

Jeremiah

Josiah's Reforms

Lesson #8 for November 21, 2015

Scriptures: 2 Chronicles 33; Habakkuk 1:2-4; 2 Kings 22; 23:1-28; Philippians 2:3-8; 1 Corinthians 5:7; *Prophets and Kings* 384,392-405,410.

1. This lesson will cover a surprising, almost stunning, story about the delightful reign of Josiah, king of Judah. His grandfather was Manasseh, the worst king in Judah's history. Manasseh spent the first 50 years of his life doing everything he could to corrupt the people and the temple in Jerusalem. After 50 years as king, he was captured by the Assyrians and taken as a prisoner to their temporary capital in Babylon. For some reason, a little while later, he was released and returned to Jerusalem. He became king again; during the last five years of his life, he decided to try to reform and undo the evil influences of his first 50 years. When he passed away, his son Amon became king and was just as evil as the first 50 years of Manasseh's reign. Amon was murdered by some of his own staff; his eight-year-old son Josiah became the new king.
2. Read 2 Kings 23:25. Was he better than David? What do you think it was that led to this surprising experience of the new king? We know almost nothing about his mother or grandmother; but, his mother's and grandmother's names suggest that they may have been God-fearing women. Perhaps it was their influence that led Josiah to lead an exemplary life.
3. Think of becoming the king of a corrupt nation at the age of eight. It is almost impossible to imagine how an eight-year-old child could have tried to stem the tide of evil done by his father and grandfather. But moral free will and freedom sometimes can take unusual turns. Someone who is free can choose what is right or choose what is wrong.
4. As we know, unfortunately, much of the Old Testament is the story of wrong choices made by Abraham's descendants and how God responded. This week's story is an exception. Manasseh was the 14th ruler of the kingdom of Judah. His reign of 55 years, as already mentioned, was mostly evil. During the first ten years, he apparently co-reigned with his father, Hezekiah. We have an ancient Hebrew seal bearing the inscription: "Belonging to Manasseh, son of Hezekiah King of Judah." A careful look at the first line on the top of that seal shows a small image of Asherah, the nude goddess of fertility with her two wings. **See picture on page 6.** Manasseh died in 643/642 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Amon, who ruled for two years. Thus, his grandson Josiah lived his first six years under the final years of reform under Manasseh and then two years of evil under his father, Amon.
5. Read 2 Chronicles 33. It is a chronicle of the evil deeds of Manasseh and is hardly readable. Remember that he was the son of Hezekiah who was one of the good kings!
6. Having read the story of Manasseh, do you expect to see him in heaven? If so, what does that say to us about the love, kindness, and forgiveness of God? One of the earliest acts of Manasseh was the killing of the prophet Isaiah.

According to the Jewish tradition as recorded in the Talmud, Isaiah hid himself in a tree while fleeing from Manasseh but was betrayed by the fringes of his garment. The tree was sawn in half on Manasseh's command, killing the prophet. There is an echo of this account in Hebrews 11:37, 38, describing the sufferings of Old Testament prophets (compare also Ellen G.

White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 381, 382). One can imagine the two men sitting down somewhere along the river close to the tree of life as Manasseh tells Isaiah the story of God's grace: how he was captured by the Assyrians and taken to Babylon where he finally turned to God and repented of his ways. (*Adult Teacher's Bible Study Guide*, p. 107.)

7. In the new earth, will Isaiah remember being sawn in two in that hollow log at the order of Manasseh? If not, will he—and we—remember other aspects of the struggles on this earth and the battles in the great controversy over the character and government of God? If everything is forgotten as some would claim, what would be the point of the whole great controversy? If Isaiah does remember, will he hold it against Manasseh? Against God? What might he say to Manasseh?

8. No doubt, Manasseh had some time for serious thinking as he was hauled to Babylon with nose hooks and bronze fetters on his body. That led to true repentance.

