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# Israel and Judah:

## 41. Josiah, His Renewal, and Death

by David Sielaff, August 2021

Then read the accompanying “[August 2021 Newsletter](#)”

Israel and Judah: 41

Josiah,  
His Renewal,  
and Death

**The situation: King Josiah of Judah has grown in knowledge and wisdom. Discovery of the Scroll of the Law of God in the Temple surprised everyone in the Kingdom of Judah. The king, the nobility, the priests, and the people all have failed to obey Israel’s covenant with YHWH. Severe judgments will be the penalty. Josiah takes responsibility and takes action to lead his people to renew their Covenant with YHWH. Will God change His mind as He has done in the past?<sup>a</sup>**

This article covers the latter reign of King Josiah, his continued reforms, and brief details of his death. His death was a surprise and was unforeseen by any prophet. I repeat here Josiah’s command to take the scroll to Huldah the Prophetess because of great danger to the Kingdom of Judah:

**“Go, inquire of Yahweh about me and about the people and about all Judah concerning the words of this scroll that has been found; for great is the fury of Yahweh which ravages against us because our fathers did not hearken to the words of this scroll and do according to all that is written concerning us.”**

• 2 Kings 22:13

Also, I repeat the last portion of Huldah’s prophetic words from YHWH who speaks specifically to Josiah:

***TEXT: After Huldah’s Prophecy, Josiah Reacts to God’s Judgment on Judah***

2 Kings 22:20–23:6

<sup>20</sup> **“Wherefore, behold Me, I shall gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your tombs in peace.**

**Your eyes shall not see all the evil which I**

2 Chronicles 34:28–33 (then 34:4–5)

<sup>28</sup> **Behold, I shall gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your tombs in peace.**

**Your eyes shall not see all the evil which I**

<sup>a</sup> See Dr. Martin’s important article, “[The Repentance of God in the Bible](#)” which talks about God changing his mind due to people repenting and doing righteousness. Then read my September 2017 Commentary, “[God’s Change of Mind](#).” Truly human survival is in God’s Hands, as Jesus tells us.

am bringing on this place.”

So, they brought back this decree to the king.

<sup>1</sup> Then the king sent word, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> The king went up to the house of Yahweh, and every man of Judah and all the dwellers of Jerusalem with him, also the priests, the prophets and all the people from the small unto the great. Then he read into their ears all the words of the scroll of the covenant that had been found in the house of Yahweh.

<sup>3</sup> The king stood by the column and **contracted the covenant** before Yahweh:

- [1] to walk after Yahweh, to keep
- [2] His instructions,
- [3] His testimonies and
- [4] His statutes

with all the heart and with all the soul, and to carry out the words of this covenant as they were written on this scroll.

Then all the people ratified the covenant.

<sup>4</sup> The king instructed Hilkiah the great priest, the priests of the second in rank and the keepers of the threshold to bring forth from the temple of Yahweh

- [1] all the furnishings made for Baal,
- [2] for Asherah and
- [3] for all the host of the heavens.

He burned them outside Jerusalem on the Kidron terraces and carried their dust to Bethel.

<sup>5</sup> He caused the idolatrous priests to cease (whom the kings of Judah had appointed to fume incense on the high-places at the cities of Judah and round about Jerusalem),

and those fuming incense to Baal, to the sun and to the moon, to the zodiac and to all the host of the heavens.

<sup>6</sup> He brought forth the Asherah pole

am bringing on this place and on its dwellers.”

So, they brought back this decree to the king.

<sup>29</sup> Then the king sent word and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>30</sup> The king went up to the house of Yahweh, and every man of Judah and the dwellers of Jerusalem, also the priests, *the Levites* and all the people from the *great unto the small*. Then he read into their ears all the words of the scroll of the covenant that had been found in the house of Yahweh.

<sup>31</sup> The king stood *at his position* and **contracted the covenant** before Yahweh:

- [1] to walk after Yahweh, to keep
- [2] His instructions,
- [3] His testimonies and
- [4] His statutes

with all his heart and with all his soul, and to *perform* the words of the covenant as they were written on this scroll.

<sup>32</sup> *He made all those who had converged in Jerusalem and Benjamin ratify it; and the dwellers of Jerusalem acted according to the covenant of Elohim, the Elohim of their fathers.*

<sup>33a</sup> Josiah took away all the abhorrences from all the areas that belonged to the sons of Israel, and he had all those who had converged in Israel take up service to serve Yahweh their Elohim.

<sup>33b</sup> All his days they did not withdraw from following Yahweh Elohim of their fathers.

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[back to 2 Chronicles 34:4–5, *out of sequence*]

<sup>4</sup> *In his presence, they tore down the altars of the Baalim, and he had the incense stands that were upward above them hewn down;*

*he had the Asherah poles,*

**from the house of Yahweh** outside Jerusalem to Wadi Kidron and burned it in Wadi Kidron; he had it pulverized to dust and had its dust flung over the tombs of the sons of the people.

*the carvings and the molten images broken down, pulverized and sprinkled on the surface of the tombs of those who had sacrificed to them.*

<sup>5</sup> He burned the bones of priests on their altars and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. [end text]

King Josiah ordered that the Book of the Law that was discovered in the Temple be given to Huldah the prophetess for her to give God's validation of the document and to find out its significance for the people of Judah. YHWH's prophecies to King David in 2 Samuel chapter 7 were in the minds of Josiah, the prophet Jeremiah, the prophet Zephaniah, and every other worshipper of YHWH. Josiah and the priests also had warnings from other sources, for example Psalm 106 particularly verses 35–40.

**2 Kings 22:20 and 2 Chronicles 34:28.** These are God's last words through Huldah the prophetess;<sup>b</sup> they contain two statements by YHWH. The first statement is that King Josiah will be gathered **"to your tombs in peace."** This turns out to mean that Judah will not be at war when Josiah dies. Good kings of Judah are apparently buried in the Tombs of David unless otherwise specified. This site is within the bedrock of the City of David just south of the Gihon Spring.<sup>c</sup> We will learn how Josiah dies at the end of this article and in 2 Kings 23:28–30 and 2 Chronicles 35:20–27.

