

# Josiah Brings Reform

Printed Text • 2 Kings 22:8-10; 23:1-3, 21-23

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE the events that led Josiah to renew the covenant; SENSE our need for spiritual renewal; and SEEK spiritual renewal and ENGAGE in at least one activity that will help us experience spiritual renewal.

## In Focus

Marcus and Felicia had been happily married for years (or so Felicia thought) when she discovered that Marcus had been seeing another woman for nearly three months. The news of the affair devastated Felicia. For months she was on an emotional roller coaster. One moment she was angry, and the next moment she was either bitter or just confused. All Felicia knew was that she loved her husband and wanted to keep her family together. She couldn't understand why Marcus would jeopardize their marriage and all they had worked together to build. For months after Marcus ended the affair, the couple struggled with Marcus' indiscretion. Finally, they decided to seek marriage counseling.

After a year of intense counseling, Marcus and Felicia worked through their problems and were reconciled. Felicia was able to forgive her husband's indiscretion and began to trust him once again. God had given them a second chance. As a show of their renewed relationship, the couple decided to renew their marriage covenant. They did so by inviting all their family and friends to witness what God had done in their lives.

God gives us second chances if we accept responsibility and seek to reestablish our relationship with Him. In today's lesson, King Josiah calls the people together and leads them in a renewal of the covenant.

## Keep In Mind

"And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant" (2 Kings 23:3. KJV).

## Words You Should Know

**A. Covenant** (2 Kings 23:3) beriyth (Heb.) – An agreement that involves promises on the part of each participant.

**B. Stood** (v. 3) 'a m a d (Heb.) – To stand (by, fast, firm, still, up), take one's stand, or present oneself.

**C. Passover** (v. 21) pecach (Heb.) – To pass, spring over, or spare (Exodus 12:13, 23, 27; cf. Isaiah 31:5). The Passover was an annual Hebrew festival commemorating the last meal eaten in Egypt, in preparation for the Exodus, as Yahweh passed over the protected houses of the Hebrews, slaying only Egypt's firstborn (Exodus 12:12 ff; 13:2, 12).

## Say It Correctly

**Covenant.** cov-e-NANT

**Jerusalem.** je-ru-SA-lem

## KJV

**2 Kings 22:8** And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

9 And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord.

10 And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

**2 Kings 23:1** And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.

2 And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.

3 And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

21 And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant.

22 Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah;

23 But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the Lord in Jerusalem..

## NLT

**2 Kings 22:8** Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the court secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the Lord's Temple!" Then Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and he read it.

9 Shaphan went to the king and reported, "Your officials have turned over the money collected at the Temple of the Lord to the workers and supervisors at the Temple."

10 Shaphan also told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." So Shaphan read it to the king.

**2 Kings 23:1** Then the king summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

2 And the king went up to the Temple of the Lord with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, along with the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. There the king read to them the entire Book of the Covenant that had been found in the Lord's Temple.

3 The king took his place of authority beside the pillar and renewed the covenant in the Lord's presence. He pledged to obey the Lord by keeping all his commands, laws, and decrees with all his heart and soul. In this way, he confirmed all the terms of the covenant that were written in the scroll, and all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

21 King Josiah then issued this order to all the people: "You must celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as required in this Book of the Covenant."

22 There had not been a Passover celebration like that since the time when the judges ruled in Israel, nor throughout all the years of the kings of Israel and Judah.

23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah's reign, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Josiah.** Considered one of the best of all the kings of Judah who followed David, Josiah was the son of the godless Amon and the grandson of the wicked Manasseh (2 Kings 21). Ascending to the

throne at age 8, Josiah was apparently blessed with God-fearing advisors who resisted the idolatrous influence of his father and grandfather.

At the age of 16, in the eighth year of his reign, Josiah personally “began to seek the God of David, his father” (2 Chronicles 34:3). It was at this point that he began to purify Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry (2 Kings 22:1–2).

