

A PLAN FOR REVIVAL

THE STORY OF KING JOSIAH

II KGS. 22:1-20; 23:1-25 & II CHRON. 34:1-33; 35:1-19.

INTRODUCTION

REVIVAL! A stirring; a spiritual awakening; reform; regeneration; a special move of God among his people to call them away from a drift towards neglect and sin, back to the old paths of truth and holiness.

REVIVAL! The great reforms under Ezra. The revival under John The Baptist. The early church regeneration. The great reformation beginning in the 16th century. The world wide revivals of the 1800's. The great Welsh revival. The Azusa Street revival. These, and others, all made a difference in the spiritual landscape of their day. There was a genuine work of God in each of these that changed the lives of God's people and his church.

In the early years of the 21st century, the need for revival in the magnitude comparable to any spiritual awakening of all the past history of God's people is urgent and critical. In Rev. 3:14-22, the Laodicean church symbolizes the need of today's churches in very graphic detail. First, the church in general is lukewarm, disinterested, complacent, and apathetic. What an appalling indictment. Then, it is accused of having an attitude of being (spiritually) rich and having no need of anything spiritual. This attitude is then berated by the stinging description of the inspired words of the Holy Spirit: the church cannot see that it is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. What a deplorable characterization of the church of God in these times. Then God says the church is a nauseating draught that he will vomit out of his mouth.

What does God see in today's church that the church can't see in itself? What is going on in the name of Christ at the sacred precinct of the church that God sees as so detestable to his sense of righteousness, justice and holiness? How has the church drifted inexorably into a spiritual condition that God describes in repugnant terms and threatens her regurgitation as an unacceptable representation of his true temple, the body of Christ. And even though some may exclude themselves from this symbol of a lukewarm spiritual church, that is probably only a confirmation that we are in the grip of apathy and neglect of God and his truth and can't see it. The primary hindrance to a great awakening of the church of today is her own spirit of self-sufficiency, coupled with a spirit of apathy. When you see yourself as being "whole" and are indifferent to all entreaties for spiritual change, it becomes nearly impossible to accept either the diagnosis of need or the remedy for it.

Revival in our lives and our churches comes about so very different than the average church member perceives it to be. We regularly see announcements in the papers of some certain church having "revival services", with specific dates given for them. If revival could be a reality by just announcing it, we all should prepare our advertisements. But it can't. While it is fine to have special meetings, to call them revivals may contribute to the decline of spiritual awakening because it gives the wrong impression. If you ask many churches when they last had a revival they would in all likelihood give you the dates of their last series of meetings. (And there is nothing wrong with a series of meetings; they just don't amount to revival).

Another area where the modern church likes to claim revival is when these announced meetings are evangelistic campaigns and then declare revival when unchurched people make an affirmation of faith. No doubt about it, we all need evangelistic campaigns and people need to be added to the church. However, church revival should be just that: revival of the church, member by reluctant member. Granted, if any church had a genuine revival among it's existing members, the fire would spread to those outside the church and call them too.

Today we have a multitude of preachers who call themselves “evangelists”, who go from church to church or city to city, holding what is called “revival meetings”. This corps of preachers use many tactics to get “a place to hold a revival”. I know, because over the years I have received their letters and their “credentials”. I am yet to invite any one to fill my pulpit who solicits to do so, suggesting they can “stir up the people for the Lord”. I fear the kind of “stirring” it might be. And that is not to say that I have not or will not invite other preachers into my pulpit. It is just an area where I think caution and wisdom must be used.

Then again, revival takes on the connotation and appearance of a big entertainment show. A highly publicized evangelist accompanied by celebrity appearances and “special music artists”; a jokester, or if you are lucky the evangelist may also be able to play 3 musical instruments and sing all at the same time. And God’s people love to have it so.

My point in all of this is to say that today’s Christianity has a very strange and unrealistic view of what true revival really is. If you have read much history of the great, life changing, church changing revivals of the past, then you certainly know that they did not come about following such patterns as we see today. In contemporary church culture it is entirely possible that a mighty outpouring of a Holy Ghost sent revival on some churches would have the effect of splitting them right down the middle. I might add regarding that corps of “church hoping” evangelists that I just wonder how long they would last if God sent them to pastor a little struggling church off the beaten path that had a lot of problems in it. They probably would not hear that call.

Let me enlarge a little more on “revival preachers”. Take a closer look at what we call “televangelists”. Nothing wrong with preaching over television. It just strikes me as pretty shallow for a “televangelist” to have crusades planned way in advance, always for those areas where large crowds (and maybe large collections) can be expected. It didn’t work that way with the “evangelist Phillip” in the 8th chapter of Acts where God called him from a city wide campaign in Samaria and sent him to the desert country to preach to one Ethiopian eunuch. That will take the publicity winds out of your crusade sails real quick. Too many of these “great revival campaigns” (so-called) have too much of an appearance like Barnum and Bailey circus when they come to town. A lot of lights, bells and whistles; a mighty noise and a good side show. Then when they leave town, what is left is a lot of clean up to do and less money to do it with.

If I sound skeptical of the shallowness of the campaigns and crusades purporting to be “great awakenings”, let me assure you that it is intentional. I have read the story of Josiah’s great revolutionary revival and it has stirred my spirit within me to an altogether different approach to revival. The many man-made forums for revival we are so accustomed to, do not measure up to the practical, powerful and realistic outline we find in this great story of Josiah. So let us return to his story and share from his lesson the spiritual awakening it can provide for us and our churches. Before we do return to the story of Josiah and the great spiritual changes he effected it will help us to understand the magnitude of the problem he faced if we first explore some background events before he became king. To say the least, Josiah came to the throne in a very desperate time when idolatry and apostasy and indifference to the law of God and the temple of God was so rampant that they had rejected every vestige of righteousness God had set before them.

It was approximately 641 B.C. when Josiah became king at the tender age of 8 years. This was about 35 years before the beginning of the Babylonian captivity of Judah, thus connecting his day with a time of unconscionable sin among God’s people. Amon, Josiah’s father, reigned in Jerusalem before him. He only reigned for 2 years before his own servants conspired against him and killed him in his own house. In that 2 years, Amon shewed himself to be exceedingly wicked, even as his father, Manasseh before him. He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. He served idols and worshipped them and forsook the Lord. After Amon’s own servants conspired against him and slew him, the people of the land rose up and slew these conspirators.

However, a full view of the depth of idolatry and wickedness which Josiah inherited, can only be seen

if you look at the history of his grandfather, Manasseh. (II Kgs. 21). Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign and he reigned for 55 years. “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen.” He built again the high places that Hezekiah (his father) had destroyed. He made altars to Baal and made a grove, as wicked Ahab had done. He worshipped the host of heaven and served them, i.e., the heathen gods of the sun, moon, stars, planets, etc. He built altars in the temple itself and in the two courts of the Lord’s house. He made his son pass through the fire (a form of heathen worship). He dealt with familiar spirits, wizards and witchcraft. He wrought much wickedness before the Lord. He put a graven image of the grove (idol altar of prostitution) in the house of the Lord. Manasseh seduced the people (and this includes the priests also) to do more evil than the nations God had destroyed before all Israel. He did wickedly above all that the Amorites did and made Judah to sin with his idols.

This wickedness of Manasseh had gone on for the 55 years of his reign and the 2 years of Amon’s reign when Josiah came to the throne. Beyond all of this, there was still existing in Jerusalem the high places king Solomon had build (almost 400 years before) during his time, to the heathen gods Ashteroth, Chemosh and Milcom. You can easily see from all of this that Josiah became king after years of idolatry, desecration, wickedness and evil in the sight of the Lord. Spirituality, righteousness, worship of god and purity of hearts was virtually non-existent in Judah, Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord. What an overwhelming, disheartening, disgraceful mess. And Josiah was but a child of 8 years old who, at that age, probably could not comprehend what it would take to revolutionize Judah, Jerusalem and the true worship of God.

