THE DEATH OF JOSIAH IN CHRONICLES:
ANOTHER VIEW

by

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In a recent note in this journal H. G. M. Williamson¹ argues that the account of Josiah’s death in 2 Chr. xxxv 20-5(26-7) is not the Chronicler’s own creative rewriting of the existing parallel text of the Deuteronomistic History (hereafter Dtr), 2 Kgs xxiii (28) 29-30a; nor is it drawn by him from some distinct source. Rather, the Chronicler took over this account from an expanded version of Dtr, of the sort attested by the Qumran Samuel manuscripts. My own study of the question has convinced me, however, that Williamson’s supposition of such an “intermediate stage” is superfluous since 2 Chr. xxxv 20-5 (26-7) can satisfactorily be explained as the Chronicler’s own reworking of 2 Kgs xxiii (28) 29-30a in its MT form. In what follows I shall first present the positive evidence for this claim, and then consider Williamson’s own arguments in the light of that evidence.

I begin by calling attention to various features in which 2 Chr. xxxv 20-5 (26-7), precisely in its peculiarities vis-à-vis 2 Kgs xxiii (28) 29-30a, carries forward and “caps” a whole series of motifs or theological principles highlighted by the Chronicler throughout his presentation of the post-Solomonic period (2 Chr. x-xxxvi). Note the following items:

(1) A distinctive feature of the Chronicler’s theology is his systematic inculcation of the principle that individual sin is punished in the lifetime and on the person of the culprit, with its corollary that where personal affliction is present there must also be a

preceding personal sin. But then it is immediately apparent that
the account of 2 Chr. xxxv 21-4 admirably exemplifies the above
principle: here, Josiah's sad end results, not, as in Kings, from bad
luck or mere lack of judgement, but from his culpable refusal to
heed the divine warning mediated to him by Neco.

(2) Another characteristic and distinctive feature in the
Chronicler's narration of the post-Solomonic era is the motif of the
king who starts out good, but turns bad later in his reign: see
Rehoboam (2 Chr. x-xii), Asa (2 Chr. xiv-xvi), Jehoshaphat (2
Chr. xvii-xx), Joash (2 Chr. xxiv), Amaziah (2 Chr. xxv), Uzziah
(2 Chr. xxvi) and—more mutedly—Hezekiah (2 Chr. xxxii 25). Here
too, however, it is precisely the peculiarities of Chronicles' version of Josiah's death that assimilate his career to this typical
pattern: the youthful zealot for Yahweh's words set out in the book
of the law ends up disregarding a divine directive.

(3) Throughout 2 Chr. x-xxxvi the Chronicler develops the motif
of the warning speech addressed to a king projecting a war about
its destined negative outcome. In doing this he uses passages from
Dtr, i.e. 2 Chr. xi 1-4 (= 1 Kgs xii 21-4, Shemaiah to Rehoboam),
2 Chr. xviii 16-22 (= 1 Kgs xxii 17-23, Micaiah to Ahab), 2 Chr.
xxv 17-24 (= 2 Kgs xiv 8-11, Jehoash to Amaziah), but also in-
troduces compositions of his own exemplifying the motif, i.e. 2
Chr. xiii 4-12 (Abijah to Jeroboam). In the above texts, the
speaker of the warning varies: in the first two cases cited it is a
prophet, in the latter two rather a king. These prophetic/royal

2 In Dtr, the principle is developed much less systematically, especially at the
level of the individual; see, e.g., the leprosy that strikes the personally blameless
Amaziah (2 Kgs xiv 1-7) or the untroubled career of the wicked Manasseh (2 Kgs
xxi).

3 In Dtr the pattern, while not absent, is much less obvious and explicit than
in Chronicles. Thus of the kings cited above as exemplifying the pattern in
Chronicles the Deuteronomist makes no personal accusations against either
J(eh)oash or Azariah/Uzziah at any point during their reigns. Similarly, while he
reports incidents in the course of the reigns of Asa, Jehoshaphat, Amaziah—and
likewise Josiah himself—which might be construed as blameworthy (e.g., sur-
rendering of Judean treasures to foreigners), he, in contrast to the Chronicler,
does not explicitly evaluate them as such. Curiously, the one clear instance of this
"Chronicistic pattern" in Dtr, i.e. its account of Solomon, is not reproduced in the
Solomonic narrative of Chronicles where Solomon appears as a perfect king.

4 Here too then the pattern exists already in Dtr, once again, however, without
the prominence and frequency it has in Chronicles.

5 On this text, see R. W. Klein, "Abijah's Campaign against the North (II Chr
13)—What were the Chronicler's Sources?", ZAW 95 (1983), pp. 210-17.