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## SEEKING PROPHECY IN HISTORICAL NARRATIVES: *AHAZ AND HIZKIYAH* IN *KINGS* AND *CHRONICLES*\*

Rabbi Hayyim Angel

### I. INTRODUCTION

In his introduction to the Book of Samuel, Abarbanel presents himself as the first to search for the fundamental nature of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. Why does the conglomeration of Samuel and Kings omit major episodes that are later included in Chronicles? Why does Chronicles omit major episodes that are included in Samuel and Kings? Furthermore, why does Chronicles repeat entire passages already recorded in Samuel or Kings? One may ultimately ask why Chronicles was canonized in the Bible at all. Presumably, those stories omitted by Samuel-Kings were omitted deliberately, and those included were already told. Therefore, Chronicles appears superfluous.

. . . These are the doubts pertaining to this formidable question, but in searching for its solution, I remain alone and nobody joins me in this endeavor. I have not found any discussion—great nor small—in the words of our Sages of blessed memory; not the Sages of the

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\* This essay is based on a lecture given at the second annual *Yemei Iyun* in *Tanakh* of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, in Teaneck, NJ (June 2004). 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); Amos Hakham, *Da'at Mikra: Isaiah vol. 2* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1984), pp. 369-408; Yair Hoffmann (ed.), *Encyclopedia Olam ha-Tanakh: Isaiah* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Dodzon-Iti, 1994), pp. 160-190; 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).

Talmud, nor the later commentators. . . . God has added to my grief, in that there is no commentary on Chronicles in this land with the exception of the few glosses of Radak of blessed memory. And those comments are negligible in their brevity and he did not address this issue at all. Additionally, the Jews do not study Chronicles in their academies. I confess my own sins today: I have not studied it nor explored its issues until now.<sup>1</sup>

Until fairly recently, Abarbanel's lamentation from 500 years ago remained as accurate as when he wrote it—precious little attention was given to the Book of Chronicles. In the past generation, however, there has been a surge of scholarly interest in the nature and theology of Chronicles, and in its relationship with earlier biblical books. This essay will explore that relationship, specifically with regard to Kings *Ahaz* and *Hizkiyah*.

Almost half of Chronicles has parallels in earlier biblical books. The rest of the material likely was drawn from other written sources and oral traditions extant at that time.<sup>2</sup> It is a retelling of history, which stands independently as a theologically significant narrative. A close comparison of the parallel accounts will enable us to refine our understanding of each book, especially when we focus on which events each book chose to include, and how each presented history in accordance with its respective religious messages.

## II. AHAZ IN KINGS

### A. THE EXTENT OF AHAZ' WICKEDNESS

He did not do what was pleasing to the Lord his God, as his ancestor *David* had done, but followed the ways of the kings of Israel. He even consigned his son to the fire (*ve-gam et beno he'evir ba-esh*), in the abhorrent fashion of the nations which the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. He sacrificed and made offerings at the shrines, on the hills, and under every leafy tree (II Kings 16:2-4).<sup>3</sup>

Though Kings judges *Ahaz* negatively, the extent of his wickedness is subject to a range of interpretation. By “consigning his son to the fire,” did *Ahaz* ritually pass him between two fires in such a way that he remained alive; or did he burn his son

<sup>1</sup> Abarbanel, *Nevi'im Rishonim* (Jerusalem: Torah ve-Da'at Press, 1955), pp. 163-164. See also his introduction to Kings on pp. 428-429.

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

<sup>3</sup> Translations of biblical passages from NJPS *Tanakh*, 1985.

to death, in which case he was a murderer? Rashi and Ramban debate this point more generally in their discussions of passing one's son through fire for *Molekh* (see Lev. 18:21). Actually, the Kings narrative of *Abaz* does not explicitly mention any foreign deities. It is possible that *Abaz* performed all of the enumerated rituals for the sake of Heaven, even though he was gravely misguided in doing so.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, perhaps *Abaz* was guilty of murder and idolatry—the greatest crimes in the Torah; or perhaps he did not murder anyone, and was guilty of misdirected God-worship by offering sacrifices on the *bamot* (literally, “high places,” altars outside of the Temple), and the fire ritual with his son.

