

409 Stilling of the noise and tumult

In II Kings 22.1 we read that Josiah was only eight when he began to reign over Judah (in 640 BC). Josiah followed his grandfather and father, Kings Manasseh and Amon, who had both done “evil in the sight of the Lord” (21.2,20), for the previous 57 years! Amon had just been murdered by his servants, who were themselves duly slain by “the people of the land” (21.23-24), who then turned to the boy king Josiah. So Judah was in a terrible state, due in no small part to sinful leadership which had allowed and encouraged wanton idolatry, with all its sinful side effects, among God’s covenant people.

But by God’s grace, and entirely unexpected in view of the track records of Manasseh and Amon, Josiah “did [that which was right] in the sight of the Lord (22.2a). Clearly somebody, perhaps his mother or his nurse, was quietly guiding this young boy in the right paths – an encouragement for any of us as we seek to play our part in setting those coming after us on the right paths in life.

Eighteen years later Josiah set about “repairing the breaches of the house of the Lord” (22.3-6), and in so doing, Hilkiah the high priest “found the book of the law in the house of the Lord” (22.8 / II Chronicles 34.14 / Deuteronomy 31.24-26). What a message lies in that discovery! – that God’s chosen, covenant people had lost that crucial book, presumably for decades or centuries.

When Shaphan the scribe read “the book of the law” to the king, Josiah “rent his clothes” (22.11), realising that “great [is] the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us” because of Judah’s incessant, blatant disobedience (22.13mid). The word of the Lord duly came to Josiah through Huldah the prophetess: God’s wrath would indeed be kindled against Judah, and not quenched, though because of Josiah’s “tender heart, humility and weeping before God” (from 22.19), this judgment would be delayed until after Josiah’s time (22.15-20).

Now roughly 2,600 years separates King Josiah from the peoples and leaders of today, but the divinely-placed leadership principle still holds good: leadership at all levels of a society remains crucial.

Regarding leadership in our day, the United States is currently riven with anger and division as the acrimonious presidential election is worked through, a mood fostered in no small part by the mutual loathing between Donald Trump and his numerous political enemies.

Political leadership in the United Kingdom is also “up against it”. By God’s allowance Covid-19 continues to loom large here, as elsewhere, acting as a clear wake-up call for “those with ears to hear” among the leaders and people to turn back to Him while there is still time to do so. This reminds us of God mercifully sending His prophets to the kings of Israel and Judah with much the same message, summed up in those words from Deuteronomy 8.3, “Man does not live by bread alone ...”. But so far at least there is barely a murmur of a mention among our political leaders of our dependence upon, and our accountability to, Almighty God. Further lockdowns are now in place, and the figures for the daily rate of deaths associated with Covid continue to be published each evening. (One terrible irony of these sad figures is that figures immensely worse, concerning the number of abortions carried out in this country since the vile Abortion Act of 1967 - an estimated 9,563,907 abortions – passed by without national comment: the blindness, sinfulness and hypocrisy over this appalling practice are mind-blowing).

So we reach the point again, mentioned at times in these Reflections, of the urgent need for personal and national repentance and confession to Almighty God. We seek His forgiveness through faith in His Son Jesus Christ for the blatant sinfulness within society over the years, fostered in no small part by the policies and example of our national leaders.

We can be sure that, as with King Josiah, the Lord still responds to “tender hearts, humility and weeping before the Lord” by national leaders (from II Kings 22.19). We know that “the sacrifices of God [are] (still) a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51.17 / and egs., Matthew 11.28-30 / John 4.14; 24 / Revelation 21.6; 22.12-17). And we know that the Lord God our Creator “stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people” (from Psalm 65.7). How we could all do with a good dose of that divine “stilling” right now!

Meanwhile we thank God for the widespread kindnesses shown by so many in these trying times, in which we seek to play our full part in the name of Christ. We pray for one another, and for our leaders, and for the nations, crying out to the Lord in dependence and repentance - for His “stilling of the noise and the tumult”.