

BUILDING A CULTURE OF LIFE

2Kings 22:11-13; 23:1-3,10,24-25

Have you ever been in a situation where you thought everything was going pretty well and then suddenly discovered that you have really messed up because you just didn't know what was expected? This might be like suddenly realizing that you hadn't filed your income tax for the past five years and that you were in deep trouble. Sometimes we just don't know how important certain things are simply because we have not been made aware of them or we just forgot about it.

Such a discovery was made by young king Josiah of Judah. Josiah's great-grandfather was Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king that sought God's help and led the nation well. Hezekiah's son Manasseh was just the opposite. He was probably the most wicked king that Judah had ever had. His reign lasted 55 years and he led the nation into idol worship and paganism. After he died, his son Amon took over the throne and it was apparent that he was no better than Manasseh. Some of his servants (domestic servants or court officials) assassinated Amon after he had been king for two years. The reason for doing this is not given in the account; however, some have thought that it was because he was being oppressive to them. Others had thought that they realized that a change was needed for the country. This assassination triggered an uprising of the people of Judah who executed those who killed the king and then they took his eight-year-old son Josiah and made him king. Those who were in a guardian position for Josiah actually ruled the country during the early years because an eight-year-old child was not capable of doing so. These people were intent on restoring the proper religious influence to the nation. They began reforms that impacted the political as well as the social and religious aspects of life in Judah. As Josiah became older, he started having his own influence and agenda which were greatly influenced by the reformation movement that he had watched develop as he grew up. He was known as one of the best kings to ever rule Judah. One of the projects that Josiah started was the renovation of the temple. During the long reign of his grandfather (Manasseh) the temple had been neglected. One of the key political officials was put in charge of this operation and he was to work with the high priest Hilkiah to get the job done.

While the work was underway, the workmen found a copy of the law. It is unclear whether this was the first five books (of Moses) or just a portion of these. Nevertheless, it was a significant discovery. I get the impression that for years they did not have access to the Scriptures and really did not know what was contained in the law. The workmen gave the writings to Hilkiah, the priest and he passed it along to Shaphan the official in charge of the restoration of the temple. Shaphan took the writings to Josiah and read it to him. It is not clear exactly what parts of the Scriptures were read to the king; however, many think that it was such a passage as Deuteronomy 28. When Josiah heard these words, he tore his robe as a sign of deep anguish and remorse and immediately sought help to determine what could be done to change the situation.

Follow the Right Blueprint – 2Kings 22:11-13

¹¹ When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. ¹² Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying, ¹³ "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." 2 Kings 22:11-13 (NASB95)

Josiah called together some of the most influential people in the nation and instructed them to look into the problem. Today we might refer to such a group as a "blue-ribbon panel." Their assignment was to find out what God intended to do to the nation since they had obviously done the things that God said would bring a curse on the people and the land. Josiah was astute enough to realize that the nation was in big trouble because they had ignored what God required. They had done the very things that God said was abominable to Him and Josiah was suddenly confronted with the facts. He was afraid for himself and for the people.

How can we apply such a response to what is happening in our nation? We don't have a king who can authoritatively call the shots on religious things and what happens in the secular life of the nation. We keep telling ourselves that we have separation of church and state. So how would this work for those in policy making positions to be influenced by a discovery of what the word of God says regarding obedience to the principles of the kingdom of God?

Looking back on what happened in Judah, it is not likely that anything good was going to happen when Manasseh was king because he was basically evil. So what is the first lesson for us? Make sure that the top leadership is a person of good (or at least neutral) character. Who has the responsibility to make sure this happens? Since we are theoretically self governed in that we elect representatives, then we have a responsibility to know the candidates and vote for those of good moral character.

Josiah was only eight years old when he became king and those in positions of advising him were actually running the government. They really made up a shadow government that was in operation for nearly two decades. In our government, there are official and unofficial advisers to the president. These are supposedly chosen by the president, but are (for all practical purposes) chosen (or the choice is strongly influenced) by his closest and most powerful advisor. The lesson for us is that we need to know the candidate and we need to know those on whom he would rely for advice.

We should apply this same due diligence to those who are in the legislative and judicial branches of government. Notice that the process has to start with "we the people." Being self-governed means being involved in the process at least to the extent of knowing how the system works and especially knowing the character and beliefs of those who are candidates for office. Before we can make a "right" choice, we also have to know what the word of God says and then use that as the basis for making our decisions. If we (as a nation) are going to follow the right "blueprint" then we (as a people) must be committed to the principles found in the word of God.

What did the assigned delegation discover when they "inquired of the Lord" regarding what was going to happen? The prophetess told them that the word of God that was recorded in the Scriptures would be fulfilled. That is really profound! We would all do well to realize this truth. I'm sure that the disappointing part of the message was that there was nothing they could do to keep it from happening. The good news in the message was that it would not happen in Josiah's lifetime because he had shown humility and was sensitive to the message of the Scriptures.

