

2ND KINGS

Week 34, Chapters 22 continued

The clock is ticking. Closer and closer we get to the moment when Judah will join their Israelite brethren in exile, and the people of Judah are oblivious to it. They are reveling in the good times as the economy was looking up, they were in a time of relative peace, they have a good king who cares for their welfare, and Assyria has lost its grip on the Holy Land. It was a lot like a day we hear about in the Book of Matthew:

Matthew 24:37-39 CJB

³⁷ For the Son of Man's coming will be just as it was in the days of Noah.

³⁸ Back then, before the Flood, people went on eating and drinking, taking wives and becoming wives, right up till the day Noah entered the ark;

³⁹ and they didn't know what was happening until the Flood came and swept them all away. It will be just like that when the Son of Man comes.

Prophets have come and gone with their warnings from God that if Judah doesn't change their ways and remember who they are in Him that He is going to turn them over to their enemies for judgment. But now the divine message is about to change in the most ominous way. The warning that Judah has grown weary of hearing and has become immune to it is no longer to change or else; the new warning is to prepare for the coming disaster because it is now a certainty; the opportunity to change and repent has come and gone. And therein lays a principle that every Christian, and everyone who for some reason is holding out against God just a little longer, needs to think long and hard about. It wasn't the people of Judah who decided for themselves what the timing might be, or what the conditions might be that they would finally cross over some cosmic line of no return; it was the Lord who made that determination based on His own criteria. And the people weren't aware when that moment of divine decision happened.

In 2nd Kings Chapter 22 we are learning about the last great and righteous king that would ever rule Judah: King Josiah. After Josiah dies, barely more than 20 years will pass before King Nebuchadnezzar attacks Jerusalem, destroys the Temple, and hauls off most of the population of Judah to Babylon. There they will reside on unclean land, eat unclean food, breath unclean air, and have no means to atone for their sins.

King **Yoshiyahu's** father was Amon, who was murdered after only 2 years on the throne. King Amon had taken over from his father, King Manasseh (Manasseh was Josiah's grandfather). Recall that Manasseh was the most wicked king Judah had ever known; at least that was the case for the first 49 of his 55 year reign. But in the final 6 years he had a complete change of heart, and ruled as a righteous king. The contriteness and sincerity of his turn towards the God of Israel is reflected in the Prayer of Manasseh that is recorded in the Apocrypha. However most modern bibles used by the Western Christian Church have removed the Apocrypha due to an edict by Martin Luther in the mid 1500's. And I will say without reservation that while Luther did many good things, the blatant anti-Semitism that he developed later in his life so tainted his views that it resulted in him making some terrible doctrinal decisions that have haunted the Western branch of the church since that time; and most Christians have no idea of it. It has materially changed our bibles, changed the nature of what is available for Believers to learn about our faith heritage, and it has deprived us of much needed context for the decades leading up to the birth of Christ and the New Testament.

Let me also define a term for you that I use often: Western Church. It surprises many Believers to learn that the brand of Christianity that most of us practice is only one of several. There are two main branches of Christianity today: Western and Eastern. Catholicism and Protestantism are the primary representatives of the Western branch (with the Anglicans arguing that they are the middle ground between the two), and the various Orthodox Christian denominations (Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Coptic, Syriac, Chaldean, and others) represent the Eastern Branch. Luther had no effect on the Eastern branch since he was a Roman Catholic (the Western branch). He tried to reform the Catholic Church to his viewpoints; the result of his failure to do so was that his followers adopted some new doctrines that developed into Protestantism. So in the Western Church one is generally a follower of Catholicism, or one of the hundreds and hundreds of variations of Protestantism, or Anglican.

As we get ready to open our bibles please remember that we have to look further into the Holy Scriptures for a proper understanding of the era of **Yoshiyahu** than only the book of 2nd Kings. 2nd Chronicles 34 and 35 add a great deal of information as do the Prophetic books of Jeremiah and Zephaniah. We'll continue to incorporate some of it in our study. So when we left off last time, we saw in 2nd Kings 22 that in his 18th year as the King of Judah, Josiah set about to refurbish the Temple that had been so shamefully neglected and misused for many decades. But 2nd Chronicles 34 informed us that many of the reforms he undertook took place in the years leading up to that decision to repair God's Sanctuary.

We'll return now to 2nd Chronicles 34 and read about the Temple rebuilding project and the discovery of a scroll that changed Josiah's life. Please note that this is substantially, but not entirely, the same as what we read last week in 2nd Kings 22.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 34:8 - end

The words of verse 8 explain that it was **after** he cleansed the land and the house (meaning the Temple and its grounds) that **Melech Yoshiyahu** (King Josiah) finally ordered the Temple to be extensively repaired. So the idea is that in Josiah's mind, step one in returning Judah to a right relationship with the Lord was to get rid of all the idols, the altars to false gods, those who led the people to worship these false gods, and to perform all the Torah-prescribed purification rituals to remove the defilement caused by these abominable objects and actions and people. Step two would happen once step one was completed; and step two was repairing the Temple.

While the Temple and its earlier counterpart the Wilderness Tabernacle were real, tangible, and every rule and regulation, every piece of furniture and all the rituals prescribed for it were to be scrupulously obeyed, in fact all of it was also a shadow and representation of some heavenly principles that would in time be played out in the lives of the followers of Jesus Christ. Thus when we see what Josiah did, we see a pattern for humanity that is meant to be observed.

The Temple is God's dwelling place on earth, and Paul tells us that Believers are essentially God's Temples because His presence (His Holy Spirit) dwells in us. When one who has yet to submit to God finally makes that decision, we come to Him battered, broken, full of corruption, confusion, uncleanness, and sin. We are essentially in the same condition as were the land and the people and the Temple of Judah and Jerusalem prior to Josiah. The first thing that has to happen is that we recognize our condition and understand what must be done to remedy it. The next thing is to accept that remedy, and then go about cleansing our lives of all the idolatry, perversion, confusion, uncleanness and sin by means of the only way available to us: faith in **Messiah Yeshua**. But that faith must be accompanied with action, otherwise it is a meaningless faith.

When Josiah began to refurbish the Temple, he had already cleansed it some years earlier. It was already rid of its defilement; it had already been re-holyfied and re-dedicated to the God of Israel and suitable for use. From a spiritual perspective nothing more was needed. However from an earthly and human perspective God's house was in disrepair and unsightly and people were dissatisfied with it. We hear of no directive from God to greatly beautify the Temple; its disheveled condition primarily hurt the sensibilities of Josiah, the priests, and many of the leaders of Judah. It is like that for the new Believer. The outward scars of our previous

sin and rebellion before we came to Christ probably remain visible. Perhaps the circumstances of our lives haven't substantially changed since that saving moment when we first believed and turned our lives over to God; and we still struggle to make ends meet or to establish meaningful relationships with people. But that makes us no less clean, no less saved and no less valuable in God's eyes than if we were fortunate enough to have had most of those scars cosmetically covered over, or have had the roadblock to relationships with people removed, and now our lives look solid even something to be admired or envied. God can use us either way, because what matters is our spiritual condition before Him. Are we clean and purified by the Living Water, or are we unclean and distant from God's presence?

The Temple repairs that Josiah wanted had nothing to do with God's spiritual perspective; this was an outward beautification project for the benefit of the community. And we should not chastise or shake our heads at Josiah for this; God didn't condemn Josiah for it anymore than he commended him for it. This was the classic case of morality versus preference. It was immoral that the Temple should be defiled and the behavior that went on there unauthorized and unclean. So Josiah attacked that problem with the greatest zeal and in accordance with God's Torah, he remedied it. But it was preference (acceptable human choice) to make it prettier. The Temple refurbishment was also a symbol of change; and humans are visual creatures so outward change is often needed to symbolize inward transformation. But let us not confuse the two issues. Remember that God never even WANTED a Temple, let alone a grand one. He was satisfied with the simple mobile tent He had ordained through Moses. It was David who had expansive visions for an opulent Temple.

What would have happened if Josiah had gone about this in the opposite way? How about before he cleansed the land and the Sanctuary of idols and false gods and pagan religious behavior, he thought step one was to beautify the Temple? In fact, that is precisely what many people try to do when they supposedly want to turn their lives around, or say that they are going to trust God from here forward. They think that BEFORE they fully submit to Christ, before they get rid of all of their defilements and perversions and unclean ways, first they'll make themselves look better. So instead of donning Christ, they don Christian lingo; they carry a bible, wear a cross around their neck, and go to Church; they hang out with Christian people. They stop swearing and talk nicer. They donate to charity. But in the end they are only a prettier, but still empty and defiled, Temple. Clean on the outside, filthy on the inside. Pleasing to the eye, but unusable by God. Josiah had it mostly right.

