

Josiah, The Royal Restorer

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Introduction

Josiah was the sixteenth king of Judah after the division of the United Kingdom of Israel. He is one of the more remarkable kings of Judah from several perspectives:

1. His reign began at an extremely early age.
2. He rejected the idolatrous influences of his father and grandfather before him.
3. He conducted an unprecedented purge of Idolatry that involved not only his own kingdom, but the old Northern Kingdom as well.
4. He instituted a great restoration of the true worship and service of Jehovah.
5. His life and reign constituted the last blaze of glory for the doomed nation of Judah.

Only three years after his death, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and took captives back to Babylon with him, thus beginning Judah's 70 years of Babylonian captivity.

Background of Josiah's Reign

The reign of Josiah is spectacular on its own, but it takes on an even greater luster when seen against the background of his immediate predecessors on the throne. His grandfather, Manasseh, had a long reign of fifty-five years (697–642 B.C.). His reign was chiefly characterized by zeal for the idolatry his righteous father, Hezekiah, had opposed. So zealous was Manasseh that he even built pagan altars in both rooms of the temple and instituted the burning of children as sacrifices. His evils and errors were so unbounded that he "...seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel" (2 Kin. 21:9).¹ As an immediate consequence, God sent Assyria against Judah, and Manasseh was taken in chains to Babylon (2 Chr. 33:1–11). His captivity produced humility and repentance, upon which God returned him to his throne in Jerusalem. He undertook a reformation, removing the heathen altars and gods from the Temple and repairing the Lord's altar, upon which he offered peace and thank offerings (vv. 12–16). However, the reformation was superficial – "too little, too late." Although Manasseh "commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel," he could not overcome the disastrous influence of the first part of his reign. He apparently did not tear down the high places he had built throughout the land and the people continued to worship at those

pagan shrines (vv. 16–17). His reign is generally described and remembered by the inspired historians as one of great evil, which overshadowed his attempted reforms.

Amon, son of Manasseh, succeeded his father as king of Judah. He was so evil, and his brief reign was so inglorious that he merits but twenty verses in all of the Bible. The following passage summarizes his wicked reign:

Amon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem. But he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more (2 Chr. 33:21–23).

It is apparent that he eagerly followed the ignoble example of Manasseh in lusting after idols. It was a blessing for the nation that he died at the hands of his own servants after a reign of only two years (642–640 B.C.) (v. 24). “And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead” (2 Kin. 21:24). Josiah’s reign thus began in the maelstrom of both civil strife and religious apostasy.

Two faithful prophets were contemporary with this righteous king. The book of Zephaniah begins by saying, “The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah...in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah” (Zep. 1:1). Far more prominent was Jeremiah, whose prophetic work began in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign (Jer. 1:2). This would have been the year after Josiah began his work of restoration. This great prophet composed a lamentation for the good king upon his death (2 Chr. 35:25). Doubtless, both prophets were well-pleased with the efforts of their king, but Jeremiah often noted that even all that Josiah could do would be insufficient to turn back the wrath of God from Judah (Jer. 15:13–14; 16:10–13; 17:1–4; et al.).

The Life and Times of Josiah

The Early Years (2 Chr. 34:1–7)

At the tender age of eight years, Josiah was enthroned over Judah in Jerusalem. At the age of sixteen (“while he was yet young,” v. 3) he gave evidence of the unswerving and bold piety for which his name is forever enshrined as one of the most revered kings of God’s people. Even as a teenaged king he reminded the inspired historian of David in his zeal for God (v. 3).

