

2 Kings Lesson 23

2 Kings Chapter 23

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Memory verses for this week: *1Ch 16:10 Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. 1Ch 16:11 Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually.*

Introduction: In chapter 22, we saw King Josiah take the throne of Judah at the tender age of eight. His record was great, and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. In this week's lesson, we study more about Josiah.

After hearing the words of the book of the Law, Josiah then read God's Word to the assembled nation and made a covenant before them to serve the Lord. He begins a process of reformations to purge out all forms of idolatry from the land. Josiah then re-institutes the Passover in Judah. His untimely death is recorded followed by brief account of his ungodly successors in Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim.

I. Josiah Legislates Morality in Judah

2Ki 23:1 And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.

2Ki 23:2 And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD.

After hearing the reading of the Law of Moses by Huldah, Josiah assembled the entire leadership as well as all of the men of Jerusalem and Judah to the Temple where he, himself, read to them "the words of the book of the covenant."

Precisely which portions of the Law were read is not clear. It likely may have been from Exodus 24 as well as portions of Deuteronomy warning of God's chastening upon Israel if they forsook Him.

2Ki 23:3 And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

2Ki 23:4 And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and

carried the ashes of them unto Bethel.

Note again verse 3.

"The king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant".

It may be that Josiah stood upon the brazen scaffold which Solomon had made for official appearances at the Temple. We saw the king standing beside a pillar in 2 Kings Ch. 11.

2Ki 11:14 And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner was, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, Treason.

In any event, he there publicly recommitted himself to a covenant with the Lord:

(1) to walk after the Lord,

(2) to obey His commandments, testimonies and statutes (i.e., all the laws of God, moral, civil, and ceremonial). Implicit in the text is that the king made this covenant with God on behalf of the nation that they as well would obey all of God's word "with all their heart and all their soul."

Furthermore, the king determined before his people to perform the words of the covenant written in God's Word. Evidently, in standing to the covenant, the men of Judah publicly agreed thereto.

In verse 4, Josiah lost no time in proceeding to purge idolatry from Judah. He ordered those in authority at the Temple to rid the Temple of anything which pertained to Baal, their groves, and worship of the heavens. The "priests of the second order" likely refers to the second course of priests which were on duty when ordered to cleanse the Temple.

The "keepers of the door" were Levites. All priests and Levites on duty at the Temple were ordered to throw out anything which was idolatrous. Not only were there items pertaining to Baal worship, but also the idol of the grove for Ashtoreth. There also were items pertaining to worship of the heavens.

All of these Josiah ordered burned in the Kidron valley just east of and below the Temple. The ashes were then carried to Bethel (in what had been the northern kingdom). This was where Jeroboam had first erected a golden calf centuries earlier. In so sending the ashes there, Josiah showed contempt of that place and his detestation of the idolatry there.

II. Josiah Removes Priests in Idolatrous Places

2Ki 23:5 And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven.

2Ki 23:6 And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people.

2Ki 23:7 And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove.

Josiah removed the priests of the idolatrous places in Jerusalem and throughout Judah. He removed the grove in the house of the Lord. The context lends itself to the idea that the grove in the house of the Lord was rather a carved one, as some think the image of the grove, possibly of Ashtoreth itself. This Josiah had burned at the Kidron brook in the deep valley just east and beneath the Temple mount.

He then ordered the ashes to be ground into powder and cast them upon the graves of those who had worshiped these idols. See II Chronicles 34:3-4.

2Ch 34:3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images.

2Ch 34:4 And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them.

He broke down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove. In the midst of the apostasy which had overtaken Jerusalem, homosexuality had also come out of the closet to openness. The association between apostasy and such immorality is not a coincidence. America is very much in the same condition today. The reference may be to a house of homosexual prostitution or at the least homosexual activity. Also, the hangings (a form of tapestry) for idolatrous worship were manufactured at this same place. Josiah destroyed it all.

2Ki 23:8 And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city.

2Ki 23:9 Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the

LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren.

The king then ordered all the priests from their homes throughout Judah to defile the high places scattered across the realm. This may have been accomplished by placing dead carcasses upon the high places across the land. Geba and Beersheba were the northern and southern extremities of Judah respectively.

There evidently were also high places at one of the very gates of Jerusalem on the left-hand side. Josiah destroyed these as well. The mention of Joshua, governor of the city, evidently refers to a chief magistrate or 'mayor' of the city.

"Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren".

This apparently refers to priests of Jehovah who had compromised their ministry by offering sacrifices upon spurious high places around the kingdom. They were thus no longer allowed to come to the official altar of Jehovah at Jerusalem. However, they were permitted to partake of the holy things with the priests, such as the meal offerings made of unleavened flour. Josiah was thorough in purging sin and compromise from his kingdom.

2Ki 23:10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.

