



Second Kings - Chapter Twenty Three

XI 2 Kings 22:1-23:30 - Josiah (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Three

Josiah continued the reforms by gathering the people to the temple, having the law read to them and then leading them in reaffirming their covenant with the Lord. After that he set about comprehensively removing and destroying every idolatrous place, symbols and the people who led worship at such places. This he did throughout all Judah and parts of the former northern kingdom, including destroying the altar at Bethel that Jeroboam had erected there.

For the first time since the days of the judges, Josiah reintroduced the Festival of the Passover. He fully committed himself to following the Lord and ensured that nothing remained in the land that offended the Lord. However, even this was not enough to remove the judgement that Judah must face.

When Pharaoh Neco II travelled north to join the Assyrians in their military campaign against the Babylonians, Josiah went out to meet him in battle at Megiddo. There he was killed and brought back for burial in Jerusalem. Yet, because he had served the Lord so faithfully, it is recorded that he rested in peace with his ancestors.

Josiah was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, who was evil in the sight of God. Pharaoh Neco took him as prisoner to Egypt where he died and place another son Eliakim as king. Eliakim was renamed Jehoiakim by Neco and was forced to pay tribute to Egypt. He, too, was another bad king.

XI.c 2 Kings 23:1-20 - Josiah's Reformation

This section provides Josiah's great reforms in detail. He starts by gathering the elders to hear the law read to them and then has them recommit to a covenant with the Lord. He then sets about removing all idolatry from the entire land.

¹ Then the king directed that all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem should be gathered to him. ² The 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. ³ The 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.

2 Kings 23:1-3

Then the king directed that all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem should be gathered to him. 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 by the pillar. This is similar to the ceremony of anointing Joash as king, refer to 2 Kings 11:12-14.

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).

All the people joined in the covenant. 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 worked through the example and leadership of King Josiah.

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.

⁴ The king commanded the high priest Hilkiah, the priests of the second order, and the guardians of the threshold, to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. ⁵ He deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who made offerings to Baal, to the sun, the moon, the constellations, and all the host of the heavens. ⁶ He brought out the image of Asherah from the house of the Lord, outside Jerusalem, to the Wadi Kidron, burned it at the Wadi Kidron, beat it to dust and threw the dust of it upon the graves of the common people. ⁷ He broke down the houses of the male temple prostitutes that were in the house of the Lord, where the women did weaving for Asherah. ⁸ He brought all the priests out of the towns of Judah, and defiled the

high places where the priests had made offerings, from Geba to Beer-sheba; he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on the left at the gate of the city.⁹ The priests of the high places, however, did not come up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but ate unleavened bread among their kindred.

2 Kings 23:4-9

All the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven. Everything to do with Baal and Asherah and the worship of the host of heaven is subject to radical treatment; refer to 1 Kings 14:15 and 16:31-33, and 2 Kings 17:7-23. This reveals just how deep idolatry was in Judah. There were idols dedicated to Baal, to Asherah, and to all the host of heaven in the very temple itself. From this account, it seems that Josiah began the cleansing reforms at the centre and worked outwards.

He deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places. 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 idolatrous 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. It is likely that these priests were an order made by the idolatrous kings of Judah, and called *kemarim*, from *camar*, which signifies to be scorched, shrivelled together, made dark, or black, because their business was constantly to attend sacrificial fires, and they probably wore black garments.

The Wadi Kidron or Kidron Valley, whose eastern slopes had been associated with idolatry since the time of Solomon: <<***Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem***>> (1 Kings 11:7), was a convenient place to destroy their cult objects, thereby removing them from Jerusalem and desecrating the valley itself as a religious site.

And threw the dust of it upon the graves of the common people. Throwing the ashes of the idol on the graves of the common people outside the city was not intended to defile their graves, but the very opposite. Any contact with death was believed to be an act of defilement, so scattering the dust on the graves served to defile the idols.

He broke down the houses of the male temple prostitutes. Supposedly sacred prostitution was an integral part of the worship of many of these pagan idols. The temple had become a brothel and King Josiah corrected this disgraceful perversion.