The three decades of Josiah’s reign were among the happiest years experienced by Judah. They were characterized by peace, prosperity, and reform. King Josiah dedicated himself to pleasing God and led Israel in their renewed observance of the Mosaic Law. It is a testimony to the grace of God that a wicked king like Amon could have such a godly son and successor. The spiritual reform brought about by Josiah climaxes with the discovery of the Book of the Law in the eighteenth year of his reign and the celebration of the Passover (2 Kings 22:8–23; 23).

Even though he never knew his great-grandfather Hezekiah, Josiah was like him in many ways. Both had close personal relationships with God. Both were passionate reformers, working diligently to lead their people back to God. Both were bright flashes of obedience to God among a succession of evil kings.

Although Josiah’s father and grandfather were exceptionally wicked, his life is an example of God’s desire to guide those who set out to be obedient. Even when he was young, Josiah understood that his land was spiritually sick. Idols were everywhere. Josiah began by destroying whatever he recognized as not belonging to the worship of the true God. He continued by renovating the temple, and, in the process, he rediscovered God’s Word. Certainly, Josiah was someone to emulate. He began well, continued well, and ended well.

## Background

The covenant between God and His people is one of the most important overarching theological concepts interwoven throughout the Bible. When God made a covenant with Abram (Genesis 12), He promised to bless Abram’s descendants and to make them His special people. In return, Abram was to remain faithful to God and to serve as a channel through which God’s blessings could flow to the rest of the world.

In the Mosaic covenant at Sinai, the Israelites promised with an oath to keep the commands of the covenant as found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:3; Deuteronomy 4:13). Their obedience was to be rewarded by God’s care and provision, prosperity, victory over their enemies, and the outpouring of God’s Spirit (Exodus 23:20–33). Curses would follow disobedience.

Over and over again, the Israelites broke their oath. In contrast, God did not and does not break His promises. His oath to raise up believing children to Abraham (Genesis 22:16–17) is an everlasting covenant that He continues to keep today (Genesis 17:7).

### At-A-Glance

1. Josiah Recognized Sin and Repented (2 Kings 22:8–10)
2. Josiah Renewed His Covenant Relationship with God (23:1–3)
3. Josiah Publicly Celebrated His Relationship with God (vv. 21–23)

# In Depth

## 1. Josiah Recognized Sin and Repented (2 Kings 22:8–10)

Josiah began to diligently seek the God of his father David when he was still no more than 16 years old. In the 12th year of his reign, at age 20, he began to purify Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry. It was in the 18th year of his reign (22:8), during his renovation of Solomon's temple, that the Book of the Law was found by the high priest and read before him (vv. 8–28).

When Josiah heard the law (22:11), he was shocked, frightened, and humbled. In grief, he tore his robes and immediately instituted more reforms designed to lead his people back to God. It took just one reading of God's law to compel him to change both the course of his life and that of the nation.

The Word of God should cause us, like Josiah, to immediately take action to reform our lives and bring them into harmony with God's will. The hardest part of repentance is changing the attitudes that produced the sinful behavior in the first place. What needs to be changed in our lives?

## 2. Josiah Renewed His Covenant Relationship with God (23:1–3)

Josiah did more than repent when the law was read to him—he took action! First, he renewed his personal covenant relationship with God. Then, he led the nation in renewing their covenant before the Lord. To show their consent, all the people stood up, thereby binding themselves to obedience. In general, they were covenanting: (a) to serve only the one true God, (b) to faithfully regulate their conduct by the mandates presented in the law, and (c) to serve God and follow His commands with their whole heart and soul. It is up to each one of us to personally enter into covenant with God and to walk in obedience to that covenant. No one can do it for us. Blessings follow those who obey, while curses follow those who disobey. Similarly, just as King Josiah led the nation in renewing their covenant, we also have a responsibility to positively affect those who look to us for leadership. Parents, employers, teachers, mentors, and peers are all to take steps to impact those over whom they have influence.

