

# History and Ideology: The Case of Jeremiah 44

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## 1. Introduction

There was a time when biblical scholars would entitle their studies “The History of (Ancient) Israel.”<sup>1</sup> Then the definite article disappeared, and we were offered “A History of Ancient Israel,”<sup>2</sup> as the definite articles became reserved for “The History of Palestine.”<sup>3</sup> After this came the “search,” and this has since been replaced by the “invention” of Ancient Israel.<sup>4</sup> If these examples are indeed representative, they probably reflect an expected oscillation of the biblical studies pendulum from the optimistic positivism of the Albright school towards the opposite pole of skepticism, minimalism, and nihilism.

Within the range of this latter pole three trends can be identified. The first trend is best represented by Philip Davies’ study *In Search of “Ancient Israel”* (note the author’s quotation marks). I am not sure whether this title is meant to be a paraphrase of Van Seters’ *In Search of History* or of Erich von Däniken’s *In Search of Ancient Gods*.<sup>5</sup> Davies’ premise, formed apparently in the wake of the theories of Hayden White<sup>6</sup> and others, is that:

All story is fiction, and that must include historiography . . . historiography, as a branch of literature, is also ideology;

and

If all historians are inescapably bound to tell a story and not “the facts,” then at least this story must be our own.<sup>7</sup>

One may reject this premise of Davies and still respect his ambition to write fiction! Yet, I cannot avoid the impression that Davies’ work often reveals symptoms

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1. Martin Noth, *The History of Israel [Geschichte Israels]* (London, 1959).

2. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1959); J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Israel* (London, 1984).

3. Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis, 1993).

4. Philip R. Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”* (Sheffield, 1992); Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London and New York, 1996). For a short historical survey of studies on Ancient Israel, see: Giovanni Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (New York, 1988), 1–20.

5. John Van Seters, *In Search of History* (New Haven–London, 1983); Erich von Däniken, *In Search of Ancient Gods* (New York, 1974).

6. Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore–London, 1973).

7. Davies, *In Search*, 13–14.

of the “Pygmalion Syndrome”: the author seems to fall in love with his fictitious Galathea while forgetting that the image he has created was not intended to be flesh and blood—namely a “real” history—but rather fiction. However, as fiction, such studies are irrelevant to this article.

The second trend could be called “the conspiracy theory”: “Ancient Israel” is actually the fruit of either a Zionist or a Christian colonial conspiracy or a combination of both.<sup>8</sup> I will not argue with this trend either. Too many conspiracy theories, be their object the Kennedy assassination or Princess Diana’s death, or the spurious “Protocols” of the Elders of Zion have to do with obsessions—political or other—rather than with impartial scientific evidence. Treating obsessions is beyond my professional competence.

Relevant to this study is only the third trend. It pretends neither to produce fiction nor to prove a conspiracy, but rather to ground its study of Ancient Israel on firm evidence rather than on wishful conservative thinking. It therefore examines the methodology used in previous studies, attempting to refine it in order to establish a more adequate and valid methodology. One of the dominant characteristics of this approach is the disqualification of the Bible, mainly so-called “biblical historiography,” as a historical source for the study of pre-exilic Israel. The methodological postulate is that being an ideological book, which contains no contemporary evidence of the pre-exilic period, the Bible cannot and should not be considered a reliable historical source. Here is a quotation from Lemche’s study on “Ancient Israel”:

From a methodological and logical point of view it is impossible to reconstruct the history of Israel and its religion in pre-exilic times.<sup>9</sup>

Or another quotation from Garbini:

The value of the Old Testament as a historical source is very relative and . . . a particular piece of information cannot be considered reliable until it has been confirmed from elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, since one must use solely independent contemporaneous evidence in any reconstruction of the history of Ancient Israel, only archaeological and contemporary epigraphic findings meet the requirements. This interesting methodological argument deserves close attention.

For an examination of the validity of this argument, the Josianic cultic reform (hereafter: JR) seems to be a most appropriate test case. This alleged reform is probably one of the most widely discussed biblical events since 1805, when de Wette

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8. See Whitelam, *The Invention*; Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism* (Sheffield, 1997).

