

Josiah's Reforms

Hezekiah had set high standards for reform in Judah. However, Manasseh, his son, destroyed everything that Hezekiah had worked toward. This sent Judah down the path from which they would not completely

recover. Manasseh repented, but the damage was done. After Manasseh, Amon became king, and he supported the evil ways that had been established. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord as Manasseh his father had done, and Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and he served them. Moreover, he did not humble himself before the Lord as his father Manasseh had done, but Amon multiplied guilt" (2 Chron. 33:22-23, NASU). Amon was assassinated, and Josiah became king.

Josiah was only 8 years old when he became king, and he reigned for 31 years. Josiah "did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kings 22:2). In some ways he was incomparable: "Before him there was no king like him who 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; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kings 23:25). Yet, again, for all that Josiah did in trying to turn the hearts of the people back to God, "the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned



against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him" (vs. 26). The reforms of Josiah were great, but they were short-lived due to the hearts of the people who had

imbibed so much wickedness.

As a young man in his teens, "he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images" (2 Chron. 34:3). They tore down the altars to Baal in his presence, cut down the incense altars, and broke in pieces and ground to powder the carved and molten images in order to spread these on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them (vs. 4). The text then says, "he burned the bones of the priests on their altars and purged Judah and Jerusalem" (vs. 5). This is interesting because it is in fulfillment of a prophecy made in the days of Jeroboam I. Jeroboam had come to the altar at Bethel to burn incense (recall a golden calf had been set up there), and a "man of God" from Judah "cried against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, 'O altar, altar, thus says the Lord, 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you'" (1 Kings 13:2). Indeed, Josiah did just that.

The reforms of Josiah went well up into the “cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, even as far as Naphtali, in their surrounding ruins, he also tore down the altars and beat the Asherim and the carved images into powder, and chopped down all the incense altars throughout the land of Israel” (2 Chron. 34:6-7). He was personally overseeing this whole process.

Then Josiah set out to repair the temple, “the house of the Lord his God” (vs. 8). Though Hezekiah had done the same, now many years had since passed and it had gone back into disrepair. Hilkiah the priest was overseeing the project, and while they were bringing out the money which had been brought into the temple, he found the book of the law (vs. 14). Shaphan brought the book to Josiah and read from it. “When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes” (vs. 19). Josiah commanded the priests to inquire of the Lord, recognizing that God’s wrath must have been great “because our fathers have not observed the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book” (vs. 21).

God answered that He would still bring judgment upon Judah for their evil. However, God’s message to Josiah was one of peace, and it should teach us a valuable lesson:

““Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and because you humbled yourself before Me, tore your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you,’ declares the Lord. ‘Behold, I will gather you to your fathers and you

shall be gathered to your grave in peace, so your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place and on its inhabitants”” (vv. 27-28).

Josiah gathered all the people together, “from the greatest to the least,” went up to the house of the Lord, and he read the law to them and renewed the covenant. For the rest of his life, they were faithful.

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