

# *Josiah's Reform and the Book of the Law*

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[p.3]

## **Introduction**

The passage in 2 Kings xxii-xxiii which records the reign of Josiah is an important *crux* for Old Testament historical and literary criticism. It is generally held that a study of the reforms which follow the discovery of the book of the law in the Temple compels the conclusion that, if the account is historical, the book in question was Deuteronomy, in whole or part. This conclusion is widely held by scholars of all schools, but it is itself made the basis of far-reaching and divergent suppositions concerning the date, origin and purpose of Deuteronomy, and concerning the growth of the canon of Old Testament scriptures.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the prevalent view is that expressed in the following words by Dr. T. H. Robinson:

His [Josiah's] place in history is primarily due to the reforms which he carried through in 621 B.C., on the basis of a law-book found in the Temple. It is usual to identify this document with Deuteronomy, or with a substantial portion of it, mainly on the ground that the book demands that centralization of sacrifice which was the outstanding feature of Josiah's reforms, and makes modifications in existing practice which suggest that the principle was new.<sup>2</sup>

Those who regard Deuteronomy as a product of the exilic period<sup>3</sup> either do not accept the historical accuracy of 2 Kings xxii-xxiii, or else find all the injunctions necessary to produce the required results in the so-called 'Holiness Code' of Leviticus xvii-xxvi, which thus takes the place of Deuteronomy as the book found in the Temple.

The main basis of agreement, which provides the starting

[p.4]

point for all investigation on the subject, is that certain actions recorded in 2 Kings xxii.11 to xxiii.24 were prompted by the book discovered in the Temple.<sup>4</sup> That this main point of agreement itself requires modification of such a kind as to render conclusions based on it invalid or precarious, is the thesis of this paper. Our procedure will be to examine the relationship of the discovery of the book to the other activities recorded of Josiah in Kings and Chronicles, and to the writings of the contemporary prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah. In particular, it is proposed to investigate the actual course of events in Josiah's reign, the identity of the book found in the Temple in 621 B.C., and finally to make some observations

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<sup>1</sup> It is commonly stated, for example, that the canonization of the Pentateuch began in 621 B.C.

<sup>2</sup> *A Companion to the Bible*, ed. T. W. Manson (Edinburgh, 1939), p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> For a list see J. N. Schofield, "The Significance of the Prophets for Dating Deuteronomy" in *Studies in History and Religion*, ed. E. A. Payne (Lutterworth Press, 1942), p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 91. In *The Problem of the Old Testament* (Nisbet, London, 1906), p. 257, James Orr commented: 'The credence accorded to this narrative in 2 Kings by the critics contrasts singularly with their free treatment of other parts of the later history of Kings.' Some, however, demur in regard to the actions of Josiah in Samaria. R. H. Kennett, for example, considered 2 Kings xxiii, 4b, 15-20 'clearly a later insertion' (*Deuteronomy and the Decalogue* [Cambridge, 1920], p. 4).

about the position of the law in Jerusalem in the years immediately prior to 621 and about the possible relationship of the discovered book to the reforms.

[p.5]

## I

### What Was The Actual Course of Events in Josiah's Reign?

The writer of the book of Kings is not simply an annalist. Many critics regard his historical record as superior to that of the writer of Chronicles, but all agree that his purpose is interpretative and didactic, and that certain religious ideas govern his selection and presentation of events. In particular, his closing chapters are controlled by the theme of judgment upon the overreaching iniquity of Manasseh resulting in the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity. This iniquity was the final provocation which sealed the doom of Judah. Thenceforward the end was inevitable.

Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed ... which the LORD would not pardon (2 Ki. xxiv.3, 4).

This is the verdict of Kings on the destruction of Jerusalem.

It is in such a context that Josiah is placed, and it is important to notice how the historian relates his life and achievement to this theme of doom. We find that, although

like unto him there was no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart ... neither after him arose there any like him,

the verdict did not alter, for

notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal (2 Ki. xxiii. 26).

So it comes about that the writer of Kings does not attempt anything in the nature of a consecutive, exhaustive account of Josiah's reign. He reigned for thirty-one years, but the writer's theme is sufficiently and strikingly illustrated by a spot-light on one significant incident which occurred about the middle of the reign. This incident epitomized the whole life and character of

[p.6]

Josiah in relation to the circumstances of his times, for on the one hand it revealed his righteous character in contrast with the evil against which he contended, while on the other hand it emphasized the irrevocable judgment of Jehovah, the theme of the writer's story. The incident was the discovery in the Temple of 'the book of the law' and the king's reaction to it. After a brief general introduction the records jumps straight to this incident of the eighteenth year, and the usual comment on the king's life is found immediately at its close. Even the account of Josiah's death appears only as a *supplementum* outside the main framework, which

is thus seen to be occupied entirely by this one illuminated scene: xxii.3-xxiii.24. It may be analysed as follows:

(1) xxii.3-11. Josiah gives orders for the Temple to be repaired; Shaphan the scribe is to collect from Hilkiah the high priest the money contributed by the people, to pay the workmen and to buy building materials; no reckoning was made with the workmen because of their honesty. Hilkiah gives Shaphan a book with the words 'I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD'. Shaphan reads it, then returns with it to Josiah and after reporting on his commission reads the book to the king, who on hearing it rends his clothes.

(2) xxii.12-20. Josiah is greatly distressed at the wrath which threatens himself and his people because their fathers have not obeyed what was enjoined in the book. He sends a deputation, headed by Hilkiah, to inquire of Jehovah 'concerning the words of this book'. Huldah the prophetess confirms that the threats of the book against Jerusalem are real and irrevocable, but that Josiah, for his contrition, will not see the evil in his day.

(3) xxiii.1-3. The king calls an assembly of all the people and in the Temple makes a covenant, to which the people stand, to walk after the LORD 'to confirm the words of this covenant that were written in this book'.

(4) xxiii.4-20. A list of actions carried out by the king in Judah and Samaria chiefly concerned with the suppression of all worship at high places and astral cults, and the purification of Jerusalem and the Temple from heathen emblems.

(5) xxiii.21-23. Josiah commands the passover to be kept 'as it is written in this book of the covenant'; there was none like it before.

[p.7]

(6) xxiii.24. Moreover, other reforms are made: Josiah puts away those with familiar spirits, wizards, the teraphim, the idols and all the abominations spied in the land 'that he might confirm the words of the law'.

Let it be noted that the repair of the Temple (1), the contrition (2), the covenant (s), the passover (5), and the additional reforms (6) are all carefully and precisely related to the book that was found. Only the long list of reforms (4) is not so related.

When we consult the account of Josiah's reign in the book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles xxxiv and xxxv), some important differences are seen. In the first place, it is much more of a chronicle, in the sense of being a consecutive record of the whole reign, for, instead of one significant year being selected, there is mention of the eighth, twelfth and eighteenth years of Josiah's reign, as well as a further reckoning, 'after all this', when Josiah's final conflict and death are recorded. The Chronicler is apparently possessed of a more detailed record of Josiah's reign, in certain respects, than the writer of Kings; he gives a full account of his death, and supplies such information as that Maaseiah the governor of the city and Joah the recorder were sent with Shaphan to see to the repair of the Temple, the purpose for which the timber was to be used, the names of the overseers and the various types of personnel employed. Moreover, the Chronicler makes explicit what is probably implied by the Kings account, that the book was actually found *before* the repair of the Temple began, and

presumably in or near the place where the money had been kept.<sup>5</sup> The description of the passover is amplified in accordance with certain special interests of the Chronicler, but the fact of greatest significance which emerges

[p.8]

from the expanded chronology is this: the Chronicler distinctly avers that the purge of Judah and Jerusalem (including the Temple), with the crusade against high places and images both in Judah and the Northern Kingdom, took place *before* the repair of the Temple, at the outset of which the book was found.

It might be easy to dismiss this fact in terms of a summary judgment on the value of the Chronicler's historical evidence. But we are at least entitled to ask why the Chronicler should have related the events in this way, particularly if we may presume that he had the Kings account before him, and, more important, to ask whether in fact the two accounts are incompatible. 'He may well', says Dr. H. H. Rowley, speaking of the Chronicler in general, 'have had access to good sources of information now lost to us, and there is a tendency to-day to credit his narratives, where they do not appear to be dictated by his theories.'<sup>6</sup>

Since it will be argued that the two accounts are not incompatible, the question of the Chronicler's motive will not arise. We are, of course, aware that many modern commentators regard the Chronicler as having falsified the history of Kings in order to represent Josiah as pious from his youth, who 'needed not the special cause of the discovery of the book of the law to influence him to remove idolatries'.<sup>7</sup> Now it is not impossible that the Chronicler *did* feel the Kings account not to do justice to the early piety of Josiah, and that the expanded chronology was deliberately included to avoid any misunderstanding. But that this was merely a 'theory' or that he thereby falsified the history, we believe is disproved by the conclusions of this study.

However, there are not wanting scholars who have a favourable estimate of the Chronicler's evidence at this point, and that irrespective of varying views of Deuteronomy. Oestreicher, who dated Deuteronomy in the early monarchy, held that 'the reform of Josiah was a restoration of the Yahweh cult directed against the Assyrians, initiated in 627 or 626 (the year of Assurbanipal's death) and slowly carried through. The law was not found till some time during the reform, as described in Chronicles'.<sup>8</sup>

[p.9]

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<sup>5</sup> N.B. xxxiv.8, 9, 14. Shaphan was sent to repair the Temple. To do this he collected the money from Hilkiah. *When* the money was brought out to be handed over, Hilkiah found the book. This sequence is somewhat obscured by the fact that the Chronicler completes the account of the building commission before going on with the account of the discovery and its consequences. Verse 14 belongs in point of time between verses 9 and 10. The Chronicler is expanding 2 Kings xxii.5, 6, and in so doing transposes the terms of the king's commission into an account of their execution. In 2 Kings xxii only verse 7 goes beyond the limits of the actual incident of the discovery, and that is perhaps influenced by the previous account of a repair of the Temple in 2 Kings xii.15. But neither Kings nor Chronicles gives any support to the widespread idea that the book was found *during* the actual course of the repairs.

<sup>6</sup> *A Companion to the Bible*, p. 76.

<sup>7</sup> Curtis, I. C. C., 2 Chronicles *ad loc.*

<sup>8</sup> Pedersen, *Israel*, Vol. IV, p. 751.

J. N. Schofield, who thinks that Deuteronomy was unknown in Judah before the exile (*The Significance of the Prophets*), appears to accept the Chronicler's evidence of extensive reforms in the twelfth year, but, like Oestreicher, gives them largely a political significance.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, H. H. Rowley, who dates Deuteronomy early in the reign of Manasseh, takes seriously the Chronicler's record of reforms before the discovery of the book, although he doubts if they began as early as the twelfth year of Josiah, and does not appear to consider the possibility that they included any of the reforms recorded in the Kings account.<sup>10</sup>

Our first task, then, is to compare more closely the two accounts of the actual reforms.

The structure of the reform list in 2 Kings xxiii.4-20 gives some grounds for thinking that it is a classified list, and that it does not necessarily describe an uninterrupted series of actions. We suggest eight divisions:

(a) All the vessels made for Baal, the Asherah and the host of heaven were removed from the Temple by Hilkiah and the priests, burnt in the fields of Kidron and their ashes carried to Bethel (verse 4).

(b) The suppression of the Chemarim of the high places of Judah ordained by the kings of Judah, and of those who burned incense to Baal and all the host of heaven (verse 5).

(c) The removal of the Asherah from the Temple; it was burned at the brook Kidron, stamped to powder and cast on the graves of the *b<sup>e</sup>ne ha-<sup>c</sup>am*; the houses of the sodomites associated with the Asherah in the Temple were destroyed (verses 6, 7).

(d) The priests were brought out of the cities of Judah and the high places were all defiled; the high places of the gates at Jerusalem were destroyed (verse 8).<sup>11</sup>

(e) The defiling of Topheth (verse 10).

[p.10]

(f) Innovations of previous kings of Judah in and around the Temple, the palace and the city, including the high places of foreign gods, were done away with and variously disposed of. Ahaz, Manasseh and Solomon are mentioned by name (verses 11-13).

(g) The breaking in pieces of maççebas and cutting down of asherim (verse 14).

(h) A record, including some narrative, of Josiah's actions in Samaria; the destruction and defilement of Jeroboam's altar and high place at Bethel, and of the houses of high places throughout Samaria 'which the kings of Israel had made'; the slaying of the priests of the high places on the altars. 'And he returned to Jerusalem' (verses 15-20).

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<sup>9</sup> *The Historical Background of the Old Testament* (Nelson, London, 1938), p.193.

<sup>10</sup> *The Prophet Jeremiah and the Book of Deuteronomy*, in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*. Presented to Professor T. H. Robinson by the Society for Old Testament Study, edited by H. H. Rowley (T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1950), pp. 164 ff.

<sup>11</sup> A note is added (verse 9) that these priests did not 'go up' to the altar of Jehovah at Jerusalem, but 'did eat unleavened bread among their brethren'.

Each section in this list is complete in itself and deals with some particular action or type of action. Beyond this there does not seem to be any clear logical connection between the successive sections. We notice, for instance, that (a), (c) and (f) all have some bearing on the cleansing of the Temple—mentioning first incidental vessels, then the Asherah, then the altars to the host of heaven—and that the method and place of disposal are different in each case. Similarly (b) and (d) both concern the suppression of worship at high places throughout Judah, but are separated by a section not obviously connected with either. Other high places in Jerusalem are separately mentioned in (f). The list is presumably in rough chronological order, though some sections, (f) and (g) for instance, may be designed rather to bring together the destruction of certain classes of objects, whenever destroyed.

The Chronicles reform list, on the other hand, which occupies only five verses (xxxiv.3-7), is more homogeneous, and contains no specific references such as appear in Kings. The first and last clauses are very general, and verse 4 looks like a recounting of typical rather than of particular procedure. Nevertheless the list appears to be a re-written abridgement of the Kings list, since both speak comprehensively of the destruction and defilement of high places throughout Judah, Jerusalem and the Northern Kingdom, and both conclude with the words 'and he returned to Jerusalem'. The strewing of the dust of the broken asherim and images on the graves of them that had sacrificed

[p.11]

to them corresponds to the particular treatment meted out to the Asherah in the Kings list, and the burning of the priests' bones on altars corresponds to the particular procedure at the Bethel altar in the Kings account. The Chronicler, then, has his chief interest in high places, and omits all particular acts of reform, notably in connection with the Temple. At the same time he clearly implies, in a way that Kings does not, that the reforms occupied a long period of time—six years in fact, from the twelfth to the eighteenth of Josiah's reign.<sup>12</sup> Further, he concludes his account with the words 'when he had purged the land and the house', so that the reader is intended to understand that the Temple was included in the reforms, however reluctant the Chronicler might be to go into distasteful details.

Can this assertion of the Chronicler, that these comprehensive reforms took place before 621 and the discovery of the book, be reconciled with the history as recorded in 2 Kings xxiii? In other words, can 2 Kings xxiii.4-20 be regarded as a list of reforms which began about 627, the twelfth year of Josiah's reign, but which appear in their present position in Kings for other than purely chronological reasons?

It must be admitted at once that verse 4 has all the appearance of following naturally after verse 3, but leaving verse 4 out of consideration for a moment, we may observe that the narrative can be read directly from verse 3 to verse 21, omitting the account of the reforms, without any apparent loss of continuity. Moreover, there is not a word in verses 5-20 which demands their presence at this particular juncture. This is the more remarkable since none of the other sections, (2), (3), (5) or (6),<sup>13</sup> could be read in any other context. The reference to 'the book which was found', which precisely fixes these sections, is entirely absent from section (4). Not only so, but the very fact that there are two 'reform' sections, one explicitly

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<sup>12</sup> As against W. Robertson Smith, for example, who charges the Chronicler with putting the solemn repentance and covenant 'ten (*sic*) years after the reformation itself' (*The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, 3rd ed. [Black, London, 1907], p. 145).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. pp. 6 f.

related to the discovery, and one not, raises suspicion. If the reforms of (4) had only just been concluded, would the historian write ‘And moreover (וְאֵלֶּיךָ)’

[p.12]

all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD?’<sup>14</sup> It is true that the abominations here mentioned were probably in the main of the type mentioned in conjunction with them, i.e. wizards, idols, etc., but the whole form of the verse gives grounds for suspecting that the two lots of reforms are not to be taken as belonging to the same period or as being the result of the same discovery. Is it probable, in fact, that the thorough reforms of section (4), involving not only the whole of Judah but the Northern Kingdom, would or could have been carried out by Josiah in the period between the covenant and the passover which themselves took place within the compass of a single year?<sup>15</sup> In addition, there is the inherent likelihood that the cleansing of the Temple would *precede* structural repairs. The alternative to this, namely that the king began the repair of the Temple before the sanctuary was purified of the Asherah and strange altars, ‘involves the admission that the covenant into which the pious king brought his people was concluded in the presence of heathen emblems’.<sup>16</sup>

The crucial question is, therefore, one of the relationship of the list of reforms to the incident of the discovery of the book. What impression does the writer of Kings seek to convey? The modern reader might take it for granted that these reforms are required by the import of the preceding narrative to have taken place at this point. But is this really so? It is not denied that *some* sort of active response on the part of Josiah would be quite natural, and indeed there is ample evidence for such a response apart from the particular list of reforms we are considering. But even so, the main emphasis in the account of the discovery of the book is not a demand for a revolution in religious practice,

[p.13]

but the *revelation of doom* which is imminent because of Manasseh’s sin, *even in spite of* Josiah’s humility. Josiah does not send to ask what he should do, so much as to find out if the threat is really true.<sup>17</sup> Huldah gives no order to Josiah to begin a great reform, but simply avers that the threat is exactly as the book states. There is not a word in the account of the discovery and Josiah’s immediate reaction which is inconsistent with a considerable process of reform having already taken place, or which lays an explicit obligation on Josiah to institute a reform.<sup>18</sup> It is not Josiah’s sins, but the sins of ‘our fathers’ which the king sees to have provoked God to this anger. Even the covenant ‘to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul’ is not

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<sup>14</sup> 2 Kings xxiii.24.

<sup>15</sup> Especially if the LXX is to be relied on when it places the discovery in the eighth month of the eighteenth year. Skinner (who rejects the LXX addition, *Century Bible*, Kings *ad loc.*) transposes the order of the Judaean reforms and the passover, presumably because of this difficulty, but gives no evidence in support (*Prophecy and Religion*, pp. 89 f.).

<sup>16</sup> A. C. Welch, *The Work of the Chronicler* (Schweich Lectures 1938), p. 137. See also Keil on Kings *ad loc.*

<sup>17</sup> There are no grounds in the text for the assertion that the king’s concern was ‘because of the glaring disparity between its [the book’s] requirements and the *existing* state of things in matters religious and moral’. (So Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 89, italics mine.)

<sup>18</sup> J. Pedersen is one of the few writers who notes that ‘it is not expressly stated that the law-book caused the reform’ (*Israel*, Vol. IV, p. 579).

represented in the narrative as a covenant of *reformation*<sup>19</sup> particularly. It was rather the appropriate response to what, for Josiah, was a new disclosure of the law of Jehovah in which the idea of the covenant was prominent. If the book had an immediate direct issue, it was in the passover which the king commanded the people to keep 'as it is written in this book of the covenant'.

Before suggesting a reason why the writer of Kings should have seen fit to place a long list of Josiah's reforms at this point, we must first come to a decision about verse 4 of chapter xxiii, which begins 'And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest...' As noted before, it follows verse 3 quite naturally; Hilkiah and the priests have already been mentioned in the story, and the covenant has just been concluded in the Temple from which Josiah now orders certain vessels to be removed. *Only* this verse, however, of all the reform list, has this connection with the context; with verse 5 the setting becomes the whole of Judah. We conclude, then, that verse 4 and verse 4 only belongs strictly to this point in the narrative of the discovery and the covenant; verses 5-20 constitute an independent

[p.14]

list of reforms.<sup>20</sup> Our suggestion is, that this mention of the removal, at Josiah's command, of heathen vessels from the Temple following the covenant provided, for the writer of Kings, a cue to introduce the catalogue of all Josiah's previous reforms. He was not concerned with chronology, and may even not have known to what year or years the reforms belonged. At the same time, he saw that there was a peculiar appropriateness in recording the piety of Josiah at this point. For it set forth a compelling witness of Josiah's righteousness where it would weigh most heavily against the evil of Manasseh and the retribution incurred thereby—but even there not heavily enough to tip the scales and avert disaster. It was not the writer's purpose to intrude irrelevant dates and years; by thus placing the record of Josiah's zeal in conjunction with the discovery of the book and the solemn covenant there is least distraction from the focus of that dramatic scene.<sup>21</sup>

There are some further minor advantages in holding that only verse 4 belongs to this point in the narrative, and that verses 5-20 belong to the years before 621. It makes it easier to see, for instance, why only the *vessels* which had been used for the worship of Baal, the Asherah and the host of heaven were the objects of the king's immediate action. The vessels were surely of very minor importance beside the Asherah itself or the altars to the host of heaven in the two courts. But if these had already been removed, the king's action in 621 becomes simply the obliteration of all remaining trace of them, and an appropriate gesture

[p.15]

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<sup>19</sup> So W. R. Smith refers to it, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>20</sup> It may be noted that whereas verse 4 begins with a *waw* consecutive (וַיְצַו), verse 5 begins with a simple *waw* and the perfect tense (וַיִּשְׁבְּחֵהוּ). This would confirm, though it can hardly establish, the suggestion that whereas verse 4 is contiguous with the narrative at this point, verses 5 ff. are not.

<sup>21</sup> We need not deny that the writer of Kings may have 'wanted to convey the idea of a connection' between these reforms and the law-book, as Pedersen says (*loc. cit.*), even if, as Pedersen also seems disposed to admit, the law-book did not actually cause the reform. But in this case the connection would be general rather than particular. According to Kings, the ultimate source of *all* Josiah's behaviour and activity was 'all the law of Moses', so to record a list of religious actions in conjunction with others produced specifically by the law-book would adequately convey the truth of the writer's assessment of Josiah. The previous reforms, though not directly initiated by the law-book found in the Temple, were none the less ultimately prompted by the Torah of Moses, even if mediated and interpreted by prophets and righteous men.



of his intention to maintain the covenant. It also gives a reason why the ashes of these vessels were carried to Bethel; for if Bethel had already been destroyed and defiled by the king, publicly to convey and deposit the ashes at the desecrated place would have now a widely recognized significance.

There is, of course, nothing strange in this kind of 'block insertion' in the literary methods of the Hebrews. The re-writing and more subtle assimilation of historical sources is as yet undeveloped, and how a writer arranges sources at his disposal depends largely on the general ideas governing his works. A similar process in the historical books has been pointed out in part of 1 Samuel by Professor Edward Robertson<sup>22</sup> and in Ezra by J. Stafford Wright.<sup>23</sup> The latter quotes some salutary remarks on the subject by C. C. Torrey in his *Ezra Studies*, p. 252:

Many of the grave inconsistencies which trouble us did not disturb the author himself, simply because he understood, better than we do, what he meant to say ... Very many ancient writers did not bind themselves to observe logical sequence; did not care especially for symmetry; and would have been greatly astonished ... if they could have heard attributed to them the views which they are now believed to have held.

We have given some reasons for believing that the account of 2 Kings xxiii can readily, and with advantage, be accommodated to the account of 2 Chronicles xxxiv and its precise chronology. But there is further evidence which can be adduced in favour of the reformation having begun about the twelfth year of Josiah, from the writings of the contemporary prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah.

It is widely held that both Zephaniah and Jeremiah began their prophetic activity at the time of and under the stress of, some serious peril from the north about 627-626 B.C. The theory that this peril is to be identified with the maraudings of the Scythians is by no means improbable, though it falls short of

[p.16]

conclusive demonstration.<sup>24</sup> But it seems certain that some such movement as other sources report the Scythians to have engaged in did threaten Judah at this time. Zephaniah and Jeremiah do not name the foe to whom they refer, but he is none the less a real foe. In any case, it is not difficult to imagine that such a threat of invasion, which might well have swallowed Judah and Jerusalem—there is some evidence that Judah was in fact ravaged—put Josiah and his people in a ready frame of mind for heeding prophetic exhortations and for setting about a reform of religion. Skinner admits as much, but of course has to suppose that the resolve 'that the lesson of the late crisis should not be lost' did not take effect until it received a second impetus in the eighteenth year of Josiah.<sup>25</sup> 627-626 B.C. was also about the time of the death of Ashurbanipal, and it would not have been surprising if this aroused a renewed determination in Judah to be free of dependency on foreign powers with consequent disfavour towards foreign elements in social and religious life. Our present task, however, is simply to show that the two prophets, Zephaniah and Jeremiah, were in their earliest

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<sup>22</sup> Tyndale O.T. Lecture 1943, *Samuel and Saul*, printed in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* for March 1944, and subsequently in *The Old Testament Problem* (Manchester, 1950), pp. 105 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Tyndale O.T. Lecture 1946, *The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem* (Tyndale Press), p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion see the chapter 'The Northern Peril' in Skinner's *Prophecy and Religion*, and also Oesterley and Robinson, *A History of Israel*, Vol. I, pp. 412 ff.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix on pp. 39 f.

preaching condemning or attacking just those practices which were abolished by Josiah in his reformation.

## Zephaniah

It is worth remarking at the outset that Zephaniah was in all probability a prince of the royal house, and that therefore his utterances can hardly have gone unnoticed by Josiah. The latter was about twenty years of age at this time, and had probably emerged from his minority when he was sixteen, which was the year in which the Chronicler tells us 'he began to seek after the God of David his father'. It is not impossible that Zephaniah had some hand in the regency which must have controlled affairs and been responsible for the education of Josiah during the years of his minority. At all events, one is forced to notice the remarkable similarity between Zephaniah's first oracle of judgment and the first section of the reform list of 2 Kings xxiii.5 ff.

[p.17]

### Zephaniah i. 4, 5.

I will stretch out my hand upon *Judah*, and upon all the inhabitants of *Jerusalem*; and I will cut off the remnant of BAAL from this place, the name of the CHEMARIM with the priests; and them that worship the HOST OF HEAVEN upon the housetops; and them that worship, which swear to the LORD and swear by Malcam.

### 2 Kings xxiii. 5.

And he put down the CHEMARIM, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of *Judah*, and in the places round about *Jerusalem*; them also that burned incense unto BAAL, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the HOST OF HEAVEN.

The correspondence is the more striking in that nowhere else are these three abuses mentioned together, and Chemarim are mentioned only once in the Old Testament outside these passages; no other canonical prophet of Judah, except Jeremiah, mentions Baal. The Chemarim appear to be idolatrous priests who owe their office to the king and not to their Levitical descent. They are described here as those 'whom the kings of Judah had ordained', and since Hosea (x.5) has priests of Samaria in mind, his Chemarim are probably the order instituted by Jeroboam 'from among the people, which were not of the sons of Levi' (1 Kings xii.31). The Chemarim of Josiah's day are probably to be distinguished from the 'priests of the high places' (2 Kings xxiii.9) who may have been Levitical priests.

The scope of Zephaniah's oracle is probably wider than is reflected in the particular reforms of 2 Kings xxiii.5. The reference to 'them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops' may well be directed against 'the altars upon the upper chamber of Ahaz' (2 Kings xxiii.12); and if, as seems likely, Milcom (not Malcam) is the correct vocalization in Zephaniah i.5, then 'the abomination of the children of Ammon' is mentioned by name in both places. Indeed the pronouncement of judgment on Ammon and Moab would involve condemnation of the high places of the gods of those countries, which were in Jerusalem, and also of the rites of Molech at Topheth.

[p.18]

### **Zephaniah 9, 11.**

Surely MOAB shall be as Sodom and the CHILDREN OF AMMON as Gomorrah ... the LORD will be terrible unto them: for He will famish all the gods of the earth.

### **2 Kings xxiii. 13.**

And the high places ... which Solomon had builded ... for Chemosh the abomination of MOAB and for Milcom the abomination of the CHILDREN OF AMMON, did the king defile.

It may also be noted that, in addition to these two oracles, Zephaniah is aware of abuses in the Temple itself:, and condemns them in the words

Her priests have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law (iii.4).

So we see that before 621 Zephaniah was condemning Baal worship, Chemarim, worship of the host of heaven (with perhaps Ahaz's palace altars), the rites of Milcom (including the rites of Molech at Topheth) and probably the rites of Chemosh; also he was condemning the profanation of the Temple and disregard of an existing law.

## **Jeremiah**

Jeremiah was 'of the priests that were in Anathoth' and so presumably a descendant of Abiathar.<sup>26</sup> Skinner remarks that if this supposition be correct

...nowhere would the best traditions and purest ethos of the religion of Yahwe be likely to find a surer repository than in a household whose forbears had for so many generations guarded the most sacred symbol of its imageless worship, the Ark of God.<sup>27</sup>

Now Jeremiah began his ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, or about 626. It is frequently held that he remained in obscurity at Anathoth at least until 621.<sup>28</sup> Jeremiah's own testimony, however, is that he had exercised a continuous ministry both to Jerusalem and to the whole of Judah from the thirteenth year of Josiah onward:

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king

[p.19]

of Judah; ... the which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even unto this day, these three and twenty years, the word of the LORD hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising up early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened.<sup>29</sup>

Some of Jeremiah's earlier recorded utterances may well belong to the thirteenth year. If it is held that chapter xi.1-8 is 'with evident allusion to the law-book discovered in Josiah's

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<sup>26</sup> See 1 Kings ii.26.

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> So, for example, Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 106, and Oesterley and Robinson, *A History of Israel*, Vol. I, p. 417.

<sup>29</sup> Jeremiah xxv.1-3.

eighteenth year',<sup>30</sup> or to the covenant made following the discovery,<sup>31</sup> there would seem to be at least a general probability that chapters i-x belong to the period before this. Many scholars, however, have given up the attempt to discover a chronological sequence in the component parts of Jeremiah, largely because there are passages in chapters i-x which appear to them to be 'post Deuteronomic'. This, however, in the present discussion, is to beg the question. For if the reforms really began in the twelfth year of Josiah, then this fact would itself provide a criterion for dating the material of the early chapters of Jeremiah. But for the present we must be content with using only the first three chapters of Jeremiah as almost certainly belonging to the earliest year or years of his ministry, and only such other sections in chapters i-x as clearly demand a date before 621. Chapter vii. 29 ff., for example, must surely have been spoken *before* the cleansing of the Temple and the defilement of Topheth, which means, at the least, before the discovery of the book.<sup>32</sup>

[p.20]

At the outset of his ministry Jeremiah knows that the people of Judah 'have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands' (i.16), and he openly condemns this worship as a forsaking of Jehovah. Its characteristics are just those which Josiah sought to obliterate—the worship at high places of Baal (ii.20) with the attendant asherim and maççebas (ii.27 and iii.9). The whole of Judah is contaminated by these high places of illicit worship (ii.28 and iii.2). The correspondences between these utterances and what Josiah actually did may be briefly set out as follows:<sup>33</sup>

**Jeremiah ii. 28.**

According to the number of thy *cities* are thy gods, O *Judah*.

**ii.20, iii. 2.**

Upon EVERY HIGH HILL ... thou didst bow thyself... Lift up thine eyes unto the BARE HEIGHTS, and see; where hast thou not been lien with?

**i.16.**

They have BURNED INCENSE unto other gods.

**2 Kings xxiii. 8.**

And he brought all the priests out of the *cities of Judah* ...

and defiled the HIGH PLACES...

where the priests had BURNED INCENSE from Geba to Beersheba.

<sup>30</sup> S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 9th ed. (Edinburgh, 1913), p. 255.

<sup>31</sup> J. Skinner, *op. cit.* p. 97 ff.

<sup>32</sup> It is no real objection to this view that the same charges are repeated later in the book, e.g. at xix.4, 5 and xxxii.34, 35, even if the actual wording of vii. 29 ff. is influenced by later preaching on the subject. For it is to be expected that Jeremiah's *first* condemnation of these abuses was made while they were still in full swing, and whether they were ever effectively suppressed or not, it is clear that Jeremiah, like the writer of Kings, regarded past no less than present sins as the cause of Jehovah's rejecting and forsaking the generation of His wrath, and this accounts for the repetition of the charges. In fact, however, there is no clear evidence that abominations were re introduced into the Temple, or that the rites of Molech were again practised at Topheth. Oesterley and Robinson's *History* concurs in this.

<sup>33</sup> The centred reference letters relate to the various reforms as they are listed on pp. 9 f.

**iii.9.**

She committed adultery with STONES (g) and with STOCKS.

**xxiii. 14.**

And he brake in pieces the MAÇÇEBAS and cut down the ASHERIM.

To these we may add the abuses mentioned by Jeremiah in chapter vii and their corresponding reforms:

**vii.30, 31.**

They have set their ABOMINATIONS in (c) *the house which is called by my name*, to defile it.

**xxiii.6, 7, 12.**

And he brought out the ASHERAH from *the house of theLORD* ... and he brake down

[p.21]

the HOUSES OF THE SODOMITES that were in *the house of the LORD*.

(f) And the ALTARS which Manasseh had made in the two courts of *the house of the LORD*, did the king break down.

**xxiii.10.**

And they have built the high places of TOPHETH, which is in *the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire.*

(e) And he defiled TOPHETH, which is in *the valley of the children of Hinnom*, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through *the fire* to Molech.

It is further evident from Jeremiah, however, that a measure of reform had already been attempted:<sup>34</sup>

Judah hath not returned unto Me with her whole heart, but feignedly (iii.10).

Throughout these chapters Jeremiah is castigating a people whose actions belie their pretensions, and who feel no shame for what they have done (ii.35; iii.3) and who seem to be unaware that their worship at high places is unacceptable (ii.23). Now it is significant that in the Kings reform list the defilement of high places throughout Judah is not recorded until after the suppression of the Chemarim and other officials of heathen worship, and after the cleansing of the Temple. Jeremiah's insistence that the high places themselves are the source of the trouble suggests that he is speaking at a time when, with the suppression of the Chemarim and of those who burned incense to the host of heaven, the people of Judah thought they had cleared themselves of any faults and were now offering acceptable worship.

The reforms of 2 Kings xxiii.11-13 are directed against the actions of previous kings of Judah, but since they have to do with the worship of the heavenly bodies or with the high places

<sup>34</sup> A. Lods quotes also Jeremiah iv.3, 4 and viii.8, as allusions to an attempt at reform in Judah, in *The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism* (London, Kegan Paul, 1937).

[p.22]

of foreign gods, they may be reckoned to fall under the condemnation of the prophets already quoted. It is noteworthy, however, that Zephaniah is sensitive to the responsibilities of the royal house (i.8); Jeremiah, too, does not spare the offences of previous kings in his castigations, and he specifically connects these offences with worship at heathen shrines (ii.26) and, in a later passage, with worship of the host of heaven (viii. 1, 2). So a reform of royal misdeeds would be consistent with the demands of the prophetic preaching of this period.

Of the reforms in the old Northern Kingdom little that is definite can be said. It has already been noted that the conveying of the ashes of the Temple vessels to Bethel in 621 is easier to understand if Bethel had earlier been defiled by Josiah; and the fact that Jeremiah addresses an appeal to Israel at all presupposes at least an interest in what was going on in the north. It may even be that the words 'Backsliding Israel hath shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah' (iii.11), coming, as they do, immediately after the statement that 'Judah hath not returned unto Me with her whole heart, but feignedly', contain a hint of reform already attempted in the Northern Kingdom.

Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; I will not look in anger upon you ...  
Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God,  
and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree.

It would have been easier for Jeremiah to present the divine offer of mercy to the people of Israel in this strain if Josiah had already destroyed the shrine at Bethel and the houses of high places built by kings of Samaria. Jeremiah is not likely to have overlooked 'the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat wherewith he made Israel to sin' if no action had yet been taken to redress it. But whether or not Jeremiah's words imply reform already begun, they certainly imply—what is of prime significance for this study—reform already desired and publicly advocated for Samaria before 621.

Since, therefore, all the reforms of 2 Kings xxiii.5-20 are found to be reflected in the pre-621 utterances of Zephaniah and Jeremiah, sometimes with a quite remarkable verbal correspond-

[p.23]

ence, is it possible to avoid the conclusion that this reformation of Josiah actually began in the twelfth year of the reign, as the Chronicler states, and that the king was influenced by the preaching of these two prophets? It satisfies a considerable amount of corroborative evidence, and does violence to no plain statement of the records. The only factor which suggests anything to the contrary is the present position of the list of reforms in Kings, and even this can readily be explained in terms of the writer's general purpose. Moreover, on such a view of events it is possible to give full justice to 'the living aspirations of the age' and to the influence of contemporary happenings.<sup>35</sup> Whatever may have been the extent and character of the postulated 'prophetic reforming party' or of national political aspirations, we do know that from the twelfth and thirteenth years of Josiah's reign the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah were preaching in the strongest language against the worship of Baal and of the starry hosts, against profanation of the Temple, against high places, against foreign cults and former royal misdeeds. One prophet was probably a member of the royal house, the other a priest, and they

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<sup>35</sup> See Appendix on pp. 39 f.

were able to appeal to the rumour and spectacle of a foe from the north which was perhaps sweeping down past Jerusalem to the very borders of Egypt as symbolizing the imminent judgment of Jehovah on Judah's apostasy. Can we believe that they met with no response, even from the king who 'walked in all the way of David his father', but that when, one day, a book was found in the Temple, the king was in a moment converted, surprised beyond measure to find that he and the nation had been doing wrong, and immediately set about those very reforms for which the prophets had been fruitlessly calling for six years? Such a view does justice neither to Chronicles nor to Jeremiah nor to Zephaniah, and we have given ground for holding that it is not demanded by the Kings account itself.

In concluding this part of the paper we may briefly note what the discovery of the book *did* lead Josiah to perform. Its chief results were the making of the covenant and the keeping of the passover, the latter having presumably either fallen into disuse or been observed imperfectly. Josiah's first action after the covenant, however, was, we suggest, an expression of his deter-

[p.24]

mination to maintain the covenant by completing thoroughly what he had begun. The vessels once used in the worship of Baal, the Asherah and the host of heaven were found to be still in the Temple—noticed, perhaps, by Josiah himself when he 'went up to the house of the LORD' to make the covenant. They were no longer serving their original purpose since the Asherah and the altars had been removed, but now, they, too, were removed and destroyed. Then, after the passover, Josiah made an attack on semi-secret and domestic abuses in Judah: those that had familiar spirits, wizards, teraphim and idols. This was in accordance with the specific injunctions of the discovered book. Such an attack must have involved some searching, and the force of the statement 'all the abominations that were spied in the land' may be that only such abominations as could be detected were put away.<sup>36</sup>

The conclusions of this section in regard to the actual course of events in Josiah's reign may be set out in the following Table:

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Events.</i>	<i>2 Kings</i>	<i>2 Chron.</i>
639	Josiah, aged 8, began to reign.	xxii.1	xxxiv.1
631	Josiah, aged 16, began to seek after the God of David his father. The end of his minority?		xxxiv. 3a
627	Zephaniah began his prophetic ministry. Josiah, aged 20, began reform.	xxiii.5-20	xxxiv.3b-7
626	Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry. The reform continued, against high places, astral cults, and all forms of idolatry, in Samaria as well as Judah and Jerusalem, until 621.		

<sup>36</sup> The Chronicler, despite his great interest in the passover, does not relate it to the book that was found, although he dates it in the eighteenth year of Josiah. Nor does he describe the attack on wizards, idols, etc., although it seems likely that he has made use of this verse from Kings (xxiii.24) with its reference to 'all the abominations', as well as the following verse (xxiii.25) in compiling a general statement about Josiah's actions with which to conclude the first half of his account of Josiah (2 Ch. xxxiv.33). It really covers everything the king ever did, as its final sentence shows, and it is certainly not intended to imply a repetition of the reforms recorded earlier in the chapter, even though it is placed where, in 2 Kings, the long list stands, i.e. between the covenant and the passover.

[p.25]

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Events.</i>	<i>2 Kings.</i>	<i>2 Chron.</i>
621	Josiah, aged 26, ordered the repair of the Temple, and the book of the law was found. There followed the covenant, the final clean-up of the Temple, the celebration of the passover, and the purge of wizards, teraphim, etc.	xxii.3- xxiii.4, xxiii.2 1-24	xxxiv. 8- xxxv.19
608	Death of Josiah, aged 39, at Megiddo at the hands of Pharaoh Necho.	xxiii.29, 30	xxxv.20-25

[p.26]

## II

### **What Was The Book of the Law' Found in the Temple?**

If the foregoing is a correct account of the actual course of events in Josiah's reign (which Chronicles demands and Kings readily admits), it is clear that the usual reasons advanced for identifying the book found in the Temple as Deuteronomy have to be abandoned. The question of the relation of Deuteronomy to the reforms will be raised later, and it is sufficient here to say that if the reforms of 2 Kings xxiii.5-20 are held to show the influence of Deuteronomy, it follows that Deuteronomy must have been in existence at least by the twelfth year of Josiah's reign, and its broad contents known to Zephaniah and Jeremiah at that time. This argument does not preclude the possibility that Deuteronomy was the book found in the Temple, but it does mean that other grounds must be examined for the identification of the book.

There are certain indications in Kings as to the contents of the discovered book, and these may now be examined.

(a) It contained threats of judgment on national evil sufficient to produce in Josiah alarm and contrition, even in spite of his own readiness to walk after Jehovah with all his heart (xxii.13).

(b) It contained an emphasis on the covenant existing between Jehovah and his people; it could be called 'the book of the covenant' (xxiii. 2), and the king could speak of 'the words of this covenant that were written in this book' (xxiii. 3). The people's side of this covenant may have been expressed in terms of 'walking after Jehovah' and 'keeping his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with the whole heart and soul'; these expressions, however, may simply have been what Josiah himself regarded as being consistent with keeping the covenant.

(c) It contained an injunction to keep the passover unto Jehovah (xxiii.21).

(d) It probably contained injunctions to put away them that had familiar spirits, wizards, teraphim, idols and similar abominations; although, again, these may not all have been mentioned



[p.27]

by name,<sup>37</sup> so long as Josiah held that action against them was involved in performing ‘the words of the law which were written in the book’ (xxiii.24).

(e) It possibly contained condemnation of Baal-worship, the Asherah, and worship of the host of heaven, as Josiah’s first step was to obliterate from the Temple all remaining signs of their previous association with it. On the other hand, however, this action may have been performed simply as a convenient demonstration of the king’s general determination to ‘walk after Jehovah’. The action is not, like the others, specifically connected with the book, but was consequent upon the covenant, which, as we have suggested, may not have been specific in its terms.

Thus the only contents of the book which can be regarded as certain are the considerable threats, the injunction to keep the passover, and the reference to the covenant; the reference to familiar spirits and wizards, etc., may be regarded as highly probable.

The book of Deuteronomy would, of course, suit the requirements of the situation very well. Its whole tone would conduce to the effect described, and it contains strong threats (xxviii. 15-58), an injunction to keep the passover (xvi.1-8) and references to the covenant (v.2, 3; xxix.1-29). In addition it contains condemnation of those with familiar spirits and wizards (xviii.9-14), of idols (xxix.17) and abominations (xxvii.15, etc.); of the Asherah (xvi.21) and worship of the host of heaven (iv.19).

However, the so-called ‘Holiness Code’ of Leviticus xvii-xxvi, or any larger part of Leviticus, would fulfil the necessary conditions just as well. It, too, contains strong threats (xxvi.14-45), an injunction to keep the passover (xxiii.5-8), and references to the covenant (xxvi.15, 25, 44, 45) as well as condemnation of some of the other abuses, those with familiar spirits and wizards (xix.31; xx.6), idols (xix.4; xxvi.30) and abominations (xviii.26-30).<sup>38</sup>

As a matter of fact, it is possible to imagine Exodus xx-xxiii

[p.28]

producing the effects we have noted, no less than Deuteronomy or the ‘Holiness Code’. Here Jehovah promises to ‘visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me’ (xx.5), with which compare Josiah’s words ‘Great is the wrath... because our fathers have not hearkened’; and if the children of Israel do not heed the voice of Jehovah’s angel, but provoke him, ‘he will not pardon your transgression,<sup>39</sup> for my name is in him’ (xxiii.21). The injunction to keep the passover is here (xxiii. 14, 15), and moreover the whole section is explicitly called ‘the book of the covenant’ in the following chapter where an actual procedure of standing to the covenant is described (cf. 2 Kings xxiii.2, 3). Sorcery is condemned (xxii.18), and idols (xx.23, etc.), and anything associated with the worship of other gods (xxii.20; xxiii.32). The only drawback is that the

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<sup>37</sup> Teraphim are nowhere condemned as such in the Pentateuch. Their earliest recorded condemnation is in I Samuel xv.23, which, interestingly, associates witchcraft and idols with teraphim as in 2 Kings xxiii.24.

<sup>38</sup> The ‘Holiness Code’ concludes with the phrase ‘by the hand of Moses’, which is the phrase by which the Chronicler describes the book that was found (2 Ch. xxxiv.14).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 2 Kings xxiv. 4 ‘and the LORD would not pardon’.

threats in the discovered book were probably more specific than are contained in Exodus xx-xxiii, for Huldah speaks of ‘what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof that they should become a desolation and a curse’.

We have indicated the smallest possible ‘units’, roughly speaking, within the Pentateuch, which fulfil the requirements of the Kings narrative so far as it concerns the inferred contents of the book. The next step is to examine the narrative of the actual discovery for any hints which would help in the closer definition of the book.

First, let us observe the occasions when the book was read. It was read by Shaphan when he received it from Hilkiyah in the Temple. Since the verb  $\text{קָרָא}$  generally means ‘to read aloud’, this may mean that Shaphan read the book aloud to Hilkiyah. As an official scribe he would be accustomed to doing this sort of thing. The book was again read by Shaphan, presumably later the same day, aloud to the king. So on one day, between its discovery and the king’s contrition, the book was certainly read twice. Was it read more often on this day? If Shaphan read it aloud to Hilkiyah, it is unlikely that Hilkiyah had read it himself previously. But if not, then it is possible that Hilkiyah had already read or perused the book. Again, if the deputation to the prophetess was despatched on the day of the discovery, another probable

[p.29]

reading appears, for it seems reasonable to suppose that the book went with the deputation and was read to Huldah. Their commission was to inquire of Jehovah ‘concerning the words of this book’, and Huldah in her reply referred to ‘all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read’. If, therefore, the events of 2 Kings xxii.3-20 belong to one day, we have the book read certainly twice, probably three times, and possibly four times. ‘All the words of the book of the covenant’ were again read a few days later by the king to the assembly of the men of Judah.

It is therefore a justifiable conclusion that the book was not unduly long; it was short enough to be read conveniently *in toto* at least twice between its discovery and the sending of the deputation.<sup>40</sup> This conclusion concurs with another which may also be inferred from the narrative.

Hilkiyah the high priest says to Shaphan ‘I have found the book of the law’. Some commentators have drawn attention to the definite article ‘*the* book of the law’, in claiming that the book found was the whole Torah. Strictly speaking, however, it is possible to read  $\text{מֵעֵאָהֳרֵי סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה}$  as ‘I have found *a* book of the law’? as the definitive  $\text{הַסֵּפֶר}$  is lacking, and the article alone with  $\text{הַתּוֹרָה}$  is ambiguous. But whether Hilkiyah means ‘the book’ or ‘a book’, it was not a bundle of scrolls but one scroll which was found. ‘The book of the law’ in Hilkiyah’s words may, of course, be a title rather than simply a description of the article found, but the further statement ‘Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan and he read it’, and Shaphan’s own words to Josiah, ‘Hilkiyah the priest hath delivered me a book’, make it quite clear that it was a single scroll. This seems to preclude the possibility that the book found was larger than would at that time be written on one scroll. We cannot pronounce with any certainty on the length of this scroll, but, taking this point in conjunction with the conclusion of the previous paragraph, we may put forward the suggestion that the book is unlikely to have been longer than the longest of the three ‘units’ discussed above, i.e. than Deuteronomy.

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<sup>40</sup> The threats only may have been referred to Huldah (cf. 2 Ki. xxii.16).

Is there any indication in the narrative of what the scroll was? A glance at all the references to the book throughout the narrative is suggestive:

[p.30]

- 'the book of the law' (xxii.8).
- 'the words of the book of the law' (xxii.11).
- 'concerning the words of this book' (xxii.13).
- 'the words of this book' (xxii.13).
- 'even all the words of the book' (xxii.16).
- 'the words which thou hast heard' (xxii.18).
- 'all the words of the book of the covenant' (xxiii.2).
- 'to confirm the words of this covenant that were written in this book' (xxiii.3).
- 'as it is written in this book of the covenant' (xxiii.21).
- 'that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book' (xxiii.24).

Now it cannot be overlooked that this manner of referring to the book found in the Temple is exactly the manner in which the book of Deuteronomy refers to itself. Not only is the book which Moses is said to have written on this occasion given the title of 'the book of the law' in Deuteronomy xxxi.24-26, and again in Joshua i.8, but all the phrases have close parallels either within the kernel of this book or in the passages referring to it. Here is a collection of such references, with which the Kings list can be compared:

- 'a copy of this law in a book' (xvii.18).
- 'to keep all the words of this law' (xvii.19).
- 'all the words of this law' (xxvii.3).
- 'confirmeth... all the words of this law' (xxvii.26).
- 'all the words of this law that are written in this book' (xxviii.58).
- 'written in the book of this law' (xxviii.61).
- 'the words of the covenant' (xxix.1)
- 'the words of this covenant' (xxix.9).
- 'the covenant that is written in this book of the law' (xxix.21).
- 'all the curse that is written in this book' (xxix.27).

It is not sufficient to say that the passage in Kings is in 'Deuteronomic style'. Rather, it is difficult to see how the writer could indicate more clearly and pointedly, without having a recognized title to quote, that he is identifying the scroll discovered with Deuteronomy.

There are two or three more points in the narrative which should be reckoned with. First, the discovered book, whatever it

[p.31]

was, possessed unquestioned authority. The directness with which the high priest despatched it to the king, the spontaneous reaction of Josiah to it, and the confirmation given to its message by the prophetess, put this fact beyond dispute. Secondly, although Josiah was in a sense surprised at the find, he gave no hint that he thought it a new or recent manuscript. Josiah assumed that it had been possible for 'our fathers' to 'heed the words of this book'; as

did Huldah the prophetess, so he and Huldah, at least, imagined the book to have been authoritative in an age prior to their own.

In the third place, what exactly is implied by Hilkiah's words 'I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD'? Do they imply that the book had been 'lost', and if so, what would constitute a 'loss' of a law-book in the Temple? There may be no certain answer to these questions, but we may at least observe that it is difficult to account for Hilkiah's behaviour throughout the incident unless he regarded his finding of the book as a discovery of something which, so far as his experience was concerned, had not been known in the Temple for some time. Yet there is no reason to suppose that his attitude to the authority and antiquity of the book was any different from that of Josiah and Huldah. Now if the book was Deuteronomy, as seems probable for the reasons already advanced, some interesting light is thrown on the situation; for Deuteronomy makes three stipulations about its own use and preservation: (a) the prototype was to be placed in the custody of the priests the Levites by the side of the ark of the covenant. It was there a witness against the people, and was to be read to the assembly of all Israel at the end of every seven years (Deuteronomy xxxi. 9 ff., 24 ff.). (b) A copy was to be made from this prototype for the use of the king when he should arise. 'It shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God' (Deut. xvii.18 ff.). (c) An engraving of the law was to be made 'very plainly' on the plaster surface of great stones to be set up for the purpose on Mount Ebal when the Jordan had been crossed (Deut. xxvii.1-8).

On any view of the antiquity of Deuteronomy, then, there is no reason to suppose that more than two copies of Deuteronomy *ought* to have been in existence in Jerusalem in the time of Josiah

[p.32]

—the prototype by the ark (or its descendant) and a royal copy. It is easy now to see what a loss of this law would imply. The king's copy had clearly perished or was long lost, not surprisingly, and the priests' prototype was no longer by the ark but either perished altogether or concealed somewhere else in the Temple, deliberately or accidentally; it is pretty safe to assume that it had not been read to any assembly of Israel in Hilkiah's time.

It is not only easy to see what would be involved in the loss of the book; if the book was Deuteronomy it is also possible to account for the action of Hilkiah and Shaphan in despatching it straightway to the king. It was not necessarily the obvious thing to do to send to the king a newly discovered law-code. If it had to do with ritual or ceremonial laws or was a manual of instructions to priests or Levites regarding their duties or dealings with the people, then it was no particular concern of the kings. But if Hilkiah and Shaphan read in the discovered book that the law therein was enjoined to be written for the king from the copy in their custody, then there was every reason why the king should immediately be informed of the discovery of the book and its contents.

At this point we may mention a theory of the origin of the discovered scroll put forward some years ago by an Egyptologist, Professor Edouard Naville).<sup>41</sup> Naville was struck by the analogy of the circumstances of the discovery with similar discoveries alluded to in certain

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<sup>41</sup> *The Discovery of the Book of the Law under King Josiah. An Egyptian Interpretation of the Biblical Account*, by Edouard Naville, Hon. D.C.L., Ph.D., Litt.D., Member of the Institute of France. 46 pp. (S.P.C.K., London, 1911).

Egyptian texts. It seems that it was an Egyptian (and also a Babylonian) custom to deposit sacred texts in the foundation walls of sanctuaries. For example, in a sanctuary of Thoth one of the books believed to have been written by the god was deposited beneath his image. Certain rubrics belonging to chapters in *The Book of the Dead*, and inscriptions in the Temple of Denderah, give information about the discovery of such texts when temples were being inspected or pulled down. Naville's suggestion is that the document discovered in 621 had been deposited in the Temple walls when it was built by Solomon, and that the repairing or rebuilding of the walls by Josiah brought it to light. He believes the narrative

[p.33]

implies that Hilkiah was unable to decipher the book, and therefore gave it to Shaphan to read out to him. This was because it was in a script no longer employed in Judah at the time—perhaps cuneiform—but a script which Shaphan, as correspondent on State affairs with the Assyrians and Babylonians and others, could read. Naville takes the Chronicler's addition 'by the hand of Moses' (בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה, LXX διὰ χειρὸς Μωϋσῆ) in 2 Chronicles xxxiv.14, to mean that the script of the book appeared to Hilkiah to be very ancient, belonging to the time of Moses.

We may add that Naville believed the book to be Deuteronomy, and that one of the reasons for its being deposited in the Temple at Jerusalem was to give special status to the Temple as 'the place which the LORD your God shall choose, to put His name there', of which the book thus anonymously spoke. Solomon may well have been influenced to prepare such a copy by the example of Joshua who inscribed the law on the first place of worship to be erected in the Promised Land, and by the actual injunction to put a copy of the law by the ark (Deut. xxxi. 24-26).

Naville is wrong in supposing that the book was found during the repair of the old crumbling walls,<sup>42</sup> since, as we have seen, Hilkiah handed the book to Shaphan on the occasion of the latter's visit to the Temple to initiate the repairs; and to that extent the analogy with Egyptian evidence breaks down, unless we suppose that the walls and foundations were already breached sufficiently to expose such a deposit. However, the theory of a foundation deposit is worthy of consideration. If it were true, it would indicate that both the priests' and the king's copies of Deuteronomy had disappeared by the time of Josiah.

Finally, there is a reference to the law in the general comment on the king's life:

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.<sup>43</sup>

Although the word 'turned' (שׁוּב) is used, the comment is on

[p.34]

Josiah's life in general, of which the incident of the discovery is an illustration and a symbol. It is hard to read the whole account without supposing that a certain measure of contrast is

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<sup>42</sup> The supposition is widespread. So, e.g. Oesterley and Robinson, *History*, Vol. I, p. 418. See note on p. 7 above.

<sup>43</sup> 2 Kings xxiii.25.

implied between the book that was found and 'all the law of Moses'. The inference seems to be that the writer of Kings regarded the scroll as a single book of a larger corpus of Mosaic Torah. The way Josiah reacted to the discovery of this particular scroll was characteristic of his whole attitude to 'all the law of Moses'.

[p.35]

### III

## What Law Was Known In Judah in the Years of Josiah Before 621 B.C.?

We have put forward the view that a whole series of reforms (listed in 2 Ki. xxiii.5-20 and 2 Ch. xxxiv.3-5) was carried out by Josiah from the year 627 to 621 B.C., largely under the influence of the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah. We have also concluded that the law-book found in the Temple in 621 was in all probability Deuteronomy. If these two conclusions are valid, their effect is to separate two questions whose connection has long been regarded as axiomatic, namely, the origin of Deuteronomy and the reforms of Josiah.

The latter we have traced in detail to prophetic preaching. But does this sufficiently dispose of the arguments of those who see in Deuteronomy clear evidence of the reforms, in particular as an attempt to centralize sacrifice at Jerusalem? In reply to this we may ask: Is there any action recorded in 2 Kings xxiii.5-20 which could not have been procured by the word of the LORD uttered by Jeremiah at the outset of his preaching?

And I will utter My judgements against them touching all their wickedness, in that they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, could such reforms have been effected without some measure of centralization of sacrifice? This condemnation of syncretistic worship, involving Jehovah's claim to exclusive worship and opposition to all idolatry, is sufficient to have determined the programme of the first six years of Josiah's reform, with centralization as the necessary means to that end.

Thus, the reason for the abolition of all high places was because (a) some were heathen high places anyhow, and obviously under censure, and (b) those high places which had been used for the worship of Jehovah had, like the Temple itself become corrupted by the intrusion of heathen elements. Therefore, as Jeremiah saw, the time had come for the abolition of all haphazard and

[p.36]

unregulated worship which lent itself so readily to contamination.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jeremiah i.16.

<sup>45</sup> It would seem that some previous kings of Judah who 'did that which was right in the sight of the LORD' took away some high places but retained others. The easiest explanation of these dual references (e.g. 2 Ch. xiv.3 and xv.17) is that the kings took away heathen high places and practices associated with them, but left untouched those used for the worship of Jehovah. But by Josiah's time corruption was so persistent that it was felt that all high places would have to go. In this connection we may recall that the dissolution of high places and their

On this view the centralization of worship at Jerusalem was undertaken as the best means, in the circumstances of the times and in the light of past experience, of securing a proper fulfilment of Jehovah's demand for exclusive worship. The historian nowhere says that centralization was the motive of the reform; but it was the demand for exclusive worship which led Jeremiah to inveigh against all high places, and this in turn led Josiah and his supporters to centralize the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup>

There still remains the question of the origin of Deuteronomy and of the relationship to it of Zephaniah and Jeremiah. A solution will not be attempted here in any detail, but some remarks bearing on the subject may be offered.

First, it is important to realize what is, and what is not, involved in a conservative view of the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy in considering its place in the seventh century. Reference has been made to the requirements set out within Deuteronomy for its own promulgation, and in the light of these and of the - literary conditions of the day, it is perfectly possible for Deuteronomy to

[p.37]

have been written in the time of Moses and yet for its exact text to have been virtually unknown in the middle of the seventh century. This does not mean that all knowledge of the tenor of its contents need have vanished. The multiplication of manuscripts was probably a later (exilic?) development, and at the best of times knowledge of the Torah of Jehovah was presumably communicated to priests as well as people by means of oral training and tradition, with occasional public readings.<sup>47</sup>

When, for example, Jeremiah reminds the people of a law purporting to have been given by Jehovah in the wilderness, and summarizes it as 'Hearken unto My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people, and walk ye in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you', he may well be referring to Deuteronomy as he had received its message in his training, and as he knew at least some of the people should be familiar with it.<sup>48</sup> Yet he may never have seen an actual copy of Deuteronomy, nor have been aware of all its details and provisions at the time he spoke.<sup>49</sup>

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attendants by Josiah was carried out in two stages: the first stage (2 Ki. xxiii.5) concerned heathen priests and rites, whereas the second stage (2 Ki. xxiii.8, 9) concerned places and priests which apparently had some show of orthodox worship. Incidentally, there is no evidence in the Old Testament that worship was ever offered to Jehovah in Judah at a Canaanite high place, despite much popular teaching to the contrary.

<sup>46</sup> The bringing in of the priests of the high places of Judah to Jerusalem is often quoted as if it supported the supposed dependence of Josiah on Deuteronomy in his actions. But this may be doubted. Deuteronomy xviii.6-8 speaks of the Levite who 'sojourns' in some part of Israel, and who, if he comes 'with all the desire of his soul unto the place which the LORD shall choose', will be allowed to 'minister in the name of the LORD his God'. The priests of the high places, on the other hand, were not sojourners in the sense implied by Deuteronomy, nor did they come voluntarily to Jerusalem, nor were they allowed to minister there. Deuteronomy xviii.6-8 is far from reflecting conditions in Josiah's day. Why should Josiah's motive in taking the priests away from their former shrines be other than purely prudential?

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy vi.6-9, xxxi.10-13, xxxi.19.

<sup>48</sup> See Deuteronomy vi.3, *et passim*.

<sup>49</sup> For these reasons it is a safer procedure to argue from the reforms to the prophetic preaching rather than from the reforms directly to the law. It would be easy, of course, to indicate many possible sources of the various actions of Josiah in the Pentateuch as we know it, but that would not of itself prove that the Pentateuch was extant at the time, or that Josiah and his people had 'read' it. Besides it would not be necessary to be able to

Thus, though the Torah of Jehovah was largely in abeyance at the beginning of Josiah's reign, simply because the nation as a whole had 'rejected' it, that is no reason why a faithful few among prophets or priests or people might not have been aware of, and (so far as they could) carried out, the essential requirements of the law, even though most of them had never seen any written copy of such a law.

In the second place, we should regard the discovery of the book, whatever it was, as both the climax and the seal of Josiah's reforming movement. That movement had its beginnings very likely in the first reactions to the evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon. The latter was slain by his own servants, and the regency that

[p.38]

followed, though nothing is said of it in the Old Testament, was one during which the child Josiah himself began to seek after the God of David his father, so we surmise that it was sympathetic towards the true worship of Jehovah. Of the prophets, Zephaniah was probably of the royal house, and Jeremiah was in the priestly tradition. Possessed, through oral training, of the essential demands of the Torah of Jehovah, these men would have been in a position to influence the king towards reform, even if some of those demands were *at the moment* extant in writing only in the book which lay hidden in the Temple. When the discovery was later made, as a result of the reform, the thing which really disturbed the king was, as we have seen, the threat of doom. This was apparently something which had not been brought home to him before; he had not realized that the weight of the nation's sin incited by his predecessors placed an intolerable burden on his own shoulders, and would have to be paid for. This message came to him from the book. It does not follow that other contents of the book must therefore have been unknown to the prophets and the king's guardians. Things other than the threats may have been impressed on their memories, and even if they were aware of the threats, their force may not have been appreciated in the same way or to the same degree as it was by the king, due to his special position of responsibility.

The foregoing suggestions in regard to the knowledge and distribution of the law, and the relationship of the Temple discovery to it, may be briefly summarized.

There is a strong likelihood that the discovered book was Deuteronomy; it may have been hidden in the Temple for centuries, or may have been lost only for a short period. The reforms secured by Josiah from his twelfth year onward were in accordance with the demands of the Torah of Jehovah, known to Josiah probably through the preaching of the prophets and the instructors of his youth. The full extent of this Torah known at the time *need* not have been very great—a quite brief commandment might induce far-reaching reforms—but, on the other hand, the full Torah *may* have been a more extensive corpus of literature than was readily available or known to individuals in 627 B.C., and in particular there is no *a priori* reason why it should

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point to detailed sources; can any reason be shown why all the reforms could not have been produced by a faithful adherence to the Decalogue alone, indeed to the first and second commandments alone?



not have included the book of the law of which a copy was found in the Temple in 621 B.C. This certainly must have been the case if it is held that the 'centralization' implied by the crusade against all high places could stem only from Deuteronomy; but this is disputable. The testimony of the writer of Kings is that the Torah of Jehovah (including that part of it contained in the book found by Hilkiah), in accordance with which Josiah ordered his life and activities, could be described as 'all the law of Moses'.

It is hoped that the conclusions and suggestions of this paper may indicate some fresh lines of investigation in dealing with the problem of Deuteronomy.

## Appendix

There appears to be some inconsistency in the views of Skinner and others concerning the relation of the actual causes of the reform (according to their construction) to the role of the law-book. There is, of course, no *a priori* reason why any number of events should not have combined to produce a reform in religion. The problem is to reconcile probability with evidence. Skinner has a whole set of causes which ought to have produced the reform, but which, so far as our evidence takes us, did not do so. On the other hand the cause which, according to the evidence, did produce the reform, was 'the dead hand of written authority' according to Skinner, and presumably in capable of any such thing. For, while adhering firmly to the *data* that the reform began in 621 and that the programme of the reform was a law-book alleged to have been found in the Temple, Skinner can write that prior to 621 'in the highest quarters of the land a new spirit was at work, which was resolved that the lesson of the late crisis should not be lost, and that the national life should be purged, by force if need were, from the religious and social abuses which had provoked the anger of Yahwe. This movement took effect in a series of drastic reforms enacted and enforced by Josiah in the eighteenth year of his reign'. If Skinner intends thus to relegate the place of the book in achieving the reform to the role of inducing the king to take the lead in action, then we are confronted by the 'pious fraud' hypothesis in practically its baldest form; for although Skinner disavows

[p.40]

the suggestion that the book was 'a contemporary production of the reform movement of the reign of Josiah', it is impossible to avoid the inference that, if the document had anything at all to do with this 'reform movement', the manner of its being brought to the king's notice was deceitful. But the real difficulty of Skinner's view lies in its reconciliation with the facts as they are presented in the Biblical evidence. It is all very well for Skinner to say that 'the reformation of Josiah was not brought about by the dead hand of written authority apart from the living aspirations of the age' (p. 92). But apart from alleging (what he disclaims) that the 'living aspirations of the age' *produced* 'the dead hand of written authority', how are we to suppose that the process was managed? Is it, in short, compatible with the 'indisputable fact' that 'the programme of the reform was a law-book alleged to have been found in the Temple'? Here is the crux of the problem. There were in Judah, according to this view, all the stimuli necessary for reform—a prophetic reforming party which had existed in the State since the days of Isaiah, a desire (now that the Assyrian Empire was crumbling) to be independent of foreign influences, a state of national peril from northern foes, a pious young king—but nothing whatever was actually done as a result of these things alone. An entirely new factor—a law-book—was, by hypothesis, the efficient cause of the reform. Even if there were ever a time in the history of the Jews when they regarded the 'written authority' of their scriptures as a 'dead hand', it must remain the difficulty of Skinner's view that what the living aspirations of the age could not do, the law immediately achieved.

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