

Last time we saw that Kings and Chronicles emphasize different parts of the story of Manasseh.

Kings sees Manasseh as a total disaster.

Chronicles reminds us that there is hope – even for a total disaster –
as Manasseh repented and returned to the LORD.

Likewise, the book of Kings also has a single-minded narrative about Josiah
which the Chronicler complicates.

It is interesting to see how Samuel-Kings complicates the stories of David and Solomon,
but simplifies Manasseh and Josiah,

while the Chronicler simplifies the stories of David and Solomon,
and complicates Manasseh and Josiah!

With Josiah, the book of Kings tells the story of Josiah’s 18th year.

There are two chapters (22-23) about the reign of Josiah.

There are 45 verses in Kings that focus on the 18th year of Josiah.

There are 3 verses about the end of his life!

The Chronicler adds a little more information:

1 verse on the 8th year,

4 verses on the 12th year,

and then 44 verses on the 18th year of Josiah,
and 8 verses on the end of his life.

And while they have roughly the same number of verses focused on the 18th year of Josiah
they emphasize very different things –
as the Chronicler wants us to see another aspect of the story.

In the book of Kings, everything hinges on the discovery of the book of the law.

Of course, the book of the law was discovered *because* Josiah was repairing the temple,
but only in Chronicles are we told *why* Josiah was repairing the temple:
because he had started his reforms earlier!

We think that Josiah died in the year 609,
so he began to reign around 640 BC.

This puts the eighth year of his reign in 632,
and the twelfth year in 628.

By this point the Assyrian empire was crumbling.

In the 650s, Ashurbanipal had brutally suppressed a Babylonian revolt,
but after his death around 630, the Babylonians revolted again.

This time the Babylonians allied with the powerful Median empire in the north and east
(modern Iran).

Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince of Babylon,
married the daughter of the king of Media
(he built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon because she missed the mountains).

While Ninevah did not fall until 612,
the Assyrians were in no condition to object to anything Josiah did!

Josiah became king at the age of 8.

His father, Amon, had been assassinated – which brought him early to the throne.
He would have been six years old when his grandfather, Manasseh, died.

We are not told of any major influence on his life.

Joash – the other child king in Judah’s history –
had been guided by the faithful priest, Jehoiada.

We don’t know anything more about the childhood of Josiah –
but the silence of the text regarding any such influence,
only serves to highlight how, here at the end of the house of David,
Josiah stands alone.

The text organizes the story around the King –
and his interactions with the priest, the prophetess, and the people.

1. Josiah the King and the Reformation of Worship (34:1-13)

a. Altars for Destruction: Cleansing Judah and Israel of Idolatry (v1-7)

34 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. ² And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. ³ For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. ⁴ And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. ⁵ He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. ⁶ And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins^[a] all around, ⁷ he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

In the eighth year of Josiah’s reign, he would have been 16 years old.

As a sixteen-year old king, he began to seek the God of David his father.

And four years later, at around 20 years of age,
he began to go after the idolatry of his people.

I want you to see *how* he goes after idolatry:

he goes after the high places – the Asherim and the images;

he zeros in on the day-to-day piety of the people.

In verse 5, we are told that Josiah burned the bones of the priests on their altars.

Why does Josiah burn the bones on the altar?

His men would have become unclean by touching human bones (Num 19:11-22).

But by burning human bones on the altar,
he desecrates it, rendering it unfit for any future sacrifice.

This demonstrates what the burning of bones is all about.

It is a symbolic demonstration of their future.

The bones of the wicked are burnt as a sign of the coming wrath of God against them.

But the bones of the righteous are spared as a sign that there is still hope for them!

Some day God will raise their bones from their graves and give them life.

Just a few short years later Ezekiel will see a vision of dry bones in Ezekiel 37.

Israel and Judah have died.

They have descended into the grave of exile and death.

And their only hope is that God will raise the dead and give life to their bones.

But for the wicked priests who served at the altar of Bethel,
there is no hope.

Their bones are burnt.

There is quite a debate these days about cremation.

Is it appropriate for a Christian, who hopes in the resurrection of the body,
to request that his bones be burnt?