2Ki 23:11 And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathanmelech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

2Ki 23:12 And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron.

"Josiah defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech".

The valley of Hinnom (also known as Gehenna in the New Testament) was immediately to the south of the ancient city of Jerusalem. For centuries, there had been a city dump which through spontaneous combustion was continuously on fire. There also was located the image of Molech, the pagan idol to which infant children were made to pass through its flames.

Verses 11 and 12 tell of the purging of wickedness from Judah. King Josiah was relentless and thorough.

" he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the

entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathanmelech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire".

Though some think these were real horses, the context lends itself to the view that they were statues thereof (graven images) which had been dedicated by earlier kings of Judah to the worship of the sun. There also were chariots for these pagan idols to sun worship nearby which Josiah destroyed as well.

Earlier kings of Judah evidently had erected pagan, idolatrous altars upon the roof of the royal palace which Ahaz had built. The apostate king Manasseh also had erected pagan altars in the outer courts of the Temple. Josiah had them violently thrown down, broken up, and ground into powder. He once again cast the dust thereof into the brook Kidron.

III. High Places Destroyed by King Josiah

2Ki 23:13 And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile.

2Ki 23:14 And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.

2Ki 23:15 Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove.

Josiah was relentless in purging all vestiges of idolatry from Jerusalem. What is astounding is that some of these corrupt places had existed since the time of Solomon approximately 375 years earlier. The mount of corruption is thought to be the Mount of Olives immediately east of Jerusalem. Evidently, along the way to the Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives were pagan high places built to Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom, the idolatrous abominations of neighboring pagan nations.

Josiah proceeded to destroy each of these. Not only did Josiah utterly destroy these places, he also desecrated them by placing the bones of dead men thereon rendering them unfit to ever be used for any kind of worship.

Having utterly purged the idolatry scattered throughout Judah, Josiah now turned his attention to the apostasy of the now obsolete northern kingdom there in verse 15. Israel (the northern kingdom) had been deported from their land for almost one-hundred years. The Assyrian influence there had somewhat diminished.

Josiah traveled north to Bethel and destroyed what originally had been one of the high places for the golden calves erected by Jeroboam I centuries earlier.

2Ki 23:16 And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.

2Ki 23:17 Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel.

2Ki 23:18 And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria.

While at Bethel, Josiah saw the tombs near mount Bethel. He ordered them opened and the bones of those buried therein were to be burned and their ashes spread upon the idolatrous altar of Bethel thus desecrating it. These likely were the graves of the priests and other worshipers of the golden calves.

About 350 years earlier, a man of God from Judah had foretold the day when Josiah would burn the bones of the priests of the golden calves upon their own altar. See I Kings 13:1-3.

1Ki 13:1 And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense.

1Ki 13:2 And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.

1Ki 13:3 And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.

That prophecy found its fulfillment here. Upon a grave marker, Josiah read an inscription which caught his attention. He therefore inquired of the local population about it. They in turn informed him that it was the grave of the man of God from Judah who had prophesied (350 years earlier) concerning what Josiah did that day. Josiah ordered that the grave of this prophet not be disturbed. Reference is also made to the compromising prophet of Samaria who had directed that his own body be buried with the prophet of Judah.

It should be noted that tombs of Israel down through the centuries were not caskets in the ground as is common in America. Rather, they were crypts in which the bones of the deceased were placed after their flesh had decomposed in a preliminary grave.

2Ki 23:19 And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel.

2Ki 23:20 And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.

Josiah continued his campaign of exterminating idolatry out of not only Judah but also the largely empty land of Israel to the north. He purged the land of the northern kingdom even as he had Judah. Josiah rounded up all remaining priests of these idolatrous shrines and killed them.

Wherever he found idolatrous altars, even in the former northern kingdom, he desecrated them by burning dead men's bones upon them. Having accomplished to the best of his knowledge his campaign to exterminate idolatry from the whole of Israel, Josiah returned to Jerusalem.

IV. Josiah Commands People to Keep the Passover

2Ki 23:21 And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant.

2Ki 23:22 Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah;

2Ki 23:23 But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem.

Upon his return to Jerusalem, the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant". It is apparent that the observance of the Passover in Judah had been forgotten. Josiah ordered that it be observed once again as commanded in the book of Exodus.

Throughout the centuries in which Israel had occupied their land, no Passover had been celebrated to the degree which Josiah ordered. What is remarkable is that his observance of the Passover exceeded anything which had ever been done from the time of Joshua including the reigns of David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, or any other king of Judah.

Josiah was determined to honor the Lord His God as had no other king before him. That he did. In having some years to comprehend the importance of the sacred character of Passover, Josiah ordered this major observance. For further details see II Chronicles 35:1-19.

