



Lesson 3: Kings of the Kingdom of Judah

Theme: Godly rulers influence people to live righteously.

Golden Text:

"And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, after the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." **2**

Kings 23:25 (KJV)

Study at a Glance: The 5 W's

KEY AREA	DETAILS AND SUMMARY
WHO (Author & Audience)	King Asa (Judah's reformer king who sought the LORD), King Manasseh (Judah's longest-reigning and most wicked king), King Josiah (Judah's greatest king who rediscovered God's Law), Azariah son of Oded (the prophet who encouraged Asa to seek the LORD), Hilkiah (the high priest who found the Book of the Law in the Temple), the people of Judah and Benjamin (who followed each king's lead), and over all of it, the LORD God of Judah , who rewards those who seek Him and judges those who forsake Him.
WHAT (Core Message)	The contrasting reigns of three kings of Judah: Asa , who removed idols and led the nation to seek the LORD; Manasseh , who rebuilt the idols and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; Josiah , who found God's forgotten Word and turned the nation back to the LORD. Shows how one godly leader's devotion can guide a nation toward righteousness, while one ungodly leader's rebellion can drag a nation to the brink of judgment.

WHEN (Timing)	Spanning roughly 911 B.C. (Asa's first acts as king) through about 609 B.C. (Josiah's death) over three centuries of southern kingdom history compressed into three portraits of kingship.
WHERE (Location)	The southern kingdom of Judah: Jerusalem (the Temple, where Asa renewed the covenant, Manasseh erected pagan altars, and Josiah rediscovered the Book of the Law); The cities of Judah (which Asa fortified and Josiah purged of idols); The valley of Zephathah at Mareshah (where Asa defeated the Ethiopian army).
WHY (Rationale)	Because the spiritual temperature of a nation rises and falls with the heart of its leader. Asa sought the LORD and the people followed him into covenant. Manasseh abandoned God for idols and dragged Judah into judgment. Josiah turned back to God's Word and the nation followed him in reform. Each king's personal devotion or rebellion became the public direction of the entire nation, a living lesson that godly rulers influence people to live righteously, and ungodly rulers influence people to sin.

Introduction

Imagine a great house with a single lamp burning in its center. When the lamp is lit, the whole house is filled with light every room, every hallway, every corner. People move freely, safely, confidently. They can see where they are going. But when the lamp goes out, the darkness is immediate and total. People stumble. They lose their way. They begin to grope along walls, and after a while, they stop trying to find the light, they learn to live in the dark.

The southern kingdom of Judah was that house. Its lamp was the worship of the LORD. When King Asa lit the lamp removing idols, commanding the nation to seek the LORD, renewing the covenant the whole house filled with light. The people followed. But when Manasseh became king, he did not merely dim the lamp; he put it out. He rebuilt every altar his father had torn down. He set up idols inside the very Temple of God. He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood from one end to the other. And for fifty-five years longer than any king before or after him the house sat in darkness, and a generation grew up that could not remember what the light looked like.

Then a boy king named Josiah came to the throne. He was eight years old. He had grown up in Manasseh's darkness. But somewhere in his teens, he began to seek the God of David. And in his

eighteenth year, during Temple repairs, the priests found the Book of the Law dusty, forgotten, buried under the debris of decades of neglect. They read it to Josiah, and he tore his clothes. The lamp had been found. He relit it, and the nation followed him back into the light.

This lesson follows the lamp from its lighting to its extinguishing to its rediscovery and asks the question that hangs over every generation: **who is tending the lamp, and is it burning in your own house?**

Key Terms Defined & The Word Search Technique

Before we open the text, let's learn a simple tool for studying any passage: a **"word search"** (word study). Here is the method in its simplest form, using the word **"seek"** in 2 Chronicles 14:4 as our example.

1. **Select the word.** Pick a word in the verse that seems important. Here: Asa *"commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers"* (2 Chr. 14:4). Why seek?
2. **Find the original word.** Use a concordance or Bible app to find the Hebrew (or Greek) word and its reference number. *"Seek"* = the Hebrew **darash** (Strong's H1875), meaning to seek, inquire, require, or seek with care.
3. **Read the immediate context.** What is happening here? Asa has just removed foreign altars, broken down pillars, and cut down the Asherim (vv. 3-5). He is not merely tearing down the old; he is commanding the people to actively pursue the LORD. The word *"seek"* is not passive; it is a deliberate, intentional pursuit. Asa is telling the nation: do not just stop sinning start seeking.
4. **Trace the word through Scripture.** See how God uses the same word elsewhere. **Darash** is the same word Moses used when he told Israel, *"If thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him"* (Deut. 4:29). It is the word David used when he wrote, *"Seek ye the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually"* (1 Chr. 16:11). It is the word the prophet Isaiah used: *"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near"* (Isa. 55:6). Throughout Scripture, seeking God is never a casual glance it is the whole-hearted, deliberate pursuit of a person who knows that life is found only in the LORD. Asa did not invent this command; he recovered it.
5. **Compare and apply.** Seeking God was always the cure for idolatry not just tearing down the false, but pursuing the true. Asa knew that a nation cannot merely stop worshipping idols; it must start worshipping God. What am I seeking? What have I been commanded to pursue that I have let grow cold? What would it look like for me and for the people I influence to *"seek the LORD God of our fathers"* with the same intentionality Asa commanded?

The Method: Select → Find the original → Read the context → Trace it through Scripture → Apply. We will use this tool in each section.

Transition into Section 1: Every lit lamp needs a hand to strike the match, and Judah's did not begin with Josiah. Long before the Book of the Law was found in the Temple, a king named Asa determined to remove the idols his fathers had tolerated and turn the nation back to the LORD. In Section 1 we see how

Asa's personal devotion became a national movement and how the seeking of one king lit the lamp for an entire generation.