## 3. Josiah Publicly Celebrated His Relationship with God (vv. 21–23)

God had commanded that the Israelites celebrate the Passover as a yearly holiday in remembrance of their sovereign deliverance from Egyptian slavery (Numbers 9:1–4), but this had not been done for many years. As a result, during the days of the judges who led Israel, and throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, the Passover had not been observed.

The Passover was an important festival because it was a kind of sacrament uniting the nation to God on the basis of God's grace to them. Every part of the festival and meal had God-ordained symbolic meaning. When Josiah rediscovered the Passover in the Book of the Covenant, he ordered everyone to observe the ceremonies exactly as prescribed.

As is stated in 2 Kings 23:22, "Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah." In other words, this Passover celebration stood out from those in the past in its manner and spirit. It had more enthusiastic participation, was based on purer principles, and was more religiously observed (2 Chronicles 35:1–18). African American Christians have much to celebrate. Not only have we been delivered from chattel slavery, but we have been liberated from the bondage of sin! In our churches and homes, we need to celebrate with words and songs of praise. In our places of employment, we can have an attitude of joyful celebration as we give testimony of the great things He has done in our

lives! After all, we have been bought with a price . . . have access to God . . . have newness of life . . . are complete in Him! (See John 10:10; Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Colossians 2:10.)

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Why is Josiah described as being one of the best Israelite kings (2 Kings 22:1–2; 23:25)?
2. What happened when the priest read the Book of the Law to King Josiah (vv. 11–13; 23:3–24)?
3. What does it mean to be in covenant with the Lord (v. 3)?
4. What does it mean when Scripture says the people “stood” as Josiah was leading them in the renewal of their covenant (v. 3)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Do you think most Christians have an idea of what it means to be in a covenant relationship with God? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the idols in our society?
3. What are some common attitudes that Christians need to change?
4. What are some Christlike attitudes and behaviors we need to be more careful to express in our homes?
5. What are some ways that we can celebrate what Christ has done in our lives?

### **Liberating Lesson**

Although Josiah’s father and grandfather were extremely wicked, his life is an example of God’s willingness to provide ongoing guidance to those who set out to be obedient. Even when he was young, Josiah understood that there was spiritual sickness in his land. Idols were everywhere. Josiah began his search for God by “cleaning up” whatever he recognized as not belonging to the worship of the true God. As he did so, God’s Word was rediscovered. The king’s intentions and the power of God’s written revelation were brought together. Like Josiah, it’s time for all Christians to rediscover the power of God’s Word!

### **Application For Activation**

How would you describe your relationship with God? Today God’s Word is easily accessible. How much change must you make in order to bring your life into alignment with God’s teachings? Are you deeply humbled, realizing that you desperately need Him to cleanse and renew you? Good intentions and reforms are not enough. You must allow yourself to be truly humbled and changed by God’s Word. What is God saying to you today? When Josiah realized the terrible state of Judah’s religious life, he did something about it. It is not enough to say we believe what is right; we must respond with action, doing what faith requires. This is what James was emphasizing when he wrote, “faith that does not result in good deeds is useless” (James 2:20, NLT). This means that faith requires acting differently at home, school, work, and church. It’s not enough to simply talk about obedience. Think about some attitudes and actions that God wants you to change.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### 2 Kings 22:8–10; 23:1–3, 21–23

The kings of Judah had neglected the temple of God, and it fell into ruin. Desecrated with Baal worship, Ashtoreth idols, administrative abandonment, and absence of godly worshipers, the temple merely reflected Israel's spiritual condition. Exposed to and moved by the prophet Jeremiah's preaching, young King Josiah set out to repair the temple buildings and restore the godly worship of Yahweh. Thanks to his leadership, Israel experienced spiritual renewal throughout the nation.

