

## The Last Great Passover – Josiah

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 22 & 23

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34 & 35

Dear Brethren and Sisters, Our first reading—2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 22 & 23—describes the reign of King Josiah, the last good and the last independent king of Judah. He came to the throne at eight years of age. At 16, he began to seek God. At 20, he began to totally purge the land of all false worship. At 26, he repaired the temple, the law was found, and the great passover was held. At 39, he died in battle, defending the land.

He was in some senses the best of the kings. Nothing adverse is recorded concerning him. He is represented to have followed a totally obedient, totally zealous course all the days of his life.

We cannot say he was as great as David. But, the record that we have of him is more pure than David's. His reign is a fitting and striking ending of the kingdom that had its beginning in David. There was Saul before David, as there were four evil men, vassals of foreign powers, after Josiah. But the period from David to Josiah really comprehends the kingdom.

There is much about Josiah's life and circumstances that is typical of Christ. And like Christ, he alone of all the kings had his name and work foretold long before his birth—his work of purifying and uniting the nation.

He began his reign about 640 BC. In the loving providence of God a final period of peace and prosperity was given to Israel. Assyria, which had long dominated the area, was now greatly weakened. Josiah was able to fully re-establish his rule over the whole land, right up to Naphtali, which is the most northern of the tribes, and he used the opportunity to totally cleanse the whole land of idolatry and corruption.

Verse 3 of chapter 22 takes us to his 18<sup>th</sup> year. But 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34 gives earlier details, which we will look at briefly. Verse 3 – “In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father.” He would then be 16 years old. We do not know who guided him or if he did this entirely of himself. His grandfather Manasseh, wicked but later repentant, had died when he was six. His totally wicked father, Amon, had died by murder, when he was eight and had had the kingdom thrust upon him. Of course, others would rule until he came of age. But at 16, he began to seek God.

Continuing 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34:3 – “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.” He would now be 20. This would probably be the age at which he was given complete rulership of the kingdom on his own, and he immediately began to reform it.

The prophet Zephaniah prophesied in his reign. And from the nature of his denunciations and prophecies, it would seem that he prophesied very early in that reign before these reforms and was possibly the cause of the course that Josiah followed.

Jeremiah does not begin his prophetic work until one year after this in Josiah's 13<sup>th</sup> year.

Verses 4-7 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34 describe a very thorough cleansing, not only of Judah but also of the whole northern kingdom, which Josiah obviously added to his dominion at the withdrawal of Assyria.

Verse 6 (4-5 are about Judah) – “And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali.” And verse 7 states that he went through all the land of Israel, destroying the idols, and then returned to Jerusalem.

This brings us in verse 8 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34 back to this 18<sup>th</sup> year, which we had reached in Kings, indicating that the cleansing process occupied six years, from his 12<sup>th</sup> to his 18<sup>th</sup> year. Now we turn to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 22, and pick up this 18<sup>th</sup> year, although we will come back to the other.

We do not know what the condition of the national worship at the temple had been for these six years. Clearly, they had long since cleaned out the idols and corruptions, and doubtless, a form of worship was being carried on. But the temple, broken down by Manasseh and Amon, had not been repaired. It is apparent (verse 4) also that a collection for repairing the house of the LORD had been sometime underway.

So now (verse 5) the temple is to be repaired. And especial mention was made of the fact that there was no checking on expenditures, because all the workmen were faithful. This seems to be one of the hints that we find throughout that this reuniting and cleansing of the land and purifying and rebuilding of the temple by this most perfect of the kings was typical of the final restoration to come.

In the process of repair, the high priest Hilkiah finds the book of the law (verse 8). Was it the original book that Moses wrote 800 years before? From one point of view it does not seem likely. But when Solomon put the Ark in the temple, it was pointedly recorded that there was nothing in it except the tables of stone. However, it was not certain from the record whether the book was to be put in the Ark or beside it. And they may have been separated later. So the book may have still been around.

From another point of view it would be very fitting and forceful if this truly was the original Mosaic manuscript. In our day manuscripts have been found 2000 years old and still exist. There is no difficulty about this, even apart from miraculous preservation. This was 800 years.

The whole reign of this wonderful king seems very significant, which leans us to the view that this was Moses' own book.

Another question is whether this was the only copy then available to the king and the rulership, and whether the law was generally known up to this time. It seems certain that it was known of generally. The prophets always show complete familiarity with it. Of course, they spoke by inspiration. There were bound to be copies and parts of copies in various hands, and many quotations in various writings.

