



Second Chronicles - Chapter Thirty Four

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Four

Although Josiah was only a child when he came to the throne, he soon became obedient to the Lord and at the age of just twelve he not only removed all the articles of pagan worship - he destroyed them!

By the time he was in his mid twenties, Josiah gave instruction to repair the temple and restore it to its purpose as the centre for worshipping the Lord. The money that was collected from Judah and the remnant of Israel was used to purchase the materials and pay for the workers to complete their tasks under the supervision of the Levites. While they were doing this work the book of the Law was discovered in the temple and read to the king. When he heard the Word of God he was dismayed for he realised just how far from the Lord the people had strayed.

In response, the prophetess Huldah was consulted and she brought the words that Josiah feared. The Lord would indeed bring about all the curses he had declared upon those who were disobedient. However, he recognised that Josiah was truly humble and penitent. Therefore, he graciously promised that Josiah would not live to see the disaster that would befall the nation. Josiah's response was to gather all the elders of the nation to Jerusalem and have them renew their covenant promises with the Lord.

III.o 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:27 - Josiah

The considerable space that the Chronicler devotes to Josiah's reign (640-609 BC) is a mark of his importance as an example of godly leadership. From his youth (v.3), Josiah demonstrates faithfulness to God. Like the other great kings before him, he promotes reform according to the Law of Moses and instructions of David,

eliminating idolatry and restoring the temple (vv.3-13 and v.33). Although the inexorable shadow of exile hangs over his reign (vv.23-28), Josiah persists in leading his people into a renewal of their relationship with God and in re-establishing the Law of Moses as the basis of the nation's future life (vv.29-32).

The climax of his reformation, as it was for Hezekiah, is the celebration of a Passover unexcelled in its inclusive breadth and faithfulness: <<***No passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such a passover as was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present, and by the inhabitants of Jerusalem***>> (2 Chronicles 35:18). Josiah is evidently a model for faithful living for the Chronicler's own restoration community, centred on the temple and governed by the same law; refer to Nehemiah 8:1-8.

III.o.i 2 Chronicles 34:1-7 - Reign of Josiah

Josiah came to the throne as a child but soon discovered his love for God and set about destroying all elements of pagan worship in Judah and the surrounding tribal lands that had been Israel and over which he had some influence.

¹ Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem. ² He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

2 Chronicles 34:1-2

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign. Because of the assassination of his father Amon it was necessary for this young child to be proclaimed as king. Although no details are given, he would clearly have had guardians advising him and either helping with or making the important decisions of state on his behalf while he was being taught how to be king for himself.

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord. This was probably true of Josiah at this young age; but it is really more intended as a general description of his entire reign rather than a description of him at eight years of age.

Josiah is the ideal king of Deuteronomy 17:20, who does not turn from the Mosaic Law to the right or to the left. He transcends even David and Hezekiah in his faithfulness to God; refer to 2 Kings 23:21-25.

³ For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a boy, he began to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles, and the carved and the cast images.

2 Chronicles 34:3

For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a boy, he began to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles, and the carved and the cast images. Josiah's decisive move against pagan worship is made as soon as he has come of age by turning twenty: <<*Take a census of the whole congregation of Israelites, in their clans, by ancestral houses, according to the number of names, every male individually; from twenty years old and upwards, everyone in Israel able to go to war*>> (Numbers 1:2-3a). The reform includes both Judah and the territories of the former northern kingdom, where the decline of Assyrian power after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BC allowed Josiah to pursue his religious and political concerns.

The worship of this great variety of idols was entrenched after the reign of Amon. The late reforms of Manasseh helped against this trend, but since the short but wicked reign of Amon there was much idolatry in the land. The variety of idols described shows how deep idolatry was in Judah. There were idols dedicated to Baal and to Asherah and to all the host of heaven in the very temple itself; refer to 2 Kings 23:4-5. From the Second Kings account, it seems that Josiah began the cleansing reforms at the centre and worked outwards.

In the twelfth year. This has been linked to a particular time of chaos that occurred throughout the ancient Near East and that was precipitated by an invasion from the north of barbaric, nomadic horsemen known as the Scythians (628-626 BC). Their incursions wrought terror among complacent Jews: <<*Thus says the Lord: See, a people is coming from the land of the north, a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth. They grasp the bow and the javelin, they are cruel and have no mercy, their sound is like the roaring sea; they ride on horses, equipped like a warrior for battle, against you, O daughter Zion! 'We have heard news of them, our hands fall helpless; anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labour*>> (Jeremiah 6:22-24), and: <<*At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm'*>> (Zephaniah 1:12).