At the helm of this revival was Josiah, whose name means "whom Yahweh heals." The son of King Amon, Josiah ascended to the throne at 8 years old, began rebuilding the temple and restoring the worship of Yahweh at 16 years old, reigned over Judah for 31 years, and was fatally injured in battle and died at 39 years old. King Josiah was assisted in this spiritual revival by many people, but most notably by Hilkiah (khil-kee-yaw', whose name means "my portion is Yahweh"), who served as a high priest in charge of restoring the temple under Josiah's reign; and Shaphan (shaw-fawn'), a Levite who served as a secretary, or scribe, to King Josiah.

**8 And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.**

As Hilkiah and Shaphan carried out Josiah's instructions in 2 Kings 22:3–7 to restore the temple, they discovered the Book of the Law (cf. Deuteronomy 28:58–61). In Hebrew terminology and understanding, "book of the law" specifically refers to the Torah (to-law'), or the first five books of the Bible (also called the book of Moses or the Pentateuch). These "books" were guidelines for moral authority, godly worship, and pious living, as opposed to a list of prohibitions and consequences.

It may be profitable to understand that the word "LORD" displayed in this manner (i.e., with all capital letters) is a translation of the word Yahweh (yaway), which means "the existing One" and is the proper name of the one true God. This is significant in this passage since the Book of the Law was found in God's temple—a book that had been neglected by God's kings in the process of worshiping false gods. Hilkiah's discovery must have certainly resulted in great delight, awe, and distress. In his excitement, Hilkiah handed over the book to be read by his assistant Shaphan, even though it would have been appropriate that Hilkiah read the book himself.

**9 And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD.**

Following Josiah's instructions (2 Kings 22:3–7), Hilkiah and Shaphan indeed find a great treasury of money available to pay the artisans who labored to restore the temple and the surrounding buildings. The money referred to here amounted to about 10 years' worth of undocumented tithes and offerings given by the people for temple service and upkeep. These funds were duly collected during Amon's reign, yet they had not been used for the priestly portion or the building fund. Josiah so trusted the

priests in the temple as men of integrity and honesty, that he instructed the money simply be gathered and distributed among the workers. As instructed, Hilkiah, the high priest turned project manager, collected all the money and distributed it honestly without account or accountability.

Shaphan was charged with the task of making a progress report to Josiah. He reported that the restorative work was on schedule, that the reserved finances were being managed, and that the Book of the Law had been recovered from the rubble of the temple ruin.

**10 And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.**

The word “book” (Heb. *cepher*, say'-fer) can refer to a common letter, instructions, written order, commission, request, written decree, or law book. In this instance, it refers to excerpts of the Deuteronomic law recorded in Deuteronomy 28–31, which describe God’s fierce judgment upon people who disregard His words. In 2 Chronicles 34:14, this book is referred to as the “book of the Law of the LORD given by Moses, which implies that these scrolls might have been transcribed by Moses and could very well have included Moses’ signature. Shaphan assumes his usual duty as a scribe, or secretary, and reads the book to Josiah as written.

To flesh out what takes place between this verse and the next verse assigned in this lesson, you are encouraged to read 2 Kings 22:11–20. This interlude records Josiah’s repentant response to what he heard, his beckoning his spiritual leaders and prayer partners to seek God’s face concerning national repentance and the restoration of the covenant, and the word of a prophetess to interpret Yahweh’s denunciation of the people. Like a male prophet, a female prophetess was called by God to speak for Him typically in the midst of a spiritual crisis of national proportions. It is the prophetess Huldah (*hul'da*) who announces the Word of the Lord to Josiah, which in essence was that “God [will] destroy this place and these people.” However, God would not do this while Josiah reigned because Josiah had sought the Lord with repentance and weeping.

**23:1 And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.**

Upon receiving this comforting and critical word from the prophetess Huldah, Josiah goes into action to revive the land and rid it of idolatry. The first thing he does is to call for a unified gathering of the “elders” (Heb. *zaqen*, *zaw-kane'*), or those having authority from the nations of Judah and Jerusalem.

