

Old Testament History

The Divided Kingdom – Lesson 13

Background:

Introduction:

Following the death of Hezekiah his son Manasseh ascended to the throne at the age of twelve and reigned over Judah from 687-642 BC.¹ Although little is known of this king, his reign brought a major departure from the religious reforms of his father. He restored everything his father had abolished. Manasseh erected altars to Baal, erected an image of Asherah² in the temple, worshipped the sun, moon and stars, gave official recognition to the Ammonite god Molech, and sacrificed his own son to him (2 Kings 21:6).

Manasseh was quick to eliminate any threats to his rule, and killed anyone who opposed his acts. Rabbinical tradition says Manasseh also killed the prophet Isaiah by commanding that he be sawn in two (perhaps one of whom the Hebrew writer spoke in Hebrews 11:37). He earned the distinction of seducing Judah "to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel" (2 Kings 21:9). He was temporarily deported to Babylon where he humbled himself before God in repentance (2 Chronicles 33:11-13), and upon his return to Jerusalem tried to reverse the trends he had set. But his reforms were quickly reversed after his death by his wicked son Amon.

Amon, the fourteenth king of Judah, promoted idolatry in the land, and restored the images which his father Manasseh had cast down toward the end of his life. Zephaniah refers to the moral depravity that prevailed during this king's reign (Zephaniah 1:4; 3:4, 11). His evil reign was brought to an abrupt end when he was assassinated by his own servants.

Josiah, the son and successor of Amon, was only eight years old when he was officially crowned as Judah's king (640-609 BC). He was the opposite of his father and grandfather, and was quickly recognized for his zeal for the Lord. When he finally came of age he set about to repair the temple, which had fallen into disgraceful disrepair. In the process, a scroll was found hidden away in the inner recesses of the building (2

¹ Many date the reign of Manasseh from 677 to 642 BC, a total of 55 years. Since Manasseh was Hezekiah's only son, it is likely that he was designated as Judah's future king around the age of two and therefore co-reigned with his father during the last ten years of Hezekiah's death. Officially, Manasseh began his reign at the age of 12 and reigned as Judah's king a total of 45 years (687-642 BC).

² Asherah (Ashtoreth) is the chief female deity worshiped in ancient Syria, Phoenicia, and Canaan. The worship of Asherah was often associated with sensuality and ritual prostitution. The priests and priestesses of Asherah also practiced divination and fortune-telling. Because the Israelites had not completely eradicated the idolatrous Canaanites from the land during the days of Joshua, the worship of Asherah survived and plagued Israel, beginning almost immediately after the death of Joshua (Judges 2:13).

Kings 22:8). On further examination, he found it was a copy of the Law of Moses, something that had not been in circulation since at least as far back as the days of Hezekiah. When the young king finished reading the book, he recognized the terrible sins that the nation as a whole had committed. At first the scroll was given to Hilkiah the priest for his reactions, and then passed on to the prophetess Huldah. This godly woman read the scroll and predicted that the curses written in it would fall on Judah because they had broken the covenant with God. Josiah repented and humbled himself before the Lord, and as a result would not have to witness Judah's tragic end in his lifetime (2 Chronicles 34:24-28).

Josiah took the scroll and, standing before the assembled nation, read it aloud. With one accord the people responded by reaffirming their faith in God, at least for the moment. Josiah began cleansing the nation of all the instruments of heathen worship, as well as the shrines in the valleys and the high places, as well as the hireling priests who served the pagan deities. Josiah even destroyed the worship center at Bethel as the man of God had predicted centuries before (2 Kings 23:15; cf. 1 Kings 13:3). The king then celebrated the most magnificent Passover feast, which had not been seen since the days of Samuel. No king did as much for God so zealously and in so short a time; and yet, the nation could not be saved. The iniquities of Judah far outweighed any benefits from the reform and devotion of this remarkable king.