Encourage Others' Involvement – 2Kings 23:1-3

¹ Then the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. ² The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. ³ 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 carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant. 2 Kings 23:1-3 (NASB95)

After having discovered the situation which the nation was facing, Josiah turned his attention to doing all he could to bring as many people as he could under the umbrella of mercy that was extended to him. He started with the leadership of the nation in the secular and religious areas. It was a reasonable thing to do. If the king was not aware of what the Scriptures said, then it was very certain that others in positions of leadership were not aware either.

After he had read the words to these people who were summoned to the meeting, he then took the lead in committing himself to the Covenant that God had made with the nation of Israel during the time of Moses. The people followed his lead and took their stand on the principles of God's commandments and ordinances.

How we use this action in today environment to "do what we can" that will help others come under God's umbrella of mercy? I don't think that the President would call in all the governors, senators, and other officials and share with them what the Bible says they should be doing as leaders. Since the elected leaders can't do this in their official roles, what other options do we have? There is nothing that says we cannot share the message of the Scriptures with others, commit ourselves to the teachings of the Bible and encourage other to do the same.

What might be a reasonable thing for the elected officials to do when they discover that they have drifted away from the principles upon which our nation was founded? They might read the pertinent documents in a public setting and rededicate themselves to the principles upon which our government was founded as described in the Constitution.

It cannot stop with just saying the words. Actions have to follow for the commitment to be real. Josiah initiated actions that were carried out by the priests to tear down the pagan altars and high places that had been used during the time of Manasseh and apparently some that had not been taken care of during the reform of Hezekiah. One of the more onerous places of pagan worship was just south of Jerusalem where sacrifice of children took place.

Protect Children's Well Being – 2Kings 23:10

¹⁰ He also defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech. 2 Kings 23:10 (NASB95)

The term "Topheth" came to mean the place of fire; however, the name itself was derived from the Hebrew word for "beating drums and cymbals." Some commentators say that the practice of having loud drums and cymbals being played was to drown out the screams and cries of the children being sacrificed on the altar of Molech. It is said that Josiah defiled this area so that it could not be used for child sacrifice again. We are not told what the specific defilement was, but we do know that it was turned into the garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. The area was called Gehenna in the New Testament and was frequently used as an image and picture of Hell. The garbage was burned and the fire did not go out. It was also used as a place where the filth and dung of the city were taken and where criminals were buried.

There are many facets to the idea that we need to protect the well-being of children. If we were to discover any place in the world where such practices as worship of Molech that had parents bring their children and burn them in fire, then we would find total outrage among all who knew about it. Steps (either sanctions or military invasion) would be taken to put an end to such practices. We could make the argument that people today have found more subtle ways to neglect the well being of children. Some are harmed by unintended consequences and others are harmed by deliberate actions.

I have often thought that many modern day parents are sacrificing their children to career, materialism, and pleasure seeking by not giving them the proper attention as they are growing up. There are many families where both parents have to work to make a living. That is different

from those that have their priorities on career and other things. We can work and we can have the things needed for a comfortable life and we can have fun in what we do, but our priority had better be on rearing the best generation of new people to replenish the earth.

The abortion mills can be likened to "sacrificial altars" that are built to the goddess of "irresponsible freedom." Too many people are worshipping there. The kindest thing that can be said about abortion is that it is a barbaric form of birth control. At the other end of the spectrum we see it as murder of an unborn child. By far, the majority of the abortions are carried out on unmarried women and the reason for the abortion in more than 95% of the cases have nothing to do with rape, incest, or the health of the mother. We have become callous to the reality of abortion in this the most enlightened and biblically oriented nation on this earth.

Solomon tells us in Proverbs 24:11-12 "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" Eugene Peterson in the *Message* puts it this way: ¹¹Rescue the perishing; don't hesitate to step in and help. ¹²If you say, "Hey, that's none of my business," will that get you off the hook? Someone is watching you closely, you know – Someone not impressed with weak excuses. In James 4:17 "In fact, if you know the right thing to do and don't do it, that, for you, is evil (or a sin)."

Josiah was said to have defiled the place where child sacrifices were carried out. How can we "defile" or cause people to be repulsed by the practice of abortion? What can be done to help people realize that they are ending a human life by such practices? It may be that we take a stand on the side of what is right in such matters so that whatever influence we have can make a difference. We can also help those who are working to educate those who are facing such decisions and we can work to change public opinion as to the evil that is being practiced. We don't need to be politically correct when it comes to protecting human life.

Keep Your Heart in It – 2Kings 23:24-25

²⁴Moreover, Josiah removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. ²⁵Before 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. 2 Kings 23:24-25 (NASB95)

Not only did Josiah work on getting rid of the places of pagan worship, he also put away those who practiced such things as séances, magic, and fortune telling. These were forbidden in the Scriptures and he wanted to be in complete agreement with what God had commanded. He also went so far as having people remove all pagan symbols and idols from their homes. His pursuit of being in compliance was wholehearted.

What are the alternatives for us in our culture and with our laws that could come close to what Josiah did for Judah? The first thing would be for all Christians to get their own house in order. You might be surprised to know how many church members have consulted a fortune teller or had their palm read or read their horoscopes. We might even find that we have symbols of pagan religion and pagan religious practices in our homes even though we have no intent of worshipping such things. The next step would be to help educate or enlighten others about the dangers of trusting in anything other than God for our well being.