

1

Introduction

“Because thine heart was tender. . .” 2 Kings 22:19

The excellent person whom these words concern was one of the best of the kings of Judah, and the youngest who ever sat upon that throne, being but eight years old (verse 1) when he began to reign. God had much work for him to do, and therefore brought him to govern early. About three hundred years before (as some compute), even in the days of Jeroboam, when the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were first divided, he was spoken of by name (1 Kings 13:2), as a prince who would be a zealous reformer. In the eighth year of his reign (and the sixteenth of his life) he gave manifest proofs of his inquiring early after God; and in the twelfth year of his reign, he vigorously set about to purge the land and abolish idols (2 Chronicles 34:3). When he came to his eighteenth year, he applied himself to repairing the temple, in which work nothing remarkable had been done since the days of Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 12:5). He then sent his principal officers of state to Hilkiah the High Priest, with necessary orders for this purpose; and while they who had the oversight of this affair were

searching among the ruins, the original book of the law, written by Moses, was providentially found (verse 8).

It is very probable that some of the preceding idolatrous kings had sought to burn all the copies of the law they could meet with; and therefore that which God had ordered to be laid up inside the ark (Deuteronomy 31:26) might be taken thence in those persecuting times by some faithful priests, and hidden in a more secret place for the use of the posterity. This valuable treasure, that had been lost a great while, being now seasonably recovered and brought to light, was delivered to Josiah, who, upon the reading of it, immediately rent his clothes, which was the outward expression of an extraordinary inward commotion. Some transcripts, or at least some broken pieces of this sacred volume, had likely been preserved and come to his view before, or else he would have scarcely done so much and gone so far as he did; but he was struck with reverence to this most authentic book, and perhaps wrought upon all the more by those affecting passages (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28) wherein idolatry is so severely threatened.

Huldah the prophetess is hereupon consulted as to what would be the best course to prevent the judgment written; and the reason for consulting her seems to be intimated in these words: "Now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college" (verse 14). The king was very earnest and impatient to be