

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 15

DECLINE



2 KINGS; 2 CHRONICLES; PROPHETS



MEMORY VERSES

“Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity
and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his
inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger
forever because he delights in faithful love.

He will again have compassion on us;
he will vanquish our iniquities.

You will cast all our sins into
the depths of the sea.”

—Micah 7:18-19



GOD'S PEOPLE WORSHIPED

CORE PASSAGE: 2 KINGS 18:1-6; 22:1-2; 23:1-3

CONTEXT

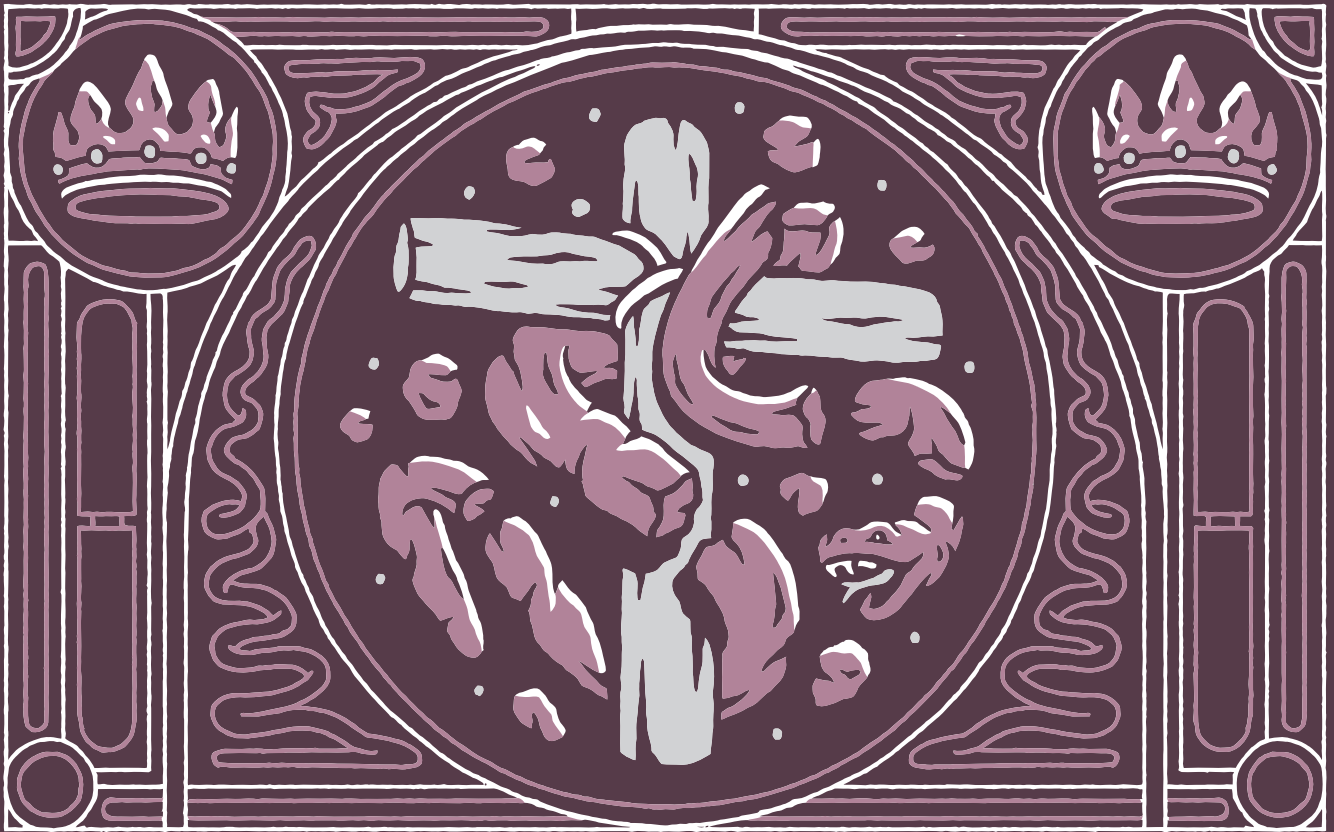
Throughout most of the history of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God's people did not follow His ways. Often they chose to worship the idols of the nations around them. In His mercy, the Lord sent prophets to call His people to repentance, but God's message often fell on deaf ears. As a result, God sent the Assyrians to attack, conquer, and exile the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom. The Assyrians also threatened the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but the Lord rescued them through a much-needed, God-fearing leader. In the declining years of Judah, the Lord gave them two faithful kings who worshiped the Lord alone.

KEY CONCEPT

Worship of God includes following Him and His Word.

As you examine 2 Kings 18:1-6; 22:1-2; 23:1-3:

- Recognize that both Hezekiah and Josiah relied on God's Word to lead the people of Judah.
- Consider how the Word of God convicts us of our sin and leads us to humble ourselves before the Lord.



