

September 20, 2026 (Lesson 3)

KINGS OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH

1. **Asa: One of Judah's Good Kings** (2 Chronicles 14:2-13; 15:1-2, 7-12, 16)
2. **Manasseh: Judah's Worst King** (2 Kings 21:1-16; 23:26-27)
3. **Josiah: Judah's Best King** (2 Chronicles 34:1-8, 29-33; 2 Kings 23:24-25)

Central Truth: Godly rulers influence people to live righteously.

Focus: Acknowledge the influence of leaders and depend on God's righteous rule.

Evangelism Emphasis: Both leaders and followers need salvation from sin by Jesus Christ.

Golden Text: "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, . . . neither after him arose there any like him" (2 Kings 23:25).

After the rule of Jeroboam, each successive ruler of the northern kingdom of Israel was unrighteous and ungodly. They worshiped Jeroboam's golden calves. They followed after Baal. They sacrificed their children to Molech. There wasn't a "good egg" in the entire lot.

However, the situation was different in the southern kingdom of Judah. Here we have some of the great men of the Old Testament. There were God-fearing rulers like Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Uzziah, and Josiah. But there were also some bad rulers, like Jehoram, Ahaz, and Amon. Some started out good but did not end well, like Asa. The most wicked and notoriously evil of all Judah's kings was Manasseh. Despite the vileness evident through most of his rule, he repented and turned to God before his death.

As with last week's lesson, this study examines the importance of leadership. As we review three of Judah's most notable kings, we will see how things can turn bad very quickly, as happened with Manasseh. More importantly, we will see how a godly leader can influence God's people in a positive way. This is a life lesson we would all do well to emulate.

1. ASA: ONE OF JUDAH'S GOOD KINGS

A. Righteousness and Rest (2 Chronicles 14:2-7)

² And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God: ³ For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: ⁴ And commanded Judah to

seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. ⁵ Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him. ⁶ And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the Lord had given him rest.

One of the righteous kings of Judah was Asa. He was the son of King Abijah and grandson of Rehoboam. His father was a wicked king (1 Kings 15:3), yet Asa served the Lord. Our lives are not determined by our upbringing or heritage. We can choose to serve the Lord no matter our background.

In the history of Judah, there were several periods of revival and spiritual reform. The first of these was under Asa. After the spiritual decline that occurred under Rehoboam (14:22-24) and Abijah, Asa sought to turn his kingdom back to God. He removed the altars to false gods and destroyed the “high places” (2 Chron. 14:3). Often pagan people would worship their gods on hills and elevated land, thinking this brought them physically closer to their deities. Asa demolished the idols and got rid of the sacred groves (vv. 3, 5). These groves were clusters of trees dedicated to the goddess Asherah. He also commanded the people to seek the Lord, and to give allegiance to God’s laws (v. 4). In these acts, we see a prescription for revival—repentance from sin, seeking God in prayer and worship, and giving heed to the Word of God. There will never be a true revival without these three elements.

As a result of Asa’s obedience to God, the Lord blessed the land with peace. In the absence of war, Asa wisely used this as an opportunity to strengthen the nation’s infrastructure (vv. 6-7). He renovated towns and cities. He fortified them with towers, gates, and strong walls. “So they built and prospered” (v. 7). Asa’s reign was a high point in Judah’s history, both economically and spiritually.

Patrick’s Impact

When we think of Patrick of Ireland, we probably think of shamrocks, leprechauns, and green milkshakes. Yet, Patrick was a true hero of the faith. Called to Ireland by an angelic vision, this

pioneer missionary devoted his life to winning the Irish to Christ. Before his death in the late 400s, he had changed a nation through the Gospel. One man, anointed by God, permanently influenced a people and the world!

B. Victory and Courage (2 Chronicles 14:8-13; 15:1-2, 7-12, 16)

14:11 And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let no man prevail against thee. ¹² So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled.

15:9 And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.

¹² And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul.

¹⁶ And also concerning Maachah the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron.

During this prosperous time, Asa had an army of over half a million men noted for their valor (2 Chron. 14:8). For ten years, there was peace. But then, apparently hearing of Judah's prosperity, Egypt came to invade the land. They were led by Zerah, who is not mentioned in secular history and is only known from this passage. He was an "Ethiopian" (v. 9), meaning he came from Cush, a region south of Egypt also called Nubia. It is roughly the same area as modern-day Sudan. Probably Zerah was a general working for the pharaoh. He led a huge army of "a thousand thousand"—one million soldiers—the largest army mentioned in Scripture. There were also three hundred chariots. Egypt was famous for its use of chariots in military campaigns, which gave them a strategic battle advantage.

