

JOSIAH AND THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF LIFE
2 CHRONICLES 35

I.

We are in the midst of the NFL playoffs in the run-up to the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl is generally recognized as the biggest sporting event in the US. It is certainly the most watched event on TV in this country. It is also shown in 200 other countries around the globe. It is the biggest advertising event of the year. The day of the game is second only to Thanksgiving in terms of food consumed. It is the most bet on sporting event of the year with a reported \$6.8 billion wagered last year.

The only international sporting events which compare are the Summer Olympics and the World Cup. They garner more total world attention. But then they are only held every four years.

What is the biggest religious event on the calendar? Christianity is still the largest religion in the world. So a good case could be made for a Christian holiday like Christmas. Christmas is certainly the largest commercial event in much of the world. Church attendance peaks at this time of year in churches around the globe. It is a national holiday in many countries.

If we bring in God's perspective on this issue, our view might be modified. There is certainly no command in the Bible to observe the birthday of Jesus. There is no evidence that his birthday was observed in New Testament times or in the early history of the church. Only two of the four gospels describe His birth.

Perhaps a better case can be made that God is more interested in Passover, which was commanded by God to be observed by His people. If we add to the mix the death and resurrection of Jesus which were tied in to that feast, then we might have a good argument for saying that God regards the Passover- Good Friday- Easter days as the most important part of the religious calendar.

Passover was certainly a big deal in the Old Testament. It plays a central role in the passage before us this morning. We are going to look at it to see what, if any, implications it has for us today.

We are nearing the end of our study of the kings of Judah. We have reached the 600s BC. (PROJECTOR ON--- KIVIDED KINGDOM MAP 1) The northern part of the divided kingdom, which was still called Israel, was swallowed up by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. All of Israel's kings were described by the Bible as evil. Assyria was the big kid on the block for over a century. It was also a challenge to the southern kingdom of Judah for many years.

Our focus has been on Judah. We began to look last week at King Josiah, who ruled from 641 to 609 BC. He was a good king. The author of 2 Kings says that there was no king like him among the 20 kings who ruled over Judah. The author of Chronicles says that he did not turn to the right or to the left. He did have significant challenges during his reign. On the domestic front he had to deal with a nation which had turned away from worship of YHWH, the true God of Israel, to Canaanite gods. On the foreign policy front he faced a primary challenge from Assyria to the north. (JUDAH AND ASSYRIA)

We saw earlier that Josiah's great grandfather Hezekiah was king when the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem. He was a good king who cried out to God. The Lord supernaturally intervened and wiped out the Assyrian army. Assyria is still a threat in Josiah's day, but its power is on the wane. So we saw last week that Josiah extended his religious reforms into the remnants of the northern kingdom. Now we will look at the culmination of his religious efforts.

I.

In the first 19 verses of 2 Chronicles #35 (which can be found on p. 386 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs) we are going to find that THE PASSOVER OBSERVANCE WAS THE CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT OF JOSIAH'S LIFE. (I. THE PASSOVER OBSERVANCE WAS...) Last week we saw in #34 that Josiah was only eight years old when he became king. At an early age he decided to follow the Lord. That commitment was reflected in his efforts to rid Jerusalem of idols and to promote YHWH worship. That reform effort was expanded into the north. He also supervised the reopening of the temple in Jerusalem. In doing that a copy of the Old Testament law was discovered. Apparently it had been lost to the religious leaders of Judah. This discovery led to further repentance and a renewed promise by King Josiah and the people of Jerusalem to follow the true God.

So in v. 1 of #35 we take up the story: **“Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month.”** In v. 19 of this chapter we are told that this happens in the eighteenth year of his reign, which means that King Josiah was 26. This would also make the year about 623 BC.

So we need to remember the story of the Passover. The roots of this Jewish feast go back to the time when Joseph the son of Jacob the son of Isaac the son of Abraham was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. Joseph ended up as the #2 man in Egypt. He brought his brothers and extended family to Egypt to preserve them during a major famine. During the next 400 years the Hebrews grew into a significant nation. The Egyptians felt threatened by them and put them into slavery.

