

**The Reunited Kingdom, part 14  
(2 Chronicles 29:1–36:23)**

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**The Reign of Josiah, part 3: Josiah's Fidelity in Worship Reforms, part 3:  
Josiah's Later Reforms, part 2: Josiah Renews Covenant  
(2 Chronicles 34:14-33)**

*Josiah Renews Covenant (34:14-33)*

Having described how Josiah repaired the temple, the Chronicler narrowed his focus to a major event that took place during the renovations. He reported the discovery of the **Book of the Law of the Lord** (34:14) and the covenant renewal that took place in response to the Book.

*Comparison of 34:14-33 with 2 Kgs 22:8-23:3*

On several occasions Chronicles paraphrases Kings, but for no obvious reason. A number of other differences are best accounted for as problems in textual transmission. Nevertheless, some variations deserve special attention.

First, the opening verse (34:14) is added to the account of Kings. It provides a temporal orientation to the events that follow by setting them within Josiah's temple renovations.

Second, Shaphan's report to Josiah is expanded in Chronicles to read "**Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them**" (34:16). This variation highlights the exemplary character of Josiah's restoration of the temple.

Third, in 2 Kgs 22:13 Josiah ordered inquiry "for me and for the people and for all Judah." The Chronicler, however, shifted this language to **for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah** (Hebrew = "and in Judah" [NRS, NKJ]. Here the Chronicler's perspective on the "remnant" moves to the foreground.

Fourth, the Chronicler clarified the focus of Huldah's prophecy. In Kings she said, "everything written in the Book" (2 Kgs 22:16). Chronicles reads **all the curses written in the book** (34:24).

Fifth, the Chronicler expanded the prophetic response to Josiah's repentance by repeating his "humbling" motif twice in the same verse. He added, **and you humbled yourself before God**

(Hebrew = "before me") (34:27). The Chronicler frequently used the terminology of "humbling" to describe the act of genuine repentance (see *Introduction: 18 Humility*).

### *Structure 34:14-33*

The Chronicler's text is so similar to Kings that the structure of this passage is not greatly influenced by his variations. This material divides into a symmetrical three step pattern (see figure 61). The symmetry of this episode is evident. It begins with Josiah realizing Judah's sins through the reading of the Book (34:14-21). It ends with Josiah and the nation renewing commitment to righteousness according to the Book (34:29-33). The turning point of the story concerns the prophecy which Huldah gave to the King (34:22-28).

### *Josiah Recognizes Sin through the Book (34:14-21)*

The Chronicler begins this portion of his record with Josiah facing the severity of sin in Judah. As he discovered, the sins of the nation were great.

### *Structure 34:14-21*

As noted in figure 61 above, the opening of this material divides into three steps. This story develops from the discovery of the book (34:14-15) to Josiah's humble reaction (34:19-21). Between these events lies the scene in which Josiah heard the Book (34:16-18).

### *Josiah's Leaders Discover the Book (34:14-15)*

The Chronicler expanded the beginning of this section to provide a setting for this narrative. He noted that these events took place **while they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the Lord** (34:14). The nearest antecedent of **they** is the Levitical supervisors mentioned in 34:12-13. We can be sure that money was brought out many times during temple renovations. Yet, at some point these Levites carried out their supervisory tasks and a major event took place.

**Hilkiah the priest**, who was in charge of all the temple renovations (see 34:9), **found the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses** (34:14). It is not possible to determine the identity of this book with complete certainty. Two proposals are common.

First, some interpreters have argued that the Book was the entire Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is called the "Torah" or "Law of Moses" in the biblical tradition (see Dan 9:13; Mal 4:4; Lk 2:22; 24:44;

Jn 1:45; Mt 7:12; 11:13; 22:40). It seems unlikely that the entire Pentateuch would have been referred to as a single Book at this time, but this possibility cannot be ruled out.

