

Sunday, February 12, 2017

The Day of the Lord – Zephaniah

7. The Ways of Josiah – 2 Chron. 34:1-7; 2 Kings 22:1-23:25

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Take your Bibles and turn with me this morning to 2 Chronicles chapter 34. This is our final sermon in the series “The Day of the Lord” from the Minor Prophet Zephaniah, but we have finished with the text in the Book of Zephaniah. And if you remember the first message in the series is titled “The Days of Josiah” and in that message we looked at verse 1 of chapter 1 of Zephaniah and examined the background and context leading up to the ministry of the Minor Prophet who was the cousin of King Josiah. Both Josiah and Zephaniah were descendants of godly King Hezekiah. Now we are going to look at “The Ways of Josiah” and see how the ministry of Zephaniah affected his reign in the Land of Judah and even after. What changed as a result of the message proclaimed by the prophet to the King and to the people of Judah as they were facing certain judgment?

So this morning we will be looking at the historical accounts of the reign of Josiah from 2 Chronicles 34:1-7 and 2 Kings 22 and 23. We will be able to see the stages of reform and revival that happened at different times in Josiah’s life and reign.

In 2 Chronicles 34:1-2 (and the verses are the same as 2 Kings 22:1-2) we are introduced to Josiah’s Right Walk with the Lord.

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

We know from the history we have already studied that Josiah became king after some turmoil in the land. There were wicked kings, assassinations, and finally Josiah was crowned at the tender young age of 8 years old. He was the rightful heir, a descendant of Hezekiah, and as we will learn, the first righteous king since Hezekiah. And as we noted in our first sermon in the series, Josiah ascended to the Throne of Judah in 640 BC and he reigned for 31 years until 609 BC.

We learn about Josiah that even as a young boy it says that “**he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.**” He was pleasing to the Lord. He was a man, even as a boy, after God’s own heart! He purposed to do what was right in God’s sight.

This would have been an accomplishment even for an older king, for a mature man. How much more so for a boy? And as we look at the description given we see in verse 3, “**For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images.**”

He began to reign at 8. At 16 he was not just following, but pursuing God and instigating reformation throughout Judah. Now when you think of most 16 year olds, do you think of

young people determined to follow the Lord, not turning to the right or left, not deviating in their dedication to do what is right no matter what the cost, no matter what the reaction of their friends, no matter the consequence? Well that is the expectation that we should have, isn't it? As we rear them in the fear and admonition of the Lord we should do so with an expectation that our children will walk in righteousness. We should not be surprised when young people do what is right.

However, there is a societal expectation, a worldly model, that tells us that young people are expected to rebel and test the boundaries and push the limits. In fact there is a belief that until you have not rebelled and sowed wild oats, you will eventually. No one can reach adulthood it seems without veering wildly off course. Then again, adulthood seems to be further and further into the future doesn't it? For the generations of today it seems that their 20 year olds are a lot younger than the 20 year olds of my generation.

Now, it is true that we are born sinners. That Josiah was just as much a sinner as any of us. We are born into depravity – not that we are as sinful as we could be, but our whole being is tainted by the stain and reign of sin from conception. By nature we are born enemies of God, with a bent to rebel and run the other way. But this is what we know according to Scripture, as we know the Lord and as our children know the Lord there is no expectation in the Word of God that teenagers or any other age should rebel against authority.

Anyone who does not know the Lord and who is not taught self-discipline, and to walk in the Spirit, and to pursue holiness then you will certainly not live as you ought to live according to God's Word. You see, there is no age limit, there is no expiration date for the application of the Word by the power of the Spirit to our lives and the lives of our children. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit in his mother's womb, and Abraham and Sarah conceived and bore Isaac when he was 100 and she was 90. For God, who has put **"eternity in their hearts"** as He tells us in Ecclesiastes 3:11, **"nothing is impossible"** (Luke 18:27). Age is not a factor and God is not bound by time. So our expectations should be governed by the power and ability of God, and not by the limitations of being born with a sinful, fallen nature.

