

2nd Kings Chapter 23 – John Karmelich

1. My lesson title is "Why our efforts to please God are not good enough". The issue of this chapter is about what we can and cannot do to please God based on our efforts. Yes I want to encourage all of us to make a difference for God with our lives. What I want to get across here is the limits of what we can and cannot do to make a difference for God.
 - a) Let me explain that idea by describing the events in this chapter and why we should care about them. This chapter mainly focuses on the life of a good king in ancient Israel. This king had a father and a grandfather that were both evil men who to put it simply, turned their backs on God and caused Him to pronounce a severe and irrevocable punishment upon that kingdom. Imagine being in charge of anything knowing that God has already placed an irrevocable curse on that project. Here comes the however: God said that because the king of the moment is a good one, I'll delay that destruction until after that king is dead.
 - b) The question becomes, what does the good king do now? Should he sit around and enjoy his life knowing that whatever bad thing God has planned won't happen until after he is gone or should he make the effort to make a difference for God as much as he can? What he did was what we should all do. We should do what we can to delay God's judgment and use our lives for His glory until that event ultimately does occur.
 - c) In effect, that is the point of this lesson. Doing good things for God's glory does make a difference in our lives and is in effect the greatest purpose we can have for living out our lives. The question is, is it good enough? If it's not, why should I bother? Think about all of this from the perspective of this king: He knew about the death sentence pronounced by God Himself on his kingdom, yet he still made an incredible effort to draw as many Israelites as possible to seek God. It was not to try to prevent the inevitable, but just to try to save as many people as possible before the inevitable happens. If you think about it, that too is the mission of Christians. We get and accept the idea that God will destroy the world we live in one day. (If our world had a beginning, it has to have an ending too.) If our world will come to an end one day, then our mission as Christians is to lead as many people as we can to Jesus or help them grow in their faith in Jesus so they can lead even more people to Him. That effectively is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) for us as Christians to fulfill. Therefore, as we read about this good king here in Chapter 23, think of what he does as making his best effort to fulfill his own role in that great commission.
2. With that said, there is more to this chapter than that. We will also read how this good king died in a battle against the Egyptians. With some cross references to the same story in 2nd Chronicles we will discover how it was God's will for the Egyptians to join the Assyrians to fight the newest growing threat in that region, the Babylonians. That's the background story of the Israelite king's death and I'll get to why that is significant as we go through this chapter.
3. Then after this good king dies, we begin the painful story of the destructive end of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. That marks the end of any Israelite self-ruling independence for over 2,500 years. I'll explain some of that in this lesson and in the final one (next lesson) on Kings. Starting here, we're going to start reading about a succession of the final kings of this country who seem to come and go pretty quickly as this nation comes to a horrible end. Why all of that occurs will be the focus of the next lesson but will also be touched upon in this one. To put it simply, I'll just say God's judgment is inevitable as it was for them so it will be for us as well.
4. OK, time to stop preaching to the choir on that point. The main thing to gather from studying the text in this chapter is that making an effort to make a difference for God is important, and is what Jesus called us to do as Christians. It is about understanding the difference between what does and what does not make an eternal difference. With that daunting task stated, it is time to start the verse-by-verse commentary on this lesson.

