

Hilkiah's Discovery

Devotional Reading: Romans 7:7–12

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 33:1–33

Today's Scripture: 2 Chronicles 34:15–22, 26–27

I. Discovering a Book

2 Chronicles 34:15–21

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.

¹⁹ When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. ²⁰ He gave these orders to Hilkiah, 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.”

individuals named Hilkiah. This particular *Hilkiah* is the high priest during the reign of Josiah. He is also the great-grandfather of Ezra.

Shaphan is part of the group responsible for overseeing the repairs to the temple. His work as a *secretary* likely focuses on protecting and maintaining royal documents.

The temple renovation project likely unearthed many items that had been buried, including money. Hilkiah, however, discovers something more significant *in the temple of the Lord*: “the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses” (2 Chronicles 34:14). Because modern bookbinding techniques had not yet been invented, this “book” may have been rolled in the form of a scroll.

There are several reasons why this book could have been a copy of Deuteronomy. First, the phrase “the Book of the Covenant” in 2 Chronicles 34:30 can fit Deuteronomy, since that book is in the form of a covenant renewal treaty. However, that same phrase is used in Exodus 24:7, most likely to describe the material in Exodus 20–23.

Second, the emphasis in Deuteronomy 12 on worship in one place is consistent with Josiah's reforms. Third, the purging of the land of pagan cultic places is found in Deuteronomy 12. This depiction

15. Scripture mentions at least seven

could have made an impression on Josiah since that is precisely what he had been doing even before the book of the law was found. Fourth, the reference to curses in 2 Chronicles 34:24 could point to the extended curses spelled out in Deuteronomy 27:9–26; 28:15–68. Fifth, the celebration of Passover in 2 Chronicles 35 is similar to the commands of Deuteronomy 16:1–8.

A final argument in support of Deuteronomy is its emphasis that keeping the land depends on obedience to the covenant. Reading Deuteronomy 29 alone would be enough to cause Josiah to tear his clothes in anguish in this regard.

16. The parallel account states that *Shaphan* read the book after receiving it from *Hilkiah* (2 Kings 22:8). In addition to bringing *the book to the king*, *Shaphan* reports on the status of the work on the temple. Such extensive renovation required the service of carpenters, stone masons, and other laborers.

17. The text does not state the source of this *money* or where it was discovered *in the temple of the Lord*. Regardless of its source, the money is distributed to *the supervisors* and the *workers* of the temple restoration project.

18. Before revealing the contents of the *book*, its chain of custody needed to be established. *Shaphan*, whose role as a *secretary* involves handling documents, is given the book by *Hilkiah the priest*, who discovered it. *Shaphan* then reads it aloud *in the presence of the king*.

19. The word of the Lord demands a response. Some reject it, while others submit to it. Josiah dramatically responds as *he tore his robes*. The act of tearing one's clothing signals remorse, humility, and repentance.

After hearing *the words of the Law*, Josiah is horrified. Although he has worked to remove idolatry from Judah,

he knows that Judah is far from being completely obedient to the law. Some outward reform had occurred, but Josiah recognizes the need for something else.

20. The group the king *gave . . . orders* to consists of select members of his court. We know very little about these individuals. *Ahikam son of Shaphan* protected the prophet Jeremiah. In the parallel account of this narrative, *Abdon son of Micah* is named “Akbor son of Micaiah.” This narrative contains the only mention in Scripture of *Asaiah the king's attendant*.

21a. Josiah directs this group to seek a better understanding of *the Lord* in order to discern the significance and meaning of *what is written in this book* of the law. The king's directive is not just for his own knowledge, but also for the good of others. The findings would affect all inhabitants of the divided kingdoms: the *remnant in Israel* and the residents of *Judah*.

21b. Josiah recognizes that the burden Israel and Judah continued to experience was due to disobedience to the Lord. The Law of Moses clearly specifies the results of *the Lord's anger* that is to befall the people because of their rebellious idolatry (Leviticus 26:14–45; Deuteronomy 28:15–68; 29:18–28; etc.).

II. Consulting a Prophet 2 Chronicles 34:22, 26–27

²² **Hilkiah 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.’”

22. Several prophets serve in Judah during Josiah's reign, namely Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum. The king's entourage visits none of those, however, but rather seeks out *the prophet Huldah*. Other female prophets mentioned by name in the Bible are Miriam, Deborah, Noadiah, and Anna.

26. The first part of Huldah's prophetic response is in 2 Chronicles 34:23–24. It describes the disaster and curses that are to come on Judah because the people have worshiped pagan gods and rebelled against the Lord. The kingdom of Judah would experience conquest and exile from the land, as promised by the Law of Moses.

The second part of Huldah's response is in the verse now before us. Whereas she had previously identified King Josiah simply as “the man who sent you to me” (2 Chronicles 34:23), she now identifies him specifically as *the king of Judah*. This casts the spotlight on Josiah personally.

27a. Huldah's response acknowledges Josiah's humble and contrite response to receiving the book of the law. First, the state of his *heart* has been demonstrated by his mourning of Judah's sin and his desiring to follow God's will. When Josiah heard the words of the book read, he submitted, grieved, and repented. Most of Judah's kings were prideful and rejected the Lord. A few, however, demonstrated humility before the Lord: Rehoboam, Hezekiah, and even Manasseh. Even today, God favors those who are humble (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5–6, both quoting Proverbs 3:34).

In the years to follow, Josiah's son

Jehoiakim would ascend to the throne of Judah. He would lack the humility of his father. Jehoiakim's officials would gain possession of a scroll that contains “all the words” the Lord had given to the prophet Jeremiah regarding Israel, Judah, and all the nations (Jeremiah 36:2, 21). When Jehoiakim would hear the words, he would cut the scroll to pieces and throw them into the fire. Rather than repent and mourn the words of the Lord, Jehoiakim and his officials would not express fear or would not tear their garments.

King Josiah listened to the word of the Lord, humbled himself, and obeyed. King Jehoiakim, however, did the opposite: he exalted himself and rejected the Lord's warnings. Josiah honored the prophetess Huldah, but Jehoiakim had the prophet Jeremiah arrested. Josiah was spared the horrors of exile. Jehoiakim, however, was not; because of his disregard for the word of the Lord, he was carried into exile in Babylon.

27b. Josiah's actions and attitudes do not go unnoticed. Through the prophecy of Huldah, the Lord gave Josiah a promise of hope: “I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here” (2 Chronicles 34:28). The prophecy revealed that Josiah would not experience the pending disaster of exile. However, this did not mean he lived a long and peaceful life. Approximately 13 years later, Josiah died following a questionable decision to engage the Egyptians in battle (2 Chronicles 35:20–25).

Even so, we do not lose track of the fact that Josiah was spared the horrors of exile because of his humility and desire to obey the word of the Lord. His was a posture of humility. As such, the Lord responded with mercy and grace.

Involvement Learning

Hilkiah's Discovery

Into the Lesson

Define the word *reform*.

List examples of reform.

In what ways does reform involve returning to core values or principles that have been neglected or forgotten?

Into the Word

Read 2 Chronicles 34:15–18.

1. Underline in one color the key actions mentioned in these verses.
2. In a different color, mark the individuals mentioned in these verses.
3. Draw a box around the key acts of reform in these verses.

How do these acts of reform demonstrate a change of heart toward God's law?

Read 2 Chronicles 34:19–21.

1. Underline in one color the key actions mentioned in these verses.
2. In a different color, mark the individuals mentioned in these verses.

How do Josiah's efforts to restore the temple reveal a restoration of faith?

Read 2 Chronicles 34:22, 26–27.

1. Underline in one color the key actions mentioned in these verses.
2. In a different color, mark the individuals mentioned in these verses.
3. Draw a box around words or phrases that describe the key features of the covenant renewal ceremony.

What was the significance of this ceremony for the people?

Key Verse

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

Into Life

Make a plan to value the public and private reading of Scripture in an effort to keep God's Word from being neglected. Write down the plan's steps and how you will follow these steps in the upcoming week.

Thought to Remember

Be a Josiah, not a Jehoiakim.
