

# Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context

*A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman*

*Edited by*

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Winona Lake, Indiana  
EISENBRAUNS  
2006

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Printed in the United States of America.

www.eisenbrauns.com

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Essays on Ancient Israel in its Near Eastern context : a tribute to Nadav  
Na'aman ; edited by Yairah Amit . . . [et al.].

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN-13: 978-1-57506-128-3 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Bible. O.T.—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Jews—  
History—To 586 B.C. 3. Middle East—Antiquities. 4. Bible.  
O.T.—Historiography. I. Amit, Yaira. II. Na'aman, Nadav.

BS1171.3.E87 2006

933—dc22

2006029725

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984. ©™



## *Observations on Josiah's Account in Chronicles and Implications for Reconstructing the Worldview of the Chronicler*

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Nadav Na'aman oversaw my final undergraduate essay as well as being my MA thesis adviser.<sup>1</sup> My first graduate course was his seminar on Chronicles. I still remember how good and inspiring I found his teaching. There is no doubt in my mind that this seminar and Nadav's tutoring contributed much to my formation as a "budding scholar." They certainly left in me a lifelong interest in the book of Chronicles. It is only fitting, then, that I write on Chronicles in this volume dedicated to him. Moreover, I remember that, at the time, he was working on the period of Josiah. Eventually, he published his outstanding article on Josiah's reign in the journal *Tel Aviv*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, I have chosen to deal with a few aspects of the account of Josiah in Chronicles.<sup>3</sup> It is with great pleasure that I offer him this chapter as a humble token of my deep appreciation and longstanding friendship.

The book of Chronicles is above all a didactic (hi)story. Its primary and intended rereaders were supposed to learn, among other things, about YHWH,

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1. I would like to stress that, without Nadav's willingness to serve as my supervisor in my final undergraduate essay and his kind support at that time, I doubt very much that I would have been able to continue my studies in this area beyond the undergraduate level. At the time, students from the Open University encountered some problems when they tried to get into graduate programs. I am very thankful that when I had to face this crossroad in my road to my second career, I had the good fortune of meeting Nadav Na'aman.

2. N. Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," *TA* 18 (1991) 3–71.

3. There is a third consideration that led me to choose this topic. Recently it was my turn to teach a seminar on Chronicles and a student of mine decided to write an MA thesis on Josiah in Chronicles (K. A. Ristau, *Reading and Re-Reading Josiah: A Critical Study of Josiah in Chronicles* [MA Thesis, University of Alberta, 2005]). I am sure that, through me, Nadav's spirit and teachings played a role in the intellectual development of this student and in his excellent MA thesis. I am sure that Nadav would be glad to see that the influence of his scholarship and teaching methods goes on, not only through his numerous writings, but also through a continuous chain of students, united by a living thread of scholarship that constantly develops into new forms, shapes, colors, and shades of colors.

the relationship between YHWH and Israel, the demands and expectations associated with this relationship (including their being Israel, that is, a manifestation of a theological, transgenerational, transtemporal entity), their own story about themselves and their past in the light of this relationship, and aspects of what the implied author of the book (that is, the Chronicler<sup>4</sup>) considered to be a proper worldview(s).

It cannot be emphasized enough that studies in Chronicles must clearly distinguish between the messages conveyed by a particular account, or portion thereof, and the messages conveyed by the book as a whole. The former are only strands in the dense tapestry of the latter. In other words, the messages of the whole evolved as the intended and primary rereaders (hereafter, “target readers”) moved beyond the level of individual accounts (or sections thereof) and evaluated and reinterpreted their particular messages in a way that was strongly informed by the messages of other accounts. As a result, they developed a more integrated and integrating, sophisticated understanding of the theological positions shaped in and communicated by the book of Chronicles as a whole. It is this understanding that the target rereaders were supposed to associate with the Chronicler. Certainly, these considerations do not devalue the role that a careful study of the messages of particular accounts, or sections thereof, must play in research or played in the world of the target rereaders. On the contrary, meticulous analyses of each of these accounts and their messages become even more necessary, even if they lead “only” to individual strands in a large tapestry, because this tapestry was created by interweaving these threads and strands. The more one understands the literary and theological sophistication of the book of Chronicles, the more one must pay careful attention to nuances, literary topoi, allusions, and references to other sections in the book that are present in each individual account. Likewise, the more one understands the literary and theological sophistication of Chronicles, the more one has to pay careful attention to the world of knowledge of the target rereaderships and the manner in which it affects the messages that these rereaderships abstract and shape out of the book as a whole.

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4. By *Chronicler* I mean the implied author of the book of Chronicles as a whole and as it was constructed by the primary and intended rereaderships within which and for which the book was composed. I make no distinction in this essay between the terms *ideological* and *theological* as they apply to worldviews held by the Chronicler, as the latter was understood by the ancient Israelite literati for whom the book of Chronicles was written and who were its primary rereaders. By using the term “rereaders” (and “rereaderships”), I am emphasizing that most readings of the book or sections in it were in fact “rereadings.” As has been well established, the process of reading a text for the first time is different from the process of rereading the same text again and again.

Keeping these considerations in mind, I am focusing on a few aspects of the account of Josiah's reign in Chronicles<sup>5</sup> (only a monograph could do full justice to the wide range of issues related to this account).<sup>6</sup> To be sure, much has been written about the historicity, or lack thereof, of Josiah's reform, about whether the narrative about this reform in the book of Kings is more or less historically accurate (in modern, Western terms) than that of Chronicles, or vice versa,<sup>7</sup> and about narrative subunits in the account (for example, the description of the Passover). Although I am interested in these questions and have contributed to some of these debates, I am focusing in this essay on the theological messages that the target rereaders of Chronicles were likely to abstract and learn through their reading and rereading of the Josiah narrative. I am especially interested in matters of (constructed) historical causality; the centrality and provisional nature of the temple; the obligations of Israel's leaders and Israel as a whole; human responsibility for the destruction of monarchic Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple; cumulative guilt; and divine testing. In other words, this essay deals with theological and historiographical aspects of worldviews that appear in Chronicles, as shaped and communicated by the Chronicler to the target rereaders.<sup>8</sup> I am not speaking to the historical King Josiah but to the character that the target rereaders of Chronicles in the Achaemenid period imagined as they read and reread the book. This Josiah, of course, must be distinguished clearly from the historical king. This essay is historical, however, in the sense that I attempt to reconstruct elements of the assumed intellectual, theological discussions among the elite(s) in Persian period Yehud, most likely in Jerusalem.

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5. I must stress, however, that this is a study of some aspects of the account of Josiah in *Chronicles*. Consequently, I deal with both the so-called parallel and the "unparallel" texts in Chronicles. The readers of the book were asked to read it as a whole. Since the target rereaderships were not asked to skip the "parallel" sections, analyses of their reading of the text cannot do so. I discussed these matters elsewhere at some length; see "The Book of Chronicles: Another Look," *SR* 31 (2002) 261–81; reprinted in my *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles* (London: Equinox, forthcoming).

6. But see L. C. Jonker, *Reflections of King Josiah in Chronicles: Late Stages of the Josiah Reception in 2 Chr 34f.* (Textpragmatische Studien zur Hebräischen Bibel 2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 2003), which in fact deals only with *some* aspects of the account.

7. For a recent discussion on the first issue, see the recent volume of the European Seminar of Historical Methodology on the matter (L. L. Grabbe, ed., *Good Kings and Bad Kings: The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century* (JSOTSup/LHBOTS 393; ESHM 5; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005). For a good survey on the second issue, see D. A. Glatton-Gilad, "The Role of Huldah's Prophecy in the Chronicler's Portrayal of Josiah's Reform," *Bib* 77 (1996) 16–31, esp. pp. 16–20.

8. In addition, I advance a few observations about the differences, or lack thereof, between Chronicles and Kings on some of these matters as suggested by their respective accounts of the reign of Josiah.

According to Chronicles, once Josiah had purged/purified the country and temple (see 2 Chr 34:8), he decided to begin repairing (or perhaps better in this context: restoring) the temple.<sup>9</sup> As often happens in narratives of this type, the literary subunit opens with a temporal reference. Significantly, it consists of not one but two temporal clauses (see 2 Chr 34:8a). The first clause refers to institutional, “monarchy-organized” time (the 18th year since Josiah became king); the second clause refers to “event-centered” time (“after purging the country and the temple,” נִבְּרָ). The first clause creates an envelope with 2 Chr 35:19 that encapsulates the narrative movement from the decision to begin to repair the temple to the conclusion of the celebration of the Passover. In addition, it creates an important literary-chronological proximity, a close temporal relation between the reform of Josiah and the campaign of Pharaoh Necho (2 Chr 35:19–20),<sup>10</sup> the meaning of which I will discuss briefly below.<sup>11</sup> The second temporal clause suggests to the target rereaders that not only the temple but also the country had to be purged before a pious leader such as Josiah could begin restoring the temple to its former glory. Conversely, it raises the disquieting issue of whether a properly and fully sacred temple can coexist with an impure land (see 2 Chr 36:21). This is particularly troubling due to the fact that the target rereaders lived in the (late) Persian period, and the land is explicitly portrayed as encompassing not only Judah (Yehud) but also Cisjordanian Northern Israel (an expanded Samaria).<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting in this regard that the account about Josiah explicitly mentions the ark (2 Chr

9. The ל + infinitive construct form לְטַהֵר is to be understood as temporal; compare with the first temporal clause.

10. For the use of אַחֲרַי ‘after’ in Chronicles in the sense of a relatively close time, see 2 Chr 22:4; 25:14, 25; and for the precise expression אַחֲרַי כָּל זֹאת used in the same manner, see 2 Chr 21:18. This expression does not appear elsewhere in the HB. On the device of literary-chronological proximity, see I. Kalimi, “Literary-Chronological Proximity in the Chronicler’s Historiography,” *VT* 43 (1993) 318–38; and idem, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005) 18–35, esp. 22–23.

11. For a larger discussion of the issue, see my “When YHWH Tests People: General Considerations and Particular Observations regarding the Books of Chronicles and Job,” forthcoming in a collection of essays edited by Duncan Burns and John Rogerson; and for the issues that the close temporal relationship raises on the matter of lack of (intended/perceived) historical mimesis, see my “Observations on Ancient Modes of Reading of Chronicles and Their Implications, with an Illustration of Their Explanatory Power for the Study of the Account of Amaziah (2 Chronicles 25),” *History, Literature and Theology in the Books of Chronicles*.

12. See 2 Chr 34:6. It should be stressed that the point is the cultic purity of the land, not its political domination by a Davidide or any other Jerusalemite leader/elite. On the Chronicler’s ideological construction of the land of Samaria as part of the land of Israel but also as peripheral to Judah and Jerusalem, see chap. 10 in my *History, Literature and Theology*

35:3),<sup>13</sup> which was an object that was not present in the Second Temple.<sup>14</sup> Reports about a great, utopian past carry here, as they often do, subversive undertones. In this case, the subversive undertones relate to the ideological status of the existing Jerusalem temple in Persian Yehud because, without diminishing the importance and centrality of the temple, attached to it are undertones of the temple's transitory character.<sup>15</sup>

The account of Josiah's renovation of the temple carries strong undertones of both utopia and dystopia, as an examination of the following subsections of the account demonstrates. This combination of utopia and dystopia served, among other factors, to draw the attention of the target readerships, and as an important signpost for their continuous rereading of the narrative. This being

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*in the Books of Chronicles.* Regardless of whether the reference to the land of Simeon is to be understood in terms of 2 Chr 15:9 (as is most likely) and therefore in the North or not, the use of the term "as far as the land of Naphtali" asks the target rereaderships to envision a territory larger than that of the Persian province of Samaria.

13. In the case of a purified land, these speculations are probably associated with presence of images of a future utopia encompassing both north and south in prophetic literature within the ideological discourse(s) of postmonarchic communities. In the case of the ark, these concerns led to traditions such as 2 Macc 2:4–8. On the ark, see C. T. Begg, "The Ark in Chronicles," *The Chronicler as a Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein* (ed. M. P. Graham, S. L. McKenzie, and G. N. Knoppers; JSOTSup 371; London: T. & T. Clark, 2003) 133–45 and bibliography.

14. Neither the sequence "purging of land and temple"—"repairs of the temple" nor the reference to the ark appears in the "parallel" account in the book of Kings.

15. To be sure, these undertones are only strands in the general tapestry created by references to the temple in Chronicles. As the literati read and reread each literary unit in the book in a manner strongly informed by their knowledge of the other units, a multilayered, multidimensional ideological image of the temple was shaped. Certainly, the temple stands at the center of the community, but it is not *the* utopian temple, and thus it bears a provisional character: it will endure till YHWH decides otherwise. I discussed similar constructions of central institutions as bearing this type of provisional character in "The Secession of the Northern Kingdom in Chronicles: Accepted 'Facts' and New Meanings," in *The Chronicler as a Theologian*, 61–88 and in *History, Literature and Theology in the Books of Chronicles*. For other ways in which the ideological need for a proper temple in Jerusalem is set in perspective by other considerations, see my "Sense of Proportion: An Aspect of the Theology of the Chronicler," *SJOT* 9 (1995) 37–51 and in slightly modified form in *History, Literature and Theology in the Books of Chronicles*. For an acceptance of ideological constructions of provisional nature that go together with strong claims for the centrality of an ideologically provisional institution, see, for instance, 1 Macc 14:41. On the utopian character of the temple described in a prophetic book and the role that this construction served in the discourse of its target readership, see H. Liss, "'Describe the Temple to the House of Israel': Preliminary Remarks on the Temple Vision in the Book of Ezekiel and the Question of Fictionality in Priestly Literatures," *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature* (ed. E. Ben Zvi; PFES 92; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2006) 122–43.

so, it likely raised or related to central issues in the discourse(s) of these readers' text but also invited the rereaders to think carefully about the meanings that the story conveys.

According to Chronicles, King Josiah appointed three of his top officials to head the project of repairing the temple (2 Chr 34:8b). These officials and, indirectly, the king were in possession of the silver that was collected by the Levites from Judah, Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, and the remnant of (northern) Israel to finance this project. Because the funds were to be considered a (sacred) donation to the temple, they had to be delivered to the institution and therefore, the process had to involve Hilkiah the priest, even though the three royal officials (see v. 10) were those who allocated the funds to the various groups of workers.<sup>16</sup> More importantly for present purposes, as the silver was brought out, Hilkiah, the priest, found ספר תורת ה' ביד משה 'the book of YHWH's teaching given through Moses'.<sup>17</sup> Within the worldviews that informed the target rereaderships of Chronicles, such a finding could not have been considered the result of blind chance. On the contrary, the target rereaderships were supposed to understand the finding of the book as a divinely intended sign.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, they would have understood the association between

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16. There was clearly a hierarchy and ideal division of areas of responsibility and work. The project stemmed from royal initiative, but the silver had to be collected by the Levites, who were the keepers of the threshold (contrast with 2 Kgs 12:10, in which the priests are the keepers of the threshold); the temple was to be restored with the contributions of the Israelites, not with contributions from the king alone (see Exod 35:4–36:7 and Exod 30:11–16), even if the king had to be in control of these contributions. The process had also to involve the priest, Hilkiah. The counterpart account in Kings is substantially different; contrast 2 Kgs 22:3–7 with 2 Chr 34:8–13.

17. The text claims that the book was found in the temple, but the circumstances in which it was found and how they related to the silver brought to the temple are left open. It is worth noting that, although the account in Kings may be understood as suggesting a connection between bringing the silver out and finding the book, a connection of this sort is not explicit. Chronicles, however, is unequivocal and emphatic in its claim for the temporal setting of finding the book: 'בהוציאם את הכסף המובא בית ה' (2 Chr 34:14; cf. 2 Kgs 22:8). Chronicles emphasizes the relationship between the restoration project and the discovery. See below.

18. It is worth stressing that the story's use of a common literary/theological motif (see below) requires that the book be found in the narrative world. Consequently, there is no point in asking questions such as: How can it be that within the world portrayed in the book Josiah failed to know the contents of the book, or was unaware of them? On the identity of the book, see below. On the question of target rereaderships who were not expected to raise this type of historically mimetic question, see the chapter on "Observations on Ancient Modes of Reading of Chronicles and Their Implications," in my *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*.



finding the book and the provision of silver for the temple restoration as consistent with and a reflection of a commonly held view according to which silver, or material ability in general, could not be considered the only or even main requirement for a proper restoration of the temple. The deity whose temple was to be restored had to communicate approval of the project.<sup>19</sup> Approval could be conveyed by omens, dreams, or “miracles,” such as finding an ancient text.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, the structure of the narrative, the positive depiction of the king, well-known discourses about building and restoring temples, and the common motif of finding texts in temples and holy places all converge in creating a familiar expectation. According to the logic of the narrative up to this point, the finding of the book is anticipated to be a promising omen, if not a direct expression of YHWH's blessing of the activity that the king was about to undertake; indirectly, it implies Josiah's personal worthiness/piousness and the appropriateness and legitimacy of the drastic cultic actions he had just undertaken.<sup>21</sup>

However, the text strongly defamiliarizes the common topos (that is, overturns the expectations of the target rereaderships). The book found just as the process of purification of land and temple was completed and just as the temple was about to be restored<sup>22</sup> brought an unmistakable message of assured devastation for the land, city, temple, and people. The text then goes even further

19. This view was, of course, part and parcel of ancient Near Eastern discourses about building and restoring temples for millennia. See, for instance, Gudea's cylinder and the curse of Akkad.

20. The text evokes a familiar image—namely, that of a common literary (and ideological) ancient Near Eastern motif of finding books in temples or sacred places, the primary purpose of which is to convey divine legitimacy. See T. Römer, “Transformations in Deuteronomistic and Biblical Historiography: On ‘Book Finding’ and Other Literary Strategies,” *ZAW* 109 (1997) 1–11 and literature mentioned there. See also idem, “Du Temple au Livre: L'idéologie de la centralization dans l'historiographie deutéronomiste,” in *Rethinking the Foundations. Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible: Essays in Honour of John Van Seters* (ed. S. L. McKenzie and T. Römer; BZAW 294; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000) 207–25 (esp. pp. 222–24), and compare with L. K. Handy, “The Role of Huldah in Josiah's Cult Reform,” *ZAW* 106 (1994) 40–53.

21. Again, the account of Josiah in Chronicles departs substantially at this point from the one in Kings, and thus its message to its target rereaderships differs. In Chronicles, the finding of the book *follows* the cultic purge of the land.

22. Note that this characterization of the relevant circumstances is made by the reliable narrator of Chronicles. The intended rereadership of the book and any rereadership that identifies with it is expected to read with the grain and, consequently, accept the validity of this characterization.

and upsets its own overturned expectations (that is, it defamiliarizes its own defamiliarization of the common topos), because, contrary to the expectations it raises, the process of restoration is allowed to proceed, apparently with divine acceptance. Thus, it suggests at least one important, theological level, blessing<sup>23</sup> in the face of sure destruction. The blessing is not associated with the building project per se but with the book that has been found. The book is a central and unequivocal marker of both destruction and—in the worldview of the authorship and target rereaderships of Chronicles—blessing.<sup>24</sup> The presence of such a multilayered cluster of defamiliarization of motifs and contradictory juxtapositions serves two main rhetorical functions: (a) it further draws the attention of the readers and rereaders to the centrality and multilayered meaning of the text, and (b) it provides an ideological approach that places each apparent contradiction within a central unifying framework.

Within the narrative, the book certainly points to destruction. As soon as Josiah heard the book, he tore his clothes (2 Chr 34:19), because he understood that the wrath of YHWH was about to come against Judah and Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> Not only did the king humble himself, but also, according to the account, he correctly understood the reasons for the impending divine punishment (2 Chr 34:21).<sup>26</sup> Then, assuming the validity of the devastating mes-

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23. The presence of the divine instruction among the community and its leaders is constructed within the relevant discourses of the target rereaderships as a blessing and as a crucial source of sustained hope for what they considered to be manifestations of transtemporal Israel (such as Josiah's Judah; the community of the rereaders in Persian Yehud; or Israel under the leadership of Moses or Joshua).

24. With which book was the target rereaderships of Chronicles asked to identify the *ספר תורת משה ביד משה*? Given the following description of the Passover and the multiple references to Pentateuchal texts as authoritative in Chronicles, it is most likely that they were asked to identify it with the Pentateuch, as understood by the Chronicler. The same holds true for 2 Chr 17:9. The target rereaderships of Kings were asked to imagine the book as a text similar in some respects to the present book of Deuteronomy but certainly not identical to it. A discussion of this matter is, of course, beyond the scope of this essay.

25. That is, against the Judah and Jerusalem of the narrative and of the social memory held by the target readership and their stories about it but also, on a different level, by connotation, against the readerships that identified with people in the narrative and considered them a manifestation of transtemporal Israel.

26. Josiah explicitly places blame on the ancestors for not observing the word of YHWH by doing all that was written in the book (2 Chr 34:21), whereas YHWH blames the dwellers of "this place" (Jerusalem, and by extension, Judah) for abandoning him and making offerings to other gods (2 Chr 34:24–25). Of course, it is clear from the context that YHWH refers not only or even mainly to the Jerusalemites and their practices at the moment Huldah utters the divine message but instead points to a persistent, cumulative situation in the past that shaped the present and future conditions within the world of the narrative and in

sage conveyed by the book and its finding, he decided to inquire of YHWH, on his behalf and on behalf of the remnant of Israel and Judah, through the prophetess. His request involved or implied some hope that YHWH may turn away from punishment (cf. Jer 21:2).<sup>27</sup> Huldah's response dashed these hopes (2 Chr 34:24–28). She confirmed that the finding of the book signaled that the curses and announcements of destruction written in it were about to take place and even emphasized the fullness of the judgment to come against Jerusalem (including its temple) and its inhabitants. The only consolation for Josiah was that, because of his humble reaction upon learning about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, the fulfillment of divine wrath would be postponed until after his death.<sup>28</sup>

It is worth stressing that Huldah neither calls for repentance nor suggests that Josiah and the people should correct their ways. She does not refer to his previous reforms as merit for lightening the extreme punishment. In fact, she does not refer to his previous reforms or to his plans for restoring the temple at all, even though the target readership was supposed to understand that both Huldah and YHWH are supportive of them. Moreover, Huldah's prophecy does not personalize the main gist of the divine message in terms of Josiah's deeds, faults, or future. Although Josiah is given a personal blessing (dying before the fulfillment of the unavoidable punishment),<sup>29</sup> Huldah and, indirectly,

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the social memory of the target readerships. From a slightly different perspective, we may state that the readers likely understood YHWH to be referring to the general, and partially transtemporal, mental category of monarchic-period Jerusalemites or Judahites. Similarly, Josiah's reference to the ancestors was not to be understood by the target rereaderships as a claim for personal purity and guiltlessness on his part or on the part of his contemporaries. To the contrary, he links himself with a long tradition of a sinful behavior, the effect of which becomes clear to him the moment he hears the words of the book. Certainly, within the narrative world, YHWH understands Josiah's reaction as an expression of humility, not as a "hubristic" claim of innocence or dissociation from a sinful past. All in all, YHWH, Josiah, the Chronicler (see also 2 Chr 36:15–16), and the target rereaderships, who are supposed to identify with the positions advanced by the former two, share a common attitude to the matter.

27. The typical ancient Near Eastern topos would be that of double checking the divine message (see L. K. Handy, "The Role of Huldah"). The main goal of Josiah when he sent his delegation was not to double-check the validity of the book found by Hilkiah in the temple or of his interpretation of the book (he was convinced of its validity) but to *intercede* for himself and the remnant of Israel and Judah (notice the use of the expression **דרש בעד** and compare Jer 21:2. The point was already noticed by Josephus.

28. He was also promised that he would die in peace; however, when he sinned on the matter of Neco, even that promise was reversed.

29. Compare the story about Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 20:14–19, which is alluded to in 2 Chr 32:25–26. Of course, the authorship and target rereaderships of Kings as well as the

YHWH are clear: the issue is not about YHWH's wrath against Josiah. Quite the opposite: YHWH is pleased by Josiah's reaction to the reading of the book. The issue is not YHWH's punishment of Josiah but the coming destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and its inhabitants. In the world of the book, the characters YHWH, Josiah, and Huldah all agree on this point, and so should the target rereaderships, who not only considered these authoritative characters reliable but also were well aware of the fall of Jerusalem, Judah, and temple shortly after the death of Josiah.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, the Chronicler considers (and asks the target rereaderships to consider) the deeds of Josiah and the people that took place in the world of the book after Huldah's and YHWH's announcement to be praiseworthy. The text, on the other hand, does not state anywhere that the announced punishment was or could have been commuted in any way, or even substantially delayed because of their deeds.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, as soon as Josiah dies and a new king is crowned, the narrative world quickly moves into and through the process that directly leads to the fulfillment of Huldah's prophecy: the destruction of Jerusalem, Judah, and the temple. In fact, only 19 verses separate the crowning of Jehoahaz, Josiah's successor, and the burning of the temple (2 Chr 36:1–19). This is comparable to the amount of space given to the account of Josiah's Passover (2 Chr 35:1–19) or the story of finding the book and Huldah's prophecy (2 Chr 34:14–29). The book strongly suggests to the target readers that, as soon as Josiah died, the gates that restrained the divine punishment promised by Huldah were opened.<sup>32</sup> These readers also learn that the time of the process might have been moved up due to Josiah's rejection of the deity's word from the mouth of Neco. Certainly, this failure led to the un-

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Chronicler and its target rereaderships knew all too well that YHWH's קֶצֶף (fury) and its accompanying temporal manifestations were not canceled but simply postponed to a time after the death of Hezekiah.

30. See also Josephus, *Ant.* 10.59–61. On the ideological tension between individual freedom of action and the unavoidable character of the punishment, see below.

31. This feature is particularly noticeable in Chronicles, considering texts such as 2 Chr 12:5–8 and 15:2, 4. Note that the explicit, textual construction of YHWH's fury is against the king personally in 2 Chr 19:2–3.

32. The process was certainly much quicker than the story associated with Hezekiah's sin (2 Kgs 20:14–19; cf. 2 Chr 32:25–26). K. Ristau observes that the death of Josiah is associated with a new, everlasting חֻק עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל 'established ordinance/custom in Israel'—the custom of קִינּוּת 'lamentations' (2 Chr 35:25). In the perspective conveyed by the book of Chronicles, Josiah's temple did not endure, but the lamentations for him and for what his death symbolized did endure. So did the teachings of the book found during his reign; so did his story, for the future edification of Israel.

timely and certainly less than peaceful death of the king,<sup>33</sup> but nowhere is he (or his reaction to Neco's quasi-prophetic role as authoritative speaker of the deity) blamed for the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup>

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33. This is another case of the ubiquitous theme of testing the righteous that appears in Chronicles, Job, and other works that eventually became part of the Hebrew Bible. The more righteous the person is, the more likely s/he is to be tested. I have written elsewhere about these matters ("When YHWH Tests People: General Considerations and Particular Observations Regarding the Books of Chronicles and Job"). It is sufficient to state that, according to the Chronicler, Josiah underwent and failed the test when he was at "his best," and his failure not only shortened his life but also the Judahite monarchy and the (monarchic-period) temple. This said, his failure may also have been understood in terms of the implementation of a preexisting divine plan. These two understandings of the events complement each other.

Of course, the death of Josiah was a historical fact in the shared memory of postmonarchic Israel. For studies of the ways in which this death was construed in different historiographical narratives and through traditions, see Z. Talshir, "The Three Deaths of Josiah and the Strata of Biblical Historiography," *VT* 46 (1996) 213–36 and S. Delamarter, "The Death of Josiah in Scripture and Tradition: Wrestling with the Problem of Evil?" *VT* 54 (2004) 29–60.

34. See already Josephus, *Ant.* 10.59–61. The reluctance of some modern scholars to accept this understanding seems to have less to do with the text *per se* and more to do with their own understanding of a principle of reward and punishment in Chronicles. In their opinion, this principle would have been inconsistent with the argument above because of its implicit "fatalism." I do not share the position that the principle of reward and punishment in Chronicles is incompatible with the understanding advanced here; neither do I consider reward and punishment in Chronicles to be an absolute. Furthermore, consistency with one's preexisting position is a questionable standard for the determination of meaning in ancient texts. It also assumes a concept of "logical" consistency that is certainly alien to Chronicles and most if not all ancient historiography (compare Josephus's well-known emphasis on YHWH's reward of the pious and punishment of the wicked with his also well-known use of the motif of "Fate" or "Destiny"; he assumed both motifs to be at work in human affairs, even if at times they seem contradictory).

This said, it is still possible that some ancient readers adopted a secondary (or complementary) strategy of reading—namely, one in which the text relates a conditional announcement of judgment. If so, the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah would be envisaged as having nothing to do with Huldah's prophecy or the related omen of finding the book. But this secondary reading would have been strongly balanced within the target rereaderships by the one advanced above. For a very good example of a substantially different approach, see Glatt-Gilad, "The Role of Huldah's Prophecy in the Chronicler's Portrayal of Josiah's Reform," 25. He writes: "Huldah's prophecy indeed could have been averted altogether, since both king and people were riding high on a crest of allegiance to Yahweh. However in the aftermath of Josiah's eleventh hour sin, the Chronicler sees Huldah's prophecy as being essentially reversed. Josiah himself pays for his disobedience with his life, yet his people, who through Josiah's efforts have been drawn closer to Yahweh worship,

I would like to stress that (a) given that, in the world of the text, the prophecy of Huldah explicitly refers to a full destruction that is about to happen following the death of Josiah, (b) the text explicitly recounts how the judgment was indeed fulfilled, (c) the text nowhere states that the judgment could be averted, and (d) the text nowhere states that the announcement was revoked or that Josiah's request for intercession was accepted; therefore, it is difficult to imagine how any implied or primary rereadership of this account—that approached it with and not against its grain—could have failed to understand the judgment as being unavoidable, at the very least in one of their likely readings or rereadings of the text. But this likely understanding of the text raises significant questions.

Chronicles is didactic (hi)story and the elements discussed above are very salient in the narrative, as it was most likely read and reread within the rereaderships for which it was written. This being so, the preceding observations raise a substantial number of fundamental ideological issues. They include: (a) What are the target rereaderships in the Achaemenid period supposed to learn about the relation between temple and *ספר תורת ה' ביד משה*? (b) What were these readers supposed to learn from the report that Josiah renovated the temple, properly observed the Passover, purged cultic improprieties, all the while knowing that none of it would last because of YHWH's punishment? (c) Why was the motif of finding the book of the divine instruction used to convey a sense of unavoidable disaster? (d) Why was it that Josiah's humbling of himself, following his immediate recognition of the divine message conveyed by the book, could have "saved" him and, by extension, the Judahites who were alive while he was alive but not monarchic Israel (Judah)? (e) How does the rhetorically and ideologically extreme case of raising the certitude of disaster in the middle of an account of the deeds of one of the most pious kings relate to the principle of divine reward and punishment.

Turning to (a), it is clear from the text that, once the book is found, the silver and the book move in opposite directions. The silver goes to the temple and temple restorations; the book toward the king and eventually toward the people. To be sure, the book leads the king and the people to the temple, while it is still in existence,<sup>35</sup> but it stands separate from it. It is not one of the temple buildings, vessels, or part of the sacrificial service, even if it is supposed to control them. The book is certainly not an "artifact" in the temple. In fact, the authority and legitimacy of the temple itself stand as a derivative of the

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merit a new lease on life. The final destruction is no longer inevitable, but is only to come about as a result of the wickedness of Zedekiah and his generation."

35. See, for instance, 2 Chr 34:29–31 and the observance of the Passover in 2 Chronicles 35.

book rather than vice versa. This concept of the book, a written text at the center of the community, is central to the text-centered community of Persian Yehud. To be sure, it does not diminish the importance of the temple in Chronicles, but it sets it in proportion.<sup>36</sup> Not incidentally, the facts about the past agreed upon by the target rereaderships of Chronicles certainly included the existence of a period in which Israel survived without a (proper) temple, Jerusalem, or a hold on the land, for that matter.<sup>37</sup> Although this was not considered a positive period by any means, it proved that Israel could exist even without a temple.<sup>38</sup> Israel without any knowledge of written divine teachings and authoritative interpretation of them, however, would have been, from the perspective of Chronicles, impossible.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, similar concepts are communicated in the so-called Dtr History and are at least implied in the Pentateuch and other works in biblical literature. This is not a new idea; in fact, this is a central tenet in the ideological discourses of postmonarchic Israel and is conveyed forcefully in Chronicles as well.

The emphatic account of Josiah's continued reform, his restoration of the temple, and the great Passover celebration gains an additional level of meaning from the readers and rereaders that inferred that Josiah knew that the punishment was unavoidable and that it would bring an end to Jerusalem and the temple. For one thing, it teaches that pious people should follow and show full loyalty (חסד) to what is written in תורת ה' (see the precise language of the closing evaluative comment in 2 Chr 35: 26). They should do so unconditionally, whether their actions deliver them from disaster or not.

This narrative taught the target readers even to repair a temple that is about to fall. These readers could only deduce that if the doomed temple of Josiah's

36. Cf. T. Römer, "Du Temple au Livre: L'idéologie de la centralisation dans l'historiographie deutéronomiste," in *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible: Essays in Honour of John Van Seters* (ed. S. L. McKenzie and T. Römer; BZAW 294; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000) 207–25 (222–24) and bibliography; K. van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book: Analogies between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (ed. K. van der Toorn; CBET 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997) 229–48.

37. See 2 Chr 36:19–23; 2 Kgs 25:25–26; cf. Ezek 37:1–14.

38. The theological position that Israel can exist without temple (and offerings) is reflected, of course, in other Jerusalem-centric works and across borders of literary genre. See, for instance, Amos 5:25.

39. I discussed these matters and reached a similar conclusion on the basis of other passages in Chronicles in "A Gateway to the Chronicler's Teaching: The Account of the Reign of Ahaz in 2 Chr 28,1–27," *SJOT* 7 (1993) 216–49 (repr. in *History, Literature and Theology in the Books of Chronicles*, forthcoming); cf. "Sense of Proportion."

times was to be unequivocally supported, repaired, and richly endowed, the more they must support, repair, and endow a temple that is (perhaps) merely provisional in ideological terms and may stand for centuries. In other words, Josiah's reported actions represent the most powerful example of unconditional support for the Achaemenid-period temple. In addition, Josiah's actions involved not only a celebration of a Passover for his generation, among others, but also established a memory of the event that helped Israel to follow YHWH's path through future generations. Josiah leaves future generations with the new custom of lamentations, but also with examples to follow for living in accordance with YHWH's will. History does not end with Josiah, and each of the target readers was asked to identify with the pious king of the past. When they made decisions, they were encouraged to consider (especially in cases of leadership in the community) which kind of memory they were creating for future generations. To be sure, this is consistent with a society, or at least a rereadership, that has a strong historical consciousness, such as the target rereaders of Chronicles.

The use of the motif of finding the book as an omen for disaster is consistent with the tendency in postmonarchic discourse (amply demonstrated in prophetic literature) to link the deserved punishment that brought the monarchic era to an end with hope for the future. Just as in prophetic literature the seeds of future hope are embedded in the very announcement of judgment,<sup>40</sup> so in Chronicles the finding of the book relates to the story of impending, certain doom, while at the same time brings about a renewed access to YHWH's teaching, which was exactly what Israel needed to survive and prosper. From the perspective of the rereadership, the book meant on the one hand doom for monarchic Israel, but on the other, it symbolically embodied the hope of Israel. This double role of the finding of the book served to enhance the appeal of the text, draw the attention of the target rereaders to the ideological construction of YHWH as a deity who is unwilling to punish Israel without providing it with hope (compare, e.g., Hos 1:3–2:3; 2:4–25; 11:1–11), and as a signpost for them in their reading and rereading of the text. Moreover, it raises the common motif in postmonarchic discourses that past judgment not only leads to renewed hope through didactic functions fulfilled by its continuous remembrance in the community but that, at a deeper level, past judgment and future hope are so closely and essentially linked to one another that, from at least one perspective, the two may be seen as two facets of one divine "creation."

In addition, the characterization of Josiah in the account is directly related to the characterization of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah was meant to evoke the characterization of Solomon. Jonker maintains that there is parallel relationship

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40. See, e.g., Hos 1:3–2:3.



in Chronicles between David/Solomon and Hezekiah/Josiah.<sup>41</sup> Josiah is also explicitly associated with Samuel in the text (2 Chr 35:18). Furthermore, the explicit claim that the book was so fundamentally legitimate and authoritative that it goes back to YHWH and Moses (rather than simply to Davidic blueprints of the temple and its workings) evokes a comparison between Josiah and Moses, who is associated with *תורת ה'*, the institution of the proper cult in general (Exodus–Deuteronomy), and the first Passover.<sup>42</sup> This comparison elevates Josiah but also exposes his shortcomings.<sup>43</sup> Josiah is no Moses. There is no book of YHWH's teaching given through Josiah, and there never can be, within this discourse. Instead, the most Josiah can achieve is to behave loyally in regard to what is written in the book (2 Chr 35:25).<sup>44</sup> In the ideology of Chronicles, Josiah (as any Israelite leader at any other time, including the Persian Period) is to make sure that the observance of the Passover follows (the true meaning of) the legislation written in the authoritative texts associated with Moses, which stands as binding *Halakah*. Of course, he may take contingent actions unrelated to (but not opposed to) this *Halakah* (for example, his great offerings), but they will never become binding *Halakah* for generations to come.<sup>45</sup>

41. For Solomon/Hezekiah, see H. G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 119–25; idem, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982) 350–51 and passim; cf. M. A. Throntveit, “Hezekiah in the Books of Chronicles,” in *SBL 1988: Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 27; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 302–11. For Jonker's position, see L. C. Jonker, *Reflections of King Josiah in Chronicles*, 59 and passim.

42. If the target rereaderships associated, even loosely, the images conveyed by 2 Chr 34:8–9 and, to some extent, vv. 10–12 with the images of Exod 35:4–36:7 (compare Exod 30:11–16), then they would have placed Josiah in a narrative and ideological slot that, at least structurally, is seemingly comparable to that of Moses.

43. A study of the complex network of *partial* typological characterizations linking kings such as David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, and perhaps Asa is beyond the scope of this essay. It may be mentioned, however, that a characterization that suggests a (complementary) relationship between Moses and David has been noticed in Chronicles. See, among others, S. J. De Vries, “Moses and David as Cult Founders in Chronicles,” *JBL* 107 (1988) 619–39.

44. On the expression *ככתוב* in this verse, see K. L. Spawn, “As Is Written” and Other Citation Formulae in the Old Testament: Their Use, Development, Syntax and Significance (BZAW 311; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002).

45. Of course, the “true meaning” of the written legislation is that which the Chronicler thinks it to be, within the usual historical and ideological constraints that governed the Chronicler's work. On the report about the observance of Josianic Passover and ways in which it sheds light on the Chronicler's approach to abstract the “true” meaning of existing texts, I have expanded elsewhere. See my “Revisiting ‘Boiling in Fire’ in 2 Chr 35:13 and Related Passover Questions: Text, Exegetical Needs and Concerns, and General Implications,” forthcoming.

