

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-31 Moses's Writings Are Rediscovered

An English proverb says, "Out of sight, out of mind." This means that when someone or something goes away, or is lost, or hidden, we gradually stop thinking about it. Formerly it meant much to us; it shaped and perhaps guided our lives. But now we don't think about it anymore. In ancient Israel, the people gradually lost respect for the written Word of God. It no longer guided their lives. And some of the scripture scrolls were misplaced and lost.

Some 200 years had gone by since the time of Elijah and Elisha. Events in the northern kingdom of Israel had gone from bad to worse. Idolatry was widespread. Not one of the 20 kings of Israel had been a godly ruler. God had sent many prophets to counsel the kings and guide the nation, but with little effect. Israel had been invaded and plundered time and time again. Finally, the Assyrian army invaded the land, threw its king into prison, and besieged the capital city. Samaria was destroyed three years later, and the people of the ten northern tribes were carried into exile. In this way God punished the northern kingdom of Israel for turning away from him over and over again. These ten tribes were lost forever.

God had also sent prophets to the southern kingdom of Judah. All 19 of its kings had been descendants of David, as God had promised: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2Sam 7:16). But not all were righteous.

There were several periods of religious revival and decline. Revival involved turning away from idol worship and turning back to worship of Yahweh. The nature gods and goddesses of Canaan and neighboring nations continued to be a temptation to the people of Judah. Often they tried to combine the worship of pagan gods with worship of Yahweh. But Yahweh wanted to be their only one true God. "I will not yield my glory to another," God proclaimed (Isa 48:11).

When the Assyrians captured and destroyed the Northern Kingdom, they continued southward to threaten Judah. Hezekiah, the godly king of Judah, was a righteous reformer. Supported by Isaiah the prophet, he resisted the threats of the Assyrian king. Isaiah predicted the downfall of the invader, "Because you rage against me and your arrogance has come to my ears ... I will make you return by the way which you came" (Isa 37:29). Then the angel of the LORD attacked the armies of the Assyrians. Many were killed, and the army withdrew. Jerusalem was saved!

Sadly, Hezekiah was succeeded by wicked descendants. His son, King Manasseh, restored places of pagan worship, including one near Solomon's temple. He went so far as to sacrifice his own children on a pagan altar, and he killed many godly men who opposed him. The reign of Manasseh's son, King Amon, was equally bad, but short-lived.

The next king, eight-year-old Josiah, became a great religious reformer—the last righteous king of Judah. He was a reformer like his great-grandfather, Hezekiah, but more so. Josiah "followed completely the ways of David, his ancestor; not turning aside to the right or to the left" (2Kings 22:2). At 20, Josiah began to reform the nation. Armed with hatchet and mattock, he began to hack down the pagan altars and idols. For six years he led the destruction of objects of idol-worship in Jerusalem, Judah, and even to Ephraim and northward.

Next, he began the reconstruction of Solomon's Temple, then over 300 years old. The temple and associated buildings were in ruins from neglect. He collected money from all the tribes for this reconstruction. Meanwhile the workers found a scroll or several scrolls in the temple. The high priest gave them to the king's secretary, who showed them to Josiah. He was amazed to realize they had recovered the books of Moses, the Book of the Law.

When the secretary read the scroll out loud, King Josiah was grief-stricken. He commanded, "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about the words of this scroll. Great is the LORD's anger against us. People who lived before us have not obeyed the words of this scroll."

Josiah's advisors went to a female prophet named Huldah. She lived in Jerusalem with her husband. God spoke to her, and she said to the advisors, "This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the scroll the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made.'"

Then she continued, "Tell the king of Judah: '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, and because you tore your robes in grief and wept in my presence, I also heard you. Therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place'" (2Kings 22:8-20).

The king called all the elders to meet him at the temple of the LORD. There he read the scroll to all the people—the scroll found in the temple. He then stood by a temple pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands with all his heart and soul. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

Several more months went by with destruction of idols and pagan altars. Then Josiah commanded that the Passover Feast be observed again every spring. The Bible says that no one had observed the Passover for years. The king gathered the people and supplied thousands of animals for the biggest Passover Feast in the history of Judah. All of these reforms were in response to the finding of the Word of God.

The word of God is the only sure foundation for the church of God. "For 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). This is another good verse for you to memorize.

This story is **important** because it shows that the rediscovery of God's Word became the strong foundation for the reform of the kingdom of Judah.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that ignorance of the Word of God results in the increase of sin and rebellion in a nation. Knowledge of the word of God, however, brings about righteous changes in persons and nations.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why was the northern kingdom of Israel destroyed? [Pause]

- A. If you answered, “Because they turned away from God, and God turned away from them,” you answered correctly.
2. How did the southern kingdom of Judah escape destruction by the Assyrian armies? [Pause]
A. If you said, “Righteous king Hezekiah was turning the nation back to God, and God honored him by sparing Jerusalem from destruction,” you are correct.
3. What reforms did King Josiah bring about in Judah? [Pause]
A. If you said, “He destroyed pagan idols and shrines, rebuilt the temple, renewed the covenant with the LORD in response to the finding of the Book of the Law, and restored the Feast of Passover,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. One young man, Josiah, was able to turn a whole nation back to the one true God. He focused on obeying God’s Word. God has not changed. He can use a man or a woman to turn a family, a tribe, a town or city, or even a whole nation to faith. Join with one of your fellow-leaders to ask God to help you make a difference in your world.