Josiah's previous reform shows that he was generally familiar with the laws of God. But it seems certain from his stunned reaction to this book that he had no direct familiarity with the full and authentic text.

There is a strong Jewish tradition that Manasseh and Amon had made great effort to stamp out all the copies of the Scriptures and to persecute those that had them, like the Catholic church in its hey-day. And this is exactly what we would expect, apart from tradition, especially in the light of Jehoiakim's treatment of Jeremiah's prophecy, burning it and throwing it in the fire, and his attempts to seize Jeremiah for writing it.

How fitting and how very powerfully dramatic if the very manuscript of Moses showed up at this last bright moment of Israel's history before the kingdom went into its 2500-year eclipse.

When parts of it were read to Josiah, he was tremendously moved. He was an extremely devoted and intense and zealous man. For six years he had been laboring to cleanse the land from everything contrary to divine holiness. He would certainly have sought, and so far in vain, for a full sure text of the divine law. And now he hears these ancient, inspired, divine denunciations of the very things he knows are deeply engrained in the corrupted nation.

There is a great sense of urgency in his sending (verse 13) the high priest to inquire of God. He appears to realize that the cup is full and the threatened wrath about to fall. This gives us a deeper insight into the intense zeal which drove him to cleanse the land so thoroughly. We get the details of that cleansing in chapter 23. No previous efforts begin to compare with his for thoroughness. He knew how utterly corrupt the nation was. He knew that God's patience had lingered long.

To whom doth the high priest go for the divine word? To Huldah, the prophetess. There is great significance here. Where was the Urim and the Thummim? The high priest himself should have been the source of divine communication. Where were Zephaniah and Jeremiah? They had to go to a woman.

Now God had set it up from the beginning that the man was to take the responsibility and to answer for it. The woman does not come into the governmental and the legislative realm, unless the man fails.

We remember the striking case of Deborah, who saved Israel. Barak, called of God, would not go to battle unless she went with him. The man had failed. So God at that time saved Israel by two women, just as He will save the race through the women's seed, because the man had failed.

That surely is the big lesson here. Man had totally failed of his responsibility. God must drive that home by instructing him through a faithful woman. And that woman appears to be the first to announce to the nation that the long drawn-out day of God's patience had ended.

There was now no way of averting the national disaster that Josiah's God-attuned mind had sensed was pending. But, there is a word of comfort for Josiah himself. He would not see it; he would die in peace and be gathered to his fathers in honor and respect. He was the last king who was given an honorable burial in the city of God—the last to see peace in the land.

Beginning chapter 23, he called a great assembly of the nation—all that could be gathered together. This was immediately after the message from Huldah—"both small and great," and read to them (apparently himself personally) all the words of the book of the law that had been found. And, just as they had before Moses, an earlier mediator, all the people solemnly swore that they would perform the LORD's words with all their heart and with all their soul. Perhaps they even thought they meant it. They have this solemn covenant at both ends of their national life.

Verse 4 of chapter 23 obviously takes us back. This is clear from the fact that verses 4-20 of this chapter 23 describe in detail what 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34 tells us began in his 12<sup>th</sup> year, which was six years before this. These verses appear to summarize the description of all his activities for the cleansing of the land, doubtless of course also running over into this very period, for he would do much more as a result of this law that had been found.

They were (verse 4) to remove from the temple everything that had to do with Baal. That was the worship that Jezebel and Athaliah had introduced from the Zidonians. And everything to do with a grove, or more correctly, Ashtoreth, who was the goddess of the original Canaanites. And everything connected with the host of heaven, the worship of sun, moon and stars, which was introduced into Israel by Manasseh, though warned against as early as Deuteronomy.

These are the same things we find in the chapters in Ezekiel that we have just read, which again was about 30 years later, showing that they were all back in again, as soon as Josiah was gone.

It will be noticed from the margin in verse 5 that for planets the margin has twelve signs or constellations. That is the zodiac, associated with very ancient pagan abominations—inseparably connected with them. This superstition still has its adherents in the world.

God's terrible denunciation on all these corruptions should warn us not to give currency for even a moment, not even in lightness to the slightest favor of these pagan things that God hates. It is NOT a harmless game. It is a pagan corruption—the signs of the zodiac, witchcraft, and abominations.

The priests of paganism, as we see later in the chapter, Josiah slew without mercy.

