

A King Like No Other

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[0:00] Well, I wonder who you would think the leaders, the best leaders in history might have been. I've just given you a quick peek at someone. It could have been those who've led their nations through troubled times.

Perhaps this man, Winston Churchill, who steered his nation through the war. Or perhaps even this woman, she's 93, still growing strong.

She's pretty amazing, really, isn't she? Or perhaps this man, Nelson Mandela, who saved South Africa from apartheid, essentially. Or perhaps this man, Abraham Lincoln, who led America through the civil war and saved the whole Union, the United States of America.

Or closer to home, perhaps this young Bob Hawke, who helped the economy grow. Or perhaps even John Howard, who saved Australia from guns.

I guess it depends how you vote, doesn't it? Well, tonight we come to arguably the greatest king in Judah's history. Certainly since King David. But before we get to him, two preliminary comments.

[1:09] The first is that chapters 22 and 23 really go together. So I suspect there will be some overlap between what I say tonight and what Paul will say next week.

We haven't actually had time to discuss, as he's in Myanmar at the moment. But I'll try not to steal too much of Bishop Barker's thunder. Though someone did tell me not to worry, which was encouraging.

Another person told me the same thing, though she added, because no one will really remember what you said last week anyway. Thank you, my wife. Thank you. The second preliminary comment is that to really help us appreciate King Josiah, we really need to understand the story so far, including the chapter before ours tonight.

So we're going to do a bit of a brief background and then spend some time in chapter 21 first, before we get to chapter 22. So tonight's talk will be a bit longer, but I take it the Summer Bible Study series gives us more time to get into God's Word a bit deeper.

So firstly, the background, and there's a timeline on the back of your outline that you might find helpful. We'll pick it up halfway down at 922 BC, towards the bottom, actually, of the timeline.

[2:24] And as you can see, the golden era under King David and Solomon has long gone, and so has the kingdom as a whole. In 922 BC, the kingdom split, as you can see there.

In fact, on the next slide, I think, is a map. You can't see the detail. Just look at the colours. The purple is Judah in the south. So the southern kingdom was called Judah after its biggest tribe, Judah.

And the northern kingdom, with ten tribes, kept the name Israel. And just by the by, it's when they split into Judah that we get the name Jews from.

So before 922 BC, they were technically just Israelites. But then for 200 years, God sent prophet after prophet to warn Israel in the north.

But king after king did evil. So after 200 years of warnings, which, by the way, is pretty patient, isn't it? 200 years of warnings.

[3 : 26] God sent judgment in the form of Assyria in 722 BC on the right-hand side of the outline or timeline there. And the Assyrians assimilated Israel, the northern kingdom, into their mass kingdom.

And the northern kingdom of Israel was no more. What was left were half-Israelites known as Samaritans after the capital in the north called Samaria.

And meanwhile, seven years later, in the south, Judah, there was a good king, finally, called Hezekiah. He ruled 29 years. And you can see on the left-hand side there from 715 BC to 686 BC.

And he listened to God's word, mostly. The end of his story isn't terrific, which is chapter 20 of Two Kings. But generally, he was a good king and seemed to co-rule with his son Manasseh for the last 11 years of his reign.

Because if you can look at the kings on the left-hand side, Manasseh's rule actually began in 697 BC, while his father, Hezekiah, was still king.

[4 : 36] Perhaps Hezekiah was trying to train his young 12-year-old prince. That's when Manasseh actually started to rule at 12. Or perhaps Hezekiah's illness came back. Or perhaps he just lost interest.

Which might be the case if you read the end of chapter 20. Either way, it's Manasseh who wins the worst king of Judah award. He's up there with, seriously, Hitler and Stalin as worst leaders in history.

Which brings us to point 1 of your outlines and chapter 21 of your Bible. So pick it there, chapter 21. Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king and he reigned in Jerusalem 55 years.

His mother's name was Hezbo and he did evil in the eyes of the Lord following the testable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

Notice here in verse 2 that Manasseh followed the nations. He was shaped by the world. And this meant he undid everything his dad, Hezekiah, had done.

[5 : 47] Perhaps in part to break free from his dad's rule. But it says here mostly to follow the nations around him. Either way, we read what he did in verses 3 and following.

He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed. He also erected altars to Baal and made Asheropol as Ahab, king of Israel, had done.

Which is the worst king of Israel. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshipped them. He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord himself had said, In Jerusalem I will put my name.

In the two courts of the temple of the Lord he built altars to all the starry hosts. Did you notice that in the very place God put his name, Manasseh put idols and altars to worship other gods.