As we teach our children and instruct them from the Word of God, they will learn, they are able to walk in righteousness and holiness, they will bear the fruit of self-control, and they will prove that God can and does use young people throughout history to accomplish His purposes. Josiah is a great example. So is Samuel, and Joseph, and David, and Daniel, and even Jesus at age 12 in the Temple teaching the teachers.

What is astounding here with Josiah is that from the age of 8 to 16 he was following the Lord and His Word but not actively pursuing growth in grace and obedience. And he at this point did not even have the Book of the Law – it was buried and hidden in the Temple.

But what did he have? The prophets. The revealed Word of God proclaimed by Jeremiah. And he heard and obeyed and listened to godly counselors and he did was right in obedience and faithfulness.

“He did what was right in the sight of the Lord.” Too often God’s people are accused of doing what is right in their own eyes, right? But here, Josiah, from age 8 to 16, is doing what is right in the eyes of God. What a testimony, both to his obedience and to God’s faithfulness to His people, even though they were sinful and hard hearted. God gave sinful, stiff-necked, idolatrous Judah a righteous king. What grace!

Next we see Josiah’s reforms. In verses 3 through 7 we see for our second point from the text, Josiah’s Removal of Wickedness throughout the land.

“For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. 4 They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which were above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. 5 He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. 6 And so he did in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, as far as Naphtali and all around, with axes. 7 When he had broken down the altars and the wooden images, had beaten the carved images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.”

As a young king, Josiah worked to remove wickedness from the land. And here is what is interesting about this program of reform, Josiah understood that the idols had to be removed. This was more than telling the people not to worship the idols. The idols needed to be forcibly removed and destroyed. So he had men use axes to chop up the idols and chop down the places of false worship. Then they burned what was left and ground it into powder. This began in about 628 BC when Josiah was 16, he started this program of reformation to rid the nation of its idols. Guess when Zephaniah began his ministry and when he prophesied? Remember from our first message that Zephaniah’s ministry was from 635 to 625 BC.

In 635, when Zephaniah began ministering, Josiah had been king for 4 years. He was 12 years old. Zephaniah had access as his cousin, as part of the royal family. And as he began preaching about the coming Day of Judgment for sin, imagine the impression this made on a 12 year old with the responsibility of ruling over the people of God. Specifically God was going to judge Judah for what? For their idolatry. Josiah and his court heard the Word of God, the word of warning preached.

As Zephaniah began preaching in 635 BC by the time we get to 628 BC, as Josiah is now 16 years old, as he is now apparently old enough to do something about it, one of the first things that he did was to begin this reform by tearing down and destroying the idols in the land. Everything that Zephaniah proclaimed in the land as deserving of God's wrath and judgment, Josiah sought to uproot it. Josiah, as a young king, was concerned about his people! He was concerned that the Lord was angry with them.

Turn with me now to 2 Kings 22. This is telling the same story but gives us a little more detail. Josiah has a right walk with the Lord, he is working to remove wickedness from the land, and now in 2 Kings 22:3-20 we see Josiah's specific and particular Response to the Word of the Lord. This campaign of reform we learn will take 10 years to accomplish. This was not a short term mission. This was a national overhaul. Idolatry had become ingrained in their way of life, worshipping God and false gods side by side. And in 2 Kings 22 we skip the 10 years of tearing down places of idol worship and pick up the story at 622 BC, where we find Josiah at the age of 26. During this year, something incredibly significant happens. Let's read the text:

“3 Now it came to pass, in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the scribe, the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the house of the Lord, saying: 4 “Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may count the money which has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. 5 And let them deliver it into the hand of those doing the work, who are the overseers in the house of the Lord; let them give it to those who are in the house of the Lord doing the work, to repair the damages of the house— 6 to carpenters and builders and masons—and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. 7 However there need be no accounting made with them of the money delivered into their hand, because they deal faithfully.”