In the twelfth year of his reign (20 years of age) he began his initial efforts to rid the land of idolatry.² The vast extent of the conversion to paganism in Judah and Israel can be understood from the descriptions of the purge that Josiah effected. He began by destroying the high places, groves, and carved and molten images in Jerusalem itself. From thence his iconoclasm moved throughout Judah, breaking down the altars and groves to Baalim and the heavenly bodies, as well as every other molten and carved idol. He even went so far as to burn the bones of the idolatrous priests on their own altars. Not content to stamp out the abominations of pagan religion in Judah, he journeyed into the former territory of the Northern Kingdom to do the same.³

The Temple Repaired and the Law Discovered (2 Kin. 22:3–20; 2 Chr. 34:8–28)

As a part of his work of restoring true religion in Judah, Josiah ordered the restoration of the Temple. It must have been in a terrible state of repair, since there is no record of any such work being done on it since that ordered by Jehoash two centuries earlier (2 Kin. 12:4–5). Apparently, the only work done on the building had been that of setting up images of and altars to pagan deities by Manasseh, then removing them and repairing the altar of the Lord upon his repentance (2 Chr. 33:3–5; 11–16). However, it seems that his infamous son, Amon, had re-installed these abominations in the Temple because they once more had to be removed by Josiah.

While the Temple restoration work is placed at the eighteenth year of his reign, it is apparent that preparations for this work had been underway for a considerable time. The Levites had gathered money “of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin” for the rebuilding project (2 Chr. 34:8–9). Obviously, such a collection required extensive travel, which, in turn, required much time. Likely, the inspired historians fastened upon the eighteenth year due to the fact that it was in that year that the “book of the law of the Lord given by Moses” was discovered – a matter of great significance – in the course of the repair work (2 Chr. 34:8–14; cf. 2 Kin. 22:3–8).⁴

The discovery of those ancient scrolls in the Temple was both exciting and discouraging to Josiah. Hilkiyah, the high priest, announced the find to Shaphan, the scribe, and delivered it into his hands to read (2 Kin. 22:8). Shaphan then read the book before the young king, who was so terrified by its judgments of God upon apostasy that he rent his clothes. He promptly

deputized Hilkipah, Shaphan, and other trusted servants to certify that this was indeed the faithful law of God. This they did by consulting Huldah, the prophetess, who resided in Jerusalem. She confirmed that the curses of the book would come upon Judah, but, because of the humble faithfulness of Josiah, God would not bring them to pass during his lifetime.

The Great Restoration (2 Kin. 23:1–25; 2 Chr. 34:29–35:19)

Upon the certification of the newly discovered book in the Temple, Josiah took immediate action. The first thing he did was to gather a huge congregation of his citizens in Jerusalem (“all the people, great and small,” 2 Chr. 34:30) and read the words of the book to them. After the reading, he committed himself to keep the commandments of the Lord:

And the king stood in his place, 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 his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book (2 Chr. 34:31).

Following this pledge, Josiah had the whole assembly stand as a sign of their joining with him in his commitment to the covenant of God.

The discovery and certification of the law, followed by the solemn pledge to keep it, led Josiah to intensify his restoration efforts. This was begun in the Temple itself. All the remaining appurtenances of idolatry that remained in the Temple and in Jerusalem were brought out and burned at the brook Kidron just east of the city. So corrupt had Judah become that gross immoralities were being practiced as a part of the Temple rites. These were all swept away by Josiah (2 Kin. 23:4–14).

One of the most interesting parts of Josiah’s restoration campaign was his demolition work at Bethel in Israel. It was here that wicked Jeroboam had set up one of his golden calves at the founding of the northern secessionist kingdom some three centuries earlier (1 Kings 12:26–29). This was to keep the people from going to Jerusalem to worship and perhaps being wooed back to Judah and Rehoboam. Josiah disinterred the bones of the idolatrous priests which he burned on their altar. He finished his work there by tearing down the last vestige of this abomination, burning it, and grinding it to powder (2 Kin. 23:15). All of this was done “...according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words” (v. 16). This statement refers to the prophet from Judah who cried out against Jeroboam and his pagan altar in Bethel (1 Kings 13:3). His prophecy was especially remarkable in the

following respects: (1) It specified that the bones of the false priests would be burned upon their own altar (which is exactly what Josiah did). (2) It called Josiah by name as the son of David who would do this. (3) It was spoken three hundred years in advance of its occurrence. No man can thus see the future as if it were the present. Only God has such incomprehensible ability. Josiah pursued this same course of destruction throughout old Israel and then returned to Jerusalem (2 Chr. 34:33).

