

SECOND KINGS 21-25
&
SECOND CHRONICLES 33-36

¹Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. ²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, following the abominable practices of the nations that YHWH drove out before the people of Israel. ³For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he erected altars for Baal, made a sacred pole, as King Ahab of Israel had done, worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. ⁴He built altars in the house of YHWH, of which YHWH had said, "In Jerusalem I will put my name." ⁵He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of YHWH. ⁶He made his son pass through fire; he practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of YHWH, provoking him to anger. ⁷The carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which YHWH said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever; ⁸I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land that I gave to their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them." ⁹But they did not listen; Manasseh misled them to do more evil than the nations had done that YHWH destroyed before the people of Israel.

In the seventh century Judah appears to have followed the Assyrian system in which a king's first year is calculated from the New Year after his accession to the throne. His fifty-five year reign was 698-643.

In other circumstances such a long reign would have been interpreted positively as a blessing from God. However, the Deuteronomists give him the worst judgment of any king of Judah or Israel. They had to find a reason for the fall of Judah and the exile. Preceded by such a good king as Hezekiah, and succeeded by Josiah, the favourite of the Deuteronomist School, Manasseh receives most of the blame for the catastrophe (see 23:26). He was so bad that not even the fidelity of Josiah could even up the balance. The practices for which they condemn him are part of the standard repertoire of offences that recur in their judgment of the kings.

A new factor is 'worship of the hosts of heaven' (verse 3). Worship of the stars was an element in Assyrian religious cult.

In light of the absolute dominance of Assyria, he would have had no choice but to submit to being a vassal of the Assyrian king, and to do what was demanded of him, including honouring the Assyrian gods. Furthermore, there would have been those in Judah, probably including priests from the smaller sanctuaries, who blamed Hezekiah for the way things turned out, and many welcomed Manasseh's long reign. Things fell apart religiously, but because he was a loyal vassal of the powerful Assyrian king there was peace in Judah and growing economic prosperity.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies this passage (2Chronicles 33:1-10).

The prophets (verse 10) are not named, and none of the prophets of the scrolls come from the period of Manasseh's reign. The indictment of Manasseh stands as a judgment of Judah, and parallels 2Kings 17 which is a reflection on the fall of Samaria.

In verse 3 Manasseh was likened to Ahab, the worst of the kings of Israel. Ahab is mentioned again in verse 13. Samaria fell because of the failure to live the Torah in fidelity to the covenant with YHWH. Judah will suffer the same fate (verse 14). Manasseh takes the bulk of the blame, but it is the people who have sinned (verse 15).

Verse 17 focuses on the shedding of innocent blood. Even though the following statement of Micah 3:9-11 refers to an earlier period, it may explain the image.

⁹Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity,

¹⁰who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong!

¹¹Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon YHWH and say,

“Surely YHWH is with us!
No harm shall come upon us.”

The Chronicler

The Chronicler replaces verses 10-16 with 33:11-17 (see page 232) and concludes:

¹⁸Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of YHWH God of Israel, these are in the Annals of the Kings of Israel. ¹⁹His prayer, and how God received his entreaty, all his sin and his faithlessness, the sites on which he built high places and set up the sacred poles and the images, before he humbled himself, these are written in the records of the seers.

²⁰So Manasseh slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in his house. His son Amon succeeded him.

¹⁰YHWH said by his servants the prophets, ¹¹“Because King Manasseh of Judah has committed these abominations, has done things more wicked than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has caused Judah also to sin with his idols; ¹²therefore thus says YHWH, the God of Israel, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ¹³I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line for Samaria, and the plummet for the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. ¹⁴I will cast off the remnant of my heritage, and give them into the hand of their enemies; they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, ¹⁵because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their ancestors came out of Egypt, even to this day.”

¹⁶Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he caused Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of YHWH.

¹⁷Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, all that he did, and the sin that he committed, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?

¹⁸Manasseh slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza. His son Amon succeeded him.

¹¹Therefore YHWH brought against them [Judah] the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon.

¹²While he was in distress he entertained the favour of YHWH his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. ¹³He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that YHWH indeed was God.

¹⁴Afterward he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon, in the valley, reaching the entrance at the Fish Gate; he carried it around Ophel, and raised it to a very great height. He also put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah.

¹⁵He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of YHWH, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of YHWH and in Jerusalem, and he threw them out of the city. ¹⁶He also restored the altar of YHWH and offered on it communion and thanksgiving sacrifices; and he commanded Judah to serve YHWH the God of Israel.

¹⁷The people, however, still sacrificed at the high places, but only to YHWH their God.

The Chronicler

As a vassal king, Manasseh would have at times been summoned to Assyria. The Annals of Esarhaddon speak of him paying tribute c.674 (ANET 291). The Annals of Esarhaddon's successor, Ashurbanipal, also speak of Manasseh c. 668. The Chronicler attributes Manasseh's return to Jerusalem as a sign of YHWH's blessing in response to Manasseh's change of heart.

The idea of Manasseh's repentance is entirely lacking from the account given by the Deuteronomists. However, among the Apocrypha there is a document entitled "The Prayer of Manasseh", which portrays Manasseh as a pious king who pleads to God for mercy. It includes the following:

I pray and beseech you,
Spare, YHWH, spare me,
Do not destroy me
With my transgressions on my head.
Do not be angry with me forever,
Nor store up evil for me.
Do not condemn me to the grave For
you, YHWH, are the
God of the penitent.
You will show your goodness to me
For, unworthy as I am,
You will save me in your great mercy.

During Manasseh's reign Egypt was conquered by Assyria. A puppet regime was created (the 25th Saite Dynasty). Manasseh's name occurs in the list of twenty-two kings of Hatti, the coastlands and the islands who were summoned by the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon (ANET 291).

