



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

JOSIAH

The Young King Who Returned to God's Word

The Short Answer

Josiah became king of Judah while still a child and eventually led one of the most sweeping spiritual reforms in the nation's history. He sought God, destroyed idols, repaired the Temple, rediscovered the Book of the Law, humbled himself before God's Word, renewed Judah's covenant, and restored Passover. Yet Josiah's story reveals an important truth: **external reform is not the same as inward transformation**. Josiah could tear down idols, restore worship, and call people back to Scripture, but he could not change the hearts of an entire nation. Judah's long rebellion was still moving toward judgment. Josiah points toward the need for a greater King. Jesus does more than reform behavior. Through the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, He gives new life and changes hearts.

2 Kings 22-23 · 2 Chronicles 34-35 · Jeremiah 1-7 · Zephaniah 1-3

Opening Memory Anchor

God's Word does not merely inform faithful people - it calls them to respond.



WELCOME

This guide is meant to send you back to Scripture

Josiah's story moves from inherited idolatry to seeking God, from reform to rediscovered Scripture, and from covenant renewal to a sobering death at Megiddo. Part One follows the story in accessible language. Part Two addresses the harder questions of reform and heart transformation, judgment, prophecy, geopolitics, and how Josiah's Davidic kingship points toward Jesus.

Foundational
truth

External reform matters, but only God can transform the heart.

How to use this study

- Open and read the cited passages rather than relying only on summaries.
- Distinguish what Scripture explicitly says from reasonable historical or theological inference.
- Use Memory Anchors to retain the central ideas.
- Where Scripture leaves questions open, do not pretend certainty.

PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

Josiah - The Young King Who Returned to God's Word

1. WHO WAS JOSIAH?

Josiah was king of Judah, the southern kingdom. He became king at only **eight years old** after his father Amon was assassinated. **Read 2 Kings 22:1-2 and 2 Chronicles 34:1-3.** Scripture says he did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight and followed the example of David. In the eighth year of his reign, while still young, he began seeking the God of David. By the twelfth year, he began removing idolatry. His spiritual growth unfolded over time: he began by **seeking God**.

Memory
Anchor

Faithfulness often begins with sincerely seeking God before knowing everything about Him.

2. WHAT KIND OF SPIRITUAL WORLD DID JOSIAH INHERIT?

Josiah inherited a nation deeply damaged by generations of idolatry. His grandfather Manasseh had promoted pagan altars, Baal and Asherah worship, occult practices, child sacrifice, and idols inside the Temple. **See 2 Kings 21:1-9.** Manasseh later humbled himself before God (**2 Chronicles 33:10-17**), but much damage had already been done. Josiah's father Amon returned to evil practices. Josiah inherited the consequences of spiritual compromise, but his family history did not determine his own response to God.

3. WHAT DID JOSIAH DO BEFORE THE BOOK OF THE LAW WAS FOUND?

Read 2 Chronicles 34:3-7. Josiah removed pagan altars, Asherah poles, carved idols, cast images, and incense altars. His campaign even extended into territories that had once belonged to the northern kingdom. Josiah was already pursuing reform before the Book of the Law was rediscovered. But something even more profound happened when Scripture itself was recovered.



4. HOW WAS THE BOOK OF THE LAW DISCOVERED?

In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, the king ordered repairs to the Temple. During the work, Hilkiah the high priest announced that he had found the Book of the Law. **Read 2 Kings 22:8.** Shaphan read it and then read it aloud to Josiah.

Scripture does not explicitly identify the scroll's exact contents. Many scholars understand it to have included **Deuteronomy, or a substantial portion of it**, because Josiah's response closely reflects that book's covenant commands, warnings, and concern for faithful worship. That identification is a historical and theological inference rather than an explicit statement of Scripture.

The discovery reveals how far Judah had drifted. The nation still had a Temple, priests, and religious traditions, yet God's written Word had apparently been neglected severely enough that its rediscovery became a major event.

Important principle

Religious activity can continue even while Scripture is being ignored. Biblical faith must continually return to what God has actually said.

5. HOW DID JOSIAH RESPOND WHEN HE HEARD GOD'S WORD?

Josiah tore his clothes - an ancient expression of intense grief, horror, mourning, or repentance. **Read 2 Kings 22:11-13.** He immediately recognized that Judah had not obeyed God. He did not change the message, defend Judah's behavior, or excuse previous generations. He humbled himself and sought the Lord.

Memory Anchor

The right response to God's Word is not merely agreement - it is humble obedience.

