

Hilkiah's Discovery

Devotional Reading: Romans 7:7–12
Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 33:1–33

2 Chronicles 34:15–22, 26–27

¹⁵ Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” He gave it to Shaphan.

¹⁶ Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: “Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them.

¹⁷ They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers.” ¹⁸ Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

¹⁹ When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. ²⁰ He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king’s attendant: ²¹ “Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD’s anger

that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book.”

²² Hilkiah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

²⁶ “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: ²⁷ Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD.’”

Key Text

Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” He gave it to Shaphan. —2 Chronicles 34:15

Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

Unit 1: Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify what Hilkiah found.
2. Contrast King Josiah's reaction to hearing Scripture read to that of his son King Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 36:20–26.
3. Make a plan to value the public and private reading of Scripture in an effort to keep God's Word from being neglected.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Dead Sea Scrolls
- B. Lesson Context

I. Discovering a Book (2 Chronicles 34:15–21)

- A. Reporting and Reading (vv. 15–18)
Sugar Cookies
- B. Reacting and Requesting (vv. 19–21)
Lost in the Temple Today

II. Consulting a Prophet

(2 Chronicles 34:22, 26–27)

- A. Identity and Location (v. 22)
- B. Response and Reason (vv. 26–27)

Conclusion

- A. Listening to God
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Dead Sea Scrolls

The world of archeology was turned upside down in 1947 after shepherds made a startling discovery in a cave near the Dead Sea: seven ancient scrolls encased in jars. Over the next 10 years, hundreds more scrolls were found in the surrounding area, most dating from the third century BC to the first century AD. The collection, called the Dead Sea Scrolls, became one of the most significant archeological finds of the twentieth century.

These scrolls shed significant light on life during the time between the testaments, the practices and beliefs of the people who lived in that region, and the reliability of the Old Testament texts. These scrolls had been “lost” for centuries, waiting to be discovered. Since their unearthing, our knowledge of the time period that Jesus walked on earth has significantly expanded.

Today's lesson details an account of a significant archeological discovery made in the temple complex in the seventh century BC. The response of Judah's king to this finding would have significant ramifications for him and the kingdom.

B. Lesson Context

This lesson continues exploring the kings and prophets of the kingdom of Judah. As such, the context of lesson 2 also applies to this lesson.

Following the reign of Hezekiah in Judah (715–685 BC), the Jerusalem temple fell into disrepair and neglect. Much of this occurred during the reign of Judah's longest-reigning king, Manasseh (696–642 BC). His reign was marked by sin and evil. He reestablished idolatrous practices (2 Kings 21:3), shed innocent blood (21:16; 24:4), and “did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (21:2). His sinful acts culminated in his desecration of the Jerusalem temple (21:7), the same temple that Hezekiah had purified (see lesson 2). Scripture lists Manasseh's sinful actions as a reason Judah faced disaster, destruction, and exile (21:10–15).

Manasseh was succeeded as king by his son, Amon. He was also an evil king: he worshiped

idols and “did not humble himself before the Lord” (2 Chronicles 33:22–23). Two years into his reign, he was assassinated. His eight-year-old son, Josiah, replaced him on the throne of Judah (34:1).

Josiah’s reign (640–609 BC) differed from those of his father and grandfather. At age 16, he began to seek after God (2 Chronicles 34:3a). Four years later, he made efforts to cleanse both Judah and Jerusalem of idolatry (34:3b–7). Then, at age 26, in the eighteenth year of his reign, he took steps to repair the temple in Jerusalem (34:8). This act was significant because previous kings had allowed the temple complex to “fall into ruin” (34:11). In the years preceding the project, little faithful worship had occurred in the temple, except during a brief season (33:14–17). The temple’s restoration was the climactic reform of Josiah’s reign. Yet, it yielded an unexpected finding, as today’s lesson will show.

The parallel account of 2 Chronicles 34:15–22, 26–27 (today’s lesson) can be found in 2 Kings 22:8–14, 18–19.

I. Discovering a Book

(2 Chronicles 34:15–21)

A. Reporting and Reading (vv. 15–18)

15. Hilkiyah said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” He gave it to Shaphan.

Scripture mentions at least seven individuals named Hilkiyah (1 Chronicles 26:11; 2 Kings 18:18; etc.). This particular *Hilkiyah* is the high priest during the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8). He is also the great-grandfather of Ezra (Ezra 7:1).

Shaphan is part of the group responsible for overseeing the repairs to the temple (2 Chronicles 34:8). His work as a *secretary* likely focuses on protecting and maintaining royal documents.

The temple renovation project (see Lesson Context) likely unearthed many items that had been buried, including money (2 Chronicles 34:17, below). Hilkiyah, however, discovers something more significant *in the temple of the Lord*: “the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses” (34:14). Because modern bookbinding techniques had not yet been

Don’t neglect God’s Word.



Visual for Lesson 3. *Display this visual as you ask the discussion questions associated with 2 Chronicles 34:15.*

invented, this “book” may have been rolled in the form of a scroll (compare Jeremiah 36:2; Ezekiel 2:9).

The consensus among commentators is that the book was a form of Deuteronomy. The title *Deuteronomy* means “the second [giving of the] law”—a reference to the Law of Moses. There are several reasons why this book could have been a copy of Deuteronomy.

First, the phrase “the Book of the Covenant” in 2 Chronicles 34:30 can fit Deuteronomy, since that book is in the form of a covenant renewal treaty. However, that same phrase is used in Exodus 24:7, most likely to describe the material in Exodus 20–23.

Second, the emphasis in Deuteronomy 12 on worship in one place is consistent with Josiah’s reforms. Third, the purging of the land of pagan cultic places is found in Deuteronomy 12. This depiction could have made an impression on Josiah since that is precisely what he had been doing even before the book of the law was found. Fourth, the reference to curses in 2 Chronicles 34:24 could point to the extended curses spelled out in Deuteronomy 27:9–26; 28:15–68. Fifth, the celebration of Passover in 2 Chronicles 35 is similar to the commands of Deuteronomy 16:1–8.

A final argument in support of Deuteronomy is its emphasis that keeping the land depends on obedience to the covenant. Reading Deuteronomy

29 alone would be enough to cause Josiah to tear his clothes in anguish in this regard (see 2 Chronicles 34:19, below).

The text gives no reason why this document was lost in the first place. It is possible that most, if not all, copies were lost or hidden during the idolatrous reigns of Manasseh and Amon. Some commentators speculate that this book was deposited in a secure location during the repairs to the temple that occurred during Hezekiah's reign (2 Chronicles 29). Over time, those who served in the temple may have forgotten about the book.

What Do You Think?

What *personal* practices and habits help prevent God's Word from becoming neglected?

Digging Deeper

What *corporate* practices and habits also help in this regard?

16. Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: “Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them.”

The parallel account states that *Shaphan* read the book after receiving it from *Hilkiah* (2 Kings 22:8). In addition to bringing *the book to the king*, *Shaphan* reports on the status of the work on the temple. Such extensive renovation required the service of carpenters, stone masons, and other laborers (see 2 Chronicles 34:10–11).

17. “They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers.”

The text does not state the source of this *money* or where it was discovered *in the temple of the Lord*. Regardless of its source, the money is distributed to *the supervisors* and the *workers* of the temple restoration project.

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

Before revealing the contents of the *book*, its chain of custody needed to be established. *Shaphan*, whose role as a *secretary* involves han-

dling documents, is given the book by *Hilkiah the priest*, who discovered it. *Shaphan* then reads it aloud *in the presence of the king* (and presumably others in his court).

The book of Deuteronomy contains a prescription for the public reading of “this law” before all Israel (Deuteronomy 31:9–13). Deuteronomy also stipulates that the king is to read a copy of the law “all the days of his life” (17:19; compare Joshua 1:8). As *Shaphan* reads the book, all those present—including the king—hear the law, which probably had not been read publicly for many decades.

Sugar Cookies

My grandmother's sugar cookies have been part of my family's Christmas celebration for as long as I can remember. Her memory lives on whenever we pull out her recipe card and make the same cookie dough. My grandmother's handwriting swirls across the card with peaks and dips like ocean waves.

I didn't want to lose the treasure of this tradition. Last year, I gifted my mom a glass cutting board with the recipe etched onto its surface. I didn't just want to remember the recipe; I wanted to preserve my grandmother's legacy. The cutting board serves as a lasting reminder of my family's history gathered around her table, eating her sugar cookies.

We preserve the things we treasure. That's why

How to Say It

Abdon	Ab-dahn.
Ahikam	Uh-high-kum.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Hilkiah	Hill-kye-uh.
Huldah	Hul-duh.
Jehoiakim	Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.
Manasseh	Muh-nass-uh.
Nahum	Nay-hum.
Noadiah	No-uh-die-uh.
Rehoboam	Ree-huh-boe-um.
Shallum	Shall-um.
Tokhath	Tok-hath.

it's so tragic that the people in Judah lost the book of the law. This book reminded the people of their past: how the Lord had made them his covenant people. In this way, the book of the law is significant and worth treasuring; it was the way the people remembered their history.

What steps can you take to ensure that God's Word doesn't become "lost" to you? —N. H.

B. Reacting and Requesting (vv. 19–21)

19. When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes.

The word of the Lord demands a response. Some reject it, while others submit to it. Josiah dramatically responds as *he tore his robes*. The act of tearing one's clothing signals remorse, humility, and repentance (examples: 2 Samuel 1:11–12; Isaiah 36:22–37:1; Acts 14:13–15; contrast Leviticus 10:6; 21:10).

After hearing *the words of the Law*, Josiah is horrified. Although he has worked to remove idolatry from Judah (see Lesson Context), he knows that Judah is far from being completely obedient to the law. Some outward reform had occurred, but Josiah recognizes the need for something else (see 2 Chronicles 34:21b, below).

What Do You Think?

When was a time that God's Word evoked strong feelings in you?

Digging Deeper

How did those feelings lead you to action regarding obedience to the Word of God?

20. He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant:

The group the king *gave . . . orders to* consists of select members of his court. We know very little about these individuals. *Ahikam son of Shaphan* protected the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:24). In the parallel account of this narrative, *Abdon son of Micah* is named "Akbor son of Micaiah" (2 Kings 22:12). This narrative contains the only mention in Scripture of *Asaiah the king's attendant*.

21a. "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and

for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found.

Josiah directs this group to seek a better understanding of *the Lord* in order to discern the significance and meaning of *what is written in this book* of the law. The king's directive is not just for his own knowledge, but also for the good of others. The findings would affect all inhabitants of the divided kingdoms: the *remnant in Israel* (reference absent from 2 Kings 22:13) and the residents of *Judah*.

What Do You Think?

What further training or expertise do you need to deepen your study of God's Word?

Digging Deeper

Who from your community will you invite to join you in studying God's Word?

Lost in the Temple Today

My father set a good example for us. He read the Bible often, taught Sunday school from this commentary, and was otherwise very involved with fellow Christians in general and church ministry in particular. He had been church treasurer, took communion to shut-ins, and helped with interior renovations of our church building. The list goes on.

Then something changed. He stopped going to church. He would leave the room rather than discuss Christianity. He stopped reading his Bible—I heard him say once that "It's all just speculation."

In effect, the Word of God became "lost" to my father. His Bible was still just right there on the shelf within easy reach, but it might as well have been gathering dust in someone else's basement hundreds of miles away.

As we read today's text, we may wonder how a lengthy scroll of a Bible book can get "lost" within the very confines of the temple itself! But it still happens. Given that our bodies are the temple of God today (1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; etc.), think how easily it is for God's Word to get "lost" in there as the issues and things of

earthly life take priority. What guardrails can you erect so that you aren't one of the "rocky places" that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 13:5, 20–21? —R. L. N.

21b. “Great is the LORD’s anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book.”

Josiah recognizes that the burden Israel and Judah continued to experience was due to disobedience to the Lord. The Law of Moses clearly specifies the results of *the Lord’s anger* that is to befall the people because of their rebellious idolatry (Leviticus 26:14–45; Deuteronomy 28:15–68; 29:18–28; etc.).

What Do You Think?

What is your comfort level in discussing God’s anger?

Digging Deeper

How do you resolve that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) but that he also demonstrates wrath (Psalm 7:11; Romans 1:18–19; Ephesians 5:6; etc.)?

II. Consulting a Prophet

(2 Chronicles 34:22, 26–27)

A. Identity and Location (v. 22)

22. Hilkiyah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

Several prophets serve in Judah during Josiah’s reign, namely Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum. The king’s entourage visits none of those, however, but rather seeks out *the prophet Huldah*. Other female prophets mentioned by name in the Bible are Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), and Anna (Luke 2:36).

The role of Huldah’s husband, *Shallum*, as *keeper of the wardrobe* is not given. But perhaps he cares for the priestly garments in the temple.

(A similar role is described in 2 Kings 10:22.) The quarter where they live is likely the second district in the northern (newer) part of *Jerusalem*. This quarter is near the temple complex, thus allowing Shallum easy access to the temple. Given the probability that both Huldah and her husband are somehow connected to the temple, she is the ideal person to inquire about the book of the law.

B. Response and Reason (vv. 26–27)

26. “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:’

The first part of Huldah’s prophetic response is in 2 Chronicles 34:23–24, not part of today’s lesson text. It describes the disaster and curses that are to come on Judah because the people have worshiped pagan gods and rebelled against the Lord (34:25; see 33:2–9). The kingdom of Judah would experience conquest and exile from the land, as promised by the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 28:15, 36).

The second part of Huldah’s response is in the verse now before us. Whereas she had previously identified King Josiah simply as “the man who sent you to me” (2 Chronicles 34:23), she now identifies him specifically as *the king of Judah*. This casts the spotlight on Josiah personally. See the next verse.

27a. “ ‘Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence,

Huldah’s response acknowledges Josiah’s humble and contrite response to receiving the book of the law. First, the state of his *heart* has been demonstrated by his mourning of Judah’s sin and his desiring to follow God’s will. When Josiah heard the words of the book read, he submitted, grieved, and repented. Most of Judah’s kings were prideful and rejected the Lord. A few, however, demonstrated humility before the Lord: Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 12:12), Hezekiah (32:26), and even Manasseh (33:12–13). Even today, God favors

those who are humble (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5–6, both quoting Proverbs 3:34).

In the years to follow, Josiah’s son Jehoia-
kim would ascend to the throne of Judah (609–
598 BC). He would lack the humility of his father.
Jehoiakim’s officials would gain possession of a
scroll that contains “all the words” the Lord had
given to the prophet Jeremiah regarding Israel,
Judah, and all the nations (Jeremiah 36:2, 21).
When Jehoia-
kim would hear the words, he would
cut the scroll to pieces and throw them into the
fire (36:22–23). Rather than repent and mourn
the words of the Lord, Jehoia-
kim and his officials
would not express fear or would not tear their gar-
ments (36:24).

King Josiah listened to the word of the Lord,
humbled himself, and obeyed. King Jehoia-
kim, however, did the opposite: he exalted himself
and rejected the Lord’s warnings. Josiah hon-
ored the prophetess Huldah, but Jehoia-
kim had the prophet Jeremiah arrested (Jeremiah 36:26).
Josiah was spared the horrors of exile. Jehoia-
kim, however, was not; because of his disregard for the
word of the Lord, he was carried into exile in Bab-
ylon (2 Chronicles 36:5–7).

sion to engage the Egyptians in battle (2 Chron-
icles 35:20–25).

Even so, we do not lose track of the fact that
Josiah was spared the horrors of exile because of
his humility and desire to obey the word of the
Lord. His was a posture of humility. As such, the
Lord responded with mercy and grace.

Conclusion

A. Listening to God

Josiah received the book of the law, heard its
words, and humbly sought the Lord. His example
gives us a model for responding to God’s Word
today. Josiah received God’s words *attentively* and
submissively.

To listen attentively assumes a posture of
receptivity. We set aside our defensive tendencies,
desires to deflect, and self-justifications. When we
listen attentively to God’s Word, we set aside our
expectations. Instead, we patiently receive God’s
Word and let its power transform us.

After listening attentively, we submit to God’s
Word and let it lead us into obedience. We hear
God’s Word and commit to follow it. We are
God’s children, obedient to his Word.

We can only receive God’s Word if our spiri-
tual “ears” are prepared to “hear.” This reception
occurs when we have a heart willing to repent of
our sins, submit to God’s word, and seek him
above all else. Only then can we listen attentively
to God’s words.

How do you receive God’s Word? Are you like
Josiah and listen to it attentively and submissively?
The one who is Creator, Ruler, and Redeemer has
revealed himself through Scripture. How can we
not be interested to what he has to say?

B. Prayer

Lord God, we seek you night and day as we
listen to your voice and meditate on your Word.
Give us soft hearts so we might obey your Word
and submit to your guidance for our lives. In
Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Be a Josiah, not a Jehoia-
kim.

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to cultivate a
tender heart and humble attitude before
the Lord?

Digging Deeper

What barriers prevent you from cultivat-
ing these things? How will you deal with
such obstacles?

27b. “I have heard you, declares the LORD.”

Josiah’s actions and attitudes do not go unno-
ticed. Through the prophecy of Huldah, the Lord
gave Josiah a promise of hope: “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 and on those who live here”
(2 Chronicles 34:28). The prophecy revealed that
Josiah would not experience the pending disas-
ter of exile. However, this did not mean he lived
a long and peaceful life. Approximately 13 years
later, Josiah died following a questionable deci-