

CHRONICLES: THE NEGLECTED BOOK OF THE BIBLE PART II

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The Talmud (TB *Bava Batra* 15a) attributes the writing of the Book of Kings to the Prophet Jeremiah, and the authorship of the Book of Chronicles to Ezra the Scribe (later completed by Nehemiah). The Sha'agat Aryeh in his commentary to the Talmudic tractate *Yoma* (53b) indicates that Ezra just collated earlier, more ancient sources. Kings and Chronicles differ on many occasions in their accounts of the history of the kings of Judah and Israel. These differences have been explained as being due to the Chronicler's pro-Levite and pro-Davidic bias.

The Chronicler's pro-Levitic and pro-Davidic bias is well documented. He elevates the Levites to a position of greater importance than what the Torah had reserved for them. Levites stand alongside the *Kohanim*, often doing the work which formerly was the prerogative of the priests alone, such as bringing the sacrificial blood to be dashed on the altar to the priests (II Chron. 30:16 ff). Additionally, the Chronicler had Levites become singers and teachers of religion alongside the priests (II Chron. 31:4). These new and elevated tasks of the Levites led most scholars to conclude that the Chronicler's description of these Levitical duties were not a reflection of what their duties actually were during the First Temple era that the Chronicler was recording, but rather descriptions of their duties during the Second Temple era, the period in which the Chronicler lived.

An example where we find a pro-Davidic bias is when we compare the two accounts of the death of King Saul in both books (I Sam. 31:4 ff.: and II Chron. 10:4 ff.). In describing the death of Saul and his three sons in Samuel, the Chronicler states that not only were his three sons killed but his whole dynasty (*kol beito*) was wiped out (10:6). It is a statement patently false since Ish-Baal (Ish-Bosheth) was king for another seven years until he was killed, and only then was David chosen king. A probable reason why the Chronicler "forgot" about a fourth son of Saul who survived and continued the

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kingship of the House of Saul for about seven years after Saul's death may be due to the Chronicler's interest in promoting David as the legitimate successor to Saul. Indeed, immediately following the story of the burial of Saul by the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead, the Chronicler skips the story of the Amalakite who informs David about Saul's death and instead goes on to tell us that already David began his reign as king in Hebron (I Chron. 11:1 ff).

It is, however, my contention, already expressed in Part I of my article on Chronicles,¹ that the differences between Kings and Chronicles are primarily due to the fact that the Chronicler must have had access to some sources which were not available to the authors of Samuel and Kings. Thus, the Chronicler mentions a *Commentary* (midrash) of the *Book of Kings* (II Chron. 24:27) and the records of Iddo the seer (II Chron. 9:29, 12:15, 13:22) as sources of information, neither of which appear in the Book of Kings. On the other hand, the authors of Samuel and Kings may have had some sources not available to the Chronicler. Thus, the Book of Kings mentions the *Book of the Acts of Solomon* (I Kgs. 11:41).²

When describing the events following the death of King Jehoahaz, both Chronicles and Kings give similar accounts about how the late king's mother, Athaliah, had all of his other sons killed in order to seize power for herself and that only the baby brother, Jehoash, was saved. The princess who saved Jehoash later turned him over to the Priest Jehoiada in the Temple where he was not only hidden but tutored by Jehoiada. Several years later Jehoiada arranged for the overthrow of Athaliah with an impressive ceremony in which Jehoash was crowned as the new legitimate king of Judea (II Chron. 23 and II Kgs. 11).

Since Jehoash (or Joash) was for many years under the influence of Jehoiada, II Kings 12:3 and II Chronicles 24:1-2 have words of praise which describe Jehoash as a king who did what was pleasing to the Lord. But then the Chronicler – and not the Book of Kings – describes how, after the Priest's death, Jehoash threw off the religious values he had been taught and turned instead to the officers of Judah who influenced him to forsake the Lord's Covenant and reintroduce idolatry into the kingdom (II Chron. 24:17). The Chronicler then reports that several unnamed prophets were unsuccessful in dissuading Jehoash from his new idolatrous policy (24:19). Even worse; the Chronicler records the fact that Jehoiada's son Zechariah, who publicly

preached against Jehoash's betrayal of the Covenant of the Lord, was himself assassinated for opposing Jehoash's idolatrous policies (24:21). The fact that the author of Kings made no mention of the terrible deeds of Jehoash after the death of Jehoiada indicates that this information was not available to the author/editor of Kings, for there would be no reason for him to have omitted these injurious facts about Jehoash.

Another example of the Chronicler supplying us with more information than in Kings is in the case of Amaziah, which has some similarity to what occurred to Jehoash. If we only had the Book of Kings we would not know that Amaziah, despite being described as a king who *did right in the eyes of the Lord* (II Kgs. 14:3), later in his life turned to idolatry: *Wherefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Amaziah* (II Chron. 25:14ff).

A third example where the Chronicler tells us much more than Kings is in his description of the reign of King Uzziah (Azariah), such as his conquests of territories which once belonged to Judah and his building projects not only in Jerusalem but also in the Negev, including the development of water reservoirs. Both the author of Kings and Chronicles – when describing Jotham son of Uzziah later on – describe him as following in the footsteps of his father and, like him, doing *what is right in the eyes of the Lord* (II Kgs. 15: 34, II Chron. 27:2). Although the author of Kings relates that Uzziah spent the last years of his life plagued with leprosy in a special compound reserved for lepers, he does not indicate the reason. It is only in Chronicles (26:16ff) that we learn that Uzziah's leprosy was a punishment for trespassing against the Lord when he went into the Temple with the intention of burning incense on the altar of the Lord. The priests protested and told him that no layman, including a king, was permitted to sacrifice even incense on the altar except via a priest. Uzziah nevertheless insisted on going through with his sacrifice and just at that moment he was stricken with leprosy. If we only had the book of Kings and not Chronicles, we would not know why Uzziah became a leper.

Also interesting are the similarities and differences we read in the description of King Jotham in Kings and Chronicles. As noted above, in both cases the writers say that Jotham was a king who followed the righteous path of his father, King Uzziah (Azariah). However, the author of Kings admits that although he was righteous, he did tolerate the existence of *bamot*, the high places (II Kgs. 15:35) while the Chronicler does not mention this fact at all. Both

authors, however, do mention some of the king's building projects (II Kgs. 15:35, II Chron. 27:3-4). Additionally, the Chronicler provides facts about some of Jotham's military victories against Amon (27:5) and compliments him for not interfering with the cult of the Temple, which according to Chronicles was the reason his father Uzziah was punished with leprosy (27:2).

When writing about King Ahaz, both the Book of Kings and Chronicles stress how far Ahaz moved in the direction of idolatry during his reign. According to Chronicles, Ahaz even resorted to *burning* his sons (plural) in fire as a sacrifice to the gods (28:3), while Kings records that his sacrifice only involved *passing* his son (singular) through fire (16:3).

Although both books do not differ greatly about how Judea became a vassal of Assyria and the tribute that King Ahaz paid to the Assyrian monarch, they do differ as to where Ahaz was buried. According to Kings, he was buried with his ancestors in the City of David (16:20). Chronicles has him buried in Jerusalem, but emphasizes that he was not interred in the sepulcher reserved for the kings of Israel (28:27).

When it comes to the reign of Hezekiah, both Chronicles and Kings describe him as a righteous king, loyal to the traditions of David. However, Kings does not mention his organizing a grand popular observance of the Pesah holiday, which Chronicles does at length in chapter 30. Invitations were dispatched to the communities of Israel that had survived expulsion after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern tribes. Chronicles spends an entire chapter (31) giving a highly detailed account of the religious reforms sponsored by Hezekiah, including Temple reforms. On the other hand, Kings only devotes a single verse to Hezekiah's anti-idolatrous campaign, and does not mention any Temple reforms. Yet surprisingly it is Kings, not Chronicles, that records Hezekiah's destruction of the copper serpent (II Kgs. 18:4) dating from the time of Moses and later called Nehushtan, which had become an object of idolatrous worship.