The Temple was literally in ruins. It needed repair. The priests under the High Priest Hilkaiah, collect funds from the people and start the work of rebuilding. The first steps of course involve cleaning up the mess. As that is happening, we go on in verse 8,

8 Then Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.” And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. 9 So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, “Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the Lord.” 10 Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, “Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it before the king.

If you can imagine, this is 3 years after the ministry of Zephaniah had ended. We don't know why it ended, we don't know if he died, or if he is there or not there, but we do know

his ministry had come to an end. He had prophesied during the 10 years the high places were being torn down, but now he had stopped. But now, Josiah is 26 years old, and he commissions the rebuilding of the Temple. And as they begin, the High Priest finds the Book of the Law, the written Word of God. The High Priest gave it to the scribes who were responsible for keeping and copying the Scriptures, and a scribe took it to the King and read it to Josiah.

And do you know what Josiah heard in the Word of the Lord? He heard the same things Zephaniah had been preaching. And Jeremiah. And the other prophets. He heard that if you are obedient to the Lord you will be blessed, and if you are disobedient you will be cursed and judged. And as he hears this, he begins to respond to God's Word. First we are told that he heard the Law. **"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."** (Rom. 10:17). In verse 11 we continue,

11 Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes.

What did that signify? As he heard the responsibilities for faithfulness and obedience and the dangers of disobedience and idolatry, he was so grieved because now I believe he sensed how deep the sin of Judah went. This was not sin from just his generation, or his parents' generation, or his grandparents' generation. It was more than tearing down the idols and destroying their places of worship. It was deeper than that. This way of life, this stronghold of sin was so ingrained in the way of life for the people of Judah for generation upon generation upon generation – and in his sorrow and grief, he tore his royal robes.

Josiah was so moved and so grieved when hearing God's Word that he expresses it in the most dramatic fashion possible. This was a significant sign of repentance and sorrow. And he as the King was repenting as the representative of his people before the Lord. It says then,

12 Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, 13 "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

He sent the priests to inquire of the Lord, to intercede for him and the people. Remember, he was righteous, but the people were not, and that condition of sinfulness grieved the King before the Lord. He wanted to know if there was any hope at all for the nation at this point. So great was their sin, and so great the holiness of God. Was there any hope for them at all?

He feared that the work of reform for the last ten years was too little too late in light of the depths of the wickedness of the people as their true condition was brought to light by the Word of God. We read then in verse 14,

14 So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her. 15 Then she said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to Me, 16 “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read— 17 because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched.’””

As they inquired of the Lord, He sent His Word through this prophetess, and the word back was not good news. It is the same message that Zephaniah had preached. Judgment was coming, it was sure, and it could not be stopped. Josiah had been motivated to remove the idolatry from the land, to hope that he could undo that which was deserving of wrath. But the Word from God is that it is too late. The physical places of false worship were removed but in their hearts the people were still idolaters. Judgment was coming. However, that is not the end of the message from the Lord. We go on in verse 18,

18 But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Concerning the words which you have heard— 19 because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,” says the Lord. 20 “Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.””’ So they brought back word to the king.”

Here we see the patience and longsuffering grace of God. Here is a drop of mercy in a sea of wrath. God said through the prophetess that He had seen Josiah’s repentance and sorrow when he had heard the Word of the Lord and had torn his clothes. The Lord confirms that the judgment is coming, but it will not come in Josiah’s time. These things will come to pass after Josiah has been taken to be with the Lord.

We know that Josiah reigned until 609 BC. The Book of the Law had been found in 622 BC. For the last 13 years of his life then, Josiah reigned in peace, up until the end. He led the people in continued reform and revival that we will see in 2 Kings 23 later, but as we

see he was faithful to the Lord we have to realize that the judgments proclaimed by Zephaniah and the other prophets did not come to pass until 586 BC. For 25 years after the death of Josiah there was no judgment.

