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SEEKING PROPHECY IN HISTORICAL NARRATIVES: MANASSEH AND JOSIAH IN KINGS AND CHRONICLES¹ Rabbi Hayyim Angel

I. Introduction

The prophetic authors of biblical historical narratives, such as those in Kings, included material selectively. They were relating prophetic messages using history as their primary vehicle of expression.

Chronicles provides a divinely inspired alternative presentation of the historical information related in Kings. Almost half of Chronicles has parallels in earlier biblical books. The rest of the material was likely drawn from other written sources and oral traditions extant at that time.² It is a retelling of history, which stands independently as a theologically significant narrative. A close comparison of the parallel accounts in Kings and Chronicles will enable us to refine our understanding of each book, especially when we focus on which events each book includes, and how each presented history in accordance with its own religious outlook. In this study, we will explore this relationship, specifically with regard to Kings Manasseh (697-642 B.C.E.) and his grandson Josiah (640-609 B.C.E.).

¹ This essay is based on a lecture given at the fourth annual *Yemei Iyun in Tanakh* of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (June 2006) and is a sequel to my article, "Seeking Prophecy in Historical Narratives: Ahaz and Hezekiah in Kings and Chronicles," *Milim Havivim* 2 (2006), 171-184. In addition to the classical commentators on Kings and Chronicles, I have drawn from: Moshe Eisemann, *I & II Chronicles: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1987); Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1977); Sara Japhet, *Old Testament Library: I & II Chronicles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I & II Kings* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1989); Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I & II Chronicles* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1986); Bustenay Oded (ed.), *Encyclopedia Olam ha-Tanakh: I & II Kings* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Dodzon-Iti, 1994); Bustenay Oded (ed.), *Encyclopedia Olam ha-Tanakh: I & II Chronicles* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Dodzon-Iti, 1995).

² Isaac Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 1. See further discussions in Abarbanel, introduction to Early Prophets, 8; introduction to Kings, 428; Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I Chronicles*, 51-55.

II. Manasseh in Kings

Manasseh was involved with more forms of idolatry and categories of sinfulness than all the Northern and Southern kings *combined*.³ The elaborate description of Manasseh's iniquities justifies the decree for the destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian exile:

Therefore the Lord spoke through His servants the prophets: "Because King Manasseh of Judah has done these abhorrent things—he has outdone in wickedness all that the Amorites did before his time—and because he led Judah to sin with his fetishes, assuredly, thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such a disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that both ears of everyone who hears about it will tingle. I will apply to Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the weights of the House of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem clean as one wipes a dish and turns it upside down. And I will cast off the remnant of My own people and deliver them into the hands of their enemies. They shall be plunder and prey to all their enemies because they have done what is displeasing to Me and have been vexing Me from the day that their fathers came out of Egypt to this day." (II Kings 21:10-15)⁴

This decree becomes a refrain in Kings (II Kings 22:15-20; 23:25-27; 24:1-4), highlighting that Manasseh ultimately caused the destruction.

Despite his unrivaled idolatry and murder, Manasseh appears to have died of natural causes, having reigned for fifty-five years—longer than anyone else in Israel's history. It appears that only later generations suffered for his sins, while he and his generation lived in relative peace.

III. Josiah in Kings

Kings underscores Josiah's unique stature by noting that he had been prophetically predicted centuries before his birth, during the reign of Jeroboam son of Nebat:

"O altar, altar! Thus said the Lord: A son shall be born to the House of David, Josiah by name; and he shall slaughter upon you the priests of the shrines who bring offerings upon you. And human bones shall be burned upon you." (I Kings 13:2)

Kings further stresses that Josiah eradicated the idolatry of its three main

³ See the detailed charts in Klaas A.D. Smelik, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 141, 149.