9. N. P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, 1988), 32. He poses some rhetorical questions to undermine the credibility of the Bible as a historical source for the pre-exilic period: “were these editors concerned to write a history of Israel, or did they have some other intention? . . . whether the editors attempted to describe an event ‘as it happened’ or whether they made use of ideological patterns in order to depict particular historical relations” (52). Lemche claims that the story of David’s accession to the throne is “a literary composition which adheres to a pre-existent narrative pattern” which should lead to the conclusion that this “cannot be regarded as an attempt to write *history* as such” (53). It is clear that the ideas of Hayden White are being echoed here. However, White’s main premise is, that “*history* as such,” any “*history* as such,” is built upon a narrative pattern, so in this sense biblical historiography is not unique but is rather in good company.

10. Garbini, *History an Ideology*, 16.

published his famous hypothesis associating the Book of Deuteronomy with the Josianic reform, as told in 2 Kings 22–23.<sup>11</sup> The event bears not only on dating the D document but also on any comprehensive reconstruction of pre-exilic Israelite religion. It is also one of the most important events in the eyes of biblical historiographers, whose accounts of the reform (2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34–35) have an unmistakably ideological flavor. Was it a real historical event, or just a late ideologically-motivated fictitious account? King Josiah himself is lucky: unlike King David, his very existence has not been seriously questioned.<sup>12</sup> This, however, does not prove the historical reality of his alleged reform, which is not corroborated by any extra-biblical evidence. Was it, then, an actual event?<sup>13</sup>

Most scholars answer this question in the affirmative. Yet the doubts expressed as to certain details, mainly the date of composition of the story in 2 Kings 22–23, have attenuated the conviction with which the affirmation is held.<sup>14</sup> H. D. Hoffmann does not doubt that a religious reform was executed by Josiah.<sup>15</sup> Yet he dates 2 Kings 22–23 to the post-exilic period, indicating the fictitious character of the “*Auffindungsbericht*”—the story of the lost book’s discovery.<sup>16</sup> Lemche, too, is uncertain about “whether this account [2 Kings 22–23—Y.H.] corresponds to the actual conditions; and, it is also possible to raise doubts as to the factual extent of the reforms in question.”<sup>17</sup> Ahlström has dated the story to the time of Ezra, claiming its purpose was the legitimization of Ezra’s Torah.<sup>18</sup> Such a claim undermines the historical credibility of the account of the Josianic reform. Similar apprehensions as to the veracity of the reform account are expressed by Levin<sup>19</sup> and Garbini.<sup>20</sup>

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11. W. M. L. de Wette, *Dissertatio critico-exegetica qua Deuteronomium a prioribus Pentateuchi libris diversum alius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris opus esse monstratur* (Jena, 1805).

12. Yet whoever doubts the very existence of a pre-exilic Judean Kingdom necessarily questions the historicity of King Josiah, let alone the biblical account of him. A recent example of this attitude is: J. R. Linville, *Israel in the Book of Kings: The Past as a Project of Social Identity* (Sheffield, 1998). For him “the story of Josiah’s reign depicts the transformation of monarchist greater Israel into ‘exilic’ Israel; transfiguring the political sphere of action into the model of an ‘exilic’ piety” (p. 252). D. A. Glatt-Gilad is right in considering this conclusion an “illustration of Linville’s penchant for idiosyncratic interpretations”; see Glatt-Gilad’s review of Linville’s book in *JBL* 119 (2000), 116–18.

13. The question refers not to the historicity of all the details in the story—the finding of the book, Huldah’s prophecy, etc.—but rather to the cultic reform as such.

14. For a discussion of recent scholarly views about the Josianic reform, see B. Giesemann, “Die sogenannte josianische Reform in der gegenwaertigen Forschung,” *ZAW* 106 (1994), 223–42.

15. H. D. Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen, Untersuchungen zu einem Grundthema der deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Zurich, 1980), 269: “Dennoch kann kein Zweifel bestehen, dass er die historische Grundtendenz jener Josia-Zeit richtig wiedergibt, ja dass die politisch motivierte und durch religioese prophetische Impulse verstaerkte restauration des Jahweglaubens tatsaechlich in der kurzen Regierungszeit des Josia letztes Mal Prophetie und Koenigtum zur Uebereinstimmung gekommen sind.”

16. “Im Idealbild des Josia haelt Dtr seinen Zeitgenossen des Exils und der Fruehnachexilischen Zeit dass Model vir Augen, dem es nachzueifern gilt” (*ibid.*, 269–70); “Der Auffindungsbericht . . . ist ganz eine fiktive dtr Komposition . . . Die Auffindung des Buches ist also kein historisches Ereignis, sondern eine dtr Tendenzerzahlung” (268).

17. Lemche, *Ancient Israel*, 170–71.

18. Ahlström, *Ancient Palestine*, 777.

19. C. Levin, “Joschija im deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk,” *ZAW* 96 (1984), 351–71.

20. G. Garbini, “Hebrew Literature in the Persian Period,” T. C. Eskenazi and K. H. Richards, eds., *Second Temple Studies* 2 (Sheffield, 1994), 180–88: “the discovery of *Deuteronomy* in the Jerusalem temple . . . is a much later and entirely fictitious narrative” (180).

Römer has indicated that the story in 2 Kings 22–23 is built upon the literary model of finding an ancient book in a temple, and hence its historical accuracy is dubious.<sup>21</sup> This imputed resemblance between the Josiah story and Mesopotamian texts referring to temple reforms has led Handy to a more decisive conclusion: “Nor . . . is it safe to claim . . . that there actually was a reform in Judah of any kind from which this tale of the good king Josiah derived,” especially since “neither has archaeological data provided any confirmation of a reform under Josiah.”<sup>22</sup>

My purpose in this discussion is to show that the historicity of the reform can be tested from the Bible itself, without the need of any extra-biblical sources. But unlike the above-mentioned studies, and others as well, which examine the historical veracity of the account of the reform through the story in 2 Kings, I will refer to Jeremiah 44. Jeremiah 44 is a prophetic sermon, encased in a historiographic account, both heavily loaded with ideology. This combination makes Jeremiah 44 a good test case for the methodological assumption that the more ideological an account, the less valid and useful it is as a historical source.

## 2. Authorship

Jeremiah 44 is a combination of two literary elements, both in prose. It is therefore a part of the prose layer of the book of Jeremiah. It contains a semi-biographical report (as in chaps. 26, 28, 36, 38) about a harsh controversy between the prophet and his audience (vv. 1, 15–25). This part of the chapter bears the characteristics of the so-called “biographical” source of the book (Mowinckel’s source B).<sup>23</sup> The second and main part of the chapter, however, is a prose sermon directed against widespread national idolatry, professedly delivered by Jeremiah after his reluctant migration to Egypt. This prophetic sermon (vv. 2–14, 26–28; commonly categorized as a part of the “C” source), which ends with an אֵימָה—a divine sign—is said to have been uttered in a national gathering of “all the Jews who are dwelling in the Land of Egypt, who are dwelling in Migdol and Tahpanhes and in Nof and in the land of Patros” (v. 2).

Since the whole chapter is in prose, scholars derive their views on its authorship and coherence from their premises about the composition of the prose sections B and C of the whole book. In this matter there are two alternate views: The first one considers sources B and C as contemporaneous with Jeremiah: B is the work of Baruch ben Neriah and C is a collection of authentic Jeremianic prophecies. The alternative treats B and C as later sources, which do not reflect the real biography or the authentic views, let alone words, of Jeremiah.

I accept neither the Jeremianic authenticity of the prophecy nor the utmost accuracy of the semi-biographic story, but my thesis here does not depend upon this

21. T. C. Römer, “Transformations in Dtr. and Biblical Historiography,” *ZAW* 109 (1997), 1–11.

22. L. K. Handy, “Historical Probability and the Narrative of Josiah’s Reform in 2 Kings,” in S. W. Holloway and L. K. Handy, eds., *The Pitcher is Broken* (Sheffield, 1995), 252–75, at 261.

23. See S. Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania, 1914). Mowinckel’s codes to the three main sources in the book of Jeremia—A (authentic Jeremianic poetic prophecies), B (the biographical source) and C (prose sermons)—are used by most scholars and will be used here too.

skeptical evaluation, and it will not be upset by the more conservative view. It does depend, however, on defining chapter 44 as Deuteronomistic. Such a definition does not necessarily contradict the Jeremianic authenticity of the sermon and the veracity of the biographic account by Baruch. Living around 586 B.C.E. and denouncing idolatry and similar transgressions, both Jeremiah and Baruch may have used a Deuteronomistic style and expressed Deuteronomistic ideas, and might therefore be considered “Deuteronomists.”

