

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

**John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.**

Fifty-First Week - Thursday

JOSIAH KING OF JUDAH

*"The king [Josiah] went up to the house of Yahweh with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem--the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of Yahweh. Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before Yahweh, to follow Yahweh and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in the book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant. . . . Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to Yahweh with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him" (2 Kings 23: 2-3, 25).*

Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight, and he was the best and most beloved of the kings who sat upon the throne since David. There were none that approached him in his zeal against idolatry and his devotion to the Lord. He extirpated every trace of idolatrous abominations throughout the country, root and branch, abolishing even all the high places that previous kings had spared and even high-priests had tolerated.

In Bethel Josiah also performed the task which had been allotted to him by name more than three hundred years before. This fulfillment of the prophecy against the altar of Bethel, delivered in the time of Jeroboam, was now in all respects complete. In order to defile that altar and inflict posthumous dishonor upon the leaders of that corrupt worship celebrated there, Josiah caused their bones to be taken from the sepulchres and burned upon the altar.

In this undertaking a noticeable incident occurred. Observing an inscription upon one of the tombs, but not being near enough to read it, Josiah asked what it was. He was told by the people of the place, "It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel." Then Josiah said, "Let him alone; let no one move his bones." So they left his bones alone; but the historian does not fail to observe, "with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria." We see here the worldly wisdom of the astute old prophet who had said to his sons, "When I am dead, then bury me in the tomb where the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones." The old prophet had no doubt calculated on the impossibility of distinguishing their remains after the lapse of so

much time, thereby sparing his own bones from defilement at the same time as those of the man of God. The notice taken of this inscription by King Josiah would suggest that there were no inscriptions on the other sepulchres. This inscription was probably placed upon the tomb by the old prophet for the very purpose that was now accomplished.

Josiah's thorough search for every relic of idolatry or superstition in the temple brought to light the original copy of the law written down by Moses. In opening it, the king's eye fell upon the passage in Deuteronomy declaring the doom that awaited the nation if it fell into idolatry. Seeing for the first time this original manuscript written by that holy and revered hand, it made an extraordinary impression on him. This may be somewhat comprehended by those who have been privileged to examine some of the most ancient manuscripts of the Scriptures now existing, to whom the very age of the vellum and the antique style of writing seem to take the reader back so much nearer to the time of the writer, giving a vividness to his impressions of ancient truth that no modern copy can impart. It is a curious feeling that one must experience to fully appreciate.

And if this is the case in respect to manuscripts which still fall far short of the time of the writers, imagine how much more intense it would be in the presence of the original autograph itself! Suppose, for instance, that we had the original autograph of St. John's Gospel and read on the last page, "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true." Would not this, written under his own hand, give an intensity to our conviction of the truth of his testimony such as we had never before been able to comprehend in the perusal of the printed copies, or even of the most ancient manuscripts?

Josiah's anxiety was so great that he sent at once to Huldah the prophetess to inquire whether this judgment would indeed be executed. The answer was yes. In fact, the sentence had already gone forth and would soon be executed, but Josiah's eyes would be spared from beholding it. And he did not behold it, for he died.

The death of Josiah took place as a consequence of his resistance to the march of Pharaoh Necho through his territories. Necho wanted to take advantage of the waning Assyrian power by taking some of the lands Assyria had acquired west of the Euphrates. This, however, put Josiah into a dilemma. To allow the safe passage of the Egyptians would be to take their side against the Assyrians, and thus he would be regarded by his Assyrian masters as unfaithful to his duty. So Josiah decided to adhere to his Assyrian allegiance, remembering how much the kingdom had formerly suffered for trusting the Egyptians and how strongly that trust had been denounced by the prophets.

Necho was sincerely desirous of avoiding a battle with Josiah, sending messengers to remonstrate with him: "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you." Josiah, however, thought he saw his duty clearly and persisted in opposing him. He could doubtless

see through Necho's pretense of being sent by God. Yet Josiah apparently had some misgivings and therefore went disguised into the battle. Nevertheless, he was defeated. A commissioned arrow found him, giving him a mortal wound. He died quickly of his wound, and his body was conveyed in his "second chariot" to Jerusalem for burial. All the nation mourned deeply for him, and the prophet Jeremiah gave expression to the universal grief in the lamentation he composed for one so greatly beloved and so truly mourned.

Josiah was the only king of Judah who perished in battle. There was much cause for weeping, for with him terminated the peace, the prosperity, and the piety of Judah. With him all the hopes of the nation perished; and after him nothing was to be found but idolatry and desolation.