⁴ Translations of biblical passages are, with small adjustments, from the *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures, According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia & Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

promoters in the period, i.e., Solomon, Jeroboam, and Manasseh:

The king also defiled the shrines facing Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of the Destroyer, which King Solomon of Israel had built for Ashtoreth... As for the altar in Bethel [and] the shrine made by Jeroboam son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin—that altar, too, and the shrine as well, he tore down... (II Kings 23:13-15)

Unfortunately, Huldah the prophetess had informed Josiah of the sealed decree prior to his reformation (II Kings 22:15-20), and the narrative concludes that Josiah's superior efforts could not reverse the metaphysical damage of his grandfather Manasseh:

However, the Lord did not turn away from His awesome wrath which had blazed up against Judah because of all the things Manasseh did to vex Him. The Lord said, "I will also banish Judah from My presence as I banished Israel; and I will reject the city of Jerusalem which I chose and the House where I said My name would abide." (II Kings 23:26-27)

Despite his unrivaled reformation, Josiah met with a violent death at the hands of Egyptian archers (II Kings 23:29-30). In fact, his arrow-induced demise is paralleled by that of the notorious king Ahab (I Kings 22:34-35).⁵

Some Midrashim attempt to justify Josiah's premature death by blaming his generation. Though the king eliminated public shrines, many idolaters went underground, re-emerging after Josiah's death (*Ta'anit* 22b; *Lam. Rabah* 1:53). This midrashic explanation receives textual support from the nation's rapid regression to idolatry after Josiah, and from Jeremiah's complaint of insincere repentance, dated to Josiah's reign:

The Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what Rebel Israel did, going to every high mountain and under every leafy tree, and whoring there? [...] And after all that, her sister, Faithless Judah, did not return to Me wholeheartedly, but insincerely—declares the Lord. (Jer. 3:6, 10)

Alternatively, Josiah's death might present an unsolvable theological quandary. One Midrash plays off verses in Ecclesiastes lamenting the reality that everyone dies:

For the same fate is in store for all: for the righteous, and for the wicked; for the good and pure, and for the impure; for him who sacrifices, and for him who does not; for him who is pleas-

⁵ See further analysis of this connection in Rafi Yaakovi, "Ahab and Josiah: Matter and Spirit" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 5 (1988), 69-78; Sara Japhet, *Old Testament Library: I & II Chronicles*, 1042-1043.

ing, and for him who is displeasing; and for him who swears, and for him who shuns oaths. That is the sad thing about all that goes on under the sun: that the same fate is in store for all. (Ecc. 9:2-3)

“For him who sacrifices,” applies to Josiah [...] and “for him that does not sacrifice,” applies to Ahab. [...] The former [Josiah] died by arrows and the latter [Ahab] died by arrows. (*Lev. Rabah* 20:1)⁶

Similarly, R. Yosef Ibn Caspi expresses disdain toward those who would question why Manasseh died peacefully, whereas Josiah was killed:

There are fools who ask: “How could [Manasseh] die peacefully as did Hezekiah his father, and more than Josiah?” Who knows if this is [how he died]...? And let us grant that he indeed died peacefully—who understands God’s thoughts and judgments?⁷

The narratives following Josiah’s death fulfill the predestined decree, predicated on God’s “visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations” (see Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9). Zedekiah, the king at the time of the destruction of the Temple, was the third generation from Manasseh. Jehoiakhin, who was exiled along with the Judean nobility, was the fourth.

IV. Chronicles

A. *Manasseh*

While Chronicles’ description of Manasseh begins similar to that of Kings, it then relates that Manasseh paid for his sins and was exiled to Babylonia. Shockingly, Manasseh became the greatest penitent in Chronicles:

In his distress, he entreated the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to Him, and He granted his prayer, heard his plea, and returned him to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord alone was God. (II Chron. 33:12-13)

Manasseh returned to Judea, where he promptly cleared away much of his idolatry. This repentance is particularly impressive in Chronicles, where five kings moved from a distinct period of righteousness to a distinct period of wickedness: Rehoboam, Asa, Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah. Manasseh is the *only* king in Chronicles whose religious life took an upward turn.

⁶ Translations of passages from the Talmud and *Midrash Rabah* (with minor modifications) taken from Soncino.

⁷ Ibn Caspi, II Kings 21:18.