### B. THE SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WAR

Then King *Retzin* of Aram and King *Pekah* son of *Remaliah* of Israel advanced on Jerusalem for battle. They besieged *Abaz*, but could not overcome [him]. At that time King *Retzin* of Aram recovered Elath for Aram; he drove out the Judites from Elath, and Edomites came to Elath and settled there, as is still the case. *Abaz* sent messengers to King *Tiglat-pileser* of Assyria to say, “I am your servant and your son; come and deliver me from the hands of the king of Aram and from the hands of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.” *Abaz* took the gold and silver that were on hand in the House of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent them as a gift to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria responded to his request; the king of Assyria marched against Damascus and captured it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put *Retzin* to death (II Kings 16:5-9).

Given the negative overview of *Abaz* in Kings, one might conclude that *Abaz*'s use of Temple valuables was sinful. However, one might deem his actions to fall under the category of saving lives, and therefore permissible and even required. The concurrent military losses reported in verse six demonstrate that *Abaz* had genuine cause for alarm.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, *Abaz*'s son *Hizkiyah*, praised for his unparalleled faith (II Kings 18:5), also used Temple valuables to bribe the Assyrians (II Kings 18:15-16). Similarly, the righteous King *Asa* used Temple valuables to bribe Aram against the Northern Kingdom (I Kings 15:17-21). It is difficult to view *Abaz*'s stripping the Temple as unambiguously negative—he was acting on behalf of his nation, and in fact warded off disaster.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See also R. S.R. Hirsch on Lev. 18:21, and Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: II Kings*, p. 669, who believe that this foreign act was performed for the sake of Heaven.

<sup>5</sup> Bringing the Chronicles account into the picture, *Abaz* would have an even greater reason to be terrified of the Aram-Samaria alliance: they already had inflicted heavy casualties on the South. See II Chr. 28:5-8, and discussion below.

<sup>6</sup> *Pesahim* 56a is critical of *Hizkiyah* for his submission. *Kobelet Rabbah* 9:3, on the other hand, favorably likens *Hizkiyah* to *Ya'akov*, who also made military preparations and sent gifts to *Esav* in addition to praying to God.

### C. THE ARAMEAN ALTAR

When King *Abaz* went to Damascus to greet King *Tiglat-pileser* of Assyria, he saw the altar in Damascus. King *Abaz* sent the priest *Uriyah* a sketch of the altar and a detailed plan of its construction. The priest *Uriyah* did just as King *Abaz* had instructed him from Damascus; the priest *Uriyah* built the altar before King *Abaz* returned from Damascus. . . . King *Abaz* commanded the priest *Uriyah*: “On the great altar you shall offer the morning burnt offering and the evening meal offering and the king’s burnt offering and his meal offering, with the burnt offerings of all the people of the land, their meal offerings and their libations. And against it you shall dash the blood of all the burnt offerings and all the blood of the sacrifices. And I will decide about the bronze altar.” *Uriyah* did just as King *Abaz* commanded (II Kings 16:10-16).

Given the negative overview of *Abaz* in Kings, one might conclude that copying the Aramean altar was sinful. However, *Uriyah* the High Priest was involved in its construction; elsewhere, *Yeshayahu* called him a “reliable witness” (Isa. 8:2).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it appears that *Abaz* specifically served God on this altar. Indeed, this element in the narrative plausibly might be interpreted as positive, i.e., *Abaz* enhanced the Temple by installing a larger altar that could handle a greater volume of offerings than the original altar built by *Shelomo*.<sup>8</sup>

### D. CHANGING THE FACE OF THE TEMPLE

King *Abaz* cut off the insets—the laver stands—and removed the lavers from them. He also removed the tank from the bronze oxen that supported it and set it on a stone pavement—on account of the king of Assyria. He also extended to the House of the Lord the Sabbath passage that had been built in the palace and the king’s outer entrance (II Kings 16:17-18).

