

2 Kings 23-24

Josiah renews the covenant

After his repentance for the idolatry of the people, Josiah calls together all of the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, the inhabitants of the city and the priests and prophets and he reads the book of the LAW in their hearing. He then leads the people in a renewal of the covenant and in pledging to do all that is written in the book of the Law.

Then the king orders the high priest to remove all of the articles of pagan worship from the temple and he burned them in the Kidron Valley outside of the city and took the ashes to Bethel. Bethel is outside of the territory of Judah and is the pagan worship site set up by Jeroboam when Israel split into Northern Israel and Southern Judah. He did away with all of the idolatrous priests who were offering sacrifices to the sun, moon, stars and Baal at the high places around Jerusalem. He destroyed the housing for the male shrine prostitutes that were functioning in the Temple of the Lord! There were Aaronic priests who were operating, unsanctioned mini worship centers in the towns of Judah and Josiah destroyed all of those places because they were syncretistic and not in line with the teaching of the Law. Topheth (v.10) is in the valley of Ben Hinnom (known in the NT as Gehenna) and was the worship center for the sacrifice of children to Molek – Josiah put an end to that! He removed the horse-statues and the chariots dedicated to the sun that were at the entrance to the temple. He even destroyed worship sites that dated all the way back to the time of Solomon. Then he went to Bethel and destroyed that worship site in the former kingdom of Israel – he continued this purge by destroying the pagan worship centers throughout Samaria (Hill country of Ephraim) and killed the priests.

Then Josiah gave orders (23:21) to celebrate the Passover as it is written in the book of the Covenant. The writer proclaims that this was the most authentic Passover ever celebrated while the people were in the Land. Then Josiah turned his attention on the Mediums and Spiritists and even the household gods that the people privately worshiped. Josiah was a king like no other in Jerusalem and sought the Lord and served him with all his strength in accordance with all the Law of Moses. Some scholars say that Hezekiah was a king like David and Josiah was a king like Moses.

23:26 – it is surprising then, when the writer states, “Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger...” Manasseh had so provoked the Lord that there was no turning back from the judgment that was to fall upon Judah and Jerusalem.

Chapter 24 – The conclusion of the Political history of Jerusalem – “The Stooges”

In 23:29 we read about the death of Josiah. One would have expected him to die of old age – but he inserted himself into the global politics of the time and it cost him his life. The writer does not comment on whether it was right or wrong, but it certainly ended the last independent king of the Davidic line. The Babylonians are on the rise and the Assyrians are on the run. Babylon in southern Mesopotamia rebelled against the Assyrian Empire and established its own independence. Realizing their own strength and their former master's weakness, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon began his conquest from the southern point of the fertile crescent to the north and west. Assyria made its last stand at the Euphrates River at a battle known to history as the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. The Assyrians called on their former enemy, Egypt to come up and support them. They did hoping to hold off Babylon before they swept in and took control of all of the western half of the fertile crescent and then threatened their own borders. So, while Pharaoh Necho was marching his army up the coastal plain toward Carchemish, Josiah decided to curry the favor of Nebuchadnezzar by attacking the Egyptian army before they reached their destination. Well, Judah's army was defeated in the raid and King Josiah was killed in battle. His body was returned to Jerusalem and his son, Jehoahaz was placed on the throne.

Jehoahaz was 23 years old and only reigned 3 months but he was evil. Jerusalem was defenseless and the Egyptians came and removed Jehoahaz as a rebel king and carried him off to Egypt. They then chose another son of Josiah to place on the throne – Jehoiakim

Jehoiakim was 25 years old and he would reign for 11 years and he was an evil king. Although placed on the throne by the Egyptians, the Egyptians lost the great battle to the Babylonians so Jehoiakim was no longer a vassal king to Egypt but now to the Babylonians. Upon his first visit to Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar took captives from the city – mainly young sons from noble families including from the royal family of David. Among these captives were Daniel and his three friends. This is known as the First Deportation. After three years Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar trying to throw off the heavy burden of tribute and taxation. He hoped that Jerusalem was insignificant enough to the world empire that there would be no retribution. But as the writer points out, God is making sure that they pay for their sin and rebellion. Jehoiakim died and his son Jehoiachin is placed on the throne.

Jehoiachin was 18 years old and reigned in Jerusalem for 3 months. Nebuchadnezzar returned to the city and Jehoiachin was carried off to Babylon in chains. His uncle, Zedekiah, was placed on the throne by the Babylonians. This means that Jehoiachin was the last generation of the line of David, since his successor was from the previous generation. Nebuchadnezzar carries off a large number of skilled workers, priests, and soldier to Babylon, leaving Jerusalem without leadership and impoverished. In this second deportation, the prophet Ezekiel, a priest, was taken to Babylon.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king, he ruled for 11 years and he was evil as well. He will rebel against Nebuchadnezzar and this time the city will be destroyed and the rest of the people rounded up and carried off in the Third Deportation. This will all be discussed in our last lesson next week.