



Josiah began to reign as the king of Judah when he was only eight years old. Many years before, his birth was foretold by the prophet who cried out against idolatry in Bethel, saying, "Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon [the altar] shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (1 Kings 13:2).

While Josiah was very young, he "began to seek after the God of David his father." Josiah began to "purge [clean] Judah and Jerusalem" of idol worship. High places, groves, carved and molten images were broken into pieces and beat into powder. The altars of Baal were also destroyed. Then Josiah burned the bones of the dead false priests upon their own altars.

When Josiah returned to Jerusalem, he made plans to repair the damage that had been done to the temple of the Lord. Workmen were hired, and the work began. While the work was being done, the high priest Hilkiah (*hil-KI-uh*) found the Book of the Law—the words of the law written by Moses.

Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan (*SHAY-fuhn*), the king's scribe (secretary), and Shaphan brought the book to the king. When the king heard Shaphan reading the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. He realized that Israel had disobeyed the words of this book.

Josiah sent men to ask Huldah (*HUL-duh*) the prophetess what God's will was for those that were left in Israel and in Judah. Huldah told the men that God was going to send punishment because the people had forsaken Him and worshiped idols. But because Josiah's heart was tender, because he had humbled himself, tore his clothes, and wept before God, God promised that this would not come during Josiah's lifetime. He would go to his grave in peace.

Josiah wanted the people to turn back to God. He

Church of God Sunday School

JOSIAH AND THE FORGOTTEN BOOK

2 Kings 22:1 – 23:28;
2 Chronicles 34:1 – 35:27

sent word for all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to come to him. He led these elders, the priests, the prophets, and all the people into the house of the Lord. There the king read the Book of the Law that had been found.

"And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments." Josiah promised "to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book." All the people also agreed to this covenant with the Lord.

Josiah commanded "the high priest, and the priests of the second order" to bring out of the temple "all the vessels that were made for Baal." These were destroyed. The graven image of the grove (idol) was brought out of the "house of the LORD." (What was an idol doing inside the temple of God? Years before, Josiah's wicked father and grandfather had placed it there; 2 Kings 21:3, 7.)

Houses of terribly wicked people that had been set up in the temple courts were torn down. There were altars "on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz" (Hezekiah's father). There were also altars in the "two courts of the house of the LORD." All these were broken and beaten by the king, and the dust was cast into the brook Kidron.

Josiah destroyed the high places that Solomon had built for Ashtoreth, for Chemosh (*KEE-mosh*), and for Milcom (*MIL-kom*). The altar that Jeroboam had set up in Bethel was broken, burned, and stomped into powder. Again, bones were taken from nearby graves and burned upon the altar. This was to pollute or defile that place of worship, so that wicked people would not set up a place of worship later.

Josiah saw a grave that was different. Perhaps it had a special stone to mark it. When he asked about it, he was told it was the grave of the prophet who had foretold of Josiah's destroying that very place of worship. It had happened just as the prophet of the Lord had said. Josiah commanded that the bones of this prophet be left alone.

When Josiah finished destroying the idolatrous

priests and their altars, he returned to Jerusalem. There he kept the Passover Feast (the very important feast that Israel should have been keeping every year). Josiah gave special instructions to the Levites. It was important that everything be done according to the law of Moses.

Josiah gave his own cattle and lambs to the people for their Passover offerings: 30,000 lambs and 3,000 cattle! Not since the days of the Prophet Samuel had the Passover been kept in such a wonderful way!

Truly God did a wonderful work through Josiah! The Bible tells us that "there [was] no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him."

At the end of Josiah's reign, he foolishly joined a fight against the king of Egypt. Josiah was warned away by ambassadors from Egypt, but he would not listen. Although he disguised himself during the fight, he was wounded by the archers. His servants took him back to Jerusalem, where he died.

During the thirty-one years Josiah was king, he destroyed many, many idols and groves and altars in

Judah and Jerusalem. He got rid of those who were involved with witchcraft. He restored worship at the temple and also made sure the words of the Law were read and obeyed. He did his best to turn Judah back to God.

But God's "great wrath . . . was kindled against Judah." (No doubt, God knew the people would return to their idolatrous ways after Josiah died.) God said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel . . ." The Prophet Jeremiah mourned for King Josiah. He wrote a lamentation (mournful song) that the people were to sing in remembrance of their king.

"And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah." Josiah would be the last king of Judah who "did that which was right in the sight of the LORD."

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**MEMORY VERSE:**

*" . . . there [was] no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, . . . soul, and . . . might, . . . neither after him arose there any like him."*

*—2 Kings 23:25*