Solomon was the third king of his people. Many years later, a boy called Josiah became the eighteenth king. Many years had passed, and the beautiful temple which Solomon had built was no longer cared for properly. Parts of the metalwork and the woodwork were broken. There were rooms into which no one went any more, which were full of things which no one used any more and which no one knew how to use. The people had forgotten the stories and the laws behind their worship. When Josiah was 26, he decided that the time had come to restore the temple.

Firstly, he commanded that all the money which was given at the temple should be used to mend the temple, none of it should be kept to spend on other things. Then he ordered that the best craftsmen and skilled workers should be allowed to spend the money and do the work in whatever way they thought best. Josiah decided to trust the people to do a good job, instead of always asking them questions about what they were doing. Now that there was money and time to repair the temple, the work began.

There was a lot of clearing up to do.

One day, as they were putting out some rubbish, they found some rolled up scrolls. They were covered in writing. ‘These look very old,’ one of the workmen thought. ‘I’d better give them to the high priest.’ Later that day, the King’s secretary, Shaphan, visited the temple and the high priest showed him the scrolls. Shaphan took them outside into the light and began to read. What he read shocked him very much. He hurried back to the palace and showed the scrolls to the king. He said, ‘My lord, here is a book which the workmen found when they were cleaning out the temple. May I read it to you?’ Josiah nodded.

Shaphan the secretary began to read. He read the scrolls all the way through and, when he had finished, Josiah was silent for a long time. How could something so important have been lost for so long? Josiah was so upset that he tore his clothes and began to cry. He was the king, but he had never before heard the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had never been told about how the people escaped from Egypt or how Moses was given the law on the mountain. He had never heard of the festival of the Passover. Josiah felt as badly as if all the crown jewels had been thrown out on the rubbish dump. How could something so precious have been left to gather dust? Josiah prayed to God, saying, ‘I’m sorry.

Josiah decided that all the people needed to hear the words on the scroll. He called all the leaders of the land together and told them to bring all the people from their towns and villages to stand in front of the temple. When the people were gathered, Josiah stood by the pillar of the temple and read the scrolls out loud. When he had finished, the people were
silent. Josiah solemnly promised that, from now on, he would live keeping God's laws and remembering all the stories of the past. All the people bowed their heads and solemnly promised that they would live in this way, too. Josiah ordered the priests to arrange a great feast of the Passover, so that the people could remember that they had been slaves in Egypt and that God had rescued them. And the people held a great festival with stories and prayers and feasting and singing; it was the biggest Passover for hundreds of years. Not since the time of Solomon and David had such a Passover been celebrated.

[We hang the symbol of a scroll on the tree for Josiah, to remember how he treasured the words of the scroll and helped his country rediscover their stories and laws.]

**A moment to wonder**

Have you ever found something that was old and precious?

**A prayer**

As green as a healthy tree, the story of God's love keeps growing. We remember Josiah, who helped his people find their lost stories and laws. We pray for everyone who studies history and helps other people to understand the past.

Amen.