The next stage of the movement to restore true religion among the people of God was the keeping of the Passover. From the descriptions given, we infer that the Passover had been altogether neglected for a long time, as would be expected in the midst of a people given wholly over to idolatry. The historian in 2 Kings devotes only two verses to the celebration of the sacred feast, concluding: "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" (2 Kin. 23:22). However, 2 Chronicles elaborates upon the feast in some nineteen verses (35:1-19). One interesting note about this grand Passover is that it involved "all Judah and Israel" (v. 18). This indicates that the descendants of those stragglers in the Northern Kingdom that had been left behind by the Assyrians over a century before had identified themselves with Judah.

The Sad End of Josiah (2 Kin. 23:29-30; 2 Chr. 35:20-27)

As in the case of the great Passover of Josiah's eighteenth year of rule, the account of Josiah's death in 2 Kings is much briefer than that in 2 Chronicles. Necho, the Pharaoh of Egypt, led his army to assault Charchemish on the Euphrates, passing through Judah and Israel on the way. Whether out of loyalty to Assyria, a determination to prevent violation of his national boundaries, or some other motive, Josiah felt it his duty to confront the Egyptian monarch. He did so at Megiddo, despite Necho's attempt to persuade him not to meddle in a mission that was not directed against Judah. Unfortunately, Josiah pursued his attack and lost his life in the battle. He was brought back to Jerusalem and buried in the tombs of the kings with great lamentation: "And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah" (2 Chr. 35:24b). The lamentation was so great that Jeremiah, the "weeping prophet," composed a special lamentation for Josiah and the singers commemorated him in their songs long after his decease.

With the death of righteous Josiah, the last gasp of life in the nation of Judah expired. When his glorious reign ended the time had come for the awful curses of the "book of the law"

discovered by Hilkiah in the Temple to come to pass. It would be only three years before Nebuchadnezzar would enter Judah and begin taking its citizens into Babylonian exile that would not end for 70 years. What a bright light was King Josiah of Judah in an otherwise dark and dismal history of a nation that could have had the choicest blessings of the God of Heaven.

Lessons We Can Learn

Josiah was a unique king in Judah. His memory is a blessed one in Holy Writ. He was exemplary in many virtues, and consequently his life holds important lessons for us who live some twenty-six centuries after him.

Young People Can Exert Powerful Influence for Good

Josiah was only eight years old when he became King of Judah. Eight years later, at only 16 years of age, observers had no doubt about the direction his life would take: “In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father . . .” (2 Chr. 34:3). He was still only twenty years old when he began his assault upon idolatry. By the age of twenty-six (the eighteenth year of his reign) he had finished his work of ridding Judah and Israel of Idolatry and restoring the true worship of God (2 Chr. 34:33; 35:18-19). His powerful influence for good in his young years is incalculable.

We need to set before children at an early age the idea that they can and should wield a powerful influence for good. Timothy, who from a child had been taught God’s Word and who had readily followed it (II Tim. 3:15), is a notable example of the working of this principle. It is estimated by some that he was only fifteen years old when he became the companion of Paul and Silas in their Gospel adventures (Acts 16:1-2). He was still a “youth” when Paul addressed him in his first letter (I Tim. 4:12), yet he had already attained a remarkable influence among the congregations and was so valued by Paul that he left him in Ephesus to withstand the efforts of false teachers there (1:1-3).

Young people need to understand that “peer pressure” can work both ways—for good as well as for evil. Those who are older need to help them see the powerful influence for good they can be upon others if they will set their hearts on serving God. They have the ability to exert upon their friends and classmates a wholesome “peer pressure.” Let us learn from Josiah that a righteous young person can powerfully influence others.

We Do Not Have to Emulate Our Evil Predecessors

Josiah had a heritage of great spiritual evil and cowardice from his grandfather, Manasseh, and his father, Amon. The former had been so wicked that God allowed him to be taken to Assyria as a bound captive. He was so zealous in his devotion to Canaanite gods that he even outdid the Canaanites themselves (2 Chr. 33:9). Even though he tried to undo some of his evils in the last part of his life, he was unable to overcome the evil he had already implanted in the people. Amon had no redeeming qualities. He sought all of the heathen deities his father had rejected in the latter part of his life. One would expect Amon's son to follow in the course of his father, but he was repulsed by it completely.

