

JOSIAH AND THE MARKS OF BIBLICAL COMMITMENT  
2 CHRONICLES 34

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

He was born January 15, 1929, in Atlanta. His parents named him Michael. He was the second of three children. Michael grew up in a comfortable economic background. His father was a pastor. So the young man was able to get a good education. He showed flashes of exceptional ability. In high school he placed second in a major oratory contest. He also had athletic ability. He was the quarterback of his high school football team.

Michael also had a Christian commitment at an early age. When he was just fifteen, he started college at a school with Baptist roots. He preached his first sermon at age seventeen. After college he went on to graduate school. Eventually he earned a PhD. He left a mark on the church scene and on the country. Unfortunately he died young. (PROJECTOR ON--- MARTIN LUTHER KING) Martin Luther King was struck down by an assassin's bullet when he was just thirty-nine years old. But he left such a positive impact upon our nation that we have a day set aside to honor him tomorrow.

(PROJECTOR OFF) The passage before us today deals with another man who made an early spiritual commitment and who also left a positive mark upon his nation. He also died young, also as a result of violence. He also died at the age of 39. His name was Josiah. Although he had a short life, the Bible says that there was no one else like him. We are going to look at his life this morning to see what it has to teach us.

(PROJECTOR ON--- DIVIDED KINGDOM CHART 2) The time setting for our story is the 600s BC. After Solomon died, Israel was split into a northern and a southern kingdom. By the time of 2 Chronicles #34 the northern kingdom, which kept the name Israel, has been overrun by the Assyrians and has ceased to exist as a separate nation.

(JUDAH AND ASSYRIA) Two weeks ago we saw that Judah was almost eaten up by the Assyrians. However, Jewish King Hezekiah had a genuine faith in God, and he cried out to the Lord for help. God intervened and destroyed the Assyrian army which was laying siege to Jerusalem. The threat from the north was removed for a time.

(PROJECTOR OFF)

Last Sunday Pastor Steve took up the story in 2 Chronicles #33. We saw that King Manasseh replaced his father Hezekiah. He had a long rule of 55 years. Because Manasseh was an evil king, God brought the Assyrian army down upon Judah. Manasseh was captured and hauled off to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. There he repented. He acknowledged his sinful decisions to worship idols and to turn away from the God of Israel. As a result, the Lord had him released and sent back to Jerusalem.

There he got back on the right track with the true God. Now we are going to look at Manasseh's grandson who ended up on the throne of Judah.

I.

As we begin #34 [which is p. 385 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs], we are going to consider JOSIAH AND HIS COMMITMENT TO FOLLOW GOD AS A YOUTH. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. JOSIAH AND HIS COMMITMENT...) That is the subject of the first seven verses of #34. The story begins in v. 1: **“Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem.”** Thus it is that he lived to be 39. His rule is generally regarded as having lasted from 641 to 609 BC.

According to v. 2, **“And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”** Josiah earns a great evaluation from the inspired author of the Scriptures. He is the only ruler of Judah who is described as not having turned aside to the right or the left.

The author of 2 Kings describes him in even more glowing terms. In 2 Kings #23 v. 25 (2 KINGS 23:25) he writes, **“Before 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.”** We have encountered some pretty godly kings in the southern kingdom of Judah. We have read about Joash and, more recently, Hezekiah, but Josiah was better than all of them, even though he was a young man and had a relatively short life.

(PROJECTOR OFF) Verses 3-5: **“For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. 4 And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. 5 He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.”**

So it was at age 16 when Josiah began seeking God, which is terminology which we have seen used of kings who seek to follow God and obey His law. It is at age 20 when Josiah takes specific action to deal with the problem of idolatry and false worship practices. Age 20 was generally regarded in the Ancient Near East as the time of adulthood. It was perhaps at this time that Josiah became independent of any guardians who had been appointed to watch over him.

The idols and gods who were removed were associated with Canaanite worship practices. It is implied that the priests of Baal were executed. Their bones were burned on the altars which they had used to make sacrifices.

Verses 6 & 7 add, **“And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, 7 he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.”** King Josiah extends his campaign for religious reform into the remains of the northern kingdom. Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Naphtali were tribes in what was previously called “Israel.”

The twelfth year of Josiah when this campaign began would be 629 BC. We know from Assyrian history that two years earlier King Ashurbanipal died. He was the last of the most powerful kings of Assyria. (PROJECTOR OFF) The power of Assyria begins to wane after that. From 628-626 Scythian nomads began to make attacks upon parts of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian rulers were occupied with fending off these Scythians. This meant that Josiah had more opportunity to exert his influence in the remains of the northern kingdom of Israel without Assyrian interference. Still Josiah was only twenty years old, or a little more. This was pretty courageous action for such a young man. I suspect that he had opposition for these moves from within his own country, certainly from those who had been Canaanite worshipers.

