

## INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, a little old lady in Vienna was cleaning a dusty corner of her attic when she opened a trunk and found a bundle of papers...among those papers were several undiscovered and unpublished compositions by the renowned composer, **Franz Joseph Haydn**. A few years ago scholars discovered several compositions of Mozart—he wrote them at age 7 or 8! Formerly thought... (Leopold Mozart).

Today's Bible lesson takes us back to the year 622 B.C. when workmen laboring to renovate the Temple in Jerusalem made a similar, startling discovery. Josiah, who became king at the tender age of 8, was now 26. He ordered the temple repairs and sent his secretary to check on the work each week. One day the high priest told Josiah's secretary that the workers had found a **book** (a *scroll*) in one of the foundation deposits. Had it been left there by mistake or deliberately hidden?

The king asked to see the scroll which was written in an ancient form of Hebrew. After all, the scroll dated from Solomon's day, 350 years earlier. The secretary read it to him aloud. Why did he have it read *aloud*...? The secretary/administrator was named *Shaphan* and the priest was called *Hilkiah*.

The scroll was likely a portion of the Torah, one of the five Books of Moses. Scholars think it was the Book of Deuteronomy. Josiah had never read it before. I doubt he had read much of any book and perhaps not any of the Scriptures. But when he heard this scroll read he had quite a reaction.

**Example:** finding treasure--finding the Grene & Poteat books on *Polanyi*

Neither Shaphan nor Hilkiah had much reaction (we suppose) but the king was “blown away” by hearing this portion of Torah. The king was a quick learner. He saw that the nation had not kept God's law and deserved to be punished. He ordered his officials to consult a prophet to learn what God would do. Josiah's interest in God's word sparked a religious revival among the Jews in 620 B.C.

**Background:** Mannasseh and Amon and Hezekiah (Assyria & Babylon)

A young king likely would have relied on his older, wiser advisors. *Hilkiah*, the priest, and *Huldah*, the prophetess, played crucial roles in this revival. They are mentioned along with *Shaphan*, the secretary. The prophets *Jeremiah* and *Zephaniah* probably were part of the picture as well. These experts knew the law and helped the king and the nation “get their act of faith together.”

Josiah could have read, studied, consulted the Scriptures before this great discovery. There were plenty of copies. But suddenly he was *curious* about this ancient document — and for the first time in his life, he listened to the whole book of the law with real interest and understanding. Josiah not only heard God’s revelation he decided it was worth heeding. And as king he saw that his nation had veered far away from the decrees of Scripture...

There were alternative worship places that were dedicated to Babylonian and Assyrian deities... National reform was greatly needed. But can such renewal really begin with the reading of God’s word? Does God’s revealed wisdom really have such power? Power to change lives, change society?

Jesus told a parable about a rich man and poor Lazarus. The rich man talked with Father Abraham (in heaven presumably) and asked him to send Lazarus from heaven down to earth on a mission of mercy. The rich man and Father Abraham got into an argument over what does it take to generate faith in the human heart.

The rich man had brothers he was concerned about. *“Please send Lazarus to warn my brothers or they will end up here like me.”* Cf. Luke 16.

Father Abraham replied, *“No, they have the Scriptures.”*

*“Of course, they have a Bible. Everyone has a copy of the Scriptures--In the kitchen, on the coffee table, in a drawer. But send Lazarus back and they will listen to him and repent.”*

*“No, they have the Scriptures.”*

*“I know they have a Bible. But if someone got out of the grave and returned to speak to them, then they would believe!”*

Father Abraham: *“They have the Scriptures and if they won’t believe the Bible they won’t believe even if someone comes back from the dead.”*

That’s the argument. The rich man says that people finally believe when they see something miraculous, when they experience something unusual. When events change the landscape and force us to pay attention. Something unusual. You can’t just read the Bible and expect to come to faith. You can’t just preach and teach and nurture people from the Scriptures. What do you think? Does seeing lead to believing or does faith enable sight? Is the rich man or Father Abraham correct? The early church fathers had a motto that stated: *“Faith leads to understanding.”* In other words, you have to decide to trust the Scriptures before they will guide you. You have to take a step of faith and then the Word can instruct you or illumine your path.

Josiah, I believe, had a little *faith* (maybe the size of a mustard seed) that enabled him to be open and receptive when this scroll was discovered.

Deuteronomy is a *Law* book filled with covenant stipulations. And it is a *history* book—a story book about God and ancient Israel. In fact the whole Bible is a story book and a guide book. It tells of God’s way with his people through narrative, law, prophecy, poetry, gospels and epistles. It is filled with stories of faith and God’s revelation of Himself. This Word shows us who God is & what He promises and what He expects. And it includes wisdom for living obediently and joyfully.

And like Josiah and the Israelites we need a fresh encounter with this Living Word. Our challenges include the Josiah one and other more modern ones. We may take the Scriptures for granted or interpret them wrongly or use the Bible selectively to support our favorite ideas and values. And lots of people inside and outside the church have forgotten God’s word. Spiritual amnesia is widespread!

1. **amnesia**—*ignorance* especially of big picture
2. **amnesia**—*presumption* that there is nothing new for me
3. **amnesia**—*ideology* (interpreting in light of experience or dogma)

4. **amnesia**—*preferring* some texts over others

Does it surprise you to learn that Josiah, one of the best Jewish kings, at first was ignorant of God's Law? Don't be surprised! Consider how important our Constitution is and yet how few people can recite it or even recognize its contents. Fortunately, *specialists* like lawyers and judges know it and keep it alive.

In Josiah's day *specialists* (priests and prophets) knew the law and kept it alive. But the influence of God's Word had waned until people heard the Word anew--until the King listened to the Book of Deuteronomy.

Who keeps the Bible alive today? The Church does! You and I do! Sunday School and VBS do! People who read God's Word with a desire to follow the wisdom disclosed... But how can God get our attention so we read and listen and act like Josiah did? For Josiah it was something new and old—a new discovery of something ancient. What has God used to get and keep your attention? For the rich man it was concern for his brothers... A baptism, confirmation, wedding?

Of course, the goal in view is not simply reading an old book called the Bible. In the words of the Prayer Book we have *to bear, read, mark and learn* and inwardly *digest* the Bible, taking it into ourselves in a way that shapes the very substance of our thinking, feeling and doing. It is less important to ask a Christian what he or she believes about the Bible than it is to inquire what he or she *does* with it.

We are in the long run shaped by what we attend to, what we spend time on, who we listen to, what we read or watch, what we allow to influence us. Father Abraham says. *“You have the Scriptures, and if you don't listen to the Bible neither will you be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”*