

The Passover of Two Kings. A Literary and Comparative Study of the Passover of Kings Josiah and Hezekiah

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The Passover festival is the first cultic institution in Israel and one of the oldest Jewish traditions. The history of its reception in the Hebrew canon reveals a long evolution and, at the same time, various interpretive developments within the communities that succeeded the generation of the Exodus. Considered from a sociopolitical and theological perspective, Passover acquires a significant dimension that extends beyond the experience of departure from Egypt, depending on whether it is interpreted from the Deuteronomistic or Chronicler perspective. Although the celebration's background remains the memorial of liberation from the Pharaonic yoke, the biblical narration of Passover in the Hebrew canon does not always foreground the exodus motif.

Indeed, the literary framework spans a temporal arc of approximately 1,114 years, from Pharaonic Egypt to Alexandria: from approximately 1280 BCE, the assumed date of the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Law at Sinai, to approximately 30 BCE, the approximate date of the completion of the Book of Wisdom. This indicates, first, that Jewish communities did not always live in the same place or at the same time. Second, under the influence of diverse historical conditions, they did not always celebrate Passover under the same religious motif.

The main objective of this study is to demonstrate the literary function of the Passover celebration in the Deuteronomistic work. The analysis then compares the text under study with its Chronicler counterpart. The point of departure is the hypothesis that Passover, celebrated after the departure from Egypt (Ex 12:1–13:16) and at Sinai (Num 9:1–14), through

the conquest of the Promised Land (Josh 5:10–12) and the Reform of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:21–23), and up to the community of the Alexandrian diaspora, cannot be perceived and interpreted solely from the perspective of the Exodus. Thus, setting aside the debate on the demarcation line between the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic history (Priotto, 2019a, pp. 7–11), this study focuses essentially on the Deuteronomistic corpus in its final redactional phase. This implies that, even in the process of canonization and by virtue of its canonical position, the final redactor systematized it in relation to the first part of the canon, namely the Pentateuch. This favors a reading of the Deuteronomistic Passover in close connection with the Pentateuch, thereby broadening the literary scope from Genesis to 2 Kgs (Nobile, 1990, pp. 191–196).

On this basis, several questions arise. Given the command in Ex 12:14, 17 to celebrate Passover perpetually throughout the generations, what might explain the pronounced scriptural silence regarding possible Paschal celebrations, such that the Deuteronomistic Passover is the only attestation that appears after Joshua's Passover, celebrated in the Promised Land to conclude the Exodus journey? What relationship can be established between these two Paschal traditions – the Deuteronomistic and the Chronicler – which are quasi-parallel yet have different protagonists? To clarify the function of Passover and highlight its relevance across time, this study offers a comparative analysis of King Josiah's Passover in 2 Kgs 23:21–23 and King Hezekiah's Passover in 2 Chr 30. The approach is not chronological, for both methodological reasons and reasons related to historical prevalence.

1. 2 Kings 23:21–23: Text and Context

King Josiah's Passover is best understood within its literary framework, 2 Kgs 22:1–23:30, that is, from his accession to the throne of Judah (2 Kgs 22:1) to his death (2 Kgs 23:30). The Deuteronomist does not present Josiah's death as a punishment inflicted by God. On the contrary, Huldah's prophecy in 2 Kgs 22:20 makes a positive allusion to it, thereby forming an inclusion that emphasizes Josiah's reform of

YHWH’s worship, together with the celebration of Passover according to the book of the covenant found in the Temple. The following articulation is that proposed by Marco Nobile (2010, p. 459).

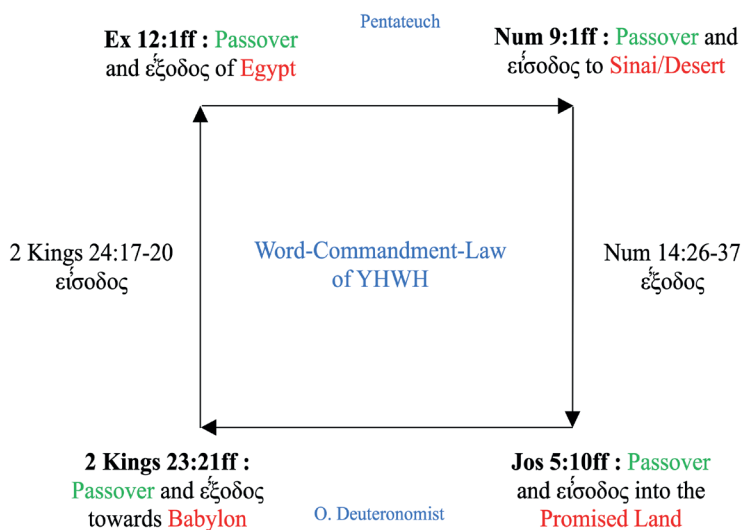
- 2 Kgs 22:1–11: Work on the Temple and discovery of the book of the Law;
- 12–20: Oracle of Huldah;
- 2 Kgs 23:1–3: Stipulation of the covenant;
- 4–20: Cultic reform and elimination of foreign cults;
- 21–23: Passover celebration;
- 24–30: Final data on the reign of Josiah.

The fourth Passover is celebrated in accordance with, and following, an act of obedience to the Law/Word of YHWH. The Deuteronomistic editor intends to demonstrate that the king who “does” **עָשָׂה** (2 Kgs 22:2) the will of YHWH and walks in his ways can command the people to “do” **עָשׂוּ** (2 Kgs 23:21) the true Passover. “Doing the Passover,” among other meanings, is the cultic expression of “doing God’s will.” The understanding of this Passover should therefore be located within this unity, dominated by the figure and actions of King Josiah. The text of 2 Kgs 23:21–23, as preserved in the Masoretic Text (TM), does not present major textual-critical problems. It is articulated in three parts: verse 21 is narrative, whereas verses 22–23 are commentative. These verses function as editorial explanations: verse 22 highlights the uniqueness of the celebration, whereas verse 23 emphasizes the historical scope of Josiah’s action while also specifying its conformity to the Law (see Deut 12:2–6; 16:2; see also Ps 132:13 and Ex 20:24).

TM of 2 Kgs 23:21–23	Our Translation
21 וַיֹּצֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-כָּל-הָעָם לֵאמֹר עָשׂוּ פֶסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כְּכָתוּב עַל סֵפֶר הַבְרִית הַזֶּה:	21 The king commanded all the people: “Keep the Passover for the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant.”
22 כִּי לֹא נַעֲשֶׂה פֶסַח הַזֶּה מִיָּמֵי הַשֹּׁפֵטִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁפְטוּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא יָמֵי מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה:	22 For no Passover like this had been kept since the days when the judges judged Israel, nor during all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah.
23 בַּיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּם שְׁמַנְהָ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה לְמֶלֶךְ יוֹשִׁיָּהוּ נַעֲשֶׂה הַפֶּסַח הַזֶּה לַיהוָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם:	23 Only in the eighteenth year of King Josiah was this Passover kept for the Lord in Jerusalem.

From “That Night” (Ex 12:42) to “This Passover” (2 Kgs 23:23)

From the outset, it should be emphasized that King Josiah’s Passover has a particular character only insofar as its editorial position within the larger literary unit of the Pentateuch–Deuteronomistic Work is considered. Its placement is intentionally designed by the final editor to give the Genesis–2 Kgs block a significant theological orientation, with the Passover celebration serving as its pivot. Within this historical framework, Passover appears to function as a catalytic element at the turning point in the history of the Chosen People, conditioning both their ἐξοδος (their dispossession) from the land and their εἰσοδος (their possession) within the land. This is verified through what may be called the “Paschal square” of the Pentateuch–Deuteronomistic literary framework: Ex 12:1–36 (הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה); Num 9:1–14; Josh 5:10–12; and 2 Kgs 23:21–23 (הַפֶּסַח הַזֶּה). This square indicates that the Passover narratives within this block serve a specific theological function. It also shows that the concept of Passover invokes two further notions located within the dynamic triad Law–Passover–Land; in other words, word (text), worship (Temple), and place/land (inheritance) in both corpora: the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic Work.



According to Marco Nobile, “Passover is deliverance and a journey towards the Promised Land, but it is also a structural sign of a temporal articulation whose features are painful.” The two sections Egypt–Sinai and Sinai–Palestine are not simply accounts of a journey to the Promised Land, but two sequences of events whose almost symmetrical traits describe the continual unfaithfulness of the chosen people (cf. Ex 16:2–35; 18:13–26 and Num 11:4–35; see also Ex 17:1–17 and Num 20:1–13), to the point of provoking total condemnation and the complete destruction of the desert generation (Num 14:22–23, 29–30). By celebrating the Passover, the next generation, led by Joshua, marks the end of the Exodus (Josh 5:10–11, 12) and the beginning of a long period that will know no other Passover than that of Josiah, the fourth. This final stage, from Joshua to Josiah, resembles the other two: from Egypt to Sinai and from Sinai to entry into the Promised Land. It is as if the people of this last period formed a single entity, a single generation, which conquers the Promised Land after the third Passover only to lose it after the fourth and go into exile, just as the generation that had celebrated the Passover at Sinai went into the desert to die there” (Nobile, 1990, pp. 195–196). Nobile’s interpretation strongly supports the “Paschal square,” insofar as Passover in the Deuteronomistic work should not be read merely as a narrative of political deliverance culminating in a journey from one place to another. Nor can its meaning be limited to liturgical celebration. It is broader, encompassing a turbulent history of possession and dispossession of the land corresponding to the people’s fidelity to the command of YHWH as set forth in the Law revealed to the people’s guide.

King Josiah’s Passover is presented within the editorial fabric of Genesis–2 Kgs as the fourth Passover in the history of the Chosen People, that is, the only one celebrated after Joshua’s and before the deportation to Babylon. Yet Ex 12:14, 17 states that the command to celebrate Passover is an immutable law to be observed annually as a perpetual rite. This could lead one to infer that no Passover was celebrated between Joshua and Josiah. However, the comparative text of 2 Chr 30 reports that before Josiah, King Hezekiah celebrated Passover in Jerusalem. It follows that the Deuteronomistic editor’s objective is not

to disregard more than 500 years of history – “from the time when the Judges judged Israel and during all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah” (2 Kgs 23:22b), that is, from the conquest of Canaan to Josiah’s accession to the throne of Judah – but rather to establish a comparison between Passovers. Moreover, a close reading shows that the text itself does not imply that no Passover was celebrated (Gosse, 2021, p. 53). The two Deuteronomistic comments introduced by the conjunction *וְ* in vv. 22 and 23 emphasize, especially in v. 22, a comparison – through the particle *בֵּין* – between King Josiah’s Passover and, possibly, those celebrated since the time of the Judges.

At the same time, the reference to the time of the Judges is the Deuteronomistic terminus a quo that reinforces the reference to Josiah, whose name resembles Joshua’s. A strong inclusion is thus established within Deuteronomistic history itself, extending from *יְהוֹשֻׁעַ* to *יְאֹשִׁיָּהוּ* and thereby conferring upon Josiah the typological status of Joshua, whose principal activity consisted in conquering the land of Canaan. The same applies to Josiah – described by the Deuteronomist as the new David – whose political-religious action leads to the recovery of the ancient northern territories, unifying them under the single Yahwistic faith centered on Jerusalem after the decline of Assyrian power, which had still occupied the North. This highlighting of Josiah’s figure is further clarified in the text under study through the inclusion of *הַמֶּלֶךְ* in v. 21 and *יְאֹשִׁיָּהוּ* in v. 23. It is indeed the king who gives the order “to make Passover,” *וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ*, much as in Deut 16:1: *וַיַּעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה*, a phrase that the LXX translates as *Ποιήσατε τὸ πασχα*. The verb *ποιέω*, considered in its poietic aspect and meaning “to make,” suggests an act of creation. In the Bible, therefore, Passovers follow one another but are not identical. The core of the Passover ritual may be the same, but its meaning and interpretation depend on the context and the protagonists around whom the celebration takes place. This gives Passover its creative character.

It is therefore necessary to clarify what is distinctive about the Passover in 2 Kgs 23:21–23, that is, to clarify its function in the Deuteronomistic work. Although the Deuteronomistic writer remains silent about the process of “making” this Passover, he nevertheless

provides an important clue to its uniqueness. The phrase כְּכָתוּב עַל סֵפֶר הַזֶּה in v. 21b is sufficient to characterize the Passover. Rather than dwelling on the ritual's performance, it emphasizes Josiah's will to celebrate Passover in accordance with the Lord's Law. This marker of uniqueness – the true Passover, constituted by Josiah's obedience and fidelity to the Lord's command – does not address a political question of liberation, but rather a religious problem. It implies that earlier Passover celebrations since settlement in the Promised Land were not fully compliant with the Law because they were celebrated in impurity, with the exception of this one. This is underscored by the preposition בְּ, which recalls Deut 16:1–8 and, in turn, refers to Ex 12:1–20.

At first glance, Josiah's Passover evidently implies a restoration of the memorial of liberation from Egypt. On the political level, this assertion is supported by the historical context marked by the collapse of the Assyrian Empire and the territorial emancipation of the kingdom of Judah, finally freed from the threat of Nineveh. However, this does not appear explicitly in the text, and the political explanation is insufficient to justify the function of this feast, which is situated immediately after the undertaking of purification from idolatry. The objective pursued by the Deuteronomistic editor therefore lies elsewhere. For the Deuteronomist, Passover regains its full and original meaning only in this Reform, which distinguishes it from other celebrations. This is why he describes the Reform extensively (2 Kgs 23:1–20) but recounts the performance of Passover in a single sentence (see 2 Kgs 23:21b). This Passover is therefore celebrated against a religious background of purification and restoration of worship. It is Passover because it marks the “passage” from idolatry (polytheism) to the worship of YHWH (monotheism), fixed in Jerusalem in accordance with the prescriptions of the Law. Thus, the geographical specification בִּירוּשָׁלַם makes sense in response to Deut 16:5–6, illuminated by Ps 132:13–18. The added value of this Passover “on that night” (Priotto, 2019b, pp. 29–39) is clearly located at the level of this Reform. In this regard, Josiah's Passover is the Passover celebrated under the sign of reconciliation with the covenant of the proto-Deuteronomy rediscovered in the Temple.

2. The Relationship between Josiah's Passover and 2 Chronicles 30

The silence concerning the description of Josiah's Passover, characteristic of the Deuteronomistic account, is broken by the Chronicler. Josiah's Passover is celebrated against the background of a renewed covenant, with the code of the Law found in the Temple. The details provided by the Chronicler concerning Hezekiah's Passover lead one to affirm that the context surrounding this Passover is fundamentally religious rather than political. Here too, the celebration of Passover in accordance with the prescriptions of the Law of Moses precedes the salvation of Hezekiah and of all the inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chr 32:20–23). Even within the broader work of the Chronicler, the relationship between Law, Passover, and Land is preserved.

TM of 2 Chr 30:13–21	Our Translation
¹³ וַיִּסְפְּפוּ יְרוּשָׁלַם עִם־רֹב לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־חַג הַמִּצּוֹת בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי קֹהֵל לֹבֵב מְאֹד:	¹³ A large crowd gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month; it was a very great assembly.
¹⁴ וַיָּקֻמוּ וַיְסִירוּ אֶת־הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת אֲשֶׁר בִּירוּשָׁלַם וְאֵת כָּל־הַמִּקְטָרוֹת הִסִּירוּ וַיִּשְׁלִיכוּ לַעֲחָל קִדְרוֹן:	¹⁴ They arose and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and they removed all the incense altars and threw them into the Kidron Valley.
¹⁵ וַיִּשְׁחֲטוּ הַפֶּסַח בָּאַרְבָּעָה עֶשֶׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם נִקְלְמוּ וַיָּבִיאוּ עֹלוֹת בֵּית יְהוָה:	¹⁵ They then sacrificed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites, seized with shame, sanctified themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the Lord.
¹⁶ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ עַל־עֲמֻדָם כַּמִּשְׁפָּטִים כַּחֲתוּרַת מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם אֶת־הַדָּם מִיַּד הַלְוִיִּם:	¹⁶ They stood in their customary place, according to the prescriptions of the law of Moses, the man of God; and the priests sprinkled the blood received from the hands of the Levites.
¹⁷ כִּי־רַבֹּת בְּקֹהֵל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הִתְקַדְּשׁוּ וְהַלְוִיִּם עַל־שְׂחִיטַת הַפֶּסַחִים לְכָל־לֹא טָהוֹר לַהֲקִדֵּשׁ לַיהוָה:	¹⁷ Since many in the assembly had not sanctified themselves, the Levites were responsible for slaughtering the Passover victims for all who were not pure, in order to consecrate them to the Lord.
¹⁸ כִּי מִרְבִּית הָעָם רַבֹּת מֵאֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה וְיִשָּׂשכָר וְזִבְלוּן לֹא הִטְהָרוּ כִּי־אָמְרוּ אֶת־הַפֶּסַח בְּלֹא כְתוּבָה כִּי הִתְפַּלֵּל יִחְזַקְיָהוּ עֲלֵיהֶם לֵאמֹר יְהוָה הַטּוֹב יִכְפֹּר בָּעֵד:	¹⁸ For a large part of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, and they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the Lord, who is good, forgive."
¹⁹ כָּל־לִבָּב הֵכִין לִדְרוֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָיו וְלֹא כְּטָהֳרַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ: ס	¹⁹ All those who have set their hearts to seek God, the Lord, the God of their fathers, even though they have not undergone the purification of the sanctuary.

TM of 2 Chr 30:13–21	Our Translation
וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶל־יַחְזַקְיָהוּ וַיַּרְפָּא אוֹתֵיהֶם: כ	²⁰ The Lord answered Hezekiah and healed the people.
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּמְצָאִים בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֶת־תֵּג הַמִּצּוֹת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בְּשֹׂמֶרֶת תָּה נְדוּלָה וְהַסִּלְלִים לַיהוָה יוֹם בַּיּוֹם הַלְלוּם וְהִכְהִינִם בְּכָל־יָעַן לַיהוָה: כ	²¹ Thus the children of Israel who were in Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great joy; and day by day the Levites and the priests praised the Lord with instruments that resounded loudly for the Lord.

From the outset, unlike the Deuteronomistic redactor, who highlights Josiah’s religious actions (2 Kgs 22–23) and devotes only one verse to King Hezekiah’s Reform (2 Kgs 18:4), the Chronicler assigns great importance to Hezekiah, whom he regards as the third great king of Israel after David (1 Chr 10–29) and Solomon (2 Chr 1–9). Accordingly, he allocates considerable narrative space to him: 2 Chr 29–32 (Nobile, 1992, p. 180). Although Josiah is venerable, his life and actions are summarized in only two chapters within the entire work (2 Chr 34–35). His prominence does not surpass that of Hezekiah, since his death is interpreted by the Chronicler as a punitive act of God (cf. 2 Chr 35:20–25). Furthermore, the account of the Passover celebration under King Hezekiah in Chronicles is integrated into a long literary unit that includes chapter 29 – a Deuteronomistic literary development (cf. 2 Kgs 23:1–20)? – and chapter 31, which reports the purification of the Temple and the reorganization of worship. The narrative structure may therefore be presented as follows:

- 2 Chr 29:1–2: Introduction
 - 3–17: The Reform (purification of the Temple)
 - 18–36: Rededication and sacrifices
- 2 Chr 30:2–12: *Mitzwat hammelek* (the king’s decree)
 - 13–21: **The Passover celebration**
 - 22–27: The extension of the feast
- 2 Chr 31:1–21: The reorganization of worship, priests, and Levites

The celebration of Unleavened Bread and Passover begins from verse 13 – וַיֵּאסְפוּ יְרוּשָׁלַם עַם־רַב לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־חֵג הַמִּצּוֹת בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי קֹהֵל לְרַב מֵאֹד: A large crowd gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Unleavened

Bread in the second month; it was a very great assembly – which is in inclusion with verse 21; the whole constituting a perfect literary unit. It should be noted a striking aspect in these verses 13 and 21: the text speaks of the feast of *הַמִּצּוֹת* (Unleavened Bread) while in verses 15-20 it is about *הַפֶּסַח* (Passover). The use of these two terms signifies that the Chronicler reuses the Deuteronomistic *Vorlage* where the two feasts of different origins are unified (cf. Deut 16:1–8). The Priestly tradition of Lev 23:5-8 and Num 28:16-17 separates the two feasts. Verse 14 resumes the Reform which must precede Passover according to the model of Deut 12:2-6. It is at verse 15 that the actual description of Passover begins, which occurs on the fourteenth day of the second month¹.

In its description, the Chronicler highlights four particular traits of this Passover that are absent from 2 Kgs 23:21–23: a large assembly (*הַקָּהָל*), or a great people (*הָעָם רַב*); the importance of purification (*טְהָרָה*); an increasingly significant role for the priests and Levites (*הַלְוִיִּם וְהַכֹּהֲנִים*); and the great joy that characterizes this festival (*שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה*). One example is the convocation of all Israel from north to south, from Dan to Beer-sheba (v. 5).

Let us pause for a moment on this amplification “all Israel from North to South”, characteristic of this Passover under Hezekiah. Several studies note that the celebration of Passover under Hezekiah poses serious

1 Passover was to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month (Nisan). The Passover in Chronicles takes place on the fourteenth day of the second month (Iyyar). Verses 2 and 3 provide the justification: “The king, his officials, and all the assembly had consulted in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover in the second month; for it could not be celebrated at its appointed time, because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient numbers and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem.” J. van Goudoever estimates that the month of Nisan, when Passover was celebrated, must have coincided with the spring equinox. Because the lunar year lagged behind the solar year, an additional month, called the second Adar, had to be intercalated every three years before Passover (van Goudoever, 1997, pp. 19–20). The Targum of Chronicles also alludes to the intercalation of an additional Nisan month. In fact, according to the priestly tradition, the Torah itself already provided that, in exceptional cases, when one was impure or traveling during the Nisan Passover, it could be celebrated in the second month (Num 9:10–11). This regulation of the festival in the second month denotes an evolution of the feast that corresponds more closely to postexilic conditions. This gives the text of Chronicles a late style compared with traditions that report the celebration exclusively in the first month, notably the Deuteronomistic work (see also Le Déaut et al., 1971).

problems for modern critics regarding its historical value. Its historicity is debated within the canon itself in relation to the Deuteronomistic work. One could first observe that there is not the slightest trace of such a festival in the Deuteronomistic historical work. The author of the second book of Kings, for example, who focused on the centralization of worship in Jerusalem, would not have failed to allude to such a festival that brings everything back to Jerusalem. Is the Deuteronomist's silence on the event motivated simply by his theological perspectives, which are entirely different from the Chronicler's? Secondly, according to the Chronicler's chronology, it seems unlikely to us that Hezekiah would have dared to make overtures to the inhabitants of Samaria (in the North) in the first year of his reign, because Samaria was already under Assyrian occupation around 721 BC² a few years before his accession to the throne around 716–715 (cf. 2 Chronicles 29:1–3). Such an operation undertaken in the North would have created trouble for him from the Assyrian occupier. Or must we assume that this convocation was addressed exclusively to members of the anti-Assyrian party in the Northern Kingdom who were turning towards Jerusalem? Even the Deuteronomistic redactor, who places the fall of Samaria in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, could not resolve the ambiguity because Hezekiah's decree would have met with opposition from King Hoshea, who was still reigning in the North before Samaria's capture by Sargon II. Let us say that the Chronicler's perspective would simply be theological: through the verb שׁוּב (to return – to convert) and the mention אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְיִשְׂרָאֵל (...to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel), one can think of an anti-Samaritan polemic, since at the time of the redaction of the book of Chronicles, the Judeo-Samaritan schism was already consummated. In this sense, the convocation of all Israel (North) to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem is better understood as a reformist claim to banish the sanctuary of Gerizim because, as the Chronicler states, the sanctuary of Jerusalem is “the sanctuary that the

2 Cf. 2 Chr 30:6–7, 9: the plural use of the noun *melek* (v. 6) in the TM, which suggests a relatively long period during which more than one king succeeded one another on the throne of Assyria, whereas the LXX, the Peshitta, and the Vulgate have the singular.

Lord has consecrated forever” לְמִקְדָּשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִקְדִּישׁ לְעוֹלָם (2 Chronicles 30:8; Delcor, 1992, 93–106).

For reasons of purification, the Chronicler makes the sanctification of the people, priests, and Levites a *sine qua non* for the Passover rite. The Levites are responsible for the immolation of the Passover victims in place of the heads of families, according to Deut 16:6, because not all were pure. The account also emphasizes the immense joy that leads to the prolongation of the feast.

From the Judges to Josiah, from Solomon to Hezekiah: A Matter of Inclusions

Before concluding, a brief digression is necessary. This title accounts for the Chronicler’s parenthesis (Solomon–Hezekiah) within the broader Deuteronomistic–Chronicler inclusion of the history of the monarchy, from its beginning with the Judges to the last king faithful to God: Josiah, identified with David, the archetype of all the kings of Israel. It also highlights the two most important moments in this history, under Solomon and Hezekiah, when the greatest undertaking was achieved – one that no other kings of Israel had undertaken except these two: the centrality of Yahwistic worship in Jerusalem and, consequently, the predominant place of the Temple.

To this end, the text of 2 Kgs 23:21–23 establishes a significant link between Josiah’s Passover and that of the period of the Judges who succeeded Joshua, also considering the prophet Samuel as a judge acting in God’s place in the project of monarchy in Israel. This concern with historical figures from Israel’s past is also prominent in the Chronicler’s work. He often recalls major figures who intervened on the occasion of great festivals in Israel. This is the case, for example, with Josiah’s Passover, which he compares to Samuel’s in 2 Chr 35:18, and with the Feast of Tabernacles in the time of Ezra, which recalls the memory of Joshua in Neh 8:17. Regarding Hezekiah, the relationship with Solomon is firmly established; the Chronicler implicitly places Solomon as the *terminus a quo* of Hezekiah’s Passover: “There were great rejoicings in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like it in Jerusalem” (2 Chr 30:26). The mention

of this great joy – which is absent in 2 Kgs 23:21–23, which speaks of a great feast rather than great joy – is already present in verse 21. Yet its true motive remains uncertain. Does the Chronicler intend the great joy of this celebration to correspond to that which characterizes Ezra's Passover (Ezra 6:19–22), celebrated after liberation from the Babylonian exile, thereby insinuating a political referential background as the motive for this joy? (Nobile, 1992, pp. 195–196). Would Hezekiah's own words in 2 Chr 30:6. 9 support an interpretation that places this joy under the sign of liberation of some northern tribes – Ephraim, Asher, Zebulun, and Manasseh – from the Assyrian yoke?

