

# DIGGING DEEPER – WEEK 5

## *Royal Responsibility*

$$E + R = O$$

This equation evaded the understanding of the kings of Judah during Jeremiah’s lifetime; and if we aren’t careful, we will miss its meaning as well. Let me explain.

### **Events + Response = Outcome<sup>1</sup>**

The two variables in this equation differ from each other in that the first variable—Events—is beyond our control. Many events and circumstances in life just happen to us. We can’t change them. Job loss, cancer, defiant children, and death of loved ones, for example, assail us at different times in life. In other seasons, we experience precious gifts of healthy children, God’s financial provision, and talents that enable us to find success in our area of expertise.

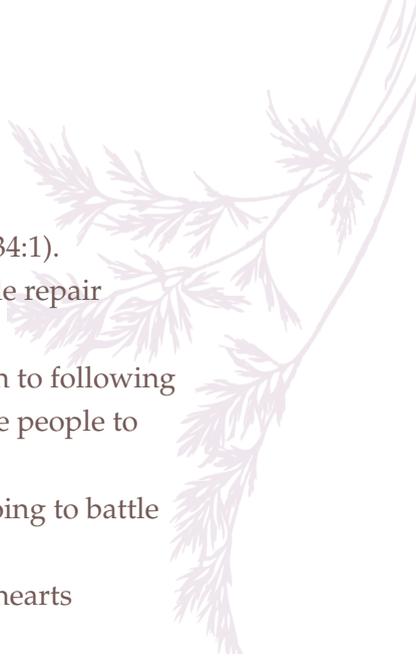
While we cannot govern the circumstances we often find ourselves in, the second variable—Response—rests fully in our hands. Our response to the challenges and successes of life are up to us. Will we remain humble? Will we seek God’s help? Will we trust in what we can’t see or let bitterness overtake us? Will we blame others for our problems or accept harsh realities with faith in a loving God?

Together the E and the R define the ultimate Outcome in our lives. As we look at the lives of the kings of Judah during Jeremiah’s ministry, we mostly find negative examples. In other words, they show us “what not to do” with the R. These kings had little control over their E. They were kings by birth, with great responsibility over a nation during a time of oppression. Let’s look at their lives and see how their formulas played out.

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## Josiah (640-609 B.C.) – 2 Kings 22:1–23:30

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- Events** —Became king at age 8 (2 Kings 22:1; 2 Chronicles 34:1).  
—In 622 B.C. a manuscript was found during Temple repair revealing God’s laws that were being broken.
- Response** —Instituted political and religious reforms to return to following God—destroyed idols, celebrated Pasover, led the people to obey God (2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34–35).  
—Refused to listen to God’s directions about not going to battle against Egypt.
- Outcome** —Reforms were more outward than inward in the hearts of people.  
—Died in battle against Egypt near Megiddo in 609 B.C. for his failure to consult God about the battle (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-24).  
—Jeremiah composed the funeral songs for Josiah that the Israelites sang for centuries as laments for the good things Josiah had done (2 Chronicles 35:25).

Josiah was the only king Jeremiah had a good relationship with. His ministry started during Josiah’s reforms. “At first Jeremiah was enthusiastic about the reform, but his interest waned when it proved ineffective.”<sup>2</sup> Josiah definitely had some good responses to the events in his life, but he also chose to let political prejudice and hatred for Egypt blind him to the greater picture of God’s plan.

## Jehoahaz (609 B.C.) – 2 Kings 23:31-33; 2 Chronicles 36:1-4

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- Events** —Son of Josiah who reigned only three months because Pharaoh Neco deported him to Egypt, where he died.
- Response** —He was anti-Egyptian, which is probably why he was chosen as king over his older brother Eliakim (Jehoiakim) when Josiah died. Ezekiel 19:3 calls him a lion and a “man-eater”.
- Outcome** —Jeremiah told the people to mourn for Jehoahaz (Jeremiah 22:10-12) and prophesied he would never return from captivity.



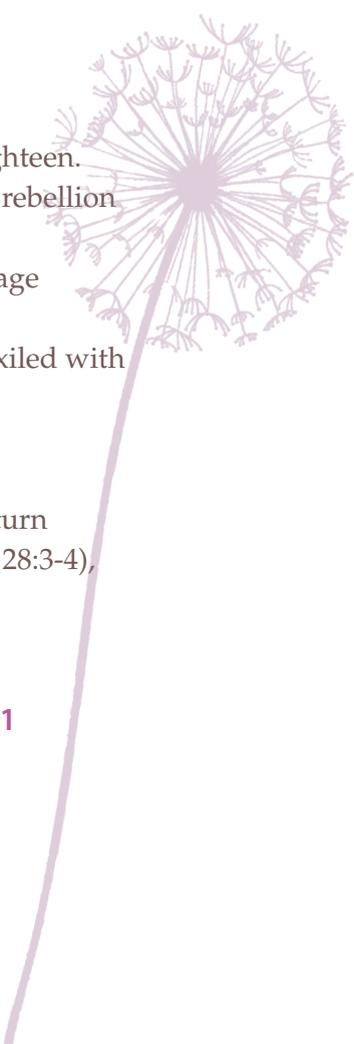
## Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.) – 2 Kings 23:34–24:7; 2 Chronicles 36:5-8

- Events** —Son of Josiah originally named Eliakim, who was set up as king by Pharaoh Neco.  
—In 605 B.C., when Egypt was defeated by Babylon at Carchemish, Jehoiakim became a Babylonian vassal.
- Response** —Pro-Egyptian.  
—“He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God” (2 Chronicles 36:5).  
—Known for his re-institution of idol worship throughout Judah.  
—Rebelled against Babylon in 605 B.C. to side with Egypt and get out from under heavy tribute.
- Outcome** —“Jehoiakim had been a failure as ruler on both domestic and international fronts. Self-indulgent and luxury-loving, he was cast in the mold of Solomon”<sup>3</sup> (Jeremiah 22:11-13, 17).  
—He reigned eleven years until Nebuchadnezzar took him away to Babylon in chains.

## Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.) – 2 Kings 24:8-17; 2 Chronicles 36:9-10

- Events** —Jehoiakim’s son, who became king when he was eighteen.  
“Inherited a disintegrating kingdom, with Judah in rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar’s overlordship”<sup>4</sup>
- Response** —Resisted Babylonian rule; didn’t follow God’s message of surrender.
- Outcome** —Reigned only three months and ten days and was exiled with other leaders to Babylon.  
—His sins discounted his descendants from ruling (Jeremiah 22:24-30).  
—Many in the kingdom thought Jehoiachin would return (a false prophet, Hananiah, predicted it in Jeremiah 28:3-4), but Jeremiah rightly said he would remain exiled (Jeremiah 13:18-19).

## Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.) – 2 Kings 24:17–25:26; 2 Chronicles 36:11-21

- Events** —Last king of Judah; uncle of Jehoiachin.  
—Set up as king by Babylon.
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- Response** —Indecisive and pulled between pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian counselors.  
 —Fear of man instead of fear of God (Jeremiah 27:12-15).  
 —“He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and he refused to humble himself when the prophet Jeremiah spoke to him directly from the LORD” (2 Chronicles 36:12).  
 —Joined in an anti-Babylon conference with Egypt, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon (Jeremiah 27:1-7).
- Outcome** —“Zedekiah’s revolt was fatal, leading to the fall of Jerusalem and the conquest of Judah.”<sup>5</sup>  
 —Zedekiah had to watch as his sons and officials were slaughtered, and then his eyes were gouged out before he was led away to a Babylonian prison where he later died (Jeremiah 52:10-11).

As we see the formula of  $E + R = O$  played out in the lives of the kings of Judah, we must look at our own lives. What events have happened that we didn’t ask for? These kings faced political pressure from within and without. The decisions they made affected thousands of lives. The circumstances of their lives were by no means a piece of cake. How about you? Think about the tough situations, injustices, or daily drones that aren’t the fairy tale life you expected.

The kings named above blamed everyone but themselves, tried to manipulate human solutions, and responded with pride and the fear of people in the “events” of their lives. Their outcomes tell us that maybe we should try something else. As we look at the hand that has been dealt us, let’s take Jeremiah’s message to heart and take personal responsibility for our responses. It is the only variable we can control.

No matter how we have reacted in the past, we can confess our mistakes and decide today to take ownership for our responses. We can choose humility, obedience to God, ears that listen to God’s messengers, and a soft heart. By doing this we don’t become doormats. Rather, we may become more courageous women who stand up for the truth in God’s Word as we respond to His leading. As you consider applying this formula in your life, focus more on the R than the E. It has a great impact on the O in your heart and mind today.

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1. Jack Canfield, *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 6.
  2. Philip J. King, *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 19.
  3. *Ibid.*, 21.
  4. George Arthur Buttrick, editor, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, Volume II, E-J* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 811.
  5. King, *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion*, 25.