But this repentance, remarkable though it was, came too late to save the kingdom from the corrupting influence of years of idolatrous practices. Many had stumbled and fallen, never again to rise.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 383.0.

9. We know little about Amon, his son, except that his reign was worse than his father's, and he never repented.

10. Back in the days of Samuel, the children of Israel pleaded for a king. (1 Samuel 8) They felt that the chaos in their nation was a result of not having any central leadership. They were also very concerned about the evil ways of Samuel's sons. So, they began to pray for a king. A well-known preacher once said: "Be careful what you pray for. You just might get it." Thus, Israel ended up with three kings—Saul, David, and Solomon—under the united monarchy and then, the terrible slide into idolatry and destruction of the kings from the two kingdoms that followed.

11. Josiah came to the throne at a time of great turmoil, apostasy, and violence and a time of threats from nations south and north.

From a human point of view the divine purpose for the chosen nation seemed almost impossible of accomplishment.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 384.2.

12. To get an idea of how bad things were, look at Habakkuk 1:2-4. How do you think our days compare with Josiah's? Habakkuk received the terrible news that changes would come, but not for the better. The Babylonians were on their way.

13. Read 2 Kings 22:1-2. How can we explain the righteous behavior of this young man who grew up in such a terrible environment? Was he influenced by the last few good years of the reign of Manasseh, his grandfather? Or, was it primarily the good influence of his mother and possibly his grandmother? Or, was it good, God-loving advisors?

14. One of the early things that Josiah did was to clean up the temple in Jerusalem. It is easy for us to think of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a beautiful building with the ark of the covenant inside and the other articles mentioned in Scripture. What we usually do not recognize is the fact that Solomon began a long history of putting pagan idols in that beautiful temple. In the days of Josiah, the temple had deteriorated considerably. Josiah realized that in order to institute a new kind

of worship, he would need to clean it up. Read 2 Kings 22:3-7.

15. Unfortunately, Josiah learned that it was not as easy to reform the thinking of the people of Judah as it was to clean up the temple. Do we need any cleansing in our churches today? Do we need any cleansing in our church institutions? Or, even our church hierarchy?
16. A remarkable thing happened as those trusted workmen were cleansing the temple and restoring it to its original beauty. Read 2 Kings 22:8-11.
17. We do not know exactly what or how much was included in that "Book of the Law." Looking at the comments that are made in Scripture, scholars suspect it may have been the book of Deuteronomy. (See Deuteronomy 17:18-20.)
18. When Josiah first had some of that book read to him, he tore his clothes in dismay. So, what did he do next? Read 2 Kings 22:12-20. One of the most respected prophets of Judah in those days was a woman named Huldah. She lived in Jerusalem with her husband Shallum who was responsible for the temple robes. When the leading men of the nation went to Huldah with their question about what should be done, she basically repeated a message that had been given previously by Jeremiah. Because of the reforms that he had undertaken, King Josiah was promised that the times of terrible trouble and destruction would not come until after his death.

Through Huldah the Lord sent Josiah word that Jerusalem's ruin could not be averted. Even should the people now humble themselves before God, they could not escape their punishment. So long had their senses been deadened by wrongdoing that, if judgment should not come upon them, they would soon return to the same sinful course. "Tell the man that sent you to me," the prophetess declared, "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched." 2 Kings 22:15-17.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 399.1.

19. The good news was that Josiah did not just sit down and relax. Contrast the response of Hezekiah after Isaiah spoke to him. (2 Kings 20) Josiah determined to do everything he could to try to straighten things out not only in Judah but also in the former kingdom of Israel to the north. He wanted to do what was right in the sight of the Lord.

. . .but in announcing the retributive judgments of Heaven, the Lord had not withdrawn opportunity for repentance and reformation; and Josiah, discerning in this a willingness on the part of God to temper His judgments with mercy, determined to do all in his power to bring about decided reforms. He arranged at once for a great convocation, to which were invited the elders and magistrates in Jerusalem and Judah, together with the common people. These, with the priests and Levites, met the king in the court of the temple. —Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 400.1.

20. Read 2 Kings 23:1-28 to see what Josiah did. First, he summoned all the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem and then read the whole book of the covenant to them. Then, he personally made a covenant with the Lord, and all the people also promised to keep that covenant. He began by ordering the removal from Solomon's Temple of all the objects used in the

worship of Baal, of the goddess Asherah, and of the stars. He burned those objects and scattered their ashes. He removed the priests who had been placed there by the prior kings of Judah and whose work had been to offer sacrifices on the pagan altars in the area of the temple. Those priests worshiped Baal, the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars. After destroying the idol to Asherah, he destroyed the living quarters in the temple occupied by the temple prostitutes—both female and male. He brought to Jerusalem all the priests from outlying areas who had been conducting those pagan worship services. Then, he tore down the altars and tried to destroy every trace of pagan worship in the surrounding areas. Do we need to clean our “soul temples” just like that?

21. Next, he destroyed the temple and the “god” Molech in the Valley of Hinnom where people had previously offered their sons and daughters as burnt offerings. Then, he took upon himself the task of destroying the pagan temples and idols left by prior kings including King Ahaz, King Manasseh, and even King Solomon. He desecrated the altars that King Solomon had built for his foreign wives on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem—idols to Astarte the goddess of Sidon, Chemosh the “god” of Moab, and Molech the “god” of Ammon. He scattered human bones over the sites where those idols had been. He then turned his attention to the northern territory formerly occupied by the kingdom of Israel—later called Samaria—and tore down the pagan places of worship there as well.
22. Read 1 Kings 13. The work which Josiah was doing had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier by the prophet from Judah who went to condemn what Jeroboam was doing in the cities of Bethel and Dan. But, Josiah was not able to remove all the traces of evil of his predecessors.

Few realize that, in their lives, they constantly exert an influence which will be perpetuated for good or evil. **Hundreds of years had elapsed since Solomon caused those idolatrous shrines to be erected on the mount; and, although Josiah had demolished them as places for worship, their debris, containing portions of architecture, were still remaining in the days of Christ.** The prominence upon which those shrines had stood was called, by the true-hearted of Israel, the Mount of Offense.—Ellen G. White, *The Health Reformer* May, 1878; 2SDABC 1032.7. [Bold type is added.]

23. Finally, Josiah decided the time had come for them to restore the Passover service. See 2 Chronicles 35:1-19.

²¹**King Josiah ordered the people to celebrate the Passover in honour of the LORD their God, as written in the book of the covenant.** ²²**No Passover like this one had ever been celebrated by any of the kings of Israel or of Judah, since the time when judges ruled the nation.** ²³Now at last, in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, the Passover was celebrated in Jerusalem.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., 2 Kings 23:21–23). New York: American Bible Society. [Bold type is added.]

24. After refurbishing the temple, it was certainly appropriate to use it for the purpose for which it was intended. That Passover celebration was like no Passover celebration that had ever been offered since the days of Moses. The whole nation came together with the intention of starting something new, something that would transform the people of Judah.
25. Does this ancient story have any lessons for us today? Paul thought it had lessons for the people in his day.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8: You must remove the old yeast of sin so that you will be entirely pure. Then you will be like a new batch of dough without any yeast, as indeed I know you actually are. For our Passover Festival is ready, now that Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us celebrate our Passover, then, not with bread having the old yeast of sin and wickedness, but with the bread that has no yeast, the bread of purity and truth.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., 1 Corinthians 5:7–8). New York: American Bible Society.

26. Read 2 Chronicles 34:26-33; and 35:20-24. Unfortunately, after reigning for 31 years, Josiah made a foolish mistake. When King Necho came from Egypt with his forces to fight against the Assyrians, Josiah felt that he needed to go and oppose him in battle. But, didn't we read that Josiah was to die in a time of peace?