However, by the middle of the seventh century, Assyria's dominance in the region was beginning to wane. When Babylon revolted in 652, it took the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, four years to assert his authority.

Amon's two year reign was from 642-641. The fact that his mother is from Galilee indicates the continuing connections between Judah and the north.

He receives the standard judgment for a king who 'did not walk in the way of YHWH'(verse 22).

His assassination reveals two opposing forces in Judah at the time. One is the public 'servants'(a palace clique, verse 23). The other is the landowners ('the people of the land', verse 24).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler's version of verses 19-22 is consistent with his very different judgment of Manasseh:

²¹Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned two years in Jerusalem. ²²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, as his father Manasseh had done. Amon sacrificed to all the images that his father Manasseh had made, and served them. ²³He did not humble himself before YHWH, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself, but this Amon incurred more and more guilt.

– 2Chronicles 33:21-23

The Chronicler copies verses 23-24 (2Chronicles 33:24-25). He omits verses 25-26, except to state:

The people of the land made his son Josiah king to succeed him.

– 2Chronicles 33:25

¹⁹Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. ²⁰He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, as his father Manasseh had done. ²¹He walked in all the way in which his father walked, served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them; ²²he abandoned YHWH, the God of his ancestors, and did not walk in the way of YHWH.

²³The servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his house. ²⁴But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made his son Josiah king in place of him.

²⁵Now the rest of the acts of Amon that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁶He was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza; then his son Josiah succeeded him.

The Deuteronomists

¹Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. ²He did what was right in the sight of YHWH, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

The Chronicler

³In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a boy, he began to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles, and the carved and the cast images. ⁴In his presence they pulled down the altars of the Baals; he demolished the incense altars that stood above them. He broke down the sacred poles and the carved and the cast images; he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. ⁵He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and purged Judah and Jerusalem.

⁶In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, ⁷he broke down the altars, beat the sacred poles and the images into powder, and demolished all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

The Deuteronomists

Josiah was placed on the throne by 'the people of the land', the land owners who killed those responsible for the assassination of Josiah's father, Amon (see 21:23-24). He reigned from 640-609. He is given unqualified approval by the Deuteronomists (verse 2; see also 23:25). They portray him as the model king.

The Deuteronomists focus immediately on Josiah's renovation of the temple (see 2Kings 22:3-10, page 235).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler repeats verses 1-2 (2Chronicles 34:1-2), except that he leaves out the reference to Josiah's mother.

In verse 3 he states that Josiah was sixteen when he 'began to seek the God of his ancestor David'.

Then 'in the twelfth year' (628) he set out on a campaign of purifying the cult, undoing what his grandfather Manasseh had done to please his Assyrian overlords (verses 3-5; see 21:3-7).

This campaign took him beyond Judah, 'as far as Naphthali' (verse 6). This was made possible by the death of King Ashurbanipal of Assyria in 628, when King Josiah was 20. Preoccupied with internal struggles, Assyria was not in a position to enforce its will in the provinces, which opened up for Josiah the opportunity to throw off the vassalage that had kept Judah subject to Assyria for a century.

The withdrawal of Assyria provided the opportunity that the Deuteronomic School had been waiting for. At last they had a champion ready to carry out with rigorous efficiency the reform for which they had been preparing. They focus immediately on Josiah's determination to renovate the temple. In his eighteenth year of his reign (622; verse 3), on Josiah's orders, the temple was being cleared of Assyrian altars with a view to being reconsecrated. A document, called 'the book of the law' (verse 8), was discovered. This was reported to Josiah by 'Shaphan the secretary' (verse 10).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler closely follows the account in 2Kings, except that he introduces one of his favourite topics: the presence of Levites. Levites were in charge of collecting money for the temple (2Chronicles 34:9). He adds:

¹²The people did the work faithfully. Over them were appointed the Levites Jahath and Obadiah, of the sons of Merari, along with Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to have oversight. Other Levites, all skilful with instruments of music, ¹³were over the burden bearers and directed all who did work in every kind of service; and some of the Levites were scribes, and officials, and gatekeepers.

– 2Chronicles 34:12-13

The Chronicler copies verses 8-10 (2Chronicles 34:15-18).

³In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of YHWH, saying, ⁴"Go up to the high priest Hilkiah, and have him count the entire sum of the money that has been brought into the house of YHWH, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people; ⁵let it be given into the hand of the workers who have the oversight of the house of YHWH; let them give it to the workers who are at the house of YHWH, repairing the house, ⁶that is, to the carpenters, to the builders, to the masons; and let them use it to buy timber and quarried stone to repair the house. ⁷But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly."

⁸The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the book of the law in the house of YHWH." When Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it. ⁹Then Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workers who have oversight of the house of YHWH." ¹⁰Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

¹¹When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. ¹²Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah, saying, ¹³“Go, inquire of YHWH for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of YHWH that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”

¹⁴So the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; she resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter, where they consulted her. ¹⁵She declared to them, “Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶Thus says YHWH, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants – all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷Because they have abandoned me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. ¹⁸But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of YHWH, thus shall you say to him, Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, ¹⁹because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before YHWH, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says YHWH. ²⁰Therefore, I will gather you to your ancestors, 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.” They took the message back to the king.

All we know for the moment is that this document contains ‘the law’; that is to say, it details YHWH’s will for his people. Hearing its contents is a shock to Josiah. God’s will has been neglected for a long time. No wonder YHWH has been so angry with his people. No wonder they have been oppressed for so long. He tears his garments as a sign of repentance, and sends his chief advisers off to find out what God wants him to do.

