

Josiah

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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In my last few sermons, we have been looking at the leadership of various kings of Judah (more specifically, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Manasseh), and I had one sermon that looked at the prayers that are in the books of Chronicles.

I decided, as I was thinking about what to give this time, that I would do one more just because it is a fascinating subject to me to look at these men and the examples of their lives that have been put there for our learning and admonition so that we can get some good theological, good spiritual examples of how to, or how not to, live one's life. So I decided I would go ahead and do one more because this person has always been my favorite of the kings.

But I like to get a running start on these things, so let me just go back and repeat some background information that we have already gone over.

I have concentrated on the accounts of their lives from the book of II Chronicles, as opposed to the parallel accounts in II Kings. I have done that because there is a perspective in Chronicles that is different from the perspective in Kings. You get the idea from Kings that it was written very close to all of these reigns. Maybe they were daily annals of the kings that were written at the time. So they give a fairly good perspective of what was going on at the time.

Whereas the Chronicler, having authored the Chronicles much later, has a perspective on the history that is "better" maybe than the one in Kings. At least it is thematic throughout. It is all one account in which he is bringing out certain themes, certain ideas that he wants the people who read his book to get. So there is a bit more of a straight line through the Chronicles, rather than in Kings, of an idea that he is trying to get across. What we have found out is that the Chronicler's theme is essentially that God has told us what He will do and He does what He has said. I have mentioned this in several of the sermons.

God has told us what He will do. It is there in the Book. It is there in the covenant. If we do well, He will reward us as He has promised to do. But if we do poorly, we do badly—if we sin—then the curses that are written in the Book will come upon us. So He has told us what He will do, both positively and negatively; and then, depending on how we react to Him, He reacts to us as He has said He will.

That is the basis of our faith because we know this God is a God of His word. He does not lie. It says there in the Bible a couple of times that He does not lie at all. He is not going to try to fool us. He is not going to try to do anything differently from His pattern. He will do what He has said. So we can take that to the bank and know that if we cross the line, there are certain things that will happen—because He is God.

I should mention that not only is it the basis of our faith but it is the purpose of the covenant: To lay out those terms for us so that we know what we are getting into and how we are supposed to act before God—how we are supposed to conduct our lives before God. In that way, it ties in with my dad's sermons on the covenants.

It is clear from the content of the book that the Chronicler penned a united account of the lives of the kings, from Saul all the way through to Zedekiah, and he did this from a viewpoint that is post-exilic (after the Jews came back from Babylon). So he has had time to look back upon all of these men (and a woman) and their examples and give us an idea of the things that they did right, what they did wrong, and how it fits into this theme that we have seen in these sermons. The book ends, as you know, with the proclamation of Cyrus for the Temple to be rebuilt and the Jews to go back to Jerusalem. So it has got to be at least after that time.

In that first sermon, we saw that the genealogies, specifically of Jeconiah the king (that goes through Zerubbabel), go six or seven generations into the exile and the return. We are talking a good long time after they came back (because they came back in about 538 BC to 530 BC, somewhere in there). There were probably two returns: One, very soon after Cyrus said, “Go back,” which would have been 538 BC; and then another one several years later, in 530 BC, as more of them were prepared to return to the land.

So take six or seven generations beyond that. Let us say we take a generation at only 20 years. Say we count it from 530 BC. Then the seventh generation, from 530 BC, would be, at 20 years, into the beginning of the 300s. That is 140 years. 140 years from 530 BC would take us down to 390 BC. It is pretty early in that intertestamental period but later than any of the other books (viz. Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi) that were written about that same time. But you get an idea that the Chronicler was looking back over hundreds of years, from his perspective.

You heard me say several times already the term ‘the Chronicler.’ That is the term I decided to use rather than a specific name of a person because we do not really know who wrote these books. Jewish tradition has held through a couple thousand years that it was Ezra the scribe. That is a very good name for a person who might write books.

Ezra, though, arrived in Judea from Babylon (or ‘Persia’ at the time because by that time it was a Persian territory) in 458 BC. If he was only 30, that means he was born in 488 BC; and then the time period we are thinking that this book may have been written, he would have had to have been quite an old man. He would have had to have been over 80 years old by the time this was written—by the time he would know who the seventh generation of Jeconiah’s descendants were. But it is possible (it is on the outside chance, but it is very possible).

There are a few points in his favor that he is indeed the author, and I would like to go through five of these. Let us go to II Chronicles 36. I want to see the most obvious of these.

II Chronicles 36:22-23 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!

Ezra 1:1-3 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying [it sounds like an echo here], Thus says Cyrus king of

Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? May his God be with him! Now let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem.

It is very obvious that the last few verses of Chronicles and the first verses of Ezra are pretty much exactly the same. So this gives people who study these things an indication that they have the same author and that Ezra wanted it made known very clearly that his book, Ezra, was tacking right on to the end of the book of the kings that we know as the Chronicles. So that is fairly clear, easy to see. There are others that are not quite as easy to see.

Ezra was a priest. He was of the direct high priestly line. You can trace his genealogy through the high priest that is in Josiah's time—Hilkiah—all the way back to Phinehas and Aaron. So he was of that high priestly line and you would expect a priest to talk about Temple things, priestly things, sacrifices, and that sort of thing. Chronicles does indeed highlight the Temple and the priesthood, as you might expect from a priest who was writing it. So that is another point in his favor.

The third point is that Chronicles and Ezra have a great deal in common in terms of style and subject matter. There are lots of lists and genealogies and content about Temple worship and Levitical duties in both. You find a lot of that in there and sometimes it is boring (that David went through all the Levites, and he put them in their places and made them do this and that and the other thing), but that would be something that would be interesting to a priest.

So, reading from I Chronicles all the way through Ezra 10, you would not notice much of a difference in style. The only one big difference in style is that when you get into Ezra, he starts writing in the first person (“I did this,” “I did that,” “I came,” “I went,” “I did all this.”). But, for the most part, the book of Ezra, up to chapter 7 at least, is written in the third person.

The fourth little point that might be helpful to thinking that it was Ezra is that the person who wrote Chronicles had to have been quite knowledgeable about the history of Israel and Judah; and also he had to have had access to a variety of written records, especially royal records. So he had to have been somebody of account who would be able to not only know these things, but be able to research them.

I know we do not use the book of Maccabees (one of the Apocryphal books) very much, but there is a verse in II Maccabees 2. It might have a historical basis to it, if not being theologically correct in every way. But this verse says that Nehemiah collected a substantial library (which Ezra would obviously have had easy access to).

II Maccabees 2:13 (RSVA) The same things are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings.

It gives the impression that Nehemiah did his utmost to collect all the historical accounts that he could—all the ones that had survived the fall of Jerusalem—and he put them in a library while he was still governor of Judah. Ezra would obviously have had access to that. Nehemiah was probably slightly younger than Ezra. He was made governor of Judah twice, one time in the 440s and the other

time in the 420s. So he lives down in to this time, which makes him a good candidate actually to have written the Chronicles.

The fifth point in Ezra's favor is that the author would most likely have been a leader of the people, concerned about the people, trying to shepherd them into a way that they were not going at the time. If he had not been a leader, this book would have been lost in obscurity. (Who would have thought it was important enough to keep? They would have just thrown it on a trash heap and been done with it.) So only a leader would use a book of this nature, with a theme of this nature, to spur national revival.

By the way, Chronicles is the last book of the Old Testament in terms of the way the Jews order the books. So this book, by a leader's authority (obviously God's, but somebody God used) was put right at the end of the canon so that they would have this thought on their mind as they were leaving their reading of the book: God has said what He is going to do and what He will do, and He has done what He has said.

So these are all good points in Ezra's favor. But they are not conclusive, unfortunately. You cannot point to any one of them and say "Well, that just clinches it."

Like I said, the book might be slightly later than Ezra's time. But if he lived to be 80 or 90 years old, he probably could have done it.

An educated layman or a civil leader would probably know enough to write the details about the Temple and the Levitical activities mentioned; if not, they could have done a little bit of research or grabbed the ear of the local Levite and asked him about that. So it would not have been difficult to find that information.

The books of Chronicles and Ezra, while being similar in some areas, have a great many dissimilarities. You could say they are similar, but somebody else could come back and say they are not really similar.

The point about Nehemiah's library is that the royal records in it were accessible to more people than just Ezra. They could have used the same sources.

The last point about the author being a leader: There were other leaders in Judah than just Ezra. It could have been any one of the priests, or Levites, or governors. Or, it could have been Nehemiah himself who did it.

