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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2340 ~ Good King Josiah.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

After the death of King Manasseh of Judah, his evil son, Amon, reigned as a king for just two years. Amon went straight back to the heathen worship of his father's earlier years and refused to listen to the Lord's messengers who warned him not to. Amon's own servants actually killed him and in turn, they were executed by the people of the land. So Amon's son, 8-year-old Josiah, was crowned the next king of Judah, and he ruled for 31 years, from 640 BC to 609 BC.

Josiah was the last of the good kings of Judah who worshipped the Lord and did what God told him to, like his ancestor, King David, had done. Around 300 years before Josiah was born, there'd been a prediction about him in 1st Kings, Chapter 13. After the split between the 10 northern tribes and the 2 southern ones of Israel, Solomon's son ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah, while a court official called Jeroboam was given rule over the northern kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam had two golden calf idols made up and one was set up in Bethel, the place where Abraham's grandson, Jacob, had had a vision from God. Jeroboam told the people to go and worship God there instead of going back to Jerusalem in Judah, where the Temple of God was. So many of the priests, Levites and other people who wanted to remain faithful to the Lord's commandments on worship moved into Judah to live.

Just as Jeroboam was about to offer incense on the altar at the dedication ceremony, an unnamed prophet from Judah spoke to the altar. He predicted that one day, a king from Judah named Josiah, would kill the pagan priests and burn human bones on the altar. Even before Josiah had arranged for the repairs necessary for the Temple of God in Jerusalem, he'd already started the process of destroying the pagan altars and idols that had been set up all over Judah.

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When the high priest found the Book of the Law in the Temple of God while it was being cleaned and repaired before worship of the Lord again, Josiah was very concerned to hear it talk about the unfaithfulness of their ancestors. He sent Hilkiah, the high priest, and a delegation to visit a prophetess living in Jerusalem and inquire of the Lord what they should do. She said that although the Lord's message to Josiah was that God would definitely punish Jerusalem and its people for their unfaithfulness to Him, just as many prophets had warned them this would happen, because Josiah had humbled himself before the Lord, this punishment wouldn't happen in his lifetime. Disaster wouldn't strike until after his death.

See how by Josiah's repentance, an entire generation was spared. But God doesn't only listen to the prayers of kings and priests; He listens to the sincere prayers of every believer and anyone who's seeking Him. Our prayers for others can make an enormous difference, not only in our own lives, but also in the life of our church and nation.

In the 18th year of Josiah's reign, as recorded in 2nd Kings, Chapter 22, and 2nd Chronicles, Chapter 34, after the Book of the Law had been read to the people, Josiah made a covenant with the Lord and the people also, to do what the Book of the Law said. From then on, he also required the people to start obeying the law as written in the book found by the high priest.

We mustn't underestimate the significance of Josiah's covenant renewal and his commitment to God's word. Seventy years of exile were soon to come, followed by 500 more, during which time Israel's hope would be kept alive, largely by God's written word. Then Jesus, God's living Word, came in human flesh. Through Jesus, the written word of the Old Testament would be finally fulfilled. In Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 5, Jesus said: "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose."

Following the renewal of Josiah's covenant with the Lord, Josiah ordered that all remaining pagan objects of worship be destroyed and all pagan priests be killed or deposed. Josiah even carried his reforms north into Israel itself, which at that time, was inhabited mainly by foreign settlers sent there by the Assyrians after Israel's capture in 722 BC. During this trip north, Josiah came to Bethel and destroyed the substitute altar which had been set up to worship one of Jeroboam's golden calves. Josiah then removed human bones of evil priests from nearby tombs and also burned them on the altar to defile it further. All this fulfilled the prophecy given nearly 300 years earlier.

When Josiah's work of destruction of the pagan worship places in Israel was finished, he returned back home to Jerusalem in Judah. He ordered the removal of all household gods, wherever they could be found, and he got rid of all spiritual mediums and witches. Clearly Josiah's campaign against pagan worship was more thorough and extensive than that of any reform-minded king before him.

The Bible says that Josiah followed the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength. In 2nd Kings, Chapter 18, it says there was no king like Hezekiah – before or after him. Hezekiah's special quality was his trust in the Lord. But Josiah's special quality was his careful obedience to the Lord's commands.

In rejoicing over the removal of pagan worship from Israel and Judah, Josiah held a national celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem. Although the original Passover was primarily a family affair, it later became a national festival. In the 18th year of Josiah's reign, the people celebrated the Passover feast on a massive scale. It had never been so large since the days of Samuel the prophet.

Some years later, King Neco of Egypt, was passing through Israel on his way to help Assyria fight the Babylonians, who were gaining more and more power in the Middle East. But Josiah didn't want the Assyrians to receive this help. Assyria had been threatening Israel and Judah's independence for two centuries now and Josiah wanted to prevent any renewal of Assyrian power over either kingdom. So, he went out to fight King Neco. Although Neco tried to dissuade Josiah from fighting him by claiming that he was under the direction of God, Josiah wouldn't listen to him. Josiah disguised himself so that he wouldn't be a target in his kingly robes, but he was shot by an arrow anyway and died as his chariot returned to Jerusalem. The writer of 2nd Chronicles explains that God was indeed directing Neco and that Josiah's opposition to God's plan thus resulted in his death.

As soon as Josiah had died, the people of Judah quickly reverted back to their pagan ways. God's punishment for Judah had been postponed but not cancelled. So great did the sins of Judah become that God was now even going to reject Jerusalem, which He'd chosen as the place for His Temple and where He'd put His name.

We have to ask: was Josiah a failure? Josiah died at the young age of 39, and as a political and religious leader, he did fail to bring about lasting reforms. But as an individual, he was faithful to God, and in God's sight this is what counts most. God doesn't require us to be successful. He does, however, require us to be faithful and to serve Him with all our heart and soul.

Following Josiah's reign, as always, the people's major sin was to turn from the Lord and worship false gods again. We may see little connection between the last days of Judah and the state of the church in our day. But we must be on guard against the same spiritual decay that affected Judah in today's story. Are we truly seeking the Lord, or are we worshipping the false gods of money, success and power?

In 1st Corinthians, Chapter 10, it says: "So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols." And in Colossians, Chapter 3: "So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world." The worship of false things in any form is idolatry. Whatever you love more than God becomes an idol.

We have to ask ourselves: are we developing and feeding our faith, or are we just dependent on the spiritual leaders that God has given us? Also: is our success in ministry coming from the Lord or because we're cooperating and compromising with the world?

We need to examine ourselves. Have our lives become lukewarm and complacent towards God over time? We need to be careful not to become like the Laodiceans whom Jesus spoke of in Revelation, Chapter 3. Let's find answers to this question or the fate of Judah will surely overtake us. For in 1st Peter, Chapter 4, it says: "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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