

Josiah: Old Testament Model of the Shepherd as Leader

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Many people pattern their lives after persons whom they would like to emulate or possibly just to partially imitate in their own lives. We all do it to a lesser or greater degree. There is always someone who has touched our lives in a special way and we either consciously or unconsciously model our lives after them. In Biblical history we have many persons after whom we could pattern our lives. Josiah is certainly one of those persons. We will, therefore, review the life of Josiah with this in mind and consider as our subject for this paper, Josiah: Old Testament Model of the Shepherd as Leader.

Josiah was the son of Amon, an idolatrous king of Judah. If he had followed in the footsteps of his father, as young children are often prone to do, he would not have made much of a model for us as a shepherd and as a leader. The reason he did not follow in the footsteps of his father may have been due to the influence and guidance of his mother, Jedidah or his maternal grandfather, Adaiah. They are expressly mentioned preceding the statement concerning the godly life of Josiah which states, "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kings 22:2 and 2 Chronicles 34:2). More to the fact of his faith and life is that God elected him personally to be his instrument of righteousness and to carry out his will among the people.

Nearly 300 years before his birth, at the beginning of the divided kingdom, God had sent a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah to Bethel in the northern kingdom to prophecy about Josiah and his purging the kingdom of idolatry. In 1 Kings, Chapter 13, we are told, "By the word of the Lord a man of God came from Judah to Bethel as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. He cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord: 'O altar, altar! This is what the Lord says: A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.'" Yes, God had named Josiah by name and called him to carry out his righteous acts among the people.

Josiah began his righteous reign in Jerusalem when he was eight years old and was king of Judah for 31 years from 640 - 609 B.C. Because of beginning his reign at such an early impressionable age and at an age that could be easily influenced, Edersheim, suggests that he was protected from bad influences and exposed to good influences by godly people around him. Edersheim states, "As his extreme youth would withdraw him from the influences and temptations to which Manasseh had been exposed at his accession, so it must have necessitated the tutorship, or at least guidance, of men to whom, as generally venerated, a royal child would be entrusted. That such there were, we infer from the revival of prophecy, as represented by a Huldah, a Jeremiah, and a Zephaniah; from the notices we have of some whom we afterwards find surrounding the king; and, lastly, from the bearing of the priesthood under their chief Hilkiah. Nor, indeed, could the lessons of the reign of Hezekiah, and even of that of Manasseh, have been wholly effaced during the brief rule of Amon. Such men as they, under whose auspices afterwards the reformation of Josiah was carried out, could have had no difficulty in showing the youthful king how the brightest memories of the royal house of Judah were associated with the names of David, Jehoshaphat, and Joash, Uzziah, and Hezekiah, and that the times of greatest national prosperity had been those of faithful and earnest allegiance to Jehovah and His service (Edersheim: 177-178)."

In the eighth year of his reign as king, when he was 16 years old, he began to faithfully serve the Lord. It was at this age that he more than likely began to personally administer the government as he "began to seek the God of his father David" (2 Chronicles 34:3). In the twelfth year of his reign, when he was 20 years old, he began to purge the land of its idolatrous practices. (The dual accounts of his life in 2 Kings 22 - 24:30 and 2 Chronicles 34 - 35 differ in this respect in that the account in 2 Kings doesn't mention the beginning of the purging until after the discovery of the Book of the Law which took place when he was 26 years old.) This purging was not confined only to his own kingdom, but also a considerable part of the neighboring kingdom of

Israel and at Bethel, in particular, executed all that the prophet had prophesied. (1 Kings 13; 2 Kings 23:1-19; 2 Chronicles 34:3-7, & 32).

So when did this purging take place? Franzmann, in his footnote, asks the same question and then answers it by saying, "This actually occurred before the repair of the Temple. The purging of the land took place in the eighth year of Josiah's reign (when Josiah was only 16), while the repairing of the Temple was begun in the eighteenth year of his reign (when he was 26) (Franzmann: 515)." Whatever the case may be, this purging involved many things, some of which consisted in warning the people against their idol worship and telling them that their hardships and calamities came from their rebellion against God. He tore down their altars and statues and called them to repentance. One of these statues that was worshipped through infanticide was the idol called Molech. It had the form of a human body and the head of an ox. Roaring fires were built beneath the brass hollow statue and when it became red hot, small children were laid on its outstretched arms and were seared to death. In many of these places where idolatry was practiced, Josiah purposely scattered or burned human bones in order to desecrate these pagan places of worship. No respectable Jew wanted to become ceremonially unclean by coming in contact with the bones of dead bodies so these places would now be avoided by them. Having done this, he sought to restore the true worship in the Temple, which Solomon had built for the worship of Jehovah, but through idolatry and lewd practices had been defiled and also neglected.

Together with other faithful people and workers, Josiah made plans to repair the neglected Temple. A thorough housecleaning and repair went on in the Temple. In the course of this work, Hilkiyah the priest found a book, or rather a scroll which had been lost, forgotten or hidden. While we cannot be sure what book was found, many Bible scholars today think it was the book of Deuteronomy, although some think that it might have been the whole Pentateuch. Concerning this, Franzmann says, "We cannot determine whether this refers to the whole Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) or only to the Book of Deuteronomy. Nothing of importance hinges on this question." In the footnote following this quote he asks an interesting question concerning how the Book of the Law became lost. "Had 'the Book of the Law' been hidden in the Temple? - How the book had come to be in the Temple, very likely in some very inconspicuous place, we are not told. It has been surmised that some faithful priest or Levite (servant in the Temple) had hidden it away for safekeeping during one of the times when idolatry was actively promoted and the true worship of God was under a cloud (Franzmann : 515)."

When king Josiah heard what was in the book, he tore his clothes as a sign of deep remorse, sorrow and repentance. As a shepherd and leader, Josiah realized that the people of Israel were not living as demanded by this book of God's Word. They were not celebrating the festivals or remembering the fasts that God had commanded. The sacrifices were neglected, and Israel had turned after pagan idols instead of continuing to serve the true God. But why didn't the shepherd and leader of God's people realize this neglect of God's Word?

It is certainly difficult to account for this ignorance. Some suppose that all the copies of the law had perished, and that the king had never seen one. But this is very unlikely, for, however scarce complete copies may have been, the pious king was likely to have been the possessor of one. The probability seems to be that the passages read were those awful denunciations against disobedience with which the book of Deuteronomy concludes, and which, for some cause or other, the king had never before read, or which had never before produced on his mind the same strong conviction of the imminent dangers under which the nation lay, as now when read to him from a volume invested with a character so venerable, and brought with such interesting circumstances under his notice. We should bear in mind that it is very difficult for us in this age and country to estimate the scantiness of the opportunities which were then open to laymen of acquiring literary knowledge connected with religion. The special commission sent forth by Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xvii, 7) is a proof that even under such kings as Asa and his son the Levites were insufficient for the religious instruction of the people. What, then, must have been the amount of information accessible to a generation which had grown up in the reigns of Manasseh and Amon? We do not know that the law was read as a stated part of any ordinary public service in the Temple of Solomon (unless the injunction Deut. xxxi, 10 was obeyed once

in seven years), though God was worshipped there with daily sacrifice, psalmody, and prayer. The king, in his alarm, sent to Huldah ‘the prophetess’ for her counsel in this emergency [see Huldah]: her answer assured him that, although the dread penalties threatened by the law had been incurred and would be inflicted, he should be gathered in peace to his fathers before the days of punishment and sorrow came (M’Clintock and Strong : 1033).

Nonetheless, after consulting with the prophetess Huldah and sensing the wrath of God about to be poured out on his wayward people and possibly hoping to avert the impending doom, Josiah called them together to hear the reading of the Law and then inaugurated widespread reforms, for the reestablishment of true religion in Israel.

What was the effect of the reading? The writer of the Book of Chronicles tells us that the reading of the scriptures was startling. The people turned from their ways of ungodliness and made a solemn pledge to follow the Lord. A Passover was held greater than any since the early days of Israel. The idols were banished “from all the territory belonging to the Israelites” (2 Chronicles 34:33), every false priest and scribe and prophet was removed from office, and the cruel sacrifices of children were stopped. In short, one of the greatest tragedies in the history of Israel came when the Bible was forgotten; and one of the greatest reforms of their History was instituted when the Bible was brought back.

God’s anger, however, was not turned away from the people, because the sins of Manasseh were still in the hearts of the people. Wolfgramm says concerning this,

But even the zeal and dedication of Josiah could not undo the sins of his grandfather, King Manasseh. As we read the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet who began his work five years before the rediscovery of the Book of the Law (compare Jeremiah 25:3 and 2 Kings 22:3), it is clear that the reforms of Josiah did not have a real or permanent effect on the hearts of the people. Even though God had chosen to establish his name in Jerusalem, even though God met here with his people and here accepted the sacrifices of his people, the city of Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed just as God had declared earlier.