Many blame their evil or erroneous behavior upon their families or their sociological environment while growing up. If any child ever had an excuse for living a life contrary to God's Word because of the influence of his father, Josiah had one. While God does not want children to grow up under wicked mothers and fathers, Josiah proves that one can do what is right in spite of this serious handicap. Without argument, it is more difficult for one reared in ungodly surroundings to resist or overcome such, but again, Josiah proves that it can be done.

This also applies to those whose parents have reared and schooled them in religious error. In fact, this especially relates to Josiah, for it was chiefly for their religious corruption that both his grandfather and his father were remembered. It is not uncommon to help someone come to a knowledge of the Truth, only to hear him or her say, "My mother and father were members of the _____ Church, and I would show disrespect for them and condemn them by obeying the Gospel." We are thankful Josiah did not thus reason about the religion of his fathers.

A favorite ploy of the sociologists of the present is to excuse everything from mayhem to murder and from robbery to rape because of the "environment" of the perpetrator. According to such theorists, if one has been financially disadvantaged, lived in a slum, is part of a minority race, or is mistreated as a child, then his criminal behavior is excusable. In fact, others ("society"), rather than the criminal, are responsible for his atrocious conduct, we are told. All such liberal ideology conveniently ignores the fact that millions of decent, hardworking, and prosperous citizens came from terrible environments. Likewise, thousands of saints grew up in terribly wicked home environments and/or in surroundings of religious error, but have

overcome such to become stalwart servants of Christ, including numerous faithful Gospel preachers and elders and their wives. One who refuses to do what is right because of family loyalties or childhood environment is simply unwilling to accept responsibility for one's own decisions and life. Josiah proves that one can come from an environment that is not conducive to righteousness at all and still be what God would have him be.

The Law of God Alone Is Authoritative in Religion

When Shaphan the scribe read to Josiah the law of God that Hilkiah had discovered in the Temple, he was struck with fear (2 Chr. 34:19). He knew that what was written in this book had not been respected as authoritative by so many of the kings before him (v. 21). He also knew that God's law was not then being carried out among his people. He knew that by it alone could he know what was pleasing to God. He knew that the people were practicing what it did not authorize (e.g., idolatry) and they were neglecting that which it did authorize and demand (e.g., keeping the Passover). Once it was confirmed that the book was indeed the law of God and that what it promised and threatened would come to pass, Josiah demonstrated unquestioning obedience.

This is what our world needs so desperately to learn. The ideas and words of men in religion are not authoritative. Those who practice their religion by human doctrines do so in vain (Mat. 15:9). Those outside the body of Christ who claim to believe in Christ are hopelessly divided because they are unwilling to accept the Word of Christ as their sole authority in religion, or if accepting it as such, they handle it incorrectly and "wrest [it]... unto their own destruction" (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:16). The same factors are a principal cause of divisions among brethren, also.

Many brethren need to learn again the exclusive authoritativeness of God's Word, if they ever learned it. The law of Christ is the sole authority in religion, and we sin when we practice that which is not authorized by it. Our forefathers in the Faith in the nineteenth century understood this truth and by application of it they themselves escaped, and helped multiplied thousands of others to escape, the labyrinth of false religion. If we do not have Bible authority for what we do in worship, for our daily behavior, for our attempts to gather a crowd of people into the building, for what we teach, and for everything else we say and do, then we had better

not say or do it: "And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17).

When True Religion Has Been Corrupted It Must Be Restored

Josiah was wise enough to perceive this fact. Accordingly, he set out on a resolute course of destroying idolatry and restoring the true worship of Jehovah. That there is one true and living God demands the conclusion that there is one true religion authorized by Him. (While many through the ages who have acknowledged the God of Heaven have nonetheless been pluralistic in their religion [e. g., Aaron and the golden calf, Exo. 32:4-8], all such have been utterly inconsistent.) The corruptions of religion in the days of Josiah cried out for restoration of the true religion. Josiah had been taught enough of the law of Moses and the history of God's people even before the discovery of the book of the law in the Temple that he knew he could not be faithful to God without beginning a crusade to restore true religion (2 Chr. 34:3ff). The discovery of the book in the Temple further encouraged his zeal in this respect (2 Kin. 23:1ff). One who believes in God and comes to a knowledge of the Truth cannot think or act otherwise and be logically or Scripturally consistent.