We might wonder what influences he had which prompted him to turn out so well. We saw last week that his grandfather Manasseh was an evil man who devoted himself to false religion for most of his life. He did make a major change later in life. Manasseh died when Josiah would have been about six years old. Perhaps Manasseh did have some good influence upon Josiah in the child’s early life. We who are grandparents can be useful to the Lord in pointing grandkids in the right direction.

We have skipped over Josiah’s dad. We will look briefly at him now. It turns out that he was a pretty bad guy. Look back at the end of the previous chapter. We are going to read vv. 21-25 of #33. There we find: **“Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. 22 And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as Manasseh his father had done. Amon sacrificed to all the images that Manasseh his father had made, and served them. 23 And he did not humble himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself, but this Amon incurred guilt more and more. 24 And his servants conspired against him and put him to death in his house. 25 But the people of the land struck down all those who had conspired against King Amon. And the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place.”**

So Josiah had a father who was characterized as evil. Amon was seemingly influenced in the wrong direction by the earlier legacy of his father Manasseh. Probably Josiah had a, or some, godly guardians. How they arrived in such a position of influence we are not told. Somehow at age 16 King Josiah made a decision to follow the God of the Bible.

In recent years the majority of kids which we have had in our children’s programs have come from outside of Boulder City. Most of them have come from broken families. Almost all of the boys which I have had in my Sunday school class in recent years have

lived in homes where their own father is not present. Most of them have been pretty good kids. As a church we need to see this situation as an opportunity to produce Josiah's. Look for opportunities to encourage Jenny and Jay in what they do with our youth. We could always use more volunteers to help out during our church time and during our Sunday school.

II.

In the next section of our chapter we encounter **JOSIAH AND HIS COMMITMENT TO WORSHIP**. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. JOSIAH AND HIS COMMITMENT TO WORSHIP)

Verse 8 in our chapter tells us: **“Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had cleansed the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God.”**

Josiah is now 26 years old. He sets out to undertake a major temple renovation. The last time when this was done was during the reign of his great grandfather Hezekiah. Josiah's evil father had apparently made a move back to Canaanite worship. The temple in Jerusalem had been defiled and Biblical worship had been stopped or curtailed. The temple had fallen into disrepair. Josiah puts a priority on restoring this center of Jewish worship.

Verse 9: **“They came to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the house of God, which the Levites, the keepers of the threshold, had collected from Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel and from all Judah and Benjamin and from the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”**

Manasseh and Ephraim were the most dominant tribes in the north. Josiah and the priests and Levites were getting donations for the temple from Jewish survivors in these northern regions.

According to vv. 10-13, **“And they gave it to the workmen who were working in the house of the Lord. And the workmen who were working in the house of the Lord gave it for repairing and restoring the house. 11 They gave it to the carpenters and the builders to buy quarried stone, and timber for binders and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had let go to ruin. 12 And the men did the work faithfully. Over them were set Jahath and Obadiah the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to have oversight. The Levites, all who were skillful with instruments of music, 13 were over the burden-bearers and directed all who did work in every kind of service, and some of the Levites were scribes and officials and gatekeepers.”** Isn't it interesting that music people were put in charge of a building project. We wouldn't normally think of musicians as being the most qualified people to serve as building managers. But the Levites along with the priests had been assigned by God to have authority over the temple. Some of the Levites were also scribes and gatekeepers and other officials.

The main thing to notice here is that the author of the Chronicles sees that godly kings make proper worship at the temple in Jerusalem a priority. The Old Testament Law made clear that temple worship and animal sacrifices there were foundational to proper worship of YHWH, the God of Israel. So worship there had proven to be a spiritual battleground for the kings of Judah. Some of the kings let it slide and even actively opposed it. Men like Josiah made proper worship a priority.

Worship today may take a different form. Animal sacrifice and worship in Jerusalem is not central to what the New Testament teaches us Christians about proper worship. We as individual Christians can make worship a priority. But the Bible also seems to recognize that collective worship is important. The recent Covid pandemic has made that a challenge.

A survey of US churches from a few months ago found that 13% of churches were attracting less than 50% of their pre-Covid attendance. Some 35% of pastors reported attendance levels between 50 and 70% of their earlier attendance, and an additional 30% were reporting attendance levels between 70 and 90%. (Lifeway Research, *Christian Post*, 11/9/2021) The problem is that we miss out on some of the worship experience which God intended for us when we don't meet together. Some among us are vulnerable to the dangers of this virus plaguing us, and some of us don't want to infect others, and some of us have infirmities which keep us from going out, but we need to balance that with the desired goal of meeting together whenever it is reasonably safe to do that. Collective worship is God's ideal for us. We need to guard against the temptation to watch worship services from home because it is just more convenient and comfortable to do that.