So while those points do seem to be in Ezra's favor, there are arguments against them. But if I were to choose who I thought wrote the book of Chronicles, I would say probably Ezra and at second place it would probably be Nehemiah. After that, I would think it would be somebody like Malachi or one of the prophets who wanted to make sure that this theme came through loud and clear to those who read the Bible (or at least the Old Testament).

But there is one further thing that might make Ezra seem to the one who did this. Let us go to Ezra 9 and read a prayer that Ezra gave when they found out about all these marriages between Jewish men and pagan women.

Ezra 9:5-15 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe [just stick that in the back of your minds], I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, and said, “O my God: I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day. And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.’ And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people of these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!”

If you were really thinking about what he was saying here, this has the same tone as what the Chronicler is trying to get across through all these kings. The things that were mentioned was how bad they were or how good they were, in terms of whether they tried to reform or whether they did not and just became more evil. In the one that we are going to talk about today, we will see these same sorts of phrases come up again and again.

So, in contrast to that prayer over Judah’s sliding back into apostasy, we are going to look at the life of a king who stands above all the other kings of Judah—maybe the greatest of the kings—and that is Josiah. He has been my favorite in the Kings and Chronicles for a long time.

Josiah may have been the most personally righteous of all the kings, and I have even thrown David in it. David was a pretty righteous man. Josiah was a pretty righteous man. I do not know if you can say one was more righteous than the other. But we will see, from what is said about Josiah, that that is the case. Josiah certainly did not have the foibles that David had. Josiah was certainly the most zealous reformer of all the kings.

The people who were in Judah at the time followed him but, unfortunately, their reformation was only skin deep, and they quickly fell back into their idolatrous ways seemingly days after he died. It is just the impression you get.

Even so, I should say, Josiah's legacy was remarkable for the fact that he was doing all of this almost all by himself and nobody really followed him in their hearts. It is amazing the legacy that he left Judah—and us, actually.

So let us get right into Josiah. We will go to II Chronicles 34. You know what kind of king he was, three chapters are devoted to him. Amon, his father, gets about six verses. Josiah was a king of a different color, a different stripe, and he was quite a good man. Let us read just the first few verses here.

II Chronicles 34:1-2 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. 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.

Here we have Josiah, the son of Amon, the son of Manasseh. We are just a couple of years after the reign of Manasseh—because Amon only reigned two years. Amon was such a bad man. The way he is described is he is an increasingly evil man. He would find out worse and worse ways to be evil. But, after two years, his own servants had had enough of him and they killed him. They would rather have an eight-year-old boy under a regent (or a regency council or something like that) than to have this man, Amon, rule over them. So Josiah was made king when he was just 'knee high to a grasshopper,' as was once said—just a little thing.

His name, by the way, in Hebrew is 'Yoshiyahu' and it means 'Yahweh (or Yah) will give' or 'God will reward' which is pretty indicative of what God did in his life: He was constantly giving Josiah more and more—and I am not talking wealth. Mostly what I am talking about is giving him energy, and strength, and the abilities to do things, and in particular, His Word. He kept giving him more of His Word. We will see that in a little bit.

So Josiah became Judah's fifteenth king. He reigned from 640 BC to 609 BC. That is a reign of 31 years. After he died, Judah fell very quickly in about 23 years. (Four kings were in those 23 years.) But, just 23 years later, they were scraping Jerusalem off the face of the earth.

In verse 2, the Chronicler here uses three different phrases to describe Josiah's singular righteousness. Notice, it is the "he did what was right in the sight of the Lord"; he "walked in the ways of his father David"; and "he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left."

Now it might appear at first glance, running through there fairly quickly, that they are saying the same things over and over again, that they kind of just generally all mean the same thing. And in a sense they do. They are all telling us that he was a very exceptionally righteous person, better than anyone who had come before him since David. But, really, the Chronicler is saying three different things. There are three different emphases here about what he is trying to get at.

The first—"he did what was right in the sight of the Lord"—is the most general. This is essentially saying that he conducted his life in conformity with God's will. He led a good life and he pleased Him. When God looked and God's sight went to Josiah, He saw somebody that He liked that was good. He was righteous. He was upright. So he had, before God, conducted himself in a way that made God happy, and made Him pleased at what he had done.