Josiah's humility could not "save" monarchic Israel. The target rereaderships were asked to place in proportion the role of the king. To be sure, a good king may embody Israel to some extent and bring well-being (for example, Hezekiah), but only for the length of his reign or the portion thereof during which he is pious. Certainly, the ideology brought to bear here is no different from the ideology informing much of ancient Israelite historiography.<sup>46</sup> A good king/leader should also attempt to avert punishment from Israel by interceding before YHWH. In this case, Josiah did so indirectly by means of his delegation to Huldah and directly by means of his behavior as a repentant sinner (compare with David after the census); but this does not mean that YHWH *must* meet the king/leader's request.

The explicit reason for YHWH's announcement of judgment is the transgenerational sin of Israel and its kings. A repentant Josiah or even his generation cannot embody or cleanse all of transgenerational Israel. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, not only is transgenerational merit and sin present in Chronicles, but also it is usually associated with crucial events.<sup>47</sup> The destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple certainly qualifies as a crucial event.

It is worth noting that a divine decision to punish later does not preclude the guilt of the later generation. To illustrate, the intended and primary rereaders of the book of Samuel know that YHWH pronounced a severe punishment on the House of David (2 Sam 12:10–12) that was later fulfilled, but this did not remove agency or responsibility from Amnon or Absalom. Similarly, Huldah's announcement of disaster removes neither agency nor responsibility from Zedekiah and his generation. In fact, Chronicles when read as a whole reflects commonly accepted discourses in postmonarchic Israel

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46. See, for instance, the case of the major judges in Judges. Even Moses is aware that the people will eventually sin and be removed from the land to which he is bringing them and which he cannot enter (see Deut 4:25–31; 29:28; 30:1–10).

47. For example, the choice of Solomon as the builder of the temple, the new beginning in the Persian period that required the purification of the land, which in turn resulted in an entire generation's being exiled for sins they had not committed. On the general matters see my "Book of Chronicles: Another Look," and the bibliography there; idem, "Sense of Proportion." For a very different approach, see S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989; Hebrew original, Jerusalem, 1977) 162–63. Just as with most ideological positions communicated by the Chronicler, transgenerational sin and merit are presented in a balanced and informed way, and they balance and inform other ideological positions conveyed by the Chronicler, such as individual responsibility and accountability. It is only the tapestry created by all these partial positions that truly reflects the sophisticated theological world of the Chronicler as most likely understood by the target rereaderships.

with regard to both divine plans that must be fulfilled and individual agency and responsibility.<sup>48</sup>

In this regard, one wonders about the differences between Kings and Chronicles. In Kings, the divine announcement of unavoidable disaster appears first, though in a low-key manner, during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:16–19), then during Manasseh's reign with significant development (21:10–14; 24:3–4), and later in Josiah's days in the finding of the book and Huldah's prophecy (22:8–20). In Kings, YHWH's decision is grounded mainly in the deeds of a single king, Manasseh, and Josiah's piety only postpones the dreadful punishment. The logic of the system according to which the deeds of a single king (and probably his generation), no matter how negatively portrayed, could determine YHWH's decision to bring monarchic Israel to an end is qualified within the same book (see 2 Kgs 21:15; cf. 17:7–23; 21:8). However, in Chronicles the system itself is substantially altered. The reference to Hezekiah is left in (2 Chr 32:25–26, 31) but is opaque. The references to Manasseh's sin as the determinative cause of YHWH's anger are removed; thus, the main announcement of destruction occurs during Josiah's days, just when monarchic Judah is at one of its peaks. As the Chronicler does this, the grounds for YHWH's decision are clearly associated with the general disobedience of past generations and their kings rather than with Manasseh's generation or Manasseh alone, who in any case repents in Chronicles. Most significantly, choosing Josiah's days for the setting of this didactic (hi)story communicates to its target rereaderships the ideological messages about hope, Torah-centeredness, the importance of the temple and its maintenance and cult. Moreover, it is precisely during times of righteousness, after positive cultic reforms, that YHWH decides to test people, particularly leaders (for example, Zerah's invasion during Asa's days, the Moabite–Ammonite invasion during Jehoshaphat's time, and Sennacherib's invasion during Hezekiah's reign).<sup>49</sup> What better test than informing Josiah of a future invasion that cannot be prevented and that

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48. If this were not the case, their “ideological systems” would have collapsed, because either (a) none of the statements of YHWH concerning the future (whether communicating hope or pointed at judgment) would have held any water; because YHWH would have had to update them according to the future actions of individuals due to sole human agency and the implied lack of divine foreknowledge; or (b) no matter what a person did, his/her future would be the same, because it was already decided by YHWH. Both extremes represent impossible alternatives in their discourses in general and in Chronicles in particular. The kind of balance shown in Samuel and Chronicles (to mention two examples) was the “systemically” acceptable choice.

49. See my “When YHWH Tests People.”

will destroy temple, city, and monarchy to see whether he will restore the temple and lead his people to observe the instructions of YHWH's Torah.<sup>50</sup>

Of course, to inculcate in the target rereaderships the balance between YHWH's determination of the future and human agency and responsibility, the Chronicler draws attention to the association of the divine announcement with Josiah and his reforms as well as stressing the responsibility of Zedekiah and his generation (2 Chr 36:11–16).<sup>51</sup>

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50. Interestingly, although Josiah passed this test, he failed the test associated with Neco (pious kings such as Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah are tested twice in Chronicles). Perhaps, the Chronicler is hinting that the failure is somewhat related to the timing of the prophesied divine punishment. Whether this is the case or not, Josiah has agency and he is punished for his mistake.

51. I wish to thank, my former student Ken Ristau for his comments on this essay and for many insightful discussions on Josiah in Chronicles. We often agreed to disagree or concluded, "I write my thesis and you write your own essay."