

GOD WITH US
Part 7: Kings & Prophets to Exile and Return
Judah's Fall and God's Faithfulness

Message 4 – Josiah: Rediscovering the Bible
2Chronicles 34,35; 2Kings 22, 23:1-31

Introduction

Josiah was the last great king of Judah in the years leading up to the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.). He inherited a kingdom on the verge of collapse. His grandfather, Manasseh, had reigned 55 years, leading the nation into gross idolatry – even worse than the Canaanites (Amorites) who had dwelt in the land for 400 years before the conquest under Joshua. Manasseh worshipped Molech and offered his sons in fire as part of the worship ritual. *“Manasseh shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end” (2Kings 21:16)*. It was because of Manasseh’s wickedness that God determined that Judah would go into captivity. (Manasseh did repent of his wickedness near the end of his life after being taken into captivity with a hook in his nose! God mercifully allowed him to return to Jerusalem where he tried to reverse all his wrongs against God. However, it was not in time to make substantial reforms and turn the people’s hearts back to God.) Manasseh’s son, Amon, followed in his father’s earlier pattern of evil turning again to idolatry, yet he reigned for just 2 years. **Josiah** then became king at 8 years old and he reigned for 31 years. He led a spiritual reform in Judah much like that of Hezekiah, his great grandfather. Josiah’s good reign would bring a season of peace and joy to God’s people, before their final plunge into wickedness and eventual captivity in Babylon.

Early Reforms: 2Chronicles: 34:1-7

“In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles and idols. Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles and the idols” (34:3,4).

Josiah was just 16 years old when he began to *“seek the God of his father David.”* Between the years 16-20 he developed his own faith and understanding of God. Then, when he was 20 years old,

he began to purge Judah of idolatry. For the extent of his reforms, read the account in 2Kings 23. Note the extent of the idolatry practiced by the previous kings *and* the radical nature of Josiah's effort to purge Judah from every last vestige of idolatry.

Young people can be inspired by Josiah. He grew in his own faith while still young; then moved quickly to call the nation back to God. As the apostle Paul wrote to young Timothy: "Let no one look down on your youthfulness; rather, in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1Timothy 4:12). Young people can make a big difference in the world if they are committed to seeking and serving God.

Repair of the Temple: 34:8-13

When Josiah was 26, he began to repair and rebuild the temple of the Lord, which had fallen into complete ruin during the long, wicked reigns of his predecessors Manasseh and Amon.

"In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and Maaseiah the ruler of the city, with Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the temple of the LORD his God" (34:8).

The work was overseen by the Levites – the priestly tribe responsible for the temple – while the work force was comprised of *faithful* laborers from other tribes and all walks of life.

"The workers labored faithfully. Over them to direct them were Jahath and Obadiah, Levites descended from Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, descended from Kohath. The Levites—all who were skilled in playing musical instruments—had charge of the laborers and supervised all the workers from job to job. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and gatekeepers" (34:12,13).

What a great picture of how the body of Christ is to function: all the workers "from job to job." Each person had a different role to play in the overall effort to rebuild the temple. Similarly, each person in the body of Christ has been uniquely gifted to play a role in building "the Church" (the visible representation of the kingdom of God on earth today). Have you found your place on the team in God's building work today? Start by serving somewhere where there's a need. Over time, God will begin to direct you to the specific role(s) He has designed you to fulfill in the body of Christ. "He who is faithful in little will also be faithful in much" (Luke 16:10).

Discovery of the long-lost Bible: 34:14,15

While they were refurbishing the temple, a shocking discovery was made: The workers found a copy of the five books of Moses (Genesis – Deuteronomy) which had been *lost and forgotten* during the long, wicked reign of Manasseh.

“While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that had been given through Moses. Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD” (34:14,15).

This “Book of the Law” would have been a scroll (or series of scrolls) containing the record of Abraham’s descendants, leading up to and culminating in the sacred covenant made between Yahweh and Israel at Mt. Sinai (the equivalent of our books Genesis - Deuteronomy). The amazing thing to ponder is that the people of God had been living for so many years without wondering where the copy of the scrolls were.

In the movie, The Book of Eli, a lone warrior makes his way through a post-apocalyptic wasteland carrying the only remaining copy of a treasured book. The “bad guy” wants to steal the book from Eli since he knows the power the book has. Eli fights to retain his treasure (a Bible). The message is not unlike that of Josiah: When a culture loses the Word of God, it begins to rapidly decay. When a culture rediscovers the Word of God, it can begin the process of healing and rebuilding. This begs the question: What about America today? We ARE losing sight of the Word of God. Believers (young and old) need to find time and creative ways to absorb God’s precious Word each day. Whether you listen on your audio books app in the car, in the bathroom or kitchen, or read on your iPhone, android, iPad or actual Bible, how can you intentionally allow God’s truths to draw you to know God better, and grow you up in your faith?

Josiah reads from the Bible: 34:16-21

When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king’s attendant: “Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD’s anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept

the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book” (34:19-21).

While Josiah may have read much more of the book, it seems certain that he read the concluding chapters of Deuteronomy - the blessings and curses associated with obedience or disobedience to the covenant with Yahweh (Deuteronomy 28-34). When he read this section, he immediately understood why the nation was experiencing such difficulty: *“Great is the Lord’s anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the Lord . . .”*. He tore his robes in anguish.

So often when we go through extended difficulties in life we fail to ask the all-important question: Might my difficulties be due to the fact that I have been trying to live my life my own way, rather than seeking the heart and will of God? This is not to say that life “with God” is always smooth and easy, and life “apart from God” is always difficult and full of trials. Yet, when we are walking closely with God, even the difficult seasons of life will be met with more peace, resolve and a sense that God is working out His plan in our lives. We should pay attention when life is not working well and honestly ask: Am I trying to do things on my own? Am I inviting God into my daily decision-making process? Am I seeking His direction and guidance for my life? Or, am I going my own way?

Huldah the prophetess consulted for direction: 34:22-28

Josiah’s advisors immediately sought counsel from a godly woman, the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shallum, Josiah’s wardrobe keeper. Since the wardrobe keeper was in very close contact with the king daily, it is certain Shallum saw firsthand Josiah’s sincere faith, and Josiah knew Huldah’s reputation.

“Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD’s anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book.” Hilkiyah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum . . . keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter” (34:21,22).

Huldah’s answer to the king’s messengers revealed her insight into God’s Word, and her courage to speak the truth in a very difficult time . . . no matter what the cost. It was clear and in two parts:

She said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: (1) Tell the man who sent you to me, ‘This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people—all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all that their hands have made, my anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.’ (2) Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Now I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.’” So they took her answer back to the king (34:23-28).

Additional Insights on Huldah the Prophetess

Huldah’s Role

Huldah’s prophetic role was significant. She was God’s voice to the nation between the ministries of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Her importance is evidenced by the fact she was immediately consulted by King Josiah’s leaders after the discovery of the long-lost Bible. Her words were deemed accurate and authoritative, so much so that the king depended on her words for direction for the entire nation.

She proclaimed that God would soon bring disaster on Judah because of continued disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant and they would be expelled from the land. Yet, she also proclaimed that God had seen Josiah’s responsive heart of humility and brokenness, therefore God would spare the nation during Josiah’s lifetime, and Josiah would be buried in peace.

God used Huldah to inspire and empower Josiah to lead a national revival. Josiah personally read to the nation from the Book of the Law. He then celebrated the largest Passover of any of the kings. He also eradicated any remaining idol worship from the land.

Her Feminine Strength

Huldah was fearless. While there was no Bible being read during

her day, she was “the voice of God” to the people. She daily spoke God’s words to people who came to consult her. She was full of wisdom and the courage to speak even if it was bad news. She balanced being married to Shallum, the King’s wardrobe keeper, with her role as God’s prophetess to the people.

God on Display

God’s Word was put on display through Huldah’s bold prophetic voice. She inspired King Josiah to continue honoring God and reforming the nation. God was brought back to center stage in Judah through Huldah’s prophetic ministry and through Josiah’s commitment to follow the Law of Moses in the Word of God.

How did God use her life?

Excavations in Jerusalem have revealed “Huldah’s Gate,” a main entrance into the ancient temple mount! Huldah’s legacy of leading people back to God lives on, both through biblical record and the archaeological record.

Huldah is an example of faithfulness to use God’s gifts that He has given to each one of us. Hers was the gift of prophecy, and she was trustworthy in the stewardship of that gift in her lifetime. Huldah inspires the question: How am I being faithful to God with my gifts, and by building trust before people for the wider purposes of God in my world today?

We are privileged to own Bibles today. We must take time to hide God’s Word in our hearts and to obey it. God can use us to make an impact in our world as we share God’s truth with others with words of encouragement and/or gentle, respectful correction.

