

The Lost Book

II Kings 22; II Chronicles 34

Introduction

One of the men with whom I attended seminary was an avid scuba diver. It was fascinating to learn how he operated safely under water. Don told me that when you are deep under water, it is difficult to tell which way is up. This is because the water diffuses the light. You are also totally weightless, so you have no sense of gravity. Surrounded in an aura of light and being weightless as well, makes it very easy to lose all sense of direction and to become disoriented. You may sense that the direction to your left is actually up and that your air bubbles are going sideways! You may be so convinced that your perception is true that you decide to ignore your bubbles and go the way you think is up – and even swim to your death. One of the first things Don was told, when he was learning to scuba dive, was to always trust the air bubbles; to always follow the bubbles. No matter how you felt; no matter what you thought, the bubbles were always right.

Today, our society is a group of scuba divers – disoriented, confused, not knowing which way is up. They are following their own opinions of what is up and down; what is right and wrong. And, they tend to follow the directions of other disoriented swimmers, who say, “Live like this,” “Believe this,” “Think this way, not that way.” The problems that arise with knowing exactly what is right and wrong are apparent.

A book published in 1991, entitled, *The Day America Told the Truth*, reveals the moral disorientation of our country in the statistics it presents. The statistics reveal:

- seventy-three percent of Americans will steal from those who will not miss it;

- sixty-four percent will lie for convenience, as long as no one is hurt;
- ninety-three percent say they alone decide moral issues, basing their decisions on their own experience or opinion.

We see this disorientation in an interesting story that Michael Loftis, whose missionary work in Easter Europe and the Middle East is supported by our church, told me. He and his family were in the British Museum, along with hundreds of people who were filling the crowded aisles and were bunched together in front of displays. The Loftis family had the unique privilege of standing in front of a glass display that held the original Alexandrinus, which is an ancient Greek copy of the Bible. This copy was given as a gift to King James of England; the same King James who authorized the translation of the King James Bible.

Can you imagine seeing first hand, nothing less than the miraculous preservation of scripture? This is a manuscript that is fifteen centuries old! Michael said, “Stephen, the sad thing was, we were the only people looking at the ancient copy of scripture. The rest of the crowd was in a frenzy to get past us to a display of music that had been composed and autographed by the Beatles.”

This Book, the Bible, ladies and gentlemen, has, in effect, become a lost Book.

So, what is the problem? Like divers who do not follow their own bubbles, we no longer follow our Bibles. Even though there are millions of copies of this Book, it has become lost in the murky dark waters of unbelief or disregard.

Unfortunately, the Bible is treated in a similar fashion by the “believing world” as it is by unbelievers. The Evangelical Christian Publishers Association estimates that the average religious home in America contains at least four Bibles. Yet, the same symptoms of a lost world emerge from religious homes and churches.

The problem is, while the Bible sits on lamp stands and coffee tables in our living rooms, it is not allowed to sift into our lives! There is a difference between having a Bible inside your home, and having a Bible inside your heart.

I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, that we need to rediscover the Word of God that, as Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12, tells us, is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. Like some relic from an archeological dig, we need to rediscover the truth that God does not just want us to possess the Bible, He wants the Bible to possess us.

How do we rediscover the Bible? The answer is found in the book of II Kings, chapter 22. While you are turning to that passage in your Bible, I will set the stage for one of the most dramatic discoveries of God’s Word in the Old Testament.

In our last discussion, in our nearly completed study of the books of Kings and Chronicles, we began the biography of a young boy who became the King of Judah. We carefully noted the age at which he became the king as being the age when other children are entering the third grade. And, to our amazement, although his grandfather and father were ungodly, he was godly.

You may remember that Ezra informed us in the Chronicles account that Josiah was sixteen years of age when he began a lifelong passion for knowing the God of his father David. He yearned to know God in and through the events of his life. Then, when he was twenty years old, he began to purge the land of idolatry and evil.

A Spiritual Leadership . . . A Unified Undertaking!

We ended our previous study at that point. In our study today, we will begin when Josiah turned twenty-six years old, or as Jeremiah records in II Kings, when he was in the eighteenth year of his reign. At this time, Josiah made an announcement.

The strategy for temple repair

Notice II Kings, chapter 22, verses 3 through 7.

Now in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam the scribe, to the house of the Lord saying, “Go up to Hilkiah the high priest that he may count the money brought in to the house of the Lord which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. Let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the Lord, and let them give it to the workmen who are in the house of the Lord to repair the damages of the house, to the carpenters and the builders and the masons and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the house. Only no accounting shall be made with them for the money delivered into their hands, for they deal faithfully.

Now, King Josiah is going to have the dilapidated temple, that had been ignored for seventy-five years or more, repaired. Let me give you a couple of points in his strategy for temple repair.

The finances are raised

1. The first point is that the finances are raised.

What a wonderful scene this is! It is an incredible picture of partnership. In verse 4, we are told that the people made this possible as they contributed to the work on God’s house. So, the finances are raised.

