

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Return to Nevertheless Land”

Second Kings 23:25-30

2 Kings 23:25 Now before him [Josiah] there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did *any* arise like him.

2 Kings 23:26 Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him.

2 Kings 23:27 And the LORD said, "I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.' "

2 Kings 23:28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

2 Kings 23:29 In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went to the aid of the king of Assyria, to the River Euphrates; and King Josiah went against him. And *Pharaoh Necho* killed him at Megiddo when he confronted him.

2 Kings 23:30 Then his servants moved his body in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in his father's place.

The key word in these verses, and a very sad one at that, is **nevertheless**. Fantastic reforms precede the word **nevertheless**; terrible judgments follow after it.

Did Josiah make any difference? Josiah was a godly leader:

1. He called for the repair of the Temple.
2. He called for the reading of God's Law after it had been found abandoned at the Temple.
3. He made a personal commitment to renew the covenant to obey the Lord.
4. He led his people to renew their covenant to obey the Lord.
5. He removed the idols from Judah.
6. He removed the idols from Bethel.
7. He reinstated the Passover Feast.
8. He outlawed sorcery and superstition.

Josiah's grandfather Manasseh had installed all sorts of pagan idols in the temple and his father Anton had reinforced idol worship; but now Josiah ordered the idols all removed, burned outside the city, and the ashes taken away to Bethel. Bethel was a defiled place from which idolatry had spread throughout the Northern Kingdom and into Judah as well.

In his zeal Josiah even extended his efforts beyond the borders of Judah, into what was left of the Northern Kingdom. Bethel was the place where Jeroboam had built the altar to the molten bulls (or golden calves) in an effort to keep his people from going south to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. After he had destroyed the images on the mountain in Bethel, Josiah looked around the mountainside and saw a cemetery. He knew that spreading the ashes of the dead on the altar of Bethel would be an appropriate way to defile the site so he dug up some of the anonymous graves, removed and burned the bones on Bethel's famous altar, and thereby desecrated the shrine.

Evidently, two of the graves were marked to identify the persons buried there. One was the grave of "the man of God who came from Judah," and the other was the grave of "the prophet who came from Samaria." Respecting these two men, neither of whom is named, Josiah commanded that their burial places remain undisturbed. After executing the idolatrous priests who were in charge of the shrine at Bethel, Josiah returned to Jerusalem.

Next Josiah reinstated the Passover Feast. For seventy-five years there had been no Passover feast held in Jerusalem, and even before that the ceremony had been diluted. Josiah was determined to do it right according to the Law.

Finally Josiah put away all those who were involved in the occult and he prohibited the use of household idols.

Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him.

Why? Because the people only *reformed*, they did not *repent*. Josiah could force reform upon them and, for a time, they could enjoy

the benefits of godliness. But without real heart-change they were only putting-off the inevitable.

I want to take a realistic look at Josiah. It's one thing to read God's summary of his life and rejoice at the eulogy. But it's something entirely different to live Josiah's life.

Josiah would have been a textbook case of burn-out today. As a kings-kid, serving God was forced upon him from the young age of 8 years old. He had no real childhood. Such stuff is the fodder of modern psychotherapy!

Eighteen years into his reign they discovered the Word of God lying around the disrepaired Temple. As glorious as it was to discover the Word Josiah had to wonder what kind of knuckleheads had been advising him for eighteen years.

For the next several years he lived away from the city and any sense of a normal life as he attacked idolatry. Seemed as though everywhere he went there were idols and idolaters to contend with or kill.

It would have been a constant struggle to rejoice as king over *that* Judah, over *those* people. His personal involvement in every reform indicates he had little support that he did not demand as king.

I submit to you that Josiah suspected that his reforms were just that – reforms. Then, after all his godly zeal, Josiah's reward was to die in battle at the hands of an enemy of God at what we would consider the untimely age of 39 years old.

Nevertheless...

Did Josiah make a difference? What did it matter?

Ever feel that way? Maybe not; but I think a lot of people do because until your eulogy is written it can be hard being you.

I want to talk about what makes it all worth while – not just in the end but along the way.

First there is the big picture. Josiah's overall circumstances were chosen for him by the Lord. God had determined he would become king at age 8. God knew the hour of his departure from the earth and the circumstances. God knew the times in which Josiah would live and serve him – tough times fraught with difficulties and dangers.

