



AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY FOR A UNEXPECTED KING

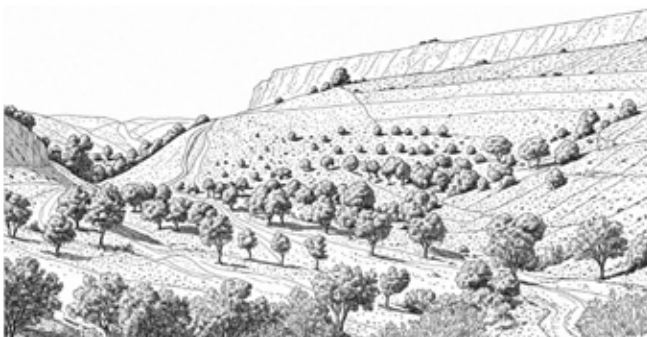
2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34:1-28

We cannot change people's hearts or deliver them from divine judgment, but we can show them what it means to follow the Lord and enjoy His blessings. King Josiah's pursuit of the Lord and commitment to obeying Him was both an example and a rebuke to the people of Judah.

When Judah's wicked King Amon was assassinated after reigning only two years, nobody expected a better king would take Amon's place on the throne. And certainly, nobody expected very much from his eight-year-old son, Josiah, who was suddenly placed on the throne of Judah. They were all in for a surprise.

We are given an overview of Josiah's reign here in 2 Kings 22:1:

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. . . . And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father.



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Then verse 3 jumps to the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign. But over in the parallel account in 2 Chronicles, chapter 34 fills in some of the details of the earlier years of his reign.

As we begin our survey of his kingship, I want to highlight some of the qualities of Josiah that make him such a godly example to his people. And the first quality is this: He has an insatiable *spiritual hunger*.

In 2 Chronicles 34:3, we read, "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father." The Hebrew verb translated "to seek," means, "to carefully, diligently look for." In Chronicles, this verb usually refers to looking to God in every life situation.¹

Now we would like to know what caused this diligent walk with the Lord when Josiah was sixteen years old, but we are not told. I do not think it's a coincidence, though, that the prophet Nahum as well as the prophet Zephaniah are ministering at this time, and they will be joined shortly by the prophet Jeremiah.

I don't doubt for a minute that these prophets are reinforcing the work God is doing in the young king's life. They are surely feeding the spiritual hunger that will establish the godly foundation in Josiah's life and reign.



A second important quality of Josiah appears in the twelfth year of his reign, when he is twenty years old. Listen to verses 3-7 of 2 Chronicles 34:

He began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He . . . cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel.

This second quality is what we will call uncompromising *spiritual courage*. It takes a bulldozer of bravery to take on this industry of idolatry. Josiah is standing against the crashing waves of wickedness that have grown through nearly seventy years of national apostasy. And Josiah's own father had led the way.

So, where did this courage come from? Well, it started with that spiritual hunger, which ended up creating spiritual muscle and determination to do the right thing.

Now the third quality of Josiah is highlighted in both 2 Kings 22 and the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 34. Josiah is in his eighteenth year on the throne; he's now twenty-six years old.

We will call this third characteristic, unshakable *spiritual conviction*. Josiah already has torn down the pagan altars; now he wants to repair the temple in Jerusalem. He wants his people to return to true worship, and God is about to reward him with a rather unexpected discovery.

While the priests get started repairing the temple and apparently are in the process of cleaning out the rubble, Hilkiah the high priest finds what he calls here in 2 Kings 22:8 the "Book of the Law." Based on the responses we see here, this might have been the book of Deuteronomy, but it's possible it was the entire Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament.

What a discovery this is! Hilkiah gives the book to Josiah's servant, Shaphan, who heads over to read it to King Josiah.

Verse 11 records that after hearing the book read, Josiah "tore his clothes"; that was a symbolic act of grief and repentance. Josiah's command to Shaphan, Hilkiah, and the other servants here in verse 13 explains his reaction:

"Go, inquire of the LORD . . . concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book."

Josiah is stunned by the nation's disobedience and guilt. He fears God's judgment is just around the corner. Josiah pulls the fire alarm.

Let me point out another characteristic of this godly king: a sense of *spiritual priority*. What matters most to him is what matters most to God.

Now realizing how far Judah has gone astray, Josiah knows that nothing less than national repentance is needed. But is there any hope?



Josiah seeks an answer from a prophetess in Jerusalem named Huldah, and she responds in verses 16-17:

“Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods . . . therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.”

In other words, the wheels of judgment are already rolling toward the nation. But there is a ray of hope for Josiah as Huldah continues:

“Because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you . . . Therefore . . . you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.” (verses 19-20)

In other words, judgment will not arrive during Josiah's lifetime.

Now Josiah will continue to do everything possible to turn his people back to the Lord, and many will follow him, but his nation as a whole will refuse to repent. Less than forty years from this point, divine judgment will finally come as the nation is sent into exile.

Whether you're a teacher today, or a lawyer, a mechanic, a surgeon, a mom, or a dad, your godly example is standing against the waves of wickedness in our day. You may not be able to turn everyone in your world toward Christ, but your life is a beacon of light to show the way home for those who repent and join you in following the Lord.

So, let's be more like young King Josiah—having a spiritual hunger for God's Word, a willingness to obey God's Word, and the courage to live out the truth of God's Word, wherever God has placed us in the world today.

- In what ways is your walk with God like an insatiable spiritual hunger?
- Upon what source of truth does an uncompromising spiritual courage rest and become active?
- What value does your unshakable spiritual convictions have in convincing an unbeliever that God's promises are true?
- What does a strong sense of spiritual priority look like in a world that continually forces its influence on believers?

How does this example of the prophet's investment in Josiah's life encourage you to have maturing believers investing in your life? What must you first admit about yourself so that the investment of the maturing believer in your life becomes effective?

¹ Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 10b (Inter-Varsity, 1994), 528.

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