Lesson:  II Kings 22:14-20;  Time of Action:  622 B.C.;  Place of Action:  Jerusalem

Golden Text:  “Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou hearest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD” (II Kings 22:19).

I. INTRODUCTION.  Josiah ascended to the throne of Judah at age eight (see II Kings 22:1).  Unlike his predecessors, Josiah had a heart that yearned to live for God.  When he was sixteen, Josiah began to seek the LORD (see II Chronicles 34:3); and when he was twenty, during his twelfth year as king, he began to make religious reforms in Judah.  It was during the temple repairs that Hilkiah the high priest, found a long lost copy of the Law of Moses, most likely the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible (see II Kings 22:8-10).  With the Word of God in hand, the king suddenly became disturbingly aware of how far his people had departed from the LORD.  He committed himself to obeying the newly discovered Word and how its message affected both him and the people of Judah.
II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. Our lesson takes place during the reign of King Josiah who was Judah’s last good king. Like his great-grandfather Hezekiah, Josiah tried to bring religious revival to Judah, the southern kingdom which had followed Israel, the northern kingdom, in embracing idolatry. But Israel’s idolatry led to their captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Josiah became king when he was eight years old (see II Kings 22:1; II Chronicles 34:1), and it was said of him that “he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left” (see II Kings 22:2; II Chronicles 34:2). We can conclude that there were godly influences around him to mold him because at age sixteen, Josiah began seeking the LORD (see II Chronicles 34:3). At age twenty, in 628 B.C., Josiah began extensive religious reforms throughout Israel (see II Kings 22:3-7; II Chronicles 34:3-7). King Josiah was twenty-one when Jeremiah’s long prophetic ministry began (see Jeremiah 1:1-2). Jeremiah’s messages against idolatry must have contributed greatly in making Josiah’s reforms a reality. During Josiah’s reforms, while the temple was being repaired (see II Kings 22:3-7; II Chronicles 34:8-13), Hilkiah the high priest found a long lost copy of the Law of Moses (see II Kings 22:8), most likely the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Shaphan, the scribe showed the book to King Josiah and read it to him (see II Kings 22: 9-10). It may be that when the king heard the words from Deuteronomy chapters 28 & 29, pronouncing curses upon the Israelites for disobedience, he was so affected that he “rent” or tore his clothes as a sign (see II Kings 22:11) of someone who was ashamed of the sin of his people and afraid of the wrath of
God. For some time now, Josiah thought that the behavior of those in his kingdom was bad because of the idolatries that had been found among them. The evils taking place among God’s people was verified to be as bad as Josiah perceived them to be because of what was written in the book of the law that was being read to him. Rending or tearing his clothes signified the rending of his heart for the dishonour done to God, and the ruin he saw coming upon his people. As a result of what was read to him from the book, King Josiah called a group together from within his court and assigned them to “Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us” (see II Kings 22:13). Our lesson begins with verse 14.

III. SEEKING THE PROPHETESS (II Kings 22:14). Our first verse says “So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.” The names listed here were the group of officials in King Josiah’s court who he sent to consult God concerning what was read to him out of the book that was found in the temple. These men included “Hilkiah the priest” who was also the high priest (see II Kings 22:4, 8); “Ahikam” the son
of “Shaphan” the scribe (see II Kings 22:8), the one who brought the discovered book of the law to King Josiah; “Achbor” the father of Elnathan who later became an official in King Jehoiakim’s court, who was the son of Josiah (see Jeremiah 26:22; 36:11-12, 24-25); “Shaphan” whom we’ve already identified as the scribe (see II Kings 22:8), the one who brought the discovered book of the law to King Josiah; and finally “Asahiah” who was identified as “a servant of the king” (see II Kings 22:12). These men set out to find “Huldah the prophetess” to have her tell them what God had planned for Israel because of their disobedience which the book of the law revealed (see II Kings 22:13). This probably included finding out from “the prophetess” what the people and the king could do to turn away God’s wrath and prevent the judgments which their sins undoubtedly deserved. “Huldah” is described as “the prophetess” or one who spoke to the people for God. She is also said to be “the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas.” There were a number of men named “Shallum” in the Bible, but this one appears to have been Jeremiah’s uncle (see Jeremiah 32:7) and was also the “keeper of the wardrobe” which means that “Shallum” took care of either the king’s clothing or the priest’s robes, or maybe even both. This delegation was sent to “Huldah the prophetess” where “they communed with her” meaning they talked with her. One additional thing is said about “Huldah” parenthetically: (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;). This probably means that “Huldah” and her husband “Shallum” lived in the second quarter, or the new part of “Jerusalem.” Note: The Bible clearly reveals that God not only gave men the spirit of prophecy, He
also gave that gift to women. “Miriam the prophetess” (see Exodus 15:20) helped to lead Israel out of Egypt (see Micah 6:4). “Deborah the prophetess” (see Judges 4:4) judged Israel, and now “Huldah the prophetess” instructed them in the mind of God, and being a wife didn’t prevent her from being a “prophetess” for “marriage is honourable in all” (see Hebrews 13:4). Remember, God is no respecter of persons” (see Acts 10:34). As the sovereign God, He can use anyone, male or female, or anything (see Numbers 22:21-33) to accomplish His will. It’s interesting that both Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:1-2) and Zephaniah (see Zephaniah 1:1) also prophesied at this time, yet the king’s messengers went to “Huldah” to hear from God. It may be that since her husband had a place in the king’s court (for he was keeper of the wardrobe) and they lived close by, these men may have consulted her on other occasions and found that the word of God she spoke was indeed the truth.

IV. THE MESSAGE CONCERNING JUDAH (II Kings 22:15-17)

A. The prophetess speaks (II Kings 22:15). This verse says “And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me.” We are told in the previous verse that when this delegation from the king found Huldah the prophetess, they talked with her no doubt telling her why the king had sent
them. In response, “she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me.” She began her message to be given to the king by uttering the words that most, if not all God’s prophets began with when presenting a message from God. She said “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel.” These words also revealed the special relationship that God had with His chosen people (see Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 26:18-19). Among the prophets who prophesied with the words “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel” was Joshua (see Joshua 7:13; 24:2), Samuel (see I Samuel 10:17-18), Nathan (see II Samuel 12:7), Ahijah (see I Kings 11:30-31), Isaiah (see Isaiah 30:15; 37:21), Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 11:3; 13:12; 21:4), and many others. Introducing a message from God using the words “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel” identified the speaker as a true prophet from God. Then Huldah told the men that they were to “Tell the man that sent you to me” what follows in the remaining verses. Notice, that Huldah didn’t refer to the king respectfully as “his majesty” or to herself as “his humble servant” the way most people referred to a king. Instead, she referred to King Josiah as “the man that sent you to me” reminding these men that the king was just a “man” and she, not him, was the one who had heard from the “LORD.” The words that she was about to speak came from “the LORD God” before whom all of us are on the same level. Although kings may be like gods to some people, they are mere men to God and He deals with them as such, “For there is no respect of persons with God” (see Romans 2:11; Colossians 3:25).