When one looks at the multitude of pagan religions with billions of devotees and then when one looks at the thousands of religious groups that are aberrant forms of "Christianity" he cannot be content if he loves God and His Word. The attitude of so much of the world that claims to believe in the God of the Bible is that the sincere Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist is likely in no danger of being lost. Even more widespread is the view that if one believes in Christ in any degree, he may believe whatever else he chooses and may practice what pleases him in religion.

The spark of every movement to restore true religion has been the conviction that the one God has but one religion. This teaching was the very foundation of the Mosaic system:

I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the

name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain (Exo. 20:2-7).

This principle is no less true of the religion of God through His Son. Although His church had not yet been established at the time He gave the following teaching, He spoke it in regard to His soon-coming kingdom: "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). Simply put, God has directed man to worship Him in the attitude and by the avenues that please Him, and man is obligated to thus honor God's Will. Notice that Jesus plainly stated that God seeks "true worshippers," that is, those who will worship Him as He has ordained.

God cannot be pleased with mere form and ritual (Mat. 6:1-7) nor with humanly authorized practices (15:9). Religion that is not based on Truth is unacceptable, regardless of the sincerity of the devotee (Acts 10:1-6; Rom. 10:2-3). Just as there is "one God," there is also "one faith" (i.e., "the faith," referring to the entire body of Gospel Truth and the religion based upon it [Acts 6:7; Eph. 4:13; I Tim. 4:1; Jude 3; et al.]) (Eph. 4:5-6).

This incontrovertible principle drove our spiritual forebears of two centuries ago to ring forth the clarion call to their friends, neighbors, and kindred to come out of their corrupt sects to the old paths of Truth and righteousness in a great restoration of true religion. It is tragic that many brethren are currently malevolent toward any such appeal. Such have joined the ranks of those who consider the church of our Lord to be merely another acceptable denomination (albeit a rather sorry one) in their pluralistic view of religion. They are boldly leading a counter-restoration campaign aimed at aping all of the very trappings of pseudo-religion that the restoration principle has helped millions escape.

Almost as destructive to true religion as these are those who have "stuck their heads in the sand" in their posture of denial of the digression that is rampant in the church. To them one cannot teach anything blasphemous enough to earn identification and/or exposure as a false teacher. Whatever errors they may hear preached or see practiced, they, as the famous three monkeys, are determined to "see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil." While admirable in ordinary circumstances, when crimes are being committed these traits become sinful. Some brethren are committing the crimes of rape and murder against the bride of Christ, arson in the

house of God, and sedition against the kingdom and rule of Christ the King. They are wolves preying on the flock (Acts 20:29). With their liberal and heretical doctrines and practices, they are doing things to the church of Christ that could not have been done by assaults from without. Just as the restoration campaign of Josiah was conducted among the people of God, we must realize that, due to the severe encroachments of error, a similar campaign among the saints is now required to salvage as many as possible. Let us never relent in our cry for true religion, both among those within and without the kingdom.

God Is a God of Pattern

Josiah understood this signal truth, otherwise the false worship would have been acceptable and there would have been no need to restore the Passover. The means by which Josiah knew how to restore true religion in Judah and Israel was by consulting the pattern — God’s revealed Word. Since God began having His inspired prophets write His will in a book for preservation, His pattern has ever resided in His book, as it did in Josiah’s day. This work of restoration could have been done by any of the kings before him by consulting and following God’s book, but most of them cared little, if any, for God. In fact, they cared so little for God and His religion that they allowed a significant portion of the pattern for it to become lost in the debris of the corrupted Temple.