Verses 8-9 deal with the Levitical priesthood, who had professedly led the worship of God, though in an unauthorized way in the high places. Here we have another interesting type. For these were taken to Jerusalem where they could be watched, but degraded from the altar service, though maintained by the priestly supplies and doubtless put to menial work, for all must work for what they receive.

Verse 10 – "And he defiled Topheth, in the valley of Hinnom." Here was the beginning of the Gehenna picture, which we find thereafter—the Valley of Gehenna, the valley of refuse—garbage. Manasseh had established Moloch worship in the Valley of Hinnom beside Jerusalem, in which children were passed through the fire, and in some cases, burned in the fire.

It is strange that Manasseh, who was the worst king of Judah, who introduced every possible abomination, who murdered God's people and tried to stamp out God's worship. We are told that he did more wickedly than all the Amorites before him—the original inhabitants of the land. He filled Jerusalem from one end to the other with innocent blood of those who attempted to maintain God's pure worship. It is strange that he should finally repent, and that God should accept his repentance and still finally cast off Judah because of all Manasseh's abominations.

Human beings are very strange—unpredictable. And God's ways are strange, but always, we are assured, right and good.

If Manasseh was totally repentant, and he must have been for God to accept him, then the cruel evils that he had done would be a terrible everlasting burden upon him. Verses 11-12 give more of Manasseh's abominations that Josiah cleansed.

Then in verse 13, the places of worship that Solomon built for the false gods of his wives. Solomon—wisdom and privilege such as no man had ever been given before, and in his youth he was zealous for God, and God loved him.

What tragedies of folly and wasted opportunity the Scriptures contain for our instruction! What tragedy where God's people after faithfulness turn to stupidity in their old age! We pray that God will be merciful.

Do we ponder these things sufficiently—these lessons? Are we doing all that God requires? A total living sacrifice even unto the end. Everything ruthlessly eliminated that hinders our total service. **THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.**

Why did the good kings, like Hezekiah, leave these abominations of Solomon to mislead the people? Doubtless, some tried to obliterate them. But once these things had an historical existence and a hold on the popular mind, the wicked kings would keep building them back up, as Amon did with all of Manasseh's corruptions that Manasseh in his repentance tried to remove.

But Josiah was more persevering and more thorough. Whatever he broke down, he defiled in such a way that superstition would thereafter avoid the place as a place of worship. He defiled it with men's bones.

There is a type here too in the finality of his thoroughness of cleansing and in its terrible ruthlessness, as we shall see.

So far verses 4-14 of this 2 Kings 23 have paralleled 2 Chronicles 34:4-5—Judah. In verse 15 he moves to the northern kingdom, as 2 Chronicles 34:6-7 tell us. He gives first and special attention to Bethel. We remember when the 10-tribed kingdom was first established under Jeroboam that Bethel was the main center of their idolatry—the calf worship. The prophet came from Judah and told Jeroboam that a man of the line of David named Josiah would slay the idolatrous priests on that altar and burn men's bones upon it. That was 300 years before this. And now the time had come for its fulfillment. God's purposes work out slowly, but His words never fail. Judgment comes at last.

Both at Bethel and throughout the northern kingdom (verses 16-19), Josiah slew all the idolatrous priests right on their very altars—somewhat as a sacrifice, as Zephaniah points out, a terrible sacrifice of judgment, and burned men's bones on them. Both actions very extreme and unusual and shocking. It was a total dreadful cleansing of the land by blood—purging out all the leaven.

So in this terrible way, the whole land was cleansed and united for its last great recorded act of worship together—the great passover of Josiah's 18<sup>th</sup> year. He was still only 26.

Verse 22 – “Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges...nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah.” There had been a similar cleansing of the land and a similar great passover under Hezekiah, a hundred years before, just before the northern kingdom had been destroyed by the Assyrians, as Judah was now about to be destroyed by Babylon.

Hezekiah's passover was more deep and joyous. There is more indication of popular sincerity and enthusiasm and zeal. Josiah's passover was more total and thorough, and there was indication of a broader participation from the north—a more nationwide passover. In Hezekiah's day most in the north had just mocked the invitation to attend—a very few came. Of course, in Josiah's day the population was much less, because of the intervening captivity. It was a remnant that was left. But though Josiah's passover was the greatest ever held in the kingdom, and possibly the greatest national passover ever since it was inaugurated in Egypt, it was a hollow form, carried through by the tremendous zeal of just this one man.

