

Josiah's Great Revival

2 Kings 23:1-25

2 Kings 23:1-3 - *"Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. 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 that had been found in the house of the LORD. 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."*

Background Notes

Josiah became king when he was only 8 years old. When he was 26 years old, he began major repairs of the Temple. It had fallen into disrepair during the evil reigns of wicked Kings Manasseh and Amon. While work on the Temple was progressing, a hidden copy of the Book of the Law was found. The priests had probably hidden it to prevent King Manasseh or King Amon from destroying it.

After consultation with Huldah the prophetess, King Josiah gathered all the people together in the Temple courts, including the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets. Zephaniah and Jeremiah were undoubtedly present. After the reading of the Law in the presence of the people, Josiah called the people to publicly enter into a covenant with the Lord to keep the Law of God.

Doctrinal Points

1. Great revivals require great commitment.

Did you ever follow a diet & exercise program to lose weight or to get in shape? What's the key element in making it really work? **Commitment!** Commitment for more than one day! Commitment in areas that take a lot of effort. Commitment when you're on your own – not only when people are watching! It takes great commitment.

This is true in the spiritual area as well. Do you want revival in your personal life? Do you want revival in your church life? What does it take? It takes great commitment!

Look at verse 3. Notice that Josiah and the people committed themselves to **follow the Lord** and **obey His Word**. This is required today as well. Our commitment must be to the Lord and His Word - not to people or programs! The right programs come as a result of our commitment to the Lord and His Word.

Let's ask ourselves: How much will we sacrifice to really know the Lord and His Word? Do we really want to obey God, even if it cuts into our leisure time and pleasure time? Remember the "getting in shape" illustration? Great revivals require great commitment!

2. Great revivals involve great reform.

2 Kings 23:4-20 - *"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. 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. 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. 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. 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 that were at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were to the left of the city gate. 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.*

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. 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. 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. 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. And he broke in pieces the sacred pillars and cut down the wooden images, and filled their places with the bones of men.

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. 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 that the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. 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.' 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.

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. 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."

In these verses, it's very clear just how bad the moral and spiritual conditions were before Josiah's revival. We also see how sweeping the reforms were as a result of his revival. Gross idolatry was being practiced in the Temple area, including ritual homosexual acts (v4-7). Josiah did away with all this spiritual and moral corruption. Child sacrifice was being practiced in Judah, and Josiah destroyed the pagan altar to Molech so the horrendous atrocity of child sacrifice could no longer be practiced (v10).

Even the priests who were using the high places to burn incense to the Lord were demoted (v9), because all sacrifices to the Lord were to take place only in Jerusalem at the house of the Lord - not at the high places.

By the way, you can see an incense altar from the high place at Arad – it's in the Israel Museum today. Archaeologists found the altar lying on its side - overturned and defiled. Using radioactive carbon technique, archaeologists were able to date the last use of the altar to the time of Josiah's revival!

Verses 15-18 describe Josiah's removal of the idolatrous golden calf shrine at Bethel, set up by King Jeroboam I. Josiah defiled this shrine by digging up the graves in the area, and burned the bones on the pagan altar. This fulfilled the prophecy made by a prophet of Judah about 300 years before this time. 1 Kings 13:1- 2: *"And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, "O altar, altar! Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you and men's bones shall be burned on you.'"*

Notice that Josiah was mentioned specifically **by name** in this prophecy that was spoken 300 years before his time! That prophecy was fulfilled in 2 Kings 23. However, two graves were honored and left undisturbed: the grave of the prophet who spoke this prophecy, and the grave of the good prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 13 (v17-18).

Josiah's revival swept north to the cities of Samaria (v19-20). Even though the Assyrians had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel 100 years before this time, Jews were still living in the northern cities - and practicing idolatry. Josiah not only removed all the idolatrous shrines, but he put the idolatrous priests to death, in accordance to the Law.

Josiah made a clean sweep - from Geba in the north area to Beersheba in the south (v8-14). All the idolatrous shrines were destroyed and burned down, the pagan altars defiled, and the cult objects burned.

As Josiah's revival involved great reform, so revival today will involve great reform, whether it is personal or national. When reform comes, sinful practices will be stopped. Sinful events will not be planned. God will be permitted to come back into the classroom, back onto the campus, back into the courts, and revered in our homes and hearts. God's Word will be read, and studied, and obeyed. Great revivals involve great reform.

Practical Application

Make celebration a part of your reform.

2 Kings 23:21-25 - *"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.' 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. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was held before the Lord in Jerusalem.*

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 Hilkiyah the priest found in the house of the Lord. 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."

King Josiah not only got rid of the negative practices in his reform – he also practiced the positive. He commanded all the people to celebrate the Passover, in accordance with the Law. Passover had not been celebrated like this since the time of the Judges! This would have been about 400 years before Josiah's time, if the Passover had last been celebrated at the time of Samuel, the last Judge.

God was pleased with this celebration because it was in line with His Word. And God is pleased today if celebration is part of our reform! Let's not just clean house and remove sin in our moral and spiritual reform - let's practice the positive. Let's celebrate with worship and praise to the Lord! Let's make a celebration a part of our reform!