B. Judgment is certain (II Kings 22:16). This verse
says, “Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read.” To emphasize that the prophecy she was about to give to this delegation came directly from God, Huldah repeated the words “Thus saith the LORD.” But here she added the word “Behold” which is normally used in Scripture calling for someone to pay close attention. Huldah then told them that God’s message to the king is “Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof.” In many cases in the Scriptures, the word “evil” refers to morally bad actions (see Genesis 6:5; 50:15, 17; Numbers 14:27; Judges 2:11; 3:7; I Samuel 12:19; Psalms 21:11; 34:14; Proverbs 8:13, etc.), but here it refers to God’s judgment resulting from disobedience (see Exodus 32:12; Joshua 23:15; Nehemiah 13:18; Isaiah 31:2; 47:10-11; Jeremiah 2:3; Ezekiel 5:16, etc.) as recorded in Deuteronomy Chapter 28. The words “this place” most likely refers to the land of Judah which of course, included Jerusalem. God promised to bring judgment on “this place” meaning Judah and all of its “inhabitants.” God’s judgment would include “all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read.” As noted earlier, “the book” of the law (the first five books of the Bible) was found in the temple during its repairs and brought to King Josiah. After reading “all the words of the book,” especially the judgments or curses God promised for disobedience (see Deuteronomy 28:13-68), the king sent these men (see verse 14) to Huldah to ask her about those judgments (see II Kings 22:8-13). The “evil” or judgments God would bring upon His people could not be avoided for God said “I will bring evil” meaning that His mind was
already made up and nothing could be done to change it. God was fed up with His people. The warnings Moses gave in the law for disobedience (see Deuteronomy 28:20; 29:25:31:16-17) were sure to come to pass. Judah’s judgment was inevitable!

C. Judgment is deserved (II Kings 22:17). This verse says, “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 kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.” Undoubtedly, King Josiah knew the reason why God had promised to bring judgment upon His people because he had read it in the “book” (see II Kings 22:11, 13). Now Huldah the prophetess confirmed God’s reason for judgment. She said it was “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.” God’s people deserved His judgment because they had “forsaken” or abandoned Him and replaced worshiping Him with the worship of idols when they “burned incense unto other gods.” In other words, the people were worshiping idols when they “burned incense” while offering sacrifices to idols; sacrifices that should have been offered to God and Him alone. God also said that His people worshiped “other gods” or idols so “that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands.” The words “all the works of their hands” refer to both the sacrifices the people offered as well as the “incense” they “burned unto other gods” (see Jeremiah 1:16). Later, Isaiah would declare how ridiculous it
was to worship idols (see Isaiah 44:15-20). This idolatry is what “provoked” or caused God’s “anger” with His people (see Jeremiah 1:16; 19:4; 44:3, 8). It’s interesting that God said that His people committed these sinful and disobedient acts “that they might provoke me to anger” which implies that they were intentionally rebellious and disobedient. But what else could God do except keep His word (see Isaiah 46:11)? His people had broken not the second, or third or even the fourth commandments; they broke the very first one: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (see Exodus 20:1-7). God will not tolerate being replaced by idols!

V. THE MESSAGE CONCERNING THE KING (II Kings 22:18-20)

A. Concerning the king and the words of the book (II Kings 22:18-19).

1. (vs. 18). This verse says “But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel,
As touching the words which thou hast heard.” Huldah the prophetess not only had a message from God for Jerusalem and Judah (see verses 16-17), she also had one for King Josiah. She said “But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard.” Earlier, Huldah had referred to the king as “the man that sent you to me” (see verse 15), but this time she refers to him as “the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD” emphasizing his position as leader over Judah. Again, the prophetess uttered the words “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel” so there could be no doubt that the message she had for the king came directly from God. The phrase “As touching the words which thou hast heard” refers to what the king “heard” read to him from the book of the law (see II Kings 22:11).

2. (vs. 19). This verse says “Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou hearest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.” As Huldah shared the message that God had for the king, she revealed the mercy God had in store for him. God’s message to king Josiah was “Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD.” She speaks of the king’s great tenderness and concern for the glory of God and the welfare of the nation when she said “thine heart was tender.” The
The truth is that God will distinguish those who distinguish themselves. The hearts of the people were hardened and so were the wicked kings who came before him (see I Kings 14:21; 15:1; II Kings 8:16, 26; 11:1; 16:2-3; 21:1, 19), but Josiah’s “heart was tender” or receptive to God’s word. He received God’s word, trembled at it and yielded to it. He was exceedingly grieved (see verse 11) because of the dishonor shown to God by the sins of the kings who came before him and of his people (see II Kings 22:13). This revealed that his “heart was tender.” In addition, she said Josiah “hast humbled thyself before the LORD.” God said that the king demonstrated a “tender heart” and humility when “thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse.” Josiah heard and received the words that God spoke in the book of the law “against this place (Judah), and against the inhabitants,” of Judah declaring that the land would be cursed and become desolate. Unlike the nation and its “inhabitants,” God was going to show mercy to King Josiah not only because his heart was tender and he humbled himself (see James 4:6, 10) when he heard the words of the book, but also because he “rent” his “clothes, and wept before” God. Josiah’s response to hearing the words of the book was a sign of contrition and repentance (see Zephaniah 2:3). God was showing mercy to Josiah when He said “I also have heard thee.” This phrase means that God had accepted Josiah’s response of humility and contrition to what he heard read from the book. In essence, the message God had for Josiah was “because your heart was tender (receptive, penitent) and you humbled yourself before
the LORD when you heard what I said against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I have heard you.”

B. Concerning the king’s future (II Kings 22:20). Our final verse says “Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.” Having revealed that God would be merciful to Josiah, Huldah went on to describe how God would show His mercy. God said “Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace.” The phrase, “I will gather thee unto thy fathers” was another way of referring to a person’s death. But when Josiah died, God promised that he would “be gathered into thy grave in peace.” This promise does not refer to the way Josiah would die, for he would be killed in a battle (see II Kings 23:29-30). It refers to the time when he would die. God said that it would be before “thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place.” The “evil” here refers to the Babylonian Captivity that would take place in 586 B.C. about 36 years later (see II Kings Chapter 25). It could be said that anyone who didn’t live to see the Babylonians conquer Jerusalem and destroy the temple died “in peace.” That would be Josiah’s future. More importantly, Josiah would “be gathered into thy grave in peace” because he would die in the love and favor of God. There is nothing more peaceful in death than knowing you
have God’s love and favor. The last part of this verse says “And they brought the king word again.” Once Huldah the prophetess finished her prophecy concerning the future judgment of Judah, and the mercy God would show to Josiah, the delegation returned to King Josiah with the message as the prophetess said “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel (see verses 15, 16, 18, and 19).” Those words would assure King Josiah of the reality of her prophecy. It would all come to pass (see Numbers 23:19). Note: Both the words that King Josiah heard from the reading in the book of the law and the prophecy from Huldah the prophetess prompted the king to make some other reforms. First, he gathered all the people together and read the book of the law to them. Then He “made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book” (see II Kings 23:3). What’s important about all of this is that “all the people stood to the covenant” (see II Kings 23:3) which means they agreed to the covenant. If we know anything about Israel’s history, we know that they didn’t keep their commitment. Yes, Josiah had the idols removed from the temple and burned. He also removed everything pertaining to idolatry from the land and re-instituted the Passover (see II Kings 23:1-25). But God also recommitted to removing Judah out of His sight just as He did Israel (see II Kings 17:1-18; 18:11; 21:12-13). Although Judah was spared destruction while Josiah was alive, after he died (see II Kings 23:28-30), his son Jehoahaz became king “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord,
according to all that his fathers had done” (see II Kings 23:31-32). Just as God had promised, Judah was invaded by the Babylonians and eventually carried off into Babylon. Of course, Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple was burned (see II Kings 25:1-10). But this happened after Josiah’s death according to God’s promise that he would not see the judgment that God would bring upon Judah.

VI. Conclusion. The promise to obey God is worthless unless one is willing to make the changes necessary in keeping that promise. Reform often requires purging. Godliness requires the expulsion of sin and the elimination of anything that promotes ungodliness. These efforts begin with a confrontation with the Word of God and a conscious awareness of both sin and the demands of God. Josiah allowed himself to fall under the scrutiny of the law of God. When he saw himself and his nation in the light of Scripture, he understood what he had to do.
Sunday, March 21, 2021: “Prophet of Wisdom” Commentary (The ISSL Curriculum)