

2 Kings 22-23 • The Josiah Reforms

Introduction

Why do we sometimes desire and pray for “revival”? Are we praying for something specifically we perceive is needed, or are we just desiring an emotional change in our self or church? It’s interesting that “revival” is not a word that exists in the entire Bible. Josiah’s reforms—which might be a biblical example of spiritual revival—began with one heart’s desire for God more than self.

¹Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. ²He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.

[Read v.22:1-2]

Q: Compared to other kings, which way did Josiah “walk”? Against whom is he measured? What else characterized his life?

A: He “did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David...” He is compared to David in his whole devotion to the Lord. His life was characterized by the fact that he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. What does that mean? How remarkable is it that (1) he was not like his father Amon nor grandfather Manasseh, and (2) he began reforms at such a young age.

Application: What does the life of Josiah teach us about the spiritual component of parenting? Or if one’s parents **AREN’T** a spiritual role model?

Q: What does it mean that Josiah (and David) were wholly devoted to the Lord? Does it mean they never sinned?

A: It doesn’t mean that they did not sin. Primarily it means that they neither personally worshipped, nor allowed the corporate worship, of other gods. They were wholly devoted to the LORD God of Israel, and, unlike Solomon and the other bad kings, never strayed from either of these.

Application: What would it take in your life to be “wholly devoted” to God; that is, have no idols controlling your heart? What is your role in others’ devotion to commonly known “idols”? How might you be allowing the corporate worship of other gods?

[Read v.22:3-7]

Q: In verses 3-7, what was the initial work that Josiah set about to do, and how old was he? Why was the “house” in such disarray?

A: He was 26. His initial work was to restore the temple of Solomon; that is, to begin to refurbish it. The temple had obviously been neglected as a result of the idolatries of the wicked kings before him (Manasseh and Amon).

Q: How did he treat his workmen?

A: He treated his workers with trust, based on **their** trustworthiness in the Lord.

Application: Would you equate “the temple” to a church building, or to the church body, or to your own body? How does cleansing and restoring the temple apply to whichever you chose?

³Now in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam the scribe, to the house of the LORD saying, ⁴“Go up to Hilkiah the high priest that he may count the money brought in to the house of the LORD which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. ⁵Let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD, and let them give it to the workmen who are in the house of the LORD to repair the damages of the house, ⁶to the carpenters and the builders and the masons and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the house. ⁷Only no accounting shall be made with them for the money delivered into their hands, for they deal faithfully.”

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⁸Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan who read it.

⁹Shaphan the scribe came to the king and brought back word to the king and said, “Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD.” ¹⁰Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king.

[Read v.22:8-10]

Q: What monumental and incredible event took place while they were cleaning the temple?

A: Apparently in the temple there was left the single, last remaining copy of the Law. This could possibly be **all** the Scriptures that were written up to that time: the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy), Joshua and Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, Job, all of David’s psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes; however, it is more likely that this book was only the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. That means from our perspective, we came within one copy of losing Genesis through Deuteronomy. Only by the providence and grace of God were they preserved. It is also quite probable that they knew such a book had existed... “I have found **the** book of **the** law...,” not “**a** book of laws,” but that they has assumed it had been lost.

Q: What does this say about the state of Believers and Judah at that time?

- They weren’t living personally according to God’s Word but according to oral traditions or opinions.
- They weren’t operating the temple or priesthood according to God’s Word but according to however they thought best. They had no idea that anything was wrong with the temple or all of the ungodly influences in and around them.
- The influence of the traditions and practices of all the false gods and religions had overtaken and replaced God’s ways and they could not discern the difference.

Application: *What happens when an individual, congregation, or even entire organization no longer operates according to the Bible? What replaces it? Is that person or entity lost to God forever? How is reconciliation possible?*

Point: *It’s important to note that Josiah’s reforms began by his noticing “something” is wrong with the Temple. Even though he didn’t have the Bible—or even knew of its existence—he knew in his heart that “something” was wrong and that God’s house needed to be repaired. What ensued was God showing Josiah what was **REALLY** needed to repair and cleanse His house by complete obedience to His Word. It wasn’t the temple that needed cleansing as much as the people using the temple.*

[Read v.22:11-13]

Q: What was Josiah’s response when he heard the book read? How do you suppose he knew what to do to this point without having the book of the law?

A: He showed great remorse and repentance. His obedient response came from an amenable heart.

Q: What was Josiah’s immediate direction to the then-spiritual leaders of the day? What does this say about Josiah’s character and leadership?

A: “Go, inquire of the Lord **for me and the people and all Judah** concerning the words of this book...” (v.13) His instincts hit the mark that he needed God’s direction beginning with his own life and then for everyone else.

Application: *Revival begins with the individual and then with the individual whose burden is for everyone else. How do we pray for revival? How do we envision it occurring? Or is it just a word that means no more than other words in our spiritual vocabulary?*

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¹⁴So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter); and they spoke to her. ¹⁵She said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched.’”

