

America needs a 'Josiah' for the next American President



Article By Joel Rosenberg

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As the presidential campaign season heats up, Americans are trying to get to know the many candidates in both parties and determine who would be best to lead America in 2017 and beyond. Who has the right character, vision, and detailed, substantive, serious plans for reform? Who has the wisdom, experience and sound judgment? Who is ready for the enormous and complicated challenges facing this great country?

Choosing the right leader is not an easy process, but it is vitally important. America is on the **wrong track**, going in the wrong direction. We are heading steadily ? perhaps rapidly ? towards **implosion**. We've murdered 57 million babies. We have five Justices on the Supreme Court who have decided that the Bible is wrong and they know better than God what the definition of marriage should be. We have taken on \$18 trillion in debt and we're taking on more and more debt with no end in sight. We are surrendering to Russia, Iran and ISIS. Our tax code is corruptingly complex and killing jobs and opportunity. We can't ? or won't ? control our sovereign borders. Our schools are a mess. Violence, drugs and pornography are epidemic. Sadly, the list goes on and on.

So who can get us turned around and heading in the right direction? I've been praying about this and studying the Scriptures for many months, asking the Lord for clarity, and here is what I have concluded.

America needs a Josiah.

A President cannot save America from all our troubles, but leadership matters. We need a leader like the one-time King of Judah whom the Bible describes as one of the most humble, strong, wise and impressive leaders of all-time. Last week, at the Word of Life Bible camp in the Adirondack Mountains of Upstate New York, I taught a five-day series of messages titled, 'Living Like Jeremiah In A Time of Coming Judgment.' It was a survey of the life and times and ministry of the ancient Hebrew prophet Jeremiah. I'll post more notes from those messages in the days ahead. But on Day #2, I taught about the first of five kings under whom Jeremiah served. His name was Josiah and his story is one that offers great hope. So I'd like to post these notes first.

I hope you'll take a moment and read through these notes, and read through the accounts of King Josiah in **2 Kings 22-23** and **2 Chronicles 34-35**. At the end of these notes, you'll see some of my 'final thoughts' about how I believe the life and lessons of Josiah apply to our time and this presidential campaign. I hope you find this helpful. Please feel free to share with others.

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JOSIAH AND THE ROAD TO REFORM AND REVIVAL

Lessons from the life of Judah's most humble and godly king

At a time when Hebrew prophets like Jeremiah were warning of the coming judgment of the people of Jerusalem and Judah because they were refused to read, listen to, or obey the Word of God, the Lord mercifully raised up a leader who did, in fact, love the Lord his God and loved His Word.

His name was Josiah. A godly king, Josiah passionately sought the Lord in his private life and pursued bold, sweeping reforms in his public life to get the Jewish nation turned around and headed back in the right direction.

As a result, the Lord in His sovereignty graciously chose to forestall the promised coming judgment for more than two decades. Indeed, during Josiah's tenure in power, the Jewish people experienced one of the greatest periods of repentance, reform and revival in their ancient history.

In the end, however, when Josiah passed away, new leaders emerged and tragically they turned away from the Lord and led the people astray. Judgment came to the nation in 586 B.C. with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple at the hands of the Babylonian army.

Are there lessons from the life of Josiah for our nation at this time? Is it possible that the Lord might graciously raise up a leader like Josiah who loves Him and His Word and will boldly pursue serious reforms to help turn our nation around and get us headed back in the right direction? Despite our many sins and failures as a nation, might the Lord be willing to forestall judgment ? at least for a while ? and give us a season of great reform and revival?

These are important and intriguing questions. As we seek answers, let us begin by trying to better understand Josiah, his times, his nation, and his God.

Who was Josiah?

- Josiah was 8 years old when he became the king of Judah (2 Chronicles 34:1), that is around 627 B.C.
Josiah reigned for 31 years. (2 Chronicles 34:1)

The ESV Study Bible and the MacArthur Study Bible state Josiah reigned as king from 640 B.C. to 609 B.C.

The Jewish Virtual Library states Josiah reigned from 640 B.C.E. to 609 B.C.E. (see https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0011_0_10368.html)

The Jewish Encyclopedia states Josiah reigned from 639 B.C.E. to 608 B.C.E. (see <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8926-josiah>)

Josiah's grandfather was Manasseh, the most wicked king in the history of Judah (2 Kings 21:1-18).

- Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king (2 Kings 21:1)
- Manasseh ?did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel.? (2 Kings 21:2)
- Manasseh was the most evil king in the history of Judah and during his reign idol worship, witchcraft, and child sacrifice were practiced. Indeed, the Bible states that ?Manasseh seduced them [the people of Judah to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel.? (see 2 Kings 21:3-9, and particularly verse 9).
- Because of the evil done during the reign of Manasseh, terrible judgment was coming and it was certain. ?Now the Lord spoke through His servants the prophets? that ?I am bringing calamity on Jerusalem and Judah? and ?I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish?.I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they will

become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies because they have done evil in My sight, and have been provoking Me.? (see 2 Kings 21:10-15)

Josiah's father was Amon, another wicked king of Judah. (2 Kings 21:24)

- Amon was 22 years old when he became king. (2 Kings 21:19)
- Amon reigned for only two years before being assassinated. (2 Chronicles 33:21, 2 Kings 21:23)
- Amon ?did evil in the sight of the Lord, as Manasseh his father had done.? (2 Kings 21:20)
- Amon ?walked in all the ways that his father [Manasseh had walked, the idols that his father had served and worshipped them.? (2 Kings 21:21)
- Amon ?forsook the Lord, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the Lord.? (2 Kings 21:22)
- ?The servants of Amon conspired against him and killed the king in his own house.? (2 Kings 21:23)

Josiah's mother was ?Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath.? (2 Kings 22:1)

- Jedidah became a widow at a fairly young age, as Amon was only 24 when he was assassinated (2 Kings 21:23)
- The Scriptures do not tell us whether Jedidah played a positive spiritual role in the life of Josiah.

What was the turning point in Josiah's life?

- The Bible tells us that Josiah was about 15 or 16 years old (in the eighth year of his reign) when ?he began to seek the God of his father David.? (2 Chronicles 34:2)
- Josiah was about 19 or 20 years old (in the twelfth year of his reign) when he began ?to purge Judah and Jerusalem? of the idols and altars and places of false worship. (2 Chronicles 34:2-7)

Josiah was about 26 years old when he directed the High Priest (Hilkiah) to hire workers to clean up and repair the Temple in Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 34:8-13)

- It was during this process that a lost copy of ?the book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses? was found in the Temple. (2 Chronicles 34:14)
- The king asked that the word of the Lord be read to him and it was read to him. (2 Kings 22:8-10)
- ?When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded [his servants, ?Go and inquire of the Lord for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do all that is written concerning us.?' (2 Kings 22:8-10)
- Hearing the very word of God had a tremendously powerful impact on Josiah. As the king heard the word of God ? as it was read to him and as he listened to it carefully ? he suddenly understood its import.
- Josiah understood that while he was making some good reforms, he still was not leading the nation in the right direction.
- Josiah understood that the leaders of the nation before him hadn't led the nation in the right direction, that they had ignored and defied the Lord and his word, and that there were enormous consequences facing them for having taken this path.
- Josiah understood that certain judgment was coming.
- Josiah, thus asked his advisors to seek the Lord to find out whether there was any way to turn the ship of state around, as it were, to get back on the right track and to avoid cataclysmic judgment.
- Josiah's advisors ? including the High Priest ? apparently did not know the Lord well enough to seek the word of the Lord directly. So they sought out a true servant of God who was living in Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 34:20-22)

What was the message that the Lord sent to Josiah?

- The Lord saw Josiah's anguish over the wrong direction his nation was going in, and in His mercy the Lord sent a message to the king through a prophetess named Huldah. (2 Chronicles 34:22-30)
- This is the message Josiah received:

Judgment is coming to the nation because the people have turned against the Lord and His word ? it is deserved, it is certain, it will come to pass, and nothing can be done to stop it.

- ?Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read.? (2 Kings 22:16)
- ?Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched.? (2 Kings 22:17)

However, because Josiah's heart is so tender before the Lord and because when he heard the word of the Lord he humbled himself and repented and sought to obey the Lord, God sovereignly chooses to delay the certain coming judgment until after Josiah passed away.]

- ?But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the Lord thus you shall say to him?.[Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what 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 truly have heard you,' declares the Lord.? (2 Kings 22:18-19)
- ?Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place.? (2 Kings 22:20)

What kind of reforms did Josiah make during time in power?