The King assigned the Temple task to **Shafan, Ma'aseiyah** and **Yo'ach** (Joash) who were government officials; they went to **Hilkiah** the High Priest and gave him the money that had been collected over the years at the Temple. The money was in turn handed over to the construction supervisors to purchase materials and pay the laborers. And for emphasis, the end of verse 11 lays the blame for the ramshackle condition of the Temple squarely at the feet of the Kings of Judah because there it says:

^{CJB} **2 Chronicles 34:11** *that is, they gave it to the carpenters and construction-workers to purchase worked stone, timber for the crossbeams and roof beams for the houses which the kings of Y'hudah had destroyed.*

2nd Chronicles tells us something that 2nd Kings 22 doesn't about these supervisors: they were all Levites (even their clans are mentioned). And that makes sense because Levites were to care for all the necessary functions of Temple service. But 2nd Kings adds something that 2nd Chronicles leaves out: in chapter 22 verse 7 these particular Levites were so well trusted that no accounting of the huge amount of money spent and used for the repairs was required of them. Their integrity was above reproach. Thus the project didn't go to the lowest bidder; and pagans weren't used to repair God's Temple; and only the most trustworthy and faithful men were given the authority to carry out the task. The King put the right people in charge and allowed them to use their God-given gifts and abilities and their own judgment to bring about the King's vision. That is a formula that needs to be remembered and considered as we go about the Lord's business.

But then one day, something astonishing happened that would change Josiah's legacy. As one of the many rooms and appendices to the Temple were being repaired, someone found a scroll. It was an electric moment; they may not have understood exactly what it was, but they knew it was important. They gave it to the High Priest who took one look at it and was overjoyed at what had been found. Both 2nd Kings 22:8 and 2nd Chronicles 34:15 agree precisely on the words of **Hilkiyahu** as he reported his find to **Shafan**, the King's representative. The Complete Jewish Bible says this:

"I have found the scroll of the Torah in the house of Adonai."

Almost all other bibles will say that **Hilkiyahu** said this: ***"I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord."***

This nuance between the two translations is not only important, but in many ways opens a window for us to view the way that Christianity and Judaism has historically looked at the Old Testament and why we must repent of this as followers of the God of Israel and change.

In the original Hebrew it says that it was the **sepher** of the **Torah** in the **beit** of **YHWH** that was found. Translating **sepher** to book or scroll is fine because it can denote either. But translating **Torah** to law is a tragic error. It has also brought on some of the most silly and needless debates about the nature of what was indeed found (I'll get to that in a moment).

Next **beit** indeed means house, so that translation is sound. But finally YHWH is NOT **Adonai** and it is NOT Lord. It is Yehoveh, or Yahweh, or in English Jehovah. "Lord" is not God's name, but YHWH is. Lord is a generic title; Yehoveh or Jehovah is a formal name. Did you know that the Canaanite word ba'al means lord? Thus ba'al translated to Hebrew means Adonai, and Adonai translated to English means lord. And indeed if the word Adonai was there in the original Hebrew in the verse we're examining then we would be right to translate it in English as Lord and then deal with the consequences. But that is NOT the case. The original Hebrew is YHWH, yud-heh-vav-heh, (and by the way, this is not disputed).

Here's my point. First, it is Hebrew tradition, which became Christian tradition, to mistranslate God's name Yehoveh into Adonai, Lord, theoretically as a sign of respect. But in the end this good intention has caused enormous misunderstanding of the Scriptures and sent us down many rabbit trails that were unnecessary. It also serves to confuse when we are talking about the Father and when we are talking about the Son. Thus in modern Christianity things that ought to be ascribed to the Father are at times ascribed to Christ and vice versa.

But second, the mistranslation, mostly by gentile Christians, of the word **Torah** to law changes the actual meaning of the verse. It obfuscates what it was that was actually discovered by those workmen and handed over to the High Priest. First of all Torah in no way means law. **Torah** means instruction or teaching. There a number of Hebrew and Aramaic words in the bible that is most often translated into the English word law: **choq**, **dath**, **qeyam**, and **torah**. While there are subtle nuances in meaning among the words **choq**, **dath**, and **qeyam**, they all better translate to statute or decree. Saying "law" in this instance isn't exactly wrong, and in modern English it is probably close enough. But translating **Torah** as law is way off the mark and misses its entire point. It is a straightforward mistranslation that scholars are well of aware of, but their denominational creeds won't allow them to correct the error because it is well understood what it might mean to a series of their foundational doctrines that they have no interest in re-examining.

