

**The Reunited Kingdom, part 16
(2 Chronicles 29:1–36:23)**

by Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

**The Reign of Josiah, part 5: Josiah's Infidelity in Deadly Battle;
Closure of Josiah's Reign (2 Chronicles 35:20–36:1)**

Josiah's Infidelity in Deadly Battle (35:20-25)

Having described Josiah's ideal worship reforms, the Chronicler turned to an event which revealed a failure. As in the record of Hezekiah, the positive features of Josiah's life far outweighed his failures. Nevertheless, the Chronicler decided that one of Josiah's shortcomings provided an important lesson for his post-exilic readers.

Comparison of 35:20-25 with 2 Kgs 23:29-30

The Chronicler expanded the record of Kings from two to six verses. Several of these differences are noteworthy.

First, the Chronicler introduced the story with his own words, **after all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order** ... (35:20a). This introduction revealed the Chronicler's tendency to divide kings' reigns into periods of fidelity and infidelity (see *Introduction: 10-27) Divine Blessing and Judgment*).

Second, the Chronicler added the words of Neco which Josiah rejected along with his own interpretation of these words (35:21-22).

Third, the Chronicler expanded 2 Kgs 23:29b-30 (// 35:23-24a) to explain some of the circumstances surrounding Josiah's death.

Fourth, the Chronicler added a report of widespread mourning for Josiah, including the lament of Jeremiah (35:24b-25). This addition honored Josiah as one of Judah's great kings.

Structure 35:20-25

The Chronicler's version of battle between Josiah and Neco takes the form of five symmetrical steps and an afterword (see figure 61). This episode begins with Josiah going out to meet Neco for battle (35:20). This beginning balances with Josiah returning to Jerusalem and dying (35:24a). The

turning point consists of Josiah ignoring the warning of Neco and entering battle (35:22). Prior to this turning point, Neco warns Josiah that harm will come to him if he fights (35:21). After the turning point, Josiah is fatally wounded in battle (35:23). The story itself is followed by an afterword which explains some details about the mourning over Josiah (35:24b-25).

Josiah Goes Out for Battle against Neco (35:20)

As noted above the Chronicler added a transitional introduction to this story. Josiah went up against Neco **after all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order** (35:20). The years of Josiah's exemplary fidelity had come to an end (see 34:1-35:19). Like many kings before him, Josiah's time of blessing led to infidelity. (For the Chronicler's warning against permitting blessings to lead to infidelity see comments on 1 Chr 5:24.)

The initiation of the action of this episode consists of **Neco king of Egypt going to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates** (35:20). This event took place in 609 B.C. some thirteen years after the Passover in Josiah's eighteenth year (622 B.C.). Neco was on his way to fight with Assyria against the Babylonians (see 2 Kgs 23:29).

Josiah did not favor Neco's intentions and **marched out to meet him in battle** (35:20). Josiah's motivations are not altogether clear. It is likely, however, that from the time of Hezekiah (see 31:31 // 2 Kgs 20:12-15), Judah looked to Babylon as a potential source of help against Assyria. To keep the Egyptians from helping Assyria would have been in Josiah's own self-interest.

In a subtle manner, the Chronicler raised the issue of foreign alliances once again. Throughout his history he condemned the times when Judah joined with other nations in military alliances (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*). Here Josiah fights against Egypt but in alliance with Babylon. This involvement with Babylon will prove to be devastating.

Josiah Hears Warning from Neco (35:21)

Neco learned of Josiah's approach and sent word to the king of Judah. It was common for kings to send messages to their opponents before battle (see 1 Chr 11:4-5; 2 Chr 13:4-12; 25:17-19; 32:10-19). Neco sent word to Josiah to dissuade him from attacking. He protested that there was no quarrel between Judah and Egypt; he merely wanted safe passage. In fact, Neco supported his request with a theological assertion. He claimed, "**God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God who is with me, or he will destroy you**" (35:21). The Chronicler cast the Egyptian's message in terms that appear elsewhere in his history. Neco claimed that God was **with** him, indicating that God would fight for him (see 13:12; see also *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). To resist the Egyptian army was to resist God himself and to incur destruction at God's hand.

