**Three Evil Kings and One Promise: Another Look at the Doctrine of Retribution and the Question of the Eternal Reign of the Davidic Dynasty in the Book of Chronicles**

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**Abstract**

One of the most widely studied subjects in scholarship on the book of Chronicles is the question of the revival of the Davidic dynasty after the exile. Most scholars have adopted the same methodological approach: analyzing sources in the book directly or indirectly connected to the promise of the Davidic dynasty. This article addresses the issue from a novel angle – through a discussion of the three most wicked kings described in Chronicles: Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Ahaz. It seems that only in cases in which a king has no merits whatsoever does the question arise whether his rule (and the succession of his son after him) can be justified. The comparison between these three kings uncovers numerous connections between them, in particular the motif of the death of their children, which does not appear anywhere else in the book. This article demonstrates the impact of this motif on the question of the continuation of the Davidic lineage and on the Chronicler's doctrine of retribution.

**Introduction**

Among the many subjects that have engaged the attention of scholars of the book of Chronicles, two are worthy of particular note: the doctrine of retributionand the question of the eternal nature of the Davidic dynasty.

The doctrine of retributionreceived attention especially after the studies by Sarah Japhet.[[1]](#footnote-1) Japhet, in line with Wellhausen, showed that Chronicles presents a measured and consistent system with regard to the punishment meted out to sinners or the reward given to the righteous. The reward or punishment is usually mentioned following closely upon a good or bad deed by the king, a fact which earned this doctrine the name “personal and immediate retribution.” And indeed, the doctrine is reflected in many passages in that book, usually with no parallel in the *Vorlage*.[[2]](#footnote-2) In order to emphasize its existence among his listeners, the Chronicler uses a fixed vocabulary in a way that creates ideational uniformity that is easy to identify. So, for example, the roots עז״ב or מע״ל are regularly employed to describe sinful acts, while the roots דר״ש or שע״ן are used regularly to describe good actions.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Japhet’s perception was not entirely accepted among scholars, with no small amount of criticism leveled against it. On the whole, her critics succeeded in demonstrating that the doctrine she describes is not reflected in all the instances of reward and punishment in Chronicles, but instead there are some small or significant departures from that doctrine.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Another issue that has attracted considerable scholarly attention is the eternal nature of the Davidic dynasty’s rule and the question of its revival after the Exile.**[[5]](#footnote-5)** At least five central approaches to this matter can be identified:

1. The first approach believes that the dynastic promise is fulfilled, in practice, in the Persian period in the form of the community, the Temple, and the ritual that takes place in it.[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus, this approach uproots the concern with a personal figure from the house of David worthy of inheriting the kingship and moves the center of gravity to the Temple and the community.

2. The second approach believes that fulfillment of this promise can be found in the person of Zerubavel, a descendant of the Davidic line, who came to the Land of Israel from Babylon at the end of the 6th century BCE.[[7]](#footnote-7) According to this view, the promise to the Davidic line is not still awaiting fulfillment but has come to be in the here-and-now, in flesh-and-blood reality.

3. The third approach, which is essentially a messianic approach, believes that an appropriate person from the house of David has not yet emerged to restore the dynasty to power, and thus at the heart of the book is a wish for the reestablishment of the kingdom under a king from the house of David.[[8]](#footnote-8)

4. The fourth approach believes that the Davidic dynasty is still awaiting the fulfillment of the promise at some time in the future in the form of an ideal “Temple Community.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

5. The fifth approach believes that the promise to David was already fulfilled by Solomon and the construction of the Temple, but the expectation of dynastic renewal continues and is dependent on the people’s deeds.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It should be noted that in the discussion of reward and punishment and in the discussion of the expectation of the return of the Davidic dynasty, scholars have used a similar methodology: citing verses from Chronicles that offer proof, direct or indirect, of the conception under discussion or, alternatively, to rebut the claims of competing conceptions.[[11]](#footnote-11) This methodology, of course, is widely accepted among scholars and constitutes a basis for all biblical research.

Below, I shall attempt to add another layer to the deliberation concerning those two themes, but from a different angle. Instead of citing and analyzing the range of scriptural passages that deal directly or indirectly with those themes, I will approach them through an analysis of passages and events related only to the reigns of the three most evil kings in Chronicles: Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Ahaz.[[12]](#footnote-12) Those three kings are considered unusual in comparison to the other kings of Judah in Chronicles, because their periods are characterized only by negative actions. From a cultic and political perspective, the reigns of those three kings represent, each in its own time, a very severe low point. It seems worthwhile to examine the conceptions about reward and punishment and the dynasty precisely during periods of crisis, when the Davidic king is at his low point. In my view, only in such a situation, when the king has no credit at all to his name—only then should the question be asked: by what right does he continue to rule, and by what right should his kingship be inherited by his son after him? If we can make use of the Chronicler’s terminology for a moment, the question would be phrased this way: how can the promise to the Davidic dynasty exist simultaneously with the Chronicler’s doctrine of immediate retribution inflicted on the sinner?

We begin the discussion with a brief survey of Jehoram, Azahiah, and Ahaz—the three worst kings in the history of the Kingdom of Judah.