The second—that he “walked the ways of his father David,”—does not necessarily say the same thing. It is similar, but it puts it off into another category. And the category that we are looking at here is his leadership ability as king; his righteous leadership of the people, that he was like David, a shepherd of a flock; and he, in righteousness and in justice, did what was right—the kind of things that a king should do. So, right now, he was not only personally a good man, he was also a great king ranked up there with David, in following his ways, of his methods of leadership. And the people loved him just like they loved David.

The third one—that “he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left”—is specific as well. In just about every place where it is mentioned, it is talking about the way he lived his life in terms of the law of the instruction of God. God had set a path for a person to live his life in His Word and Josiah conformed to the Word, to the instruction, to the law that God had given. He was not one that strayed from the path and then came back. He was one who did not turn to one side or to the other. He was always walking the straight and narrow path that God had given him through His Word.

It is in the Word of God that we find (if you remember Psalm 119:105) “Your word is a lamp to my feet.” Well, that is the kind of thing we are talking about here, that God’s Word laid out for Josiah was a light, a lamp that he followed. He never took his eyes off it. He did not stray. Once he learned something that God wanted him to do, he would do it. From that point on, he never did anything differently. He was a remarkable man. And as we will see in the very next verse, this started early. Let us go there.

II Chronicles 34:3 For in the eighth year of his reign . . .

Now, remember, he started at eight. So the eighth year of his reign he was fifteen or sixteen, depending on where in the year it was.

II Chronicles 34:3-6 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year [that means he is now 19 or 20] he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which were above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And so he did in the cities of Manasseh [remember, Israel had left 100 years before], Ephraim, and Simeon, as far as Naphtali [that is way up in the north; Naphtali was one of the northern-most tribes] and all around, with axes [margin says ‘swords’].

He meant business!

II Chronicles 34:7 When he had broken down the altars and the wooden images, had beaten the carved images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.

Like I said, he was quite a guy, and this was starting at twenty years old that he did most of this. Now he begins to have a relationship with God on his own, apparently. We do not know if there was anybody there helping him. Perhaps the high priest, I do not know. Perhaps his mother maybe, it is not said.

But the word here, the content of it, says that he did it. He began. It was on his own initiative that he began to seek the Lord—at fifteen or sixteen, right around there. He was not even in his majority yet. He could not rule on his own. He was under somebody else who would rule in his stead until he became probably 20. That is probably why it says that in his twelfth year he began doing the purging of Israel and Judah.

But he used the time that he had as a young man, before he had the responsibilities of the kingship fully, to begin to have a relationship with God. He began to seek God. I wonder if he read Amos where, in chapter 5 verse 4, it says “Seek God and live.” Who knows? I do not know what he had available to him. Amos was a Jew sent to Israel, and I am sure his writings were around.

But for some reason (God is obviously that ‘some reason’), Josiah, at a young age, had a love for God. He wanted to seek Him out and get to know Him and have a relationship with Him. It is very much like David. Notice here that it says, in verse 3, “he began to seek the God of his father David.” It makes me wonder if he read or studied the life of David and used David as an example of how to be a good king from this early age—that he based a lot of what he did on what David had done, that he wanted to copy the life of David in his own life because he saw what it got David.

David was a great king. David was very successful. David ruled for 40 years. And God loved David and David loved God. So that was Josiah’s plan—that he would follow the example of David. It was a good plan. So he, at a very young age, was wise. How many fifteen or sixteen-year-olds decide to delve into the Bible, find an example, and follow it? Of course, I am just guessing that is what he did. But who else does a king of a nation look to? Another king in the line, maybe, that just had a very successful career. So he began early on to look to God in His Word in every situation, following the example of David.

And then once he reached his maturity at age twenty, his twelfth year, he began to take that decisive action that he had been studying about over the past few years. It says here that “he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem.” That could be a very nice word, but it could also be a very rough word. It could be the difference between ‘cleanse’ or ‘scour.’ When you ‘cleanse’ something, you could be gentle. When you ‘scour’ something, you are not. You are very harsh and rough with it because you are trying to get some pretty deep dirt out of something. The word is ‘tahir.’ It means ‘to clean’ but it also means ‘to purify.’

