

salvation for Judah. The outward worship had been set in order but there was no real change of heart. The country's doom was inevitable.

CONCLUSION

A man took his kids to a carnival. They were about the only ones visiting the carnival rides that morning. So when they climbed into the Tilt-O-Whirl, they hoped the operator would give them a decent ride. The first few minutes were rather fun. They laughed and enjoyed the funny feeling inside their stomachs. But after a while, the ride was not so much fun. And after more time — way past the length of an ordinary ride — Dad began to feel queasy. He wanted to get out, but couldn't. They were going too fast to escape. The centrifugal force had him immobilized against the back of the car. Every time they spun past the operator, he looked pleadingly at him, trying to communicate "Please! I need to get off!" But the operator kept the ride going. After another few minutes, the ride became miserable. The funny feeling inside his stomach turned into a churning concoction that included his breakfast. He had lost control. He was caught, going around in circles, held down by a merciless carnival ride operator. After what seemed like hours, the operator finally stopped the ride. Feeling green Dad staggered off the platform and lost his breakfast. Of course, the kids gathered around, cheering him on. They thought Dad's discomfort was the best part of the ride.

If you're caught spinning in a diabolical ride that started out fun but has turned into an addiction — if you're going around in circles, powerless to get off — you know the helpless feeling of losing control of your life. You know what it means to need God's supernatural help to stop the ride so you can escape.

GOD IS REMEMBERED

2 Kings 23:1-23

INTRODUCTION

A young bride was so nervous she said to her pastor, "I'm afraid I might not make it through the ceremony." The pastor soothed her, saying, "When you enter the church tomorrow and the processional begins, you will be walking down the same aisle you've walked many times before. Concentrate on that aisle. When you get halfway down the aisle, you'll see the altar, where you and your family have worshiped for many years. Concentrate on that altar. Then, when you're almost to the altar, you will see your groom, the one you love. Concentrate on him." The next day, the bride walked down the aisle with her chin up and eyes bright. But those along the center were a bit surprised to hear her muttering over and over, "Aisle, altar, him. Aisle, altar, him."

After Manasseh's wicked reign Judah needed altering.

REFORMATION BEGUN

Once young Josiah, grandson of wicked King Manasseh, was old enough to take over the reins of government, he set about clearing up the mess left by his father and grandfather. Especially the religious mess. The first thing was to clean up the Jerusalem temple and get rid of all the pagan influences that had been brought in. During the clean up a book was found.

2 Kin 22:10 ¹⁰Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king.

The Book speaks of the disaster coming upon the country because the kings and people have not walked in the way of the Lord. Josiah immediately sets about correcting abuses and reforming the life of the nation. The first thing he does is call an assembly of the elders of the nation. They go to the temple and renew the covenant. This is the basic agreement between God and Israel: *I will be your God and you shall be my people.* King and people promise to obey all the laws and ordinances of the Lord. Then, after the words comes the action. Everything associated with pagan religion is removed from Jerusalem. The idolatrous priests are removed. All innovations contrary to the Law of the Lord, going right back to the time of Solomon, are undone. Nothing will ever get done; wrong will not be righted until a beginning is made. Despite the reforms Hezekiah had made it would have been so easy to take the wickedness and idolatry of the reigns of Ahaz, Manasseh and Amon as the norm and say, *We've always done it this way.* Much of the wickedness had been done for so a long time that it

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had become acceptable. Josiah was calling the people to return to the ways of Moses and Joshua and David. The Reformers of C16 did not consider their work as bringing new innovations into the church, but returning the church, its beliefs and practices to what it had been in the days of the NT. Like Josiah's, it was a *back to the Bible* movement. That's what is needed today. Beliefs and practices that are not warranted by the Bible need to be removed from the church and from the society in which we live. We are not in the business of accommodating the ways of the world, but obeying the Word of God and walking in his ways.

REFORMATION CONTINUED

2 Kin 23:4 ⁴And the king commanded ... to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron and carried their ashes to Bethel.

Although there is pasture land east of Jerusalem, the **fields of the Kidron** is a deep valley which runs below the temple area. It was a good dumping ground for the items being thrown out of the temple. The idolatrous priests, those who offered sacrifices and those who burned incense to Baal, the sun, the moon and the stars, were deposed. Baal-worship included sexual rituals and for these prostitutes were employed who actually lived in the temple. Their quarters were completely cleared out and any buildings demolished. Then the reformation was taken further into other parts of the city and beyond, where pagan shrines had been built. These were destroyed. The valley of Hinnom which ran along the south of the city had been used in the worship of the god Molech which included child-sacrifice was defiled so that it could never be used again of any kind of worship. Josiah removed **the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun**. Exactly what this means is not known, but archeologists have found miniature statuettes of horses with discs between their ears. They were associated in some way with sun-worship. Then the reforms moved even further, beyond Jerusalem and Judah and into the territory of what had been the northern Kingdom of Israel. At Bethel, King Jeroboam had set up a rival temple to Jerusalem. There, God had been worshipped in the form of a bull-calf, but over the years it had become a place of Canaanite worship. Everything was destroyed and defiled. So the list goes on.

His aim was to sweep every vestige of religious error and moral crime from his dominion. Truly, what more laudable purpose could any man have than

this, to crush all evil within his domain, to crush it not only in its form but in its essence?(D Thomas)

Josiah's reform was not just a whim or a sudden impulse. It was a noble purpose, the result of the renewal of the covenant and the desire to walk in all the ways of the Lord. But what about its methods? Josiah has been criticized for the use of brute force and violence rather than argument, persuasion and moral influence. It was not an age of argument and persuasion. Desperate times call for desperate measures. *A London businessman was selling a warehouse property he owned. The building had been empty for months and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, and strewn trash all over the place. As he showed a prospective buyer the property, he took pains to say that he would replace the broken windows, bring in a crew to correct any structural damage, and clean out the garbage. The buyer said, "Forget about the repairs. When I buy this place, I'm going to build something completely different. I don't want the building; I want the site."*

Matt 5:30 ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Evil must be completely rooted out and destroyed. That is why Jesus came. It took the brutality and violence of the cross to accomplish it. When we become God's the old life is over. He makes all things new. All he wants is the site and the permission to build. It's the most radical reform program there is.

REFORMATION CHALLENGE

When Josiah called the elders and leaders together he challenged them to do what was needed. They respond to the challenge even though the country's doom has been pronounced. When the book of the law had been found, the prophetess, Hulda had been consulted about its the authenticity. It was indeed the Word of the Lord, but there had been so much disobedience and wickedness over many years that there was only doom pronounced for Judah. Yet Josiah leads his country in repentance and reform. He does not hold out any hope that the disaster can be averted. He does not ask for God to turn back his wrath. He does not pray for deliverance. He simply acts in obedience and faith. As Job once said, **Though he slay me, I will hope in him**. We are not to obey God for any reward it may bring or to avoid judgment. Faith, to which we are challenged is to obey. That's it. That's faith. Acts of righteousness, even as sincere as Josiah's will not guarantee salvation. Salvation can never be earned. It is always only by the grace of God through faith. Josiah's reformation was too late. There was to be no