

2 Chronicles 34:18-21 ¹⁸ Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, "Hilkiah the priest gave 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 clothes. ²⁰ Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, ²¹ "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book which has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD which is poured out on us because our fathers have not observed the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book."

Once Josiah realizes the gravity of the situation regarding the words of the law, and Israel's and Judah's lack of compliance with the law of the Lord, he immediately calls the priest to do what priests do and that is to make intercession between him and the Lord.

And so, Hilkiah seeks the Lord on the matter. But notice how he does this. He doesn't go into the holy place and pray but goes to someone else. Who is that?

2 Chronicles 34:22 ²² So Hilkiah and *those* whom the king had told went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, the keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter); and they spoke to her regarding this.

Why do you suppose Hilkiah goes to this prophetess instead of interceding before the Lord himself?

If Hilkiah, who is a priest, didn't know where the book of the law was up until this point, then what was his involvement in the things of the Lord, and could he have felt incompetent regarding his acceptance before the Lord?

The only way a prophet or prophetess could have been recognized in Judah is if this person had proved him or herself by handling the words of God accurately at some point in their ministry. And so, it would stand to reason that they would go to the one person whose faithfulness to God and His word would be impeccable.

Deuteronomy 18:19-22 ¹⁹ 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. ²⁰ 'But the prophet who speaks a word

presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' ²¹ "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' ²² "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

When the King of Judah asks for a word from the Lord they're not going to get second best. They don't want a prophet or in this case a prophetess who speaks presumptuously.

But here's the problem; if this is a true prophet of God then you better be ready for any word that comes from God whether you like it or not.

2 Chronicles 34:23-25 ²³ She said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to Me, ²⁴ thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am bringing evil on this place and on its inhabitants, *even* all the curses written in the book which they have read in the presence of the king of Judah. ²⁵ "Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place and it shall not be quenched.'"

In the Scriptures here we're not told that there was any lag time between the seeking out of the prophetess and the prophetess giving them the word from the Lord. If this is the case then it appears that God had spoken to her before the priest came to her to inquire of the Lord.

But even if God had not done this it's clear that God did speak to her and she was willing to give that word to the priest to give to Josiah, which addresses the issue of whether or not she was a true prophetess of God.

What would give us an indication that she was?

She was not afraid to give bad news to the king. The king had it in his power to have her put to death if he didn't like the message, but she doesn't appear to fear the king, in all likelihood because she feared the Lord her God.

But the message that she has for the nation of Judah is not the only message she receives from God. She also receives a personal message for Josiah.

2 Chronicles 34:26-28 ²⁶ "But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus you will say to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel *regarding* the words which you have heard, ²⁷ "Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and *because* you humbled yourself before Me, tore your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the LORD. ²⁸ "Behold, I will gather you to your fathers and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, so your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place and on its inhabitants.'" And they brought back word to the king.

And so, what God is saying to Judah and Israel is that His wrath will be poured out on the nation but His hand will be stayed in regard to that judgment until Josiah dies.

Why does God do this?

Because Josiah humbled himself before the Lord.

God takes note of the actions of all people and it is clear that there is judgment for all people as God judges the intentions of the heart, which leads to another question.

Why was Josiah's heart turned toward the Lord while others in Judah were not?

There's only one reason. God turned Josiah's heart toward Him. Josiah could not take credit for a heart that sought after the Lord. It is purely God's grace and mercy that turned a heart of stone into a heart of flesh.

Jeremiah 17:9 ⁹ "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

Romans 3:10-12 ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

Paul is quoting from Psalm 53. But Solomon also knew the hearts of men which only lead to death.

^{NAU} **Ecclesiastes 9:3** This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they *go* to the dead.

And so, if man cannot turn his own dead heart toward God then God must personally intervene and turn the heart of man who is then enabled by the Spirit of God to seek the Lord for salvation.

Titus 3:5-7 ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

Ezekiel 11:19 ¹⁹ "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

This is precisely what the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit is. It is God taking the heart of stone out of the flesh and giving us a heart of flesh.

As we return to our text however, we see an interesting outcome of the faith of Josiah. We actually see Josiah covenanting with God to follow Him all his days and then he makes the entire nation of Judah follow him.