Zerah came to Mareshah, a town in the plain of Judah, near the Judean foothills. Upon seeing this vast host, Asa cried to the Lord. Asa's prayer contains several significant elements. First, he said, "Lord, there is no one beside You to help us" (v. 11a MEV). The king recognized God is so mighty,

it was virtually nothing for Him to defeat Judah's enemy. Second, he petitioned God for help, saying, "We depend on You" (v. 11b MEV). Asa was not relying on his own army or any human agency, but only on the Lord. Third, he said they were prepared to fight in the name of the Lord, who is "our God" (v. 11c). Judah's trust was in Jehovah, the one true God, and they expected victory in His name.

In answer to Asa's prayer, God delivered Zerah and the Egyptian army into the hands of Judah. The armies of Judah routed their foes and gained many spoils from the battle (v. 13). Considering the size of the opposing armies, this is one of the greatest military victories recorded in the Bible.

Following this great victory, the Lord sent a prophet named Azariah to Asa (15:1-2). He declared the Lord was with Asa. He warned against disobeying God but promised continued prosperity and blessing if the people would serve God faithfully, declaring, "Be ye strong therefore . . . for your work shall be rewarded" (v. 7). Upon hearing these words, Asa renewed his efforts to rid the land of idolatry. He removed the idols, which were an abomination to the Lord (v. 8a). He not only destroyed the false gods, he also revived worship of the true God. He restored "the altar of the Lord, that was before the porch of the Lord" (v. 8b). This would have been the brazen altar, on which the various sacrifices were made to the Lord. Asa led Judah "into a covenant to seek the Lord" wholeheartedly (v. 12).

The thoroughness with which Asa brought reform included dealing with his own mother, Maachah, who was a worshiper of Asherah, the Canaanite goddess (v. 16). He removed her from her position as the queen-mother. He also tore down her idol, which was probably an Asherah pole erected in a sacred grove. He crushed it and then burned it to ashes. After this, the land had rest until near the end of Asa's long reign.

Asa lapsed toward the end of his reign. He made a treaty with the king of Syria (16:1-4), placing his faith in a human king rather than the Sovereign Lord (vv. 7-9). As a result, Judah once again experienced war (v. 9). When Asa became sick, instead of turning to God, he sought earthly remedies (v. 12). All in all, Asa was a righteous king, but he made some mistakes. This should serve as a warning to us about the importance of consistently following God until the end of our lives. We should finish well.

§ *According to 2 Chronicles 15:14, how did the people express their commitment to seek the Lord? What can we learn from their example?*

2. MANASSEH: JUDAH'S WORST KING

A. Manasseh's Abominations (2 Kings 21:1-9)

¹ Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. ² And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. ³ For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them.

⁵ And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. ⁶ And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

⁹ But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel.

Judah experienced spiritual reform under Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-7). However, Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, did not follow his ways. Instead, Manasseh was the most wicked king in Judah's history—the Ahab of the south. Appropriately, his name means “forgetfulness” or “forgetter,” for he forgot his God and his godly father. His was the longest reign—fifty-five years. It began in 697 BC, twenty-four years after Samaria's fall. Thus, he was the first Judean king not a contemporary of the northern kingdom.

The list of Manasseh's sins is a catalog of iniquity. The text uses the word “abominations” to describe Manasseh's transgressions (21:2, 11). The Hebrew word means something that is detestable or abhorrent. These things were revolting to the holy God. In these sins, he followed the practices of the surrounding nations (v. 2) but went even further in his abominations (v. 11).

The first abomination mentioned is the reversal of Hezekiah's accomplishments (v. 3). Hezekiah had torn down the idolatrous shrines, but Manasseh rebuilt these high places. He then followed Ahab's example by building altars to Baal, a popular Canaanite deity, and paying homage to Asherah, a licentious pagan goddess. Manasseh honored her by erecting wooden poles or images of the goddess (vv. 3, 7).

Manasseh served the “host of heaven” (v. 3), the Assyrian astral cult. Contemporary records mention him as the loyal vassal of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. Manasseh may have instituted astral worship as a political measure to honor Sennacherib. However, worship of the heavenly bodies was a form of idolatry expressly forbidden by Jehovah (Deut. 4:19). This worship of stars and

planets was also the origin of astrology, for it was believed these celestial gods controlled people's lives.