B. *Josiah*

While the Chronicles account of Josiah is largely parallel to that of Kings, Chronicles reports that Josiah initiated the reformation years before Hilkiah found the Torah scroll. It is noteworthy that Josiah's death receives considerably more attention in Chronicles:

After all this furbishing of the Temple by Josiah, King Nekho of Egypt came up to fight at Kharkemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out against him. [Nekho] sent messengers to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I do not march against you this day but against the kingdom that wars with me, and it is God's will that I hurry. Refrain, then, from interfering with God who is with me, that He not destroy you." But Josiah would not let him alone; instead, he donned [his armor] to fight him, heedless of Nekho's words from the mouth of God; and he came to fight in the plain of Megiddo. Archers shot King Josiah... (II Chron. 35:20-23)

In Kings, Josiah's death was cast in purely political terms, i.e., he opposed the Egyptian army so they shot him. In Chronicles, however, Josiah sinned by shirking the word of God through Nekho.⁸

While Kings repeatedly attributes the destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian exile to Manasseh's sins, Chronicles points its finger at Zedekiah and his generation:

Zedekiah... did what was displeasing to the Lord his God; he did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah [...]. He also rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who made him take an oath by God; he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart so as not to turn to the Lord God of Israel. All the officers of the priests and the people committed many trespasses, following all the abominable practices of the nations. They polluted the House of the Lord, which He had consecrated in Jerusalem [...]. They mocked the messengers of God and disdained His words and taunted His prophets until the wrath of the Lord against His people grew beyond remedy. He therefore brought the king of the Chaldeans upon them [...]. (II Chron. 36:11-17)

⁸ The rabbis and later commentators debate whether Nekho spoke in the name of his gods or in the name of God, since "*elohim*" is ambiguous. *Tosefta Ta'anit* 2:10 believes that "*elohim*" here is secular, i.e., he spoke in the name of his pagan deities. Cf. *Ta'anit* 22b: "What is meant by 'God who is with me?' Rav Judah said Rav said: 'Idols.' Josiah said [to himself], 'Since he [Pharaoh-Nekho] puts his trust in his idols, I will prevail over him.'" *Soferim* 4:23, followed by Radak and Yehudah Kiel (*Da'at Mikra*), on the other hand, maintains that "*Elokim*" here is sacred, i.e., Nekho spoke in the name of God. Regardless, Chronicles holds Josiah accountable for this misdeed.

V. Addressing the Discrepancies

Faced with conflicts between Kings and Chronicles, some interpreters attempt to resolve each problem locally. While many explanations have been offered, Abarbanel's responses underscore the difficulties inherent in local reconciliations.

Addressing the irreversible intergenerational decree in Kings, Abarbanel cannot believe that God would refuse to rescind His decree if Josiah's generation repented.⁹ Consequently, he asserts that many of Josiah's contemporaries remained closet idolaters.¹⁰ Thus, despite the refrain in Kings that the decree was irreversible, Abarbanel insists that a more genuinely righteous generation in Josiah's time, in fact, would have abrogated the decree.¹¹ Similarly, Abarbanel refuses to read II Kings 24:3-4 as evidence of a decree. Rather, he interprets these verses to mean that Jehoiakim and his generation continued to sin as did Manasseh:

All this befell Judah at the command of the Lord, who banished [them] from His presence because of all the sins that Manasseh had committed, and also because of the blood of the innocent that he shed. For he filled Jerusalem with the blood of the innocent, and the Lord would not forgive.¹²

It appears that Abarbanel's valiant efforts to eliminate the sealed decree stray from the simple meaning of the verses in Kings.¹³

Even more extraordinary is Abarbanel's explanation of the opposing accounts of Manasseh's repentance.¹⁴ Abarbanel adopted Rambam's theological distinction between *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*:¹⁵ people who had attained full visionary prophecy wrote the books included in *Nevi'im*, whereas the authors of the psalms, wisdom, and historical narratives canonized in *Ketuvim* wrote while in a conscious state; God guided those authors' writing with "divine inspiration."¹⁶

⁹ Abarbanel, II Kings 23:26, 29.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ta'anit* 22b; *Lam. Rabah* 1:53; Jer. 3:6-10 discussed above.

¹¹ Cf. Ralbag, II Kings 23:22; Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: II Kings*, 401-402.

¹² Abarbanel, II Kings 24:3-4.

¹³ Alternatively, Kiel quotes *Keli Yakar* (in *Da'at Mikra: II Kings*, p. 773 n. 31b): since Manasseh could not undo the murders he committed, Kings omitted his repentance. Chronicles, on the other hand, tells the story as it happened, i.e., at least he repented of his idolatry (Malbim also; cf. Ralbag, II Kings 23:4, 25). This reconciliation is difficult as well, since idolatry certainly is emphasized in Manasseh's reign, and continues to be mentioned in later references to the decree.

¹⁴ Abarbanel, commentary on II Kings 23:29.

¹⁵ Rambam's view is not universally accepted in Jewish thought. For discussion and sources, see Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991), 56-72, and especially, 167-170, nn. 287, 293, 294.

¹⁶ Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed* II:45.

Consequently, Abarbanel suggests that Kings was composed through prophecy, by Jeremiah (*Bava Batra* 15a). This heightened insight enabled Jeremiah to see through Manasseh's self-serving motivations for repenting, so he omitted that repentance from Kings. Chronicles, however, was composed by Ezra (*Bava Batra* 15a) through divine inspiration—a lesser level of revelation. Consequently, Ezra failed to recognize the shortcomings of Manasseh's motivations, so he recorded his repentance. This, though, is a surprising claim. Even *the reader* of Chronicles can see that Manasseh's repentance came under duress. It is difficult to imagine that Ezra missed this point.

It appears that the perspectives of Kings and Chronicles cannot be “reconciled.” In *Sanhedrin*, *Hazal* debate Manasseh's status in the World to Come:

Three kings and four commoners have no portion in the World to Come: the three kings are Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh. Rabbi Yehudah said: “Manasseh has a portion therein, for it is written, ‘and he prayed.’” They [the Sages] answered him: “They restored him to his kingdom, but not to [his portion in] the World to Come.” (*Sanhedrin* 10:2)

This tannaitic argument revolves around which text is primary. The anonymous first opinion relies on Kings' harsh treatment of Manasseh, whereas R. Yehudah turns to Chronicles' presentation of Manasseh's repentance.

Rabbi Yohanan said: “He who asserts that Manasseh has no portion in the world to come weakens the hands of penitent sinners.” (*Sanhedrin* 103a)¹⁷

Rabbi Yohanan offers a religious-educational point to support Rabbi Yehudah, but not an objective argument to resolve the tension between Kings and Chronicles, since that resolution does not exist. The first opinion in the mishnah would respond to Rabbi Yohanan that, like it or not, Kings unambiguously teaches that there are some sins that generate irreversible decrees. Thus, *Hazal* remain deadlocked in disagreement as a result of the divergent perspectives of Kings and Chronicles.¹⁸

VI. Why the Accounts are Different

Rather than reconciling individual contradictions, a more thoroughgoing approach attempts to ascertain the underlying religious principles of each book. The Talmud states that prophetic books were included in the canon because

¹⁷ Cf. *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 348, which casts Moses' final blessing to Israel as including a prayer that God should forgive even Manasseh.

¹⁸ The Jerusalem Talmud poignantly relocates this debate to the heavenly court: “The ministering angels were shutting the windows [of heaven] so that Manasseh's prayer should not reach God. They said to God: ‘Master of the universe! One who worshipped idols and who placed a statue in the Temple—will You accept his repentance?’ He said to them: ‘if I do not accept his repentance I will be locking the doors before every penitent’” (J.T. *Sanhedrin* 10:2, 28c).

of their enduring religious value:

Only the prophecy which contained a lesson for future generations was written down, and that which did not contain such a lesson was not written. (*Megilah* 14a)

At the same time, however, Rashi distinguishes between the Torah and *Nakh*:

Torat Moshe is called “Torah” because it was given for all generations. The prophets are called only “*kabalab*,” since they received each prophecy through divine inspiration for the needs of their time and generation.¹⁹

Thus, the Torah’s primary audience is all Jews of all times, and it is eternally relevant. While also containing eternal messages, however, prophetic books simultaneously address the generations in which they were composed as their primary audience.

Traditionally, Kings was composed in the era of the destruction of the Temple, by Jeremiah. Chronicles was composed at the beginning of the Second Temple period, by Ezra (*Bava Batra* 15a). One of the main purposes of Kings is to vindicate God for the destruction—it was Israel’s fault, rather than God’s abandonment or injustice. Chronicles, on the other hand, wanted to inspire faith and hope in the Returnees to Zion.²⁰ Rather than viewing Kings and Chronicles primarily as histories, they are prophecies that employ historical narratives to teach eternal messages about God and His relationship with Israel.

A. Reward and Punishment in Kings and Chronicles

Like many other biblical books, Kings leaves many events—good and bad—unexplained theologically. In contrast, Chronicles links virtually everything political and personal to direct reward and punishment. If, for example, a sin is mentioned in Kings, Chronicles almost always supplies a relevant punishment to its narrative. If an act of righteousness is mentioned in Kings, Chronicles supplies a reward. If suffering is mentioned in Kings, Chronicles supplies a sin. If a good event occurs in Kings, Chronicles supplies an act of righteousness. Thus, Chronicles presents a far more systematic and transparent theological framework than Kings.²¹

Kings teaches that the political and religious actions of one generation—both good and bad—can affect later generations. In contrast, Chronicles adopts the view of Ezekiel 18 and almost completely eliminates intergenerational merit

¹⁹ Rashi, *Hulin* 137a, s.v. *Torat Moshe*.

²⁰ Cf. Abarbanel’s introductions to Samuel and Kings.

²¹ See Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles*, 147-148. For an important modification of this absolute position, see Ehud Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles* (London: Equinox, 2006), 21-24, 161-163.

and retribution from its historical narrative. Chronicles contends “the person who sins, only he shall die” (Ezek. 18:4).²²

Within the theological framework of Kings, then, Manasseh could be singularly wicked, yet suffer no repercussions during his lifetime. Josiah could be singularly righteous, yet die a violent death. Manasseh’s sins could cause destruction several generations later. In contrast, Chronicles reports punishment within Manasseh’s lifetime, i.e., he was exiled to Babylonia. The moment he repented, he returned to Israel and went on to reign longer than anyone else. Similarly, Josiah was killed because he ignored the word of God. The destruction of the Temple and Babylonian exile are blamed on the sins of Zedekiah’s generation, not that of Manasseh.

Chronicles’ recasting of history neither disputes nor replaces the Kings account. Instead, each book selects and presents its historical material in accordance with the underlying theological lessons it wishes to convey.

B. A Longer View of History

In Isaiah 7, the prophet pleaded with Ahaz not to appeal to Assyria for military assistance. Ahaz, however, refused to listen. Isaiah subsequently prophesied that Judea would indeed achieve a short term victory against Aram and Samaria, but then Judea would suffer devastation. Thus, Ahaz sowed the seeds for the downfall of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms by inviting the Assyrians to the region.

The destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian exile form the climax to the Book of Kings. That decree was sealed during the reign of Manasseh, and fulfilled in Zedekiah’s time. Therefore, Kings casts Manasseh as the worst king, whereas Ahaz is presented as much less wicked.

By the time of the writing of Chronicles, however, much of the damage from Babylonia was undone, i.e., the Babylonian exiles had permission to return to Israel and the Second Temple was standing. In contrast, the effects of the Assyrian invasions remained, i.e., the Northern tribes still were lost. Since the Assyrian damage ultimately proved more permanent than the Babylonian damage, Chronicles casts Ahaz as the worst king. It could afford to cast Manasseh as a penitent.

C. Purposes of Kings

Kings opens with instability in the monarchy. David was frail, Adoniyah attempted to usurp the throne, and Solomon was forced to eliminate threats before finally securing his throne (I Kings 1-2). Solomon then achieved an ideal state because of his faithfulness to God and His commandments (I Kings 3-10).

²² See further discussion in Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles*, 138-154; Kiel, *Da’at Mikra: I Kings*, 124-127. See also Gershon Brin, *Studies in the Book of Ezekiel* (Hebrew), (Tel-Aviv University: The United Kibbutz Press, 1975), 80-105; Mordekhai Tropper, “The Ethical Principles of Ezekiel the Prophet” (Hebrew), *Shematin* 114 (1994), 33-38.

That came to an abrupt collapse when he promoted idolatry (I Kings 11). His empire began to unravel during his lifetime, and God visited the decree for the division of the monarchy onto his son Rehoboam.

This pattern continues throughout Kings. The three great disasters, i.e., the splitting of the kingdom, the exile of Northern kingdom, and the destruction of the Temple, all came as a result of idolatry. All three punishments were intergenerational decrees. Several Northern dynasties likewise followed this pattern of idolatry leading to intergenerational punishment.

Many at the time of the destruction were complaining: “Our fathers sinned and are no more; and we must bear their guilt” (Lam. 5:7; cf. Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:2). Kings addresses their concern by agreeing that they were in fact suffering primarily for the sins of their ancestors. Rather than being unfair, this was part of a broader pattern in God’s judgment—many disasters of Israel’s history may be explained this way. The generation of the destruction did not have to be the worst generation to experience the nation’s worst disaster.

D. The First Nine Biblical Books

Aside from its internal consistency, Kings forms the completion of the first nine biblical books, which flow as a coherent narrative unit. The world began with instability (*tohu va-bohu*); people were placed in the Garden of Eden conditional on their faithfulness to God’s command; sin undermined the fabric of creation by leading to exile from Eden, and ultimately the Flood. In Kings, the monarchy also started with instability; through faithfulness to God, Solomon built a stable empire and a Temple that symbolizes the Garden of Eden;²³ and sin undermined the stability leading to destruction and exile.

Additionally, Israel was dispossessed four generations after Manasseh’s sins, just as their Canaanite predecessors were dispossessed after four generations of sin: “And they shall return here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Gen. 15:16). Finally, Kings concludes with the surviving Jews returning either to Babylonia—the homeland of Abraham; or to Egypt (II Kings 25:26), thus effecting a complete reversal of the earliest biblical narratives. Anticipating these disasters, Jeremiah poignantly laments the reversal of creation to its primeval state of desolation:

I look at the earth, it is unformed and void (*tohu va-bohu*); at the skies, and their light is gone. I look at the mountains, they

²³ See, e.g., *Num. Rabbah* 12:6: “Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai said, ‘[...] From the beginning of the world’s creation the Divine Presence had dwelt in this lower world; as it says, “And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden, [...]” (Gen. 3:8), but once the Divine Presence departed at the time when Adam sinned, it did not descend again until the Tabernacle had been erected.’” Also *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 20: “‘He drove the man out,’ (Gen. 3:24)—He was driven from the Garden of Eden, and settled on Mount Moriah, for the entrance to the Garden of Eden opens onto Mount Moriah.”

are quaking; and all the hills are rocking. I look: no man is left, and all the birds of the sky have fled. I look: the farm land is desert, and all its towns are in ruin—because of the Lord, because of His blazing anger. (Jer. 4:23-26)

The four-verse appendage of Yehoyakhin's release from prison (II Kings 25:27-30) seems intrusive to the stark conclusion to Kings, providing only a marginal degree of comfort.

E. Purposes of Chronicles

“Adam, Seth, Enosh; Kenan, Mahalalel, Yared; Enokh, Methuselah, Lamekh; Noah, Shem, Ham, and Yapheth” (I Chron. 1:1-4). By opening from the beginnings of humanity, Chronicles casts itself as a “new version” of the first nine biblical books, culminating with the building of the Second Temple. The Returnees to Zion were led by Zerubabel, a Davidic descendant; and Joshua, the High Priest from the Zadokite line.