III.

We come then in vv. 14-21 to JOSIAH AND HIS COMMITMENT TO THE WORD OF GOD. (III. JOSIAH AND HIS COMMITMENT...) According to vv. 14-18, **“While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given through Moses. 15 Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the secretary, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.’ And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. 16 Shaphan brought the book to the king, and further reported to the king, ‘All that was committed to your servants they are doing. 17 They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of the Lord and have given it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen.’ 18 Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, ‘Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.’ And Shaphan read from it before the king.”**

The question is: What is the book which was found. Some suggest that it was the Book of Deuteronomy which makes reference to the Mosaic Covenant, to the responsibility of kings, and to blessings and curses which come from following the law or not following the law. I tend to think that it was the entire Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, which was found. There is no indication that Josiah had access to any other

part of the Pentateuch. The other books in this early part of the Old Testament could have produced a similar reaction from King Josiah as we will find in the next few verses. But it is only with the discovery of this book that Josiah seems to discover how far from correct worship Judah has strayed.

So how did this first part of the Bible get lost? First, we have to keep in mind that it was a difficult and laborious job to write out a long document like this. Most people at this time probably did not read or write. In the more immediate context Amon and Manasseh had turned away from the true God and had tried to shut down worship of the true God. The temple was apparently closed, and worship at the temple was apparently stopped. Perhaps there were few, if any, other copies of the Law of Moses floating around. Perhaps what copies there were had been confiscated.

If Josiah and the priests and Levites had no Bible to guide them in the cleanup of the temple and the ridding of the country of idol worship, how did they know how to proceed? Probably oral tradition had a part in that. Nonliterate societies have been known to have a strong tradition of passing down stories to future generations. Then also there may have been prophets who had a part. No specific mention is made of prophets in our text. But we know that a guy named Nahum was a contemporary of King Josiah.

That is why I asked Jerry to read the first chapter of the Old Testament Book of Nahum. I would like to pick out a couple of the verses there. God through the prophet is addressing Assyria and its leaders and the people of the capital city of Nineveh. (NAHUM 1:11) Beginning in v. 11 of #1 the text says, **“From you came one who plotted evil against the Lord, a worthless counselor. (NAHUM 1:12) Thus says the Lord, ‘Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut down and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. (NAHUM 1:13) And now I will break his yoke from off you and will burst your bonds apart.’”**

Josiah and his people are thus encouraged not to fear the Assyrians. Perhaps this message gave Josiah encouragement to expand Judah’s influence into the occupied northern kingdom of Israel. Perhaps Nahum gave other instructions to Josiah about his religious reform movement which have been lost to us.

In v. 19 back in our text we read, **“And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes.”** This was a sign of humility and repentance. Josiah was doing this, I suspect, not just for himself but also in behalf of the whole nation. He suddenly realized how far he and his people had strayed from correct worship.

Verses 20 & 21 add, **“And the king commanded Hilkiyah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, 21 ‘Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book.’”**

Inquiring of the Lord meant going to a prophet to get more specific directions about how to respond to the present circumstances.

Both Leviticus and Deuteronomy spoke about curses which would come from God for failure of Israel to follow His law. Perhaps what the scribes read from the law of Moses included a passage like Deuteronomy #28 v. 36 (DEUTERONOMY 28:36). There Moses had declared what would happen for this disobedience: **“The Lord will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone.”** That had already happened to many residents of the northern kingdom of Israel who had been hauled off to other parts of the Assyrian Empire.

Verse 49 of Deuteronomy 28 (DEUTERONOMY 28:49) adds, **“The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand...”** That happened with the Assyrian invasion. The Assyrians eventually reached Jerusalem when Josiah’s granddad Manasseh was carried off to Nineveh. The prophecy would have a certain fulfillment later when Babylon invades Judah. In Josiah’s reaction to this reading of God’s word we see that he takes it seriously.

A scholar by the name of David Lull says that it was Martin Luther King’s commitment to the Bible which was the driving force in his life. He says, **“It was the Bible that led him to choose the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest over hatred, despair, and violence. Dr. King often pointed out that it was Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount that inspired the ‘dignified social action’ of the civil rights movement.”** (“King’s Vision of Justice: Rooted in the Bible,” David J. Lull)

So how do we demonstrate a sincere commitment to the word of God. Certainly church attendance and involvement in Bible studies play a part. How we live our lives says something about our commitment to the Bible. I would suggest our commitment to personal devotions is also very important. If we really believe that this book is the inspired message of God directed to us, then it would seem reasonable that we need regular reminders from it about how to live our lives. Perhaps in this new year some among us need to make a renewed commitment to make daily reading of the Bible part of our priorities.

