



God Moves

God's Spirit moves with power when His people obey His Word.

2 KINGS 22:8-20

The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered by Bedouin shepherds in the late 1940s. They found what became recognized as the oldest copies of parts of the Old Testament. Other writings were also found that shed light on life during the times of Jesus. These scrolls continue to be studied and reviewed, giving renewed interest in examining the truths found on those manuscripts.

Why does the discovery of an ancient document rekindle interest in the circumstances surrounding that document?

Image: The Dead Sea Scrolls; Jerusalem, Israel

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

2 KINGS 22:1–25:30 (2 CHRON. 34:1–36:23)

King Josiah of Judah initiated significant spiritual reform early in his reign (2 Kings 22:1-2; 2 Chron. 34:1-7). He commissioned repair work on the temple (2 Kings 22:3-7). During the temple repairs, Hilkiah the high priest found the book of the law in the temple (22:8). Josiah heard the words of the scroll, tore his clothes, and asked Hilkiah to inquire of the Lord on behalf of God's people (22:9-13). Huldah, a prophetess in Jerusalem, told Josiah God's judgment was coming on Judah for the people's persistent sin; yet, God would not bring Jerusalem down in Josiah's day (22:14-20).

Josiah made a covenant with the elders of Jerusalem and Judah to follow the Lord (23:1-3). He also commanded Hilkiah to cleanse the temple of all remnants of Baal worship from the days of earlier kings (23:4-6). He also re-instituted the Passover celebration at a level the people had not experienced since the days of the judges (23:21-23; 2 Chron. 35:1-19).

Tragically, Josiah died in battle with Neco, king of Egypt (2 Kings 23:26-30). His son, Jehoahaz, succeeded him, but reigned only three months before Neco deposed him and deported him to Egypt (23:31-33). Neco appointed Jehoiakim, another of Josiah's sons, king over Judah, but Jehoiakim did evil in God's sight (23:34-37). During his reign, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Judah, but Jehoiakim died before the battle ended (24:1-7). Jehoiachin his son became king at age eighteen, but surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar after reigning only three months (24:8-15).

Zedekiah, a third son of Josiah, became king over Judah but also committed evil (24:17-20). In response to Zedekiah's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah a third time, and the city fell (25:1-4). The Babylonian army overtook the fleeing Zedekiah, slaughtered his sons, blinded him, and led him in chains into exile (25:5-7). A month later, Nebuchadnezzar's officials came to Jerusalem, burned the temple and palace, and broke down Jerusalem's walls (25:8-10). The Babylonians also took with them anything of value from the Lord's temple (25:13-17). Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as Judah's governor, but Gedaliah was assassinated after only two months (25:22-26).

When Evil-merodach succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as Babylon's king, he released Jehoiachin from prison and allowed him to eat at

the king's table the rest of his life (25:27-30). Many exiles probably saw in this act a glimmer of hope for Judah's future.

As you read 2 Kings 22:8-20 in your Bible, highlight words that point to Josiah's character. What role did Josiah's character play in his response to the found scroll?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

DISCOVERED (2 KINGS 22:8-10)

⁸ The high priest Hilkiyah told the court secretary Shaphan, "I have found the book of the law in the LORD's temple," and he gave the book to Shaphan, who read it. ⁹ Then the court secretary Shaphan went to the king and reported, "Your servants have emptied out the silver that was found in the temple and have given it to those doing the work — those who oversee the LORD's temple." ¹⁰ Then the court secretary Shaphan told the king, "The priest Hilkiyah has given me a book," and Shaphan read it in the presence of the king.

VERSES 8-10

Part of Josiah's reforms included restoring and repairing the temple, which his predecessors had damaged (2 Chron. 34:11). To hire carpenters, builders, and stonemasons indicated the damage was extensive. At this point the temple was over 300 years old.

During the temple repairs, *the high priest Hilkiyah . . . found the book of the law*. To be *found* indicates the book had been ignored and forgotten for years. Scholars have long debated exactly what Hilkiyah found. The *law* typically referred to the first five books of the Old Testament, known collectively as the Pentateuch or the Torah. Hilkiyah had found at least one or more scrolls of the Pentateuch. The reforms Josiah subsequently implemented indicate he found at least the book of Deuteronomy.

Shaphan was a *court secretary*; he served as both a scribe and a treasurer. To emphasize the importance of his role, his title is repeated throughout the story (see vv. 3,8,9,10,12). After receiving

the book from the high priest, Shaphan read it. Taking the scroll with him, Shaphan went to see King Josiah. He explained that the high priest had given him the scroll, which he then began to read to Josiah. As Josiah heard the Law, how would he respond?

Why is it so important for people to read God's Word?

Why might someone ignore God's Word?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

The Scriptures reveal the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.

[See Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 2 Peter 1:19-21.]

RESPONSE [2 KINGS 22:11-13]

¹¹ When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. ¹² Then he commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, the court secretary Shaphan, and the king's servant Asaiah, ¹³ "Go and inquire of the LORD for me, for the people, and for all Judah about the words in this book that has been found. For great is the LORD's wrath that is kindled against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words of this book in order to do everything written about us."

VERSE 11

When King Josiah heard the words Shaphan read to him, he *tore his clothes*—an expression of grief. His reaction suggests this was the first time he had heard these words. This was despite the fact the Lord had commanded that once every seven years at the Jewish Feast of Booths the priests were to read aloud the words of the Law to all of Israel (Deut. 31:9-13). The more Shaphan read, the more Josiah realized how God's people had not lived up to the covenant.

Shaphan's every word served only to highlight further the people's neglect of and disobedience to God's Word.

How does God use the Bible to move people to obedient action?

VERSES 12-13

In response, Josiah pulled together a delegation of five well-respected men. By naming each of the five men, the text highlights the fact this was a formal delegation that had been assigned a serious task. King Josiah instructed the delegation to go personally and directly before the Lord and to inquire about His anger against His people. Josiah's concern was for himself, *the people*, and *all Judah*. He was certain God's anger had been *kindled* because of the people's defiance. As it does in English, the Hebrew word for *kindled* carries the idea of being set on fire. Thus, God's wrath was burning because of the people's disobedience.

Josiah made no excuses. Neither did he try to explain away generations of disobedience. He simply summarized with a few words that this disobedience had begun with their *ancestors* and that since that day, none of *us*, God's people, had done what the book had instructed.

Josiah's concern that God's people had not obeyed *the words in this book* pointed back to the warnings David gave Solomon. David had warned Solomon to obey what was written in the law of Moses in order to have success (1 Kings 2:1-4). Additionally, God had warned Solomon that if he or his sons turned away from Him and served and worshiped other gods, He would cut off Israel from the land He had given them (1 Kings 9:1-9). Neither the leaders nor the people had heeded either warning, and the result of their disobedience was coming to pass.

What qualities might be needed for a person to carry out a task like the one assigned by Josiah? Why is it important to choose the right people for important tasks?

BIBLE SKILL: Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.

Read slowly and reflectively (2 Kings 22:11-18). Consider how Isaiah may have felt knowing he was responsible for those he led to guide them in the ways of God. Who are the people in your flock or circle of influence? How can the Word of God help you lead them more effectively?

PROVEN (2 KINGS 22:14-20)

¹⁴ So the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem in the Second District. They spoke with her. ¹⁵ She said to them, “This is what the LORD God of Israel says: Say to the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶ ‘This is what the LORD says: I am about to bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants, fulfilling all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read, ¹⁷ because they have abandoned me and burned incense to other gods in order to anger me with all the work of their hands. My wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.’ ¹⁸ Say this to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD: ‘This is what the LORD God of Israel says: As for the words that you heard, ¹⁹ because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I myself have heard’ — this is the LORD’s declaration. ²⁰ ‘Therefore, I will indeed gather you to your ancestors, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster that I am bringing on this place.’” Then they reported to the king.

