

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IN THE GOD - KIND OF WAY

by Mario Ducic
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While reading and contemplating spiritual renewal from the story of Josiah, in **2 Kings 22:1-2; 23:25**, I believe God showed me principles for true spiritual renewal – spiritual renewal in the God-kind of way.

Many times our spirits become poisoned by new and diverse philosophies or doctrines so that when we come to the desert times of our life we chase after various ideas and directions in which we suppose spiritual renewal and refreshment will be found rather than turning to God's Word for the spiritual strength we need.

Some may say, "If I could only change my environment everything would be different", "If only those around me would believe that I am right surely we would all see a spiritual awakening." Some may even say, "If I were to get married then I would see a spiritual renewal in my life!" Worse yet, "If only I could find the right church or pastor then I would be able to do what I've always wanted to and believe as I desire." I assure you, if these are your thoughts you can be certain that you *wont* find spiritual renewal; spiritual renewal is linked to the Spirit and not to our environment and surroundings and it begins from within not from without.

I would like to establish this principle by using the example of King Josiah, the last godly Hebrew king to reign before Israel went to Babylonian captivity; but before we go further I would like to provide you with some background. The book of 2 Kings offers us a history of the fall of Israel and Judah, which began in 852 BC. The book describes two of the greatest tragedies that brought the Israeli and Judean kingdoms to destruction, providing us with a history of the last 130 years of Judah's 345-year history. It also reveals Israel's great instability, this proven by the fact that in a period of 200 years she had many kings and 9 dynasties in comparison with Judah's 20 kings and 1 dynasty.

In that time many Old Testament prophets warned, encouraged, and reminded the kings of their responsibility before God. They were God's representatives. For example, Amos and Hosea prophesied to Israel while Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah all prophesied to Judah. In short, the book of 2 Kings reveals the great spiritual and moral downfall of the Hebrew people. There was a battle within as well as without, along with great pressure, ultimately resulting in the dark history of God's people – collapse and enslavement. The purpose of this book was to give to the Hebrew people, especially those taken into Babylon captivity, a prophetic understanding of their history, in the time when their monarchy was divided, so that they would not repeat the sins of their forefathers.

In **2 Kings 23:25** we read that Josiah was a king that loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength as no king had before. Through his example we will see that God has His own eternal principles regarding spiritual renewal that are still relevant for today. The question that lies before us is, “What is spiritual renewal in a God-kind of way?” and “What was it that Josiah did to experience it?”

Josiah, in the Hebrew, means “May Jehovah give.” May Jehovah give understanding, for only He can send us spiritual renewal; yet only if God's people obey His commands. Dear brothers and sisters, let me warn you not to build for yourselves golden calves or create for yourselves gods after your own desires and spiritual ideas. There are timeless principles that neither you nor I can avoid and if we disobey God's commands we will find only two ways left to go: the way of the flesh and the way of Satan. Both of these lead to destruction.

Philippians 3:3 says, “*For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*” While *Hebrews 3:14* says, “*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.*” When we are spiritually dry and in need of renewal we cannot allow ourselves to trust in our flesh and fleshly passions saying, “If only I had this or that, could do this or that, I would be refreshed spiritually.” **Because you surely would not!**

These are all fleshly desires that will never lead us to spiritual renewal in a God-kind of way. If we purpose to go the way of the father of lies we certainly cannot be renewed for the Word tells us in **John 8:44**, *“You are of your father the devil and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”* Additionally, the Apostle Paul warns about false prophets and teachers who act as servants of God. He says, and I paraphrase, *“It is nothing new that Satan manifests himself to us as an angel of light. Therefore, it is no wonder that his servants pretend to be servants of righteousness.”* This verse goes on to say that their end will be according to their deeds. These doctrines are human doctrines and are taught by so-called servants of God who lead people away from truth and true spiritual renewal.

Every form of teaching that encourages us to fulfill our own plans and desires, that focuses us on ourselves and not the Kingdom; all that fails to fully encourage us to become more like Christ and to die to ourselves may appear to be the answer to spiritual renewal and the good path that “Seems good to us but in the end leads to death.” If you will notice, the result affects us in the same way physically as it does spiritually. This includes each and every type of devilish teaching and deceitful spirit luring people away from reading the Word of God and from living by His principles by offering their own false ideas of spiritual renewal.

BUT GOD HAS HIS OWN WAY TO SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Now, let us examine the principles of God pictured in the life of Josiah. Josiah was the 16th king of Judah, the son of Amon, and the grandson of Manasseh. Both his father and his grandfather did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord (2 Kings 21:20-21); they did not **sin in the eyes of the people, rather in the eyes of the Lord.** We also read in **Deuteronomy 3:25-26**, *“When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the Lord your God to provoke Him to anger. I call heaven and*

earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed.”

In those days they made graven images while today people create spiritual idols that are carried in their hearts, which are brought before the Lord, and with which they provoke Him. All the while wondering why they succeed at nothing in their lives; however, instead of removing those idols and repenting of their sin they continue doing evil the eyes of the Lord. Perhaps this is not evil in the eyes of their peers for man cannot see the evil of the heart yet God is the One who searches the heart of man.

We further read that Josiah came from a generation that did not please God and that failed to care for the spiritual condition of the people; yet God, because of his great love and mercy, raised up a man who brought about spiritual renewal; he was a man who wholly dedicated himself to God and brought about a return to the law of Moses. In all of this we see that God decided to again visit his people rather than punishing the evil of their ancestors. This is the love of God. And in the same way Jesus, *“Showed his great love toward us in this while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”* God reaches out to us despite our iniquities and He desires to bring us back to Himself in order that we might be spiritually renewed. Josiah’s reform took place in three stages of his life.

The first stage takes place in **2 Kings 22:1**. Josiah was surely blessed and was taught by true spiritual teachers who resisted the sin and idolatry of his father Amon. In the first stage of his life, as a young man, he began seeking the Lord. **2 Chronicles 34:3** reads; *“For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David.”*

In the second stage Josiah began cleansing the land of all possible idols. We read in **2 Chronicles 34:3-7**, *“And in the twelfth year (that is the twelfth year of his reign) he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and molten images.”*

The final stage took place when he was 26 years old; Josiah called for a renewal of the temple under the leadership of the High Priest Hilkiah. The story can be found in **2 Chronicles 34:8-22**.

As I was read about the renewal God brought to Israel through Josiah God showed me that the principles in effect then are still in effect in today; they have not changed.

BY THESE PRINCIPELS ALONE CAN WE BE RENEWED.

The first principle can be found at the end of verse **2 of 2 King 22**. It reads, *“He did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”* Do not turn from the ways of the Lord; do not turn back to your old way of living. We find a good example of this in God’s direction to the kings, *“Also it shall be when he sits on the throne of his kingdom that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn away from the commandment to the right hand or to the left and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”* (**Deuteronomy 17.14-20**)

After God gave His law to Moses He said in **Deuteronomy 5:32**, *“Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you: You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”*

Dear brother, God left us His Word to light our way and each time we neglect His Word we slip spiritually; we become spiritually lost and begin looking for our own way out while we create our own theology. We must not allow ourselves to turn from the ways of God and His Word; we must return to those things, which God commanded us to hold on to. There is only one way and that way is Jesus Christ; He was steadfast in all things and did not turn to the right or left, rather He came to completely fulfill the written word as

He said in **Matt 5:17**, “*Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*” God’s Word is the foundation of spiritual renewal and if we desire renewal and refreshment we must return to it. Jesus said in **John 8:31**, “*If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed.*” Only if we abide in His Word will we be His disciples. **Psalm 119:50** reads, “*This is my comfort in affliction, for your word has given me life.*” It is the Word of God which guards our lives and which leads us to true renewal.

When Josiah began rebuilding the temple. The High Priest uncovered the Law of Moses and when the scribe, Shaphan, began reading the law to King Josiah he tore his robe. This revelation confirms that God guards his Word from idol worshipers and heretics continually seeking to destroy His law. God’s Word is indestructible, as Isaiah says in **Isaiah 40:8**, “*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.*’

Let us read on. In **2 Kings 22:13** Josiah said, “*Go, inquire for the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.*” We are, as well, a generation that doesn’t have true spiritual fathers. We have many who call themselves “Spiritual Father” and “Apostle” but according to God’s Word they are truly not what they claim to be. We need to raise up a new generation of spiritual fathers who will do right in the eyes of the Lord, as Josiah did.

The second principle of spiritual renewal is humility and repentance. In **2 Kings 22:15-17** we read that God is bringing his judgment on those who did not live by His law and who have turned to other forms of spiritual renewal. Surely the same words that the Lord spoke to Solomon after he built the temple rang in Josiah’s ears. We find those words in **2 Chronicles 7:13-16**; only when God’s people humble themselves and turn from their wicked ways, can God heal. There is no easier or nobler way. We must remove all pride, repent, and seek forgiveness.

John the Baptist, of whom the Bible says “There was no greater man born”, also preached this same sermon, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Peter’s first sermon on the Day of Pentecost consisted of those same words and we read them in **Acts 2:38-39**, “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off as many as the Lord our God will call.*” The first sermon of our Lord Jesus was a call to humility and repentance, as we can see in **Matt 4:17**, “*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” And in **Mark 1:15**, “*The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*”

The Greek word for repentance is “metanoia”. Meta, meaning “after” or “change” and Noeo, “To see or understand” (or No’os , “moral consciousness” also meaning “the mind”). So, we can literally translate this word “The change of our way of thinking and purposes”.

Humility and repentance bring change. Today there are so many Christians in the church who, after so many years of sitting in the church under the teachings of the Word of God, have experienced no changes in their lives. These kind of so-called Christians have never been truly born again because there never came a change of habit or thought.

The Third Principle is renewal of the covenant; this is change according to the Word of God. Again, we see the great love and mercy of God in **2 Kings 23:3** as Josiah made a covenant, again, with the Lord and brought about specific changes in Israel. Renewal requires specific changes. The following paragraph is taken from an excellent commentary found in the “Full Life Study Bible” regarding verse 2 Kings 23:4.

”Josiah’s reforms follow the Scriptural principle that repentance for specific sins is essential to true revival. Whenever genuine repentance occurs, specific sins will be identified, false brothers and sisters expelled, worldly practices forsaken and godly standards restored. Any talk of the need for revival and repentance in the churches

without specifying what must be changed indicates that the commitment to real change in people's hearts and lifestyles is lacking."

Repentance and change must come in areas of adultery, lying, slander, gossip, hate, envy, pride, enmity, alcohol, smoking, drugs, and in-submission to authority. **2 Kings 22:5** mentions that Josiah removed the idolatrous priests. May I pose to you a question? Are you true or false priests of the Lord?

The Bible says in **1 Peter 2:9**, that we are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people." We must ask ourselves if Jesus would have been talking about us when He said in **Mark 8:38**, "*For whomever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*" James also said in his book, "*Adulterer and adulteresses! Do you no know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*"

In **2 Kings 23: 8-13** it says that Josiah brought down all the high places in Jerusalem, in other words, all those things that were lifted up against the one true God. The Apostle Paul said **2 Corinthians 10:5-6**, "*Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*" One commentary regarding this verse said:

"The church today is often tempted to meet the world's challenge through the world's weapons, i.e. through humanistic wisdom, philosophy, psychology, exciting attractions, entertainment-based church performances, etc. These often serve as a substitute for the basic New Testament practices of intense prayer, uncompromising commitment to God's Word, and proclamation of the gospel in power. Worldly weapons cannot bring about a Holy Spirit revival, for such weapons cannot possibly destroy sin's strongholds, deliver us from Satan's power or overthrow the evil passions running rampant in the world

today. If we use the worlds' weapons, we will only secularize the church and separate it from the weapons of faith, righteousness and the power of the Spirit"

Lets look at what those high places were that Josiah brought down.