I highly recommend Don McClure's book, *None of These Things Move Me*. It's his personal testimony of God's faithfulness through the years. Don talks about the big picture:

Whatever our course is, we have to determine to embrace it and not covet somebody else's course... We have to accept our circumstances and not be divided about them. Instead we can thrive in them and thrill in them... What validates my love for God is if I can trust Him with my course, if I can say "Yes and amen" to whatever flows from His hand. (pps. 34-35).

One of the most fundamental lessons in the school of the Holy Spirit is summed-up by the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11-12,

[Philippians 4:11](#) ... I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

[Philippians 4:12](#) I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound.

Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Learning to be content abounding and being abased is foundational to your walk. It's the kind of thing you need constant refresher courses in!

Josiah was called to be king at just the time in the story that God had determined. Whatever roles or offices or positions you hold, you, too, are called to them at just the time in the story that God has determined. You can learn to thrill and thrive in your course, or you can try to thwart it. Accept your circumstances – the one's you know are from the hand of God.

Josiah had the big picture. He walked his course. At the end of his course it could be said of him [now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him.](#)

A few things stand out in that eulogy. Foremost of which is the phrase **according to all the Law of Moses**. Within the big picture Josiah was guided by the Law of Moses. We would say he was guided by the Word of God (since we have more of it than just what Moses compiled and wrote).

I said that Josiah was guided by the Word. It would be better to say that, with the Word as his guide, he submitted to God's will and to God's ways as revealed in the Word. The Word of God is a guide but more than that. It is the truth and must be submitted to and obeyed.

There is a scene in *Finding Nemo* where Dory has been told to swim through the trench not over it. The trench seems ominous. Marlin, applying only his own wisdom, convinces Dory to swim over the trench not through it. The results are disastrous, nearly fatal, as they encounter the school of jellies and are stung repeatedly trying to swim over the trench.

Josiah obeyed God's Word. He decided to go through the trench. For him that meant taking on idolatry and idolaters. It meant many years spent away from the comforts of his home. It meant unpopularity.

Was it worth it if, in the end, God still judged Judah? Asking that question reveals the real answer. Obedience is its own reward. You don't obey God to get something or somewhere. You obey God because He is God. Obedience affects us internally eternally.

How many of God's servants seemed to fail? Jeremiah comes immediately to mind. Did he make a difference? Not one recorded convert in his earthly ministry! The Jews went into captivity just as Jeremiah said. Yet we revere him precisely for his obedience to his difficult course.

Big picture people who obey God find that they **turn to the Lord with all their heart, soul, and might**. That is how Josiah is described. Contrast him with his subjects. They reformed because they were forced. He repented and **turned** to God by faith.

Josiah's **heart** is mentioned. His affections were set on God. God was his one great love. A person will sacrifice much for love. You parents: What would you sacrifice for your child? You'd die in their place. Gladly.

So why do we find it so difficult to die daily to the Lord? It must be because we have left Him as our first great love. It must be because our affections are set on other people or possessions.

Josiah's **soul** is mentioned. It can be hard to pin down with 100% accuracy exactly what is meant by the **soul**. Here I think it refers to what we would call our mind. If so then these words from the apostle Paul can encourage us:

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
Philippians 2:6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

Philippians 2:7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.

The mind of a servant will set you free from any **nevertheless** thoughts that intrude. As long as what you are doing is for the Lord, what difference if it makes any temporary difference?

Josiah's **might** is mentioned:

2 Kings 23:25 Now before him [Josiah] there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did *any* arise like him.

Implied is that he was mighty because he was dependant upon God. It wasn't by **his might**, but by God's Spirit that Josiah accomplished all that he did.

At the same time we can understand **might** to refer to Josiah's actions and activities – the things he dedicated himself to accomplishing. He tore-up his own pad with his own priorities and adopted God's priorities as his own. He expended all his **might** on God's projects.

Josiah died in battle, at a relatively young age, at the hands of one of God's enemies.

Unless you are raptured, you will die at the hands of one of God's enemies. Death is an enemy. But dying is also a victory because the Lord died before us and conquered death once-for-all. If the worse thing that can happen to you is death; and if you die and go to be with the Lord; how is that a defeat?

As far as Josiah dying relatively young that is our very limited earthly perspective. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints – at any age, of any cause. We burden ourselves needlessly with our own perspectives. Think backwards from eternity. All of us are only here for a moment. We are each no more than a vapor in terms of life on earth.

Did any of it make a difference? It did to Josiah. It did internally eternally as far as he was concerned.

Don't return to **nevertheless** land! Turn to the **LORD** with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might, according to all the Word of God.

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