
REDISCOVERED SCRIPTURE BRINGS NATIONAL REFORM

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By Jim Jordal

And when they brought out the money…into the house of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses. 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. And Shaphan carried the book to the king…. saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiyah…and Shaphan the scribe…saying, Go, inquire 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.

Second Chronicles 34:14-21 (KJV)

Miracle of miracles--Hilkiyah the priest finds the long-lost book of the law in the house of God during King Josiah's restoration of the temple. It had been lost for about 60 years during the evil reigns of Manasseh and his son, Amon. Perhaps the copy rediscovered by Hilkiyah was the only one still in existence. In any event, the new king Josiah began at the young age of 16 to dedicate himself to following the Lord into a restoration of true worship, hence the renewed funding of the temple and the advent of Hilkiyah's discovery as he brought money into the temple.

It's sad that the Scriptures were lost in the house of God for this length of time. Considering the many questionable stands on economic justice taken by many church groups today, one wonders if that hasn't happened again. But that's not the main message of this account. The main message concerns what happened when a well-intentioned, sincere, Godly national leader heard the unvarnished truth of God's word read directly from Scripture without being "interpreted" through the minds of theologians and other "experts."

As Scripture proclaims, the word of God will do its work, and it certainly did in this case. King Josiah, even though reported to be a king who "did which was right in the sight of the Lord," realized that the nation had sinned deeply over the past several generations, and that God was angry with this. His response to that knowledge was not to mount a propaganda campaign, or to minimize the message of God, or to call in his advisors to plan a way to soften the message to the people. It was to tear his clothes in grief at this sin, and then command corrective action.

The corrective action taken then was the same as what we need today. Josiah the king gathered the people--great and small--together to hear him read "the words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the house of the Lord." According to MacArthur's Commentary what was read was probably the entire law from Genesis 1 through Deuteronomy 34: (And you think sermons today are too long). In any event, the crowning point of the law being read was found in Deut. 28-30, which reveals the choice between good and evil presented to the people, and the consequences of each choice.

That's what we don't hear much of today. We hear--and correctly so--of the necessity for contrition, repentance, personal salvation, holy living, the sacraments, and righteous living in loving community. But we seldom hear of national sin and its awesome consequences. We've become such New Testament Christians that we have little time for consideration of the Old Testament laws for jubilee justice as the means for overcoming oppressive economic and social systems.

National sin is just what Moses said it was. It's ignoring God and His will in every form of national life. It's the idolatry of "things" over people, pleasure over principle, lust over responsibility, religious form over freedom, and above all the exaltation of human intelligence and experience over the clear word of God. And it's the national ethos of economic growth at the expense of people, the environment, and public decency.

In Deuteronomy 28:1 Moses says it clearly: "And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord your God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command you this day, that the Lord your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth; and all these blessings shall come upon you…"

As we witness the decline of ethics, morality, and public decency in the nation today, perhaps it's time for us to ponder, as did king Josiah and his people, what happens when the nation loses its sense of direction by ignoring the word of God. Perhaps it's time to realize the correlation between obedience to God and national calamity. And perhaps it's time to re-discover the complete word of God in our national places of worship. After all, look what happened when Josiah applied Scripture to the nation and its woes.