Manasseh even desecrated the temple of the Lord. He erected altars and idols within the temple courts (2 Kings 21: 4-5, 7). Here in the sacred precincts where God had revealed Himself to Israel and chosen to put His name, Manasseh worshiped Baal and Asherah.

Manasseh was so wicked that he sacrificed his children to idols (v. 6). In this, he followed the Ammonite practice of sacrificing their sons to the god Moloch, especially their firstborn. An earlier king of Judah, Ahaz, was specifically indicted for burning his children in sacrifice (2 Chron. 28:3). Not only a horrendous abomination, this was also an affront to God's law declaring that firstborn sons belonged to Him (Ex. 13:2).

Manasseh was heavily involved in the occult (2 Kings 21:6), openly practicing witchcraft. He engaged in divination, using supernatural means to predict the future. He also sought out mediums to communicate with dead spirits. All these practices were unequivocally condemned in the Mosaic Law (see Deut. 18:9-14; Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6). Though the Lord takes the occult very seriously, we live in a day when witchcraft, magic, divination, contacting the dead, and the like are not taken seriously. Rather, they are forms of entertainment. We would do well to learn from the example of Manasseh. Tarot cards, Ouija boards, séances, casting spells, and all other forms of occult activity are demonic and an abomination to God.

§ *Why do you suppose the Lord allowed Manasseh to reign for over five decades?*

B. Jehovah's Judgment (2 Kings 21:10-16; 23:26-27)

21:12 Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. ¹³ And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.

23:27 And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.

Since the Lord could not overlook such blatant offenses, He declared judgment on Judah. This declaration came through the Lord's prophets. Specific prophets are not mentioned, yet one may have been Jeremiah. His life span overlapped Manasseh's by several years. God declared the coming calamity would be so great that people's ears would "tingle" (2 Kings 21:12). Jeremiah prophesied the same calamity, including the same reaction—tingling ears (Jer. 19:3).

This judgment is comparable to the destruction of the northern kingdom (2 Kings 21:13). A "line" and a "plummet" refer to builders' tools used to make sure a prescribed plan is accurately followed (following the blueprints). The Lord had a definite plan for Jerusalem's destruction. The language further indicates God is fair and just in His dealings. His measuring "line" of judgment was the same for Manasseh and Judah as it had been for Ahab and Israel. His judgment would be so devastating that it would be like a washed plate—turned upside down and wiped completely clean, with nothing remaining.

The Lord said He was abandoning the Judeans (v. 14). Previously, He had mercy on them and often spared them from enemy attacks. This was true in Hezekiah's time, but now God was lifting His protecting hand. He would not hinder the forces of the enemy. This shows how seriously Manasseh had provoked God to anger (v. 15).

Verse 16 concerns another instance of Manasseh's sin—the shedding of "innocent blood" describing his vengeance on the prophets who dared to pronounce judgment on him. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus states Manasseh "cruelly put to death all the righteous among the Hebrews, and did not even spare the prophets" (*Antiquities of the Jews*). Jewish and early Christian tradition assert Isaiah was martyred at this time by being sawn in two.

There is one positive note in this story. Manasseh did finally heed the words of the prophets and repent (2 Chron. 33:10-20). Yet, this only postponed God's judgment. Manasseh's sins were so detestable and offensive that, in His holy anger, God promised eventual devastation (see 2 Kings 23:26-27; Jer.15:4).

Dangerous Disbelief

I believe one of the reasons for crime, perversion, and the evils of modern humankind is that we have lost belief in the certainty of God being just, holy, and righteous, and that He will judge the world.—Billy Graham

3. JOSIAH: JUDAH'S BEST KING

A. Reformation and Restoration (2 Chronicles 34:1-8)

¹ Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. ² And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left. ³ For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images.

⁸ Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God.

Is revival possible in our day? Many people think we have gone too far; our wickedness as a society is too great. Yet, consider the case of Josiah. As we have seen, Manasseh was the most wicked king Judah had known. His son and successor, Amon, was just as evil (2 Kings 21:19-22). But Amon's son, Josiah, was different. Josiah was only eight years old when Amon died. God used this youth to accomplish Judah's greatest revival. It was near the end of Judah's history, and God's judgment loomed on the horizon. Yet, this son of wicked kings was a mighty reformer for God. Josiah's example should give us hope for our day.

Josiah had been on the throne only eight years when he wholeheartedly turned to God at just sixteen years old. The text says he "walked in the ways of David" (2 Chron. 34:2) and "began to seek after the God of David" (v. 3). Apparently, David served as role model for the young king. Like David, Josiah was a "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

In his diligence to follow the Lord, Josiah initiated a series of religious reforms. When Josiah was twenty years old (2 Chron. 34:3), he began the systematic eradication of pagan idolatry from Israel. Under Manasseh, the people had engaged in the worship of many foreign gods. Josiah targeted the very idols honored by his father and grandfather, purging the land of "the high places"—altars on the tops of mountains and hills. Josiah also destroyed the various idols, carved of wood or made of molten metal. This included "wooden images" (NKJV) sacred to the goddess Asherah.

Josiah also broke down the images of Baal, the popular Canaanite god, and demolished the altars of incense associated with Baal (v. 4). All of the idolatrous objects were smashed into pieces and then ground into a fine powder. Josiah wanted to ensure it would be impossible to worship these images again. He then scattered this dusty powder over the graves of idol worshipers, thereby desecrating what remained of these idols by bringing them into contact with the dead. He was also symbolically making a statement about idol worship itself—it ends in death.

Verse 5 says Josiah dug up the bones of idolatrous priests and burned them on the altars where they had worshiped. This act would have been considered horrific in ancient Israel. It was a pronouncement of judgment on these priests, and it was also a means to defile the pagan altars making them unfit for any future worship.

Next, Josiah went out of Judah into what remained of the kingdom of Israel. By this time, Israel had been conquered by Assyria. Yet, there remained a scattered remnant in the land. Verse 6

mentions several specific tribes as representatives of the northern Israelites. Josiah traveled as far as Naphtali, one of the northernmost tribes.

After cleansing the land of idols, Josiah next turned his attention to the Lord's temple, which had been neglected and defiled by his predecessors. This occurred during the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was twenty-six years old (v. 8). The king appointed a committee of three trusted men to look into repairing the house of God.

Standing Firm

God is calling our children as He is calling all children and adults who are His to stand firm for Him. We need to understand that it is God alone who can make us and our children stand firm.—
Christine Yount

B. Commitment to God's Law (2 Chronicles 34:29-33; 2 Kings 23:24-25)

2 Chronicles 34:31 And the king stood in his place, 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 with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. ³² And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

2 Kings 23:24 Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord. ²⁵ And like unto him was there no king before him, that 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; neither after him arose there any like him.

The men appointed by Josiah were faithful in repairing and restoring the temple (2 Chron. 34:10-12). While undertaking this task, they discovered a copy of the Law of the Lord (v. 14). This was probably the Book of Deuteronomy, or perhaps a portion of this book. Apparently, the written word was scarce at this time, a natural consequence of the sins of Manasseh and Amon. Initially, there must have been great excitement at such a rare discovery. Shaphan the scribe was given the scroll, which he brought to the king. When Josiah heard the words of the book, his heart was broken at how God's people had broken His Law. In response, the king tore his royal robes (v. 19). He recognized God was righteously wrathful over the sins of Israel (v. 21). Josiah sought the counsel of a prophetess named Huldah, who foretold the coming judgment of God, but which would be delayed because of Josiah's contrite heart (vv. 22-28).

As a consequence, Josiah gathered the leadership of Judah together at Jerusalem. He read the words of the Law to them. As king, he made a covenant to obey God's commands and then required the people to also enter into a covenant of obedience to God's Word. For this short period of time during his reign, "the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God" (v. 32). Josiah then renewed his efforts to remove all ungodly worship (see 2 Kings 23:24). He got rid of all "mediums and psychics" (NLT). Previously, he had removed all public altars, but now he ensured that all "household gods, the idols" (NLT) were removed. The veneration of household gods was a constant problem in ancient Israel, going back to the days of Jacob and the judges (see Gen. 31:19; Judg. 18:14). The reforms were all done in response to Josiah hearing the Word of the Law. The writer of 2 Kings 23 noted the exceptional nature of Josiah's reforms, and that there wasn't anyone like him, before or after (v. 25).

\$ *Why are occultic practices so widespread today, and how should God's people respond?*

OUR INFLUENCE

If you were to map the spiritual life of Judah as a nation, it would look like a roller coaster—constantly up and down. Godly leaders encouraged obedience to the Law of the Lord, but wicked leaders led the people away from God and into idolatry. This tells us good leadership is vital, and is a

lesson for each of us. We all influence others by our words and deeds. Let the kings of Judah serve as an example to us. How are we influencing others? Are people being drawn to the Lord because of our lifestyles? Are we agents of righteous change in the lives of those around us?