

Josiah and the Book of the Law — November 3, 2024

2 Kings 22; Jeremiah's Message; Priestly Discernment; The Empty Mind and the Spirit of God; 1 John 3–4

Scripture Reading: 2 Kings 22:1–23:2; Jeremiah 1:2; 5:7, 30; Leviticus 10:8–11; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 John 3:24–4:6

“Because thy heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before Jehovah, when thou heardest what I spoke against this place... I also have heard thee, saith Jehovah.” (2 Kings 22:19)

“Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

Josiah: An Eight-Year-Old King and the House in Disrepair

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign. An eight-year-old child, placed on the throne of Judah — yet the Scripture says he walked in all the way of David his father and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left. His mother is mentioned, as the mothers of Israel's kings so often are: mothers in scripture carry a tremendous weight of responsibility for the formation of their children. But behind the mother, the Lord was working. By the time Josiah was twenty-six, he had a heart for the house of Jehovah. The house had fallen into disrepair. He sent men to gather money and organize its repair. In our day, what has fallen into disrepair? Not a building, but the testimony to the one body of Christ. That testimony has fallen into disrepair. Are all believers now twenty-seven bodies? Or thirty-three thousand denominations? The one body that Scripture teaches has been obscured. That is the disrepair of our day.

Jeremiah: Five Years Before, the Lord Had Already Sent His Messenger

Jeremiah 1:2 places the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. The events of 2 Kings 22 take place in the eighteenth year. Five years before the book of the law was found and read to the king, the Lord had already sent his messenger. Jeremiah was in Israel, speaking the Lord's word, while the rebuilding project was being planned and carried out.

Jeremiah 5:7 and 5:30 give the content of his message: they have committed adultery, they troop to the harlot's house, everyone neighs after his neighbor's wife — and an appalling and horrible thing is committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsehood, and the priests rule by their means, and my people love to have it so. What the people of Josiah's day embraced is not different in principle from what fills our own day. The sins that Jeremiah described were not new to Israel then and they are not new to our generation now. What is in the heart of man has not changed.

The lesson about Jeremiah's role is important for us. Haggai 1:13 gives the standard for any messenger: Jehovah's messenger with Jehovah's message. That is the standard in the New Testament too. It is not enough to have been educated in the scriptures or certified by an institution. A messenger for the Lord is one to whom the Lord has given a spiritual gift and through whom the Lord is sending a word for his people at a particular time. The messenger and the message must belong together. And the Lord's timing in sending Jeremiah five years before these events was not accidental; the Lord has perfect timing in the sending of his messengers.

The Prophetess: God Will Use What He Must in a Time of Weakness

When Josiah needed the word of the Lord, he sent his men not to Jeremiah — who was the prophet in Israel at the time — but to Huldah the prophetess. The proper means of communication in Israel was through a priest or prophet. But the priests and prophets had become part of the problem that Jeremiah described: they were among those who had not hearkened to the words of the book. Josiah could not go to organized religion for the word of the Lord, because organized religion had left the Lord.

This is the pattern in times of weakness: the Lord uses what he must. In Judges, when Gideon's generation needed a word from God and the regular channels had failed, the Lord raised up a Deborah. The Lord is able to use a donkey if necessary. But that is not normal, and those who mistake the extraordinary provision of God in a time of ruin for the regular order of God have misread scripture. God's use of a prophetess in the days of Josiah was not a statement that this is how things ought to be; it was a statement that the regular channels had disqualified themselves. The testimony to the one body has fallen into ruin, and the Lord will use whom he must — but that should grieve us and not comfort us, because it means the regular channels of God's order have been marred by what has come in.

Priestly Fitness: Leviticus 10 and the Danger of the Empty Mind

Leviticus 10:8–11 gives one of the foundational requirements for a priest going into the tent of meeting: no wine, no strong drink, lest ye die. The reason is stated: that ye may put difference between the holy and the unholy, and between the clean and the unclean, and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes. The priest needed full faculties. His discernment, his judgment, his clarity of mind and conscience had to be unimpaired, because the work of the priest was to make distinctions — this is holy, that is not; this is clean, that is not. An impaired mind cannot make those distinctions.

This connects directly to a phenomenon that became very visible in the 1960s and 1970s in Western culture, and that has never gone away: the deliberate emptying of the mind. Transcendental meditation, yoga in its religious form, psychedelic drugs — all of them had the same objective: empty your mind, stop thinking, stop worrying about your conscience, let your mind go blank. An empty mind, as a brother once said, is where the devil wants to rush in. He loves for men to empty their minds, because then he can fill them. The consequences of what fills an emptied mind have been visible in every generation: people who stare at the sun until they go blind, who jump off bridges, who commit violence, who embrace false religion. The way of God for his priests was precisely the opposite: a mind filled with God's statutes, clear, discerning, capable of making the distinctions that matter.

First Corinthians 6:12 gives the New Testament principle: all things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. The test of whether something has power over me is not whether I feel addicted; the flesh always tells itself it is not addicted. The test is whether I can stop. And the things that most reliably empty or cloud the mind — whether substances, or the endless consumption of entertainment and distraction — all work toward the same end: a person less capable of distinguishing holy from unholy, less available to the Lord as a messenger. Josiah's example is the corrective: when he received news that convicted and alarmed him, he wept, he inquired of the Lord, and he gathered all the people to hear the word of God. He did not reach for something to make the bad news less distressing.

The Remedy for an Empty Mind: The Spirit and the Word Together

First John 3:24–4:6 provides the remedy. He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him; and hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. The Spirit of God indwells every believer. If he

abides in me, the question of emptiness resolves itself: one cannot be simultaneously filled with the Spirit and empty. The Spirit occupies the whole of what he inhabits. And his presence is what enables the test of 4:2–3: every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God; every spirit that confesseth not is not of God.

This test is not only the historical fact of the incarnation. It goes to the person of Christ himself — his holy, sinless humanity, his deity, the reality of what he was when he came. There are many in Christendom who say yes to the historical event but deny the substance: who teach that the Lord came in a sinful human nature, or who reduce him to a great teacher, or who center their message on prosperity and earthly success rather than on taking up the cross. These are not spirits confessing Jesus Christ come in flesh. They are spirits of Antichrist, and John says they were already present in his day and are increasing in ours.

But verse 4 is the encouragement: ye are of God, children, and have overcome them, because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. The Spirit of God who indwells us is greater than any power the enemy deploys. That is our only resource — not human strength, not argument, not cultural positioning, but the Spirit of God. And verse 6 adds: we are of God. He that knoweth God heareth us — that is, those who have the Spirit of truth recognize the truth when it is spoken. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Truth first; then love. It must be in that order. We are prone to let our affections take the lead, but truth must come first, and love must be truthful. Being truthful in love, as Ephesians 4:15 has it — that is the order.

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