

Russell Kelfer

**Josiah:
He Did What
Was Right**

#1246-A

Series: Little Known Legends



DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

The annals of Scriptural history hold the stories of dozens of men and women who came from good homes, were given good training, and yet somehow made wrong choices and turned out living in total opposition to God's laws.

The reverse is also true. Many times we read of children who grew up in what appeared to be a wicked environment, with parents who seemed to dare God to judge them for their disobedience. And yet, occasionally, out of the ashes of those households there would rise up a man or a woman whose heart simply beat for God. Today's story is about such a youngster. At an age when most children are still in the second grade, this lad became a king. His immediate heritage was one of evil and idolatry. But somehow within him, the God who had so directed his great-grandfather, Hezekiah, took control of his life, and the result literally changed the course of God's people for a season.

What sets this man apart from so many of the others is the effect that the Word of God had upon his life and upon his ministry. We read of him first in I Kings 13 where his birth was prophesied more than 300 years in advance. Jeroboam, one of Israel's most wicked kings, who lived about 970 B.C. won the throne in a rebellion against Solomon shortly before Solomon died. He lived in fear that he would be overthrown and that one of David's lineage would again be on the throne. So paranoid was he that he moved the capitol city so the people would not go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the temple. Instead, he had golden calves made and encouraged the people to go to Dan and Bethel to worship these calves who, according to Jeroboam, "rescued you from your captivity in Egypt."

To further alienate the people from David's influence he chose new priests who were not of the tribe of Levi, and he chose a new date for the Tabernacle Festival, holding it on a day in November of his choosing. It was on that day that Jeroboam was approaching the altar to burn incense to the golden calf-idol when an unnamed prophet of the Lord approached him. Here's what happened:

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

By the word of the Lord he cried out against the altar: “Altar, altar! This is what the Lord says: ‘A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.’”

That same day the man of God gave a sign: “This is the sign the Lord has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out.”

When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, “Seize him!” But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back.

Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the Lord. (I Kings 13:2-5 NIV)

More than 300 years passed before that prophecy came true. But God in His wisdom saw it as though it were happening then. Always God’s Word comes to pass. Always. Dynasty after dynasty rose and fell. King after king disobeyed the commandments of God. Only now and then did a righteous man sit on the throne. But the promise had been given that one day a special man would be raised up by God, a man many have never even heard of, but a man so special to God that his birth was foretold four generations in advance. Josiah was his name. It means “Yahweh supports.” It was into a world just as wicked and vile as the one over which Jeroboam ruled that the young man came.

HIS PREDECESSORS

His great-grandfather Hezekiah had been the last good man to sit on the throne. His grandfather, Manasseh, rose to the throne at the age of 12 and ruled for 55 horrible years. His rule was one of idolatry and rebellion to all Hezekiah had stood for. Here are the first words we read of Manasseh’s reign,

He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them.

He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, “In Jerusalem I will put my Name.” (II Kings 21:2-4 NIV)

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

It went downhill from there. God's judgment on Manasseh unfolds,

The Lord said through his servants the prophets:

“Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols.

Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle.

(II Kings 21:10-12 NIV)

And of course, God did. So we read,

Manasseh rested with his fathers and was buried in his palace garden, the garden of Uzza. And Amon his son succeeded him as king.

Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years. His mother's name was Meshullemeth daughter of Haruz; she was from Jotbah.

He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done.

(II Kings 21:18-20 NIV)

So there you have Josiah's rich heritage. Grandpa was one of the worst kings in history, making idol worship a national pastime, defiling God's name and God's temple even as so many generations had before him. So Grandpa dies, and Dad becomes king. He was a bigger loser than Grandpa. So pitiful was his reign that he was assassinated after only two years in office, and his son, at the ripe old age of eight years, was considered to be a better prospect for royalty than dear old Dad.