God has always been a God of pattern. To deny such is to deny one of the plainest truths of the Bible. He was a God of pattern in the Garden of Eden as he forbade Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of one tree (Gen. 2:16–17). He had a pattern for Cain and Abel, which Abel observed, and Cain rejected in their respective offerings (Gen. 4:1–5; Heb. 11:4). He had a detailed pattern for Noah concerning the ark (Gen. 6:14–16). As already noted, He also had a pattern for His religion under Moses. This is seen in the meticulous blueprint for the Tabernacle and all of its appurtenances, concerning which He told Moses: “And see that thou make them after their pattern, which hath been showed thee in the mount” (Exo. 25:40).

This very statement is quoted by the writer of Hebrews and applied to the “ministry thy more excellent, ...better covenant, ...better promises” of Christ (Heb. 8:5–6). We dare not miss the argument of this passage. The writer was reasoning from the lesser to the greater: If God was so concerned about the lesser institution which revolved around the Tabernacle that He would instruct Moses to adhere to every detail of the Divine pattern for it, **how much more**

would He demand that men adhere to every detail of the greater institution, the church of Christ.

How dare men say that there is no pattern for the church or for the religion of Christ in any respect. The very idea that God would be so careful about a lesser institution that He would demand careful adherence to His directions for it, but that when it concerned His greater and perfect institution, He would shrug and say, “Build it any way you choose,” is beyond absurd and ridiculous. Nonetheless, both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have taught this error for centuries. In recent years we have begun hearing some “progressive” brethren ridicule the “pattern mentality” as if it were some sort of dread disease. Men may deny that God has a pattern for His church (i.e., its worship, its organization, its terms of entrance, its nature, its work, its destiny) all they choose, but they must deny what the Scriptures teach to do so.

Just as the pattern of true religion was in God’s book in the time of Josiah, so it is today. The Word of God is the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11). As long as the pure seed of the Gospel remains, the true church of Christ can exist. Like every other seed, the Gospel produces only after its kind (Gal. 6:7). When men believe and obey it, it produces only Christians, which constitute only the church of Christ. If the church should totally apostatize so that for two hundred years no real Christian could be found, as long as the Gospel is extant, by merely following its teaching, the church could be restored at any time. God is a God of pattern and His pattern is in His Word.

Restoration Involves Tearing Down False Religion

Josiah understood that the true religion of God could not be restored without tearing down the false religious practices that had grown up among His people. Since the practices were the result of religious teaching, by implication we understand that he also opposed the false teaching behind those practices. Thus, his first work of restoration was an assault upon the false religions (2 Chr. 34:3ff).

The restorers of the early nineteenth century followed this same necessary procedure. Alexander Campbell’s first monthly publication, *The Christian Baptist*, begun in 1835, was strongly iconoclastic. He and others who were sounding forth the appeal to restore the religion of the New Testament knew that the errors, innovations, and human traditions that had

combined to corrupt what was called “Christianity” in those days had to be cleared away for restoration of the true doctrine and practice to be accomplished.

This process continues to be necessary. Men will not and cannot appreciate the Truth until they have been made dissatisfied with their errors. The air many brethren breathe nowadays is so filled with pseudo-tolerance that few of them want to hear any preaching that exposes or identifies error. I refer not only to errors among brethren and their need of correction; these same squeamish brethren do not even want any sectarian or denominational errors laid bare, even if done in the kindest of manners. “Just preach the Gospel and leave everybody alone,” is their theme. By this dictum they hope to squelch any word from pulpit, classroom, or page that might be the least bit offensive to the most sensitive soul. “We might run someone off!” “We might lose some members and some money!”

One of the most serious objections some of our “sophisticated” brethren have to the exposure of any error is that it is “negative,” and they insist on hearing only “positive” things. It is noteworthy that Jeremiah, the major prophet during the reign of Josiah, was commissioned by God to do the very thing his king had already begun: “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). Notice that the prophet must first be occupied with uprooting and tearing down before he could do the work of building and planting.

A like charge was given to Timothy by Paul: “Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). These are not merely gentle suggestions. The first is the mandate of God to His prophet and the second is the forceful command of God’s inspired apostle. In both of these passages the unbiased reader not only observes that the “negative” work of exposing and uprooting the error is to be done, but that it is given first position. One should also observe that the number of charges to do the “negative” work in these verses is double those concerning the “positive” (four to two in the first, two to one in the second).

