

Humble Yourself Before the Lord 2 Kings 21:1-23:30

Last week in our growth group, we were discussing the discipline of “serving.” When the subjects of spiritual gifts came up, I told them that I don’t have the gift of musical leadership. (That surprised no one). I have tried to lead musical worship before. My first attempt was at “Baptist Men’s Day.” I was a relatively new Christian, eager to glorify God. While my intentions were good, my voice and guitar playing was not. After singing three songs, playing a total of about six chords on my guitar, I sat down beside my encouraging mother, who put her arm around me and said, “You did your best, honey.” That was a nice way of telling me, “Try something else.” But I would not be denied. I thought maybe “small groups” were my thing. About a year later, Dr. Shaddix invited me over to his house for a prayer group, along with my friends David and Landon, and encouraged me to bring my guitar. The plan was to lead a few choruses. I chose the short chorus, “Humble Thyself” as my first selection. The only problem is I was having trouble shifting through the chords in this “very difficult song.” Instead of playing, “Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, humble thyself in the sight of the Lord... And he will lift you up” I decided to just sing “Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord” over and over. The guys were locked in for the first two “humble thyselfs” but after I kept repeating it, they just burst into laughter. After receiving their mockery, I told them that it was for effect. I was giving the emphasis on this phrase because they needed to hear it!

“You humbled yourself in the sight of the Lord” is not a phrase uttered very often about the kings of Judah and Israel, despite the admonition from Deuteronomy concerning the kings, “his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers” (17:20a). Even the best of kings, like Uzziah and Hezekiah, fell to pride (cf., 2 Chron 26:16). The other idol-worshipping kings definitely acted in pride against Yahweh. But in these chapters, we find a king who “humbled himself before the Lord” (2 Kings 22:19), named Josiah. At the end of the story of Josiah, the writer says, “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD, with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him” (23:25).

On the other hand, we have a king who lived in prideful rebellion against God, named Manasseh. Let us consider his idolatry that we must avoid, and the obedience of Josiah that we need to pursue.

MANASSEH’S IDOLATRY (2 Kings 21:1-26)

Following the noble reign of Hezekiah, we read of the faithless reign of Manasseh. In the last chapter, we noted how Hezekiah led a reformation, despite having a wicked father (just as Josiah will do). Here we read how Manasseh led the nation into idolatry, despite having a faithful father. He apparently reigned with his father a few years, as well. So he had seen what a faithful leader looks like up close. Yet, he is as evil as they come.

Your father does not have to be the determining factor in your spiritual journey. Undoubtedly, fathers influence their children. But being the son of a Christian does not mean you will be a Christian too. On the flip side, being the son (or daughter) of an unbelieving wicked father does not mean you have to be wicked. The book of kings shows us the importance of personally making a decision to follow the living God.

We could break down Manasseh's idolatry in four parts: (1) the perversions he pursued; (2) the privileges he forsook; and (3) the disaster he brought; (4) the legacy he left.

The Perversions He Pursued (2-9)

From verse 1 we find that this king reigned for fifty-five years! This makes him the longest reigning king in Israel or Judah's history. During a period of fifty-five years, he literally exhausted God's patience (23:26-27). He did massive damage to the nation, so much so that even the reform of Josiah could not quench God's wrath; he could only delay it. He followed in the legacy of the evil kings, whose reign said to them "Anything you can do, I can do worse."

However, instead of God sending a prophet to speak, or an avenger to act, we read of little adversity, and then a nice burial in a "garden" (21:26). Why did God allow this king to reign fifty-five years? I do not know the answer. One possibility is that his reign itself was a time of judgment (Davis, f. 5, 310-311). But I would not fight for this position.

We do not always know the answers to the mysteries of God's world. It appears that internally, the leaders in Judah were okay with his practices. Moreover, the writer goes on to tell us that the perverted acts of Manasseh are not his alone; he leads the *people* into more sin than the Amorites who lived there before them (2 Kings 21:9, 11).

What did he do? We read that he was the son of "Hebhzibah," who did "evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel" (2). He rebuilt what Hezekiah tore down, namely,

“the high places” (3a). He then re-instituted fertility worship, erecting altars for “Baal and Asherah” (3b). The author speaks of him as another “Ahab king of Israel” (3c).

Manasseh’s paganism also went beyond Ahab. He also instituted astral worship. The author tells us that he “worshiped all the host of heaven and served them” (3d, cf., 5). He built altars to sun, moon, and stars in the temple (5). Astral worship is explicitly forbidden in Deuteronomy (4:19; 17:3). Believing that the heavenly bodies influenced the events on earth was common among surrounding nations (Olley, 340). Many today are still attracted to this practice. How opposite this is from Micaiah’s vision of Yahweh being worshiped among the host of heaven, not as one among other gods? (1 Kings 22:19).

God is the creator of moon, stars, and sun, and we are not to worship them (Isa 40:26). Isaiah says the Babylonian astrologers who make predictions are powerless (47:13). This practice is folly, whether it is done on a popular level of a horoscope, or for leaders in seeking the hosts for determining major decisions (Ibid. 340-341). While creation is amazing, Paul warns us against worshiping creation, instead of Creator (Rom 1:25). The better a thing is, the more likely we are to make it idol. God’s creation is good and majestic, and we tend to make people (especially those in relationship with us) or God’s creation an idol. These things cannot give you what only God can give you, namely salvation, provision, satisfaction, and meaning.

Manasseh Manasseh proved to also be another Ahaz. He burned his own son as an offering (6), violating God’s word (cf., Deut 18:10-11). He also went further than Ahaz (6; 16:3-4) by putting a carved Asherah pole in the temple (7). In so doing, he was endorsing the worship of Asherah as the consort to Yahweh. If all of this were not enough perversion, he also gave himself to the consultation of dark powers: “using fortune telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers” (6b). Necromancy was the practice that included mortals communicating with chthonic deities of the underworld (cf., 1 Sam 28:7). The author summarizes, “He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger” (6c). Evil that was “more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel” (9).

What does all this tell us? It may tell us something about Manasseh’s *politics*. Did he think that behaving like the surrounding nations, would give Judah more favor in the eyes of the nations, including Assyria? Perhaps. Did he think that his father did harm to the nation? Maybe. What we definitely learn from this story is how the *human heart* works. Humanity is “incurably religious.” Nietzsche said “There are more idols in the

world than there are realities” (Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, ix). We are worshiping people. We ponder the meaning of life. Animals do not do this. So the question is, what will you worship? Will you give yourself to myths, superstitions, the goddess of sex, or to the living God. One thing that is common in this false religious practices is that we want a god that we can control and manipulate; not the God who “is in the heavens, who does as he pleases” (Ps 115:3); a God who demands repentance and exclusive worship. But when you turn from this god to idols, you find that what your heart is ultimately looking for is Him. That leads to the next point.

The Privileges He Rejected (4, 7-9)

The sad reality of turning from the living God is that you are turning from the greatest privileges you could ever enjoy. In verse 4, the writer says, “In Jerusalem will I put my name,” and then this privilege is expanded in verse 7-9:

And the carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the LORD said to David and to Solomon his son, “In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever. And I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander anymore out of the land that I gave to their fathers, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the Law that my servant Moses commanded them.”

(2 Kings 21:7-8 ESV)

Notice the privilege of God’s presence. God says that he will “put his name there” (7). He will put himself there. When you turn to idols, you are turning from the most satisfying relationship available, and a peace that cannot be found elsewhere. The presence of God now, in the new covenant, is not found in a temple, but in his people. God dwells within us, through Christ by faith (cf., Rom 8:9).

In rejected Yahweh, Manasseh and the people were also turning from his favor. God promised them security, land, and stability, if they would keep his commands (8). But the author notes, “They did not listen.” (9)

God has promised us a land too. Because of the work of Christ, those who are new creations in Christ are waiting for the dawning of a new creation, in which the glory of God covers the earth like the waters cover the seas (Hab 2:14). He will give us a land for which we did not labor or deserve (cf., Josh 24:13), if we will follow his word, repenting and turning to Christ for salvation. Do not forsake the privilege that is offered to you.

Tragically, many trade the glory of God and his gracious privileges for their idols. In the words of Jeremiah they have “forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed for themselves cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer 2:12-13). Idolatry is forsaking a fountain for that which you think will give you water. Think of this picture in the temple. Trading the place of atonement, for goddess worship; trading the showbread, a picture of God’s sustaining power, for Baal; trading a prayer-hearing God, symbolized at the altar of incense, for fortune-tellers, mediums and necromancers (Davis, 314). Manasseh says, “No thanks. I prefer the broken cisterns to the living water.” And it was not because Manasseh had not been taught better, or for that matter, showed better. Hezekiah was his dad! He simply did not care who God was. If you want to avoid the sins of Manasseh, remember that God is your greatest joy, and your highest good, and you have no where to go outside of him to find what your heart longs for.

The Disaster He Brought (10-16)

Next, we read of the coming judgment against Jerusalem. His sins are briefly summarized in verse 12, as the reason for the devastation. Four word pictures are used to describe the coming wrath of Yahweh. First, Yahweh says that the disaster will make peoples' “ears tingle,” signaling a *terrible* judgment (12). Second, “the measuring [plumb] line of Samaria” is a graphic image used by the prophets to describe God’s *standard* of judgment (13a; cf., Amos 7:7-8). The divine architect will assess Judah like he has with Samaria and to Ahab. Third, he speaks of the *comprehensive* nature of his judgment with the image of “wiping” Jerusalem like a dish (13b). Finally, Yahweh announces that he will “forsake the remnant of my heritage [the faithful followers found during Hezekiah’s reform] and give them into the hands of their enemies” (14). This image speaks of the *helplessness* of Judah in judgment (Davis, 316).

Verse 15 reminds us of the sadness of it all. God brought this people out of bondage in Egypt, but they had a history of provoking Yahweh to anger. Manasseh put them over the top, beyond the hope of recovery (Ibid.). Not even the reforms of Josiah could keep hold God’s wrath back ultimately. The writer later reflects back on Manasseh saying, “Still the LORD not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him” (26).

The Legacy He Left (17-26)

The writer cannot document all of the evil of this fifty-five year king. But he goes on to add that he also “shed very much blood” (16). This often refers to abusing the poor, a great offense for anyone, and particularly awful for a people who used to be slaves themselves (cf., Isa 1:15-17). Josephus records that Manasseh slaughtered the prophets daily (in Olley, 342); Justin Martyr and Tertullian claim that he was the one responsible for putting Isaiah to death by sawing him in half, as is probably alluded to in Hebrews 11:37). At this point we are not surprised, for when one thinks they are not accountable to God, their depravity may have no limits.

His son Amon takes after him (20). The nation had two more years of an idol-worshiping king (21-22). His reign ends when he gets assassinated by his servants (23). But this death does not lead to the end of David’s line, for the people rise up and make Josiah, his son, the king (24). Fascinating. For whatever reason, the people do not abandon Davidic succession. They suffered under fifty-five years of Manasseh, and two years of Amon. Would you blame them for choosing a different king? But they do not. Thus, we have a delay in the judgment on Judah, and we are introduced to one of Judah’s greatest kings, in Judah’s darkest time (25-26).

But before we move on to Josiah, there is one more note on the legacy of Manasseh that we need to point out. He devastated the land with wickedness. He passed it on to his son. But he also passes down *hope to sinners*. Yes, Manasseh should give sinners hope. How so? In 2 Chronicles 33:1-20, the chronicler tells us that Manasseh repented! The Assyrians captured him with hooks, and bound him with chains and took him to Babylon (33:11). Then we read these surprising words:

And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, and god was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God. (2 Chron 33:12-13; cf., 19)

Then we read that he tried to undo the damage that he had done (14-17). Remarkable!

The reason Kings does not mention this repentance is because it did not ultimately change the course of Judah’s history as a whole. Judgment was irreversible. And apparently, his conversion did not have much of an impact on Amon. But nevertheless, he repented personally. The chronicler reminds us that God’s grace can reach the worst of idolaters. Even Manasseh was not beyond the reach of God’s transforming grace. While his previous acts forever had a lasting, negative effect, he himself experienced God’s mercy.

How do you receive such grace? Notice our theme of humility:

And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. (2 Chron 33:12)

Manasseh reminds us that in one sense it is never too late to turn to God for repentance. A friend this week told of a man, who tried to kill himself with a shotgun after his wife left him. Somehow despite shooting himself in the neck he did not die. He had been witnessing to this man for some time. After God spared his life, he eventually became a Christian. God's grace reaches the Manassehs. How? One must "humble himself or herself." Peter writes, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he might exalt you" (1 Pet 5:5b-6). Perhaps the testimony of Manasseh encouraged those who were later in exile, that if they humble themselves and repent, then God would hear and restore them too.

JOSIAH'S OBEDIENCE (22:1-23:30)

Judgment is coming to Judah, but it is delayed due to the stellar leadership of King Josiah. He is like a "second Moses" similar to Hezekiah, "a second David." Josiah is pictured as the ideal king of Deuteronomy, where we read that the king must not "turn aside from the commandment" (Deut 17:20). At the end of Josiah's reign, the writer tells us that he indeed "turned to the LORD with all his heart" obeying the Shema. The Shema is named for the first word of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear," and it goes on "O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (ESV). This confession has been echoed through the centuries by Jews, every morning and evening, and was reinforced by Jesus, who also added that whole-hearted love for God cannot be separated from love for one's neighbor. Josiah follows the Shema wholeheartedly, surpassing even Hezekiah in his devotion to the teaching of Moses. Provan summarizes Josiah's reign well, "[Josiah] is the best of all kings, but he is a king come too late" (271).

Despite reigning after dark spiritual days of Manasseh, Josiah leads the people into a time of reformation, much like Hezekiah led a reformation following the wicked leadership of Ahaz. Once again, we see how God often uses unlikely people (the grandson of Manasseh in this case), in an unlikely time, to lead a time of reformation. God in his grace gave a generation a godly leader. How kind of Yahweh.

In the introduction of Josiah (22:1-2), we see what kind of king that he is. He is a young king, who took the throne at age eight (1). This young king is known for doing

“right in the eyes of the Lord.” The chronicler emphasizes his passion for God at a young age:

For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father (34:3a).

How early can you begin to start seeking God? While you are “yet a boy” or “yet a girl.” If you are a young person, reading this, begin seeking God now! Isaiah says, “Seek the LORD while he may be found” (Isa 55:6). We have a host of examples in Christian history of young people seeking the Lord, like David Livingstone who memorized Psalm 119 at age 9! Do not fail to seek God because your peers are not doing so. You seek the Lord, taking a cue from those in the past.

The writer draws our attention to the eighteenth year of his reign in verse 3, and proceeds to tell the story of this significant year. Before recapping the events, notice how Josiah takes the initiative in providing spiritual leadership. Consider how he “sent” or commanded” in chapters 22-23:

- “the king sent” (22:3)
- “the king commanded (22:12)
- “the king sent” (23:1)
- “the king commanded” (23:4)
- “the commanded” (23:21)
- And we may add 23:24, “Josiah put away”

Josiah faithfully sets out to follow Yahweh, giving us a marvelous example of obedience to God’s word. Let me point out three challenges for all of us: (1) value the Word, (2) humble yourself before the Word, and (3) obey the Word.

#1: Value the Word (22:1-10)

Josiah has a lot of work to do and he begins with repairing the temple, similar to young Joash did (3-7; 2 Kings 12:1-16). As the work is being done, Hilkiah the high priest said to Shephan, “I have found the book of the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord” (8). Then Shephan returns to report to Josiah about the financial matters of the repair (9), and also relays, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book” (10). Shephan and his family stands as an example of the importance of giving the word to people. Olley reports:

[H]is son: Ahikam (12, 14) later was a protector of Jeremiah (Jer 26:24), and Ahikam's son Gedaliah was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar as governor of Judah after the destruction and looked after Jeremiah (2 Kings 25:22; Jer 39:13; 41:3); another son, Elasha, was entrusted with Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jer 29:3); yet another, Gemariah, provided the room from which Baruch read Jeremiah's scroll to the people, which was heard by Gemariah's son, Micaiah, who urged the king not to burn the scroll (Jer. 36:10-17, 25).

Quite a legacy! Those of us who have the word have a stewardship of getting it to people who do not have access to it.

After reading the book himself (8), Shephan proceeds to read it to Josiah (10). Two questions emerge: (1) What book was found? And (2) How long had it been missing? The first answer is probably Deuteronomy. Provan notes that the phrase "book of the law" is used in the Pentateuch only of Deuteronomy (cf., Deut 28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26; Josh 1:8; 8:30-35; 23:6; 24:26) (Provan, 271). As has been pointed out, Deuteronomy is the key book for the kings of Israel. What about question 2? We know that previous kings had access to it, so it must have disappeared under the fifty-five year reign of Manasseh. It was apparently removed from its place beside the ark (cf., Deut 31:26) in this period. That Manasseh wanted nothing to do with God's Word should not surprise us.

God's Word got lost in God's temple and no one seemed to care, until Josiah was made aware of it. How similar to our contemporary mood? My friend, have you put the Word away, or are you valuing it? Josiah is commended because he "humbled himself before the LORD" (22:19), but notice that it is a reference to his humility before God's Word. He humbled himself before God, by humbling himself before God's Word. He believed that God himself spoke through his Word. If we have such a high view of Scripture, then surely we would want to read it and hear it, right?

Agnostic professor at UNC Chapel Hill, Bart Ehrman points out the fact that many professing believers claim to believe that God "breathed out his word" (2 Tim 3:16-17), but mysteriously do not read it! I have heard him explain the following story in a debate on the Bible:

I'm teaching a large undergraduate class this semester on the New Testament, and of course, most of my students are from the South; most of them have been raised in good Christian families. I've found over the years that they have a far greater commitment to the Bible than knowledge about it. So this last semester, I

did something I don't normally do. I started off my class of 300 students by saying the first day, "How many of you in here would agree with the proposition that the Bible is the inspired word of God?" *Voom!* The entire room raises its hand. "Okay, that's great. Now how many of you have read *The Da Vinci Code*?" *Voom!* The entire room raises its hand. "How many of you have read the entire Bible?" Scattered hands. "Now, I'm not telling you that *I* think God wrote the Bible. You're telling me that *you* think God wrote the Bible. I can see why you'd want to read a book by Dan Brown. But if God wrote a book, wouldn't you want to see what he had to say?" So this is one of the mysteries of the universe. (*The Textual Reliability of the New Testament*, 13-14)

We should not need an agnostic to persuade us to read the Bible. If we believe God speaks presently through his Word, will we not want to read it? Are you like these students, denying your belief by your practice? May it not be so! May God give us a heart like the Psalmist, "my heart stands in awe of your word" (119:161). And let us value it so much, that we get it in the hands of as many people as possible!

#2: Humble Yourself Before the Word (22:11-20)

In light of hearing the Word, the focus shifts from temple repair to spiritual repair. Upon hearing the Word, Josiah "tore his clothes" (11), as a sign of humility. This humility is affirmed later, when the prophetess tells Josiah, "because ... you humbled yourself before the Lord" judgment will be delayed (19).

Consider three expressions of responding humbly to God's Word from Josiah's life. First, notice his ***humble tenderness***. In verse 19, notice that the writer says that his heart was "penitent" (11, ESV), or "responsive" (NIV), or "tender" (HCSB). The chronicler uses the word "tender," as well (2 Chron 34:27, HCSB, ESV).

Do not respond to the Word with hardness of heart, but with tenderness of heart. In the New Testament, James says, "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (1:21b). Soft-heartedness is the good soil, which bears fruit (cf., Mark 4:20).

Josiah exemplifies Isaiah's words, "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (66:2). Here is a king, trembling at the King's words.

Second, look at his ***humble openness*** to learn the Scriptures. Immediately, he seeks to know what "the words of this book" mean for him and the nation (12-13). He does not simply put the book back on the shelf. He recognizes the gravity of its message, and wants someone to explain it to him. Huldah explains the meaning to him in two parts. On the one hand, there is no hope (16-17). Judgment is coming to Judah. But on the other hand, judgment will be delayed because of the responsiveness of Josiah, who will go to his grave in peace and will not see the disaster that is coming (18-20).

Do you have a teachable spirit? Do you seek to know the meaning of God's Word? When someone teaches us the warnings in it, do you get mad at them, and reject it, or do you humbly repent and seek mercy? Imagine for a moment, that the apostle Paul or Isaiah was going to come preach at your worship gathering next week. Do you think people would show up? No, I know they may be more gifted than your pastor, but do you realize that we get to what Paul told Timothy to do every week, "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). We read from the prophets and the apostles every week. Do you value this privilege? Peter says, "Long for pure spiritual milk" like a baby craves milk (1 Pet 2:2).

Thirdly, notice his ***humble blessedness***. God honors Josiah by granting him relief from his judgment in his lifetime. God truly looks on those who honor his word with favor. Psalm 1 begins by saying, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the council of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law does he meditate day and night" (1:1-2). Psalm 119, that amazing chapter on God's Word, opens with "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!" (119:1). I am not imply prosperity theology; for those who follow the Word of God may be slain for it (Rev 6:9), but they still are blessed (1 Pet 4:14). Real blessing comes by humbling oneself before God's Word.

#3: Obey the Word (23:1-29)

What happens next is an illustration of the goal of receiving and understanding God's Word: obedience to it. It is at this point, that Josiah shines. His reforms are impressive, and it leads to the conclusion that he "turned to the LORD with all his heart" (23:25).

Covenant Renewal (1-3). What did he do? He first read of his covenant renewal (1-3). He gathers everyone together to read the book of the law to them (1-2). God's people have a long history of the public reading of Scripture (cf., Ex 24, 31; Josh 8:30-35; Neh 8; Luke 4; 1 Tim 4:13; Col 4:16). God gives life to his people through His Word. The reading sets up the covenant renewal, in which he promise to follow the Lord wholeheartedly (3a; cf., Deut 6:17; Josh 24:1-27). Then the people follow his lead (3b).

Comprehensive Reform (4-20). Next, we read of the action of Josiah. He follows the Word. It is one thing for me to tell my kids to do their chores, but it is another thing for them to do it! I do not tell explain their chores, so they can go have small groups about it, and discuss the Greek words for "mowing the lawn" and "sweeping the porch." I give them instructions, expecting them to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). These words in James are important. James says those who are just hearing it are "deceiving themselves." It is possible to deceive oneself in thinking that taking in information is sufficient. Obedience must flow.

Allow me to summarize his reforms, with thanks to Dr. Davis for providing the following "twelve-step 'de-Manassehfication' program":

1. Removing pagan vessels from the temple (4)
2. Deposing pagan clergy (5)
3. Pulverizing the Asherah image (6)
4. Wrecking the male prostitutes' temple apartments (7)
5. Defiling Judah's high places, deposing their priests (8-9)
6. Desecrating Tophet, the place of child sacrifice (10)
7. Removing and destroying sun worship paraphernalia (11)
8. Smashing royal idolatrous altars (12)
9. Eliminating Solomon's folly (13)
10. Destroying the props of fertility worship (14)
11. Pulling down/defiling Jeroboam's Bethel worship center (15-16)
12. Purge throughout the northern cities (19-20) (Davis, 328)

Provan notes, "It is comprehensive and thorough" reform (273).

Among his acts, is the fulfillment of Yahweh's word to Jeroboam I. Josiah beats the altar at Bethel to the dust (15), and defiles it by burning bones on it, which was done "according to the word of the LORD that the man of God proclaimed, who predicted

these things” (16). Once again God’s Word is proven true. This time it is 1 Kings 13:2 coming to pass, some three hundred years later!

And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD and said, “O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, 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 make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.’” (1 Kings 13:2 ESV)

Here is another reason to value the word, and humble yourself before it: *it is totally trustworthy*. Soon, Judah will see that Huldah’s word will also come to pass.

Getting back to the concept of obedience, here is Josiah’s example of doing the Word. Such obedience will require sacrifice, attacking idols, reorienting our lives, and might involve pain. But it is worth it. If you are going to remove cancer, it will involve some pain (Olley, 353), but it will also bring healing.

Celebration of Passover (21-27). After Josiah purifies worship, he re-institutes the Passover, following Deuteronomy 16:1-8. In celebrating the festival, he outdoes Hezekiah and even David (21-23). They remember the blood of the lamb that saved them from God’s wrath. The last mention of the Passover was in Joshua 5:10-12. Then we read of more anti-paganism efforts in verse 24, followed by an unparalleled commendation of his life in verses 24-25.

Despite all of these efforts, however, the wrath of God continues to burn against Judah because of the acts of Manasseh (26). Judgment was certain (27).

Consider this application. Josiah knew that his reforms could not turn away Yahweh’s wrath; it could only delay it. His reformation could not ultimately save the nation; yet he obeyed anyway. Here is what we need to learn: “Obedience without incentives is likely genuine” (Davis, 330). He obeyed out of love for Yahweh, not for what obedience might bring practically.

The book of Job opens with a question that Josiah answered rightly, and we must seek to answer rightly. Satan asks, “Does Job fear God for no reason?” Or to put it another way, “Will Job serve God if he gets nothing out of it?” (Olley, 351). Have you ever said, “Why should I obey now?” Perhaps, you think, “I’m not going to obey God because I can’t undo the past.” “I won’t obey since I’m not in a position of ministry.” “I’m not going to obey God since it will never bring me out of debt.” If you are into obedience

for your own self-centered reasons, then it is not obedience. Why do we obey? For what we can get in this life? No! That is prosperity theology. How many people reject prosperity theology in theory, but practice in real life? Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15). That is why we obey Jesus – we love him. Period. We love him because he first loved us, and those who truly love him, will obey him. So are you? Are you making the most of your situation right now?

Josiah eventually gets killed at Megiddo in a needless battle with the Egyptians, and his son Jehoaz reigns in his place (28-30). The chronicler tells Josiah apparently tried to seek the favor of Babylon by opposing the Egyptians, but this indicated his actual turning from God's Word, which that God actually spoke through the Egyptian king Neco (2 Chron 35:22). Even the best of kings had his problems. His reign ends, and now we are left to wait on the coming judgment.

Six centuries later, a descendant of Josiah, Jesus, lived a life of better than Josiah. His obedience was perfect. He would pray in the garden, "Not my will, but your will be done" (Matt 26:39). He obeyed out of love to the Father, even though it would not ease his present suffering, but only bring agony on a wooden cross. Because of his perfect obedience in dying in our place, as the ultimate Passover Lamb, and rising from the dead, we have eternal life, and the power to live out the Great Commission of "teaching them to *obey* all that he has commanded" (Matt 28:19-20, my emphasis).

Josiah is a wonderful example in this story. He is an example of humility and obedience; but Jesus is the ultimate hero of the story, demonstrating incomparable humility, and total obedience. He is the King we need to turn away the coming wrath of God. It is this King, who can forgive the worst of sinners, who live like Manasseh, if they will humble themselves and repent. Will you humble yourself before the King? If you will, grace is yours. If you refuse, then a judgment worse than exile is yours. You can be hidden in Christ, protected from wrath, secured forever, if you will trust in him.