The second statement is that Josiah will not see the fulfillment of YHWH's doom inflicted upon the Kingdom and land of Judah and particularly upon Jerusalem.

**2 Kings 23:1 and 2 Chronicles 34:29.** Undeterred by YHWH's statements, Josiah acted immediately and gathered the officials of his kingdom.

**2 Kings 23:2 and 2 Chronicles 34:30.** All available people in Jerusalem **"from the small unto the great"** gathered at the Temple and so did the priests, and the prophets. The texts seem to say that Josiah himself read the words of the Book of the Law to all the people.

**2 Kings 23:3 and 2 Chronicles 34:31–32.** Josiah had multitudes of people gathered at the Temple to speak to and on behalf of all the people of Judah. Josiah also pledged himself to **"with all the heart and with all the soul, and to carry out the words of this covenant"** on the scroll.

The people agreed to renew their covenant with YHWH, and they also pledged to obey YHWH's laws with the four listed elements [1] through [4]. The people there at the Temple pledged to do so, and Israel's covenant with YHWH was ratified again just as their ancestors agreed to it in the days of Moses.

**2 Chronicles 34:33a.** Josiah eliminated all pagan objects in Jerusalem.

**2 Kings 23:4.** Josiah instructed **"Hilkiah the great priest"** to remove pagan artifacts, symbols, and implements from the Temple of YHWH. This discovery was made after repairs of the Temple were made (2 Kings 22:3–7). Upon Josiah's orders Hilkiah personally oversaw the destruction of the pagan items used to worship pagan gods, within the Temple itself. He may have been the father of Jeremiah the prophet (Jeremiah 1:1). This Hilkiah found the book of the Covenant in the Temple.

Hilkiah took the items around and from YHWH's Temple and burned them in the Kidron Valley just east of the Gihon Temple. He gathered the ash and took it to Bethel north of Jerusalem to spread on the graves and tombs of the pagan prophets. According to their beliefs, this grave insult (pardon the pun) to their "gods" would have done damage to the prophets in an imaginary pagan afterlife.

Josiah cleansed the Temple of all pagan **"furnishings"** as he did in the land of Israel north of the Kingdom of Judah (2 Chronicles 34:3–7). He took the dust of the burned implements to be spread over Bethel, north of Jerusalem, for a reason:

<sup>b</sup> Her complete statement is contained in 2 Kings 22:13–20 and 2 Chronicles 34:21–28. See ["Israel and Judah: 40. Josiah and Discovery of the Law"](#) for my explanation and analysis.

<sup>c</sup> See my October 2006 article, ["The Location and Future Discovery of King David's Tomb."](#)

“The distribution of the ashes to Bethel is no mere ‘absurd intrusion’ by a later editor, for Josiah set out to expand his borders (see on v. 29 [of 2 Kings chapter 22:]) and here may have aimed to desecrate Bethel as the place which originated the false worship of the golden calves (1 Kgs 12:28–29) but long before taken [and ruled] by Assyrian or other conquerors (Hos. 10:5–6). Bethel also marked the southern border of the former Northern Kingdom, now the Assyrian province of Samaria, and so was a clear challenge to the weakening Assyrian masters.”

• *D.J. Wiseman, 1 and 2 Kings, p. 320*<sup>d</sup>

**2 Kings 23:4–5.** In each of these verses the phrase “**all the hosts of the heavens**” is used. The prophet Zephaniah wrote during the reign of Josiah. He referred to much of what the narratives of Kings and Chronicles present. Worship “to the host of the heavens” is talked about as well as other sins of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. They would swear to YHWH at one time and swear to Milcom and other gods at another time.

“I will stretch out My hand over Judah, And over all dwellers of Jerusalem; And I will cut off the name of Baal from this place, And the name of the idolatrous priests with the priests, And those worshipping on the housetops to the host of the heavens, And those worshipping — swearing to Yahweh and swearing by Milcom, And those turned away from following Yahweh, who do not seek Yahweh, nor inquire of Him.”

• *Zephaniah 1:4–6* (see also Jeremiah 13:19)

At the core of their beliefs, the people had no loyalty to YHWH and that is the essence of idolatry. Judgment and punishment will come to them

**2 Chronicles 34:33a and b.** Presumably this verse describes what took place within Jerusalem. “**All his days**” meant all the remaining days of Josiah’s life. The people were obedient to YHWH and followed Josiah’s command only so long as he lived.

The phrase “**the areas that belonged to the sons of Israel**” likely refers to areas in Jerusalem populated by many Israelite refugees from the destroyed northern kingdom of Israel. They preserved their pagan ways and brought them south to Judah. Yet even they followed and obeyed Josiah’s commands until he died. This verse ends with a statement that Josiah himself followed YHWH and did not deviate from his devotion to God.

**[Editor’s Note]** From this point in the narrative, neither Second Kings nor Second Chronicles are chronological. The narratives are presented in a topical format by subject. Second Chronicles chapter 34 does not follow the sequence of 2 Kings chapter 23, so events are somewhat difficult to understand as one goes back and forth between Kings to Chronicles narratives. However, there does seem to be a distinction by reforms and destruction of pagan sites and artifacts within Jerusalem and outside Jerusalem, especially in the lands of the former northern Kingdom of Israel.

**2 Kings 23:5 and 2 Chronicles 34:4.** The “**idolatrous priests**” were from Judah, and some may have been apostate Levitical priests. Josiah made them cease their burning of incense in the cities of Judah and in Jerusalem. Why did the priests do that? Perhaps burning incense was a way for them to claim those places for Baal and other gods. We cannot know from the texts if those priests were killed for their idolatry, or if the ashes were sprinkled on the tombs of already dead idolatrous priests who formerly burned incense to pagan gods against YHWH’s orders and covenant.