I would say that around 40% of the time that we find the word "law" in our bibles, the original word is **Torah**, with the remainder of the times being mostly **choq** and then a few times **dath** and **qeyam** (and no, I have not done an exact word count, but I've looked at it close enough to see it in proportion). Further, from a technical standpoint, if the intent of saying "Law" is as an abbreviation for the Law of Moses, then it is really misleading to refer to the Law of Moses as the Torah. In fact the Law of Moses is but a section in the Torah. Parts of it begin at Exodus 20, but it is mostly contained in Leviticus, with a repeat of some of it in Deuteronomy (mainly those commands that necessarily change when Israel stops wandering in the wilderness and settles down as farmers and ranchers in Canaan). Further, there is the Priest's Code (meaning the rituals and organization of the priesthood that pertains ONLY to Levites) as opposed to the civil code that is statutes and regulations that pertains mostly to lay people.

So what did the workmen discover? Did they discover the Law (the Law of Moses?). NO! They

discovered the Torah, as the Hebrew so plainly says. Now: was it all of the Torah? It is impossible to know for certain and is a fruitless debate among scholars fueled by nothing but egos and speculation, because we get no other information about it. Common sense says that at the least it was Deuteronomy, for a couple of reasons. The most compelling reason for this conclusion comes from the Torah itself in Deuteronomy 31.

Deut. 31:25-26 CJB

²⁵ ***Moshe gave these orders to the L'vi'im who carried the ark with the covenant of ADONAI:***

²⁶ ***"Take this book of the Torah and put it next to the ark with the covenant of ADONAI your God, so that it can be there to witness against you.***

The thought among many academics is that Moses was talking ONLY about the section of the Torah that we today call Deuteronomy. However the context is such that it could just as easily mean the entire Torah, since Deuteronomy is the 5th of the 5 books that forms it. While I'm not dogmatic about it, my opinion is that this means the entire Torah, not just one section of it, because it says so.

Nonetheless, Moses instructed that a copy of the Torah was to be kept near the Ark of the Covenant at all times, and tradition says that for many years that is what happened. So why, in Josiah's time, wasn't the Torah simply sitting there next to the Ark of the Covenant for him to refer to? And could it have been that this one was the ONLY copy of the Torah that remained in all the land, and so to find it was both startling and euphoric? Again, no explanations are offered, but there is no end of speculation. It does seem reasonable to assume, however, that apart from the Ark itself there was no more precious holy item for the priests than the Torah. So after this long litany of wicked kings, the Temple continually robbed and trampled upon by gentile kings and pagan priests, and many of the precious items simply given away to pagans as gifts from Judah's kings or owed as tribute to a conqueror, it is unthinkable that somewhere along the line, at a moment of high danger, the priests would not have taken the Torah and hidden it nearby to save it.

It was **Shafan** who took this amazing find to King Josiah and began to read it to him. Upon hearing it the King began to tear his clothes as a customary sign of grief and torment. The probably near-universal thrill of finding the Torah suddenly turned to terror as Josiah, and no doubt **Shafan** and all those listening, heard its words. It is hard to know exactly what part of it they were hearing, but no doubt it had to do with certain of God's laws and commandments and what would happen if they were not obeyed. It is to Josiah's merit that he took those words to heart and immediately sprang into action.

His first move was to try to ascertain just what this might mean for his kingdom, and how it applied to the current situation. So he issued an order to the High Priest **Hilkiah**, to **Shafan** who had read the scroll, **Achijah** who was **Shafan's** son, **Asayah**, and a fellow that 2nd Chronicles says is **Avdon** but 2nd Kings says his name is **Achbor**. Likely all of these were present when the scroll was read to the king. Josiah says that they must inquire of God about this to see just what kind of a predicament they find themselves in, and what (if anything) can be done about it. And whereas earlier the decrepit state of the Temple was directly blamed on Judah's wicked kings, the blame for the trespasses against the Lord, and the consequences of which so alarmed Josiah was blamed on the "fathers". This can only mean the royal line of kings of both Judah and Israel. In 2nd Chronicles 34:21 the king tells the men that the consultation with God is to be on behalf of Josiah and "for the people left in Israel and Judah", and that it is their ancestors who may have kindled God's wrath to overflowing. So here we see a couple of things: one, Josiah sees himself as more than the King of Judah, but rather, like David, the king of all the 12 tribes. In addition even though Israel, the northern kingdom, is long gone there are small pockets of the 10 tribes who somehow remained in the land and Josiah regards them as belonging to him.

But second, what is interesting to me is that **Hilkiah** the High Priest is not the person tabbed to consult directly with God; and consulting God is a usual task for a High Priest who does so by lots or by Urim and Thummim stones. Rather these 5 men are to go as an embassy to a local female prophet named Hulda and she is to give them God's oracle in regards to their inquiry. As with many aspects of this story, we ask why? Why wouldn't the High Priest just consult with God himself, instead of going to Hulda?

But we encounter another "why" that is also a head scratcher. We know that Jeremiah was alive and prophesying at this time, so why not consult him since he was the leading prophet of his time? Jewish Tradition answers this by claiming that Josiah reasoned that a woman would be more merciful than a man, and so would pray passionately for the annulment of the wrathful divine decree that she had been assigned to pronounce over Judah. I think that's pretty far fetched. What we can probably surmise is that Jeremiah was somewhere else for some unstated reason and Hulda was nearby (right there in the city of Jerusalem) and immediately available. She was a well regarded prophetess and so there was certainly no wrong in the king having his men go to her to consult God for them. He was in a hurry for an answer and who could blame him?

The Old Testament names 3 female prophets: Miriam (Moses' sister), Deborah the Judge, and now Hulda. These prophetesses prophesied in eras hundreds of years apart. And I think we can see some substantial differences in what their ministries amounted to, but also some glaring similarities that surrounded them. Miriam operated in a difficult time and seems to be a leader of women in praise and worship, but not as a seer. There is no mention of her being a prophet in the sense of consulting God on behalf of Israel's leadership. Rather she was a prophet in a different sense, almost as an honorary office because of her relationship to Moses

and the leadership role that automatically came with it. Debra's role as a prophet seemed mostly to be as a leader of Israel in a very dark time of national apostasy. She was not a go-between that we're aware of, but rather must have accepted direction from the Lord in her decisions, and grace as a leader of men, and was at times given prophetic knowledge of certain victory in battle.

Hulda operated in an extremely dark time for Judah, and indeed was more like the classic prophets of her day; she was a go-between and assigned to deliver oracles from God to His people, including (at least indirectly) to the king. To me the common ground among these 3 women prophets is that they all operated during spiritually dangerous and bad times when Israel was in rebellion, and at a time when faithful men of courageous leadership were in short supply. All throughout the wilderness journey there was a dearth of male leadership outside of Moses and Joshua. All throughout the era of the Judges men shunned their duties as leaders, had little interest in doing what was right in God's eyes and so women stepped to the front. And now in these dismal final days of Judah, when the soul of the nation was essentially lost and wicked, and Jeremiah was somewhere else, a woman is called to be God's agent, and she answers the call.

I mean no disrespect to any of these faithful women prophets; my intent is to demonstrate that they seem to be operating outside their traditional female God-given roles because the men of their times refused to operate righteously inside their traditional male God-given roles. It is not that women were somehow incapable of being God's prophets or very good leaders; rather it's that it was on the male side of the ledger that being a prophet or being a leader was to occur. But over and over in the bible we find that the Lord is no respecter of persons; if one refuses to answer the call, He'll use whoever will.

Therefore I'll end today's message in this way; it sure seems that a lot of women are taking leadership roles in the modern church. And I believe it's because they have to because too few men are willing to step forward. While some women may relish this role, most do it reluctantly because they're not wired that way. I've also talked to many faithful women who may not be leaders at their congregations but they are the spiritual leaders in their homes. They are the ones who insist on going to worship service. They are the ones who organize and attend bible studies. They are the ones who volunteer their time for the good of their church community that they fellowship with. They are the ones who see to it that their children learn God's Word and then urge them towards a relationship with our Savior. Most would give anything if their husbands would take that job from them and assume the role of family spiritual leader; a role that the Lord has given to men as our responsibility since the time of Adam and Eve and has never taken it back.

I must tell you that it does my soul so much good, and I am grateful, that we have many faithful men in this congregation who step forward and do what men are supposed to do; lead your families and teach the knowledge of the Word to your children and your wives. And for the men

who might be ignoring some or all of that responsibility that is expected of your walk with Christ, and so have forced your wives to pick up the slack (or, heaven forbid, that role goes unfilled in your household), I ask you to pray earnestly about it, repent, and get into the game. And ladies it's not that you aren't capable of assuming these roles and doing a great job; you have been, you are, and unless something changes, you will be.....for as long as men refuse to do our part.

But what concerns me the most is that it seems from a biblical perspective that what is happening when women are being pushed into assuming the role of prophets (and I mean that in the sense of teachers) and leaders of the family, and often even leading men in spiritual matters, it is because men are saying no to God; and that is the sign that we are knee-deep into a dark time.

Next week we'll examine Hulda's prophetic response to these men's inquiry and what it means for Judah and for Josiah.