

Homiletics Analysis: 2 Chronicles 35

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

Second Chronicles 35 records Josiah's celebration of the Passover — the most elaborate and faithful observance of that feast since the days of Samuel. The chapter opens with Josiah's meticulous preparation: he establishes the Levites in their divisions, restores the ark to the temple, assigns the priestly and Levitical orders to their proper stations, and supplies the offerings from his own royal resources on an unprecedented scale. The Levites are exhorted to serve the people rather than themselves, echoing the servant-leadership model of David and Solomon. The Passover is celebrated with full liturgical order, and the narrator notes with explicit comparison that no Passover like this had been kept in Israel since Samuel's day. The chapter then pivots sharply. Pharaoh Neco of Egypt moves through the land, and Josiah — despite a prophetic warning delivered by Neco himself — insists on engaging him in battle at Megiddo. He disguises himself, enters the fray, is struck by archers, and dies of his wounds in Jerusalem. The chapter closes with a national lamentation, Jeremiah's mourning song, and the note that Josiah's deeds are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

This Text — Intent:

God is seeking to accomplish two things simultaneously through this chapter, and the tension between them is the chapter's real claim. First, He is displaying what faithful covenant worship looks like when it is ordered, whole-hearted, and generously led — setting a standard that indicts every half-hearted version of it. Second, and with striking severity, He is demonstrating that even the most faithful acts of covenant worship do not confer immunity from the consequences of presumption. Josiah's Passover obedience does not exempt him from the consequences of battlefield disobedience. The chapter refuses to let either truth cancel the other. God is seeking to produce in the reader a worship that is genuinely whole-hearted *and* a humility that does not mistake a record of faithful service for license to override clear divine instruction.

Subject Sentence: Josiah's great Passover and fatal presumption — covenant faithfulness and its limits.

Primary Claim: God calls His people to whole-hearted, ordered, generous covenant worship — and He will not be presumed upon, even by His most faithful servants; obedience in one arena does not license disobedience in another.

Interpretive Evaluation

The central interpretive challenge of this chapter is the juxtaposition of Josiah's extraordinary Passover and his inexplicable, fatal decision to fight Neco. Readers and expositors have struggled to hold these two movements together rather than allowing one to overshadow the other.

On the Passover section (vv. 1–19): There is broad interpretive agreement across traditions that this passage presents an idealized portrait of covenant worship — organized, sacrificial, Levitically ordered, and generously supplied. The narrator's comparison to Samuel's day (v. 18) is widely understood as the highest possible commendation within the Chronicler's framework. No significant divergence exists here among orthodox traditions. The passage calls for acknowledgment as a positive model of liturgical faithfulness.

On Josiah's death at Megiddo (vv. 20–27): This is where significant interpretive pressure arises, and it surfaces in at least three distinct readings:

First, some traditions — particularly those that emphasize human responsibility and divine conditionality — read Josiah's death as evidence that the covenant blessings are fully conditional and Josiah's earlier faithfulness simply ran out. This Wesleyan/Arminian-adjacent reading emphasizes the warning Neco delivers as a genuine prophetic word that Josiah should have heeded. This reading **acknowledges** something real: Neco's warning is explicitly said to come from God (v. 22), and Josiah's failure to listen is the narrator's stated cause of his death. The text directly supports this.

Second, some readers — particularly those inclined toward redemptive-historical readings that want to close the chapter on a note of lamentation and typological significance — tend to treat Josiah's death primarily as a foreshadowing of exile, the end of Judah's last faithful king, with the Megiddo narrative functioning as tragic denouement rather than a distinct moral lesson. This reading **qualifies** properly in noting the typological weight of Josiah's death, but it risks muting the text's explicit moral: Josiah *did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God* (v. 22). The Chronicler is not vague here. The death is not presented as tragic fate but as a consequence of specific disobedience.

Third, and most problematically, some devotional and biographical treatments of Josiah minimize the Megiddo failure altogether — treating the chapter as pure triumph with a tragic but passive ending. This reading **must be refuted**. The Chronicler devotes eight verses (vv. 20–27) to the Megiddo episode, explicitly identifies Josiah's failure to heed God's word through an unlikely messenger as the cause of his death, and records national lamentation that signals catastrophic loss. The Chronicler never records lamentation for a theologically insignificant death.

The Reformed reading affirms the full weight of both movements. The Passover section is presented without irony — it is genuine, excellent, covenant-faithful worship, and it must be preached as such. The Megiddo section is presented without softening — Josiah's presumption is real, his failure to listen is culpable, and his death is a consequence. The Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not mean the elect are exempt from temporal consequences for disobedience, and this passage is a vivid demonstration of that truth. Josiah dies in covenant relationship with God — he is mourned as a great king, Jeremiah sings for him, his deeds are commended — yet he dies as a direct consequence of not inquiring of the LORD (cf. the Chronicler's language elsewhere) and not heeding a prophetic word.

One contribution worth retaining from the typological reading: Josiah's death at Megiddo does mark a genuine turning point in the Chronicler's narrative, and the sustained lamentation connects to the coming exile. This does not excuse Josiah; it contextualizes his death within the larger movement of Judah's decline that his Passover had briefly interrupted but could not reverse.

Key Canonical Support

- **Exodus 12:1–28** — The original Passover institution, which Josiah's celebration fulfills with extraordinary fidelity; the comparison establishes the theological weight of what Josiah accomplished liturgically.
 - **Deuteronomy 17:18–20** — The law of the king: the king is to read the law and not think of himself as above his brothers or turn aside from the commandment; Josiah's battlefield decision is a failure of this royal humility, pressing against the very standard he had otherwise so faithfully kept.
 - **1 Kings 13:1–26** — The man of God from Judah who delivers a true word but is himself deceived and dies for disobedience; structurally parallel to Josiah — a faithful servant who fails to heed a specific, clear divine instruction and suffers immediate consequences, regardless of prior faithfulness.
 - **2 Kings 23:21–23** — The parallel Passover account, which confirms the historical event but omits the Megiddo episode's theological framing; the Chronicler's additions reveal his interpretive intent and make clear the moral weight he places on Josiah's failure.
 - **Jeremiah 22:10–12** — Jeremiah's own mourning over Josiah's line; Josiah's death inaugurates a season of lamentation and signals that the reform could not hold, contextualizing the chapter within the covenant failure leading to exile.
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Aim: To call worshipers to offer whole-hearted, ordered, generous covenant worship — and simultaneously to humble any confidence that a record of faithful service licenses presumptuous self-direction in the face of God’s clear word.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
35:1	Josiah keeps the Passover in Jerusalem; the Passover lamb slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the first month	Date and location establish full Mosaic compliance
35:2–3	Josiah appoints priests, encourages the Levites who teach all Israel, commands them to put the ark in the temple	Levites instructed: “You need not carry it on your shoulders anymore” — suggests prior displacement
35:4–5	Divisions of Levites established according to David and Solomon’s written instructions; arranged by family groups to serve the people	Josiah explicitly invokes both Davidic and Mosaic authority
35:6	Levites commanded to prepare, sanctify themselves, slaughter the Passover lambs, and prepare for their brothers the people	Servant-leadership emphasis: for the people
35:7	Josiah provides 30,000 lambs/goats and 3,000 bulls from his own possessions	Royal generosity on extraordinary scale
35:8	Leaders contribute willingly — Hilkiah, Zechariah, Jehiel give 2,600 Passover offerings and 300 bulls	Generosity from the top cascades downward
35:9	Levitical leaders provide 5,000 Passover offerings and 500 bulls	Levitical leaders match and extend the pattern
35:10–13	Service established; priests sprinkle blood; Levites skin	Detailed liturgical precision; “as ordained” appears

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	the burnt offerings; Passover lambs boiled according to the ordinance	repeatedly
35:14–15	Levites prepare for priests and singers; no group neglects its station because each serves the others	Mutual service: the Levites do not rest until all other orders are served
35:16	All the service of the LORD prepared in that day to keep the Passover and offer burnt offerings on the altar	Summary: full liturgical order achieved
35:17–18	People of Israel present keep the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days; no Passover like this since Samuel's day	Narrator's theological verdict: unprecedented in the kingdom era
35:19	Passover kept in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign	Temporal anchor; connects to the law-finding of ch. 34
35:20	After all this, Neco king of Egypt comes up to fight at Carchemish; Josiah goes out against him	Abrupt pivot; "After all this" creates deliberate contrast
35:21	Neco sends messengers: "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I am not coming against you today... God has commanded me to hurry; cease opposing God, who is with me, lest He destroy you"	Neco's warning is explicit and theological; narrator will confirm it was from God
35:22	Josiah does not turn away from him; disguises himself; does not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God	The narrator's interpretive statement: this was God's word; Josiah's failure is named directly
35:23	Archers shoot Josiah; he says to servants, "Take me away, for I am badly wounded"	Immediate consequence

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
35:24	Servants take him out of the chariot; he dies in Jerusalem; all Judah and Jerusalem mourn for Josiah	National mourning confirms the gravity of the loss
35:25	Jeremiah laments for Josiah; all singing men and women speak of Josiah in their lamentations to this day; made a statute in Israel	Jeremiah's mourning; lament institutionalized
35:26–27	Josiah's acts of faithfulness according to the law written; his first and last deeds written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah	Chronicler's final verdict: his deeds were faithful; the record stands — but he is dead

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	35:1–6	The King Orders the Passover: Priestly, Levitical, and Mosaic Precision
2	35:7–9	The King's Generosity: Royal and Levitical Provision Cascades Downward
3	35:10–16	The Service Fulfilled: Every Order in Its Place, Each Serving the Other
4	35:17–19	The Narrator's Verdict: No Passover Like This Since Samuel
5	35:20–22	The King's Presumption: God Speaks Through an Unlikely Messenger; Josiah Does Not Listen
6	35:23–25	The King's Death: Immediate Consequence and National Lamentation
7	35:26–27	The Chronicle Sealed: Faithfulness Recorded,

Division	Verses	Label
		Disobedience Not Erased

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Josiah's great Passover and fatal presumption — covenant faithfulness and its limits.

Primary Claim: God calls His people to whole-hearted, ordered, generous covenant worship — and He will not be presumed upon, even by His most faithful servants; obedience in one arena does not license disobedience in another.

Applications (Five)

1. [Mind/Belief] — Recognize that God can speak through unexpected and even theologically compromised messengers. Neco was a pagan king. He was an instrument of Egyptian imperial power. He had no covenant standing. And God spoke through him. Josiah's failure was not primarily military miscalculation — it was theological refusal: he would not receive God's word through an unworthy vessel. Christians who are serious about Scripture can be particularly susceptible to this failure — dismissing a rebuke, a warning, or a call to reconsider because it comes from the wrong source, the wrong tradition, the wrong kind of person. This passage insists that the messenger's credentials do not determine the message's authority. The question is always: is this word from God? Josiah should have stopped and asked.

2. [Affections/Worship] — Let genuine, ordered, generous worship reshape what you think worship is for. Josiah's Passover is not emotional spontaneity. It is organized, prepared, divisionally structured, royally resourced, and ritually precise. And it is the greatest act of worship in the kingdom era. The modern tendency to equate authentic worship with informal spontaneity and distrust liturgical order as dead religion finds no support here. Josiah's worship is *alive precisely because it is ordered* — each group in its place, each role fulfilled, generosity flowing from the top down, no order neglecting another. Let this chapter form your appetite for worship that is costly, structured, and executed with full attention rather than minimal effort.

3. [Will/Behavior] — Identify one specific area of your life where a record of faithfulness has quietly become a license for self-direction. Josiah was the most faithful king Judah had seen in generations. And that very record created the precondition for his presumption. He had earned the right — or so the logic runs — to trust his own judgment. This is not unique to Josiah. The longer a believer walks faithfully with God, the more subtle the temptation to stop inquiring and start assuming. Pick one specific domain — a relationship, a decision already in motion, a habit of prayer or Scripture reading — and ask honestly: am I moving in this direction because I have sought God's word, or because I

have a record of generally being a faithful person? Josiah did not inquire. Name where you are not inquiring.