**2 And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD.**

Josiah leads the procession from the courtyard to the temple. Following him into the presence of God is the unified force of godly priests, God’s prophets, and all the inhabitants of Israel, regardless of class or caste. With all the people present, Josiah does an unusual thing – he begins to read the book. The magnitude of the task of restoring the temple and Josiah’s passion for inciting a revival of godly worship moves him to personally read the book, even though it would have been appropriate, even expected, that the high priest Hilkiah, the scribe Shaphan, or any of the other priests or prophets present perform this task.

By assuming the position of mediator between God and the people, Josiah certainly demonstrates leadership by example. This book of the “covenant” (Heb. *beriyth*, *ber-eeth'*) is the divine ordinance with signs or pledges between God and Israel. Revival began in the land with the reading of all the words of the Lord, which were heard by all the people of the Lord.

**3 And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.**

Josiah “stood” (Heb. `amad, aw-mad’, which means “to appoint, ordain, or establish”), as one in a position of authority, on stairs (serving as a “pulpit”) to read the Book of the Covenant. While he preaches from this perch, Josiah renews the covenant made with Moses. This renewed covenant called for the people to take three distinct actions to demonstrate renewal: They were charged to “walk” (Heb. yalak, yawlak’, which connotes a manner of life) after the Lord, to “keep” (Heb. shamar, shaw-mar’, which means “to observe or celebrate”) God’s instructions, and to “perform” (Heb. quwom, koom, which means “to fulfill”) the words, vows, and acts of the covenant.

Josiah further admonishes the people that they must adhere to this renewed covenant with all their “heart” (Heb. leb, labe), which refers to the conscience will, understanding, and emotions, and with all their “soul” (Heb. nephesh, neh’-fesh), which refers to the emotions, passions, and character. In essence, the people were to move from habitual to wholehearted worship of the Lord. They were charged to resist rituals and respond in righteousness.

**23:21 And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant.**

And Josiah “commanded” (Heb. tsavah, tsaw-vaw’ meaning “to appoint or ordain as a divine act”) the people to keep the Passover. The Passover, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was the seven-day feast commemorating Israel’s deliverance from the Egyptians and the passing over of the death angel that smote the firstborn of every Egyptian home. It is recorded that Josiah restored and encouraged Israel’s priests to lead this “praise party” with much aplomb.

Keeping the Passover was one of the acts of worship on Josiah’s restoration and revival agenda. Reading the story in context, one would discover that Josiah’s plan was spiritually aggressive and physically thorough. He set out to remove all vestiges and evidences of the worship of Baal, Ashtoreth, and the “gods” of the sun, moon, earth, and sky. This included gathering up all the idols, poles, statues, and buried remains used in false worship and burning them outside the city walls; tearing down the shrines of the priests and prostitutes devoted to these false gods; destroying the rooftop altars and mountainous high places; defrocking the mediums and spiritists; and killing the pagan priests. For revival among God’s people, there was first the reading of the Word of the Lord, followed by a purging of the places where the people worshiped.

**22 Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah;**

**23 But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem.**

It is noted that Josiah led this spiritual revival. He is remembered as having “put his money where his mouth is” by providing over 30,000 sheep and goats and 3,000 cattle for anyone in need of an acceptable sacrifice for the temple. Josiah’s officials and priests followed his example of generosity and worship. This outpouring of worship was the direct result of the reading of the Word and the cleansing of the temple of foreign gods and their influences. However, it was not the opulence that made this revival so unforgettable. Yes, it was performed to the letter of the law; yet it was the purity of purpose, the participation of the people, and the pious pageantry that established this record of



acclaim. The extraordinary manner and spirit in which this Passover was observed is also recorded in 2 Chronicles 35:1–18. The people kept this renewed covenant as long as Josiah lived.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Deuteronomy 31:10-13

## **Tuesday**

Deuteronomy 31:24-26

## **Wednesday**

2 Chronicles 34:1-18

## **Thursday**

2 Chronicles 34:19-28

## **Friday**

Psalms 119:9-11

## **Saturday**

2 Kings 23:1-24

## **Sunday**

2 Kings 22:8-10; 23:1-3, 21-23