Second, it is more common to identify this book as Deuteronomy. A number of evidences point in this direction. 1) This story comes from the book of Kings which depends heavily on Deuteronomy as its standard for evaluating the kings of Israel and Judah. 2) This book is called **the Book of the Covenant** (34:30), a designation that may have reflected the concentration of covenantal motifs in Deuteronomy (but note also Ex 24:7). 3) Deuteronomy has lists of curses (see Dt 27:9-26; 28:15-68) which may explain the Chronicler's focus on **the curses written in the book** (34:24). 4) The centralization of worship and the exclusion of high places are important themes in Deuteronomy (see Dt 12:2-5). These motifs guided Josiah's reforms (34:33). 5) The Passover is emphasized in Dt 16:1-8 as it was in Josiah's reforms (35:1-19). In the final analysis, it seems likely that Hilkiah discovered the Book of Deuteronomy.

This reference is one of the few clues as to how sacred texts in ancient Israel were kept safe. Apparently, the **Book of the Law** had been stored within the temple and was forgotten during the days of Amon (see 33:21-24), and perhaps even during the reign of Manasseh (see 33:1-20). While other books may have also been kept in royal archives, apparently this **Book of the Law** had not been in Josiah's possession. As a result, when temple service was neglected the result was that the Scriptures of Israel were also neglected.

Upon discovering this book, Hilkiah reported to his superior, **Shaphan the secretary** (34:15a). Josiah had sent Shaphan to give royal supervision to the collection and distribution of funds (34:8). He reported directly to the king. Hilkiah realized that the Book had important implications for Josiah's kingdom. For this reason, he **gave it to Shaphan** (34:15).

### *Josiah Hears the Book (34:16-18)*

Shaphan brought an official report to Josiah, but he may not have realized the significance of Hilkiah's discovery. He did not mention the Book until after a general description of the work's progress. Moreover, when he introduced the subject of the Book, he did not use Hilkiah's words, **the Book of the Law** (34:15). Instead, it simply referred to it as **a book**, or "some book" as it might be translated (34:16). Despite Shaphan's indifference, Josiah realized that the Book had an important message for his kingdom.

Shaphan began with an account of the work in general. The Chronicler's version of Shaphan's report is very similar to 2 Kgs 22:9-11. One notable exception is the additional information that [the] **officials are doing everything that has been committed to them** (34:16a). The Chronicler added these words to present the reform effort as a model for his post-exilic readers. The priests and Levites were fully cooperative with the royal program of reform, even as they should be in the Chronicler's day.

In addition to this general report on the progress of work, Shaphan informed the king of Hilkiah's discovery. He said that Hilkiah had given him **a book** and he **read from it in the presence of the king** (34:18).

*Josiah Reacts to the Book (34:19-21)*

After hearing Shaphan read, Josiah reacts (34:19-21). In a context where reform is going well, the text surprisingly reports that Josiah heard **the words of the Law** and **tore his robes** (34:19). Huldah later referred to this act as an aspect of Josiah's sincere contrition (see 34:27). Throughout Scriptures heart felt repentance expressed itself by the tearing of clothing (see 1 Kgs 21:27; Isa 36:22; 37:1) and other similar physical actions (see Ezr 9:3; Job 1:20; Jon 3:6). Josiah's reaction demonstrated the depth of his commitment to the Law of God, a motif that appears frequently in Chronicles (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*).

Josiah also ordered the leaders of his reforms to **go and inquire of the Lord** (34:21). Although this phrase derives from 2 Kgs 22:13, it fits well with the Chronicler's theological use of this terminology. "Seeking" or "inquiring" of God alludes to the promise of God given to Solomon in 7:14. It is frequently one of the chief characteristics of those who find the blessing of God (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). In this case, to **inquire of the Lord** meant specifically to ask for prophetic insight into the situation (34:22).

