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#### SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

by Rev. R. O. Todd LESSON: 2 Kings 22: 1 to 23: 30 During the period in which the Assyria, the Assyrian religion was the official religion of the country. That, erence to God. heathenism.

Deuteronomy in the Bible, was dis- Tian pulpit. covered. The condemnation of corrupt religion was so vehement in this book, that on reading it the King was greatly disturbed and distressed. A public meeting was held at which the King vowed to keep the law of God set forth therein, and the people vowed to support him. There followed a vigorous policy of suppressing the shrines of heathen worship throughout the country, which eliminated many corrupt practises which had entered into religious worship. The centre of worship was made to be the Temple of Jerusalem, where it could be more

easily regulated and kept pure. While much reeded purification of worship was brought about by this policy, it is doubtful if the reforms touched the inner spiritual life of the people as a whole, for in the lesson to follow we shall see that the society of Judah was by this time so corrupt that the reforms under Josiah were not able to save it from rain. The prophetess Huldah declared that any reform undertaken by Josiah would not preserve the nation beyond his own time. Temporarily, however, the nation', doom world be stayed. (2 Kings)

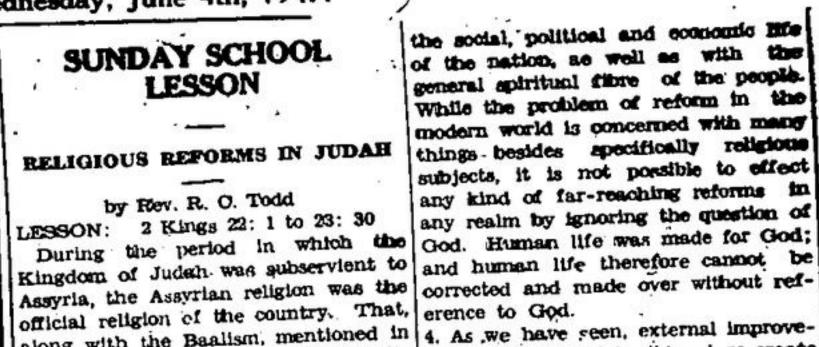
22 15-20. It turned out that during Josiah's reign, the mena e of Assyria was permanently disperied by the fall of that nation to the armies of the new power Babylon. A political vacuum was created in which Judah asserted her independence. That - independence; however, was threatened by Egypt, and in battle against Egypt, King Josiah fell. Dominance see-sawed for some time between Egypt and Babylon, with the weight of power altimately going

to Babylon. While the religious reforms under Josiah did not permanently stay the doom of the nation, they did have some good perihanent results. The Book of Deuteronomy came to light; worship was nenceforth centred in Jerusalem, and the semi-heathen shrines throughout the country were at last eliminated. But they do not seem to have created any revival of spiritual or national life in Judah. The process of social disintegration was only temporarily interrupted. The reason partly lay, no doubt, in the external nature of the reforms. Necessary and useful though they may be changes made in the outward conditions of worship do not necessarily have a profound effect upon the spiritual life of people. Enforced by the government, these reforms of Josuah's necessary though they may have been. did not reflect a popular desire for reformation. The shrines of heathen worship may have been closed, but they were not replaced by a genuine revival of faith in God.

There are several things we might note as to the relevance of this lesson. 1. The reforms under Josiah were made possible through an effort to repair the temple. The "book of the law" was discovered in the Temple and became the instrument of reformation We might do well to-day to look for the beginning of reformation of any aspect of modern life in repairing the life of the Church. In taking the church seriously, so as to desire to repair it, improve it and revive it, we may well discover the incentive and the inspiration for wider reformations. 2. It was the discovery and fresh read ing of the scripture which drove Josian to under ake his reformation When men feel the impact of God's Word they are driven to action. Where

no action comes from the reading of the Scriptures, that is a sign that God's Word has not been heard. But when the Scriptures come to life, so that men hear the living word of God men themselves come alive in response to it. The times of real reformation, as in the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, and in the Methodist revival under Wesley, are times when the Bible, far from being regarded as a "paper-pope," comes alive for men as the living word of God.

3. The relationship between the rebe noted. The growth of heathenism ligious and public life of Judah must was symptomatic of national decay. The character of religious life in nation - whether it is dynamic or duil, self critical or easy going, genuinely concerned about relationship with God, or merely formal and institutional — is closely related with



along with the Baalism, mentioned in 4. As we have seen, external improvea former lesson, really made the rell- ments under Josiah did not re-create glous situation in Judah corrupt. Last the life of Judah. The deeper issues of week we hinted at the rise of power life were missed altogether. Reforms of Babylon. The rise of this new pow- of any kind - religious, social, politier meant a decline in the political and cal, economic-are not easily achieved. military ascendancy of Assyria, and They are not made merely by reading that Judah was in a position to act more scripture; they are not made by more independently man she had for merely taking more interest in reliyears. The political situation was gion, merely by building up the memgreatly to the advantage of anyone bership and finances of the Church. wishing to undertake religious re- This does not mean that men can do forms, since there was no longer the nothing. In fact it means that they political pressure in favour of Assyrian must do a great deal of confession, repentance, and praving for the aid The reforms came in 621 B.C. during of the saving grace and power of God, the reign of King Josiah. The Temple while at the same time listening for of God was being repaired, and during hearing and obeying, the living Word the course of the repairs a book of the of God. in the Scriptures and in the law," now embodied in the book of preaching and teaching of the Chris-



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