

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON JEREMIAH

LESSON SIXTEEN: JEREMIAH'S ALLY: KING JOSIAH

by Sandy Harber

**"Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years."
II Chronicles 34:1**

Jeremiah began his ministry in the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign (Jeremiah 1:2). The two men were about the same age and they worked toward a common goal: to rid the land of idolatry and turn the people back to the God of Israel. God had planned Jeremiah's ministry before his conception (Jeremiah 1:5). Almost 300 years before his birth Josiah was identified by name as God's instrument of judgment against the idolatry of Israel (I Kings 13:2). God has a plan and a purpose for all of us (Jeremiah 29:11). Whether or not we fulfill that purpose is up to us. God does not force compliance. He opens the door, but does not push us through it. Jeremiah and Josiah willingly accepted their commissions from the Lord. And they faithfully executed their calling as servants of the Most High God.

Josiah was born in 648 B.C. during the reign of his grandfather, King Manasseh. Manasseh was the longest ruling monarch in the Davidic line, reigning for 55 years from 697 - 642 B.C. (II Chronicles 33:1). He was also one of the most evil kings, causing the people to sin, and bringing down the wrath of God upon the Kingdom of Judah (II Kings 21:10-16). Manasseh's list of crimes was long: he rebuilt the altars and places of idol worship that his father had dismantled, he erected altars to false gods in the temple and the temple courtyards, he promoted the worship of the host of heaven, he sacrificed his own children to the god Molech by forcing them to walk a path between two rows of brazen idols that were heated within, so that the children perished in the heat and flames, he observed feast days dedicated to false deities, he participated in occult practices and witchcraft, and he consulted mediums who were possessed or controlled by demons (II Chronicles 33:2-9). When King Manasseh and his people refused to repent of their idolatry God used the Kingdom of Assyria to punish them. The king was among those sent to Babylon in chains. The Bible does not tell us how long he was imprisoned in Babylon. However, we do know that he repented and begged the Lord humbly to deliver him (II Chronicles 33:12). God answered his prayers and restored him to his throne (II Chronicles 33:13).

King Manasseh changed his ways when he returned to Judah. He removed the idols from the temple, repaired the brazen altar and offered sacrifices to God on it, and commanded the people to worship and serve the God of Israel (II Chronicles 33:15-16). Unfortunately, the damage was already done. The people of Judah had embraced the gods of neighboring nations: Baal, Molech, and Chemosh. They worshiped the host of heaven, as well. Thus the people of Judah continued to worship and serve their false gods at the same time that they worshiped the God of Israel (II Chronicles 33:17). This was the state of affairs for the first six years of Josiah's life. Scripture does not tell us how much influence the repentant king had over his small grandson. Perhaps he attempted to prevent Josiah from making the same mistakes that he had. If not King Manasseh, someone else had provided the young prince with a good foundation so that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left" (II Chronicles 34:2).

In 642 B.C., when Josiah was six years old, his grandfather died and his father, Amon, was crowned King of Judah. Amon was 22 years old when he came to the throne and he followed the former example set by his father, doing evil in the sight of the Lord (II Chronicles 33:21-22). For the brief two years that King Amon reigned he grew worse and worse (II Chronicles 33:23). The Bible doesn't tell us why Amon's own servants conspired to kill him, only that they did so "in his own house" (II Chronicles 33:24). Perhaps there were those in the king's household who feared returning to the blatant idolatry, with all its sinful practices, that Judah had experienced under King Manasseh before his incarceration in Babylon. Whatever the cause, Amon's assassination placed eight-year-old Josiah on the throne (II Chronicles 33:25). And terminated any evil influence the king might have had upon his son. God's hand was upon His chosen prophet and king from the beginning.

"Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6