

JOSIAH

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Josiah ('healed by God', 'supported by God')

King Josiah, for more reasons than one, was an absolutely remarkable character:

- he became a king when only 8 years old,
- he was the son of a godless father and yet did what was right in the sight of the Lord.
- With only 16 years of age he embarked on the Herculean task of purging the country from idolatry.
- His name, origin and actions had been foretold by the man of God in Bethel, over 300 years before.
- He celebrated the best Passover ever in the kingdom of Israel / Judah.
- Finally we read that there was no one before or after him that returned to the Lord like him (2 Ki.23:25).

How was it possible that so young a boy turned out to be a king doing 'what is right' in the eyes of the Lord, and 'seeking the Lord'? It was, of course, God's grace. He Himself prepared Josiah. Nevertheless we can identify three contributing factors, instruments or circumstances God used in the process:

- His grandfather Manasseh engaged in idolatry and occultism. Taken captive by the Assyrian, Manasseh humbled himself greatly. Once God had brought him back he abolished idolatry (2.Chr. 33:11ff).
- His father Ammon was evil as well, but did not humble himself. He only reigned for 2 years. Then his servants made a conspiracy against him and murdered him in his own house.
- His mother Jedidah ('beloved') is mentioned in 2 Ki.22:1. She most likely was a godly woman and an influence for good on Josiah.

We can learn a lot from Josiah for our lives today (even though we may not turn king aged 8 (or ever)).

Let's look at this in 8 stages:

1. Josiah's reign (introductory overview section)

- He reigned for a long time, 31 years, from when he was 8.
- He did what was right in the sight of the Lord
- He walked in the ways of David
- He did not depart left nor right.

2. Josiah's reforms

- In the 8th year (hence with 16) he 'began to seek the Lord' —> starting point. Comparable to conversion.

Teenagers ask themselves many questions. One of them is 'what shall I do with my life?'. Josiah did the only right thing: he sought God.

- Over the next 4 years God prepared him
- In the 12th year, at 20, he began his big clean-up operation: destroyed idols of every description, exhumed the remains of idolatrous priests and burnt the bones on the altars where they had sacrificed. In this way he fulfilled the prophecy of the man of God from Judah (1.Ki.13) pronounced 300 years before.
- Expanded his mission to other tribes (far north (Naphtali) as well as south (Simeon)), not under his jurisdiction strictly speaking (the 10 tribes had already been led away to Assyria).
- This was not just arranged by delegation. He participated in this work himself (v.7).

3. The House of the Lord

- A new phase in Josiah's life: the 18th year: after 6 years of cleaning up his interest turned to the House of the Lord (separation comes before worship)
- The house of God speaks to us of His presence, His interests on earth (Eph. 2:22; Acts 20:28).
- Josiah realised that the house of the Lord had fallen into disrepair: to 'reinstate' and to 'repair'
- Had Josiah's interest not been turned to the house of the Lord, the next events (see following sections) would never have happened.

4. A great discovery: 'the book'

- Hilkiyah the priest 'found' the book. How long had it been lost (since the early days of Manasseh?)?
- The interest in the house of God led to the discovery of the book. Mere cleansing would never have achieved this.
- So in history: during the Reformation a great work was done. Courageous reformers refused to fall in with Roman idolatry. And yet this work was 'not complete' (Rev. 3:2). The interest in the house of the Lord was not there. Then, in the 19th century the truth of the church was recovered: the body of Christ and the house of God. It was at this stage that 'the book was found' and the truth was fully recovered ('thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name', Rev. 3:8).
- Shaphan carries the book to the king but only refers to it as 'a book', and mentions it last, after reporting on everything else (the workmen, the money, etc.).

5. Josiah's reaction

- The reading of 'the book' prompted a profound twofold reaction. Josiah (i) rent his garments and (ii) inquired of the Lord. The word of God brings about repentance and dependence.
- Huldah is the instrument to make known the Lord's mind (exercising this gift in the sphere given to her). A twofold message is given. The first part is introduced by: 'tell the man' and states that the judgement will come and cannot be averted any more. The second part is addressed to 'the king of Judah' and reassures Josiah that God had accepted his humiliation and would not bring the judgement in Josiah's day.

6. The covenant

- Josiah is not satisfied with escaping the judgement himself. If there was grace for him there must be grace for others. He made 'all the people great and small' to hear the word.
- The king made a covenant to walk after the Lord 'with all his heart' and 'all his soul' and 'caused all... to stand to it' (!). Whilst we do not enter into a covenant with God we can have 'purpose of heart' and 'cleave to the Lord' (Acts 11), not trusting in self but in His grace.
- Following this, Josiah continued the cleansing operation (described in more detail in 2 Kings).

7. Josiah's Passover

- The interest in the house led to the discovery of the book. Now, the book leads to (i) separation and (ii) worship.
- There had been no Passover like this in Israel's kingdom, not even in Hezekiah's day (correct date, sufficient cleansing, more sacrifices, involvement of Levites, priests, singers, door keepers, etc.)
- What does the recovery of the Passover teach us? It was a (i) memorial and a (ii) feast of national unity. This second aspect had become more important as the people of God became dispersed (Ezra 6:20). The Lord's supper is evidently a new institution, different from the Passover. Yet the two aspects apply: it is a memorial (1. Cor. 11) and the expression of the unity of God's people (1. Cor. 10:17).

8. 'After all this' (Josiah's death)

- No report on years 19-31 of Josiah's reign. Was it lost time?
- Josiah died in a battle that was not his, despite warnings not to interfere; pierced by an arrow. This time he had not inquired of the Lord; a sad end to the life of this great reformer king.
- And yet Josiah is honoured in his death: through Jeremiah's lamentation and a burial in his own sepulchre in Jerusalem (the last king who had this privilege). Let us learn from Jeremiah who did not emphasise Josiah's shortcomings but paid his due respects realising what God had wrought through this extraordinary man. Also, he became a (however faint) picture of the true Son of David, who was truly greater than all before or after, who was pierced and died – but not for own failure (He had none).

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