



LESSON 19 COVENANT RENEWAL

Israel		Judah	
Jeroboam	931–910	Rehoboam	931–913
Nadab	910–909	Abijah	913–911
Baasha	909–886	Asa	911–870
Elah	886–885		
Zimri	885		
Omri	885–874		
Ahab	874–853	Jehoshaphat	873–848
Ahaziah	853–852		
Joram	852–841	Jehoram	848–841
Jehu	841–814	Ahaziah	841
		Athaliah	841–835
Jehoahaz	814–798	Joash	835–796
Jehoash	798–782	Amaziah	796–767
Jeroboam II	793–753	Uzziah	792–740
Zechariah	753		
Shallum	752		
Menahem	752–742	Jotham	750–731
Pekahiah	742–740		
Pekah	752–732	Ahaz	735–715
Hoshea	732–722	Hezekiah	729–686
		Manasseh	696–642
		Amon	642–640
		Josiah	640–609
		Jehoahaz	609
		Jehoiakim	608–598
		Jehoiachin	598–597
		Zedekiah	597–586

When the Lord first delivered Israel out of Egyptian bondage, He brought them to Mt. Sinai and promised that they would be His “own possession... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”. But for Israel to experience these blessings they must “obey My voice and keep My covenant” (Exodus 19.5-6). The main principles of the covenant were then enumerated in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and the covenant was ratified in a ceremony that included the elders of the people swearing, “all that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (Exodus 24.7). Entering a covenant with the Lord brought the assurance that obedience would result in blessings beyond measure (Leviticus 26.1-13; Deuteronomy 28.1-14), but also carried the warning that breaking the covenant would result in numerous curses (Leviticus 26.14ff; Deuteronomy 28.15ff), the last of which would be a return to bondage (Deuteronomy 28.68).

Throughout our study of the divided kingdom we’ve seen how both Israel and Judah continuously violated God’s covenant. We’ve already noted how the final covenant curse came upon Israel because she “rejected His statutes and His covenant” (2Kings 17.15). God was preparing to bring the final curse upon Judah, declaring during the days of Manasseh,

“I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they will become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies; because they have done evil in My sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day.” (2 Kings 21:14–15)

God’s judgment was looming as Josiah came to the throne, a boy only

eight years old. However, he would be so careful to follow the Lord, to keep the covenant of God, that his passing would be mourned by the prophet Jeremiah (2Chronicles 35.25). In this lesson we will examine how Josiah sought to renew the covenant between the people and the Lord. In our next lesson we will look more at the geopolitical landscape during Josiah's reign, and how the changing power structure of the area resulted in the king's death and hastened God's judgment on Judah. For now, it is enough to note that for much of Josiah's reign there was a power void in Palestine. Assyria was weakening, Egypt and Babylon were rising, but were not yet strong enough to exert much influence in the area. Thus, Josiah was able to seek after the Lord with little concern for what the surrounding nations were doing.

Josiah seeks the Lord (2Chronicles 34.1-7; 2Kings 22.1-2)

Josiah may have only been a boy when he came to the throne, but he was already wise enough to reject the evil ways of his grandfather Manasseh and his father Amon. Perhaps the young king had been influenced by the repentance of Manasseh late in his reign, or maybe his mother or other counselors were faithful to the Lord. What we know is that he "walked in the ways of his father David and did not turn aside to the right or to the left" (2Chron. 34.2). His faithfulness was exactly what God wanted to find in the king (Deuteronomy 17.20) and the behavior that would result in covenant blessings (see Deuteronomy 28.14).

The Chronicler lists three significant dates in Josiah's reign. The first was in the 8th year of his reign, when he was 16 years old (632 B.C.). It was at this time that his devotion to God began in earnest, for "he began to seek the God of his father David" (vs. 3; see Proverbs 8.17). In the 12th year of his reign (628 B.C.) he began to purge the land of every aspect of idolatry. We will examine this purge in more detail later in the lesson, but note that this purge extended throughout Judah and the former territory of Israel (vs. 6). The final date given was in Josiah's 18th year of ruling over Judah (622 B.C.). The events of that year resulted in the covenant being renewed... for the last time.

