

Kings: Josiah leads Israel to Serve

BIBLE BASICS

Josiah's Place in History

After the reign of King Solomon, the united kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms in 931 BC. The northern kingdom, known as Israel, consisted of ten tribes, while the southern kingdom, called Judah, comprised two tribes. Each kingdom had its own capital city with Samaria serving as the capital of Israel and Jerusalem as the capital of Judah.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was characterized by a series of wicked kings who led the people away from the worship of the true God and into idolatry. This resulted in moral decay, social injustice, and political instability. In 722 BC, after 209 years of existence, the Northern Kingdom was conquered by the powerful Assyrian Empire under King Sargon II. The Assyrians deported many of the Israelites, leading to the dispersion of the ten lost tribes.

In contrast, the Southern Kingdom of Judah experienced a mix of good and evil kings. While there were periods of faithfulness and prosperity, there were also times of idolatry and wickedness. Despite these challenges, Judah survived longer than Israel, enduring for 345 years until it was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

King Josiah was a significant figure in Judah's history. Though Josiah's father, King Amon did evil in the sight of the Lord, King Josiah was a good king of Judah who reigned for 31 years, from 641-609 BC. We read in 2 Chronicles 34 that he was only eight years old when he became King "and he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (2 Chronicles 34:2).

A Dark Heritage

Josiah's ascension to the throne occurred during one of the darkest periods in the history of the kingdom. His grandfather, Manasseh, had begun his reign at the tender age of 11 and ruled for 55 long, tumultuous years. Despite being the son of the righteous King Hezekiah, Manasseh abandoned the worship of God in the temple, permitting the construction and worship of idols throughout the land.

Manasseh's reign was a stark contrast to the wisdom and devotion of his father. The kingdom suffered under his leadership as he led the people astray. It was only in the final years of his life, after being captured and punished by the Babylonians, that Manasseh repented and returned to God. This period of repentance, however, was brief, overshadowed by the decades of wickedness that had preceded it.

Following Manasseh's death, his son Amon assumed the throne. Amon, having grown up in an environment devoid of godliness, continued his father's wicked ways. The sins of the father had poisoned the son, perpetuating a cycle of evil. This downward spiral mirrored the deterioration of humanity that had led to the great flood, where unchecked wickedness had corrupted the hearts of men.

Amon's reign was short-lived, lasting only two years. During this time, he intensified the idolatrous practices of his father, leading the people further away from God. His actions provoked his own servants to conspire against him, resulting in his assassination within his own palace.

The reigns of Manasseh and Amon marked a 60-year period of spiritual darkness in the kingdom. Three generations had grown up without experiencing the true worship of God. The consequences of this spiritual drought were far-reaching, leaving a legacy of idolatry and wickedness that Josiah would have to confront.

The people lived through 60 years without God. Literally. The only contemporary prophets were Micah who passed in the early years of Manasseh and Isaiah who was, according to Tradition, sawn in half by Manasseh. No prophets in the South. No mention of a high priest. The ark of Covenant was no longer where it was supposed to be. The Israelites did not seek it, and the high priest was corrupt. Everything was terrible for 60 years. No glimmer of hope. Darkness.

A new king!

While Manasseh repented, a short repentance at end of his life, giving a bleak of hope, it was only to be demolished again, with worse coming upon the nation. Amon reigns but for 2 years and was murdered because they disliked his leadership for various reasons. Imagine now, the 75 year old Israelites, who had seen God's glory. They lived in the days of Hezekiah. And they pray. Finally, an opportunity – an opportunity to find good. 'Save our nation Lord; Restore our glory'. But then an 8 year old...Really? An 8 year old? Have you not learned from Manasseh at 11, immature? From Solomon THE WISE, who declares:

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child,
And your princes feast in the morning!
17 Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles,
And your princes feast at the proper time—
For strength and not for drunkenness!
Eccl 10:16-17

Everything pointed towards disaster. By all accounts he was supposed to be a corrupt king. But here is what the bible says of Josiah: "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord ..." (2 Chronicles 34:1-2) This unexpected turn of events highlights a fundamental truth: God's ways are not our ways. Human judgment often relies on outward appearances and conventional qualifications. When Saul was chosen as king, the people looked for strength, strategy, and intelligence. In the face of Goliath, they sought a champion with experience in warfare and physical prowess. But God's perspective transcends human limitations. He sees the heart, the potential, and the unwavering faith that may lie dormant within an individual. God sees things differently. Always.