5. Chapter 23, Verse 1: Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ² He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets--all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD.
- a) To explain where we are in the text, it is always best to explain where we left off. In the previous chapter we read how the current king of the Israelites became a king at the age of eight as his father was assassinated. By the time this king was old enough to get the fact that both his father and his grandfather had turned the country away from God, this king decided to make the effort to turn both his life and hopefully the lives of those living in that kingdom back to God. The first thing he did, was clean out the official temple that is dedicated to God. Don't take that lightly. After the last two kings had ignored God and worshipped all sorts of other things, there were a lot of changes that needed to be made.
 - i) OK, and we should care about all of this ancient history because? Because when we make the effort to seek God, the effort begins with us. To put it another way, the king didn't tell the Israelites to go clean up their act. The king stated by doing it himself and cleaning up God's house. To come back to my lesson theme, before we can be a witness to others, first we need to get our own life in order so that we can be that witness. It doesn't mean we have to be perfect, but at the same time we do have to make that effort to seek God with our lives and His will for our lives.
 - ii) Meanwhile, back to the king himself. When the temple was cleaned out, a copy of God's law was found. Since his father and his grandfather turned from God, it is logical to assume the reading of God's word was illegal or at least discouraged. A classic debate among bible scholars is when the text says (in Chapter 22) a copy of the "Book of the Law" was found. Some believe it refers to all first five bible books and some say it refers just to Deuteronomy. Either way it refers to God's word.
 - b) All of that leads me to the start of this chapter. When that book was found in the temple, the priest who found it, read it to the king in the last chapter. Now to start Chapter 23, we read of the king gathering all of the Israelites so that the king himself could read what is written in God's word to all the Israelites.
 - i) I admit, I am fascinated by the practical aspect of this picture. Here are all of the Israelites living in that kingdom gathered in Jerusalem to hear the king read from the book of Deuteronomy. Here are the questions I have:
 - a) How did everyone hear? Did the king speak from the top of a mountain and let his voice carry down the hillside area?
 - b) What about young children? Did they stay at home with their moms or did they just run around and be a distraction to the speaker?
 - c) How much did he read anyway? It would take a few hours to read the book of Deuteronomy nonstop, let alone time for priests to help people in the crowd understand what it meant.
 - d) Some have suggested the king just read the 10 Commandments or just read about how God promised to destroy that country if the Israelites refused to listen to Him. I suspect that is the likely scenario. In other words, it was a quicker event than I suspect it could have been. It was long enough to let it sink in to everyone how the country had turned from God, but it was not detailed enough to read the entire book and let everyone get distracted as the king went on and on.
 - ii) That leads back to you and me. The point is the best way to encourage people to get closer to Jesus is to teach from His Word. It has a great way of convicting us of our sins all by itself, without having to add a lot of commentary to it. With the last two generations turning from God, I'm sure it was unique to hear bible passages being read to them and letting the bible "do it's thing" of convicting us of our sins.

- c) In summary, we are reading the start of a revival. It always starts with cleaning up our own act, which is why the Temple itself was cleaned up in the last chapter. Then the king wanted to spread the idea of worshipping the true God not by saying how much his life is changed, but by simply teaching God's word to others and letting the bible convict us. To quote Charles Spurgeon: "Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion! Unchain it and it will defend itself." In other words, just read it and it by itself will convict our hearts.
 - i) With that said, we are reading in this text of the start of a revival towards God in Israel itself. Yes doing what the king wanted is important for one's own health and well being. Obeying God's word because it is the right thing to do is the goal here and that is what the reading of the bible did. With that said, time for Verse 3.
6. Verse 3: The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD--to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.
- a) One of the classic questions one may ask about the Jewish nation is when did they ever agree to be "God's chosen people" and do what it is He demanded of them? Yes you can say the desire to leave slavery in Egypt was the start of that commitment. However, one can also find a few times in their history where God's word was read to them and they as a nation collectively agreed to follow what it says. In other words, the nation of Israel was convicted by what the bible said and agreed to follow God and obey His laws.
 - b) That thought leads us back to Verse 3. After the king of Israel had read whatever it was he read from the book, he himself agreed to keep the commands as taught in the bible and he agreed to serve God Himself. Then all the Israelites present agreed to do the same.
 - c) This makes me wonder how sincere the crowd was. If this king is ruling over our lives, it can be deadly to oppose what that king desires. I suspect many in that crowd were truly convicted by the word of God and others were thinking, if the king says "do this" and we want to live to see tomorrow, then we too should say "do this". Whatever the motivation, the point is the Israelites were now committed to serve God under a king who had a heart for God in the first place. OK, so far so good. Time to read on.
7. Verse 4: The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. ⁵ He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem--those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the LORD to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people.
- a) To use an old cliché here, "It's time for the king to put his money where his mouth is". In other words, it is one thing to say one is going to seek God. It's another to "walk the walk".
 - b) Once that commitment to God is made, it's now time to do something about it. Back then, it meant to remove from God's temple, all the things dedicated to other gods. I could give a lecture on the history of these other religious practices, but let me just say it's pretty bad stuff once you know the details. Let me just give enough details to understand what it is that the king ordered. Within God's temple itself, things were made for a demonic entity called Baal. Think of it as statues and articles that people worshipped. The closest thing I can compare it too in our society is when people keep say crosses on their car dash boards or say statues of the Virgin Mary to protect them as they drive as opposed to just trusting in God Himself for protection. However, this false religion is much worse and let's just say people sacrificed their own children to show their loyalty to these false gods.
 - c) You may know the Greek word "Gahanna" which refers to hell in the New Testament. That word has its origin on where children were sacrificed alive here to these gods.

