

God Receives the People's Repentance

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God desires that people repent of their sin and turn to Him in worship and obedience.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: 2 Chronicles 29–35

In 1928, Alexander Fleming was experimenting with bacteria that cause staph infections. He left a Petri dish uncovered, and it became contaminated with mold spores. The bacteria grew all over the plate except in the area where the mold had formed. This was Fleming's accidental discovery of penicillin, which would later be mass-produced for use in World War II and go on to save countless lives from bacterial infection.¹



What medical marvel have you witnessed saving the life of a loved one, friend, or acquaintance?

Group Time

Point 1: Repentance involves removing and destroying idols (2 Chron. 34:1-7).

¹ Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. ² And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. ³ For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. ⁴ And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. ⁵ He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. ⁶ And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, ⁷ he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

King Josiah served as a godly leader to his people and made tremendous reforms for his land. We can always hope and pray for our leaders to do the same. We also can look at Josiah's life and apply his example of repentance and reform to our own areas of dominion, namely, our lives. Three elements of Josiah's life encourage believers to do so: 1) **Josiah's Age**; 2) **Josiah's History**; and 3) **Josiah's Community**.



How can personal repentance of sin influence a community of people?

Josiah had a great opportunity to honor God as king. He easily could have been overwhelmed, but instead, we see him boldly assault the evil he saw within his sphere of influence. Josiah waged war against the evil in his kingdom because he was humble and repentant before God. Lasting reform only comes from true repentance.

Repentance: A response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine _____ for one's sin, a turning away from one's sin toward _____, and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation.

Point 2: Repentance involves restoring and resuming worship (2 Chron. 34:8-11).

⁸ Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had cleansed the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God. ⁹ They came to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the house of God, which the Levites, the keepers of the threshold, had collected from Manasseh and Ephraim and from all the remnant of Israel and from all Judah and Benjamin and from the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ And they gave it to the workmen who were working in the house of the LORD. And the workmen who were working in the house of the LORD gave it for repairing and restoring the house. ¹¹ They gave it to the carpenters and the builders to buy quarried stone, and timber for binders and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had let go to ruin.

Josiah, in his eighteenth year of ruling over Judah, was merely twenty-six years old. He set his heart on honoring the temple of God, following in the steps of the good kings before him: David, Asa, Joash, and Hezekiah. The next step on his mission to weed out all idolatry and evil from his kingdom required God's temple coming to life once again.



Why was the temple so vital for the cleansing of the promised land?

Josiah had become a wildfire, fueled by his passion for God's glory, and his calling overflowed to others as he got them involved in the good work he was doing. Josiah enlisted a team of people to restore the worship at the temple: leaders, Levites, carpenters, builders, and more. This was always the purpose of God's kings—to lead God's people in worship and obedience to the Lord their God. So too with Christians.

How do you view the fire in your heart for repentance, faith, and obedience?

Repentance

Faith

Obedience

Point 3: Repentance involves recovering and obeying God's Word (2 Chron. 34:14-15,18-21).

¹⁴ While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD given through Moses. ¹⁵ Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan.


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¹⁸ Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it before the king.

¹⁹ And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes. ²⁰ And the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, ²¹ "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book."

Penicillin was a life-changing discovery, but some bacteria have become resistant to it. With all human discoveries and inventions, humankind will always be limited. God's power, however, is unlimited, and His Word will accomplish what He sends it to do (Isa. 55:11). In this case, it convicted the heart of King Josiah over the sins of his people.

 When has God's Word overwhelmed you with its truth and power?

Josiah was terrified upon hearing God's word in the book of the law because he understood the wrath of God against Judah's sin and disobedience of His word. Six centuries later, the very embodiment of the Word of God would be sent to earth, but curiously, He was not sent to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17). Josiah feared God's wrath for his people's disobedience and repented; **Jesus** came to die on a cross so God's wrath would fall on Him and repentant people would be saved.

 What are some ways we should respond to the Word made flesh for us?



Voices from Church History

"Not only do we know God by Jesus Christ alone, but we know ourselves only by Jesus Christ ... Thus without the Scripture, which has Jesus Christ alone for its object, we know nothing, and see only darkness and confusion in the nature of God and in our own nature."²

—Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

Daily Study

Day 1: Read 2 Chronicles 29:1-36

Hezekiah seems like the kind of person people were drawn to, a magnet for the people of Israel. Although his father, Ahaz, didn't do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, Hezekiah did. In the first month of his first year, he swung open the doors of the temple (that's if they could swing at all) and decided to restore it.

It makes one wonder if he had been waiting anxiously for his opportunity to sweep into the building and start making reforms. Maybe he kept a blueprint under his pillow. He certainly kept the dream in his heart.

Hezekiah employed and encouraged the people, as any good leader does, and spoke of the covenant he longed to make with God on their behalf (2 Chron. 29:10-11). In a mere sixteen days, the Levites cleansed and consecrated the temple and walked into the newly renovated building, where they slaughtered animals to make atonement for all of Judah.

Hezekiah may have had a blueprint for restoring the temple, but he had no clue how his restoration pointed to a far greater temple—Jesus. Under the new covenant inaugurated with Jesus' blood, God doesn't dwell in a building—He dwells in His people.

Since this is our wondrous reality, we must take measures as Hezekiah did to swing open our lives and make reforms. This looks like confession, and we can go directly to the source and ask that He cleanse us, and He is faithful to do so every time (Heb. 4:16; 1 John 1:9).



What do you need to confess today?

Day 2: Read 2 Chronicles 34:1-7

We live in a largely postmodern culture that often values feelings over facts. This potentially leads people to reject absolute truth because it doesn't sit right with them—a terrifying conclusion given the life and death implications of truth in Scripture.

Christians know that sin is real (Rom. 3:23). Because our culture believes everyone is innately good, sin isn't a term we use frequently. Instead, we talk about our feelings and how we are "struggling" with something rather than the fact that we have a sin we must confess. This line of thinking can even slip into our churches.

Between Hezekiah's reign and Josiah's, there were two bad kings, Manasseh and Amon. The good work Hezekiah had done on the temple and to purify the land was destroyed by their sin. So Josiah went throughout the land to tear down altars, remove false gods, and destroy the wickedness. Sin can easily creep in and pollute us both individually and corporately if we aren't constantly returning to God. We must take sin seriously.



How can you as an individual keep sin from creeping into your life and your church?

Day 3: Read 2 Chronicles 34:8-13

A recent Pew Research Center study found that 23 percent of the adult population of the United States identified as "religiously unaffiliated," or the "nones," up from 16 percent in 2007.⁴ This has led people to seek new forms of community building outside of the church, such as at the gym. How sad that the life-giving community of the church could be substituted with a work-out group, that the vision and purpose in the Great Commission could be overshadowed by getting one's body in shape.

Josiah recognized his role in filling his sphere of influence with the truth of God, but he also called others into the adventure. He allowed others to realize their dynamic role in God's kingdom (1 Cor. 12). This hasn't changed. Every believer has been placed in his or her church, neighborhood, and community to influence it with the love of God, a far greater task than hopping on a spin bike and getting a good sweat. So let us be on God's mission first and foremost, and let's call others to join us in this meaningful work.



How are you loving and serving alongside the body of Christ for its growth and for the Great Commission?

Day 4: Read 2 Chronicles 34:14-33

Like finding hidden treasure, Hilkiah discovered the book of the law. But the high priest didn't stumble and trip over himself racing to get the book to King Josiah; instead, he handed this gold mine to Shaphan, who *eventually* told Josiah about the book.

The book was read to King Josiah. He tore his clothes as he realized not only had he sinned in the eyes of God but so had all of his people. His reaction, though, was fitting only if God is real and holy. What we begin to realize in 2 Chronicles is that repentance does not necessarily suspend the earthly consequences of personal and corporate sin. The kingdom of Judah would eventually be destroyed, and the people would be exiled to Babylon even though Josiah had turned his face to God.

We must never see God's grace as cheap. Instead, it's a call for us to come and die to ourselves. Even then, often there will be earthly consequences for our sinful choices, rippling out and affecting the multitudes. So let us be wise, loving, and obedient.



What is a specific example in your life of sin having earthly consequences? How were these circumstances reconciled by grace?

Day 5: Read 2 Chronicles 35:1-27

"None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah" (v. 18). When one dives deeply into the holiness of God, repents, and is made new, celebration is in order. Because Josiah understood the gift he had been given, he threw a party like no other. A quick math calculation reveals that 41,400 animals were slaughtered for the Passover!

There is a pattern in Josiah's life that must be noted. He tore his robes upon hearing God's word. He repented profusely over his people's disobedience. But then he rose to his feet, gathered the people, and celebrated profoundly. Such is the pattern for the believer. It should never be rushed and never be forced. Rather, when our eyes are unveiled to our wickedness and then we drink deeply of a grace that stretches as far as the east is from the west, our bodies can't help but stand up straighter and our lips can't help but have an upward turn. Praise the Lord!



How can you more fully cultivate in your life the pattern of mourning that turns into joy?

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A Word from the Editor



Trevin Wax

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader.

Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of *The Gospel Project* is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God's people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God's extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.

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