Josiah Defiantly Enters Battle (35:22)

Although the Egyptian king had warned him, Josiah **disguised himself to engage him in battle** (35:22). Josiah's actions are reminiscent of the time when Ahab disguised himself in battle against Syria (see 18:29). The reason for Josiah's behavior is not altogether clear. Either he hoped to hide his identity from Neco, God, or both. Whatever the case, his actions proved futile. Although he hid, an archer's arrow still found its way to Josiah (see 35:23).

The Chronicler explained that Josiah's pursuit of battle was not rightly motivated. Josiah refused to pay attention to Neco, even though he had spoken **at God's command** (35:22). Neco claimed to be speaking for God (35:21), but nothing prior to this verse indicates that his claim was true. Apparently, the Chronicler assumed his audience knew other information that authenticated the divine origin of Neco's message. Interestingly enough, an apocryphal explanation appears in 1 Esdras 1:26 where Jeremiah is said to have confirmed that Neco's words were from God. This scenario is feasible. Josiah certainly had prophets about him, perhaps even Jeremiah. A message from an approaching enemy would have motivated Josiah to seek confirmation from his prophets (see 18:3-4,6). If this series of events lies behind the Chronicler's words, we have another example of the importance he placed on obedience to the prophets (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*). In all events, the Chronicler made it clear that Josiah not only rejected Neco's warning, but also defied the word of God given through the king.

Josiah is Seriously Wounded (35:23)

The Chronicler paraphrased 2 Kgs 23:29 to describe how Josiah was killed. He had already alluded to Ahab's battle against Syria (see 18:28-19:3) by noting that Josiah had disguised himself (see 35:22). Here the Chronicler noted that **archers shot King Josiah** and the king demanded, "**Take me away; I am badly wounded**" (35:23). The connection between this passage and Ahab's fatal wounding is apparent. In Ahab's case, **someone drew his bow at random and hit the king**. Then the king ordered, "**Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded**" (18:33). The similarities make it likely that the Chronicler expected his readers to treat 35:23 as an elliptical description of a similar scenario. Just as God's judgment against Ahab came through the arrow shot **at random** (18:33), so Josiah came under divine displeasure through the arrow of an enemies bow (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*).

Josiah Returns and Dies (35:24a)

The Chronicler expanded the account of 2 Kgs 23:30a to explain that Josiah returned from battle and died in Jerusalem. This scene closes the episode in balance with the opening scene where Josiah left Jerusalem for war (35:20). The king's disregard for the word of God led to a tragic end. The Chronicler's message to his readers is evident. As he had illustrated many times, when the kings of Judah proved unfaithful, tragedy often followed (see *Introduction: 10-27) Divine Blessing and Judgment*).

Nevertheless, Josiah is honored. The Chronicler noted that he was not simply "buried" (2 Kgs 23:30a). He was **buried in the tombs of his fathers** (35:24). Attitude of high regard is often indicated for a king by mentioning his burial in the royal tombs (see *Introduction: 28) Healing and Long Life/Sickness and Death*).

Afterword Concerning Mourning (35:24b-25)

The Chronicler emphasized Josiah's honor even further by adding an afterword to this episode. In this brief report, he noted that **all Judah and Jerusalem mourned** the death of Josiah (35:24b). Jer 22:10, 15-16 confirm that Jeremiah was moved to laments when Josiah died. Jeremiah's laments were sung **to this day** (35:25). In fact, they had become a **tradition** (35:29). Apparently, the Chronicler appealed here to customs which his readers knew. (For the Chronicler's use of the terminology "to this day" see comments on 1 Chr 4:41.) He conveyed the sad circumstance of Josiah's death by these recognizable allusions. By these means the Chronicler made it clear that Josiah was greatly honored despite his failure.

Closure of Josiah's Reign (35:26-36:1)

In balance with the opening of Josiah's reign (see figure 61), the Chronicler brought his record to a close in his typical manner. Depending on 2 Kgs 23:28, the Chronicler noted where more information on Josiah could be found (35:26-27; see *Introduction: Historical and Theological Purposes*). Moreover, he complimented Josiah with the observation that he lived according to the **Law of the Lord** (35:27). The standard of Mosaic Law is evident again (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*). The Chronicler then added that **the people of the land** (i.e. commoners see 1 Chr 5:25; 23:13,20,21; 26:21; 33:25) made Jehoahaz **king in Jerusalem** (36:1). The Chronicler noted that the transfer of power was left up to the people because of Josiah's untimely death.