Josiah was, in essence, a divine gift bestowed upon a nation in desperate need of redemption. Despite his young age and lack of experience, he embarked on his reign with a singular objective: to seek the God of his father David: “For in the eight year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek God of His father David.” (2 Chronicles 34:3). This yearning for spiritual connection and restoration set him apart from his predecessors and ignited a flame of hope in the hearts of the Israelites.

Josiah's story of restoration serves as a powerful reminder of our own spiritual journey. Like the young king, we are called to seek God and restore our fallen image to that of Christ. This restoration is not a one-time event but a continuous process of aligning our thoughts, actions, and desires with the teachings of Jesus. Accordingly, we will go through 5 steps Josiah took that entirely changed and restored the nation.

Step 1: Seek the Lord Diligently

“For in their 8th year of his reign, he began to seek the God of His father David”

Despite having no godly example before him, when Josiah was 16 years old (the eighth year of his reign) he began to seek the God of his father David. This gives us hope as servants for those we serve that truly seeking God is transformative no matter one's age, circumstances, or experiences.

Realize, no matter how bad the situation is, seek God. Josiah's pursuit of God, even in the face of adversity, serves as a beacon of hope for all believers. It underscores the transformative power of seeking God, regardless of one's age, circumstances, or past experiences. Josiah's initiative proves that it's never too early or too late to begin a relationship with God. We can strategize, and plan, but without God it is destruction.

The profound impact of Josiah's reign is evident in Jeremiah's lament upon the king's death. Scholars suggest that Lamentations 3:27-28 refers to Josiah, highlighting the burden of sin he bore—both from his predecessors and his nation. This “yoke in his youth” speaks to the weight of responsibility Josiah carried as a young king. It underscores the importance of seeking God early in life, as it equips individuals to navigate the challenges and responsibilities that come with leadership and service.

Step 2: Purge all Evil from Surrounding

“The twelfth year, broke down altars in his presence and cut down all idols, ...” (2 Chronicles 3-7)

In the 12th year of his reign, age 20, **he began to purge all of Judah** of idols (2 Chronicles 34:3-7). The more Josiah sought the Lord, the more he wanted to remove all evil distractions from himself and from God's presence. Not only was Josiah being transformed, but he was transforming those around him, indeed his entire kingdom, despite his age and undoubtedly criticism from elders of the kingdom. The prophet Jeremiah, his contemporary, lamented Josiah's death saying, “it is good for a man to bear the yoke of his youth” (Lamentations 3).

Was their resistance? Ofcourse! Josiah's actions were not met with unanimous support. It is natural to expect resistance when attempting to overhaul a way of life that had been entrenched for over 60 years. The reforms Josiah implemented undoubtedly disrupted the status quo and challenged the comfort of those who were accustomed to the old ways.

The Bible provides other examples where God commanded the Israelites to purge evil and cleanse themselves from corrupting influences. One such example is the story of King Saul and the Amalekites. God instructed Saul to wage war against the Amalekites and to leave no survivors, including women, children, livestock and keep nothing. While this may seem harsh to modern sensibilities, it underscores the necessity of completely eradicating evil influences to prevent them from taking root and spreading.

Similarly, when the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, God commanded them to drive out the inhabitants and destroy their idols. These nations had a history of wickedness and idolatry, and their presence posed a constant threat to the spiritual well-being of the Israelites. The Israelites' repeated failures to fully drive out these nations led to intermingling and the adoption of their idolatrous practices, causing great spiritual harm.

These examples highlight a recurring theme: the dangers of mingling with the world and compromising with sin. Everytime they let the nations dwell and commune with them, they slowly influenced them, and got them to practice what they practice. Just as Josiah purged Judah of idols, and Saul was commanded to destroy the Amalekites, we too must cleanse ourselves from harmful habits and negative influences. This involves not only purging evil from our surroundings but also from within ourselves.

Purge and cleanse evil from inside yourselves.

Step 3: Repairing the House of God

“In the 18th year of his reign, rebuilt and repair the altar of God.” (2 Chron 34: 8-10)

In the 18th year of his reign (age 26), he sent people **to repair the house of the Lord his God** (2 Chronicles 34:8). Repentance is incomplete if I change my ways and stop there. After we purge our hearts from evil, we must welcome the presence of God and ensure a place of worship. This transformation takes time and effort, it took Josiah 10 years, so too we must be diligent in building and developing our relationship with God.