**2 Kings 23:6 and 2 Chronicles 34:4.** Josiah supervised the removal of an Asherah pole from the Temple, and burned that pole and others, pulverizing the burnt remains to ashes. Asherah poles were made of wood with lewd female sex symbols carved into them. Further information on Asherah poles during this period is found in 2 Kings 18:4, 21:7, 21; and 2 Chronicles 33:15, 22.

**2 Chronicles 34:5.** Burning the bones of idolatrous priests on the altars they used somehow cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>d</sup> Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 320.

*TEXT: Josiah's Other Acts of Cleansing Jerusalem, Judah, and Bethel*

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**2 Kings 23:7–14**

<sup>7</sup> [1] He tore down the cubicles of the cult-prostitutes that were **in the house of Yahweh**, where the women were weaving tunics for Asherah.

<sup>8</sup> [2] He brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah and defiled the high-places where the priests had fumed incense, from Geba unto Beer-sheba.

[3] He broke down the high-places of the hairy goat demons that were beside the portal of the gateway of Joshua, the city chief, which were on one's left at the city gateway. <sup>9</sup> The priests of the high-places, however, did not go up to the altar of Yahweh in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread in the midst of their brothers.

<sup>10</sup> [4] He defiled Topheth, which is in the ravine of the sons of Hinnom, so as to lure no one to make his son or his daughter pass through fire to Moloch.

<sup>11</sup> [5] He eradicated the horses (that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun) at the entrance of the house of Yahweh by the room of Nathan-melech the eunuch, which was in the precincts; and

[6] he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

<sup>12</sup> [7] As for the altars on the housetop of the upper chamber of Ahaz that the kings of Judah had built, and the altars that Manasseh had built in the two courts of the house of Yahweh, the king tore them down. He fractured them there and had their dust flung into Wadi Kidron.

<sup>13</sup> [8] As for the high-places adjoining Jerusalem, at the right of the mount of corruption, which **Solomon king of Israel had built** for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, **for Chemosh the abomination of Moab**, and for Milcom the abhorrence of the sons of Ammon, the king [Josiah] defiled them.

<sup>14</sup> [9] He broke the monuments to pieces, cut down the Asherah poles and filled their place with human bones. **[end text]**

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Some of these acts of ritual cleansing in 2 Kings 23:7–16 are covered in the framework of 2 Chronicles 34:3–7. too divergent for an understandable side-by-side presentation of the Kings and Chronicles passages. I will indicate correspondences in the notes below:

**2 Kings 23:7.** This passage tells us that ritual prostitutes (male and female prostitutes as in most pagan sexual rites) were operating **“in the house of Yahweh”** in temporary private shelters for their operations.

What was the attraction? Spirits of the pagan gods (or demons impersonating the gods) could and often did possess the “priest” or “priestess” who was prostituting for money. The possessed individual would provide the worshipping Israelite male a unique experience. It is not said where that took place. Given space considerations, it likely happened east of the main altar located in the Court of Israel and the Court of Women. Most likely only Israelite men took part in this sexual activity. Women were not allowed in the court where the sacrifices were conducted. Perhaps this sexual rite was thought to be an “offering” to pagan gods.

When YHWH says the people “prostituted” themselves to foreign gods, it was not just figurative religious language. There were male and female prostitutes who were paid “offerings” to their gods. They did so whenever an evil king followed a dead “good” king. Note again what the people of Israel and Judah did just before the united Kingdom of Israel was divided after King Solomon died and his son Rehoboam began his reign:

**“Judah did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and they made Him jealous above all that their fathers had done by their sins with which they had sinned. They too were building for themselves high-places, monuments and Asherah poles on every lofty hill and under every flourishing tree.**

**There were even cult-prostitutes [males, the term is masculine in Hebrew] in the land. They practiced all the abhorrences of the nations which Yahweh had evicted from before the sons of Israel.”**

• **1 Kings 14:22–24**

King David's great grandmother was a Moabite woman who married a man from the tribe of Judah. The Moabites were related to Israelites through Abraham's nephew Lot whose incestuous union with his oldest daughter led to the founding of the Moabite people (Genesis 19:37). When the people of Israel encountered the Moabites before they entered the land YHWH promised to them, Moabite women were sent to seduce the people of Israel with sex to "enhance" the worship of the Moabite "gods."

**"While Israel dwelt in Shittim, the people started to commit prostitution with the daughters of Moab, who called the people to the sacrifices of THEIR elohim. The people ate their sacrifices and bowed themselves down to their elohim. Thus Israel was paired with Baal-peor, and the anger of Yahweh grew hot against Israel.**

**Yahweh said to Moses: 'Take all heads of the people and gibbet them before Yahweh in front of the sun so that the heat of Yahweh's anger might turn back from Israel.' So Moses said to the judges of Israel: 'Kill each one his men who are pairing themselves with Baal-peor.'**"

• Numbers 25:1–5

Most Moabite women were required to "serve" in their pagan temple for a time. This was one reason it was remarkable that Ruth wanted to convert and be accepted by the people and by YHWH. She came to believe and worship YHWH as Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law did. Sexual rituals were part of their worship. Some of Solomon's concubines were Moabite women (1 Kings 11:1). See the note for verse 13 below.

