

HILKIAH'S DISCOVERY

Tawanda hummed a song as she climbed into the driver's seat of her car. Something about her coffee dates with Gina always put a spring in her step. Gina happened to be the pastor's wife, and Tawanda affectionately called her the church's "first lady," even though Gina was the humblest soul Tawanda could imagine.

"We shouldn't allow people to abuse or harm us," Gina had said, "but there is nothing wrong with a meek spirit."

All her life, Tawanda had felt ashamed of being a "pushover" and someone that didn't find it easy to stand up for herself. She remembered it was her older sister who used to accuse her of being *weak*. Ironically, the same sister had been one to manipulate or force her way most of the time.

As Tawanda shared some of this backstory, Gina just said with a smile, "Did you ever hear what Jesus said about those who are meek? In God's kingdom, it's the meek and humble who get a place of honor. God can ask us to be gentle and patient because that's what Jesus is like. Let me show you what He says in the Beatitudes."

A few minutes later, Tawanda admitted, "I had no idea all that was in the Bible."

"Maybe it's one of the ways that God has been shaping you to be more like Jesus," said Gina. "Surprise!"

1 What is something you've learned in Scripture or about God that has surprised you?

2 What words of Scripture have been transformative in your life?

3 If you could clear up one erroneous belief that people have about the Bible, what would it be?

¹⁵ And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.

¹⁶ And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it. ¹⁷ And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen.

¹⁸ Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

¹⁵ Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” He gave it to Shaphan.

¹⁶ Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: “Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them. ¹⁷ They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers.” ¹⁸ Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

God’s Word Discovered

Generations after Hezekiah, a new king is on a righteous campaign to restore Judah’s worship of the one, true God. Josiah does what is right in God’s eyes (2 Chron. 34:2–3). Josiah becomes king at only eight years old, and when he is sixteen, he begins to seek God. At twenty, he begins ridding Judah of the influence of foreign gods. This is all the more impressive because Josiah’s grandfather, Manasseh, did extraordinary evil in the sight of God, to the point that God says that Judah shall be delivered into exile (2 Kings 21:10–15). King Amon, Josiah’s father, continued this heinous evil and refused to humble himself before the Lord. Then, Josiah becomes king at a young age because Amon’s officials conspire to assassinate him. On the heels of these terrible tragedies, Josiah heeds the messages of the prophets and turns his heart toward the Lord God of Israel.

Josiah has the idols, alters, and Asherah poles taken down and the bones of false priests burned (2 Chron. 34:4–7). He seeks to repair God’s temple in Jerusalem, which has been neglected and filled with false worship once more. With money collected from Judah and the

remnant of Israel, workers are paid to repair and restore the temple (2 Chron. 34:9–11).

It is during this restoration that Hilkiah the priest finds a scroll, the “Book of the Law,” neglected somewhere in the temple. It is possible that the book had been stored near the walls or foundation of the temple, which is how it had become lost. Most historians agree that the “book” here contains part or all of Deuteronomy, since Josiah’s later reforms match what is written in Deuteronomy (which is Moses’ final sermon to God’s people entering Canaan).

Shaphan, the temple secretary, takes the scroll to King Josiah and reports that work is proceeding as expected (v. 16). The money for the temple is being used for its restoration (v. 17). Apparently in the mind of Shaphan, the discovery of a scroll is trivial, almost an afterthought. He reports about it last and calls it simply “a book” (v. 18). Until Shaphan reads the text before the king, no one recognizes the significance of this discovery.

Why do you think Josiah serves the Lord, when his father and grandfather had not?

What prompts the rediscovery of an important message from God?

Do you see any ways that we repeat the pattern of treating God’s Word as trivial?



One consequence of rampant idol worship in Israel is that Israelites begin to treat God as one among many deities to appease. This image discovered on a painted piece of pottery (eighth century BC) depicts God with a partner deity, like a spouse. The inscription says, “Yahweh and his Asherah.”

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¹⁹ And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. ²⁰ And the king commanded Hilkiyah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying, ²¹ Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

²² And Hilkiyah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college:) and they spake to her to that effect.

²⁶ And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard; ²⁷ Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

¹⁹ When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. ²⁰ He gave these orders to Hilkiyah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: ²¹ "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book."

²² Hilkiyah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

²⁶ Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: ²⁷ Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD."

Josiah's Repentance

Josiah hears the message of this scroll for the first time and responds with repentance. Tearing of robes signifies *grief*: he is cut to the core by the recognition that he and the people of Judah have not kept their side of the covenant.

The book of Deuteronomy lays out God's requirements for Israel, stipulations that a nation devoted to God must observe. They are to worship Him alone, reminding each generation that God is unlike any other (Deut. 6:4–9). They shall care for the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan (Deut. 10:18–19). They shall behave with justice in all their dealings, remembering that God was their merciful rescuer (Deut. 16:18–20). Imagine hearing some of these ideas from Moses' sermon for the first time!

The same document outlines blessings and curses, a way of success and a path to abject failure. Moses says, "I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction" (Deut. 30:15). But Josiah hears these words as a king whose nation has failed at nearly every turn. He attributes the division of the people and the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel to this failure: "Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the Lord" (2 Chron. 34:21).

Josiah sends his staff to inquire with a prophet, to see what God has to say about their disobedience. They go to Huldah, a woman living in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 34:21). What they hear in response is extraordinary (v. 27). God is indeed angry with Judah, among other things, for the sins of Josiah's father and grandfather. But because Josiah humbles himself before God's Word and repents with sincere grief at Judah's sin, God listens. God doesn't remove the consequences or paper over the breach in the covenant relationship, but the Lord hears Josiah's appeal, and that is enough.

What does Josiah's response to hearing God's Word demonstrate?

Why was God angry with the people of Judah?

What does it mean, "I have heard you, declares the LORD" (v. 27)?

Giving Order to Chaos

When my daughter was young, she loved the idea of playing with LEGO bricks. For her birthday, she asked for an elaborate set, complete with a house, pets, and minifigures whose skin tone and curly hair looked just like hers. But when it came to actual assembly, her exuberance turned to frustration. She would ignore the instructions and get right to work, stacking bricks in hopes the house would look exactly like it did on the box.

Her younger brother took a different approach. After digging through the box for the instruction manual, he laid it open to the first page. Step by step, brick by brick, he followed the manual with precision. Before long, the pile of bricks became a charming cottage.

When Hilkiah discovered the scroll and brought it to the king, the people of Judah had been living without this Scripture to guide them. Their lives looked more like my daughter's disorganized pile of bricks, rather than the darling house the designers intended. But under Josiah's leadership, they opened Scripture and let it guide their reformation.

Sometimes I can be more like my daughter—and the people of Judah—than I'd like to admit. I look first to the world around me—whether social media posts, viral videos, or even good books—when deciding how to assemble the pieces of my life. But as difficulties come and stresses mount, the structure collapses, and I don't look or sound like Jesus.

What if I took the better approach? What if I started looking to Scripture first when making decisions? What if I allowed God's Word to direct the pieces of my life: my schedule, attitudes, and words? I think the result would be what the designer had in mind.

1 Where do you go for ideas and wisdom when making decisions? Has any source ever led you in the wrong direction?

2 When have you seen God's mercy come into a difficult situation, perhaps a circumstance where forgiveness seemed impossible?

A Practice of Scriptural Study

As you may already know, a plan of Scriptural study is printed at the bottom of this page of each lesson. These readings are designed to prepare your heart to receive from God. And like the people of Josiah's day, you might find that you "discover" a message that was long forgotten or a truth of Scripture that you had previously neglected. God speaks to us through the study of Scripture!

This week, you are invited to hone your practice of reading and studying the Word of God. You can use this space to note one verse or phrase that stands out in the week ahead.

Key Text

And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.
—2 Chronicles 34:15 KJV

Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan.
—2 Chronicles 34:15 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 22 through September 27

Mon. Philippians 2:5–10—The Humble Servant Exalted by God.

Tue. Isaiah 42:1–7—The Faithful Servant.

Wed. Acts 2:25–31—The Resurrected and Glorified Servant.

Thu. Acts 13:44–49—A Light for the World.

Fri. Psalm 84—A Doorkeeper in God's House.

Sat. Isaiah 50:4–9—God's Servant Obeys.

Next Week: Isaiah 53:1–7

Next week we turn to a famous text that presents a puzzle and mystery for readers of Isaiah. Who is the suffering servant who can take away sin?