⁴ In his presence they pulled down the altars of the Baals; he demolished the incense altars that stood above them. He broke down the sacred poles and the carved and the cast images; 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 purged Judah and Jerusalem. ⁶ In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, ⁷ he broke

down the altars, beat the sacred poles and the images into powder, and demolished all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 34:4-7

He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars. Josiah did this both to carry out the prescribed punishment of idolatrous priests in Israel and to defile these pagan altars. Josiah's reforms did not only remove sinful things, but also the sinful people that promoted and permitted these sinful things. The idols that filled the temple did not get there or stay there on their own - there were priests who were responsible for these sinful practices. Any thorough reformation can not only deal with sinful things; it must also deal with sinful people. If sinful people are not dealt with, they will quickly bring back the sinful things that were righteously removed. The Lord made his feelings known long before: *<<I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense-altars; I will heap your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols. I will abhor you>>* (Leviticus 26:30).

In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali. A fortress at Mesad Havashyahu on the Mediterranean Sea has been discovered that dates to the last third of the 7th Century BC. Several Hebrew ostraca found there indicate that the site was under Judæan control. Josiah's control thus extended not only to the north, as far as Naphtali, but also westward to the coast.

III.o.ii 2 Chronicles 34:8-21 - Discovery of the Book of the Law

Josiah gave instructions for the temple to be restored and brought back into use as the centre of worship to God. During the work the book of the law was found and brought to Josiah. When the words were read to him, he realised their significance and knew that the collective sins of Judah meant they were heading for disaster. He humbled himself before Lord in response to what he had heard.

⁸ In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God. ⁹ They came to the high priest Hilkiah and delivered 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 They delivered it to the workers who had the oversight of the house of the Lord, and the workers 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 tie-beams and joists for the buildings that the kings of Judah had let go to ruin. ¹² The people did the work faithfully. Over them were appointed the Levites Jahath and Obadiah, of the sons of Merari, along with Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to have oversight. Other Levites, all skilful 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.

2 Chronicles 34:8-13

In the eighteenth year of his reign. After his energetic campaign to cleanse the land of Judah and Israel of idolatry, Josiah put his efforts towards restoring the neglected temple, much as his predecessor Hezekiah had done in 2 Chronicles Chapter 29. The repair of the temple was preceded by a definite commitment to God when Josiah was aged 16, then some four years later an iconoclastic purge attacking idolatry in Judah. The Chronicler in 2 Chronicles Chapters 34-35 appears to present a two stage sequence of events:

1. The purification of religious practices in Judah, Jerusalem and Naphtali in Josiah's twelfth year.
2. A continuing reformation stimulated by the discovery of the Book of the Law in the eighteenth year.

However, this may be a presentation to fit in with the Chronicler's particular emphases.

It is possible that Josiah was motivated to rebuild the temple after hearing or remembering that this was what King Jehosh/Josh had achieved many years before; refer to 2 Kings Chapter 12.

He sent Shaphan. Josiah's initial concern is simply to repair the temple, like Joash in 2 Kings 12:1-16, not to reform its worship. In fact, the reforms introduced by Joash some 200 years previously were still in place: it was still the task of the gatekeepers to collect the money for temple repairs, and it was the duty of Shaphan as secretary, along with the high priest, to oversee the counting and distribution of the money to the men in charge of the work.

To repair the house of the Lord his God. The repair of the temple in 622 BC was part of the continuing process of reform that Josiah had initiated.

They came to the high priest Hilkiah. According to Jeremiah 1:1-2 the prophet Jeremiah was the son of this particular priest Hilkiah. Jeremiah began his ministry during the reign of King Josiah. Ezra is recorded as the great grandson of Hilkiah:

<<After this, in the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah>> (Ezra 7:1).

The Chronicler adds that contributions came from Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel, as well as Judah and Benjamin, pointing to the unity that now existed among the people and their shared interest in the temple: <<And some of the people of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh lived in Jerusalem>> (1 Chronicles 9:3) [after the exile]. The Chronicler further states that the repair work was done under Levitical supervision; refer also to 2 Chronicles 24:8-12 and 29:12-19.

