

2 *Kings 22:3–13; 23:1–3 (NIV)*

³In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the temple of the LORD. He said: ⁴“Go up to Hilkiah the high priest and have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the LORD, which the doorkeepers have collected from the people. ⁵Have them entrust it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. And have these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the LORD—⁶the carpenters, the builders and the masons. Also have them purchase timber and dressed stone to repair the temple. ⁷But they need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are honest in their dealings.”

⁸Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” He gave it to Shaphan, who read it. ⁹Then Shaphan the secretary went to the king and reported to him: “Your officials have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the workers and supervisors at the temple.” ¹⁰Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

¹¹When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. ¹²He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Akbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king’s attendant: ¹³“Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD’s anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us.”

¹Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ²He went up to the temple of the LORD with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. ³The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

2 *Timothy 3:10–17 (NIV)*

¹⁰You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Here’s a simple question – what if we lost the Bible?

And so we come to the last installment of this brief series from the scroll of the kings. Last week, we heard how God rescued the kingdom of Judah from certain, very certain, destruction at the hands of the mighty Assyrians. Sadly, though these Israelites of the south were rescued for the moment, in 587 BC they too were overrun and marched away into exile. It was the Babylonians rather than the Assyrians, but exile was exile. Jerusalem was burned, the temple built by Solomon was destroyed, and the Ark of the Covenant lost. Surely, this was the end of all YHWH’s grand promises. Jerusalem was dead and her people scattered.

But it was not the end. Even in the darkest valley, the God-Who-is, the God of hope, faithfully keeps the promises he makes. But that story is for another day. Today, we are

going to consider the last member of a very exclusive club – the *good* kings of Israel and Judah. There were very few and the last was a young king named Josiah.

Josiah took the throne of Judah when he was eight years old, in 640 BC. He would reign for thirty-one years, until 609 BC. The writers of Kings had this to say about Josiah: “He did what was right in the eyes of YHWH and followed completely the ways of his father¹ David, not turning to the right or to the left.” (2 Kings 22:2)

In addition to destroying the pagan altars and temples, Josiah began the restoration of Solomon’s temple. It had fallen into disrepair and Josiah wanted to put things right in the temple of YHWH. During the reconstruction, the priests found a copy of the Law of Moses. Whether it was the entire Pentateuch² or only the scroll of Deuteronomy, we can’t be sure. The astonishing part of the story isn’t that the scroll was found but that it had ever been lost in the first place. We don’t know how long they had been without the written Law, but consider this: What if all the Bibles disappeared? Every one of them. From our homes, our churches, our libraries. Even from our hard drives and the internet. And all the ancient manuscripts as well. Every last one of them. And all the references and quotations in other writings. . . All of it simply gone, never to be recovered.

How would Christianity change? In our generation? Our children’s? Our grandchildren’s? Would the body of Christ survive? Could there be a church without the Bible? Could we rely merely on memory and tradition.

More than 600 years before Jesus, the people of God discovered that they had been confronted with these questions.

The discovery of a recovery

Let’s go back in the story a bit. Josiah’s grandfather, King Manasseh of Judah (686-641 BC) embodied all that could go right and go wrong. His early years on the throne were an abomination to God, as he led the people to other gods. But imprisonment by the Assyrians brought genuine repentance to Manasseh, who, after returning to Jerusalem, tore down all the images of other gods and the altars used to worship them. Manasseh was succeeded by his son, Amon, whose short reign mirrored the terrible days of Manasseh’s early years. After Amon’s assassination, his son, Josiah, took the throne though he was only eight.

When Josiah was sixteen, we are told he began to seek God. When he was twenty he purged the kingdom of all the altars, tents, images, and so on that were used for the worship of foreign gods and he ordered the execution of the idolatrous priests. When Josiah was twenty-six, he led the people in the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Everyone in the kingdom contributed wealth to this project and “the people did the work faithfully.”³

In the course of the reconstruction, the workers made a staggering discovery. They found a copy of “the book of the law of the LORD given to Moses”. It isn’t the discovery of the book that should stagger us, it is the fact that they had lost it in the first place. When he learned of the book’s recovery, Josiah tore his clothes in anguish and dismay for he knew that the people had not been keeping the covenant with God. But what was he to do next?

Josiah sent the scrolls to a prophet, Huldah, to confirm that they were actually the books of the law and to provide a prophetic⁴ interpretation. Huldah is especially worth noting, for she was a woman. The fact that she is acknowledged as a prophet of God in the patriarchal culture of the Israelites reminds us that God’s work is never the province of only one gender. She offers two prophecies from God. First, Judah remains headed for destruction. Their sin had been great and the consequences of their sin cannot be avoided. Very dark

¹ This is, of course, figurative. David was Josiah’s ancestor but predated him by 400 years.

² The Pentateuch, Greek for “five scrolls” is comprised of the first five books of the Old Testament. The

² The Pentateuch, Greek for “five scrolls” is comprised of the first five books of the Old Testament. The Jews believed that the hand of Moses – virtually coming from God’s mouth - had written those books. The five books also are referred to as the Torah, meaning “teaching” or “law.”

³ The book of Chronicles helps to fill in some of the details, for that book also tells the story of the Kings of Israel, though it is a more “cleaned-up” version with its own perspective on events.

⁴ It is important to know that prophecy in the Bible is much more a matter of *telling forth* God’s word than it is foretelling the future.

and difficult times lay ahead. But she also bears this word – Josiah will reign a long time and will die before the darkness descends on Judah. Josiah has been responsive to God’s word and humble, she tells him. He won’t have to see Judah’s destruction.

King Josiah then calls all the people to the temple, where he reads to them the entire “book of the covenant.” After the reading is finished, Josiah pledges himself to a life of obedience to God and the covenant, and he makes the people do the same.

When Josiah went seeking God at the young age of sixteen, he could not have imagined that God would reveal himself to Josiah in this way, through the discovery of the long lost Torah. In the coming centuries, as the Jews were battered and torn by one oppressor after another, commitment to the collection, composition, editing, and copying of the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets became a prominent part of Judaism. And after the final destruction of the second temple in 70AD, Judaism became a religion built around the reading and study of these writings.

A living legacy

This reverence for the written word of God characterized the first Christians as well, as they were all Jewish. The apostle Paul, a learned Pharisee, had a younger protégé, Timothy, whom, in a letter, he urged to “continue in what you have learned and firmly believed.” Timothy is to cling to the “sacred writings” that will teach him about salvation through faith in Jesus. (see today’s second Scripture passage)

The writings Paul has in mind are what we often call the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament. The “sacred writings” can’t be the New Testament, for though some of the New Testament writings existed at the time, none had been collected or disseminated as “Scripture.” Nonetheless, the Old Testament writings, which never mention Jesus by name, still point to him as the realization of God’s millennia-old promise to redeem humanity.

Thus, though Paul can’t be talking about the New Testament in 2 Timothy, his words reveal the long Jewish tradition of there being sacred writings that are inspired in a way that other very helpful writings are not. “God-breathed,” as Paul puts it in the Greek.

The United Methodist Church holds that the writings that constitute Scripture are the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. Other Christians would define the list a bit differently, but all Christians embrace the central place of Scripture of the body of Christ. As Josiah re-learned 2,600 years ago and as Paul reminded Timothy, we are truly a people of the book.

If you are not part of a Bible study that meets regularly, consider joining one this fall. There are several that meet during the week, evening and weekday.

Which translation should I read?

There are many excellent English translations of the Bible. We at St. Andrew most often use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the newly updated NIV (copyright 2011, which is a better translation than the 1984 version). The NRSV translation team sought to be as close to the ancient Hebrew and Greek as reasonably possible. In their own words, the translators sought to be “as literal as possible, as free as necessary.” Consequently, the NRSV can be a little difficult to understand in spots. The new NIV is a also good choice. I find the translation to be reliable and it can be a bit easier to follow. Just be sure to get the 2011 copyright, not 1984. It is also in available in many more editions than the NRSV.

You might also enjoy reading from Eugene Peterson’s biblical paraphrase, *The Message*. I find that *The Message* often has an immediacy and emotional effect that I don’t get from the NRSV or NIV.

Bear in mind, however, that to get an “easier-to-read” translation and especially a paraphrase, the translators have to get further and further from the original Hebrew and Greek. Eugene Peterson is a knowledgeable scholar, but paraphrasing ancient languages into English presents big challenges.

So, I’d go with the NRSV or NIV (2011) and supplement your reading elsewhere. If you read the daily Bible passages in these studies, you might take my advice and read the passage twice each day. Once using the NRSV or NIV and once using *The Message*.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. You might begin this week by discussing this question: "What if all the Bibles disappeared? . . . Simply gone, never to be recovered. How would Christianity change? Would the body of Christ survive? Could there be a church without the Bible? Bishop Willimon calls Methodists a "people of the book." What do you think he means? Do you agree with him? Do you think we look that way to other Christians?"
2. How central a place does the Bible really hold in the church? in the UMC? in St. Andrew? Are we a scripturally-formed congregation? How would such a congregation differ from one that is not scripturally-formed?
3. Do you think that we tend to read or talk about the Bible more than we actually read it? If so, why do you think we don't spend more time reading the Bible? Why do we find it so easy to neglect the Bible? What barriers are there to our becoming better readers of the Bible? How can we overcome these barriers? How can we help our children to be people of the book?

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own.

This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class – now studying the Gospel of Mark We'll begin our study of Romans on Sept 9

Meets every Monday from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying 1 Peter

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall on Tuesdays.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current Series: *Old Testament Turning Points*

New Series from Scott starting Sep 8:

Saints and Sinners: True and Not-So-True Stories of the Pope
An entertaining and enlightening history of the Papacy, from Peter to Gregory to Joan(?) to Francis

Scott Engle and Robert Hasley will be leading a trip to Israel in late October 2014. This will be a land-only trip that will include all the major sites in Israel.

The next information night will be Tuesday, Sept 10, 7pm, Piro Hall

For more information go to www.scottengle.org or email Scott at sengle@standrewumc.org

Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at www.standrewumc.org. Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with each week's recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at www.scottengle.org