God raised up Moses in the household of the pharaoh. Moses had to flee the country for killing a man. But God brought Moses back to lead the Hebrews out of slavery. The pharaoh was resistant to letting them go. So God brought a series of ten plagues upon the Egyptians. The tenth plague was the killing of the oldest son in every family. In order to avoid that judgment God told the Hebrews to follow the procedure described in

Exodus #12, which we heard read a little earlier. The blood of the lamb was applied to the doorposts. The angel of death passed over those homes with the blood. The Hebrews feasted on the lamb. Then they left Egypt. The haste with which they left and their dependence upon God was to be reflected in the annual observance of the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread which immediately followed the Passover.

Back in our text vv. 2 and following describe the procedures which led up to the celebration of Passover. According to vv. 2-4: **“He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the Lord. 3 And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the Lord, ‘Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, built. You need not carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel. 4 Prepare yourselves according to your fathers' houses by your divisions, as prescribed in the writing of David king of Israel and the document of Solomon his son.’”**

The instruction about the ark should cause us students of the Bible to wonder what it was doing outside of the temple. The ark of the covenant was supposed to stay in the innermost part of the temple. There are a couple of possibilities. Grandpa Manasseh had put idols into the temple years ago. Perhaps either he took the ark out, or the priests took it out and put it into hiding to protect it from defilement. Now it was being put back. Some scholars suggest another possibility that the priests took the ark out and put it back in as part of a ceremony of rededication of the temple.

The primary thing to notice is that proper temple worship is getting set up. The priests, who are a subset of the tribe of Levi, are taking a lead in doing their job. The Levites are assisting the priests. King Josiah is having them follow a pattern of service in the temple established by King David. That earlier king established a rotation whereby 24 sets of priests and Levites rotated in and out of Jerusalem twice a year for a week at a time to serve in the temple.

Verses 5 & 6 describe the king's further instructions: **“And stand in the Holy Place according to the groupings of the fathers' houses of your brothers the lay people, and according to the division of the Levites by fathers' household. 6 And slaughter the Passover lamb, and consecrate yourselves, and prepare for your brothers, to do according to the word of the Lord by Moses.”**

Originally the lay people were supposed to kill the lambs. When Josiah's great grandpa reinstated the Passover, most of the people were not prepared and ceremonially clean. So King Hezekiah had the Levites step in and do the killing of the lambs. That appears to have become standard practice. Perhaps the large number of worshipers also made it more practical to do it this way. First, the priests and Levites sacrifice lambs for themselves.

According to vv. 7-9, **“Then Josiah contributed to the lay people, as Passover offerings for all who were present, lambs and young goats from the flock to the**

number of 30,000, and 3,000 bulls; these were from the king's possessions. 8 And his officials contributed willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the chief officers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings 2,600 Passover lambs and 300 bulls. 9 Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethanel his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the Passover offerings 5,000 lambs and young goats and 500 bulls.” Three generations earlier King Hezekiah held a Passover in which he provided 17,000 sheep and 2000 bulls. (2 Chronicles 30) Almost twice as many animals are provided now. Probably there were more people who showed up now for the feast.

King Josiah and the other leaders take a lead in demonstrating generosity in their religious contribution. It is always good for leaders to set an example for generosity. I was appalled years ago when Jessie Jackson was running for president and he released his previous year's income tax records. His income amounted to \$210,000. This was 1987. His charitable contributions amounted to less than one percent of his income. It seems to me that this is a pretty bad example for a Christian leader to set.

Verses 7-9 here mention donations of bulls as well as lambs. The Passover feast required lambs. Why the bulls? The one day Passover was followed by the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Bulls could be used in various sacrifices associated with that feast.

Look next at vv. 10-13: **“When the service had been prepared for, the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their divisions according to the king's command. 11 And they slaughtered the Passover lamb, and the priests threw the blood that they received from them while the Levites flayed the sacrifices. 12 And they set aside the burnt offerings that they might distribute them according to the groupings of the fathers' houses of the lay people, to offer to the Lord, as it is written in the Book of Moses. And so they did with the bulls. 13 And they roasted the Passover lamb with fire according to the rule; and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, in cauldrons, and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the lay people.”**

Obviously there was a lot of killing which took place in the temple. In Exodus the blood from the sacrifices was to be applied to the doorposts of Jewish homes. Here it seems to be sprinkled on the altar. The sacrificed lambs were apparently given to the heads of families. They in turn presented the remains to the priests. Portions of the lamb were put on the fire on the altar. The rest was given back to the family to be shared in the Passover meal.