They delivered it to the workers who had the oversight of the house of the Lord. Josiah understood that the work of repair and rebuilding the temple needed organisation and funding. He paid attention to both of these needs when he commanded Hilkiah to begin the work on the temple.

¹⁴ While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, the priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses. ¹⁵ Hilkiah said to the secretary Shaphan, ‘I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord’; and Hilkiah 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 delivered it into the hand of the overseers and the workers.’ ¹⁸ The secretary Shaphan informed the king, ‘The priest Hilkiah has given me a book.’ Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

2 Chronicles 34:14-18

The priest Hilkiah found the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses. The phrase the book of the law is used in the Pentateuch only in reference to Deuteronomy, e.g. Deuteronomy 28:61 and 29:21, which was read to the king and provided the basis for his actions. Available to the kings of Israel and Judah in previous years according to 1 Kings 2:3, and 2 Kings 10:31, 14:6 and 18:6, it was evidently lost or concealed during the long reign of the mostly apostate Manasseh, who systematically infringed its laws before his final repentance. According to Deuteronomy 31:24-27 there was to be a copy of this book of the law beside the Ark of the Covenant, beginning in the days of Moses, and it may have been this copy which was found by the high priest. The Word of God was with Israel, but it was greatly neglected in those days. As Paul notes, this would place the people under the curse of God: <<For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all

the things written in the book of the law'>> (Galatians 3:10). The discovery of the book of the law in the course of temple repair is itself a reward for faithfulness because it becomes the springboard of further reform.

This neglect could only happen because Judah was in prolonged disobedience towards God and his commandments, which stated that:

- Each king was to have a personal copy of the law, and he was to read it according to Deuteronomy 17:18-20.
- In accordance with Deuteronomy 31:9-13 the entire law was to be read to an assembly of the nation once every seven years at the Festival of Tabernacles to keep the law before the people.
- The Levites, scattered among the country, also had the implied responsibility to teach the law to the people of Israel.

The first record of a public reading of the law is in Joshua 8:30. The next is during the reign of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 17:7, more than 500 years later. Then, in the reign of Josiah there was another public reading of the law in v.30, more than 250 years after Jehoshaphat. Of course, there might have been other public readings of the law as commanded which are not recorded; however, the fact that some are recorded probably means they were unusual, not typical.

Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. Second Kings 22:8b states: <<*When Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it*>>. It seems remarkable that this was even worthy of mention - that the high priest found the Word of God and the secretary read it. Yet the Word of God was no neglected in those days that this was worthy of mention. Is it possible that the high priest was in office without ever having read the law?

Shaphan then read it aloud to the king. Here the Word of God spreads. It had been forgotten and regarded as nothing more than an old, dusty book. Now it was found, read, and spread. The reader perhaps should expect some measure of spiritual revival and renewal to follow.

Throughout the history of the God's people, when the Word of God is recovered and spread, then spiritual revival follows. It can begin as simply as it did in the days of Josiah, with one man finding, reading, and believing the Word, and then spreading the message of hope that it provides for all.

¹⁹ When the king heard the words of the law he tore his clothes.

²⁰ Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, the secretary Shaphan, and the king's servant Asaiah:

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 the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us is great, because our ancestors did not keep the word of the Lord, to act in accordance with all that is written in this book.’

2 Chronicles 34:19-21

When the king heard the words of the law he tore his clothes. The hearing of God’s Word performed a spiritual work in King Josiah. It was not merely the transmission of information; the hearing of God’s Word had an impact of spiritual power on Josiah. Although it is not until the eighteenth year of his reign (v.3) that the new king begins to take action concerning the apostate condition of worship in Judah, the authors of Chronicles and Kings do not blame him. Brought up in a royal court that had been apostate for fifty seven years that subjected all opposition to a reign of terror, Josiah was not aware of the Lord’s demands. As soon as he became aware, he tore his clothes in grief and despair and sent officials to inquire of the Lord.

He tore his clothes. The tearing of clothing was a traditional expression of horror and astonishment. In the strongest way possible, Josiah demonstrated his grief on his own account and on account of the entire nation. This was an expression of deep conviction of sin, and a very good thing. This conviction of sin is the special work of the Holy Spirit, even as Jesus himself once said: **<<And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement>>** (John 16:8).

Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah. It was not that King Josiah knew nothing of God or how to seek him. It was that he was so under the conviction of the sin of God’s people that he simply did not know what to do next.

Those who are left in Israel and in Judah is another added reference to the northern kingdom to stress the unity of Israel for the returning exiles.

For the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us is great. Josiah knew that the kingdom of Judah deserved judgement from God. He could not hear the Word of God and respond to the Spirit of God without seriously confronting the sin of his kingdom and, indeed, his own personal sin as a human being. After all, the words that he had just read were quite clear: **<<The next generation, your children who rise up after you, as well as the foreigner who comes from a distant country, will see the devastation of that land and the afflictions with which the Lord has afflicted it – all its soil burned out by sulphur and salt, nothing planted, nothing sprouting, unable to support any vegetation, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord destroyed in his fierce anger – they and indeed all the nations will wonder, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land? What caused this great display of**

anger?’ They will conclude, ‘It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. They turned and served other gods, worshipping them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them; so the anger of the Lord was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in this book. The Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is now the case’>> (Deuteronomy 29:22-28). The words of the prophets that had so recently served the land would have confirmed this coming judgement: <<Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them; the mountains quaked, and their corpses were like refuse in the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still>> (Isaiah 5:25), and: <<Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked. So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem>> (Amos 2:4-5). Later, it would be accepted as the just reason why the people found themselves in Babylon: <<All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you>> (Daniel 9:11).

III.o.iii [2 Chronicles 34:22-28 - The Prophet Huldah Consulted](#)

Josiah wanted to hear from the Lord concerning the things he had read in the law and so the prophetess Huldah was consulted. Through her God confirmed that the curses on a disobedient people would indeed come to pass. However, because Josiah was pious and had humbled himself before the Lord, the disaster would not befall Judah during his lifetime.

²² So Hilkiah and those whom the king had sent went to the prophet Huldah, the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe (who lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter) and spoke to her to that effect. ²³ She declared to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, ²⁴ Thus says the Lord: I will indeed 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.

2 Chronicles 34:22-24

The prophet Huldah. Interestingly, it was not Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:2) or Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1:1) who were consulted, but an obscure prophetess who was the wife of a court official or perhaps of one of the temple personnel, for it is not clear whether Shallum was in charge of the wardrobe of the king or of the priests. Huldah lived in the Second Quarter of Jerusalem, probably a residential area on the western hill. With the apparent approval of King Josiah, Hilkiah the priest consulted this lady for spiritual guidance. It was not because of her own wisdom and spirituality, but that she was recognised as a prophetess and could reveal the heart and mind of God. Her words confirm what is already known from the unnamed prophets of 2 Kings Chapter 21: the Lord is going to bring disaster on Jerusalem and its people.

Huldah was not the only female prophet in the OT: <<*Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing*>> (Exodus 15:20), <<*At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel*>> (Judges 4:4), <<*Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid*>> (Nehemiah 6:14), <<*And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz*>> (Isaiah 8:3), which was a reference to his own wife.

I will indeed bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants. Josiah knew that Judah deserved judgement, and that judgement would indeed come. Judah and its leaders had walked against the Lord for too long, and would not genuinely repent so as to avoid eventual judgement.

All the curses that are written in the book that was read before the king of Judah. God's Word is true, even in its promises of judgement. God's faithfulness is demonstrated as much by his judgement upon the wicked as it is by his mercy upon the repentant. All the curses is an allusion to the covenant curses in Deuteronomy Chapters 27-29.

²⁵ Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the works of their hands, my wrath will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched. ²⁶ But 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, ²⁷ because your heart was penitent 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, says the Lord. ²⁸ 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 and its inhabitants.’ They took the message back to the king.

2 Chronicles 34:25-28

My wrath will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched. Genuine repentance by individuals always leads to God’s mercy and their salvation. However, the nation had gone beyond the point where yet another chance would not achieve the right outcome. Only by bringing righteous judgement upon his people by sending them away into exile would the Lord see any real response by the remnant that would eventually return to the land.

Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent and you humbled yourself before God. Josiah’s heart was open in two ways. First, it was open to the Word of God and was able to receive the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. Second, it was open to the message of judgement from Huldah in the previous verses. In essence, Josiah had the characteristics that God wanted from his people: *<<He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?>>* (Micah 6:8).

This is the Chronicler’s addition, alluding to the promise of God in 2 Chronicles 7:14, emphasising Josiah’s exemplary spiritual character.

