

CHAPTER 34

Before we see Judah and Jerusalem ruined we shall yet see some glorious years, while good Josiah sits at the helm. By his pious endeavours for reformation God tried them yet once more; if they had known in this their day, the day of their visitation, the things that belonged to their peace and improved them, their ruin might have been prevented. But after this reign they were hidden from their eyes, and the next reigns brought an utter desolation upon them. In this chapter we have,

- I.** A general account of Josiah's character (v. 1, 2).
- II.** His zeal to root out idolatry (v. 3-7).
- III.** His care to repair the temple (v. 8-13).
- IV.** The finding of the book of the law and the good use made of it (v. 14-28).
- V.** The public reading of the law to the people and their renewing their covenant with God thereupon (v. 29-33). Much of this we had 2 Kings 22.

~~180~~ 2 CHRONICLES 34:1-7

THE REIGN OF JOSIAH

Concerning Josiah we are here told,

- 1.** That he came to the crown when he was very young, only eight years old (yet his infancy did not debar him from his right), and he reigned *thirty-one years* (v. 1), a considerable time. I fear, however, that in the beginning of his reign things went much as they had done in his father's time, because, being a child, he must have left the management of them to others; so that it was not till his twelfth year, which goes far in the number of his years, that the reformation began, v. 3. He could not, as Hezekiah did, fall about it immediately.

2. That he reigned very well (v. 2), approved himself to God, trod in the steps of David, and did not decline either *to the right hand of to the left*: for there are errors on both hands.
3. That while he was young, about sixteen years old, he *began to seek after God*, v. 3. We have reason to think he had not so good an education as Manasseh had (it is well if those about him did not endeavour to corrupt and debauch him); yet he thus sought God when he was young. It is the duty and interest of young people, and will particularly be the honour of young gentlemen, as soon as they come to years of understanding, to *begin to seek God*; for those that seek him early shall find him.
4. That in the twelfth year of his reign, when it is probable he took the administration of the government entirely into his own hands, he *began to purge his kingdom from the remains of idolatry*; he destroyed the high places, groves, images, altars, all the utensils of idolatry, v. 3, 4. He not only cast them out as Manasseh did, but broke them to pieces, and made dust of them. This destruction of idolatry is here said to be in his twelfth year, but it was said (~~1233~~ 2 Kings 23:23) to be in his eighteenth year. Something was probably done towards it in his twelfth year; then he began to purge out idolatry, but that good work met with opposition, so that it was not thoroughly done till they had found the book of the law six years afterwards. But here the whole work is laid together briefly which was much more largely and particularly related in the *Kings*. His zeal carried him out to do this, not only in Judah and Jerusalem, but in the cities of Israel too, as far as he had any influence upon them.

~~1418~~ 2 CHRONICLES 34:8-13

THE REIGN OF JOSIAH

Here,

1. Orders are given by the king for the repair of the temple, v. 8. When he had purged the house of the corruptions of it he began to fit it up for the services that were to be performed in it. Thus we must do by the spiritual temple of the heart, get it cleansed from the pollutions of sin, and then renewed, so as to be transformed into the image of God. Josiah, in this

order, calls God *the Lord his God*. Those that truly love God will *love the habitation of his house*.

2. Care is taken about it, effectual care. The Levites went about the country and gathered money towards it, which was returned to the three trustees mentioned, v. 8. They brought it to Hilkiah the high priest (v. 9), and he and they put it into the hands of workmen, both overseers and labourers, who undertook to do it by the great, as we say, or *in the gross*, v. 10, 11. It is observed that the workmen were industrious and honest: They *did the work faithfully* (v. 12); and workmen are not completely faithful if they are not both careful and diligent, for a confidence is reposed in them that they will be so. It is also intimated that the overseers were ingenious; for it is said that all those were employed to inspect this work who were skilful in *instruments of music*; not that their skill in music could be of any use in architecture, but it was an evidence that they were men of sense and ingenuity, and particularly that their genius lay towards the mathematics, which qualified them very much for this trust. Witty men are then wise men when they employ their wit in doing good, in helping their friends, and, as they have opportunity, in serving the public. Observe, in this work, how God dispenses his gifts variously; here were some that were *bearers of burdens*, cut out for bodily labour and fit to work. Here were others (made *meliori luto* — *of finer materials*) that had skill in music, and they were *overseers of those that laboured*, and scribes and officers. The former were the hands: these were the heads. They had need of one another, and the work needed both. Let not the overseers of the work despise the bearers of burdens, nor let those that work in the service grudge at those whose office it is to direct; but let each esteem and serve the other in love, and let God have the glory and the church the benefit of the different gifts and dispositions of both.

~~4314~~ 2 CHRONICLES 34:14-28

THE REIGN OF JOSIAH

This whole paragraph we had, just as it is here related, ~~4218~~ 2 Kings 22:8-20, and have nothing to add here to what was there observed. But,

1. We may hence take occasion to bless God that we have plenty of Bibles, and that they are, or may be, in all hands, — that the book of the law and

gospel is not lost, is not scarce, — that, in this sense, the *word of the Lord* is not *precious*. Bibles are jewels, but, thanks be to God, they are not rarities. The fountain of the waters of life is not a spring shut up or a fountain sealed, but the streams of it, in all places, *make glad the city of our God. Usus communis aquarum — These waters flow for general use.* What a great deal shall we have to answer for if the great things of God's law, being thus made common, should be accounted by us as strange things!