TIMELINE

Assyria Besieges and Conquers Israel, Deporting the People (2 Kings 17)

Manasseh and Amon, Two Evil Kings of Judah,
Turn Back to Idols with Excessive Wickedness (2 Kings 21)

SESSION STUDY: Assyria Threatens Judah,
but Hezekiah Relies on the Lord (2 Kings 18–20)

SESSION STUDY: Josiah Repairs the Temple, Finds the Law,
and Restores the Worship of the Lord (2 Kings 22–23)

Judah's Remaining Kings Return to What Is Evil in the Lord's Sight (2 Kings 23–24)

Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** 2 Kings 18:1–20:21

☐ **Day 2:** Isaiah 36:1–39:8

☐ **Day 3:** 2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33

☐ **Day 4:** 2 Kings 21:1–23:30

☐ **Day 5:** 2 Chronicles 33:1–35:27

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 19



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

WORSHIPING GOD INCLUDES REMOVING OTHER THINGS WE ARE TEMPTED TO WORSHIP (2 KINGS 18:1-6).

Highlight the descriptions of Hezekiah as a king of Judah, and underline the specific actions of Hezekiah recorded in the passage.

1 In the third year of Israel's King Hoshea son of Elah, Hezekiah son of Ahaz became king of Judah. **2** He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. **3** He did what was right in the LORD's sight just as his ancestor David had done. **4** He removed the high places, shattered the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake that Moses made, for until then the Israelites were burning incense to it. It was called Nehushtan. **5** Hezekiah relied on the LORD God of Israel; not one of the kings of Judah was like him, either before him or after him. **6** He remained faithful to the LORD and did not turn from following him but kept the commands the LORD had commanded Moses.

So often Israel and Judah found themselves in a spiral of sin, disobedience, and idolatry, a spiral we ourselves likely are familiar with. We may be believers in Christ, but we are not yet perfect beings, so we still struggle with sin. Yet all throughout the Bible books detailing Israel's and Judah's kings, we see that God is the One upholding His promises. God is the One who keeps the covenant to bring the people back to Himself.

King Hezekiah was a gracious gift from God in the midst of some turbulent years. Many of the kings before him did well but tolerated a form of unsanctioned worship, but his father worshiped idols and led the people of Judah to do the same. Hezekiah, however, walked in remarkable obedience to the Lord, just as David had done. This involved destroying idols (v. 4). He did not simply provide lip-service and tell the people to stay away from idols. Rather, he removed them entirely, even destroying the bronze snake that Moses raised in the wilderness because the people worshiped it (Num. 21:9).

LEADER NOTE: At this point, God's people had preserved the bronze serpent from the wilderness for almost seven hundred years. No doubt it had served as a reminder of God's mercy to heal those who had been bitten by poisonous snakes because of their sin. But it had also become an object of false worship. Hezekiah rightly understood that even the good gifts given to us by God can lead us astray when we allow them to usurp the Lord's rightful place in our lives.

What idols do you need to remove from your own life so that you may walk with the Lord more faithfully?

Hezekiah eliminated idols in Judah because he trusted God alone (2 Kings 18:5). His reliance on the Lord was so remarkable that no other king of Judah could compare to Hezekiah. Relying on the Lord was a key factor missing from the evil kings—they relied on alliances with pagan nations and their worship of false gods. Hezekiah's trust in God led God to bless Judah during Hezekiah's reign, particularly through Hezekiah's faith-filled obedience.

Because of his faith in the Lord, Hezekiah faithfully kept the Lord's commands (v. 6). He knew the law of the Lord, and he was blessed to receive the prophet Isaiah's counsel when the Assyrians—who had just exiled the Northern Kingdom of Israel—threatened the people of Judah (18:13–19:37). He understood that the people of Israel were exiled because they turned away from the Lord. Hezekiah's faithfulness as king blessed the people of Judah and delayed their own exile to Babylon by several decades.

LEADER NOTE: Christians today can sometimes view the historical books in the Old Testament as boring, confusing, or even discouraging with the judgment God brought upon His people. Yet it is important to remember that all of God's Word is powerful, inspired, and instructive for the Christian life. We can receive encouragement to stand firm in a secular world by reading about God's faithfulness to Hezekiah, who received the commendation of being a king unlike any who had gone before or followed him.

Who has been a faithful, godly leader in your life, and how has their leadership blessed you and others?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

God's Word teaches us all we need to know and obey the Lord. Scripture compels us to stay faithful to God because God has always been faithful to us through His covenant, especially the new covenant through Jesus Christ. Jesus's death and resurrection is our salvation.

WORSHIPING GOD INCLUDES KNOWING HIS WORD THAT WE MAY FOLLOW IT (2 KINGS 22:1-2; 23:1-3).