6. WHY WAS JOSIAH SO ALARMED?

The Law contained covenant blessings for obedience and warnings of judgment for persistent rebellion. Important background includes **Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30**. Judah had repeatedly violated its covenant with God through idolatry, injustice, and rebellion. Josiah realized the nation was guilty before God and sent representatives to seek the Lord.

7. WHO WAS HULDAH?

Josiah's officials went to **Huldah the prophetess**. **Read 2 Kings 22:14-20.** She faithfully delivered God's message: judgment would come because Judah had abandoned the Lord and worshiped other gods. But because Josiah's heart was tender and he humbled himself, he would not live to see the coming national disaster. Scripture presents Huldah simply as a genuine prophet of God whose message was received by the king, priesthood, and royal officials.

8. DID JOSIAH'S REPENTANCE CANCEL JUDAH'S JUDGMENT?

No. Josiah's repentance mattered greatly, but generations of persistent rebellion had consequences. **See 2 Kings 23:26-27.** God truly forgives repentant people, yet forgiveness does not always erase every earthly consequence produced by sin. Josiah experienced mercy personally and Judah experienced a season of reform, but the nation's long covenant rebellion was still moving toward judgment.



9. WHAT DID JOSIAH DO AFTER HEARING GOD'S WORD?

Josiah gathered the people and had the Book of the Covenant read publicly. **Read 2 Kings 23:1-3.** He renewed the covenant before the Lord and pledged to follow God wholeheartedly. Then he intensified his reforms: pagan objects and shrines were removed, idolatrous priests were removed, Topheth - associated with child sacrifice - was desecrated, and false altars were destroyed. Josiah did not treat repentance as merely emotional. **His repentance produced action.**

10. WHAT CAN JOSIAH TEACH ABOUT TRUE REPENTANCE?

Biblical repentance means more than feeling regret. It involves turning away from sin and toward God. Josiah heard God's Word, recognized sin, humbled himself, sought God, changed direction, removed what dishonored God, and restored what God commanded. Repentance does not earn forgiveness; it responds honestly when God exposes sin. **See Mark 1:14-15; Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9.**

11. WHY WAS PASSOVER SO IMPORTANT?

Read 2 Kings 23:21-23 and 2 Chronicles 35:1-19. Passover remembered God's rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt (**Exodus 12**). By restoring it, Josiah called Judah to remember who God is, what God had done, and who they were as His covenant people.

The New Testament directly connects Jesus with Passover. John identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God (**John 1:29**), and Paul writes that Christ is our Passover Lamb (**1 Corinthians 5:7**). Josiah restored remembrance of the Exodus; Jesus accomplishes the greater rescue - deliverance from sin and death.

12. WAS JOSIAH ONE OF JUDAH'S GREATEST KINGS?

Yes. **Read 2 Kings 23:25.** Josiah turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul, and strength in accordance with the Law of Moses. The wording echoes **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**, commonly called the **Shema**, Israel's foundational confession of loyalty to the one true God and the command to love Him wholeheartedly. Yet even a faithful king could not permanently rescue Judah.

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE

Interpretive posture

Where Scripture speaks clearly, believe it. Where Christians draw inferences, identify them as inferences. Where Scripture leaves mystery, trust God's character and do not manufacture certainty.



13. WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD AROUND JOSIAH?

Josiah reigned during a major geopolitical transition. Assyria, which had dominated the ancient Near East and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, was collapsing. A major turning point came in **612 BC**, when **Nineveh fell** to a coalition led by Babylon and the Medes.

Assyria did not disappear immediately. Remaining forces regrouped farther west while Babylon pressed against them. Egypt under Pharaoh Neco II moved north to support the remaining Assyrians - **an unlikely alliance between former rivals against the rising Babylonian threat**. Assyria's weakness helps explain why Josiah could extend reforms into former northern territory. The same great-power struggle later forms the background to his death at Megiddo.

14. WHERE DO JEREMIAH AND ZEPHANIAH FIT INTO JOSIAH'S STORY?

Both prophets ministered during Josiah's era. **Zephaniah 1:1** places Zephaniah during Josiah's reign. His unusually long genealogy traces him to a man named Hezekiah; some interpreters suggest this may be King Hezekiah, making Zephaniah a member of the royal family. Scripture does not explicitly confirm that identification, so it remains a possibility rather than a certainty. Zephaniah condemns idolatry, complacency, corrupt leadership, violence, and compromise while calling people to seek God (**Zephaniah 1:4-6; 2:1-3**).

Jeremiah's ministry began in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (**Jeremiah 1:1-3**). He repeatedly confronted Judah's false confidence and divided hearts. **Jeremiah 7:1-11** describes people claiming to worship God while continuing in serious sin. Together these prophets show that Josiah's reforms were real, but the nation's spiritual problem went deeper than outward reform.

15. DID THE PEOPLE REALLY REPENT, OR DID THEY JUST FOLLOW JOSIAH?

Scripture shows both national reform and continuing heart problems. Josiah sincerely sought God, worship practices changed, the covenant was publicly renewed, and Passover was restored. Yet **Jeremiah 3:6-10** describes Judah's return as incomplete - not wholehearted, but in pretense. This does not mean Josiah's repentance was false. It means **a faithful leader's repentance cannot substitute for everyone else's repentance**. Josiah could command the removal of idols; he could not command love for God into another person's heart.

16. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REVIVAL, REFORM, AND HEART TRANSFORMATION?

REFORM changes practices, structures, behaviors, or institutions. Josiah destroyed idols, repaired the Temple, removed pagan worship, restored Passover, and renewed the covenant.

REVIVAL is a modern Christian term commonly used for renewed spiritual awakening, repentance, worship, and devotion to God. Josiah's reign involved significant spiritual renewal.

HEART TRANSFORMATION goes deeper than external change. Scripture teaches that God desires more than outward conformity (**Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4**) and promises a new covenant in which His law is written on people's hearts (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**).

Reader
safeguard

You do not need to master covenant theology's technical distinctions to understand the central point: Josiah could change many things around the people, but he could not change their hearts for them.

Memory
Anchor

Rules can restrain behavior. Only God can transform the heart.



17. DOES BIBLICAL REVIVAL ALWAYS SAVE A NATION FROM JUDGMENT?

No. Josiah's reforms were among the most extensive in Judah's history, yet national judgment still came. Repentance should never be treated as a technique for guaranteeing political prosperity or national survival. God is not manipulated by religious activity. The appropriate response to God is faithfulness because He is worthy - not because obedience guarantees the outcome people desire.

18. WHY DID GOD STILL JUDGE JUDAH AFTER MANASSEH REPENTED?

Second Chronicles records that Manasseh eventually humbled himself, prayed, and removed some idolatry (**2 Chronicles 33:10-17**). Yet Second Kings continues to describe his reign as a major reason judgment was coming (**2 Kings 21:10-15; 23:26-27**). These passages are not necessarily contradictory. Manasseh could genuinely repent personally while the consequences of decades of corruption remained. He had encouraged widespread idolatry and bloodshed, and the nation continued in deep rebellion.

Scripture holds two truths together: **God responds mercifully to genuine repentance**, and **sin can create consequences that extend far beyond the moment of repentance**. No one is beyond God's mercy, but sin should never be treated casually.

19. WHY DOES THE DISCOVERY OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW MATTER SO MUCH?

Josiah's story contains a striking pattern: **God's Word was neglected -> rediscovered -> read -> sin was exposed -> the king humbled himself -> reform followed**. Hebrews describes God's Word as living and active, exposing the thoughts and intentions of the heart (**Hebrews 4:12-13**). James warns against hearing without doing (**James 1:22-25**). Josiah heard - and acted.

20. CAN CHRISTIANS REMAIN RELIGIOUS WHILE LOSING SCRIPTURE'S CENTRALITY?

Yes. Josiah's generation demonstrates that religious structures can remain while God's Word becomes neglected. Modern believers should ask whether Scripture is shaping beliefs or merely confirming existing opinions; whether it is being read in context; whether difficult passages are ignored; whether traditions are being treated as equal to Scripture; and whether obedience changes when Scripture exposes error.

Application

READ -> UNDERSTAND -> RESPOND. What does the passage say? What does it mean in context? What does it reveal about God? How should faith and obedience respond?

21. WHAT HAPPENED AT BETHEL, AND WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

Josiah destroyed the false altar at Bethel (**2 Kings 23:15-18**). Centuries earlier, after Israel divided, Jeroboam established unauthorized worship centers at Bethel and Dan (**1 Kings 12:25-33**). A prophet then predicted that a descendant of David named **Josiah** would desecrate the altar (**1 Kings 13:1-2**). Josiah eventually did exactly that. Practices tolerated for generations are not necessarily acceptable to God merely because they have become traditional.



22. WHY DID JOSIAH DIE AT MEGIDDO?

By this time Assyria was collapsing and Babylon was rising rapidly. After Nineveh fell in 612 BC, remaining Assyrian forces continued resisting Babylon farther west. Pharaoh Neco II marched north to assist them - **an unlikely Egypt-Assyria alliance formed against the rising Babylonian threat**. Josiah went out to intercept him at Megiddo. Scripture does not explicitly explain Josiah's political motive. He may have wanted to prevent renewed Egyptian-Assyrian influence, but that remains historical reconstruction.