**"There shall come to be neither a cult-prostitute from the daughters of Israel, nor shall there come to be a cult-prostitute from the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the price of a cur [dog] into the house of Yahweh your Elohim for any vow offering [a sacrifice], for they are an abhorrence to Yahweh your Elohim, indeed both of them."**

• Deuteronomy 23:17–18<sup>e</sup>

If you examine modern translations and learn that the first use of the word "prostitute" is different and is often translated as "cult-prostitute." They are two different Hebrew words.<sup>f</sup>

**Verse 8.** Josiah had the priests; presumably Levitical priests defile the pagan high places. Some of them were likely idolatrous Levitical priests. "Hairy goat demons" were probably understood to be similar to the Greek god Pan. Assyriologist D.J. Wiseman says the Hebrew phrase "**from Geba unto Beer-sheba**" denotes the northern and southern boundaries of Judah in days of Josiah.<sup>g</sup>

**Verse 9.** Were "**the priests of the high-places**" apostate Levitical priests or non-Levitical priests from among the people of Judah? We are not told. These priests did not go to the Temple or "**the altar of YHWH in Jerusalem.**" While Josiah reigned it likely was not safe for them to go there.

**Verse 10.** The Tophet was where the nobles and kings of Judah sacrificed children in the Valley of Hinnom (*Gehenna* in Greek). Josiah ritually defiled the Tophet to minimize future sacrifices there.

**Verse 11.** These were some type of statues of horses honoring the sun god(s).

**Verse 12.** The altars of evil King Ahaz of Judah were built on top of tombs outside the southern gate to the Temple (2 Kings 15:10–18). This may be what Ezekiel was referring to in Ezekiel 43:5–9. The sequence was: evil King Ahaz, good Hezekiah, evil Manasseh, evil Amon (only 2 years), then good King Josiah. The next three and final kings of Judah were all sons of Josiah. Reread the list of Manasseh's sins and evils:

**"He did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, according to the abhorrences of the nations which Yahweh had evicted from before the sons of Israel. So [1] he rebuilt again the high-places that**

<sup>e</sup> The King James Version translates Deuteronomy 23:17 as "**There shall be no whore** [feminine gender in Hebrew] **of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite** [masculine in Hebrew] **of the sons of Israel.**"

<sup>f</sup> Women of Moab were sent to seduce men of Israel, using sex as a lure to commit not only sexual sin, but also the sin of idolatry (Leviticus 19:29; Numbers chapters 22–25). In 1 Kings 15:12 cult prostitutes were removed by King Asa of Judah. More were removed in 1 Kings 22:48 by King Jehoshaphat of Judah. Hosea 4:14 explicitly says offerings were done by cult prostitutes.

<sup>g</sup> D.J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, p. 321.

his father Hezekiah had destroyed; [2] he set up altars for Baal and made an Asherah pole just as king Ahab of Israel had done. [3] He bowed himself down to all the host of the heavens and [4] served them. [5] He built altars for them in the house of Yahweh of which Yahweh had said, 'In Jerusalem I shall place My Name.' [6] He built altars to all the host of the heavens in the two courts of the house of Yahweh. [7] He also caused his own son to pass through fire; [8] he consulted clouds, [9] practiced augury and [10] dealt with mediums and wizards. [11] He performed much more to do what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh to provoke Him to vexation."

• 2 Kings 21:2–6

**2 Kings 23:13.** Solomon did these evils as this verse says. In fact, from the time of Moses and Joshua little had changed for the Israelites or those of Judah. The people of Israel worshipped many pagan "gods." What happened in the reign of Josiah was the same as what occurred earlier in the time of the Judges:

"The sons of Israel again did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh. They served [1] the Baalim and [2] the Ashtaroth, and [3] the elohim of Aram, [4] the elohim of Sidon, [5] the elohim of Moab, [6] the elohim of the sons of Ammon, and [7] the elohim of the Philistines; they forsook Yahweh and did not serve Him."

• Judges 10:6

Later Solomon, the wisest of men, honored and worshipped pagan gods:

"Solomon did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh and did not fully follow after Yahweh like his father David. Then Solomon built a high-place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab ..."

• 1 Kings 11:6–7

Solomon's constructions were somewhere on the Mount of Olives. They were permanent places of worship and they remained until Josiah defiled and then tore them down. His actions with the wives and concubines who worshipped pagan gods probably gave future evil kings license to do the same, and they went further and did much worse.

In the past good kings like Josiah would have been able to cause God to repent and save His people from God's wrath. This time is different. YHWH will no longer delay His judgments against the people of Judah. This should not surprise us; even God's patience has an end. No more. Not even a religious revival by a "good" king, devout priests, Levites, and prophets of YHWH can save the kingdom of Judah, its people, or the people of Jerusalem.

**Verse 14.** Undeterred by YHWH's declaration of judgment, Josiah continued his good work of defiling the structures Solomon built making them unusable for pagan rituals. Everything the pagans held sacred, Josiah made sure he defiled to thwart their future use at those locations.

[Editor's Note:] Verses 2 Kings 23:15–18 tell of Josiah's acts to cleanse the land of Israel north of the Kingdom of Judah and particularly at the city of Bethel north of Jerusalem. I told of that cleansing information in pages 6 and 7 of last episode "[Israel and Judah: 40. Josiah and Discovery of the Law.](#)"

### ***TEXT: Josiah Restores the Passover***

**2 Kings 23:19–21**

(verses 19–20 are out of sequence)

<sup>19</sup> Josiah also put away all the houses of the high-places in the cities of Samaria that the kings of Israel had built to provoke Yahweh to vexation;

he dealt with them according to all the deeds that he had done at Bethel. <sup>20</sup> **He sacrificed all priests of the high-places** that were there, **on the altars**, and he burned human bones on them. Then he returned

**2 Chronicles 35:1**

to Jerusalem.

<sup>21</sup> The king instructed all the people, saying,  
**“observe the Passover for Yahweh  
 your Elohim according to what is written on  
 the scroll of this covenant.”**

<sup>1</sup> *Josiah*  
 observed the Passover for Yahweh  
 in Jerusalem; they slew the passover on the  
 fourteenth of the first month. [end text]

**2 Kings 23:19–20.** There may not be a separation between last part of verse 19 and verse 20. They may be a single thought. The pagan Israelite priests (or apostate Levitical priests) were executed on the altars where they themselves sacrificed to idols and likely killed people upon those altars near Bethel, north of Jerusalem. Perhaps they were taken to Jerusalem and killed there on the pagan altars. These were **NOT** sacrifices exclusive to YHWH.