*Abaz* changed the face of Temple as a result of his servitude to the Assyrians. Following the negative overview of *Abaz*, Radak asserts that he was motivated by the sinister desire to degrade the Temple. Rashi and R. Yosef Kara, however,

<sup>7</sup> This is assuming that *Yeshayahu* referred to the same *Uriyah*. Malbim, who believes that *Abaz* sinned by building this altar, maintains that *Uriyah* obeyed only because he was coerced by the wicked king. Alternatively, Amos Hakham asserts that this altar was built for the sake of Heaven, and therefore the righteous *Uriyah* willingly participated (*Da’at Mikra: Isaiah vol. 1*, p. 88, n. 37a). Some commentators maintain that the *Uriyah* in Kings is not the same *Uriyah* referred to by *Yeshayahu*.

<sup>8</sup> See I Kings 8:64, where *Shelomo* brought so many sacrifices during the Temple dedication that the altar could not handle them (cf. Yehudah Kiel, *Da’at Mikra: II Kings*, p. 674).

adopt a positive view and maintain that *Ahaz* hid these utensils to protect them from further Assyrian plundering.

In summary, Kings depicts *Ahaz* as a negative religious figure. However, the extent of his sinfulness is ambiguous, and his other actions are subject to interpretations ranging from Temple desecrator to Temple enhancer and nation protector. Regardless, he was worse than his Southern predecessors by offering sacrifices on the *bamot* and by passing his son through fire, even if these acts were done for the sake of Heaven.

### III. HIZKIYAH IN KINGS

He did what was pleasing to the Lord, just as his father *David* had done. He abolished the shrines and smashed the pillars and cut down the sacred post. He also broke into pieces the bronze serpent that *Moshe* had made, for until that time the Israelites had been offering sacrifices to it; it was called *Nehushtan*. He trusted only in the Lord the God of Israel; there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those before him. He clung to the Lord; he did not turn away from following Him, but kept the commandments that the Lord had given to *Moshe*. And the Lord was always with him; he was successful wherever he turned. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him (II Kings 18:3-7).

The Book of Kings extols *Hizkiyah's* faith, and includes among his accomplishments his unprecedented act of eliminating the *bamot*. Even his rebellion against Assyria is cast as an act of faith (Abarbanel). Despite his unrivaled faith, however, *Hizkiyah* suffered terrible military setbacks by the Assyrians, and stripped the Temple in order to pay *Sanheriv* to desist:

In the fourteenth year of King *Hizkiyah*, King *Sanheriv* of Assyria marched against all the fortified towns of Judah and seized them. King *Hizkiyah* sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; and I shall bear whatever you impose on me." So the king of Assyria imposed upon King *Hizkiyah* of Judah a payment of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. *Hizkiyah* gave him all the silver that was on hand in the House of the Lord and in the treasuries of the palace. At that time *Hizkiyah* cut down the doors and the doorposts of the Temple of the Lord, which King *Hizkiyah* had overlaid [with gold], and gave them to the king of Assyria (II Kings 18:13-16).

*Sanheriv's* devastating invasion is not presented as a punishment. Rather, it was the natural political outcome of *Ahaz's* becoming a vassal to Assyria, *Hizkiyah's*

rebellion, and the ruthless imperial ambitions of Assyria. Like *Abaz*, *Hizkiyah* used Temple treasures in an attempt to save his nation. Unfortunately, *Hizkiyah*'s bribe was ineffective, as *Sanheriv* still marched against Jerusalem.

From the *Ravshakeh*'s taunting of the Judeans, it appears that *Hizkiyah* depended on God, and on an alliance with Egypt:

The *Ravshakeh* said to them, "You tell *Hizkiyah*: Thus said the Great King, the King of Assyria: What makes you so confident? You must think that mere talk is counsel and valor for war! Look, on whom are you relying, that you have rebelled against me? You rely, of all things, on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it! That's what Pharaoh king of Egypt is like to all who rely on him. And if you tell me that you are relying on the Lord your God, He is the very one whose shrines and altars *Hizkiyah* did away with, telling Judah and Jerusalem, 'You must worship only at this altar in Jerusalem' (II Kings 18:19-22).

Just like *Abaz*, *Hizkiyah* too depended on foreign military assistance.

In II Kings 19, *Hizkiyah* consulted *Yeshayahu* and engaged in prayer. *Yeshayahu* prophesied that God would protect Jerusalem. An angel then smote the Assyrian forces surrounding Jerusalem. It appears that the *Hizkiyah* narrative should have ended here as a fittingly dramatic climax to the righteous *Hizkiyah*'s reign.

Instead, the narrative continues with *Hizkiyah*'s illness, prayer, and recovery. From God's promise that He *will* save Jerusalem (20:6), it is evident that these events predate the miraculous salvation reported in chapter 19 (Rashi, Radak). *Berodakh-bal'adan* then arrived from Babylonia. Abarbanel (on II Kings 20:12), Amos Hakham, and Yehudah Kiel maintain that this royal visit was not out of concern for *Hizkiyah*'s well-being; *Berodakh-bal'adan* wanted to revolt against *Sanheriv*, and traveled to Israel to determine *Hizkiyah*'s worthiness as an ally.<sup>9</sup> *Yeshayahu* then condemned *Hizkiyah*:

Then *Yeshayahu* said to *Hizkiyah*, "Hear the word of the Lord: A time is coming when everything in your palace which your ancestors have stored up to this day will be carried off to Babylon; nothing will remain behind, said the Lord. And some of your sons, your own issue, whom you will have fathered, will be taken to serve as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." *Hizkiyah* declared to *Yeshayahu*, "The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "It means that safety is assured for my time" (II Kings 20:16-19).

<sup>9</sup> Amos Hakham, *Da'at Mikra: Isaiah vol. 2*, p. 401; Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: II Kings*, p. 753. Josephus likewise suggested this possibility (*Ant.* X:30).

Amos Hakham views this exchange as a fundamental dispute between king and prophet. *Hizkiyah* wanted to do what appeared sound in the present (“it means that safety is assured *for my time*”), whereas *Yeshayahu* was prophetically looking into the future when the Babylonians would return as a mortal enemy. According to this interpretation, *Hizkiyah* never regretted his actions, even as he accepted God’s decree; rather, he defended his decision, even though it was against the will of *Yeshayahu*.<sup>10</sup>

Although *Yeshayahu* opposed alliances, the Kings narrative portrays *Hizkiyah* as superbly righteous, standing by *Yeshayahu* and his nation, praying, and ultimately meriting one of the great miracles of the Bible.<sup>11</sup>

#### IV. AHAZ IN CHRONICLES

##### A. THE EXTENT OF AHAZ’ WICKEDNESS

He did not do what was pleasing to the Lord as his father *David* had done, but followed the ways of the kings of Israel; he even made molten images for the Baals. He made offerings in the Valley of Benhinom and burned his sons in fire (*va-yav’er et banav ba-esh*), in the abhorrent fashion of the nations which the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. He sacrificed and made offerings at the shrines, on the hills, and under every leafy tree (II Chron. 28:2-4).

Unlike the ambiguities in Kings’ evaluation of *Ahaz*, there is no doubt as to Chronicles’ view. *Ahaz* was an idolater. Additionally, by transposing two letters from Kings’ *he’evir*, to Chronicles’ *va-yav’er* it is clear that *Ahaz* burned his sons.<sup>12</sup> Thus, *Ahaz* was an idolater and a murderer.

##### B. THE SYRO-EPHRAIMITE WAR

The Lord his God delivered him over to the king of Aram, who defeated him and took many of his men captive, and brought them to Damascus. He was also delivered over to the king of Israel, who inflicted a great defeat on him. *Pekah* son of *Remaliah* killed 120,000 in Judah—all brave men—in one day, because they had forsaken the

<sup>10</sup> Amos Hakham, *Da’at Mikra: Isaiah vol. 2*, pp. 407-408.

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller analysis of the three biblical accounts of *Hizkiyah* and their relationship to the prophecies of *Yeshayahu*, see Hayyim Angel, “Differing Portrayals of Hezekiah’s Righteousness: Narratives and Prophecies,” *Nahalab: Yeshiva University Journal for the Study of Bible* 1 (1999), pp. 1-13; updated in Hayyim Angel, *Through an Opaque Lens* (New York: Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006), pp. 226-242.

<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the singular “son” is used in Kings, whereas Chronicles uses “sons” instead. Insisting that *Molekh* worship involved burning children, Ramban (on Lev. 18:21) cites this verse in Chronicles as a proof-text against Rashi.

Lord God of their fathers. *Zichri*, the champion of Ephraim, killed *Ma'aseyahu* the king's son, and *Azrikam* chief of the palace, and *Elkanah*, the second to the king. The Israelites captured 200,000 of their kinsmen, women, boys, and girls; they also took a large amount of booty from them and brought the booty to Samaria (II Chronicles 28:5-8).

In Chronicles, the Syro-Ephraimite alliance inflicted massive devastation on the Southern Kingdom, in direct contrast to the Kings account, in which they were unable to defeat *Abaz* (II Kings 16:5). In an effort to reconcile the accounts, Abarbanel and Malbim submit that the allies first inflicted destruction on Judea, as reported in Chronicles. Subsequently, they unsuccessfully marched on Jerusalem, as reported in Kings.

An equally surprising discrepancy between the accounts is that in Chronicles, the Assyrians did not help *Abaz*:

At that time, King *Abaz* sent to the king of Assyria for help . . . *Tilegat-pilneser*, king of Assyria, marched against him and gave him trouble, instead of supporting him. For *Abaz* plundered the House of the Lord and the house of the king and the officers, and made a gift to the king of Assyria—to no avail (II Chron. 28:16-21).

The commentary ascribed to Rashi<sup>13</sup> and Malbim both assert that this “trouble” refers to the bribe *Abaz* had paid the Assyrians. Assyria’s non-help cannot refer to events surrounding the Aram conflict, since Kings reports that Assyria did help against Aram; but rather against the other enemies who had taken advantage of Judah’s weakened state. Alternatively, Radak suggests that Assyria first defeated Aram as reported in Kings, but then attacked Judea.<sup>14</sup> Chronicles also deems *Abaz*’ use of Temple treasures to be unambiguously sinful and a cause of further punishment (v. 21).

### C. THE ARAMEAN ALTAR

In his time of trouble, this King *Abaz* trespassed even more against the Lord, sacrificing to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, for he thought, “The gods of the kings of Aram help them; I shall sacrifice to them and they will help me”; but they were his ruin and that of all Israel (II Chron. 28:22-23).

<sup>13</sup> See discussion of this attribution in Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I Chronicles*, introduction, p. 140; *II Chronicles*, appendix, pp. 89-90.

<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that in the Assyrian records, *Tiglat-pileser* was invading the region anyway, in order to control Aram and Tyre (James B. Pritchard, *ANET*, pp. 283-284). From this point of view, *Abaz*’s bribe was unnecessary, and now obligated Judah to Assyria as a vassal.

Unlike the Kings account, where *Abaz* built a copy of the Aramean altar for the sake of Heaven, Chronicles reports that *Abaz* worshipped Aramean deities. Verse 22 emphasizes *Abaz*'s failure to repent despite the national suffering he had caused. This verse stands in direct contrast to *Menasheh*'s response to his suffering: "In his distress, he entreated the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers" (II Chron. 33:12). This detail establishes *Abaz* as the worst king in Chronicles.

#### D. CHANGING THE FACE OF THE TEMPLE

*Abaz* collected the utensils of the House of God, and cut the utensils of the House of God to pieces. He shut the doors of the House of the Lord and made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. In every town in Judah he set up shrines to make offerings to other gods, vexing the Lord God of his fathers (II Chron. 28:24-25).

In Kings, *Abaz* removed several Temple utensils. As discussed above, commentators debate whether he acted out of anti-God sentiments, or whether he was attempting to salvage what he could from the Assyrians. Chronicles, however, concludes its account with *Abaz*'s active promotion of idolatry. He committed the unprecedented crimes of shutting down the Temple and destroying its utensils. Thus, Chronicles eliminates all the ambiguities from the Kings account. It adopts the most negative portrayal of *Abaz*, and highlights the disasters of his reign.

### V. HIZKIYAH IN CHRONICLES

II Chronicles 29-31, almost completely unparalleled in Kings, reports *Hizkiyah*'s remarkable cultic reforms. This presentation creates an expectation for reward, especially in light of the emphasis in Chronicles on direct recompense for righteous and evil behavior (see further discussion below). Instead, chapter 32 begins with *Sanheriv*'s invasion of the south! Several commentators suggest that although *Hizkiyah* was righteous, many in his generation were less pious.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, Malbim (on II Chron. 32:1) submits that the Assyrian invasion was a potential *reward*, since the Messiah could have come then (see *Sanhedrin* 94a). Nothing in Chronicles suggests either answer, though.

Chronicles obviates this theological quandary by downplaying the Assyrian devastation: "After these faithful deeds, King *Sanheriv* of Assyria invaded Judah and encamped against its fortified towns with the aim of taking them over" (II Chron. 32:1). While *Sanheriv* "aimed" to conquer, there is no acknowledgement in Chronicles that he succeeded. Instead, *Hizkiyah* preached faith to his people

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Radak and Metzudat David (on II Chr. 32:1), and Abarbanel (on II Kings 18:17).

(32:6-8), prayed alongside *Yeshayahu* (32:20), and then God sent His angel to smite the Assyrian camp (32:21). The narrative of the Assyrian invasion concludes:

Thus the Lord delivered *Hizkiyah* and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from King *Sanheriv* of Assyria, and from everyone; He provided for them on all sides. Many brought tribute to the Lord to Jerusalem, and gifts to King *Hizkiyah* of Judah; thereafter he was exalted in the eyes of all the nations (II Chron. 32:22-23).

Thus, *Hizkiyah* appears to have *gained* from this invasion, as other nations brought gifts and held him in the highest esteem.

Other omissions in Chronicles include *Hizkiyah's* rebellion; consequently, *Sanheriv's* aggression appears unprovoked. Since Chronicles condemns the use of Temple treasures (as with *Abaz* in II Chron. 28:21), it omits the tribute *Hizkiyah* paid to the Assyrians from Temple funds in Kings. Finally, there is no reference to *Hizkiyah's* alliance with Egypt. Instead, *Hizkiyah* is depicted as relying exclusively on God.<sup>16</sup> As great as *Hizkiyah* is in Kings, he is far superior in Chronicles.

## VI. WHY THE ACCOUNTS ARE DIFFERENT

While many commentators have attempted to reconcile the two accounts, these reconstructions explain only what might have occurred historically. Returning to Abarbanel's inquiry cited at the beginning of our essay, though, we still must ask why the authors of each book selected and presented what they did.

### 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 searches its written and oral sources to supply 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.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ralbag and Abarbanel (on II Kings 18) conclude from the Chronicles account that *Hizkiyah*, in fact, never allied with Egypt, and the *Rabshakeh* was wrong. However, *Yeshayahu* condemns an alliance with Egypt (Isa. 30:1-3; 31:1-3), and there is no reason to doubt the *Rabshakeh's* taunts in Kings. Nearly all other commentators assume that there was in fact an alliance. Chronicles omits it to protect *Hizkiyah's* image. See further discussion below.

<sup>17</sup> See Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought*, pp. 147-148.

Additionally, 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 and retribution from its historical narrative; “the person who sins, only he shall die” (Ezek. 18:4).<sup>18</sup>

Within the theological framework of Kings, then, *Abaz* could be wicked, yet suffer few repercussions during his lifetime. *Hizkiyah* could be righteous, yet inherit the consequences of *Abaz*'s politics and endure the near-destruction of Judea. In contrast, within the theological framework of Chronicles, *Abaz* was wicked, so Chronicles reports great losses in his lifetime. There were heavy military casualties in the war against Aram and Samaria, so Chronicles enumerates sins commensurate with those losses. *Hizkiyah* was righteous, so Chronicles omits *Sanheriv*'s devastation of the South. The invasion and its aftermath are portrayed as beneficial to *Hizkiyah* and his nation.

It must be stressed that Chronicles' recasting of history neither disputes nor replaces the Kings account. Instead, each book selects and presents its material in accordance with the underlying theological lessons it wishes to convey.

### B. ALLIANCES IN KINGS AND CHRONICLES

Kings reports alliances as neutral political events, and therefore recounts how *Abaz* helped his country by bribing the Assyrians, and that *Hizkiyah* believed that Egypt and Babylonia could help him in his revolt against Assyria. In contrast, Chronicles conception of good faith excludes all military alliances, adopting the prophetic standard of *Yeshayahu*: “Ha! Those who go down to Egypt for help and rely upon horses! They have put their trust in abundance of chariots, in vast numbers of riders, and they have not turned to the Holy One of Israel, they have not sought the Lord” (Isa. 31:1).<sup>19</sup> Chronicles expects people to pray to God for salvation. To promote this level of faith, Chronicles reports that *Abaz*'s alliance with Assyria harmed the Southern Kingdom. To preserve the righteous

<sup>18</sup> See further discussion in Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought*, pp. 138-154; Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I Kings*, introduction, pp. 124-127. See also Gershon Brin, *Studies in the Book of Ezekiel* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv University: The United Kibbutz Press, 1975), pp. 80-105; Mordekhai Tropper, “The Ethical Principles of Ezekiel the Prophet” (Hebrew), *Shematin* 114 (1994), pp. 33-38.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Isa. 7:1-9; 30:1-3. Prophets often opposed foreign alliances, mainly because 1) dependence on these alliances often was symptomatic of a decreased faith in God; 2) alliances often led to cultural influence; 3) they were politically unsound—nations would help only when it was in their own best interests, not because they genuinely cared about Israel; 4) the powerful nations might abuse the alliances, enslaving Israel. For a fuller exposition of this issue, see Menahem Boleh, *Da'at Mikra: Jeremiah* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1983), p. 29.

image of *Hizkiyah*, Chronicles avoids mention of *Hizkiyah*'s pact with Egypt. He prayed, and God responded with a miracle.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Kings does not pass judgment against the use of Temple treasures to save the nation. Therefore, it reports that both *Abaz* and *Hizkiyah* did so in their respective efforts to protect Judea. In contrast, Chronicles condemns such behavior. Consequently, it states that this sin of *Abaz* led to further suffering, and also omits mention of *Hizkiyah*'s doing likewise.

### C. A LONGER VIEW OF HISTORY

*Yeshayahu* was involved in the writing of some of the historical sources used by Chronicles (II Chron. 26:32; 32:32). We therefore might expect to find his imprint on the *Abaz* and *Hizkiyah* narratives in Chronicles.<sup>21</sup>

In Isaiah chapter 7, the prophet pleaded with *Abaz* not to appeal to Assyria for military assistance. *Abaz*, however, refused to listen. *Yeshayahu* subsequently prophesied that Judea would indeed achieve a short term victory against Aram and Samaria, but then Judea would suffer devastation. Thus, *Abaz* 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 exile form the climax to the Book of Kings. That decree was sealed during the notorious reign of *Menasheh* (II Kings 21:10-15), and was fulfilled in *Tzidkiyahu*'s time. Therefore, Kings casts *Menasheh*—the cause of the destruction and Babylonian exile—as the worst king, whereas *Abaz* was wicked but to a much lesser degree.