While Kings does not record Hezekiah's preparations for the feared Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, Chronicles provides much information about his measures (II Chron. 32:1-8). These included stopping up water sources outside of the city and its suburbs and a system which would convey needed water into the city without being detected by the enemy. We believe this pro-

ject to be the eighth-century tunnel which has since been named after the Judean king (II Chron. 32:30).

It is not only new information in Chronicles not recorded in Kings that makes the book interesting but also the subtle differences between two accounts of the same story. For example, the Book of Kings has Josiah embark upon religious reforms only after the discovery of a sacred scroll which warns of a future destruction (II Kgs. 22:8-20, and chapter 23). In contrast, the Chronicler already has Josiah embark on the policy of destroying idols and idolatrous sites *before* the discovery of that scroll in the Temple (II Chron. 34:3-14). Furthermore, Josiah's reforms were much more extensive than those recorded in Kings: they included destroying not only the high places and altars in and around Jerusalem but even those as far north as Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon and Naphtali (II Chron. 34:6).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The radically different accounts in Kings and Chronicles of the events leading to the defeat of Judah and the death of the righteous King Josiah, and of the last days of the Kingdom of Judah, strongly support my thesis that different sources were used by the compilers of these two biblical books. According to Kings: *In his days, Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, marched against the king of Assyria to the River Euphrates: King Josiah marched toward him but when he confronted him at Megiddo [Pharaoh Neco] slew him* (II Kings 23:29).³ Yet Chronicles relates that Neco first sent envoys to Josiah saying: *What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I do not march against you this day but against the kingdom [Assyria] that wars with me* (II Chron. 35:21). In addition to this assurance by Neco, regrettably ignored by Josiah, Chronicles details how exactly the king met his death – *archers shot King Josiah* (35:23) – and mentions the fact that *Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah* (35:25).

There is no other explanation for the significant differences in the accounts of Kings and Chronicles regarding the final days of the Kingdom of Judah. Kings is quite specific when describing Zedekiah's unsuccessful attempt to flee from Jerusalem, his capture, and the cruel fate of the king and his sons (II Kgs. 25:4-7). Chronicles, citing Jeremiah repeatedly, makes no mention of Zedekiah's end. The use of entirely different language to describe the destruc-

tion of the Temple and Jerusalem points to the use of different sources by the authors of Kings and Chronicles.

NOTES

1. J. Adler, "Chronicles: The Neglected Books of the Bible", *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 37:3 (2009) pp. 113-7.

2. Historical books such as the annals of the kings of Judah and Israel are frequently used in the Book of Kings and the Book of Chronicles. However, only Chronicles cites prophetic sources: *the history of Samuel the seer, the history of Nathan the prophet, and the history of Gad the seer* (I Chron. 29:29); *the chronicles of the prophet Shemaiah and Iddo the seer* (II Chron. 12:15); *the other events of Uzziah's reign were recorded by the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz* (II Chron. 26:22). The Chronicler also uses Jeremiah, entirely ignored in Kings, as a source of information for Josiah and Zedekiah. It is strange that Kings, attributed by the Talmud to Jeremiah, doesn't mention Jeremiah at all.

3. The biblical text is not clear as to what motivated Josiah to become involved in a war with Egypt. Was he trying to prevent Egypt from supporting Assyria against the rising star of Babylon, or from attacking Assyria and weakening this older power so that it might eventually be destroyed by Egypt and Babylon together? Or was Josiah concerned about the real intentions of Egypt toward Judah and Israel? Biblical historians explain that at this time, the seventh century BCE, Assyria was on the wane and Babylonia was gaining ascendancy at its expense. Historians conjecture that Josiah had probably rebelled against Assyria earlier on, and had allied himself with Babylonia. Pharaoh Neco was on his way north to join forces with the Assyrians in an attempt to wrest power from the Babylonians, and Josiah wanted to stop him. See *Olam ha-Tanakh, Melakhim Bet*, edited by Gershon Galil (Ramat Gan: Revivim Publishing House, 1994) pp. 203-4 (Hebrew).



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