Remember what God commanded through Moses: **“Anyone sacrificing to any elohim, he is doomed, unless it be to Yahweh, to Him ALONE”** (Exodus 22:20).<sup>h</sup> See also Numbers 25:2–4; Joshua 23:15–16; 1 Kings 18:40; and in 2 Kings 11:18. Elijah commanded the people to seize and kill the priests of Baal. King Jehu of Israel did the same in 2 Kings 10:24–25. Remember, as we read in the last episode #40:

**“Behold, a man of Elohim, he came from Judah by the word of Yahweh to Bethel while Jeroboam was standing at the altar to fume incense. He called out against the altar by the word of Yahweh and said, ‘Altar, altar,’ thus speaks Yahweh:**

**‘Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David; JOSIAH is his name. And he will sacrifice on you the priests of the high-places who are fuming incense on you; and he shall burn human bones on you.’”**

• **1 Kings 13:1–2**

I believe this was done by Josiah just as **“the man of Elohim”** predicted in the reign of Jeroboam, the first king of the northern Kingdom of Israel.

**2 Kings 23:21.** Several years passed between Josiah’s cleansing up to verse 20 and verse 21 and 2 Chronicles 35:1 when he commanded the Passover preparations to be made. The narrative of 2 Kings chapter 23 is about all the reforms of Josiah. In this case 2 Chronicles is the more chronological text, which is unusual.

Josiah ordered God’s people to observe and perform the Passover ritual as prescribed in the Book of the Law discovered in the Temple. Remember, the Passover was normally observed in homes, with other observances done at the Temple. Evidently the details of the Passover observance had been neglected and perhaps even forgotten. Josiah worked to correct that mistake. He hoped God would recognize the piety of the people. Unfortunately, the people had not been faithful for a long time.

**2 Chronicles 35:1.** This verse declares the Passover was performed by the people as Josiah ordered.

### **TEXT: Details of Josiah’s Renewed Passover**

#### **2 Chronicles 35:1–17 (Repeating verse 1)**

<sup>1</sup> Josiah observed the Passover for Yahweh in Jerusalem; they slew the passover on the fourteenth of the first month.

<sup>2</sup> He assigned the priests to officiate in their terms of duty and encouraged them in the service of the house of Yahweh.

<sup>3</sup> He said to the Levites who taught all Israel understanding and were holy to Yahweh:

**“Put the holy coffer [the Ark of the Covenant] in the house that Solomon son of David, king of Israel,**

<sup>h</sup> No doubt the people doing such sins and evils thought, like Solomon, that if they gave YHWH first preference there is no harm in honoring other gods. After all, YHWH made them also put and keep what may seem to us to be idolatrous elements **inside the Temple**. Dr. Martin’s article **“Lingering Idolatry in the Temple of God”** explains these facts. These idolatrous anomalies were even in the Herodian Temple that Jesus said was **“My Father’s House”** (John 2:16).

built; it is no longer carried on your shoulders. Now serve Yahweh your Elohim and His people Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Prepare yourselves by your fathers' houses according to your apportionments and the written decree of David king of Israel and the document of Solomon his son; <sup>5</sup> and stand ready in the sanctuary, by the distributions of your fathers' houses, for your kinsmen, the sons of the people, so that there be Levites for each apportionment of a father's house.

<sup>6</sup> Slay the passover lambs and sanctify yourselves and prepare it for your kinsmen to observe it according to the word of Yahweh given by means of Moses."

<sup>7</sup> Josiah donated to the sons of the people small cattle, he-lambs and young goats — all as passover offerings to all who had converged — to the number of 30,000, and large cattle, 3,000; these were from the king's own goods.

<sup>8</sup> As for his chief officials, they donated a voluntary offering to the people, to the priests and to the Levites; Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel who were the chief officers of the house of Elohim, gave to the priests as passover offerings 2,600 small cattle, he-lambs and young goats, and 300 large cattle.

<sup>9</sup> Conaniah, Benaiah, Shemaiah and Nethanel his brothers, and Hashabiah, Jeiel and Jozabad, who were chief officials of the Levites, donated as passover offerings to the Levites 5,000 small cattle and 500 large cattle.

<sup>10</sup> The service was prepared; the priests stood at their positions and the Levites in their apportionments, according to the king's instruction. <sup>11</sup> They slew the passover lambs, and the priests received the blood from their hand and sprinkled it, while the Levites did the flaying.

<sup>12</sup> They took away the ascent offerings to give them for distribution to the fathers' houses, to the sons of the people, that they might offer them to Yahweh, according to what is written in the scroll of Moses; and thus also with the large cattle. <sup>13</sup> They cooked the passover offerings with fire according to the custom, while the holy offerings they cooked in pots, in cauldrons and in pans, and brought them rapidly to all the sons of the people.

<sup>14</sup> And afterward they made preparations for themselves and for the priests, since the priests, the sons of Aaron, were offering up the ascent offering and the fat portions until night; and the Levites, for their part, made preparations for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron.

<sup>15</sup> The singers, the sons of Asaph, were at their standing ground, according to the instruction of David and Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun, the vision seer of the king; and the gatekeepers were at each and every gate. There was no need for them to withdraw from their service since their kinsmen the Levites made the preparations for them.

<sup>16</sup> So all the service of Yahweh was prepared that day to observe the Passover and to offer up ascent offerings on the altar of Yahweh according to the instruction of king Josiah. <sup>17</sup> The sons of Israel who had converged, observed the Passover at that time, and the festival of unleavened bread for seven days.

[end text]

**2 Chronicles 35:1–2.** Verse 1 is repeated from the previous section. Verse 2 tells how Josiah decisively planned to make the Passover happen.