Indeed, the chapter is replete with Deuteronomistic features: the stereotypic ideology of the chapter; the description of the “entire” people gathering to listen to God’s reproach, followed by the audience’s rejection of the condemnation; the concept of idolatry being the cause of all national calamities; the inclination to blur the distinction between “fathers” and “sons,” past and present generations,<sup>24</sup> the syntax and the vocabulary—all these are typically Deuteronomistic, as is recognized by most scholars and commentators.

### 3. *Literary Coherence*

The literary coherence of Jeremiah 44 is discussed in many studies. Some scattered verses (e.g., vv. 3–6, 10–14, 20–23, 27)<sup>25</sup> and two longer sections—the account of the controversy in vv. 15–25 and the sign in vv. 29–30—are considered by some scholars as secondary. It is my view that the controversy section is an integral part of the composition, while the sign section (vv. 29–30) is secondary. However, these two assertions are not vital for my thesis, and will therefore not be discussed here. It is important, on the other hand, to take note of the unique character of vv. 29–30.

In order to convince his audience that a calamity will befall the Judeans in Egypt, Jeremiah gives them a sign—אֵרָת:

Thus says Yahweh: I will give Pharaoh Hophra King of Egypt into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of the seekers of his soul, as I gave Zedekiah King of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon his enemy and the seeker of his life (v. 30).<sup>26</sup>

This entire section is detached from both the sermon and the controversy and mentions neither of them. It is a clear case of a *vaticinium ex eventu*,<sup>27</sup> as proved by the poor analogy in the sign. Surely the expected natural analogy is “Nebuchadrezzar will destroy *Hophra* as *he* destroyed *Zedekiah*” and not “an *anonymous enemy* will destroy *Hophra* as *Nebuchadrezzar* destroyed *Zedekia*.” It is clear that the author

24. See Y. Hoffman, “Pseudepigraphic Exigencies in Deuteronomy,” *Shenaton* 5–6 (1978–79), 41–54 [in Hebrew].

25. For a detailed and up-to-date discussion, see William McKane, *Jeremiah*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1996), 1083–95.

26. V. 30. Pharaoh Hophra reigned between 589/8 and 570, when his general Amasis defeated him and usurped his throne. See McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1082.

27. This opinion is held by most contemporary commentators: e.g., Bernhard Duhm, *Jeremia* (Tübingen–Leipzig, 1901), 334; D. Carl Heinrich Cornill, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Leipzig, 1905); Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, HAT (Tübingen, 1968), 263; McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1082; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 743. Holladay is more vague when he suggests that, “the prophecy is so shaped that Hophra’s ultimate fate conforms to it.” See Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2.305.

avoided the more logical analogy because he already knew that it was not Nebuchadrezzar who killed Hophra but rather the latter's general and successor, Amasis. Thus, the author (or an editor), being aware of this historical fact when asserting that Jeremiah had anticipated the end of Hophra some years before it occurred, was clever enough not to mention Amasis by name; when "fulfilled," the authenticity of too "accurate" a prophecy might appear rather suspicious, not only to biblical critics but even to the common reader. The author therefore preferred the vague terms: "enemies" (איביו) and "seekers of his life" (מבקשי נפשו), which *post factum* could have been construed as referring to Amasis, without raising too many skeptical eyebrows.<sup>28</sup>

The background of this *vaticinium ex eventu* can only be the victory in 570 B.C.E. of Amasis over Hophra, when the event was still fresh in mind and vivid enough to serve as a divine ארת. This might also be the date of the composition of the entire chapter, if vv. 29–30 were indeed an original part of it. If, on the other hand, these verses are a later addition, then 570 B.C.E. or shortly thereafter is the *terminus ad quem* of this Deuteronomistic chapter as a whole.

