

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver St.  
Flagstaff, AZ 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## A TEENAGER STARTS A REVIVAL

2 Chronicles 34 & 35

By

Steven J. Cole

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Kings of Judah Lesson 14

A Teenager Starts A Revival  
2 Chronicles 34 & 35

Former Secretary of Education William Bennett writes about how teachers in the 1940's were asked to identify the major problems they faced in the schools. They listed talking out of turn; chewing gum; making noise; running in halls; cutting in line; dress code infractions; and littering. When asked the same question in 1990, teachers listed drug and alcohol abuse; pregnancy; suicide; rape; robbery; and assault (cited in *Liberty* [Nov./Dec., 1994, p. 5).

Do you remember the story of the little Dutch boy who saved his city from destruction by sticking his finger in the hole in the dike? Do you ever feel like that little boy, except that you're trying to plug holes with all your fingers and thumbs, but more leaks are breaking out every minute? I sometimes feel overwhelmed as I see our godless culture hurtling toward destruction.

King Josiah must have felt that way. He lived in an evil day; his culture was on the brink of God's judgment. His grandfather, Manasseh, had been the most wicked king in Judah's history, plunging the nation into worse sins than the Canaanites Israel had conquered centuries before. Even though Manasseh repented, he could not undo the damage he had done. It's much easier to lead people into sin than it is to lead them out again. It's like emptying a box of BB's on a hardwood floor. It's easy to scatter them, but it's not so easy to get them all back in the box. Josiah's father, the wicked Amon, reigned only two years before he was assassinated. He reestablished the pagan practices of his father's earlier years. Into this wicked culture, plunging headlong toward destruction, little eight-year-old Josiah was thrust as king.

What could this boy-king do? He stuck all his fingers in the holes in the dike! He didn't finally avert God's judgment, but he did manage to hold it off for over 30 years. At age 16, Josiah began to seek the Lord (34:3). As a young man of 20, he started a series of reforms in an attempt to turn the nation back from destruction. But even though Josiah himself "did right in the sight of the Lord"

(34:2), if we read the contemporary prophets, Jeremiah and Zephaniah, we learn that his reforms weren't able to go deeply enough. But he did manage to keep one generation from judgment. As such, Josiah should be an example to us as we seek to make a difference in our evil culture. Like Josiah,

Though we live in an evil day, we can see God work through us if we will seek Him and obey His Word.

1. Josiah lived in an evil day; so do we.

When you read 2 Chronicles 34:3-7 and the parallel passage (2 Kings 23:4-15, 19-20) you begin to see what Josiah was up against. Although the people in his kingdom would claim to be followers of the one true God, they had incorporated all sorts of worldly practices into their worship: idolatry, sexual immorality, and even child sacrifice, all under the guise of religion! It's amazing how people can delve into anything and everything other than God's Word in the name of religion! These people claimed to be God's covenant people, but they were totally corrupt in their lifestyle.

In Josiah's day, as in ours, there was a widespread lack of understanding of God's Word. When we read of a copy of the Law being discovered in the Temple and read to the King, we get the distinct impression that even the godly Josiah had never heard it read before (34:15-19)! We don't know whether Manasseh and Amon had destroyed the copies used by the priests and Levites during Hezekiah's reign. But apparently God's Word was scarce. Whenever people do not read and understand the Bible, they have no basis for evaluating or confronting their behavior. And so they drift into the worst of sins without even knowing that they are thoroughly pagan.

I wish you all would read David Wells' two excellent books, *No Place for Truth* and *God in the Wasteland* [both, Eerdmans], which show how worldly the American church has become because we have abandoned God's truth and God-centered living and have replaced it with a human-centered, therapeutic approach in which human needs become sovereign. Wells argues that the church is in the business of truth, not of marketing its "feel-good" product to religious consumers. He states,

A business is in the market simply to sell its products; it doesn't ask consumers to surrender themselves to the product. The church, on the other hand, does call for such a surrender. It is not merely marketing a product; it is declaring Christ's sovereignty over all of life and declaring the necessity of obedient submission to him and to the truth of his Word (*God in the Wasteland* [Eerdmans], p. 76).

The evening before Thanksgiving I had an interesting conversation with Jim Owen, author of the excellent book, *Christian Psychology's War on God's Word* [EastGate]. He thinks that a major part of the problem in American Christianity is that we do not want to submit to authority, including the authority of Scripture that confronts our self-centered, fulfill-my-needs mentality. Thus we are abandoning the historical-grammatical-contextual approach to biblical interpretation and are accepting books in which popular authors subjectively read into the Bible the latest psychological "insights" and then claim that they are biblical. I think his analysis is correct.

The point was clearly illustrated earlier this year when *Christianity Today* ([5/16/94], pp. 38-40) ran a news article summarizing some of the far-out views set forth by the popular Christian writer, Karen Burton Mains, in her book, *Lonely No More* [Word]. She holds to a number of Jungian psychological concepts about "the male-within-the-female and the female-within-the-male," which she says "have always seemed exceptionally scriptural to me." She describes a seven-year-old, emaciated "idiot child" in her mind's eye, who turns out to be "the Christ child that is within me." She explained to CT that this was metaphorical language representing "the repressed, malformed" part of herself with which Christ identifies.

In spite of these and many other weird things she says, which are at best a mixture of worldliness with Christianity, the article was slanted in favor of Mains and against the "self-appointed heresy hunters" who dare to criticize her! And, the subsequent letters to the editor were largely defensive of her! David Wells is correct: American Christianity has abandoned the idea that we must submit to God's revealed, absolute truth and has moved into a subjective, therapeutic hodgepodge of worldly ideas.

But even though, like Josiah, we live in an evil day when even those claiming to be God's people are marked by worldliness, there is a way out of the darkness. It involves seeking the Lord and obeying His Word.

2. Josiah sought the Lord and obeyed His Word; so can we.

A. Josiah sought the Lord (34:3a).

There are two lessons to note here:

1) *Seek the Lord early in life if you can.* Josiah was 16 when he began seeking the Lord. He was not from a godly home. He lived in an evil day. And yet he began seeking the Lord during his teen years and never turned away.

Many Christians have the erroneous notion that teenagers must go through a phase of rebellion. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, where Christian parents expect their teens to rebel! Some kids feel like they'll never be well-adjusted if they don't sow some wild oats. That's baloney!

I want every young person to hear this: Even if you come from a bad home and even though we live in an evil world, you can seek the Lord. You'll never regret avoiding drugs or drinking or sexual immorality, because sin always leaves scars. I thank God that He graciously preserved me from rebelling against Him or against my parents. I think I'm fairly well-adjusted in spite of it!

2) *Keep on seeking the Lord.* "He *began* to seek God." Seeking the Lord is a lifelong process. You don't just try it halfheartedly for a few months and then say that it didn't work. Walking with the infinite God and learning His ways is a lifetime process.

You'll go through dry times and difficult times. You'll be tempted to turn to the world for the latest wisdom on how to deal with your problems. You'll be tempted to give up on the Bible because "it doesn't seem to work." But always remember, what you need is the Lord! Let your problems drive you to depend on Him alone. Seek Him through His Word! Trust in Him and don't lean on any other source. The renewing of our minds through Scripture isn't a quick fix. We've got to run with *endurance* the race set before us. With Josiah we must keep seeking the Lord.

B. Josiah obeyed God's Word (34:2).

Verse 2 summarizes Josiah's life: "And he did right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David and did not turn aside to the right or to the left." There's a difference between doing right in the sight of people and doing right in the sight of the Lord, isn't there? We can only do right in the sight of the Lord when we obey His Word. Josiah had, as you will have, many opportunities to turn aside to the right or to the left, but he didn't do that (except at the end of his life). He obeyed God's Word.

The story of the discovery of this copy of the Law of Moses (at least Deuteronomy, but probably the first five books of the Old Testament) is a marvelous example of how God has preserved His Word down through the centuries. Tyrants have tried to eradicate it. Even clergymen have tried to keep it from the common people. During the middle ages church authorities opposed the translation of the Bible into the vernacular because they feared that if lay people read the Bible, heresy would result. William Tyndale, one of the early translators of the Bible into English, was condemned for heresy, strangled, and burned at the stake in 1536 on account of his efforts. A letter he wrote from his prison cell requests a Hebrew Bible, grammar and dictionary so that he could continue translating. We take it for granted that we have several translations of the Bible lying around the house. But it has not always been so.

But whenever God's Word is read and obeyed, great changes begin to take place in individuals and in society. But owning several copies of the Bible or keeping one on your coffee table won't do you any good.

1) *We must read the Word.* We can't obey it if we don't know what it says. And we must not just read our favorite sections which reinforce our prejudices. We must read it all. Read the sections that step on your toes. We don't know for sure which portions for the Law Hilkiah read (maybe all of it). But I would guess that he read Deuteronomy 28 which spells out the grave consequences of disobedience for the nation.

2) *We must respond to the Word.* Josiah's response was to tear his clothes in horror. You don't need to tear your clothes, but sometimes the Word ought to rend your heart. When Josiah heard what God's Word said, he said, "We're in a heap of trouble" (paraphrase

of 34:21). He had deep convictions about the truthfulness of God's book. He knew that when God says something, He means it. He knew that sin has consequences. So Josiah responded with a tender heart and humbled himself before God (34:27).

Even though Josiah's reforms to purge the land of idolatry (34:3-7) preceded the discovery of the Law, what he did illustrates what ought to take place when a person gets into God's Word. It exposes things in our lives that are displeasing to God. You've got to take strong action against such things: chop them down, break them in pieces, grind them to powder, burn it and scatter the ashes, etc. (see 34:4-5). Jesus said that if your eye causes you to lust, tear it out; or your right hand tempts you to adultery, cut it off (Matt. 5:29-30). He meant that we need to respond to God's Word by dealing radically with our sin.

3) *We must learn the Word from mature believers.* The king wanted to find out exactly what these words meant as applied to him and his kingdom. So he sent a delegation to Huldah the prophetess (34:22-28). Apparently Jeremiah and Zephaniah weren't nearby. While God prefers to use men in positions of spiritual leadership, when obedient men are not available, He will use women (Judges 5). Clearly, a woman like Huldah is an exception in Scripture, not the rule. Those who use such exceptional cases to build a feminist theology are grasping at straws. But even so, God does use godly, faithful women.

Huldah shoots straight by telling the messengers what the Lord says (34:23). The job of a person teaching or preaching God's Word of truth is to make plain what God says, even if it steps on some toes. The Word doesn't always make you feel warm and fuzzy. It confronts sin and speaks of God's judgment, as well as His love and mercy. But the Word always brings healing if we submit to and obey it.

As a hearer of the Word, Scripture warns you against shopping for teachers who tickle your ears and tell you what you want to hear rather than what you need to hear (2 Tim. 3:3). I've read church growth books that tell pastors if we want to build the church, we shouldn't preach with authority or confront sin, because baby boomers don't like that sort of thing. You can find

many pastors who fall for that marketing approach. But they will turn away your ears from the truth (2 Tim. 4:4).

So, we must read the Word; respond to the Word; learn it from others.

4) *We must seek to influence others with the Word.* Once we have read the Word and responded to it with personal obedience and have been taught it by others, we have an obligation to influence others with the Word. Josiah didn't keep it to himself. He got everybody together and read the Word to them and sought to help them obey it too (34:29-33). If God's work in your life is real, you will want to bring others under its influence.

Some may say, "I wouldn't want to offend somebody by telling them what the Bible says." If you see someone with an illness and you've been cured of the same thing by taking a certain remedy, won't you tell him what you've found? God's Word gives us all that we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4). People with problems don't need human wisdom; they need God's Word. Every Christian should grow in being equipped with the Word so that you can help others discover its riches.

Thus even though Josiah lived in an evil day, he sought the Lord and obeyed His Word. So can we. The result?

3. God worked through Josiah; He can work through us.

Josiah purged the land of idolatry and immorality. He restored the Temple and reestablished worship in its proper place. He led the people in the greatest Passover in hundreds of years. Josiah's Passover was greater than the one led by Hezekiah because all Israel participated and because it was observed in more accordance with the Mosaic law. He saved a generation from God's judgment.

In our evil day God can do great things through us if we will seek Him and obey His Word. Although it seems impossible to see our nation restored to the place where school teachers complain about the kids chewing gum instead of carrying guns, God can do the impossible! We need spiritual revival!

### Conclusion

Josiah's story ends on a sad note. Pharaoh Neco passed through Judah on his way north to Carchemish where he intended

to join with Assyria against Babylon (35:20). He did not intend to fight Josiah, but Josiah insisted on fighting him. It probably seemed like the sensible thing to do. But no where do we read of Josiah seeking the Lord about this battle. In fact, he disguises himself before going into battle (35:22), which reminds us of the ploy used by the wicked Ahab. Why disguise yourself if you're in the will of God? But Josiah goes against Egypt, gets shot in battle and dies at 39. The revival stops. And in a few short years, Judah falls to Babylon.

What that says to me is, "Don't get sidetracked from what God has called you to do." The good is often the worst enemy of the best. We've got to be careful or the devil will entice us into the wrong arenas and it can nullify the eternal impact of what God has called us to do. Josiah got sidetracked from the spiritual work into political solutions. Didn't the land need to be defended? Wasn't that a king's job? Yes, but he should have sought the Lord. In this case, God really was speaking through this pagan pharaoh (35:22)! Josiah should have stuck to his spiritual reforms.

Just before the 1984 election, I heard a well-known pastor speak on "The Second Most Important Day of Your Life." He said that the most important day of your life is when you trust Christ as Savior. But the second most important day would be when you went to vote for Ronald Reagan! In my opinion, he was putting far more faith in the political system than is warranted! While I'm pleased with the recent election, I'm not optimistic that the Republican Party can solve America's problems. Only God can solve our problems and He will do it as His people turn from sin, seek Him and obey His Word. The world's problems are essentially spiritual, not political. The church's primary task is to proclaim the gospel and bring people under Christ's lordship. Let's not get sidetracked from our main mission!

At age 12 Robert Louis Stevenson was looking out into the dark from his upstairs window, watching a man light the street lanterns. His governess came into the room and asked what he was doing. He replied, "I am watching a man cut holes in the darkness." Though we live in a dark day, we can be used of God to cut holes in the darkness, if we will seek Him and obey His Word.

## Discussion Questions

1. How can we effectively proclaim God's absolute truth to a relativistic world?
2. What is worldliness? How has it affected the church?
3. Some would argue that the church needs to experience God, not learn doctrine or theology. Why is this a false dichotomy?
4. Should Christians be involved in politics? How much time should God's people commit to the political process?

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