However, Mathias Delcor argues that this great rejoicing crowd, coming from all Israel, resembles the context of the dedication of the Temple under Solomon. Thus, he states: “The Chronicler, after the fall of Samaria when the Northern Kingdom had disappeared, imagined that the conditions were met to unite all the tribes and rebuild under Hezekiah the great Israel in the likeness of Solomon's. This is why he wants to present Hezekiah as a new Solomon and why he imagined concluding his religious reform with a very solemn Passover feast similar to that of the Dedication of the Temple” (Delcor, 1992, p. 103). In the same vein, the Chronicler inserts the decision of the *qahal* (the assembly of the people) to add seven further days of joy to the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, thereby rivaling the feasts of the dedication of the Temple under King Solomon (see 2 Chr 7:9; Delcor, 1992, p. 98).

The Chronicler's Passover narrative therefore contains Deuteronomistic motifs, the first redaction of which likely dates to the exilic period. For example, the Passover was celebrated in accordance with the prescriptions of the Law of Moses: כְּמִשְׁפָּטֵם כְּתוּרַת מֹשֶׁה (v. 16). This motif is the backbone of Josiah's Reform. If Hezekiah's Passover is likely historical but the final editor gave it a different orientation from the Deuteronomistic one, then Hezekiah was the prophetic precursor of Josiah's Reform. His invitation to return to Jerusalem is not only a sign of hope for the exiles of the North but also a prophetic act valid for the future exiles of the South. Myers states that “it is commonly held that the Chronicler transferred to Hezekiah some of Josiah's celebrations, particularly this one... While the Chronicler may have used

language and ideas employed by the Deuteronomist (particularly in verses 6–9), there is no reason to think that he invented the story itself. There is good reason to believe that Josiah followed, at least in some respects, Hezekiah's policy" (Myers, 1965). It is in this sense that these two Passovers can be placed in parallel.

Conclusion

After analyzing the texts under study, several observations may be offered in conclusion. Both traditions speak of the fidelity of the two kings in similar phraseological terms. With regard to Josiah and Hezekiah, the Deuteronomist states that they did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, entirely as their father David had done. Among all the kings of Judah who came after or preceded them, there were none like them (cf. 2 Kgs 18:5; 22:2; 23:25). The Chronicler, for his part, reports the same testimony concerning both: "he walked in the ways of David his father; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left" (2 Chr 29:2; 34:2). Both traditions also present the reforms carried out by these two kings, and both speak of the Temple and Jerusalem. However, each presents the facts according to its own theological objective. The Deuteronomistic editor focuses on the Reform, whereas the Chronicler emphasizes the importance of the festival, marked by the number of participants from all Israel, the duration of the festivities, and the resulting joy. Ultimately, the two episodes, although belonging to different eras and traditions, not only correspond but also complement each other.

Abstract

The Passover of Two Kings. A Literary and Comparative Study of the Passover of Kings Josiah and Hezekiah

This article examines the Passover celebrations of Kings Josiah and Hezekiah through a literary and comparative analysis of 2 Kgs 23:21–23 and 2 Chr 30. The study explores the theological and literary function of Passover within the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler traditions, highlighting the relationship between

Law, worship, and land. It argues that Josiah's Passover represents cultic restoration linked to covenant fidelity and purification from idolatry, whereas Hezekiah's Passover emphasizes communal unity, purification, and liturgical joy. The comparison demonstrates both continuity and the distinct theological perspectives of the two biblical traditions.

Keywords: Bible, Chronicles, covenant, cult, Deuteronomist, Hezekiah, history, Jerusalem, Josiah, Passover, reform, Temple, theology

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