2. We may hence learn, whenever we read or hear the word of God, to affect our hearts with it, and to get them possessed with a holy fear of that wrath of God which is there revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, as Josiah's tender heart was. When he heard the words of the law he *rent his clothes* (v. 19), and God was well pleased with his doing so, v. 27. Were the things contained in the scripture new to us, as they were here to Josiah, surely they would make deeper impressions upon us than commonly they do; but they are not the less weighty, and therefore should not be the less considered by us, for their being well known. Rend the heart therefore, not the garments.

3. We are here directed when we are under convictions of sin, and apprehensions of divine wrath, to enquire of the Lord; so Josiah did, v. 21. It concerns us to ask (as they did, ^{<4123>}Acts 2:37), *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* and more particularly (as the jailor), *What must I do to be saved?* ^{<4163>}Acts 16:30. *If you will thus enquire, enquire* (^{<2312>}Isaiah 21:12); and, blessed be God, we have the lively oracles to which to apply with these enquiries.

4. We are here warned of the ruin that sin brings upon nations and kingdoms. Those that forsake God bring evil upon themselves (v. 24, 25), and kindle a fire *which shall not be quenched*. Such will the fire of God's wrath be when the decree has gone forth against those that obstinately and impenitently persist in their wicked ways.

5. We are here encouraged to humble ourselves before God and seek unto him, as Josiah did. If we cannot prevail thereby to turn away God's wrath from our land, yet we shall deliver our own souls, v. 27, 28. And good people are here taught to be so far from fearing death as to welcome it rather when it *takes them away from the evil to come*. See how the property of it is altered by making it the matter of a promise: *Thou shalt be*

gathered to thy grave in peace, housed in that ark, as Noah, when a deluge is coming.

~~484~~ 2 CHRONICLES 34:29-33

THE REIGN OF JOSIAH

We have here an account of the further advances which Josiah made towards the reformation of his kingdom upon the hearing of the law read and the receipt of the message God sent him by the prophetess. Happy the people that had such a king; for here we find that,

1. They were well taught. He did not go about to force them to do their duty, till he had first instructed them in it. He called all the people together, great and small, young and old, rich and poor, high and low. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear the words of the book of the covenant;* for they are all concerned in those words. To put an honour upon the service, and to engage attention the more, though there were priests and Levites present, the king himself read the book to the people (v. 30), and he read it, no doubt, in such a manner as to show that he was himself affected with it, which would be a means of affecting the hearers.

2. They were well fixed. The articles of agreement between God and Israel being read, that they might intelligently covenant with God, both king and people with great solemnity did as it were subscribe the articles. The king in his place covenanted to keep God's commandments with all his heart and soul, according to what was *written in the book* (v. 31), and urged the people to declare their consent likewise to this covenant, and solemnly to promise that they would faithfully perform, fulfil, and keep, all and every thing that was on their part to be done, according to this covenant: this they did; they could not for shame do otherwise. He caused *all that were present to stand to it* (v. 32), and made them all *to serve, even to serve the Lord their God* (v. 33), to do it and to *make a business* of it. he did all he could to bring them to it — *to serve, even to serve;* the repetition denotes that this was the only thing his heart was set on; he aimed at nothing else in what he did but to engage them to God and their duty.

3. They were well tended, were honest with good looking to. *All his days they departed not from following the Lord;* he kept them, with much ado,

from running into idolatry again. *All his days* were days of restraint upon them; but this intimated that there was in them a *bent to backslide*, a strong inclination to idolatry. Many of them wanted nothing but to have him out of the way, and then they would have their high places and their images up again. And therefore we find that *in the days of Josiah* (²⁴¹⁸Jeremiah 3:6) God charged it upon treacherous Judah that she *had not returned to him with all her heart, but feignedly* (v. 10), nay, had *played the harlot* (v. 8) and thereby had even *justified backsliding Israel*, v. 11. In the twenty-third year of this reign, four or five years after this, they had *gone on to provoke God to anger with the works of their hands* (²⁴¹⁸Jeremiah 25:3-7); and, which is very observable, it is from the beginning of Josiah's reformation, his twelfth or thirteenth year, that *the iniquity of the house of Judah*, which brought ruin upon them, and which the prophet was to bear lying on his right side, was dated (²⁴¹⁸Ezekiel 4:6), for thence to the destruction of Jerusalem was just forty years. Josiah was sincere in what he did, but the generality of the people were averse to it and hankered after their idols still; so that the reformation, though well designed and well prosecuted by the prince, had little or no effect upon the people. It was with reluctance that they parted with their idols; still they were in heart joined to them, and wished for them again. This God saw, and therefore from that time, when one would have thought the foundations had been laid for a perpetual security and peace, from that very time did the decree go forth for their destruction. Nothing hastens the ruin of a people nor ripens them for it more than the baffling of hopeful attempts for reformation and a hypocritical return to God. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked.*