
JOSIAH: OBEDIENCE WITH NO HOPE OF REWARD

King Josiah came to power in the Southern Kingdom of Judah around 640 BC. This is long after the time of David and Solomon: the kingdom has been divided for almost 300 years, the Northern Kingdom of Israel has already been conquered by Assyria, and the Southern kingdom isn't too far behind—a long series of mostly unfaithful kings (including Josiah's father, Amon) have led Judah away from God, and before long, Babylon will begin to conquer them.

This is the situation when Josiah comes to power at the age of 8. Even though he's young, and even though he had a wicked father, the Bible tells us that Josiah was a good and faithful king: *"He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left."* (2 Kings 22.2)

According to 2 Kings 22, in the 18th year of his reign, Josiah begins a project to repair and restore the Temple, and during the construction project, the book of the law is found (v. 8). Scholars and commentators disagree on exactly what this means, but what we're talking about here is that the Law of Moses has been found—either the entire Torah (the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy), or at the very least, the Book of Deuteronomy on its own. Either way, what this means is that the Law of Moses—the Covenant that God made with His people and the laws He gave them to follow—has been found and is read to King Josiah for the first time (v. 10). It shows just how bad things had gotten under Josiah's wicked father that Josiah apparently hadn't been exposed to the Law before now.

A covenant is an agreement or a promise made between two parties, but even more than that, it is the dynamic relationship between those parties. In Jehovah's covenant with the Israelites, He promised to be their God and protect them, and in return, the people were to be faithful and obedient to His commands. When Josiah hears the words of the Law, he tears his clothes because he realizes how unfaithful Judah has been—they haven't followed the commands of the Law of Moses, and they've worshipped gods other than Jehovah. In short, they haven't kept up their part of the bargain.

So Josiah sends to Huldah the prophetess to inquire of the LORD—what does God say about the situation?

And she said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD. Therefore, behold, 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 disaster that I will bring upon this place.'" And they brought back word to the king.

(2 Kings 22:15-20 ESV)

So basically, God says that for all their wickedness, the people of Judah will be punished, but because Josiah humbled himself before God, he won't have to witness the destruction of his country and will die before it happens.

Put yourself in the place of Josiah: what do you do next? No matter what you do, it's too late for Judah and they're going to be punished for their past sins after he dies. It seems like it whatever he does doesn't matter, because the same negative consequences will happen either way! What will Josiah do next?

And *this* is why I think Josiah is such a cool character, and such an example for us today: even when he knows that there's no reward coming his way, he *still* does the right thing because of his devotion to God.

In 2 Kings 23, Josiah goes out and reads the Book of the Law in front of all the people and along with them, reestablishes the covenant with God. Then, he sets about in a systematic way to make things right. He goes throughout Judah and even into the northern territory of Israel and does away with unauthorized worship practices, destroying idols and

pagan altars and getting rid of idolatrous priests. He removes the mediums and spiritists from land as well, and also re-institutes the Passover feast:

For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem.

(2 Kings 23:22-23 ESV)

Josiah does all of this despite the knowledge that Judah is going to be punished no matter what, and sure enough, after Josiah is killed in a battle against Egypt, Judah is quickly overthrown.

Josiah's life underscores how important it is to serve God **because we love Him**, not because we're **hoping to get something for doing so**. I think a lot of times people get the idea that as Christians, we spend our lives doing good things for God and that He then pays us back by letting us go to heaven. To be clear, the Bible *does* speak of heaven as a reward and the hope of heaven should help to motivate us to keep going, especially when times get rough. But if the *only* reason you're serving God is so He'll pay you back heaven, then you really have the wrong perspective on things. Serving God will seem like a chore and before long, you'll trick yourself into thinking that God owes you something, when He really doesn't at all.

A much better model of how to live comes from Josiah, and that's serving God not to get a reward, but just because you love Him and want to do things that please Him. That's what He really wants. If instead of spending your life **working for a reward**, you spend it in willing, sacrificial devotion to the God you love, that's when you get to see that the yoke of Christ is easy, and His burden is light.

This devotional was downloaded from lukedockery.com/free-resources. Check there for other resources including Bible class series, stand-alone lessons, and eBooks.