2Ki 23:24 Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

2Ki 23:25 And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

Throughout his reign, as Josiah became aware of further ungodliness in his kingdom he rooted it out. Not only did Josiah purge idolatry from the land, he also got rid of anyone involved with occult activities. Noteworthy is the association implied here between idolatry and the occult.

Even more significant was the determination of Josiah to obey the written Word of God in every detail. Whatever he read in the Word of God, Josiah set out to obey in the uttermost.

Verse 25 said:

"And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him".

In the history of either Judah or Israel, there was no king, before or after, which turned to the Lord with all his heart, all his soul, and all his might as did Josiah. He obeyed the Law of God in its every detail to the utmost of his ability. What is even more significant is that Gods own Word places Josiah on a higher plane spiritually than even King David. He truly was one of the great kings of Judah (and certainly greater than any king of Israel).

2Ki 23:26 Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal.

2Ki 23:27 And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.

Sadly, the sin of Judah had accumulated to such a degree in his predecessors that even the righteousness of Josiah could not stay the wrath of God against Judah. The sin of Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather, was such that God had had it with Judah. The righteousness of Josiah only delayed that judgment. It would not come in Josiah's lifetime as God had promised him. as we studied about at the end of last week's lesson.

2Ki 22:19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.

2Ki 22:20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

Just beneath the surface is the truth that God always keeps His Word. He promised in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that if His people departed from Him, He eventually would remove them from their land. God also promised Josiah it would not come in his lifetime. God kept both His written Word as well

as His spoken Word. He always keeps His Word.

2Ki 23:28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

2Ki 23:29 In his days Pharaohnechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him.

2Ki 23:30 And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead.

Perhaps in foolishness or perhaps in God's providential timing—likely both, Josiah placed himself in a situation in which he died an untimely death.

Further details of the reign of Josiah may be found in II Chronicles 34- 35.

International politics so conspired that Egypt went to war against Assyria to the north and east. The Egyptian army, led by “Pharaohnechoh king of Egypt” marched through Judah without the permission of Josiah. The king of Judah therefore imprudently marched out to do battle with the discourteous Egyptians at Megiddo.

The Egyptians, though encroaching upon the kingdom of Judah had no fight with Josiah and they let him know that. (See II Chronicles 35:20-27.)

However, Josiah persisted. Thus, in one of the great battlefields of history, the valley of Jezreel just beneath mount Megiddo. Josiah was slain in battle by Egyptian forces.

It may have been imprudence on the part of Josiah. It may have been the providential timing of God for greater fulfillment of the divine calendar. Likely, it was a combination of both. God allowed Josiah to foolishly confront the Egyptians to his death. At about the age of 39, this great king slept with his fathers. After burying their king, the men of Judah placed his son, Jehoahaz, upon the throne of Judah. Sadly, the son of this great king did not follow in his father's footsteps.

V. Jehoahaz Takes the Throne

2Ki 23:31 Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

2Ki 23:32 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

2Ki 23:33 And Pharaohnechoh put him in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold.

Jehoahaz at the age of 23 reigned in Jerusalem. The mother of Jehoahaz is noted as that of Jeremiah of Libnah. Though the time frame here is at the same time with Jeremiah the prophet, the latter was from the town of Anathoth in Benjamin. (See Jeremiah 1:1-2.)

Libnah was in southwestern Judah. There likely is no relation therefore to the prophet Jeremiah. This young king reigned for only three months. Several things are amazing.

(1) As a young man and in reigning only three months, God already noted him as evil.

(2) Though the son of one of the greatest and godliest kings of Judah, he did not follow in the character of his father. One reason may have been a less than dedicated mother who influenced him.

(3) This young king reverted back to the wickedness of his forefathers.

Accordingly, God allowed "Pharaohnechoh put him in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold". (Riblah in Hamath was in Syria).

What Jehoahaz was doing there after being king for only three months is not noted. One thing is for sure. He did not belong there. It might be inferred that this young king foolishly set out to avenge the death of his father. However, the text is silent at this point. The Egyptian king therefore removed him as king and imposed a tribute tax upon Judah of one-hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. This may have been an annual tax.

2Ki 23:34 And Pharaohnechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there.

2Ki 23:35 And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it unto Pharaohnechoh.

2Ki 23:36 Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah.

2Ki 23:37 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

After removing Jehoahaz from the throne of Judah, the Egyptians placed his brother Eliakim on the throne and renamed him Jehoiakim. The name Eliakim means "God raises" or "God sets up." The name Jehoiakim means "Jehovah raises up."

Precisely why Pharaohnechoh changed his name is unclear other than perhaps to assert who was in charge, forcing the young king of Judah to even change his name.

Jehoiakim taxed the people of Judah in order to pay tribute money to Egypt. Evidently two years older than his brother Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim ascended the throne of Judah and reigned for eleven years. The fact that he had the same godly father as his brother in Josiah, this young king did evil before God as his forefathers had done. The fate of Judah was thus sealed.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.