In the north, war continued between Assyria and Babylon, with the intervention of the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho (Necho II – 609-594 BC) who moved his forces through Judah to fight with the Assyrians against Babylon. Josiah, wanting to rid himself of Assyrian rule, attempted to block the passage of Necho II. He saw Necho's northern campaign as a threat to Judah's security. When he engaged Necho in battle at Megiddo, Josiah was seriously injured. He was brought back to Jerusalem, where he eventually died after reigning 31 years. His death was followed by a period of national mourning (2 Chronicles 35:20-27).

Historical Notes:

When Necho II came to the throne of Egypt (c. 610 BC), the Egyptians were still recovering from the chaos created by raids into Egypt from armed bands of Scythians and those from Phrygia and Cappadocia. Sargon II of Assyria had managed to keep these people under Assyrian rule. But with the rising threat from Babylon, the armies of Assyria were fighting too many fronts to maintain control of the vast empire. When Necho came to power in Egypt, all that remained of the mighty Assyrian army were the troops, officials and nobles who had gathered around a general holding out in Harran, and who had taken the throne name of Ashur-uballit II after barely escaping defeat at Nineveh. Necho attempted to assist this remnant almost immediately after his coronation, but the force he sent was too small, and the combined armies were forced to retreat west across the Euphrates. In the spring of 609 BC, Necho personally led a sizable force to help the Assyrians. At the head of a large army, consisting mainly of mercenaries, Necho took the coastal route into Syria, supported by his Mediterranean fleet along the shore. When he prepared to cross into the valley of Jezreel, he found his passage blocked by the army of king Josiah, who had sided with the Babylonians.

Josiah attempted to block Necho's advance at Megiddo, where a fierce battle was fought that resulted in Josiah being fatally wounded.

Herodotus recorded the campaign of Necho in his *Histories*, Book 2:159.

"Necos, then, stopped work on the canal and turned to war, some of his triemes were constructed by the northern sea, and some in the Arabia Gulf (Red Sea), by the coast of the Sea of Eruthrias. The windlasses for breaching the ships can still be seen. He deployed these ships as needed, while he also engaged in a pitched battle at Magdolos with the Syrians, and conquered them and after this he took Cadytis (Kadesh) which is a great city of Syria. He sent the clothes he had worn in these battles to Branchidae of Mietus and dedicated them to Apollo."

Necho soon captured Kedesh and moved forward to join with the forces of Ashur-uballit and together crossed the Euphrates to lay siege to Harran. Although history records Necho II as the first pharaoh to cross the Euphrates since Thutmose III, he failed to capture Harran, and retreated back to northern Syria. At this point, Ashur-uballit vanished from history, and the Assyrian Empire was conquered by the Babylonians.

According to the Book of Jeremiah in the summer of c. 605 BC Carchemish was the site of an important battle which was fought by the Babylonian army of Nebuchadrezzar II and Necho II of Egypt. After being forced to retreat, Necho returned to Egypt. But on his march back, he found that Jehoahaz had succeeded his father Josiah to the throne. Necho deposed Jehoahaz and replaced him with Jehoiakim. He brought Jehoahaz back to Egypt as his prisoner, where Jehoahaz ended his days (2 Kings 23:31; 2 Chronicles 36:1-4).

Outline:

I. Manasseh and Amon (2 Kings 21:1-26; 2 Chronicles 33:1-25)

A. Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20)

B. Amon (2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chronicles 33:21-25)

II. Josiah and the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:1 – 23:3; 2 Chronicles 34:1-33)

A. Josiah reigns in Judah (2 Kings 22:1-2; 2 Chronicles 34:1-7)

B. The Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:3-20; 23:1-3; 2 Chronicles 34:8-33; cf. Jeremiah 3:6-10; Deuteronomy 27:1 – 28:68)

