

Josiah, Child King

Narrator 1 - Political Climate

Assyria had taken the northern kingdom of Israel less than a century before Josiah's reign. With their movements south it seemed only a matter of time until they would conquer the Kingdom of Judah where Josiah lived. This means Josiah was the king during a time of great uncertainty in Judah.

Narrator 2 - Religious Climate

People in Judah were worshiping the gods of Assyria. The temple was filled with idols, prostitutes, and sun worshippers. People burned their children in sacrifice to the Assyrian god, Molech. Other pagan shrines dotted the hilltops around Jerusalem and throughout the land of Judah.

Narrator 3 - International Relations

Ancient Assyria was known for having some of the most advanced weapons of the day. One of the early Kings of Assyria claims to have conquered 42 different kings. He wrote: "I carried away their possessions, burned their cities with fire, demanded from their hostages tribute and contributions, and laid on them the heavy yoke of my rule." Assyrians were also well-known for their use of torture.

Narrator 4 - Josiah's Family

Josiah's father, King Amon, was so evil, that his employees killed him. When Josiah was eight years old his dad is executed by his own staff and Josiah is made king. This is what the scripture tells us in 2 Kings 21:19-24

¹⁹Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned two years in Jerusalem... ²⁰He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. ²¹He walked in all the way in which his father walked, served the idols that his father served, and worshiped them; ²²he abandoned the LORD, the God of his ancestors, and did not walk in the way of the LORD. ²³The servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his house. ²⁴But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made his son Josiah king in place of him.

Narrator 1 - Josiah Becomes King at 8 Years Old!

2 Kings 22:1-2 tells us:

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. ²He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

Can you imagine?! An 8-year-old boy hears that his dad has been killed, and then is made the king? What must he be thinking and feeling? It was into this difficult context that Josiah became king.

Narrator 2 - Josiah Turns the Country Back to God

Josiah proceeds to do what had to be pretty unnatural. He does exactly opposite what his dad would have done. Josiah follows God's commands. Josiah begins by paying the workers fairly. Then, despite the concerns about Assyrian aggression, Josiah decided to destroy all false gods and to tear down the places of worship of false gods.

Perhaps Josiah had heard about his great grandfather, Hezekiah, who while king had purified the temple and restored the Passover celebration. In his youth Josiah set reforms like Hezekiah's in motion again. Then in the process of cleaning out the temple priests discovered an old book of Scripture. Josiah took the message to heart, spurred by his fear of God's judgment against those who failed to follow the law.

Narrator 3 - 2 Kings 22:8 – 13 recounts the time when the scripture was found:

⁸The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD." ...¹⁰Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king. ¹¹When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. ¹²Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah, saying, ¹³"Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

Narrator 4 – Prophecy

After Hilkiah brought this scroll to Josiah's attention, Josiah consulted the prophetess Huldah who said in 2 Kings 22:15-20

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶Thus says the LORD, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷Because they have abandoned me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. ¹⁸But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, ¹⁹because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the LORD. ²⁰Therefore, I will gather you to your ancestors, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place." They took the message back to the king.

It was hard to hear. But Huldah assured him that the evil foretold would come, but not in his day; because he humbled himself before the Lord.

Narrator 1 - Josiah's Response to God's Word

Josiah directs the people of Judah to worship the Lord as described in 2 Kings 23: 1-3

Then the king directed that all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem should be gathered to him. ²The king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him went all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. ³The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant.

Narrator 2 – Josiah's Response Continued

Josiah then encouraged the exclusive worship of Yahweh, forbidding all other forms of worship. The instruments and emblems of the worship of Baal were removed from the Jerusalem Temple. Places of worship to foreign gods were destroyed. Josiah had pagan priests executed and even had the bones of the dead priests of Bethel exhumed from their graves and burned on their altars. Josiah returned the Ark of the Covenant to the temple and also reinstated the Passover celebrations.

Narrator 3 – Prophecy Comes True

Despite all of Josiah's efforts to turn the people back to God, the prophecy of Huldah did eventually come true. The nation of Judah was punished, but because of Josiah's humility, the calamity did not occur during his lifetime. After Josiah's tragic death at age 39 Judah went quickly downhill and fell to the Babylonians.

Narrator 4 - Josiah's Legacy

Josiah left a legacy as one of the greatest kings in the history of Israel. 2 Kings 23:25 tells us:

Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

Josiah is also referenced in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:10-11).

For more information on Josiah, read 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35