

# **LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for Aug. 22: Applying God's word leads to renewed passion\_80904**

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## **Applying God's word leads to renewed passion**

2 Kings 21:123:25

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Time for reading the Bible often falls prey to busy schedules and other priorities. To neglect Scripture risks ordering our lives according to human standards rather than God's ideals. King Josiah exemplifies that applying God's word to our lives leads to a renewed spiritual passion.

### **Discovery**

Two wicked kings, Manasseh and Amon, followed Hezekiah. Manasseh's wickedness was so pronounced that God declared he would abandon his people to their enemies. Judah would never recover from this epoch in its

history.

The godly Josiah became king after Amon died. Josiah's godly character was more like his great-grandfather, Hezekiah, than either Manasseh or Amon. The mention of his mother and grandmother suggests they played a significant role in his commitment to God.



Josiah's thorough devotion to God prompted him to restore the temple, which had fallen into disrepair during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. During this cleansing, Hilkiyah, the high priest, found the book of the law. This law may have included all of the first five books of the Old Testament, but at the least it included most, if not all, of Deuteronomy. Hilkiyah gave this book to Shaphan, the king's personal secretary. After reading it to himself, Shaphan read it to Josiah.

Josiah reacted by tearing his clothes in shame. This expressed his readiness to repent according to the words of the law. He longed to demonstrate his obedience to God by keeping the words of the book.

The king recognized the nation's guilt before the Lord. God was rightfully angry with the people because of their sin. Josiah needed direction on how he and the nation might respond to God's word and avert punishment.

The king sent his advisers to seek prophetic insight concerning the law. The messengers consulted Huldah, a prophetess who was married to a temple official. "Prophetess" also designated Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). Some may be surprised to learn that prophets such as Jeremiah and Zephaniah, who were ministering at that time, were not consulted.

Huldah declared God's judgment on Judah was inevitable. However, God would withhold destruction until after Josiah's time because of the humility

and devotion of the king.

## **Renewal**

Josiah acted swiftly. He assembled the nation's leaders and summoned them to a covenant renewal ceremony. His action mirrors that of Moses and Joshua (Exodus 24:3-8; Joshua 8:34-35). "The people of Jerusalem" may refer only to their representatives, but the king may have gathered as many people as the temple grounds could hold. Special categories singled out by the narrator include rich and poor ("small and great"), as well as priests and prophets.

Although the king may have read the book to the people, a scribe most likely did so (Deuteronomy 31:9-10). The designation "book of the covenant" highlights the law's importance in the covenant between God and the people. This is the first time the phrase has been used in 2 Kings.

Josiah stood at the pillar, the spot reserved for the king. He stood there not only for himself, but also as the nation's leader. He personally pledged to keep the commandments and statutes. He also spoke as the people's representative as they, too, renewed their commitment to God's covenant.

## **Reform**

The covenant renewal resulted in religious reform. The king instructed priests to remove and burn all the vessels in the temple used to worship Baal, Asherah and the host of heaven. Their presence in sacred precincts demonstrates the extent pagan worship had infiltrated worship of Yahweh. The king removed idolatrous priests—those who had led the people in heathen practices. These false priests had burned incense in the high places to Baal and various heavenly objects. A particularly offensive Asherah icon was burned with its ashes being scattered to convey its

profaneness. Cult prostitutes associated with Baalism and fertility were eliminated. Local centers of worship that competed with the temple were destroyed. Other pagan centers of worship were likewise destroyed and desecrated.

A more positive aspect of the reform was the celebration of the Passover. Second Chronicles 35:1-17 describes the magnitude of this celebration. Citizens of Judah as well as those of the remnant in Israel joined at the festival. Not since the days of Samuel had Passover been observed in this manner (2 Chronicles 35:18). Josiah's actions elicited the summary that there was no king like him in Judah's history. He worshipped with all his heart, soul and strength (2 Kings 23:13; Deuteronomy 6:5).

The optimism of Josiah's reign came to a tragic end. He was killed in battle, and the permanence of his reform died on the battlefield. Future kings returned to wickedness as the nation resumed its death spiral.

Renewal brings God's favor on people. However, the decline of Judah reminds us renewal must have deep roots; that is, it must be internal as well as external.

### **Questions for discussion**

- What part of your life is due for a cleansing?
  
- What reminders of a closer relationship with God might you find there?

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