You're probably asking yourself, “What chance does this kid have?” Two generations of utter depravity are all he has known. He has witnessed his own father's execution and has been elevated to the position of spiritual leader of a nation at the time of his life when he should have been getting the alphabet down and learning his multiplication tables. Chances are ten to one that he'll turn out worse than the two losers that preceded him. But God always has His man, and this was no exception. For out of the garbage heap of a family of losers there surfaces a man after God's own heart. The next verse tells the story,

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

(II Kings 22:2 NIV)

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

What a breath of fresh air at last. “He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, not turning aside to the right or to the left.” Here was a youngster, barely old enough to ride a two-wheel bike, running a country. But somehow the kingdom is made up of people with the hearts of little children. While he was still young enough to see reality without the clouds that compromises bring, he was old enough to alter the course of his people. And so we begin to read of a progression of spiritual transformation that had not happened in Israel for generations. Finally, here was a man who did what was right. Now let’s see what happens next,

In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the temple of the Lord. He said:

Go up to Hilkiah the high priest and have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the Lord, which the doorkeepers have collected from the people.

Have them entrust it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. And have these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the Lord—

the carpenters, the builders and the masons. Also have them purchase timber and dressed stone to repair the temple.

But they need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are honest in their dealings acting faithfully.”

(II Kings 22:3-7 NIV)

HIS PROJECT

Josiah is now twenty-six years young. What transpired in those eighteen years since he became king we do not know for sure, but many Bible scholars seem to find indications that the rumblings of spiritual revival have already taken place. Its first practical outworking is the renovation of the temple. Josiah sent Shaphan, the secretary, to the temple with instructions to withdraw the funds from the temple treasury and use them to complete much-needed repairs to God’s house. The money was to be given to those contracted to do the work, who, in turn were to pay the workers, the carpenters, the builders, and the masons. The money was also to be used to buy the necessary supplies to finish the job.

Now most church administrators would cringe at Josiah’s next admonition, but it’s there nonetheless. He said, “Don’t bother to keep an accounting of the use of the funds, I trust you.”

So the first major activity of Josiah’s ministry as king is

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

underway. But while he thought that the building program was his goal, God had other plans. To God, the building program was simply a way to get the attention of the leadership and the people. He had something more important than the facilities in mind: the Word of God. Read on,

Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it.

Then Shaphan the secretary went to the king and reported to him: "Your officials have paid out the money that was in the temple of the Lord and have entrusted it to the workers and supervisors in the temple."

Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.

He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant:

"Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written therein concerning us."
(II Kings 22:8-13 NIV)

Now if you are in any way in a position of spiritual leadership, howbeit in the home, in the church or in a Christian organization, listen carefully. This is the way spiritual leadership is to respond to the Word of God. He fell on his face in utter repentance for his people and immediately acted to correct the disobedience that had plagued the nation for so long. The next few verses tell the tale,

Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense. He broke down the shrines at the gates—at the entrance to the Gate of Joshua, the city governor, which is on the left of the city gate.

He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech.

He removed from the entrance to the temple of the Lord the

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun. They were in the court near the room of an official named Nathan-Melech. Josiah then burned the chariots dedicated to the sun.

He pulled down the altars other kings of Judah had erected on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz, and the altars Manassah had built in the two courts of the temple of the Lord. He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley.

The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption—the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon.

Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones.

Even the altar at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin—even that altar and high place he demolished. He burned the high place and ground it to powder, and burned the Asherah pole also.

(II Kings 23:8, 10-15 NIV)

This man's middle name was "courage." Here we have an entire nation of people including those in authority who have spent all of their lives worshiping idols. For at least two generations, they had not heard the Word of the Lord but had found their religious fulfillment at the shrines of satanic altars. Now here comes a 26 year-old king who has just read the Word of God for the first time. Here is what he did:

He took the vessels that had been made for the worship of Baal and burned them until they were unrecognizable, taking the ashes to Bethel, the place where idol worship had become the major attraction. He turned it into a garbage dump, and the garbage was the remnants of all the other idols in the country. Those who had become priests of idolatry, he murdered upon the very altars they had used to worship Satan. Those who were descendants of Aaron he spared but disallowed them from ever again approaching the altar of the Lord.

He set fire to the images of the grove and other gods and goddesses and cast the ashes upon the graves of the common people. To touch those graves was to become ceremonially unclean, so by throwing the heathen ashes there, no one could so much as touch them without becoming unclean. He took the bones of the

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

priests he had slain and placed them where the images had been, implying that dead men and dead gods belong together.

He defiled and destroyed Jeroboam's altar at Bethel. He polluted it, desecrated it, and made it repulsive. And the Scripture tells in detail of his spreading the bones upon it exactly as it was prophesied in I Kings 13:2 by that unnamed prophet, some 350 years before. Truly, every word God speaks comes true.

Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the Word of the Lord proclaimed by the man of God who foretold these things.

The king asked, "What is that tombstone I see?" The men of the city said, "It marks the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and pronounced against the altar of Bethel the very things you have done to it."

"Leave it alone," he said. "Don't let anyone disturb his bones." So they spared his bones and those of the prophet who had come from Samaria.

Just as he had done at Bethel, Josiah removed and defiled all the shrines at the high places that the kings of Israel had built in the towns of Samaria that had provoked the Lord to anger.

(II Kings 23:16-19 NIV)

And so the negative acts of Josiah to destroy idol worship are here described in detail. But you cannot remove the idolatry without replacing it with true worship. And so we read,

The king gave this order to all the people: "Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant."

Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed.

But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem.

Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the Lord.

(II Kings 23:21-24 NIV)

And finally we read this postscript,

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses. (II Kings 23:25 NIV)

HIS LEGACY

Now, aren't you glad you've heard about a man named Josiah? No, his name is not upon the lips of the average believer like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But listen to what God said about him. "There was never another king, not before him or after him who turned to the Lord as he did, with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength."

We read not too long ago about a man named Jehu, who, like Josiah, took a stand for righteousness and against idolatry. But we read a sad footnote to Jehu's life, "He did not serve the Lord with all his heart." Not so with Josiah. Here was a man who gave the totality of his being, heart, soul, and strength to being God's man. It did not matter that the odds were against him. It did not matter that the whole nation was poised to worship golden calves, to sacrifice their children in the fires of idolatry, to the worship of animals and idols and to the sinful practices that often accompanied these Satanic activities. It didn't matter that generations had never heard the word of God or celebrated the Passover or understood that they belonged to a jealous God. It didn't matter.

Because when a man of God gives his heart, soul, mind and strength to the worship of Jehovah, fear of the consequences is not a factor. Popularity is not a factor. Political pressure is not a factor. Religious tradition is not a factor. Suddenly there comes upon that man or woman a sense of intensity that supersedes all human logic. That man or woman is a citizen of a new kingdom. And the calling of God in his heart is so strong that he or she is willing to forsake all that they have, all that they own and all of their dreams. All of their ambitions are melted into an ocean of desire simply to do the Father's will.

HIS LESSONS

Two things characterize that man or woman, and both of them were found in Josiah's life:

1- A bitter hatred for sin and that which defiles the Word of God. Josiah did not simply do away with the idols of this world. He crushed them openly, destroyed them totally along with any evidence, and brought God's judgment on those who had perpetrated

the worship of anything or anyone other than the Living God.

2- A holy awe of God's Word. Once Josiah heard the Word of God, he was so stricken in his heart that he rent his clothes, fell on his face before God, and repented. Then he did what we are to do when we repent. He turned and began to walk in the ways of his God.

I wonder if those aren't the two missing ingredients in the Body of Christ today. I wonder if what is needed is not a band of believers who know how sin affects the heart of God and how it affects the life of the Christian, and refuse at any price, to allow unholiness and compromise to touch their lives. We as Christians have come to accept sin as normal and lower God's standards accordingly. You have to ask yourself when you read a story like this, "Where are the prophets of this age? Where are the men and women who despise the filth and immorality and the religious lies that are going around? Where are the men and women who are so sick of the idols of our day that they are willing to destroy every semblance of them? Where are the men and women so sick of the inroads Satan is making into our society, that they are willing to fast and pray until they have enlisted the power of God to rise up against the evils of this world and to acknowledge that we are not fighting against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places? Where are the people that are so aware of the reality that while sin affects the Body of Christ that they are no longer going to say, "Well, this is just the way life is in this century; we can't help it?"