The Judeo-Christian tradition has long said that burial is an important picture of that hope.

I'm not willing to say that cremation is inherently sinful—
but there is something *proper* about burial.

I'm not a huge fan of modern burial practices.

We waste a huge amount of space
by giving everyone so much room to “stretch out.”

The ancient “family grave” makes a lot more sense to me!

You could easily fit 20 bodies in the space we allot for one!

Just give the previous body a few years to decompose before putting the next one in.

But Josiah thought that how we treat the bodies of the dead
says something about what we think of the future.

He exhumes the bodies of the wicked,

and burns their bones – in a sense it is a second death.

And I think he was right.

In Kings we hear all about how Josiah is the one who destroys the golden calves at Bethel.

There's no reference to that here.

In the book of Kings the first thing that happens is the discovery of the book of the law in the 18th year of Josiah.

And then in 2 Kings 23:4-20, there are 17 verses that describe the destruction of idolatry in Judah and Israel.

Here, the Chronicler gives us a five verse summary that makes it clear that at least the first wave of idol-chopping took place in the *twelfth* year of Josiah

(6 years before the episode mentioned in Kings).

(Kings doesn't say that *everything* happened in the 18th year, so it is possible that these are the same events – and that Kings simply included it later in his narrative).

But that is because the book of Kings organizes the whole reign of Josiah around the finding of the book of the law.

The Chronicler, on the other hand, wants to show you something else about Josiah – something that you will only see if you see Josiah's reign in its broader context.

I want you to pay attention to the pronouns in this section.

Notice in verses 1-7:

He did what was right.

He did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

He began to seek to the God of David his father.

Now it's true that *they* chopped down the altars of Baal – but only *in his presence* – and then *he* cut down the incense altars, burned bones, etc.

When Joash reformed Jerusalem, he gathered the priests, Levites and all the people, and *they* rejoiced and brought their taxes

When Hezekiah reformed Jerusalem and all Israel, he spoke to the priests, Levites and people, and *they* arose and cleansed the house of the LORD, offered sacrifices, and *all Israel* gathered – and all the people rejoiced.

What is more, "*they* set to work and removed the altars..." (2 Chron 30:14).

In verses 1-7, there is no "they."

"They" only participate in Josiah's reforms so long as *he* is watching.

Josiah is a good king.

He does what is right in the eyes of the LORD.

He tries to lead the people to do what is right in the eyes of the LORD.

But they will not follow!

Or, at least, they only follow half-heartedly.

When you see how many plurals are used in the reigns of earlier kings,
the singulars of Josiah's reign are all the more striking.

This may also help explain why so few prophets make mention of Josiah.
Kings and Chronicles both portray him as arguably the best king since David.
He certainly rivals Hezekiah for faithfulness.
But the prophets of his day (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and several minor prophets)
seem to ignore him.

He came to his own (land),
but his own (people) did not receive him.

Having sought the God of his father David,
he then set to repair and restore the temple of Solomon – the house of the LORD.

b. Repairing and Restoring the Temple (v8-13)

⁸ Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had cleansed the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God. ⁹ They came to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the house of God, which the Levites, the keepers of the threshold, had collected from Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel and from all Judah and Benjamin and from the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ And they gave it to the workmen who were working in the house of the LORD. And the workmen who were working in the house of the LORD gave it for repairing and restoring the house. ¹¹ They gave it to the carpenters and the builders to buy quarried stone, and timber for binders and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had let go to ruin. ¹² And the men did the work faithfully. Over them were set Jahath and Obadiah the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to have oversight. The Levites, all who were skillful with instruments of music, ¹³ were over the burden-bearers and directed all who did work in every kind of service, and some of the Levites were scribes and officials and gatekeepers.

The 18th year of Josiah sees a shift to the third person plural.

Now we see how *they* began to follow the king.

Verse 8 makes it clear that all this was still at the direction of the king.

He sent his palace officials to make sure that it happened.

And *the Levites* collected money from Manasseh and Ephraim

and all the remnant of Israel, as well as from Judah and Benjamin.

And the workmen were faithful in their labors –

under the direction of the musicians!

It appears that it took ten years for the people to begin to follow their king.