**Jehoram**

Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat is the first king of Judah whose era of rule is described in negative terms from beginning to end.[[13]](#footnote-13) His evil nature was brought about, in the Chronicler’s view, by personal connections between Jehoshaphat and Ahab, King of Israel, which led to marital ties between his son Jeroham and Ahab’s daughter, Athaliah. This problematic reality forced both the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler to mention, right at the outset of the story, the promise to the house of David: “However, the Lord refrained from destroying Judah, for the sake of His servant David, in accordance with His promise to maintain a lamp for his descendants for all time” (2 K 8:19), and “However, the Lord refrained from destroying the house of David for the sake of the covenant he had made with David, and in accordance with his promise to maintain a lamp for him and his descendants for all time” (2 Chr 21:7).**[[14]](#footnote-14)** In other words, as egregious as Jehoram’s sins may be, they cannot cancel the promise of eternity to the house of David.

Nevertheless, despite the similarity between the two formulations, it appears that each of them tries to spotlight a different emphasis, which can lead to a considerable difference in meaning between them. So, for example, the formulation in Kings tries to place in center stage the Kingdom of Judah, which is saved from ruin that could be the result of the king’s sins, while Chronicles, describing the same era, highlights the salvation of “the house of David,” meaning a descendant in the Davidic line. Some think that the difference is necessary because leaving the wording as “the Lord refrained from destroying Judah” would appear unreasonable, since God had already destroyed Judah when they were exiled to Babylon.[[15]](#footnote-15) Others have thought that the change indicates the Chronicler’s desire to emphasize that after the recovery of the people, such as it was, in the province of Yehud, what remained was to restore the Davidic dynasty and appoint a king from that dynasty[[16]](#footnote-16). Still others think that the difference is to be found in the Chronicler’s concept of personal recompense, which tends to punish only the individual person, not the public, for his misdeeds.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Another difference between the two formulations noted above can be found in the reason for Judah’s rescue in Kings or that of the house of David in Chronicles: “for the sake of His servant David” in Kings, versus “for the sake of the covenant he had made with David” in Chronicles. Even a perfunctory glance at these two formulations shows clearly that the connection between David and God in the version in Chronicles is more solid, since it rests on a covenant between the two of them.[[18]](#footnote-18) By contrast, the connection between David and God in Kings appears less strong, resting as it does on God’s kindness (*ḥesed*) toward His servant David, grace that could undergo change as circumstances change.

It would seem that this relationship between these two formulations should be expressed in the measure of punishment that the sinning king deserves to have imposed upon him: the kindness formulation should not present broad punishment being inflicted upon Jehoram and his line, while the covenant formulation should stave off all punishment that has any direct connection to the dynasty.[[19]](#footnote-19)

However, despite the kindness formulation that appears in Kings, the Deuteronomist chooses to go on to present Jehoram’s sins. In spite of Jehoram’s many sins, he dies a natural death and is buried with his ancestors in the City of David. The book of Kings contains no hint of a punishment imposed on him or his descendants. The description in Chronicles, on the other hand, is very far from that. A letter that is received, supposedly from Elijah the Prophet, warns the king that his many sins will lead to a very great punishment.[[20]](#footnote-20) And indeed, after the letter the Chronicler describes a series of severe punishments meted out to Jehoram: Edom and Libnah rebel against him, he is punished with a harsh illness of the intestines from which he never recovers, but worst of all is that all his sons but the youngest one are killed in an incursion by the Arabs. Among this series of punishments, we should take note of two: his intestinal illness and the death of his sons. As Zimran has shown, the “disease of the bowels” was in his genitals and caused him to become infertile.[[21]](#footnote-21) To this was added the other severe punishment in the form of the death of his sons in the Philistine and Arab invasion.[[22]](#footnote-22) These two punishments are in contradiction with the covenant formula.[[23]](#footnote-23) That formula creates an anticipation on the part of the reader that the text will ignore Jehoram the sinner or at worst will punish him in a way that will not have a direct influence on his descendants and thus on the continuation of the dynasty. Instead, the reader is exposed to a description of punishments that are in basic contradiction to the covenant formula. How, then, can one explain this gap between the covenant formula, which grant immunity to the king and, most important, to his line, and the heavy punishments that are inflicted not only on Jehoram but on his dynasty in the form of the abdominal illness and the death of his sons? For the time being, we will leave this question without an answer, and we will come back to it after we conclude our discussion of Kings Ahaziah and Ahaz.

**Ahaziah**

Ahaziah, who was Jehoram’s “youngest son,” is enthroned by the residents of Jerusalem as King. The Chronicler repeats, at the beginning of the story, the account of the incursion by Arabs and the death of Ahaziah’s older brothers, and it may be that this repetition hints at his ascent to the throne not having been the preferred option, but rather with no other choice in the absence of any older brother to take their father Jehoram’s place was Ahaziah crowned king. Ahaziah’s shaky status at the time of his ascent to the throne is emphasized by contrasts to his father Jehoram in four ways:

1. Jehoram was marked as the successor during the life of his father, Jehoshaphat. This fact undoubtedly contributed to his attainment of personal glory and the stability of the kingdom; Ahaziah, by contrast, was enthroned with no other option.

2. Jehoram is the firstborn son, while Ahaziah is the youngest son.

3. Jehoram takes power “over his father’s kingdom” (2 Chr 21:4) by killing all his brothers until he alone was left, without competitors. Ahaziah, too, remains alone, but his aloneness was not because he became powerful but because all his brothers had died.