The workers are released

2. The second principle follows, which is that the workers are released.

I chose the word “released” specifically because of the implications of verse 7. Can you imagine the implications of this method of handling a building repair project? Josiah said, “Raise all the money and give it to the workers. But, don’t bog them down with financial reports, let them build!”

The workers are released! That is kind of risky, isn’t it?!

Who were these workers? You should circle all of the different occupations or groups of people referenced in these verses. In:

- verse 4 – the high priest, the doorkeepers, the people;
- verse 5 – the workmen;

- verse 6 – the carpenters, the builders, the masons.

Ezra adds, in II Chronicles, chapter 34:

- verse 12 – the musicians;
- verse 13 – the burden bearers.

An exciting work of God is never accomplished by a select few; it is accomplished by a unified people to the cause. The cause of these people was to repair the temple of God, so that they could worship God as God is to be worshiped.

In the book of Acts, chapter 2, verse 46, we are told that those in the exploding church in Jerusalem were continuing together with one mind; one passion; one purpose to glorify God and reach their world for the risen Christ.

In our church, as in any church, there is a plea for people to participate instead of spectate.

A Stunning Discovery . . . A Righteous Response!

Now, suddenly, the construction project is halted because of an archaeological discovery. Look at verse 8a of II Kings, chapter 22.

Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.” . . .

The Hebrew is more dramatic. It literally says, “The book of the law I have found!”

It was probably a scroll written on animal skin, which was preferred over papyrus during this time.

The definite article, “the book of the law,” more often refers to the entire Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Old Testament. However, Ezra, in II Chronicles, chapter 34, verse 14, adds the words, “given by Moses”. Since the fourth century, this phrase has been understood as a specific reference to the book of Deuteronomy. So, this was most likely a discovery of the book of Deuteronomy, the last book of Moses.

The question I asked was, “How did it get lost??”

The Jewish nation was incredibly tenacious with its preservations and transmission of scripture. This passage indicates that all they had of the law was this book that had only then been discovered.

Josephus wrote in the first century that faithful priests actually hid the scroll in the bottom of one of the temple chests.

So, was the book really lost? It was lost in the same way that your Bible sometimes gets lost. Sir, the reason you had your kids looking all over the house for your Bible on Sunday morning was because you had not looked at it since the last Sunday! Does this describe you? All of the women are saying, “Amen!” And all of the men are saying, “Stick to the text!”

Your Bible gets lost when several days go by without looking at it.

For seventy-five years, during the reign of Manasseh, and during the reign of Amon, and during the eighteen years between Josiah’s coronation as king at the age of eight to this point at age twenty-six, the scripture was lost because, frankly, no one wanted to see it. It was lost because it was no longer loved!

When the Bible is no longer consulted and studied and applied, even though in our generation, there are millions of copies in print, it is, in effect, a lost Book!

Now, the Bible tells us that Shaphan the scribe came and read the book of Deuteronomy to the king. Notice verses 10 and 11.

Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king. When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.

Tearing of clothing was the symbol for repentance and humility. The reading of this book provoked deep repentance.

Frankly, I find it amazing that reading from Deuteronomy would provoke anything. When was the last time you read Deuteronomy and tore your clothes? Yet, if you look in the book of Deuteronomy, you discover that that is the book where they were told how to worship, and where they were not only given law, but were given the grace of God through the system of atonement whereby they could be forgiven. It is beautiful.

Think about the fact that we have sixty-five additional books of the Bible; we have the completed word from God. Imagine the impact that God wants this completed canon of scripture to have on our lives – especially when we observe Josiah, who had only a few passages from a book we rarely open. The impact of hearing from God, the ultimate standard of holiness, changed Josiah’s life.

Let me tell a true story that first appeared in the magazine produced by the Naval Institute, entitled, *Proceedings*.

While on maneuvers, a battleship lookout noted a light in the dark, foggy night. After noting the light's coordinates, the captain recognized his ship was on a collision course with the other vessel. He said, "Signal the ship, 'We are on a collision course, advise you change course twenty degrees.'"

The return signal came, "Advisable for you to change course twenty degrees."

The captain said, "Send, 'I'm a captain, change course twenty degrees.'"

"I'm a seaman second class," came the reply, "you had better change course twenty degrees."

By this time, the captain was furious. He yelled, "Send, 'I am a battleship. Change course twenty degrees.'"

The reply came flashing back, "I am a lighthouse."

Oops!

Josiah simply discovered the presence of God's authority through the word – and immediately altered his course of action. In fact, Josiah responded with immediate personal application. Notice in verse 13, Josiah says,

Go, inquire of the Lord for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.

The key words are at the beginning of the verse and the end of the verse, "Go, inquire of the Lord for ME . . ." and ". . . to do according to all that is written concerning US"! The hardest person in the world to apply the word to is yourself. Josiah applied the word to his own life first!

Rediscovering the ministry of the Word

Now, notice verses 18 and 19, where the prophetess Huldah sends word back to King Josiah.

But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the Lord thus shall you say to him, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'Regarding the words which you have heard,

because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what 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 truly have heard you,' declares the Lord."

Do you want to know what the word is to do in our lives? It is to provoke a response like this in us. Let us rediscover the ministry of the word. There are many, but let me give you three ministries.

A ministry of liberation

1. The Word of God is to have a ministry of liberation in your life.

John, chapter 8, records the words of Jesus Christ saying to his audience, in verses 31b through 32,

If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

There is the initial moment of freedom when God judicially pronounces you forgiven; when the account of Jesus Christ pays for your individual guilt and sin. There is also a continuing experience of freedom; a lifestyle of freedom that occurs when you, as His disciple, apply the truth to your life. The ministry of liberation occurs when this Book, the Bible, moves out of your living room and into your life!

Notice chapter 23, verse 3, of II Kings.

The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statues with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. . . .

King Josiah is making a public dedication to put the word to work in his walk.

You should study the word "walk" sometime. In the New Testament, we are told to:

- walk in newness of life,
- walk by faith,
- walk by the Spirit,
- walk in love,
- walk as children of the light.

The New Testament also makes an interesting distinction between those who walk and those who wander. The ministry of the word is to begin the process of walking.

A ministry of transformation

2. The Word of God is also to have a ministry of transformation in your life.

Romans, chapter 12, verse 2a, tells us,

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind

...

The verb, “to be transformed” in the Greek New Testament is passive. That means you do not transform yourself. In fact, you cannot do it to yourself; it has to happen by some agency other than you! We discover in the book of Colossians, chapter 3, that the agency is God Himself through His word which dwells within us; takes up residency and moves in and through us.

Howard Hendricks, a professor of some of my seminary classes, told us one day, the story of the man who came up to him and bragged, “I’ve been through the Bible nineteen times.”

Hendricks responded, “And how many times has the Bible been through you?”

The Greek word for “transformed” is “morphoo,” which gives us the word “metamorphosis”. If you look up “metamorphosis” in the dictionary, it means to go through a series of radical changes. When you accepted Jesus Christ and became initially free, you were inviting Him to radically change you. Did you know that?

First, you discover the ministry of liberation; that is, you are set free. Then, you discover the ministry of transformation; that is, the word is going to radically change you.

A ministry of evaluation

3. That introduces a third ministry of the Word of God, which is a ministry of evaluation.

James, chapter 1, verses 22 through 25, refers to the word as a mirror. We look into this mirror for the specific purpose of changing by way of evaluation.

Now, when you got out of bed this morning, you looked into a mirror. One hundred percent of us had the same conclusion – damage had occurred during

the night and emergency repair was needed! We made those repairs and others appreciated it!

No one ever argues with a mirror. The mirror does not change, we do. And, when you come to the word, you discover, whether you like it or not, the truth of the word does not change according to our ability to stomach it. The word does not change, we do.

When Josiah saw his life and his nation in the reflection of the word, he began to immediately repair his kingdom and his life. We will take a look in our next discussion at chapter 23 of II Kings, which reveals the changes he began to institute.

Application

Let me conclude our study today by giving two truths that come from this portion of Josiah’s biography.

Being confronted and exposed to the truth does not guarantee being changed by the truth

1. First, being confronted and exposed to the truth *does not* guarantee being changed by the truth.

It is possible to be exposed to the word without experiencing the word; that is, without putting the word into practice. It is possible to be in church and hear the word, but the word never get into us and we never change. Chapter 23 will reveal that certain priests who were exposed to the same passages of scripture as Josiah, refused to worship God correctly.

Imagine driving down a highway that has many curves and a steep cliff to the side. Then, you see a sign ahead that reads, “Dangerous Curve Ahead”. Immediately you are confronted with a choice to make. One possible choice is to observe the warning and slow down. A second choice is to ignore the warning and maintain your current rate of speed. A third possibility is to defy the warning and increase your speed. The response you choose to exercise however, will not change the truth of the sign. The curve remains dangerous, regardless of whether you acknowledge that fact or not.

The prevalent attitude of our generation has the approach of, “Let’s cover the danger signs and then, build a hospital at the bottom of the cliff!”

Being teachable and submissive to the word does guarantee a life of change and transformation

2. Secondly, being teachable and submissive to the word *does* guarantee a life of change and transformation.

The question every believer is challenged to ask after studying this portion of Josiah's biography is, "Is the word at work in my life?!"

Has the Word of God:

- liberated you from the penalty of sin through salvation?
- transformed your life; corrected and changed you?
- caused you to evaluate your life, so that all that is in you that is unlike the image of Jesus Christ is being carved and cut away?

In March of 1986, in Bel Air, Maryland, a twenty-five year old man, whose name was not released, was given a traffic ticket for not having his toddler secured in a car seat. The young man grumbled about the ticket and fastened his son into the appropriate restraint. The ticket was stuffed into the glove compartment. Nineteen minutes later, this man and his young son were involved in an accident. The little toddler sustained a few minor injuries, but was protected by the restraints of his car seat. Unfortunately, the father was killed. You see, although he heeded the warning to fasten his son's seat belt, he never buckled his own.

Let the word liberate you, transform your life, and cause you to evaluate your life. Put the word to work in your own walk.

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