



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for March 30, 2008
Released on Wednesday, March 26, 2008**

“Josiah Renewed the Covenant”

Lesson: 2 Chronicles 34:15, 18-19, 25–27, 29, 31–33.

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 34.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 119:25–40.

Times: probably near 622 B.C.

Place: Jerusalem

HOW TO SAY IT

AMON. *Ay-mun.*

HILKIAH. *Hill-kye-uh.*

JOSIAH. *Jo-sigh-uh.*

SHAPHAN. *Shay-fan.*

LESSON TEXT

2 Chronicles 34:15, 18, 19, 25–27, 29, 31–33

15 And Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan.

.....

18 Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

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

.....

25 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 poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched.

26 And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard;

27 Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

.....

29 Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

.....

31 And the king stood in his place, 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 his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book.

32 And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

33 And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to explain how a discovery of the law of God was used by Josiah to define Judah's sin and lead his people to covenant with Jehovah.

Principle: to realize that knowledge of God's Word is necessary for spiritual development.

Application: to urge those who want truth to saturate themselves with biblical teachings.

LESSON OUTLINE

THE BOOK—2 Chronicles 34:15, 18—19.

THE MESSAGE—2 Chronicles 34:25—27.

THE RETURN—2 Chronicles 34:29, 31—33.

INTRODUCTION

Have you had the experience of packing boxes with certain items only to be left with an empty corner or side that really needs to be filled? When that occurs, you sometimes have to look around to find items that will fill the spaces.

That means that when it is time to unpack, you will repeatedly find surprises. Maybe these surprises help counter the hard work and occasional periods of frustration that always accompany a major move. It is even better when a box has been left unopened for a few months or years and you come across favorite items.

One day such a surprise discovery happened in the land of Judah. Hezekiah had been a godly king, but he was followed by Manasseh and Amon, both of whom were wicked men. During their reigns the worship of Jehovah was sadly neglected, resulting in an ugly situation regarding the temple. It became neglected and desecrated.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Second Chronicles 34 is the story of the reforms of godly King Josiah. At eight years of age, Josiah became king (v. 1). Josiah ruled the southern kingdom of Judah from about 640 to 609 BC. Josiah's two predecessors, namely Manasseh and Amon, were evil. Their evil permeated Judah for nearly 60 years. This meant that Josiah had a lot of work to do to turn things around spiritually for his nation.

Second Chronicles 34 offers us interesting parallels to 2 Kings 22 and 23. It is important to study both accounts for the fullest picture. Some information that the author of Chronicles gives us is unique, not being mentioned in 2 Kings 22 and 23. One such piece of information is that in the eighth year of Josiah's reign (about 632 BC) he began to seek after "the God of David his father" (2 Chronicles 34:3a).

Perhaps the preaching of Zephaniah of the time had some influence upon the young Josiah (age 16). The ministry of the prophet Jeremiah, which began about 626 BC (see Jeremiah 1:2), may have had some influence as well. Another piece of information in 2 Chronicles but not 2 Kings is that Josiah began to purge the land of idolatry when he was 20 years old (2 Chronicles 34:3b).

Before today's lesson text opens, those accounts tell us that we are in the eighteenth year of King Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22:1, 3; 23:23; 2 Chronicles 34:1, 8), with the king at age 26. At that time he undertook to repair the temple, since it had not been attended to during the reigns of previous kings. Throughout the story one can perceive the author's emphasis on the Levites' part in the repairs (2 Chronicles 34:9, 12, 13, 30; absent from 2 Kings).

After Josiah began his reform in Jerusalem and Judah, he moved into the northern territory. Then, "he returned to Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 34:6, 7). That holy city is the setting for today's lesson.

QUESTIONS

THE BOOK—2 Chronicles 34:15, 18–19.

Josiah sought to repair the temple in his eighteenth year as king, as noted in the Lesson Background. In the process of paying money to the workers and their overseers, "Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses" (v. 14).