2 Chronicles 34:30-33 ³⁰ The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the Levites and all the people, from the greatest to the least; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. ³¹ Then 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 written in this book. ³² Moreover, he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand *with him*. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. ³³ Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the LORD their God. Throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following the LORD God of their fathers.

Notice the words of dedication to the Lord that describe this covenant Josiah makes with the Lord. He kept His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul.

It does not appear that Josiah is paying lip service to God. He means every word he said and follows through with his promise as we see in verse 33.

2 Chronicles 34:33 ³³ Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the LORD their God. Throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following the LORD God of their fathers.

But there's an interesting comparison here between Judah and Josiah. Does anyone notice the difference between these two in verses 32-33 regarding their motivation to follow the Lord?

Josiah serves the Lord with all his heart and all his soul. The rest of the nation, we are told, are made to follow after and obey the law of the Lord.

This does not mean that there weren't those of Judah who also served and followed the Lord in the same fashion as did Josiah. What it does mean is that there were those who followed after God because they were made to do so, with hearts that were not seeking God with all their strength and soul.

The righteous in the land can certainly have an effect on the rest of the population, especially when those righteous are in positions of power and authority. But, as we'll see that can only last so long before the true colors of the people go back to wallowing in the mud.

But back to our text. Josiah continues to show his reverence to the Lord in his obedience to reinstitute the Passover celebration.

By the way the last time that the Passover was celebrated in Judah where both Judah and Israel participated in significant numbers was when King Hezekiah had become king in his father Ahaz's place.

This was around 720 BC. The time in which Josiah is reigning and celebrating the Passover with both Judah and Israel is around 620 BC. Around 100 years has passed, and in that passing the book of

the law of the Lord essentially became lost and now Josiah discovers it again and orchestrates the assembly of both Israel and Judah to celebrate the nation coming up out of Egypt and being delivered by God Himself.

By the way the prophets who were prophesying during the reign of Hezekiah were Isaiah, Micah and Hosea. The prophets speaking for God to His people during the reign of Josiah were Jeremiah and possibly Zephaniah.

But despite the fact that the Passover was celebrated during the reign of Hezekiah where representatives from Israel joined Judah we see here in our text that the comparison between the Passover celebrated by Josiah was more akin to the Passover celebrated very early on during the reign of King David, some 700 years prior to this event.

2 Chronicles 35:15-19 ¹⁵ The singers, the sons of Asaph, *were* also at their stations according to the command of David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the gatekeepers at each gate did not have to depart from their service, because the Levites their brethren prepared for them. ¹⁶ So all the service of the LORD was prepared on that day to celebrate the Passover, and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD according to the command of King Josiah. ¹⁷ Thus the sons of Israel who were present celebrated the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days. ¹⁸ There had not been celebrated a Passover like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; nor had any of the kings of Israel celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did with the priests, the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁹ In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign this Passover was celebrated.

This is the high point of Josiah's reign and we might well say that because of his faithfulness to God that he lived happily ever after. But of course real life, even real life for those faithful to God, doesn't always work out that way.

Just when you think that life is going to be somewhat normal and you're trying to faithfully serve the Lord the enemy comes against you in one form or another and instead of enjoying the peace of the Lord war is once again on the horizon.

2 Chronicles 35:20 ²⁰ After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt came up to make war at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to engage him.

But what is interesting about this foe is that he is actually a non-combatant of Judah and he has no intention of coming against Josiah and Judah but rather his neighbor to the north, Babylon. In this time in history Egypt was relatively friendly with Judah and it had also made an alliance with Assyria, and Babylon was fighting Assyria. Well, because Egypt was aligned with Assyria they set out to help their friend.

Well, whenever an army is parked at your border, there is reason to wonder what they're up to. And so, Josiah confronts Neco's advance and in turn Neco sends messengers to Josiah to assure him that he has no intention of making war with Judah but instead he only wants to help his friends to the north.

2 Chronicles 35:20-21 ²¹ But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What have we to do with each other, O King of Judah? *I am not coming* against you today but against the house with which I am at war, and God has ordered me to hurry. Stop for your own sake from *interfering with* God who is with me, so that He will not destroy you."

