

Josiah's Reforms¹



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Chronicles 33; Habakkuk 1:2–4; 2 Kings 22; Philippians 2:3–8; 2 Kings 23:1–28; 1 Corinthians 5:7.

MEMORY VERSE: “There was no king like Josiah either before him or after him. None of them turned to the LORD as he did. He followed the LORD with all his heart and all his soul. He followed him with all his strength. He did everything the Law of Moses required” (2 Kings 23:25, NIV).

PARENTS KNOW JUST HOW HARD IT IS TO SEE THEIR CHILDREN MAKE CHOICES THAT THEY KNOW WILL HURT THEM. This heartache is not found only with parents and children. For example, we all know friends or relatives or others who have made choices that we knew would be harmful to them. This is the sad part of what it means to have free will. Free will means nothing if we do not have the freedom to make wrong choices. A “free” person who can choose only the right is not truly free or even truly moral.²

Much of the Holy Bible is the story of God warning His people about not making wrong choices. This has been a large part of what the book of Jeremiah is about too. It is about the pleadings of God, who respects free choice and free will, to His chosen nation.

Sadly, most of the stories in the Bible are not good. But this week we will find a hint of hope. We will study one of the few kings who used his free will to do what “was right in the sight of the Lord.”

DEFINITIONS

1. reforms—the changes and improvements that help bring people back to God.
2. moral—able to choose between right and wrong.

KING MANASSEH AND KING AMON (2 Chronicles 33)

We often like to think we are fair-minded about understanding things as they really are. But as humans we really are not fair-minded. We do not understand the world as the world really is. Instead, we understand it as we really are. Because we are fallen humans, our sinful condition influences our understanding and interpretation of the world around us. For instance, how can we explain someone such as King Manasseh of Judah (about 686–643 B.C.), especially those early years of his terrible backsliding? We cannot imagine how he thought he was doing right with the terrible evils he did in Judah.



Manasseh's repentance came too late to save the kingdom from the evil practices of idol worship.

DEFINITIONS

3. restored—established again as king.

Read 2 Chronicles 33. What does this story tell us about just how evil King Manasseh was? More important, what does this teach us about the willingness of God to forgive?

No question, being hauled off to Babylon with nose hooks and chains is a sure way to get a man to rethink his life. Manasseh truly repented (had a change of heart over the evil) of his ways. And when he was restored³ to the throne, he tried to repair the damage that he had done. Sadly, the damage was too great for him to undo.

“Manasseh’s repentance [turning back to God] was wonderful, but it came too late to save the kingdom from the evil influences of many years of idol worship. Many had fallen, never again to rise.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets [Special Messengers] and Kings*, page 383. And even more sad was the fact that Amon, Manasseh’s son, was one of those who had been terribly influenced by Manasseh’s backsliding. Amon took the throne after his father died. “Amon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, just as his father Manasseh had done. Amon worshiped and offered sacrifices to all of the statues of gods that Manasseh had made” (2 Chronicles 33:22, NIV). Worse, unlike his father, Amon never repented of his ways.

Who does not know personally the terrible results that can come even from sin that has been forgiven? What promises can you claim for the victory over sin? Why not claim them now before the sin brings its terrible results?

A NEW KING (2 Chronicles 33:25)

A preacher once said, “Be careful what you pray for. You just might get it.” Israel had asked for a king, just like the nations around it. The people got what they asked for. But much of Israelite history after the judges was the story of how these kings became evil on the throne and, as a result, made the nation evil too.

Yet, there were always exceptions, such as King Josiah, who succeeded to the throne in 639 B.C. and ruled until 608 B.C.

What was the setting in which the new king had come to the throne? Read 2 Chronicles 33:25.

The young king came to the throne at a time of great trouble, backsliding, and fighting, even at the highest levels of government. Because of what was going on, many faithful people in the land wondered whether God’s promises to Israel could ever be fulfilled. “From a human point of view God’s purpose for the chosen nation seemed almost impossible to make happen.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 384.

The strong concern of these faithful people is found in the words of the prophet Habakkuk. Read Habakkuk 1:2–4. What is the prophet saying?

Unfortunately, the answer to the problems of sin, rebellion (war against God), troubles, and lawlessness would come. But it would come from the north, from the Babylonians, whom God would use to bring judgment upon His backsliding people. As we have understood all along, it did not have to be that way. But because of the people’s refusal to repent, they faced the punishment that their sins brought upon them.

How often does “God’s purpose” seem to be impossible to bring about? What does this tell us about how we need to reach out in faith above what we can explain or fully understand?



Young King Josiah came to the throne at a time of great trouble, backsliding, and fighting.

JOSIAH ON THE THRONE (2 Kings 22:1, 2)

Read 2 Kings 22:1, 2. When we think about the condition of the nation at the time Josiah came to the throne, what is so wonderful about these verses?

The Bible does not give us any explanation for this wonderful young man (Josiah) who could have very easily become as wicked as his father before him. But that was not the case. For whatever reasons, Josiah chose a different path. That choice was to have a positive but very limited influence on the nation.

Second Kings 22 explains what Josiah did to the temple. From the time of the dedication of the temple by Solomon, many hundreds of years had passed until Josiah's reforms (changes for the better) in 622 B.C. The kings had not really taken care of the temple. Time had worn down the building, which had once been beautiful. The young king found that the temple was no longer suitable for worship as a result of long years of neglect.



Josiah saw that the once beautiful temple was no longer suitable for worship.

What did Josiah do when he discovered the temple needed to be repaired? Read 2 Kings 22:3–7.

Today we would say that the king sent his minister of finance to the high priest and asked him to plan and supervise the materials and labor required to remodel the temple. They did not have to explain how they were using the money because they were acting faithfully. For whatever reasons, Josiah trusted them. And as far as the record shows, that trust was honored.

