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THE LOST BOOK FOUND.

– DEC. 4. – 2 KINGS 22:8-20. –

"Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart."

MANASSEH'S son, Amon, succeeded him as king of Judah. Born and reared during the period of his father's blind idolatry, he seems not to have shared in his father's repentance and reformation: his short reign of two years was full of wickedness and endeavor to reestablish idolatry, and ended with his own assassination by his servants. He was followed in the kingdom by his son Josiah, a lad of eight years, who developed a very different character, became a true servant of God, and one of the greatest reform kings upon the throne of Israel. We are not to regard this as a miracle, but rather to expect and look for natural causes, as having something to do with it. We find some suggestion along this line in his name, for in olden times names were given to indicate the characters hoped for, and thus at least became a manifestation of the attitude of the parental hearts. The name Josiah signifies, "Jehovah will support." He was born during the period of his grandfather's reformation movement. His mother was doubtless, [R2390 : page 342] according to the custom of that time, chosen by his grandfather, Manasseh. Her name indicates that she was of godly parentage, – Jedidiah signifying "the beloved of Jehovah;" and her mother, the king's grandmother, was by name Adiah, "The honored of Jehovah." From such good parental stock, on the maternal side at least, we should expect the foundation of a good character, and developments substantiate this.

This religiously inclined boy, we may reasonably infer, was under the council of his religious mother, and his state counsellors were probably those whom Manasseh had gathered about him after his reformation, and who were evidently rejected by Amon. Josiah's sixteenth year dates his conversion – the date at which the chronicler

says, "He began to *seek after* the God of David, his father." And this brings to our attention a fact that is lost sight of by many; *viz.*, that it is one thing to be well-born and well disposed, and another thing entirely to consecrate the heart to the Lord; and this last step many morally inclined, "good" people, neglect to take, – to their own permanent disadvantage. It is not sufficient that we be well disposed, moral; it is necessary that we become the Lord's, devoting ourselves wholly to his will, and then seek after him to know his will that we may do it. It is only to those that thus draw near to the Lord that his promise extends – "Draw near unto me, and I will draw near unto you."

The result of the king's thus seeking the Lord culminated four years later, when he was twenty, in a determination to use his influence and power for the complete overthrow of idolatry throughout the kingdom; and the next six years of his reign were devoted to this work. He prosecuted it not only in Jerusalem and throughout Judah, but extended his influence over a large portion of the territory once ruled by the ten-tribe kingdom, and pushed the work of reformation and destruction of idols as far as Naphtali on the sea of Galilee. Apparently there was a certain amount of opposition to this reform-work, which required six years for its accomplishment; moreover, it seems to have required the king's presence with his servants, to insure thorough destruction of the symbols of idolatry which apparently abounded in every district.

It was on the king's return to Jerusalem, after having seen to the accomplishment of the cleansing of the land of its idols, that looking about for the next proper step to the service of God, he determined that it should be the repair of the Temple. Altho his grandfather, Hezekiah, had cleansed the Temple, repairing its doors, etc., it would appear that it had subsequently been entirely neglected, so that many of the rafters were broken, and thorough repairs were requisite. Accordingly, money donations were invited for the repair of the Temple, and the work was carried to completion.

As it was with Josiah's public work, so it should be with the heart work of all who present themselves to the Lord: they should first begin by breaking off their sins in righteousness, by utterly destroying the fleshly idols of the heart, selfishness in various forms, as the Apostle suggests. "Put away all filthy communications out of your mouths." "Put away all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit [mind] perfecting holiness in the reverence of the Lord." (Col. 3:8; 2 Cor. 7:1.) After having thus become servants of righteousness in our own hearts and lives, we may properly begin to look out for other conquests, fields of usefulness and service to the Lord. We may *then* begin to lend a hand in building up the true Temple of God, the Body of Christ, the Church – in cleansing it from defilements and in instituting in it the proper reforms. But all reform should begin with our own hearts first. He who has not sought the Lord personally, and then, obedient to the Lord's leading, broken down the idols of his own heart, and begun a thorough cleansing work in his own life and heart, has no business whatever to take hold of the repairs of the great antitypical Temple.

Josiah's repairing of the Temple was over two hundred years after the very similar repairing made by king Jehoash, and brought to light a very ancient manuscript of the Law, probably the book of Deuteronomy. Presumably this was the copy of the Law which Moses wrote with his own hand, and commanded to be placed in the side of the Ark, with the golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded. Quite probably the Ark, as the most sacred and most valuable of the Temple's furniture, had been secreted at the time the Temple was denuded of much of its golden ornamentations to pay tribute to invaders, and was now discovered. We are to remember too, that books were little in that day, and that few could either write or read them, and that the Law of Moses was communicated to the people orally by the priests, from memory.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the Book of the Law was found by the priest Hilkiah, it was esteemed a treasure, delivered to Shaphan, the king's secretary, and read in the king's hearing. Its

delineations of the Law of God incumbent upon his people Israel, were so different from what the people had been taught by the priests, by word of mouth, that the king was astonished, and rent his garment (an expression of dismay). Nor could we expect otherwise, when we [R2391 : page 342] remember that idolatry had flourished to a considerable extent for over three hundred years, with only occasional reformations, and that during all that time the priests and Levites who had in any degree remained faithful to the Lord were without support from the people; for they had no land of their own, and were largely dependent upon the tithes, and consequently during the period of idolatry would be obliged to engage considerably in secular employment.