I want to focus specifically here are the three things that Josiah did, the three ways he responded to hearing the Word of God that brought 38 years to pass before judgment came – do you see that? Typically in Scripture a generation is 40 years. In fact, Josiah died at age 39. So for God to spare the people judgment for 38 years, we see that the response of Josiah to the Word of God brought a generation peace and not judgment! An entire generation was spared. And don't forget that many born in that generation were taken into the exile. Daniel and his friends among them.

As we have read Zephaniah and as we ask how we can apply the message of the Minor Prophets today, we see the wrath and doom and gloom and the certainty of judgment for sin. But where do we find hope? We find hope in Josiah's response to the Word of the Lord. It says first, when he heard the Word of the Lord that his heart was tender. The phrase for tender heart means Josiah had a contrite heart. Now what is contrition? The word means "soft", hence tender hearted. It refers to being bruised or wounded. There is a softness to a contrite heart. Not a hard heart. It speaks to a heart that is sensitive to something. Here his heart was sensitive to hearing the Word of God.

The Scriptures tell us that when we are sensitive to God's Word, when we have a soft place in our hearts for Him and His Word, we respond to it as we ought. Psalm 34:18 says, "**The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.**"

So often we think that it is the believers who have it all together and who seem to not have any doubts, fears, or struggles, we think those are the strong Christians. But here we see that God cares about those who are broken hearted. Those who have a contrite spirit. Those who have fought the battle with sin and are bruised and wounded.

Think about the parable of the Shepherd and the Sheep. There are 100 sheep in the flock. One goes missing. One is lost, wandering, wayward, injured. And who does the Shepherd go after? He doesn't go after the 99 who are where they are supposed to be. That one, who has the greatest need. **The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart.** Josiah had a contrite and tender heart. And God was near to him.

Psalm 51:17 tells us, "**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart— these, O God, You will not despise.**" Again, so often we fall for the myth that God is looking for a bunch of super Christians to go and turn the world upside down. But do you know who God is looking for? Those who are broken. Those who are battered. Those who are bruised. Because those are the ones who can go out into the world and be compassionate and sympathetic towards sinners. "**The sacrifices of God** (the things He

values and accepts) are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart— these, O God, **You will not despise.**”

Isaiah 57:15 says, **“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”** God is with the contrite.

In Isaiah 66:2, **“For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,” Says the Lord. “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”** God looks for those who respond to His Word with a contrite heart, with brokenness, with tenderness. Those who understand their sinfulness and their need, who understand that we cannot do this on our own. We must have the Lord! Without Him we can do nothing.

It may seem foolish to gather and listen to the Word of God preached and taught and explained and applied. God says preaching is foolishness. He says He does not use the strong, or the wise according to this world to accomplish His purposes. He confounds the wise by sending men like me out to proclaim His Word! He uses the broken, the weak, the foolish things to demonstrate that it is all His Spirit, His Power, His Word – it is all about what He is doing.

Josiah responded with a tender heart and it says he humbled himself before the Lord. So his second response to the Word of the Lord was to have humility. What is humility? The word means “to bow down.” It is to lower yourself before another. Humility is not thinking that you are less than you are; it is thinking of yourself less. Humility is understanding that it is not all about me. It is about serving the Lord and serving others. It is a right perspective.

Psalms 10:17 says, **“Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear.”** He says there when we humble ourselves that He, that God is going to prepare our heart. For what? For whatever comes next! For whatever you are about to deal with or experience. But you know how we deal with it, we worry, and stress, and fear, and doubt, but here the Lord says that if we want our hearts to be ready for what is next, we need to humble ourselves. We need to bow before Him and trust Him to take care of us.

Psalms 18:27, **“For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks.”** The Lord saves those who know that they cannot save themselves and who know that they must turn from self and sin and trust Christ to save them.

