

## FINDING GOD'S WORD

"And Hilkiash the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiash gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it." II Kings 22:8.

Josiah, the sixteenth king of Judah, was not only one of the greatest kings that country ever had, but he was also one of the noblest men in the Old Testament. He was the son of Amon and Jedidah and was a native of Jerusalem.

Josiah succeeded two very evil men. His grandfather, Manasseh, was a sinner of the vilest type. He had introduced every kind of idolatry. During his reign idolatry had become rampant, and the true worshipers of God were persecuted cruelly and slain. He had released upon the people a multitude of evils, so that his reign marked a very definite apostasy in the history of the kingdom of Judah. It was said of him that "he filled Jerusalem with blood from one end to another." Eventually Manasseh was taken into captivity and, by means of the sufferings and humiliations which he endured, was brought to repentance and restored to his throne. The reformatations which followed his return, however, but touched the surface of the national life. He was not able to reform all of the profane practices which he had introduced himself. Soon after his death, the pleasing appearances of religion, which the people had assumed in compliance with their king, were all thrown off.

When Amon, the son of Manasseh and the father of Josiah, ascended the throne he found it easy to reintroduce all the idolatries, vices and oppressive deeds of his father's earlier reign. During his reign the kingdom was all but debauched and destroyed. Fortunately, the reign of Amon was very brief. It lasted only two years, for he was murdered by his courtiers in his own palace.

Immediately the people arose against the conspirators and enthroned Amon's eight-year old son, Josiah, in his place. He had various handicaps from the outset. Among them were his extreme youth, the degeneracy of the times and the fact that his father was one of the worst men who ever reigned over Judah. To be the son of a wicked father, beholding daily his bad example, is a serious handicap to any boy. Strange to say, Josiah did not follow in the steps of his father. Avoiding the example of his father and his grandfather, "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." It is encouraging to note that he did not waste the days of his youth in the service of Satan. He was anxious to please God.

Where Josiah received his religious instruction, and from what source came the influence which made him what he was, it is difficult to conjecture. We cannot say with positive accuracy how he came to be what he was. In all probability his mother was a good woman, even though she was married to a very bad man. It is quite probable that, recognizing the responsibilities that would rest upon Josiah and with the heart of a mother desiring the very best for her son, she instructed him in the law of the Lord. She must have wielded an ennobling influence over her boy. One can visualize her constantly battling for the spiritual welfare of her son against all the debasing tendencies of an immoral court and the influence of his idolatrous and wicked father. As a rule, a boy will follow his father's ways, but the grace of God touched this lad's heart and led him in the right paths.

In addition to the guidance of his mother, the prime ministers must have encouraged Josiah to high purposes. Seemingly, his ancestor, David, was his ideal. Doubtless, Hilkiash was also a good influence in his life. Evidently he had some wise and godly advisers who loved Jehovah and were courageous enough to break away from the established order of things and help lead the people back to God. Trained in the things of God, it is not

surprising that Josiah practically duplicated the noble career of his great-grandfather, Hezekiah. He remained true to God in spite of the bad example and reputation of his wicked father, who "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (II Chronicles 33:22).

When he was sixteen years of age Josiah had a genuine religious experience. With God's grace implanted in his heart, he promptly leaned toward righteousness and purity. Even though he was the son of a profligate father, he formulated a definite plan of seeking God's favor. He determined that God should be the real leader of his kingdom. He obeyed the law of the Lord. He consistently and persistently followed the Lord God. His career was unbroken by spiritual lapses. God gave him strength to serve Him and crowned his subsequent efforts with success. Just here we should learn the folly of excusing ourselves from serving God by the circumstances in which we are placed. Each of us is responsible to God for his own life and conduct, no matter how others may act.

Fully aware of the blighting curse of idolatry throughout his kingdom, Josiah set himself to the task of eliminating all degrading pagan worship from the land. He knew full well that if this great feat was to be accomplished it would be necessary to replace heathen worship with that of the true homage of God. He was determined to abolish all signs of idol worship. In order to do so, he commanded the idols to be burned or ground into powder and scattered to the winds. He saw to it that the shrines of the false deities were obliterated and the groves were destroyed. The priests, who had supported these corruptions, were put down with marks of infamy, and many of them were slain with the sword.

Josiah conceived his work as being twofold in nature--negative and positive. Instead of trying to cover the bad with the good, he proceeded to destroy the evil to the very limit of his ability. After he had demolished the idols, as far as was possible, he began to foster and build up the worship of the true God. This he did by preparing for and accomplishing the restoration of the temple of the Lord. The accomplishment of this long-delayed and much-needed task required great heroism, courage and skill.

Josiah's subjects were at their worst both in religion and morals. The temple was profaned and degraded to sensuous and immoral practices. The moral conditions had become terrible beyond description. They were so bad that sodomites had actually been brought and housed in the temple of God to practice their unspeakable orgies. With God out of their minds, the people had given themselves to sacrificing their own flesh and blood as peace offerings to a heathen god. Innocent children were burned on sacrificial altars.

Josiah knew that no permanent reforms could be accomplished without laying a spiritual foundation. Desirous that his people should worship, serve and obey God, the King gave orders for the house of the Lord to be repaired. This is an indication that he had been taught something of his duty toward the house of the Lord, which was neglected, dirty and broken down.

In the process of clearing away the rubbish of the temple which was in ruins, the workmen found an old scroll which had been lost and buried deep in the ruins among the debris for a long time. This scroll, which may have seemed a thing of little value to the workman who discovered it, was the Book of the Law or part of the Holy Scriptures. How did it happen to be there? The people had long since lost any interest in it. They had ceased to read, study and obey it. The Book had been lost for so long that its message was in large measure forgotten. When a possession is not prized, it may be lost without anxiety or grief. When people neglect or forget the Holy Scriptures, they are headed for moral disaster.

The Book, which was only a fragment of the Bible we know, was really lost to them long before it was covered in the rubbish of a fallen temple. That loss was disastrous in its results. It was in those days of the lost and forgotten Book that sin blasted the foundation from under their nation. King and people alike seemed to have been ignorant of the existence of this Book of the Law. So far as many are concerned individually today,

the Bible is a lost book even though it may lie snugly in a prominent place in the home. The Bible is a lost book, so far as you are concerned, if you have not read a chapter in it for months. The Bible is the one book we cannot afford to dispense with, neglect or leave unread.

Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." When Shaphan had read it, he took it to Josiah and read it to him. The reading of this Book marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the nation. It occasioned a great heart-searching on the part of the King. It set him to thinking about the great faults and sins in their national life. It revealed to him that they had not only been doing things which they ought not to have done, but they had been leaving undone many things which they should have done.

The Bible is the Book which enables us to know something of our sinfulness and our needs. Is there any book that can search the depths of the human heart as the Bible searches them? Is there any book that can test conduct and lay bare the springs of action as the Bible does? It probes our consciences and searches our hearts as no other book does or can. That is why Coleridge said, "I believe the Bible to be the Word of God because it finds me."

As the Word of God was read and Josiah discovered how far he and his people had departed from the revealed will of God, a sense of sin was awakened within him, and the fear of God possessed him. By the law is the knowledge of sin, so it was no wonder that he rent his royal robe in deep grief. Distressed over their sinfulness, Josiah sought for a prophet to inquire of the Lord how the seemingly inevitable punishment might be averted. They found Huldah the prophetess and asked her if these warnings and threatenings with reference to their disobedience would be fulfilled. She informed the King that all God had said was certainly true, but she encouraged him by saying that His judgments would not come upon the nation in his lifetime, because the Lord had taken note of his genuine repentance, earnest prayers and sincere efforts at reformation. Huldah assured Josiah that, although the penalties threatened by the Law had been incurred and would be inflicted, he should be gathered in peace to his fathers before the days of punishment and sorrow arrived.

This exhibition of divine patience and mercy caused Josiah to long for a return to the Lord on the part of the people of his nation. Immediately he sent messengers throughout the land and summoned the people to assemble at the temple. When they did so, it was a great mass meeting, including prophets, priests, other leaders and the populace, both small and great. The purpose of this gathering was that all of those present should hear the message of the Book of the law. To this vast assembly Josiah read, or caused to be read, "all the words of the book of the covenant," in order that the hearers might understand what the Lord required.

Without hesitation or question Josiah submitted his life to the Word of God and undertook to live in accordance with its precepts. He made a complete surrender of himself to God. Standing in a prominent place before his people, the King humbly and solemnly renewed his vow to the Lord, pledging his loyalty to God and promising to be faithful in his obedience to God's Word to the very limit of his ability to do so. Such a disposition to be obedient to God's commandments is the test of sincerity.

Falling in line with the noble example of Josiah, by a rising vote the people solemnly declared their adherence to the covenant and pledged themselves to worship, obey and serve God. From this it is evident that God's Word exerted a purifying power not only in Josiah's personal life but also in the affairs of the nation. Truly it is a blessed thing when God raises up a man to call the people back to the truths and the ways of the Bible. King Josiah was a splendid example of what God can and will do with a life that is surrendered and obedient to Him. So faithful was he in living in compliance with the will of God that the Bible says, "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, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him" (II Kings 23:25). What a wonderful epitaph!

Many have the Word of God but do not read it. Others read it but do not obey it. Because its standard of life is so high, they are unwilling to deny themselves of the temporal pleasures that sin offers in order to measure up to it. Those who do not care to have their lives shaped by the Word of God are usually interested in putting it out of their sight. Many are neglecting the Bible through the deceitfulness of riches, the infatuation of pleasure and the pride of scholarship. Ignorance of the teachings of the Bible is one of the appalling facts of our day. It is exceedingly important that we learn its great truths, make it our guidebook and practice its precepts.

God's blessed Book has not lost its power. It has not grown out of date. It speaks to the needs of people in all days, including our own. It is the eternal Word, as fresh today as it was when it was first written. Time neither dulls nor rusts the Sword of the Spirit. What a pity that to so many it is a lost book! It is a lost book to those who neglect it, disbelieve it or disobey it.

God's Word will either keep us from sin, or sin will keep us from it. The Psalmist wrote, "The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide" (Psalm 37:31). God's Word and victorious living are inseparable. The purity of the Word always uncovers the uncleanness of the heart. When people want to do wrong they hate the Bible. An infidel lecturer in Hyde Park, London, was asked why he always attacked the Bible and no other book. "Why can't you let it alone?" he was asked. "Because it won't let me alone," he replied. Only as the Word of God becomes a part of us will our lives be fruitful and be lived to the glory of God. If you have lost it through neglect or otherwise, find it, study it, believe it, obey it, and teach it to others.