

JOSIAH, A KING LOVED BY THE LORD

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Long, long ago, in fact, six hundred years before the Lord was born, there was a little boy who became king' of the kingdom of Judah. His name was Josiah and he was only eight years old. Of course, while he was only a child he had to have help in ruling over the kingdom, but when he was eighteen years old he began to rule by himself.

One of the first things he did, when he began to rule by himself, was to send to the priests of the temple asking them for a report about the money collected at the temple. And the high priest sent back word to the king that he had found in the temple the book of the Law—what we call THE WORD—which had been lost for very many years. In those days, you will remember, they did not have printing and so books were very scarce. Books had to be copied by hand, and the people had become so very fond of the pleasures of the world, that they no longer copied the Book of the Law and were careless about keeping the copy they had. So when the copy was found during the repair of the temple, the priests and the king were much excited by the discovery, and the king especially was eager to hear what it taught.

Now, when the Book of the Law was read to the king—to this young man, only eighteen years old, who had been king for ten years—he learned at once that nobody was living according to the Book of the Law. He knew that the Book of the Law was the Lord's Word, given to all the people to teach them the right things to do, and when he heard it he knew at once that the way people were living—the things they were doing—were all wrong. And being a very good young man—a good king—he at once commanded that all the bad things the people were, doing should be stopped. He commanded that the people should be taught that those things were very wrong in the Lord's sight, and that they should also be taught the right things to do.

What Josiah, the young king, saw to be especially wrong was the worship of idols and images. The people no longer were worshiping the Lord. They had built many altars, especially on high places—on hills and mountains—and set up beside them great images of men and women whom they called “gods,” and to whom they prayed. They asked those images for very many things that simply could not be given to them—especially not by graven images and molten idols. For this broke the first commandment, in which the Lord had taught: “I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”

Josiah was a very brave young man in commanding the people to stop worshipping their idols; for the people were a very wicked and headstrong people. Also, they were led by wicked men who had set themselves up as priests and who made the people pay them lots of money in their worship of the idols. These bad priests did not like Josiah's interference with their misleading of the people. But Josiah was not afraid of them. To make sure that he was doing the right thing in destroying all these false idols and images and the altars and buildings erected for the worship of them, he sent some priests to a great prophetess named Hulda. They asked her what he should do, and she said that Josiah was doing the right thing. She told them that the people had fallen into very wicked ways of living and were so bad that they would soon be destroyed. But Hulda the prophetess also said that Josiah was a good man and would not be destroyed. So Josiah went ahead with the good work he had begun: he destroyed all the images, idols, altars and buildings that led the people away from the worship of the Lord.

All of this happened more than six hundred years before the Lord was born into the world. And what Hulda said of the bad people came true; for about sixty years later they were carried captive to a far off country, to Babylon, and their own great city, Jerusalem, with its wonderful temple that had been built by Solomon, was completely destroyed.

And of course Josiah died, but many hundreds of years afterwards Swedenborg saw him in the spiritual worlds and there recognized him as the good king Josiah. And Swedenborg said about him that the Lord had loved Josiah because Josiah had loved the Book of the Law and had obeyed its teachings. For whoever loves the Word and lives according to what it teaches, also loves the Lord, and the Lord loves him.