4. Despite Ahaziah’s situation at the outset, he very quickly “catches up” with his father, also following the path of the house of Ahab. We should pay attention, though, to the fact that, unlike his father, who constantly acts of his own accord, Ahaziah is led around by the house of Ahab. The root יע״ץ (give advice, take counsel) appears in this context three times, right at the beginning of the story, and more than anything else expresses his dependence on those around him.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahab in preparation for the war in Ramoth-gilead (2 Chr 18) recurs with his grandson Ahaziah: he goes out to war in Ramoth-gilead together with Jehoram, King of Israel. The results of those two wars are remarkably similar: The King of Israel is injured during the course of the war, while the king of Judah emerges unscathed. During Ahaziah’s visit with Jehoram, King of Israel, which is explained by the Chronicler as God’s intention—“The Lord caused the downfall of Ahaziah because he visited Joram”—he and his nephews die at the hand of Jehu son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had anointed “to cut off the house of Ahab” (2 Chr 22:7).

The credit earned by Jehoshaphat prior to the war in Ramot-gilead helped him escape the wrath of God after he cooperated with Ahab, King of Israel, as the prophet testifies: “For this, wrath is upon you from the Lord. However, there is some good in you” (2 Chr 19:2–3). And in the same way, because of Jehoshaphat’s merits, his son Ahaziah earns burial: “He was given a burial, because it was said, ‘He is the son of Jehoshaphat who worshipped the Lord wholeheartedly’” (2 Chr 2:9).[[25]](#footnote-25)

After his death, Athaliah, his mother, rises up and wipes out all his sons except for Jehoash, who was saved by Jehoshabeath, Jehoram’s daughter. In this act of killing all the king’s sons, we return to the story of the killing of Jehoram’s sons by the Arabs. In both instances, all the children are murdered except for one young boy who is saved. One must ask: Is it a coincidence that in both these stories, about Jehoram and about Ahaziah, the motif of the killing of all the sons but the youngest occurs?

**Ahaz**

Many scholars consider Ahaz as the most evil king of all the kings of Judah in Chronicles.[[26]](#footnote-26) They have noted that the emphasis on his evil character has been accomplished in a very sophisticated way, using chaotic writing that reflects the chaotic period that his sins brought about.[[27]](#footnote-27) Ahaz commits every sin possible. He follows the path of the Kings of Israel, makes molten images for Baal worship, burns his sons in the fire, offers sacrifices and incense on the unsanctioned shrines, makes an offering to the gods of Damascus, cuts the utensils of the Temple into pieces, makes altars for pagan offerings in Jerusalem, and closes the doors of the Temple (2 Chr 28). Unlike Jehoram and Ahaziah, about whom the account of their sins appears only at the beginning of their respective stories, with Ahaz the sins appear at the beginning and at the end, thus creating a sense that he never stopped sinning.

Such a voluminous set of sins brings with it a very large set of punishments. We should pay attention to the fact that the Chronicler is careful to provide theological explanations for those punishments, in accordance with the theory of reward and punishment: “because they had forsaken the Lord, God of their fathers” (2 Chr 28:6), “for he threw off restraint in Judah and trespassed against the Lord” (2 Chr 28:19). Ahaz is defeated by the king of Aram and by the king of Israel, his son Maaseiah and some royal officials are killed, the Edomites strike at him, the Philistines take away significant portions of his kingdom, the Assyrians to whom he had turned for help became his adversaries instead.

We should pay attention to the fact that all these punishments are directed at Judah. Surprisingly and unusually, Ahaz himself suffers no damage. The Chronicler does not take him to task and shorten his life with an unanticipated death. Quite the opposite: he describes Ahaz’s death as “he slept with his fathers,” a fate generally reserved for righteous kings or at least those who had merits. It goes without saying just how unusual this phenomenon is in comparison to other kings. The great majority of kings of Judah who sinned, whether only at the end of their lives or throughout their lives, died an unnatural death. One could point to Asa (2 Chr 16:12), Jehoram (21:19), Ahaziah (22:9), Jehoash (24:25), Amaziah (25:27), Uzziah (26:21), and Amon (33:24). Even that great righteous king Josiah died an unnatural death, because he went out to fight against the Pharaoh Necho and did not heed God’s word.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Only after the death of Ahaz does the Chronicler settle accounts with him, when he states that his burial place was not among the graves of the kings of the house of David in Jerusalem.[[29]](#footnote-29) There is no option other than to end this brief survey too with a question: Why does Ahaz deserve a death that only a few kings are fortunate enough to have in Chronicles?

**Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Ahaz**

The following table presents a brief summary of the frame story of each one of the three kings examined above:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Ahaz** | **Ahaziah** | **Jehoram** |  |  |
| 28:2 | 22:3 | 21:6 | “He followed the ways of the kings of Israel/ House of Ahab.” | The Sin |
| 28:5–7 | 22:5 |  | Defeat in War | Its Punishment |
| 28: 3, 7 | 22:10 | 21:17, 22:1 | Death of the king’s sons |
| – | 22:9 | 21:19 | Unnatural death |
| “He was buried..., but not in the tombs of the kings.” | (22:9) | 28:27 | “He was buried..., but not in the tombs of the kings.” |

With all the three of them, the story begins with a sin (following in the path of the kings of Israel or the house of Ahab), continues with punishment (defeat in war, death of the kings’ sons), and concludes with a burial not in the burial site of the kings of the house of David. Unquestionably, some of these components and the order in which they appear find expression in the narrative of other kings in Chronicles as well, and thus they are not at all new. Nonetheless, there is one component that is unique to these three kings: the death of their sons. How can this phenomenon be explained?

