

August 2

2 Kings 22-32 and 2 Chronicles 34

2 Kings 22 introduces us to one of the greatest kings that Judah ever had. Coming very near the end of Judah's existence as a nation, Josiah came to the throne. He is the key figure in our reading today, and he is characterized beautifully by verse 25 of chapter 23. "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did - with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength." That is an incredible testimony. How would you like that written as an epitaph on your tombstone or as a commentary on your life?

This is the very reason that I named my son Josiah. This passage just makes me cheer!

We pick up our reading today with Josiah in the 18th year of his reign which would put him at 26 years old. At this time he began the religious reforms that were to rid the land of idolatrous practices so prevalent in the time of the evil King Manasseh. Part of the reforms included the work of cleaning and repairing the temple of God. The hired help was paid through the money that was given to the temple. It was actually during the act of bringing out the money of the temple that an incredible discovery was made! The Book of the Law was found!

Remember, "books" as we know them did not exist in the times of the Old Testament kings and prophets. The words of scripture were written on scrolls. Duplicate scrolls, which would have to be painstaking copied by hand on very expensive materials, would be very rare indeed, making the value of the originals nearly incalculable. Since the vast majority of the people were unable to read and write anyway, the motivation to produce costly and labor intensive copies was not very high. The precious "books" then were rolled up and stored, often inside pottery containers, in the safest place anyone could think of, with the individuals who could actually read them -- in the temple, with the priests. During the awful reign of Manasseh, the evil, those scrolls went unused and one of them, at least, was lost. And for many years, no one missed it -- not even the priests. This is just the beginning of seeing how bad things had gotten in Jerusalem with reference to the worship of the Lord. How could you lose the Book of the Law? Now you need to know that there is some debate as to whether what the priests discovered was the whole Torah that is all five books of the Pentateuch -- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy or just the Book of Deuteronomy or even a significant portion of Deuteronomy. It seems incredible to me that it could be the whole Torah but with everything else we are told in this chapter along with what we read about the reign of Manasseh, I suppose that it is a very real possibility.

Besides losing the Book of the Law, did you catch some of the corruption that Josiah had to address? There were articles dedicated to the worship of Baal,

Asherah (the fertility goddess) and the starry host, and astrological and demonic forces in the temple...not just in Judah and not just in Jerusalem...but, IN THE TEMPLE! Male shrine prostitutes are in the temple as well (and if there were male prostitutes, you can bet there were female prostitutes as well). If that wasn't enough, there were shrines dedicated to child sacrifice, to sun worship, mediums and spiritists...no wonder no one knew where the Book of God's law was. What is even more incredible is that apparently not only was the Book lost, but at least some of its contents had been completely forgotten for Josiah was astonished when he heard its contents read to him. One wonders what Hilkiah, the chief priest, knew and did before that scroll was rediscovered!

One small historical note on this. Did you notice that the child sacrifice happened in a valley called Ben Hinnom? Well, later, Jesus would warn people of a place called Gehenna - where there was fire and pain and evil. We translate that word "Hell" in the New Testament. But the picture of Gehenna goes back to this practice of child sacrifice by fire in the valley of Ben Hinnom.

Along with sweeping out evil practices and objects of worship, Josiah reinstated the Passover!! The crazy thing is that it had been nearly 300 years - since Samuel - that the Passover had been celebrated. Whoa!

However, when he determined to put that right, Josiah organized a feast the likes of which had not been seen since the days of Samuel the judge. That's quite a statement because I rather suspect that both David and Solomon (from what we know of them) would have put at least a little energy into doing this feast with gusto!! Josiah provided, according to the Chronicles passage, 30,000 sheep and goats, and 3,000 cattle of his own and the officials, priests and people brought many more!!

We have seen today that King Josiah, the righteous, with his rediscovery of and recommitment to the law of God was a very bright star in an increasingly dark sky. God's sentence of judgment upon Judah had already been pronounced and would not be turned aside, but because of Josiah's righteousness though the storm clouds were gathering on the horizon, there was a brief period of peace and blessing.

This is great stuff. Josiah turning back to God. So, my challenge today is to imagine that Josiah marched into your life with the same passion. Are there any idols that need banishing? Are there any wrongs that need righted? Any Passovers to be celebrated? Well, be like Josiah and do it!

This could be the end, but if you are still with me, I have one more interesting comment...

Did you notice that when the scroll was discovered, advice was sought from Huldah the prophetess? We have already met Anna -- a New Testament holy woman, and Deborah, an Old Testament judge, now we meet Huldah the prophetess. Now what is really interesting here is that there was no lack of male prophets abroad. Jeremiah was working and so was Habakkuk and there were others too but it is to Huldah, a woman that the priests and scribes go for advice. I am not interested in making a big deal over this but it does put to flight one often heard "explanation" for why God used women in biblical times. I have often heard it said that God used Deborah only because there were no men willing and available to come forward and be used. Well I suppose that may have been true in Deborah's day -- Barak was not exactly an enthusiastic volunteer, but it was clearly not the case in the days of King Josiah -- Jeremiah was there but Huldah was used. I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions but it does show that God is not adverse to gifting and using women in some very significant ministries!