Finding the Law and renewing the covenant (2Chronicles 34.8-32; 2Kings 22.3-23.3)

Recall that Manasseh had filled the temple with idols and altars (see 2Kings 21.1-7), and even though Manasseh repented later in his life, it would seem that proper worship had not occurred in the Temple for the duration of his and Amon's reigns (a combined total of 57 years). Thus, Josiah not only sought to rid the Temple of idol worship, but to restore it completely for the Lord. This work was entrusted to the workmen (2Chronicles 34.8-13), but it was while this

work was being completed that a wondrous discovery was made: "Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses" (2Chronicles 34.14). We do not know if this was the entire Pentateuch (Genesis - Deuteronomy) or just a portion, perhaps Deuteronomy. What we can glean from Josiah's reaction (2Chronicles 34.19,21) is that he was now familiar with the curses that would come upon covenant unfaithfulness (see Leviticus 26.14ff; Deuteronomy 28.15ff).

Josiah desired further instruction from the Lord; what could be done since they had so flagrantly violated the covenant? Hilkiah was sent to the prophetess Huldah, the wife of a man who maintained the priestly garments (i.e. the wardrobe). Note that in this matter Josiah was abiding by the Law, relying on God's chosen messengers rather than on the mediums, spiritists, etc. of his grandfather (2Chronicles 33.6; see Deuteronomy 18.9ff). Through her the Lord revealed that disaster was indeed coming, but Josiah would be spared because of his humility in seeking the Lord (2Chronicles 34.23-28).

Disaster was looming, but that did not deter Josiah from attempting to turn the people back to the Lord. He gathered the elders, priests, Levites and all the people together in order to read the book of the covenant. As the king stood in his place by the two chief pillars of the Temple (see 2Kings 11.14) he renewed the covenant between the people and the Lord (2Chronicles 34.30-32). However, it would seem that the hearts of the people were not as pure as Josiah's. Note how the text says he "made" those present to stand with him and enter the covenant. Perhaps it is reading too much into the text to see this as Josiah forcing the people into the covenant, but when we examine the prophets of this time we will see that the people were not seeking after the Lord.

Defiling what defiles (2Kings 23.4-20; 2Chronicles 34.33)

Once the covenant was renewed Josiah proceeded to rid the land of all traces of idolatry. The Chronicler states that "Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel" (2Chronicles 34.33), but the writer of Kings goes into much greater detail. Note the following measures taken by Josiah:

1. He purified the temple of idolatry (2Kings 23.4-7). The idols were burned and carried to Bethel (10 miles to the north) to desecrate that idolatrous site and to desecrate the graves of



idolaters (note 2Chronicles 34.4).

2. He defiled the high places throughout Judah (2Kings 23.8-9). Geba was on the northern boundary of Judah (see 1Kings 15.22) while Beersheba marked the southern boundary. High places were set up in all manner of places, including at least one entrance to Jerusalem.
3. He defiled the site of Molech worship (2Kings 23.10). “Topheth was the cultic installation where children were offered to the god Molech. The word is thought to signify the hearth where the child was placed. The Hebrew term has parallel terms in both Ugaritic and Aramaic with the meaning ‘furnace, fireplace.’ (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
4. He destroyed all idolatrous sites in Jerusalem (2Kings 23.11-12). These included objects devoted to the sun, shrines in the king’s palace and altars in the Temple.
5. He defiled an idolatrous site which dated back to the reign of Solomon (2Kings 23.13). This “mount of destruction” was located on the hill east of the city, i.e. the Mount of Olives (see 1Kings 11.7).
6. He defiled Jeroboam’s shrine at Bethel (2Kings 23.15-18), fulfilling the word spoken to that wicked king (see 1Kings 13.1-2).
7. Finally, he went through all of Israel’s territory defiling the high places and slaying idolatrous priests.

As we conclude, pay attention to the fact that Josiah didn’t just destroy idolatrous objects and sites; he defiled them! (note vs. 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 20) Idolatry had defiled the people and brought the curses of the covenant on them. To reverse course radical measure were taken: Josiah sought to defile the very things that defile!