Now ask yourself the question. Is Neco, the king of Egypt, a man who follows the one true God, and is the one true God the God of the Egyptian nation?

So, what is going on here? Why does Neco declare that he's only following the orders of God?

The word God here in this verse is the Hebrew word Elohim, and it is translated God. It's the exact same word we read in **Genesis 1:1** ^{NAU} In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

But it's also the exact same word for the gods of the Egyptians prior to the time of God bringing the Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt.

Exodus 12:11-12 ¹² 'For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments-- I am the LORD.

So, here's the problem; if the word Elohim means God or god then what God is Neco speaking of?

We need to look at the context again.

2 Chronicles 35:21 ²¹ But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What have we to do with each other, O King of Judah? *I am not coming* against you today but against the house with which I am at war, and God has ordered me to hurry. Stop for your own sake from *interfering with* God who is with me, so that He will not destroy you."

It's still unclear because Elohim can be a plural or a singular, but as we look at the conversation between Neco and Josiah, Neco assumes that Josiah understands who this God is and that this God communicates with people. In this case this Elohim has actually ordered Neco to hurry to help Assyria. And in the process Neco knows the power of this God as he makes it clear that if Josiah interferes with these orders from God that God will destroy Josiah.

But then the next verse.

2 Chronicles 35:22 ²² However, Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to make war with him; nor did he listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to make war on the plain of Megiddo.

Here it's apparent that Josiah either believes that Neco never heard from the one true God or that he's using Josiah's God by putting words in God's mouth in a way to intimidate Josiah. Either way, Josiah does not believe that these are the words of God which is clear from the fact that Josiah pays no attention to the words of Neco which are supposedly coming from the mouth of God.

But then we come to the next verse.

2 Chronicles 35:23-24 ²³ The archers shot King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am badly wounded." ²⁴ So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in the second chariot which he had, and brought him to Jerusalem where he died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

So, have we solved the issue as to whether or not the one true God, the God of Israel, spoke to Neco? After all, the words of Neco did in fact come true as Neco said they would if Josiah tried to impede Neco's army, when he said, "Stop for your own sake from *interfering with* God who is with me, so that He will not destroy you."

Maybe we should ask another question. Does God ever speak to pagans and use them as His servants to accomplish His will for His people?

Jeremiah 25:8-9 ⁸ "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, ⁹ behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

Nebuchadnezzar is called God's servant, which tells us what about God's will in conjunction with man's will?

God determines how even kings are to be used according to His will and none will stay His hand if He so chooses to turn the hearts of such people to accomplish His will.

Unfortunately for Nebuchadnezzar he thought his power came from himself instead of God and after being used by God to punish Israel this king made a decree in all the land to worship him as god and three men decided they would not bow the knee to a man but only to the one true God.

Anyone remember who they were?

Daniel 3:26 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego who are described by Nebuchadnezzar as servants of the Most High God.

Upon placing them into the fiery furnace for their insolence God protected them from the fire and Nebuchadnezzar has an epiphany.

Daniel 3:26-30 ²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. ²⁷ The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around *and* saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire *even* come upon them. ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or

worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ "Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." ³⁰ Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

But then the king has a dream and the only who can help him understand it is Daniel who is known to the king as Belteshazzar. Now keep in mind that Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the God Most High but still holds to his gods.

The dream demonstrates how this Most High God will bring this mighty king to his knees.

Daniel 4:24-33 ²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: ²⁵ that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. ²⁶ 'And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that *it is* Heaven *that* rules. ²⁷ "Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by *doing* righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.' ²⁸ "All *this* happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. ²⁹ "Twelve months later he was walking on the *roof of* the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰ "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' ³¹ "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³² and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.' ³³ "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*.

But here's the beauty of God's grace and mercy upon whom He desires to show mercy as Nebuchadnezzar then humbles himself before the Most High God.

Daniel 4:33-37 ³³ "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*. ³⁴ "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation. ³⁵ "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' ³⁶ "At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. ³⁷ "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

2 Chronicles 35:25-27 ²⁵ Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. And all the male and female singers speak about Josiah in their lamentations to this day. And they made them an ordinance in Israel; behold, they are also written in the Lamentations. ²⁶ Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his deeds of devotion as written in the law of the LORD, ²⁷ and his acts, first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.