

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 29, Part 3

2 Kings 22-23, Part 3

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The picture of the temple that we get in the opening verses of chapter 3 is pretty grim. So, what did he do? Well, number one, he removed the articles made for the pagan gods in the temple of Yahweh. Number two, he removed the Asherah pole.

Again, this is not comfortable, but there's pretty good reason to believe that this was the symbol of an erect penis. She was a fertility goddess in the temple. He removed the male cult prostitutes.

Now, it used to be generally agreed that these were homosexual prostitutes. That's not politically correct today, but I still think it's right. He removed the women who were weaving clothes and hangings.

What? For Asherah. He removed the horses of the sun and the chariot, which was at the gateway of the temple. The Gateway of the temple faced east.

He removed the Manasseh's altars. Wow. Now, we don't have time, but what worries me a bit about this is that it is very similar to the picture of the temple that Ezekiel got 20 years after this.

Was this stuff all put back? Some would say, no, it's remembering what that temple looked like in those days, and that's possible. But I tend to think in the nature of the story that, yeah, they were all put back after Josiah died. Outside of the temple, he removed idolatrous priests from the high places around the country.

He removed the Tophet, which is probably a mocking term for the altar to the god Molech in the Hinnom Valley down south of the city where people burned their children. He removed, finally, finally, the high places that Solomon had made for his wives. All those years, those temples to Chemosh, to Molech, there they were.

Josiah finally has removed them from the Mount of Olives. Then he went farther north. He destroyed the altar that was at Bethel.

This, of course, was the great holy place for the northern kingdom. He killed the Israelite priests. Remember that Jeroboam, right at the beginning of the northern kingdom, had made, had installed priests who were not from the line of Aaron.

I think these guys survived. He just removed them because they were in Judah and were from the line of Aaron. These guys were not; they were killed, and their bones burned on their own altars.

Now, I don't advise killing false priests. But I do advise taking sin in your life very seriously. Don't make a place for it.

Don't leave a place for it. So, you see this kind of radical obedience to God, more radical, particularly at this point right here, than any other king in Judah's history, going to go after the roots. Unfortunately, as I have said, he was alone.

He was alone. The people didn't stop him, but they surely didn't participate in it. I guess it's my advancing age or something, but forgive me if I'm overly blunt.

It may be that the COVID thing is going to do us good, and it's going to weed out a lot of people in our churches who've been not disapproving of our religious radicalness, but we're not participating in it either. I don't know. We'll see. We'll see.

So, let me ask. Well, first of all, let me comment. How was Josiah able to do these things in the northern area? It's because Assyria was losing control.

This had been Assyrian territory where they had resettled pagan people, and a Hezekiah could send invitations up there inviting them to come to Jerusalem for a great Passover, but he couldn't go up there and do anything. But now Assyria has lost control of the area, and Josiah can go up and finally do something about it. Here's the second thing that relates to biblical studies.

This was all predicted 300 years earlier. Jeroboam was up, I presume, standing on the edge of the altar as the high priest leading the sacrifices, and a prophet from Judah shows up, and he says, one day, a man named Josiah will burn dead men's bones on this altar. Now, I won't ask for any raised hands, but I ask you, do you believe in predictive prophecy? Do you believe that God can inspire somebody to say something that specific 300 years in advance? Again, I'm sorry to say that the bulk of Old Testament scholars do not, and they say this was made up after the fact to try to demonstrate this was all of God.

It wasn't of God, of course, but somebody wanted us to think it was. Again, there's at least one Old Testament student who says, no, the God I serve knows the future. The God I serve is able to predict the future when it serves his good purposes.

One more thought before I let you go. If, in fact, Josiah's reforms didn't change the people's hearts, what was it good for anyhow? What was it about? And I believe this was what it was about. The exile was coming unless there was a radical revival in the land.

The exile was coming. If there had been no Josiah, what might the results have been? Because you see, I'm confident that Josiah confirmed the faith of the remnant in the

land—people who had been sighing and groaning under the sins of Manasseh and Ammon.

And now they say, yes, yes, God kept that 300-year-old promise. Yes, it is possible to live for God. Yes, it is possible to be courageous in the midst of everything else.

In other words, God was preparing their hearts for what lay ahead. And so there were people. Now again, you've got to think about this.

In that terrible final siege, two and a half years, nobody went in, nobody went out, no food came in. In that terrible final siege, many righteous people died. And when finally the city fell, and all the leadership was dragged off into captivity, many righteous people were taken.

You better have a pretty strong faith in that day or you're going to succumb. You're going to go under. So, I'm confident that, indeed, just as God gave them Hezekiah so that Judah would survive the Assyrian onslaught and have some more years for the word of God to be developed more fully.

In the same way, I'm confident God provided a Josiah to prepare people to say, yes, I'm going to stand no matter what. I'm going to believe no matter if I die in the process. And so there were people who, when the exile came, there were people who had an Isaiah scroll inside their robes, a Jeremiah scroll inside their robes.

We can't take the temple with us, but we can take God's word with us. And so, more than ever before, they become the people of the book. I think that's the result of Josiah.

Let me pray.

Father, thank you. Thank you for your goodness and your grace.

Thank you for your incredible patience across thousands of years. And as we look at our own nation now, we cry out to you, oh God, have mercy. Have mercy even yet.

We can't see the future. We don't know what may lie ahead. We see trends that are moving much more rapidly than we would have imagined 20 years ago.

We see our political system showing cracks, and we wonder. I have taken for granted that yes, the America that I have known from my childhood would persevere, would survive. I'm not so sure of that now.

But Lord, you, you are eternal. You are forever. Your grace is unending.

Your power is limitless. Thank you. Help us, oh Lord, to stand and have done all to stand.

And whatever you want to do with us, through us, for us, we're ready to receive it and ask that you will enable us not merely to take your gifts into ourselves and consume them on ourselves but take your gifts and give them to a lost world. In your name, we pray. Amen.