SECOND KINGS

Chapter 23

***Josiah Renews the Covenant***

**Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 2 He went up to the temple of the Lord with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. 3 The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. 4 The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. 5 He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. 6 He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people. 7 He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the Lord and where women did weaving for Asherah. 8 Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense. He broke down the shrines at the gates—at the entrance to the Gate of Joshua, the city governor, which is on the left of the city gate. 9 Although the priests of the high places did not serve at the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, they ate unleavened bread with their fellow priests. 10 He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech. 11 He removed from the entrance to the temple of the Lord the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun. They were in the court near the room of an official named Nathan-Melech. Josiah then burned the chariots dedicated to the sun. 12 He pulled down the altars the kings of Judah had erected on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz, and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple of the Lord. He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley. 13 The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption—the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon. 14 Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones. 15 Even the altar at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin—even that altar and high place he demolished. He burned the high place and ground it to powder, and burned the Asherah pole also. 16 Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the word of the Lord proclaimed by the man of God who foretold these things. 17 The king asked, “What is that tombstone I see?” The men of the city said, “It marks the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and pronounced against the altar of Bethel the very things you have done to it.” 18 “Leave it alone,” he said. “Don’t let anyone disturb his bones.” So they spared his bones and those of the prophet who had come from Samaria. 19 Just as he had done at Bethel, Josiah removed and defiled all the shrines at the high places that the kings of Israel had built in the towns of Samaria that had provoked the Lord to anger. 20 Josiah slaughtered all the priests of those high places on the altars and burned human bones on them. Then he went back to Jerusalem. 21 The king gave this order to all the people: “Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” 22 Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed. 23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem. 24 Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the Lord. 25 Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses. 26 Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger. 27 So the Lord said, “I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, ‘There shall my Name be.’” 28 As for the other events of Josiah’s reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? 29 While Josiah was king, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the Euphrates River to help the king of Assyria. King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle, but Neco faced him and killed him at Megiddo. 30 Josiah’s servants brought his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah and anointed him and made him king in place of his father.**

**23:1** *elders.* See note on 10:1. (CSB)

**23:2** *Book of the Covenant.* Although this designation is used in Ex 24:7 with reference to the contents of Ex 20–23, it is here applied to either all or part of the book of Deuteronomy or the entire Mosaic law. Whatever else the scroll contained, it clearly included the covenant curses of Lev 26 and/or Dt 28 (see notes on v. 21; 22:8, 11). (CSB)

**23:3** *pillar.* See note on 11:14. (CSB)

*renewed the covenant.* Josiah carries out the function of covenant mediator; cf. Moses (Ex 24:3–8; Dt 1:34), Joshua (Jos 24), Samuel (1Sa 11:14–12:25) and Jehoiada (2Ki 11:17). (CSB)

*follow the Lord*. See notes on 1Sa 12:14, 20. (CSB)

*pledged themselves to the covenant.* It is likely that some sort of ratification rite was performed, in which the people participated and pledged by oath to be loyal to their covenant obligations. Whether this was done symbolically (see Jer 34:18) or verbally (see Dt 27:11–26) is not clear. (CSB)

**23:4** *doorkeepers.* See 12:9. (CSB)

*Baal and Asherah.* See note on 1Ki 14:15. (CSB)

*starry hosts.* See note on 17:16. (CSB)

*took the ashes to Bethel.* See vv. 15–16. Bethel was located just over the border between Judah and the former northern kingdom in territory nominally under Assyrian control. With a decline in Assyrian power, Josiah was able to exert his own influence in the north. He apparently deposited the ashes at Bethel in order to desecrate (see note on v. 14) the very place where golden calf worship had originally polluted the land (see notes on 1Ki 12:28, 30). (CSB)

**23:5** *pagan priests.* See Hos 10:5; Zep 1:4. (CSB)

*kings of Judah.* A reference to Manasseh and Amon, and perhaps to Ahaz before them. (CSB)

*high places.* See note on 18:4. (CSB)

**23:6** *Asherah pole.* See note on 1Ki 14:15. The Asherah poles destroyed by Hezekiah (18:4) were reintroduced by Manasseh (21:7). When Manasseh turned to the Lord, it is likely that he too got rid of the Asherah poles (see 2Ch 33:15) and that they were then again reintroduced by Amon (2Ki 21:21; 2Ch 33:22). (CSB)

*scattered the dust over the graves of the common people.* Intended as a defilement of the goddess, not as a desecration of the graves of the poor (see Jer 26:23). (CSB)

**23:7** *male shrine prostitutes.* See note on 1Ki 14:24. (CSB)

**23:8** *desecrated the high places.* See note on 18:4. (CSB)

*Geba to Beersheba.* Geba was on the northern border of the southern kingdom (see 1Ki 15:22), and Beersheba was on its southern border (see note on 1Sa 3:20). (CSB)

**23:9** *ate unleavened bread with their fellow priests.* Although not permitted to serve at the temple altar, these priests were to be sustained by a share of the priestly provisions (see Lev 2:10; 6:16–18). They occupied a status similar to that of priests with physical defects (see Lev 21:16–23). (CSB)

**23:10** *Topheth.* The name of an area in the Valley of Hinnom where altars used for child sacrifice were located (see Isa 30:33; Jer 7:31; 19:5–6). (CSB)

*sacrifice his son or daughter.* See 17:17; 21:6; see also note on 16:3. (CSB)

*Molech.* See note on 1Ki 11:5. (CSB)

**23:11** *horses … dedicated to the sun.* If live, the horses may have been used to pull chariots bearing images of a sun-god in religious processions. Small images of horses have recently been found in a cult place just outside one of the ancient walls of Jerusalem. (CSB)

*Nathan-Melech.* Perhaps the official in charge of the chariots. (CSB)

**23:12** *altars … on the roof.* Altars dedicated to the worship of all the starry hosts (see Jer 19:13; Zep 1:5)—erected by Ahaz (2Ki 16:3–4, 10–16), Manasseh (21:3) and Amon (21:21–22). (CSB)

**23:13** *high places … Solomon … had built.* See note on 1Ki 11:5. (CSB)

**23:14** *covered the sites with human bones.* The bones would defile these sites and make them unsuitable for cultic use in the future (see Nu 19:16). (CSB)

**23:15** *altar at Bethel.* See 1Ki 12:32–33. Nothing is said of the golden calf, which undoubtedly had been sent to Assyria as tribute at the time of the captivity of the northern kingdom (see Hos 10:5–6). (CSB)

**23:16** *tombs.* Of the priests of the Bethel sanctuary (see 1Ki 13:2). (CSB)

*burned on the altar to defile it.* See notes on vv. 6, 14. (CSB)

*the man of God who foretold these things.* See 1Ki 13:1–2, 32. (CSB)

**23:18** *prophet who had come from Samaria.* See 1Ki 13:31–32. Samaria is here not to be understood as the city by that name since the prophet came from Bethel (see 1Ki 13:11), and the city Samaria did not yet exist (see 1Ki 16:24). Rather, it is to be taken as a designation for the entire area of the former northern kingdom (see notes on 17:24, 29; 1Ki 13:32). (CSB)

**23:20** *slaughtered all the priests of those high places.* These were non-Levitical priests of the apostate worship practiced in the area of the former northern kingdom (see notes on 17:27–28, 33–34). They were treated like the pagan priests of Judah (see v. 5) in contrast to Josiah’s treatment of the priests at the high places in Judah (see vv. 8–9). Josiah’s actions in this matter conformed to the requirements of Dt 13; 17:2–7. (CSB)

**23:21** *Celebrate the Passover.* A more complete description of this observance is found in 2Ch 35:1–19. (CSB)

*as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.* See note on v. 2. This appears to refer to Dt 16:1–8, where the Passover is described in a communal setting at a sanctuary (see Ex 23:15–17; 34:23–24; Lev 23:4–14) rather than in the family setting of Ex 12:1–14, 43–49. (CSB)

**23:22** The uniqueness of Josiah’s Passover celebration seems to be in the fact that all the Passover lambs were slaughtered exclusively by the Levites (see 2Ch 35:1–19; cf. 2Ch 30:2–3, 17–20 for the Passover observed in the time of Hezekiah). (CSB)

**23:23** *eighteenth year.* See note on 22:3. (CSB)

**23:24** *household gods.* See note on Ge 31:19. (CSB)

*requirements of the law.* See notes on v. 2; 22:8. (CSB)

**23:25** *was there a king like him.* See note on 18:5. (CSB)

*with all his heart … soul and … strength.* See Dt 6:5. (CSB)

**23:26** *Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger.* The judgment against Judah and Jerusalem was postponed but not rescinded because of Josiah’s reformation (see notes on 21:15; 22:20). (CSB)

**23:27** *as I removed Israel.* See 17:18–23. (CSB)

*Jerusalem, the city I chose.* See 21:4, 7, 13. (CSB)