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 their land and the second Temple was standing. In contrast, the effects of the Assyrian invasions were felt acutely—the Northern tribes still were lost. Chronicles, therefore, casts *Abaz*—the cause of the Assyrian damage that ultimately proved more permanent—as the worst king. *Menasheh*, in contrast, repented and returned from exile in *Babylonia*—a striking parallel to the Returnees to Zion (II Chron. 33:11-13).

<sup>20</sup> Chronicles reports four invasions against righteous kings: *Zerah* the Cushite invaded *Asa* (II Chr. 14), *Baasha* of the Northern Kingdom invaded *Asa* (II Chr. 16), a confederation of nations invaded *Yehoshafat* (II Chr. 20), and *Sanheriv* invaded *Hizkiyah* (II Chr. 32). In three of the four instances, the kings prayed and received supernatural intervention. When *Asa* bribed Aram against *Baasha*, *Hanani* the seer condemned him (II Chr. 16:7-9). Thus, the invasions are not cast as punishments in Chronicles; they are presented as a form of divine test, where the proper response is to pray. Cf. *Encyclopedia Olam ha-Tanakh: II Chronicles*, pp. 114-115; 148-149. See also Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought*, pp. 221-223.

<sup>21</sup> For a broader discussion of the special role of the prophetic word in Chronicles, see Yairah Amit, "The Role of Prophecy and Prophets in the Theology of Chronicles" (Hebrew), *Beit Mikra* 28 (1983), pp. 113-133.

## VII. VIEWING PROPHETIC HISTORIES IN CONTEXT

The Talmud states that prophetic books were included in the canon on the basis 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.”<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, however, Rashi distinguishes between the Torah on the one hand, and *Nakh* on the other:

*Torat Moshe* is called “Torah” because it was given for all generations. The prophets are called only “*kabalah*,” since they received each prophecy through divine inspiration for the needs of their time and generation.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the Torah’s primary audience is all Jews in all times. While also containing eternal messages, prophetic books simultaneously address the generations in which they were composed as their primary audience. Abarbanel similarly focuses on the time of the composition of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles as a key to understanding the overall purposes of each book.

Traditionally, Kings was composed in the era of the destruction of the Temple, by *Yirmiyahu*. Chronicles was composed at the beginning of the Second Temple period, by *Ezra*.<sup>24</sup> 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 in the Returnees to Zion.

In the narratives we have been considering, *Abaz* was the antithesis of the goals for the Returnees to Zion: he ignored *Yeshayahu*, lacked faith in God, relied on a superpower, and was an unrepentant sinner. In contrast, *Hizkiyah* listened to the prophets, did not depend on foreign governments, prayed to God, inspired national religiosity, and threw his efforts into restoring the Temple.

Chronicles thus exhorts its original audience: do not depend on Persia—depend on God. Restore the Temple and listen to your prophets. The burden of the sins committed by Jews before the destruction will not weigh you down. Even the wicked *Menasheh* repented and God listened to his prayers! If you are faithful to God, good things will happen to you, and in your lifetimes.<sup>25</sup> Rather than viewing Kings and Chronicles primarily as histories, they are prophecies that employ historical events to teach eternal messages about God

<sup>22</sup> *Megilah* 14b.

<sup>23</sup> Rashi to *Hullin* 137a.

<sup>24</sup> *Bava Batra* 15a.

<sup>25</sup> See further discussion in Yehudah Kiel, *Da’at Mikra: I Chronicles*, introduction, pp. 7-9; Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought*, pp. 117-120.

and His relationship with humanity. It is exciting that attention to the interrelationship between Kings and Chronicles has been steadily growing. Through such study, we may sharpen our understanding of the underlying meaning of each biblical book, ultimately revealing the eternal prophetic voices veiled beneath the historical narratives.