

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 29, Part 2 Kings 22-23, Part 1

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Last week we saw how the die was formed for the mold for Judah's last years. This week we see a moment of hope. Hope that unfortunately was quenched, but nevertheless a moment.

And we want to think about the significance of that moment for the long term in the future. As the background says, Josiah came to the throne as a boy, age 8, and ruled from 641 until 609 BC, but he was only 39 when he died. The circumstances of his death are not very clear.

What is happening from the beginning of his reign until the time of his death is the really sudden collapse of the Assyrian Empire. The last significant king was a man named Ashurbanipal, and he ruled for some 40 years. And it appears that during that 40 years, maybe they began to rest on their laurels because they had captured Egypt, at least for a while, and had achieved all their goals, but things just pretty clearly fell apart.

When he died in 629, everything just collapsed from there on. Within 20 years, the last Assyrian armies had been pushed over onto the Euphrates River and were fighting for their lives. In 609, the Egyptian pharaoh, for reasons we don't completely know, decided to go north and see if he could help the Assyrians. Most people believe that what he was hoping for was to keep a weak Assyrian state between him and Babylon, and probably that's what was going on.

But at the Pass of Megiddo, that narrow pass where you come off the coast road through the, again from your point of view, through the mountain range that extends out to Mount Carmel, a choke point on the great highway from Egypt to Babylon, Josiah tried to stop the Egyptians. Now, it's interesting that in Chronicles, the pharaoh speaks for God and says, I am serving Yahweh, and if you fight against me, you'll be fighting against Yahweh. And Josiah didn't listen.

Now, I rather suspect that part of the reason he didn't listen is because he was pretty sure the pharaoh didn't know what he was talking about. But at any rate, Josiah was killed. And so, what might have been, we can imagine, had he lived another 20 years, but in fact, the reform that he started came to a sudden crashing end.

And he had no less than three sons on the throne after him. The oldest, we think, was Jehoiakim, who was 25. His next brother was Jehoahaz, who was 23.

The people put Jehoahaz on the throne. Maybe he was anti-Egyptian; we don't know. But for some reason, they chose him over his older brother, Jehoiakim.

Well, the Egyptians captured him after only three months and carried him off to Egypt and put Jehoiakim on the throne, the older brother. Well, he promptly sold out to Egypt. As the Bible tells us, Egypt had put a huge tribute on Judah and Jehoiakim went ahead and collected it, taxing the rich.

That was in 609. Well, the Pharaoh's help for the Assyrians did them no good, and the Babylonians defeated the army.

And a few years later, in 605, Nebuchadnezzar came through, and Jehoiakim changed horses. He abandoned the Egyptians and became a Babylonian vassal. But in 601, Nebuchadnezzar experienced a defeat at the borders of Egypt.

It was kind of a surprise to everybody, including him. He pulled his armies back to Babylon to regroup. Apparently, Jehoiakim saw his chance and decided to revolt.

In the aftermath, with the Babylonians having pulled back, it's clear that the biblical text talks about raiders. It certainly looks as though things had just kind of collapsed with no major power in the area. And so, Jerusalem was subject to all of these raids.

But Nebuchadnezzar was on the rise, and Egypt was on the fall. Nebuchadnezzar was able to regroup and came back. And sometimes, we do not know exactly when, perhaps in 599, the Babylonians were back.

And in 598, Jehoiakim died. We do not know why. Kings and Chronicles don't agree.

Chronicles says he died in captivity in Babylon. And Kings knows nothing of that. So, it's just kind of mysterious.

I kind of think the city was besieged. There was obviously pestilence. There was famine.

There was general chaos. I think they may not know exactly what happened to Jehoiakim. But he died.

His son, Jehoiakim, 18 years old, came to the throne and immediately surrendered. He was on the throne again, like his uncle had been three months before. And the whole family, the whole royal family, was taken into captivity in Babylon.

And so then, son number three comes to the throne. His name was Mattaniah. And we don't quite know why, but Nebuchadnezzar changed his name to Zedekiah.

So, there's son number one of Josiah. There's son number two. And there's son number three.

The Bible never considers Zedekiah to be a legitimate king. He was a lackey of the Babylonians. The Babylonians put him on the throne.

And so Jehoiakim is a cynic. We'll talk about that next week. And Zedekiah was a man who ruled by poles.

Whichever way the wind was blowing, that's what he was in favor of. And ultimately, he broke his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. And in 589, the siege began in January.

No, it's going to be 88. No, I think it is 89. Let's see.

Began in January. And in 586, in July, the city fell. So that's the background of all of this that happens after Josiah.

But to give you a sense of where we're going especially next week. Okay, finding the Torah. Notice what is said about Josiah in the second verse of chapter 22.

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. That's pretty standard. But now, what comes next is not.

He followed the ways of his father, David, completely, not turning aside to the right or to the left. That's unusual. That's saying more about him than we've seen of even the best of the previous kings, which would be Hezekiah and Asa.

So that clearly, this young man with very, very, I was going to say heretical, but apostate grandfather and father, nevertheless, had pretty clearly paid attention. And he is not merely doing the right thing, but in terms of what we're told of David, he was wholeheartedly for God. No divided heart here.

He is God's man, top to bottom. Now, it's apparent that he doesn't know the Bible. What he knows is evidently by tradition, by oral teaching, and by word of mouth because the temple is in a mess.

Verses four and five. Go up to Hilkiah, the high priest, and have him get ready the money that's been brought into the temple of the Lord, which the doorkeepers have collected from the people. Have them entrusted to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple.

Have these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the Lord. Now, why do you suppose the temple was in need of repair? Well, it's not destroyed yet. Who was his predecessor? Manasseh, yes.

52 years of corruption. And I think there is something more going on here. Years ago, I visited a Hindu temple near Mound, West Virginia.

Yep, Mound, West Virginia. A group of Hindus had bought a large farm, and so the pastor with whom I was staying, holding meetings, said, you need to see this. So, he drove me across the Ohio River. We were in Ohio.

The farm was a mess, which impressed me. Finally, we got up to the temple. Well, the temple was gorgeous.

All the colors of the rainbow and everything else. And then we drove around behind it. It was all a facade.

Now, why would that be? And I suggest the answer is because paganism does not believe that this world is real. This world is just a shadow. So, not only would Manasseh not have kept up the temple because it was the temple of Yahweh, and he didn't have any interest in it, but I also believe his fundamental acceptance of the pagan worldview would have affected it.

If you believe this world is real, then caring for this world is significant. Maintaining what this world has for God's sake, not for the world's sake, not for our sake, but for God's sake. And so, the attention that Solomon gave to the temple all those years ago was a mark of his theology.

This is the real world God has given us. It is a real world in which he's put us in charge of. And we should maintain it at the very highest level.

So, the temple is in disrepair. As we'll see in a few moments, it's full of pagan stuff. And so the workmen are appointed.

Now, I want you to notice verse 7. They need not account for the money entrusted to them because they are honest in their dealings. That's a direct quote of what was said of the builders working under Joash a century earlier. I wonder why you've heard me say it before; when the Bible says it, it's because there's some significance there.

There's some importance that the Holy Spirit wants us to land on. Again, I suspect it's related to this very point. That is, God's commission assumes integrity that our words and our behavior match.

There's a reality to our words that matches the reality of our behavior. Again, if this world is a shadow, and you perform magical rituals to make the real world do what

you want, then this world doesn't matter very much. And what you say and are in this world doesn't matter very much.

What matters is whether you do the rituals right, whether you do the magic right. But who you are, whether your words and your behavior match, and what does that have to do with anything? I suspect that's what's going on. In the work on the real temple, integrity matters.

They go together. Now, the high priest finds the book and he recognizes it, that it's the book of the Torah. But he gives it to the recorder or perhaps the scribe.

I've got the NIV here. It calls him the secretary. I suspect it's more scribe, the writer.

And the writer, Shaphan, brings it to Josiah and says, Hilkiah, the priest, has given me a book. Again, I wonder if that's significant. Hilkiah, the high priest, recognizes this as the Torah.

Shaphan, but that doesn't have any significance to Shaphan. It's just a book, just another book. I think what this says is that apart from the religious folks, it's just a book.

I think it refers to the loss of awareness of the word of God as something that is happening among us—just a book.

If I don't know anything about it, it doesn't really matter. Now the question is, how in the world could it be lost? As I say in the background, the majority of scholars today, in Old Testament scholars, will say that's not possible. It wasn't lost.

It was created at this time. Jeremiah quotes from the book a good deal, and all his quotes are from Deuteronomy. So, the suggestion is that it was the book of Deuteronomy that was found, and the argument is a prophetic group was growing up, and they were really concerned about the paganism of Israel and they were beginning to think about this monotheism and this Yahweh character that some folks were worshipping and they decided that we've got to straighten these people out.

So, they found out that the temple was being repaired. So, they wrote the book and stuck it in there to be found as though Moses had written it. I'm telling you, that's the majority opinion among Old Testament scholars today.

So how could it be lost? Anyway, how can you lose the US Constitution? What do you think? All right, there probably were not multiple copies. They had stopped teaching it and reading it. Yeah, I think that's exactly right.

In that sort of a society where there's not a lot of writing, there was more writing than some people want to admit, but not a lot, where oral tradition was a major factor anyhow, so I think that it had been lost in practice even before Manasseh and during that 55 years of Manasseh and Ammon, it was lost in fact. Let me say one more thing about scholarly opinions here. There are those today who will say, well, they knew. People knew it wasn't written by Moses.

They accepted that sort of thing, and you made an impact on your teachings by putting in the name of some old person that people would remember with honor, but everybody understood. To which I say reverently hogwash, one of the marks of the pseudepigrapha, that is, those books that are not in our canon, in our standard collection, are clearly written by somebody other than they claim. In other words, books didn't get into the canon if anybody doubted that they were what they claimed.

So, at least one Old Testament student insists that, indeed, you better believe the book. If the book says it was written by Moses, that's good enough for me. That's good enough for me.

So, notice Josiah's reaction. When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, interestingly, he recognized where it came from; he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiyah, the priest, Ahikam, son of Shaphan, Achbor, son of Micaiah, Shaphan, the secretary, and Isaiah, the king's attendant.

Go inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Why did he react that way? He didn't say anything about anybody else reacting that way. Hilkiyah, the high priest, doesn't appear to have reacted that way.

Tore his robes. Why do you think he reacted like that? He believed what it said and what did we say about his character earlier? Yes, yes. Even if he didn't perhaps know the written text, he knew Yahweh and he knew what Yahweh was like and now great Scott, here's a book that was inspired by Yahweh and look what it says.

He was prepared, in other words, to respond. He had a heart that was ready to respond. And I think that's where, in this segment, I would say the word is for you and me.

Is my heart tender toward the Lord? Is my heart open to all that he might be saying? Or am I building a wall around myself to protect me from uncomfortable ideas from God? Or am I saying, Lord, I want your word. I want your truth. I want your will whatever that may be.