**The Death of the Sons**

The death of the kings’ sons is, as was mentioned above, a recurring motif only in the narratives of those three kings. Jehoram’s sons die in the incursion by the Arabs, while Ahaziah’s sons were murdered by Athaliah. Regarding Ahaz, there are two passages that touch on this subject:

1. The first passage, “he **burned** [***yayyav‘er***] his **sons** in fire” (2 Chr 28:3), contains two changes from the wording that appears in Kings: “he even **consigned** [***he‘evir***, literally “caused to pass through”] his **son** to the fire” (2 K 16:3). These changes have yielded different opinions among scholars. Some have opined that the original wording in Chronicles was ***vayya‘aver*** [“he consigned”], and our present text simply reflects a scribal error, reversing the order of two letters.[[30]](#footnote-30) I accept the view of scholars who think that the change reflects the reality of Ahaz’s time—that children were actually burnt in the worship of Molekh, and that in making that change the Chronicler sought to do away with the lack of clarity in the term “consign” that he found in his sources.[[31]](#footnote-31) The plural “sons” reflects an established custom in this regard.[[32]](#footnote-32)

2. The second passage is a description of the death of Maaseiah, who was apparently another of Ahaz’s sons and who was killed by Zichri, “the champion of Ephraim” (2 Chr 28:7).[[33]](#footnote-33)

The sons’ deaths undoubtedly create a very sharp conflict with the promise of dynastic continuity, for without those sons, that continuity cannot take place. On this point, the Chronicler’s theory of reward and punishment reaches the pinnacle of its sophistication. Regarding the question of how it is possible to impose a very severe punishment upon the sinful king without endangering the continuity of the dynasty, the Chronicler walks a fine line: he undermines the stability of the dynasty quite dramatically, to the point of killing off the kings’ sons, but at the same time he leaves one son alive as a remnant in keeping with the promise of an eternal dynasty. Unlike the Deuteronomist, he cannot simply go on as usual while these three kings run roughshod all the time over God’s laws and commandments. He chooses to punish them even to the extent of risking undermining the covenant with David.

It seems that punishing the children of these kings contravenes the Chronicler rules. He chooses to quote, with certain changes, Deuteronomy 24:16: “[…] in accordance with what is written in the Teaching, in the Book of Moses, where the Lord commanded, ‘Parents shall not die for children, nor shall children die for parents, but every every person shall die only for his own crime.’” (2 Chr 25:4). This is a sophisticated reworking of the verse in Deuteronomy, which emphases personal punishment and especially the fact that sons are not supposed to bear the sins of their fathers. The change from the passive voice of *yumetu* (“shall be put to death”) in Deuteronomy to the active voice of *yamutu* (“shall die”) in Chronicles is, in Japhet’s view, significant:

Yet this small change extends the rule’s validity from the purely judicial execution of punishment to punishment in general. It is now not merely a legal ruling affecting the court but a statement of principal involving Providence – one feature of divine justice.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Nevertheless, when we are dealing with a king who has not a single merit to his name, the Chronicler chooses flagrantly to ignore the rule that he himself has established and to punish the sons as well. That punishment is the most extreme measure that can be taken toward a king who is a complete sinner. Punishing the king alone is reserved by the Chronicler for kings who have sinned but still have some measure of merit; a king who is a total sinner is punished, and so are his offspring. However—and here the promise to David finds expression—the punishment of the kings’ sons in recompense for his sins is limited: the stability of the dynasty may be made shaky, sometimes even dramatically so, but it must not be entirely done away with.

The portrait that emerges from the preceding analysis contradicts, in my view, the idea advanced by some scholars that in presenting the problematic figure of Jehoram alongside mention of the terms of the covenant, the Chronicler is integrating two worldviews: the view that ascribes importance to the royal house of David and the view that reward and punishment are personal and immediate.[[35]](#footnote-35) To my way of thinking, one should not speak here of integration between two concepts that are of equal important but rather about two concepts whose valence shifts according to the conditions. In cases where the king is a complete sinner, the reward and punishment concept outweighs the concept that ascribes importance to the Davidic dynasty. The fact that in such instances he chooses to punish the king’s children as well supports the idea that in certain instances, the Chronicler chose to push his theory of reward and punishment to the limit at the expense of the concept that ascribes importance to the house of David, for if not, why not be satisfied with the punishing the king alone?