My friends, Josiah did not just throw rocks at the immorality and idolatry of his day, he declared war. You say, "Yeah, but the odds are against us today." Oh Beloved, look at the odds he faced! What this man did would be akin to walking into the Iranian government today, destroying all of the places of worship and telling the people you have to worship the Living God, burning the religious material, hanging their pagan priests, and telling the whole nation, "Repent!"

The other quality Josiah had was an awe of the Word of God. I can remember when people used to rise whenever the Word of God was read out of awesome respect. I can't help when I hear testimonies of what is going on behind what used to be the Iron Curtain in the Eastern Bloc countries, when people taking truckloads of Bibles, people would intercept the truck, they would

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

just take the Bibles because these people were so hungry for the Word of God. And they would bring so many Bibles to a crusade, but before they could even have a crusade, the people would grab up the Word. You heard in this class about a missionary leading a man to Christ, and that man had only one request, and that was for a Bible. When the man was given a Bible, the man clutched the Bible to his heart as though it was the dearest possession he had ever had. And we hear it, and we read it, and we talk about it as though it was something we we're supposed to dissect and act intellectual about rather than of it literally being the Living Word of the Living God spoken directly to our hearts. I think Isaiah 66:2 is still needed in our day, and we ought to memorize it. It says this,

On this one will I look; on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, the one who trembles at My word.

When was the last time you trembled at the impact the Word of God was having on your life? When was the last time just reading the Word sent chills down your spine because it spoke to your heart in such a way that it was like the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, the joints and the marrow, and it was literally a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart? I am convinced in our generation we do not lack knowledge of the Word; we lack respect for the Word. Dear God forgive us. You see, every time we read it; every time it is read; we ought to bow down in awe. God is speaking to us! We thumb through it and say, "I want to get through it; I've read that before. But the Scripture says of itself, "Every Word of God is pure!" It's a light!

Isn't it sad that generations seem to pass before another Josiah appears on the scene of history? Why are there so few of him and so many of us? Is it not because we have allowed our gospel to degenerate into a message that allows the absolutes of God to coexist with the idols of this world? Aren't we trying to have it both ways? What would happen Beloved, if we recapture that kind of abandon Josiah had and if we return to the reading of the Word of God publicly and privately, as though it is the Word of God that it is? As though each time it is read, God was speaking directly to each one of us, individually? I'll tell you what would happen—the same thing that happened in the Book of Acts, the same thing that happened in Josiah's reign.

What would happen if just you and I began to serve God with the kind of abandon that characterized Josiah? Have we forgotten that the "normal" Christian life is the life of a fanatic whose only

Josiah: He Did What Was Right

goal in life is to glorify God? The “compromise” version we so deify today is not a Scriptural reality. Unless we are willing to “forsake all that we have”, we cannot even be His disciple. To the degree that we save our lives, Jesus said, to that degree we lose them.

The trouble is, we live as though we have years left to get serious about Jesus Christ being everything. None of us know how many days or weeks or years we have left before God either calls us home, or before the trumpet sounds and the saints who are alive and remain are raptured into the presence of God. None of us know. We cannot do anything about the compromises we have made along the way. But wouldn't it be something if we would just begin today to be the spiritual fanatics for Christ we were called to be? Wouldn't it be something indeed! Josiah, he did what was right. Maybe it's time for us to do the same.

Let us pray.

Our Father and our God,

We read about men like this and we are in awe, and we think it is wonderful that You raise up on occasions every few hundred years, a man like Josiah. How can we be so blind Father because the calling You gave Josiah is no different from ours? We are to stand in a wicked generation, and there has been none more wicked than the one in which we live, without compromise.

And the reason we can stand is that You have given us a Living Word which we so take lightly. We study it and we talk about it. We even teach about it. But when it is read and when it is spoken, so often there is a shield about our heart, and we do not take it personally.

Father, remove the veil this morning between us and Thee and grant us a vision to see there may not be many days left, but the days that are left can be Your days if we will become Josiahs.

He did what was right.

Amen.

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer