

SECOND CHRONICLES

Chapter 34

Josiah's Reforms

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. ² He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left. ³ In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images. ⁴ Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. ⁵ He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem. ⁶ In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, ⁷ he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem. ⁸ In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and Maaseiah the ruler of the city, with Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the temple of the LORD his God. ⁹ They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the temple of God, which the Levites who were the doorkeepers had collected from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel and from all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ Then they entrusted it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the LORD's temple. These men paid the workers who repaired and restored the temple. ¹¹ They also gave money to the carpenters and builders to purchase dressed stone, and timber for joists and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin. ¹² The men did the work faithfully. Over them to direct them were Jahath and Obadiah, Levites descended from Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, descended from Kohath. The Levites—all who were skilled in playing musical instruments—¹³ had charge of the laborers and supervised all the workers from job to job. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and doorkeepers.

34:1–36:1 Both accounts of Josiah's reign are about the same length and treat the same subjects, but with considerable variation in emphasis. Both deal with three different aspects of Josiah's reform: (1) the removal of foreign cults, (2) the finding of the Book of the Law and the covenant renewal that followed and (3) the celebration of Passover. On the second item the two histories are quite similar.

On the first item the writer of Kings goes to great lengths (2Ki 23:4–20), while the Chronicler summarizes it only briefly (34:3–7, 33). The account of the Passover is greatly expanded in Chronicles (35:1–19), while only alluded to in 2 Kings (23:21–23). Not only are these items treated at different lengths, but the order is also changed. In Kings the finding of the Book of the Law in the temple in Josiah's 18th year is the first incident mentioned. The writer appears to have organized his material geographically, i.e., beginning with the temple and spreading through the city, then into the rest of the nation. The Chronicler, on the other hand, has arranged the incidents in order of their occurrence and has characteristically introduced a number of chronological notes into the text: 34:3 (two notes without parallel in Kings); 34:8 (see 2Ki 22:3); 35:19. Chronicles makes it clear that the reform began in Josiah's 12th year (34:3), six years before the discovery of the Book of the Law. (CSB)

34:1–7 At the beginning of Josiah's reign, idolatry was as entrenched in Judah as it had been at his grandfather Hezekiah's time, if not more so. Following in Hezekiah's footsteps, the young king and his regent began a campaign to destroy the images and altars of heathen worship. (TLSB)

34:1–2 See 2Ki 22:1–2. (CSB)

34:1 *thirty-one years*. 640–609 B.C. (CSB)

34:2 *right ... left*. Not referring to political mainstream, as we might use this expression today, but to singular faithfulness to the covenant laws and promises. (TLSB)

34:3–7 The writer of Kings covers this aspect of Josiah's reform in much greater detail (2Ki 23:4–20). He also delays his account of the removal of pagan cults until after the discovery of the Book of the Law, while the Chronicler places it before. (CSB)

34:3 Some scholars have sought to tie the events of Josiah's 8th (v. 3), 12th (v. 3) and 18th (v. 8) years to stages in the progressive decline and fall of the Assyrian empire, which had dominated the area for about two centuries. The demise of Assyrian control in Aram and Palestine undoubtedly facilitated and encouraged Josiah's reassertion of Davidic authority over former Assyrian provinces (vv. 6–7). However, one must not undercut religious motives in Josiah's reforms. Otherwise, the reform is reduced to merely a religious expression of an essentially political rebellion. (CSB)

eighth year. At age 16, Josiah began to seek the Lord. (TLSB)

34:5 *burned the bones*. Josiah's aggressive destruction of idolatrous institutions and priests has inspired similar destructive outbursts by religious groups (e.g., early Christian mobs at times destroyed pagan temples; iconoclastic mobs in the medieval and Reformation eras destroyed things they regarded as idolatrous). It should be noted that as

king, Josiah had jurisdiction in these matters, in contrast to angry, destructive mobs. The Lord would not have us fulfill His Word by destroying our neighbor's property. He calls us as individual believers to share the Word peaceably and so change people's hearts. (TLSB)

34:6–7 Josiah's reform began in Judah and Jerusalem (v 3) but extended to Manasseh, Ephraim, and even Naphtali, the northern part of the now-fallen kingdom of Israel. His concern for all Israel reflects that of Hezekiah (30:1). After the failure of Amon (33:21–25), a new son of David is given to Israel, one who cleanses "all the land of Israel" (v 7). (TLSB)