But while they are working on repairing the temple,

the priests discover something that has been missing for years!

2. Hilkiyah the Priest and the Book of the Law (34:14-21)

¹⁴ While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD given through Moses. ¹⁵ Then Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan. ¹⁶ Shaphan brought the book to the king, and further reported to the king, "All that was committed to your servants they are doing. ¹⁷ They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of the LORD and have given it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen." ¹⁸ Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it before the king.

But as they are bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD,
Hilkiyah the high priest finds the Book of the Law.

What exactly did he find?

Most agree that the Book of the Law is Deuteronomy.

After all, Deuteronomy is where Moses threatens exile
if Israel turns to other gods.

The cynical have argued that Hilkiyah and his buddies *wrote* the Book of the Law
and then "found" it at a convenient time
when they had a king who would be receptive to their pious forgery.

Some have even argued that God inspired them to do this!

We certainly have few references to any "books" prior to Josiah's day.

In 2 Kings 11:12 we are told that the high priest Jehoiada gave Joash the "testimony."

This is almost certainly a reference to the Mosaic law,
but it is hard to say for certain how much of the law it contained.

And to be honest, we do not know when Deuteronomy was written.

We know when it was preached!

Moses preached these sermons just before he died.

Someone else wrote them down,
and gave the book its introduction and conclusion.

I believe that Deuteronomy had to be in some sort of written form by the time of David.

The book of Judges is constantly interacting with the themes of Deuteronomy,

and the book of Judges almost certainly had to be written around the time of David,
because the book of Judges is addressing a conflict between Benjamin and Judah
(and after the time of David Benjamin and Judah were the best of friends).

So the most likely scenario is that the while the law of Moses

was still preserved in some form as late as the days of Joash,

few kings ever took it seriously;

and during a time of apostasy

(perhaps as early as Rehoboam or as late as Manasseh)

the Law was forgotten.

Perhaps a copy of the law was used for ceremonial purposes (like Joash's coronation),

but it is clear that its content had been ignored for a long time.

We cannot imagine how a “holy book” could be lost.

But in those days books would have been very expensive.

Very few copies of the law would exist.

If the kings and the priests became corrupt

(as they were for much of the period)

then even the few copies that did exist would be buried in the archives.

[Read:]

¹⁹ *And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes.* ²⁰ *And the king commanded Hilkiyah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying,* ²¹ *“Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book.”*

Josiah – now 26 years old, and having sought to follow the LORD for ten years – tears his clothes.

He has been seeking the LORD for a decade,
but only now does he realize how far short Jerusalem has fallen.

Enough of the law had been remembered to conduct the basic worship of the LORD,
but much had been forgotten.

Now, as Shaphan reads the book of the Law,
Josiah sees that all of the wrath and judgment that has come upon Jerusalem
has come because of Jerusalem’s lack of faithfulness to God –
because “our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD.”

And so he sends Hilkiyah and Shaphan to inquire of the LORD.
Josiah is the first king for many generations to inquire of the LORD.
Usually the LORD had to send prophets first.
But when Josiah hears the *written* word,
he wants to understand what it means for him.
And so he sends the priest and the recorder to find a prophet.

3. Huldah the Prophetess and the Word of the LORD (34:22-28)

a. Thus Says the LORD: “I Will Bring Disaster” on Jerusalem (v22-25)

²² *So Hilkiyah and those whom the king had sent^[b] went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter) and spoke to her to that effect.* ²³ *And she said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ‘Tell the man who sent you to me,* ²⁴ *Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will*

bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book that was read before the king of Judah. ²⁵ *Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands, therefore my wrath will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.*

So they go to Huldah, the prophetess,
and she says that God is about to do according to all the curses in the book.

This makes it clear that whatever was read must have contained curses
(almost certainly the curses of Deuteronomy).

Last week we saw from Lamentations 3 that God brings both good and evil –
and that the word translated “evil” is sometimes translated “disaster.”

Well, in verses 24 and 28, the word translated “disaster” is the same word!
“Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place and upon its inhabitants,
all the curses that are written in the book...”
Why does God bring evil upon Jerusalem?
Because of their sin.
The wages of sin is death.
The reason why God brings disaster upon a nation is invariably because of sin.