SECTION 1: Asa — One of Judah's Good Kings

(2 Chr. 14:2–13; 15:1, 2, 7–13, 16)

- **Word Search for This Section:** "*seek*" (*darash*, H1875)

Discussion Questions

- **(Text/Exegesis)** 2 Chronicles 14:2-5 describes Asa's reforms: he removed foreign altars, broke down pillars, cut down the Asherim, and "commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment." Azariah the prophet then told Asa, "The LORD is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (15:2). How does this prophecy serve as both an encouragement and a warning? What did Asa do in response (15:8, 12-15)?
- **(Application)** Asa was so committed to seeking the LORD that he even removed his own grandmother Maachah from her position as queen mother because she had made an idol to Asherah (15:16). He did not let family loyalty override his obedience to God. Where does family loyalty come into tension with obedience to God? Have you ever had to choose between pleasing a family member and following God?

Transition to Section 2: Asa lit the lamp, and the nation followed him into the light. But lamps do not stay lit on their own. Generations later, a king would come to the throne who did not merely fail to tend the flame — he deliberately extinguished it. In Section 2 the spotlight moves to a king whose fifty-five-year reign became the Bible's definition of wickedness, and whose influence was so toxic that even the best king who followed him could not fully undo the damage.

SECTION 2: Manasseh — Judah's Worst King

(2 Kgs. 21:1–16; 23:26, 27)

- **Word Search for This Section:** "*provoke*" (*ka'as*, H3707)

Discussion Questions

- (Text/Exegesis) 2 Kings 21:2-9 catalogs Manasseh's sins: he rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed, erected altars to Baal, made an Asherah, worshipped the host of heaven, built altars to false gods inside the very courts of the LORD's Temple, made his son pass through fire, and practiced sorcery and divination. Verse 16 adds that "he shed innocent blood very much, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." How did Manasseh's sins go beyond personal failure to become national pollution? What does verse 9 mean when it says he made Judah "to err," and verse 11 that he "hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did"?
- 2 Kings 23:26-27 says the LORD "turned not from his fierce wrath" because of all that Manasseh had provoked Him with, and that He would ultimately "cast off this city Jerusalem." Manasseh reigned 55 years longer than any king of Judah and his influence was so deep that even Josiah's unparalleled reforms could not reverse God's decree of judgment. How does prolonged ungodly leadership create consequences that outlast the leader? What does this teach us about the weight of influence in a family, a church, a workplace, or a nation?

Transition to Section 3: Manasseh extinguished the lamp, and the house sat in darkness for two generations. But God had not forgotten the lamp. In Section 3 He raises up a boy-king who grew up in Manasseh's darkness, found the forgotten Word of God buried in the rubble of a neglected Temple, and turned the nation back to the LORD — proving that even the longest night can end when someone is willing to relight the lamp.

SECTION 3: Josiah — Judah's Best King

(2 Chr. 34:1–8, 29–33; 2 Kgs. 23:24, 25)

- **Word Search for This Section:** "*turn*" (*shuv*, H7725)

Discussion Questions

1. **(Text/Exegesis)** 2 Chronicles 34 describes Josiah's spiritual journey: in his eighth year as king (age 16), he "began to seek the God of David" (v. 3); in his twelfth year, he began purging Judah and Jerusalem of idols (vv. 3-7); and in his eighteenth year, the book of the covenant was found in the house of the LORD. Josiah read it to all the people and led the nation in renewing the covenant (vv. 29-32). How did Josiah's personal awakening become a national reform? What role did the rediscovery of God's Word play in that transformation?
2. **(Application)** 2 Kings 23:25 says, "Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might." Yet even Josiah's unparalleled

devotion could not turn away God's wrath from Judah 2 Kings 23:26 says "notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath... because of all the provocations wherewith Manasseh had provoked him." What does it mean to serve God wholeheartedly even when the outcome may not change? How can faithful obedience matter even when the damage seems irreversible?

Closing: Bringing It All Together

The southern kingdom of Judah did not fall in a day. It rose and fell and rose again one king at a time, each one setting the spiritual temperature for an entire nation.

- **Asa lit the lamp.** He removed the idols his fathers had tolerated and "commanded Judah to **"seek"** (*darash*) the LORD. His personal devotion became a national covenant, and the people "sought him with their whole desire" (2 Chr. 15:15).
- **Manasseh extinguished the lamp.** He rebuilt every altar his father had torn down and **"provoked"** (*ka'as*) the LORD with fifty-five years of idolatry, sorcery, and innocent blood, a reign so toxic that even the best king who followed him could not reverse the decree of judgment.
- **Josiah relit the lamp.** He **"turned"** (*shuv*) to the LORD with all his heart and all his soul and all his might, rediscovered God's forgotten Word, and led the nation back into the covenant.

The whole story is captured in three words: **a king who sought, a king who provoked, and a king who turned** — and a God who, through it all, showed that the heart of a leader becomes the direction of a people.

One Word to take home: turn. Not a one-time event but a way of life. Asa sought the LORD, and the nation followed. Manasseh provoked the LORD, and the nation followed. Josiah turned to the LORD, and the nation followed. The lesson is clear: whoever you influence your family, your students, your congregation, your coworkers will follow the direction you set. Seek the LORD. Do not provoke Him. And if you have drifted, if the lamp has gone dim, if the Word has been buried under the debris of neglect **turn**. Turn with all your heart and all your soul and all your might. It may not reverse every consequence. It may not undo every damage. But it will light the lamp for the generation that comes after you and that is enough.

The God who said, *"If ye seek him, he will be found of you,"* is still the God who rewards those who turn.