Ahaziah survives the incursion by the Arabs because without him the house of David would not continue on. Before his ascent to the throne, the Chronicler again mentions the circumstances that had left him all alone: “because all the older ones had been killed by the troops that penetrated the camp with the Arabs” (2 Chr 22:1). Mentioning this, along with pointing out that he was the youngest son, portrays Ahaziah’s preparedness for the role of king in a problematic light and sharpens the point that he becomes king only because “the older ones,” who would have been more appropriate than he is, have been murdered.[[36]](#footnote-36) In this way, the Chronicler expresses his hesitation regarding the kingship of Ahaziah and the fact that he continued to rule after his father. Before Ahaziah’s death, the Chronicler points out another detail: not only Ahaziah was killed by Jehu but even his nephews as well. The death of the latter is another blow to the Davidic dynasty’s chances of survival, which are now completely and solely dependent upon Ahaziah’s heirs. However, Ahaziah does not learn a lesson from his father, and his sins lead a situation in which the shaky status of the dynasty, which had begun with his brothers’ deaths and later the deaths of their children, continues with the murder of his children other than the baby Jehoash.

Taking stock of the reign of Jehoram and Ahaziah reveals that in their short era, there are no fewer than four descriptions of the murder or killing of sons or brothers of the Davidic dynasty:

1. Jehoram murders his brothers (2 Chr 21:4)

2. Jehoram’s sons die at the hands of the Arabs (2 Chr 22:1)

3. Ahaziah’s nephews dies at the hand of Jehu (2 Chr 22:8)

4. Ahaziah’s sons are murdered by Athaliah (2 Chr 22:10).

As a result of this whole series of murders, an especially fragile situation is created: the dynasty of the house of David is now hanging from a single thread in the person of the baby Jehoash.

As distinct from the relatively swift transition of rule from Jehoram to Ahaziah, after the murder of Ahaziah’s sons there has to be a hiatus of at least six years until Jehoash, the sole heir, will be ready to sit on the throne. After six years, Jehoiada the priest gathers the Levites and the chiefs of the clans in Jerusalem, “and he said to them, ‘The son of the king shall be king according to the promise the Lord made concerning the sons of David’” (2 Chr 23:3). At first glance, this statement appears to be an additional expression of the importance of the Davidic dynasty and its eternal reign, and various scholars have understood it this way.[[37]](#footnote-37) The verse does indeed express the importance of the dynasty, but along with that it may contain another statement, one that steps back a bit: between the lines we can understand that Jehoash too is made king for lack of any alternative, because he was the last remnant of the house of David and not because he was worthy. Perhaps the Chronicler regarded Jehoiada the priest as the one most worthy of being king at that time, and it would be no wonder. Others have already noted that the Chronicler shaped his image as though he were one of the kings of the house of David.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The heavy price paid by Jehoram and Ahaziah for their evil deeds recurs with Ahaz. However, Ahaz, the most sinful king, goes even further than they did: he himself undermines the stability of the dynasty by killing his own sons. He places them on the pyre and makes this abominable act a regular practice. And if that is not enough, the Chronicler later describes how Zichri, the champion of Ephraim, kills his son Maaseiah. Worthy of our attention is the fact that Maaseiah’s title is “the king’s son.” This phrase can be assumed to include some administrative role in the royal court, as we found, for example, in the case of Ahab’s son Joash (2 Chr 18:25). That is, if Ahaz sought to keep his son Maaseiah alive in order that he inherit his position when the time comes, this plan did not come to fruition and he too was killed. The death of the sons of Ahaz, whether it occurred by his own hand or by an outside force, is doubt be a major problem for dynastic continuity. In addition, the Chronicler’s attitude to the sinful king is also made more difficult. Unlike the two previous kings, with Ahaz he refrains from noting which of his sons remains alive to inherit his father’s place someday. In this context, it may be that the fact that Ahaz does not die an unnatural death of the sort the Chronicler tends to assign to other sinful kings, is intended to support the readers’ and listeners’ feelings that Ahaz alone remains of the house of David and that after his death the dynasty will come to an end.[[39]](#footnote-39) In this sense, Ahaz’s remaining alive is the same as the young son’s remaining alive after the murder of the other sons, but with one difference: the survival of the young son should enable the dynasty to sprout up anew, while Ahaz’s survival effectively brings the dynasty to an end.

These three evil kings, then, bring about a gradual diminution in the importance of the Davidic dynasty. Jehoram’s sins caused his sons to die and Ahaziah, his youngest son, to be crowned king for lack of an alternative; Ahaziah’s sins caused his sons to die and for there to be no Davidic king for six years until the coronation of Jehoash, who apparently also ascended to the throne for lack of any alternative; the very grave sins of Ahaz caused his sons to die without explicit mention of who else might have survived to succeed him.

This is the appropriate point at which to mention that in opposite instances, in which the king is righteous and his rule is threatened with destruction, the Chronicler chooses to broaden the personal reward and to reward the king with the birth of children as well. Thus Rehoboam, Abijah, and Jehoash earn an especial description of the expansion of the family unit (2 Chr 11:18–23, 13:21, 24:3). In the case of all three of those kings, the dynasty of the house of David faced eradication from two of the bitterest enemies: the house of Jeroboam and the house of Ahab. The reward of being granted children not only cancels the worry about eradication, but also but also grants a promise to the king that the dynasty will grow even more than had been anticipated.