The prophet Zephaniah also lived and wrote during the reign of King Josiah. Now would be a good time to read his short book in your Bible. He wrote repeatedly about ‘the day of the Lord,’ a day when, according to God’s own words, ‘I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem’ (Zephaniah 1:4).

Twenty years after the death of Josiah, Babylonian soldiers destroyed both the temple and the city (Wolfgramm: 303-304).

Josiah, a faithful king, shepherd, and leader was, according to God’s promise through the prophetess Huldah, to be spared this wrath of God, “Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place” (2 Kings 22:20).

God was going to fulfill this promise to Josiah through his death in the battle against the Egyptians. How else can we explain Josiah’s disregard for this Word of God spoken through the mouth of Pharaoh Neco, “Whom we know from secular history as the mighty Rameses II (Wolfgramm 305).” “What quarrel is there between you and me, O king of Judah? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry, so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you” (2 Chronicles 35:21).

We might ascertain that Josiah did not believe that Neco was actually speaking God’s Word, but was a false witness who was just saying, “Thus says the Lord” for his own purposes. So these words of warning only fell on deaf ears and ultimately carried out God’s promise to Josiah. There are, of course, other plausible explanations as to why he went into battle with Neco. Here are several other explanations which led to the battle.

With the reign of Josiah came clear changes in Judah's policy and religion. During the Assyrian period Judah had forged a close relationship to Egypt. Every rebellion against Assyria in the 8th Century B.C. was undertaken with the aid of Egypt and it is not improbable that even Manasseh attempted to liberate Judah from the Assyrian yoke with Egyptian help. Jer. 2 refers to Josiah's cooperation with Egypt. However, at the end of the 7th Century Egypt's policy toward Assyria changed when the two powers cooperated in the face of a new threat, Babylonia. Josiah realized that if the alliance between Assyria and Egypt managed to defeat Babylonia-Media then Judah would once more fall under the domination of foreign power. This led to a shift in Josiah's formerly pro-Egyptian policy which was implemented in 609 B.C. just before the decisive battle between Assyria and Babylonia-Media at Harran. Josiah's decision to go against the Pharaoh Neco would have certainly been opposed by some pro-Egyptian circles in Judah. They would have argued against conflict with the Egyptians who so often had supported rebellions of the Palestine kingdoms. Josiah's strategy involved drawing up in battle against Egypt at Meggiddo. This move reflected his goal of significantly weakening the Egyptian army as it marched to give aid to the Assyrian army at Harran. It is also possible that Josiah was in contact with the Babylonians (cf. Merodak-Baladan and 2 Kgs 20; Isa 39), a fact which is in harmony with the Old Testament sources' assertion that Judah had two political parties, the pro-Egyptian and the pro-Babylonian after the death of Josiah and that Nebuchadrezzar, in spite of Jehoiakim's rebellion, was willing to appoint Mattaniah, the son of Josiah and the brother of Shallum, king over Judah probably because he knew of Josiah's and Shallum's anti-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian attitudes (Laato : 365-366)."

The other explanation is from Franzmann who says,

A question arises as to why Josiah decided to intercept the Egyptian army and to engage it in battle. The Egyptians were not invading Josiah's territory. They had followed a route along the Mediterranean Sea and were going to cross the land of the former kingdom of Israel. Why did Josiah feel it necessary to do battle with the Egyptians?

We cannot be certain. As we said above, Babylon was on the rise, while the Assyrian empire was crumbling. Some believe that Josiah was motivated by a misguided zeal. He knew that God had placed his curses on Assyria, foretelling her destruction. (See Isaiah 10:5-12; 14:24-27; 30:31-33.) Perhaps, they suggest, Josiah saw himself as the agent of God in bringing about the downfall of Assyria. Therefore he attempted to thwart the Egyptian attempt to prop up the tottering Assyrian empire. Others see Josiah's action as an effort to gain a favorable political position with Babylon (Franzmann : 518).

Whatever explanation we feel that led Josiah to his decision, we cannot but see God using this decision to carry out his gracious promise to Josiah through the prophecy of Huldah. In the ensuing battle against Neco at Megiddo, Josiah was mortally wounded by an Egyptian archer who shot King Josiah. He told his officers, "'Take me away, I am badly wounded.' So they took him out of his chariot, put him in the other chariot he had and brought him to Jerusalem, where he died" (2 Chronicles 35:23-24). Thus in accord with the fulfillment of God's Word, he was "gathered" to his fathers and he was "buried in peace" (2 Kings 22:20). "Here is the only time we read this expression in 1 and 2 Kings. It means something more than the usual expression, he 'slept with his fathers.' Hezekiah was like faithful Abraham, who not only died but 'was gathered to his people' (Genesis 25:8). He would some day eat bread in heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His sins were forgiven for the sake of that Savior who would be born from his family [Matthew 1:10,11] (Wolfgramm 294-295)." Concerning the death of Josiah, Laato makes this observation, "The description of the death of the Messiah is patterned on Josiah's death at Megiddo. Like Josiah the Messiah is pierced. In addition, the mourning of the

people over the fate of Josiah (see 2 Chr 35:24-25) corresponds to the eschatological ritual mourning portrayed in Zech 12:10-13 (Laato : 293).”

Josiah was called by God to carry out a reformation of His Word which had become lost among his people. Josiah faithfully carried out this reformation of God’s Word and, in accord with the first and second tables of the Law, loved the Lord. “Neither before nor after, Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did - with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength in accordance with the Law of Moses” (2 Kings 23:25).

In comparison to the reformation of Josiah, commentators readily make reference to Dr. Martin Luther and the restoration of the Gospel which again in Luther’s day had become a hidden treasure. At the time of Luther, the Word of God, for all practical purposes, had indeed become a lost and unused book. The Gospel message of free salvation by faith in Christ was hidden under, a rubbish pile of man-made rules and regulations. He who is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6), had to take second place to Mary and the saints. It was through Luther that we as God’s shepherds today can lead our people in singing with joy in our hearts the truth of the beautiful reformation hymn:

O God, our Lord, Your holy Word Was long a hidden treasure
Till to its place It was by grace Restored in fullest measure.
For this today Our thanks we say And gladly glorify you.
Your mercy show And grace bestow On all who still deny you.

(CW: 204 V.1 - Text: 1941 Concordia Publishing House. Used by permission of CPH.)

It was certainly by God’s grace and mercy that he permitted Hilkiam to find the Book of the Law of the Lord in the Temple. It was certainly a hidden treasure. But the finding of this treasure brought many blessings to all who heard its reading. It led many to honest soul-searching and true repentance and its discovery became an occasion for great joy.

When Dr. Martin Luther discovered again the truth of the Gospel, his spirit was lifted and the Word of God became pleasing to him. Thulin, in his book, *Life of Luther*, quotes from Luther’s *Tischreden*,

Previously I lacked nothing except that I made no distinction between the Law and the Gospel: I held them to be one and the same and contended that there was no difference between Christ and Moses except for the element of time and the degree of perfection. But when I discovered the true difference, namely, that the Law is one thing and the Gospel another, then I broke through into the clear.

The words ‘righteous’ and ‘the righteousness of God’ were like a bolt of lightning in my conscience; whenever I heard them I was terrified: if God is righteous then he must also punish. But by the grace of God when I was reflecting one time in this very tower and chamber [of the Wittenberg monastery] on the words [of Romans 1:17], ‘he who through faith is righteous shall live’ and ‘the righteousness of God,’ the thought suddenly came to me: If it is through our faith that we are to live as righteous one’s, and if the righteousness of God is to avail for salvation for everyone who believes, then this righteousness will be ours not because of our merit, but because of God’s mercy. Thus was my spirit lifted up - for the righteousness of God is that by which we are justified and redeemed by Christ - and those words became more pleasing to me. It was in this tower that the Holy Spirit revealed to me the Scriptures (Thulin : 23).

The treasure of the Gospel restored to Luther the hope and joy of everlasting life in the knowledge of Christ who loved him with an everlasting love, purged his conscience from dead works, and filled his heart with peace. It made him one of the greatest shepherds and leaders of the New Testament era. It brought joy and happiness to the people of Germany who, through Luther’s German translation and preaching of the precious

Word of truth and life, once again enjoyed the treasure of the Gospel. They once again heard a proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel.

As God's shepherds and leaders in the Lutheran Church today, we too have the responsibility of bringing God's Word to his people. "God's law continues to be a mirror to show us our thorough depravity in the sight of a holy God. The apostle Paul wrote later that he would not have known last, he would not have realized that God is offended by our sinful thoughts, were it not for the 9th and 10th commandments, where God says, 'Do not covet' (Romans 7:7). When the Bible becomes a lost and unused book, people lose not only the sweet comfort of the Gospel; they also fail to recognize the full extent of their sin and guilt [Wolfgramm : 292-293]." We are, therefore, to preach both God's Law in order to show the people their sins and we are to preach God's Gospel in order to show the people their Savior from sin. There is not a single one of us who does not appreciate his Lutheran heritage and who does not show that appreciation through our preaching of God's Word the Bible. We noted that one of the greatest tragedies in the history of Israel came when the Bible was forgotten and one of the greatest reforms of their history was instituted when the Bible was brought back.

I don't think I am being overly pessimistic when I say that the Bible is becoming a hidden and soon to be lost book in our day to many people as it was in the days of Josiah. Our land, like Israel, is slowly becoming destitute of the principles laid down in the Scriptures. Everywhere we turn there are those who live contrary to God's Word. The Bible is an ignored and forgotten book. It is out of date to so called modern minds. If, as a shepherd and leader, you haven't heard it yet, I'm sure you soon will in one form or another - "Pastor - you're not with it, you're living in the dark ages! Everyone lives this way. Everyone is doing it." Well, have we got news for them - Right! Heathens and unbelievers may live that way, but Christians don't. Our enthusiasm should rival that of Josiah in preaching against the sins of our so called modern society. There is so much drivel out there that people use to justify their sins, I'm sure we all could use "Tums for the tummy" to keep ourselves from getting spiritual indigestion. Nonetheless, take heart as shepherd and leader in the WELS, we at least can climb into our pulpits on Sunday mornings and still preach the full counsel of God Word to God's people who have come to hear us. They come to celebrate with us in our services that which will make them wise for salvation.

What St. Paul said in his letter to Timothy is still true for ourselves and our hearers today, "From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:15-17). As we preach and teach God's Word from our pulpits and in our classrooms, we can have the assurance, through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, that the lives of our people will be touched, that they will be made wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, that they will be trained in righteousness and equipped for every good work. Because the Scriptures testify of Christ, the Son of the living God, born of the virgin Mary, and of all he did to save sinful human beings from sin, from death, and from the power of Satan, our hearers, blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit, will through our preaching and teaching have the gift of salvation and of eternal life. All we can do is to keep on applying God's Word to ourselves and to our people as did Josiah. "Josiah publicly announced his intention to keep the Lord's covenant and invited the people to do the same. In this way Josiah is a good example for every Christian pastor. A faithful pastor will apply God's word to his own heart and life before preaching it to the people. God's people will respond today as the people of Jerusalem responded with repentance and faith (Wolfgramm: 296). "If, however, they don't and if they won't, we can do no less than Christ who with a heavy heart wept over, the people in Jerusalem saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." (Matthew 23:37)

Josiah applied God's Word both to himself and to the people. As God's shepherds and leaders in his Church today, we are privileged to do the same. Every time we study God's Word in preparation for our sermons, Bible classes, confirmation classes, Sunday School teachers meetings etc., and we apply that Word to ourselves and to our people we are modeling ourselves after Josiah. Every time we hold a worship service and lead our congregations in the confession of sins and pronounce God's absolution upon them we are modeling

ourselves after Josiah. Every time we preach God's Word and administer the body and blood of our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, in Holy Communion, we are modeling ourselves after Josiah.

God called Josiah to carry on his work as a shepherd and leader. God gave him the faith, the strength, and the abilities, to carry on this work. God has also called us to carry on his work as shepherds and leaders. God has given us the faith and he also gives us the strength and the abilities to carry on this work. Certainly we realize that we are not Josiah. He was God's own man for a certain time and a certain called work. You and I are also God's own man for a certain time and a certain called work. God only expects that we do that work as best we can with the faith, the gifts, and the abilities with which he has blessed us.

May each of us, therefore, model our lives and work as shepherds and leaders after Josiah; and as it was said of Josiah that he loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, and strength - let us strive with God's blessings and help to do the same.

During this summer's Vacation Bible School the children not only learned about Josiah, but also sang a song about him. In conclusion of this paper I, in a childlike faith, would like to close with this simple and prayerful hymn for us all:

We have learned of King Josiah;
 How he kept your holy Word.
 When I hear your words of promise,
 Come to me, oh gracious Lord.

Refrain:

Come, Lord Jesus, be my guest.
 For then I know I will be blessed.
 I need your love and care each day,
 Please come, Lord Jesus and stay.
 [V.B.S. Devotions: Back page]

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