¹⁸“But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD thus shall you say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel, “Regarding the words which you have heard, ¹⁹because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you,” declares the LORD. ²⁰Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place.’”” So they brought back word to the king.

^{23:1}Then the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. ²The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. ³The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant.

[Read v.22:14-20]

Q: To whom did Josiah’s counselors go?

A: To the prophetess Huldah. [Note: The “second quarter” was probably a suburb of Jerusalem comprised of refugees from Israel after its invasion by the Assyrian Empire in 722.]

Q: What is significant about this action? What does this tell us about these counselors?

A: They knew that they were incapable of inquiring of the Lord themselves and sought out someone specifically recognized as a prophet of the Lord. Even though Hilkiah was the high priest, it was in name only and—probably due to not knowing the Law—was not in reality a functional priest. He had the title but not the walk.

Q: What is a possible application for individuals or organizations that recognize the need for spiritual reform, but at the same time recognize they don’t personally have the wisdom or knowledge themselves?

A: They need to seek the counsel of God’s leaders outside their circle of influence.

Q: What is the prediction of Huldah?

A: That all the things described in the book will in fact take place. But because of Josiah’s willingness to abide by the law, the destruction of Jerusalem will be put off until after he dies.

Q: Provide at least 3 well-known biblical examples of God delaying or altering judgment. What is the common denominator of these men? What does this teach us about the timing of God’s judgment?

- Lot
- Hezekiah
- Josiah

The common denominator is their personal desire for God’s law and work, not for their own personal self or gain. One thing this might teach us is that God’s judgment will inevitably come, but lingers in the presence of those burdened to see others reconciled to Him, burdened for the work of the Lord. God provides extended time for repentance and then brings judgment when the response to it flickers out.

[Read v.23:1-3]

Q: With whom did Josiah first begin the process? Who did he gather first and why?

A: He began with “*all the elders*”, probably because these are the most influential leaders in that time and culture, exerting influence on all the clans and families beneath them. Josiah doesn’t reject the oldest because—according to human logic—they should have known better and therefore aren’t useful or worthy of participating in revival, but begins with them.

Application: *What does this speak to you concerning spiritual revival and working within the body of Christ? Is your desire inclusive of the **WHOLE** body? Do you recognize that how it works is not necessarily according to man’s logic?*

Q: To whom does Josiah extend the process and to where do they go, what do they do?

A: He brings everyone—spiritually and/or culturally great or small—to

God's house "...he read in their hearing all the words of the covenant..."
Josiah **PERSONALLY** reads---preaches, so to speak---God's Word.
Everyone clearly sees the sincerity and integrity of Josiah's heart and intention and are led by God, not Josiah personally.

Q: Who makes "a covenant before the Lord"?

A: Josiah first, then all the people.

Application: *What are you learning of God's principles for spiritual revival? How do they align with the desires of your personal relationship with Him? With the desires for your church?*

[Read v.23:4-9]

Q: What are the 2 main things recorded here with which spiritual cleansing and reform begins?

A: The temple and the priesthood.

- (v.4) All the unholy things allowed into the temple for the false worship of Baal, Asherah and the host of heaven were removed and burned.
- (v.4) Taking the ashes to Bethel is symbolic of **ALL** the false worship in Israel dating back to Solomon's death when Israel and Judah separated from each other and Israel tried to duplicate their own priesthood and temple worship in Bethel.
- (v.5) The false priesthood was removed.
- (v.7) The economic profits generated by false worship were destroyed.
- (v.8) In the presence of the priests that had devoted themselves to false gods/worship, Josiah destroyed both the objects of their false worship and the very living and titles they derived from same.

Q: How does this speak concerning God's working of judgment or revival?

A: Here as elsewhere throughout the entire Bible, God's judgment and/or spiritual awakening begins with the church first before expanding outward.

Q: How does this relate to all we're taught concerning the End Times church?

A: We're warned of great apostasy and the abundance of false teachers and false shepherds. Just as God's house had to be cleansed in Josiah's time, so the church will be cleansed in the Last Days leading up to final judgment. Judgment will begin with the church first before expanding outward.

Q: What has been the overall pattern of God's working to this point?

- It began with the individual whose heart responded with great remorse and repentance personally, and with a great burden for all people corporately.
- It was extended first to the elders and then to all people.
- It centered on a return and commitment to complete devotion and obedience to God's Word.
- Cleansing began with the church first.

⁴Then the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel.

⁵He did away with the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah and in the surrounding area of Jerusalem, also those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and to the moon and to the constellations and to all the host of heaven.

⁶He brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD outside Jerusalem to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and ground it to dust, and threw its dust on the graves of the common people.

⁷He also broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes which were in the house of the LORD, where the women were weaving hangings for the Asherah.