But at the last he died in battle. Why?—Because he did not heed the warnings given. . . . [2 Chronicles 34:26-33; 35:20-24 quoted.] {2SDABC 1039.6} [Was God actually speaking through King Necho?]

Because Josiah died in battle, who will charge God with denying His word that Josiah should go to his grave in peace? The Lord did not give orders for Josiah to make war on the king of Egypt. When the Lord gave the king of Egypt orders that the time had come to serve Him by warfare, and the ambassadors told Josiah not to make war on Necho, no doubt Josiah congratulated himself that no word from the Lord had come directly to him. To turn back with his army would have been humiliating, so he went on. And because of this, he was killed in battle, a battle that he should not have had anything to do with. The man who had been so greatly honored by the Lord, did not honor the word of God. The Lord had spoken in his favor, predicted good things for him; and Josiah became self-confident, and failed to heed the warning. He went against the word of God, choosing to follow his own way, and God could not shield him from the consequences of his act. (2SDABC 1039.7)

In this our day men choose to follow their own desires and their own will. [1040] Can we be surprised that there is so much spiritual blindness?—Ellen G. White, *MS 163*, 1903; 2SDABC 1039.8. [Content in brackets is added.]

27. It is interesting to note that Josiah's reforms were basically the undoing of all the evils put in place by his grandfather, Manasseh, and his father, Amon. Of course, there were still traces of pagan temples and other remnants of heathen forms of worship as we noted, some even from the time of Solomon.
28. One of the most significant parts of this whole story was the reformation that took place as a result of reading God's Word. Should we sometimes have church services which consist only of reading the Bible? Compare the story of Ezra as recorded in Nehemiah 8 which was approximately 230 years later. Ezra read the Bible in Hebrew and his assistants translated it into Aramaic—the language of Babylon that the people had been forced to use when taken into captivity. Would that have been the first modern language translation of the Bible? When they interpreted the law to the people, there was a tremendous reformation. Read Nehemiah 8-10. Would any such reformation take place today as a result of the reading of God's Word? God knew how things were going to work out. He knew that Josiah's reforms were not going to be permanent. Why did He bother inspiring

prophets and the king to carry out those reforms?

Josiah had read to priests and people the Book of the law found in the side of the ark in the house of God. His sensitive conscience was deeply stirred as he saw how far the people had departed from the requirements of the covenant they had made with God. He saw that they were indulging appetite to a fearful extent, and perverting their senses by the use of wine. Men in sacred offices were frequently incapacitated for the duties of their positions, because of their indulgence in wine. [Compare Nadab and Abihu as recorded in Leviticus 10:1-11.]

Appetite and passion were fast gaining the ascendancy over the reason and judgment of the people, till they could not discern that the retribution of God would follow upon their corrupt course. Josiah, the youthful reformer, in the fear of God demolished the profane sanctuaries and hideous idols built for heathen worship, and the altars reared for sacrifices to heathen deities. Yet there were still to be seen in Christ's time the memorials of the sad apostasy of the king of Israel and his people—Ellen G. White, *The Health Reformer* April, 1878; 2SDABC 1038.8-9. [Content in brackets is added.]

29. As we have noted before, the people of these two kingdoms—Israel to the north and Judah to the south—seemed to follow almost unthinkingly the behavior of their kings. Why do you think that was? And why was it that political peace seemed to come only when the kings were faithful to God?
30. Why do you think Josiah sent his leading man in the government to consult Huldah the prophetess in Jerusalem when there were at least six male prophets alive at that time? How many female prophetesses can you name? The Bible mentions: Miriam; Deborah; Huldah; Isaiah's wife; and Anna; in addition to the four daughters of Philip, the deacon-evangelist.
31. Did faithful parenting have anything to do with the story of Josiah? If so, it must have been his mother! What should parents today learn from this story about the influence of a godly parent?

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“Belonging
to
Manasseh,
son of
Hezekiah
King of
Judah.”