Verses 14-15: **“And afterward they prepared for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, were offering the burnt offerings and the fat parts until night; so the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron. 15 The singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their place according to the command of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the**

king's seer; and the gatekeepers were at each gate. They did not need to depart from their service, for their brothers the Levites prepared for them.” Besides assisting the priests the Levites were involved as gatekeepers and singers. Music was thus part of the worship which happened in the temple, especially in connection with this feast.

Verses 16-19: **“So all the service of the Lord was prepared that day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord, according to the command of King Josiah. 17 And the people of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days. 18 No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, and the priests and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.”**

It appears that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed went unobserved for much of Israel's history. This was bad. It reflected the poor state of spiritual health of the nation. Josiah's great grandfather Hezekiah revived it after the rule of some ungodly kings. The northern kingdom of Israel had recently been overrun by Assyria. The godly remnants from Israel joined the brothers from the south for a celebration in Jerusalem. That Passover was put together hastily. They observed it in the second month of the year instead of the prescribed first month. But it was a joyous time. There was such spiritual enthusiasm that the observance was extended for an additional seven days.

(2 CHRONICLES 30:26) Back in #30 v. 26 the author observed, **“So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.”** Obviously this combined feast had been observed in Solomon's time. But it may have been mostly neglected in much of the divided kingdom period.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Many Bible scholars think that the Chronicles were written by Ezra or someone connected with him. Ezra the priest led a return of Jews from captivity in Babylon a century after our story. The Babylonians had overrun Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Ezra in his return wants to see proper temple worship reestablished and the feasts observed. So in his chronicling of the history of Judah he is focusing on times when efforts were made to revive the Feast of Passover. He sees a need to get it going in his day.

According to the Book of Ezra #6 the temple was rebuilt and rededicated after the return from the Babylonian Captivity. In #6 vv. 21 & 22 (PROJECTOR ON--- EZRA 6:21) we read this: **“It [the Feast of Passover] was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. (EZRA 6:22) And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven**

days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.” Persia was actually in control of this part of the world in Ezra’s day. But one of the titles which the Persian king wore was king of Assyria. Clearly the Passover was a big deal to Ezra and the religious leaders connected with him.

(PROJECTOR OFF) In the New Testament gospels the Passover was also a big deal to the religious Jews. It is no coincidence that the death of Jesus happened in connection with the Passover. When John the Baptist saw Jesus in the first chapter of John’s gospel, he called him “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

So it was that the crucifixion of Jesus happened on Good Friday at the exact time when the Passover lambs were being killed in the temple. Jesus’ death made those sacrifices obsolete. The author of Hebrews (PROJECTOR ON--- HEBREWS 10:11) explains: **“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (HEBREWS 10:12) But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, (HEBREWS 10:13) waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. (HEBREWS 10:14) For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”** The resurrection happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the third day after His death.

It was at the setting of the Passover meal when Jesus established the Lord’s Supper. The basic intention of that ongoing observance was that His followers would remember the sacrifice which He made for them. (PROJECTOR OFF) So the point of both the Passover and the Lord’s Supper is that God’s people would remember their situation of enslavement--- in Egypt to physical taskmasters, and for all of us, our enslavement to sin. We are all to remember the great deliverance which has been provided for us. The second deliverance meant the painful death of Jesus. We benefit from the sacrifice for sins which he made for us when we put our trust in Him. This great salvation which has been provided for us is something which we should remember and greatly appreciate, especially at our regular observance of the Lord’s Supper.

II.

In vv. 20-27 of #35 we find that THE BATTLE AGAINST EGYPT WAS THE LOW POINT OF JOSIAH’S LIFE. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE BATTLE AGAINST EGYPT...) Verse 20 tells us, **“After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to meet him.”**

We have fast forwarded 13 years from the big Passover celebration to 609 BC. We know a lot about the geopolitical situation. We not only have Jewish and Biblical records, we also have records of the described conflict from Babylon, Egypt, and Assyria. (CARCHEMISH 3) There were three dominant countries in this part of the world at this time: Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria. Egypt had been a strong country throughout much of ancient history. Assyria has had a big impact on Judah during this

divided kingdom period, but its power was decreasing. The Babylonian Empire was on the rise.

