

# SECOND KINGS

## Chapter 23

### *Josiah's Reforms*

Then the king sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. 2 And the king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. 3 And the king stood by the pillar 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 all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant. 4 And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the keepers of the threshold to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron and carried their ashes to Bethel. 5 And he deposed the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and the moon and the constellations and all the host of the heavens. 6 And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron and beat it to dust and cast the dust of it upon the graves of the common people. 7 And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah. 8 And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had made offerings, from Geba to Beersheba. And he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on one's left at the gate of the city. 9 However, the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brothers. 10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech. 11 And he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the precincts. And he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. 12 And the altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars that Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, he pulled down and broke in pieces and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron. 13 And the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 14 And he broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with the bones of men. 15 Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, that altar with the high place he pulled down and burned, reducing it to dust. He also burned the Asherah. 16 And as Josiah turned, he saw the tombs there on the mount. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of the LORD that the man of God proclaimed, who had predicted these things. 17 Then he said, "What is that monument that I see?" And the men of the city told him, "It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel." 18 And he said, "Let him be; let no man move his bones." So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria. 19 And Josiah removed all the shrines also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which kings of Israel had made, provoking the LORD to anger. He did to them according to all that he had done at Bethel. 20 And he sacrificed

**all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem.**

**23:1–25** Josiah hoped that the destruction of Jerusalem could still be averted if he and the people complied with the Book of the Law. Josiah “made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD” (v 3); cleansed the temple and its environs of idolatrous altars, images, and paraphernalia (vv 4–14); destroyed the false altar at Bethel and “all the shrines also of the high places” (vv 15–20); revived the celebration of the Passover (vv 21–23); and ordered the people to abolish private superstitious practices (vv 24–25). (TLSB)

**23:2** *house*. The temple. (TLSB)

*he read*. Josiah may have done the reading personally, but he could also have made certain that others read on his behalf (see Solomon’s role in building the temple, 1Ki 6:14–16). (TLSB)

*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. (CSB)

Because the king could read “all the words of the Book” at an assembly of the people, the rediscovered scroll may not have contained all the writings of Moses, but only a portion of Ex, Lv, or Dt. However, see the events described in Ne 8:1–8, which may be a complete reading of the Five Books of Moses, also called “the Book of the Law” as in 2Ki 22:8. All five books can be read aloud in c 15 hours. (TLSB)

**23:3** *made a 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)

In a solemn ceremony, Josiah and the people pledged themselves to the Lord in a solemn agreement. For similar renewals of the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. (TLSB)

*joined in 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** *second order*. Common priests, in distinction from the high priest(s). (TLSB)

*Kidron*. Trash was dumped near this brook. (TLSB)

*carried their ashes to Bethel*. 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 the very place where golden calf worship had originally polluted the land. (CSB)

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

Hbr term for officiants in idolatrous worship occurs only here and in Hos 10:5; Zep 1:4. They are distinguished from “the priests of the high places” (v 9), who professed to worship the Lord but at shrines outside the temple of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

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

*the constellations*. Possibly signs of the zodiac. The Hbr word occurs again in a slightly different form in Jb 38:32, where the ESV transliterates it “Mazzaroth.” Horoscopes, though false, are still popular today. (TLSB)

**23:6** *Asherah*. 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)

*sdust 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)

Act of defilement. (TLSB)

*common people*. Lit, “sons of the people”; perhaps idolaters. (TLSB)

**23:7** *hangings*. May describe garments for idols to wear. (TLSB)

**23:8** *Geba to Beersheba*. Geba was on the northern border of the southern kingdom (see 1Ki 15:22), and Beersheba was on its southern border. (CSB)

Judah’s territory extended from Geba, a few miles north of Jerusalem, to Beersheba. At Beersheba, large cut-stone blocks were used to build a horned altar, which may have served the local high place. A temple discovered at Arad was likely destroyed during Josiah’s reform. Its small altars were overturned and plastered over.

