

Judah." "This prophecy of irremediable doom repeats itself in the two other prophets of the reign. It was irremediable for exactly the same reason as the 'blasphemy against the Spirit' is not to be forgiven—the sinners have gone too long and too far to repent. We can say with absolute certainty that the bar to forgiveness never can be on God's side. But forgiveness not merely cannot be given—it cannot be received—without change of heart and life. Even Josiah's zeal could not do more than wake a flickering loyalty to Jehovah, which postponed the inevitable judgment, God's appointed remedy."—*Moulton*.

17. Because they have forsaken me. This is the immediate or remote cause of every earthly calamity. **Have burnt incense unto other gods.** This was the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual condition of hostility to the true God.

18. But to the king of Judah. From this on the message is more merciful and the tone more courteous and tender. **As touching the words which thou hast heard.** The words read from the new-found roll.

19. Josiah "heard" God's words, therefore God "hears" his.

20. I will gather thee unto thy fathers. A Hebrew phrase for death. **Thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace.** Around his death Providence will throw merciful protection. It is not easy to find this prophecy fulfilled in Josiah's death. But we are not justified in ending the prophecy with this phrase. It is closely connected with what follows. **Thine eyes shall not see all the evil that I shall bring upon this place.** Josiah's best hopes clustered about his nation. The glory of Jehovah and of his people were all he lived for. Death in battle was not more terrible (rather, indeed, more to be desired) than death from disease. Josiah's soul recoiled from neither; the one horrible thing from which he pleaded to be saved was the apparent ruin of God's cause—the overthrow of the nation, the destruction of the temple, the forfeiture of Judah's privileges. This was the evil paramount. If Judah will not so turn to God that this evil might be averted, if the ruin must come, then merciful will be the arrow that "gathered him to his grave."

CRITICAL AND HOMILETICAL NOTES.

Josiah—a mere child—found the kingdom in a wretched state when he came to the throne. His father, Amon, and his grandfather, Manasseh, did wickedly in the sight of Jehovah, and the people were gone in apostasy. True, Manasseh attempted certain reforms, but it was too late for reformation. The downward tendency was too rapid to be stopped. It might be checked temporarily, but inevitable destruction awaited Judah. Had Josiah lived to old age and continued his reign of righteousness without interference, the outlook for his people would have been much better. But his reign was comparatively brief, and while it marked "the last dying glory of the earthly kingdom of David," it also proved that Judah was hopelessly engulfed in the dark waters of moral and spiritual degeneration.

Verse 8. Hilkiah. He was the son of Shalum, the high priest under Manasseh and Amon, and ancestor of Ezra, the scribe. His relation to the recovery of the book of the law, as well as other matters in which he had played a conspicuous part, made his career as high priest illustrious. **The book of the law.** There is great divergence of opinion as to what this "book of the law" really was. It is held by Kennicott that it was "the original autograph copy of the

Pentateuch written by Moses." Some biblical scholars hold that it was the whole Pentateuch, some that it was the three middle books, some that it was the Book of Deuteronomy alone. There is not space to go into that controversy here, interesting as it is. It may be sufficient to say that the suggestion of fraud and forgery made by some hostile critics is too absurd to be entertained, for, as Rawlinson aptly says, "fraud or mistake might as easily have imposed a new Bible on the Christian world in the sixteenth century as a new 'law' on the Jews in the days of Josiah."

10. Delivered me a book. It should be noted that what Hilkiah called "the book of the law" Shaphan referred to as "a book." This confidence of the former and indifference of the latter are explained when it is recalled that one was a high priest, devoted to the spiritual regeneration of the nation, and the other was a scribe, concerned more for the material interests of the people; and that for about three quarters of a century "the book of the law" had been so thoroughly neglected that its very existence had become a tradition. **Read it before the king.** Shaphan had already read certain passages of the remarkable book (see verse 8). What portions were read before the king is not