

Lesson 104

Josiah Follows God

Judah returns to the Lord under Josiah's reign.

Overview

Lesson Focus

King Josiah was the last of the faithful kings of Judah. He cleansed the land of idolatry, repaired the temple, observed the Passover, and made a covenant to obey God. He sought the Lord from a young age. When the Book of the Law was found, he led the people in repentance and rededication to the one true God.

Key Passages

2 Chronicles 34:1–3, 34:8, 34:14, 34:19 & 21, 34:24–25, 34:27–28, 35:18, 35:24–25

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Describe how Josiah followed the Lord.
Identify Josiah's reforms.

Memory Verse

Ephesians 2:4–5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

The northern tribe of Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity in 721 BC while Hezekiah reigned in Judah. Hezekiah was a good king who trusted in the Lord, and Judah was delivered from the Assyrians because of his dependence on God. After he died, his son Manasseh ruled in his place. Manasseh reigned for 55 years and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings 21:1–2). He rebuilt the high places, built altars for various idols in the house of the Lord, burned his son in a pagan offering, and dealt with mediums and necromancers (2 Kings 21:3–6). Because of the evil of Manasseh, God promised to bring disaster on Judah and Jerusalem, just as he had done to Israel (2 Kings 21:12–13). After Manasseh, Amon reigned for two years in the pattern of his father, Manasseh.

At the tender age of eight years old, Josiah inherited this spiritually bankrupt nation and was given the responsibility to rule. But Josiah did what was right in the sight of the Lord and walked according to the ways of David (2 Chronicles 34:2). He was a good leader, beloved and respected. The Bible attributed his righteousness to the fact that he began to seek

the Lord while he was still a boy (2 Chronicles 34:3). Based on the timing provided in Scripture, he was around 15 or 16 when he began to seek the Lord and by the time he was 20, he began purging the land of idolatry.

After six years of cleansing the land, Josiah turned his attention to repairing the temple (2 Chronicles 34:8). He collected money from the people to fund the repairs and did not ask the workers to give account because they worked honestly. This process is reminiscent of Joash's restoration project (2 Kings 12:9–15). During the restoration, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law (2 Chronicles 34:14). Josiah's secretary read him the book, and Josiah was sorely grieved. He tore his clothes and immediately inquired of the Lord. The prophetess Huldah they consulted confirmed that disaster was imminent. All the curses written in the Book of the Law, which had grieved the king, would come on Judah. However, because of his tender and humble heart, Josiah would receive mercy and would not witness the judgment of Judah (2 Chronicles 34:23–28).

In response, Josiah gathered the people and read to them the Word of God detailing the law and the covenant given through Moses. Then Josiah stood in the temple complex and made a covenant to follow the Lord with all his heart and soul. He made the people of Judah enter the covenant with him and serve the Lord. As a result of his devotion and actions, the people did

not turn away from following the Lord as long as Josiah lived (2 Chronicles 34:31–33). Along with destroying idol worship and repairing the temple, Josiah kept the Passover in such a way as hadn't been done since the days of Samuel (2 Chronicles 35:18). Josiah and his officials contributed willingly to those who did not have a proper offering, and everyone who was present kept the Passover.

Josiah died from the wound of an arrow after he confronted Neco, the king of Egypt, who was passing through to fight with the Assyrians near the Euphrates River. Josiah was mourned by all of Judah and his death lamented by Jeremiah and all the singers. He was buried with honor in Jerusalem. The death of Josiah marked the end of an honorable and beloved leader, but it also signaled the end of Judah. Josiah was the last of the good kings of Judah, and the four who reigned after him were mere puppets and pawns, serving Egypt and then Babylon. So, Judah faced the judgment that God had promised.

Historical/Apologetics Background

One of the distinctive events of Josiah's reign is the discovery of the Book of the Law. There is some discussion regarding what exactly Hilkiah found. The historical books refer to this copy of Scripture as the Book of the Law (2 Chronicles 34:14) and the Book of the Covenant (2 Chronicles 34:30). Both of these terms refer to the law of Moses, although it is not clear as to

the extent. Exodus 24:7 uses the title Book of the Covenant to refer to the laws given in Exodus 20–23. This leads some scholars to believe that the book Hilkiah found would have been a complete copy of the Pentateuch (five books written by Moses). Others suggest that the book was most likely the book of Deuteronomy, or a part of it, since this is the book in which Moses explains the law and reconfirms the covenant with the people of Israel. Although there is some disagreement as to the breadth of the book, most agree that based on Josiah's reaction to hearing the passage read and Huldah's resulting prophecy, the Book of the Law included, at the very least, parts of Deuteronomy dealing with God's warning of judgment if Israel failed to obey God.

Another interesting aspect of Josiah's reign is the extent of his rule. He was the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, and the northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken into captivity. When Assyria conquered a land, they would deport many of the captive nation and replace them with people from other areas of the empire. In this way, they worked to avoid the possibility of revolt. By the time Josiah began to rule, there was only a remnant of Israel in the land, but the Assyrian empire was on the decline. Josiah's reign was devoted to obeying the Lord and restoring the pure worship of Yahweh. Because of his desire to return fully to the commands given in the covenant, his reforms extended throughout the land of Israel.

He accepted the responsibility of shepherding all of God's people, not just the tribes in the southern kingdom. For the reign of this one king, the nation of Israel, or at least its remnant, was once again unified in repentance and worship of the one true God.

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