



Second Chronicles - Chapter Thirty Five

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

III.o 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:27 - Josiah (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Five

Josiah turned his attention to the Levites and the priests, ensuring they understood their duties and divisions according to those stipulated long ago by David and Solomon for the temple. He then provided vast numbers of lambs for the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread that would follow it. Other leaders also made willing contributions. The priests prepared and made the offerings in accordance with the Law of Moses and they were ably supported by the Levites. And so the greatest Passover celebration since the days of Samuel was held.

The Egyptian Pharaoh Neco was travelling north to join the king of Assyria as part of an alliance against the growing strength of the Babylonians. King Josiah led his army out to face Neco, who made it clear he did not wish to fight with Judah but Josiah went into battle anyway and was mortally wounded. He was taken back to Jerusalem, where he died and was buried.

III.o.v 2 Chronicles 35:1-19 - Celebration of the Passover

Just as Josiah encouraged and instructed the priests and Levites ‘in the service of the house of the Lord,’ the detailed account of his Passover serves as an encouragement and model to the Chronicler’s own generation in their use of the temple for worship and spiritual renewal. The Passover was the most significant pilgrimage festival in the postexilic community for reaffirming their identity and vocation as Yahweh’s people; refer to Ezra 6:19-22 and the comment made on 2 Kings 23:22.

¹ Josiah kept a passover to the Lord in Jerusalem; they slaughtered the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. ² He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the Lord. ³ He said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the Lord, 'Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon son of David, king of Israel, built; you need no longer carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel. ⁴ Make preparations by your ancestral houses by your divisions, following the written directions of King David of Israel and the written directions of his son Solomon. ⁵ Take position in the holy place according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of your kindred the people, and let there be Levites for each division of an ancestral house. ⁶ Slaughter the passover lamb, sanctify yourselves, and on behalf of your kindred make preparations, acting according to the word of the Lord by Moses.'

2 Chronicles 35:1-6

Josiah kept a passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. This was the correct date according to the Mosaic Law and stands in contrast to the last recorded Passover under Hezekiah, which was delayed: <<*For the king and his officials and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the passover in the second month (for they could not keep it at its proper time because the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem)*>> (2 Chronicles 30:2-3).

The late keeping of the Passover by Hezekiah was permissible under the law for those who were unclean or absent: <<*Speak to the Israelites, saying: Anyone of you or your descendants who is unclean through touching a corpse, or is away on a journey, shall still keep the passover to the Lord. In the second month on the fourteenth day, at twilight, they shall keep it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs*>> (Numbers 9:10-11).

Passover remembered the central act of redemption in the OT: God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the days of Moses. Their neglect of Passover proved that they had neglected to remember the Lord's work of redemption for them. It was as if a group of modern Christians had completely forgotten communion or the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which remembers Jesus' work of redemption for them. Josiah brought the nation's focus back on God.

He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the Lord. Josiah understood that it would take an enormous amount of planning and work to properly conduct this Passover. The priests needed to be both set and encouraged for this. Charles Spurgeon remarks, "The first thing is to

get every man into his proper place; the next thing is for every man to have a good spirit in his present place, so as to occupy it worthily.”

Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon son of David, king of Israel. Although Scripture does not record it, it is assumed by many commentators that the ark had been removed from the most holy place during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, or in the course of Josiah’s renovation works.

You need no longer carry it on your shoulders. This was the only permissible way to transport the ark by law. Now Josiah is saying that it will be returned to the most holy place in the temple and it will not be removed again. The ark of God was now at rest - or so Josiah thought!

Make preparations by your ancestral houses by your divisions. Josiah directs the Levites in their duties as stipulated by David and Solomon, and their new duties of slaughtering and skinning the Passover lambs for the priests to sacrifice.

Slaughter the passover lamb. This seems a straight forward command except that one of the main features of the Passover was the sacrifice of a lamb for each household in accordance with Exodus 13:43-49. This meant a substantial amount of work for the priests.

Sanctify yourselves. The priests and Levites had to be ceremonially clean in order to perform their duties as they were serving the Lord as well as his people.

⁷ Then Josiah contributed to the people, as passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls; these were from the king’s possessions. ⁸ His officials contributed willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the chief officers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the passover offerings two thousand six hundred lambs and kids and three hundred bulls. ⁹ Conaniah also, and his brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the passover offerings five thousand lambs and kids and five hundred bulls.

2 Chronicles 35:7-9

Then Josiah contributed to the people, as passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock. This was staggering generosity on the part of King Josiah. He provided **thirty thousand** lambs or goats for the Passover sacrifice, as well as **three thousand** cattle. It shows how passionate King Josiah was to have a proper Passover celebration, that he was willing to bear the

expense. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel gave two thousand six hundred lambs and kids and three hundred bulls. Josiah and his officials, including the chiefs of the Levites emulate David (1 Chronicles 29:2-5) and Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:5) in their generosity. The total number of offerings is more than double that at Hezekiah's Passover (2 Chronicles 30:24), a further indication of the greater generosity and significance of this occasion.