Josiah's actions demonstrate that repentance isn't merely about ceasing harmful actions. It's also about actively creating an environment where God's presence can flourish. This involves restoring and maintaining our spiritual connection with Him. Our relationship with God is nurtured through prayer, but obstacles can hinder this vital connection. Lingering guilt and unaddressed sin can create a barrier to effective prayer. Similarly, spiritual laziness, neglecting to seek God's guidance, can also impede our communication with Him.

Josiah's story reminds us that the journey of spiritual restoration is often gradual. It requires perseverance and a refusal to give up even when progress seems slow. Over time, with consistent effort, we can rebuild and restore our relationship with God to its full potential, overcoming one obstacle at a time. One battle at a time.

Step 4: Embrace your brothers and sisters in Christ

"They gave it to the ..." - 2 Chronicles 34: 9,10,11,12

When King Josiah sought to repair the house of God, he didn't embark on this task alone. He recognized the value of community and collaboration, enlisting the help of skilled individuals with diverse talents. The money collected was given to the foremen overseeing the house of the Lord, who then gave it to the workmen to repair and restore the house. The money was used to buy materials to repair the houses that the kings of Judah had destroyed. The Levites oversaw the work, with some supervising, some skilled with musical instruments overseeing the burden bearers and all the workers, and some serving as scribes, officers, and gatekeepers. (2 Chronicles 34:8-13) This collective effort mirrored the interconnectedness of God's people, working together to restore a sacred space.

Similarly, our individual journeys toward repentance and salvation are not meant to be solitary endeavors. We are not isolated islands but rather integral parts of the Church, the body of Christ. As Paul eloquently states in 1 Corinthians 12:12, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." This verse emphasizes the unity and interdependence of believers, each with unique gifts and roles to play in the greater community.

The Church serves as a support system, a spiritual family where we can find encouragement, guidance, and accountability. Through fellowship with other Christians, we can experience the transformative power of God's love and grace. In times of struggle and doubt, we can lean on our brothers and sisters in Christ, who can offer prayer, counsel, and a listening ear.

Embracing our brothers and sisters in Christ means recognizing their value and contributions, even when they differ from our own. It means fostering a spirit of unity and cooperation, putting aside personal differences for the sake of the Gospel. It means celebrating each other's successes and mourning each other's losses, walking alongside one another through the ups and downs of life. Embracing our brothers and sisters in Christ is an essential step in our spiritual growth. It reflects the heart of God, who desires for His children to live in harmony and love. As we embrace one another, we become a living testimony to the power of Christ's redemption and the beauty of His Church.

Step 5: Be Ready to Hear and Answer

"I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." 2 Chron 34:14-21

Suddenly they found the word of God. While repairing the house of the Lord they found the Book of the Law given to Moses. They read it to King Josiah who tore his clothes because Israel and Judah had not kept the word of the Lord and asked what he should do (2 Chronicles 34:14-21).

The rediscovery of the Book of the Law in the temple serves as a powerful metaphor for spiritual renewal. It reminds us that when we neglect God's word, we lose our way and invite spiritual darkness into our lives. When we seek God, repent, and purify our hearts, then we are ready to hear God's word and respond to His calling. There is a transformative power to repentance and obedience to God's commandments. While the word of God existed, but the Israelites had no clue where it was. It was lost in the house of God. It certainly was not referred by the people as a source of life. Evidently, they were unknowingly spiritually dry.

The king's act of tearing his clothes upon hearing the words of the Law signifies a profound recognition of his and the nation's deficiency and disobedience. This act of repentance reminds us that true

repentance leads to a renewed commitment to following God's will, clinging to the word of God. He saw the message: those who follow God, live; those who do not, die and are destroyed. Oh the fear that reigned in his heart. He needed to know, what about them now? *"Behold I bring calamity...they provoked me...therefore I will pour my wrath on this land...but as for the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the lord...thus I say to you....because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words ... I also have heard you"* (2 Chron 34:23-28) Josiah had a beautiful heart, a tender heart. One that loved God, was inclined to Him and was touched by His Word. Just like King David, who with 'a broken a contrite heart' God did not despise (Psalm 51). A true repentant heart, God never turns away.