Josiah could thoroughly purge out all the machinery and outward aspects of idolatry, but he could not give spiritual life to this debased and corrupted people. It would appear that Manasseh with all his abominations and persecutions of the righteous had given the people what they wanted. And so they must suffer for his sins, though he himself repented and was forgiven.

2 Kings 23:25-26 – “And like unto him (Josiah) 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. 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.”

Josiah lived and reigned another 13 years. We are not told one word about what occurred in them. God is not giving out history as such, but instruction. We must always remember this as we read. We read, and we are here for the lessons and not the stories, although the better we get the story the better we are likely to get the lesson, if our mind is right.

Doubtless there were 13 more great passovers, for there is no indication that Josiah slackened his zeal, but much the reverse. But, we are told nothing.

The next recorded event is his strange and puzzling death in battle at the age of 39—the only king of Judah to die in battle.

The record is given more fully in 2 Chronicles 35, beginning at verse 20. There we find that Necho had come up against the land. Assyria, which had dominated the land since the time of Hezekiah 100 years before and even earlier, had now declined. Babylon was just beginning to rise in the east, but had not yet come in this area. Egypt had a young new king—Necho. He was determined to reestablish the Egyptian power up the Mediterranean coast, now that Assyria was gone and before Babylon got there. So he took his army to the north to meet the advancing Babylonian forces in the area of Carchemish on the northern Euphrates, for Babylon now controlled that far and was pushing westward. To get there Necho had to cross Josiah's land. Josiah went out with his little army to stop him. Necho tried to persuade Josiah that he had no quarrel with him, but just wanted to pass through. And he claimed (verse 21 of this 2 Chronicles 35) that he had God's authority to do so. But Josiah persisted, though his forces would be puny compared to those of Egypt. He was killed in the ensuing battle. Judah was defeated, and the Egyptian king and army went on its way to the north.

Was Josiah right or wrong in this action? Necho's claim of divine authority can easily be dismissed as false, just like Rabshakeh's to Hezekiah, except for a strange remark by the inspired historian in verse 22, speaking of Josiah, "And hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God"—FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.

Was it a warning from God through this heathen that he should have heeded? Or did he have a deeper communication from God that led him on? We remember Paul on the way to Jerusalem and to divinely foretold calamity against the protestations of his companions, and how he still pressed on.

Certainly, in the divine purpose the time had come for Josiah to be removed. The judgments of God were overdue, and he had been told they would not come in his day. But Josiah did not know when they were due. He would feel that it was his duty to defend the land. Hezekiah had been told the same thing about judgments to come, and peace in his day, and the judgment upon his posterity, and still the kingdom had gone on thereafter for another 100 years, quite apparently because of Hezekiah's righteousness at the time. Josiah would know this.

Pharaoh's claims about not having no designs upon Judah were obviously false. He was going to contest Babylon for control of this whole area. We see how he acted when he came back.

Josiah may have felt that God would give him victory to carry on his righteous rulership of Israel, now that it was unified and strong and recleansed. Or, he may have sensed, as Christ and Paul did as they went to Jerusalem, that the time had come to give their lives for the people.

It was certainly fitting that he should end his life, which had been totally spent in service to God and his people, in defending the kingdom and the people that God had entrusted to his care. He could not have died more honorably. He was obviously courageous, as well as faithful, for he personally led his troops into battle, disguising himself so that he could enter right into the fray.

There was great and unparalleled mourning at his death, unlike anything ever before—a perpetual ordinance in Israel. It appears to have been genuine, and doubtless was. The people may have realized too late that the glory was gone and that their national liberty and well-being had died with this wonderful young king, and it was the end of their independence. Thereafter until the kingdom was destroyed, they were miserable vassals of foreigners—their kings set up and put down like pawns, beginning with this Necho, who had killed Josiah and who took his son away a prisoner to die in Egypt.

It is remarkable that such a wicked people should have mourned so sternly righteous a king, who had so ruthlessly stamped out their beloved idolatries and corruptions. But he must have had other qualities than sternness to endear himself to them.

The depth and genuineness of the mourning is testified by its being made the type of the great mourning of Israel at the revelation of Christ to them, as Zechariah records in 12:11—“In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the Valley of Megiddon.” It was the valley of Megiddon where he met the Gentile force and gave his life.

The picture is reversed in that same place when Christ returns. They have been in mourning ever since. Josiah was the last true king. The few who briefly followed him were worthless reprobates who took the nation rapidly into its ruin.

But this last great mourning, when Christ returns, will end all their mournings and will usher in their everlasting joy.

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