⁸Then he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; and he broke down the high places of the gates which were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on one's left at the city gate.

⁹Nevertheless the priests of the high places did not go up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brothers.

¹⁰He also defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech.

¹¹He did away with the horses which the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entrance of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the official, which was in the precincts; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. ¹²The altars which were on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, the king broke down; and he smashed them there and threw their dust into the brook Kidron.

¹³The high places which were before Jerusalem, which were on the right of the mount of destruction which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the sons of Ammon, the king defiled.

¹⁴He broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with human bones.

¹⁵Furthermore, the altar that was at Bethel and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah.

¹⁶Now when Josiah turned, he saw the graves that were there on the mountain, and he sent and took the bones from the graves and burned them on the altar and defiled it according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things. ¹⁷Then he said, "What is this monument that I see?"

And the men of the city told him, "It is the grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel."

¹⁸He said, "Let him alone; let no one disturb his bones." So they left his bones undisturbed with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria.

¹⁹Josiah also removed all the houses of the high places which were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made provoking the LORD; and he did to them just as he had done in Bethel. ²⁰All

[Read v.23:10-15]

Q: Having moved on from the temple and priesthood, what are the things next addressed by Josiah?

A: Basically these are false practices and institutions initiated by the bad kings of Judah reigning before Josiah from Solomon to that present time.

Q: Why do you suppose that even during times of spiritual revival during the few good kings of Judah prior to Josiah, that these institutions and practices were allowed to survive in tact and even continue to operate?

A: Probably because the traditions of men had been given a higher place than the traditions of God. They had confused "leadership" with good "spiritual leadership" and allowed the strength of the names of their kings to outweigh the name of the One True King.

Application: *How do we know it is time or appropriate to challenge a leader, regardless of their stature? What is the standard by which all things should be measured? [Hint: It was almost lost and became the central focus of Josiah's reforms.]*

[Read v.23:16-20]

Q: What is the significance of Bethel and Samaria?

A: Geographically, Samaria is basically the land previously belonging to the northern kingdom of Israel, which was carried away a long time ago into captivity by the Assyrians. The remaining Jews were heavily intermarried with other races relocated there by the Assyrians. Bethel was the city in which the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel—Jeroboam—established a parallel false priesthood, altar and temple of sorts. Samaria and Bethel represent both the pollution and dilution of God's people and work by false worship.

Q: How is this significant in the current chain of events?

A: It began with the individual heart and then the core of the church in a recommitment to God's Word. Beginning first with the church, it moved outward in the immediate vicinity (Jerusalem and Judah) before extending to the outermost boundaries of the original, whole nation of Israel (Bethel and Samaria). Note the similarity to Jesus' final instructions to His disciples:

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the priests of the high places who were there he slaughtered on the altars and burned human bones on them; then he returned to Jerusalem.

²¹Then the king commanded all the people saying, “Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God as it is written in this book of the covenant.” ²²Surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah. ²³But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was observed to the LORD in Jerusalem.

²⁴Moreover, Josiah removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. ²⁵Before him there was no king like him who 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; nor did any like him arise after him.

“but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
— Acts 1:8

Application: *What does this teach us about how far we desire to extend spiritual revival and how it will get there?*

[Read v.23:21-23]

Q: Why didn't they immediately “observe the Law” by celebrating the Passover and other feasts before doing all the things leading up to this? What does this say about the proper role of sacrifices and rituals in the Law?

A: Sacrifices and celebrations are intended as the **END** of the process, not the process itself. They're supposed to be the visible witness of a changed heart, **not a substitute** for a changed heart. They needed to remove all obstacles and cleanse all pollution before celebrating the revived condition of their heart in the context of the Passover.

[Read v.23:24-25]

Q: What is the final, extraordinary phase of Josiah's reforms?

A: He removed from the lives of the people the corrupting spiritual influences that were closest to their daily life. Whereas all of the other reforms focused mainly on the temple, priesthood, and religious institutions/practices established by men, mediums and spiritists were out-and-out false teachers/false religions that resided in their very midst. “Teraphim” refers to household idols, things that they didn't even have to leave their home to wrongly worship.

Application: *What just came to your mind in reading this that **YOU** need to deal with, get rid of? What are the worldly influences overpowering your walk?*

Q: Why did he do this?

A: “...that he might confirm the words of the law...” (v.24) Here we have a remarkably clear interpretation of the Mosaic law that Josiah's reforms were the correct application of the Law.

Q: What were the chief characteristics of Josiah as an example for us?

- Sought to “confirm the words of the law...” by his actions
- “...turned to the LORD with all his heart and all his soul and with all his might...”
- “...according to all the law of Moses...”

Overall Application: *It is common to make the application of the sins of the kings of Israel to the nation of America. But in reality, while there are surely consequences for choosing sinful paths, the real lesson applies to the church. Could they also apply personally?*