I'm not sure we quite grasp how offensive to God this is. The closest thing I could come up with was, Imagine you going to a Jewish synagogue and putting up a Nazi flag.

[6 : 58] Now multiply that a thousandfold. That's how offensive it was to God. Manasseh sacrificed his own son in the fire, Practised divination, sought omens, consulted mediums and spiritualists.

He did, I think this is an understatement, He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing God's anger. You see, Manasseh wins the worst king of Judah award by far, doesn't he?

And so hideous and so serious was his sin, That God says he'll bring judgment. Just skip down to verse 10 for a moment. Down to verse 10, Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle.

I will stretch out over Jerusalem, the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab, that is the northern kingdom. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.

I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and give them into the hands of enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their enemies. They have done evil in my eyes and have aroused my anger from the day their ancestors came out of Egypt until this day.

[8:51] Moreover, Manasseh has also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit so that they did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

He's the worst king, right? It's pretty obvious. And his sin so serious that it will rightly be judged.

But hang on a second. If you're familiar with 2 Chronicles 33, as I'm sure you all are, it's our favourite book, isn't it? Then 2 Chronicles 33 says Manasseh was disciplined by God and actually repented at the end of his life.

But the problem is, it was too little, too late. Even though Manasseh did repent and tried to change some things, we are told in 2 Chronicles 33 that the people continued to sin.

You see, the damage had already been done. Manasseh had already walked Judah into judgment, which is why his obituary, or tombstone, if you like, included his sin.

[10:05] You see verse 17? As for the other events of Manasseh's reign and all he did, including the sin he committed, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?

There are some funny headstones or tombstones around, like this one. Here lies John East. Pardon me for not rising. Maybe it's my dad humour.

I quite like that one. But Manasseh's headstone here, his obituary in verse 17, is no laughing matter, is it? At verse 17, he's very typical of the way the writer of two kings would end a king's reign, except Manasseh is the only king to have his sin included in his obituary.

It's etched onto his tombstone, if you like. And he stands, I think, as a warning for us that sin is serious, not just because it's offensive to God, which is enough in itself, not just because it deserves judgment, which is also enough in itself, but also because it can lead others astray, just like Manasseh walked Judah into judgment.

I like the time we were driving in the car and another car cut us off. One of the kids said, oh, dumb driver. Now, where do you think they got that from? Their mother. No, I'm joking.

[11:37] I'm joking. No, no, it was me. It was me. Or more seriously, remember the words of Jesus on this slide. If anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

You see, you are not to be shaped by the world like Manasseh. Not just because it is offensive to God, and it is. Not just because it deserves judgment, and it does, but because it can also lead others astray.

Well, Manasseh's sin is not only etched into memory, it's also passed on as his legacy, because his son, Ammon, followed his father's footsteps. In fact, if you look in your Bibles at the end of chapter 21, at verse 20 and 21, the writer makes this point by repeating the word father three times into verses.

He followed completely the ways of his father, worshipping the idols, his father. He forsook the Lord, the God of his ancestors, and did not walk in obedience to him.

And I'm pretty sure there's another father there in the Hebrew. Thankfully, though, he ruled for only two years. But you see, this is the background, the time of moral mud and sordid sin that our king enters into.

[13:13] And perhaps this king would now revive Judah and save them, not from war or guns, but from the judgment God just announced.

Certainly, Josiah is a king like no other. In fact, the best king of Judah. Point two, chapter 22. Josiah was eight years old when he became king and he reigned in Jerusalem 31 years.

His mother's name was Jediah, daughter of Adiah. She was from Bozkath. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed completely the ways of his father, David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

Now, the very mention of Josiah's name in verse one would have been like a ray of light piercing the moral darkness. Because if we'd been reading through one kings and two kings, we'd remember a prophecy made some 290 years earlier, which said that it was a prophecy against false altars.

A man of God appeared and said, altar, altar, this is what the Lord says, a son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you, he will sacrifice the priests of the high places and made offering, that made offerings here.

[14:41] And human bones will be burned on you to desecrate the false altars so they couldn't be used anymore. Now, you'll need to remember this for next week because it comes up again in chapter 23, but here appears a king called Josiah.

And before you have even time to wonder whether this could be the one to remove the false altars and restore true worship, we're told in verse 2 that he did do what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed completely the ways of his father David and, there should be another and, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

Three things we are told about Josiah and they're all good, aren't they? In fact, since the split of the kingdom, there have been seven kings who did right in the eyes of the Lord, only two kings who walked in David's ways, but there have been no kings of whom it was said they did not turn to the right or to the left.

