

Buzz King  
[buzz@BuzzKing.com](mailto:buzz@BuzzKing.com)  
BuzzKing.com  
303 437 7419

**2 Kings 22:11-13, ESV.**

*<sup>11</sup> When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes.*

*<sup>12</sup> And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, <sup>13</sup> "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."*

**Politics and Religion: *Bringing the Kingdom of God to Earth.***

A common complaint that you see in social media is that Christians are hypocrites, that we claim to live by the ways of Jesus Christ, but in truth we are just as selfish as anyone else. These comments can be vicious. There are clearly a lot of people who are looking for reasons to dump on formal religion, especially Christianity. I think a lot of it has to do with the negative portrayal that we are given in television dramas and on news shows. A common characterization of Christians is that we use our faith for political advantage, that Christianity is a worldly tool for us, that we use it to get ahead. Certainly, politicians who say they are Christians are routinely accused of this. But here is something very interesting: there is a theory among scholars that politics significantly impacted

the nature of the Old Testament, that mixing politics and religion is quite old. The idea is that a certain king named Josiah manipulated the content of the Hebrew Scriptures to serve himself politically. Yes, the claim is that he artificially had parts of Scripture altered to serve his personal political career.

As a chaplain and a pastor, one nice thing is that most of the people I meet react in a positive, even affirming way when they find out that I am a Christian reverend. But there was a time, a rather extended amount of time, when it was a little uncomfortable for me to be a Christian. That's when I was a professor. The problem is that in ultra-liberal academic environments, being a Christian is at best politically incorrect. Academics act like they are superior human beings, but in truth most of them are insecure, and so they are heavily influenced by what they have seen on TV, in the news, or in social media. They want to make sure that no one ever gets the idea they might be conservative, and Christians are portrayed as being ultra conservative, insular, and bigoted. We know that there are indeed Christians who let politics overly influence their interpretation of Jesus Christ's teachings; I'm not denying that. But the bottom line is that in the U.S., politics and Christianity are, at least in the minds of most people, intimately tied. This does intimidate some people who truly love God and their neighbor, and who try to live with forgiveness, grace, and generosity, and who do embrace the principle

that all people are made in the image of God. It can make them nervous about being identified as Christians. This is why the few academics who happen to be people of faith are not open about it.

Most of what I witnessed was petty and no real threat to me at all. I was once asked by another professor why I wore a cross around my neck. He said that he associated that with “believers”. I wasn’t some kind of Christian, was I? he asked. I said yes. He said but you do research, you teach. I told him that Jesus was a teacher, too. In fact, given that Jesus was supposed to be uneducated, he proved himself to be extremely knowledgeable. My associate was not impressed. I told him that in the Gospels Jesus is called a teacher about 70 times. The word used in the Gospels is the Greek word for teacher “*didaskalos*”, the Hebrew term for a teacher, “*rabbi*”, or the corresponding Aramaic term “*rabboni*”.

A form of the word “*didaskalos*” appears in the passage below:

Here is a quote from the Gospel of John, Chapter 7:

*<sup>14</sup> About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. <sup>15</sup> The Jews therefore marveled, saying, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?” <sup>16</sup> So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.”*

Jesus has been under suspicion by the religious authorities, and they have been plotting against him. During a Jewish festival, Jesus goes to the Temple and

begins teaching. Someone who might have been a religious leader questions how Jesus could be doing this when he has never had formal religious study under anyone. It is then that Jesus says, *“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.”*

So, let me just say that I am happy to have gone from teaching technology to teaching the message of God. It is an honor to do so in this church. I also don't have to put up with the politicization of Christianity. But in case you think that this is a new phenomenon, the Bible itself has stories of faith being used as a political weapon. Let's look at a passage from 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, Chapter 22:

*<sup>11</sup> When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes.*

*<sup>12</sup> And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, <sup>13</sup> “Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”*

Some of the books of what we call the Old Testament have obvious signs of having been heavily edited, specifically, books like Genesis, Isaiah, Ezekiel, the two Samuel books, the two Kings books, books of various minor Prophets, and Chronicles. There is a theory that a king named Josiah, who is prominent in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, deliberately altered parts of the Bible, partly for political reasons. Here is his story.

Josiah becomes King as a boy. His father and the kings just before his father have been corrupt, wicked men. Josiah, however, is famous as perhaps the most

faithful of all of Israel's kings. He is in the lineage of King David and lives a few hundred years or so after David. Josiah's great contribution is a vast overhaul of Israel's moral climate: he works to end idolatry and bring people back to worshipping the one, true God. Previous kings have allowed, even encouraged, the Israelites to worship not just God, but the gods of the Canaanites who live among them. A chief pagan god is Baal. After he has already begun his revival, an official in Josiah's court discovers a long-lost book of faith in the Temple. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings it is referred to as a "*Book of the Law*". Many scholars today think that it was a version of the Book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy Moses reiterates to a new generation of Israelites - those largely born in the desert during forty years of wandering and are about to enter the Promised Land - the history of what has happened since the faithful escaped Egypt. The Israelites are encamped in Moab. They are waiting to cross the Jordan River and enter Canaan. Moses is going to die before entering Canaan and this is his opportunity to set them on the right spiritual track. The Book of Deuteronomy thus overviews for a naïve generation that has grown up in the desert the laws that God wants the Chosen People to live by.

When this Book of the Law, perhaps a version of Deuteronomy, is found in the Temple, King Josiah is greatly distressed. It is read to him, and he realizes just how far the People of God have fallen morally. This is what the king declares:

*“Great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book.”*

Josiah asks his officials to go to a prophetess named Huldah to try to get direction from God. Huldah announces that because of their worshipping of the gods of the Canaanites, God is going to punish the people of Israel. But she tells him that because Josiah has been true to God, he will not live long enough to see this disaster come about. Josiah then orders his officials to destroy all altars and icons that have been erected to honor Baal and other pagan gods. He gathers the people of Israel and leads them in renewing their dedication to the one, true God. The Temple is cleansed of all that is pagan. He returns Passover to its original glory after previous generations have watered it down. Josiah would later die in a battle with Egypt, and Israel would then become a vassal state of Egypt.

It's conjectured by some that this Book of the Law contained roughly Chapters 5 to 26 and 28 of Deuteronomy. That would essentially mean that the original *Book of the Law* was an early draft of Deuteronomy. Then, goes the theory, during Josiah's time and perhaps also after Josiah's death, people retargeted the book. Most likely, it was changed so that it flow better with respect to the books that follow it, namely the history books of Joshua, Judges, the two Samuels, and the two Kings, which together with Deuteronomy are typically called the

“Deuteronomistic History”. Many scholars believe that these books were written or perhaps edited at the same time so that they would tell a focused story. Specifically, the person who put this series of books together, partly out of existing material, was trying to explain the reason for the Fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the Babylonian exile. In other words, God punished the people of Israel for their lack of faith, their tendencies toward idolatry, and in general, the breaking of the Old Covenant. The point is that material that had initially been written simply to encourage the Chosen People to be faithful to God was turned into something that would explain away the terrible things that happened to the Israelites. This sort of reinterpretation of Scripture would have helped King Josiah in his efforts to clean up the religious practices of his day. But this is just a theory.

And there is more to this theory. The story of King David is told in the Samuel and Kings books, and Josiah happened to be directly descended from David. The theory suggests that King Josiah had the story of David’s rule reengineered to focus on – and perhaps exaggerate – the powerful unification of the kingdom under King David to legitimize the unification of the new kingdom under Josiah. This means that he manipulated the story of his ancestor King David to enhance his own power. He then used this power to greatly reform the Jewish state, which had fallen into corruption under previous leaders. This would imply that perhaps the Book of the

Law that was found in the Temple was actually planted there and was used as a basis for rewriting much of the Hebrew Scriptures many, many hundreds of years after the events they describe happened. Thus, Josiah would have manipulated faith to advance himself politically, something that as modern people we might disapprove of, even if he used this to do good.

But I don't personally care if any of this could be true. We already know that the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, contain a lot of allegorical and metaphorical material, and a lot of material that in general is not accurate historically. We read it as a faith story. It tells us who God is, and how God loves and protects us, and how God wants us to live. As Christians, we are far more concerned with the historicity of the New Testament, the story of Jesus. Jesus himself taught us to love all people, including our enemies. He did not come to Earth to promote himself as a political leader. His goals were not worldly. He was a descendent of King David and King Josiah, but he did not want to be a Jewish king.

We might wonder, however, what our world would be like if the leaders of the world today were like Jesus, if they did not want to manipulate people and society to empower themselves. Suppose every leader alive today, in any role, anywhere in the world, truly lived like Jesus. What would our world be like? Suppose all leaders focused on living with compassion and kindness, on



forgiveness. Imagine a world where leaders truly wanted to serve people instead of promoting themselves. Imagine empathy being a primary character trait of anyone with any power whatsoever. What would happen if the people who were in control of governments literally believed that all people were made in the image of God – and were thus equal in the eyes of God? What would it be like if we could count on all individuals in our government and all governments never settling for anything less than full justice for all?

I gave a sermon recently about Heaven. There is a Christian theory of Heaven, one that says that at the End Times, the Earth will be transformed. Instead of all of us being whisked away to another reality, we will remain here, and God will wash the Earth clean. God will dwell among us. There will be no sin. There will be no suffering. In a sense, it's like the ultimate version of a world where everyone lives like Christ. Other than disease and true accidents, all suffering on this planet is indeed due to the corruption of humanity. We could get pretty close to Heaven on Earth if we were to remove the corrupting power of politics.

Here is something intriguing but complicated, though, about the life of Jesus. The Gospels portray him as being in some ways apolitical. Remember that in the Gospel of Matthew, the Pharisees try to trick Jesus into saying that it is wrong to pay taxes to Caesar, so he will be arrested. Here is the interaction:

*<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. <sup>16</sup> And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. <sup>17</sup> Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" <sup>18</sup> But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. <sup>20</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" <sup>21</sup> They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." <sup>22</sup> When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.*

Jesus believed that we should obey the laws of society, even if the government is corrupt. He drew the line, of course, at doing anything immoral. The real point, however, is that God does not force us to behave in a loving, kind fashion where we never disobey the laws of God. We have full free will. Notice that he said, *"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* He let the Romans subjugate people with less power, administer horrific punishments to those who did not accept their control, and starve the poor so that the rulers could live extravagant lives. But Jesus pointed out that there is a higher power, there is a greater authority, there is a world that is not of this world. He was giving us a challenge, not telling us that evil is okay on this world. The way that we live as true Christians, as believers who are not hypocrites, is to remember that our job is to live for the things of the Kingdom of God, not the Kingdom of People – but to do all that we can to make the world around us here today resemble the Kingdom of God - and to be teachers so that others can learn to do the same.