

## KEY VERSE

The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.  
—2 Kings 23:3

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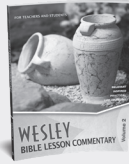
## GUIDED BY THE WORD

## SCRIPTURE

- 2 Kings 22:1–4, 8–20; 23:1–5, 25

## LESSON FOCUS

God's leaders are guided by his Word.



## CHECK IT OUT

*Wesley Bible Lesson Commentary*  
Volume 2 • Unit 4 • Lesson 12  
Activity: God's Word in Your Life

## SESSION OVERVIEW

engage

The nation of Israel had not been faithful in following the ways of the Lord, but had repeatedly worshiped Baal and a host of other pagan deities. When the young man Josiah became king over Judah, he set out to repair the temple of the Lord, and upon doing so, the workers discovered a copy of the Law. When it was read to Josiah, he repented before the Lord for the sins of his people over the years. He then had it read publicly for all the people to hear. Finally, he cleansed the temple of the Lord of all the articles associated with the worship of other gods.

## INTRODUCTION

examine

North America is a land that was founded on principles contained in the Bible. Its first white settlers were Catholic missionaries, Pilgrims, and Puritans. For several hundred years, the Bible shaped both the culture and the laws of the United States and Canada. Its stories were widely known. People named their children after their favorite Bible characters. Schools even used the Bible as a text for teaching people how to read. But over time, something tragic happened. People lost their Bibles—not literally; they just quit reading them. A great many people today are ignorant of the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and even the meanings of Christmas and Easter. We are fast becoming a people who are biblically illiterate.

## 1 Neglecting the Word of God leads to a tragic spiritual situation (2 Kings 22:1–4).

### NIV

1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath.

2 He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and followed completely the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

3 In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the temple of the LORD. He said:

4 "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest and have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the LORD, which the doorkeepers have collected from the people.

### KJV

1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.

2 And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

3 And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying,

4 Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people:

It is a situation not at all unlike that faced by ancient Israel. Neglecting the Word of God inevitably leads to spiritual tragedy. The spiritual condition of the nation of Israel was deplorable. For centuries they had tolerated, and even encouraged, idolatry and various forms of immorality associated with Baal worship. Nearly every high place throughout the land had altars where people regularly sacrificed to the pagan fertility god Baal and his female consort Asherah. Josiah's father and grandfather, kings Manasseh and Amon, had for fifty-seven years encouraged the people in their idolatry. Worship of Jehovah was at an all-time low. Priests still went through the motions of their duties at the temple in Jerusalem, but few people made pilgrimages there to offer any sacrifices or make any vows.

Josiah began his reign as king over Judah when he was only **eight years old** (2 Kings 22:1). His father, Ammon, had been assassinated by some of his officials after only two years on the throne. They thought

that perhaps they could better control the direction of the kingdom through a “boy king.” What they didn’t count on, though, was the fact that Josiah, while only a teenager, **did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and followed completely the ways of his father David** (v. 2). He instituted a number of radical reforms that had not been seen for hundreds of years. According to 2 Chronicles 34, he had the various altars to Baal and the sacred poles of Asherah throughout the land torn down in the twelfth year of his reign. He destroyed all the carved idols and cast images, and he ground into powder the incense altars that were above them. He even had the bones of the priests who served these gods burned on their own altars. When he finished all this, **in the eighteenth year of his reign** (22:3), he directed his attention to the neglected temple in Jerusalem. He collected money from all over Israel and set about giving the entire temple a face lift—repairing the stone and beams, cleaning out the closets, and polishing up the instruments.

## ONE

explore

1. How does the Word of God become neglected, as it was in Judah?
2. What happened to King Josiah when he heard the Word of the Lord?
3. Which verse or passage of Scripture has changed your thinking or behavior most dramatically?

## 2 The correct response to hearing God’s Word is repentance (2 Kings 22:8–20).

### NIV

**8** Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” He gave it to Shaphan, who read it.

**9** Then Shaphan the secretary went to the king and reported to him: “Your officials have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the workers and supervisors at the temple.”

**10** Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, “Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

**11** When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.

**12** He gave these orders to Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Akbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king’s attendant:

**13** “Go and 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. Great is the LORD’s anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us.”

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**NIV** *continued*

**14** Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

**15** She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me,

**16** 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read.

**17** Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.'

**18** 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:

**19** Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people—that they would become a curse and be laid waste—and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.

**20** Therefore 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.'" So they took her answer back to the king.

**23:1** Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

**2** He went up to the temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord.

**3** The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

**4** The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel.

**5** He did away with the idolatrous priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts.

**25** Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.

**KJV**

**8** And Hilkiyah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

**9** And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD.

**10** And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

**11** And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.

**12** And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying,

**13** Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

**14** So Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

**15** And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,

**16** Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read:

**17** Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

**18** But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard;

**19** Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.

**20** Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

**23:1** And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.

*continued*

**KJV** *continued*

2 And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.

3 And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

4 And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel.

5 And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven.

25 And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

While they were in the process of making repairs to the temple, one of the priests made a wonderful discovery. He found the **Book of the law** (v. 8) of the Lord that had been given through Moses. It had been neglected and lost over time. When he showed it to the king's secretary, he read it. Then he took it to the king and read it to him.

When Shaphan read the Scriptures to Josiah, it was like a knife going through the king's soul. The writer of Hebrews said, "The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). When King Josiah heard the word of the Lord, he **tore his robes** (2 Kings 22:11). This was a sign of great contrition. He recognized that his fathers had led the nation to sin greatly against the Lord for many years. Consequently, he knew that the Lord must have been very angry against Judah.

After hearing God's Word, Josiah decided to inquire of the Lord what he should do next. So, he sent a group of his advisors to speak with the prophet Huldah. She advised them that the Lord was intent on bringing judgment against Judah, **according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read** (v. 16). However, because the king himself had been responsive and had humbled himself before the

Lord when he heard the Word, the Lord would stay his hand of judgment until after Josiah's reign was over and he was buried in peace.

The Word of God had such a profound effect on King Josiah that he decided to call together all of the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple, where everyone had gathered—the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets. . . . He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant (2 Kings 23:2). They were strange words to their ears—old words, yet new words to them, since the book had been neglected for such a long period of time.

After he finished reading, the king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD (v. 3). He pledged himself to follow the LORD and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, just as Moses had set forth in the book so many years before. And, following his example, all the people pledged themselves to the covenant as well (v. 3).

It is one thing to make a promise to God at an altar after being convicted by his Word, and it is another thing altogether to follow through with that promise. Josiah and the people of Judah followed through. The first thing they did was to get rid of all the vestiges of Baal worship that remained in the temple. Then he and the people did a thorough house cleaning throughout the land, getting rid of all the pagan priests, destroying their shrines and altars, even the quarters of the temple prostitutes. There was, for a brief period while Josiah was the king, a genuine revival of morality and worship in the land.

## TWO

### explore

1. What difference did the king's leadership make in the response of the people?
2. What evidence was there that the Word of God made a difference in the land?
3. Why is the public reading of God's Word important today?

## LIFE APPLICATION

### exercise

Just as in Josiah's day, there is a tremendous neglect of the Word of God today, even within our churches. We haven't lost our Bibles, but we don't read them like we should. What are some things you can do to recover the importance of the Word to your life? What are some things you can do to encourage the influence of the Word of God in your home, your church, and your workplace?