- d) Coming back to the text, the point is the king took out of the temple dedicated to God, all the items not meant to be there and I'm sure in a public way, burned those items so that they could not be used again. The point is the king "walked the walk" and followed on his commitment to seek God.
 - i) OK John, we don't have any "Asherah" poles in our garages. How does this apply to our lives? The issue is about anything and everything that turns us away from worshipping God in our lives. As I was taught many years ago, God doesn't want to be #1 on a list of 10 things. God wants to be #1 on a list of 1. As an example, if we are going shopping, take God with us. If we are going to work, make God part of our work. No we can't focus on God 24 hours a day. However we can pray and ask Him to be a part of every aspect of our lives. The point is we're always to be a witness for Him in every situation we are in. It doesn't mean we have to be perfect all the time, but if we make the effort to seek Him with our lives, I do find that He then works in our lives to constantly draw us closer to Him and work with us to be a good witness for others.
 - ii) As to potential sin issues we each have to deal with, I'll let God deal with each of us. God knows I have my own issues to deal with as do each of you. I find that I don't have to convict others of specific sins as God through His word does a good job of that on His own. My point is simply to seek Him and then He's work on our lives to clean out our own "Asherah poles".
- e) In the meantime, the current king is not through "walking the walk" of seeking God.
- 8. Verse 7: He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the LORD and where women did weaving for Asherah.
 - a) Time for a little more background. In order to encourage the false god Baal to bless the lives of those who worshipped it, they would try to sexually entice that false god. That is why they had male (homosexual) prostitutes whose official job it was to have sexual acts in order to entice that false god. To keep it brief, the king brought this practice to an end and destroyed the living quarters of those who performed this act.
 - b) As to the weavings, think of it as clothing made for the worship of this false god. Let's just say the king brought that to an end here too. Bottom line is the king was doing what was necessary in order to discourage the worship of a false god in Israel.
- 9. Verse 8: Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense. He broke down the shrines at the gates--at the entrance to the Gate of Joshua, the city governor, which is on the left of the city gate.

⁹ Although the priests of the high places did not serve at the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, they ate unleavened bread with their fellow priests.

 - a) At this point, the king is getting warmed up. It was not just a matter of cleaning up the temple dedicated to God, but he also makes the effort to bring the worship of Baal to an end. The priests associated with Baal-worship ate with each other and are avoiding any association with this king. All over the land associated with that kingdom, the shrines dedicated to other gods were destroyed. The king didn't put to death worshippers of other gods, but was just trying to encourage everyone to seek God as much as possible.
 - b) This leads to the question, what does God want us to do about other religions? To state the obvious, God does not call on us to destroy nonbelievers. It comes back to the quote by Charles Spurgeon of "Who has to defend a lion, it defends itself". Meaning all we have to do is share God's word with others and that changes people's hearts far more than any act of violence or forcing our religion upon them. I think of the expression, "People don't care what we know until they know that we care" when being a witness to others. I have heard some wonderful testimonies of changes in people because others take the time to care for them and then and only then show how God is working in our own lives.
 - i) With that word of encouragement stated, it is time to get back to the text itself.

- c) Notice the specifics given in these verses. Whoever put together Kings had access to the historical records of what this king did, down to pretty specific details of where the idols were located within the city. The point is not to memorize all of these details about what the king did destroy, but to know that he made a complete effort to help the Israelites get close to God and turn away from worshipping false idols.
 - d) Before I move on, there is one bit of trivia I do want to share here. Verse 8 says that the places dedicated to false gods were destroyed from Geba to Beersheba. That's like saying from the furthest point south and north of our country is where it happened.
10. Verse 10: He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech. ¹¹ He removed from the entrance to the temple of the LORD the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun. They were in the court near the room of an official named Nathan-Melech. Josiah then burned the chariots dedicated to the sun.
- a) I have to admit I'm truly enjoying reading about a king dedicated to serving God and how this king is making every effort possible to draw the Israelites back to serving God. To me this is like giving a herring to a trained seal as it is "right up my alley". Remember how I stated earlier that the location where people would sacrifice their children to this false god became associated with the word the New Testament uses for hell: Gehenna. The king destroyed the "Topheth", which is a statue used to lay babies upon as they were burned alive to show one's dedication and trust in this false god.
 - b) Verse 10 then talks about "horses that the kings of Judah dedicated to the sun". To put it simply, the Assyrian Empire had a practice of worshipping the sun out of gratitude for the light and warmth it provides. They would sacrifice horses to honor that god. Since the king of Judah (the Southern Kingdom of Israel) feared the Assyrian Empire, as it was the dominant power in that region for about 150 years now, previous kings of Israel gave honor to that false god as a way of showing respect to that empire.
 - c) Bottom line is the king was doing what he could to honor God and bring to an end any and all worships of false gods that occurred in Israel at that time or in recent past.
 - d) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. However there are no statues dedicated to the sun or idols for burning children in my neighborhood. Why should I care about any of this ancient stuff? Let's put it this way, if we believe Jesus has died for all of our sins, past, present and future, what are we doing about it? How are we showing gratitude to God for what He has done for us? How are we using the most valuable thing God gives us, our time? What use can we have for our time greater than to make a difference for Him with our lives? I'm not saying we have to go to our neighbors and tell them to come to our church or die! I'm saying that like this king who realized that God had pronounced a death sentence on his kingdom, so God has pronounced a death sentence on our world. The best use of our time is to make a difference for God and lead others closer to Him by whatever means God has called us to do so.
 - i) For me, it means writing among other things. For others it may be as simple as just going to church so that over time, our neighbors know we are using our lives to make a difference for Him with our lives. It's a matter of praying how we can use our time and let God lead us accordingly. Meanwhile, back to this king.
11. Verse 12: He pulled down the altars the kings of Judah had erected on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz, and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple of the LORD. He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley. ¹³ The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption--the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon. ¹⁴ Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones.

- a) Whenever someone new comes into power in a political office, they often make an effort to undo things done by previous administrations as they think their plan to do things is better. That's a little like what we are reading here. The short version is many previous kings in that country had made statues to false gods that still stood. This included not only the king's father and grandfather, but also things that the king's ancestor Solomon had made hundreds of years earlier. The point is the current king is trying to do what he can to discourage the Israelites living in his kingdom from worshipping any false deity that still existed and he's destroying what existed in that area.
 - i) So does that mean that God wants us to go destroy churches that are dedicated to other religions near us? Not unless we plan on going to jail or worse. The point is God wanted the Israelites to serve Him and Him alone. God calls on Christians to serve Him and Him alone. This is about doing what we can to encourage fellow believers in Jesus to stick to it. I'm a big believer in accountability. All Christians should be involved in some sort of accountability situation, to family members or to a group of believers one trusts. The point is we do what we can to encourage each other to seek God and since this king is well a king, he's doing what he can to encourage his fellow Israelites to seek God and seek Him alone for their lives.
- b) Coming back to the text the king took the bones of dead false worshippers and used those bones to cover the sites dedicated to those false gods (Verse 14). Why is that? The same reason we respect gravesites today. The idea is people don't want to step on gravesites, so therefore those Israelites won't go to those spots to worship those idols like they have for the last few generations. Think of it as a creative way to encourage other believers to seek God and Him alone for guidance for our lives.
 - i) Meanwhile, this king is not through destroying temples and statues made to false god in this country at that time.

12. Verse 15: Even the altar at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin--even that altar and high place he demolished. He burned the high place and ground it to powder, and burned the Asherah pole also. ¹⁶ Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the word of the LORD proclaimed by the man of God who foretold these things.