One aspect of the syncretistic worship of Judah under King Rehoboam was religiously legitimised prostitution within the sanctuary. It is possible that the sexual intercourse envisaged had a specifically ritual character, designed to persuade the gods and goddesses to act in a similar way and deliver, through their intercourse, fertility to the land and to the community; refer also to Hosea 4:1-19.

The weaving for Asherah probably relates to ritual garments used in the worship of this goddess: <<He said to the keeper of the wardrobe, 'Bring out the vestments for all the worshippers of Baal.' So he brought out the vestments for them>> (2 Kings 10:22).

These verses reveal something of the extent of official idolatry in Judah. It was widespread, elaborate and heavily invested in. Previous kings of Judah had spent a lot of time and money to honour these pagan idols. It took a long, dedicated commitment on the part of King Josiah to undertake this work.

Defiled the high places where the priests had made offerings. These were local places of worship in various cities; refer to the comment made on 1 Kings 3:2. One example is probably an Israelite temple found at the site of Arad. It was built in the 10th Century BC, and has many similarities to the Solomonic Jerusalem temple: e.g. a sacrificial altar in the courtyard of the Arad complex measured exactly the same as the temple altar described in Exodus 27:1. The Arad complex was not a legitimate Israelite shrine and was therefore abolished in the 7th Century BC, through the reforms of either Josiah or Hezekiah. Among the high places destroyed were some at a particular gate of the city called the gate of Joshua but which is otherwise unknown.

¹⁰ He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of Ben-hinnom, so that no one would make a son or a daughter pass through fire as an offering to Molech.

2 Kings 23:10

The valley of Ben-hinnom or the Son of Hinnom ran along the western and southern sides of ancient Jerusalem until it met the Kidron Valley running from north to south. It is here associated with the worship of Molech; refer to the comment made on 1 Kings 11:7-8. Topheth is the site where this worship was practiced. Sacred sites of this kind, containing urns holding ashes and bone remains of children and animals, have been found at Carthage and other

Phœnician colonies of the western Mediterranean. The Hinnom Valley is the short form of the name, which was transliterated into Greek as *Gehenna*. Here, it appears the sacred rites of Molech were performed, and to this all the filth of the city was carried and perpetual fires were kept up in order to consume it. Hence, it has been considered a type of hell; and in this sense it is used in the NT. Refer also to the comment made on Matthew 23:15.

The rabbis say that **Topheth** had its name from *toph*, a drum, because instruments of this kind were used to drown the cries of the children that were put into the burning arms of **Molech**, to be scorched to death.

¹¹ He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of the eunuch Nathan-melech, which was in the precincts; then he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

2 Kings 23:11

He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun. The practice of dedicating horses to the sun appears to have been distinctively Assyrian, by way of the Hurrian peoples of Mitanni in northern Mesopotamia and Syria in the second half of the 2nd Millennium BC. In an excavation in Jerusalem, dating from the 8th to 7th Centuries BC, hundreds of religious vessels were found. Among these were animal figurines, many of them horses. Some of the horses had a disk between their ears, perhaps representing the sun. They could have been miniatures of the horses described here, which were placed **at the entrance to the house of the Lord.**

¹² The altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars that Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, he pulled down from there and broke in pieces, and threw the rubble into the Wadi Kidron.

2 Kings 23:12

The altars on the roof. A Ugarit text describing the ritual for the annual celebration of the grape harvest at the temple of Baal in that city mentions a king sacrificing on a roof in the context of the worship of Shaphash, the female sun deity at Ugarit. The roof is a natural location for worship of the starry host.

The upper chamber of Ahaz is presumed to be the location where King Ahaz sacrificed his own son to Molech; refer to 2 Kings 16:1-4.

¹³ The king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of Destruction, which King Solomon of Israel had

built for Astarte the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

2 Kings 23:13

Because of its hosting of idolatrous altars, the Mount of Olives, the central summit on a ridge of three running to the east of Jerusalem and the Kidron Valley, is here called the Mount of Destruction or corruption.

Astarte was commented on in 2 Kings 17:7-23; on Chemosh and Milcom, refer to the comments made on 1 Kings 11:5 and 11:7-8.

¹⁴ He broke the pillars in pieces, cut down the sacred poles, and covered the sites with human bones.

2 Kings 23:14

He broke the pillars in pieces. Josiah is destroying all the buildings associated with idol worship. Excavations at 'En Hatzeva, 20 miles or 32 km southwest of the Dead Sea, have uncovered a huge cache of religious objects from the 7th to 6th Centuries BC. These objects were used in a nearby shrine. The shrine and the objects appear to be Edomite. The temple was suddenly destroyed, perhaps during Josiah's reforms.

¹⁵ Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin—he pulled down that altar along with the high place. He burned the high place, crushing it to dust; he also burned the sacred pole. ¹⁶ As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs there on the mount; and he sent and took the bones out of the tombs, and burned them on the altar, and defiled it, according to the word of the Lord that the man of God proclaimed, when Jeroboam stood by the altar at the festival; he turned and looked up at the tomb of the man of God who had predicted these things. ¹⁷ Then he said, 'What is that monument that I see?' The people of the city told him, 'It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel.' ¹⁸ He said, 'Let him rest; let no one move his bones.' So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria. ¹⁹ Moreover, Josiah removed all the shrines of the high places that were in the towns of Samaria, which kings of Israel had made, provoking the Lord to anger; he did to them just as he had done at Bethel. ²⁰ He slaughtered on the

altars all the priests of the high places who were there, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

2 Kings 23:15-20

The altar at Bethel. A marked feature of Josiah's reforms is that he not only destroys but also defiles, particularly by placing pagan religious objects in proximity with graves and human bones. It has already been hinted in v.4 that this procedure was extended to Bethel, and now that narrative is picked up. Josiah takes action against this cult, which survives in the activities of the new settlers in the land of Israel (2 Kings 17:24-41), in fulfilment of the prophecy of 1 Kings 13:2; refer also to 1 Kings 13:11-32 for the background to vv.17-18 here. Josiah's opportunity to act in this way in Assyrian territory arose from King Ashurbanipal's death around 630 BC, and the consequent civil war and general strife in Assyria; Assyria was not capable of exercising effective control in Syria-Palestine during this period.

The altar at Bethel, which Josiah's reform also reached, had been established by Jeroboam at Solomon's death; but in the course of time a purely Canaanite worship had apparently replaced the earlier worship of the golden calf.

Politically speaking, this destruction was possible because the Assyrian Empire was weak in the days of Josiah. Josiah could intervene in this area that was subject to the Assyrian Empire because they were concerned with other things and could not stop him as mentioned above.

What is that monument that I see? This is the remarkable fulfilment of a prophecy made hundreds of years earlier. The words of this anonymous prophet are recorded: <<*While Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer incense, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the Lord to Bethel and proclaimed against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, 'O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: "A son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who offer incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you"'*>> (1 Kings 13:1-2). Josiah was careful to honour the gravestone of this anonymous prophet, i.e. Let him rest; let no one move his bones.

XI.d 2 Kings 23:21-27 - The Passover Celebrated

For the first time since the days of the Judges, the Passover was kept by the people of Judah. Josiah also removed other abominations from the land that caused so much offence to the Lord. Despite all this and the total commitment that Josiah showed in following all the ways of the Lord, he could not prevent the righteous judgement that Judah must face.

²¹ The king commanded all the people, 'Keep the passover to the Lord your God as prescribed in this book of the covenant.' ²² No such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, even during all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah; ²³ but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this passover was kept to the Lord in Jerusalem.

2 Kings 23:21-23

A Passover like this had not been observed since the days of the judges who judged Israel; refer to Joshua 5:10-12 for the last mention of Passover in the narrative, and Deuteronomy 16:1-8 for the stipulations for keeping it. In celebrating this festival Josiah outstrips not only Hezekiah in faithfulness to God, but even David. Josiah could not command heart obedience to the Word of God, but he could establish a national holiday to observe the Passover. The celebration of the Passover had become so neglected that this was a remarkable observance.

Actually, King Hezekiah held a great Passover Festival although it was delayed by one month because there were not enough priests and Levites sanctified in time to minister at the appropriate time. Refer to 2 Chronicles Chapter 30.

Passover remembered the central act of redemption in the OT: God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the days of Moses. Their neglect of Passover proved that they had neglected to remember the Lord's work of redemption for them. It was as if a group of modern Christians had completely forgotten communion or the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which remembers Jesus' work of redemption for them.

²⁴ Moreover, Josiah did away with the mediums, wizards, teraphim, idols, and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, so that he established the words of the law that were written in the book that the priest Hilkiah had found in the house of the Lord.

2 Kings 23:24

Moreover, Josiah did away with the mediums, wizards, teraphim, idols, and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem. King Josiah also fulfilled the commandment of God to put away those who practiced the occult and spiritism. His passion was to perform the words of the law which were written in the book. The great reformation in the days of Josiah is an example of simply going back to the Word of God and seeking to base all thought and practice on what God has revealed in Scripture. It was an OT example of the Reformation

principle of *sola scriptura*, the Latin which means ‘by Scripture alone.’ On [mediums](#) and [wizards](#), refer to the comments made on 2 Kings 21:1-9.

The [teraphim](#) or **household gods** were images of deities that could be either life-size as in 1 Samuel 19:13-16, or figurine-size, refer to Genesis 31:19-35. They could be used in divination in general: <<*For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the fork in the two roads, to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the teraphim, he inspects the liver*>> (Ezekiel 21:21), and: <<*For the teraphim utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; the dreamers tell false dreams, and give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they suffer for lack of a shepherd*>> (Zechariah 10:2), and perhaps necromancy in particular. Some extra-biblical texts suggest that the worship of such family deities in the ancient Near East was closely linked with the care and worship of dead ancestors and rituals in Mesopotamia certainly involved such figurines that often represented a dead person, who was believed to speak through the representation.

²⁵ 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.

2 Kings 23:25

Before him there was no king like him, nor did any like him arise after him. Josiah was one of the most remarkable kings of Judah, unique in the strength of his obedience and commitment. He stands as a wonderful example of what a leader can and should be. There were other great kings of Judah and the united kingdom of Israel, such as David and Hezekiah. Yet one thing that made Josiah unique was his godliness in his day. He lived in a remarkably wicked time, so his godliness was remarkable against the backdrop of his times. David was a greater but not a better man than Josiah.

In spite of several generations of idolatry and rebellion against the Lord, somehow Josiah arose as a righteous king who not only appeared outwardly to be righteous but turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses. Nevertheless, not long after his reign Judah was severely judged by the Lord. This shows that despite all Josiah’s efforts, there was only an outward conformity among the people of Judah for their hearts were not really turned towards the Lord.

Jeremiah ministered in the days of Josiah, and his message to the people of Israel shows this. Through Jeremiah, God promised that if the people genuinely turned to him that they would dwell in the land securely: <<*For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent*

blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever>> (Jeremiah 7:5-7). Nevertheless, God looked at the people of Judah and said: <<Yet for all this her false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but only in pretence, says the Lord>> (Jeremiah 3:10).

²⁶ Still the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. ²⁷ The Lord said, ‘I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.’

2 Kings 23:26-27

Although Josiah was himself righteous, it was not enough to turn away God’s wrath from the nation that had done such evil, i.e. still the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath. The righteousness of this one king could not change the overall situation. God did not turn from his wrath because despite Josiah’s personal godliness, and his righteous example and leadership, the people of Judah still provoked him, loving the sins introduced during the wicked days of Manasseh, Josiah’s grandfather. From consultation with Huldah Josiah knew that there would be no lasting value in their reformation. That fact, however, did not give him the right to refuse to follow the light which had come to him.

Because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. God must purge his people of deeply rooted unfaithfulness, and only exile would accomplish this.

Second Chronicles 33:11-19 describes a remarkable repentance on the part of Manasseh. Because he and his people would not listen to the warnings of God, the Lord allowed the Babylonians to bind King Manasseh and take him as a captive to Babylon: <<While he was in distress he entreated the favour of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors>> (2 Chronicles 33:12), and God answered his prayer and restored him to the throne. Manasseh then proved that his repentance was genuine: <<He also restored the altar of the Lord and offered on it sacrifices of well-being and of thanksgiving; and he commanded Judah to serve the Lord the God of Israel>> (2 Chronicles 33:16). Manasseh was raised by a godly father, yet he lived in defiance of his father’s faith for most of his life. Nevertheless, at the end of his days he truly repented and served God. In this way, it can be said that it was true that Manasseh rested with his fathers. Yet, his repentance was too late to change the nation. The widespread revolts during the reign of Ashurbanipal,

which occurred from 652-648 BC, may provide the occasion for Manasseh's summons to Babylon and imprisonment. If so, his subsequent release and reforms apparently came far too late to have much of an impact on the obdurately backslidden people.

I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel. God promised to bring Judah low by having them conquered by another nation and sending them into exile just as he had ordained that the northern tribes be taken away by the Assyrians not that long before. Although they would have been shocked, the fate of the other tribes had not impacted the people of Judah sufficiently for them to turn wholeheartedly to the Lord under Hezekiah, allowing them to easily revert to idolatry under his son and grandson. Even the great reformations under Josiah would be turned aside when he would later be succeeded by wicked sons.

XI.e 2 Kings 23:28-30 - Josiah Dies in Battle

Josiah tried to prevent Pharaoh Neco from joining the Assyrians in battle against the Babylonians but he died in the fight against the Egyptian king. His body was brought back to Jerusalem for burial.



Josiah's Battle with Neco 609 BC

Josiah met his demise in the valley of Megiddo as he sought to prevent Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt from reaching Carchemish to assist the Assyrians, who were being attacked by forces from the rising Babylonian Empire.

²⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁹ In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him; but when Pharaoh Neco met him at Megiddo, he killed him. ³⁰ His servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. The people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in place of his father.

2 Kings 23:28-30

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. This was part of the geopolitical struggle between the declining Assyrian Empire and the emerging Babylonian Empire. The Assyrians made an alliance with the Egyptians to protect against the growing power of the Babylonians.

When Pharaoh Neco met him at Megiddo, he killed him. After the death of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal around 630 BC, Egypt gradually emerged as the major power in Syria-Palestine and as the ally of Assyria in its struggle with Babylon, sending troops northward, at least from 616 BC onward, to join with the Assyrians in battle. The battle mentioned here took place in 609 BC as Pharaoh Neco II marched north for what was apparently the last joint Assyrian-Egyptian engagement with the Babylonians and their allies, the Medes. Megiddo controlled the main international highway running from Egypt to Damascus as it entered the Jezreel Valley; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 9:27-28. Josiah's decision to confront the Egyptian army there implies that he had captured Megiddo from either the Egyptians or the Assyrians before the battle, and was perhaps hoping to benefit from being seen to take the Babylonians' side. However, Josiah was killed in the battle.

Second Chronicles 35:20-25 reveals more about this. Pharaoh warned Josiah against battling against him saying: <<What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I am not coming against you today>> (2 Chronicles 35:21b). Josiah stubbornly refused to hear this warning, which was actually from God, and

disguised himself in battle - yet he was still shot by archers and died. This was a sad end to one of the great kings of Judah.

The Babylonian Chronicle recounts the expeditions of Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt to aid the Assyrians. Josiah sought to prevent Egypt's reinforcing of Assyria. Evidence of the battle at Megiddo can be seen at the site. The exact place of the battle seems to have been Hadadrimmon, in the valley of Megiddo. This national disaster was in the mind of a post-exilic prophet: <<*On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo*>> (Zechariah 12:11).

The people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in place of his father. The regular succession to the throne of Judah, the practice of primogeniture, ceased with the lamented Josiah. Jehoahaz was not the eldest son of the late king. Johanan and Jehoiakim were both older than he according to 1 Chronicles 3:15. He was made king by popular choice: it was the preference of the multitude, not the appointment of God, and that has never boded well throughout history.

XII 2 Kings 23:31-25:30 - The End of Judah

The history of Israel recorded in 1-2 Kings now comes to its end as imperial power passes to Babylon, the temple and palace are destroyed, and Jerusalem's treasures are carried off to a foreign land. It is left to Josiah's grandson Jehoiachin to offer such hope as can be found for the future of the Davidic 'lamp'.

XII.a 2 Kings 23:31-35 - Reign and Captivity of Jehoahaz

Josiah's son Jehoahaz succeeded his father but was a bad king, the opposite of his godly father. He was taken captive by Pharaoh Neco and incarcerated in Egypt, where he died. Neco replaced him with another son of Josiah called Eliakim but whom Pharaoh renamed as Jehoiakim. He, too, did evil in the sight of God and was no more than a vassal of the Egyptian king.

³¹ Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; he reigned for three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ³² He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestors had done. ³³ Pharaoh Neco confined him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, so that he might not reign in Jerusalem, and imposed tribute on the land of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. ³⁴ Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz away; he came to Egypt, and died

there. ³⁵ Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land in order to meet Pharaoh's demand for money. He exacted the silver and the gold from the people of the land, from all according to their assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Neco.

2 Kings 23:31-35

Jehoahaz means 'Yahweh has seized' and was probably a throne name, for his personal name as Shallum according to 1 Chronicles 3:15 and Jeremiah 22:11. The new king of Judah is summoned to Pharaoh Neco's temporary headquarters at Riblah on the eastern bank of the Orontes River, as the Egyptians return from the unsuccessful siege of Haran in 609 BC. Jehoahaz is removed from power and subsequently imprisoned in Egypt.

Pharaoh Neco II asserted control over Judah after Josiah's death. The people who had made Jehoahaz king probably hoped he would continue Josiah's opposition to Egypt; Neco pre-empted this risk by deposing him in favour of Eliakim, whom he renamed Jehoiakim as a mark of his authority over him. The tribute that Neco imposed on the land was a tax exacted from those who had supported Jehoahaz.

Inscription 88 of the Arad Ostraca, dating to circa 600 BC, is fragmentary but appears to be a letter from a king who has just been enthroned. The king is apparently warning the military commander of Arad of a possible military encounter with Egypt. Arad at this time guarded the southern end of Judah. The excavator identified the king who wrote this letter as Jehoahaz, who ruled Judah for three months in 609 BC.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestors had done. The excellent reforms of Josiah did not last long after his death as Jehoahaz once more led the people in rebellion against the Lord.

Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. After the defeat of King Josiah in battle, Pharaoh was able to dominate Judah and make it effectively a vassal kingdom and a buffer against the growing Babylonian Empire. He imposed on the land a tribute and put on the throne of Judah a puppet king, a brother of Jehoahaz.

Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land in order to meet Pharaoh's demand for money. Jehoiakim was nothing more than a puppet king presiding over a vassal kingdom under the Egyptians. He imposed heavy taxes on the people and paid the money to the Egyptians, as required. Neco had simply made Jehoiakim into a tax collector rather than a true king. Yet at the same time Jehoiakim was wasting resources on the construction of a new palace by forced labour; refer to Jeremiah 22:13-19.

XII.b 2 Kings 23:36-37 - Jehoiakim Reigns over Judah

This brief introduction to Jehoiakim shows him to also be a bad king.

³⁶ Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. ³⁷ He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as all his ancestors had done.

2 Kings 23:36-37

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as all his ancestors had done.

Jehoiakim, like his brother Jehoahaz, did not follow the godly example of his father Josiah. Jeremiah 36:22-24 describes the great ungodliness of Jehoiakim - how he even burned a scroll of God's word. In response to this, Jeremiah received this message from God: *<<And concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah you shall say: Thus says the Lord, You have dared to burn this scroll, saying, Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it human beings and animals? Therefore thus says the Lord concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: He shall have no one to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night>>* (Jeremiah 36:29-30).

To add to his evil deeds, this vassal king even killed one of the Lord's prophets: *<<There was another man prophesying in the name of the Lord, Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim. He prophesied against this city and against this land in words exactly like those of Jeremiah. And when King Jehoiakim, with all his warriors and all the officials, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard of it, he was afraid and fled and escaped to Egypt. Then King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him to Egypt, and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and threw his dead body into the burial place of the common people>>* (Jeremiah 26:20-23). It is hardly surprising that God did not relent from bringing punishment on this king and the people who followed his lawless ways.