¹⁰ When the service had been prepared for, the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their divisions according to the king's command. ¹¹ They slaughtered the passover lamb, and the priests dashed the blood that they received from them, while the Levites did the skinning. ¹² They set aside the burnt-offerings so that they might distribute them according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of the people, to offer to the Lord, as it is written in the book of Moses. And they did the same with the bulls. ¹³ They roasted the passover lamb with fire according to the ordinance; and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, in cauldrons, and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the people. ¹⁴ Afterwards they made preparations for themselves and for the priests, because the priests the descendants of Aaron were occupied in offering the burnt-offerings and the fat parts until night; so the Levites made preparations for themselves and for the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

2 Chronicles 35:10-14

They slaughtered the passover lamb. It seems that on this Passover the sacrifices were all directly made by the priests themselves. They did not allow the head of each household to perform the sacrifice individually as would normally have been the case.

As it is written in the book of Moses. The law is very precise as to how the offerings were to be prepared, which parts they were to offer to the Lord, which parts were given to the priests and Levites, and which were to be given to the people for their celebration. Above all, these celebrations were to be shared by families and communities together with the Lord.

Afterwards they made preparations for themselves and for the priests. This was the correct order. First they made their offerings to the Lord, then the people were served, and finally the priests and the Levites had their share.

¹⁵ The singers, the descendants of Asaph, were in their place according to the command of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and the king's seer

Jeduthun. The gatekeepers were at each gate; they did not need to interrupt their service, for their kindred the Levites made preparations for them.

2 Chronicles 35:15

The singers, the descendants of Asaph, were in their place. There was nothing in the Law of Moses directing singing or a communal worship service at the celebration of Passover. Josiah therefore went beyond the commandment to make this an especially meaningful and memorable occasion. The song worship helps to keep the focus on the Lord.

The gatekeepers were at each gate; they did not need to interrupt their service, for their kindred the Levites made preparations for them. This shows that Josiah was mindful of the security and the strength of the kingdom even during this great celebration. Also, part of the gatekeepers' duties was to ensure that only those who were ceremonially clean could enter the temple courts. Every guard stayed ready and on duty, and the Levites prepared portions for the grateful gatekeepers.

¹⁶ So all the service of the Lord was prepared that day, to keep the passover and to offer burnt-offerings on the altar of the Lord, according to the command of King Josiah. ¹⁷ The people of Israel who were present kept the passover at that time, and the festival of unleavened bread for seven days. ¹⁸ No passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such a passover as was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present, and by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁹ In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this passover was kept.

2 Chronicles 35:16-19

So all the service of the Lord was prepared that day. Because of the remarkable planning, organisation, and hard work of the king, the priests and the Levites, this massive amount of sacrifice and festive meals were all prepared on the same day. They did this not out of some strange compulsion, but in trying to be obedient to the command of Moses for the day on which to observe Passover; refer to Numbers 9:1-5.

No passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel. Josiah's Passover surpassed all other centralised celebrations, including Hezekiah's unorthodox Passover, in its faithful commitment to worship as authorised by Moses and David, and in its broad inclusion of all Judah and Israel.

This Passover was remarkable for several reasons. It was remarkable:

- In the magnitude of its celebration, including even the remnant of the north who came to celebrate it in Jerusalem.
- In its strict obedience to the Law of Moses.
- In the way it shined amidst these dark years in Judah's history.

III.o.vi 2 Chronicles 35:20-27 - Defeat by Pharaoh Neco and Death of Josiah

Josiah's death occurred in the course of confronting Pharaoh Neco II at Megiddo in 609 BC, when the Egyptian king was bringing his army north to help the Assyrians against Babylon. Apparently, Josiah decided to seek favour with Babylon by opposing the Egyptians, but this indicated a turning away from trust in the Lord.

Josiah's failure to listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God (v.22) contrasts with his attention to God's words from the Book of the Law and from Huldah the prophetess in the previous chapter. Here God spoke even through an Egyptian king, warning Josiah against meddling in a war between Babylon and Egypt: <<**Like somebody who takes a passing dog by the ears is one who meddles in the quarrel of another**>> (Proverbs 26:17). The manner of his death is also uncomfortably like Ahab's in 2 Chronicles 18:29-34. Nevertheless, Josiah's reign is judged very positively, as his burial and the mourning for him attest.



Josiah's Battle with Neco 609 BC

Josiah's Reforms and His Battle with Neco 628-609 BC

Early in his reign, King Josiah of Judah launched a massive effort to abolish pagan worship throughout Judah and the land of Israel, and to refurbish the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. At the same time, the waning power of the Assyrians allowed him to add much of the land of Israel to his kingdom. Josiah met his demise at Megiddo, however, as he sought to prevent Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt from reaching Carchemish to assist the Assyrians, who were being attacked by forces from the rising Babylonian Empire.

²⁰ After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, King Neco of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out against him. ²¹ But Neco sent envoys to him, saying, 'What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I am not coming against you today, but against the house with which I am at war; and God has commanded me to hurry. Cease opposing God, who is with me, so that he will not destroy you.' ²² But Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but joined battle in the plain of Megiddo.