34:6 *Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali.* The Chronicler's concern for "all Israel" (see Introduction to 1 Chronicles: Purpose and Themes) is apparent in his recording the involvement of the northern tribes in Josiah's reform (see also vv. 9, 21, 33). The Chronicler again shows all Israel united under a Davidic king, just as he did under Hezekiah (see note on 30:1). *Simeon.* Perhaps some Simeonites had migrated from Judah to the north. (CSB)

34:7 *throughout Israel.* Defined by the list of tribes in v. 6. (CSB)

34:1–7 Josiah seeks the Lord and destroys the idolatrous shrines in Judah and all Israel. Sincere faith is expressed not only by service to the Lord but also by leaving behind and removing those things that tempt us and would divide our devotion. The Holy Spirit will lead you not only to confess your sin but also to put away and avoid temptation. The Lord alone is your God; He is the only Savior. • O one true God, grant me an undivided heart, that I may serve You truly. Amen. (TLSB)

34:8–21 The Chronicler provides more detail than the account in Kings. The involvement of all Israel is noted esp in v 9 with the Chronicler's reference to a collection from both north and south, which expresses the unity of the people under a Davidic king faithful in the worship of the Lord. (TLSB)

34:9 *Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel.* Again as part of his concern with "all Israel," the Chronicler notes that worshipers from the north also brought gifts to the temple (not explicitly indicated in 2Ki 22:4). (CSB)

34:10–13 Cf. 24:8–12. (CSB)

The Book of the Law Found

¹⁴ While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that had been given through Moses. ¹⁵ Hilkiyah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan. ¹⁶ Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: "Your officials are doing everything that has been

committed to them. ¹⁷ They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers.” ¹⁸ Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

¹⁹ When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. ²⁰ He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, ^a Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king’s attendant: ²¹ “Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD’s anger that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book.” ²² Hilkiah and those the king had sent with him ^b went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, ^c the son of Hasrah, ^d keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. ²³ She said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, ²⁴ ‘This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people—all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah. ²⁵ Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all that their hands have made, ^e my anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.’ ²⁶ Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: ²⁷ Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. ²⁸ Now I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.’” So they took her answer back to the king. ²⁹ Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰ He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites—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. ³¹ The king stood by his 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, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book. ³² Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it; the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. ³³ Josiah removed all the detestable idols from all the territory belonging to the Israelites, and he had all who were present in Israel serve the LORD their God. As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the LORD, the God of their fathers.

34:14 *found*. Possibly with the money. (TLSB)

34:20 *Abdon*. Identified as “Achbor the son of Micaiah” (2Ki 22:12). (TLSB)

34:21 Hbr word for “inquire” is the same as “seek” in v 3. (TLSB)

not kept ... this book. Priests had apparently continued their service based on traditions passed down from one generation to the next but had failed to return to the source of the traditions: Scripture itself. This would explain how, over time in a largely oral society, true and false worship practices could become mixed. (TLSB)

34:22–28 After the reading of the Book of the Law (v 18), the curses are now applied (cf Dt 27:9–26; 28:15–68; 29:20). (TLSB)

34:22 Huldah’s husband is called “the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas.” (TLSB)

34:24 *I will bring disaster*. Cf Dt 32:23. (TLSB)

34:27 *tender*. Or, “fearful.” (TLSB)

34:28 *will be buried in peace*. See the death and burial account (35:20–25). (CSB)

Josiah would be fatally wounded in battle (35:23), but Huldah’s point is that he would not witness the destruction of the kingdom, which God threatens in vv 24–25. (TLSB)

34:29–33 Response of Josiah and the people. This ceremony of covenant renewal is in a worship context; a procession goes to the temple, and a solemn oath is taken by the king to pledge fidelity to it. (TLSB)

34:29–31 See 2Ki 23:1–3. (CSB)

34:30 *the priests and the Levites*. Cf. 2Ki 23:2, which has “the priests and the prophets.” (CSB)

34:30 *Levites*. 2Ki 23:2 reads “prophets.” Levites could also serve as prophets. See note, 1Ch 25:1. (TLSB)

34:32–33 All Israel pledged faithfulness to the Book of the Covenant. Further removal of abominations from “all the territory” takes place. Josiah’s reformation spread through the whole land. Cf 2Ki 23:3. (TLSB)

34:33 *all the territory ... Israel*. Josiah extended his influence and rule into the area of Israel recently conquered by the Assyrians. (TLSB)