The Chronicler’s pendulum thus swings between two poles: with kings who are completely evil, the pendulum swings in the direction of personal and familial recompense, while with righteous kings in whose time there is concern about the continuity of the dynastic line, the pendulum swings in the direction of the promise to David in the form of particular mention of the family’s enlargement. Whether the pendulum is at one side or the other, the Chronicler does not cancel out one pole in favor of the other. With particularly evil kings he does indeed choose the pole of reward and punishment but he still takes into account the promise to David; with good kings he chooses the pole of the promise to David but he still takes into account the principle of reward and punishment.

It should be said, therefore, that the way Chronicles relates to the principle of reward and punishment and to the promise to David and the relationship between those two motifs is not preordained, and it does not have only one mechanism for engaging them. A preference for one motif over the other is contextually dependent. Sometimes use will be made of the promise to David, and sometimes use will be made of the doctrine of personal recompense. The contradiction that exists between these two themes in a way in which one seems to cancel out the other is only an apparent contradiction, since it is hard to imagine a situation in which these concepts exist as equals to each other. In the vast majority of instances, and relying of the Chronicler’s judgment, there is a clear preference for one of those concepts over the other in a manner that makes it possible for them to coexist.

Why, we must then ask, does the Chronicler act in this fashion?

It may be that the Chronicler wants to communicate to his listeners and readers that even if in the past, before the Exile, the importance of the Davidic dynasty was such that it was able to grant immunity to the king and his family, in the post-exilic period, the importance of the dynasty is limited because concern for a punishment of additional exile overcomes the will, which still exists, to reestablish the dynasty. To put it differently, the Chronicler sets up the doctrine of retribution in opposition to the dynasty in a head-to-head battle in the case of evil kings devoid of merit—and decides in favor of reward and punishment, since in his view remaining in the land without a king is preferable to another exile. Any king who departs for the straight and narrow will suffer punishment, although if he has merits to his name he has a certain amount of immunity regarding anything related to his descendants. Kings with no merit whatsoever will be punished to the full extent of the law, and that punishment will be meted out not only upon them but on their descendants as well. From the Chronicler’s perspective, all means are legitimate to rewrite history and the forces at work in it, to the extent that they will exert a direct influence on his listeners and readers.[[40]](#footnote-40) Just as he puts a great emphasis on the figures of David and Solomon as kings nearly completely free of opprobrium, so does he emphasize his doctrine of personal reward and punishment in a manner that we have not found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. These two forces, each at its peak, join together into one historical reality in order to exemplify for the people the principle of the carrot and the stick that has a decisive influence here-and-now on the character of life in the renewed community of Yehud.

