

Revival Kings of Judah (4)

Josiah

Josiah is the last of Judah's revival kings. Indeed with the death of Josiah we really see the end of the nation. There were 4 further kings of Judah and a further 22 years after Josiah, but the nation was not independent in those years. These 4 kings were but puppets, firstly of the king of Egypt and then the king of Babylon. Josiah was aware that the judgement of God was coming upon the nation; this had been revealed to him by Huldah the prophetess. Despite this, knowing that judgement was coming and that anything he gained or built would not last, he achieved much for God. In this young king, only 39 at his death, we see the greatest of the kings of Judah. The scriptural record declares 11 Kings 23 v 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 the law of Moses: neither after arose there any like him."*

The record of Josiah is found in 11 Kings 22 & 23 and 11 Chronicles 34 & 35. This study will focus on the record as found in Chronicles.

Reading: Study 1 – 11 Chron 34 v 1 – 8, 14 – 19 and 23 - 28

Study 2 – 11 Chron 34 v 14 – 18, 21, 23 – 25 and 29 – 31
11 Chron 35 v 1 – 4, 18 and 24

Background:

When Josiah came to the throne the situation in Judah was desperate. Spiritually Judah was far from the Lord. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied in the days of Josiah Jer 2 v 13 *"For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me the fountain of living water, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."* Politically and militarily Judah was insignificant: the glory of Solomon's kingdom was long gone. The neighbouring nation of Israel had been taken captive 80 years before, in the days of Hezekiah. There had not been a good king in Judah since Hezekiah.

Josiah's grandfather Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, did not follow in the footsteps of his father. He reigned for 55 years and 11 Chron 33 records *"he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."* and *"did like unto the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel."* His wickedness was such that he *"set a carved image...in the house of God."* How tragic, the people of God so far from the Lord. Jerusalem was like Athens in the days of Paul Acts 17 v 16 *"he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."* It is also recorded of Manasseh in 11 Kings 21 v 16 *"Manasseh shed innocent blood very much."*

The Lord intervened and brought Manasseh very low, into affliction. In his extremity he turned to the Lord and the Lord heard him – Ps 107 v 6 *"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses."* In the latter part of his long reign there was some recovery and he began to reverse and change the society he had built.

The son of Manasseh, Josiah's father, was Amon. Amon reigned for only 2 years and the record of his life is 11 Chron 33 v 22 *"he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord"* and v23 *"Amon trespassed more and more"*. He was assassinated by his servants at the age of 24 and *"the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead."* Josiah was only 8 years old when his father was murdered and he inherited the throne. A young king inheriting such a godless,

idolatrous and violent kingdom and yet he was to become one of the best of Judah's kings. From such unpromising beginnings, from a most unlikely background and in a relatively short time he achieved so much for God. This is what God can do and He still works like this today in the lives of men and women Ps 118 v 23 *"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes"*.

The record of Josiah's life is punctuated by key years. We read of these years in the opening verses of 11 Chron 34:

v1 *"Josiah was **eight years** old when he began to reign"*

v3 *"For in the eighth year of his reign...he began to seek after the God of David his father" – Age 16*

v3 *"In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem" – Age 20*

v8 *"Now in the eighteenth year of his reign...to repair the house of the Lord his God" – Age 26*

The remainder of the record of the life of Josiah concentrates on 3 great events:

1) **A book that was found** 11 Chron 34 v 14 *"Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord"*

2) **A Passover that was celebrated** 11 Chron 35 v 18 *"There was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel"*

3) **A battle that was fought** 11 Chron 35 v 22 *"Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him"*

Eight years old:

Right at the beginning of the record of the young king we learn *"he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of David his father"*

Sixteen years old:

