

Jehoshaphat's Way, Josiah's Recovery, and Daniel's Prayer

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Jehoshaphat — What He Did Right and What He Left Undone

First Kings 22:41–50 records the reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah. He walked in all the ways of Asa his father, turning not aside, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord. There is a serious matter in what the Lord sees when He looks down from heaven at the lives of those who belong to Him. Thou God seest me — that is as true of every king of Israel or Judah as it is of each of us today. And of Jehoshaphat it could be said that he did right.

He was not a man of great prayer ordinarily. He was not Elijah, who prayed fervently that it would not rain and prayed again and the rain came. But in 1 Kings 22:32, when the captains of the Syrian chariots bore down on him, mistaking him for the wicked king Ahab, Jehoshaphat cried out — the shortest prayer in Scripture perhaps — and they turned back. They turned back because, it seems, they recognised in that moment that this was not Ahab. Ahab was not a man of prayer. Jehoshaphat, whatever his limitations, was a man who cried to God, and God answered. That ought to encourage every one of us who is poor at articulating prayer. God is able to answer even when we are very poor at praying.

Nevertheless the high places were not taken away. His father Asa had left them; Jehoshaphat left them too. He did no better than his father on that point. And then: Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. That is the defining feature of world-bordering. In chapter 22:7–8, Jehoshaphat sat with Ahab while Ahab declared his hatred for the prophet Micaiah because he never prophesied good concerning him, only evil. And what did Jehoshaphat say? Let not the king say

so. That was the moment to get up and walk away from a man who hated a prophet of Jehovah. Those who hate God's prophets have at bottom a wrong relationship with God Himself. But instead of walking away, Jehoshaphat stayed — because he had made peace with the king of Israel.

The old story of the coachman makes the point. A gentleman needed a coachman for a narrow road where the cliff fell straight down beside it. The first candidate boasted he could come within a foot of the edge without difficulty. The second could come within inches. The third got the job. He said: I keep as far away from that cliff as possible. The life of Jehoshaphat is a study in the consequence of getting too close to what dishonors the Lord. His ships were broken before they could bring the gold from Ophir. The righteousness that gold speaks of never reached his house. He would have been a happier and a more effective king had he spent more time in prayer and kept further from Ahab's court.

*Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? —
James 4:4*

Josiah — Finding the Book and Acting on It

Second Kings 22 introduces Josiah, a king of entirely different character. He was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did what was right in the sight of Jehovah and walked after the way of David his father, turning not aside to the right hand or to the left.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, during repairs to the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the high priest found the book of the law. When it was read before the king, he rent his garments. He did not say: this is interesting history, let me file it away. He said: great is the wrath of Jehovah that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book. His conscience was reached. The truth entered through the conscience, and it produced immediate action.

Second Kings 23 records what followed. Josiah gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, read the book of the covenant in their ears, and stood on the dias and made a covenant before Jehovah to walk after Him with all his heart and with all his soul. Then he acted. He brought out all the vessels made for Baal and the Asherah and burned them at the Kidron. He abolished the idolatrous priests. He broke down the houses of the sodomites. He destroyed the high places — not just in Jerusalem but in Geba and Beersheba and the surrounding cities. He defiled Topheth in the valley of the sons of Hinnom. He took down the altars on the roof of Ahaz's upper chamber, the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple. He destroyed the high places Solomon had built for Ashtoreth, for Chemosh, for Milcom. He went all the way to Bethel and broke down the altar Jeroboam had made.

This was not passive introspection. Josiah recognized a corporate responsibility. All of those abominations had been built up over what we can calculate was hundreds of years — many kings, much energy, much time. The point of departure is the point of recovery. The Passover had not been kept since the days of the judges. He went back to the beginning of the failure and acted according to what he found written. How much greater is our responsibility, who have greater light than Josiah had, and the power of the Holy Spirit to enable what He requires of us.

Daniel — The Source of Strength Is Prayer

Three brief passages from Daniel complete the picture. Daniel 1 shows the first thing recorded of his character: he purposed in his heart not to pollute himself with the king's meat or with the wine. Daniel 1:9 adds: God granted Daniel favour and mercy before the prince of the eunuchs. Daniel 2:36 records his confidence before Nebuchadnezzar: this is the dream — we will tell the interpretation before the king. Daniel 5:14 has a different king, Belshazzar, saying: I have heard of thee that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and

understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee.

And Daniel 6:10 gives the source of all of it: when Daniel knew that the writing was signed — that is, the law forbidding prayer to anyone but the king — he went into his house, and his windows being open toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. He did not change. He did not reduce his prayer. He did not pray quietly with the windows shut to avoid trouble. He opened the windows toward Jerusalem and prayed three times daily, as he had always done.

Solomon in his dedication of the temple had foreseen exactly this. He prayed: if thy people sin against thee and thou give them up before the enemy, and if they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies — forgive. Daniel's prayer in chapter 9 shows him doing precisely that: we have sinned. He puts himself with Israel. He does not stand apart from the failure of his people. And his strength, his wisdom, his finding favour with Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius — all of it flows from this one source. Daniel was a man of prayer. That was where his strength lay. May it be where ours lies too.