1. How were the repairs of the temple paid for, and who was the priest overseeing it?

In the eighteenth year of King Josiah's reign, he ordered a major repair on the temple, which had been cleansed during the purge (2 Chron. 34:8). Money was collected from all over the land and given to those in charge of the job of repairs. They, in turn, paid those who were to do the actual work (vs. 9–11).

There was a large task force involved because of the immensity of the challenge (vs. 12–13). The high priest at that time was Hilkiah (v. 9). He is probably the Hilkiah named in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 6:13 and Ezra 7:1. He was in the family line of Aaron—the brother of Moses and Miriam.

2. What occurred to catch Hilkiah's attention, and to whom did he relate his discovery (2 Chronicles 34:15)?

At the time the money was being delivered, Hilkiah was apparently working in the temple by himself. While doing so, he made a surprising discovery. He found a copy of the book of the law that had been given to Moses (2 Chron. 34:14). It is amazing that this book had been "lost" until this moment.

We may be amazed to read that *Hilkiah*, a priest, has *found the book of the law* in the temple. Isn't that where it's supposed to be? And how can such an important thing ever get "lost"? The answers lie in the neglect of decade after decade by evil Kings Manasseh and Amon (v. 11).

Hilkiah immediately reported his find to Shaphan the scribe (or secretary). Another issue also presents itself: Exactly which book is this? Many scholars think that it is probably the book of Deuteronomy. There are several facts to support this conclusion. First, the phrase "the book of the covenant" in 2 Chronicles 34:30 can fit the entirety of the book of Deuteronomy since it is in the form of a covenant renewal treaty. (We also recognize, however, that the phrase "the book of the covenant" is used in Exodus 24:7, most likely to describe the material included in Exodus 20–23.)

Either way, it now became an object of focused attention. Both Hilkiah and Shaphan recognized its importance.

3. What did Shaphan do with the book (v. 18)?

When Shaphan reported to Josiah on the progress of the work, he told him that everything they had been ordered to do was being done properly and that the money had been delivered. He then added that in the process Hilkiah the priest had found a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

It must have been an emotional experience for King Josiah as he sat listening to the words of the law of Moses. Had he heard any of this before, or was everything he heard a new revelation to him? What might have been particularly striking to him was the clarity of the warnings that God had given. Deuteronomy 28, for example, spells out in detail what God would do to chasten His people if they turned from Him. It must have caused fear in Josiah as his realization of the extent of Judah's departure from God became clear.

Obviously, God's commandments to the king had not been followed: "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (Deut. 17:18–19). Josiah now knew that God had every reason to judge His people.

4. What was Josiah's response to hearing the book read (v. 19)?

"Josiah's reaction was dramatic. The more he listened to the contents of the scroll, the more distraught he became. Every word of it sounded like a condemnation; very clearly this was not a book that the kingdom had lived by. Finally, he jumped up, tore his robe to demonstrate how upset he was, and issued an order" (Corduan, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: 1 and 2 Chronicles*, Broadman & Holman).

To rend or tear one's *clothes* is to communicate remorse, humility, and repentance (see Isaiah 36:22; 37:1). King Josiah already has been busy ridding the land of the trappings of idolatry. The anguish that Josiah now demonstrates shows that his heart truly matches those actions. He instinctively knows that outward reform in terms of smashed pagan idols will not necessarily mean inward reform or true repentance on the people's part.

THE MESSAGE—2 Chronicles 34:25–27.

5. What did Josiah do after hearing the message of the recovered book, and what message came back to him?

The command Josiah issued was given to five of his trusted servants (v. 20). He said, "Go, enquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book" (v. 21).

We cannot help wondering whether this copy of the book of the law was the only one left in existence. If so, the probable explanation is that all other copies had been destroyed during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. In their days the worship of Jehovah had been completely abolished, with the possible exceptions of individuals scattered throughout the land who still trusted and sought to obey God. It was taking a long time under Josiah to get the worship of God reestablished; this was now the eighteenth year of his reign.