Circle each time the word “all” is used in the passage.

1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. **2** He did what was right in the LORD’s sight and walked in all the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn to the right or the left.

.....
1 So the king sent messengers, and they gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. **2** Then the king went to the LORD’s temple with all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well as the priests and the prophets—all the people from the youngest to the oldest. He read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the LORD’s temple. **3** Next, the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant in the LORD’s presence to follow the LORD and to keep his commands, his decrees, and his statutes with all his heart and with all his soul in order to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book; all the people agreed to the covenant.

Hezekiah, a righteous king, was followed by his son, Manasseh, whose sins were abundant. Manasseh undid all the good of Hezekiah and even sacrificed his own son (21:1-16). The evil perpetrated during his rule was the tipping point that guaranteed God’s judgment against Judah (23:26-27). Manasseh did exhibit repentance under God’s punishment and made some significant reforms (2 Chron. 33:10-16), but when his son, Amon, became king, all of those reforms were undone once again in favor of idol worship. Amon’s assassination led to his son, Josiah, taking the throne at age 8 (2 Kings 21:19-24).

Josiah, like Hezekiah, was a faithful king of Judah. He repaired God’s temple, and while doing so, the priest Hilkiah found “the book of the law.” At the hearing of God’s Word, Josiah tore his clothes in repentance (22:3-11). He could have walked in the wicked ways of his father and grandfather, disobeying God’s Word or ignoring it altogether, but he took God’s Word seriously.

LEADER NOTE: Manasseh’s father was a godly king, but Manasseh did most everything he could in rebellion against the Lord. Josiah’s father was an evil king, yet he responded in humility and repentance to the law of God. Some believers come from generations of faithful Christ-followers; some are the first or only member of their family to trust Christ. We should cherish godly homes and embrace our responsibility to teach the faith to the next generation, but each person must repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ to be saved.

What is the relationship between the Word of God and our obedience to and worship of the Lord?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE: Since the Bible is the inspired Word from God, God's special revelation to humanity, the Bible is the ultimate standard of authority for the Christian. Because it is truthful in everything that it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.

When Josiah heard the words of the law, he understood immediately the judgment that rightly would come upon Judah because they had broken covenant with God (vv. 12-13). Moses had warned the Israelites of the curses that would befall the people of Israel when they turned away from the Lord (see Deut. 27-29).

Even though Josiah was walking righteously and not directly responsible for the sins of his ancestors, he still accepted the wrath of God as an appropriate punishment for the sins of his people. But once more, God showed His grace in response to a king's humility (2 Kings 22:14-20). So Josiah took the Word of God and shared it with all the people of Judah, resulting in a renewed covenant by the whole nation to turn from their sin and follow the Lord alone—a pattern we see perfected in the rule of the Messiah-King, Jesus, with His church.

LEADER NOTE: Typically, a covenant is an agreement between two parties to uphold certain terms. The Lord had already established the Mosaic covenant with Israel, which they had broken irrevocably. Here, Josiah led the people to renew their commitment to wholehearted obedience to the Lord and His Word. This would forestall God's judgment for a time, but the people and subsequent kings would reject the Lord and earn the wages of their sin—death.

What areas of your life require a renewed commitment to the covenant God has created with us in Jesus?

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: Before your group arrives, write the word “Worship” on a board. Challenge the group to call out some other words or phrases that carry the same meaning as “worship” in our culture today, and record these on the board. (Answers may include honor, adore, etc.) Ask: “As a society, what do people worship? How can we see outwardly what they worship inwardly?”

TRANSITION: In the Old Testament, the root meaning of the word translated “worship” means “to bow down.” In those days, often there was a literal bowing down to a person or thing deserving of honor. We don’t literally bow before sports figures, money, or self-aggrandizement, but we can watch a life bend itself toward those things.

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: After Solomon died, Israel became two nations: the Northern Kingdom (Israel, or Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). These two nations rarely got along, often fighting against one another. The Northern Kingdom had a succession of kings, but none of them followed the Lord. Unsurprisingly, without a godly leader, the nation moved further and further away from God. God’s gracious call for them to return to Him had been rejected enough that He sent the Assyrians to destroy and capture Samaria. Their root problem? They did not see God as Lord. The external proof? They worshiped idols. God’s first two commandments had been ignored, and the Israelites paid for their sin. Judah witnessed this judgment, but how would they respond to their own sin?

RECAP

SAY: As you studied this week’s passages, you saw the heart of worship from two kings of Judah: King Hezekiah and King Josiah.

ASK: What stood out to you from these kings as you studied this week? How you were encouraged, instructed, or convicted by the examples of Hezekiah and Josiah?

TRANSITION: This week’s passages didn’t include the word *worship*, but they illustrated it. Let’s dig into that.