It’s not necessarily that this individual is the most sinful person.
It’s not that this nation is the most sinful nation.

It’s rather that God wants us to see that we *all* deserve death.
We all deserve God’s wrath and curse.
Disaster is coming.
Bad things are coming.

Or to say it another way:
God’s judgment is coming.

And Josiah responds the way a king should!
He hears the word of the LORD and responds in faith,
asking, in effect, “what shall we do?”

Whose word causes you respond?
Whose opinion matters to you?
Who can get you to act?
Your boss?
Your spouse?
Your friends?
Our hearts should be tender and open to the Word of the LORD.

Huldah then addresses Josiah in verses 26-28.

In verse 23, Huldah said, “tell the *man* who sent you to me” –

In other words, Huldah does not address him as king.

She addresses him as a man – and not as *adam*, but merely as an *ish*.

(*adam* might have suggested that he was *the* man –

but the Hebrew word *ish* is just an ordinary word for “man.”)

Tell the man who sent you that disaster is coming.

But *to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD,*

in other words, Huldah has two messages:

one to the man who sent you – there is no hope –

but for the king of Judah – there is hope!

b. But Not in Your Day – Because Your Heart Was Tender (v26-28)

²⁶ *But 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, ²⁷ because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD. ²⁸ Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place and its inhabitants.’” And they brought back word to the king.*

“Because your heart was tender” –

when you heard the word of judgment –

“because you humbled yourself before God” –

when you heard his words –

Because you heard me, God says,

I have heard you.

I hope that you understand that this is how prayer works.

If you refuse to hear God,

don’t expect him to hear you!

If you insist on rejecting the word of the LORD,

then don’t be surprised when God refuses to hear your prayers!

As we saw in Solomon’s prayer,

prayer is a response to the Word of God.

Because God has spoken–

because God has acted to redeem his people–

therefore we respond in faith and repentance to the Word of the LORD.

And when we respond in faith and repentance,

God hears us.

This is most true of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 5:7 says

*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications,
with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death,
and he was **heard** because of his reverence.*

Jesus himself was *heard* by God because Jesus was faithful to his Father's word.

Jesus is the faithful king who humbled himself,
and therefore was heard.

Because Josiah was faithful,
God promises that the disaster would not come in his day.
Josiah can save himself,
but he cannot save the land or the temple.

Notice, then, what Josiah does next:

4. The People of God and the Renewal of the Covenant (v29-33)

²⁹ Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰ And the king went up to the house of the LORD, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. ³¹ And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. ³² Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin join in it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. ³³ And Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel and made all who were present in Israel serve the LORD their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the LORD, the God of their fathers.

He starts by making a covenant with the people.

We have seen that the Chronicler emphasizes the singularity of Josiah.
For whatever reason, the people have not followed him wholeheartedly.
So now the king reads the Book of the Covenant.

He gathered all the people and read *all the words of the Book of the Covenant,*
and made a covenant before the LORD,
to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments
and his testimonies and his statutes
with all his heart and all his soul,
to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book.

Notice that Josiah makes this covenant for himself—
that *he* will do all these things.

He is a faithful covenant mediator.

So far, Kings and Chronicles agree.

But in Kings we are told that *all the people joined in the covenant* (2 Kings 23:3).

Here in Chronicles it is worded a little differently.

Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin join in it (v32).

And he made all who were present in Israel serve the LORD their God (v33).

We saw at the beginning of the chapter that the Chronicler emphasized the third person singular.

Josiah sought the LORD.

Josiah reformed worship.

Josiah destroyed idols.

Here at the end of the chapter the Chronicler also emphasizes the singular role of the king.

Josiah *made* the people join the covenant.

Josiah *made* Israel serve the LORD.

Josiah was a good king.

He loved the LORD – and loved his people –

but the people did not follow willingly (as they had in Hezekiah's day).

The king had to *make* the people obey and serve God.

Josiah could not change their hearts.

He was a good king – but he wasn't the Christ!

How does Christ exercise the office of a king?

As our catechism puts it,

“Christ executes the office of a king by *subduing us to himself*,

in ruling and defending us,

and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.”