Central Study Hour – Lesson 8 on Jeremiah: “Josiah’s Reforms”

*INTRODUCTION:* THERE WAS NO KING LIKE HIM.

**Read 2 Kings 23:25** (Memory Text).
*To what great kings did Josiah compare favorably?* David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah. Yet Josiah’s day was a time of great apostasy. Over the years many prophets had given warnings, but God didn’t force them. They had the freedom to make wrong choices. Much of Scripture is the story of God warning His people about making wrong choices. This is a major part of what the book of Jeremiah is about: the pleadings of God, Who respects free choice and free will, to His chosen nation. In this lesson we see a glimmer of hope. Josiah was one of the few kings who, using free will, chose to do what “was right in the sight of the LORD.”

*SUNDAY: THE REIGNS OF MANASSEH AND AMON*

**Read 2 Chronicles 33:1-6** (or just note highlights from the passage).
*Who was Manasseh’s father?* Hezekiah, a follower of God who was a good king who cleaned idolatry out of Judah and led them back to God after the apostasy of his own father, Ahaz.  
*How can we explain Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, leading Judah into such terrible apostasy? How would Manasseh justify in his own mind the horrific abominations that he allowed to flourish in Judah? Wouldn’t all of Hezekiah’s advisors influence Manasseh to continue in his father’s ways?*

**Read 2 Kings 21:16.**
*Since Manasseh slaughtered many, is it likely that this included his father’s advisors? Yes. Whoever opposed the king’s course of action would be viewed as his enemy and lose their lives. This included the prophet Isaiah. Manasseh was a young teenager. Who did he listen to?*

**Read 2 Chron. 33:9-12.**
*What does this teach us about the willingness of God to forgive?* Just imagine Isaiah and others he had executed meeting up with Manasseh in heaven!

**Read 2 Chron. 33: 15-17.**
Manasseh truly repented of his ways and, when restored to the throne, sought to repair the damage that he had done. Unfortunately, the damage was greater than he might have imagined. **Read PK p. 383 in Sunday’s lesson.** Manasseh’s son, Amon, continued in the evil ways of all those years of his father’s bad example.  
*Why do terrible consequences sometimes still come from sin that has been forgiven?* Influence on others just can’t be erased. Results don’t just disappear. Therefore, it is better to not have done the evil in the first place. That means we need to be serious about getting victory over temptation and sin.  
*What promises can we claim for the victory over sin?* Phil. 4:13, Eph. 3:20 and others.

*MONDAY: A NEW KING*

**Read the first paragraph** (ending with “the nation as well.”). After Solomon, Israel split into two nations. The 10 northern tribes carried the name “Israel,” and Judah and Benjamin became the Kingdom of Judah. Both of these kingdoms had 21 kings in their history. However, all of Israel’s kings were bad, and the northern kingdom of Israel lasted 211 years. Judah had mostly bad kings but 4 good kings and lasted 345 years. Just four good kings gave them 134 more years than their sister kingdom! The last of those good kings was Josiah.  

**Read 2 Chron. 33:21-25 and 34:1** (or just note highlights from the passage).
*What was the context in which the new king had come to the throne?* His father was assassinated, and then the assassins were killed. Violence, turmoil and apostasy were everywhere when Josiah became king at the young age of 8 years old. **Read PK p. 384 in Monday’s lesson.**
Habakkuk was a prophet about the time of wicked Amon’s assassination (7 years before Jeremiah’s call).

Read Habakkuk 1:2-4.
What is the prophet saying here? We cry to you God, but You don’t hear us. Violence and strife are here without justice. The wicked are in the majority and judgment is perverted everywhere. Now, an 8 year old (Josiah) has become king. Habakkuk and others saw no hope.

From a human point of view, how often does “the divine purpose” seem to be impossible to accomplish? (Like today?) What does this tell us about how we need to reach out in faith beyond what we see or fully understand? We must trust God and His word. Be careful not to put too much trust in pastors and church organization. We need to help, support and build up our pastors and our church, but trust God first, no matter how things look.

