yun tells how there were no Bibles in China during the Cultural Revolution. Some had seen verses of the Bible, or a few hymns, but very few had seen an entire Bible. So the word of God was rare in the land of China. Brother Yun was filled with desire to have the Bible. So he went to an old man who was known to have a Bible and asked him to show the Bible to him. In those days Chinese people were required to read the words of Mao Tse Tung, not the Bible. If anyone was found to have the Bible, the whole family would be severely beaten in public at the center of their village. The old man told Brother Yun, "The Bible is a heavenly book. If you want it, you need to pray to God who is in heaven. Only he can give it to you. God is faithful and he answers everyone who earnestly seeks him." Brother Yun believed this word and prayed with fasting earnestly for four months, crying out, "O Lord, please give me a Bible!" Then miraculously, God gave him the Bible. He believed

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that it was the very word of God. He began to memorize it. The word of God worked in and through him. When he simply recited the Bible in one village, there was a great work of repentance among the people. We have to find the Bible. Whoever finds the Bible is changed and influences people around him. Finding the Bible is the way of life for us, our families, our nation and the whole world.

What did Josiah do with the Bible? Look at verses 11-13. He read it. He listened to the words of God very carefully. The word of the Lord revealed the sin of Josiah and his people. He was so shameful about their sin. He feared the Lord's judgment against them. He tore his robes and wept in the Lord's presence. (19) Then he asked his officials to inquire of the Lord in order to escape the Lord's judgment against them.

The officials went to the prophetess Huldah. She said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, This is what the Lord says: "I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read."' It was because they forsook the Lord and burned incense to other gods and provoked the Lord to anger--his fierce anger would not be quenched. The Lord said to Josiah in verses 18-20, "Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord...I have heard you." Josiah would not witness the disasters with his own eyes. Here we learn God's righteous judgment. People make light of God's judgment, saying, "Where is God's judgment?" (2 Pe 3:5) It is because God does not judge man immediately when they sin. However, that does not mean there is no judgment from God. If we do not repent, we pile up God's wrath against us. God does not punish us at the moment we commit sin, because he does not want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Ti 2:4) However, God's day of judgment will come like a thief. In that day, the heavens will disappear with a roar and the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. (2 Pe 3:10-12) God's judgment is more dreadful than we can imagine. How did Josiah respond to God's message of judgment?

Second, Josiah turned to the Lord according to the law of Moses (23:1-30).

When Josiah heard that he was exempt from God's judgment, he did not say, "Oh, that is good, there will be peace and security in my lifetime," like Hezekiah. Also, he did not become helpless due to despair. He did his best in order to save future generations. We should not despair over the Lord's judgment. We should do our best to help the coming generation, entrusting the result into the hand of God.

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What did Josiah do? Look at 23:1-3. Josiah went up to the temple of the Lord with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets--all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. They had a very sincere Bible study. Josiah renewed the covenant, promising to follow the Lord and keep his commands with all his heart and with all his soul. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. Then they were ready to remove all the idols from their land.

Verses 4-14 describe Josiah's reform and reveal that Judah's sin was terrible. There were idols in the temple of the Lord. Josiah removed them and burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley. He ground them to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of common people. He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes and the women who participated in sexual immorality as part of the ritual of idol worship. Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places from Geba to Beersheba. He allowed the priests to live in Jerusalem, although they could not serve at the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem; they ate the bread of repentance. He desecrated Topheth so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech. Some kings of Judah had dedicated horses and chariots to the sun and placed them at the entrance to the temple. They were probably influenced by the Egyptian worship of the sun, with the concept that the sun races across the sky like horses. Josiah removed all the traces of bad influence that came from Manasseh, Ahaz and even Solomon. Josiah's reformation also reached Samaria. Josiah demolished the altar at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam. (15-20) Josiah found the tomb of the prophet who had warned Jeroboam to repent. He spared that tomb and honored the man of God. Josiah thoroughly removed idols from the land of Judah. So we can find the expressions, "ground it to powder," and "scattered the dust," "burned," "cut down," "smashed," "removed," "slaughtered," and "demolished." Josiah did not compromise. He reformed thoroughly according to the words of God.