You see, here is a king like no other. And if you're still not convinced, then next chapter tells us, this is where I'm stealing a little bit of thunder, but turn to chapter 23, verse 25, it's over the page of the Pew Bible, towards the top of the page, chapter 23, verse 25, and notice what it says, verse 25, neither the before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, in accordance with Deuteronomy, the law of Moses.

You notice the repetition of all? Here is a king like no other. Surely he is the leader to put Judah back on track.

[16:47] Surely he can save his nation not from apartheid, but from judgment. I remember when Barack Obama was elected, there was great expectation even coming to here, to us in Australia, on the other side of the world.

In fact, there was even a book written about him in his presidency, Barack Obama, Hope for the World, was the title of the book. And given what's happening with Trump at the moment, there are even calls and T-shirts to bring Obama back, not that he can stand again.

And closer to home, it wasn't that long ago when Scott Morrison was elected, only May last year, and many Christians, despite the flack he's copped over the fires recently, many Christians breathed a sigh of relief when he was elected.

I remember that Sunday morning after the election Saturday night, people were physically relieved for this was our hope to save our deteriorating religious freedom, or so it was thought.

But you see, here is someone way better than Obama or Morrison. Someone who did right in the eyes of the Lord, who walked in the ways of David and did not turn to the right or to the left.

[18:07] Here is Josiah, a king like no other. Surely again, he is Judah's hope. Surely he could bring about revival that would save his nation.

Certainly that's what he seems to start doing. He actually gets going with reforms and repairs like the temple so that true worship could take place. But the writer seems to focus on what is found in the temple.

So at point three, verse three, it says, in the 18th year of his reign, King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan, son of Azaliah, the son of Melusatham, to the temple of the Lord.

He said, go up to Hilkiah, the high priest, and have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the Lord, which the doorkeepers have collected from the temple. Have them entrust it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple, and have these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the Lord, the carpenters, the builders, and the masons.

Also, have them purchase timber and dressed stone to repair the temple, but they need not account for the money entrusted to them because they are honest in their dealings.

[19:25] Here we jump from Josiah's first year as king to his 18th year, verse three, as king. And now we know from 2 Chronicles chapter 34 that he's actually already started his reforms, undoing everything Manasseh had done.

As one commentator put it, he had started his 12-step de-Manasseh-fication program. And so on the next slide, we read in 2 Chronicles 34, in the eighth year of his reign, when he was 16 years old, while he was still young, that's how young, he began to seek the God of his father David.

And in his 12th year as king, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, and idols. And here in his 18th year, in our passage, he begins to repair the temple.

Hence the instructions about giving money to supervisors to pay workers and so on. In fact, the language here in verses 3 to 7 is almost identical to the language used back in chapter 12 of 2 Kings about the good king, Joash.

It's as though the writer is building up this picture of just how good Josiah is. He's like all the other good kings combined. But the point here is that Josiah has already started his reforms.

[20:52] And this helps us to understand why the people were happy to give money to the repairs of the temple and why the supervisors could be trusted and were honest. There had been six years of reformation already.

So why then does our writer skip over those earlier years and jump straight to Josiah's 18th year? Well, because of what happened that year.

Verse 8. Hilkiah, the high priest, said to Shaphan, the secretary, I have found the book of the law in the temple of the Lord. He gave it to Shaphan who read it.

Then Shaphan, the secretary, went to the king and reported to him, Your officials have paid out the money that was in the temple of the Lord and have entrusted it to the workers and supervisors at the temple.

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. Now notice how the writer doesn't bother recording Shaphan passing on the instructions to Hilkiah between verses 7 and 8.

[22:03] Instead, in verse 8, he simply jumps immediately to Hilkiah's discovery. And in fact, Hilkiah speaks in the Hebrew a little bit like Yoda.

The Hebrew starts with book of the law found, have I? It's a little Yoda laugh. I don't think he did the Yoda laugh, for the record. But the point is the writer in the Hebrew highlights the importance of this book by putting it as the first thing out of Hilkiah's mouth.

He knows it's a precious discovery. So what is this book? Well, it's most likely the covenant components from the book of Deuteronomy, including the blessings and curses towards the end of the book, if you remember those.

In fact, in chapter 23, verse 2, it's called the book of the covenant and it was supposed to be with the ark of the covenant in the temple. So Josiah has it read to him as the kings were supposed to read it.

But how will Josiah respond? He's had a terrible legacy before him, but verse 11, when the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his robes.

[23:22] Now, tearing robes was a sign of grief and anguish, for he truly heard God's word. That is, he believed it and lived in light of it.

This was a sign of his soft and humble heart. something that's made explicit later on in verse 19. Just skip over to verse 19 on the other side of the page for a moment and listen to what God says about Josiah.

Concerning the words you heard, because your heart, Josiah, was responsive or literally soft, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become a curse and be laid waste.

And because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have also heard you, declares the Lord. Do you see how his heart is described?

A responsive or literally soft and humble heart. You notice the repetition of the word heard. Often in the Hebrew it carries a sense of obeying or keeping.

[24:35] Josiah truly heard God's words such that he believed it, wanted to keep it. In other words, he took the words of this book of the Lord not as human words, but as they actually are, the word of God.

Josiah truly is a king like no other. In fact, he is the ideal king which the book of the law wanted in the first place. So in Deuteronomy chapter 17 we read when the king takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, Deuteronomy, taken from that of the Levitical priests.

it is to be with him, it is to be with him and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to fear the Lord, his God, and keep literally he, all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and not turn from the law to the right or to the left.

Here is Josiah who, verse 1, does not turn to the right or to the left. The only Old Testament king for whom this is said. Then in verse 10 he reads or has the law read to him as the kings were supposed to.

And then in verse 11 he hears, keeps the words of it. Do you see how the writer is wanting us to see just how great Josiah is?

[26:17] A king like no other? So surely this king can save Judah from judgment. But before we get to that, I think he's also a great example to us of how to respond to God's word, isn't he?

Do we hear God's word with a soft and humble heart? Do we accept, you know, this book, the Bible, not as human words but as it actually is, the word of God?

It's how the Thessalonians took the word of the gospel. In fact, in the New Testament in 1 Thessalonians, Paul writes, we also thank God continually because when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as it actually is, the word of God.

So do we like Josiah and the Thessalonians take the words of the Bible as they actually are, the word of God? God? Or do we just take some of the words as they are?

I was in my study the other day, last week actually, and my daughter came in to me and she says, I'm sorry to interrupt, you only have to say one word, can I have some money? To which I replied, no.

[27:35] Then she said, you were supposed to say the other one word and then she went off to ask a mum. But is that what we do with God's word? We hear one word but it's not the word we wanted and so we go off to find another word we do want.

Not that I'm God and my wife is the world in this scenario, I should have used a different illustration, but I've heard people treat God's word like that. I've heard people say, oh, that's just the apostle Paul.

In fact, I've heard a bishop say that. And they go off and find a word they like from the world. Or I've heard some say that it's the words of Jesus that matter. That's why they're in red, isn't it?

Or another say that the Bible is more of a guideline on how to live a word rather than being authoritative for how to live as God's word.

Now, sure, we have to read the Bible in context and understand what it meant for its original hearers, but often that leads people to think it only has application for them back then, not us here now.

[28:41] but we are to take the Bible as it actually is, God's word. And then like Josiah, hear it with soft and humble hearts, so that we believe it and live by it, even if it comes into conflict with our world.

When our world clashes with God's word, which one wins out in our lives? The world or the word? Or if it comes into conflict with our own expectations and our own understanding, who wins out?

Us or God? I've heard people, Christians, say, that doesn't make sense to me, so it can't be true. Okay? And do we also hold it as something to be prized, like a precious discovery, such that we want to read it and understand it more and more?

I went to Bible college with a guy called Jamie who was obsessed with coffee. He had his own barista set up at home. He would even roast his own beans every Friday afternoon.

It stunk out the place. And then he would keep the beans only for one week for maximum freshness. It was all too much work for me, but he told me that he was after the perfect shot of coffee, what he called the God shot.

[30:03] And sometimes I fear that Christians simply want a spiritual God shot to get us through the week. I see it in various ways, like people don't want to work through the text to see the richness of the text, but just give me the big idea in some fancy way.

Or the application has to be about them. If it's just about seeing God's glory again, it doesn't somehow count. Or people recall only what the preacher said rather than what the Bible said.

Now I know the Bible is not always easy to read and our attention spans are decreasing, but do we prize God's word such that we want to understand each part of it?

Even ask for help to read it? Or do we simply want a God shot, the reader's digest version? It is worth the effort, especially because according to Thessalonians there, do you see the last verse?

It's the word that is at work in you. The spirit of God primarily works through the word of God. So thank you for coming out tonight to spend more time than usual sitting under God's word.

[31 : 23] Can I implore you to keep working at reading it, asking for help to understand it, and above all like Josiah, hear it with soft and humble hearts?

Well, because Josiah did truly hear it, that is believe it, then he commanded Hilkiah to inquire whether there was any chance to be saved from judgment. So point four, verse twelve.

Hilkiah the priest, Ahicham, Achbor, Shaphan, and Eisaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shelham, son of Tikvath, the son of Haras, the keeper of the wardrobe.

She lived in Jerusalem in the new quarter. Now, just a quick note, we're not sure why Josiah didn't send Hilkiah to a better known prophet, one whose name was easier to pronounce, like Jeremiah.

Jeremiah had been on the scene for five years by this point. Perhaps it was because Hilda was slightly closer. It says in verse 14, she lived in Jerusalem itself. Perhaps she was better known in the royal court.

[32 : 31] For as verse 14 says, if I've got this right, her grandfather in law was the keeper of the royal wardrobe. Now, there's a job my daughter would love, fashion. But in the end, it doesn't really matter, does it?

Provided they faithfully speak God's word. That's what counts. But when she does speak, I suspect it's not what Josiah was hoping to hear. See verse 15? She said to them, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, tell the man who sent you to me, this is what the Lord says, I'm going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book of the king of Judah, has read, because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made.

My anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched. again, this no doubt was not the news Josiah was hoping to hear.

For it means no matter what reforms he has done or will do, no matter how great the revival he brings, he cannot quench God's just anger.

God's God's God promised back in chapter 21 in Nassau's day, the wiping out of Jerusalem will happen no matter what.

[33 : 59] Interestingly, in verse 15, Hilda even calls Josiah the king the man. Did you notice that? As though she is subtly reminding him that despite being king, he is still just a man who cannot cancel or repeal God's judgment.

And yet, because Josiah truly heard God's word, then Josiah himself will be saved, for God will give a reprieve.

Verse 18, Tell the king this time 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.

Because your heart was responsive or soft, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become a curse and be laid waste.

And because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the Lord. Therefore I will gather you to your ancestors and you will be buried in peace.

[35 : 03] Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place. So they took the answer back to the king. You see, while God won't repeal his judgment, he will give a reprieve, won't he?

He will hold off until Josiah dies. In other words, because Josiah believed God's word, then he is saved from seeing God's judgment himself.

But, here's the thing, he cannot save his nation. That's why the graphic on the advertising for this series has the word revival with a question mark.

For Josiah cannot quench God's anger towards Judah. And if Josiah can't, then who can? Yes, Josiah does commit one act of folly right at the end of his life, which we'll see next week, but our writer has really been at pains to highlight him as the ideal king of Deuteronomy, a king who did not turn to the right or to the left, who reads God's word and truly hears God's law, a king like no other.

And so if he cannot quench God's anger and save others, who can? Who is our hope? Well, you all know the answer, don't we?

[36 : 28] Starts with G's, ends with us. For unlike Josiah, Jesus is not just a man, is he? He's also God the Son who came to earth, as we remember just a few weeks ago at Christmas.

And he truly heard his father's word to the point of being obedient to death, even death on a cross. And there at the cross he did quench God's just anger for our sin.

He drank the cup that was reserved for you and me. You see, Christ alone is the hope of the nations, not Obama, not Morrison, not even Josiah.

For only by Christ's death the wrath of God is satisfied. So it's only by truly hearing God's word about Jesus, believing it like Josiah did, that we can be saved from seeing God's anger at us too.

And for us who have believed it, then as we've seen already, we're firstly not to be shaped by the world like Manasseh was, do you remember? Secondly, we're not to be shaped by, sorry, rather we are to be shaped by the word as Josiah was, which means having that soft and humble heart that truly he is God's word such that we believe it, prize it, and live our lives by it.

[37 : 55] And thirdly, and most significantly, I think, Josiah helps us to see afresh the brilliance of Christ, such that we might joyfully follow Jesus as our leader in life.

For what Josiah, the greatest king of Judah, could not do, Jesus did do, didn't he? And that makes Jesus truly amazing, doesn't it?

My daughter had a friend for a sleep over last night, there was only two of them, but there was so much giggling and screaming, it sounded like there were 20 of them. But I asked them this morning, who's the best person at maths in your class?

And quick as a flash, they both responded in unison, Anuk. He must be pretty good. But then I said, what if there was a maths problem that Anuk could not solve? Impossible, they responded.

He even helps teachers. Truly, there's no one like Anuk in their class. But I insisted, what if there was a problem that he couldn't solve, but someone new came to the class who could solve it?

[39 : 03] To which they replied, well, that person would be amazing. I hope you can see where I'm going with this. Josiah is like Anuk.

Was there a better king in Judah's history than him? Impossible. So what if someone comes along who could solve the problem of judgment and save others that Josiah could not?

well, that person would be amazing. You see, the greatness of Josiah only serves to highlight just how much greater Jesus is.

For if the best of kings could not quench God's wrath and save others, then the one who can must truly be amazing. See afresh the superbness of our Saviour, that we might joyfully follow him as our leader in life.

Let's pray.