With all of these prior acts of wickedness feeding the fires of the existing corruption at the time when Josiah became king over Judah, it makes what he did all the more amazing. The fact that he set out on such a revolutionary accomplishment at such a young age, coupled with the vast and far reaching consequences of what he did makes his story a “hall mark for revival”. It is truly a profound commentary on what God can do with one person totally dedicated to him. The scripture (II Kgs. 22:2) says of him: “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the ways of David his father and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

A few more significant facts about Josiah will further strengthen the phenomenal change he effected in Judah in such a short time. As already noted, he became king at the youthful age of 8. II Chron. 34:3, in the 8th year of his reign (he would have been only 16) he began to seek after the God of David his father. Then, in the 12th year of his reign (age 20) he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of their idolatry. In Jer. 1:2, we are told that Jeremiah began his prophecy in the days of Josiah, son of Amon, in the 13th year of his reign. So Josiah was a contemporary of Jeremiah whose prophecy began when Josiah was 21 years old. We don’t have much specific information of any influence Jeremiah may have had on Josiah, but it is very likely that there was contact between them since their mission was much the same. Finally, the total purging of all the wicked idolatry and corruption Josiah carried out in Judah was completed in the 18th year of his reign while he was only 26 years old. This fact will become even more amazing when we see the extensive revolution he achieved at such a young age and under such overwhelming circumstances. Then, we will see his wonderful work crowned with the greatest restoration ever accomplished in all the days of all the kings of Judah.

The story of revival under king Josiah is told in II Kgs. ch. 22 & 23, and II Chron. ch. 34 & 35. As would be expected, different details are emphasized at different points in these 2 scriptures on the story. It is important to carefully analyze this story in both locations in order to coordinate the chronology of events as they transpired. If this is done it will underline a harmony of the two accounts. It will also provide a sequence of events that outlines a very specific and progressive plan for our own revival. I believe the chronological order of Josiah’s great work is as follows.

1. II Chron. 34:3. Passionately seeking God.
2. II Chron. 34:3. Elimination of the sins and idolatry in the temple.
3. II Chron. 34:8; II Kgs. 22:3. Restoration of the temple.
4. II Kgs. 22:8-20; II Chron. 34:14-28. Re-discovery of the word of God.

5. II Kgs. 23:1-3; II Chron. 34:29-33. Covenant with God.
6. II Kgs. 23:21-25; II Chron. 35:1-19. The greatest passover ever.

As we look into each of these events we will see how uniquely they speak to the spiritual needs of our own lives and churches today. More important than the exact sequence of these events is their unquestionable presence. Notwithstanding this we shall see that some things necessarily come before others in the process of revival. We shall also see that excluding any one event will stop the entire process.

STEP # 1 PASSIONATE PRAYER.

In II Chron. 34:3, it is stated that it was in the 8th year of Josiah's reign (age 16) that he began to seek the God of David his father. It is 4 years later, in the 12th year of his reign, before any other action ensues. One of the great advantages of Josiah's work is that he began to seek the Lord "while he was yet young". He did not wait until he had wasted life away to seek after God. His was not a death bed experience. In the very best years of his life he set his heart on spiritual things. We are not told of any specific needs he was seeking God for nor do we need to know. It is enough that he simply sought the Lord. It seems that our mind set is such that to seek the Lord in prayer implies that we are seeking some physical objective. Are we so alien to spirituality that simply seeking God himself is not enough. Is it not possible that Josiah was so overwhelmed by the presence of wickedness and idolatry in Jerusalem and the temple that he just fell on his face before the Lord in utter despair as to what to do? Does your heart ever become vexed by the contemptuous evil that is everywhere you look? Who is there, that upon reading about Josiah's story, can even think of feeling that all is well in today's churches and society while gross sins and apathy abounds and increases by the seconds. Surely such dire spiritual conditions as we all face cannot be left to some future generation in the hope that it will rectify itself.

Maybe you are saying I am not young like Josiah and I cannot rise to such a challenge as he did. We are as young as we will ever be; we can start now. And the great task of revival does not depend on our strength, young or old. It depends on the Lord. We simply have to follow his instructions. Even if you are alone in your seeking to begin with, you must begin now. You cannot wait until an appropriate moment; or until your whole church is ready; or until the next pastors' conference or revival seminar to focus attention on the spiritual need. Josiah was king, a political leader; a most unlikely prospect for setting in motion a great convulsive change among the people of God. After all, wasn't that the duty of the great high priest? He did not make a royal proclamation that he was going to change the religious status of the kingdom. He turned to God, while he was yet young, and sought the Lord.

We are in no position to come to God with our "agenda for revival" in our hands, neatly planned and orchestrated with pomp and publicity. God, I believe, is not very interested in the gathering of great musical artists, celebrity appearances, well organized programs or mass hysteria. Instead, God is looking for contrition, broken hearts, people on their knees weeping before the Lord over the bondages and sins we are in spiritually. Until it reaches that passion and depth I think we would be rather facetious to expect very much spiritual change.

It has often been said that every great move of God in the hearts and lives of his people started with a kneeling figure. It surely must be so. On the day of pentecost, people were waiting on the Lord in prayer and one accord. The great Welsh revival that spread to many countries, is attributed to the prayer closet. The great outpouring of the Holy Ghost around 1900, had its fires kindled in the hearts of people "seeking God". At Asbury College in 1970, revival was traceable to people who had been at prayer for some time. Josiah initiates the astounding undertaking of reform in Judah by beginning to seek the Lord "while he was yet young". Is there any wonder at the amazing results he achieved when you realize that it was birthed, not in the pomp and ceremony of the royal palace, before all the kings advisors, but on his face, humbled before God.

Every church and every Christian should heed the call to pray for revival. A church revived and on

fire with a fresh, powerful visitation of the Holy Ghost can never be a reality without long hours in the closet of prayer, empowered with importunity and passion. So much of our praying is what I would call intellectual praying: worded right; long; but very little passion in them. God is not nearly as interested in our high, intellectual praying as he is passionate praying. People of God whose prayers made a difference were passionate in their prayers. Jacob, praying all night at Peniel, is an example of passionate praying. Hannah certainly employed passion in her prayer for a son. When David was confronted with his sin with Bathsheba, he resorted to great penitence, contrition and brokenness. Hezekiah, being told that he would soon die turned to God with tears and weeping in his prayers. In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed with such passion that his sweat was like great drops of blood. Daniel and Paul are other examples of passionate praying. Our praying will be in proportion as to how deeply troubled and concerned we are about the need for revival. Without passion in our prayers, the message we are sending is that we don't see much need to be alarmed about. Passionless praying isn't going to get results. Pride, self will, intellect and apathy are the bane of prayers that can move God to move us to revival. By praying with passion, I do not mean that passion which comes from our natural, physical, emotional troubles in this life. I mean a passion that comes from a deep spiritual burden that comes from an overwhelming need and desire for spiritual awakening. And neither do I mean a "Hollywood" type of passion that flows from the head and not the heart.

In our passionate pursuit of prayer for revival, and our recognition of the very vital part it has in it, there is also a warning that should be sounded here. We should all endorse the importance of prayer as a prelude to revival. Josiah sought after God. We are confident that revival can only come if God sends it and it will be in response to importunate, passionate prayer. The defeat of wickedness is such a daunting task that, alone, we would throw up our hands in despair. So pray we must. There is no substitute for humble, broken seeking of God and his will. But Josiah did not stop with passionate praying. In fact his seeking of God led him to the great task of purging and cleansing Judah. So prayer for revival is not a comfortable method for transferring our other responsibilities over to the Lord. After we have prayed we have only prepared our hearts and minds for the impossible task before us, that only God can enable us to carry out. Christian people seem to take a certain attitude that says I know I can't do it so I will pray and let God do it and think we have finished our responsibilities. Then we wonder why revival does not come. Just go to the story of Josiah and learn that after 4 years of seeking God, "He" began to purge Jerusalem. There is a lot of talk throughout Christian circles about calling God's people together to pray for revival. This is encouraging and good. However, we seem to be waiting for God to do what we ought to do ourselves (and only we can do). Maybe it is time for a call to "break down the altars of lukewarmness" and remove the gods of the world that have so infiltrated the Christian church. While we passionately petition God's throne of grace, it is just as essential that we are listening for his directions for our next action toward revival. That is what Josiah did.

STEP # 2 ELIMINATE THE SINS AND WICKEDNESS.

In II Chron. 34:3, the same verse that says that Josiah began to seek the Lord in the 8th year of his reign, while he was yet young, also gives us the next step toward revival. "And in the 12th year he began to purge Jerusalem from the high places and the groves and the carved images and the molten images". Four years after Josiah began to seek the Lord, he set out on a formidable task of purging all the idolatry and wickedness which had been instituted in the place of the worship of God. Indeed, the prayers of Josiah did not transfer the responsibility of "cleaning up the sins of Judah" to the Lord. Instead it prepared and commissioned Josiah to initiate this daunting task of purging the sins away. And this is a critical point for us in our search for revival. As critical as our passionate praying for revival is, God is not going to remove all the sins in our lives for us. And we don't need to claim "grace" if we are unwilling to do our part to get out of the sin business. By our prayers God can reveal our needs to us; inspire us to action and give us strength for the task. God was not going to remove the altars, groves, images and other corruption that had been established among the people of Judah in rejection of God's word. Instead he heard the cries and saw the tears of Josiah and moved upon his heart and mind to purge Jerusalem.

When will we see the awesome truth and direct application of it to our need for revival today. If we

have a need for revival in our churches and lives, and we surely do, then when we begin to passionately pray for a genuine spiritual awakening, at least two things happen: (1) God will reveal to us our very own need; and (2) He will inspire us to get rid of the sins in our lives and churches. God did not (Himself) break down a single idol altar, image or grove for Josiah. He gave Josiah grace and fortitude to do it and he enlisted the help of others. Neither is God going to tear down, justify, overlook or whitewash our altars of lukewarmness; idols of worldliness; groves of false worship or blatant neglect, disobedience and turning from the right way. God is going to inspire and convict us to do that or it simply will not get done. No need for us to use the marvelous grace of God to cover our sins if we are unwilling to take full responsibility for them and purge them out. We can't take a "name it and claim it" position about our sins nor claim to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" without being willing to do ourselves what he instructs us to do. We know where the altars in our lives are and we must tear them down; stop the sins; quit the things that are wrong. Praying, believing, grace, nor the power of God is not going to stop your sins for you or gloss over them. He will enable you, but you must tear them down in order to be delivered from them and convince God you really want change.

Now lets go to II Kgs. 23:4-24, and see just how personally and specifically Josiah (and others) were involved in the removal of the barriers to the work of the Lord in Judah. This chapter gives a detailed account of everything he did to rid the temple, Jerusalem, Judah, --and even Israel-- of the wickedness they had embraced. All of the ugly, embarrassing, wicked mess was uncovered, manifest and utterly destroyed. The message for us in this detail is that God is not going to justify, sugar coat, cover or overlook a single sin which we choose to keep in our lives or church. We would like to "march down our church isles", along with the crowd, and avoid the exposure, embarrassment, condemnation and awfulness of our sins. It will not work. They must all be dealt with before God and totally destroyed. Like the prophet Samuel chopped king Agag to pieces, so we must totally destroy every vestige of sin in our heart and life. That is what Josiah did.

He started at the temple. That was the critical place. If the temple (church) isn't purged, then how can we expect the land to be purged? He "commanded" Hilkiah the high priest and other priests (preachers listen up) to bring forth out of the temple all the vessels of Baal and of the grove and of the host of heaven. The vessels of false, idolatrous, wicked worship were purged from the temple and burned outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron and the ashes carried to Bethel. A pretty good start.

Then he put down the idolatrous priests that the (prior) kings had ordained to burn incense in the high places of Judah and Jerusalem to Baal, the sun, moon and planets, all the host of heaven. When you go through the entire story of Josiah, you see that the religious leaders were dealt with up front and very seriously. They weren't just transferred to another "parish" to continue their evil orgies. They were "defrocked". While it is no doubt true that the ministry of today varies in their degree of involvement in the "sins of Laodicea", yet, I believe, none of us can exclude ourselves. After all, the letter to Laodicea was sent to the "angel" (ministering agency) and they are accountable. Whether ordained by a denominational hierarchy or flying under an independent banner; from a simplistic easy believism to gross self exaltation, false theology and carnal, materialistic agendas, the clergy first of all needs to be held accountable, even repentance and coming back to the ancient landmarks of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Mega churches that think they have it all together and little churches that think they are "keeping the lights burning". There is a self satisfied sophistry in the church that urgently needs being dealt with. And think about this: Josiah did not need for the "temple" and all of it's priests and all of their ungodly worship to be "revived". It needed to be totally changed so they could repair the breaches and start over. Let that speak to us about the sins of the church today. Don't expect God to revive our "sins"; repent of them and quit them. And before you think I am too radical in ascribing rank sins to today's church and calling for all the church to repent and turn from our lukewarmness, neglect and other spiritual sins, maybe you need to read God's letter to Laodicea again. In Rev. 3:19, God said: be zealous and repent. And we have a lot of "spiritual idols" to repent of and destroy. Just spend some time surfing the TV evangelists; the radio; the bookstores, etc. The things that are being done and taught in the name of Jesus is shameful. To assign the conglomerated, divided, materialistic, scripturally inaccurate, self elevating messages

coming forth from so much of the ministerial media of today as “gospel” is wrong. If Jesus Christ walked into our churches or broadcast pulpits today, it would be with the same spirit and anger as he had when he ran the “money changers” out of the temple. He would change the whole agenda.

But Josiah is not through. He took the grove (idol altars of prostitution) and burned them with fire, stamped it to powder and cast the powder upon the graves of the people who had worshipped at them. Then he broke down the houses of the sodomites that were right beside the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the grove. Can’t you just hear some of those “devout sisters” in their rage that their artistic work in the temple was being destroyed. It did not seem to matter that they had sodomy (gross sexual sins) in the temple. After all they were trusting in God’s “grace by faith”. In today’s church houses of sodomy abound. The latest statistic shows that 1 of every 2 church members (women too) and 1 in every 6 preachers are looking at pornography. And from there it just gets worse.

After this he ran the priests out of the cities of Judah, from Geba to Beersheba and destroyed the high places where they burned incense. Stop for a moment and look back at the prayers of Josiah, seeking God while he was young. When you pray earnestly for God to bring you revival, it may be a dangerous prayer. God may answer those prayers by directing you to deal with the sin, idolatry and tradition in your own life and church. O how God empowered Josiah.

One of the grossest sins of Judah was that they sacrificed their children to the god Molech, causing them to pass through the fire of the valley of the son of Hinnom. Whether this was a complete sacrificing of children in this fire, or a ceremonial sacrificing you can decide. In either case it represents a complete dedication of their children to a heathen form of worship. To me, one of the saddest spectacles of today’s churches is that children are being sacrificed to a system that ingrains in them the “doctrine of lukewarmness” toward the gospel, the truth, divine conversion from sin and an uncompromising commitment to the church. A recent “Barna poll” showed that while over 82% of American teenagers say that they are Christians, yet only 9% believe that there is any absolute truth; 61% say if you just do some good it will give you a free pass to eternal life; 53% say that Jesus committed sins; 30% believe that all religions are okay; and 83% believe that moral truth depends on your own individual circumstance!! And you probably thought that I was being too abrasive and judgmental about church sins. Can we not see in this the many “idol altars” that we have erected in our own church lives. Only by a mighty reformation from such human sacrifice and worship to heathen wickedness can we be salvaged.

If it was not so serious a matter, what Josiah dealt with next would be laughable. The kings of Judah had dedicated horses, of all things, to the sun. And you just know instinctively that these were the very best horses of the land. How religious and pious and sacrificial --- and blasphemous. And where were these “dedicated” horses stalled? Why, at the entering in of the Lord’s house, of course. But Josiah didn’t blink an eye as he took them away and burned their chariots in the fire.

Then there were altars on top of the chambers and altars his grandfather Manasseh had built in the courts of the Lord’s house. He beat them to powder and cast their dust in the brook Kidron. You get the sense that the entire house of the Lord, with it’s courts and surroundings was absolutely proliferated with idol altars, images, high places, groves and the like. And Josiah did not spare even one of them. But he still is not through.

Right before Jerusalem, probably as you enter the gates of the city, at the mount of corruption, were three high places that Solomon had built nearly 400 years before. When many strange women turned his heart from the Lord, he built these high places to the gods of the heathen: Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Milcom, all abominations to God. You can just imagine some of the people, who knew nothing of an experience with God, but had a religion only of tradition, crying out in protest when Josiah defiled and destroyed the high places that Solomon had built. They had viewed these high places all of their life and as far back as Solomon who himself built the temple. But Solomon was wrong in this thing and God had raised up a man to remove these abominations from before the people. Josiah did not draw back just because so great a person as Solomon had put them there. A

greater than he (Jehovah God) had commissioned Josiah to destroy them.

Then Josiah did an unusual thing. He was king only of Judah, consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Notwithstanding this, Josiah ventures into the territory of the other 10 tribes, to an altar that Jeroboam had built there when Israel divided into 2 kingdoms. There is a story in IKgs. 12 & 13, about this evil altar and of a prophet who at that time came out of Judah and prophesied against it. Because he did, Jeroboam interfered and tried to stop that prophet. But God was with him. He prophesied to Jeroboam that “a child would be born in the house of David --- Josiah by name --- and that he would sacrifice the priests on that altar and would burn men’s bones there”. Some 350 years later Josiah marches into Bethel and tore down the altar and the high place; he stamped it to powder and burned the grove. There was a cemetery close by where the people of the area, who had worshipped at this abominable altar were buried. Josiah dug up their bones and burned them upon this altar, as the ancient prophet had said. That is, all but the bones of that ancient prophet and a prophet of Samaria.

Furthermore Josiah destroyed the high places of all the cities of Samaria and slew all the priests that were found among them. And then he returned to Jerusalem. Most any leader can talk glowingly about the need for revival. But to set out on a mission to destroy the abominable causes of their idolatry and sin, takes a real hero. We are all ready for prolonged prayer for revival; or a series of meetings; or a crusade with great fanfare and demonstration. But who is willing to go forth and with the sword of the word of God, destroy the high places of sin; the altars of the world; the idols of lukewarmness, along with the personal sins that proliferate the “temple of the Holy Ghost”. In fact, for anyone to imply that today’s church is infiltrated with sins of wretchedness, blindness, nakedness, etc., that it feeds on it’s ego of self satisfaction and is a lukewarm, nauseating draught to God, is considered anathema. Big churches and little churches; successful and struggling; every denomination and independent, God is calling every one to repentance for sin.

When you reflect on how absolutely overwhelmed the temple, Jerusalem, priests and the people were with everything that represents a heathen, godless, obscene world, it is no wonder it all had to be utterly destroyed before there could come a day of reform to Judah. In fact, the very destruction of this saturation of idolatry is, of it self, a part of the reform. Had Josiah not purged all this wickedness, no great revival could come. Likewise, in the church today, we do not need to expect nor claim revival until the sins of the Laodicean church is purged. When Josiah finished, the theology, desire, practice and symbols of sin and wickedness were overthrown. It can be no less in the church.

STEP #3. RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE.

In II Kgs 22:3 and II Chron. 34:8, in the 18th year of his reign, Josiah directed that the house of the Lord should be repaired. He turned his heart and attention towards the central place in the life of God’s people, the temple.

Almost 400 years before, king Solomon had built this temple, before his heart turned from the Lord. He was instructed that it must be “exceeding magnificul”. And so it was. It was not a large building by modern standards, but it probably remains until this day the most expensive building ever built. One major reason for this is the fact that the inside of the temple was completely overlaid with gold: walls, ceilings and floors. The furnishings also and utensils of the temple, though some what sparse, were no less elegant. The table for the shewbread overlaid with gold; the candlestick was one beaten work of pure gold. Then there was the brazen altar, incense altar and the mercy seat where the sacred ark of the covenant rested. All of these had their own special purpose and function. Most significantly, in the most holy place, above the mercy seat, between the cherubims was where God met and communed with his people.

For decades now, this house of God, where his name was, where the holy oracles both resided and were revealed to the people, where God would meet with his people with such manifestation that the place was awe-struck with a sacred holy atmosphere, now it seethed with idolatrous corruption. Emanating from the very essence and typology of this temple was the great, eternal plan of God,

ensconced in the smallest detail, function and construction of this divine edifice, portraying another temple more sacred than this one. Thus serving at the same time, both the daily purpose and life of Israel while simultaneously foreshadowing an even greater temple and time to come --- the church of Jesus Christ, with all of it's resplendent glory, redemption and hope for all the human family.

When Josiah becomes king, all of this sacred temple and it's grand typology, was buried beneath the vile, abominable wickedness of the gods of the heathen world about it. It seems that every nook and cranny had some heathen altar, image, idol, high place, along with the blasphemous services to them. Just think of how desecrating it was for there to be horses at the entering of the house dedicated to the sun. What pollution, perversion and putrification it all must have been to those few souls who still longed in their hearts for the temple to be restored to it's glory and purpose. (And don't ever forget that there were such souls, though their voices were drowned out by the ungodly provocations of a backslidden culture).

Then Josiah enters upon the great, God-inspired work of removing and destroying "every appearance of evil" from the temple, Jerusalem, Judah and thereby the lives of the people. When this work is victoriously accomplished, he immediately turns his attention to the restoring and repairing of the breaches of the temple. Why? Wasn't it enough that now all of the corrupt, idolatrous, disgraceful altars and gods had been ground to powder and removed from the entire country? In fact, no it was not enough. You see, all of these involved construction, re-arranging, adding to taking from, and in general defacing and marring the sacred temple of God until it was hardly recognizable to it's original form. Now that these have been destroyed, restoring and beautifying this great temple is a very, very important task. In similar manner, the church today can hardly be recognized from the rest of the world. No, I'm not talking about the stately edifices we call churches. I mean the people who call themselves the church. In far too many ways and manners we look just like the world in the way we live, act, look and what absorbs our desires. The works of sin run deep in the life of an individual or a church. When that work is stopped and destroyed, there remains massive scars (breaches) that must be repaired. When the surgeon must cut deep into our body to remove some malignant cancer that is eating away at life, he then sets about to try to restore the body to it's normal and original function.

One very important thing we must not forget as we gaze upon the awful corruption of the temple and the people, brought in from the heathen world about them, and that is that there was, in the midst of this corruption, enough of the proper temple functions still going on to make everything seem okay. It is doubtful that all the idols were set up at once but over a period of time, thereby making the slide into moral corruption less noticeable as it progressed. And you can be sure as each addition (or rather subtraction) took place, it was justified by some method or justification of "progress". As it is said today: "we haven't changed the message, just the method". Well, the message usually dictates the methods and when it doesn't, then the message must also be wrong. Had you visited Jerusalem and the temple while all of this corruption was in place, you would have observed the sacrifices being offered; the name of God being invoked; the sabbaths being kept and offerings received. Maybe they had even added a taste of "contemporary, charismatic music to liven up the feast days and bring the psalms to life. However, as you stood their waiting for the great shekinah presence of God to fall as the ancients had told of, it never happened. It was just a ritual, carried out to a new recipe of religious orgies, folly and lifelessness. God was not about to pour out his presence in blessing upon the abominable, worldly, carnal worship of the place. As we shall soon see, he had, years before, in his law, pronounced wrath, judgments and curses upon the very thing they were doing. In all the years of Manasseh's wicked establishment of rank idolatry, you don't hear any call for the prophet to tell him what the will of God is. Isaiah prophesied in his day and tradition says Manasseh had him sawn asunder. They had just employed "creative methods" (more commonly known as carnal worldliness) to influence a "diverse culture" of people to "profess faith".

All of this just strikes me as so analogous of today's church life. The church has brought in the worlds methods, ideas, organizing, ways and most of all it's gods. And the result is the same as in Josiah's day, lifelessness and godlessness. Is not this precisely what God is saying to a lukewarm, wretched, poor, naked, blind Laodicean church. Josiah set out to repair the "breaches" of the

temple, after he had destroyed the corruption of the ungodly world that was the cause of the mess. Isn't that what the church needs to do: get rid of the world and its theology, practice and culture and then restore the sanctuary to its original plan.

Josiah gives orders that the money collected from the people of Judah (and some from all over Israel) was to be given to workmen and artificers to repair the breaches. This money had been collected for the maintenance of the temple. The construction of all the many idolatrous altars, etc., had certainly disfigured the place. Now that they were destroyed, the temple is in great need of restoration. In the 18th year of his reign he gives the command for the repairs to the house of the Lord. He gives instructions that the money collected for this work was to be given to those who would perform the work. The account of this command for repairing the temple is found both in II Kgs. 22 and II Chron. 34. It seems that the money was being collected during the 6 years when the idolatry was being destroyed. Along with everything else, the offerings for the house of the Lord also failed when idol corruption occupied the place. When the focus is on the heathen theology and worship, who is going to collect money for the house of the Lord.

Josiah gave orders to the high priest to transfer the money to the workers, artificers and supervisors. This was done without any accounting process, because the people in charge of the work were deemed faithful. Even this tells you that there has already been a great change in the people since the work begun by Josiah. Good things are happening again in Jerusalem. The house of the Lord is being restored to its glory. Evil has been completely purged. Hope is being renewed. The burden and guilt of idol worship has been lifted from their lives. A sense of urgency, pride, joy and thanksgiving is emerging. The lifeless, senseless, shallow, ungodly religion of decades is giving way to a new opportunity.

Would it not be even more so in the church today, if every where we threw off the yokes of lukewarmness, shallowness, worldliness and a theology from the dark ages. We could set out with new joy and hope to have part in the restoring of the church atmosphere that would glorify God and inspire people. Josiah gives us the plan. It is up to us to follow it.

STEP #4. RE-DISCOVERY OF THE WORD OF GOD

When Josiah began his great work of purging the sins from the house of the Lord, Jerusalem and Judah, it is reasonable to believe that his work met with opposition. But he was the king and he was on a mission and the evident hand of God was powerful upon his life. From the very outset of his work, you can be sure that no one could doubt who was in charge and that the task before him was a most urgent matter. No one should dare resist the changes he was ordering.

Because of this, I believe that a sense of purpose, duty and obedience seized upon every one involved. Also because of this I believe it was now safe again to "bring all the tithes into the store house". They would be safe now, the authority of the king guaranteed that. Thus it is said (II Chron. 34:14) when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord-----. That is, money that over the past 6 years of the work of purging had been collected and stored there.

It was not just money that was brought out of storage. When Hilkiyah went to gather the money to bring it to Shaphan for the work, he made an "amazing discovery". Hilkiyah, the high priest, *found the book of the law of the Lord*. Without any comment, Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan to carry to King Josiah. And Shaphan-

Hold everything right there! Stop the work! What is going on in the temple? What has been the guide line for all the temple functions for years? Why must it be said that Hilkiyah --- the high priest --- "found" the book of the law? Of all people, he should know where it is at all times. Does this tell us that he had not been reading, studying and teaching it? He didn't even know where it was. Is it any wonder the house of the Lord and the people were so consumed in idolatry? How long has the

book of the law been out of circulation? Years, decades? Is it like the days of the judges when everyone did that which was right in their own eyes? Is there no fear of God? Is religious ritual and lifeless tradition all that is ruling? O sure, they were no doubt having feast days, offering animal sacrifices and worshipping the sun, moon and planets that “God created”. No doubt Manasseh, many years before, had stopped all of this “old fashioned religious worship” in favor of an “emerging culture” and diverse, enlightened age. Reading and teaching the precepts of the law and requiring an obedience to it, in spirit and in truth, was mere “legalism”. It would damage the fragile psyche of the people to demand obedience to this law of Moses. What they needed to hear from the temple was words that would give them a “warm feeling”; how to enjoy the good life; just believe in God and be “tolerant” of other religions. After all, every generation has it’s own style and differences and we need to adopt new methods to keep from running them away from the temple. (Like having horses dedicated to the sun or high places to the gods of the “unreached” about us). (Or wrestling matches at church; celebrity appearances, as though they are God’s anointed blessing; or any thing the world has let’s be sure we tattoo a cross on it and give it a high place in the temple (church).

Here we must recognize one very basic fact of all history, whether it be the temple in Jerusalem or the church of the 21st century. That fact is: Forgetting, rejecting, disobeying and neglecting the word of God is the problem of every society; the cause of all sin; and the reason for the dire need of revival as well as the only hope of having it. From Adam’s fall; to the flood; the captivities of Israel; the dark age apostasy of the church and the present day apathy, neglect, worldliness and unacceptable conditions of the church in general, all are directly traceable to the book being lost in the temple. When we disobey God’s applicable word we are separated from his grace just as Adam was. When we obey it, we are brought back into covenant favor just as it was with Josiah.

This is an unthinkable circumstance. The book of the law lost right in the temple of the Lord. And Hilkiah the high priest (senior pastor if you will) just passed it on to Shaphan without comment. Like, here you take this; I don’t have time to read it, I have an important meeting with administrative and public relations duties. After all, there is supposed to be a copy of the law kept in the mercy seat and so long as they are there, then that should be sufficient. Never mind that a generation has come along and does not know the basic teachings of this law. What apathy and neglect this represents. Of course there was no shortage of “worship agendas”. From horses dedicated to the sun to houses of sodomy, religious activities abound.

Does all of this sound too much like the church today? While they were searching for the money (to meet extravagant budgets) lo and behold the “Book” is found. Rather than searching out it’s revealed message, it is passed over while we “perfect our contemporary and traditional worship services”. Or, while we preach a self made prosperity sermon or some psychological discourse or some far out rambling about Israel’s rebuilding a temple and a red heifer or a name it and claim it lecture, rather than the work of the Holy Ghost from the book of Acts. We have lost the book right in the temple, nay, right on the pulpit stand. We are too busy about all of our learned discourses about which we have no divine revelation that we have no time to seek out the word of God. Dr. John MacArthur, a widely known preacher, recently commented that the shallowness of evangelical Christians about Biblical truth is shocking. Even worse is the fact that we justify this shallowness under an umbrella of “easy believism”; eternal security; accusations of “legalism” thrown at any attempt to uphold a decent Christian standard; “the methods don’t matter”; “come as you are”; making the church relevant (translated that means changing colors like a lizard to be like the world); along with fantasy, sensational teachings presuming to be from God.

Let me define Dr. MacArthur’s description of shallowness a little further. It isn’t just the average evangelical Christian whose shallowness is shocking. It is evangelical and non-evangelical; Protestant and Catholic; mainline denominations and independents. And it is not limited only to the “average” Christian in the pew. Where do you think this shallowness originates from? It comes from the pulpit. Preachers? Shallow? But haven’t they been to seminary where learned professors of religion can teach them the deeper truths of the Bible? Of all the multitude of preachers I have ever heard talking about seminaries, I am yet to hear even one maintain that they are strong holds of deep Biblical truth. To the contrary, the remarks are usually negative, even to the point of

disavowing their Biblical enlightenment. For example, when Marble Collegiate Church of N.Y., hired a minister to be the replacement for Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, both Dr. and Mrs. Peale said that it took them 5 years to get seminary training out of him so he could be effective. Dr. C.M. Ward wrote a book: "What They Didn't Teach Us In The Seminary". In spite of this lack of confidence in seminary training, ministers in general, dote on our degrees, specialties, credentials and successes. Independents are no different. They find their justification for shallowness in their ability to criticize the "big boys". The truth of it is, that you can learn a lot at seminaries, etc. But only ---- that's ONLY, the Holy Spirit can reveal the depth of spiritual truth of the Bible to anyone. Alas, credentials and degrees and titles don't come that way.

Shallowness of preachers as it regards the Bible is so embarrassingly evident. The reason people don't notice it so much is that their own shallowness derives from the pulpit. To be sure, preachers are learned in homiletics, psychology, Greek, Hebrew, sermon making, church planting, budgeting and maybe even dealing with their governing board. When it comes to a wide array of very basic Biblical truths they have learned only at the table of traditional orthodoxy, without the agony and thrill of seeking, searching, asking, waiting, and most of all being willing to let God be true and every man a liar, in order to follow truth and despise it not. I speak of such basic truths as: The real meaning of grace; godhead; nature and destiny of man; prophecy; resurrection; principals of Biblical interpretation; holiness of life; the new birth; the coming of the Lord, and others. When very learned theologians write and preach about their belief in and the importance they place on some far out idea such as a literal red heifer they are waiting on to verify their concept of major events in the kingdom of God, do I really have to say any more about the shallowness of preachers and the fact that the "Book" is lost right in the temple. The Lord described his own generation as having eyes but could not see; ears but could not hear; and a heart that could not understand. How applicable this is today.

In spite of the outward devotion to the "Book", there is an inward emptiness concerning it's total message that is appalling. Christians make such an abstract use of scriptures supporting their line of theology and simply don't understand the Bible as a total unit of divine truth. Many Christians emphasize only the 4 gospels and maybe the book of Romans and don't have a clue about old testament truths. If what we teach from the new testament is not founded in the old testament, then our theology is questionable. Scriptures that make unquestionable, direct statements about some issue are often overlooked because of a persons theology. There is no greater need in all of today's churches than expository teaching of the word of God. But this brings people under obligation to obey it so it isn't popular. Everything that we are and that we do as Christians must be firmly rooted in the teaching of scripture. Apart from that, the "Book" may be somewhere in the church, but it is just as lost as it was when Hilkiah found it.

Shaphan took the book of the law which Hilkiah had found and carried it to King Josiah and read it to him. When Josiah heard the words of the book, he rent his clothes. He didn't debate it, get angry at it and he surely didn't ignore it. It troubled him deeply. There is speculation as to what part of the law was read to him that made him rend his clothes. Some believe it was the account of the judgments God foretold upon his people if they disobeyed his law and followed after other gods. That is a reasonable conclusion. It just as well could have been any portion of the law, because it had all been neglected. Also, the kings heart was so set on doing what God wanted that his heart would have been moved by any of it.

The king immediately sent ambassadors to Jerusalem to "enquire of the Lord" concerning the words of the book that is found. They actually inquired of Huldah the prophetess about this matter. (It is interesting to note that at this time, Jeremiah was prophesying in Judah, Jer. 1:2). The prophetess told the ambassadors the only obvious thing that could be said. That is, that everything that had been read to the king from the book would most surely come to pass.

And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, so shall you say unto him ---. Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place and against the inhabitants thereof, and humblest thyself before me, and

didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me, I have heard thee also saith the Lord. Thus Josiah was assured that the judgments on the sins of Judah would not come in his day. His attitude of tenderness, humbleness and respect for the word of the Lord; his spirit of penitence over the sins that had been perpetrated, gained for him and Judah reprieve and mercy.

In our day everyone seems to think that their own interpretation of the Bible is okay. A recent poll showed that only 9% of professing born again teen age people believe there is any absolute truth. Truth is their own individual choice. Since we feel justified in our own mind with our own view, this eliminates any need for a feeling of guilt, humbleness, and penitence. Just decide what you think is right and proceed, no matter what the Bible says. What a profound mistake. The Bible is God's mind about eternal life. The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be. Again, there is no amount of personal learning that can adequately discern the word of God as it should be applied to our lives. Sure, some things are obvious. But to accurately apply the entire word of God as God wants us to, requires the revealing power of the Holy Spirit.

If the word of God is lost in the temple (church) that is also where it can be found. Like the woman's lost coin, she swept her own house where she lost it and found it. Sadly, God has described this Laodicean church age as feeling that we have need of nothing. Do you think you can possibly convince today's church that they really need to rediscover the word of God. With our learned abilities, we are so sure the word of God is not lost. Why then, is there such an appalling shallowness and emptiness regarding the word of God in our hearts and minds. The religious leaders in Christ's day were also sure that they knew God's word and followed it. Nevertheless, the truth of God's word for them was indeed lost right in the temple. Their table (of the law) was a snare to them.

The ambassadors Josiah sent to "inquire of the Lord" were told 2 things. (1) the awful judgments described in the book of the law would surely come on all idolatry and wickedness, just as it graphically described. (2) Because Josiah had so humbled his heart and rent his clothes and tenderly wept over the great pronouncements of judgment, then mercy, peace and grace were shown to him. Likewise for the church today, condemnation and deaths are declared against all sin and it will not be avoided. At the same time, to every heart that "trembleth" at the word of the Lord, there is the offer of mercy, peace and the providence of grace. Life for every descendent of Adam's race, depends altogether and completely upon our response to the word of God. Let us therefore, like Josiah, demonstrate a genuine hunger, fear, respect and tender brokenness regarding all of the words of this "Book".

STEP #5 A COVENANT TO OBEY GOD'S WORD IIKGS. 23:1-3; IICHRON. 34:29-33

When the "Book" was found and read to the king, it's message became so urgent that no more is written after that point about the repair of the temple. Even though it certainly is reasonable to assume that this work did continue to go forward, maybe even with greater determination, yet the focus shifts to the words of the "Book". That is altogether as it should be, because nothing that is done either in the temple or the church should take priority over the word of the Lord. That is precisely why they got into such an idolatrous mess, because they left off teaching, believing and obeying God's word. Likewise, it is the cause of every deficiency, sin and apostasy of the church, both throughout it's history and today as well.

When Josiah received word from the prophetess that God had shown him mercy and granted a reprieve from judgments throughout the rest of his life, he did not breath a sigh of relief and fall into apathy. Instead he gathered the elders of Judah, and Jerusalem; the priests and Levites; and all the people great and small and gathered them at Jerusalem. Then the king himself read in their ears "all the words of the book of the covenant". No one was excluded. Everyone had been deeply affected by the years of neglect, sin, wickedness and idolatry, and everyone, including the religious leaders needed to hear all over again what God's holy will for their lives was.

For many years the word of God had been effectively silenced by the abominable worship of heathen idols. So long in fact, that the convictions of the people about obeying the word of the Lord had gradually disintegrated. Mere ritual and tradition, without any life touching message from the Lord, had taken its place. Indifference, apathy and doing your own thing must have been the order of the day. How quickly we will fall into an abyss of ungodliness when you begin to neglect the word of God. Can you even imagine what kind of orgies the functions of the temple of the Lord must have descended to? There were times in the past when the presence of the Lord was so real and powerful in the temple, that the priests could not even stand to perform the priestly functions. The “shekinah” of God had been so manifest and demonstrated in this holy sanctuary that awe and fear held people before the Lord. As the priests went about even the ordinary functions of the temple, they became extra-ordinary because God was so real in the place. The candle stick was attended, not as some perfunctory duty, but as a sacred light representing the Lord. The table of shewbread was attended with divine solemnity and thankful remembrance of the “manna” in the desert. The fragrance ascending from the altar of incense gave a hallowed aroma emanating just before the entrance to the most holy place. And there, in the holy of holies, where no one dared enter, save the great high priest once each year, the holy oracles of God were enshrined in the ark of the covenant. All of this as the word of God to Moses had prescribed and ordained that it should be. Above all this God had said: I will put my name there. I will come down and meet with you there, above the mercy seat, between the two cherubims, and commune with you.

This sacredness had all been desecrated, polluted, blasphemed and even supplanted over many years. Now heathen gods along with the sun, moon and planets were revered and worshipped in this holy temple. Horses were revered at the entrance of the temple more than Jehovah God. Houses of sodomy and altars of prostitution permeated these hallowed grounds. God must have been disgusted and nauseated at the polluted sight of it all. His word had warned against such apostasy and had delineated harsh retributions for it.

So it is in the church today. We have set aside the commands of the Lord pertaining to the order, function and sacredness of the church of the living God. Instead of a steadfast devotion to every word of the Lord, we have erected shrines, altars, theology, practices, and functions that supplant the real power and presence of the Holy Ghost. We sacrifice to our own personal theology; arrange the temple of the most high God to suit our own tastes and to represent the gods of the world before which we lovingly bow. We treat God with impunity and sacrilege and act as though God is still going to “bless the mess” we have made. It is time to call all of the people of God to a solemn assembly to hear exactly what “thus saith the Lord” about our spiritual needs. That is what Josiah did.

And the king went up into the house of the Lord and read “all the words of the book of the covenant of the Lord”. Not part of it. Not pet passages he could slant to his own application. But all of it. He was as thorough with this as he was in purging all the idolatry in Judah. While the text does not specifically say so, you just know that it was read so that there was no misunderstanding its message.

Then the king did a wonderful thing. He made a covenant, in the presence of the people, to obey this word of the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength. Good king Josiah who had sought the Lord while he was yet young; had torn down and destroyed all the wicked idolatry every where and then set out on a project to restore the temple, now he covenants (commits) to faithfully obey all of God’s word. No one else has any excuse now not to do likewise. Another chance is being offered to a sinful, idolatrous people. That opportunity is being offered by way of a total and unwavering commitment to obey all that God says. The opportunity was not for them to “profess faith in the Lord” and go on with the same way of life. The opportunity was for a commitment to obey everything the book of the law had written in it for them. The king was not saying: “now if you want to go to heaven when you die, say the sinners prayer”. The king was saying the wrath of God is determined against us unless we make an unwavering commitment to “obey” everything God has set forth in his word. This was no time for “surface” religion, but for a complete change of heart and life to absolute obedience to God.

Josiah caused all the people to stand to this covenant to walk in God's testimonies; obey all of his covenant and perform all that God's word had said for them to do. And all the people made a solemn pledge, covenant, commitment to obey the Lord. What a marvelous meeting that must have been. No one is questioning whether it is the right thing to do. No one is saying, I'll think about it and come back when I have a more convenient time. No one is saying we don't do it that way here. Every body commits to the word of God.

And that is the issue today: a total commitment to "all" the word of the Lord. Not your denomination's by laws. Not how some special preacher sees it, but to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord. This means any subject; any theology or doctrine; any method of worship; any practice or mission, all must conform to the sacred truth. Sure, someone is going to scream that we have our own interpretations about the Bible and are serving the same God. Why not take that statement itself and put it to the test of scripture. See if it is not man made and is just one of those "altars" that must go.

Church members, in general, do not have that kind of commitment today. Even in instances where there is a sincere devotion, in too many instances this devotion is to "a church", a denomination, a preacher or his style or message and not the word of the Lord. There is such a shallowness concerning the word of the Lord today, that the orthodox Christian mind is content to believe that the status quo on scriptural doctrine must be okay. After all, it feels good; the preacher has great educational credentials; he is popular and has the church on the "move".

But how can it be so right when the message is one of "just believing" without genuine fruits of conversion following; or give us your money and prosperity will follow? How can it be right when we have strayed so far from the resurrection being the central message we hear preached, especially that a resurrection is the great hope of the child of God when Jesus comes? How can it be right when the standards of moral purity and holiness are buried beneath the sentence of "works and legalism"? How can it be right when every sin, every method and every symbol of an ungodly world is at home in the sacred precinct of the church? How can it be right when the basic concept of the nature and destiny of man is taught essentially the same as extreme institutions such as Mormonism, Islam, the dark age church and virtually any world religion apart from Christianity? How can it be right when the teaching and practice of the early church concerning repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit baptism are considered cultish by much of modern orthodoxy?

Is it not time to do as Josiah did? Begin now to seek the Lord. Destroy all of the altars of indifference and self-will against God's word. Turn our hearts to the kingdom of God and seek the Lord for a revelation of all of his will for our lives. Then commit all our heart and soul to it. As Josiah experiences it, there was no room at all for any partial commitment. Partial commitment to obey the word of the Lord was the same as no commitment.

In view of the self centered, self satisfied, do your own thing Christianity of today, I believe that commitment and passion for the Lord, his word and the church are the number one issues facing the church in this hour. We already know that God has likened today's church under the symbolism of Laodicea as lukewarm; rich and increased with goods; having need of nothing (spiritually) but are wretched, miserable, blind naked and poor. Why doesn't this grab our attention? Why is there not a "Josiah" among all the popular preachers of today who will stand up and start a campaign to clean house?

There is an old saying in the real estate business that says that 3 things are important in real estate; they are: location, location and location. In this line of thinking there are also 3 things important in Christianity; they are: commitment, commitment and commitment. It seems that the important duties of the church have been relegated to "staff members" and the rank and file member is free to roam about at will. It's like, "I go to church to get a blessing, not to participate and be obligated". At the risk of being tuned out completely, let me say that the greatest obligation you will ever have is the day you commit your heart to the Lord. After all, just what do we think it really means when you "commit your heart to Christ". Has it come to mean no more than a "ritual of passage" from sin to

salvation with all of its attendant blessings, but none of its absolute obligations. How can it possibly be that we can commit our heart and life to Jesus Christ and not thereby become solemnly committed for life to obey, serve and follow him with “all your heart”? Call it works or legalism if you will, but it is exactly what today’s Christianity is missing and must return to.

What has happened to the old fashioned altar prayers in the church where our broken, weeping hearts (like Josiah) could find a genuine experience of conversion from our sins? What has happened to home and family prayers and devotions that can have such a powerful impact on today’s home life? What has happened to the mid-week prayer service that has been eliminated or changed to a covered dish supper? What has happened to regular attendance commitment? What has happened to ever member a tither? What has happened to a passionate hunger for the teaching of the word of God? And the list could extend to many other things. We don’t need to be praying that the Lord would pour out his blessings on us, nearly as much as we need to be praying: “Lord, what would you have me to do”? In the house of the Lord, there is nothing that is more beautiful, honorable and sacred than a life totally committed to the Lord, humbly serving God in whatever is needed, always dependable and present and with a beautiful attitude. Instead we are so hooked on the things of this world that in the church we want the “modus operandi” to cater to the ways, spirit and beat of the world. And of course this primarily includes not making anyone feel like they are obligated.

The spirit of indifference and lukewarmness has not come about because “the devil made us do it”. It is there because we, in our own half hearted allegiance to God, love it that way and have no desire to change. Being vomited from the mouth of the Lord is the inevitable results.

Back to the Bible should be the rallying cry of the church. Nothing can take the place of the preaching of the truths of God’s word for the needs of a sin sick society. We need to look beyond the veneer of all the agendas of our churches and “discover” the book of the Lord hidden, neglected for too long. And let its truth be center stage in all we do in the church. Revival is sure to follow.

LESSON #6. THE GREATEST PASSOVER EVER HELD.
II KGS. 23:21-23; II CHRON. 35:1-19.

How could it help but be the greatest passover ever? The greatest one ever kept during all the kings of Israel, Solomon and David included. On the 14th day of the first month, for so it had been commanded in the law, the people gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of passover and unleavened bread. And king Josiah gave more animals for the sacrifice from his own substance than all others. And the singers were in their place rendering songs of praise to God. And the priests worked very fast all day until finally near the end of the day they also were given their portion.

More than the great numbers of animals offered for sacrifice that day was the Spirit of the Lord that was present. Wicked idolatry had been utterly purged from the land. The temple had been restored. The word of the law had been found and restored to the hearts of the people. And the blessed experience of committed hearts and minds gave them a sense of restoration to the Lord. Peace and joy ruled. The tyranny of evil was swept away. A power and inspiration that was divine surely attended this great passover day. And most of all, God was glorified and pleased. There is no other experience, feeling or joy like that of being totally restored in divine favor with God and having his witness of approval upon it.

The great revivals of the past were moments in the lives of God’s people that must have been so much like this great story of Josiah. First, somewhere someone began to hunger and seek the Lord. Mighty, heart rending convictions over sins and spiritual needs began to grip lives. Confession, repentance, sorrow, yea even broken hearted weeping demonstrated the inward guilt and penitence that has evidenced every great, genuine move of God in the past. In the great Welsh revival, an eye witness account described the scene in one service. There was not even any more standing room. There was singing, confession, testimony, prayer and rejoicing over the work of cleansing and

restoration. Sins were vacated; grudges ended; forgiveness free. All under a scene of “complete disorder that was at the same time absolute order”. And church lasted hour after hour; there was no hurry to depart. People were merged together in one harmonious fellowship. An entire generation to come was impacted by it. It wasn’t over when the evangelist left town. In fact, there was no visiting evangelist with a revival troop orchestrating this great event. A young minister was a central figure in the great Welsh revival, but even he was eclipsed by the sheer magnitude of the revival itself. It was promoted from above by a divine hand, that no agenda or committee could duplicate.

The revivals of early 1900, centered in an old livery stable on Azusa St., Los Angeles, continued non stop, night and day for 3 years. It’s impact was literally world wide. Attended with a great deluge of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it marked a later day pentecost.

In 1970, in Asbury, Ky., the same kind of revival with the same life changing effects took place. With no designated leader, the power of the Holy Spirit led. The altar was filled with penitents. Singing, testimony, confession, re-union, prayer and dramatically changed lives were the hall marks of this “One Divine Moment”.

Events on the same scale as these are what the church needs and must have today. “Commercial revivals” are more of an impediment to a move of the Holy Spirit than they are a prelude to it. If you consider all of the things Josiah did prior to their great passover (seeking God, destroying sin, returning to restore the temple and finding and committing to God’s word) there is not a single one of them that could be eliminated and still have a great revival. So why should we think that we can circumvent any of them and experience a mighty awakening in the church. In fact, why would we even want to by pass any of these spiritual processes in our lives. They are each and every one good and essential to the restoration of our lives to God. May God work in our individual hearts and churches to achieve the greatest spiritual awakening we have ever known.

LESSON # 7. HOPE FOR REVIVAL.

In the great story of Josiah, we have seen what God can do with one person dedicated fully to the Lord. Over approximately 10 years his great work had gone on, beginning with seeking the Lord when he was only 16 years old and ending with the greatest passover ever held when he was 26 years old. To say that they experienced revival is an understatement. And we have used this great story as an analogy of the church today; both in the removal of corruption and the bringing of great restoration to the people. The question that we face at the end of this story is whether or not we, in 21st century Laodicea, can have revival also if we follow the process Josiah did. I believe the answer to that question is a resounding yes. We will conclude this story with some thoughts on “Hope For Revival”.

First, however, let us be very realistic about the chaotic moral conditions of the world we are in and the fact that the church is not separated from it. There are many who are predicting a near world wide revival. As great as that would be, I do not believe that is a correct assessment of the spiritual realities we face. I would love to be proven wrong on this. In addition to that, revival is being claimed or announced many times when the real evidence for it is not present. I realize that revival can always be just an isolated instance as much as a general presence. Even one person can be revived (like the Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8), because God sees the need and especially the hunger of every single heart. But in general, there are no real signs of a broad abatement of sins that true revival would certainly cause. The mere fact that someone can generate great crowds and even excitement is no grounds to say revival has come. Christ had a huge crowd when he multiplied the loaves and fishes and surely there was excitement there. But the next day when he preached the great message on the bread of eternal life, they accused him of being hard and all but the 12 forsook him. For the many reasons we have discussed concerning the spiritual condition of the church, we don’t need to “call a prayer meeting for great revival” unless we are also ready to follow other things that Josiah did. God is not going to pour out revival, neither in general nor individually, without getting rid of the sin problem that got us “un-revived”. Don’t presume to claim a great spiritual

awakening with “idol altars” to the gods of self and the world filling the temple and the word of God lost somewhere in the rubbish of it all. It isn’t going to happen.

That being said, however, there is hope. To begin with, God is just as able now as in the past to send us a great Holy Ghost filled awakening. To the church or to a single individual. God is not our problem; He is our solution. The greatest desire God would have for our lives is that we be “on fire” for him. And be sure of this: God does not have to hold back revival until the whole church in general prepares for it. Whoever and wherever an individual heart, or church follows the pattern of Josiah, revival will come. Equally important is the fact that, contrary to what we might naturally think, revival can come to some struggling, dying, discouraged small church totally out of the lime light and pass by the mega church out on the boulevard with seemingly everything going for it.

In the very worst of times, there is always a faithful few who are seeking the Lord. God has always had a remnant that was true to him and hungry for his power. When the Babylonian captivity came to a generation that had forsaken the Lord, there was a Jeremiah, a Daniel, a Mordecai and others who, though they suffered with the rest, yet they were preserved in the midst of the judgment. When the prophet Amos came on the scene the 9 chapters of his book were consumed declaring the judgments on the sinful nations, including Judah and Israel. That is, all but the last 5 verses of the book. In them there was a voice of hope given to God’s people. Christ came to a backslidden, religiously bound generation. But in it there was a Joseph, Mary, Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, Shepherds and others. It was true in the depth of the dark age church. It is also true today. In spite of the overwhelming neglect, apathy, apostasy, worldliness and more that fills the entire church with a flood tide of wickedness, there are still those who are in the world but not of the world. There are still those who hunger; are burdened; who seek the Lord; are willing to destroy every vain altar and who will tremble at the word of the Lord. It is through them that there is still hope for revival as God hears their prayers and sees their tears and works with them for revival.

More than that, pent up in the unfathomable mercy, grace and forgiveness of God, there abounds great reasons for hope when we throw our undeserving lives upon this grace in broken penitence. God still looks over the “brow of the hill” weeping for people to come to him. We will never be able to point to any moment of history accusing God of failing to show mercy to a truly hungry heart. The entire scope and purpose of God’s plan of redemption is forever locked in to “whosoever will”. If there was no one but you, God would stop making worlds to save you; there would still have been calvary. Be assured of this one thing, when God determines (not what religion says) that there is no further work for the grace of salvation, Jesus will return and the end will come. God’s heart is still compassionate; calvary’s redemptive process has not been exhausted; God still has his church and his word in this world and through it he is still able to bring revival. The only question remains with those who profess his name. Even in the desperate status of the Laodicean church, God still says: “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me. With the assurance of the merciful deliverance of God in the very worst of sinfulness throughout all the ages, we can declare there is still hope. It is God’s will that none should perish but that all should come to repentance. There is still hope. Because the shed blood of calvary has no terminal point in it’s power to cleanse, there is still hope. Because the Holy Spirit still pleads with us over our sins, there is hope. Because God’s word still possesses creating power, there is still hope. Because time still lasts; the last trump has not yet sounded and the door of faith has not yet been closed on the “ark of God”, there is still hope. Even in these last, evil days, God still offers to his people the opportunity for revival.

We have this moment. Today is still the day of salvation. My church and your church; my life and your life, still are on mercys’ side of eternity. The offer of God is still mercifully extended to a very needy world. Maybe somewhere God will raise up another “Josiah” who will seek the Lord. Someone God can use to purge sin and wickedness from the church. Someone who will seek out God’s perfect will and truth and will commit to obey it at any cost. Somewhere, broken, tender, weeping hearts; hearts that are tired of a half hearted religion and will surrender everything in their life to Jesus Christ. Somewhere in some “closet” of prayer, the burden of some soul for a life changing experience in the Holy Ghost will cry out without restraint for a fresh visitation of the

power of the Holy Spirit. Somewhere someone will be so radical that they will cast off the “pleasures of sin” that they may know the Lord only and him crucified, yea risen again. Somewhere someone will ignore orthodox theology and will lay all they believe on the altar as Abraham did Isaac, and will cry out for God to reveal the truth as he knows it to be and not our traditions. Somewhere someone will touch the heart of God in passionate pray. And when that happens, God will be moved even to repent himself of the judgments intended on a sinful generation and, like ancient Nineveh, will grant a mighty earthquake of revival that will turn your world and my world upside down.

While there is still hope; while there is still time and opportunity; while the plan of Josiah is fresh upon our hearts, let us sing the beloved old hymn: Search me O God; Know my heart I pray; Try me O savior; know my thoughts I pray. See if there be, some wicked way in me. Cleanse me from every sin and set me free. O Holy Ghost; revivals come from thee. Send a revival, start the work in me. Thy word declares; thou wilt supply our need. For blessing now O Lord, I humbly plead.

Hab. 3:2. O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.