VERSE 14

Having been assigned to get a word from God, the five-man delegation went to see the prophetess **Huldah**. She is one of five prophetesses named in Scripture. The others are Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and Anna (Luke 2:36). Huldah lived in the **Second District**, which was likely the hill west of Jerusalem that Hezekiah enclosed when he enlarged the city.

As the delegation had expected, Huldah had a message from **the LORD God of Israel**. The message was exactly what Josiah had anticipated: God was going to bring calamity on Jerusalem and its inhabitants. Huldah's prophetic message came in two parts. Each was introduced with the same phrase: "This is what the LORD God of Israel says" (vv. 15,18). The first part of her message was directed toward the nation of Judah; the second was for King Josiah.

VERSES 15-17

Huldah's message began with a jolt. God's judgment was both inevitable (**I am**) and impending (**about to**). The coming disaster would impact both the city (**this place**) and its citizens (**its inhabitants**). God's judgment was not arbitrary. He was fulfilling what He had told Moses He would do—what had been recorded in the book the workers had found while repairing the temple.

God's judgment was coming because His people had continually **abandoned** Him and worshiped **other gods**. This practice began with Solomon, whose seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines turned his heart away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:8-9). The idolatrous practices continued. After the united monarchy divided, the people of Judah continued to find new ways of worshiping anything except God (14:23-24). Worshiping the gods and idols which they had made **with all the work of their hands** brought God's anger which could **not be quenched**.

VERSES 18-20

The second part of Huldah's message, which was for King Josiah, carried a word of grace. In his psalm of repentance, David had declared, "The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart" (Ps. 51:17). Similarly, the Lord said in Isaiah, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:2).

Upon hearing the words of the Law, Josiah realized how far the people had wandered from what God had instructed and intended. His heart was broken. Rather than being haughty and defensive, the king was humble and submissive. God acknowledged Josiah's brokenness—that he had torn his clothes and wept before the Lord. Concerning Josiah's reaction, the Lord was emphatic: *I myself have heard.*

Because of Josiah's humility and brokenness, God promised him that he *will not see* all the impending disaster. Josiah would be gathered to his fathers before the devastation began. To be "gathered to one's fathers" or "gathered to one's people" was a common euphemism for death. (See Gen. 25:8-9; Num. 20:24; Deut. 32:50.) It carried no connotations of the cause of death or the mode of burial. Yet the Lord promised Josiah he would go to his *grave in peace*. Thus, Huldah's message of grace was not for Judah or Jerusalem. They would face God's sure judgment. The grace was for Josiah, whose *heart was tender* toward the Lord.

We must not allow God's Word to become "lost" to us.

There are lessons we can learn from Josiah's experience. First, we must not allow God's Word to become "lost" to us personally. His Word needs to be woven into our daily lives. We should treasure and hide God's Word in our hearts. (See Ps. 119:11.)

Second, God's Word affects our lives. Hearing God's Word changed Josiah's behavior. He led Judah to make a renewed commitment to the covenant and reinstated the celebration of Passover. Josiah's behavior was changed to such an extent that something was said of him that was said of no other king: Josiah lived "according to all the law of Moses" (2 Kings 23:25). We read God's Word not only to acquire knowledge but also to act increasingly like the people of God.

How should knowing the Bible's warnings impact how we live today? What motivates more—the promise of God's potential blessing or the warning of God's potential judgment? Explain.

APPLY THE TEXT

- All people should read and study God's Word.
- God's Word should move believers to obedience to God.
- God is true to His Word, extending grace and exacting judgment as promised.

**Discuss as a group ways of helping others read and study God's Word.
How can the group help others already involved in the group?
How can the group help others not involved in a group?**

**Evaluate your interaction with God's Word in the past three weeks.
What changes might you need to make so that spending time in His
Word can truly be a priority for you?**

**How has spending time in God's Word helped you increase in Christ-like
character? In what areas do you need improvement? Create a plan for
growing in that area.**

PRAYER NEEDS

The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah



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