Realizing how far short Israel had come of the demands of the Law, and noting the punishments prescribed in that Law for unfaithfulness, the king was greatly troubled. Accordingly he sent several of his court officers with the high priest, to inquire of the Lord, through a prophet, respecting the status of the case, and respecting what should be done by [R2391 : page 343] Israel to escape the punishments which he realized justly belonged to the nation under the conditions of that Law Covenant. The prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah were then living and prophesying, but the king for some reason sent his messengers to a prophetess, Hulda, daughter-in-law of one of his court officers. Why the king passed by two prominent prophets, to make inquiry at the mouth of one otherwise unknown in the Scripture narrative, we can only conjecture: (1) It may have been that, of a woman the king might hope to receive a softer and more peaceful message than from a man, especially as this woman, through her father-in-law, was connected with his own court, and would therefore be disposed to give as kindly a message as possible. (2) Another suggestion is that Jeremiah and Zephaniah may have been absent from Jerusalem, on preaching tours, and thus could not be readily communicated with. (3) An additional and even more forceful suggestion is that Jeremiah and Zephaniah had been prophesying in the name of the Lord publicly – foretelling the

judgment of the Lord about to come upon the nation, and that their preaching probably had somewhat to do with the reformation which Josiah had inaugurated. Thinking favorably of his own reforms, the king doubtless thought their predictions unwarranted and extreme. He felt, therefore, that he *knew* what answer these prophets would make to his questions, and desired to hear through still another channel which he might hope would be less severe. (4) Besides, Jeremiah was the son of the high priest, Hilkiah; and Zephaniah was the king's own cousin. The king's desire, therefore, would seem to be to obtain an outside testimony, and as favorable as possible.

A moral may be drawn from this part of the lesson, applicable to individual cases. At first, when we began to seek the Lord, we recognized certain things and conditions of heart as sinful and requiring the divine forgiveness, and necessary to be put away to the extent of our ability; Josiah destroyed the idols: but it was only after we had been considerably exercised in the matter of reform in our own lives, and in connection with the Temple, the Lord's Church, that the Lord supplied that clearer knowledge of his own perfection and the righteousness of his law, which enabled us to see that with all the reforms and cleansings accomplished we still came far short of the grand standard set forth in the divine law – Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy being, and thy neighbor as thyself.

And as the king rent his garment, and manifested greater contrition of heart after years of zealous service, so it is usually with the Christian who has passed through several stages of reform, and whose mind at last discerns the true meaning of the great law of Love. Then it is that he feels more than at first his shortcomings. While the world may be considering him as a great reformer, a great saint, he himself has gotten to a place where he sees the majesty of the divine law as with a telescope, and his own imperfections as with a microscope. Then it is that he also seeks the Word of the Lord for guidance, instruction, help.

The Lord's reply through the prophetess was most direct – confirmatory of all that had been declared by the mouth of Jeremiah and Zephaniah, but adding words of comfort and consolation for the king himself. – "Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou hearest what I spake against this place...and hast rent thy clothing and wept before me, I also have heard thee, saith the Lord." It was too late for any national reformation; the nation had been tried for several centuries, and it had been found wanting, and according to the divine plan the time was near at hand when the typical kingdom should be entirely overthrown – overturned until he should come, Messiah, whose right the antitypical Kingdom is, and to whom it will be given. There was no reason, from the divine standpoint, why this course should be altered, and the repentance of the king could therefore only be treated as an individual matter, and dealt with accordingly, for God has an individual providence over all those who are consecrated to him, as well as a general supervision of the affairs of the nations.

Much in this narrative reminds us of the somewhat parallel condition and circumstances at the present time. Looking back through the vista of "the dark ages," we see the parallel to Israel's and Judah's tendency towards idolatry, superstition, etc. We see false religions, doctrines and dogmas set up and worshiped in Christendom. We see here, as we saw in Judah's history, not only the worship of false gods, but also false worship of the true God – worship contrary to the commandments of his law. We see in the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century something corresponding in many respects to Josiah's reformation. It has led to a considerable smashing of false doctrines, errors and false gods – and of misrepresentations of the character and teachings of the true God. The present reformation movement also has had much to do with the cleansing and repairing of the Temple – the true Church, the saints, – and in the reestablishment of a true worship, based upon truth more clearly discerned, and better sacrifices. And finally we have found the book of God's Law – we found the Bible. It was rescued from seclusion by

the Reformers, and through the printed page has been laid before all Christendom. Not only so, but to us also it is being "*read*," – explained, made clear, under divine providence. We are seeing its heights and depths, its lengths and its breadths, as never before.

In this Book also, "we read the righteous sentence of the crumbling thrones of earth." We read of the "Day of Vengeance" that is coming upon the antitypical Israel, and as we inquire of the Lord respecting it, and whether or not it may be averted, we hear his decision in the Scriptures, as Josiah received it concerning his kingdom. The Word of the Lord informs us that so far as Christendom is concerned there is no balm in Gilead that will help and recover her. Her case has gone too far to be rectified, and to have the old garment patched. The Lord's decision is that the present social structure shall pass away in a great time of trouble, and that on its ruins he will establish through the glorified Church, the Kingdom which he has so long promised, and for which we are to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

Nevertheless, the Lord's promise is comforting to all those who mourn in Zion, to all those who are out of sympathy with evil and unrighteousness, to all those **[R2391 : page 344]** who love the law of the Lord their God, and who are seeking to serve him with all their mind, soul and strength, and to exercise his law of Love toward their neighbor also. To this class, fully consecrated to the Lord, comes the assurance, "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I shall make up my jewels, and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."