Psalms 25:9 says, **“The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His**

way.” Do you want to learn God’s Word and God’s Ways? Humble yourself before Him.

In Psalm 147:6 we read, **“The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground.”** The Lord lifts up. He upholds those who lower themselves.

As we think about Josiah, and we see that he has a contrite heart and is full of humility, there is another verse that we need to remember and this was in Zephaniah. In Zephaniah 3:12 we read, **“I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.”** Who is Zephaniah talking about? Josiah was one of them, because he heard the Word and responded in meek humility. And there were others who joined with him humbly seeking the Lord and obeying His Word. This is part of the blessing that we find in the midst of a message of judgment.

God does promise to lift up the humble. In Matthew 18:4 Jesus says, **“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”** What a picture of humility – a little child. Tender. Needy. Dependent.

Romans 12:16 tells us, **“Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.”** How often do we think more of ourselves than we should? All the time. We need to be humble and we need to associate with the humble. Being around humble people reminds us that we are not all that! We are dependent upon God and each other.

In James 4:6, 10 we read, **“But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”** And, **“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”**

Have you ever felt like you could use more grace? You know how to get more grace? Humble yourself. When it says that we humble ourselves and God will lift us up, the lifting up is not God putting you in a place to be praised and envied! To be humble is to bow down. We bow down before God. And when we bow before Him in humility He lifts us up in grace.

We seek the Lord. We find Him through humility. He is near to those who have a humble and contrite spirit.

As we continue, it says that Josiah’s heart was tender, he was humble, and he wept before the Lord. He experienced godly sorrow over the threat of judgment because of the peoples’ sin and as he heard God’s Word now God says He has heard Josiah.

Josiah wept. He was grieved over sin. As King, just as a parent grieves over the bad choices their children might make, he was sorrowful for the sins of Judah. He saw the sin. He saw

how deep and ingrained it was. He saw the judgment that was coming. And he tore his garments and he wept in sorrow and repentance.

Psalm 30:5 tells us, **“For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”** When we know that God is angry, when we know the Spirit is quenched and grieved over our sin, that should grieve us. It should grieve us when we grieve others, especially grieving the Spirit of God. Honestly that should scare us, too! We should weep over our sinfulness, knowing that the weeping lasts for a moment but joy is coming in the morning – with a new dose of mercy and grace.

In Joel 2:12-13 the prophet says, **“Now, therefore,” says the Lord, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.”** Turn to God in grief for your sin! Embrace Him with humility and with joy.

This was Josiah’s attitude because of the ministry of Zephaniah, and because of the Word of God. He heard the Word and responded with a tender and contrite heart, humility, godly sorrow and repentance.

As a result then, looking at 2 Kings 23, in the first 25 verses we will see what happened when Josiah heard the Word of the Lord and obeyed it. He Restored the Worship of the Lord.

“Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. 2 The king went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord.

After he heard the Word of the Lord he gathered the people together at the Temple so that they could hear the Word also. He read them God’s Word. He read them the Scriptures so that they could hear that the message the prophets had proclaimed was true, that God was serious about sin and that judgment was coming. As he read the Word to the people it says,

“3 Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant.

Do you see what Josiah is doing here? He is renewing the Covenant. This is just like Joshua after they crossed over into the Promised Land after the judgment of the wandering in the wilderness. They renewed their commitment to the Lord by renewing the Covenant. Josiah is calling Judah back to the Lord their God. He is reading the Scriptures to them and renewing the Covenant. And as God moved in their midst they responded. They listened. They took a stand for the Covenant. It says in verse 4,

“4 And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the articles that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel.

He finished his cleanse of the Land by cleaning the Temple. His purpose for doing this is that **“5 Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven.**

He took all of those teaching false religion and false worship and exposed them, destroying the images and the implements of their worship. He cleaned house, the House of the Lord.