Read 2 Kings 23:28-30 and 2 Chronicles 35:20-24. Neco warned Josiah not to interfere and claimed God had directed his campaign. Josiah refused to turn away, entered battle in disguise, was struck by archers, and died. Chronicles says Josiah did not listen to the words Neco spoke at God's command. This is difficult because Neco was a pagan ruler, yet Scripture sometimes shows God directing or using foreign rulers (**Isaiah 10:5-7; 44:28-45:1; Jeremiah 25:8-9**). Josiah's faithful life did not make him incapable of serious error.

23. DOES JOSIAH'S DEATH CONTRADICT HULDAH'S PROPHECY THAT HE WOULD DIE IN PEACE?

Huldah said Josiah would be buried in peace and would not see the disaster God would bring on Jerusalem (**2 Kings 22:20**), yet Josiah died from battle wounds. The promise is closely connected to his not seeing Judah's catastrophic judgment. Josiah died before Jerusalem's destruction and the Babylonian exile. Therefore, 'peace' is commonly understood in relation to being gathered to his ancestors before that national disaster rather than as a promise of a completely nonviolent death. Scripture does not explain every detail beyond this. **Where a passage leaves difficulty, it is better to acknowledge it than manufacture certainty.**

24. WHAT HAPPENED AFTER JOSIAH DIED?

Josiah's death became a major turning point. Jeremiah lamented him (**2 Chronicles 35:25**). What followed was rapid succession and growing foreign domination.

Jehoahaz	Josiah's son; reigned only three months. Pharaoh Neco removed him and took him to Egypt.	2 Kings 23:31-34
Jehoiakim	Josiah's son Eliakim, renamed by Neco. He did evil; Babylon became the dominant regional power.	2 Kings 23:34-24:7
Jehoiachin	Jehoiakim's son; ruled about three months before surrendering to Babylon. A major deportation followed.	2 Kings 24:8-16
Zedekiah	Josiah's son Mattaniah, renamed by Nebuchadnezzar. His rebellion led to Jerusalem's destruction.	2 Kings 24:17-25:21

Within roughly two decades of Josiah's death, Jerusalem fell, the Temple was destroyed, and many people were taken into exile. Josiah had not permanently changed the nation. Judah had experienced a faithful king - but still needed a greater King.



25. HOW DOES JOSIAH POINT TOWARD JESUS?

Josiah should not be forced into an artificial one-to-one symbol of Jesus. But his story fits several legitimate biblical themes that ultimately reach fulfillment in Christ.

A righteous Davidic king.	The promised Son of David whose kingdom will never end. Luke 1:31-33
Called people back to God's Word.	Perfectly obeyed the Father and taught God's Word with complete authority. Matthew 5:17-18; John 8:28-29
Cleansed corrupted worship.	Cleansed the Temple and declared the purpose of His Father's house. Matthew 21:12-13
Restored Passover.	Fulfilled Passover's deeper redemptive meaning through His sacrificial death. 1 Corinthians 5:7
Could reform a nation but not change its heart.	Establishes the new covenant and gives new life through the Holy Spirit. Luke 22:20; Ezekiel 36:25-27

THE GREATER KING

- Josiah could destroy idols. **Jesus defeats sin.**
- Josiah could restore the Temple. **Jesus brings people into the presence of God.**
- Josiah could restore Passover. **Jesus becomes the Passover sacrifice.**
- Josiah could read the covenant. **Jesus establishes the new covenant.**
- Josiah could call people to obedience. **Jesus gives new life.**

26. WHAT IS THE GOSPEL CONNECTION?

Josiah discovered that Judah had violated God's covenant. Every person faces the same deeper problem: **everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23)**. Human beings do not merely need better behavior; they need reconciliation with God.

Jesus Christ lived without sin, died for sinners, and rose from the dead. Through faith in Him, sinners receive forgiveness and new life. **See Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Ephesians 2:8-10.** The Gospel does not merely say, 'Try harder.' It announces that Christ has done what sinners could never accomplish for themselves. Those who trust Him are forgiven, made new, and called to follow Him.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Josiah inherited generations of spiritual rebellion yet chose to seek God. He removed idols before the Book of the Law was found, but when Scripture was rediscovered and read to him, his response deepened: he humbled himself, sought the Lord, renewed the covenant, and restored Passover. His reforms were real and extensive.

