

2 Kings 22: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 09 November 2020

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[0 : 0 0] 2 Kings chapter 22 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Judidah the daughter of Adiah of Bozkath, and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

In the eighteenth year of King Josiah the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah, son of Meshulam, the secretary, to the house of the Lord, saying, Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people.

And let it be given into the hand of the workmen, who have the oversight of the house of the Lord, and let them give it to the workmen who are at the house of the Lord, repairing the house, that is, to the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons.

And let them use it for buying timber, and quarried stone to repair the house. But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly.

And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the Lord.

[1 : 2 3] Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, Hilkiah the priest has given me a book, and Shaphan read it before the king. When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes, and the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahicham the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Esaiiah the king's servant, saying, Go inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.

So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahicham, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Esaiiah, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shalom, the son of Tikva, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe.

Now she lived in Jerusalem in the second quarter. And they talked with her. And she said to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Tell the man who sent you to me, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place, and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read, because they have forsaken me, and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands.

Therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus you shall say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Regarding the words that you have heard, because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord.

Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place. And they brought back word to the king.

[3 : 21] In 2 Kings chapter 22, Judah is on the brink. After over fifty years of Manasseh's reign, and the wickedness that had flourished within it, we might think that the threat of judgment that the Lord had declared concerning Jerusalem and Judah would soon come upon them.

The prophetic judgment hangs like a sword of Damocles over the sinful nation and city. At any time, the thread of grace by which it hangs might be cut, and destruction and exile befall the people.

Yet in the very twilight of the kingdom, Judah is granted a brief reprieve. Under the reign of Josiah, the nation undergoes a spiritual reformation, and their judgment is postponed. Chapter 22 and 23 recount Josiah's reign, where there is a temporary reversal of Judah's trajectory.

These should be read as a unit. Josiah is the son of Ammon, the wicked son of the wicked Manasseh, who only reigned for two years and was killed by a conspiracy. Josiah does not have promising parentage, but he proves to be a very faithful king.

He walks in the ways not of Ammon and Manasseh, but of David. Josiah begins his reign in his youth at the age of only eight, and presumably he was thrown into his reign relatively unprepared, his father being assassinated before he could enjoy a full education as the crown prince.

[4 : 38] As a boy king who ends up seeking to restore the temple, Josiah should naturally remind us of Joash. Peter Lighthouse observes the way that this sets up a broader parallel sequence in the book of 2 Kings, running from chapter 11 to the end of the book.

The structure as he sees it is as follows. First, Athaliah, daughter of Ahab, kills the royal seed in chapter 11 verse 1. Then there's Joash's reign in chapters 11 to 12.

Then there's a quick sequence of kings of Israel and Judah in chapters 13 to 16. In chapter 17, there's the fall of Samaria. And the first iteration of the sequence concludes with the revival of Judah under Hezekiah in chapters 18 to 20.

The second sequence begins with Manasseh as a king like Ahab promoting idolatry and killing the innocent in chapter 21. In chapters 22 and 23, Josiah reigns.

In chapter 24, there is a quick succession of kings of Judah. And in chapter 25, the fall of Jerusalem. And finally, the concluding element of the sequence is the elevation of Jehoiakim in chapter 25 verses 27 to 30.

[5 : 47] Josiah reigns from 640 to 609 BC. In the 18th year of his reign, at around the age of 26, Josiah determines to repair the temple.

This wasn't the first reforming action that Josiah engaged in. 2 Chronicles tells us that he was seeking the Lord from his youth and that he had already started a widespread purge of idolatry from the land in his 12th year.

2 Chronicles chapter 34 verses 3 to 7 read,

The text's description of Josiah's reforms invite a parallel between him and Joash back in chapter 12, who also repaired the temple some years into his reign. As Lyssa Rae Beale notes, the parallels also reveal contrasts between Joash and Josiah.

Josiah is far more directly overseeing the repairing of the temple than Joash. However, despite Joash's extensive purge of idolatry from the land and his repairs of the temple, these primarily set the scene for a far greater event, which is the discovery of the book of the law in the temple.

[7 : 50] When the book of the law is discovered, the repairs of the temple move to the background. The book of the law is given to Shaphan the secretary by Hilkiah the high priest and is then read to Josiah by Shaphan.

The book of the law was likely the book of Deuteronomy, the second giving of the law, as Israel was on the brink of entering into the promised land. Besides the Ten Commandments, it contained extensive material, exhorting Israel to remember the lessons of the exodus in the wilderness as they prepared to possess the land.

The book concludes with blessings and curses and witnesses called against the people. Hearing the book, Josiah is devastated by its message. He tears his clothes and he weeps in response.

It is clear that neither the people nor their rulers had obeyed the book of the law and as a result they had called down the judgment of the Lord upon them. Indeed, both the people and their king were supposed to be familiar with the book of the law.

In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 18 to 20, the king is instructed, And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests.

[8 : 56] And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

In Deuteronomy chapter 31 verses 9 to 13, we see that the people are supposed to be made aware of the contents of the book of the law, reminded of them as an entire congregation every seven years, besides the teaching that they would receive on a regular basis from the priests and the Levites in their cities and towns.

Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the feast of booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God, at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

Once he hears the contents of the book of the law, Josiah realises just how serious the sin of Judah is, and their desperate need to seek the mercy of the Lord.

It's clear that the Lord is angry with Israel, but perhaps there is some chance that the Lord will spare them if they turn to him. Josiah assembled a delegation of his highest officers, Hilkiah the high priest, Shaphan the secretary, and Ahicham his son, Akbor and Asaiah, and he sends them to a prophetess called Huldah, who lived in Jerusalem.

[10 : 53] A number of people in the delegation are mentioned favourably in the book of Jeremiah. There were several prophets who were active during the reign of Josiah. Whether or not they were as accessible as Huldah was, Huldah was the one to whom Josiah turned.

She obviously had a high reputation as a prophetess. There are not many examples of prophetesses in scripture, and they are especially rare within the Old Testament. Relatively speaking, women engage in more prophetic discourse in the New Testament.

Miriam, Deborah, Isaiah's wife, and Huldah are all described as prophetesses in scripture. As we see in the Lord's response to Miriam and Aaron in Numbers chapter 12, prophetic revelation and authority could vary from prophet to prophet.

[12 : 06] Others prophesied on just a few occasions. Some developed movements of disciples around them, while others did not. Some were leaders, while others were only consulted by leaders. Some had far more powerful and revelatory visions, while others, like Moses, had more direct conversation with the Lord.

She declares the Lord's judgment first upon the nation of Judah. They have forsaken the Lord and served other gods, so all of the words of the judgment of the book of the law would come upon them. There is, however, a more positive message for Josiah.

Similarities to the repentance of Ahab can be drawn here as well, but now the fate of the entire nation hangs in the balance, not just that of a particular dynasty. The concluding promise of the Lord to Josiah here is rather surprising considering the death that Josiah dies.

What would have been some of the key teachings of the book of the law that would have caused Josiah to tear his clothes and to weep?