The first high place was Ashtoreth – the abomination of the Sidonians. Ashtoreth was a symbol of ritual prostitution and was a pagan goddess. She was the partner of the pagan Ba'al and the Philistines worshipped her as the goddess of fertility. Other nations have also worshipped her but under different names such as, Ishatar, Afrodita, Vinece, and today we worship her as the Virgin Mary. These various goddesses have all been the goddess of sensuality, love, and fertility. In spiritual terms this represents the "soulish garbage" in which God's people have begun to put their trust. Christianity is not soulish; it is not simply filled with love, goodness, and "me, me, me". In Christ there is no emotional manipulation only simple faith and full dedication to Him and those around us. Our pettiness must be forgotten.

The second high place was Chemosh – the abomination of the Moabites. Chemosh was the god of immoral practices and astrology. In the spiritual realm he is the god of "having one's own way" and "taking things into one's own hand"; a god of those who follow their own desires and material welfare.

The third high place was Milcom – the abomination of Ammon. The god of a child sacrifice; by today's standards the god of spiritual laziness causing parents to neglect the spiritual condition of their children.

The final principle we find in the story of Josiah is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. In **2 Kings 23:24-25** Josiah is described as the most dedicated king of Israel and it is here where we find the secret to his success. The secret lies in keeping the greatest commandment given to us by God in **Deuteronomy 6:5**, which Jesus also repeated in **Matthew 22:37**, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*" That which

God seeks of us is committed to love. Love commands an attitude of the heart in which God is so respected that we continually and faithfully seek for fellowship with Him; seeking to submit to Him and to truly guard His honor and will on earth.

Those who truly love God will desire to share in His suffering as stated in **Philippians 3:10**, *“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”* This love desires to proclaim his Kingdom and live out His righteous standards here on earth. It should be strong, inspired by His love toward us, the love that gave us all he had. **John 3:16** says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” God’s love includes personal loyalty, belief in Him, a fully dedicated heart that can be seen by upholding His standards, and a desire for His presence and fellowship with Him.

We must love God with our whole heart. In the Greek the word “heart” is “Kardia” – that which represents man’s entire moral and mental activity, which includes understanding and emotions. “Heart” is used to describe the hidden matters of a man’s life. In the context of the New Testament the word heart implies physical life, will, thoughts, and understanding. We also must love Him with all our strength. The word “strength”, in the Greek, is “dunamis”, meaning strength, ability, and power. From this word we derive the English word “dynamite”. Finally, we must love Him with all our soul. The word “soul” in the Greek is “Psyhe”, which means our very life’s breath and the activity of our body, our personality; the things with which man desires, wishes, and understands.

Love for our Lord Jesus is the main key and last principle to Spiritual Renewal in a God-kind of way. Only when we return to the Word, humble ourselves with repentance, renew our covenant with God, and love the Lord can we can fulfill the second great commandment that Jesus gave: to love your neighbor as yourself. This is the only way and the only rule that exists for spiritual renewal. We will be healthy, we will love one another, and be witnesses for if we will obey these things.

Some of you are in need spiritual renewal, yet you are going your own way rather than the way of the Lord. You must return to the Word, repent for specific sins, and renew your covenant with God. Do you want this kind of spiritual renewal or are you going to simply reject it. Are you thinking that you'll just wait a little longer, as the Judeans did thinking that your judgment will never catch up with you?

There is one more saddening scripture found in **2 Kings 23:26**, *“Notwithstanding, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, wherein His anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal.”* We can harden our hearts too long and then after a time desire to return to the Lord (as the Israelites did). However, God will send His judgment, even as He decided because we waited too long to respond to His calling. Do not wait! There are some whom God is calling for the last time. Repent and cry out to God.

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