- Josiah purged the land of idol worship. (2 Chronicles chapter 34:3-7)
- Josiah ordered the Temple to be cleaned and repaired (2 Chronicles 34:8-13)
- Josiah made the reading and studying of the Bible a top priority for the Jewish people. The Scriptures state that he called together ?all? the leaders of Jerusalem and Judah and ?all the people? of Jerusalem and Judah and personally ?read in their hearing all the words of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.? (2 Chronicles 34:29-30)
- Josiah publicly made a covenant before the Lord and all the people ?to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes which all his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant written in the book [the Bible].? (2 Chronicles 34:31)
- Josiah led the people to join him in this covenant to serve the Lord with all their heart and soul, ?so all the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers? and ?throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following the Lord God of their fathers.? (2 Chronicles 34:32-33)
- Beginning when he was about 26, Josiah reinstituted the celebration of the Passover to remind the people of God's might and mercy, and it had never been celebrated so widely or in such a special manner as during the days of Josiah. (2 Chronicles chapter 35, see especially 35:18)

How did the Lord regard Josiah?

- Josiah always did right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father, David, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. (2 Chronicles 34:2)
- Before him there was no king like him who 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. (2 Kings 23:25)
- Nor did any [king like him arise after him. (2 Kings 23:25)
- When Josiah eventually died, he was buried in the tombs of his fathers and all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. (2 Chronicles 35:24)
- Jeremiah was particularly broken-hearted by the death of King Josiah. Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. And all the male and female singers speak about Josiah in their lamentation to this day. And they made them an ordinance in Israel; behold, they are also written in the Lamentations. (2 Chronicles 35:25)

Did the Lord cancel the coming judgment because of Josiah's faithfulness?

- No.
- The Lord delayed but did not cancel the coming judgment of Judah and Jerusalem because of Josiah's faithfulness to Him and His word.
- Josiah died around 609 B.C.
- Judah and Jerusalem were destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonian empire, in fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies.

How long did the Lord delay the judgment of Jerusalem and Judah?

- Remarkably, the Lord delayed the prophesied and certain judgment of Jerusalem and Judah for 22 ½ years beyond the life of Josiah.

This means that 53 ½ years passed between the time Josiah ascended to the throne to the time the divine judgment of Jerusalem and Judah came to pass in 586 B.C. under the reign of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. (31 years of Josiah's reign + 22 ½ years of the reigns of other kings)

- Jehoahaz succeeded Josiah as king and reigned for three months in Jerusalem, but he did evil in the sight of the Lord and was arrested and imprisoned by an Egyptian Pharaoh (see 2 Kings 23:28-33).
- Eliakim (who changed his name to Jehoiakim) was made the next king and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem but he did evil in the sight of the Lord. (2 Kings 23:34-37)
- Jehoiachin was the next king, he reigned three months in Jerusalem, but he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and then the Babylonian empire came to conquer the Jews and Jehoiachin was taken into exile in Babylon. (2 Kings 24:1-16)
- Mattaniah was made the next king of Judah by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, who changed his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years under Babylonian sovereignty. In the end, however, the Babylonians slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon. Then, in 586 B.C., the commander of the Babylonian forces burned the house of the Lord, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem and then the rest of the people who were left in the city [were carried away into exile. (see 2 Kings 24:17-20 and 2 Kings chapter 25)

What were the godly spiritual influences in Josiah's life that helped him turn to the Lord?

- The Bible does not give us precise clarity about how the Lord began to work so powerfully in Josiah's life, but it does give us clues.

Let's start with the negative.

- Clearly, Josiah's father was not a positive influence, and the Scriptures are silent as to any positive influence his mother was

on his spiritual life.

There is little, if any, evidence that Hilkiah ? the chief priest ? was a positive influence on Josiah.

- Neither the accounts in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles provides evidence that Hilkiah has provided godly counsel to Josiah during his youth.
- Neither account provides evidence that Hilkiah has ever set foot in the Temple prior to King Josiah ordering its restoration.
- Both accounts suggest Hilkiah was as surprised as everybody else concerning his discovery of the ?book of the law of the Lord given by Moses? in the Temple.
- Hilkiah does not take it upon himself to read the Scriptures to the king, but gives the job to Shaphan the scribe.
- Neither account suggests that Hilkiah tore his robes when he hears the Scriptures read, in sharp contrast to Josiah's reaction.
- When King Josiah commands Hilkiah and his colleagues to ?go, inquire of the Lord? concerning the coming judgment of Judah for her disobedience to God and His word, neither Hilkiah nor his colleagues appear to have a relationship with the Lord that they can go seek Him on their own. Instead, they have to seek out the wife of the keeper of the wardrobe to see if she can talk to the Lord on their behalf.
- It is Josiah ? not Hilkiah ? who calls the leaders and people of the nation together to read the word of the Lord to them.
- It is Josiah ? not Hilkiah ? who calls the people to celebrate Passover as they have never celebrated it before.
- Some commentators speak well of Hilkiah for finding the lost Scriptural scroll and presiding over the Passover, but I see no evidence that these were his ideas, or that he provided either the king or nation godly, Biblical counsel much less godly leadership. By comparison, we have the example of Ezra who as both priest and scribe showed true spiritual leadership ? in close cooperation with Nehemiah the governor ? in helping the Jewish people turn back to the Lord.

Now, let's consider the positive.

Josiah's great-grandfather was Hezekiah, who was one of the most-godly kings in the ancient history of Judah ? and one of its boldest reformers ? even though he certainly made mistakes. While Josiah never met Hezekiah, it is very likely that he learned of his great-grandfather's story of faith and bold reform as he was educated in the palace.

- Hezekiah became king at 25 years old. (2 Chronicles 29:1)
- Hezekiah reigned for 29 years. (2 Chronicles 29:1)
- Hezekiah ?did right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.? (2 Chronicles 29:2)
- Hezekiah ?opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them.? (2 Chronicles 29:3, and see all of chapter 29)
- Hezekiah restored the Temple worship. (2 Chronicles 29:20-36)
- Hezekiah reinstituted the celebration of the Passover to remind the people of God's might and mercy. (2 Chronicles chapter 30)
- Hezekiah destroyed idol worship throughout the land. (2 Chronicles chapter 31)
- Hezekiah was a man who prayed to the Lord and the Lord answered his prayers (2 Chronicles 32)

In God's tremendous grace and mercy, Josiah's wicked grand-father, Manasseh, was miraculously converted, forgiven and saved before his death.

- Manasseh died when Josiah was only four years old.
- However, Manasseh was a true believer for some ? and possibly all ? of those four years.
- While Manasseh's dramatic conversion made no impact on Josiah's father, Amon, Manasseh may have prayed for and given special attention to little Josiah.
- It is also possible that some of palace staff could have passed along some of the story of Manasseh's conversion to young Josiah as he grew up in the palace.

Consider 2 Chronicles 33:10-20:

- ?When he [Manasseh was in distress, he entreated the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of Israel.
- ?When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom.
- ?Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God?.
- ?He [Manasseh also removed the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord?.
- ?He set up the altar of the Lord?.
- ?He ordered Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel?..?
- During Josiah's reign, God graciously raised up a series of prophets, including Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk to declare the word of the Lord. There is little, if any, Scriptural evidence that Zephaniah or Habakkuk had a relationship with King Josiah, though we can be fairly confident that a monarch who loved the Lord as much as Josiah did would have wanted to hear what the Lord was saying through such prophets.

There is some Scriptural evidence of a relationship between Josiah and Jeremiah.

- The prophet Jeremiah was called by the Lord into ministry during the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign, when Josiah was 21 years old. (Jeremiah 1:1-2)

God raised up Jeremiah specifically to speak the word of the Lord to the Jewish nation, the Jewish leaders, including the king, as well as to the nations surrounding Judah.

- ?Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.? (Jeremiah 1:5)
- ?See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.? (Jeremiah 1:9)
- ?Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, and to the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you,? declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 1:18-19)

- Josiah and Jeremiah were likely the same age, or nearly so. Many Biblical commentators say Jeremiah was in his late teens or early twenties when he was called into ministry.

Might the two young men know each other growing up? We cannot say for certain, but it is possible.

- We know that Josiah was born and raised in the town of Anathoth, which was only 3 miles northeast of Jerusalem, the capital, where Josiah was born and raised. (Jeremiah 1:1)
- Jeremiah was born into a priestly family and his father was named Hilkiah. (Jeremiah 1:1) This priestly role may have brought the family into Jerusalem on a regular basis.
- Is it possible that this is the same Hilkiah who was the High Priest? While many Biblical commentators believe the answer is ?no,? some believe Jeremiah's father might have been the High Priest. If so, then that could have been Josiah and Jeremiah into contact.

- Again, Jeremiah was called into ministry was Josiah was 21. But it wasn't until Josiah was 26 years old (?in the eighteenth year of his reign,? according to 2 Chronicles 34:8) that Josiah ordered the Temple to be cleaned and restored and the book of the law was discovered and read to him. What kind of conversations and times of prayer was Jeremiah having with Josiah during these five years?
- Josiah reigned as king in Jerusalem for 31 years. (2 Kings 22:1) Jeremiah served as an active prophet of the Lord God Almighty for 18 years of those years. What kind of conversations and times of prayer was Jeremiah having with Josiah during these 18 years?

While the Scriptures do not give us any details, it is reasonable to believe that Josiah was trying to persuade his children to follow the Lord and read and heed the Scriptures. It is also reasonable to believe that Jeremiah was encouraging the king in this regard. It is also reasonable to believe that Jeremiah's heart broke as he saw Josiah's sons ? the future kings of Judah ? refusing to turn to the Lord and His word.

- ?Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithfulness.? (Jeremiah 3:22)
- ?It shall come about in that day,? declares the Lord, ?that the heart of the king and the heart of the princes will fail??.? (Jeremiah 4:9)
- ?For My people are foolish, they know Me not; they are stupid children and have no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, but to do good they do not know.? (Jeremiah 4:22)
- ?The word of the Lord also came to me saying, ?You shall not take a wife for yourself nor have sons or daughters in this place.' For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bear them, and their fathers who beget them in this land: ?They will die of deadly diseases, they will not be lamented or buried?.'. Then you are to say to them??.?You?have done evil, even more than your forefathers; for behold, you are each one walking according to the stubbornness of his own evil heart, without listening to Me. So I will hurl you out of this land into the land which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers; and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will grant you no favor.'? (Jeremiah 16:1-4, 11-13)
- The Book of Jeremiah refers to Josiah no fewer than 16 times. (Jeremiah 1:1-2, 1:3, 3:6, 22:11, 22:18, 25:1, 25:3, 26:1, 27:1, 35:1, 36:1, 36:2, 36:9, 37:1, 45:1, 46:2)
- When King Josiah died, he ?was buried in the tombs of his fathers? and ?all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.? (2 Chronicles 35:24) Jeremiah was present for the burial of Josiah, was particularly broken-hearted by Josiah's death, because he knew that great evil and terrible judgments were coming.
- Jeremiah influenced the nation on how to mourn for and remember this godly king. ?Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. And all the male and female singers speak about Josiah in their lamentation to this day. And they made them an ordinance in Israel; behold, they are also written in the Lamentations.? (2 Chronicles 35:25)

Final Thoughts

- Like the nation of Judah in its day, America is heading towards implosion, towards judgment.
- Only the grace and mercy of God can get us turned around and heading in the right direction.
- We need a great revival and a Great Awakening.
- We need leaders like Jeremiah who are willing to preach and teach the Word of God and warn the country of how much danger we are in.
- We also need a leader like Josiah who will humbly seek the Lord and boldly make serious, sweeping reforms.
- I'm not looking for a Pastor-in-Chief or Theologian-in-Chief to be President of the United States ? the role of President isn't the same in the U.S. as the role of king was in the days of Judah.
- The Church's job is to pray, fast, repent, preach, teach, disciple and lead a great moral and spiritual revival ? that is not the

President's job.

- The President's job is to follow the Constitution, protect the American people's safety, protect the American people's God-given rights and liberties, create the conditions for economic growth and opportunity, and lead the Free World in a time of great peril and volatility.
- That said, I am looking for a President who loves the Lord, reads and loves God's Word, is humble, is strong, is clear-sighted, will pursue bold reforms and can call the nation together to head in the right direction.
- I'm not going to make a quick decision of whom to support. I'm going to pray for wisdom and clarity and discernment and see if a true Josiah emerges over the next few months.
- I hope you will do the same.

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