By its very nature, the Gospel contains both “negative” and “positive” elements. Every passage that encourages faith in Christ and obedience to His Word implicitly condemns unbelief and disobedience. Every Scripture that urges purity of life upon us at the same time forbids impurity of life. Even if the Gospel did not have a single explicit condemnation or

proscription in it, every one of its “positive” teachings would necessarily imply its opposite “negative.” However, we do not have to rest the case upon implication, as reliable as it is. Only a crass ignoramus in the Scriptures or a liar would dare deny that there are hundreds of restrictive, forbidding, condemning statements in the New Testament, **all of which are “negative.”** The truth is that one cannot preach the whole Gospel without preaching both “negatively” and “positively.”

Just as a “negative-only” message is not faithful to Gospel Truth, neither is a “positive-only” one. We dare not be scared away from crying out against sin and error wherever it is found. Only when one is made to see his error will he be able to respond to the Truth. If true religion is to be restored and maintained, false religion must continually be confronted.

Restoration Involves Positively Setting True Religion in Place

After Josiah had spent six years exterminating idolatry from Judah and Israel, he then read the newly-discovered book of the law to the people, publicly committed himself to God that he would keep His “commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul . . .” (2 Chr. 34:3; 30–31). He then reinstituted the Passover (35:19). This is the necessary order of things in restoring anything: Remove the corrupt elements and then set in place the original order.

Nature despises a vacuum and ever seeks to fill a void. It would have accomplished little for Josiah merely to drive out idolatry from God’s people had he not re-introduced true worship among them. They would soon have taken up their old errors again, perhaps compounding them with new ones (Mat. 12:43–45). The true teaching and worship had to be set forth to fill the void of the old that had been stripped away. It was the same with the early restorers. They did not stop with their work of demolishing error, nor was this an end within itself. Their goal was the setting forth and establishment of primitive Christianity in its purity to replace the errors that were exposed.

Like those before us, we must not only do our utmost to correct the corruptions of error, but also to set forth New Testament Christianity so that men may see the beauty and simplicity of it. They need to see the distinctive, undenominational, unsectarian nature of the church. They need to understand the work of the church. They need to see what constitutes acceptable

Christian worship. They need to see the simple plan of salvation. They need to see (in both our doctrine and practice) the Lord's will for purity of daily life in His children.

Many in the kingdom are now weary and ashamed of the aforementioned things. They want such "doctrinal" matters kept to an extreme minimum, or better, altogether ignored. These might have been appropriate for more primitive times and for backward, country folk, but they are not appropriate for moderns, they aver. They choose rather to hear soothing platitudes on benign themes that satisfy obese egos and replace duly felt guilt with total self-endorsement. They want a message that displaces Christ's law with perverted "grace" and leaves the impression that those in error are just as approved of God as those in the Truth.

Let us ever do it in love for the souls of those who hear us but let us ever be faithfully and fully "...holding forth the word of life" (Phi. 2:16).

Every Generation Has an Obligation to Maintain That Which Has Been Restored

As long as Josiah was on the throne his restoration movement was honored by the people:

And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were found in Israel to serve, even to serve Jehovah their God. All his days they departed not from following Jehovah, the God of their fathers (2 Chr. 34:33).

It saddens us to read that his restoration of true religion died with him. His son, Jehoahaz, was crowned to succeed him: "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Jehovah, according to all that his fathers had done" (2 Kin. 23:32). The same description is given of the evil reign of Jehoikim, who succeeded Jehoahaz (v. 37), and of Jehoichin, who succeeded Jehoikim (24:9). Josiah understood his obligation to be faithful to God in his generation, but his sons felt no such obligation and reverted to the evils of their earlier ancestors.

The foregoing record well illustrates the fact that the people of God in any age are always only one generation away from apostasy. When a generation decides that it has "outgrown" the Gospel and its obligation to be faithful to God, all of the sacrificial efforts of preceding generations are overturned. A greater and more unnecessary tragedy can hardly be imagined. We see it in many of God's people nowadays. Some among the older generation are now fighting against the Truth they once boldly and ably proclaimed and lived. Many of the

younger generation either know not the price paid by so many over the past two hundred years to restore the New Testament church, or knowing, they care not. They are watching gleefully as congregation after congregation drifts perceptibly into the stagnant cesspool of denominationalism, and some are pushing and shoving with all their might to hasten the process.