Look at verses 21-23. Josiah also gave this order to all the people: "Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." Not since the days of the Judges who led Israel, or throughout the days of the kings of Israel and Judah, had any such Passover been observed. Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists and household gods and idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the Law written in the book. Here we learn that the motivation of his reformation was love the Lord and his word.

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Look at verse 25. "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did--with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses." Josiah did not serve the Lord habitually or half-heartedly. He served the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his strength. Loving the words of the Lord were his power source for carrying out the reformation. If we really love the Lord and his words with all our hearts, souls and strength, then the Lord gives us strength and power to serve him in our time, especially to love others in Christ, share the gospel with them, and to do our homework. Let's decide to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls and strength.

Look at verses 26-27. Even though Josiah's reforms were thorough, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done. Idol worship was too deeply rooted among the Israelites to be taken out. So the Lord decided to remove Judah, as he had punished Israel. Also, he determined to destroy the temple in Jerusalem, as well. It was the Lord's love because he wanted to purify them and mold them into his holy nation through divine discipline.

Verses 29-30 tell us that Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo. He died at the age of 39. People were very sorrowful for his death and the prophet Jeremiah composed a song of lament for Josiah. (2 Chr 35:24-25). His death was God's special favor for him: he did not see the Lord bring disaster upon his people. After the death of Josiah, Judah lost her strength rapidly, and was destroyed 22 years later.

III. The last four kings of Judah (23:31-25:30)

In this passage we see the last four kings of Judah. They were all evil in the sight of God. Finally the Lord carried out his righteous judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. However, God still had hope for them.

First, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, kings of Judah (23:21-24:20). After the death of Josiah, Jehoahaz became king and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his fathers had done. (32) Then he was taken as a prisoner to Egypt where he died. Pharaoh Neco imposed on Judah a levy of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Also, he made Eliakim, son of Jehoahaz, king in place of his father and he changed his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. And he did evil in the eyes of the

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Lord, just as his fathers had done. (37) He was made king by Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt. But he served Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, after Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco in the battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates in 605 B.C. (Jer 46:2) Egypt was only a paper tiger. The king of Egypt did not march out from his own country again because the king of Babylon had taken all his territory from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River. (24:7) Nebuchadnezzar allowed Jehoiakim to reign as king. He demanded only his loyalty and took captives of war to Babylon. It was the first Babylonian captivity. At that time, Daniel and his friends were among those who were taken. (Dan 1:1) Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar for three years, and then changed his mind and rebelled against him. Nebuchadnezzar sent his army and destroyed Judah. (24:2) This had been prophesied by the Lord's servant. Through Jeremiah, the Lord asked the kings of Judah to serve the king of Babylon repeatedly. But they did not listen. (Jer 25:4) So in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign, the Lord sent his words of judgment against Judah through the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah's secretary Baruch read his dictated message from the Lord to King Jehoiakim in order to help him repent. (Jer 36:1-3) But King Jehoiakim did not listen. He became rebellious and burned the prophetic scrolls one by one in the fire. (Jer 36:20-26) So the Lord judged him by Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. (Jer 36:29-31) However, the underlying cause was the sin of Manasseh. (23:26; 24:3,4)

Jehoiachin succeeded Jehoiakim as king. He was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months. (24:8) He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father had done. (24:9) At that time, the officers of Nebuchadnezzar advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it. Nebuchadnezzar himself joined them. Jehoiachin, king of Judah, had no choice but to surrender to him. Then Nebuchadnezzar removed all the treasures from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace and took away all the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the Lord. He carried into exile all Jerusalem, a total of ten thousand people. He took all the officers and fighting men and craftsmen and artisans. Only the poorest of the land were left in order to take care of the farms. It is called the second Babylonian captivity. Among the captives were Ezekiel and Mordecai. Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah.

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah. He became king at the age of 21. He reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done. It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah and in the end he thrust them from his presence. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon, who had appointed him as king. He foolishly betrayed

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the Babylonian king even though he saw that three previous kings were destroyed when they did this. Jeremiah pleaded with him earnestly, saying that he would live if he surrendered to the king of Babylon. Otherwise, he would be destroyed. (Jer 21:1-7; 34:1-5; 37:6-10; 38:17-23) But he did not listen to Jeremiah. He even imprisoned Jeremiah and betrayed the king of Babylon. (Jer 37:16-21) When he did not listen to God's servant, he faced terrible consequences.

Second, the fall of Jerusalem and Judah (25:1-30). In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He besieged Jerusalem for two years. During the siege food was so rare that parents ate their children. Ezekiel 5:10 says, "Therefore, in your midst, fathers will eat their children and children will eat their fathers." In that terrible situation, the king of Egypt marched out to confront Nebuchadnezzar in order to keep his promise to Zedekiah. But Nebuchadnezzar went out to meet him and Pharaoh marched back to Egypt. Then Nebuchadnezzar went back to Jerusalem and besieged the city again. (Jer 37:5-7) By the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. Then the city wall was broken through and Zedekiah fled along with his whole army. But he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah where sentence was pronounced on him. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. (3-7) Jeremiah prophesied that Zedekiah would be taken into Babylon. (Jer 32:5; 34:3) Ezekiel prophesied that he would not see Jerusalem again. (Eze 12:13) About one month later, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. He carried into exile all the people who remained in the city. But the commander left behind some of the poor people of the land to work the fields. It is called the third Babylonian captivity. Some of the poorest people left in the land did not have anything to lose. The Lord humbled down the rich, those who had much. But he gave grace to the poor.

It must have been a shock for the Israelites to see the temple of the Lord burned down, because the Lord promised to dwell in it. They believed that the temple would protect them from danger. (Jer 7:4) But the Lord revealed to the people that the temple was nothing but a building. When they were unfaithful to God, a building could not help them. Babylonians took away all the articles used in the temple service. (13-15) Also, the two bronze pillars named Jakin and Boaz, which were the symbol of stability and power of the temple were broken down and

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carried to Babylon. (16-17; 2 Chr 3:15-17) More than sixty prominent people were executed as well. (18-20) The prophet Zephaniah said of the day, "That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers." (Zeph 1:15,16) 25:11b reads, "So Judah went into captivity away from her land."

The Lord exiled Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C. Why did he do so? It was because he wanted to root out Judah's sin. Idol worship was so prevalent that it could not be removed by Josiah's reformation. His reformation was just like cutting several rotten branches. When a root is rotten, one cannot save the tree by taking away several branches. The Lord wanted to save the whole tree. So he transplanted the whole tree to Babylon so that somehow it might live. Judah's spiritual condition was so poor that major surgery was the only solution. Therefore, the Lord performed major surgery. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, abounding in love. However, he is not patient with the sins of people forever. The Lord is the God of love who loves sinners. But he is also the holy God who hates sin. So his righteous judgment was inevitable. Yet God is patient. Why? God is patient with us to lead us to repentance. (Ro 2:4-5) So whenever the Israelites sinned against the Lord, the Lord became angry. But he was patient with them for a long time. The Lord not only was patient with them, but sent his servants diligently, and warned his people. However, they provoked the Lord to anger continually. They killed the Lord's servants and kept on worshiping their idols. Finally their sins reached the full measure, and even Josiah's reformation could not quench the burning anger of the Lord. But even in the midst of his dreadful judgment the Lord had hope for them. To send them to Babylon was not to abandon them, but to purify them. It was an expression of his love. This hope and love was expressed by the prophet Jeremiah in 29:10-13 as follows: "This is what the Lord says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'" The Lord had great hope for his people. He never gave up his hope for them. With this hope, he purified them through discipline so that they could be used as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Verses 22-30 are the epilogue. They briefly describe what happened to Judah after the Babylonian exile. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah to be over the people who were left behind. However, Ishmael, who was of royal blood, assassinated

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him. After 37 years of exile, Jehoiachin was released from his prison and a new king of Babylon came to power. Evil-Merodach gave Jehoiachin a seat of honor higher than those of other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. This was the Lord's sign that he would bring back the Israelites to Judah and Jerusalem. Most of all, it was the sign of hope because the Lord protected David's line through which he would send the Messiah. (Mt 1:11,12)

We praise and thank God who disciplines us in his love. God is the God of patience, the God of justice, and the God of hope.