The nine chapters of genealogies connect the Returnees to the beginnings of humanity, and also to a much-idealized Golden Age represented by David and Solomon. David, Zadok, and the Levitical choir families have their pedigrees traced back to Adam. I Chronicles 9 parallels the roster of returnees in Nehemiah 11, stressing that all of human history from Adam until the Second Temple period is linked. Sara Japhet extends this idea to the overall purpose of Chronicles:

By reformulating Israel's history in its formative period, the Chronicler gives new significance to the two components of Israelite life: the past is explained so that its institutions and religious principles become relevant to the present, and the ways of the present are legitimized anew by being connected to the prime source of authority—the formative period in the people's past. Thus, Chronicles [...] strengthens the bond between past and present and proclaims the continuity of Israel's faith and history.²⁴

Chronicles characterizes the reigns of David and Solomon as stable from their outset. Chronicles omits references to rebellions, divisions, or the major sins of these individuals; its narrative demonstrates the ongoing stability of Israel.

Chronicles downplays intergenerational punishment (and merit), and presents an almost transparent correlation of reward and punishment. In contrast, Kings left many issues unexplained theologically such as Manasseh's long life and Josiah's violent death. Thus, Chronicles teaches that the people are unburdened by their bleak past. Additionally, even regular people—not just prophets—can witness God's hand in history.

²⁴ Japhet, *Old Testament Library: I & II Chronicles*, 49.

Manasseh is not explicitly blamed for the destruction in Chronicles (though Huldah alludes to the decree in II Chron. 34:23-28). Chronicles focuses on individual responsibility, so it can include Manasseh's repentance. Kings, which depends on Manasseh's unprecedented sinfulness and intergenerational punishment to justify the destruction, could not include any sign of his repentance.

Furthermore, Yehudah Kiel notes that Chronicles wanted to explain why Manasseh merited longest reign. His favorable acts *must* be included.²⁵ Perhaps Chronicles teaches that "in the place where penitents stand even the wholly righteous cannot stand" (*Berakhot* 34b), insofar as Manasseh reigned longer than any other king. At any rate, Chronicles teaches that *anyone* can repent, and God never shuts the door to penitents.

Moreover, the destruction of the Temple is cast in Chronicles as one disaster among many caused by sins, but it is not the overwhelming climactic event it is in Kings. Sara Japhet observes that this is the *only* post-Rehoboam narrative in Chronicles that is shorter than its counterpart in Kings.²⁶ Chronicles' conclusion with Cyrus' permission (II Chron. 36:22-23) fits naturally with the flow of the narrative, and paves the way for the opening chapters in Ezra. Thus, the destruction of the Temple was tragic, but only a temporary setback for a permanent nation.

On a broader level:

Manasseh's sin → exile to Babylonia → repentance → return to Israel

can symbolize Israel. This parallel is made even stronger from the fact that the Assyrians exiled Manasseh to *Babylonia*, instead of their capital, Nineveh! Thus, Manasseh serves as a microcosm for the Returnees: despite committing horrible sins warranting the destruction of the Temple, God heard his prayers, accepted his repentance, and returned him to Israel from a Babylonian exile. So too, the Jewish people had endured the destruction of the Temple and exile to Babylonia for their sins; but God accepted their prayers and repentance and returned them to Israel.

When Chronicles was written, it must have stunned the Jews who already knew the bleak Kings narrative, and who still felt rejected by God. Thus, it functions as a prophecy more than as an objective history, teaching that God's relationship with Israel is stable and eternal.²⁷ Additionally, Chronicles enables us to sharpen our understanding of the underlying themes of Kings, since we now can appreciate the elements Kings chose to omit or present differently, in order to present its own prophetic messages.

²⁵ Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I Chronicles*, 41.

²⁶ See Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles*, 309-314.

²⁷ See Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I Chronicles*, 7-9.