What a heavy burden of guilt they must bear to the Judgment if they do not repent. Not only are they denying their obligation to maintain the restored religion of Christ, but they are also working like termites to corrupt it. God can hardly be more pleased with such saints today than He was with the bulk of the apostate kings of Judah (and Israel) and those who followed their wicked leadership. Let godly parents and grandparents do their utmost to instill in their posterity the feeling of obligation to love, promote, and defend the Truth of God with their very lives and to pass it on to their children. Only when each generation feels the obligation to be faithful with the Truth placed in its hands can the restored church be maintained without interruption of corruption.

Conclusion

When religion has been corrupted, history teaches us that it cannot be reformed. Several of the Judaic kings before Josiah had made various reforms in religion, partially changing various idolatrous practices. These resulted in only piecemeal efforts that did little good. Josiah had the wisdom and spiritual fortitude to realize that the corruptions of his day required restoration of the true religion. This principle is true in every age. The sixteenth-century reformers accomplished some good things, without question. However, the corruption in doctrine and practice, in both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, could only be cured by restoration, which fact a number of dedicated men perceived in the eighteenth century, resulting in the restoration of the church of the Bible—true religion. Let us be as zealous for maintaining the restored church as those dedicated restorers were in restoring it. Let us never cease to herald the plea for restoration to everyone who will hear.

Without controversy, Josiah was one of the few bright stars in the otherwise dark night of the history of the kings of Judah. He has perhaps not been given the credit due him in the study of Biblical characters. After studying the history of his good life and his heroic restoration efforts, we should not be surprised that the inspired historians awarded him the following accolades:

And he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left (2 Kin. 22:2).

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him (23:25).

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. The record in 2 Kings 22-23 does not mention any efforts to extirpate idolatry before the finding of the "book of the law" (cf. 22:2-23:4). As one would expect, liberal commentators see in this either a contradiction and/or a mistake on the part of the historian in 2 Kings. However, this does not follow at all. The account in 2 Chronicles is simply more complete, augmenting the earlier account, rather than contradicting it. Obviously, Josiah began his work of restoration six years before the "book of the law" was discovered, which act spurred him to do this work even more thoroughly. For a good discussion of this see C. F. Keil, F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprint ed. 1982), 3:473-76.
3. Israel had been conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. and carried into captivity (2 Kings 17:5-6). By the time of Josiah's early reforms (c. 628 B.C.), the political control of the territory which once constituted the northern kingdom was in flux due to the decline and fall of the Assyrian Empire. This temporary political confusion likely explains how Josiah was able to enter and destroy the idols of that area without being militarily challenged.
4. The exact identity of this book has long been debated. The German rationalists foolishly theorized that Hilkiah wrote this book and pretended to "discover" it. If so, he must have been a consummate document forger to make a freshly-produced scroll appear to be almost nine centuries old. With Bruce, I believe that "there is little doubt that it was (as Jerome discerned) a copy of the book of Deuteronomy." Some scholars identify it as the entire Pentateuch. Since Josiah appeared to be surprised at the contents of the book, are we then to assume that Josiah did not have a copy of the law? This seems most unlikely. Indeed, his reformatory work before finding the book implies a knowledge of the true religion from some source. It is possible that he either did not have a complete copy of Deuteronomy or that having it, he had not before perceived the significance of the terrible curses Moses pronounced on apostasy. For a good discussion of this point see *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 1969 reprint ed., s.v., "Josiah"; F.F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprint ed., 1983), p. 77.

[**Note:** I prepared this MS for and delivered it orally during the Memphis School of Preaching Lectures, hosted by the Knight Arnold Church of Christ, Memphis TN, March 25-29, 1990, directed by Curtis A. Cates. It was published in the lectureship book, *Great Lessons from Old Testament Characters*, ed. Curtis A. Cates.]

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