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THE DEATH OF JOSIAH IN SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION: WRESTLING WITH THE PROBLEM OF EVIL?

by

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Introduction

Not long ago, Z. Talshir discussed in this journal three accounts of the Death of Josiah found respectively in 2Kgs, 2Chr and in 1Esdr.¹ From these three texts alone one can establish the fact that Josiah's death and the circumstances surrounding it generated intense interest on the part of storytellers long after the event itself took place. Tradents were drawn, apparently, to what we would call the theological problem of evil that stands at the core of the story: how could such a noble king experience such an ignoble death? As Talshir shows, these texts give three different answers to the question: how could Josiah, the most righteous of Judah's kings, die an ignominious death at the hands of a pagan king?

As it turns out, several other tradents and storytellers had something to say about the circumstances and causes of Josiah's death. Besides the accounts in 2Kgs, and 2Chr, creative accounts of Josiah's death are found in 2Par (the Septuagint translation of 2Chr), 1 Esdras, Sirach, Josephus, 2 Baruch, the Old Latin, Jerome's Vulgate, the Syriac Peshitta of 2Kgs, 2Chr and 1Esdr, the Targum to 2Chr, and various Rabbinic texts recorded in the Babylonian Talmud. By "creative" I refer to accounts that contain some new element in the story, an element which, as it turns out, speaks to the problem of evil at the crux of the story.

¹ "The three deaths of Josiah and the strata of biblical historiography" *VT* 46 (1996), pp. 213-36.

The initial report is contained in the deuteronomistic history (hereafter, DtrH), in 2Kgs xxiii 29-30. Already the death of Josiah is posed as a stark theological problem. Even a cursory analysis of this familiar passage makes the fact clear.

The report of Josiah's reign (xxii 1ff.) is, first of all, totally *positive*, detailing an extensive account of his righteous deeds. What is more, a *progressive, accumulative* character marks the account. The adverb □□, denoting addition, pushes the narrative forward in verses 15, 19 and 24: "Josiah did. . . . Moreover, he did. . . . Moreover, he did. . . . Moreover, he did. . . ." Finally, the report culminates in a *superlative judgment* in verse 25: "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord . . . nor did any like him arise after him."² Only two other kings receive the same sort of superlative evaluation in the DtrH: Solomon and Hezekiah.³

How shocking, then, to come upon the terse report of Josiah's death in verses 29-30: Josiah goes out with his army to intercept Pharaoh Neco and, as the text simply puts it, "when Pharaoh Neco met him at Megiddo, he killed him."

Such an ignoble end to such a righteous reign needs an explanation. And this is the function of verses 26-27 that come just after the culmination of the report of Josiah's good reign and just before the report of his death. In spite of all the good that Josiah had done, the evil of Manasseh had been so bad that the Lord "did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath."

Verses 24-25 are related to the death report (in 29-30) as explanation to event. More specifically, they explain what appears on the surface to be a breach in the justice of God. The explanation of the writer is theological and functions in the end as a theodicy. Were the

² Unless otherwise indicated, Bible selections are from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved. In the cases where I have provided my own translation, I have modeled the translations on the NRSV so as to make clear from text to text which elements are standard and which reflect a new element.

³ G. Knoppers, "'There was none like him': Incomparability in the Books of Kings", *CBQ* 54 (1992), pp. 411-31, explains the apparent logical absurdity of the DtrH claiming three incomparable kings by arguing that "each of these judgments is associated with special features of a monarch's reign, in which that king is deemed unique or incomparable. Solomon is lauded for unparalleled wisdom and wealth, Hezekiah for unparalleled trust, and Josiah for unparalleled reforms" (p. 413).

events to stand alone, either the righteousness or the power of God would be in question. Our writer is able to preserve both by attributing the death of this righteous king to the evil of his predecessor.

In a very radical way, vv. 26-27 stand over against the rest of the body of the account of Josiah's reign. They look backward, as it were, and address the large section that had come before. The entirety of Josiah's reign and its catalog of good deeds are set in contrast to the Lord's intended action. There is no continuity between them. The adversative **¶** makes this clear. Everything before this word points in one direction; everything after it describes an unexpected reality that contradicts what would be expected on the basis of the prior material. In spite of the superlative evaluation, the writer makes it clear that, because of the sins of Manasseh, Josiah's time falls under the wrath of God.

26. Still the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. 27. The LORD said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."

These two verses not only look backward and stand against the rest of the body of the account, they also look forward and provide a bridge to the account of the death of Josiah in verses 29-30.

In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him; but when Pharaoh Neco met him at Megiddo, he killed him. His servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb.

Only one verse stands between the announcement of judgment (vv. 26-27) and the account of Josiah's death (29-30): the signal phrase which introduces the concluding regnal formula—"Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?"

Thus, the collision between verse 25, the superlative evaluation, and the report of the death of Josiah in verses 29 and 30 is buffered only by verses 26-27. These verses provide a theological explanation for how we get from the one to the other. Josiah's time generally and Josiah's life in particular, fall under the judgment of God, in spite of their own goodness and because of the sins of a prior generation.

This explanation, as it turns out, dovetails with at least two of the theological convictions expressed time and again in the DtrH. In the first place, it makes it clear that it was human sin, and not any impotence on God's part, that resulted in the downfall of the Kingdom of Judah. And further, this explanation expresses a conviction about the way in which sin can work its way out in the human realm. Guilt is abiding; sin is transferable. Punishment for the sin of one generation can be played out in generations long after the original sin was committed.

2 *Chronicles xxxv*

As is well known, the Chronicler's History (hereafter CH) takes as its primary source the DtrH. However, it is also well known that the Chronicler is anything but passive in his use of DtrH.⁴ Although using the materials composed by another, the Chronicler has fashioned them to serve his own theological and historiographical interests. The report of the death of Josiah in 2Chr xxxv is a case in point.

The Chronicler's account of Josiah's reign contains several differences in relation to the DtrH. In the first place, the CH employs a different chronological scheme. Whereas the DtrH focuses exclusively on the events in Josiah's 18th year, the CH describes a development beginning in the 8th year (xxxiv 3a), well under way in the 12th year (xxxiv 3b-7) and progressing through the events of the 18th year (xxxiv 8ff.). Secondly, the Chronicler gives a dramatic increase in attention to the details of cultic matters in the accounts of the cleansing of the Temple (xxxiv 8-13) and in the account of the Passover (xxxv 1-19). In fact, the Chronicler seems more interested in what Josiah has done for the cult than in the matter of Josiah's own personal righteousness.⁵ Third, the CH fashions the Josiah account so that Huldah's prophecy occupies the mid-point. D. A. Glatt-Gilad argues that the Chronicler is conforming to a schema where prophetic oracles are a "historiographic turning point" in key events.⁶ In the DtrH, the discovery of the Book

⁴ See, for instance, S. L. McKenzie, *The Chronicler's Use of the Deuteronomistic History*, HSM 33 (Atlanta, 1984).

⁵ "It seems clear therefore that the principal objective of the Chronicler was to write a history of the dynasty of David, not primarily in terms of its historical and political achievements (though these form the framework appropriated from Samuel-Kings), but its accomplishments in the religious and specifically cultic areas." D. N. Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," *CBQ* 23 (1961), pp. 436-42.

⁶ D. A. Glatt-Gilad, "The Role of Huldah's Prophecy in the Chronicler's Portrayal

of the Law occupies the crux of the story. Fourth, the Chronicler's account of Josiah's reforms is greatly truncated. Overall, the Chronicler portrays Hezekiah, and not Josiah, as the model king.⁷ Corresponding to the extensive account of the reforms in the DtrH (xxiii 4-20) is merely one verse in the Chronicler's account: "Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel, and made all who were in Israel worship the LORD their God" (xxxiv 33a). Fifth, the Chronicler's account of Josiah has no cumulative character to it, employing no device corresponding the DtrH's מִן in 2Kgs xxiii 14, 19 and 24. Sixth, the Chronicler's account contains no superlative evaluation of Josiah. Instead, the superlative evaluation of the Passover kept by Josiah is presented in a slightly expanded form from the one in the DtrH. Seventh, there is no dramatic turnabout in the text corresponding to the וְכִי of 2Kgs xxiii 26, nor is there any mention of Manasseh and his sins. A casual observer might argue that it would be unnecessary in the Chronicler's account since there is no buildup or superlative evaluation. But even in the Chronicler's account, the tension between Josiah's righteous reign and his death is present. Finally, the Chronicler's account of Josiah's death contains a completely new section—one which gives purported background on the events surrounding Josiah's death at the hand of Pharaoh Neco.

20. After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, King Neco of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out against him. 21. But Neco sent envoys to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I am not coming against you today, but against the house with which I am at war; and God has commanded me to hurry. Cease opposing God, who is with me, so that he will not destroy you." 22. But Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but joined battle in the plain of Megiddo. 23. The archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am badly wounded." 24. So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot and

of Josiah's Reform," *Bib* 77 (1996), p. 25. He points to the further cases of Asa (2Ch xiv-xv), Jehoshaphat (2Ch xvii-xx).

⁷ Some would even say that the Chronicler has borrowed materials and paradigms from the DtrH's account of Josiah and transferred them to the account of Hezekiah's reign. Does not the Chronicler's account of Hezekiah's cleansing of the Temple seem modeled on the DtrH's account of Josiah's cleansing of the Temple? And, is not the CH's brief account of Hezekiah's reforms modeled on a longer account of Josiah's reforms in DtrH? In the latter case, some of the actual wording seems borrowed.

brought him to Jerusalem. There he died, and was buried in the tombs of his ancestors. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. 25. Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah, and all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these a custom in Israel; they are recorded in the Laments (2Ch xxxv 20-25).

The primary feature of the Chronicler's account of Josiah's death is that it provides an alternative explanation for the cause of Josiah's death. In answer to the question, 'Why did Josiah die?' the Chronicler does not point to anyone or anything beyond Josiah himself. Josiah does not die because of the sins of another. He dies for his own sin, namely, a refusal to heed the voice of God. Further, the judgment that comes upon Josiah happens immediately and is aimed directly at him individually. This notion of immediate, individual reward and retribution⁸ stands behind a multitude of the refashioned accounts in the CH.⁹

One further observation about the Chronicler's account of the death of Josiah is worth making. The account bears a striking resemblance to the DtrH's account of the death of Jehoshaphat in 1Kgs xxii. Jehoshaphat and the king of Israel were warned by the prophet Micaiah not to go up to battle with the Syrians (xxii 19-28). Instead, they made plans to fight. One can see the similarities between the two accounts by placing them side by side.

The death of Jehoshaphat
(1Kgs xxii 29-37)

29. So the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 30. The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. 31. Now the king of Aram had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Fight with no one small

The death of Josiah
(2Chr xxxv 22-24)

22. But Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but joined battle in the plain of Megiddo.

⁸ This historiographical assumption is expressed most clearly and extensively by a biblical writer in Ezek xviii.

⁹ See, for instance, J. Wellhausen's list in *Prolegomenon to the History of Ancient Israel*, (New York, 1957), pp. 203ff.

or great, but only with the king of Israel.” 32. When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, “It is surely the king of Israel.” So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out. 33. When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. 34. But a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate; so he said to the driver of his chariot, “Turn around, and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded.” 35. The battle grew hot that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans, until at evening he died; the blood from the wound had flowed into the bottom of the chariot. 36. Then about sunset a shout went through the army, “Every man to his city, and every man to his country!” 37. So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; they buried the king in Samaria.

23. The archers shot King Josiah;

and the king said to his servants,
“Take me away, for I am badly
wounded.”

24. So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot and brought him to Jerusalem. There he died, and was buried in the tombs of his ancestors.

The points of contact between the two accounts are both numerous and clear: 1) the warning from a mouthpiece of God; 2) the failure to heed the warning; 3) the attempt at disguise;¹⁰ 4) the strike of the arrow; 5) the command to the driver; 6) the death; 7) the transport back to the capital city; and 8) the burial.¹¹ When it comes to composing new materials, it appears that the Chronicler often fashioned them according to some “biblical” paradigm known to him from elsewhere in the DtrH or someplace else in the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁰ **וַיִּסְתָּר**, to disguise oneself, occurs in the Hebrew Bible only on three places: 1Kgs xxii 30 (the DtrH’s account of the death of Jehoshaphat), 2Ch xviii 29 (the CH’s account of the death of Jehoshaphat) and 2Ch xxxv 22 (the CH’s account of the death of Josiah).

¹¹ Z. Talshir discusses some of these points of contact in “The three deaths of Josiah and the strata of biblical historiography,” *VT* 46 (1996), p. 219.

Thus, we have two biblical accounts of the death of Josiah. They lie side by side, as it were, in the text. Both respond to the theological problem posed by Josiah's ignoble death in the face of his righteous deeds. And yet, the two biblical accounts offer two different explanations, one based on a theological notion of the transferability of guilt, the other founded on a theological idea of individual reward and retribution. As we will see, the presence in Scripture of these two explanations for Josiah's death seems to set up a turbulence in the history of the transmission of the story. Later tradents seem not only torn between the two explanations, but almost goaded on by them to propose their own theological solution to the problem of evil in the story.

Kings and Chronicles in the Septuagint

Extant texts provide us with fully six Greek treatments of the death of Josiah in the roughly 400 years spanning the end of late antiquity and the beginning of the common era, i.e., from that in the OG to that in Aq. These treatments are preserved in: 1) 4Kgdms (the Septuagint text corresponding to 2Kgs);¹² 2) 2Par (the Septuagint text corresponding to 2Chr, hereafter 2Par);¹³ 3) 4Kgdms Proto-Lucianic (a variant Greek text of 2Kgs preserved in the manuscripts boc₂e₂, hereafter 4KgdmsPL);¹⁴

¹² The text of 4Kgdms used is A. E. Brooke and N. McLean's *The Old Testament in Greek, Volume II, Part II: I and II Kings* (London, 1930). The translation is mine. Since the work of H. St. John Thackeray ("The Greek Translators of the Four Books of Kings" *JTS* 8 [1907], pp. 262-78) and D. Barthélemy (*Les Devanciers d'Aquila*, VTSup 10 [Leiden, 1963]) the majority Greek text of 1 and 2Kgs is believed not to represent the actual OG text, but a relatively younger Greek recension dubbed the *kaige* recension.

¹³ The text of 2Par used is Brooke and McLean's *The Old Testament in Greek, Volume II, Part III: I and II Chronicles* (London, 1932). The translation is mine.

¹⁴ The text of 4KgdmsPL used is P. de Lagarde's *Librorum Veteris Testamenti Cononicorum* (Gottingen, 1883) compared with the apparatus in Brooke and McLean's work. The translation is mine. The text is dubbed Lucianic after its supposed author, Lucian of Antioch who died in 312 CE. However, several of the readings "unique" to Lucian show up in texts written prior to Lucian's time. It is therefore assumed that Lucian took over a previously existing recension as his base text. This "layer" of the Lucianic text is dubbed "Proto-Lucianic." Since there is no independent manuscript evidence for the "Proto-Lucianic text," and since it is known to us only through the composite Lucianic text and from isolated readings in other documents, scholars have not succeeded in completely distinguishing the "Proto-Lucianic" from the "merely Lucianic."

4) 1Esdr;¹⁵ 5) Jos;¹⁶ and 6) Aq.¹⁷ In this section we will deal with the first three of these accounts.

In 4Kgdms and in 4KgdmsPL, the translation witnesses to the proto-Massoretic text, its presumed *Vorlage*. The death of Josiah is depicted as it was in 2Kgs. Josiah dies as the result of the sin of Manasseh. However, in 2Par xxxv, two significant changes are found in the translation of 2Chr xxxv. The first is in the form of an extensive plus in verse 19, numbered 19b, c, and d in the Cambridge text.¹⁸ It follows the evaluation of Josiah's Passover observance and comes immediately before the report of Josiah's death. The plus in 2Par xxxv is taken from 2Kgs xxiii 24-29,¹⁹ the passage which records the superlative evaluation of Josiah but then goes on to explain his death in terms of the sin of Manasseh! In addition, 2Par xxxv 20 does not render 2Chr xxxv 20, but rather the text of 4Kgdms xxiii 29. These two alterations should be viewed together as one move on the part of 2Par, rather than two distinct moves. The following text is produced:

¹⁵ The text used is *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*, vol. VIII, 1, *Esdrae liber I*, R. Hanhart (Gottingen, 1974). The translation is mine.

¹⁶ The text used is *Josephus, volume VI, Jewish Antiquities, Books IX-XI, with an English Translation by Ralph Marcus*, The Loeb Classical Library, 326 (Harvard University Press, 1937, reprinted 1978).

¹⁷ As it turns out, only a handful of running texts by Aq has survived to our day, one of which is from 4Kgdms xxiii 15-27. Discovered in the old geniza at Cairo, it was published by F. C. Burkitt as *Fragments of the Books of Kings according to the Translation of Aquila* (Cambridge, 1897).

¹⁸ This is the first of a series of plusses in this section of the 2Par text. Several more occur in xxxvi 1-8.

¹⁹ The plus in 2Par is not exactly identical to 4Kgdms (the so-called *kaye* recension) nor is it exactly identical to 4KgdmsPL (the so-called proto-Lucianic recension). The relationship between these three texts is more clearly seen in the case of the plusses that appear in 2Par xxxvi 1-8. L. Allen and R. Klein carried out a vigorous and detailed debate a few decades ago: R. Klein, "New Evidence for an Old Recension of Reigns," *HTR* 60 (1967), pp. 93-105; L. Allen, "Further Thoughts on an Old Recension of Reigns in Paralipomena," *HTR* 61 (1968), pp. 483-91; R. Klein "Supplements in the Paralipomena: A Rejoinder," *HTR* 61 (1968), pp. 492-95; L. Allen, *The Greek Chronicles*, two volumes (Leiden, 1974), vol. I, pp. 214-18.

18. No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josias, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, kept to the Lord,

= 2Ch xxxv
18-19

19. in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josias.

19a. King Josias also burnt the ventriloquists (τοὺς ἐγγαστριμύθους) and the diviners (τοὺς γνώστας) and the Theraphim and the idols and the Karasim which were in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem so that he established the words of the law that were written in the book that the priest Chelcias had found in the house of the Lord.

19b. Before him there was none like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his might according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

= 4Kgdms
xxiii 24-27

19c. Still, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which the wrath of the Lord was kindled in Judah because of all the ordinances (τὰ προστάγματα) which Manasses provoked.

19d. And the Lord said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I have rejected the city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, "My name shall be there."

20. And Pharaoh Neco King of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates, and King Josiah went to meet him.

= 4Kgdms
xxiii 29

21. And he sent to him messengers. . . .

= 2Ch xxxv
21ff.

The plus has a profound effect on the basic structure of the passage. The net effect is that we are left with two explanations for the death of Josiah—the sins of Manasseh *and* Josiah's refusal to heed God's warning through Neco. However, because of the key location of the plus in the passage, the second explanation (the Chronicler's) is made to serve the first (the DtrH's): the immediate events surrounding Josiah's death—Neco's warning, and Josiah's continued opposition—occur only within the context of God's prior commitment to do away with Judah because of the sins of Manasseh. This shift is all the more significant when one recalls the fact that Manasseh does not occupy the same role in the CH that he does in the DtrH. The Chronicler's Manasseh repents after his captivity in Babylon and lives out a long and prosperous reign. It is the DtrH's Manasseh who is the paradigm of evil

and the cause of the downfall of the Southern Kingdom. In the Greek text, the DtrH's Manasseh is imported into 2Par xxxv, even though the picture of the Chronicler's Manasseh is retained only a few chapters earlier (xxxiii 1-20). One effect of this shift seems to be to de-emphasize Josiah's sin.

This same intention seems to be at work in the second difference between Greek and Hebrew texts. The MT of 2Chr says that Josiah disguised himself (חִתְּפָאֵל, hithpa'el of חָפָא) when he went out to meet Neco's army. The LXX text employs the term ἐκρᾶταιώθη.²⁰ Instead of Josiah being depicted as disguising himself for battle, he is presented as strengthening himself for battle against Neco—a much nobler stance for a king of Josiah's stature.

What is interesting here is that we have evidence of ancient tradents reading their sources critically. The Chronicler's explanation for the death of Josiah seems to have been deemed inadequate by itself. It was supplemented with the one from the Kgs tradition, and it was the latter and not the former that played the dominant role for them in explaining the death of Josiah.

1 Esdras

An account of Josiah's death is also given in 1Esdr i 20-34. Esdr basically follows the CH²¹ but, like 2Par, contains elements added from 2Kgs. The account in 1Esdr i begins as follows:

20. No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the times of the prophet Samuel; 21. none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah and the priests and Levites and the people of Judah and all of Israel who were living in Jerusalem. 22. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept. 23. And the deeds of Josiah were upright in the sight of the Lord, for his heart was full of godliness. 24. In ancient times the events of his reign have been recorded—concerning those who sinned and acted wickedly toward the

²⁰ Scholars have wondered if, perhaps, the translator is reading the *ṣ* of the Hebrew text as a *š*.

²¹ Although the dating and purpose of 1Esdr remain unclear (see, for instance, the discussions by J. Myers, *I & II Esdras*, AB [Garden City, New York, 1974], pp. 8-15), the *terminus ad quem* is Jos since his Ant employs 1Esdr as the primary source beginning in book XI. Since the dates for Jos and Aq are fairly clear, we may assume that in 1Esdr, Jos and Aq, we have treatments which represent roughly the three successive centuries from the first century BCE to the second century CE.

Lord beyond any other people or kingdom, and how they grieved the Lord deeply, so that the words of the Lord fell upon Israel (NRSV).²²

Where the Chronicler's history contains only the superlative evaluation of the Passover kept by Josiah, here we have a plus containing two themes. The first part of the plus, in v. 23, is like 2Kgs xxiii 25 in that it gives an evaluation of the works and character of Josiah. The second part of the plus, like 2Kgs xxiii 26-27, points to the wickedness of others and the resulting anger of the Lord against "Israel." While the wording of this plus in 1Esdr i 23-24 is far from being identical either to the text of 2Kgs or to the plus in 2Par, it is a perfect paraphrase of those passages.

2Kgs xxiii 25-27

1Esdr i 23-24

25. Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

26. Still the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. 27. The LORD said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."

23. And the deeds of Josiah were upright in the sight of the Lord, for his heart was full of godliness.

24. In ancient times the events of his reign have been recorded—concerning those who sinned and acted wickedly toward the Lord beyond any other people or kingdom, and how they grieved the Lord deeply, so that the words of the Lord fell upon Israel.

Clearly, 1Esdr provides us with an independent witness to the same interpretive tradition contained in 2Par. According to this interpretive tradition, the Chronicler's account of the death of Josiah is inadequate on two counts: it needs to be supplemented with a report of the superlative evaluation of Josiah and with an explanation about how the sins of previous generations provoked the anger of the Lord. The

²² For our purposes here, versification is based on the NRSV and not the Greek edition of R. Hanhart mentioned above. By the time we get to i 21 the versification of the latter differs by two verses from the standard translations.

wording of the plus in 1Esdr's account has an advantage over the plus in 2Par in that it does not refer specifically to Manasseh.²³ By not doing so, the text avoids the confusion of 2Par which follows the CH in reporting about Manasseh's repentance, but then turns right around and blames Josiah's death, in part at least, on the sin of Manasseh.

But while the text of 1Esdr operates under the influence of this interpretative tradition and even incorporates it into the account, there are indications that it, like the Chronicler's account, was unwilling to accept the theological conviction underlying the DtrH's account, namely, that guilt is transferable and that Josiah could suffer for the guilt of others before him.²⁴ The text of 1Esdr, in contrast to the texts of 2Par, rejected the theological explanation of the DtrH that Josiah died on account of the sin of his predecessors and opted instead for the theological explanation of the Chronicler that understood him as dying for his own sin.

This is made clear in two further innovations reflected in the text of 1Esdr: one is the single change of a proper noun; the other a series of alterations. The first of these is to be found where the Chronicler's summarizing statement said that Josiah "did not heed the words of Neco by the mouth of the Lord." Instead, 1Esdr has, "[Josiah] did not heed the words of Jeremiah the prophet from the mouth of the Lord." In making this change, the text of 1Esdr falls back on the very familiar paradigm from the prophetic history in which a king died as the result of failing to heed the warning of a prophet. We have already pointed, for instance, to the account of the warning of Micaiah ben Imlah which was ignored by Jehoshaphat and Ahab in 1Kgs xxii. This paradigm is, apparently, much more palatable theologically than the account as it reads in 2Chr. The idea in 2Chr that God was supposed to have spoken through a foreign king introduces a degree of theological difficulty into the text for later tradents: how could Josiah have known that Neco's warning did, in fact, come from God? To the

²³ 1Esdras' only reference to a Manasseh, in ix 33, is not to Manasseh, the King of Judah.

²⁴ We speak here anthropomorphically of the intention of the *text* so as to avoid both the question of authorial and translator intentionality as well as the question of whether the innovations were carried out in the translation process or were already present in the *Vorlage*. From a literary standpoint, the text provides a putative intention regardless of what may be proven historically about any particular author or translator.

degree that this question could legitimately be asked, there was the possibility that Josiah could be excused for his actions. All such ambiguity is removed from the text of 1Esdr. Josiah clearly violated the direct word of the Lord and there could be no question about if, in fact, it were a true word from the Lord since it was delivered by one of the Lord's true prophets, Jeremiah.

The second innovation of the text of 1Esdr is actually a series of three alterations. The Chronicler tells us that Josiah

joined battle in the plain of Megiddo. And the archers (חִירִים) shot (וַיִּרֶד) King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, 'Take me away, for I am badly wounded (חֲלָהּ לִי, hophal of חָלָה)' (2Chr xxxv 23, RSV).

The text of 1Esdr, however, alters the mention of archers, changes the action referred to, and removes mention of wounds:

He joined battle with him in the plain of Megiddo, and commanders (οἱ ἄρχοντες) came down (κατέβησαν) against King Josiah. And the King said to his servants, 'Take me away from the battle for I am very weak' (ἡσθένησα, 1 aorist of ἁσθενέω) (1Esdr i 29-30 RSV).

What is to be made from these alterations? Taken alone, each could, perhaps, be attributed to textual difficulties or editorial errors. Taken together they seem to reflect a cohesive understanding. Josiah dies not at the hands of Egyptians; human agency is completely removed. The text leaves the question of agency ambiguous, but the implication seems to be that Josiah dies directly at the hand of God. This understanding would reflect the same paradigm illustrated in 2 Samuel vi where Uzzah put out his hand to stabilize the ark of God and was struck down by God and "died there beside the ark."

Beneath the exegetical innovations of the text of 1Esdr we can detect a coherent theological position. Stemming from a distinct hermeneutical viewpoint, the text of 1Esdr critically evaluated the explanations for the death of Josiah available in Scripture and tradition. The text rejects the theology of the DtrH, as well as that expressed in 2Par, and alters that contained in the CH so as to conform more closely with another set of orthodoxies. Josiah died for his own sin. His sin was that of ignoring the warning of God. The warning was clearly a valid one since it was delivered through the prophet Jeremiah. And finally, punishment came not through human agency but apparently directly from the hand of God.

Josiah in Sirach

Sir xlix contains a passage devoted to the memory of Josiah (μνημόσυνον Ἰωσίου). While it does not specifically recount his death, it does set up some ideas that will be developed in later tradition.

1. The name [literally, memory] of Josiah is like blended incense prepared by the skill of the perfumer; his memory is as sweet as honey to every mouth, and like music at a banquet of wine. 2. He did what was right by reforming the people, and removing the wicked abominations. 3. He kept his heart fixed on the Lord; in lawless times he made godliness prevail. 4. Except for David and Hezekiah and Josiah, all of them were great sinners, for they abandoned the law of the Most High; the kings of Judah came to an end. 5. They gave their power to others, and their glory to a foreign nation, 6. who set fire to the chosen city of the sanctuary, and made its streets desolate, as Jeremiah had foretold. 7. For they had mistreated him, who even in the womb had been consecrated a prophet, to pluck up and ruin and destroy, and likewise to build and to plant.

First, we notice that, in Sir, Josiah is remembered in completely positive terms. Further, a moral gap is posited between Josiah and his lawless generation, on the one hand, and between Josiah, David and Hezekiah and all the rest of the kings of Judah on the other. Though the arguments are not developed fully here, this line of thinking opens the way ultimately to blame Josiah's demise either on the sins of his evil generation or on the sins of other evil kings of Judah. Third, Sir underscores the mistreatment of Jeremiah by Judah's kings as one of the key reasons for the downfall of the southern kingdom. Though Josiah is exempted from any guilt in this matter, this text accentuates the notion that Jeremiah, as the prophet of God, was the force to be reckoned with during this era. All of these ideas, in one form or another, will factor into the explanations of later tradents.

Josephus

Josephus' account of Josiah's reign and death are marked by two significant shifts. The first takes place in the account of Huldah's prophecy; the second in the account of Josiah's death.

Jos' account of Huldah's prophecy has some interesting modifications that deal indirectly with the issue of the death of Josiah. With a couple of minor exceptions, the account of Huldah's prophecy in the CH is virtually identical to that in the DH. But Jos has some interesting differences. Following are the accounts from Chr and Jos²⁵ in parallel columns.

Huldah's prophecy

2Chr xxxiv 23-28

23. She declared to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me,

24. Thus says the LORD: I will indeed bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book that was read before the king of Judah. 25. Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the works of their hands, my wrath will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched. 26. But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, 27. because your heart was penitent and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me, and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the LORD. 28. I will gather you to your ancestors

Huldah's prophecy

Jos' Ant X.60-61

... she told them to go back to the king and say that the Deity had already given His sentence against them and that no one could make it ineffective even by supplications; this sentence was to destroy the people and drive them out of their country and deprive them of all the good things which they now had, because they had transgressed against the laws and during so long an interval of time had not repented, although the prophets exhorted them to act thus wisely and foretold the punishment for their impious deeds, which, she said, He would certainly inflict on them in order that they might believe that He was God and was not speaking falsely about any of the things which He had announced to them through the prophets. However, she said, for the sake of Josiah, who was a righteous man, He would put off these calamities for a time, but after his death would send down on the multitude the sufferings He had decreed against them.

²⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Josephus are from the Loeb volume mentioned in note 16.

and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place and its inhabitants.”

Two shifts in the text are glaring. First, there is a difference in genre. The accounts in the CH and the DH are speech reports complete with extended quotations. Jos’ account is a retrospective of the speech told in indirect discourse. But the most significant difference has to do with that part of Huldah’s speech that is directed to the personal fate of Josiah: because of his proper response to the book of the law, he would die in peace.

In Jos’ account, the promise is changed. Instead of the promise that he will die in peace, it is a promise that the calamity will not fall until after his death. In this change, one recognizes a shift to a paradigm not unlike that found in 2Kgs xx. A similar judgment of exile was pronounced against Hezekiah for his indiscretion with the envoys from Babylon. In that text, Hezekiah takes comfort in the fact that the implementation will not take place until after his death. In his account, Jos is able to alleviate one of the apparent problems in both the DtrH and the CH: how does one explain the discrepancy between Huldah’s prophecy that Josiah would die in peace, and the report of his death in battle. Jos has eliminated the problem.

Josephus’ account of the death of Josiah

Jos gives the following account of Josiah’s death:²⁶

Now Josiah after this lived in peace and, moreover, wealth and the good opinion of all men, but ended his life in the following manner. Nechao, the king of Egypt, having raised an army, marched toward the Euphrates river to make war on the Medes and Babylonians who had overthrown the Assyrian empire, for he had the desire to rule Asia. When he came to the city of Mende—this was in Josiah’s kingdom—the latter came with an army to prevent him from marching against the Medes through his country. So Nechao sent a herald to him saying that he was not taking the field against him, but was making for the Euphrates, and he bade Josiah not provoke him into making war on him by preventing him from going where he had made up his mind to go. Josiah, however, paid no

²⁶ Ant X.70-78.

attention to Nechao's request, but acted as though he would not permit him to traverse his territory; it was Destiny, I believe, that urged him on to this course, in order to have a pretext for destroying him. For, as he was marshalling his force and riding in his chariot from one wing to another, an Egyptian archer shot him and put an end to his eagerness for battle, and, being in great pain from his wound, he ordered the call to be sounded for the army's retreat, and he returned to Jerusalem. There he died from his wound and was buried magnificently in the tombs of his fathers, having lived thirty-nine years, of which he reigned thirty-one. Great was the mourning for him observed by all the people, who bewailed him and grieved for many days. And the prophet Jeremiah composed a song of lament for his funeral, which remains to this day.

Even though Jos' account follows the story line of Chr and employs material found only there, his shift away from the Chronicler's formulation is clear. C. Begg's study²⁷ details several of these shifts: 1. "Josephus makes no use of the Chronistic Necho's repeated claims to divine backing for his advance." 2. Jos "has no equivalent to the Chronicler's 'typological' mention of Josiah's 'disguising himself.'" 3. He "transposes the Chronicler's 'theological' reflection about Josiah's failure to heed Neco's words 'from the mouth of God' (xxxv 22b) into categories deriving from the Greek philosophical tradition." 4. "Josephus makes no mention of God" the effect of which is to produce "a certain exculpation of Josiah: in rebuffing Necho's admonition, Josiah is no longer guilty of 'opposing' the God for whom Pharaoh acts and speaks."

As Begg points out in the third comment above, much of the uniqueness of Jos' account stems from his use of categories from Greek philosophical thought. Clearly, this is the case at a crucial turning point in Jos' account.

1. Josiah . . . acted as though he would not permit him to traverse his territory
2. [it being] Destiny (τῆς πεπωμένης genitive absolute), I believe, that urged him on to this course, in order to have a pretext for destroying him
3. For, as he was marshalling his force . . . an Egyptian archer shot him. . . .

The second phrase, being a genitive absolute construction, stands in an explanatory relationship to the first phrase: Josiah did what he did

²⁷ "The Death of Josiah: Josephus and the Bible," *ETL* 64 (1988), pp. 157-63.

as a result of being urged on by some force external to himself. The third phrase begins with γάρ and details the outcome of the situation. As a result of doing what he did, being urged on as he was, Josiah was shot and killed. The second phrase explains the first phrase and stands as the basis for the third.

So what exactly was it that caused Josiah to do what he did? Actually, at this point, the textual history gives us two options. The majority of manuscripts used in the Loeb edition provide the reading τῆς πεπρωμένης, “it being destined.” However, three manuscripts, R, O and M,²⁸ contain an additional word: τῆς πεπρωμένης ἀλαζονείας, “it being fated boastfulness.”²⁹ The shorter phrase lays the blame for Josiah’s actions squarely in the realm of the Fates. The longer text, while acknowledging the key role of the Fates, nevertheless, lays blame on a negative character quality that was exhibited by Josiah. Both variants recognize that God or Destiny is ultimately behind the death of Josiah. They differ, though, on the degree of Josiah’s involvement and culpability in the matter.

Whichever variant one chooses, they both can be loosely designated as a “theological” explanation, that is, an assertion about certain actions and motives of Destiny or the Fates. What is interesting here is the centrality of this explanation to Jos’ report of Josiah’s death.

Such language is not infrequent in Jos. The terms εἰμαρμένη (destiny), τύχη (fortune), περίδοξ (cycle of destiny) and πρόνοια (divine providence) occur frequently, particularly in Jos’ Wars.³⁰ H. Attridge asserts that Jos intends nothing more by these terms than the “inexorable will of God worshipped in the Temple at Jerusalem.”³¹ If so, the language Jos employs to express this belief is hardly traditional Jewish nomenclature. Nevertheless, this seems to be the sort of language that communicates most clearly to his Roman captors and Jos employs it in several similar contexts. For instance, commenting on Ahab’s demise, Jos writes: “It was Fate (τὸ χρεών), I suppose, that prevailed and made the false prophet (Zedekiah) seem more convincing

²⁸ These mss date from the 14th, 15th and 13th centuries respectively.

²⁹ The editors of the Loeb edition comment that “the variant, ‘fated boastfulness,’ hardly makes sense” (p. 199, note d). Ironically, from a text critical standpoint, this would be among the stronger arguments for seeing this reading as the likely original.

³⁰ See H. W. Attridge, “Josephus and his Works”, in M. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Fortress, 1984), pp. 185-232.

³¹ P. 218.

than the true one (Micaiah), in order to hasten Achab's end."³² The terms are used almost exclusively in reference to military campaigns and political upheaval and signify God's presence and involvement in the significant flows of power that attend such events.

Jos' account of the death of Josiah recognizes the paradox between Josiah's righteous life and ignominious death. Begg points to the challenge that this story must have presented to the thesis of Jos' work which is "the main lesson to be learnt from this history . . . is that men who conform to the will of God, and do not venture to transgress laws that have been excellently laid down, prosper in all things beyond belief, and for their reward are offered by God felicity. . . ."³³ This is almost identical to one of the main tenets of the CH. And yet, the biblical materials are unequivocal on two points: first, that he died at the hands of Neco, and second, that Josiah excelled in righteous behavior. Not even the Chronicler's account alleviates the tension between these two. In fact, it is precisely the Chronicler that seeks to show time and again not only that faithlessness leads to punishment and death but also that faithfulness leads to life. Begg asserts that "Josephus would have felt an urgent need to provide some sort of 'higher explanation' of the event, rather than leaving it in its bare facticity as does Kings."³⁴ The appeal to Fate accomplishes this move.

2 *Baruch*

Though the book of 2Bar does not give a specific account of the death of Josiah, it does contain passages that speak to the reasons for the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE and others which speak directly to the character of Josiah. Together, these passages set forth a schema in which Josiah retains a claim to righteousness and the people of the land are blamed for the fall.

The book of 2Bar begins with a speech in which God announces the judgment that is to come upon Jerusalem:

And it happened in the twenty-fifth year of Jeconiah, the king of Judah, that the word of the Lord came to Baruch, the son of Neriah, 2. and said to him: Have you seen all that this people are doing to me, the evil

³² Ant 8.409.

³³ Ant 1.14.

³⁴ Begg, "The Death of Josiah," p. 161.

things which the two tribes which remained have done—more than the ten tribes which were carried away into captivity? 3. For the former tribes were forced by their kings to sin, but these two have themselves forced and compelled their kings to sin. 4. Behold, therefore, I shall bring evil upon this city and its inhabitants. And it will be taken away from before my presence for a time. And I shall scatter this people among the nations that they may do good to the nations. 5. And my people will be chastened, and the time will come that they will look for that which can make their times prosperous (i 1-5).³⁵

Here is a fresh reading of the meaning of the fall of Jerusalem and of the exile. For one thing, in verses 4b-5, we have the interesting notion that the exile will be a means by which the nations will be blessed. One hears allusions to other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. Echoes from Gen xii 3 are heard: “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Likewise, passages like the one in Ezek xxxvi 23 seem to be heard: “the nations will know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.”³⁶

For another thing, in verse 4a, the text seems to combine elements from the announcement of judgment in 2Kgs xxiii 27 (“this city” and “from before my presence”) with language from Huldah’s announcement of coming judgment in 2Kgs xxii 19 (“I will bring evil upon this place and upon its inhabitants”). Similar ideas and phraseology are employed in Jer xxxix.

But for our purposes, perhaps the most interesting aspect of this text is the dichotomy that is set forth between the people of Judah and the kings of Judah. The cause of the judgment is laid squarely at the feet of the people of Judah. There is only slight basis in the DtrH for this notion. 2Kgs xv 35 tells of the people’s actions during the reign of Jotham, King of Judah: “Nevertheless the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.” And, in 2Kgs xviii 4 we are told that Hezekiah “broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan.” But in the CH there are several significant new formulations that give

³⁵ The translation is that of A. F. J. Klijn in *OTP*, vol. I, pp. 615ff.

³⁶ Similar ideas are expressed in 2Bar xli 4 and xlii 5, according to Klijn, *OTP*, vol. I, p. 621, note d.

an even greater basis to the idea of a dichotomy between an evil people and a righteous king. In 2Chr xx 33, after giving a positive judgment on Jehoshaphat king of Judah, the CH contains the following modified material from the DtrH: "the high places, however, were not taken away; the people had not yet set their hearts upon the God of their fathers." Likewise, at 2Chr xxvii 2, the Chronicler has a unique formulation regarding Jotham: "And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord according to all that his father Uzziah had done—only he did not invade the temple of the Lord. But the people still followed corrupt practices." And again, at 2Chr xxxiii 17, after telling of the repentance and reforms of Manasseh, the Chronicler says, "Nevertheless the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the Lord their God." Taken together, these passages could easily suggest the dichotomy espoused here in 2Bar. With the blame squarely placed on the people of Judah, the door is left open for a full celebration of Josiah's righteousness. This is exactly what we have in 2Bar lxvi.

In chapter lxvi of 2Bar there is an extensive passage recounting the reforms of Josiah:

He purified the country from the idols, sanctified all the vessels which were polluted, restored the offerings to the altar, raised the horn of the holy, exalted the righteous, and honored all those who were wise with understanding. He brought the priests back to their ministry, and destroyed and removed the magicians, enchanter, and diviners from the land. 3. And he not only killed the impious who were living, but also the bones were taken from the graves of the dead and burned with fire. 4. And he established the festivals and the Sabbaths with their holy practices, and he burned the polluted with fire, and as for the lying prophets who deceived the people, also these he burned with fire. He cast the people who obeyed them, as long as they lived, into the Kidron valley, and heaped stones upon them.

On either side of this passage stands the assertion that Josiah was the only one in his generation who acted with such faithfulness. Verse 1 says: "And the tenth bright waters you have seen; that is the purity of the generation of Josiah, the king of Judah, who was the only one in his time who subjected himself to the Mighty One with his whole heart and his whole soul." And, likewise, verses 5-7 report:

5. And he was zealous with the zeal of the Mighty One with his whole soul, and he alone was strong in the Law at that time so that he left no one uncircumcised or anyone who acted wickedly in the whole country all the days of his life. 6. He, then, is one who shall receive reward for-

ever and ever and be honored with the Mighty One more than many in the last time. 7. For on his account and on account of those who are like him, the precious glories have been created and prepared which were spoken to you earlier.

Thus, 2Bar elevates the righteousness of Josiah. What is ironic is that the writer appears to employ a theme unique to the CH (the notion of the dichotomy between King and people) to overturn the Chronicler's own de-emphasis of Josiah!

Josiah in Kings and Chronicles in the Syriac Peshitta

When rendering the account in 2Kgs, the Pesh text mirrors that in the MT until it gets to the report of Josiah's death. Here a plus is found. Material has been borrowed—this time from 2Chr. Specifically, the Syriac translation has the plus that contains an account of the warning from Neco, but in an abbreviated version:

In his days, Pharaoh the Lame, King of Egypt, came against Mabog which is upon the river Euphrates; and King Josiah went out to meet him, to fight with him. And Pharaoh said to him, "It was not against you that I have come. Turn aside from me." And Josiah did not listen to him. And Pharaoh struck him and killed him in Megiddo, when he encamped there.³⁷

What is the effect of this plus? First, it does not overturn the basic theological perspective of the DtrH. The general structure of the passage remains as it was. Primary emphasis is still laid on the sin of Manasseh: Josiah was good, but the Lord remained angry because of the sins of Manasseh. Josiah went up to intercept Neco, was warned and then killed when he failed to heed the warning. No attempt is made to move the ultimate cause for Josiah's death from the sins of Manasseh to Josiah's own sin. In fact, the significant statement in 2Chr that "Josiah did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God" is not found in Pesh 2Kgs. At most, Pesh 2Kgs makes the Chronicler's explanation for the death of Josiah subservient to that in the DtrH.

³⁷ The text used is that edited by H. Gottlieb and E. Hammershaimb in *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version, Part II, fascicle 4: Kings*, *Vetus Testamentum Syriace iuxta Simplicem Syrorum Versionem* (Leiden, 1976). The translation is my own.

In the account in 2Chr, Pesh contains several interesting alterations and a significant plus.

21. And he sent messengers to him and said to him, "What have I to do with you, King of Judah. I am not coming against you today, King of Judah. For it is not against you I have come up to fight. The Lord told you to frighten me. Remove yourself from God who is with me lest he destroy you." 22. And Josiah did not turn his face from him, for he had gone out to fight him and to make his attack. And he did not listen to the words of Pharaoh the Lame. And Josiah did not know that it was from the Lord. And he went out to fight with him in the Valley of Megiddo. 23. And Pharaoh the Lame shot two arrows at Josiah.³⁸

We point out five shifts that have taken place in this account. First, Aramaic texts take advantage of a pun between Pharaoh's name and the Semitic term for "lame" (נִכְרֵה). Second, instead of Pharaoh being the one on a mission from God, it is Josiah who is acting on the command of the Lord. Even Pharaoh acknowledges this: "The Lord told you to frighten me." Third, whereas 2Chr indicates that Josiah disguised himself in preparation for his meeting with Necho, Pesh Chr says that Josiah "went forth (וַיֵּצֵא) to fight against him in the plain of Megiddo." Fourth, the anonymous archers of the CH become Pharaoh Neco himself who is said to have shot two arrows at Josiah (v. 23). Finally, there is a significant alteration of the theological explanation in the CH that "Josiah did not listen to the words of Pharaoh from the mouth of God." Instead, the text says that, "Josiah did not know that it was from before the Lord." The effect of this alteration is to lessen the charges against Josiah. Instead of willful disobedience, it has become a case of ignorance. Taken together, these modifications seem to excuse Josiah of his faults in the CH. Even his ignorance is, perhaps, justified. Perhaps the translators expect the reader to assume that since Josiah was on divine mission his ignorance was understandable. Josiah dies on the wrong side of God's action through Pharaoh, but he is unaware that this is the case, and even believes himself to be pursuing the will of God—as indeed does Pharaoh.³⁹

³⁸ The text used is prepared by R. P. Gordon in collaboration with P. B. Dirksen, *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta version. Part IV, fascicle 2: Chronicles*, *Vetus Testamentum Syriace iuxta Simplicem Syrorum Versionem* (Leiden, 1998). The translation is my own.

³⁹ Syr 1Esdr follows the Greek 1Esdr very closely. For instance, the Greek plus (with respect to the CH) appears in verse 22 without modification. Likewise, the novel interpretation registered in Greek 1Esdr i 26b (= 28b) that Josiah "did not observe the

The OL text of 2Chr is preserved in the tenth century Complutensian Bible.⁴⁰ While the base text for the translation is obviously the Greek 2Par, the OL has several fascinating variations of its own. It will help to lay out these two texts side by side. We have indicated the major differences between the two with the italicized text.

2Par

OL

18. No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josias, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, kept *to the Lord*,

19. in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josias.

19a. King Josias also burnt the ventriloquists and the diviners *and the Theraphim* and the idols and the Karasim which were in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem so that he established the words of the law that were written in the book that the priest Chelcias had found in the house of the Lord.

19b. Before him there was none like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul *and with all his might* according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

18. No Passover like it was kept in Israel from the days of the prophet Samuel. None of the kings of Israel kept in accordance with the Passover that Josiah and the priests and the Levites and all Judah and Israel and the ones found who inhabited Jerusalem kept.

19. In the eighteenth year of Josiah *this Passover was kept before the Lord, God of Israel.*

19a. And King Josiah burnt all the ventriloquists and diviners and idols and Karasim which were in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem in order to establish the words of the law that were written in the book *of the Law* that the priest Elcias found in the house of the Lord.

19b. Before him there was no king like him who turned to God with all his heart and with all his soul according to all the laws of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

word of Jeremiah the prophet" is also reproduced without change. The text consulted is that edited by W. Baars and J. C. H. Lebram in *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version, Part IV, fascicle 6: Canticles or Odes, Prayer of Manasseh, Apocryphal Psalms, Psalms of Solomon, Tobit, 1 (3) Esdras* (Leiden, 1972). The translation is mine.

⁴⁰ An introduction and printed edition are to be found in R. Weber's *Les Anciennes Versions Latines du Deuxième Livre des Paralipomènes* (Rome, 1945). The text of 1Chr in the Complutensian Bible is Jerome's; but the text of 2Chr is the OL. Translations are my own.

19c. Still, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which the wrath of the Lord was kindled in Judah because of all the ordinances [τὰ προστάγματα] which Manasses provoked.

19d. And the Lord said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I have rejected the city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'"

20. And Pharaoh Neco King of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates, and King Josiah went to meet him.

21. And he sent envoys to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, King of Judah? I am not coming against you today to make war.

And God has commanded me to hurry. Beware of God who is with me, so that he will not destroy you."

22. And Josiah did not turn away from him but strengthened himself in order to fight with him. And he did not listen to the words of Neco through the mouth of God and went out to make war in the valley of Megiddo.

19c. And in spite of *how exceptional Josiah was* God was not turned from *his intended* great wrath with which he was angry with Judah because of all the vileness [indignations] with which Manasseh provoked him.

19d. For the Divine had promised: "Behold I will remove Judah from my sight as I have removed Israel, and I will drive out the city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'"

20. *After all this, when Josiah had prepared the house of the Lord*, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up *in order to make war* against the king of Assyria at *Carcamish* on the River Euphrates, and Josiah went to meet him.

21. And he sent envoys to him saying, "What have I to do with you, King of Judah? I am not coming against you today to make war, *but against the place of my battle*, and God commanded to hurry. Beware of him who is with me and not be destroyed."

22. And Josiah did not turn away from him, but he prepared to fight against him, and he did not listen to the words *and indeed did not consider turning back*; and he went out to make war in the valley of Megiddo.

In the first place there is a plus relative to 2Par in v. 19: "In the 18th year of Josiah this Passover was observed before the Lord, God of Israel" (*In anno XVIII regni Yosie factum est pasca istut coram domino deo Israel*). This material clearly comes from 2Kgs xxiii 23. The OL has begun its borrowing of material from 2Kgs at a point earlier than 2Par.

Likewise, verse 19c has two plusses and one further difference with 2Par. The first difference comes at the beginning of the verse, the crucial turning point in the DtrH's move from the account of Josiah's superlative evaluation to the account of his death. "And in spite of *how exceptional Josiah was*. . . ." The OL pauses to elevate Josiah once

again and further heighten—or, at least, make explicit—the paradox between the two realities of Josiah’s goodness and his ignominious death.

The second plus in 19c focuses on the anger of the Lord with the addition of two words: *proposito* and *illius*. “God did not turn from his intended great wrath. . . .” This plus underscores the fact that the wrath that fell at Josiah’s time was only that which was provoked by the sins of Manasseh.

A third difference in 19c underscores Manasseh’s sins. The term *indignationes* in the OL witnesses not to 2Par’s προστάγματα but to the τοὺς παροργισμούς of 4KgdmsPL and the καίγε recension or else simply to the Hebrew text מִסְעָרָה.

The text of the OL 2Chr ends its insertion of material from the DtrH at a different place than that in 2Par. Whereas verse 20 in 2Par is a continuation of the story with DtrH material (“And Pharaoh Neco, King of Egypt, came up against the king of Assyria on the river Euphrates; and King Josiah went to meet him.”); the OL switches back to CH material at this point: “After all this, when Josiah had prepared the house of the Lord, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up. . . .” The effect of this is not insignificant. This material from the CH focuses attention once again on Josiah’s good works and brings into juxtaposition the goodness of Josiah (v. 20) and the judgment due to the provocations of Manasseh (vv. 19c and d) into the closest proximity.

The final—and for our purposes, most significant—modification occurs in v. 22b at the point of the theological explanation that Josiah failed to heed the words of Neco from the mouth of God. The OL says that Josiah, “did not listen to the words and indeed did not consider turning back” (*et non audibit verba nec reverti voluit*). All reference to the Chronicler’s clear statement that this warning was from God is erased. And further, Josiah’s courage and determination are accentuated.⁴¹

Ultimately, it seems clear that the OL is familiar with the interpretative tradition that inserts a plus from the DtrH at this point in the CH, but the OL executes the tradition in a way that is unique to itself. Additionally, the other innovations in the OL seem to express further refinements in the story, refinements that speak to Josiah’s character and to the reasons for his death.

⁴¹ One wonders if the idea for this textual variant was stimulated by a possible word-play between the proper name Neco and the Latin *nec*, “and indeed not.”

With Jerome, of course, a new set of editorial assumptions is in place. Gone are the 2Par additions from Kgs in his translation of Chr. And gone, as well, are the innovations registered in the Greek editions of Kgs. Jerome works from the Hebrew text. Nevertheless, one can detect points at which concessions were made to prior interpretative traditions. In 2Chr xxxv 22 where the MT says of Josiah that “to make war against him he disguised himself,” Jerome says instead, *noluit Iosias reverti sed praeparavit contra eum bellum*, “Josiah would not turn back but prepared the battle against him.”⁴² Likewise, in the next phrase, Jerome employs an interesting verb to render the Hebrew שָׁמַע. He says, *nec adquevit sermonibus Nechao ex ore Dei*, “in no way was he satisfied with the speech of Necho from the mouth of God.” We also note that the presence of *nec* seems difficult to explain apart from its presence in the OL. If anything, Jerome’s innovations tend to lay the focus of blame on Josiah more directly, as if to say, once Josiah had gone to all the preparation for battle, even though he heard God’s warning, in no way would he accept it.

Kings and Chronicles in the Aramaic Targums and rabbinic literature

The Targum to Kgs (part of Targum Jonathan to the Prophets) follows the Hebrew text rather closely with only a few explanatory glosses.⁴³ The Targum to Chr, (hereafter TChr) however, evidences several interesting and substantive interpretations, two sets of which are relevant for this study.⁴⁴ The first deals with the warning that Neco makes to Josiah. Instead of claiming that God has sent him on his mission, TChr has Neco say:

My idol commanded me to hurry. Therefore, leave me alone and my idol which is with me lest he destroy you (v. 21).

⁴² The text in use is the standard *editio minor* of *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart, 1984).

⁴³ The text used is that of A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic. Vol. 2: The Former Prophets according to Targum Jonathan* (Leiden, 1962). An excellent English translation is to be found in D. J. Harrington and A. Saldarini’s *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets, The Aramaic Bible*, 10 (Wilmington, Delaware, 1987).

⁴⁴ The text used is R. LeDéaut and J. Robert’s *Targum des Chroniques*, Two volumes, AnBib 51 (Rome, 1971). This also includes a French translation which was consulted for the one provided by me.

Because of this challenge, then, TChr has Josiah rush out to meet Neco in battle:

When he heard that he made mention of his idol he did not retreat at all; and Josiah did not turn aside his face from him. But in order to make battle with him he prepared himself and equipped himself with the arms of battle. And he did not receive the words of Lame who had related the statement of his idol. He came, therefore, to engage in battle in the plain of Megiddo (v. 22).

So far, Josiah is exonerated of any wrongdoing. In fact, he is portrayed as acting courageously and honorably. However, in the text of TChr, it is apparently his zeal to silence Neco that leads Josiah to make a fatal error:

And on account of the fact that Josiah did not seek instruction from Yahweh and went out to make battle in the plain of Megiddo, the lord of the earth punished him (v. 23).

Here, then, is another explanation for Josiah's demise: Josiah failed to consult the Lord regarding if and how the battle should be fought. The biblical paradigm for this interpretation is to be found in those stories in the Pentateuch and in 1-2Sam that deal with the necessity of consulting the Lord before entering into battle.

This interpretation favors the Chronicler's explanation that Josiah died for his own sin, but it also makes some modification of its own as well. Josiah's sin is transformed this time from willful disobedience to an act of oversight. Neco is likewise demoted from being the mouthpiece of God to an idol-serving pagan.

It is characteristic of the Targums to render the biblical text intelligible and theologically acceptable to its readers. And the hermeneutical grid that determines what is acceptable is Rabbinic theology. In the case of our pericope, the targumists have incorporated into the translation the interpretations discussed by the Rabbis. Talmud Bavli, Taanith 22b, records these discussions.⁴⁵ Our passage comes up in the context of a lengthy discussion of when the *shofar* is to be sounded. It contains at least four distinct explanations for the Josiah's actions and his death:

⁴⁵ The text used is that edited by I. Epstein, *Hebrew-English Edition of The Babylonian Talmud* (New York, n.d.). The translations used above are from this edition. The bracketed material is original to the translation.

What is meant by [the phrase which Neco says] "God [elohim] who is with me?" Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: "Idols". Josiah said [to himself], "Since he [Pharaoh Neco] puts his trust in his idols I will prevail over him."

And a bit later on, it reports: "R. Samuel ben Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: 'Josiah was punished because he should have consulted Jeremiah and he did not'." And a bit later on, it says: "Josiah, however, did not know that his generation found but little favour [in the eyes of God]." Finally, the passage recounts Josiah's deathbed scene:

When he was dying Jeremiah observed that his lips were moving and he feared that perhaps, Heaven forbid, [Josiah] was saying something improper because of his great pain; he thereupon bent down and he overheard him justifying [God's] decree against himself saying, "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His word." He [Jeremiah] then cited of him, "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord."⁴⁶

So, we have four explanations. First, Josiah understood Neco to be trusting in and quoting nothing other than his idols. Second, Josiah failed to consult Jeremiah. Third, Josiah's generation stood under the judgment of God. And fourth, Josiah's deathbed speech acknowledges his actions as rebellion against God. Interestingly, the Talmudists made no attempt to harmonize the discussions or to adjudicate, finally, which explanation was the correct one.

Conclusion

Throughout the tradition history, numerous attempts were made to explain the reasons for the death of Josiah. This wrestling match, as it were, began in scripture with the two canonical accounts in 2Kgs and 2Chr. These accounts, themselves, were grounded on very different theological outlooks. One explains Josiah's death as the outcome of a judgment set in motion by Manasseh in a previous generation. The other accounts for Josiah's death as a result of his own personal failure to heed a warning of God through Neco. Obviously, these two explanations dominated the tradition history. And yet, because they differed so widely, later tradents seemed to be caught in the tension between the two explanations and forced to refine their own position.

⁴⁶ Both of these speeches are excerpts from Lamentations, i 18 and iv 20 respectively (cited in footnote b1 of the translation).

Their options were basically three: to lean toward the DtrH's explanation, to lean toward the CH's explanation or to develop further alternatives. What we have seen is that tradents did all three and in various combinations. Through conflation, they attempted to harmonize the two canonical explanations, but these always ended in a text that favored one over the other. Through insertion and addition, they, like the Chronicler, were able to provide further information and, in some cases, redirect the designation of guilt. By altering key words or phrases, they were able to shift or diminish guilt, elevate character, or provide a new framework for understanding the actions of Josiah or of God. Again, though, all of these shifts tended to reflect a move either toward the DtrH's explanation at the expense of the CH's, or vice versa. What no one was able to do was to harmonize fully these two explanations.

Two exegetical moves become standard in the tradition history. One of these moves was to insert a plus from the DtrH into the Chronicler's account. This was standard in the Greek translations, 1Esdr, and the so-called LXX daughter versions, the OL and the Syriac translations. Almost invariably, these conflations resulted in the DtrH's explanation dominating the Chronicler's and in the exoneration of Josiah to some extent. Only in Pesh Kgs does the conflation move the other direction and even there the CH's explanation is subsumed by the DtrH's. Several tradents substitute Josiah's rebellion for ignorance. For instance, neither Jos nor the OL of 2Chr made any mention of Necho's claims about God. And Pesh Chr claimed "Josiah did not know that it was from before the Lord." Other tradents posit a moral chasm between righteous Josiah and his unrighteous generation (Sir, 2Bar, b. Taanith). And some tradents take independent steps to exonerate Josiah of any wrongdoing, or at least to minimize the degree of his wrongdoing, as, for instance, when the Targum quotes Neco as appealing to his idols instead of to God.

Some of the tradents attempted to make Josiah's actions heroic. Examples of this are abundant particularly in reference to the CH's claim that Josiah disguised himself. 2Par claimed he "strengthened" himself; Pesh Chr claimed he "went forth." The OL of Chr claims he "prepared to fight" and that he "did not consider turning back." The Targum says he "prepared himself and equipped himself." Even Jerome claimed that Josiah "prepared" for battle. The Targum transforms Josiah's deathbed utterances into a commendable act of piety.

In an attempt to address the issues in the story, some of the tradents

introduced new historiographic understandings. 1Esdr suggests that Josiah died directly by God's hand. Jos "Fate-ized" the account of the death of Josiah. The Targum charges that Josiah failed to seek instruction from the LORD.

Only a few tradents took steps that actually accentuated Josiah's guilt. 1Esdr says that Josiah did not heed the words of Jeremiah the prophet from the mouth of God, but this explanation may speak more to the issue of whether God could be expected to speak through a pagan king than to the issue of Josiah's guilt.

In the end, the tradents left us texts and translations that wrestled with the biblical text and the profound theological issues at stake in it. How could this most righteous king die such an ignominious death? Did he die for his own sin (individual reward and retribution) or for the sins of another (transferability of guilt)? Was Josiah, indeed, blameless or culpable? And if culpable, was it through willful defiance, ignorance or some other reason? Does God speak through pagan king or biblical prophet? Each of these explanations alleviates or accentuates the fundamental theological issue at stake in the story: How does the fate of Josiah reflect God's administration of justice in the world? No one set of explanations emerged that became the official interpretation of the biblical story. Some communities of faith, the rabbinic community, for instance, did not even attempt to harmonize all of the explanations that were put forward. They simply listed them. Explanations stood side by side—without reconciliation. One wonders whether the theological vitality of the believing communities was stimulated by promulgating the "correct interpretation" of the text, or whether they discovered, like Jacob, that God is present in the wrestling match.⁴⁷

Abstract

This study in comparative midrash traces the accounts of the death of Josiah through more than a dozen texts and translations. These include the two Biblical texts, as well as texts from Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Septuagint, Vulgate and early rabbinic writings. The evidence suggests that the later tradents may have been wrestling with the problem of evil that lies at the core of the Biblical accounts of the death of Josiah. As such, the study represents a fascinating look into the ongoing relationship between canon and the communities that looked to it for identity and ethos.

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