*the gate of Joshua*. Perhaps near his home. (TLSB)

**23:9** *ate unleavened bread among their brothers*. 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)

Prohibited from officiating at the altar, these demoted priests did not have to take up a secular occupation but were allowed to share in the benefits of their brethren, the loyal sons of Aaron (Nu 18:8–20). (TLSB)

**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)

Place where children were burned to Molech. Perhaps a vocalization for a word meaning “fireplace.” (TLSB)

*Valley of ... Hinnom*. Basis of NT “Gehenna.” *Molech*. Hbr for king (*melek*) supplied with vowels of the word for shame (*bosheth*; cf Jer 7:32). (TLSB)

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**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)

Equipment dedicated to the sun god for his trip across the sky. Cf Ps 19:4–6. (TLSB)

*chamber ... precincts.* Location unknown. (TLSB)

*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)

*Ahaz ... Manasseh.* Unfaithful kings. Cf 21:1–5. (TLSB)

**23:13** Apparently refers to a part of the Mount of Olives. *Ashtoreth.* (TLSB)

*Chemosh ... Milcom.* These gods were worshiped with child sacrifice. (TLSB)

**23:14** *filled their places with the bones of men.* 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)

*Bethel.* Controlled by Judah at this time. (TLSB)

**23:16** *as Josiah turned.* Shows that the king personally oversaw the work. (TLSB)

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

**23:19** *in the cities of Samaria.* Judah's rule even reached toward Samaria. (TLSB)

**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. 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)

*burned human bones on them.* The bodies of the wicked priests themselves were used to make the place unholy, to prevent people from returning there to sacrifice. (TLSB)

**23:1–20** With bitter detail, the writer describes Josiah's campaign to remove all elements of false worship from regions under his rule. Such bold action no doubt offended some of his subjects. Today, the Lord may call you to take bold action. Set your heart to serve the Lord and pray for His help to make changes peaceably. In all circumstances, the God of peace will sustain you for good works. Best of all, He has accomplished your salvation through His beloved Son. • Give me a soft heart toward You, O Lord, but a firm heart toward those who seek to overthrow Your ways. Amen. (TLSB)

*Josiah Restores the Passover*

**21 And the king commanded all the people, “Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” 22 For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah. 23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem. 24 Moreover, Josiah put away the mediums and the necromancers and the household gods and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. 25 Before him there was no king like him, who 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, nor did any like him arise after him. 26 Still the LORD did not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. 27 And the LORD said, “I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.”**

**23:21** *keep 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)

*no such Passover.* Hbr seems to qualify the event as a remarkable celebration, not simply as the only Passover celebrated in the past 783 years (cf Jsh 5:10–12). Passover was also celebrated under Hezekiah (cf 2Ch 30:1). Ambr: “My sons, think before you act, and when you have thought long then do what you consider right.... [Josiah] celebrated the Lord’s passover when he was eighteen years old, as no one had done it before him. As then in zeal he was superior to those who went before him, so do you, my sons, show zeal for God” (NPNF 2 10:67). (TLSB)

**23:24** *put away.* By dismissal or worse (cf v 20). (TLSB)

**23:25** *was no king like him.* Hezekiah’s reform was not nearly as complete or far-reaching, because he did not have authority in Samaria. (TLSB)

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

**23:26** *still the LORD did not turn away from the burning of great wrath.* The judgment against Judah and Jerusalem was postponed but not rescinded because of Josiah’s reformation. (CSB)

God’s great wrath resulted from the people’s deeply rooted false belief and worship. The official decrees and acts of Josiah did not produce a popular reform. (TLSB)

*provocations.* What the Lord resolved in 21:12 would still come to pass. (TLSB)

**3:21–27** The great and memorable Passover celebrated under Josiah does not fundamentally change matters of faith in Judah. The Lord will sift the people through the Babylonian exile only 26 years later. In all nations and congregations, the wicked and the righteous live alongside one another. We live, prosper, suffer, and die together. Yet, the Lord knows those who are His and will preserve them unto Himself. He has placed His name on us in Baptism, and the world cannot take it away. • Preserve Your people, O Savior, and prepare for us a homeland in Your eternal kingdom. Amen (TLSB)

*Josiah's Death in Battle*

**28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 29 In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him, and Pharaoh Neco killed him at Megiddo, as soon as he saw him. 30 And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo and brought him to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's place.**