The timeless relevance of God's word is another crucial aspect highlighted in this story. The rediscovery of the Book of the Law demonstrates that God's message transcends time and remains eternally powerful. In our Orthodox tradition, the Scriptures are revered as a living word that continues to guide and inspire believers today. Ultimately, the spiritual message of this narrative calls us to actively seek God's word, allowing it to convict and transform us. Through repentance and obedience, we experience spiritual renewal and become beacons of light in the world, reflecting the love and truth of Christ.

Step 6: Witnessing to All

"The king went up to the house of the Lord, ... And he read" 2 Chronicles 34:30

King Josiah then read the Book of the Covenant to all the people and made a covenant *"to follow the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book"* (2 Chronicles 34:31-32). Josiah made a commitment to God before all the people.

Yet, he called all his followers to the same commitment. He expected all his surrounding to embark on the same journey: "he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand." (2 Chron 34:32). As the leader of Judah, he called the nation to serve the Lord with him. As leaders in the service, we too are called to be an example to those we serve and to call them to a higher purpose.

Step 7: Leading others to the Mysteries

"There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept" - 2 Chronicles 35:18

Six decade passed with no mention of Passover. King Josiah reinstated the Passover in Jerusalem and no king in Israel kept the Passover as Josiah kept it since the days of Samuel the prophet (2 Chronicles 35:18). The Passover celebration he reinstated wasn't merely a return to tradition; it was a heartfelt reconnection with God, surpassing even the observances led by the prophet Samuel. This revival wasn't driven by obligation or ritual, but by a genuine yearning for God's presence. They truly celebrated out of their hearts, out of joy; not because of fasting, not because of habit or tradition but by true need. This depth of understanding and commitment is essential for experiencing the joy of true communion with God. If this understanding is lacking in our expressions of worship, it is crucial to persistently seek it through prayer and inquiry. This pursuit is not only personally fulfilling but brings delight to the Lord.

Josiah's leadership demonstrates the transformative power of one individual's commitment to God. Not only did Josiah reunite himself with God but through his leadership, he brought an entire nation back to God and to a greater state than those who came before him. His example serves as a reminder to never underestimate the impact of personal repentance and spiritual renewal, as it can extend far beyond oneself, even to the extent of revitalizing an entire nation. It took one individual to sanctify an entire nation. Do not underestimate your influence, and the power of your repentance. Josiah's reign was marked by a significant spiritual revival.

Josiah: A young man's pursuit of God impacts nations

Josiah's story is beautiful for two reasons: the character himself and the story itself. King Josiah's leadership teaches us that we are not defined by those who come before us nor by our youth or limitations. When we diligently seek God with repentance and a pure heart, He will respond to us and lead us in His ways. And by His grace, we become servant-leaders for those around us, leading by example and bringing others to God through our service.

The story of restoration shows the step-by-step process of repentance and how to change our hearts for a better life. When reading the Bible, we may question its practicality, but this story shows how God details processes, like repentance. This is a story and process of restoration, not just for an individual, but for an entire nation:

1. Seek the Lord Diligently
2. Purge all Evil from Surrounding
3. Repairing the House of God
4. Do Not Do it Alone
5. Be Ready to Hear and Answer
6. Witnessing to All
7. Reuniting all with God



Review Questions

1. How old was Josiah when he became king? [8 years old]
2. How long did Josiah seek God before he found the Law of Moses? [10 years]
3. Josiah was the king of what nation? [Judah. This was after Israel was divided into two kingdoms]
4. What did Josiah do when he found the Law of Moses? [He read it to the nation and made a covenant to follow God's laws with the nation as witnesses]
5. Why is it important to purge distractions around us? [It allows us to welcome God with a pure heart]
6. How do we know King Josiah was a successful leader? [He cared not just for his own salvation but for the salvation of the entire nation]

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7. Did Josiah single-handedly bring the nation back to God? [No, he used the talents of those around him (as we do with church members)]
 8. Which prophet was a contemporary of King Josiah? [Jeremiah]
 9. Which Feast did Josiah keep better than all the other kings? [Passover]
 10. List the 7 lessons from King Josiah [Seek the lord diligently, purge evil surrounding you, repair God's house, don't do it alone, be ready to hear and answer, witness to all, reunite all with God]