

# Josiah: Judah's Last Good King

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## Part I: The Boy King

### Text:

II Chronicles 34:1-3

Josiah *was* eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined *neither* to the right hand, nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images.

### Introduction:

When the Bible first began to be printed and distributed in England in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, one of the parts of the Bible that especially caught the interest of the people was the books of the Old Testament that told the stories of the kings of Israel and Judah. Needless to say, this is no longer one of the most read parts of the Bible. In fact, it is not unusual for Christians to be dreadfully ignorant of the contents of the books of Kings and Chronicles. While we may be somewhat familiar with the stories of Saul, David and Solomon, the kings of what we call the divided kingdoms are for many American Christians about as familiar as the Edwardian or Tudor kings and queens of England.

Now the reason our 16<sup>th</sup> century ancestors were so interested in these books is that the situation in which they lived paralleled the situations of ancient Israel and Judah. They too knew what a difference a king could make, and how much the situation in the country could change with the changing of the sovereign. Like Judah of old, they saw short reigns and long reigns, righteous reigns and unrighteous reigns. The same sorts of intrigue and conniving that we read about in these books of the Bible were a part of the gossip that was whispered throughout their land. Like their biblical predecessors, their regents reigned by divine right, and were the religious as well as the political head of the nation.

We, on the other hand, live in a land that from its birth, wanted nothing to do with kings and their divine rights. Consequently, all things royal tend to bore us. While the present day British

still make movies and television series about royalty, most of them find little interest on this side of the Atlantic. Most of us don't even really have an inkling about the meaning of all those royal terms like duke, earl, and chamberlain. This does not mean, however, that these books of the Bible have nothing to teach us. They too belong to Holy Scripture, and all Scripture is profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness". If God allowed these books to become a part of Scripture, it was in order that we might learn from them. Therefore, I want us over the next few weeks to examine the lives of one the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. His name is Josiah. He reigned from approximately 637 B.C. to 608 B.C. He had a long reign of 31 years, but still died before his fortieth birthday since he began to reign when he was eight years old. He is remembered as one of the best kings of Judah. Among other things, he ridded the land of Baal worship, restored the Temple, and renewed the practice of the law. In this first study, I want us to observe his life as a whole and meditate upon the following truths that are illustrated by his life.

- Where you come from does not determine where you will go
- By the grace of God we are what we are

### **I. Where you come from does not determine where you will go**

As you read the books of Kings and Chronicles and study the succession of Judah's Kings, you discover there is a succession of good and bad. The good do not always follow the good, and the bad do not always follow the bad. Stated otherwise, bad fathers sometimes produce good sons and good fathers sometimes produce bad sons. In the case of Josiah his great grandfather, Hezekiah, was a good and godly king; his grandfather, Manasseh, started out horrible, but was graciously granted repentance and ended his life well, but his father, Amon, was wicked from start to finish. Because of his wickedness, his reign lasted only two years bringing Josiah to the throne when he was only eight years old. Like many biblical stories there are details left out that leave us curious. Why did this son of a wicked father, when he was sixteen years old, begin to seek the Lord? Who had been his royal instructor? The rest of the story of his life will demonstrate that in those dark years of his childhood the temple was in disrepair, and the book of the law was unknown. People worshipped not in the place where God had put his name, but at the high places of Baal and Ashereth. What miracle of providence preserved Josiah in the midst of such moral and religious decay? We are not told and can only speculate, but here is a good son of a very bad father.

Our beginnings do not determine our end. Each of us is responsible before God for what we become. Certainly some have greater advantages than others, but saints can come from very corrupt places and times. That is the first thing the story of Josiah teaches us.

I mentioned earlier that most Americans are not very knowledgeable of the history of British Royalty. Two names that most would recognize, however, are the two 16<sup>th</sup> century rulers, Henry VIII and his daughter, Mary I, better known as bloody Mary. Henry is known for his wives, six of them, and Mary for her massacre of Protestants in her effort to return England to Rome and to the Pope. Most, however, know little of Edward VI, Henry's only son by his third wife Jane Seymour, and England's first Protestant King. Like Josiah, he came to the throne at the very young age of nine years, and from the time of his coronation he took a stand for the Bible. His reign was short, six years and five months, but in that short time he repealed the laws that had brought about the death of the great Bible translator, William Tyndale. The number of printing firms in England increased from fourteen to fifty seven during his reign of which thirty one were dedicated to the printing of the Scriptures. The following story is related of his coronation.

“At his coronation three swords were brought, to be carried before him, in token that three realms were subject to his sway. The precocious prince said that yet another sword must be brought; and the attending nobles asked what sword that might be, he answered,--“The Bible!” That, said he, “is the sword of the Spirit, and to be preferred before these swords. That ought, in all right, to govern us, who use the others for the people's safety, by God's appointment.” Adding some similar expressions, he commanded the sacred volume to be brought, and to be borne reverently in the procession before him.” (cited in Alexander W. McClure, *Translators Revisited*, pp. 43-44)

This is the son of the man who caused William Tyndale to be burned. Where you come from does not determine where you will go. Don't be a victim. Don't use your past to refuse your future. God is not limited by your environment and the things that have influenced you.

## **II. By the grace of God we are what we are**

Chronicles adds an important detail that is missing in Kings: “in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father.” The expression “seek after God”, or “seek the Lord” plays an important role in the books of Chronicles. We see it for the first time when David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and instructs the People:

“Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth” (I Chronicles 16:10-12).

In I Chronicles 28 when David is passing the reins of the kingdom to his son, Solomon, he instructs both the people and Solomon telling them:

Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave *it* for an inheritance for your children after you for ever. And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever” (I Chronicles 28:8-9).

This last phrase: “if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever” becomes the standard by which the kings of Israel and Judah are judged. The good ones seek the Lord, the bad ones don’t. But Josiah seeks the Lord, why? Theologically we can say that it was not because there was something special about him. Paul says: “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Romans 3:11). Sinful man does not seek God, and we are all sinners. Therefore when someone sets their heart to seek after God as Josiah did, it is because God in grace has awakened them to do so. We are what we are by the grace of God. Left alone, all kings will be bad kings, and all humans will come to naught. It is the grace of God that awakens us; directs our hearts toward the one who is the source of our existence and the hope of our salvation. A sixteen year old boy king begins to seek the God of David, and revival breaks out in Judah. In the final analysis, that is more about God than it is about Josiah. God’s grace is powerful and mysterious, and it is essential. It is by the grace of God that the boy Josiah became the good king Josiah, and it is by the grace of God that we rise above the depravity of sin and fulfill the high and holy calling that we have received from God. When we have, we can only say with the Apostle Paul: “I cannot boast, for it is by the grace of God that I am what I am” (I Corinthians 15: 10).