**Verse 3.** So, where was the ark kept before this time? Apparently it was removed from the Temple to a safe location and only now in Josiah's time was it brought back into the Holy of Holies. Perhaps the Ark's removal was done after Hezekiah's death. The pagan priests apparently did not care what happened to it. There must have been some ritual provision for the Levites to safely perform that move.

**Verse 4.** Josiah makes mention of "the written decree of David and the document of Solomon." Those writings were in their possession. What they apparently lacked was information from Moses (newly found) that may have been within the Ark itself. Note what Moses wrote near the end of his life:

**"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bore the ark of the covenant of YHWH, saying,**

**'Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of YHWH your God, [Why?] that it may be there for a witness against you.'**

**For I know your rebellion, and your stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, you have been rebellious against YHWH; and how much more after my death?'"**

• **Deuteronomy 31:24–27**

**"The scroll (or book) of the law"** was to witness against the people of Israel of their sins against YHWH and violations of their covenant with Him. It also served as a witness of the evils they did against fellow Israelites. This was why Josiah **"tore his garments"** as a sign of anguish and horror (2 Kings 22:11). The discovery of the Law was to convict the people of Judah of their violations of their Covenant with YHWH, not for them to reform, no matter how hard Josiah and other devout leaders tried to reform and do good before YHWH.

The scroll or book of the Law made clear the sins of the people. It indicted them, from their own actions and displayed their guilt before YHWH and to each other. They were, at that moment, without excuse. Even though King Josiah humbled himself before YHWH (2 Kings 22:11), and God acknowledged his humility and acts of reform and punishment of idolatry (2 Kings 22:19) and honored Josiah, nonetheless the punishment was not abated but merely postponed until a time after Josiah's death.

**Verse 5.** Josiah declares: the preparations for the Passover must be done correctly. All our lives depend on it. Of course, Josiah understood that it was not just the proper ritual procedure that mattered to God, but the faithfulness in the hearts of the people of Judah. Josiah did what He could to affect their hearts.

**Verse 6.** He says in effect, this time we will do it right, exactly as the procedure Moses gave.

**Verse 7.** Josiah provided the animals for the household Passover sacrifices for those who could not afford to provide for themselves.

**Verse 8.** Josiah's officials made their own donations to the people, priests, and Levites.

**Verse 9.** Presumably "brothers" as in fellow Levites. They also donated generously to the Levites.

**Verses 10–11.** For the Temple sacrifices, the priests killed the animals and the Levites flayed and cooked the meat for the distribution to the people. Passover sacrifices were usually done in a home. In this case the slaughter of the lambs, sprinkling of the blood, and preparation of the meat was conducted at a central location. This was done previously at Gilgal as we are told in Joshua 5:10–12. The meat was cut by the Levites and distributed for cooking according to an orderly process.

**"The uniqueness of this Passover may lie in the act of the Levites slaying the lambs centrally rather than by families as in Hezekiah's Passover (2 Chronicles 30:2–3, 17–20), perhaps the first to be held since that at Gilgal (Joshua 5:10–12)."**

• **D.J. Wiseman, 1 and 2 Kings, p. 324**

The Passover at Gilgal took place after Moses had died.

**Verses 12–13.** The sacrificial meat was delivered to houses "rapidly."

**Verse 14.** Only then did the priests and Levites make an offering for themselves, and performed the ascent offering for everyone.

**Verse 15.** The singers performed (no doubt with musicians accompanying them) according to King David's instructions and those of others. Even the guards at the gates were provided for during the festival period.

**Verse 16.** Josiah's preparations were carried out as ordered.

**Verse 17.** The festival celebration also included the Days of Unleavened Bread.

### ***TEXT: High Praise for Josiah's Passover Restoration***

**2 Kings 23:22–23**

<sup>22</sup> Indeed no Passover like this had been observed since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of

**2 Chronicles 35:18–19**

<sup>18</sup> Indeed no Passover like *it* had been observed in Israel since the days of *Samuel the prophet*; none of all the kings of Israel

Judah.

had observed such a Passover as Josiah did, with the priests and the Levites and all Judah and Israel who had converged with the dwellers of Jerusalem.

<sup>23</sup> For **only** in the eighteenth year of king Josiah was this Passover observed to Yahweh in Jerusalem in that manner.

<sup>19</sup> This Passover was observed in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah.

[end text]

**2 Kings 23:22 and 2 Chronicles 35:18.** High praise is given for the conduct of this Passover. It was unique and excelled in its piety. It was wonderful and Josiah's attention to detail was noted.

**Verses 23 and 19.** He was just 26 years old, having reigned 18 years.

***TEXT: More Reforms by Josiah, But YHWH's Judgments Will Still Happen***

**2 Kings 23:24–27**

<sup>24</sup> As for the mediums and the wizards, the household idols, the [clay] idol clods and all the abominations which were to be seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, Josiah took them out too [also] in order to carry out the words of the law, written on the scroll that Hilkiyah the priest had found in the house of Yahweh.

<sup>25</sup> There was no king such as he before him who turned back to Yahweh

[1] with all his heart,

[2] with all his soul and

[3] with all his intensity

according to ALL the law of Moses; nor did anyone such as he arise after him.

<sup>26</sup> However Yahweh did not turn back from the great heat of His anger when His anger burned hot against Judah on account of all the vexations with which Manasseh had provoked Him to vexation. <sup>27</sup> Yahweh said,

**"I shall also put away Judah from My presence, just as I put away Israel; and I will reject this city that I chose, Jerusalem, and [I will reject] the house of which I said, 'My Name shall be there.'"** [end text]

**Verse 24.** This passage is out of context, but it was placed there for a reason — to emphasize that the orders of YHWH regarding mediums, wizards, household idols, idol clods, and all the abominations were properly carried out in accord with the scroll of the Law found in the Temple. **"Josiah took them out"** probably means they were tried and executed if human, or if they were physical objects they were destroyed.

**Verse 25.** Josiah is praised above all other kings of Judah. He was a remarkable man and king. He followed YHWH's commands more than any other Davidic king who was considered "good" from the beginning to the end of their reign. The other "good" kings were David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jotham, and Hezekiah before Josiah. There were no "good" kings of Judah after Josiah.

**Verse 26.** Next comes the statement about YHWH's anger being so "hot against Judah" because of the actions of King Manasseh and the continual sins of the people, whose actions were so terrible and offensive that God's judgment cannot be postponed no matter how faithful King Josiah was. Read in 2 Kings 21:12–15 what YHWH said would happen to Judah and Jerusalem because of Manasseh's sins against YHWH. The people of Judah were happy to go along with their evil king.

**Verse 27.** Even with YHWH's praise of Josiah, Judah: **"The hosts of the heavens"** are referred to in verses 4–5. The prophet Zephaniah, a contemporary of Jeremiah said similar thing, as you will see below. YHWH will totally separate Himself from the people, leaders, king, and Kingdom of Judah.

Their fate was sealed despite Josiah's reforms. YHWH's anger did not diminish, nor did He change His determination for judgment against Judah. The people must have continued to sin on a massive scale in private. When they had evil kings, they sinned publicly. During Josiah's reign they covered up their sins, temporarily. After Josiah dies, they returned to their normal pagan worship covertly Jeremiah 3:25.

*TEXT: The Death of King Josiah*

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*2 Kings 23:28–30a*

<sup>28</sup> As for the rest of the affairs of Josiah and all that he did, are they not written on the scroll of the annals of the days of the kings of Judah?

<sup>29</sup> In his days,

Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria on the stream Euphrates. And king Josiah went out to meet him in battle; yet **Neco**

**caused him to die** at Megiddo when he saw him.

<sup>30</sup> Then his servants conveyed him by chariot from Megiddo and brought him dying to Jerusalem.

They entombed him in his tomb.

*2 Chronicles 35:20–27*

<sup>20</sup> *After all this, when Josiah had provided for the house, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah marched forth to meet him.*

<sup>21</sup> But **Neco** sent messengers to him, saying,

**“What is there between me and you, king of Judah? It is not against you that I am coming hither today, but against the house with which I am at war.**

**And Elohim Himself ordered me to speed up. Forbear for your own sake from interfering with Elohim Who is with me, so He does not ruin you.”**

<sup>22</sup> Yet Josiah would not be deflected from facing him; instead, he disguised himself to fight him. He would not hearken to Neco’s words **from the mouth of Elohim**; and he came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. <sup>23</sup> Shooters shot king Josiah; then the king said to his servants, **“Pass me along for I am intensely wounded.”**

<sup>24</sup> *So his servants passed him along from the chariot and had him ride in the second chariot that he had and conducted him to **Jerusalem where he died** and was entombed in the tombs of his fathers.*

All Judah and Jerusalem were mourning over Josiah; <sup>25</sup> and Jeremiah composed a dirge for Josiah. All the male singers and the female singers lamented for Josiah in their dirges until today; they made them a tradition in Israel, and they are now written up in the dirges.

<sup>26</sup> As for the rest of the affairs of Josiah, and his loyalties according to what is written in the law of Yahweh, <sup>27</sup> his affairs, first and last, behold, they are written on the scroll of the kings of Israel and Judah.

[end text]

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**2 Kings 23:28.** The formulaic statement of death and burial of kings is repeated in 2 Chronicles 35:26–27. The apocryphal book in 1 Esdras says that Jeremiah told Josiah not to go fight Neco.

**2 Chronicles 35:20–22.** Pharaoh sent **“messengers,”** plural, signaling that he did not want to fight Josiah and his army. The Chronicler says the words of Pharaoh Neco were **“from the mouth of Elohim.”** Neco told the truth to Josiah. Neco was traveling north to Carchemish, north of Syria near the Euphrates River.

D.J. Wiseman notes that Assyrian control in the west and along the eastern Mediterranean seacoast had ended and Megiddo, west and south of the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel, was an Egyptian fortress. It was on the way for Neco to perhaps go to Carchemish north of Syria near the Euphrates River. All Josiah did was delay the army of Neco. He further speculates that supporters of Josiah's **"younger son Jehoahaz considered as less pro-Egyptian than his older brother Eliakim"** (Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 325), may have played a role. However, the texts do not tell us why Josiah went to attack Neco.

**Verse 23–24.** The "shooters," slingers or bowmen, gravely wounded Josiah. He was taken to Jerusalem.

**2 Chronicles 35:25.** The prophet Jeremiah composed **"a dirge"** which was a song called today the Book of Lamentations. Jeremiah's writing regretted and mourned the death of Josiah. He wrote the lament before Josiah died.<sup>i</sup> Lamentations has five sections an acrostic pattern of the Hebrew alphabet. Its purpose is not only to lament Josiah's death, but the lament was also a prophecy announcing how the Kingdom of Judah would be destroyed like the destruction of the northern Kingdom of Israel. The lament was written before Judah's destruction, describing its destruction. The people of Judah were to be deported to the region of Babylon.

After this prophecy was given (and other prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and some of the minor prophets), in centuries to come the Book of Lamentations was read on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Ab of the Jewish Calendar, which was the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26–33), the traditional day when the Temples were destroyed, both the Solomonic Temple and the later Herodian Temple in 70 AD.

**2 Chronicles 35:26–27.** This formulaic statement of Josiah's death and burial of kings is repeated from 2 Kings 23:28 above. The books of First and Second Kings focus on the reigns and actions of the Davidic Kings of Judah. The books of First and Second Chronicles focus mainly on the religious aspects of the reigns of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

**2 Kings 23:29 and 2 Chronicles 35:20.** It is clear from verse 20 that Neco was going to the Euphrates to fight, but who he was fighting? Verse 29 indicates that he was going to fight the Assyrians, but commentators are divided. The text could be read that Neco was going to meet and help the Assyrians. Or, perhaps he was going to stake a claim for Egyptian control of Syria when the Assyrian empire was carved up by Media, Babylon, and now Egypt.