In verses 14-20 the prophet Huldah confirms Josiah’s fears. The book expressed YHWH’s anger against his people. Judah will, indeed, experience ‘disaster ... all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read’ (verse 16), but after Josiah’s peaceful death, since he is penitent and has humbled himself before YHWH (verses 19-20).

It is likely that the book ‘discovered’ in the temple is an early version of what we know as the Book of Deuteronomy. The Deuteronomists have had to go underground during the reign of Manasseh. Emboldened by the hope that they at last have a champion in Josiah, they have ‘produced’ the book which they have been working on in secret. We will see that it becomes the blueprint for Josiah’s reform agenda.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies this passage (2Chronicles 34:19-28).

In his 1&2 Kings (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, 2000, page 554), Walter Brueggemann writes:

The initial and defining act of reform is the reconstitution of the community of faith as one intentionally committed to Yahweh's Torah and to covenantal obedience to Yahweh. Thus Josiah assembles the leadership of the community and "all the people great and small." The purpose is to hear the Torah read and to pledge obedience to its radical vision of reality. Covenant-making, the submission to Yahweh's requirements and expectations, is deeply rooted in Israel's memory and imagination. The narrative surely appeals to the fundamental covenant-making of Sinai (Exodus 24:1-8) and echoes the provisions in Deuteronomy for regular reconstitution of covenant (Deut 31:9-13), the practice of Joshua upon entry into the land (Josh 8:30-35; 24:1-28), and the covenant-making of King Jehoash and the priest Jehoiada (2Kgs 11:17-20); it anticipates the work of Ezra in Nehemiah 8:1-12. All of these texts – and more especially our present text – understand that a covenantally constituted community is particularly linked to Yahweh, is committed to a radically alternative ethic, and is aimed at a quite alternative future in the world. We are here at the most distinctive ecclesial and ethical claim of the Old Testament.

The Chronicler

This passage is copied by the Chronicler (2Chronicles 34:29-33), except that he replaces 'the prophets' of verse 2 with 'the Levites'. In his conclusion he has the covenant applying to all Israel.

³²Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin pledge themselves to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem acted according to the covenant of God, the God of their ancestors. ³³Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel, and made all who were in Israel worship YHWH their God. All his days they did not turn away from following YHWH the God of their ancestors.

– 2Chronicles 34:32-33

¹Then the king directed that all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem should be gathered to him. ²The king went up to the house of YHWH, and with him went all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of YHWH. ³The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before YHWH, to follow YHWH, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant.

⁴The king commanded the high priest Hilkiah, the priests of the second order, and the guardians of the threshold, to bring out of the temple of YHWH all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. ⁵He deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who made offerings to Baal, to the sun, the moon, the constellations, and all the host of the heavens. ⁶He brought out the image of Asherah from the house of YHWH, outside Jerusalem, to the Wadi Kidron, burned it at the Wadi Kidron, beat it to dust and threw the dust of it upon the graves of the common people. ⁷He broke down the houses of the male temple prostitutes that were in the house of YHWH, where the women did weaving for Asherah. ⁸He brought all the priests out of the towns of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had made offerings, from Geba to Beer-sheba; he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on the left at the gate of the city. ⁹The priests of the high places, however, did not come up to the altar of YHWH in Jerusalem, but ate unleavened bread among their kindred. ¹⁰He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of Ben-hinnom, so that no one would make a son or a daughter pass through fire as an offering to Molech. ¹¹He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of YHWH, by the chamber of the eunuch Nathan-melech, which was in the precincts; then he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. ¹²The altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars that Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of YHWH, he pulled down from there and broke in pieces, and threw the rubble into the Wadi Kidron. ¹³The king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of Destruction, which King Solomon of Israel had built for Astarte the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ¹⁴He broke the pillars in pieces, cut down the sacred poles, and covered the sites with human bones.

There is no reason to doubt the historical reality of Josiah's attempt at the reform. However, this passage looks more like a manifesto of the Deuteronomists, listing all that has gone wrong in Judah during the period of the kings. Parallels can be found in the injunctions of the Book of Deuteronomy. Solomon began the rot (see 1Kings 11), and king after king is denounced because of his failure to be faithful to the covenant with YHWH by allowing, even encouraging, the cult of other gods.

The Deuteronomists are reflecting back on the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (597 and 587). With their view of God as controlling events of history, they had to see these catastrophic events as the will of YHWH. Since, by definition, YHWH is just, the reason for this disaster had to be failure of the people, led by their kings, to be faithful to their part of the covenant.

In verses 15-20 we see Josiah destroying the shrines of the northern kingdom. Verses 15, 19-20 allude to 1Kings 12:25-33. This reflects his success in reconquering these territories, something made possible by the fact that Assyria was fighting a losing battle with Babylon and the Medes, while Egypt was still not strong. It is in support of this program that the Deuteronomists 'invent' the picture of the once united kingdom of Greater Israel under David and Solomon, a kind of 'Golden Age' that they portray Josiah as determined to 're-establish'. This helps carry the undying hope of one day occupying the Promised Land.

The destruction of all these cult sites reflects the Deuteronomists' view that it was the multiplication of such sites that encouraged heterodox worship, and that the only hope was to insist that all cult had to take place in the Jerusalem Temple, and nowhere else. Of course such a decree could not have worked in the northern kingdom, with each tribe having its own traditional sacred site. Nor was it a workable edict even in Judah. Jerusalem in north Judah was too far distant from Beersheba, for example, in the south. This edict was workable only in the much smaller Judah of the post-exilic period.

The 'man of God' mentioned in verses 16-18 is a reference back to 1Kings 13:29-32.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits 2Kings 23:4-20. He has already covered some of these reforms in 2Chronicles 34:3-7 (see page 234; see also 34:32, page 237).

¹⁵Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin – he pulled down that altar along with the high place. He burned the high place, crushing it to dust; he also burned the sacred pole.

¹⁶As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs there on the mount; and he sent and took the bones out of the tombs, and burned them on the altar, and defiled it, according to the word of YHWH that the man of God proclaimed, when Jeroboam stood by the altar at the festival; he turned and looked up at the tomb of the man of God who had predicted these things. ¹⁷Then he said, "What is that monument that I see?" The people of the city told him, "It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel." ¹⁸He said, "Let him rest; let no one move his bones." So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria. ¹⁹Moreover, Josiah removed all the shrines of the high places that were in the towns of Samaria, which kings of Israel had made, provoking YHWH to anger; he did to them just as he had done at Bethel. ²⁰He slaughtered on the altars all the priests of the high places who were there, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

²¹The king commanded all the people, “Keep the passover to YHWH your God as prescribed in this book of the covenant.” ²²No such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah; ²³but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this passover was kept to YHWH in Jerusalem.

To put this in context we need to recall that this is only the second time that the Deuteronomists have mentioned the Passover. The first time was in Joshua 5:10-12. The most obvious conclusion is that prior to Josiah, Passover was celebrated in the home. With his centralisation of the cult, it appears that Josiah is making it a public festival to take place in the temple in Jerusalem. This enables him to keep an eye on it, and make sure it is free from any pagan accretions.

The Chronicler (2Chronicles 35:1-19)

With his interest in cult, the Chronicler gives a detailed account of the celebration of Passover, reflecting the practice in fourth century post-exilic Judah.

¹Josiah kept a passover to YHWH in Jerusalem; they slaughtered the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. ²He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of YHWH. ³He said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to YHWH, “Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon son of David, king of Israel, built; you need no longer carry it on your shoulders. Now serve YHWH your God and his people Israel. ⁴Make preparations by your ancestral houses by your divisions, following the written directions of King David of Israel and the written directions of his son Solomon. ⁵Take position in the holy place according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of your kindred the people, and let there be Levites for each division of an ancestral house. ⁶Slaughter the passover lamb, sanctify yourselves, and on behalf of your kindred make preparations, acting according to the word of YHWH by Moses.”

⁷Then Josiah contributed to the people, as passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls; these were from the king’s possessions. ⁸His officials contributed willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiyah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the chief officers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the passover offerings two thousand six hundred lambs and kids and three hundred bulls. ⁹Conaniah also, and his brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the passover offerings five thousand lambs and kids and five hundred bulls.

¹⁰When the service had been prepared for, the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their divisions according to the king's command. ¹¹They slaughtered the passover lamb, and the priests dashed the blood that they received from them, while the Levites did the skinning. ¹²They set aside the burnt offerings so that they might distribute them according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of the people, to offer to YHWH, as it is written in the book of Moses. And they did the same with the bulls. ¹³They roasted the passover lamb with fire according to the ordinance; and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, in caldrons, and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the people.

¹⁴Afterward they made preparations for themselves and for the priests, because the priests the descendants of Aaron were occupied in offering the burnt offerings and the fat parts until night; so the Levites made preparations for themselves and for the priests, the descendants of Aaron. ¹⁵The singers, the descendants of Asaph, were in their place according to the command of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and the king's seer Jeduthun. The gatekeepers were at each gate; they did not need to interrupt their service, for their kindred the Levites made preparations for them.

¹⁶So all the service of YHWH was prepared that day, to keep the passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of YHWH, according to the command of King Josiah. ¹⁷The people of Israel who were present kept the passover at that time, and the festival of unleavened bread seven days. ¹⁸No 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 was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present, and by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁹In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this passover was kept.

²⁴Moreover Josiah put away the mediums, wizards, teraphim, idols, and all the abominations that were seen 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 Hilkiah had found in the house of the YHWH.

²⁵Before him there was no king like him, who turned to YHWH 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.

²⁶Still YHWH 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. ²⁷YHWH 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."

²⁸Now 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?

²⁹In 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. ³⁰His servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb.

Verse 24 picks up the purging of unorthodox religious practices that have already been detailed in 23:4-20. Reference is again made to the 'words of the law' (see Deuteronomy 18:9-13).

Verse 25 takes us back to 22:2. The nearest to him in the eyes of the Deuteronomists is King Hezekiah (see 18:3-6).

However, Josiah's exemplary fidelity to the Torah cannot wipe out the long history of infidelity. Judah has to bear the consequences of its behaviour. Manasseh is singled out as the stand out example of unfaithfulness to the covenant.

In 609 the Assyrian army suffered a crushing defeat at Haran. Neco, Pharaoh of Egypt (610-594), was heading north to assist Assyria, when Josiah went to meet him in the plain of Megiddo. Josiah, the young king (he was only thirty-nine) who carried with him the ideals of the Deuteronomic School was killed. The shock to people's psyche cannot be over-estimated. Huldah's prophecy (22:20) and the theology of the Deuteronomists, led to an expectation of blessing for this faithful king. His death demanded a complete re-think, a re-think that occupied the Jewish theologians during the exile and beyond. In blaming Manasseh (verse 26) they were grasping at straws, but it was the only thing that helped them make some sense, within the limited constraints of their theology, of the death of this most faithful king.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits verses 24-27. He expands on the account of Josiah's death (2Kings 23:29-30). Neco was on his way to reinforce the Egyptian garrison at Carchemish. We will learn later that the garrison successfully held the Babylonians at bay till 605 when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated the combined forces of Egypt and Assyria.

²⁰After 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. ²¹But 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."

²²But 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. ²³The archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am badly wounded." ²⁴So 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. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

²⁵Jeremiah 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.

²⁶Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his faithful deeds in accordance with what is written in the law of YHWH, ²⁷and his acts, first and last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

Note the reference here to the prophet Jeremiah in verse 25. Those responsible for the editing of the Jeremiah scroll begin with the words:

¹The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ²to whom the word of YHWH came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

– Jeremiah 1:1-3

Jeremiah speaks of Josiah twice (see Jeremiah 3:6; 25:3) and once of his son, Shallum (Jehoahaz; see Jeremiah 22:11-12), but the bulk of his oracles belong to the time of King Jehoiakim and King Zedekiah.

Zephaniah is the one prophet who belongs squarely to the time of Josiah. He encouraged the people to follow Josiah's reforms (see page 244).

A note on the prophet Zephaniah

The scribes who introduce the Zephaniah scroll claim that his ministry took place ‘in the days of King Josiah’ (Zephaniah 1:1). His ministry took place somewhere between 628 and 620, including the early days of Josiah’s reform, a reform that he was inspired to encourage (see the commentary on Zephaniah by Marvin A. Sweeney, Augsburg Fortress Press 2003, page 17).

Zephaniah was influenced by Amos, a prophet whose ministry took place in the northern kingdom some 130 years earlier. Amos spoke of the ‘Day of YHWH’ as being a day when YHWH would act, not to save his people, as they assumed, but to punish them for their infidelity (see Amos 5:18-20). Zephaniah urges his contemporaries to turn to YHWH before they are forced to face God’s punishment. He declares that the Day of YHWH is imminent. Like Amos, he knows that YHWH is just. Judah would not be the only nation to face judgment. Amos speaks of the crimes of Israel’s neighbours, Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab, and of the punishment they are to endure (see Amos 1:3 - 2:3). Similarly, we hear Zephaniah speaking out against Philistia, Moab, and Ammon (2:5-11). Though he speaks out against the people’s sin, and is firm in insisting on the need for repentance, that is not his main focus. True prophet that he is, his primary focus is on YHWH, whose fidelity transcends human sin. Amos’s scroll ends on this note (see Amos 9:11-15), so does Zephaniah’s (see 3:14-20).

After a century of subjection to Assyria, at last there was some hope of liberation. Assyria’s power was declining, no other power was yet threatening to take its place, and Judah had a king who listened to the forces who were pushing for religious reform. Most of Zephaniah’s oracles speak of God’s judgment on the sins that he witnessed. The whole of the first chapter is devoted to God’s threat of punishment of Judah. Judah’s enemies, too, will be punished by God (see 2:4-6, 8-15). If the people were ever to enjoy the presence of YHWH in their midst and the blessing consequent upon such a communion, they would have to change their ways, and drastically (see 2:3). Like other prophets he explained God’s punishment as an instrument in bringing about the purifying of the nation, and he bemoans the people’s failure to repent (3:2, 7). As a true prophet his focus is on YHWH, and therefore he speaks of a remnant (3:12-13) and of restoration (2:7; 3:9). He concludes with a remarkable statement of the passionate exuberance of God’s longing for intimate communion with his people, and the sheer delight God will have when this intimacy is restored (3:14-24).

A note on the prophet Nahum

It was during Josiah’s reign that Ashur, the religious capital of the Assyrian Empire, was sacked by the Medes (614). Nahum looks forward with delight to the imminent fall of Nineveh (it happened in 612). He sees the collapse of Assyria as a sign of YHWH’s blessing on Judah. His exultation at Assyria’s imminent collapse is also delight at YHWH’s faithfulness to his chosen people. He gives poetic expression to the pent up feelings of subject Judah against its powerful oppressor. Josiah’s reforms were already bearing fruit, or so it must have seemed.

The following material belongs to the second, exilic, editing of the scroll. The Deuteronomists responsible for it are updating the scroll produced by the Deuteronomists of the time of Josiah.

It was the land owners ('the people of the land') who had placed Josiah on the throne (see 2Kings 21:24). The fact that they passed over Josiah's eldest son and chose Jehoahaz (that is his throne name; his personal name was Shallum; see Jeremiah 22:11-12) to succeed him would appear to imply that they were hoping he would carry on his father's reform agenda.

The collapse of Assyria opened the way for Egypt to expand its sphere of influence in the north. Clearly the appointment of Jehoahaz as king of Judah was not to Pharaoh Neco's liking. He wanted someone more compliant on the throne of Judah. After only three months (verse 31), Neco imprisoned him and had him transported to Egypt where he died. His exile presages the exile that will shortly overtake the whole land.

The judgment of the Deuteronomists is negative – perhaps because of the brevity of his reign. YHWH, in their understanding, must not have been happy with him. We should not expect the Deuteronomists to have a consistent line here (witness the extraordinarily long reign of Manasseh (21:1).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler is content to copy this passage (see 2Chronicles 36:1-3)

³⁰The people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in place of his father. ³¹Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ³²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, just as his ancestors had done. ³³Pharaoh Neco confined him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, so that he might not reign in Jerusalem, and imposed tribute on the land of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.

³⁴Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But he took Jehoahaz away; he came to Egypt, and died ³⁵Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land in order to meet Pharaoh's demand for money. He exacted the silver and the gold from the people of the land, from all according to their assessment, to give it to Pharaoh Neco.

³⁶Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. ³⁷He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, just as all his ancestors had done.

Pharaoh Neco replaced Jehoahaz with an older half-brother, Eliakim, to whom he gave the throne name Jehoiakim [יְהוֹיָאִקִּים]. Jehoiakim paid the hefty tribute by taxing the landowners. It is not difficult to picture the divisions in Judah. The landowners, after all, were the ones who secured the throne for Josiah, and attempted to see Jehoahaz as his successor.

Jehoiakim reigned from 609-598. His mother was from Galilee – another indication of the weakness of Assyria at this time.

The Deuteronomists pass on him the standard negative judgment.

The Chronicler

In 2Chronicles 36:4-5 the Chronicler copies verse 34. He omits verse 35 and copies verse 36, though without mentioning the mother.

Jehoiakim's shifting of allegiance was in response to the changes on the international front. Babylon had been a reluctant vassal province in the Assyrian Empire for some time. Things changed abruptly as a result of one of the most significant battles of the ancient world. In 605 the Babylonian army, led by the crown-prince Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the combined forces of Assyria and Egypt at Carchemish (see Jeremiah 46:2). That same year, Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, died, and Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon.

'For three years' (verse 1; 605-602), Jehoiakim caused no trouble, but then in 601 Babylon attacked Egypt, but was repulsed. This encouraged Jehoiakim to 'rebel against Nebuchadnezzar' (verse 1). Judah was subjected to attacks from the Chaldeans (Babylonians), along with bands of Syrians (Arameans), Ammonites and Moabites. These were puppet states of Babylon and were politically more astute than Jehoiakim. They could see no advantage in opposing Babylon.

The Deuteronomists interpret these attacks as expressing the will of YHWH who had determined to 'remove Judah from his sight' (verse 3). Once again the focus is on Manasseh (see 21:16 and 23:26-27; compare Jeremiah 15:4). If we were holding out any hope for Judah, it is decisively dashed by the final words of judgment: 'YHWH was not willing to pardon' (verse 4; see Deuteronomy 29:20). After the standard conclusion (verses 5-6), the Deuteronomists highlight the weakness of Egypt at this time (verse 7). Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin [יְהוֹיָכִן].

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits verses 1-4, except to state that 'King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up' (2Chronicles 36:6). He copies verses 5-6 (2Chronicles 36:8) and omits verse 7.

Jeremiah

The editorial Introduction to the Jeremiah scroll tells us that the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah 'also in the days of King Jehoiakim' (Jeremiah 1:3; see 25:1; 26; 35; 36). See page 248.

¹In his days King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up; Jehoiakim became his servant for three years; then he turned and rebelled against him. ²YHWH sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, bands of the Arameans, bands of the Moabites, and bands of the Ammonites; he sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of YHWH that he spoke by his servants the prophets. ³Surely this came upon Judah at the command of YHWH, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, for all that he had committed, ⁴and also for the innocent blood that he had shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and YHWH was not willing to pardon.

⁵Now the rest of the deeds of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ⁶So Jehoiakim slept with his ancestors; then his son Jehoiachin succeeded him.

⁷The king of Egypt did not come again out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken over all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Wadi of Egypt to the River Euphrates.

A note on the prophet Habakkuk

The oracle recorded in Habakkuk 1:1-11 appears to have been delivered after the Battle of Carchemish in 605. He speaks out against the lack of justice in the institutions of Judah during Jehoiakim's reign. This injustice is accompanied by violence as the rich plunder the community. His criticism is confirmed by his contemporary, Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 5:26-29; 22:13, 17). He sees the attacks on Judah precipitated by 'the Chaldeans' (Habakkuk 1:6), as being YHWH's response to Judah's failure to live the Torah. The rest of Habakkuk's oracles appear to belong to the period after the fall of Jerusalem (597), and prior to its sacking (587), as it is composed against the background of actual Babylonian oppression.

A note on the prophet Jeremiah

We begin by quoting an oracle that is critical of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 22:13-19)

- ¹³Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
who makes his neighbours work for nothing, and does not give them their wages;
¹⁴who says, "I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms,"
and who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion.
¹⁵Are you a king because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
¹⁶He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well.
Is not this to know me? says YHWH.
¹⁷But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain,
for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence.
¹⁸Therefore thus says YHWH concerning King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah:
They shall not lament for him, saying, "Alas, my brother!" or "Alas, sister!"
They shall not lament for him, saying, "Alas, lord!" or "Alas, his majesty!"
¹⁹With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried—
dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

Again and again, Jeremiah criticised the foolish policy of looking towards Egypt. He sees Babylon as YHWH's instrument for the punishment of Judah (see Jeremiah 20:4-6; 21:3-10; 22:25; 25:8-11; 27), a punishment that aims to bring about a change of mind and heart (see Jeremiah 3:1 - 4:4).

He speaks out against cult practised without obedience (Jeremiah 7:1 - 8:3), and criticises his contemporaries for having broken the covenant (see Jeremiah 11:1-17). In Jeremiah 26:20-23 Jehoiakim is portrayed as a prophet-killer (see 2Kings 24:2).

It is interesting to read Jeremiah's letter addressed to the exiles (see Jeremiah 29). He tells them that it is God's will that they cooperate with Babylon by settling in and making good citizens (verses 4-7). He warns them not to listen to false prophets (verses 8-9; he had so much trouble with them himself), and he holds out a wonderful promise of hope (verses 10-14).

Jehoiakim appears to have died just before or during the siege. His son, whose throne name is Jehoiachin (his personal name is Jeconiah, sometimes shortened to Coniah), reigned for the first three months of 597 (verse 8). He is given a negative judgment in spite of the fact that it was his surrendering to the Babylonians that saved the city from the total destruction it was to be subjected to ten years later. The Deuteronomists appear to be basing their judgment on the brevity of his reign, and on the fact that YHWH did not intervene to save the city. Nebuchadnezzar took Jeconiah prisoner 'in the eighth year of his reign' (verse 12); that is, in 597 (see the Babylonian Chronicle, ANET 564). Jeremiah speaks of King 'Coniah' (Jeremiah 22:24-30) and concludes:

Record this man as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days; for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David, and ruling again in Judah.

– Jeremiah 22:30

In a later text we hear Jeremiah portraying King Jeconiah as the leader of the Jewish community in exile that will be God's providential instrument in the formation of Judaism (see Jeremiah 24). Verse 13 speaks of the looting of the temple and the king's palace. We recall when Ahaz of Israel did the same to pay the tribute to the king of Assyria (2Kings 16:17-18).

The leading citizens of Jerusalem are taken off to Babylon (verses 14-16), leaving only 'the poorest people of the land' (verse 14). The biblical record differs as to the number who were taken into exile in 597. 2Kings 24:14 speaks of 'ten thousand captives'; Jeremiah 52:28 speaks of 'three thousand twenty-three Judeans'. On the Babylonian Exile see the Introduction pages 20-22.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler summarises this passage in two verses (2Chronicles 36:9-10).

⁸Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign; he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Nehushta daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. ⁹He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, just as his father had done.

¹⁰At that time the servants of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. ¹¹King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it; ¹²King Jehoiachin of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself, his mother, his servants, his officers, and his palace officials. The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign.

¹³He carried off all the treasures of the house of YHWH, and the treasures of the king's house; he cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of YHWH, which King Solomon of Israel had made, all this as YHWH had foretold.

¹⁴He carried away all Jerusalem, all the officials, all the warriors, ten thousand captives, all the artisans and the smiths; no one remained, except the poorest people of the land. ¹⁵He carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon; the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the elite of the land, he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. ¹⁶The king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valour, seven thousand, the artisans and the smiths, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war.

¹⁷The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

¹⁸Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ¹⁹He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, just as Jehoiachim had done.

²⁰Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah so angered YHWH that he expelled them from his presence.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

^{25:1}And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; they built siegeworks against it all around. ²So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

³On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. ⁴Then a breach was made in the city wall; the king with all the soldiers fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah. ⁵But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; all his army was scattered, deserting him. ⁶Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence on him. ⁷They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon.

Mattaniah (Zedekiah) was a full brother of Jehoahaz (see 23:31; Jeremiah 52:1). He was placed on the throne by Babylon after the failed rebellion of 598. His eleven year reign was from 597 to 587. It is likely that for the people of Judah their real king was Jehoiachin in exile. Zedekiah was a temporary fill in. He receives from the Deuteronomists the standard negative judgment (verse 19).

The prophet Ezekiel, writing from exile in Babylon, has a lot to say about events during the reign of Zedekiah, as does Jeremiah who was with Zedekiah in Jerusalem.

In 594 at the instigation of Egypt (Ezekiel 17:15, 17) Zedekiah joined a conspiracy against Babylon. A few years later, he repeated the mistake made by Jehoiakim and, encouraged by Egypt, withheld tribute (verse 20). In 589 the Babylonians set up siege against Jerusalem (25:1-2). We know from Ezekiel that Egypt's intervention was unsuccessful (Ezekiel 30:21). Zedekiah attempted to escape, but was captured (verses 4-7; see Ezekiel 12:1-16) and taken to Babylon. Ravaged by famine (Ezekiel 4:9-11; 5:10), Jerusalem capitulated (587).

Jeremiah

This passage is found also in Jeremiah 52:1-11 (see also Jeremiah 39). Jeremiah in chapters 34-35 records an encounter between Jeremiah and Zedekiah 'when King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms of the earth and all the peoples under his dominion were fighting against Jerusalem and all its cities'(Jeremiah 34:1).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler reflects on the reasons for the exile, and highlights YHWH's plan.

For the second time (see 2Chronicles 35:25) he mentions the prophet Jeremiah. A longer account of the relations between Zedekiah and Jeremiah can be found in Jeremiah 37.

He also blames 'all the leading priests and the people' (verse 14). The idolatrous practices are described in Ezekiel chapter 8.

His rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar is seen by both Jeremiah (see quotes on page 248), and Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 17:11-21) as a rebellion against God, for Nebuchadnezzar is seen as God's instrument.

¹¹Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH his God. He did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah who spoke from the mouth of YHWH.

¹³He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to YHWH, the God of Israel. ¹⁴All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of YHWH that he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

¹⁵YHWH, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; ¹⁶but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of YHWH against his people became so great that there was no remedy.

¹⁷Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their youths with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or young woman, the aged or the feeble; he gave them all into his hand.

⁸In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month – which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon – Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ⁹He burned the house of YHWH, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. ¹⁰All the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem.

¹¹Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon—all the rest of the population. ¹²But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil.

This time nothing is spared. Everything standing in Jerusalem is burned down, including the king's palace, and even the temple of YHWH.

The Deuteronomists have been preparing us for this:

YHWH 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."

– 23:27

YHWH sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of YHWH that he spoke by his servants the prophets ... YHWH was not willing to pardon.

– 24:2-4

Jerusalem and Judah so angered YHWH that he expelled them from his presence.

– 24:20

Nebuchadnezzar's reign began in 605. The 'nineteenth year'(verse 8) is 587. A further group of the leading citizens were taken into exile (Jeremiah 52:29), including 'the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylon'(verse 11). This is another indication of the split in Jerusalem between those who opposed Babylonian control and those who submitted to it.

Jeremiah

This passage is found also in Jeremiah 52:12-16. Jeremiah advised submitting to Babylon (see Jeremiah 38:2, 17). Nebuzaradan gave him special treatment (see Jeremiah 40:4). The number exiled by Nebuzaradan is given as seven hundred forty-five (Jeremiah 52:30).

Verses 13-17 give an inventory of the treasures taken from the temple by the conquering army. Reference is made to Solomon (verse 16; see 1Kings 7:13-51).

Verses 18-21 give a detailed account of the personnel who were executed: the temple hierarchy, the government officers closest to the king, and the landowners. They are taken to Riblah (see Jehoahaz, 23:33; and Zedekiah, 25:5-6).

Jeremiah

This passage is found also in Jeremiah 52:17-27. Jeremiah gives the number exiled in 597 as eight hundred thirty-two (Jeremiah 52:29).

The Chronicler

¹⁸All the vessels of the house of God, large and small, and the treasures of the house of YHWH, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all these he brought to Babylon. ¹⁹They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels.

²⁰He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹to fulfil the word of YHWH by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.

– 2Chronicles 36:18-21

¹³The bronze pillars that were in the house of YHWH, as well as the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of YHWH, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried the bronze to Babylon. ¹⁴They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the dishes for incense, and all the bronze vessels used in the temple service, ¹⁵as well as the firepans and the basins. What was made of gold the captain of the guard took away for the gold, and what was made of silver, for the silver. ¹⁶As for the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands, which Solomon had made for the house of YHWH, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weighing. ¹⁷The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and on it was a bronze capital; the height of the capital was three cubits; latticework and pomegranates, all of bronze, were on the capital all around. The second pillar had the same, with the latticework.

¹⁸The captain of the guard took the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest Zephaniah, and the three guardians of the threshold; ¹⁹from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the soldiers, and five men of the king's council who were found in the city; the secretary who was the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. ²⁰Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²¹The king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile out of its land.

²²He appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan as governor over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had left. ²³Now when all the captains of the forces and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah as governor, they came with their men to Gedaliah at Mizpah, namely, Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite. ²⁴Gedaliah swore to them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid because of the Chaldean officials; live in the land, serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you." ²⁵But in the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men; they struck down Gedaliah so that he died, along with the Judeans and Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. ²⁶Then all the people, high and low and the captains of the forces set out and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

Gedaliah is the grandson of Shaphan, who featured in chapter 22 as secretary to King Josiah. It was Gedaliah's father, Ahikam, who protected Jeremiah when Jehoiakim was king (Jeremiah 26:24; see also 36:10-12).

Such was the destruction of Jerusalem that Gedaliah took up residence at Mizpah, half way between Jerusalem and Bethel, which was also Samuel's residence (see 1Samuel 7).

One of the delegates who came to speak with Gedaliah was Ishmael (verse 23), a member of the royal family (verse 25).

Jeremiah

Jeremiah speaks of Gedaliah in Jeremiah 40:7 – 41:3. Jeremiah supported Gedaliah. Jeremiah has a lot more to say about Ishmael and also about the conflict between Ishmael, and Johanan (see Jeremiah 41:4-18). He also encouraged those who had not been exiled to stay in Judah and not flee to Egypt (see Jeremiah 42:10-12). When Gedaliah was assassinated Jeremiah was taken by force to Egypt.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits this passage

A note on the prophet Ezekiel

One of the Judeans who was taken into exile in 597 with King Jehoniah was a priest, Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:3; 3:15). His prophetic 'career' belongs to the early years of the Babylonian Exile, beginning in 593 and continuing till 571. As part of the exile himself, Ezekiel is addressing his fellow exiles. He also has in focus those who were left behind in Judah. Among the exiles as well as those left behind in Judah there appear to have been two camps.

The first party was made up of those who advocated acceptance of their fate. What was required of them was that they repent. Their fidelity to the Torah would please YHWH who, in his own time, would restore the land to them. Back in Judah, the prophet Jeremiah belonged to this party, and the priest Ezekiel, in exile in Babylon, was of the same conviction. We see this in his tirades against Egypt and those who looked to Egypt to liberate them from servitude to Babylon. In his commentary on Ezekiel, (in the Hermeneia Series, Fortress Press 1969) Walther Zimmerli includes the following as areas in which there is agreement between Jeremiah and Ezekiel: 'submission to the Babylonians, the decidedly anti-Egyptian attitude, the expectation of a new future for Israel among the exiles and not among those left in the land, the condemnation of the action of Zedekiah, and statements about the inner transformation of the people in the promised age of salvation' (page 45).

The second party was led by Zedekiah. They looked to Egypt to help them throw off the Babylonian yoke. There was no place in their thinking for submission or repentance.

In the early part of his prophetic ministry he draws on the experience of the siege of 598 to warn that if the people do not learn their lesson Jerusalem will suffer an even worse fate (see Ezekiel 4:7-17; 12:1-29). He points out the folly of the Jerusalem establishment looking to Egypt (see Ezekiel 17:11-21). In Ezekiel 33:21-22 we hear of his response to the news that Jerusalem has fallen. The catastrophe of 587 vindicates Ezekiel's warnings and opens up a new phase in his ministry. Now that the worst has happened, he focuses on YHWH's desire to forgive. He builds on earlier oracles of hope, if only people would learn the lesson and turn to God (see Ezekiel 11:16-20; 18:30-32). In chapter 36 he speaks of a new covenant, and in chapter 37 has a vision of the nation rising again. Nothing, he declares, can separate Israel from God's care (see Ezekiel 38-39).

Finally, in chapters 40-48, Ezekiel the priest, sets out a program for the rebuilding of the destroyed temple and its cult.

²⁷In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison; ²⁸he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. ²⁹So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king's presence. ³⁰For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion every day, as long as he lived.

Nebuchadnezzar's successor Amel-Marduk began his reign in 561. One of his decisions was to release King Jehoiachin from prison (verse 27). The Babylonian archives record the rations given to King Jehoiakin (see ANET 308).

Jeremiah

This passage is found also in Jeremiah 52:31-34.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler concludes by leaping ahead to the Persian King, Cyrus, who is commissioned by YHWH to rebuild the temple, and who decrees that the exiled Jews may return home.

²²In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of YHWH spoken by Jeremiah, YHWH stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: ²³“Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: YHWH, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may YHWH his God be with him! Let him go up.”