Whether original or secondary, vv. 29–30 raise the question of why a "sign" was needed at all, especially since it required such a lame analogy (Nebuchadrezzar-Amasis and Hophra-Zedekiah). My answer is that the author of the ארת (sign) section, vv. 29–30, felt that Jeremiah's arguments in his controversy with the people were not convincing enough, and, therefore, that an unequivocal sign was needed to bolster, reinforce, and sustain them. Such a divine ארת, which would be seen as having come to pass, corresponds to the Deuteronomistic concept of a prophet, whose truthfulness is tested by the fulfillment of his prophecies.<sup>29</sup>

What was the weak argument that necessitated an ארת even if that ארת gave rise to such a poor analogy? In order to answer that question we must refer to the core of chapter 44: the controversy between Jeremiah and his audience.

#### 4. The Controversy and JR

Denouncing their idolatry, Jeremiah reminds the Judeans in Egypt that worshipping foreign deities caused the destruction and desolation of Judah and Jerusalem. This idea is not merely rejected by the congregation but is also claimed to be refuted by the historical evidence:

But since we ceased to burn incense to the queen of heaven and to pour out libation to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine (v. 18).

What occasion is referred to by the words "since we left off . . ." etc.? McKane writes: "The general view is that the period to which the women look back nostalgically is the reign of Manasseh before the implementation of Josiah's reform

28. I do not share the view of some scholars, who have suggested that when speaking of "your enemies and the seekers of your life," Jeremiah means Nebuchadrezzar, so that we have therefore not a *vaticinium ex eventu* but rather an unfulfilled prophecy, which goes to prove its authenticity. For a review of the opinion held by Giesebrecht and Volz, see McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1082–83.

29. See Yair Hoffman, "Prophecy and Soothsaying," in Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler, Jeffrey H. Tigay, eds., *Tehillah le-Moshe* (M. Greenberg Festschrift; Winona Lake, Indiana, 1997), 221–43.

(Giesebrecht, Cornill, Streane, Peake, H. Schmidt, Rudolph, Weiser, Bright, Nicholson).<sup>30</sup> To the above list McKane himself can be added, as well as Holladay<sup>31</sup> and many others, including myself. Carroll refers to this interpretation as an “interesting reading of the text but by no means a necessary interpretation of it.”<sup>32</sup> However, he too agrees that: “if the hand of the Deuteronomist is to be detected in 44 . . . then it may well be the case that vv. 17–18 are intended to be a reflection on that Deuteronomistically constructed reform.” We shall return to this remark of Carroll below.

Another scholar who does not concur in the common interpretation of vv. 17–18 is Morton Smith.<sup>33</sup> His claim is that v. 18 is evidence of the continuation, not only of private, but also of the royal, official cult of the Queen of Heaven down to the siege that ended in 587 (p. 16). This interpretation is unacceptable, mainly because it does not conform with Jeremiah’s response in v. 21:

Has not the sacrificing which you did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your officials, and the people of the land, been remembered by Yahweh and has it not come into his mind? (v. 21)

Smith’s interpretation is also utterly inconsistent with the words *זכר ה' ותעלה על לבו*—“been remembered by Yahweh and has come to His mind,” which can refer only to an event in the remote past and not to the immediate period before the destruction. We should, then, maintain the common view, namely, that the controversy between Jeremiah and his audience refers to the alleged JR.

The controversy in Jeremiah 44 is a dramatization of a theoretical, theological problem that troubled Deuteronomistic historiography: what caused the 586 B.C.E. disaster? The standard Deuteronomistic answer is: worshipping “other gods” (*אלהים אחרים*).<sup>34</sup> It is this very concept that is challenged here, ostensibly by the Judeans in Egypt but actually by the same Deuteronomistic author who formulated it and made it the center of his ideology. In other words, being aware of the fragility of his own dogma and the serious problems it raises, the Deuteronomist felt a need to discuss rather than ignore it, in order to reconcile its theological difficulties. Thus, using the common biblical device for introducing abstract ideas, he composed a story about a controversy, in which he presented the dogma and its difficulty, and then the resolution of the difficulty. The snag in the dogma is, of course, that the national calamity followed immediately upon the heels of the alleged JR, which, according to the Deuteronomistic historiography, brought an end to the national idolatry and should have, therefore, prevented any further catastrophes. In the story the refutation of the Deuteronomistic dogma is put into the mouths of the audience.

The solution to the difficulty lies in a delayed execution of a previously determined divine verdict. The final judgment on Jerusalem had been determined by God

30. McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1087.

31. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 304.

32. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 736.

33. Morton Smith, “The Veracity of Ezekiel, the Sins of Manasseh, and Jeremiah 44:18,” *ZAW* 87 (1975), 11–16.

34. For the use and significance of this Deuteronomistic expression, see Yair Hoffman, “The Conception of ‘Other Gods’ in Deuteronomistic Literature,” in Ilai Alon, Itamar Gruenwald, Itamar Singer, eds., *Israel Oriental Studies* 14 (Leiden, 1994), 103–18.

even before JR, which, unfortunately, came too late and could have only postponed, but not abrogated, the punishment. This is precisely the solution ascribed by the Deuteronomist to Hulda in 2 Kgs. 22:15–20. Indirectly it is implied also in 2 Kgs. 21:12–15. It can therefore be considered the standard Deuteronomistic explication.

However, such an explanation is far from being convincing. It is a poor apology rather than a valid, congruous, convincing theological solution, and that is why, for his support, the author had to invoke the אִוֶּת in vv. 29–30, notwithstanding its weakness. The question of whether or not these verses are an integral part of the original chapter is of secondary importance here. The fact is that either the author or the editor realized the inadequacy of the normative “delayed response solution,” and created out of the victory of Amasis a *vaticium ex eventu* in order to buttress his unconvincing explanation.

Upon this background two alternate, mutually exclusive options about the historicity of JR should be considered: (1) the reform is nothing but a post-exilic, ideologically-motivated, fictitious story, or (2) it was a real historical event.

If the first alternative is correct, then the following scenario is unavoidable: sometime after the 586 destruction the Deuteronomist invented a fictitious story about a Josianic cultic reform, in order to promote the dogma that idolatry causes calamity, and worshipping Yahweh alone prevents it. But, alas, he realized that his story actually refuted the dogma it had been meant to support. Confronting this untoward result, he had to contrive an excuse—the delayed divine response. Yet, the unsatisfactory quality of this excuse compelled him to formulate another “broken reed”—the Amasis-Nebuchadrezzar אִוֶּת—to save his shaky doctrine! Whoever can live with such a convoluted chain of suppositions may indeed deny the historical authenticity of JR.

If, on the other hand, this explication is rejected, then only the second possibility remains. In that case, it would mean that King Josiah did carry out a Deuteronomistic reform, motivated by the idea that national disasters are an unavoidable consequence of idolatry, while worshipping Yahweh immunizes against any future calamity. The destruction and the exile refuted this dogma, and it needed to be defended by all kinds of stratagems. Jeremiah 44 (as well as 2 Kgs. 22:15–20; 21:12–15) is therefore an attempt of the Deuteronomist to protect the religious concept that had been promulgated by the historical JR.

The mutual exclusiveness of these two options was grasped well by Carroll, who admitted that “to read 44:17–18 against a background provided by 2 Kings 22–23 is to assume a historicity for the Josiah story.”<sup>35</sup> Since Carroll seemingly refuses *a priori* to accept the historicity of JR, he felt uneasy with the only reasonable interpretation of vv. 17–18. If, however, we avoid any *a priori* approach towards JR, then we cannot but admit its historical authenticity. Had JR not been a real historical event, and a later Deuteronomist had wanted, for some reason, to invent a fictitious story about a religious reform that helped to prevent a national disaster, he could have easily relied on his own story about the reform of King Hezekiah, about 80 years before JR. The claim could have been, then, that it saved the nation from the

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35. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 736.

Assyrian destruction; and had Manasseh not sinned so badly, the 586 catastrophe would also have been avoided. The weak “delayed response” excuse would not have been needed!

### 5. *Conclusion*

I am trying to demonstrate a methodological principle: sometimes the accuracy of a biblical historiographic account can be proved even without extra-biblical supportive evidence. Ideology can and does create fictitious historiography or molds real historical events according to its needs, sometimes even by twisting and bending some of the hard facts. Yet, this need not obstruct our ability to verify or refute the basic historical authenticity of a story even without any external evidence. Such a method, however, is effective only for readers whose approach is free of *a priori* axioms, whether of a fundamentalist or a nihilistic character, that are immune to scientific or logical proof.