Huldah's (a prophetess living at the time of Josiah) response quickly confirmed that Josiah's fears were legitimate. Through her, the Lord told the messengers that He was indeed going to bring disaster on the land and all its inhabitants (2 Chron. 34:24). The many curses that Shaphan had read and Josiah had heard were going to be fulfilled. A detailed study of Leviticus 26 alongside Deuteronomy 28 will clarify what He meant. In both chapters, God promised certain blessings when His people were obedient, but warned of certain punishments when they were not.

Josiah's spiritual sensitivity regarding God's Word enabled him to understand the ways of God toward His people. His desire to get God's people back on track and his openness to God's will were most commendable.

6. What was a time when you set out to improve an area of your life, only to discover that you were in worse shape than you had originally thought? How did you react to the discovery? How did you grow spiritually as a result?

Josiah was already involved in God-pleasing reform activity when the book of the law was found. The book helped Josiah see just how far from God the nation had fallen. When we approach our Holy God, we become more acutely aware of how far from holy we are. When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord, he was immediately aware of his own "unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). This is not said as a discouragement, but as an acknowledgment of our sinful condition and need for grace. The Lord took care of Isaiah's unclean lips (Isaiah 6:6, 7), and He can take care of ours too.

God is pleased when we choose to repent (2 Peter 3:9). As long as we are alive and in control of our will, it is not too late. We are never too far away to turn to Him. The Lord even accepted back evil King Manasseh after an unholy reign of several decades (2 Chronicles 33:10-13). Through abiding in Christ, we can grow in our ability to make better choices (Philippians 1:9-11).

7. Why did God extend His mercy to Josiah in spite of His wrath, and why does He extend His mercy to us (vs. 25,27)?

It is a wonderful truth that God is gracious and merciful and eager to forgive and restore His own when they truly repent. Prophetess Huldah's message was not just about God's determination to fulfill the curses Josiah had heard in the Mosaic law. She also had a personal message for him from the Lord. Although God's wrath would eventually be poured out on Judah because of her wickedness, God's mercy would be extended to Josiah because of his heartfelt repentance.

The Lord's message was directed to the king personally, for he had sent the inquiry. Huldah's mention of the words Josiah had heard, his tender heart, and his humbling of himself are the clues that tell us it was a personal message, not one for the whole nation. Because of Josiah's tender heart and humble spirit, God had heard him. God was aware of everything Josiah had done and said, including that he had torn his robe and wept over the situation when he heard what God was going to do to his land and people.

Two words in 2 Chronicles 34:27 explain exactly what Josiah felt and did. To be "tender" means to be yielding and sensitive. This is the opposite of a heart that is unaffected and cynical toward the realization of sin and injustice. To be "humble" means to be willing to subject oneself without conditions. Had Josiah had a hardened heart, he would never have responded in humility.

The conclusion of Huldah's message was that the calamity destined for Judah would not occur until after Josiah's death. "Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same" (2 Chron.

34:28). Surely this is a reminder to us that God values and honors tender attitudes of humility in His people.

THE RETURN—2 Chronicles 34:29, 31—33.

8. What did Josiah do as a way of leading the people of Judah back to a right relationship with God (vs. 29,31)?

Deuteronomy 31:12–13 says, “Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: and that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.” This was to be done every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles.

It was this type of gathering that Josiah called for. He sent word to all the elders throughout Judah and Jerusalem, along with the priests and Levites and many of the common people, to come together. He then read aloud to them “the book of the covenant” (2 Chron. 34:30) that had been found in the temple. It might be that what he read was Exodus 20:1 through 23:33, which is referred to as “the book of the covenant” in 24:7; or perhaps he read the entire text of what had been found. In any case, it had a profound effect on the listeners.

At the conclusion of the reading, Josiah stood before everyone and made a public commitment to follow the demands of God’s Word. “Very few of the kings of Judah promised to follow the Lord as Josiah did. After David, only Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah made such public commitments (cross reference 2 Chron. 23:3; 29:10; 1 Chron. 17:7–14). They stand head and shoulders above the other kings of Judah and Israel” (*The Nelson Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson).

It was a deep commitment within Josiah’s heart in which he announced to everyone present, certainly with the hope that they would be motivated to imitate his commitment to serve and please the Lord.

9. How did the people respond and what happened in the land (vs. 32,33)?

Josiah... made everyone present declare the same commitment. This might not have been as forced as it sounds on the surface, because 2 Kings 23:3 says, “And all the people stood to the covenant.” In that text it sounds like a willing act of participation. We can imagine that as Josiah made his declaration to follow the Lord, he requested that everyone present stand in honor of God and as evidence of their own desires to follow this same covenant.

In 2 Kings 23:4–20 we have details of an extensive purging throughout the land. Every object related to false worship and idolatry was destroyed (v. 4). All false priests were removed (v. 5), a wooden image that had been erected in the temple was destroyed (v. 6), and booths used in sensual religious rituals were torn down (v. 7). Many other acts of cleansing followed (vs. 8–15). This is summed up in the statement of 2 Chronicles 34:33, “Josiah took away all the abominations out of all... Israel.”

10. How long were they true to God?

It must have been obvious to the people that Josiah was following the convictions of his heart, and they apparently were eager and willing to follow his lead. Everyone present determined to be obedient to God, and this dedication of the people lasted throughout [Josiah’s] entire reign. They did not cease following the God of their fathers during all the days of Josiah. It was a genuine revival!

Perhaps one of the most meaningful lessons we can learn from this text is that spiritual leadership is extremely important. It is often said that a congregation

reflects the attitudes and lifestyles of those who are in positions of leadership. Each of us wields influence over many people. How are we affecting them?

CONCLUSION

RENEWING THE COVENANT

I have taught for over 30 years, in two Bible colleges. My emphasis in all my Bible classes has been *teach the people!* How will they ever know the Lord without a mature and full knowledge of His Word?

There is a desperate need in our churches for renewal. We can change worship styles or add programs to help our churches grow, but what we absolutely need is greater biblical literacy.

Only a recommitment to God's Word as divine revelation can avert a coming disaster. Submission to the Word's authority in terms of obedience is vital. Churches are in danger of losing their heritage, identity, and roots. We have whole generations that know little of the Bible, and what little they know is often misinterpreted. A fresh discovery of the Word of God can mend broken relationships with God as well as with others. It is possible to become (again) "a people of the Book"!

One person can make a difference in the life of a congregation by encouraging a recommitment to Bible study. This will take time and effort, but mature study over a long period of time will make all the difference. Let us seek to restore our covenant relationship with God through a renewed effort to understand God's Word.

PRACTICAL POINTS

Only one who is sensitive to the Word of God recognizes the true nature of sin (2 Chron. 34:15, 18–19).

Godly leaders and examples will not keep God's judgment from those who persist in sin (v. 25).

God always honors those who humble themselves before Him (vs. 26–27).

Only those willing to publicly commit themselves to the Lord can expect others to follow Him (vs. 29, 31).

Commitment to the Lord is not just words; it demands action (vs. 32–33).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Renewal always begins with repentance.

PRAYER

Our Father, you have revealed to us Your will through holy Scripture and through Your Son, the incarnate Word. Forgive us for breaking covenant with You. Today we renew our covenant with You. Help us to walk in Your ways with all our heart, soul, and strength. May Your Word bring renewal to our lives so that our relationship with You will be restored. In Jesus' name, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

With the next lesson, we move to a new unit, "Trusting God's Covenant in Hard Times." Daniel was a Jewish captive in Babylon, but he had a ministry there. This talented young man had risen to prominence in King Nebuchadnezzar's court, but he was determined not to defile himself with pagan food and wine. Have your students see how he avoided this without losing favor.

Read Daniel 1:1–21 in preparation for April 6, 2008's lesson, "Holding to Your Convictions." The Golden Text is Daniel 1:8, "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." The time is 605 B.C., and the place is Babylon. *Good studying!*

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

Kimbley Y. Baker-Richardson

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The Pulpit Commentary, Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Hrsg.), Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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