The Chronicler changed the wording of Josiah's order in 2 Kgs 22:13 to express his view of the condition of Judah and Israel at this time. Josiah ordered an inquiry **for [himself] and for the remnant in Israel and [in] Judah** (34:21). In this context, the term **remnant** had both negative and positive connotations. On one side, Josiah referred to those remaining in Israel and Judah as a remnant because warfare in Israel and Judah in previous years had so decimated the population (see 2 Kgs 17:3-5; 2 Chr 28:5b-8; 32:1; 33:11,24-25). On the other side, the term **remnant** had the positive connotation of future potential. From the time of Hezekiah the remnant of North and South had been reunited under the leadership of David's sons. Those who remained were the root of Israel's future glory. Josiah appears to have focused largely on the negative sense of this terminology (34:21b), but his reform efforts demonstrate that the positive dimension was not far from his thoughts.

The implications of this change for the Chronicler's readers is evident. They too were the remnant of Israel and Judah. Similar negative and positive connotations applied to them as they contemplated their own condition.

Josiah emphasized the importance of this inquiry by acknowledging that **the Lord's anger ... is poured out on us** (34:21). Israel and Judah had experienced divine judgment time and again. The reason for this divine anger was that their **fathers have not kept the word of the Lord ... that is written in this book** (34:21). As Shaphan read the warnings of Deuteronomy to Josiah, the king realized that both the North and South were suffering the results of serious infidelity. This realization caused Josiah to wonder what would now happen to him and his kingdom. For this reason, he sent his men to seek prophetic instruction.

Josiah's decision to consult a prophet points to one of the primary functions of prophets in Israel. The king already knew from the reading of the Book that he and the nation were deserving of divine curses (34:21). Yet, this general knowledge did not help him understand how these curses were going to be applied to his specific situation. To have this kind of understanding, he needed a prophetic

oracle. In this light, we see one of the central functions of prophets. They mediated between the general principles of the Scriptural blessings and curses and the specific historical situations explaining how God would enforce his covenant sanctions (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*).

### *Josiah Receives Prophecy about the Book (34:22-28)*

The narrative continues with an episode describing the prophecy of Huldah in response to Josiah's inquiry.

### *Structure of 34:22-28*

This material divides into three balanced sections (see figure 61). The leaders first approach Huldah (34:22). She speaks to them (34:23-28a) and they leave the prophetess (34:28b).

### *Josiah's Leaders Approach Huldah (34:22)*

Josiah's commission was that his men **speak to the prophetess Huldah** (34:22). Huldah is identified several ways here. 1) She is called a **prophetess**, one of four female prophets in the Old Testament (see Ex 15:20; Judg 4:4; Neh 6:14). It is interesting to note that although a number of well-known prophets were ministering at this time, Josiah's men went to the prophetess instead. 2) Huldah is further specified as **the wife of Shallum**, descendant of **the keeper of the wardrobe** (34:22). This is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where this precise occupational terminology appears. It may refer to the service of maintaining priestly and Levitical garments or it may refer to him simply as a tailor. 3) Huldah is said to have lived **in the Second District** (34:22). The identity of this area is uncertain. It is possible that it refers to the "second quarter" of the city (see Zeph 1:10; Neh 11:9,17).

### *Josiah's Men Receive Prophecy (34:23-28a)*

Huldah responded to Josiah's representatives with two oracles in 34:23-25 and 34:26-28. The first follows the form of an oracle of judgment (34:23-25); the second amounts to an oracle of deliverance or salvation (34:26-28). In a word, Huldah confirmed that the judgments of the Book would come to Judah, but she also assured Josiah that they would not come upon the nation during his lifetime.

Huldah's oracle of judgment (34:23-25) divides into a preliminary instruction (34:23), followed by a messenger formula (34:24a), sentencing (34:24b), accusation (34:25a) and a second sentencing (34:25b).

The prophetess first instructed Josiah's representatives that they are to **tell the man who sent** them her words of judgment (34:23). She then announced that her message was **from the Lord** (34:24a).

The first sentencing (34:24b) consisted of assurances that God was **going to bring disaster on this place** (34:24b). This disaster is explained in an addition from the Chronicler's hand as **all the curses written in the book** (34:24b). Huldah made it plain from the outset that the nation had been sentenced to the curses of the covenant, the greatest of which was exile (see Dt 4:27-28; 27:1-29:25-28).

Huldah moved to the reasons for this sentence in the form of accusation (34:25a). Although this accusation appeared from 2 Kgs 22:17, it fit well with the Chronicler's own theological vocabulary. The prophetess said, "**they have forsaken [God]**" (34:25a). To "forsake" is to become disloyal to the Lord and to seek help either in human strength or other gods (see *Introduction: 22 Abandoning/Forsaking*). Here the prophetess specified that the nation had **burned incense to other gods** (34:25a).

The prophetess then moved to a second sentencing. Because of the nation's idolatry God's **anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched** (34:25b). In other words, Jerusalem will be utterly destroyed. The record of Kings already brought this matter to the foreground in the reigns of Hezekiah (see 2 Kgs 20:16-18) and Manasseh (see 2 Kgs 21:12-15), but the Chronicler omitted these passages. Perhaps he waited until this time when his record focused on Josiah's concern for the **remnant in Israel and (in) Judah** (34:9) to make it clear that the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile was experienced by the entire remnant to which his readers traced their heritage.

Despite the terrible prediction of eventual judgment against Jerusalem, Huldah offered some relief to Josiah in her second oracle (34:26-28). This message followed the pattern of an oracle of salvation or deliverance (34:26-28a). It began with an introductory instruction (34:26a), and a messenger formula (24:26b) which were followed by a justification and statement of hope (34:27), as well as an elaboration (34:28).

The instruction and messenger formula is very similar to the first oracle (34:26; see 34:23-24a). Huldah said that Josiah's representatives were to **tell the king of Judah, who sent [them] to inquire of the Lord** (34:26a). The mention of "inquiring" or "seeking" implied from the outset an approval of Josiah's actions (see *Introduction: 19 Seeking*). Huldah also made it plain that her second oracle was also from God. She claimed only to say **what the Lord says concerning the words you have heard**, i.e. the words of the Book (34:23-25). Huldah had more to say about the application of the covenant curses to Josiah.

Huldah's second message to Josiah was much more positive than the first. The reason for this shift is stated forcefully. Huldah acknowledged, "**Your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself ... you humbled yourself ... and tore your robes and wept in my presence** (34:27). The prophetess began with the king's heart, an issue that was very important for the Chronicler (see *Introduction: 16 Motivations*). Josiah's deep conviction led to humility, a motif the Chronicler's addition causes to be repeated twice here (see *Introduction: 18 Humility*). As an earlier scene reported, Josiah ripped his clothes in mourning and he wept before God (34:19,27). These actions demonstrated the sincerity of

Josiah's repentance and regret for the sins of the nation. Because of this sincerity, God declared, "**I have heard you**" (34:27). In other words, God announced his intention to respond favorably to Josiah's contrition.

The initial declaration of divine benevolence toward Josiah was followed by an elaboration of the blessing Josiah would receive (34:28a). First, God said the king **will be buried in peace** (34:28a). This promise is somewhat problematic because Josiah actually died in battle (see 35:20-24). For this reason, the second element of blessing should be taken as an explanation of the meaning of the first. Josiah will die **in peace** in the sense that he **will not see all the disaster ... on this place and on those who live there** (34:28a). In other words, Josiah will not experience the downfall of Jerusalem. Although the judgment against Jerusalem was not reversed, king Josiah's repentance postponed the destruction of the city to a future generation and permitted him to experience the blessing of peace (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). Similar mercy was shown to Hezekiah in his day (see 32:26).

#### *Josiah's Leaders Return from Huldah (34:28b)*

To close off this section, the text reports that Josiah's representatives brought Huldah's words **back to the king** (34:28b). This final scene balances with the opening of this episode (34:22). Josiah's men fulfilled their task.

#### *Josiah Renews Covenant According to the Book (34:29-33)*

Once Josiah's men brought Huldah's words back to him, the king determined to renew covenant with the Lord.