6 And he brought out the wooden image from the house of the Lord, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground it to ashes, and threw its ashes on the graves of the common people. 7 Then he tore down the ritual booths of the perverted persons that were in the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image. 8 And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; also he broke down the high places at the gates which were at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were to the left of the city gate. 9 Nevertheless the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brethren.

10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech. 11 Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. 12 The altars that were on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, the king broke down and pulverized there, and threw their dust into the Brook Kidron. 13 Then the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, which were on the south of the Mount of Corruption, which Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the

abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the people of Ammon. 14 And he broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images, and filled their places with the bones of men.

15 Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place and crushed it to powder, and burned the wooden image. (This at Bethel was a place where they set up a golden calf and when I get the sermons online from Amos you will hear where Amos directly confronts them over this abomination). 16 As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar, and defiled it according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. 17 Then he said, "What gravestone is this that I see?" So the men of the city told him, "It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel." 18 And he said, "Let him alone; let no one move his bones." So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria. 19 Now Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger; and he did to them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel. 20 He executed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned men's bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem.

Once the Temple was cleansed and restored and the people had renewed the Covenant, now as a final step of reformation, he reinstates right worship through the keeping of Passover. It says in verse 21,

"21 Then the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." 22 Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. 23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was held before the Lord in Jerusalem. 24 Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.

Josiah went as far as he had to go, further than ALL the Kings of Israel, further than any since the times of the Judges, in order to bring the people into obedience to the Word of God. And it all boiled down to this – to the right worship of God as He had prescribed in His Word.

This was the greatest national revival in the history of Judah. This was greater than the

defeat of the prophets of Baal at Mt Carmel with Elijah. In fact, in Jesus' day there are references to certain times of the year that there are lamentations offered on the anniversary of death of King Josiah! The people so revered what he had done and so respected the thoroughness of his reforms in bringing back the right worship of God that Josiah is still remembered today for his faithfulness and obedience to the Lord and His Word.

To close then, verse 25. We have seen Josiah's Right Walk. We have seen Josiah's Removal of Wickedness. We have seen Josiah's Response to the Word. We have seen Josiah's Restoration of Worship. Now just before the Scriptures give the account of his death we read this. 2 Kings 23:25,

“Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him.”

What does the Bible tell us about Josiah? He was the godliest King that Israel or Judah ever had. Think about that. Think about David, a man after God's own heart. Think about Solomon who gave us Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, the wisest man other than Christ on the earth. Think about Hezekiah, who pleased God and was favored with 15 extra years of life. And there are other kings who we are told did what was right in the sight of the Lord. But then we read about Josiah. There was no one like him. None of the kings before him; none of the kings after him. And look at the description about how he lived. He **“turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses.”**

In other words, he was obedient, and that means the Bible says that Josiah loved the Lord His God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might. This is what Jesus said was the greatest commandment, and here we have just read in the Bible an account of a man who obeyed that command! He was more devoted to God than any before or after him.

What made the difference?

He heard the Word of God and he responded with a humble, contrite heart. He was grieved over the sin of his people. He knew that he, as king, was responsible to lead them in righteousness.

For Zephaniah to prophesy and to warn the people. For Josiah to hear the Word of the Lord through the prophet and to begin to reform and work for 10 years at tearing down the idols all over the land. And after 10 years to find and hear the Book of the Law. To see how serious the problem of sin was. For him to tear his clothes, to repent, to weep, to hear

God's Word and to heed it. He renewed the Covenant, restored worship, and reinstated Passover. He remained righteous. He persevered. He endured to the end, and was saved. There was no king like Josiah.

When we see the judgments that Zephaniah proclaimed coming to pass in 586 BC, a generation after Josiah, when we see the exile in Babylon, we see faithful young men, like Daniel and his friends, who followed in the example of a faithful young boy who became King and reigned in righteousness. And it was the Word of God, preached, read, heard, and obeyed that made Josiah a king like no other.

Let us pray.