Remodeling the temple is fine. But in the end, what really is important for a true revival and reformation?⁴ Read Philippians 2:3–8.

DEFINITIONS

4. revival and reformation—the process of turning to God and making changes to encourage more holy lives.

THE BOOK OF THE LAW (2 Kings 22:8–11)

Remodeling the temple as the center of Israelite worship was important. But remodeling a building was not all that was needed. The beauty of the building was designed to help worshipers sense something of the power and glory (beauty and holiness) of the Lord. But it is not enough to create in the people a firm desire to obey God. History is full of the sad stories about people who one minute were “worshiping” in some beautiful church somewhere. But the next minute they were walking out and doing a terrible sin, maybe even prompted by what they learned inside that beautiful building.

What happened during the remodeling of the temple? What is the importance of Josiah’s response when the scroll was read to him? Read 2 Kings 22:8–11.

They found the “Scroll of the Law.” The Bible does not say which of Moses’ writings were found. The scroll was probably found buried in the walls somewhere in the temple.

Read 2 Kings 22:12–20. What was the message that God gave through Huldah to the people and for King Josiah himself? What should these words say to us?

The message Huldah gave for the people was the same message Jeremiah had already prophesied several times. The people had turned away from God, and they would experience terrible trouble. Josiah, however, was never going to experience the trouble. He would die and be buried in peace.

“Through Huldah the Lord sent Josiah word that Jerusalem’s ruin could not be prevented. Even if the people should now humble themselves before God, they could not escape their punishment. Their senses had been deadened by sin. If the judgment did not come, then the people would soon return to the same sinful path. ‘Tell the man who sent you to me,’ the prophetess said, ‘The LORD says, “I am going to bring horrible [terrible] trouble on this place and its people. Everything that is written in the scroll the king of Judah has read will take place. That is because the people have deserted [left] me. They have burned incense to other gods. They have made me very angry because of the statues of gods their hands have made. So my anger will burn against this place. The fire of my anger will not be put out.” ’ 2 Kings 22:15–17 [NIRV].”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 399.



Through the prophetess Huldah the Lord sent Josiah word that Jerusalem’s ruin could not be prevented.

JOSIAH'S REFORMS (2 Kings 23:1–28)

God's forewarning of doom had been given. But Josiah was still determined to do what was "right in the eyes of the LORD." Maybe punishment could not be prevented. "But in announcing the punishments of Heaven, the Lord had not withdrawn opportunity for repentance and reformation [change for the better]. Josiah saw in this God's willingness to mix His punishments with mercy. So, Josiah decided to do all in his power to bring about reforms."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 400.

Read 2 Kings 23:1–28. What was the real meaning of the reform (change) that the faithful king tried to bring to his sinful nation? What do these acts tell us about just how bad things had become in the chosen nation?

Josiah gathered all the people in Jerusalem in order to renew their covenant (promise) with God. The recently found Book of the Law was read. And then the people made the vow to follow the God of Israel.

The king did not do this work by himself. But he asked those who had spiritual responsibilities to do what was needed. As an example, throughout the centuries, different things (statues and symbols that made foreign worship popular in Israel) had been gathered into the temple. Sometimes they had been part of the conditions of peace that the nation was to keep. Sometimes kings had put them in the temple to help keep peace with their enemies. They were a sign of surrender. Whatever the reasons, they did not belong there, and Josiah ordered them removed and destroyed.

Also, the Passover⁵ celebrations during Josiah's reform did not take place only within the family households. But now the whole nation celebrated it together. Its message for the people was that they had left the old period behind them. They had now entered a new time in which they promised to serve the true God. God was the one who led them out of Egypt, who gave a home for the tribes as He had promised, and who was with them in their everyday lives.

Celebrating the national Passover was important because all the old things had come to an end. What should the Passover mean to us now, as Seventh-day Adventists? Read 1 Corinthians 5:7.

DEFINITIONS

5. Passover—a Jewish holiday in March or April that celebrates the freeing of the Jews from slavery in Egypt.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: This week's lesson explains how deep the sin was that Israel had fallen into. Just how deep can be found in the kind of reforms that Josiah had to undertake. But how could the nation have fallen so far? In one way, the answer is easy: it is because humans have fallen so far. Just how far humans have fallen was explained in a famous experiment at Yale University in the 1960s.

People who took part in the experiment were brought in through newspaper ads. They were told to give electric shocks to people tied down to chairs in another room. The switches that gave the shocks were marked from "Slight Shock" to "Danger: Severe [Serious] Shock," including two more marked "XXX." The people taking part were told to give the shocks according to the orders of the scientist leading the experiment. As they did, the people who took part would hear the people in the other room scream and plead for mercy. Really, the people in the other room were just acting. They were not getting shocked at all. The point of the study was to find out how far these "normal" people would go in giving what they thought was pain to those whom they did not know. They did it just because they had been ordered to do it. The results were frightening. Many people who took part became concerned, and even angry. But that did not stop a stunning 65 percent from giving the most serious "shocks" to the people in the other room. The people giving shocks believed that they were truly hurting them. "Common people," wrote the scientist who managed the experiment, "were simply doing their jobs. They did not really mean to do any harm. But they can become agents in a terrible program." How many "common" people have done terrible things throughout history, or even today? Too many have, for sure. Why? Christians know the answer. We are sinners, plain and simple.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What does the story of Josiah's reform tell us about the importance of the Word of God in our lives?
- 2 A valid question could be raised now: If it were too late for Judah to avoid the coming evil, why make the call for turning from sin and changing one's life at all? What was the purpose of all these changes? What answer would you give? In what ways might the reason be found in how such a revival would personally influence each participant, instead of the nation as a whole?