#### *Structure of 34:29-33*

The Chronicler's record of this event divides into three scenes (see figure 61). The first scene depicts Josiah gathering the nation for covenant renewal (34:29-30a). This scene is balanced by the completion of covenant renewal (34:31-33). The turning point of this episode is Josiah's reading from the Book (34:30b).

#### *Josiah Gathers Nation for Covenant Renewal (34:29-30a)*

Josiah's covenant renewal followed the pattern established in Exod 24:4-8. There the people gathered (Ex 24:3-7), the Book of the Covenant was read (Ex 24:7) and the people unanimously committed themselves to obedience to the Law of God (Ex 24:7b).

The first step in Josiah's renewal of the covenant was to gather **all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem** (34:29) and to go **up to the temple** (34:30). The text emphasizes that this was no small band of followers. Along with the elders were **the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites** (compare "the prophets" [2 Kgs 23:2]). The Chronicler frequently associated Levites with prophetic functions in the worship of Israel. (For the Chronicler's view of Levites as prophets see comments on 1 Chr 25:1.) Put simply, **all the people** assembled, **from the least to the greatest** (34:30). Josiah's humble response to the Book motivated large crowds of people to join him at **the temple of the Lord** (34:30)

Although this material stems from 2 Kgs 23:1-2, it suited well the Chronicler's frequent emphasis on widespread national support for the actions of righteous kings (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*). In this way, he used Josiah's covenant renewal as another model for his post-exilic readers. They too were in need of national covenant renewal.

#### *Josiah Reads the Book (34:30b)*

The actual ceremony of covenant renewal first required the reading of the Law. Josiah **read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant** (34:30). The text makes it clear that this terminology refers to the Book **which had been found in the temple** (34:30). Although this is the only time when the Book receives this name, the covenantal character of Deuteronomy certainly warrants this designation. Perhaps this title was intended to draw attention to the similarities between this event and the pattern of Exodus 24 where the "Book of the Covenant" played such an important role (see Ex 24:7). The Chronicler's interest in covenant renewal in the post-exilic community may have caused him to maintain this designation from Kings (see *Introduction: 13) Covenant*).

#### *Josiah and the Nation Renew Covenant (34:31-33)*

Following the reading of the Book, Josiah **renewed the covenant** (34:31). The text describes the nature of this covenant renewal in some detail. First, it speaks of Josiah's commitment **to follow the Lord and keep his commands** (34:31). The king recommitted himself to obedience to the full range of the Mosaic Law. Second, Josiah made this commitment **with all his heart and all his soul** (34:31). Here the text points to Josiah's sincerity and deep devotion to the Law in ways which the Chronicler emphasized throughout his history (see *Introduction: 16) Motivations*). Third, the focus narrows to the specific Book that sparked this revival. Josiah devoted himself to the goal of obeying **the words of the covenant written in this book** (31:32).

Beyond Josiah's personal commitment, 2 Kgs 23:3b reads, "Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant." The Chronicler omitted these words and added a more descriptive elaboration on the same theme in 34:32-33. In order to demonstrate that the entire nation joined Josiah, he added that Josiah brought about renewed commitments from **everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin** (34:32) as well as **all who were present in Israel** (34:33). In agreement with the covenant, the king **removed all the detestable idols** that were found in **all the territory belonging to the**

**Israelites** (34:33). Both in the South and North, Josiah enforced the covenant among the people of God.

The closing words of the Chronicler's addition displays his estimation of Josiah's efforts. Judah and Israel remained faithful to the covenant **as long as he lived** (34:33). Josiah's reforms lasted his entire life.

The Chronicler's version of Josiah's covenant renewal spoke directly to the needs of his post-exilic readers. They too were in need of reviewing the Law of God and renewing their loyalties to the covenant. Such renewal, however, must include the leadership, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Judahites and all other Israelites (see *Introduction: 13) Covenant*).