- a) At this point, the king is now even traveling outside the boundaries of his country to be a witness for God. Verse 15 mentions a place called Bethel. This town was not part of the Southern Kingdom, but is part of the destroyed Northern Kingdom that is now part of the Assyrian Empire. It is a clue that the Assyrian Empire was getting weak at this point in history as the Babylonian Empire was growing. My point is that the king of Judah could go into parts of the Assyrian Empire to find Jewish people in order to spread the worship of God up there. The point is that revival spreads, and when we are dedicated to serving God, it has a way of spreading in ways far beyond what or where we originally intended to spread.
 - i) In the last set of verses the king was destroying some statues made when Solomon was king hundreds of years ago. If you were with me in 1st Kings, the first king of the Northern kingdom was named Jeroboam. The point is that Jeroboam made an altar to a false god hundreds of years earlier and now Josiah (this good king) went out of his way to destroy it.
- b) OK John, we get the idea this king went all out to spread the worship of the true God and did what he could to stop the worship of idols. We get the idea whoever wrote "Kings" is probably enjoyed this as he's giving detail after detail of the reforms this king made. You and I are not called to say, burn down say arenas to the "false god of sports" as a possible strange example of a false temple. (I happen to love sports. The issue is those who seek things other than God as the center of their lives for happiness and not turn to God.)

- c) My question is of course, how do we apply this to our lives? I will argue that God wants us to use our time to make a difference for Him in this world. Pray about what you can do or would like to do to make a difference for Him? Often it starts by considering what it is one enjoys doing anyway. Ask God about how one can use one's talents or what one enjoys doing to make a difference for Him. I remember reading about one man who went to a real bug infested location in Africa. When he was asked, "why there?" his answer was that he loved surfing and that location had some of the best surf in the world. Therefore he used his love of surfing to go to a place where he could be a witness for God. My point is God wants us to use our lives to make a difference for Him and He loves it when we do combine what we enjoy doing with being a witness for Him.
 - i) Speaking of being a witness for God, let's return to King Josiah who I get the idea that he having the power as a king loved to destroy whatever turned the Israelites away from God. Remember that this king knew that destruction was coming. He did what he could to delay that destruction by getting as many Israelites as he could to turn back to God as this king wiped out all the alternatives in that nation.
- 13. Verse 17: The king asked, "What is that tombstone I see?" The men of the city said, "It marks the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and pronounced against the altar of Bethel the very things you have done to it." ¹⁸ "Leave it alone," he said. "Don't let anyone disturb his bones." So they spared his bones and those of the prophet who had come from Samaria.
 - a) Way back in 1st Kings Chapter 13 (hundreds of years earlier) was the story of a prophet from the Southern Kingdom of Judah who was called by God to travel up to the Northern Kingdom to say in effect, "The king of the north is turning from God by worshipping at this temple that ancient bad king had made". What's amazing is that this prophet back in 1st King Chapter 13 (Verse 2) predicted a king named Josiah would come along one day and he'd destroy the bones of the false prophets who sacrificed at this false altar.
 - b) The point here is that the current king Josiah, was digging up old bones out of gravesites in order to discourage people from worshipping false gods. Again, its like the idea that people don't like to walk over grave sites, so that would discourage others to worship at the sites of these false idols. When we get near the end of this chapter, we'll discover that all of this effort wasn't good enough as the next king turned back to these idols. However I don't want to jump ahead of the story, just state that like my lesson title, if people want to turn from God they will find a way no matter what a prophet of God or a good king does to encourage the worship of Him. That's an underlying point here.
 - c) Meanwhile it's time to get back to King Josiah and his destructive tendencies.
- 14. Verse 19: Just as he had done at Bethel, Josiah removed and defiled all the shrines at the high places that the kings of Israel had built in the towns of Samaria that had provoked the LORD to anger. ²⁰ Josiah slaughtered all the priests of those high places on the altars and burned human bones on them. Then he went back to Jerusalem.
 - a) One of the background things to catch here, is the Assyrian Empire was growing weak at this point in history. The Babylonian empire was on the rise as I'll discuss in detail in the next lesson. King Josiah was now in territory controlled by the Assyrian Empire as some Jewish people still lived there. There, priests of false gods were dedicated to serving at these temples. Josiah had the power at that moment in time to slaughter the priests and "burn the bones" of them. If nothing else, it shows that this king was not alone traveling up north and brought enough soldiers with him to accomplish what he wanted to do to show his loyalty to God. It also shows the literal prophecy fulfillment of 1st Kings 13:2.
 - b) As we finish this long section about Josiah destroying temples, statues and people who were in charge of this false worship, notice what we don't read: Any of God's prophets to say "Good job king", or even much commentary by the author of kings. It's as if the text just speaks for itself that this king did what he could to seek God and encourage others to do the same before whatever destruction was going to occur to the Southern Kingdom.

15. Verse 21: The king gave this order to all the people: "Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." ²² Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed. ²³ But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem.
- a) The good news is the king has stopped traveling around the area looking for things to go destroy and has decided to come home to celebrate a Jewish holiday. In other words now that the Israelites don't have any false gods they can focus on, it's time for everyone to go perform a ritual where they can focus on God Himself.
 - b) With that said, let me state a few brief facts about Passover:
 - i) Earlier the chapter said that the king had a copy of the "Book of the Law". This holiday is discussed how to celebrate it in both Exodus and Deuteronomy, so the king would know how the holiday is properly to be celebrated.
 - ii) It is to be held the first full moon of the spring. Therefore, it would be obvious by both the time of the year and by seeing the moon when it was time to celebrate it.
 - iii) The main purpose of the holiday is to take time to remember how God delivered the nation of Israel out of slavery. In some ways, it is a little like how Christians get baptized, to remember how God has called us out of our old lives and into a new life of serving Him.
 - iv) Let me also add that as a non-Jewish Christian, if one ever gets a chance to go to a home of Jewish people to watch this holiday, do so. It is amazing to consider the symbolism of that holiday and how it ties to Jesus when one considers the ritual. I also believe that Christians from Jewish backgrounds should celebrate this holiday not for salvation, but just to recall how God has rescued His people from slavery.
 - c) Without getting into the specifics of the ritual, I admit I am fascinated by the statement in these verses how the holiday was celebrated "more now" than say when David was king or say when Hezekiah or other good kings were in charge. I don't know the specifics of how it was performed "more" now than before, but I suspect it had to do with the number of people that participated in this ritual at this time.
 - d) Remember again the king's motivation for doing this: He knew that God stated that the nation was in trouble for disobeying Him. The king was doing whatever he can to draw as many as he can to God before destruction comes. That is as good as example of being a witness for God as any I've seen in the Old Testament. Speaking of that king, let's return to reading of his efforts to reform this nation.
16. Verse 24: Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the LORD. ²⁵ Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did--with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.
- a) Let me start here by explaining the idea of "mediums and spiritists". The idea is about people who try to contact dead people for advice or just have some sort of ability to tell us about our future. So why is this so bad and why does the bible forbid it? The point is we are not seeking God for guidance, but other "spiritual sources". Are they all hoaxes or do some of them have any real power? The answer is God allows some of them to have some power in order to make the alternatives to God an appealing choice. However, He wants us to seek Him to guide our lives and not such sources. Does this mean as an example, don't see a psychologist? My answer is such doctor's only can help with symptoms. They can't deal with the root cause of sin. There are a lot of wonderful Christian counselors in that profession and I'm sure many psychologists do a lot of good work. However, I avoid mediums and spiritists if for no other reason, God knows what's best for my life.

- b) Then we have Verse 23, which is a summary statement of most of the chapter to date. The point is the king did everything in his power to lead as many people as he could to God by destroying what is false and encouraging the worship of God Himself. The problem as we'll read in a few verses, is that the hearts of people still didn't want to turn to God. That will become obvious by Verse 31. In the meantime, we're about to read of God's reaction to all of this as stated in the next two verses.
17. Verse 24: Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger. ²⁷ So the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, 'There shall my Name be.' "
- a) Time for another "bottom line": It wasn't good enough. God is saying that despite all of the reforms made by this good king, it's not enough to change God's mind about His plan to destroy the kingdom. In other words, the king's father and especially his grandfather did too much irrevocable damage. All of the effort made to reform people can't undo the desire to sin. That leads me to the question: What do we do get people to be saved? To state the obvious, there is no magic formula. We can destroy all the false gods that exist and encourage the worship of God all day, but if people's hearts are not in it, all that effort does not make an eternal difference.
- i) What we have to keep in mind is that some will get it and some won't and wisdom is needed to discern how to properly use our time. God doesn't put a big mark on the bodies of those who are saved. That's why we reach out to all people and let the Holy Spirit sort out who does and who does not get it.
- ii) In other words, it wasn't a waste of time for this king to make all of this effort. God destroyed this nation for the same reason He announced His plan in several places in the bible that He is going to destroy our world one day: It is corrupted by sin and beyond help. That's why I believe 2nd Kings ends with the destruction of the nation of Israel to show us that without His guidance it is not possible to please Him based on our efforts. God wants us to lead as many people to Him before that destruction occurs and that's what this king did and that's what God calls you and me to do today. Short version: Nice try King Josiah, but these people are now beyond help. With that said, it's time to move on.
18. Verse 28: As for the other events of Josiah's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?
- a) As I love to joke, "If you want to learn more about this king, go to the library or Google him." When Kings was put together, the official records of the kings was still available for anyone to study in the temple. Most likely the book was compiled either right before the nation was taken into captivity or during that time when such records still existed.
19. Verse 29: While Josiah was king, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the Euphrates River to help the king of Assyria. King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle, but Neco faced him and killed him at Megiddo. ³⁰ Josiah's servants brought his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah and anointed him and made him king in place of his father.
- a) The last thing we read about this king is that he died in battle against Egypt. The text tells us that the king's body was taken back to Israel and given a proper burial. The text also says that the people made Jehoahaz the next king of Israel. We read in 1st Chronicles 3:15 that the next king was the third oldest son of Josiah. Ok, so what? Usually the oldest son is the one made the king. I suspect the reason "Son #3" was picked is because he's the one that the people wanted. We'll read in the next few verses that this next king was wicked. It is almost as if the people of Israel were tired of a king telling them whom they can and cannot worship and the people "got what they wanted" and picked Son #3 to be the next king so they can do whatever they wanted to do.

- b) Before I move on, I'm dying to share a cute story from 2nd Chronicles and a little common speculation about what happened to the "Ark of the Covenant" at that time. First, we read in 2nd Chronicles 35:20-25 that God Himself had told the king of Egypt (i.e., the Pharaoh) that the Israelite king should not meddle in this war (Verse 29) as it was not his business.
 - i) To explain further, I need to quickly discuss a little about the politics of that area at that time. The Assyrian Empire was growing weak. The Babylonian Empire was on the rise. The Egyptians were still a force in that area. From what I could gather from studying a little history, the Egyptian army joined forces with the Assyrian Army to battle the Babylonians. This battle took place at Megiddo, a famous place in Israel. That's the same place as the famous Armageddon battle is to take place as described in Revelation Chapter 16:16.
 - ii) With that background told, let me share a commonly held speculation that is not stated in the bible. God said he was going to wipe out Israel due to the sins of the King Manasseh who was the grandfather of the good king of most of this chapter. There is speculation that the priests at the time of Manasseh took the "Ark" down to Egypt for safekeeping. The speculation is that's what motivated King Josiah to battle the king of Egypt in the first place. To this day there is a place in Ethiopia that claims to have that ark and they are keeping it safe there until the "Messiah" shows up on the scene to rule. Is any of this true? Who knows, but it is a possible explanation of why King Josiah would want to battle the Egyptians when God had said to that king not to meddle in this battle to begin with.
 - iii) A simpler explanation might just be that King Josiah wasn't crazy about a large Egyptian army marching through his country to go fight anyone.
 - iv) Now that I've got that story out of my system, back to the text itself.
- 20. Verse 31: Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah; she was from Libnah.³² He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his fathers had done.
 - a) Remember how I said that this was the third son of the last king and the "people" made him the king? Verse 32 says that "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD". Short version is that we are, from this point until the end of the book in two more chapters, are going to read of a succession of one bad king after another, none of which reigned very long. It's going to read like a revolving door of one bad king after the other being in charge.
 - b) Here is what we do need to remember from all of this: The Israelite nation as a whole refused to turn to God and in effect, these kings were what the people wanted. Notice in Verse 31 that this king only reigned 5 months. That's why I call the last two chapters and the final verses of Chapter 23, the "revolving door" of kings who ruled at this time. With that said, let's read on as to what the bible says about this bad king:
- 21. Verse 33: Pharaoh Neco put him in chains at Riblah in the land of Hamath so that he might not reign in Jerusalem, and he imposed on Judah a levy of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.³⁴ Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah and changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz and carried him off to Egypt, and there he died.³⁵ Jehoiakim paid Pharaoh Neco the silver and gold he demanded. In order to do so, he taxed the land and exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land according to their assessments.
 - a) Remember that the Israelites battled the Egyptians a few verses back where the good king died in battle? Apparently the cost of that battle is now the Israelites are "subservient" to the Egyptians. The Pharaoh put a tax on Israel (Verse 33) and decided to change the king of that kingdom to someone the Pharaoh liked better. In other words, the latest king in the revolving door of the Israelite kingdom agreed to pay the heavy fine to the Pharaoh.
 - b) In case you care, text also mentions the Pharaoh renamed the latest king of Israel as if to say "I'm really in charge here and I'll rename the king I want to show who is in power!"

- c) OK, time for the important question: Why is all of this stuff here in the bible? Why put in the same chapter about all the exploits of the good king with the "revolving door" of a few bad kings who were next in line? (First remember that the chapter breaks were put there many centuries later, but let me speculate why the break is, where it is.) I believe it is to show us again that all of the efforts we make to draw people close to God, can't be done without the power of the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of people to God.
- i) Let me put it this way: Did the king sincerely want people to worship God? I'm sure of it. Did he pray about it? Probably. So why wasn't his efforts successful in the long run? One reason is to show that we are not given the power to change the hearts of people to God. Only He and He alone knows who is and who will not be with Him forever in heaven. All of our efforts to get people to worship God can only go so far in people's lives. If we really want people to get saved, I'm sure the most important thing for us to do is pray that God moves in their lives. Of course some people do get and some don't, which is why we evangelize in the first place. I am also very aware that some people have a special gift for evangelism as much as I am sure that God calls on all of us to be a witness for Him.
 - ii) Bottom line is it's worth the effort to make a difference for God as we have seen all throughout history, some people get it and some don't.
 - iii) I'm sure through all of the efforts of the good king of this chapter, some people did turn back to God and this king did make a difference. However, for the majority of Israelites living back then, just as it is for a majority of people alive today, most people want to prove their worth to God by showing their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds and God should accept them based on their good deeds. I believe the hardest aspect to accept about the Gospel message is simply that we don't have to prove our worth to God by our deeds. The reason God calls us to be a witness for Him, is not to prove ourselves to Him, but just out of gratitude for what He has already done for us and because that is the best use of our time. In other words, to be obedient to God is the best way for us to live, not to prove our worth to Him.
 - iv) With that said, I still have two more verses to cover in this chapter.
22. Verse 36: Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. His mother's name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah; she was from Rumah.³⁷ And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his fathers had done.
- a) This is still the same king as listed in the last few verses. The point is the chapter ends on a mention of this king's background. Despite being related to the good king Josiah, he did act like the wicked kings that ruled over this kingdom. In effect, this king was probably a popular king because he let the people do what they wanted. He also agreed to pay the big annual tax to Egypt. In effect we're reading of the end of "Judah" as a kingdom. As a large tax is now being paid to Egypt, we can see who is really in power here.
 - b) In the next lesson, I'm going to cover the end of the kingdom of the Israelite people. It is interesting to consider for a moment how far they have fallen. Hundreds of years earlier under King David and his son King Solomon, Israel was at the height of power and didn't have to worry about being attacked by enemies. That's why most religious Jewish people who do believe in a Messiah, want one like David who conquered all their enemies so that the country can live in peace. The point here is that after generally turning from God for the better part of about 400 years, God finally said, "I've had enough of this. No matter how much this nation has made a vow to commit to following Me, they won't do it."
 - c) That in effect is the point for us as humans. The idea is we all suffer from an incurable disease called sin. Just as God pronounced an irrevocable judgment on the Israelites, so He has pronounced an irrevocable judgment on the earth. Our world has to be destroyed one day simply because the disease is incurable and the most merciful thing God can do is destroy what He has created. In the meantime, we save who we can from this judgment.

23. Speaking of salvation, what do you say I close in prayer and discuss what it is that God wants us to do until that day comes: Father, first of all, we thank You that we have been called to believe the Gospel Message and we are chosen for salvation. Help us to rely upon Your power so that we can make a difference for You. Help us to use our time for what matters eternally and make a difference to a lost and dying world. Help us to have the zeal of King Josiah so that we too can use what time, resources and power You have given us to make that difference for You. We ask is this in Jesus name, Amen.