I get the impression of Josiah being kind of like Matt Dillon from ‘Gunsmoke’ who is out to clean up his town and his nation. He was going to take whatever steps necessary to get the riffraff out. But the implication, from the wording here, is that he did what he did—his purging of Jerusalem—with rigor, with strength. He was not namby-pamby at all. He was not half-measures at all. He went in and did it and got what needed to be done.

Notice the action words here that are used to describe his activity, between verse 4 and verse 7. First of all, it says “They broke down the altars. . .” but then it says “. . . in his presence.” So he was there. Whenever he sent out his guys (soldiers, Levites, who knows what) to go knock down this altar to

Baal, he went with them to make sure it was done right. “. . . the incense altars which were above them . . .” it says, “he cut down.”

Notice these things: “the wooden images. . . he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered [them] on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them.” He did not stop with just knocking them over or saying, “Don’t go here!” He obliterated them and made them into dust. “He. . . burned the bones of the priests on their altars. . . cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.”

Then it is mentioned “with axes.” He went in there with force. It sounds like he had his army do it. He broke down the walls, beat the carved images into powder, cut down all the incense altars. It was something that he did with a great deal of energy and intensity.

This is the zeal of the Lord God of hosts that we are looking at here. That is what Josiah exemplifies throughout his entire life. He was on fire for God and full of energy. And when he wanted to get something done—to do something, to make a reform like this—he would put his entire heart, soul, mind, and body into it.

Notice the pronouns too, that ‘he’ did it: ‘he’ did the chopping down, ‘he’ did the cutting down, ‘he’ did the grinding to powder, ‘he’ burned the bones. Everybody knew who was behind this reformation. He was the spearhead of this personal crusade he had to de-idolatrize (or whatever the word would be) the nation of Judah. And then of course, it says, he went on into Israel. He was the one that was doing this. He was not sending out his flunkies to do it. He was there. He was the one smashing things, toppling things, grinding things, and doing all that. So he was thorough—energetic, intense, zealous, and thorough.

He even fulfilled a prophecy made back in the days of Jeroboam. This is an interesting one. Let us go to I Kings 13.

I Kings 13:1-2 And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, “O altar, altar! Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, a child [notice how he is described—‘a child’], Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men’s bones shall be burned on you.’ ”

Now let us go to II Kings 23 where we see the fulfillment.

II Kings 23:15-18 Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place and crushed it to powder, and burned the wooden image. As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs 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 words. Then he said, “What gravestone is this that I see?” And the men of the city told him, “It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel.” And he said, “Let him alone; let no one move his bones.” So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria.

He was thorough. He fulfilled the word of Lord when it came not only to this particular altar, but every pagan altar, every high place, every image that he came across. They all came down. Let us just see a little bit more how thorough he was. Stay here in II Kings chapter 23. Let us start in verse 4. The description here says a lot more about what he did actually, more thorough.

II Kings 23:4-14 And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the articles that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven [‘the hosts of heaven’ was the Assyrian gods and such]; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the wooden image from the house of the Lord, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground it to ashes, and threw its ashes on the graves of the common people. Then he tore down the ritual booths of the perverted persons that were in the house of the Lord [Can you imagine that?], where the women wove hangings for the wooden image. And 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; also he broke down the high places at the gates which were at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were to the left of the city gate. Nevertheless the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brethren. And he 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 to Molech [it is just amazing how much idolatry there was!]. Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. The altars that 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 pulverized there, and threw their dust into the Brook Kidron [I think it was probably dammed up after all this]. Then the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, which were on the south of the Mount of Corruption [I guess so], which Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images, and filled their places with the bones of men.

II Kings 23:19-20 Then Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger; and he did to them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel. He executed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned men’s bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem.

II Kings 23:24-25 Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord. Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and

with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him.

Such an incredibly amazing person, who did all this destruction and execution to basically wipe the entire nation clean of these abominations that people had been putting up and worshipping for hundreds of years. He came in like a tornado and just ruined all those idolatrous things. And we saw there that he did not stop at idols—he went in to all those who were consulting witches and mediums, and spiritists. Nothing was outside his purview for destruction and getting rid of those evil things.

No one had done that before, not to this extent, and certainly no one had done it afterward to this extent. He just tried his best to stamp out everything that was defiling in Judah, in Jerusalem, and in Israel. He spared no one and it does not seem like he feared the reaction of the people, or any of the leadership, or any of his enemies. He just did what needed to be done. Of course, as king, you can do that, I guess. You got the power of the army behind you and you can go in there and just wreak havoc.

But you look at all these things that he did and is it any wonder that he is spoken of highly by the Chronicler? He did exactly what God wanted a righteous king to do in this situation. He was the ideal king in a not-so-ideal world, a righteous king, one who followed God and sought Him with his whole heart in the midst of a very perverse and evil people. So what we see is that he led his people in righteousness, no doubt about that, and they only followed him as much as they had to. They did not follow fully even though he was a good and righteous leader.

Let us go back to II Chronicles, to chapter 34, where we have seen on a couple of occasions that the book of the law was found. We are going to read verses 8 and 9; then we will read verses 14 through 21. We do not need all the details. This is an important episode in Josiah's life.

II Chronicles 34:8 In the eighteenth year of his reign [so eighteen plus eight, that is twenty-six; so he is 26 years old now], when he had purged the land and the temple. . .

So it took him about six years to go throughout all the land of Judah and Jerusalem and much of Israel as well, to stamp out much of this idolatry. And he said, "Okay, I'm coming back to Jerusalem. Now it's time to fix the Temple." That is what he did.

II Chronicles 34:8-9 . . . when he had purged the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God. When they came to Hilkiyah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites who kept the doors had gathered from the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, from all the remnant of Israel, from all Judah and Benjamin, and which they had brought back to Jerusalem.

So not only was he going out and destroying all of the idols, he was taking up a collection for the Temple while he was doing it. So they brought it all back in to Jerusalem.

II Chronicles 34:14-21 Now when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiyah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses. Then Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan. So Shaphan carried the book to the king, bringing the king word, saying, "All that was

committed to your servants they are doing [he just sounds like a secretary here, you know, one thing after another]. And they have gathered the money that was found in the house of the Lord, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen.” Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, “[Oh, and by the way] Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it before the king. Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded Hilkiyah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is 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.”

So they collect all this money to repair the Temple and during the renovation Hilkiyah says, “Hey, look at this! I found a book!” And you think that they would have had them stored away. But you have got to remember how bad things had gotten. We just read in II Kings about all the idols and such that were in the Temple—in the house of the Lord or in the courts. I am sure things that were of a righteous, godly nature had been stored away somewhere. That is probably what happened here. In those times, in those days, they used to use openings or hollowed parts of the walls as storage. Perhaps one of the priests or whatever had put it in there for safekeeping and never told anybody where it was. So, finally, they get to the times of Josiah and the book of the law is found when they are doing the renovation.

I should note here, just to let you know, that in verse 30 it is also called “the Book of the Covenant” which gives us a pretty good idea of what it was. Most scholars believe that the book that they found contained at least parts of the book of Deuteronomy and perhaps the whole book. One thing that keeps them from saying that it is the whole book is Shaphan the scribe read it twice in one day (II Kings 22:8, 10). It is a long book, you could do it, but that is a substantial amount of time for someone to read a whole book twice.

But it is not impossible, it could be done; or maybe he read it through once and then figured out what he needed to read to Josiah, I do not know. But it probably contained at least Deuteronomy 4-8, which was the second telling of the commandments and the covenant parts after that—and most likely chapters 27-30 which is the blessings and the curses that are written there and God’s instructions for us to choose life.

My guess (that is all it is, just a guess on my part) is that it was the whole book of Deuteronomy because it has been called “the book of the covenant” since this time. And it is only sensible that it was the whole book of Deuteronomy given what Josiah’s reaction was—not only tearing his clothes at the blessings and the curses, most of all, seeing that they were guilty, but also that he kept his great Passover at Jerusalem immediately after that and the instructions for doing that are there in Deuteronomy as well.

But the most remarkable thing is his immediate reaction when he heard the words of God. As soon as they hit his ears, he felt immediate guilt and grief. He was prepared to hear them in a way no one else was prepared to do at the time because of his devotion of God, because of the way he had studied God’s Word as a young man and seen all of what he had thrown down—all those things that he had done throughout the land of Judah and Israel. As soon as he heard it, he knew it was true that they were guilty, that they were under the wrath of God.

So you find, in verse 21, that the first thing he wants to do, the first thing that comes to mind, is “Let us ask God about this. Consult with God to find out what we need to do.” He says here “inquire of the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us.” He could see that it was already at work “because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book.”

In Josiah’s heart, God was first. In his mind, God was the first thing he thought of. “What is God’s reaction? What would God say about this?” You can see his zeal in his reaction—because he wanted to do what was right, and he wanted to know immediately so he could get doing it. Remember I said, he was the one, as soon as he was told the Word of the Lord, was following it and not turning to the right or to the left. One of those remarkable people that can just, “If this is the way it is, I’m going to do it.” “What do I need to do, God?” is what he is essentially asking by inquiring of the prophetess, as we will see in a minute.

Let us go ahead right to that now. Starting in verse 22, we will go all the way down to verse 28.

II Chronicles 34:22-28 So Hilkiah and those whom the king had appointed went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke to her to that effect [they basically repeated what Josiah had asked]. Then she answered them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to Me, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah, because they have forsaken Me and burned incense 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 not be quenched.’ ” ’ And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Concerning the words which you have heard—because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,” says the Lord. “Surely 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 calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants.” ’ ” So they brought back word to the king.

They consult with Huldah here and her prophecy from God is essentially “Sorry, Josiah, the die has already been cast. The punishment will come. God’s wrath won’t be stayed this time.” God had already decreed, which we saw in the last sermon on Manasseh, that the apostasy in his days that he had led, and had repented from right at the very end, had been the final straw. At that point it was going to happen. There could not be enough reform and repentance, seeing the state of the people, for God to turn it away. Even Josiah’s reforms, though great and personally fulfilling for him, were too little, too late. Not because he did not put his whole heart into it, not because he did not do everything that he needed to do, but it was because the people did not follow him. They did not change.

Let us go to Hebrews 8. This is about the covenant. He says:

Hebrews 8:7-9 For if that first covenant [the Old Covenant] had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them,” says the Lord.

We are seeing, in the life of Josiah and a few of the kings afterwards, that coming to pass.

Hebrews 8:10-12 “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days [this is in the future],” says the Lord, “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

We can kind of see here what was going on, that Josiah was one who had gone beyond the Old Covenant and he had a personal relationship with God. And it is my idea, my thought that he had God’s Spirit—that he was a converted man—and that he was the only one, except maybe the prophets and the prophetesses at that time.

He was one who was going around the kingdom saying, “Know the Lord.” and it fell on deaf ears—the people would not hear. Any kind of great reformation would have to wait until God would open up the minds and hearts of the people. So they conformed on the surface, but their hearts were bad.

You can jot down Jeremiah 24:1-10. There is a prophecy there where Jeremiah is shown a basket of figs, and he said: “The figs that are good, they are very good. But the figs that are bad, they are very bad.” That is what we see here. Josiah was one of those good figs—he was very good—but he was in the midst of a pile of very, very bad figs. So God’s punishment had to fall.

But, for Josiah, God has only praise. He was impressed with the man. His heart was tender. He was humble. He had a heart of flesh, as Ezekiel’s prophecy says about those who are part of the New Covenant (it is in Ezekiel 36:25-27, which says God will take the heart of stone out and give them a heart of flesh).

Josiah had that heart of flesh. He was eager to walk with God—to walk in His statutes and His judgments—because he had a right and godly Spirit. And for that, God promised him peace and not having to see the wrath that was going to fall on Judah. And I could guess that was a comfort to him, in one way, but he would take what God would give him.

We could go on here. I was going to go in to verses 29 through 33 here, in II Chronicles 34. But this is just another example. He gets the book of the covenant, the book of the law, and he says “We need to renew the covenant with God.” So he gathers everyone there, he reads to them the book of Deuteronomy, and he tells them “You will make this covenant” and he made them stand for it. And it says:

II Chronicles 34:33 . . . All his days they did not depart from following the Lord their God of their fathers [but they were only following it because he made them, on the strength of his own leadership].

So he drove the people on by the force of his own zeal. But it was not enough. Now we will not go into the Passover that he kept there. You see more of his boundless energy. This was right afterward. They found the book of the Law in his eighteenth year and the Passover occurred right afterward. So he did everything he could to organize them all. He gave sheep and cattle, and he put everybody in their places, and he had everybody come in and keep the Passover. But it was all his own energy and doing, the big driving force behind him.

But I do want to go to II Chronicles 35 to see the end of the story. It is the lone point in his life where something negative could be said about him.

II Chronicles 35:20 After all this, when Josiah had repaired the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him.

Let me just tell you right now, Assyria was falling and Babylon was rising. Babylon was beginning to gobble up sections of Assyrian territory because they were the ones that had all the drive and energy behind them. So Assyria allies itself with Egypt. The Egyptian king is taking his army north to help Assyria against Babylon, and Josiah decides to interject little Judah into the power politics.

II Chronicles 35:21-25 But he [Necho] sent messengers to him [Josiah], saying, “What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war [meaning Babylon]; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you.” Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself [a lot like Ahab did] so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God [the Chronicler says they were God’s words]. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, “Take me away, for I am severely wounded.” His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem. So he died, and was buried in one of the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah [he was a young prophet at this time]. And to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations. They made it a custom in Israel; and indeed they are written in the Laments [not the ‘Book of Lamentations’, but another book that has since been lost].

Starting this paragraph with “After all this” is a good indication that it is a change of tone. There is a difference that happens from what had come before. It is as if the Chronicler is saying “I wish I could, but I can’t leave out this final episode in Josiah’s life.”

Thirteen years had passed from the great Passover and perhaps what we see here is maybe a bit of a letdown, I do not know. Perhaps it is a bit of pride that God had blessed him and he had been doing so well, and Judah seemed to be growing. He had, as far as we know, annexed Israel and he had gotten the nation back to a good size again.

Perhaps a little presumption that he thought God would be with him in whatever he did; I do not know. Commentators call Josiah’s actions here “foolish, stupid, headstrong” and, most of all, “inexplicable.” Nobody knows why he did. We can only shake our heads at his tragic end—the tragic end to a remarkable life.

Some think he opposed Pharaoh because he was already working with Babylon. We do not know that for sure. Others suggest that he was trying to defend Israel since he had annexed it. He did not want Egypt to be going across his borders with an army.

Some think that he was getting a little bit too big for his britches. He was a bit overconfident that God would support him in a power move like this. There is no indication that he consulted God at all (which is not like him, from what we have seen before).

In any case, he failed to heed the warning. Perhaps he thought that God would not speak through a heathen king—that the word of the Lord would only come through a prophet or the words in the Bible. No one knows what his calculations were. All we know is that it was wrong and God took the opportunity, at that point, to take him out of the way before the downfall of Jerusalem. He told him he would die before that happened, and Josiah did a stupid thing and God took the opportunity to take him away.

All Judah mourned him. Jeremiah wrote his book of laments. I think everybody in Judah kind of got the impression that a great hope was dead, that it was the beginning of the end. There would never be another like Josiah. It would be all downhill from here. It is a sad way to end a great man's life.

But I think there is something we can learn. Let us finish in Proverbs 13. Even though he died somewhat ignominiously, what he left to Judah was incalculable. It says here, in verse 22:

Proverbs 13:22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.

Josiah was definitely a good man and he left a remarkable legacy for the people of Israel (for the people of Judah, in particular). The legacy was not in wealth; I am sure he was a wealthy man, but that is not what made the biggest impression. It was his example.

He was a man who followed God in every way. Once he heard something that God said, he did it. It did not matter what it was; if God said it, he responded. His heart was tender. He was humble. He was willing to admit he was wrong. He changed. And I am sure, after what had happened in the battle, he had time, on the way back to Jerusalem (because this happened in Megiddo, and it is a good long way from Megiddo to Jerusalem), to think about how stupid he had been. I am sure he took the time to repent. And that is one reason why he is thought of so highly—that he was willing to change. He was willing to learn and to grow.

But it was his faith—his faith in God and His Word—that he exemplified before the people. And that faith, that example, sustained their hope during the exile. He was the one that they looked back to as the last great king. His example was a beacon of light to the people in the time of Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and especially the Chronicler. Obviously the Chronicler thought highly of him, to speak the way he did. It kept hope alive during those four hundred years to the appearance of John the Baptist and his great cousin Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The example that Josiah set, of righteousness before God, was one of great hope and one that people could follow as a standard that they knew. They knew that it was possible, as a man, to do what was good and right in the sight of God.

So the Chronicler showed, in the life of Josiah, that it is possible to seek God even at an early age and keep His Word with zeal and a humble heart—even when the nation is crumbling to bits and pieces around you. That is a lesson that we may just have to emulate in the coming years.