*TUESDAY: JOSIAH ON THE THRONE

Read 2 Kings 22:1, 2 (At top of Tuesday’s lesson page).
Considering the context of Josiah coming to the throne, what is so remarkable about the above texts? How could he know what was right when his grandfather and father had been so evil?
Did his mother and grandmother teach him right? Josiah’s mother’s name, Jedidah, means “beloved of Yahweh,” and his grandmother’s name, Adaiah, means “witness of Yahweh.” If they lived by their names, they likely had a loving, faithful influence on him. Somebody close had to; after all he was only 8 years old. But, the Bible doesn’t give an explanation for Josiah turning out so good. It’s just amazing.

Read 2 Chron. 34:3, 4.
When did Josiah actually begin to seek God for himself? His 8th year as king (16 years old).
When did Josiah begin to purge Judah of images and pagan altars? His 12th year as king (20 years old).
Jeremiah began his ministry when Josiah was 21 years old.

Read 2 Kings 22:3-7 (or just note highlights from the passage).
Josiah designated the money offerings to the temple to be given to carpenters, builders and masons to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the temple.

Refurbishing the temple is fine, but in the end, what really is crucial for a true revival and reformation?
Read Phil. 2:3-8.
How does this passage answer the above question? It’s about being changed in heart to be like Jesus, Who humbled Himself to die for us.
Fixing the temple was hoped to lead to and reflect revival and reformation among the people.

WEDNESDAY: THE BOOK OF THE LAW

Read 2 Kings 22:8-11 (or just note highlights from the passage).
What is the powerful significance of Josiah’s tearing his clothes? It showed his humiliation and shame for Judah’s sin; showed repentance.
What was the book of the law? It’s definitely the writings of Moses. It most certainly includes the book of Deuteronomy and probably Leviticus. It could be more.
Note highlights from 2 Kings 22:12-18. The prophetess, Huldah, said destruction was still coming upon Judah for all their wickedness and idolatry.

Read 2 Kings 22:19, 20.
When would the destruction come upon Judah? Not until after Josiah’s death because of his faithfulness to God. Read PK p. 399 (the first 5 lines) in Wednesday’s lesson.
*THURSDAY: JOSIAH’S REFORMS*

Despite the forewarning of doom, Josiah was still determined to do what was “right in the sight of the LORD.” *(Go to Friday’s lesson. Ask Question #2 at the bottom.)* The first answer is that individuals could still choose to be right with God. Personal salvation still matters even if the nation faces destruction. The second answer is found in the *Prophets and Kings* quote at the top of Thursday’s lesson. Read PK p. 400. The second answer is that the judgments of God could be tempered with mercy.

**Read 2 Kings 23:1-3.**  
*What do you think the atmosphere of this gathering was like as the king read from the book of the covenant to the people?* Here’s a description from *Prophets and Kings*, p. 400.

“To this vast assembly the king himself read ‘all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.’ 2 Kings 23:2. The royal reader was deeply affected, and he delivered his message with the pathos of a broken heart. His hearers were profoundly moved. The intensity of feeling revealed in the countenance of the king, the solemnity of the message itself, the warning of judgments impending—all these had their effect, and many determined to join with the king in seeking forgiveness.”

*Note highlights from 2 Kings 23:4-28* (See especially verses 4-7, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20-24).  
*What do all these efforts and acts of Josiah’s reforms tell us about just how bad things had become in the chosen nation?* This description is so lengthy, it shows how steeped in paganism they really were.

**FRIDAY: CLOSE**

*(Ask question #1 from the box at the bottom.)* 1.) Josiah didn’t fully understand what was wrong until he heard the Scriptures. We can’t, either. 2.) The word prompted Josiah to do what he did. His reforms were totally based on the Bible. Everything that we do should be in harmony with Scripture.