

GOD MOVES 2 Kings 22:08-20

Have you ever been in a situation where you thought everything was progressing well and then suddenly discovered that you have really messed up because you just didn't know what was expected? This might be like suddenly realizing that you hadn't filed your income tax for the past five years and that you were in deep trouble. Sometimes we just don't know how important certain things are simply because we have not been made aware of them or we just forgot about it.

Such a discovery was made by young king Josiah of Judah when he was in his mid-twenties. Josiah's great-grandfather was Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king who sought God's help and led the nation well. Hezekiah's son Manasseh was just the opposite. He was probably the most wicked king that Judah had ever had. His reign lasted 55 years and he led the nation into idol worship and paganism. After he died, his son Amon took over the throne and it was apparent that he was no better than Manasseh. Some of his servants (domestic servants or court officials) assassinated Amon after he had been king for two years. The reason for doing this is not given in the account; however, some have thought that it was because he was being oppressive to them. Others had thought that they realized that a change was needed for the country. This assassination triggered an uprising of the people of Judah who executed those who killed the king and then they took his eight-year-old son Josiah and made him king. Those who were guardians for Josiah actually ruled the country during the early years because an eight-year-old child was not capable of doing so. These people were intent on restoring the proper religious influence to the nation. They began reforms that impacted the political as well as the social and religious aspects of life in Judah. As Josiah became older, he started having his own influence and agenda which were greatly influenced by the reformation movement that he had watched develop as he grew up. He was known as one of the best kings to ever rule Judah.

During the long reign of his grandfather (Manasseh) the temple had been neglected. One of the projects that Josiah started was the renovation of the temple. A key political official was put in charge of this renovation project and he was to work with the high priest Hilkiah to get the job done.

Discovered – 22:8-10

⁸ And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. ⁹ And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD." ¹⁰ Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king. 2 Kings 22:8–10 (ESV)

While the work was underway, the workmen found a copy of the law. It is unclear whether this was the first five books (of Moses) or just a portion of these. Nevertheless, it was a significant discovery. I get the impression that for years they did not have access to the Scriptures and really did not know what was contained in the law. The workmen gave the writings to Hilkiah, the priest who passed it along to Shaphan the official in charge of the restoration of the temple. Shaphan took the writings to Josiah and read it to him. It is not clear exactly what parts of the Scriptures were read to the king; however, many think that it was such a passage as Deuteronomy 28.

Also, some money was found in the Temple which was used to pay the renovation workers. We might wonder if the money was found in the chest that king Joash had put into the Temple 200 years before this time which (apparently) was the last time the Temple was

renovated.

Response – 22:11-13

¹¹ When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. ¹² And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, ¹³ "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." 2 Kings 22:11–13 (ESV)

Josiah did more than just tear his robe as a sign of deep anguish and remorse, he immediately sought help to determine what could be done to change the situation. Josiah called together some of the most influential people in the nation and instructed them to look into the problem. Today we might refer to such a group as a "blue-ribbon panel." Their assignment was to find out what God intended to do to the nation since they had obviously done the things that God said would bring a curse on the people and the land. Josiah was astute enough to realize that the nation was in big trouble because they had ignored what God required. They had done the very things that God said were abominable to Him and Josiah was suddenly confronted with the facts. He was afraid for himself and for the people.

Can we apply such a response to what is happening in our nation? A direct application would be difficult since we don't have a king who can authoritatively call the shots on religious things and what happens in the secular life of the nation. We keep telling ourselves that we have separation of church and state. So how would this work for those in policy making positions to be influenced by a discovery of what the word of God says regarding obedience to the principles of the kingdom of God?

As we look back on what happened in Judah, we realize that it was not likely that anything good was going to happen when Manasseh was king because he was basically evil. So, the first lesson for us could be that we must make sure that the top leadership in our nation is a person of good (or at least neutral) character. Who has the responsibility to make sure this happens? Since we are theoretically "self-governed" in that we elect representatives, then we have a responsibility to know the candidates and vote for those of good moral character. The other, and more important, action we should take is that (when we realize that the battle for the soul of a nation is spiritual warfare) we put on the full armor of God and fight the battle in our prayers.

Since Josiah was only eight years old when he became king, those in positions of advising him were actually running the government. They made up a shadow government that was in operation for nearly two decades. In our government, there are official and unofficial advisers to the president. These are supposedly chosen by the president, but are (for all practical purposes) chosen (or the choice is strongly influenced) by his closest and most powerful advisers. The lesson for us is that we need to know the candidates and we need to know those on whom they would rely for advice.