You shall be gathered to your grave in peace. Because Josiah had humbled himself before the Lord, he will not personally see all the disaster that is to fall on Jerusalem and the people of Judah. He will die before the terrible events prophesied in 2 Kings 21:12-14 come to pass. It should not be missed here that although Josiah would die prematurely and unnecessarily in battle, the Lord still considers that he died in peace. That is because he died while in a right relationship with God and has nothing to do with what was happening to him at that point in his earthly life.

Your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place and its inhabitants. This was God’s mercy to Josiah. His own godliness and open heart could not stop the eventual judgement of God, but it could delay it. Inevitable judgement is sometimes delayed because of the open hearts of the people of God. God delayed judgement even in the case of Ahab, who responded to a word of warning with a kind of repentance: *<<(Indeed, there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord, urged on by his wife Jezebel. He acted most abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord drove out before the Israelites.) When Ahab heard those*

words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth over his bare flesh; he fasted, lay in the sackcloth, and went about dejectedly. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: 'Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster on his house'>> (1 Kings 21:25-29).

III.o.iv 2 Chronicles 34:29-33 - The Covenant Renewed

Josiah brought all the elders together, told them that the book of the law had been found and they renewed their covenantal promises to the Lord, promising to follow his laws and statutes.

²⁹ Then the king sent word and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰ The king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small; 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 The king stood in his place 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 the covenant that were written in this book.

2 Chronicles 34:29-31

Then the king sent word and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. Josiah heard the promise of both eventual judgement and the immediate delay of judgement. He did not respond with indifference or simple contentment that he would not see the judgement in his day. He wanted to get the kingdom right with God, and he knew that he could not do it all by himself - he needed all the elders of Judah to join in broken repentance with him.

The king went up to the house of the Lord. Since Josiah is a pious king, Huldah's oracle about the future does not deflect him from the path of religious reform; reformation in the light of the book of the covenant is still the right thing to do. His first move is to organise a covenant renewal ceremony, with Josiah taking up a prominent ceremonial position, i.e. the king stood in his place which, according to 2 Kings 23:3, was by one of the pillars. This is similar to the ceremony of anointing Joash as king, refer to 2 Kings 11:12-14.

The temple was built on the highest part of the hill and therefore people always went up to the temple and came down from it: <<About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach>> (John 7:14),

and: <<One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon>> (Acts 3:1).

He read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord. It appears that the king did this himself. He was so concerned that the nation should hear the Word of God that he read it to them himself. King Josiah stood before the people and publicly declared his commitment to obey the Word of God to the very best of his ability, i.e. with all his heart and all his soul.

He made a covenant before the Lord is literally 'he cut a covenant,' which goes back to the practice of cutting the carcass of an animal and separating the parts so the contracting parties could seal their agreement by walking between them, as Abram did with the Lord many generations before the law: <<*When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces*>> (Genesis 15:17), and is confirmed by: <<*And those who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make like the calf when they cut it in two and passed between its parts*>> (Jeremiah 34:18).

³² Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin pledge themselves to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem acted according to the covenant of God, the God of their ancestors. ³³ Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel, and made all who were in Israel worship the Lord their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the Lord the God of their ancestors.

2 Chronicles 34:32-33

Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin pledge themselves to it. They did this in response to the example and leadership of King Josiah. There appears to be no command for the people to do this; they did it spontaneously as they followed the king's example and leadership. This kind of mass response and commitment to the Lord cannot be commanded, but that does not mean that there is no part for leaders to play. It was clearly the work of God among the people, but God by his Holy Spirit worked through the example and leadership of King Josiah.

It was not enough for the king himself to do it and to offer his example to the people. They had to follow by taking a stand for the covenant themselves. This showed that the work of God's Spirit went beyond the king and the leaders and extended to the people also.

The fact that this happened among all the people means that this was a special work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible reveals that there are times when the Holy Spirit comes upon people as a group, which is a different work than the individual filling of the Spirit. There are times when the Holy Spirit seems to work on a group, and Christians should pray for such moving of the Holy Spirit today:

- *<<All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability>> (Acts 2:4).*
- *<<When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness>> (Acts 4:31).*
- *<<While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word>> (Acts 10:44).*

The ceremony compares with the basic Mizpah covenant recorded in 1 Samuel 8:11-17 and 10:25, and the renewal of the covenant at Shechem in Joshua Chapter 24, both of which marked turning points in Jewish history.

All his days they did not turn away from following the Lord the God of their ancestors. Sadly, these elders and the people in general only remained faithful to the Lord while Josiah still lived. After his death they would once more abandon the Lord and pay the price for their unfaithfulness.