

2 Kings 22 — I Have Found the Book — the Boy King Who Walked Straight, the Scroll Lost Inside the Temple, the Clothes Torn at the Reading, and Huldah's Oracle of the Tender Heart

2 Kings 22: Josiah, crowned at eight years old after the long night of Manasseh and the murder of Amon, does that which is right in the sight of the LORD and turns not aside; in the eighteenth year of his reign, c. 622 BC (Josiah reigns c. 640–609 BC — a stretch where scriptural and secular chronologies substantially agree), he sends Shaphan the scribe to fund repairs on the temple, and Hilkiah the high priest finds the book of the law in the house of the LORD; the king hears it read, rends his clothes, and sends to inquire of the LORD through Huldah the prophetess, who confirms the judgment written in the book but promises the king with the tender heart a grave in peace.

To feel this chapter, you have to feel the darkness it interrupts. One chapter back, Manasseh reigned fifty and five years — the longest reign in Judah's history, and the worst. He built altars for Baal in the temple courts, set a graven image inside the house where the Lord had said "In Jerusalem will I put my name" (2 Kgs. 21:4, 7), burned his son in the fire, and "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (2 Kgs. 21:16). His son Amon gave Judah two more years of the same and was murdered by his own servants in his own house. And then the people of the land, having executed the conspirators, did the only thing dynastic law allowed: they set the crown on the head of Amon's son. Josiah. A boy of eight.

Hebrew Word Studies

matsa (H4672) / sepher (H5612) (מָצָא / סֵפֶר) — **to find, come upon, encounter / book, scroll, written document vv. 8, 9, 13.** Matsa is the ordinary Hebrew verb of finding — lost donkeys, favor in someone's eyes — and its ordinariness is the shock of verse 8: the high priest uses the word for a mislaid tool about the covenant charter of Israel. But matsa is also one of scripture's great promise-verbs, and it almost always travels with seeking: "those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17); "if ye seek him, he will be found of you" (2 Chr. 15:2); "ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" — that last from Jeremiah (29:13), preaching within walking distance of this discovery. Josiah had been seeking for ten years (2 Chr. 34:3) before the finding came, which is the usual order of the economy of heaven. Sepher — scroll, book, written record — shares its root with sopher, "scribe," the title the chapter hangs on Shaphan five times (H5608). The book and the bookman are one Hebrew family: a sepher only lives where there is a sopher — where someone reads, copies, counts the words as things worth counting. The book had survived as an object; it revived as scripture the moment a scribe read it aloud. Nephi's family will shortly stake everything on the same conviction — that a people without the sepher "must dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Ne. 4:13), and that records are "of great worth... insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children" (1 Ne. 5:21).

qara (H7167) / **qara** (H7121) (קָרָא / קָרָא) — **to rend, tear / to call, proclaim, read aloud vv. 8, 10, 11, 16, 19.** Hebrew has staged a play on words at the center of this chapter, and the tagging preserves both halves. The verb of reading — Shaphan "read it" (v. 8), "read it before the king" (v. 10), "the king of Judah hath read" (v. 16) — is qara (H7121), literally to call or cry out, because in Israel scripture was read aloud: the word was a voice before it was a text. The verb of tearing — "he rent his clothes" (v. 11), "hast rent thy clothes" (v. 19) — is qara (H7167). Two distinct roots (the first ends in aleph, the second in ayin), but to the ear nearly one sound, and the narrative sets them side by side like a rhyme with a blade in it: read aloud, torn open. That is the whole transaction of living scripture in two syllables — "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (Heb. 4:12). Huldah, in the Lord's own voice, treats the torn robe as the visible half of a torn heart (v. 19); Joel would later plead for exactly that alignment — "rend your heart, and not your garments" (Joel 2:13) — and Josiah is the rare man in scripture who rent both. The generation after him supplies the control experiment: when Jehoiakim, Josiah's own son, heard Jeremiah's scroll read, he sliced it with a penknife and fed it to the fire, "yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments" (Jer. 36:23–24). Same family, same kind of scroll, same God — and the only variable left is the heart that does the hearing.

rakak (H7401) / kana (H3665) / **shalom** (H7965) (רָכַךְ / שָׁלוֹם / כָּנָה) — **to be tender, soft / to be humbled, subdued / peace, wholeness vv. 19–20.** Rakak means to be soft — used of gentle words (Ps. 55:21) and of flesh as against bone. Applied to a heart it is the exact antonym of scripture's great diagnosis: the hardened heart of Pharaoh, the "past feeling" of a dead conscience (1 Ne. 17:45; Eph. 4:19). A tender heart is not a weak one — Josiah is the same king who will grind idols to powder (2 Kgs. 23:6, 15). Tenderness in the biblical grammar is responsiveness: flesh instead of stone (Ezek. 36:26), a surface

the word can still cut. "To this man will I look," the Lord says, "even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2) — and 2 Kings 22 is that verse dramatized. Kana■, "humbled," is heavier: to be brought low, subdued — elsewhere it is what happens to defeated armies. Josiah did to himself what God does to the proud: he surrendered before the siege, and it is the very verb of the covenant promise "if my people... shall humble themselves, and pray... then will I hear from heaven" (2 Chr. 7:14). Both verbs meet their reward in shalom: "thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace" (v. 20). Shalom is not the absence of conflict — Josiah will die of battle wounds at Megiddo (2 Kgs. 23:29) — but wholeness: a life gathered up intact with its covenant unbroken. The soft heart, the lowered knee, the whole soul — the chapter's closing vocabulary is a straight line through the gospel's front door.

darash (H1875) / nebiah (H5031) (דָּרַשׁ / נְבִיא) — to seek, inquire of, tread a path to / prophetess vv. 13, 14, 18.

Darash — "inquire of the LORD" (vv. 13, 18) — is the Old Testament's technical verb for seeking an oracle: not idle wondering but setting out on foot to a known address where God answers. Its concrete picture is a trodden path — you darash what you beat a trail to — and from this root Judaism would later name its whole tradition of searching scripture (midrash). The verb indicts as precisely as it commends: Saul died "for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; and enquired not of the LORD" (1 Chr. 10:13–14) — the trail you tread reveals the god you trust. Josiah's first reflex on hearing the word was to beat a path to more of it, and Ezra after the exile is his direct heir: he "prepared his heart to seek [darash] the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach" (Ezra 7:10) — seek, do, teach, the whole discipleship in three verbs. The path in this chapter ends at a nebiah — the feminine of nabi, prophet: one who speaks for another. The title is the Old Testament's own, borne by Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), and here by Huldah, who delivers the only "Thus saith the LORD" in the chapter. The pairing is the lesson: a genuine darash gets a genuine answer, and the answer comes through whomever the Lord has filled. "For he that diligently seeketh shall find" (1 Ne. 10:19).

From the Chapter's Architecture

One more layer rewards a slow look: the chapter is a study in offices, every one functioning and none sufficient alone. The king initiates but cannot find; the priest finds but does not proclaim; the scribe proclaims but cannot interpret; the prophetess interprets and hands the word back to the king, who alone can enact it — and does, for a whole chapter to come. No single office owns the word of God. It moved through all of them, and the honest humility of each is what let it pass clean, ungarbled, from the dust to the throne. A church is functioning exactly when the word can travel that freely through it.