

203 Turning not aside

The "unthinkable" has happened - Donald Trump is the President-Elect of the United States. He now faces the difficult task of trying to deliver on the grand promises he made during the election campaign.

Last week we noted just how much influence any leader of a people possesses, be it for good or ill. We saw that so many of the kings of Israel and Judah turned out to be weak, wicked men, but this time we can be encouraged by one of the true "stars", Josiah, king of Judah from 640 to 609 BC.

Josiah had a wicked father and grandfather, the kings Amon and Manasseh, so the fact that Josiah already "feared the Lord" when he became king aged only eight, must be due to some faithful spiritual teaching behind the scenes, perhaps by his mother or a governess. Josiah's father was assassinated after only two years on the throne. The assassins themselves were promptly done away with, and young Josiah was made king (II Kings 21.19-22). We gather from these events something of the chaos and violence of the times, hardly a promising start for a boy-king, yet Josiah is given "top marks" for his kingship (II Kings 22.2) - "he turned not aside to the right hand or to the left". Oh for godly leaders like that today! Josiah subsequently reigned for 31 years in Jerusalem.

Young he may have been but Josiah quickly got cracking! He first ordered that "the house of the Lord", the temple itself, should be repaired (II Kings 22.3-7). During this work the high priest found "the book of the law" (22.8-11). When this was read before the king he "rent his clothes" (v 11), immediately realising "the wrath of the Lord" upon His covenant people for all their disobedience over the years (v 13). The prophetess Huldah confirmed God's intention to judge Judah (vv 15-17), but Josiah himself, because of his "tender heart" and humbling of himself, would be "gathered to his grave in peace" (vv 18-20).

The fact that the book of the law had to be found, and that its contents were such a shock, reveal just how wayward Judah had become under her kings, despite the few godly ones. We note from this example how a "ratchet-effect" can so easily develop within a society, where evil gradually spreads to become the norm, to the point where it is hardly even remarked upon! Is "the West" today not well-travelled along that road?

What an extraordinary list of Josiah's achievements now follow! First he read the law to the people, renewed the covenant and the people agreed (23.1-3). Later on he instructed the people to keep the passover (23.21-23). In his thorough clean-up, all the Baal-filth was removed from the temple, including a "grove" that just happened to have been set up within the temple itself, along with the

idolatrous priests (23.4-6) and the houses of the "sodomites" (male temple prostitutes) (23.4-7). What a scene of utter depravity existed in God's temple, the place where the Lord had put His name (I Kings 9.3ff).

Throughout the country Josiah got rid of high places, groves, priests, images, wizards and idols. Solomon is mentioned - (II Kings 23.13) - that king who had started so well, who had been so blessed by the Lord with wisdom, honour and riches, and yet who had fallen so, so far: I Kings 11.1 gives a clue (Mr Trump might take note). To please his lady-loves, Solomon had built high places near Jerusalem for the worship of Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Milcom - three gross abominations in the Lord's sight.

Yet Josiah stayed true (23.25), destroying the idolatries and slaying the vile priests involved in all this filth. Can we imagine the courage of this man? - and the strength of the opposition against him? - just as we find with all the biblical prophets through to John the Baptist, and then with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and with Paul and his companions later on. "Turning not aside" can be very tough.

Later on Josiah made one foolish mistake which needlessly cost him his life (see II Chronicles 35.20-24), but as the Lord had promised through Huldah the prophetess, he himself was indeed "gathered into his grave in peace" - just! (II Kings 22.20 / 23.29-30). Three years later the Lord's long-delayed judgement on Judah began when Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem (II Kings 24.1).

As always the Lord gives us such sure guidance in His Word. We are living in dangerous days, and how the leaders of the nations, and especially now Donald Trump, need our prayers. May they indeed "seek the Lord" in their own lives, and then "turn not aside" from leading the peoples in the ways of God's truth.

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