

CHAPTER 22

This chapter begins the story of the reign of good king Josiah, whose goodness shines the brighter because it came just after so much wickedness, which he had the honour to reform, and just before so great a destruction, which yet he had not the honour to prevent. Here, after his general character (v. 1, 2), we have a particular account of the respect he paid

- I.** To God's house, which he repaired (v. 3-7).
- II.** To God's book, which he was much affected with the reading of (v. 8-11).
- III.** To God's messengers, whom he thereupon consulted (v. 12-14). And by whom he received from God an answer threatening Jerusalem's destruction (v. 15-17), but promising favour to him (v. 18-20), upon which he set about that glorious work of reformation which we have an account of in the next chapter.

2 KINGS 22:1-10

JOSIAH'S PIOUS REIGN

Concerning Josiah we are here told,

- I.** That he was very young when he began to reign (v. 1), only eight years old. Solomon says, *Woe unto thee, O land! when thy king is a child;* but happy art thou, O land! when thy king is *such* a child. Our English Israel had once a king that was such a child, Edward VI. Josiah, being young, had not received any bad impressions from the example of his father and grandfather, but soon saw their errors, and God gave his grace to take warning by them. See ²³⁸¹⁴Ezekiel 18:14, etc.
- II.** That he *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, v. 2. See the sovereignty of divine grace — the father passed by and left to perish in his sin, the son a chosen vessel. See the triumphs of that grace — Josiah born of a wicked father, no good education nor good example given him, but many about him who no doubt advised him to tread in his father's steps and

few that gave him any good counsel, and yet the grace of God made him an eminent saint, *cut him off from the wild olive and grafted him into the good olive*, ^{<6124>}Romans 11:24. Nothing is too hard for that grace to do. He walked in a good way, and turned not aside (as some of his predecessors had done who began well) *to the right hand nor to the left*. There are errors on both hands, but God kept him in the right way; he fell neither into superstition nor profaneness.

III. That he took care for the repair of the temple. This he did in the eighteenth year of his reign, v. 3. Compare ^{<4918>}2 Chronicles 34:8. He began much sooner to *seek the Lord* (as appears, ^{<4918>}2 Chronicles 34:3), but it is to be feared the work of reformation went slowly on and met with much opposition, so that he could not effect what he desired and designed, till his power was thoroughly confirmed. The consideration of the time we unavoidably lost in our minority should quicken us, when we have come to years, to act with so much the more vigour in the service of God. Having begun late we have need work hard. He sent Shaphan, the secretary of state, to Hilkiah the high priest, to take an account of the money that was collected for this use by the door-keepers (v. 4); for, it seems, they took much the same way of raising the money that Joash took, ^{<1219>}2 Kings 12:9. When people gave by a little at a time the burden was insensible, and, the contribution being voluntary, it was not complained of. This money, so collected, he ordered him to lay out for the repair of the temple, v. 5, 6. And now, it seems, the workmen (as in the days of Joash) acquitted themselves so well that *there was no reckoning made with them* (v. 7), which is certainly mentioned to the praise of the workmen, that they gained such a reputation for honesty, but whether to the praise of those that employed them I know not; a man should count money (we say) after his own father; it would not have been amiss to have *reckoned with the workmen*, that others also might be satisfied of their honesty.

IV. That, in repairing the temple, *the book of the law* was happily found and brought to the king, v. 8, 10. Some think this book was the autograph, or original manuscript, of the five books of Moses, under his own hand; others think it was only an ancient and authentic copy. Most likely it was that which, by the command of Moses, was laid up in the most holy place, ^{<6524>}Deuteronomy 31:24, etc.

1. It seems, this book of the law was lost or missing. Perhaps it was carelessly mislaid and neglected, thrown by into a corner (as some throw

their Bibles), by those that knew not the value of it, and forgotten there; or it was maliciously concealed by some of the idolatrous kings, or their agents, who were restrained by the providence of God or their own consciences from burning and destroying it, but buried it, in hopes it would never see the light again; or, as some think, it was carefully laid up by some of its friends, lest it should fall into the hands of its enemies. Whoever were the instruments of its preservation, we ought to acknowledge the hand of God in it. If this was the only authentic copy of the Pentateuch then in being, which had (as I may say) so narrow a turn for its life and was so near perishing, I wonder the hearts of all good people did not tremble for that sacred treasure, as Eli's for the ark, and I am sure we now have reason to thank God, upon our knees, for that happy providence by which Hilkiah found this book at this time, found it when *he sought it not*, ^{<2580>} Isaiah 65:1. If the holy scriptures had not been of God, they would not have been in being at this day; God's care of the Bible is a plain indication of his interest in it.

2. Whether this was the only authentic copy in being or no, it seems the things contained in it were new both to the king himself and to the high priest; for the king, upon the reading of it, rent his clothes. We have reason to think that neither the command for the king's writing a copy of the law, nor that for the public reading of the law every seventh year (^{<5178>}Deuteronomy 17:18; 31:10, 11), had been observed for a long time; and when the instituted means of keeping up religion are neglected religion itself will soon go to decay. Yet, on the other hand, if the book of the law was lost, it seems difficult to determine what rule Josiah went by in doing that which was *right in the sight of the Lord*, and how the priests and people kept up the rites of their religion. I am apt to think that the people generally took up with abstracts of the law, like our abridgements of the statutes, which the priests, to save themselves the trouble of writing and the people of reading the book at large, had furnished them with — a sort of ritual, directing them in the observances of their religion, but leaving out what they thought fit, and particularly the promises and threatenings (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, etc.), for I observe that these were the portions of the law which Josiah was so much affected with (v. 13), for these were new to him. No summaries, extracts, or collections, out of the Bible (though they may have their use) can be effectual to convey and preserve the knowledge of God and his will like the Bible itself. It was no marvel that the people were so corrupt when the book of the law was such

a scarce thing among them; where that vision is not the people perish. Those that endeavoured to debauch them no doubt used all the arts they could to get that book out of their hands. The church of Rome could not keep up the use of images but by forbidding the use of the scripture.

3. It was a great instance of God's favour, and a token for good to Josiah and his people, that the book of the law was thus seasonably brought to light, to direct and quicken that blessed reformation which Josiah had begun. It is a sign that God has mercy in store for a people when he magnifies his law among them and makes that honourable, and furnishes them with means for the increase of scripture-knowledge. The translating of the scriptures into vulgar tongues was the glory, strength, and joy of the Reformation from Popery. It is observable that they were about a good work, repairing the temple, when they found the book of the law. Those that do their duty according to their knowledge shall have their knowledge increased. To him that hath shall be given. The book of the law was an abundant recompence for all their care and cost about the repair of the temple.

4. Hilkiah the priest was exceedingly well pleased with the discovery. "O," says he to Shaphan, "rejoice with me, for *I have found the book of the law, heureka, heureka*, — *I have found, I have found*, that jewel of inestimable value. Here, carry it to the king; it is the richest jewel of his crown. Read it before him. He walks in *the way of David his father*, and, if he be like him, he will love the book of the law and bid that welcome; that will be his delight and his counsellor."

<1221> 2 KINGS 22:11-20

THE BOOK OF THE LAW READ

We hear no more of the repairing of the temple: no doubt that good work went on well; but the book of the law that was found in it occupies us now, and well it may. It is not laid up in the king's cabinet as a piece of antiquity, a rarity to be admired, but it is read before the king. Those put the truest honour upon their Bibles that study them and converse with them daily, feed on that bread and walk by that light. Men of honour and business must look upon an acquaintance with God's word to be their best business and honour. Now here we have,

I. The impressions which the reading of the law made upon Josiah. He rent his clothes, as one ashamed of the sin of his people and afraid of the wrath of God; he had long thought the case of his kingdom bad, by reason of the idolatries and impieties that had been found among them, but he never thought it so bad as he perceived it to be by the book of the law now read to him. The rending of his clothes signified the rending of his heart for the dishonour done to God, and the ruin he saw coming upon his people.

II. The application he made to God hereupon: *Go, enquire of the Lord for me*, v. 13.

1. Two things we may suppose he desired to know: — “Enquire,

(1.) What we shall do; what course we shall take to turn away God's wrath and prevent the judgments which our sins have deserved.” Convictions of sin and wrath should put us upon this enquiry, *What shall we do to be saved? Wherewithal shall we come before the Lord?* If you will thus enquire, enquire quickly, before it be too late.

(2.) “What we may expect and must provide for.” He acknowledges, “*Our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book*; if this be the rule of right, certainly our fathers have been much in the wrong.” Now that *the commandment came sin revived*, and appeared sin; in the glass of the law, he saw the sins of his people more numerous and more heinous than he had before seen them, and more exceedingly sinful. He infers hence, “Certainly *great is the wrath that is kindled against us*; if this be the word of God, as no doubt it is, and he will be true to his word, as no doubt he will be, we are all undone. I never thought the threatenings of the law so severe, and the curses of the covenant so terrible, as now I find them to be; it is time to look about us if these be in force against us.” Note, Those who are truly apprehensive of the weight of God's wrath cannot but be very solicitous to obtain his favour, and inquisitive how they may make their peace with him. Magistrates should enquire for their people, and study how to prevent the judgments of God that they see hanging over them.

2. This enquiry Josiah sent,

(1.) By some of his great men, who are named v. 12, and again v. 14. Thus he put an honour upon the oracle, by employing those of the first rank to attend it.

(2.) To Huldah the prophetess, v. 14. The spirit of prophecy, that inestimable treasure, was sometimes put not only into *earthen* vessels, but into the *weaker* vessels, *that the excellency of the power might be of God*. Miriam helped to lead Israel out of Egypt (~~3004~~ Micah 6:4), Deborah judged them, and now Huldah instructed them in the mind of God, and her being a wife was no prejudice at all to her being a prophetess; *marriage is honourable in all*. It was a mercy to Jerusalem that when Bibles were scarce they had prophets, as afterwards, when prophecy ceased, that they had more Bibles; for God never leaves himself without witness, because he will leave sinners without excuse. Jeremiah and Zephaniah prophesied at this time, yet the king's messengers made Huldah their oracle, probably because her husband having a place at court (for he was keeper of the wardrobe) they had had more and longer acquaintance with her and greater assurances of her commission than of any other; they had, it is likely, consulted her upon other occasions, and had found that the word of God in her mouth was truth. She was near, for she dwelt at Jerusalem, in a place called *Mishneh*, the second rank of buildings from the royal palace. The Jews say that she prophesied among the women, the court ladies, being herself one of them, who it is probable had their apartments in that place. Happy the court that had a prophetess within the verge of it, and knew how to value her.

III. The answer he received from God to his enquiry. Huldah returned it not in the language of a courtier — “Pray give my humble service to his Majesty, and let him know that this is the message I have for him from the God of Israel;” but in the dialect of a prophetess, speaking from him before whom all stand upon the same level — *Tell the man that sent you to me*, v. 15. Even kings, though gods to us, are men to God, and shall so be dealt with; for *with him there is no respect of persons*.

1. She let him know what judgments God had in store for Judah and Jerusalem (v. 16, 17): *My wrath shall be kindled against this place*; and what is hell itself but the fire of God's wrath kindled against sinners? Observe,

(1.) The degree and duration of it. It is so kindled that *it shall not be quenched*; the decree has gone forth; it is too late now to think of preventing it; the iniquity of Jerusalem shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering. Hell is unquenchable fire.

(2.) The reference it has,

[1.] To their sins: “They have committed them, as it were, with design, and on purpose to provoke me to anger. It is a fire of their own kindling; they would provoke me, and at length I am provoked.”

[2.] To God's threatenings: “The evil I bring is according to the words of the book which the king of Judah has read; the scripture is fulfilled in it. Those that would not be bound by the precept shall be bound by the penalty.” God will be found no less terrible to impenitent sinners than his word makes him to be.

2. She let him know what mercy God had in store for him.

(1.) Notice is taken of his great tenderness and concern for the glory of God and the welfare of his kingdom (v. 19): *Thy heart was tender*. Note, God will distinguish those that distinguish themselves. The generality of the people were hardened and their hearts unhumbed, so were the wicked kings his predecessors, but Josiah's heart was tender. He received the impressions of God's word, trembled at it and yielded to it; he was exceedingly grieved for the dishonour done to God by the sins of his fathers and of his people; he was afraid of the judgments of God, which he saw coming upon Jerusalem, and earnestly deprecated them. This is tenderness of heart, and thus he *humbled himself before the Lord*, and expressed these pious affections by rending his clothes and weeping before God, probably in his closet; but he that sees in secret says it was *before him*, and he heard it, and put every tear of tenderness into his bottle. Note, Those that most fear God's wrath are least likely to feel it. It should seem that those words (⁽¹⁸⁸²⁾Leviticus 26:32) much affected Josiah, *I will bring the land into desolation; for when he heard of the desolation and of the curse*, that is, that God would forsake them and *separate them to evil* (for till it came to that they were neither desolate nor accursed), then he rent his clothes: the threatening went to his heart.

(2.) A reprieve is granted till after his death (v. 20): *I will gather thee to thy fathers*. The saints then, no doubt, had a comfortable prospect of happiness on the other side death, else being gathered to their fathers would not have been so often made the matter of a promise as we find it was. Josiah could not prevail to prevent the judgment itself, but God promised him he should not live to see it, which (especially considering that he died in the midst of his days, before he was forty years old) would

have been but a small reward for his eminent piety if there had not been another world in which he should be abundantly recompensed, ^{<38116>}Hebrews 11:16. When the righteous is *taken away from the evil to come he enters into peace*, ^{<25701>}Isaiah 57:1, 2. This is promised to Josiah here: *Thou shalt go to thy grave in peace*, which refers not to the manner of his death (for he was killed in a battle), but to the time of it; it was a little before the captivity in Babylon, that great trouble, in comparison with which the rest were as nothing, so that he might be truly said to die in peace that did not live to share in that. He died in the love and favour of God, which secure such a peace as no circumstances of dying, no, not dying in the field of war, could alter the nature of, or break in upon.