We should apply this same due diligence to those who are in the legislative and judicial branches of government. Notice that the process has to start with "we the people." Being self-governed means being involved in the process at least to the extent of knowing how the system works and especially knowing the character and beliefs of those who are candidates for office. Before we can make a "right" choice, we also have to know what the word of God says and then use that as the basis for making our decisions. If we (as a nation) are going to follow the right "blueprint" then we (as a people) must be committed to the principles found in the word of God

and pray and act accordingly.

Proven – 22:14-20

¹⁴ So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her. ¹⁵ And she said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ‘Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶ Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷ Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. ¹⁸ But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, ¹⁹ because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD. ²⁰ Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.’ ” And they brought back word to the king. 2 Kings 22:14–20 (ESV)

The delegation went to a prophetess named Huldah. She lived in Jerusalem and they talked with her regarding what had happened. She didn't have any trouble telling them what would happen. It was going to happen exactly as the Scriptures had said it would. God is faithful to His word. In the words she used “all the words of the book which the king read” would come true. We can count on that for all of the Bible. All of God's word will come true. There were many evil things that had happened and were still happening in Judah even though Josiah's adviser had started reforms. There were many injustices that had been and were still going on in the nation. Notice that God did not mention these since they were merely symptoms of the real problem. The real problem was that the people had forsaken God and had worshiped idols. The idols were described as works of their hands. We have a great tendency to rely on what we have done, what we have saved, our insurance, our source of income, our retirement plan, our government, the military – all the things we as individuals or as a nation have put together (the works of our hands).

Once they lost sight of the fact that they were God's chosen people and that He is a righteous God Who has demands on us, then they were left open to other value systems and other standards of practice for their lives. This led to deterioration of the moral fabric of their society and is similar to what is tearing us down as a nation.

From the message that God gave through the prophetess, it would appear that a society can go so far away from God that drastic action in the form of punishment of discipline is necessary to purge the rottenness away. Judah had gone that far and we see similar evidence in our nation today. Lewdness, greed, injustice and lack of compassion seem to be more and more accepted in our society and unless a spiritual revival sweeps our land, we will go the way of others into ineffectiveness and being at the mercy (or lack of mercy) of ruthless people in the world. Nevertheless, God does take note of the godly elements in a nation and makes provisions for them.

God saw what was in the heart of Josiah. He saw the concern and the sorrow that Josiah had because of the sins of the people. He saw the tears and the tenderness of heart and God was moved by that. I wonder what would happen today if the church were to see the sins of our nation and would have the sorrow and tears and concern of Josiah. Could we make a difference in the outcome of the United States? Might we not make a difference in the life of even one person? Is there someone we know who needs to know the truth of the word of God concerning their relationship to God and the effect that relationship has on where they will spend eternity? Because of Josiah's concern, God's judgment did not come to pass until Josiah had died. Then

judgment came on Judah. Perhaps it is not too late for our nation – perhaps we should inquire of the Lord even as Josiah did.

What would most people do if they learned that God’s judgment was going to come upon their nation but it would not happen until they had passed away? We might have a tendency to breathe a sigh of relief and be extremely grateful that God, in His mercy, had spared us and then just continue to take care of ourselves as we await the peaceful end of our lives. After all, the outcome predicted for the nation will happen and that is not going to change. In fact, the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon happened less than twenty-five years after the death of Josiah. That is very sobering.

Josiah did more than just breathe a sigh of relief; he was motivated to take action to inspire those in his realm of responsibility and influence to repent and return to God. He called all the elders of the country (secular and religious) together and read the words of the Lord to them and challenged them to keep God’s covenant. He also initiated action (beyond just words) to have the pagan worship places torn down and he disallowed any pagan worship practices such as sacrificing children. The third action he took was to “put away” those who practiced such things as seances, magic, and fortune telling. These practices were forbidden in the Scriptures and he wanted to be in complete agreement with what God had commanded. He also went so far as having people remove all pagan symbols and idols from their homes. His pursuit of being in compliance with God’s word was wholehearted.

Our first thoughts might be to think what “might have been” if someone like Josiah had discovered the word of God a century before and had instituted reforms. What might happen today if those who have access to the word of God started applying it? What are the alternatives for us in our culture and with our laws that could come close to what Josiah did for Judah? The first thing would be for all Christians to get our own house in order. We might be surprised to know how many church members have consulted a fortune teller or had their palms read or regularly read their horoscopes. We might even find that we have symbols of pagan religion and pagan religious practices in our homes even though we have no intent of worshiping such things. The next step would be to help educate or enlighten others about the dangers of trusting in anything other than God for our well-being.