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

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 went to meet him.* 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)

Josiah was able to carry out his reforms even in the former Northern Kingdom because for some time Assyria had lost control of Israel. In 612 BC, Assyria's capital, Nineveh, was destroyed by the Babylonians and the Medes. In the ensuing contest for regional control, Pharaoh Neco II (610–595 BC) marched through Israel to join surviving Assyrian forces against the rising power of Babylon. The allied army was defeated at Carchemish on the upper Euphrates in 605 BC. In an attempt to block the Egyptian advance through Israel, Josiah opposed Neco at Megiddo, one of the most strategic passes through the Carmel Ridge. See map, p 615; see also notes, 9:27; 1Ki 9:15. Josiah lost his life in the battle. Aph: "Josiah also was persecuted as Jesus was persecuted. Josiah was persecuted, and Pharaoh the Lame slew [h]im; and Jesus was persecuted, and the people that were made lame by their sins slew Him. Josiah cleansed the land of Israel from uncleanness; and Jesus cleansed and caused to pass away uncleanness from all the earth" (NPNF 2 13:398–99). TLSB)

**23:30** *dead in a chariot.* Success in mundane ventures was not a matter of course in Josiah's life, even though in his efforts to reform the people there was no king like him (v 25; 18:5–6). (TLSB)

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

Huldah's prophecy is fulfilled (22:20). (TLSB)

*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. (CSB)

**23:28–30** King Josiah dies due to conflicts over the rising regional power of Babylon. Yet, the Lord fulfills His Word to Josiah by gathering him to the tombs of the kings of Judah. When good people meet a tragic end, such as faithful soldiers or officers who fall in the line of duty, do not assume that they or their families are being punished by the Lord or that He has forsaken them. Instead, honor the noble who fall too soon in your eyes, offering thanks to God for their noble service. Jesus, too, met an early end (to our notions), but His death was purposefully timed by God for our salvation. • “Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abr’ham’s bosom bear me home, That I may die unfearing; And in its narrow chamber keep My body safe in peaceful sleep Until Thy reappearing. And then from death awaken me, That these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my fount of grace. Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend, And I will praise Thee without end.” Amen. (LSB 708:3). (TLSB)

#### *Jehoahaz's Reign and Captivity*

**31** Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. **32** And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. **33** And Pharaoh Neco put him in bonds at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem, and laid on the land a tribute of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. **34** And Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the place of Josiah his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz away, and he came to Egypt and died there. **35** And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land to give the money according to the command of Pharaoh. He exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, from everyone according to his assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Neco.

**23:31** *twenty-three years old.* No reason is given why the people chose Jehoahaz, who was two years younger than his brother (cf v 36). (TLSB)

*three months.* In 609 B.C. (CSB)

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

**23:33** *in bonds 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)

After killing Josiah, Neco proceeded northward beyond Tyre and Sidon to Riblah on the Orontes River “in the land of Hamath.” Here, at Nebuchadnezzar’s later base of operations (25:6), Pharaoh deposed Josiah’s son Jehoahaz, also called Shallum (Jer 22:11), and “put him in bonds.” No doubt Neco feared that “the people of the land” (2Ki 23:35) had made Jehoahaz king because he would follow his father’s anti-Egyptian policy. (TLSB)

**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 his 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)

Neco changed the name of his appointee to the throne to impress his vassal with his authority. Cf 24:17 for a similar action. (TLSB)

*taxed.* The overlord also exacted tribute, which the puppet king paid by taxing "the people of the land." (TLSB)

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

**23:35** *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)

**23:31–35** In three short months, Jehoahaz is able to restore false worship in Judah and so overturn his father's reform. How easy to destroy and corrupt! How hard to set things right again! The Lord alone can truly change hearts, accomplished through His life-giving Word, which purifies us from every stain of sin.  
• Cleanse me, O spotless Lamb, from all my sins, that I may do what is right in Your eyes. Amen. (TLSB)

*Jehoiakim Reigns in Judah*

**36 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebidah the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. 37 And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that 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)

Jeremiah describes in greater detail the evil that Jehoiakim did in the sight of the Lord (Jer 7:16–18; 22:18–23; 25; 26). (TLSB)

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