In the eighth year of his reign *"he began to seek after the God of David his father"*. We have to ask where this interest and desire come from. There was nothing to help or encourage the young king in service for God in 7th Century BC Judah. His father was a wicked king and would not have taught his young son about the God of heaven. Perhaps it was his mother, Jedidiah (which means 'beloved'), who instructed him in the ways of the Lord. There are examples of other godly mothers in the bible who had an influence for good on their sons e.g. Eunice and Timothy 11 Tim 3 v 15 *"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation"*. The wise writer of the Proverbs recognized the importance of teaching children, instilling into young hearts and minds the truth of God Prov 22 v 6 *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it."* The influence of a mother is great; how sad therefore to read of a previous king of Judah, Ahaziah 11 Chron 22 v 3 *"his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly."*

At 16, *"while he was yet young"* the scripture record reminds us, *"he began to seek after God"*. At 16, in full control of the kingdom, he sought after the Lord. Teenage years should be years of growing for God, years of serving God, years of learning about God - Ecc 12 v 1 *"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth"*. Mr John Grant (in his notebook series from Believers magazine) comments on this part of Josiah's life: "The mind is receptive, and the vigour and strength of youth is stirred with determination to serve the Lord". Can this be a challenge to young Christians today? God can use young people to achieve his purposes e.g. David was but a youth when he killed Goliath and Jeremiah, according to his own words, was a child when he began his prophecy.

Twenty years old:

For 4 years he had been learning and then in the twelfth year of his reign he began to act, *"to purge Judah and Jerusalem"*. The idols and their places of worship were destroyed (11 Kings 23 gives more detail of the work done in these days). Before anything can be built for God there must first be a cleansing, a clearing out of that which will defile or hinder the work of God. In the time of

Nehemiah the complaint was Neh 4 v 10 *“and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.”*

In v 3 – 7 we have a record of the work of Josiah as he sought out and destroyed idols and their worship. Some of the idols and places mentioned appear again and again in the history of Israel and Judah during the reign of the kings.

‘Baal’ – the chief male deity of the people of Canaan. ‘Baalim’ is the plural form and expresses the various aspects of Baal as different localities viewed him.

‘Ashtoreth’ – the chief goddess who was closely associated with Baal. ‘The groves’ is the image or the symbol of the goddess made in wood. The image stood upright, fixed in the ground and could therefore, be cut down and burned.

‘The high places’ were high places selected for sacrificial worship, places where altars were built.

Twenty six years old:

In the eighteenth year of his reign he set about v8 *“to repair the house of the Lord his God”*.

Having purged the land and the house of the Lord from that which defiled, the repair and building work at the temple site could begin. The repair work is described in v 9 – 13.

The work was costly and involved sacrifice. The Levites had travelled throughout Judah and the areas where Josiah had influence gathering a gift for the restoration of the temple. There was a unity about the work and all could contribute. We too can be involved in the work of the Lord in this way 11 Cor 9 v 7 *“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity”*. In the work of the house of the Lord all kinds of people were required – skilled craftsmen and bearers of burdens (labourers), overseers and porters. It says concerning the Levites in v12 NIV *“The Levites – all who were skilled in playing musical instruments – had charge of the labourers and supervised all the workers”*. This might suggest that as well as working faithfully (v12) they worked joyfully, praising God for his help to carry out the work.

In v12 *“all the men did the work faithfully”* and in v16 *“all that was committed to thy servants, they do it.”* Do these things mark us, faithfulness and obedience to all the word of God?

A Book that was Found:

v 14 – 15 The **book of the law of the Lord was found** in the house of the Lord. As the temple was purified and cleansed, as they removed the idols and the rubbish and began to repair the house of the Lord, the law of the Lord was found. For many years the law of the Lord had been lost, buried under the rubbish. Are there things in our lives that have been lost? Things that once we did, truths that previously we held, but are now lost; no longer evidenced in our daily life? Rev 2 v 4 To the Church at Ephesus *“I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love”* and Gal 5 v 7 *“Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?”* Do we need to act like Josiah, to purge our lives of that which hinders our communion with God and begin to repair our spiritual life?