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GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 92 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled “Worship: Inside and Out.” Recreate this table on a board in your room so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

| Worship: Inside and Out | |
|--|------------------|
| Reflect on the worship displayed by Hezekiah and Josiah in the passages below. | |
| INTERNAL WORSHIP | EXTERNAL WORSHIP |
| HEZEKIAH (2 KINGS 18:1-6) | |
| JOSIAH (2 KINGS 22:1-2; 23:1-3) | |

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Kings 18:1-6 aloud.

ANALYZE: As a group, slowly walk through verses 3-6, discussing the different ways Hezekiah lived a life of worship to the Lord. (You may want to re-read the verses one at a time in order to focus on them individually.) As volunteers offer answers, decide as a group whether these were external or internal forms of worship, and then add them to the chart on the board and in the PSG.

CONNECT: Hezekiah demonstrated the kind of leadership we all want in our churches, our groups, our families, and even ourselves: righteous living, a godly example in actions, and bold steps to eradicate sin. But we also see humility and faithfulness, which overflow from a heart for the Lord. Ask: “What is the relationship between external acts of worship and the internal heart of worship?”

READ: Invite a volunteer to read 2 Kings 22:1-2; 23:1-3 aloud.

ANALYZE: As a group, identify and record the internal and external evidences of Josiah's worship of the Lord. Note the impact that Josiah's life and leadership had on his people and their faith.

DEBRIEF

(PSG p. 92) Based on the examples of Hezekiah and Josiah, what should our internal and external worship of the Lord look like?

Who are some Hezekiahs and Josiahs in your own life? How has their faith impacted yours?

SUMMARIZE

Godly leadership isn't being a great speaker, having a charismatic personality, or holding a seminary degree. Rather, it is the overflow of a heart and mind yielded to the Lord and committed to worshipping Him in spirit and truth. The internal heart of worship from Hezekiah and Josiah overflowed in the worshipful actions of their lives and affected their nation. That should be how we all live. We should expect to see and encourage outward worship from ourselves and others, but we must acknowledge that God desires hearts and minds fixed on Him and lives shaped by that commitment. With true worship of the Lord that is external and flowing from what is internal, we can impact everyone around us with a true picture of our great God.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 93). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Obeying God's Word is a form of worship, and Josiah led Judah by sharing God's Word with them. When Josiah heard the law and learned God's wrath was impending, he responded appropriately with humility. His response may not look like worship to us, but any time we humble ourselves and mourn sin, we are acknowledging God's holiness.

How can the knowledge and study of God's Word inform your worship?



HEART: While we commonly think of idols as statues, real idolatry was in the hearts of the people of Judah. They often placed their own desires for sin above God's desire for our holiness. The correct response to conviction regarding idolatry is repentance and obedience to God. Both Hezekiah and Josiah led the people of Judah toward a humble response to God's holiness.

Of what sins do you need to repent, and how will you combat the idolatry present in your life and seek the Lord first?



HANDS: One amazing result of Hezekiah's and Josiah's acting according to God's will was the response of the people of Judah. Their leadership and willingness to follow the commands of God encouraged Judah to do the same. Glorifying God is the most important thing anyone can do, and many will be blessed when the people of God walk in obedience.

How can you model the beautiful gift of repentance and obedience to people in your life?

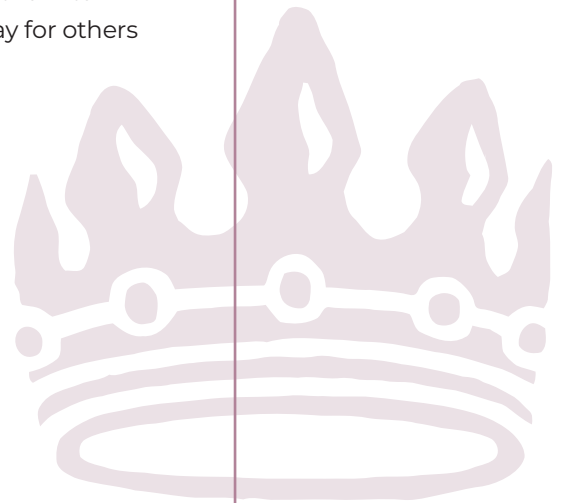
NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Read the account of Hezekiah's life in 2 Kings 18–20. Note Hezekiah's highs and lows, considering how your own faith may have done the same.
- Assess your level of commitment to praying, reading, and studying God's Word. How is your knowledge of God directly connected to your worship?
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal idols in your life, including people or things that inhabit the position God alone deserves in your life, and repent.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 93 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 19:7-11 with your group, asking the Lord to help you to consider the Lord's righteous rules are more desirable than gold and sweeter than honeycomb. Ask God to help you to delight in walking in the Lord's ways.

Notes