III. Josiah's further reforms (2 Kings 23:4-30; 2 Chronicles 35:1-27)

A. Josiah restores true worship (2 Kings 23:4-27; 2 Chronicles 35:1-19)

B. Josiah dies in battle (2 Kings 23:28-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27)

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The Exposition:

I. Manasseh and Amon (2 Kings 21:1-26; 2 Chronicles 33:1-25)

A. Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20)

1. What kind of king was Manasseh? (2 Kings 21:1-2; 2 Chronicles 33:1-2)

2. Describe his idolatry. (2 Kings 21:3-5; 2 Chronicles 33:3-5)

3. What abomination did Manasseh commit with regard to his sons? Where did these abominations take place? What other king of Judah was guilty of this sin? (2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6; cf. 2 Chronicles 28:1-3)³

4. What prophecies did Jeremiah deliver against this place? (Jeremiah 7:30-34; 19:1-15)

5. What did the Law of Moses specify regarding this particular idolatrous worship? (Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5; Deuteronomy 12:29-31)

6. Where did Manasseh place a graven image? (2 Kings 21:7-8; 2 Chronicles 33:7-8)

³ *Gehenna* in the New Testament, used to designate the place of eternal punishment, is a transliteration of the Hebrew name Hinnom (*Ge-Hinnom*). Sometime after Topheth the valley of Hinnom was defiled by Josiah (2 Kings 23:10), the site became the garbage dump of Jerusalem where the fires of burning refuse smoldering continually.

7. What did Manasseh seduce the people of Judah to do? (2 Kings 21:9; 2 Chronicles 33:9)

8. What was prophesied against Jerusalem and Judah because of the wickedness of Manasseh? (2 Kings 21:10-15; 2 Chronicles 33:10) ⁴

9. What evil did Manasseh commit? (2 Kings 21:16)

10. Who took Manasseh captive? To what city was he taken? (2 Chronicles 33:11)

11. What did Manasseh do while he was a captive? (2 Chronicles 33:12-13)

12. When Manasseh returned to Jerusalem, what defenses and reforms did he make? (2 Chronicles 33:14-16)

⁴ The prophecy given to Hezekiah by Isaiah in the matter of the Babylonian ambassadors concerned the house of David, not the destiny of the entire nation (2 Kings 20:16-19; cf. Isaiah 39:5-8). However, because of Manasseh's influence, Judah became more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel (2 Kings 21:9); therefore, the Babylonian captivity was declared for the whole nation.

13. What form of corrupt worship did the people continue to practice? (2 Chronicles 33:17)

B. Amon (2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chronicles 33:21-25)

1. What evils did Amon commit? (2 Kings 21:19-22; 2 Chronicles 33:21-23)

2. Who conspired against Amon? What happened to the conspirators? (2 Kings 21:23-24; 2 Chronicles 33:24-25)

II. Josiah and the Book of Law (2 Kings 22:1 – 23:3; 2 Chronicles 34:1-7)

A. Josiah reigns in Judah (2 Kings 22:1-2; 2 Chronicles 34:1-7)

1. To whom is Josiah compared? (2 Kings 22:1-2; 2 Chronicles 34:1-2)

2. What did Josiah do in the eighth year of his reign? What age was he at this time? (2 Chronicles 34:3)

3. What did he do in the twelfth year of his reign? Where did these reforms occur? What age was he at this time? (2 Chronicles 34:3-5)

4. Josiah carried his reforms to what places in Israel? (2 Chronicles 34:6-7)

B. The Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:3-20; 23:1-3; 2 Chronicles 34:8-33)

1. What did Josiah do in the eighteenth year of his reign? (2 Kings 22:3-7; 2 Chronicles 34:8)
2. From whom had the money that was brought into the house of God been gathered? (2 Chronicles 34:9-13)
3. What did the priest Hilkiah find in the temple? To whom did he send the book? What did the scribe do? (2 Kings 22:8-10; 2 Chronicles 34:14-18)
4. What did Josiah do when the book was read to him? (2 Kings 22:11; 2 Chronicles 34:19)
5. What did he command the high priest, scribes and others to do? (2 Kings 22:12-13; 2 Chronicles 34:20-21)
6. What did Huldah prophesy regarding the land and the inhabitants? (2 Kings 22:14-16; 2 Chronicles 34:22-24)

7. Why was this evil to come upon the people? (2 Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 34:25)

8. What did Huldah prophesy regarding the king Josiah? (2 Kings 22:18-20; 2 Chronicles 34:26-28)

9. Who was gathered together to hear the words of the book of the law? (2 Kings 23:1-2; 2 Chronicles 34:29-30)

10. What covenant did Josiah make before the Lord? Who was present? (2 Kings 23:3; 2 Chronicles 34:31-32)

11. Josiah also bound who to this covenant? How long did the people serve the Lord? (2 Chronicles 34:33)

12. According to Jeremiah, what had Judah witnessed? (Jeremiah 3:6-7)

13. What had the Lord given to Israel? Nevertheless, what had Judah done? (Jeremiah 3:8-9)

14. In what manner did Judah serve the Lord in the days of Josiah? (Jeremiah 3:10)

15. God's covenant with the children of Israel included blessings if they were obedient, and cursings if they were disobedient (Deuteronomy 27:1 – 28:68). What was the ultimate curse and punishment for disobedience? (Deuteronomy 28:49-52, 63-64)⁵

III. Josiah's further reforms (2 Kings 23:4-34; 2 Chronicles 35:1-26)

A. Josiah restores true worship (2 Kings 23:4-27; 2 Chronicles 35:1-19)

1. What reforms and purges did Josiah make with regard to the following?
 - a. The temple: (2 Kings 23:4)

 - b. Idolatrous priests: (2 Kings 23:5)

 - c. The grove (Asherah, wooden image): (2 Kings 23:6)

 - d. The houses of the sodomites: (2 Kings 23:7)

 - e. The high places for the burning of incense and their priests: (2 Kings 23:8-9)

⁵ This prophecy of captivity is not only applicable to the Babylonian captivity, but also to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (AD 70) and the subsequent scattering of the Jews among all nations.

- f. Topheth: (2 Kings 23:10)

 - g. The horses at the entrance of the house of the Lord, and the chariots of the sun: (2 Kings 23:11)

 - h. The altars of Ahaz and Manasseh: (2 Kings 23:12)

 - i. The high places built by Solomon for idolatry: (2 Kings 23:13)

 - j. The images and groves (pillars, Asherim): (2 Kings 23:14)
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2. What did Josiah do to the altar at Bethel? What prophecy did he fulfill in this incident? (2 Kings 23:15; cf. 1 Kings 13:1-10)

 3. What did Josiah burn upon the altar? What was the purpose of this action? (2 Kings 23:16; cf. Numbers 19:16)

 4. Whose sepulcher did Josiah leave intact? (2 Kings 23:17-18)

 5. What reforms did Josiah do in the cities of Samaria? (2 Kings 23:19-20)

6. What Josiah did command the people to observe in the eighteenth year of his reign? (2 Kings 23:21-23; 2 Chronicles 35:1-19)

7. Describe the feast. (2 Kings 23:22; 2 Chronicles 35:18)

8. Josiah's reforms were in order that he might do what? (2 Kings 23:24)

9. Describe Josiah's character. (2 Kings 23:25)

10. Why was the Lord's anger kindled against Judah? (2 Kings 23:26-27)

B. Josiah dies in battle (2 Kings 23:28-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27)

1. How did Josiah die? Who lamented for him? (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27) ⁶

⁶ Pharaoh Necho went to assist the Assyrians to battle against the rising power of Babylon. Josiah attempted to prevent this alliance between Egypt and the Assyrians. The NKJV states correctly that Necho went to the aid of the Assyrians.

Application:

In your own words, explain the lessons we can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations?