

2 Kings 23 (25) – There Was No King Like Him

Who was the greatest king of God's people in the Old Testament? You might think the greatest king was King David. Indeed, God said that David was a man after his own heart (1 Samuel 13:14 / cf. Acts 13:22). But David was not the greatest king of God's people. Our text today is not talking about David. Let me give you a clue. The greatest king also led the greatest revival the Israelites ever had. Now, in 2 Kings 22:2, we see how this greatest king *walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left*. That opening statement describing his life tells you of his faithful reign.

2 Kings 22-23 describe the greatness of this king and this great revival. Our text today says that this king *turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses. And that before him there was no king like him...nor did any like him arise after him*. And in 2 Kings 22:1, we see who this greatest king was. He was an 8-year-old boy, whose name was Josiah. He led the last revival of his people.

The time of Josiah's reign was preceded by a time of spiritual darkness and decline. But Josiah was stirred up, and things began to happen, as he sought the Lord faithfully and fervently. He had the Temple repaired. And in the Temple, the written word of God was rediscovered, and the flames of revival were rekindled. So, God focused and God ordained worship was reestablished. And the people renewed their commitment to God. Idols were removed. God granted repentance as people confessed their sins and separated themselves from those sins. The blood sacrifices were reinstated. The fear of God was restored and the people rejoiced. It was a true revival.

Josiah, the boy king, led a true revival that lasted his whole life. And his life is a testimony to what God can do through young people. Josiah did so much good, and all of this before he was 40 years old. He didn't even live to be 40 years old. But his life is an example to the church of what true revival looks like. Let's set the backdrop for Josiah's reign, and see how great a king he was, and what this revival was all about, and how this revival came about.

Josiah's reign was in the time around 640 B.C., to 609 B.C., between the fall of Israel into Assyrian captivity (2 Kings 17:6-12) and the fall of Jerusalem (and all Judah) into Babylonian captivity (2 Kings 21:10-15). And the fall of Israel and the fall of Judah were directly attributable to apostasy, idolatry, and false worship. And one of the references to false worship were the sites and shrines called the "high places." Many of these high places were on hills, built in the rural areas (1 Kings 14:23 / 2 Kings 16:4) and also in the cities (1 Kings 13:32 / 2 Kings 23:5 / 2 Chronicles 28:25). Some were originally intended as places to worship the One True God (1 Samuel 9:18-19), especially before the Temple was built (1 Kings 3:2). Some were a remnant of previous pagan shrines (Numbers 33:51-52). Some were built by God's people for the worship of other gods (1 Kings 11:7 / 2 Kings 21:1-5).

Moses had warned Israel that idolatry at the high places would ultimately lead to exile (Leviticus 26:30-33). And that is exactly what happened. The northern kingdom of Israel never stopped their idolatrous practices. After King Solomon died, in 931 B.C., the nation of Israel split in two. The ten northern tribes would continue to be called Israel, led by Jeroboam. The two southern tribes would be called Judah, led by Solomon's son, Rehoboam. After the division, there arose no good kings of Israel. Every king after Jeroboam was bad or worse. And in 722 B.C., Israel went into Assyrian captivity. But the southern kingdom of Judah did have some good kings, and some reforms to their idolatry, and it would last for another 136 years, until 586 B.C., when Judah went into the Babylonian captivity.

There were 8 good kings of Judah. Some were highly commended, and some were less commended. Still, while 6 of these 8 were said to be good, it is also said that they did not remove the high places (1 Kings 15:9-14, 22:41-43 / 2 Kings 12:1-3, 14:1-4; 15:1-4, 32-35). Only 2 good kings of Judah, Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-5) and Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-2), removed the high places.

And Josiah did even more. He repaired the broken-down Temple (2 Kings 22:3-7). He recovered the book of the Law and recommitted the people to it (2 Kings 22:8-23:3). He removed all the idols and such from the Temple (2

Kings 23:4). He deposed the priests and obliterated all the places and practices and objects of false worship in all of Judah (2 Kings 23:5-14).

Josiah went beyond Judah and into the former northern kingdom of Israel. The false worship that the wicked Jeroboam had instituted and other kings increased was still going on 300 years later, even 100 years after Israel had gone into Assyrian captivity. The altar of Jeroboam in Bethel was torn down (2 Kings 23:15-17), fulfilling a specific prophecy that was made 300 years earlier. 1 Kings 13:1-2 – *And behold, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the LORD to Bethel. Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make offerings. And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'"* Josiah destroyed all the high places, and dug up all the graves of the false priests and burned them on the altars, and any priests who were still there he killed and burnt them on the altars also. Josiah did this at Bethel and also at Samaria (2 Kings 23:18-20).

Josiah restored the Passover (2 Kings 23:21-23). And it was the greatest Passover in the history of Israel or Judah. He also ordered the removal of all private household gods, and prohibited all forms of spiritism and fortune telling (2 Kings 23:24). This revival was faithful, and full. And it was the final revival before God's people were led into Babylonian captivity. Josiah was a great king, and the greatest king (2 Kings 23:25). And the greatest king led the greatest revival. It lasted his whole life.

Speaking of Josiah's time, Kevin DeYoung says this about revival – So what is true revival? It is not generic spirituality, mere emotionalism, or utopian idealism. True revival is marked by a rediscovery of the word of God, a restored sense of the fear of God, a return to God through confession and repentance, a renewed spiritual commitment as God's people, and, finally, a reformation of true piety. Whether we use the word "revival" or not, this is what we should pray for, and these are the marks we should use to assess every movement of religious fervor—past, present, or future.

King Josiah led a true revival among God's people in Judah. But vs.25 isn't the end of the story. The story of Josiah and the high places teaches us that God has revealed his will for our worship, and that there is a price to pay for false worship. And God was still angry about all the previous idolatry. What Josiah did was great, but it didn't pay for the hundreds of years of sins before. 2 Kings 23:26-27 says – *Still the LORD did not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. And the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."* After Josiah, the people would descend into idolatry once again. And in 586 B.C., the southern kingdom of Judah went into Babylonian captivity.

The greatest king led the greatest revival. And that was good. And that is something we need to pray for, to live for, and to die to self for. But it wasn't enough then. And it will never be enough now. And that is the point. Reading the glory of vs.25, but then reading the grief of vs.26-27, this is meant to tell you something. The faithful life of King Josiah, and the true revival he faithfully led, it was not enough. It was great in its day. It lasted Josiah's whole life. But it didn't last after that. Actually, it wound up being a failure. Josiah could only do so much. He could only reform the nation so much. He could only restore the worship so much. No matter how much good he did, it could never be good enough. He could only stop sin so much. The Bible declares that this king was more wonderful than everyone else, but it also says he was too weak, just like everyone else. The greatest king of the OT, Josiah, could not save his people from the wrath of God.

However, Josiah's reign points us another King's reign. 2 Kings 23:25 says there was no king as great as Josiah. But Josiah didn't go through the punishment of vs.26-27. He couldn't pay for the people's sin. But Jesus did what Josiah couldn't. Jesus paid for the sins of all God's people for all time. Jesus took God's wrath on himself, and delivered his people from it. We need more than a revival in our day, we need Jesus Christ and his gospel every single day. The greatest king wasn't great enough. Only King Jesus is.