Yet Jeremiah and Zephaniah reveal that Judah's heart problem remained. Josiah could change public worship, destroy false altars, and command covenant obedience; he could not make every person love God. Even his remarkable reform did not erase the accumulated consequences of Judah's rebellion. After Josiah's death, the nation moved rapidly toward Babylonian conquest and exile.

Josiah's story therefore does more than celebrate a good king. It exposes the limits of even the best human leadership. Judah needed more than reform. It needed new hearts. The biblical story moves toward Jesus Christ - the greater Son of David who establishes the new covenant, forgives sin, and gives new life through the Holy Spirit.

SEEING JOSIAH'S JOURNEY

Moment	What happened	Spiritual lesson
Young king	Josiah begins seeking God	Inherited failure does not dictate future faithfulness.
Early reform	Idols and pagan altars removed	Faithfulness acts on what God has made clear.
Temple repair	Book of the Law discovered	Religious activity can continue while Scripture is neglected.
Word read	Josiah humbles himself	God's Word calls for response.
Huldah	Judgment and mercy announced	Repentance matters even when consequences remain.
Covenant renewal	Judah publicly recommits	Repentance should produce action.
Passover	God's rescue remembered	Faithfulness remembers God's saving work.
Prophets	Jeremiah and Zephaniah warn	External reform is not heart transformation.
Bethel	Ancient prophecy fulfilled	Tradition does not make false worship true.
Megiddo	Josiah confronts Neco and dies	Faithful people remain capable of serious error.
Successors	Judah rapidly deteriorates	One faithful generation cannot transform the next.
Davidic line	Imperfect king points forward	Jesus is the greater King.

WHAT JOSIAH'S STORY TEACHES

- God's Word should shape God's people.
- Hearing Scripture should lead to humble response.
- Repentance involves turning away from sin and toward God.
- External reform is valuable but cannot substitute for heart transformation.
- A faithful leader can influence people but cannot produce genuine faith in another person.
- Personal repentance does not always erase every earthly consequence of sin.
- God can accomplish His purposes even through rulers and nations that do not worship Him.
- Jesus is the greater King who does what even Judah's best kings could never accomplish.



REVIEW

1. **How old was Josiah when he became king?** Eight years old.
2. **What did Josiah begin doing while still young?** He began seeking God.
3. **What was discovered during the repair of the Temple?** The Book of the Law.
4. **What book do many scholars believe was represented in, or formed a major part of, the discovered scroll?** Deuteronomy, though Scripture does not explicitly identify the scroll's exact contents.
5. **How did Josiah respond when he heard God's Word?** He humbled himself, grieved over Judah's sin, sought God, and acted.
6. **Who delivered God's message to Josiah?** Huldah the prophetess.
7. **Did Josiah's reforms permanently remove Judah's coming judgment?** No.
8. **What major biblical celebration did Josiah restore?** Passover.
9. **What was the weakness of Josiah's national reforms?** They could change outward practices but could not transform every person's heart.
10. **What does Jesus accomplish that Josiah could not?** Jesus brings forgiveness, establishes the new covenant, and gives new life through the Holy Spirit.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

- **Open God's Word.** Scripture cannot shape a life that remains closed and unread.
- **Let Scripture correct you.** Do not make the Bible agree with existing beliefs; allow God's truth to reshape them.
- **Respond when God exposes sin.** Josiah did not delay after recognizing Judah's disobedience.
- **Remove idols, not just symptoms.** Anything given the devotion that belongs to God can become an idol.
- **Do not confuse external change with heart change.** Healthy reform matters, but only God transforms the heart.
- **Remember the greater King.** Josiah's reforms could not save Judah permanently. Jesus offers the rescue human rulers cannot provide.

Final Memory
Anchor

Josiah returned a nation to the Book. Jesus came to give His people new hearts.

CONTINUE READING

After Josiah: 2 Kings 23:31-25:30 **Jeremiah's warnings:** Jeremiah 1-7 **Zephaniah:** Zephaniah 1-3
New covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34 **New heart:** Ezekiel 36:22-28 **Jesus and the new covenant:** Luke 22:14-20; Hebrews 8-10

CLOSING THOUGHT

Josiah's life demonstrates what can happen when someone takes God's Word seriously. A young king inherited generations of rebellion yet chose to seek God. When Scripture confronted him, he humbled himself. When truth exposed sin, he acted. Idols fell, worship was restored, Passover returned, and an entire nation experienced dramatic reform. Yet Judah needed more than a better king. It needed new hearts. That need runs through the biblical story and leads ultimately to Jesus Christ. The faithful King has come. He does not merely repair what is broken on the outside. He saves, forgives, restores, and makes people new.

Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus.