

## The Ironic Death of Josiah in 2 Chronicles

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MOST RECENT STUDIES OF 2 Chronicles 34–35 have attempted to deal with various historical issues of the text.<sup>1</sup> Although many of the insights from these studies are valuable, very little attention has been paid to reading Josiah's rule and death in 2 Chronicles from a literary perspective.<sup>2</sup> In this contribution, therefore, I propose a literary reading of 2 Chronicles 34–35 on the terms of the Chron-

I would like to thank Gary Knoppers and Ehud Ben Zvi for their comments on this article as it evolved. Any errors that remain are, of course, my own.

<sup>1</sup> The discussion began with H. G. M. Williamson, "The Death of Josiah and the Continuing Development of the Deuteronomistic History," *VT* 32 (1982) 242-48, and continued with C. T. Begg, "The Death of Josiah: Another View," *VT* 37 (1987) 1-8; H. G. M. Williamson, "Reliving the Death of Josiah: A Reply to C. T. Begg," *VT* 37 (1987) 9-15; Zipora Talshir, "The Three Deaths of Josiah and the Strata of Biblical Historiography (2 Kings xxiii 29-30; 2 Chronicles xxxv 20-5; 1 Esdras i 23-31)," *VT* 46 (1996) 213-36; Baruch Halpern, "Why Manasseh Is Blamed for the Babylonian Exile: The Evolution of a Biblical Tradition," *VT* 48 (1998) 473-514. The work in these articles is often in conversation with that of C. C. Torrey, *Ezra Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910) 87-88, 220-21; and Adam C. Welch, "The Death of Josiah," *ZAW* 43 (1925) 255-60. Another article of interest is Stanley B. Frost, "The Death of Josiah: A Conspiracy of Silence," *JBL* 87 (1968) 369-82. Full references for the historical issues may be found in Talshir, "Three Deaths of Josiah." The history of the interpretation of 2 Chronicles 34–35 may be found in Steve Delamarter, "The Death of Josiah in Scripture and Tradition: Wrestling with the Problem of Evil?" *VT* 54 (2004) 29-60.

<sup>2</sup> Tentative steps toward such a reading may be found in Zipora Talshir, "Synchronic Approaches with Diachronic Consequences in the Study of Parallel Redactions: First Esdras and 2 Chronicles 35–36; Ezra 1–10; Nehemiah 8," in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era* (ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking; Studies in Theology and Religion 5; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003) 199-218.

icler. I begin by respecting the Chronicler's literary strategy, rather than by assuming that the Chronicler was limited to simply reworking Samuel–Kings. I also read 2 Chronicles 34–35, however, in terms of the texts that its author does seem to know and reflect. What emerges is the Chronicler's deliberate patterning of the death of Josiah on the death of Ahab in both 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18. Although this has been noted before, the full implications of this patterning have not been drawn out. In addition, the patterning of Josiah's death on the death of Ahab links Josiah's death with the death of Saul in both 1 Samuel 31 and 1 Chronicles 10. Josiah's death is linked also with the deaths of Ahaziah and Amaziah in 2 Chronicles 22 and 25, respectively. Further, I examine the role of Huldah's prophecy in 2 Chronicles 34, and of prophecy in general, in the context of Josiah's death.<sup>3</sup> I explore also the literary relationship between Josiah's death and his Passover. I conclude with some comments about what the relationship between Josiah's death and his Passover might say about the situation in Persian-period Yehud.

### I. Reading Josiah's death

Josiah's death is described in 2 Chr 35:20-27. The battle scene itself is eerily reminiscent of the death of Ahab in 2 Chronicles 18: the disguised king, the king's being shot by archers, the cry to his retainers to take him from the battle because he is wounded.<sup>4</sup> Two of the most prominent similarities have been often observed: the use of *חָפַץ* in the hithpael in the sense of "to disguise oneself" (2 Chr 18:29; 35:22) and the phrase *כִּי הִחַלִּיתִי*, "for I am wounded" (18:33; 35:23)<sup>5</sup> (two of the three uses of *חָלָה* in the hophal in the biblical corpus are in these passages, the other one being in 1 Kgs 22:34, the parallel text to 2 Chr 18:33). Both kings receive warnings not to go into battle.<sup>6</sup> The scene is reminiscent also of the death of Saul in 1 Chronicles 10: Saul's being shot by archers, the request of the retainer.<sup>7</sup> Unlike both Ahab and Saul, however, Josiah dies not on the field of battle but rather back in Jerusalem (*ירושלם*), thus punning on Huldah's

<sup>3</sup> Helpful here is David A. Glatt-Gilad, "The Role of Huldah's Prophecy in the Chronicler's Portrayal of Josiah's Reform," *Bib* 77 (1996) 16-31.

<sup>4</sup> Welch ("Death of Josiah," 255) was among the first modern scholars to suggest that one account was clearly modeled on the other.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Talshir, "Three Deaths of Josiah," 219, and the references given there, esp. Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, 221; Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (WBC 15; Waco: Word, 1987) 292; Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 1042-43, 1058-59.

<sup>6</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1043.

<sup>7</sup> See William Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles: Worship and the Reinterpretation of History* (JSOTSup 160; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 139.

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prophecy that he would die בַּשְּׁלֹמֹם “in *šālôm*” (2 Chr 34:28).<sup>8</sup> H. G. M. Williamson’s comment that the locus of the death in Jerusalem rather than on the battlefield is meant to address the problem of the nonfulfillment of Huldah’s prophecy<sup>9</sup> misses the point completely—Josiah’s death in Jerusalem does fulfill the prophecy, but ironically. This use of irony is not unlike that found in the fulfillment of prophecy in classical sources, for example, in Herodotus’s story of Croesus’s invasion of Persia and his loss of his empire (*Hist.* 1.53, 71, 91). Of greater importance to us here, however, is the clear link between the death of Ahab and the death of Josiah. When we consider that the Chronicler could have drawn on a number of literary parallels for this account of Josiah’s death,<sup>10</sup> we must consider what the patterning of Josiah’s death on the death of Ahab (and Saul) might imply about the depiction of Josiah in 2 Chronicles.

A great deal of energy has been devoted to exploring the differences between the parallel accounts in 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 35 with respect to Josiah’s death.<sup>11</sup> Josiah’s death is told very differently in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles: in 2 Kgs 23:29-30, we are told simply that Neco kills Josiah when he meets him at Megiddo, and that Josiah’s servants bring him back dead from Megiddo to Jerusalem. Zipora Talshir makes a good point when questioning whether we would even understand the account in 2 Kings as a battle account without the account in 2 Chronicles.<sup>12</sup> The Chronicler’s account is much more involved, as I discussed above. I think the most reasonable explanation for the differences is that of Talshir, who suggests that the Chronicler’s account is an expansion of an unintelligible text (unintelligible perhaps only to the Chronicler).<sup>13</sup> In this view, the Chronicler’s account fits the work’s general ideology: that a wrong (or sinful) action is followed by the appropriate punishment. There is one crucial difference, however, between the accounts that cannot be explained by the hypothesis of

<sup>8</sup> Talshir, “Three Deaths of Josiah,” 220.

<sup>9</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 409.

<sup>10</sup> Beyond the pattern of the king “sleeping with his ancestors” (e.g., 2 Chr 9:31), there is the pattern of death from an illness (e.g., 2 Chr 16:12-13; 21:18-19; 26:21-23) and assassination (e.g., 2 Chr 24:25; 33:24).

<sup>11</sup> See the references in n. 1 for the theory of the continuing development of the Deuteronomistic History as a source for 2 Chronicles, as well as Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, 289. Steven L. McKenzie (*The Chronicler’s Use of the Deuteronomistic History* [HSM 33; Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1984] 184, 188) suggests that the Chronicler had an additional source(s) rather than an expanded Deuteronomistic History, and he also makes the claim that 1–2 Chronicles does not contain an account of Ahab’s death; in his later book (*The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* [VTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1991] 128) he aligns more with Williamson’s position without fully agreeing with it. Japhet (*I & II Chronicles*, 1041–42) argues that the Chronicler used the Deuteronomistic framework and filled in the gaps.

<sup>12</sup> Talshir, “Three Deaths of Josiah,” 215.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 216, 219; building on the work of Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, 220–21.

expansion: in 2 Kgs 23:29-30, Josiah dies at Megiddo, whereas in 2 Chr 35:24 he dies in Jerusalem. This is not an expansion of an unintelligible text, as it would be perfectly possible for the Chronicler to have created a battle account and have Josiah die in battle at Megiddo. The difference between the two texts with respect to the place of death is perfectly clear: in Kings, only the part of Huldah's prophecy about Josiah not living to see the exile is fulfilled, whereas in Chronicles the whole prophecy is fulfilled, but ironically, by means of the play on *šālôm*. Both Raymond B. Dillard and Williamson, on the other hand, see the Chronicler as emphasizing only the part of the prophecy that was fulfilled (Josiah not living to see the exile), because, as Williamson says, the Chronicler "must have realized that part of the promise was not fulfilled."<sup>14</sup> Other explanations for the change of venue for Josiah's death include the suggestion that dying in Jerusalem removes the problem of dying in battle,<sup>15</sup> or that there seems to be no apparent reason for the change of venue.<sup>16</sup> The point, therefore, is that while the author of 2 Kings has Josiah die a meaningless, almost accidental death, the author of 2 Chronicles has Josiah die an ironic death, and a foolish one. The irony of his death is emphasized only by the knowledge of the account on 2 Kings.<sup>17</sup>

Surely, however, the king should stay on the battlefield through the battle—even Ahab stayed on the battlefield (2 Chr 18:34). The other king in Chronicles to leave the battlefield and go to his city is King Joram of Israel in 2 Chr 22:5-8, who ends up with a nasty death at the hands of Jehu (or not—we are not actually told that Joram himself was killed). His cousin Ahaziah, king of Judah, goes to visit him and is killed himself. Ahaziah's death also is of importance in looking at Josiah's death:<sup>18</sup> Ahaziah hides (אָבַח hithpael) in Samaria before being located and executed (2 Chr 22:9). When we consider that the hithpael of אָבַח in 2 Chr 35:22 literally means "to let oneself be searched for," and that Jehu has to search for (אָבַח) Ahaziah, then we have another link to Josiah's death. Ahaziah, of course, was a grandson of Ahab and was executed during Jehu's purge of the House of Ahab. Unlike in the case of Josiah's death, however, we are given a reason for Ahaziah going out (אָצַח) to Jehu—it was "from God."<sup>19</sup> Ahaziah's death is

<sup>14</sup> Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, 282; Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 401-2; cf. Talshir ("Three Deaths of Josiah," 220), who downplays any contradiction between the prophecy and the circumstances of Josiah's death.

<sup>15</sup> Halpern, "Why Manasseh Is Blamed," 509.

<sup>16</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1058.

<sup>17</sup> Halpern ("Why Manasseh Is Blamed," 509-11) suggests that the account in 2 Kings is also ironic, in order that the Deuteronomic distinction between true and false prophecy may be maintained.

<sup>18</sup> So comments Dillard (*2 Chronicles*, 292), without giving supporting evidence.

<sup>19</sup> The verb אָצַח is also used in 2 Chr 35:20 of Josiah's action. Talshir ("Three Deaths of Josiah," 216-17) compares the use of אָצַח לְקַרְאֵהוּ in 2 Kgs 23:29 with אָצַח לְקַרְאֵהוּ in 2 Chr 35:20 and concludes that the latter expression denotes hostility.

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ordained. Perhaps Josiah's death also is "ordained"—as in fact Neco implies in 2 Chr 35:21. But again, what we have here are links of Josiah's death in 2 Chronicles 35 with the deaths of two kings soundly condemned by the Chronicler—and both are linked with Ahab.

Finally, there is another king's death that is relevant here. Talshir points it out but does not make much of it.<sup>20</sup> In 2 Chr 25:17-24, Amaziah of Judah asks to meet his Israelite counterpart, Joash, "face to face." Although we might be tempted to read this as a request for parley, Joash's response and the subsequent events show that at least Joash thinks this is an aggressive move. Moreover, as with Ahaziah in 2 Chronicles 22, we are told the reason why Amaziah does not heed the warning from Joash—it is "from God" (25:20). Amaziah's death is also ordained. When we combine the deaths of Ahaziah in 2 Chronicles 22 and Amaziah in 2 Chronicles 25 with the death of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 35, we can see that for both of the former kings, the reasons for their foolish behavior is given: "from God," ordained as punishment. No such explicit narratorial comment is offered in 2 Chronicles 35, but perhaps we should take the two previous examples as a strong implication of such narratorial evaluation. In the cases of Ahaziah and Amaziah, God's ordaining of their deaths does not have to do with their ignoring God's word. Ahaziah is not favored with a prophetic warning of his possible fate; rather, he is executed because of the perceived sins of his Omride forebears, notably "walking in the ways of the house of Ahab" and "doing what was evil in the eyes of Yhwh like the house of Ahab" and "following their advice" (2 Chr 22:2-9). Amaziah is favored with a prophetic warning in 2 Chr 25:14-16, and we are then told that he is punished for allowing the people to "seek the gods of Edom" (2 Chr 25:20); the anonymous prophet does not even finish his warning, but suggests that all of this is God's doing (v. 16). When the prophetic word comes, therefore, it is a warning against some act already committed.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in looking at the death of Josiah, we should not conclude that Josiah's not listening to God's word through Neco leads to his downfall.<sup>22</sup> Rather, God's word through Neco, if we classify it as a prophetic warning, is a warning against some other sin already committed, a call to repentance, and a comment on an ordained outcome if there is no ordained outcome. It is not a warning against a contemplated action.

<sup>20</sup> Talshir, "Three Deaths of Josiah," 219.

<sup>21</sup> For discussions of prophecy in 1–2 Chronicles, see Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (2nd ed.; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997) 176-90; William M. Schniedewind, "Prophets and Prophecy in the Books of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Historian* (ed. M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth G. Hoglund, and Steven L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 238; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 204-24.

<sup>22</sup> Contra Begg, "Another View," 2-3; Glatt-Gilad, "Role of Huldah's Prophecy," 24-25; Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1043; and esp. Halpern ("Why Manasseh Is Blamed," 482), who sees this as the base on which the entire literary patterning is built.

Prophecy plays a role in Josiah's death in two ways: in Neco's warning, and in Huldah's prophecy (2 Chr 34:23-28). Huldah's pronouncement touches on how the people have forsaken Yhwh and worshiped other gods, causing Yhwh to decide to punish Judah (34:24-25). But Josiah has humbled himself before Yhwh, according to the pronouncement (34:27); this is language completely characteristic of Chronicles, and unique to the version of the prophecy in 2 Chronicles.<sup>23</sup> Therefore Yhwh says to him, "I will gather you to your ancestors and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace [בְּשָׁלוֹם]; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place and its inhabitants" (34:28 *NRSV*). This is the part of the prophecy that will lead to Josiah's undoing.<sup>24</sup> There is a second aspect to the role of prophecy, however—the role of Neco as a speaker of God's word. In 2 Chr 35:21-22, Josiah ignores the word of God also because it comes not from a Judahite prophet but from an Egyptian king,<sup>25</sup> though his ignoring simply means that he is blind to the actions that precipitated the warning, as I discussed above. As has often been pointed out, God's word usually comes from a Yahwistic prophet, but there are other cases in Chronicles where the divine word is heard from unlikely places.<sup>26</sup> There are two divine words that come to Josiah, both from unlikely sources: a woman (as is well known, Huldah is one of only four women in the entire Hebrew Bible who are called prophets: Deborah, Miriam, and Noadiah are the others [Judg 4:4; Exod 15:20; Neh 6:14]), and a foreigner. That Josiah does not fully understand them or chooses to ignore them is a failing—and further builds on the irony of his death.

So what is Josiah's sin, if it is not ignoring the word of God through Neco? Perhaps it might be going out against Neco, that act of making war against the Egyptian king. Certainly, this makes sense if we see Neco as the legitimate superior of a vassal Josiah.<sup>27</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:13 describes Zedekiah rebelling (מָרַד) against Nebuchadnezzar; this rebellion is described in the same terms as Jeroboam rebelling against the Davidic house in 2 Chr 13:6. From 2 Chronicles 36, then, we can see that in the Chronicler's ideology, rebellion against a (legitimate) overlord should be followed by punishment. The problem for 2 Chronicles 35 is

<sup>23</sup> Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, 281.

<sup>24</sup> Glatt-Gilad ("Role of Huldah's Prophecy," 29) suggests that Huldah's prophecy coming after the temple restoration project has begun and at the midpoint of the story of Josiah's reign serves to inspire the Passover observance (further religious reform), but that "the religious zeal . . . ultimately did not hold up."

<sup>25</sup> Halpern, "Why Manasseh Is Blamed," 513, 502-4.

<sup>26</sup> See Schniedewind, "Prophets and Prophecy," 204. Talshir ("Three Deaths of Josiah," 231-32) points out that the Chronicler considered foreign powers to be legitimate instruments of God, but that Neco is the only foreigner who spoke with God's authority. Key to our understanding here, however, is that Neco is the one who claims divine authority—within the story world, how could Josiah consider this acceptable?

<sup>27</sup> See Halpern, "Why Manasseh Is Blamed," 502.

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that there is no hint in the text itself that the Chronicler saw Neco as Josiah's overlord, although this is a solution that has been posited by interpreters.<sup>28</sup> It seems to me more likely that there was another sin or problem that led to Josiah's death being ordained, and it would most likely be the event in the story that immediately precedes Josiah's death, namely, Josiah's Passover.

Before turning to the Passover, however, we should examine the first verse of the account of Josiah's death. The narrator's comment that introduces the story of Josiah's death in 2 Chr 35:20 ("After all this, when Josiah had arranged the house . . .") would seem to imply that the arrangement of the temple was Josiah's important act, not the Passover. The contrast between Josiah's good actions around the temple and the bad death that immediately follows seems to be part of the Chronicler's literary technique: the introduction of an episode by a story that contrasts with the episode, thus emphasizing the moral of the episode at hand. The story of Saul's death in 1 Chronicles 10 introduces David and provides characterization of David through contrast with Saul. In 2 Chr 35:20, the correct action of temple restoration provides emphasis on the foolishness of Josiah's death. The laments of the people and Jeremiah after Josiah's death also point out the contrast between Josiah's appropriate actions around the temple and the cause of God's ordination of his death. This leads us to an examination of Josiah's Passover in this context.

## II. Josiah's Passover

If Josiah's sin is not disregarding Neco's words, and if his death in Chronicles is described in terms similar to those used to describe various evil kings in Chronicles, then what is the problem with Josiah for the Chronicler? In the context of Chronicles, the account of Josiah's death follows immediately after the account of his celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem. The notice that concludes the account of the Passover runs as follows: "There had not been a passover like it in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel, and none of the kings of Israel had held one like the passover which Josiah held" (2 Chr 35:18). On the face of it, this would seem to be superlative praise of Josiah's Passover.<sup>29</sup> We should compare the notice of this Passover, however, with the notice of Hezekiah's Passover in 2 Chr 30:26: "There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem." Here

<sup>28</sup> Talshir ("Three Deaths of Josiah," 217-18) analyzes the parallel account in 2 Kings 23 and concludes that the vassal-overlord relationship is certainly implied in the account in Kings. The key changes in the language of encounter made by the Chronicler, however, remove this scenario.

<sup>29</sup> See Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles*, 135-38; and Talshir ("Synchronic Approaches," 216) on Josiah observing the Passover according to *tôrâ*.

the narrator is describing Hezekiah's Passover as being the finest since the days of Solomon, the last proper king in the Chronicler's ideology.<sup>30</sup> The geographical extent of the Passover is also circumscribed to Jerusalem. We should compare the language of 2 Chr 35:18 within 2 Chronicles 34–35 with respect to the terminology of "Israel." In 2 Chronicles 34, the narrator speaks only of the "remnant [שְׂאֵרֵיהֶם] of Israel" (v. 9), as does Josiah in v. 21, although in his commands to the Levites in 2 Chr 35:3, Josiah does speak of "all Israel." We need to make a distinction here between Yhwh's people "Israel" as a theological construct and "Israel" as an ethnic/political designation, based loosely on Williamson's analysis<sup>31</sup> but with the following qualifications. Williamson's discussion of the terminology deals clearly with the idea of the "remnant" of Israel as referring to the people remaining in the north after the fall of Samaria.<sup>32</sup> With regard to his discussion of the terminology of Israel in 2 Chr 35:17-18, however, I would dispute his statement that "Israel" refers to all parts of the population,<sup>33</sup> noting rather that מְנַצֵּחַ in the niphal is used to qualify "Israel" in both verses, that is, "those of Israel who were present/found." He argues that from Hezekiah to the exile, the kingdom is considered to be "united" again from the Chronicler's perspective.<sup>34</sup> If that is so, however, then why is the terminology of "Judah" even used from 2 Chronicles 29 on? Coming at the problem from the literary angle, we might ask: At the phraseological level of the text, who is right about the extent of the Passover—Josiah, who speaks of a Passover for all Israel (2 Chr 35:3), or the narrator, who speaks of a Passover for the remnant of Israel (v. 18)? In biblical narrative, the narrator's claims usually take priority over any other speaker's, at least on the phraseological level.<sup>35</sup> So is Josiah having delusions of grandeur in 2 Chr

<sup>30</sup> See Roddy Braun, "Solomon, the Chosen Temple Builder: The Significance of 1 Chronicles 22, 28, and 29 for the Theology of Chronicles," *JBL* 95 (1976) 581-90; Japhet, *Ideology of the Book of Chronicles*, 488-89.

<sup>31</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Book of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>35</sup> For the basic sources on this, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981) 116-17; Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series 9; Sheffield: Almond, 1983) 57-59. A more nuanced view may be found in Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*, Part 2, *1 Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 18-21; *idem*, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*, Part 1, *Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 20-24, 26-36. In these studies, Polzin demonstrates how the phraseological and ideological levels do not necessarily coincide in the Deuteronomistic History (I believe we can extend this discussion to biblical literature as a whole). Polzin relies on the discussion of "voicedness" found in Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 301-33; and in an earlier transla-



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35:3? If so, then is the narrator's comment in 2 Chr 35:18 about Josiah's incomparable Passover an ironic comment?

Furthermore, we are told in 2 Chr 35:18 that "none of the kings of Israel" had celebrated Passover as Josiah had. So Josiah here is being compared not to the kings of Judah (although he was one, and kings after him are titled as "king of Judah" [2 Chr 36:4, 10]), but to the kings of Israel. Of course the kings of Israel had not celebrated Passover—as far as the Chronicler is concerned, the kings of Israel were not proper Yahwists. If we follow Williamson here, however, we can see the term "Israel" being used to describe Yahwists; that is, the theological connotations of the term are being preferred to the political ones. Either way, the phrase implicitly omits both David and Solomon from a proper celebration of Passover—which, on a certain level, makes sense for David, when there was no temple, but not for Solomon, who did properly celebrate the festivals (cf. 2 Chr 8:13). On the whole, then, I prefer to understand the phrase "none of the kings of Israel" as containing within it two possibilities of meaning, neither of them particularly flattering to Josiah. This immediately demotes the high status of Josiah's Passover. Moreover, when we look at the narrator's summary of the Passover in 2 Chr 35:16, we are told that the Passover ritual was done "according to the command [כַּמְצוּתָהּ] of King Josiah." Josiah, in his own speech, claims a written Davidic and Solomonic warrant (2 Chr 35:4), and a Mosaic warrant (v. 6). In Hezekiah's reformation of the temple, everything is done with Davidic warrant (or the warrant of David's prophets Gad and Nathan), as given by the narrator, e.g., in 2 Chr 29:25-30. In Hezekiah's Passover, the warrant comes from Moses (2 Chr 30:16). We need to recall that for the Chronicler, Hezekiah was the culmination of the post-Solomonic monarchy.<sup>36</sup> John W. Wright points out that after Manasseh's return from Babylon, Yhwh is no longer present in the narrative, that Josiah's Passover elicits no narratorial comment about Yhwh's presence or approval (in contrast to Hezekiah's Passover; cf. 2 Chr 30:27).<sup>37</sup> So just who does Josiah think he is? More important, what innovation is he introducing? Why does Yhwh not respond with approval?

tion of Bakhtin, *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (trans. Caryl Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 203-4. By making a claim about the phraseological level of the text in 2 Chronicles 35, I am not precluding the possibility of double-voiced discourse embedded within the narrator's speech.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 912; Mark A. Throntveit, "The Relationship of Hezekiah to David and Solomon in the Books of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein* (ed. M. Patrick Graham, Steven L. McKenzie, and Gary N. Knoppers; JSOTSup 371; London: Clark, 2003) 105-21, here 105-6.

<sup>37</sup> John W. Wright, "Beyond Transcendence and Immanence: The Characterization of the Presence and Activity of God in the Book of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Theologian*, 240-67, here 264.

In the view of some, there was nothing wrong with Josiah's Passover. Quite the opposite: the Passover was the culmination of the actions of the Davidic house.<sup>38</sup> If one accepts my previous reasoning that Josiah's death is ordained by God because of some foolish action, however, then this view cannot hold. Yhwh never approves of Josiah's reforms (cf. Wright above); all apparent approval comes from the narrator—or, more often, from the narrator reporting on the people's behavior (e.g., 2 Chr 35:24-25). If we examine the role of the Levites in Josiah's Passover celebration, especially when compared with their role in Hezekiah's celebrations, then perhaps we have a clue. It is commonly held that the Levites were a primary focus for the Chronicler, that in fact the Chronicler was advancing the cause of the Levites in the same way as that of the Davidic king.<sup>39</sup> There is a great deal of evidence to support this view, the most obvious point being the role that David as the ideal ruler had in the foundation and support of the Levites in 1 Chronicles 23–27. This part of 1 Chronicles has often been seen as lending support to Levitical function as it expanded or was differentiated during the Second Temple period.<sup>40</sup> If we look at Levitical function in 2 Chronicles 34 compared with 1 Chronicles 23–27 and 2 Chronicles 29, however, perhaps what we are seeing is Josiah expanding the Levitical role past what would have been considered appropriate.<sup>41</sup> That there was another opinion about the role of the Levites is clear from Ezek 44:9-14, where their function is held to be a form of punishment, a form of shaming: they are not to be (Zadokite) priests. The Chronicler's comment in 2 Chr 29:34, "The Levites were more upright of heart [ישרי לבב] than the priests," seems to be a direct response to Ezek 44:12-13, "Because they served [ישרתו] them before their idols . . . they shall not approach me, to be my priest" (the play on words is quite obvious). As Sara Japhet points out, 2 Chr 29:34 is seen as the ultimate warrant for the expansion of Levitical function into the priestly sphere, but this warrant is meant to be time-limited for a particular situation.<sup>42</sup> Josiah's Passover, then, takes the arrangements made for the overabundance of Hezekiah's rituals and formalizes them.<sup>43</sup> Is this the prob-

<sup>38</sup> E.g., Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles*, 138-39.

<sup>39</sup> See Japhet, *Ideology of the Book of Chronicles*, 90-92; Adam C. Welch, *The Work of the Chronicler* (London: British Academy, 1939) 55-80.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 158. For an interesting correlation of the genealogical material in Chronicles with the Chronicler's interest in Levites that demonstrates that the Chronicler's interest in the Levites is not supported by contemporary genealogical information, see Yigal Levin, "From Lists to History: Chronological Aspects of the Chronicler's Genealogies," *JBL* 123 (2004) 601-36, here 630-31.

<sup>41</sup> Welch (*Work of the Chronicler*, 71) points out that 2 Chr 35:1-4 is a "preface which defined certain permanent arrangements that were made by the reforming king."

<sup>42</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 930-31.

<sup>43</sup> Welch (*Work of the Chronicler*, 69) remarks that the language of 2 Chr 35:1-4 brings together temple, ark, and Levites, and the Levites are described as both teachers of *tôrâ* and holy to Yhwh in a way that "has no direct relation to the passover."

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lem? And is Josiah's death then also meant as a comment on those who would support this formalization of Levitical expansion? Is the Chronicler, by presenting these two views on the expansion of Levitical function, saying: So far, but no farther? Or is there another reason as well? Christopher T. Begg suggests that Josiah's command to the Levites about the ark—that they no longer need to carry it on their shoulders (2 Chr 35:3)—ties back to the neglect of the ark under Saul (as reported by David in 1 Chr 13:3).<sup>44</sup> Here we have another tie of Josiah back to Saul.

## III. Reading Readers Reading 2 Chronicles 35

Many commentators see Josiah's death as simply having been copied from Ahab's death in 1 Kings 22//2 Chronicles 18.<sup>45</sup> It is more important, however, to recognize that this pattern deliberately says something about Josiah, placing him firmly in the shadow of Ahab (and Saul, Amaziah, and Ahaziah). The account also acts as a frame within 1–2 Chronicles: the first account of a king's death and the last account of a king's death show the king's death as occurring in the same way. This brings us back, however, to the question of why the Chronicler chose to pattern the death of Josiah on the accounts of the deaths of four kings who were evil in the eyes of the Chronicler (if not Yhwh). I think it has a great deal to do with the picture that the Chronicler wanted to draw of Josiah. The problem with this picture is that it is not the one that the vast majority of commentators, ancient and modern, have wanted to see! If we begin with the ancient versions, we can trace some of the ways in which interpreters have dealt with the death of Josiah as it is told in 2 Chronicles.<sup>46</sup> There are two major linguistic similarities between the account of the death of Ahab in 2 Chronicles 18 and Josiah's death in 2 Chronicles 35, as I noted above. The first is the use of  $\text{פָּשַׁח}$  in the hithpael (18:29; 35:22), and the second is the phrase  $\text{כִּי הִחֲלִיתִי}$ , "for I am wounded" (18:33; 35:23). The LXX of Theodotion and its daughter versions removed  $\text{פָּשַׁח}$  from 2 Chr 35:22 and replaced it with  $\text{κραταιόω}$ , "to strengthen." This is often taken to reflect a Hebrew text-type reading  $\text{קָוַח}$  in the hithpael,<sup>47</sup> which could certainly be possible,

<sup>44</sup> Christopher T. Begg, "The Ark in Chronicles," in *Chronicler as Theologian*, 133-45, here 141-42.

<sup>45</sup> Delamarter, "Death of Josiah," 34-35; Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1043; Talshir, "Three Deaths of Josiah," 219; Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, 220; Welch, "Death of Josiah," 255; Williamson, "Death of Josiah," 246.

<sup>46</sup> The section on ancient sources was written independently of Delamarter, "Death of Josiah," which deals with many of the same issues from the specific point of view of theodicy and Josiah's death in more detail. Delamarter also deals with 2 *Baruch*, the Peshitta, the Old Latin, the Vulgate, and the targums. For a discussion of the LXX rendering of 2 Chronicles 35 as a whole, which includes the statement in 2 Kings 23:24-27 of the sin of Manasseh, see esp. pp. 37-39.

<sup>47</sup> Torrey (*Ezra Studies*, 221 n. 16) suggests that the translators "foolishly corrected" the

given the Chronicler's use of the word elsewhere (the clearest examples are 1 Chr 19:13; 2 Chr 13:7-8; 15:8; 16:9; 25:11; 32:5). Likewise, 1 Esdr 1:26 rewrites this passage by suggesting that Josiah *attempted* to fight Neco (ἀλλὰ πολεμεῖν αὐτὸν ἐπιχειρεῖ);<sup>48</sup> 1 Esdras 1:28 also removes any idea that Josiah was wounded by archers.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, all of these versions make some attempt to deal with what appears in the MT to be Josiah's disregard for the word of God (coming from Neco),<sup>50</sup> which of course is another parallel to the death of Ahab. Rather than treat this as a purely textual issue, perhaps we should treat it as an ideological issue: the translators of the LXX and the author (and/or translator) of 1 Esdras recognized the difficulty of Josiah dying like Ahab. It was a difficulty for them, because by then the depiction of Josiah in 2 Kings had become traditional and perhaps even authoritative.<sup>51</sup> We can cite Sir 49:1-4 as evidence of the acceptance of that depiction. Thus, they dealt with what seemed to them to be a problem (Chronicles' Josiah did not fit this pattern, or they could not imagine Chronicles' Josiah not fitting the pattern) by making minor changes in order to "correct" the text of Chronicles. In the MT of 2 Chronicles there are features that made correction less difficult from this later perspective: all Judah and Jerusalem lamenting for Josiah, Jeremiah composing laments, the singers lamenting "to this day" (2 Chr 35:24-25). So, for example, 1 Esdr 1:23-24 could be added as a further approving comment on Josiah.

Hebrew. We should keep in mind that there were quite possibly several versions of the Hebrew text in circulation (cf. n. 49 on 1 Esdras, below).

<sup>48</sup> Torrey (*Ezra Studies*, 221 n. 16) notes that ἐπιχειρεῖ renders שׁוּר in the sense of "search."

<sup>49</sup> Here I follow Zipora Talshir (*1 Esdras: From Origin to Translation* [SBLSCS 47; Atlanta: SBL, 1999] 175-79; eadem, "Three Deaths of Josiah," 233-34) in treating 1 Esdras as an independent creative work, based on 2 Chronicles 35-36, but not as a potential textual witness to the MT of 2 Chronicles. Rather, it is an example of a different text form only partially reflected in the LXX and other versions of 2 Chronicles. See Kristin De Troyer, "Zerubbabel and Ezra: A Revived and Revised Solomon and Josiah? A Survey of Current 1 Esdras Research," *CBR* 1, no. 1 (2002) 50-51; H. G. M. Williamson, "The Problem with 1 Esdras," in *After the Exile: Essays in Honor of Rex Mason* (ed. John Barton and David J. Reimer; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996) 201-16. Kristin De Troyer (*Rewriting the Sacred Text: What the Old Greek Texts Tell Us about the Literary Growth of the Bible* [SBL Text-critical Studies 4; Atlanta: SBL, 2003] 91-126) argues on text-critical grounds that 1 Esdras was a new Hebrew-Aramaic composition, based on Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, which was then translated into Greek. Contra Tamara C. Eskenazi ("The Chronicler and the Composition of 1 Esdras," *CBQ* 48 [1986] 39-61), who sees 1 Esdras as a rewriting of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah and hence usable as a textual witness.

<sup>50</sup> As Delamarter ("Death of Josiah," 41-42) points out, 1 Esdras makes Jeremiah the prophetic voice rather than Neco.

<sup>51</sup> Delamarter ("Death of Josiah," 36, 59) suggests that later authors tried to balance *two* authoritative versions—Kings and Chronicles—and that no later author was able to harmonize the two versions fully, favoring either the Kings version or the Chronicles version.

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An interesting piece of evidence that may confirm this hypothesis comes from Josephus (*A.J.* 10.75-77). Josephus does deal with the difficulty of Josiah seeming to disregard the word of God, but he also does not eliminate the similarities between Josiah's death and Ahab's death. Begg observes that Josephus editorialized about both Josiah's and Ahab's deaths in the same way, by pointing to the hand of fate. Begg, however, also notes that, for Josephus, Josiah was a heroic figure, and so Josephus also had to come up with a reason for his death that did not lower that status: Josiah was driven by "a malevolent fate."<sup>52</sup> Otherwise, Josephus does make the small changes that are required to maintain Josiah's heroic status, such as returning upright rather than prone to Jerusalem. He does not include Josiah's disguising himself, but it is quite possible that Josephus was using the LXX version of Chronicles, which does not include that detail (see above).<sup>53</sup> Josephus, however, does not otherwise diminish the Josiah-Ahab parallelism; in fact, he enhances it. For him it is not a problem, since he is operating with an idea about "the utter capriciousness of fate's operations which smite both" Ahab and Josiah, bad king and good king alike.<sup>54</sup> Now Begg suggests that "Josephus too makes the same peculiar connection between the good Josiah and the reprobate Ahab as does the Chronicler," implying that Josephus came to this connection independently of Chronicles.<sup>55</sup> But since Josephus is clearly relying at least in part on Chronicles here, is it not possible that Josephus saw *what was in the Chronicler's work*, and instead of eliminating it, used it to his advantage?

Modern commentators have been no less likely than their ancient counterparts to try to remove these unflattering elements of the depiction of Josiah in 2 Chronicles. The textual apparatuses in *BHK* and *BHS* both show this tendency: in 2 Chr 35:22, *BHS* suggests emending  $\text{וַיִּפְּחֵם}$  to  $\text{וַיִּפְּחֵם}$ , which would give an otherwise unattested *hithpael* of  $\text{וַיִּפְּחֵם}$ , meaning something like "And Josiah freed himself to fight him." In addition, looking at the commentators, Talshir, for example, suggests that the connection between 2 Chronicles 35 and 1 Kings 22 "is made conspicuous by the mutual yet different use of *hthps*: at Ramoth-gilead the kings probably go in disguise; in our case the verb seems to mean that Josiah seeks (*hps*) to fight despite the warning."<sup>56</sup> Peter R. Ackroyd suggests that Chronicles

<sup>52</sup> Christopher T. Begg, "The Death of Josiah: Josephus and the Bible," *ETL* 64 (1988) 157-63, here 161; Delamarter ("Death of Josiah," 45) notes that in Josephus, Huldah's prophecy is to be fulfilled after Josiah's death.

<sup>53</sup> Begg, "Josephus and the Bible," 160 n. 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 162; note that the manuscript tradition here can be interpreted as suggesting that Josiah's character was also a problem; see Delamarter, "Death of Josiah," 47.

<sup>55</sup> Begg, "Josephus and the Bible," 161.

<sup>56</sup> Talshir, "Three Deaths of Josiah," 219.

“depicts a good king, a reformer, who fails at the end.”<sup>57</sup> I would suggest that modern scholarship has also “bought into” the ideology of 2 Kings—that Josiah was a good king and that his death, although clearly patterned after the death of an evil king in 2 Chronicles, says nothing about his life and reign but relates only to his ignoring of God’s word through Neco. The ancient versions can then be called upon to support this theory, by treating them purely as disinterested textual witnesses. Modern scholars have invested considerably in the notion of the Deuteronomic History and a Josianic version of that history.<sup>58</sup> The fact, however, that so many commentators (both ancient and modern) have seen and felt the need to explain away the similarities between Josiah’s death and the deaths of Ahab, Saul, Amaziah, and Ahaziah might suggest to us that the original text’s message is one that differs from our expectations.

#### IV. Conclusion

We know from other places in 1–2 Chronicles that the Chronicler could dispute the depiction of certain figures in 1–2 Kings. Solomon is one example. More relevant to the discussion here, however, is Manasseh. In 2 Kings, Manasseh is irredeemably evil, but in 2 Chr 33:10-19, the Chronicler depicts Manasseh as repentant. The later tradition to a certain extent developed the depiction in 2 Chronicles with the apocryphal Prayer of Manasseh. So it was quite possible for the Chronicler to create a divergent depiction from the available sources: a bad king in 1–2 Kings becomes a not-so-bad or repentant king in 1–2 Chronicles. It was also quite possible for the Chronicler to portray good kings turning bad (e.g., Rehoboam).<sup>59</sup> Might it not be possible, then, for the Chronicler to frame a depiction of Josiah, a good king in 2 Kings, as a backsliding king (prideful king? king afflicted with hubris?) in 2 Chronicles? Manasseh’s efforts in 2 Chronicles are not enough to redeem Judah; Josiah’s efforts are not enough, although he seems to think that they would be. His death in battle is a foolish death—he thinks that by

<sup>57</sup> Peter R. Ackroyd, *The Chronicler in His Age* (JSOTSup 101; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 324.

<sup>58</sup> However the phenomenon of “deuteronomism” may be working itself out in biblical studies at the moment, this is still true. See *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomic History* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and James G. McConville; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000); Gary N. Knoppers, *Two Nations under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies*, vol. 1, *The Reign of Solomon and the Rise of Jeroboam* (HSM 52; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) esp. 17-54; McKenzie, *Trouble with Kings*, esp. 1-19; *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (ed. Linda S. Schearing and Steven L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> See Begg, “Another View,” 2.

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furthering Hezekiah's work, he would die in peace, even if the exile itself was inevitable. But it is also an ironic death, as he does die in *šālôm*, in a way, by dying in Jerusalem. The Chronicler's depiction of Josiah was not simply an interpretive expansion of the account in 2 Kings 23; it was a rewriting of the account. This rewriting, in conjunction with the Chronicler's rewriting of Josiah's Passover, radically changes the depiction of Josiah. By examining 2 Chronicles 34–35 in this way, we can also get a glimpse of the struggle over the legitimation of Levitical function in the late Persian period. Further work on this aspect of the texts, with a study of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in this context, might prove to be helpful.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Halpern ("Why Manasseh Is Blamed," 511–12) points out that Jeremiah and 1–2 Chronicles share certain affinities and that there is a certain amount of "unremarked" Jeremian influence on passages in 1–2 Chronicles.