IV.

We come next to JOSIAH AND HIS COMMITMENT TO LEAD OTHERS. (IV. JOSIAH AND HIS COMMITMENT...) For this we are going to skip ahead to vv. 29-33. In vv. 29 & 30 we read, **“Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30 And the king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord.”**

In our day political leaders who inject religion into discussions often get a lot of criticism. There is much pressure in our world to privatize religion. Josiah took a strong lead. He made all the leaders get together with the people of Jerusalem and vicinity to have a public reading of the Bible. Exactly what he read we are not told. If it was the whole Pentateuch, it may have taken several meetings to read the whole thing.

Verse 31: **“And the king stood in his place 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 perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.”** This appears to be a covenant between God and Josiah to follow the law of Moses as the leader of God’s people. So this agreement would have included elements of what is called the Mosaic Covenant along with additional refinements that were included in the covenant which God made with David.

Verses 32 & 33: **“Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin join in it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33 And Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel and made all who were present in Israel serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the Lord, the God of their fathers.”** Judah needed a strong leader to get the country back on the right track spiritually. Josiah exerted that strength to get other leaders back on the right track also.

That was the kind of leadership which Martin Luther King also demonstrated. There were others who might have been more inclined to use violence to deal with the racism still present in the US in the sixties. But MLK insisted upon nonviolence, and his Christian perspective prevailed. In the end the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and the Voting Rights Act of 1966 were largely the result of his influence.

V.

Let’s go back, then, to vv. 29-33 as we consider **JOSIAH AND GOD’S COMMITMENT TO DELAY JUDGMENT**. (V. **JOSIAH AND GOD’S COMMITMENT...**) In v. 21 we saw that when King Josiah was exposed to the curses which the Lord had pronounced in His law for spiritual waywardness, he sent his advisors to inquire of a prophet what God had to say about their current situation.

Verse 22 describes what happened: **“So Hilkiah and those whom the king had sent went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter) and spoke to her to that effect.”** Huldah is one of four prophetesses who are mentioned in the Old Testament.

Verses 23-25: **“And she said to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: “Tell the man who sent you to me, 24 Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will bring disaster**



**upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book that was read before the king of Judah. 25 Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands, therefore my wrath will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.”””**

Both Leviticus #26 and Deuteronomy #28 list curses that God pronounced upon His people that would result if and when His people strayed from Him. If you wish to turn to Deuteronomy #28, p. 168 in the black Bibles, I will point out a few of them.... [Cf. v. 15 f.]

It is evident that God is just, and His sense of justice and fairness demand punishment for sin.

According to vv. 26 & 27, **“But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, 27 because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord.”** Notice the effectiveness of a humble, repentant heart. Such an attitude catches the attention of a righteous God. God is not only righteous, He is also gracious. As king of Judah Josiah appears to be a representative of the nation. His humility and contrition result not only in a certain forgiveness for Josiah, they also result in a delay in judgment for Judah as a whole.

Verse 28 concludes, **“Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place and its inhabitants.’ And they brought back word to the king.”** Thus there is a promise of personal benefit from Josiah’s repentance. But there is also a benefit for the entire nation. Judgment is coming, but it will be delayed. Eventually the Babylonians will overrun Judah. (PROJECTOR OFF)

When I look at our nation’s history, I see many evidences of God’s blessing. But I also see the institution of slavery. I suspect that the nation’s slowness to deal with that sin had much to do with the Civil War. I suspect that this war resulted from the judgment of God. In the next hundred years there was still great prejudice and racism in much of the country. I suspect that Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement may have had something to do with averting further punishment from God.

When I look at our current national scene, I wonder if we as a nation are sometime going to have a divine reckoning for the fact that our nation has permitted, and sometimes encouraged, the killing of 62 million babies in the womb since 1973. I wonder if there is a divine reckoning awaiting for our effort to redefine marriage, to encourage children to change their sexual identity, to promote easy divorce, to make idols of money and pleasure, to substitute government for God. But perhaps, perhaps, if

there are Josiahs who step forward to promote the God of the Bible and the righteousness which He describes, judgment could be at least delayed.

We also need to recognize that there is a way for each of us to avoid God's personal judgment upon us for our individual sins. Josiah passed out of direct judgment because of a changed heart. We can have a changed heart, too. That comes from recognizing that we are sinners in need of a savior. It comes from recognizing that God the Son became a human being to bear our sin in our place. By dying on the cross Jesus became our divine substitute. When we trust in Him and what He did for us, we pass out of divine judgment.

In Ephesians #2 vv. 8 & 9 the Apostle Paul wrote, **“By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works that no one should boast.”**