

Who was King Josiah in the Bible?

Josiah was the king of Judah from approximately 640 to 609 B.C. His reign in Jerusalem is discussed in 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35. Josiah was the son of King Amon and the grandson of King Manasseh—both of them wicked kings of Judah. Yet Josiah was a godly king and known as one of the world's youngest kings; he began his reign at age 8 after his father was assassinated. A highlight of Josiah's reign was his rediscovery of the Law of the Lord.

Second Kings 22:2 introduces Josiah by saying, “And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” In the eighteenth year of his reign, he raised money to repair the temple, and during the repairs the high priest Hilkiah found the Book of the Law. When Shaphan the secretary read it to Josiah, the king tore his clothes, a sign of mourning and repentance (2 Kings 22:10-11).

King Josiah called for a time of national repentance. The Law was read to the people of the land, and a covenant made between the people and the Lord: “The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant” (2 Kings 23:3).

Many reforms followed. The temple was cleansed from all objects of pagan worship, and the idolatrous high places in the land were demolished. Josiah restored the observance of the Passover (2 Kings 23:2-23) and removed mediums and witches from the land. Second Kings 23:25 records, “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 all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.” God’s wrath would later come upon Judah due to the evil King Manasseh had done (2 Kings 23:25), but the judgment was delayed because of Josiah’s godly life and leadership (2 Kings 22:20).

Josiah died in battle against the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo. King Josiah was buried in Jerusalem in his own tomb, and his son Jehoahaz took the role of king.

Much can be learned from Josiah’s life that is positive. First, Josiah shows the influence a person can have from a very young age. Even children have enormous potential to live for God and to have great impact. Second, Josiah lived a life fully committed and obedient to God and was blessed for it. Third, Josiah properly responded to God’s Word. By the time he became king, the Scriptures had long been neglected, and Josiah’s heart was smitten by the failure of his people to honor God’s Word. Josiah had Scripture read to the people and made a commitment to live by it. “‘Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken . . . I also have heard you,’ declares the Lord” (2 Kings 22:19).