



Second Kings - Chapter Twenty Two

Summary of Chapter Twenty Two

Josiah was still a child when he ascended to the throne following more than fifty years of apostate rule by his father Amon and his grandfather Manasseh. Yet he was determined to be a godly king and so, as a young adult, he gave instructions for the temple to be repaired. During this process the book of the law was discovered and when it was read to the king he realised just how far away from God his ancestors had brought the nation. He instructed his priest and other ministers to inquire of the Lord through the prophetess Huldah. The word of the Lord came back saying that God would indeed bring judgement upon the nation as the book of the law said he would but because Josiah had been humble and penitent, it would not occur during his lifetime.

XI 2 Kings 22:1-23:30 - Josiah

Josiah is a long-awaited king and he achieved many significant deeds, but he comes too late to make any difference to Judah's ultimate fate. Early in his reign King Josiah of Judah launched a massive effort to abolish pagan worship throughout Judah and the land of Israel, and to refurbish the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. At the same time, the waning power of the Assyrians allowed him to add much of the land of Israel to his kingdom. Josiah met his demise at Megiddo, however, as he sought to prevent Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt from reaching Carchemish to assist the Assyrians, who were being attacked by forces from the rising Babylonian Empire.

XI.a 2 Kings 22:1-2 - Josiah Reigns over Judah

This brief introduction shows that there were finally good times ahead for Judah, although they would only last for a single generation.

¹ Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah

daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. ² He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

2 Kings 22:1-2

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign. Because of the assassination of his father Amon it was necessary for this young child to be proclaimed as king. Although no details are given, he would clearly have had guardians advising him and either helping with or making the important decisions of state on his behalf while he was being taught how to be king for himself.

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord. This was probably true of Josiah at this young age; but it is really more intended as a general description of his entire reign rather than a description of him at eight years of age.

Josiah is the ideal king of Deuteronomy 17:20, who does not turn from the Mosaic Law to the right or to the left. He transcends even David and Hezekiah in his faithfulness to God; refer to 2 Kings 23:21-25.

XI.b 2 Kings 22:3-20 - Hilkiyah Finds the Book of the Law

Josiah instructed his officials to give the income of the temple over to tradesmen so that they could repair and refurbish the temple. During this time the Book of the Law was found and read to the king. On realising just how far the nation had fallen away from the Lord, Josiah humbled himself and tore his clothes. After seeking the word of the Lord through the prophetess Huldah, he learned that the fate of the nation was sealed because of the apostasy of his ancestors, but because of his own humility it would not occur during his lifetime.

³ In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the Lord, saying, ⁴ ‘Go up to the high priest Hilkiyah, and have him count the entire sum of the money that has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people; ⁵ let it be given into the hand of the workers who have the oversight of the house of the Lord; let them give it to the workers who are at the house of the Lord, repairing the house, ⁶ that is, to the carpenters, to the builders, to the masons; and let them use it to buy timber and quarried stone to repair the house. ⁷ But no account shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly.’

2 Kings 22:3-7

In the eighteenth year of King Josiah. According to 2 Chronicles Chapter 34, this repair of the temple was preceded by a definite commitment to God when Josiah was aged 16, then some four years later an iconoclastic purge attacking idolatry in Judah. The Chronicler in 2 Chronicles Chapters 34-35 appears to present a two stage sequence of events:

1. The purification of religious practices in Judah, Jerusalem and Naphtali in Josiah's twelfth year.
2. A continuing reformation stimulated by the discovery of the Book of the Law in the eighteenth year.

However, this may be a presentation to fit in with the Chronicler's particular emphases.

It is possible that Josiah was motivated to rebuild the temple after hearing or remembering that this was what King Jehoshaphat/Joash had achieved many years before; refer to 2 Kings Chapter 12.

The king sent Shaphan. Josiah's initial concern is simply to repair the temple, like Joash in 2 Kings 12:1-16, not to reform its worship. In fact, the reforms introduced by Joash some 200 years previously were still in place: it was still the task of the doorkeepers to collect the money for temple repairs, and it was the task of the secretary to oversee, with the high priest, the counting and distribution of the money to the men in charge of the work.

Go up to the high priest Hilkiah. According to Jeremiah 1:1-2 the prophet Jeremiah was the son of this particular priest Hilkiah. Jeremiah began his ministry during the reign of King Josiah. Ezra is recorded as the great grandson of Hilkiah: *<<After this, in the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah>>* (Ezra 7:1).

Let them give it to the workers who are at the house of the Lord, repairing the house. Josiah understood that the work of repair and rebuilding the temple needed organisation and funding. He paid attention to both of these needs when he commanded Hilkiah to begin the work on the temple.

⁸ The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, 'I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.' When Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it. ⁹ Then 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 workers who have oversight of the house of the Lord.'

¹⁰ Shaphan the secretary informed the king, 'The priest Hilkiah has given me a book.' Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

2 Kings 22:8-10

I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. The phrase the book of the law is used in the Pentateuch only in reference to Deuteronomy, e.g. Deuteronomy 28:61 and 29:21, which was read to the king and provided the basis for his actions. Available to the kings of Israel and Judah in previous years according to 1 Kings 2:3, and 2 Kings 10:31, 14:6 and 18:6, it was evidently lost or concealed during the long reign of the apostate Manasseh, who systematically infringed its laws. According to Deuteronomy 31:24-27, there was to be a copy of this book of the law beside the Ark of the Covenant, beginning in the days of Moses, and it may have been this copy which was found by the high priest. The Word of God was with Israel, but it was greatly neglected in those days. As Paul notes, this would place the people under the curse of God: <<*For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law'*>> (Galatians 3:10).

This neglect could only happen because Judah was in prolonged disobedience towards God and his commandments, which stated that:

- Each king was to have a personal copy of the law, and he was to read it according to Deuteronomy 17:18-20.
- In accordance with Deuteronomy 31:9-13, the entire law was to be read to an assembly of the nation once every seven years at the Festival of Tabernacles to keep the law before the people.
- The Levites, scattered among the country, also had the implied responsibility to teach the law to the people of Israel.

The first record of a public reading of the law is in Joshua 8:30. The next is during the reign of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 17:7, more than 500 years later. Then, in the reign of Josiah there was another public reading of the law in 2 Chronicles 34:30, more than 250 years after Jehoshaphat. Of course, there might have been public readings of the law as commanded, but which are not recorded; however, the fact that some are recorded probably means they were unusual, not typical.

When Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it. It seems remarkable that this was even worthy of mention - that the high priest found the Word of God and a scribe read it. Yet the Word of God was not neglected in those days that this was worthy of mention. Is it possible that the high priest was in office without having read the law?

Shaphan then read it aloud to the king. Here the Word of God spreads. It had been forgotten and regarded as nothing more than an old, dusty book. Now it was found, read, and spread. The reader perhaps should expect some measure of spiritual revival and renewal to follow.

Throughout the history of the God's people, when the Word of God is recovered and spread, then spiritual revival follows. It can begin as simply as it did in the days of Josiah, with one man finding, reading, and believing the Book, and then spreading the message of hope that it provides for all.

¹¹ When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. ¹² Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah, saying, ¹³ 'Go, inquire of the Lord for me, 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 ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.'

2 Kings 22:11-13

When the king heard the words of the book of the law. The hearing of God's word performed a spiritual work in King Josiah. It was not merely the transmission of information; the hearing of God's word had an impact of spiritual power on Josiah. Although it is not until the eighteenth year of his reign (v.3) that the new king begins to take action concerning the apostate condition of worship in Judah, the authors of 1-2 Kings do not blame him. Brought up in a royal court that had been apostate for 57 years and that subjected all opposition to a reign of terror, Josiah was not aware of the Lord's demands. As soon as he became aware, he tore his clothes in grief and despair and sent officials to inquire of the Lord.

He tore his clothes. The tearing of clothing was a traditional expression of horror and astonishment. In the strongest way possible, Josiah demonstrated his grief on his own account and on account of the entire nation. This was an expression of deep conviction of sin, and a very good thing. This conviction of sin is the special work of the Holy Spirit, even as Jesus himself once said: <<***And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement***>> (John 16:8).

For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us. Josiah knew that the kingdom of Judah deserved judgement from God. He could not hear the Word of God and respond to the Spirit of God without seriously confronting the sin of his kingdom and, indeed, his own personal sin as a human being. After all, the words that he had just read were quite clear: <<***The next generation, your children***>>

who rise up after you, as well as the foreigner who comes from a distant country, will see the devastation of that land and the afflictions with which the Lord has afflicted it – all its soil burned out by sulphur and salt, nothing planted, nothing sprouting, unable to support any vegetation, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord destroyed in his fierce anger – they and indeed all the nations will wonder, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land? What caused this great display of anger?’ They will conclude, ‘It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. They turned and served other gods, worshipping them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them; so the anger of the Lord was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in this book. The Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is now the case’>> (Deuteronomy 29:22-28). The words of the prophets that had so recently served the land would have confirmed this coming judgement: <<Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them; the mountains quaked, and their corpses were like refuse in the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still>> (Isaiah 5:25), and: <<Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked. So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem>> (Amos 2:4-5). Later, it would be accepted as the just reason why the people found themselves in Babylon: <<All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you>> (Daniel 9:11).

¹⁴ So the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; she resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter, where they consulted her. ¹⁵ She declared to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶ Thus says the Lord, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants – all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷ Because they have abandoned me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked 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.

2 Kings 22:14-17

The prophetess Huldah. Interestingly, it was not Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:2) or Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1:1) who were consulted, but an obscure prophetess who was the wife of a court official or perhaps of one of the temple personnel, for it is not clear whether Shallum was in charge of the wardrobe of the king or of the priests. Huldah lived in the Second Quarter of Jerusalem, probably a residential area on the western hill. With the apparent approval of King Josiah, Hilkiah the priest consulted this woman for spiritual guidance. It was not because of her own wisdom and spirituality, but that she was recognised as a prophetess and could reveal the heart and mind of God. Her words confirm what is already known from the unnamed prophets of 2 Kings Chapter 21: the Lord is going to bring disaster on Jerusalem and its people.

Huldah was not the only female prophet in the OT: <<*Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing*>> (Exodus 15:20), <<*At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel*>> (Judges 4:4), <<*And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz*>> (Isaiah 8:3), which was a reference to his own wife, and: <<*Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid*>> (Nehemiah 6:14).

I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants. Josiah knew that Judah deserved judgement, and that judgement would indeed come. Judah and its leaders had walked against the Lord for too long, and would not genuinely repent so as to avoid eventual judgement.

All the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. God's word was true, even in its promises of judgement. God's faithfulness is demonstrated as much by his judgement upon the wicked as it is by his mercy upon the repentant.

Therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. Genuine repentance by individuals always leads to God's mercy and their salvation. However, the nation had gone beyond the point where yet another chance would not achieve the right outcome. Only by bringing righteous judgement upon his people by sending them away into exile would the Lord see any real response by the remnant that would eventually return to the land.

¹⁸ But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, ¹⁹ 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 because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the Lord.²⁰ Therefore, I will gather you to your ancestors, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place.’ They took the message back to the king.

2 Kings 22:18-20

Because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord. Josiah’s heart was open in two ways. First, it was open to the Word of God and was able to receive the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. Second, it was open to the message of judgement from Huldah in the previous verses. In essence, Josiah had the characteristics that God wanted from his people: *<<He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?>>* (Micah 6:8).

You shall be gathered to your grave in peace. Because Josiah had humbled himself before the Lord, he will not personally see all the disaster that is to fall on Jerusalem. He will die before the terrible events prophesied in 2 Kings 21:12-14 and vv.15-17 above come to pass. It should not be missed here that although Josiah would die prematurely and unnecessarily in battle, the Lord still considers that he died in peace. That is because he died while in a right relationship with God and has nothing to do with what was happening to him at that point in his earthly life.

Your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place. This was God’s mercy to Josiah. His own godliness and open heart could not stop the eventual judgement of God, but it could delay it. Inevitable judgement is sometimes delayed because of the open hearts of the people of God. God delayed judgement even in the case of Ahab, who responded to a word of warning with a kind of repentance: *<<(Indeed, there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord, urged on by his wife Jezebel. He acted most abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord drove out before the Israelites.) When Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth over his bare flesh; he fasted, lay in the sackcloth, and went about dejectedly. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: ‘Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster on his house’>>* (1 Kings 21:25-29).