

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON JEREMIAH

LESSON EIGHTEEN: KING JOSIAH'S CAMPAIGN

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"... and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images." II Chronicles 34:3b

King Josiah was only sixteen years old when he chose to follow the God that his ancestor David worshipped (II Chronicles 34:3a). Thus began a relationship that would guide and sustain him for the rest of his life (II Kings 23:25). Josiah wanted his people to know the God of his father David. He was distressed that the people were worshipping the false gods of neighboring nations. His desire was for them to experience the kind of relationship with the one true God that he experienced. Therefore, at the age of 20, King Josiah began a campaign to rid the land of all false gods and pagan religious practices, and to reinstitute the worship of Jehovah, God of Israel (II Chronicles 34:3b). The Prophet Jeremiah joined the king's campaign the following year, in 627 B.C. (Jeremiah 1:2). Jeremiah chapters two through six record several messages that the prophet gave publically, denouncing the unfaithfulness of the people in turning away from Jehovah and worshipping the false gods of their neighbors. Jeremiah warned that judgment was coming if they did not change their ways.

King Josiah's campaign lasted six years, from 628 - 622 B.C. (II Chronicles 34:8a). It was a massive undertaking that sought to undo nearly 400 years of evil practices, dating all the way back to the reign of King Solomon. King Solomon had temples built to various pagan gods to accommodate his foreign wives (I Kings 11:4-8). This indulgence of his wives' idolatry turned Solomon's heart away from the God of his father, David (I Kings 11:4). Once introduced, it was virtually impossible to eradicate idolatry from the land. Josiah's great-grandfather, King Hezekiah, had attempted to cleanse Judah by destroying the idols and their places of worship (II Kings 18:4), and by purging and repairing the temple of the Lord (II Chronicles 29:3-19). Hezekiah had even destroyed the brazen serpent on a pole that Moses had made to stop the plague of fiery serpents that had attacked the Hebrew people (Numbers 21:5-9). That relic of Moses' time had become an object of worship in King Hezekiah's day (II Kings 18:4). Unfortunately, Hezekiah's son, King Manasseh, replaced the altars and places of idol worship, and even introduced idols into God's Own temple (II Chronicles 33:3-5). And, Manasseh's son, King Amon, continued the idol worship during his brief reign (II Chronicles 33:22). This evil legacy was passed on to young King Josiah to deal with.

Josiah led his soldiers in a strategic campaign from Jerusalem, throughout Judah, and northward into the area formerly known as Israel. He personally supervised the destruction of temples, altars, and idols dedicated to the gods of Canaan, Moab, and Ammon (II Kings 23:4-14). King Josiah's men broke into pieces the "high places," that is, temples and altars erected on hilltops. They cut down wooden images and "groves" (asherim), which were tree stumps placed on either side of an altar that were carved in the image of male and female sex organs.

King Josiah ordered the temple to be purged and cleansed of idols and everything associated with pagan practices (II Kings 23:4-12). Horses that were stabled in the temple courtyard for use in the sun worship processions were removed and the chariots were burned. The tents in the temple courtyard that housed the sacred male prostitutes (sodomites) were destroyed. Pagan altars found in the courtyards and upper chambers were pounded to dust. The priests that participated in these practices were driven out of Judah. In the Valley of the Son of Hinnom below Jerusalem Josiah's soldiers broke in pieces the rows of brass idols on which babies and children were sacrificed.

King Josiah and his soldiers traveled north into the territory that was once home to the ten tribes of Israel who had rejected the line of David as their kings. They likewise rejected the God of their fathers and replaced Him with the image of a golden calf (I Kings 12:28-29). Josiah's men broke down and burned the altar and the high place dedicated to the golden calf worship in Bethel. Other high places and groves throughout the territory of the ten tribes were destroyed. Josiah's soldiers killed the priests that led the worship of these false gods. When his mission was completed, King Josiah returned to Jerusalem (II Kings 23:15-16, 19-20).

"And he cried against the altar . . . O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD: Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." I Kings 13:2