*this temple, about which I said, ‘There shall my Name be.’* See note on 1Ki 8:16. (CSB)

**23:28** *annals of the kings of Judah.* See note on 1Ki 14:29. (CSB)

**23:29** *Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt.* Ruled 610–595 b.c. (CSB)

*help the king of Assyria.* Pharaoh Neco intended to help Ashur-Uballit II, the last Assyrian king, in his struggle against the rising power of Babylon under Nabopolassar. The Assyrian capital, Nineveh, had already fallen to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 (see the book of Nahum). The remaining Assyrian forces had regrouped at Haran, but in 609 they were forced west of the Euphrates. It appears to be at this time that the Egyptians under Neco were coming to the Assyrians’ aid. (CSB)

*King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle.* Perhaps Josiah opposed the passage of Neco’s army through the pass at Megiddo (see 2Ch 35:20–24) because he feared that the growth of either Egyptian or Assyrian power would have adverse results for the continued independence of Judah. (CSB)

**23:30** *buried him in his own tomb.* See 2Ch 35:24–25. (CSB)

*people of the land.* See note on 21:24. (CSB)

*Jehoahaz son of Josiah.* Jehoahaz was the fourth and youngest son of Josiah. His name was originally Shallum (see 1Ch 3:15; Jer 22:11), which was probably changed to Jehoahaz at the time of his accession to the throne. Perhaps Jehoahaz was chosen by the people over Jehoiakim because it was known that Jehoiakim favored a pro-Egyptian policy instead of the anti-Egyptian policy of Josiah and Jehoahaz. *anointed him.* See note on 1Sa 9:16. (CSB)

***Jehoahaz King of Judah***

**31 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother’s name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah; she was from Libnah. 32 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his fathers had done. 33 Pharaoh Neco put him in chains at Riblah in the land of Hamath so that he might not reign in Jerusalem, and he imposed on Judah a levy of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. 34 Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah and changed Eliakim’s name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz and carried him off to Egypt, and there he died. 35 Jehoiakim paid Pharaoh Neco the silver and gold he demanded. In order to do so, he taxed the land and exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land according to their assessments.**

**23:31** *three months.* In 609 b.c. (CSB)

*Jeremiah.* Not the prophet (see Jer 1:1). (CSB)

*Libnah.* See note on 8:22. (CSB)

**23:32** *evil … as his fathers.* See 16:3; 21:2, 21; Eze 19:3. (CSB)

**23:33** *in chains at Riblah.* By either deception or overt force the Egyptians were able to take Jehoahaz captive and impose tribute on Judah (see 2Ch 36:3). Jehoahaz was imprisoned at Neco’s military headquarters established at Riblah on the Orontes River. Nebuchadnezzar was later to make his headquarters at the same place (see 25:6, 20). (CSB)

**23:34** *Eliakim son of Josiah.* Eliakim was an older brother of Jehoahaz (see 1Ch 3:15). Perhaps he had been bypassed earlier as a successor to Josiah because of a pro-Egyptian political stance. (CSB)

*changed Eliakim’s name to Jehoiakim.* The meaning of these two names is similar (Eliakim, “God has established”; Jehoiakim, “Yahweh has established”). Perhaps Neco wanted to use the name change to imply that his actions were sanctioned by Yahweh, the God of Judah (see 18:25; 2Ch 35:21). In any case, the change in name indicated that Jehoiakim was subject to Neco’s authority. (CSB)

*took Jehoahaz … to Egypt, and there he died.* See 2Ch 36:4; Jer 22:10–12. (CSB)

**23:35** *from the people of the land.* The tribute for Neco was raised by a graduated tax placed on the very people who had supported the kingship of Jehoahaz (see v. 30). Menahem of the northern kingdom had used a similar method of raising funds for tribute (see 15:20). (CSB)

***Jehoiakim King of Judah***

**36 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. His mother’s name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah; she was from Rumah. 37 And he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his fathers had done.**

**23:36** *eleven years.* 609–598 b.c. (CSB)

**23:37** *did evil in the eyes of the Lord*. Jehoiakim was responsible for the murder of the prophet Uriah from Kiriath Jearim (Jer 26:20–24), and his rule was characterized by dishonesty, oppression and injustice (see Jer 22:13–19). He reintroduced idolatrous worship in the temple (see Eze 8:5–17) and refused to accept the word of the Lord through Jeremiah (see Jer 36). (CSB)

*his fathers.* Manasseh (21:1–18) and Amon (21:19–26). (CSB)