

CHRIST CHURCH BEACON – October 11, 2009

Bible Text: 2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34-35

Title: Josiah's Reforms

I. Introduction

In today's Scripture we learn about a good king – one of the few – in the southern kingdom of Judah.

God used him to initiate a revival in Judah.

This was needed because he came after an especially evil king, Manasseh, who worshipped false gods and followed the occult.

Because of our tendency to drift away from God and seek worldly pleasures, the occasional revival is important to sustain a healthy society.

If a nation or society doesn't have spiritual revival, it will degenerate into decadence and ungodliness.

This country has had two revivals and a mini-revival in its history.

The First Great Awakening took place in the 1700's, and started in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Most of our Founders were devout Christians as a result of that revival, and they formed this country upon biblical principles for the most part.

The Second Great Awakening took place in the 1800's, and gave us a godly heritage that has helped us through very difficult times.

Without that godly heritage, I don't know how this country would have gotten thru the Civil War, two World Wars, and the Great Depression.

That period also saw the flowering of American hymn-writing – many of the hymns we sing were written in the 1800's and early 20th Century.

The mini-revival was in the late 60s and 70s with the Jesus Movement, but it wasn't enough to reverse the trend towards secularization and humanism.

What we need is a Third Great Awakening, with a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit once the scale of the other revivals.

By the way, there have been revivals outside of the United States in the last couple of centuries, most notably in Wales.

II. Scripture Found

What triggered the revival in the case of Josiah was the discovery of what was most likely the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.

1. Religion Not Practiced

The fact that the Torah was “discovered” means that the Jewish religion hadn’t been practiced for a long time.

Most likely Manasseh had most of the Torah scrolls destroyed in an attempt to stamp out the worship of the One True God.

This was probably one of the few remaining copies still in existence.

Not having the Word of God as a guide is not a good place to be, and the Israelites had fallen into paganism in a big way.

2. Josiah Convicted

Josiah, being a godly king, was shocked at the nation’s sinfulness when he read the scrolls and understood what they should have been doing.

He tore his clothes as a sign of his grief, seeing how far the nation had strayed from the God who had delivered them from Egypt.

How often do you and I stray from the God who saved us, provides for us, and loves us unconditionally?

3. Consulting a Prophet

Josiah did the right thing, and asked his officials to consult with God thru a prophetess.

They did, and God told them that he was angry with the sinfulness and unfaithfulness of the nation, and they would be punished.

This punishment happened when the nation of Judah was defeated by the Babylonians.

4. Josiah Spared

Because Josiah was faithful to God, the Lord said he would be spared the agony of experiencing this punishment.

He would pass away before all this happened.

III. Josiah's Reforms

Josiah wanted to get the country away from paganism and back to God.

To do so, he instituted reforms, which he as king could enforce.

1. Read the Scriptures to the Assembly

The first thing he did was to read the Scriptures to the people, so they could get an understanding of God's plan for his people.

That's why *we* have Bible studies, so we can get to know God better, learn God's plan for us, and to have a basis for our faith, morals, and ethics.

When Josiah read the Bible, the Bible read him and his nation, showing them what they had been doing wrong.

The Bible does the same thing for us – we read it and it, in turn, reads us and gives us a better understanding of ourselves.

2. Committed to Follow the Lord

After familiarizing the people with the Scriptures, he then committed himself to following the Lord's ways, and invited the people to do the same.

The people, convicted by their unfaithfulness, committed as well.

Today we have baptism and confirmation, where people commit their lives to following Jesus.

3. Tore Down Pagan Worship Places

Then Josiah ordered all the pagan worship places destroyed and desecrated.

To modern people living in a pluralistic society, his actions might appear to be somewhat extreme.

Yet God wanted Israel to be kept free of pagan influences so that the Israelites wouldn't be tempted to engage in the worship of false gods.

God knows best, because that's exactly what happened when pagan worship was allowed to flourish in Israel.

Today we live in a society dominated by a culture in which godly living and biblical principles aren't celebrated, but are put down.

Just as with the ancient Israelites, it can be difficult for us to be totally committed to God when we are surrounded by an ungodly culture.

That's why I emphasize Bible study and regular worship – they help immunize us against the ungodly influences that tempt us.

4. Celebrated the Passover

Lastly, Josiah and all of Judah celebrated the Passover as it hadn't been celebrated for a long time.

This was a joyful return to keeping the holy days and worshipping God according to his instructions.

Today we can enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise when we come together to worship and hear God's Word proclaimed.

IV. Josiah's Mistake

Although Josiah was clearly a godly man and loved the Lord, he got himself and the country into trouble.

It appears that he didn't seek God's will when it came to battling the Egyptians at Megiddo.

1. Didn't Consult God

Pharaoh Necho was marching towards what was to become one of the most decisive battles in ancient history.

The Egyptians were coming up along the Mediterranean coast to support the Assyrians against the upstart Babylonians.

I assume that Josiah was currying favor with the up-and-coming Babylonians by trying to stop the Egyptians.

Josiah planned to intercept them at Megiddo, which is also the site of that great last battle in the Book of Revelation – Armageddon.

The plain of Megiddo is large and flat, perfect for a big battle.

Pharaoh Necho warned Josiah by sending him a message, invoking God:

“King Josiah, there should not be war between us. I did not come to fight you, but the Babylonians. God told me to hurry, and he is on my side. So don't fight God, or he will destroy you.”

The Hebrew text uses the term Elohim for God, indicating that the Pharaoh was referring to God, not to an Egyptian deity.

2. Needlessly Cost Him His Life

By not seeking the Lord's will in this matter, Josiah lost the battle and his life.

That's why I constantly encourage you to seek the Lord's will in prayer and by reading the Bible.

It's so important to know what God wants us to do, and we should always strive to be in God's will.

V. Conclusion

Josiah was a godly king who wanted to do the right thing, once he found out what God wanted of his people when he read the Bible.

After reading to Torah, he took action, which is what we should do when the Bible convicts us in some way.

In Josiah's case, he instituted religious reforms and eliminated widespread pagan worship.

Despite this brief period of worship of the one true God, Judah was too far gone.

Subsequent kings didn't follow Josiah's ways, so the country continued to degenerate.

But that isn't the point – Josiah did what was right and was obedient to the Lord.

That's what the Lord wants of us – obedience more than anything else.

Moreover, as we draw closer to God, we look forward to spending time with him.

So let us always enter his gates with thanksgiving in our hearts, and enter his courts with praise, knowing that this is the day the Lord has made.

Therefore, regardless of how we might feel, we will rejoice and be glad in it, because we are so blessed to know the one true God.

Amen