v 16 – 21 The **book was read** before the king. As the young king heard of the judgements of the Lord due to the rebellious and idolatrous nation v19 *“he rent his clothes”*. He also had a desire to learn and understand more v21 *“Go inquire of the Lord for me...concerning the words of the book”*. Does the word of God have such an effect in our lives and do we have this desire? Ps 119 v 18 *“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”*

v 22 – 28 The **book was explained**. It is important to understand what the word of God is saying to us (see Ethiopian eunuch Acts 8 v 30, 31). Josiah sent Hilkiah and his companions to *“inquire of the Lord”*. They came to the prophetess, Huldah, and she was able to reply to their questions v23 *“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel”*. In this we see an example of what Paul taught at Lystra *“God left not himself without witness”*, for even in the dark days that existed when Josiah came to the throne, within Jerusalem there was a recognised prophetess...one with the word of the Lord.

Huldah had two messages from the Lord. Firstly in v24 and 25 the message was 'Judgement for sins', *"therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place"* and secondly v 26 - 28 'Peace for Josiah', *"thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace"*. The first message was a confirmation that God would perform all he had said and sin would be punished. The second message was a word of encouragement for the king, a life lived in the service of God had not gone unnoticed v27 *"I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord."* Josiah was promised that he would not see the coming judgement, for before it came *"gathered to thy grave in peace"*. In our day judgement is coming upon the world (see 11 Pet 3), but we can be confident like Josiah *"neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place"*.

v 29 – 33 The story of the book and the chapter ends with the **book obeyed** v31 *"to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book."* Josiah had heard the word of the Lord, he had had it explained and he was now determined to obey *"with all his heart"*. He was aware that judgement was coming, that time was short and yet he put his all into obeying. An example for us to follow, a challenge for us James 1 v 22 *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."* The people gathered to the house of the Lord and the king read from the law of God. In v32 we have the outcome *"and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God"*. For the rest of Josiah's life the people followed the Lord.

A Passover that was Celebrated:

One of the outcomes of the book being obeyed was the great event that took place in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, celebration of Passover (described in 35 v 1 – 19). In 11 Kings 23 v 21 we have the reason for the event *"keep the Passover...as it is written in the book"* and in 11 Chron 35 v 18 the outcome is recorded *"no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet"*.

It is interesting to note and learn from the role of Josiah in this great feast. It is clear that Josiah is **the instigator and driving force** of the Passover celebration. The king was active in putting the word of the Lord into action e.g. v6 *"according to the word of the Lord"*. There was much activity and excitement and conditions were difficult, but Josiah was determined and careful that all would be done *"according to the word of the Lord"*. We too must be careful to follow the teaching of the bible whatever the situation and condition.

Josiah was **an encourager** of others in the work of the Lord e.g. concerning the priests' v2 *"encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord."* Josiah also instructed the Levites to set the ark of God within the house of the Lord that they may *"serve the Lord your God and his people Israel."* At some point the ark had been removed from the temple and was currently carried about on the shoulders of the Levites. However, the house of the Lord had been cleansed and repaired and this responsibility was no longer required. Indeed, continuing to carry the ark held them back from their responsibility in preparing for the Passover celebration. This brings a challenge; is there something that we are doing that hinders us from serving God as he would have us? It might be something legitimate, or even good, but God is saying *"it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: Serve now the Lord"*.

Josiah was also **an example**, and his example was followed. We read of the example at v7 *"Josiah gave to the people...these were of the king's substance."* In the next verse we see that others followed his example for *"the princes gave willingly"*. What a leader of God's people Josiah was and all while he was a young man and conditions not favourable for serving the Lord.

A Battle that was Fought:

At v20 we read *"And after all this...Necho king of Egypt came up"*. It was a battle that Josiah did not need to fight and he did not realise that the Lord God was using the king of Egypt to accomplish his purposes. Josiah prepared to fight and the battle took place *"in the valley of Megiddo"* (see Rev 16 v16). In the valley of Megiddo he was fatally wounded and taken to Jerusalem where he was buried. There was great mourning for Josiah.