

Josiah's Death; Kings Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim

2 Kings 23:26-35

2 Kings 23:26-30 - *"Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the LORD said, "I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'"*

Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went to the aid of the king of Assyria, to the River Euphrates; and King Josiah went against him. And Pharaoh Necho killed him at Megiddo when he confronted him. Then his servants moved his body in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in his father's place."

Background Notes

In our last Talk we discussed the great revival under King Josiah and the sweeping reforms in Judah in 621BC. This great revival even extended up into the former northern kingdom of Israel. So all of Israel was affected. *"Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, that the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger... he executed all the priests of the high places on the altars, and burned men's bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem"* (v19-20).

Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. Samaria and the other cities of the north - *"the cities of Samaria"* - had fallen to the Assyrian Empire in 722BC, about 100 years before Josiah's time. We discussed the fall of the northern kingdom in 2 Kings 17. At that time Israeli captives were taken away to various parts of the Assyrian Empire, and the northern kingdom was repopulated with foreign peoples. So the idolatry in the north continued - and if anything, it got worse. So when it swept north, Josiah's revival was very significant. The pagan shrines on all the high places were removed, the idolatrous altars were defiled, and the illegal and immoral priests were executed.

Josiah's revival was a widespread and significant revival, and thus 621BC is an important Old Testament date to remember in your biblical studies. *"Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done..."* (v26). Unfortunately, in the overall scheme of things, Josiah's revival was too little, too late.

Now don't get the idea from these verses 26-27 that God does not forgive and forget when people confess their sins. He does. But the prophet Jeremiah revealed that Judah turned back to her sinful ways within a few years of Josiah's revival.

Jeremiah's ministry was largely a warning to the people of Judah of coming judgment at the hands of the Babylonians because of their wicked ways. Within 35 years of Josiah's revival, God allowed the beautiful Temple and the city of Jerusalem to be utterly destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies in 586BC.

King Josiah was killed in battle in 609BC, when he marched his army north to Megiddo to try to stop the army of Egypt. Egypt was on its way to fight Assyria (v29-30). The Assyrian Empire was waning in power at this point in history. Egypt and Babylon were maneuvering against each other to take over and fill the power vacuum.

But Josiah thought that he would intervene and stop Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo, a major crossroads in the ancient world. That was a mistake. The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 35:20-35 says, *"After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. But [Necho] sent messengers to him, saying, 'What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you.'* Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo.

And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, 'Take me away, for I am severely wounded.' His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem. So he died, and was buried in one of the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah. And to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations."

Josiah should have minded his own business and let Egypt and Babylon fight it out.

Just four years later, in 605BC, the combined Egyptian and Assyrian forces met the full might of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians at the well-known Battle of Carchemish, and the Babylonians won the battle. After 605BC the Assyrian Empire ceased to be a power, Egypt retreated, and Babylon became the dominant power in the ancient world.

Doctrinal Points

1. Godly leaders can make costly mistakes.

Josiah should have stayed at home and allowed Egypt and Babylon fight it out, but he didn't. What a terrible mistake! Josiah was a good king, and he could have continued his good reign, but he didn't listen to God's warning given through Pharaoh Necho. After his death, all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Jeremiah composed a lamentation in commemoration of this sad event. And it happened because of Josiah's mistake.

It was definitely not God's will for Josiah to try to intervene and stop Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. In 2 Chronicles 35:21- 22, the pharaoh was speaking a message from God when he said: *"God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you."* Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him... and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God."

Godly leaders can make costly mistakes, then and today. For example, godly leaders of Christian ministries can make a mistake if they turn over the reins of the ministry to the wrong successors. If the Lord is not consulted, and a bad mistake is made in the transfer of leadership, a ministry might no longer glorify God as it once did.

I can think of another ongoing example of this doctrinal point on an international scale. In the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12, the Lord decreed that those who bless the Jewish people would be blessed, and those who curse the Jewish people would be cursed. This has certainly proved true in history. Even godly national leaders make a very costly mistake if they do not bless Israel. Godly leaders can make costly mistakes.

2. Ungodly leaders can oppress many people.

2 Kings 23:31-37 - *"Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done. Now Pharaoh Necho put him in prison at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Then Pharaoh Necho made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Pharaoh took Jehoahaz and went to Egypt, and he died there.*

So Jehoiakim gave the silver and gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give money according to the command of Pharaoh; he exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land, from every one according to his assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Necho. Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebudah the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done."

The next two kings of Judah, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, were bad kings. They led Judah back to the sinful ways that were practiced under wicked kings Manasseh and Amon. As a result, God allowed the people to be oppressed by Egypt. How could God bless a land and people that practiced such gross idolatry and immorality?

Jehoahaz reigned only 3 months, because Pharaoh Necho removed him and imprisoned him at Hamath, in the northern Syria. Later Necho took Jehoahaz away as a prisoner to Egypt, where he died. (By the way, the Jeremiah mentioned in verse 31 was not Jeremiah the prophet, because the prophet Jeremiah was not married. See Jeremiah 16.)

In the meantime, Pharaoh Necho made Jehoahaz' older brother, Jehoiakim, the puppet king of Judah. As the older son of Josiah, Jehoiakim should have become king when Josiah died, but the people had chosen his younger brother, Jehoahaz. In any case, both brothers were evil kings. We read about the wicked ways of Jehoiakim in the book of Jeremiah. Jehoiakim murdered Uriah, a godly prophet (Jeremiah 26). And Jehoiakim deliberately cut up the Word of God with a knife and threw it in the fire because he didn't like what it said (Jeremiah 36). All during this time the people were oppressed by heavy taxation for the tribute that had to be paid to Egypt. The nation was suffering the consequences of bad leadership. Ungodly leaders can oppress many people.

This problem still exists today. Whether it's ungodly leaders in government, or ungodly leaders in the church, people and families can be overlooked, stepped on, not properly cared for, and badly hurt. Ungodly leaders can oppress many people.

Practical Application

When God speaks to you through an unbeliever - listen!

God spoke to Josiah through an unbeliever. "*Josiah... did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God*" (2 *Chronicles 35:22*). God used the words of pagan king Pharaoh Necho to speak to Josiah, but Josiah would not listen. Josiah did not heed the words of Necho **from the mouth of God** - and he died as a result.

Can God speak to you through an unbeliever? Yes, He can. It's possible that God may use a non-Christian to speak to you - maybe a non-Christian family member, or non-Christian friend, or non-Christian colleague at work.

Here's an illustration from my life. I was considering leaving my job as a research engineer for full time ministry. We were heavily involved in youth ministry, and we had been praying and consulting with godly believers about taking this step, but we weren't sure if this was the Lord's plan for us.

But one day when I was chatting with my non-Christian boss, he said to me, "You know Dave, you have to decide now - do you want to do engineering for the rest of your life, or do you want to serve the Lord for the rest of your life?" Those startling words came out of the mouth of an unbeliever!

God used an unbeliever to speak to me. Not long after that conversation, the Lord clearly opened the door for me to become involved in full time Christian ministry. God may speak to you through an unbeliever, and if He does – **listen!**