1. See Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (BEATAJ 9; New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 117 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . The rule can be phrased this way: when, in the exposition, one of the two components is missing—sin/punishment good/reward—the Chronicler will fill it in on his own. Sometimes the Chronicler will add both elements. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . The root מע״ל appears 14 times in Chronicles in the context of the commission of sin. See 1 Chr 2:7; 4:25; 9:1; 10:13; 12:2; 26:16, 18; 28: 19, 22; 29:6, 19; 30:7; 33:19; 36:14. The root דר״ש appears 34 times in Chronicles, in the great majority of the instances referring to serving God or walking in God’s ways—or not. See especially 1 Chr 28:9; 2 Chr 12:14; 14:3, 6; 15:2, 12–13; 17:4; 19:3; 22:9; 26:5; 30:19; 31:21; 34:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Ehud Ben-Zvi, “A Sense of Proportion: An Aspect of the Theology of the Chronicler,” *SJOT* 9 (1995) 37-51; Brian E. Kelly, *Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles* (JSOTSup 211; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Idem, “‘Retribution’ Revisited: Covenant, Grace and Restoration,” in *The Chronicler as Theologian*:*Essays in honour of Ralph W. Klein*, eds. Gary N. Knoppers, Patrick M. Graham and Steven L. Mckenzie, (JSOTSup 371; London: T&T Clark 2003) 206-227; Gershon Galil, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God (Deut 29: 29): Retribution in the Persian Period,” *Transeuphratène* 39 (2010) 89–94; Ehud Ben Zvi, “Toward A Sense of Balance: Remembering the Catastrophe of Monarchic Judah/ (ideological) Israel and Exile Through Reading Chronicles in Late Yehud,” in *Chronicling the Chronicler: The Book of Chronicles and Early Second Temple Historiography*, eds. Paul S. Evans and Tyler F. Williams (Winona Lake: Penn State University Press, 2013) 247-265 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . An impression of the range of opinions on this question, from the 1950s to our time, can be gained from Brian Kelly’s book, *Retribution and Eschatology*, 135–154, and from Marc J. Boda, “Gazing through the Cloud of Incense: Davidic Dynasty and Temple Community in the Chronicle's Perspective,”in*Chronicling the Chronicler: The Book of Chronicles and the Early Second Temple Historiography,* eds. Paul S. Evans and Tyler F. Williams(Winona Lake: Penn State University Press, 2013), 215-246: 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See: Wilhelm Rudolph*, Chronikbücher* (HAT 1/21; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1955) xxiii: “Daß die davidische Dynastie fehlte, ließ sich verschmerzen, solang die zweite Säule der Theokratie, der Tempel in Jerusalem, so Feststand”. See also: Otto Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology*, trans. S. Rudman (Oxford: John Knox Press, 1968), 408: “The failure of the Davidic dynasty could be borne, so long as the second pillar of the theocracy, the Jerusalem Temple, stood firm. God had made this possible by moving the hearts of the Persian kings. The significance of the house of David for salvation was then limited to the fact that David and Solomon had created for the Temple those ordinances upon which the acceptable worship of the present community depended”. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . This is Freedman’s view, with which Cross concurred. According to Cross, Chronicles underwent a tripartite editing process. The first edition, by the author of “the early book of Chronicles” (Chr1), as Cross calls it, comprised the core of the genealogies in Chapters 1–9. The genealogy of the house of David in Chapter 3 was updated in a secondary redaction (to c. 400 BCE) by Chr3 through the addition of the verses 3:17–24. The first edition, Chr1, comprised 1Chr 1:1–2Chr 36:21 (with the exception of minor interventions of later editing). Cross’s opinion is that the work of the early editor, Chr1, was intended to support the plan for the renewal of the kingship under Zerubavel’s leadership, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the renewal of the cult under the leadership of Joshua the High Priest. This concept has a decisive impact, of course, on their estimate that the book was written in the late 6th century. See David N. Freedman, “The Chronicler’s Purpose,” *CBQ* 23 (1961), 432–442; Frank M. Cross, “A Reconstruction of the Judean Restoration,” *JBL* 94 (1975), 4–18. Cross and Friedman’s view was accepted by other scholars as well, although they still constitute a minority among Scholars. See James D. Newsome, “Toward a New Understanding of the Chronicler and His Purpose,” *JBL* 94 (1975) 201–217: 215–217; ; Mark A. Throntveit, *When Kings Speak: Royal Speech and Royal Prayer in Chronicles* (SBLDS 93; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 107; William M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period* (JSOTSup 197; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 249 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . Von Rad, for example, thinks that the Chronicler’s interest was ”sondern der Davisdsthron unter Gericht und Gnade Jahwes im Wandel der Zeiten.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . See Rudolf Mosis*, Untersuchungen zur Theologie des chronistischen Geschichtswerkes* (Freiburg: Herder, 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . This outlook is ascribed to Wellhausen, who rejects the messianic conception of the von Rad school and prefers to characterize this expectation as “royalist.” See Hugh G. M. Williamson, “Eschatology in Chronicles,” *TynBul* 28 (1977), 115–145. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. . Thus, for example, these passages served as sources for almost every scholar who has addressed the theme of dynastic renewal: 1 Chr 17:1–27; 22:6–13; 28:2–10; 2 Chr 1:8–10; 6:3–17, 40–42; 7:17–22; 13:1–22; 21:2–7; 23:1–3. See, recently: Sunwoo Hwang, *The Hope for the Restoration of the Davidic Kingdom in the Light of the Davidic Covenant in Chronicles* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. . The analysis will not include the last four kings of Judah because as I see it, Josiah’s reign constitutes the effective end of the Israelite monarchy. See Itzhak Amar, “Saul and Josiah’s Deaths in Chronicles (1 Chr. 10; 2 Chr. 35:20-27),” *Beit Mikra* 62 (2017), 80-108 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. . Jehoram’s reign as told in Chronicles is studded with details that do not appear in the underlying text, strengthening the negative portrayal of him. See Christopher T. Begg, “Constructing a Monster: The Chronicler’s *Sondergut* in 2 Chronicles 21,” *ABR* 37 (1989), 35-51; Louis Jonker, “Textual Identity in the Books of Chronicles,” in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Kenneth A. Ristau (Winona Lake:Eisenbrauns, 2009), 206–217. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. . This verse, we should note, serves various scholars as decisive proof of the importance ascribed by the Chronicler to the Davidic dynasty and the eternal endurance of the promise to David, despite evil deeds perpetrated by various kings. See, e.g., Wilhelm Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1955), 265–266. See also Hwang’s summary: “2 Chr 21:7 witnesses the Chronicler’s firm belief in the renewal of the Davidic dynasty based on the Davidic covenant. In the midst of the full-scale negative assessment of Jehoram, the Chronicler explicitly mentions that God is not willing to destroy the Davidic kingdom because he made a covenant with David” (Hwang, *Hope for the Restoration*). Below, I will offer another interpretation of the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Edward L. Curtis and Albert A. Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910), 414 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (WBC; Waco: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1987), 166 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Japhet, *The Ideology*, 355 n. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. . Scholars distinguish between two types of covenants: “grants” and “suzerain–vassal treaties.” On the differences between them see Michael A. Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant,” *TMSJ* 10 (1999), 233-250: 235. And cf. the discussion in Michael Avioz, “The Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7: Conditional or Unconditional?” in *The Ancient Near East in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History*, eds. Gershon Galil et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012) 43-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. . Cf.Ehud Ben-Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles* (London: Routledge, 2006), 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. . The letter from Elijah raises many questions regarding timing (did Elijah leave in Jehoram’s period?), location (what is Elijah, the northerner, doing being in contact with the southern king?), and form (why doesn’t Elijah meet Jehoram face-to-face?). See Yigal Levin, *The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah: 2 Chronicles 10-36* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. . See Yisca Zimran, “‘The Covenant Made with David’: The King and the Kingdom in 2 Chronicles 21,” *VT* 64 (2014), 305-325: 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. . In the first mention of the incursion by Arabs and Philistines, there is an indication of his sons’ having only been taken captive (21:17). Only later are we told that all of them were killed by the Arabs (22:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. . Zimran has shown that Jehoram’s “disease of the bowels [*me‘ayim*]” links up neatly with the Deuteronomistic language for “offspring,” *yotz’ei me‘ayim* [“those who emerge from one’s *me‘ayim*,” the last word apparently being a general term for lower abdominal organs]. The Chronicler’s wording for this, in the promise to David, is “one of your own sons” (*asher yihyeh mi-banekh*, 1 Chr 17:11). Avioz regards the careful change of wording as motivated by concern for David’s honor. See Michael Avioz, *Nathan's Oracle (2 Samuel 7) and Its Interpreters* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. . The root יע״ץ recurs many times in Chronicles, but in Ahaziah’s case the difference from David and Rehoboam, in whose stories that verb also appears (1 Chr 13:1, 2 Chr 10:6), is obvious. With the latter, the verb that appears is *vayyiva‘ets* (“he took counsel”), meaning that it was they who initiated the appeal for advice from their advisors, while in Ahaziah’s case, the participles *yo‘atseto* (“counsel him,” 2 Chr 22:3) and *yo‘atsim* (“counselors,” 2 Chr 22:4) appear, emphasizing his dependence on his advisors and the fact that they offered him advice even when he had not requested it. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. . In this, Ahaziah is distinguished from the rest of the house of Ahab, who were not brought to burial, as Elijah had prophesied about them (1 K 21:24). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. . On the figure of Ahaz, see Ehud Ben-Zvi, “A Gateway to the Chronicler's Teaching: The Account of the Reign of Ahaz in 2 Chr 28,1-27,” *SJOT* 7 (1993), 216-249; Amir Eitan, “The Character and Times of Ahaz in the Book of Chronicles as a Test of the Creditability of the Chronicler: An Exercise in Dynamic Reading,” *Shnaton* 16 (2006), 43–69 (Hebrew); Itzhak Amar, “Chaotic Writing as a Literary Element in the Story of Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28,” *VT* 66 (2016), 349–364. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. . Amar, “Chaotic Writing.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. . This is how I think the clause in 2 Chr 35:22, ולא שמע את דברי נכה מפי אלהים, should be understood. That sentence is reminiscent of the reason given for Ahaziah’s defeat in 2 Chr 22:7:ומאלהים היתה תבוסת אחזיהו לבוא אל יורם. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. .  Japhet, *I & II Chronicles,* 909. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. . See Sara Japhet, “Interchanges of Verbal Roots in Parallel Texts in Chronicles,” *Hebrew Studies* 28 (1987), 9-50: 48. In reaching her conclusion, Japhet relies on a common expression in the Talmud and on the Septuagint parallel. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. . See Eitan, “The Character and Times of Ahaz,” 48. Eitan is drawing an inference from Micah 6:7, “Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams? / With myriads of streams of oil? / Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, / The fruit of my body for my sins?” The verse describes child sacrifice in the time of Ahaz. See also: Samuel Vargon, “The *riv* with the Inhabitants of Judea in the Time of Ahaz (Mic. 6:1-8),” *In the Bible Lands: Studies in Biblical Prophecy, History and Historiography* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2015) 233-244:243 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. . See Richard G. Coggins, *The First and Second Books of the Chronicles* (BCOT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. . Eitan (“The Character and Times of Ahaz,” 52) thinks that Maaseiah, “the king’s son,” is not Ahaz’s son but someone close to the royal court. In this regard, see also: André Lemaire, “Note sur le titre BN HMLK dans l’ancien Israel,” *Semitica* 29 (1979), 59-65; Ralph W. Klein, *2 Chronicles*: *A* *Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 399. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Japhet, *The Ideology*, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. . See, e.g., Zimran, “The Covenant Made with David,” 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. . The mention of Ahaziah’s age—42—is problematic, of course, since we are informed that his father, Jehoram, lived only 40 years. It could well be that in making this change, the Chronicler wished to signal that Ahaziah was not Jehoram’s son and was not one initially appropriate to be his heir. Cf. Donald V. Etz, “The Genealogical Relationships of Jehoram and Ahaziah, and of Ahaz and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah,” *JSOT* 71 (1996), 39-53:39-48 and cf. Boyd W. Barrick, “Another Shaking of Jehoshaphat’s Family Tree: Jehoram and Ahaziah Once Again,” *VT* 51(2001), 21-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See Norbert Lohfink, “Welches Orakel gab den Davididen Dauer? Ein Textproblem in 2 Kön 8,19 und das Funktionieren der dynastischen Orakel im deuter- onomistischen Geschichtswerk”, in *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Lit- erature in Honor of William L. Moran*, eds. Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard and Piotr Steinkeller(HSS 37; Atlanta: Brill, 1990) 349-370:359-360 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. . In this context, the narrative of Jehoiada’s death stands out. It is identical to the narration of the death of the righteous kings of the house of David, containing even motifs characteristic of the death of David himself. See 1 Chr 28 and cf. 2 Chr 24:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. . See Etz, “The Genealogical Relationships”, 50–53. Although one does not have to adopt his conclusions, but the questions that he raises certainly add to the feeling that Ahaz remains without an heir from among his sons. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. . On the Chronicler’s complex outlook, see Ben-Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology*, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)