

Learning from Josiah's Revival



By Dave Butts

One of the greatest recorded revivals took place in the southern kingdom of Judah during the reign of Josiah. As we pray and long for revival today, looking back at this biblical revival can help us understand more of what it is we are seeking. This account is found in chapters 34 and 35 of 2 Chronicles.

Josiah was just eight years old when he became king. As a teenager, something happened that caused him to begin to seek after the Lord. 2 Chronicles 34:3 says, “In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David.” This 16-year-old king began to develop a hunger to know God. At an age when, at least today, we expect little in the way of spiritual depth, God was stirring in the heart of this young man. Many of us who are longing for revival today believe that it will be birthed in the hearts and lives of the younger generations among us. Josiah is a good model of such a “youth-driven” revival.

Like his ancestor, David, young Josiah had learned to focus his desire on that which was truly important. It was God Himself that Josiah sought. It is God alone who truly satisfies and who, in Himself, is the only reasonable desire of His people. You will never find yourself longing for revival until you first find yourself desiring God Himself.

Perhaps the question that all of us must ask is: "What are we truly seeking in our lives at this moment?" What is it that drives us, motivates us, and gives us a reason to get up in the morning? As Christians, we can still find ourselves with an inadequate apologetic for our lives. We may have a Christian veneer, but inside, we may be seeking the same things as our non-religious neighbors. Does success drive us? Is it money or security that we are seeking? Perhaps it is happiness, personal peace, or a good family that becomes our desire.

Josiah acted upon his seeking heart when he began a process of repentance and turning from sin that impacted him personally, as well as the entire nation of Judah. In verses 3-7 of 2 Chronicles 34, we see that Josiah led the nation in purging the land of its idols. In all true revival there must be a turning from sin.

As the nation turned from idolatry, there became a natural turning toward God. The young king ordered his servants to begin to repair the abandoned temple, the place of worship for Judah. As the temple was cleaned and repaired, it was also restored as a place of worship. True worship will always be a mark of genuine revival. As the presence of the Lord is experienced by His people, worship will be the natural response of those whose hearts are set on God.

Verses 14-19 tell of an exciting discovery that was made. As the temple was being repaired, the workmen discovered the lost scrolls of the Law. Judah had fallen away so completely from God that they had literally lost God's Word. The rediscovery

of the Word set the nation up to be blessed and to experience the presence of God in a powerful way.

It is the “rediscovery” of God’s Word that is needed in our own culture today. In many lives, the Word has been lost. It has been unopened and unread. In many cases, even when it is read, it has not been revered, respected, believed or obeyed. One of the key marks of a genuine revival from God is the restoration of the authority of the Bible.

What happened next in the story of Josiah is so important for the Church today to comprehend. When the Law was found, the king had a heart that was responsive to what God had said. Josiah led the nation in repentance over its failure to obey the Word. With that repentance came a recommitment to not merely read it, but to act upon it. With Josiah leading the way, the nation had now put itself under the authority of the Word of God.

The role of leadership cannot be overstated here. As you read the following passage of Scripture, note that it was clearly the king who held the people accountable: “Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the Lord with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites – all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord – to follow the Lord and keep His commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book. Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it: the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers” (2 Chron. 34:29-32).

What a wonderful picture of the need for the Church today to respond to the authority of the Bible. It is not merely in

reading or hearing the Word that we are changed. We are to be doers of the Word. God calls us to listen and obey. Revival breaks out where there is a radical obedience to the Bible.

We cannot finish looking at Josiah's revival without seeing the excitement brought about by a new awareness of the Lord's presence with His people. The first nineteen verses of 2 Chronicles 35 deal with an awesome time of celebration during which Judah celebrated the greatest Passover feast in Israel's history. Verse 18 records, "The Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; and none of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover as did Josiah."

Great rejoicing is the result of returning to the Lord and experiencing His reviving power. It is important for the Church today to notice that it was not celebration that ushered in revival, but repentance and radical obedience to the Word of God. Celebration was the result of God's acceptance and forgiveness.

As the Church continues to long for and to pray for revival, we would do well to look to this young man Josiah and his amazing leadership over the nation of Judah. May the Lord raise up many young men and women like Josiah who will earnestly seek the Lord, and in doing so, lead us into a still greater experience of the presence of Christ!

Dave Butts (1953-2022) was the co-founder and president of Harvest Prayer Ministries. His popular prayer guide, [*Asleep in the Land of Nod*](#) has been used by hundreds of churches to help their congregations pray for revival.