Josiah reads God’s Word to the nation: 34:29-30

Imagine the scene: A 26 year-old king standing before the nation on the steps of the temple, reading from the rediscovered Bible (which none of the people had ever heard or read before).

“Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the LORD with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD” (34:29,30).

This was glorious occasion because of the rediscovery of God’s truth; yet it is sad to think that the Bible had been forgotten.

Recommitment to the covenant with God: 34:31-33

Josiah not only *read* the Bible to the people, he also invited them to enter into a covenant renewal ceremony.

“The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book. Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it; the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their ancestors . . . As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the LORD, the God of their ancestors” (34:31-33).

It is interesting to note the power of a leader. *“As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the Lord . . .”* Josiah was a strong young and respected leader who called an entire nation back to God!

The Great Passover Celebration: 35:1-19

Josiah proceeded to have THE greatest Passover celebration in the history of the nation. The unusual feature of this Passover was that *everything necessary for the feast was provided by Josiah*. In a typical Passover celebration, each family would bring their own Passover lamb for the sacrifice and celebration.

“Josiah provided for all the lay people who were there a total of thirty thousand lambs and goats for the Passover offerings, and also three thousand cattle—all from the king’s own possessions” (35:7).

Josiah knew that the rediscovered Word of God was placing upon the people a set of rules and observations that were unfamiliar to them. He did not assume that their commitment to the Word of God was as firm and developed as his own; thus, he took steps to ensure that the people would participate in the Passover in the proper way by literally providing the main sacrificial animals himself. Josiah’s heart was good in this, and his example was incredible. The result could go two ways: the people would be eager the following year to bring their own sacrifices; OR, they could take for granted the free gift of atonement and forgiveness, since it cost them nothing, not owning their personal responsibility to follow in his faith steps. God calls us who desire to be an example, to do as Josiah did, and pray that those who follow us will be inspired by our devotion, desiring to grow to be like us. However, we are only responsible for our own faithfulness. Each person must respond to God themselves.

The death of Josiah: 35:20-24

“In 608 Pharaoh Neco of Egypt joined forces with Assyria against the Babylonians. Josiah was pro-Babylon and wasn’t happy about the Egyptians marching along the western boarder of Judah, so he led the army of Judah against him. Josiah had no mandate from the Lord to get involved in the dispute between Egypt and Babylon, yet Pharaoh claimed that the Lord had commanded him to help Assyria (2Chron 35:22). (Wiersbe O.T. History, p.590-591)

Neco tried to warn Josiah to stay away; but he went to war anyway and ended up dying in battle.

After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Necho king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah marched out to meet him in battle. But Necho sent messengers to him, saying, “What quarrel is there, king of Judah, between you and me? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you.” Josiah, however, would not turn away from him, but disguised himself to engage him in battle. He would not listen to what Necho had said at God’s command but went to fight him on the plain of Megiddo (35:20-22).

2Kings 23:25 gives King Josiah a commendation that few people will ever have said of them at their memorial. It is even more extraordinary that Josiah was a young adult throughout his reign. Jesus said that the whole Mosaic Law (Deut. 6:5), could be summed up in one command (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). This is exactly the description of Josiah’s legacy.

“Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did- with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses” (2Kings 23:25).

Josiah lived out his faith with courage and passion for God’s glory with great hopes that his leadership and example would turn the people’s hearts **permanently** back to God. Sadly, (Jer. 11:1-13), the national revival was more outward than inward, from the heart. The rest of the kings of Judah and the people did not love or obey God at all. We are only responsible for our own lives and fervency for God in our own generation. We must pray for the next generation as we model our own devotion, but the O.T. has shown

us again and again, that we can only truly be faithful with our personal life and serve God in our OWN generation. (See Acts 13:36 on King David).

Discussion Questions

1. Josiah was a ‘bright light’ sandwiched between his grandfather, father, and son and grandson who were evil kings before and after him. How does that impact you?
2. (2Chron. 34:3) ‘In the 8th year of his reign (16 yrs old), Josiah began to seek the God of his forefather David. In his 12th year (20 yrs old), he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem...’ What ways do you think Josiah may have used to seek the God of David for those 4 years? How did those ways prepare his heart to courageously purge his nation of idol worship?
3. Josiah’s extreme emotional response after Shaphan read the Book of the Law to him (2Chron. 34:27) caused God’s heart to be moved, as proclaimed by the Prophetess Huldah. What is God looking for in each one of us? What does that really look like? What next step is God prompting in you?

“This is the one I esteem: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word” (Isaiah 66:2)



Huldah's Gate in Jerusalem