(CARCHEMISH 2) Three years earlier in 612 Babylon advanced upon the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. The Babylonians captured it and forced the Assyrians to reestablish their capital to the west in the city of Haran. (CARCHEMISH 4) The Babylonian King Nabopolassar then moved upon Haran. Eventually he won the battle for that city and captured it. The Assyrians were pushed further to the west to the city of Carchemish.

Meanwhile in Egypt Pharaoh Neco II had recently come to the throne. He perceived Babylon as a bigger threat to Egypt's interests than Assyria. So he decided to lead his army north to help the Assyrians against the Babylonians.

(CARCHEMISH 1) This meant that Pharaoh Neco had to pass through Judah. Josiah decided to intervene. Assyria had been the primary enemy of Judah for most of the past century. At times the kings of Judah had contacts with the Babylonians, which were friendly in nature. So King Josiah decided to intervene on the side of the Babylonians against the Egyptians and Assyrians.

Verses 21 & 22 describe the response of Pharaoh Neco: **“But he sent envoys to him, saying, ‘What have we to do with each other, king of Judah? I am not coming against you this day, but against the house with which I am at war. And God has commanded me to hurry. Cease opposing God, who is with me, lest he destroy you.’ 22 Nevertheless, Josiah did not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to fight in the plain of Megiddo.”**

How is it that Neco, a pagan ruler, represented the will of God to good King Josiah? It is an unusual situation. But the author of Chronicles indicates that Neco correctly identified the will of God in this situation.

How is it that King Josiah was wrong to fight against the Egyptians? Throughout the history of the kings of Judah many of the kings tried to make alliances with pagan countries to accomplish foreign policy objectives which they perceived to be in their best interests. In each situation which I remember God rebuked the kings of Judah for not trusting in Him alone. Josiah was not doing that here.

Also at key decision points we have seen the godly kings of Judah seek out prophets to determine God's will. We saw Josiah do that in #35 when his representatives went to the prophetess Huldah after the law of God was discovered in the temple. Josiah does not do that here. In fact he disguises himself going into battle, suggesting that he is at the very least not trusting in YHWH, the God of Israel.

For Pharaoh Neco to reach Carchemish he must pass through the Carmel mountains in central Judah. (MEGIDDO) The primary pass through this low mountain range came out

by the Judean city of Megiddo. It was there that Josiah and his army intercepted the Egyptians.

Verses 23 & 24 describe what happened: **“And the archers shot King Josiah. And the king said to his servants, ‘Take me away, for I am badly wounded.’ 24 So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot and brought him to Jerusalem. And he died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.”** It is a sad ending for a good king.

Neco and the Egyptian army proceeded to the north. Eventually there was a big battle against the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish. The Babylonians won a decisive victory over the Egyptians and the Assyrians. The Babylonians continued to grow in power. In a few years they would become instruments for the judgment of God against wayward Judah.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Verses 25-27 provide the epilogue for the story: **“Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these a rule in Israel; behold, they are written in the Laments. 26 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his good deeds according to what is written in the Law of the Lord, 27 and his acts, first and last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.”** It turns out that the prophet Jeremiah was a contemporary of King Josiah. This is the same Jeremiah whose book is included in the Old Testament.

Josiah is described as the best king of Judah. Yet he still fell short of the ideal. Josiah was a descendant of the one who is regarded as the greatest king of Israel, David. David was described as a man after God’s heart. Yet he was guilty of terrible deeds. He committed adultery and tried to cover that up with murder.

In both of these kings we see the principle at work that all are sinners. The most successful among us have all had mess-ups. We have all made mistakes. Before a holy God we have not only made mistakes, but we have been guilty of sins. We have done bad things. Like the kings of Judah we need forgiveness.

The kind of forgiveness which we all need is pictured in the Passover feast. We have all been in bondage--- ultimately to the power of sin. Yet the lamb of God has been sacrificed for us. Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins. He did this apart from any merit in ourselves. But the one thing which we must do to receive the benefit of that sacrifice is to apply the blood. In the Old Testament the blood of the sacrificed lamb had to be applied to the doorposts of those Hebrew homes in order for the angel of death to pass over them. In the same way we must put our trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. We must receive the gift of salvation which He offers us by an exercise of faith.

When and if we do that, we pass out of the judgment of eternal death. In Romans #8 v. 1 PROJECTOR ON--- ROMANS 8:1) the Apostle Paul wrote, **“There is therefore now**

no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Isn't that a wonderful thing?
We never have to worry about condemnation from God if we have trusted in His Son.