**2 Kings 23:29 and 2 Chronicles 35:24.** Where did Josiah die, at Megiddo or at Jerusalem. Verse 29 says **"Neco caused him to die at Megiddo."** It does not say that Josiah died at Megiddo. There is no contradiction with verse 24 that says he was taken to **"Jerusalem where he died."**

Did Josiah die in peace? One thought is that Judah was not at war with any other country, so he died during peacetime. Josiah confronted Neco and Egypt when they had no quarrel.

## **The Book of Zephaniah<sup>j</sup>**

All three chapters of Zephaniah were composed during the early half of King Josiah's 31-year reign.

**"The word of Yahweh which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah."**

• **Zephaniah 1:1**

The article "[Zephaniah](#)" in the *Fausset Bible Dictionary* gives a good analysis of when God provided His prophecy to Zephaniah:

**"He prophesied in the former part of Josiah's reign. In Zeph. 2:13–15 he foretells Nineveh's fall (625 BC), therefore his prophesying was before 625 BC; and in Zeph. 1:4–6 threatens 'cutting off' to 'the remnant of Baal' and 'the name of the CHEMARIMS [a Hebrew term for idolatrous priests of Baal] with the [Levitical?] priests'; see Hos. 10:5 margin, 'and them that worship the host of**

<sup>i</sup> In my May 2012 Commentary, "[Jeremiah and Lamentations](#)" and "[May 2012 Newsletter](#)" I give some background about the period of Jeremiah and the death of Josiah that I discuss in my short article, "[The Book of Lamentations](#)." It is the central book of the Megillot. See Dr. Martin's articles, "[Megillot in Prophecy](#)" and "[The Symbolism of Biblical Holydays](#)."

<sup>j</sup> The name Zephaniah means "Yah hides," or "Yah has hidden" or "treasured."

heaven upon the housetops, and them that worship and that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham.’

Fulfilled by Josiah (2 Kings 23:4–5). Josiah’s reformation was begun in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, and was completed in the 18<sup>th</sup>. Zephaniah in denouncing the different forms of idolatry paved the way for Josiah’s work, and probably cooperated with the king from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> year.

Jewish tradition says that Zephaniah had as his colleagues Jeremiah, labouring in the thoroughfares and market places, and Huldah the prophetess in the college in Jerusalem. His position among the prophets, and his quotations from Joel, Amos, and Isaiah, indicate the correctness of the date assigned to him in Zephaniah 1:1.

In Zephaniah 1:8, ‘I will punish the king’s children’ must refer to coming judgments on the foreseen idolatries of the younger members of the royal family (Jeremiah 22:19; Jeremiah 39:6; 2 Kings 23:31–32, 36–37; 2 Chronicles 36:5–6; 2 Kings 20:18). Not only the masses, but even princes, should not escape the penalty of idolatry. ‘The remnant of Baal’ (Zephaniah 1:4) implies that Josiah’s reformation was already begun but not completed.

- “Zephaniah,” in Fausset Bible Dictionary

When reading the prophecies of Zephaniah (given during Josiah’s reign) note that much mention is made of a period called the “Day of YHWH” (or “Day of the Lord” in the King James Version) which refers to the end-time ahead in our future. Those prophecies for his time likely take place after Josiah’s death.

“For Yahweh is not casting off for the eon; indeed though He afflicts, yet He has compassion according to the abundance of His benignities [mercies].”

- *Lamentations 3:31–32*

## Conclusion

Josiah, the leaders, and people of Judah experienced what the apostle Paul describes in the first chapter of Romans. Unfortunately, the people did not have God’s Spirit to help them change their lives, and they became an example of failure for us. They were on a downward slide to degradation and destruction through God’s instrument of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army. A later statement by the apostle Paul is relevant. Romans 1:21–32 also applies to the time of Josiah and the coming destruction and exile of Judah:

<sup>21</sup> “... because, knowing God, not as God do they glorify or thank Him, but vain were they made in their reasonings, and darkened is their unintelligent heart. <sup>22</sup> Alleging themselves to be wise, they are made stupid, <sup>23</sup> and they change the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of a corruptible human being and flying creatures and quadrupeds and reptiles.

<sup>24</sup> Wherefore God gives them over, in the lusts of their hearts, to the uncleanness of dishonoring their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> those who alter the truth of God into the lie, and are venerated, and offer divine service to the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed for the eons! Amen!

<sup>26</sup> Therefore God gives them over to dishonorable passions. For their females, besides, alter the natural use into that which is beside nature. <sup>27</sup> Likewise also the males, besides, leaving the natural use of the female, were inflamed in their craving for one another, males with males effecting indecency, and getting back in themselves the retribution of their deception which must be.

<sup>28</sup> And according as they do not test God, to have Him in recognition, God gives them over to a disqualified mind, to do that which is not befitting, <sup>29</sup> filled with all injustice, wickedness, evil, greed, distended with envy, murder, strife, guile, depravity, whisperers, <sup>30</sup> vilifiers, detesters of God, outragers, proud, ostentatious, inventors of evil things, stubborn to parents, <sup>31</sup> unintelligent, perfidious [faithless], without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: <sup>32</sup> those who, recognizing the just statute of God, that those committing such things are deserving of death, not only are doing them, but are endorsing, also, those who are committing them [by keeping quiet about the sins and evils].”

To understand how sinful and evil the social and religious situation was in Judah at this time and in its history, read my articles “[Magic in the Bible](#)” and “[Human Sacrifice in Scripture](#).”

David Sielaff, August 2021