2 Chronicles 35:20-22

King Neco of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates. This was part of the geopolitical struggle between the declining Assyrian Empire and the emerging Babylonian Empire. The Assyrians made an alliance with the Egyptians to protect against the growing power of the Babylonians.

He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but joined battle in the plain of Megiddo. Josiah disregarded what was actually good counsel from Neco when he said 'What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I am not coming against you today.' Josiah stubbornly refused to hear this warning, which was actually from God. Josiah was in sin because his attack against Egypt was in support of the Assyrian Empire, and he had no business supporting the Assyrian Empire.

There are similarities here between the folly of Josiah and his ancestor King Amaziah of Judah who was warned by King Joash of Israel not to come against him. Amaziah refused the warning, was captured and Jerusalem sacked; refer to 2 Chronicles 25:17-24.

Interestingly, Neco himself said, "God has commanded me to hurry. Cease opposing God, who is with me, so that he will not destroy you." It is unlikely that Neco understood and meant that he was in fact an agent of the God of Israel;

he probably said and understood this in terms of his own gods and his own incorrect understanding of God. Nevertheless, it was an unknowing divine prophecy, much as the words of Caiaphas regarding the death of Jesus: *<<But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God>>* (John 11:49-52).

But Josiah would not turn away from him. Josiah thought he could escape the prediction of Neco by disguising himself in battle - yet he was still shot by archers and died. This was a sad end to one of the great kings of Judah.

Josiah disguised himself in order to fight with him. A king normally led his army out and was clearly seen so that his men would be encouraged and rally to him. However, this always made him the prime target for the opposing army and so Josiah decided to go out looking like an ordinary soldier. This conduct was strangely reminiscent of the actions that also got Ahab killed in a very similar way: *<<The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes.' So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle. Now the king of Aram had commanded the captains of his chariots, 'Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel.' When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, 'It is the king of Israel.' So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him, for when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. But a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel between the scale armour and the breastplate; so he said to the driver of his chariot, 'Turn around, and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded.' The battle grew hot that day, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot facing the Aramæans until evening; then at sunset he died>>* (2 Chronicles 18:29-34).

After the death of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal around 630 BC, Egypt gradually emerged as the major power in Syria-Palestine and as the ally of Assyria in its struggle with Babylon, sending troops northward, at least from 616 BC onward, to join with the Assyrians in battle. The battle mentioned here took place in 609 BC as Pharaoh Neco II marched north for what was apparently the last joint Assyrian-Egyptian engagement with the Babylonians and their allies, the Medes. Megiddo controlled the main international highway running from Egypt to Damascus as it entered the Jezreel Valley; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 9:27-28. Josiah's decision to confront the Egyptian army there implies that he had captured Megiddo from either the Egyptians or the

Assyrians before the battle, and was perhaps hoping to benefit from being seen to take the Babylonians' side. However, Josiah was killed in the battle.

The Babylonian Chronicle recounts the expeditions of Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt to aid the Assyrians. Josiah sought to prevent Egypt's reinforcing of Assyria. Evidence of the battle at Megiddo can be seen at the site. The exact place of the battle seems to have been Hadadrimmon, in the valley of Megiddo. This national disaster was in the mind of a post-exilic prophet: <<*On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo*>> (Zechariah 12:11). King Neco would be defeated in battle with the Babylonians: <<*Concerning Egypt, about the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish and which King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah*>> (Jeremiah 46:2).

²³ The archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, 'Take me away, for I am badly wounded.'²⁴ So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot and brought him to Jerusalem. There he died, and was buried in the tombs of his ancestors. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.²⁵ Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah, and all the singing-men and singing-women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these a custom in Israel; they are recorded in the Laments.

2 Chronicles 35:23-25

The archers shot King Josiah. Although he was disguised, he was still wounded and killed. Josiah's bravery can be admired, but not his stubborn insistence on disregarding the warnings from God and going into battle anyway.

The Laments is not a reference to the Book of Lamentations that was also compiled by Jeremiah following the exile into Babylon but a separate record on songs probably commemorating national disasters that is now lost to history.

All the singing-men and singing-women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. The prophet reveals a bit of this great mourning, using it as a comparison to the great mourning that will come upon the Jewish people when they turn to their once-rejected Messiah: <<*On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo*>> (Zechariah 12:11).

²⁶ Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his faithful deeds in accordance with what is written in the law of the Lord,²⁷ and his acts, first and last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

2 Chronicles 35:26-27

Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his faithful deeds. It seems that Josiah's reign was remembered with special fondness; perhaps because he ended up being the last good king of Judah. Yet, the people of the kingdom turned against God very quickly after the reign of Josiah. Josiah had evidently made himself greatly beloved by them, and the probability is that the reforms he instituted were based on that love for him rather than on the people's real return to devotion to God. Josiah's passing removed the last obstacle to the coming national catastrophe.

In accordance with what is written in the law of the Lord. This is what made Josiah such a good king and a good man. He had a great interest in and obedience to what was written in the Law of the Lord.

The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of each king.