4. [Mind/Belief] — Reject the false comfort that obedience in one area covers for disobedience in another. The Passover did not protect Josiah at Megiddo. His faithfulness in one arena did not create a credit account he could draw on in another. This is a direct challenge to a common pattern of Christian self-management: I tithe, so my financial ethics are covered; I pray, so my speech is covered; I serve, so my private life is covered. The Chronicler will not allow it. Faithfulness is not transferable. Each arena of obedience must be its own inquiry, its own submission, its own response to God's word in that domain. Josiah's Passover was magnificent. It did not purchase him a pass at Megiddo.

5. [Affections/Worship] — Let the grief over Josiah's death produce in you a genuine mourning over wasted faithfulness — and turn that grief toward humility. The national lamentation over Josiah, Jeremiah's mourning song, the institutionalized lament — these are not sentimental. They are grief over a man who had genuinely served God, who had led a reformation, who had restored the Passover, and who threw it away on a battlefield he had no business entering. That grief is appropriate. It should produce not despair but the kind of humility that says: I do not want to finish this way. I do not want a record of genuine faithfulness ended by a single act of proud self-direction. Let the lamentation over Josiah move you toward the kind of ongoing submission that does not assume it has already arrived.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: This chapter teaches that God's covenant claims on His people are comprehensive — they extend to every arena of life, not merely to the liturgical and religious. Josiah's Passover reveals what it looks like when a leader takes the full weight of covenant worship seriously: organized, costly, delegated properly, and executed with precision. But the chapter equally teaches that God does not grant exemptions from His word based on a prior record of faithfulness. He speaks where and through whom He wills — including through a pagan king's military messenger — and the obligation to hear and heed His word does not diminish for the faithful; if anything, it intensifies. The God who commands the Passover is the same God who commands at Megiddo. Compartmentalizing worship and obedience is not an option His covenant people are given.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: This passage is a significant Reformed proof-text against the doctrine of merit-transfer — the idea, whether in its Roman Catholic form or its common evangelical folk-religion form, that faithful acts accumulate credit that can offset

or excuse failure elsewhere. Josiah's story demolishes this structure. His Passover was real covenant faithfulness; it earned him the Chronicler's highest commendation; and it counted for nothing at Megiddo. The Reformed emphasis on the *totus Christus* — that the believer's standing before God is secured entirely by Christ, not by accumulated performance — is the only framework that makes sense of Josiah's death without either minimizing his faithfulness or making God unjust. Josiah dies as a servant of the covenant, mourned and commended, but experiencing the temporal consequences of disobedience within that covenant. This is precisely the pattern the Reformed tradition has recognized: justification secured, temporal consequences not suspended. The passage also displays the Reformed conviction that common grace operates through unlikely instruments — God speaking through Neco is not an anomaly in the Chronicler's world; it is a demonstration that God's sovereign speech is not bounded by the religious credentials of the messenger.

Main Takeaway

Josiah's Passover was the real thing — ordered, costly, whole-hearted, unprecedented — and God received it as such. Then Josiah walked onto a battlefield God had told him to avoid, and he died there. Your record of faithfulness is not a reserve account you can draw on. God speaks where and through whom He chooses, and the question is always whether you are listening — not whether you have earned the right to trust your own judgment. Worship fully. Inquire always. Presume nothing.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching the Passover section without the Megiddo section, or treating them as unrelated.** The two halves of this chapter are not a triumph followed by a tragedy — they are a single theological statement. The Chronicler arranged them this way deliberately. Any exposition that ends at verse 19 or treats verses 20–27 as epilogue has preached half the chapter and missed its claim entirely. The juxtaposition is the point.
- **Turning the chapter into a hagiography of Josiah.** Josiah is one of the Chronicler's great heroes, and the temptation is to preach him as a model without reckoning with his fatal failure. The chapter does not permit this. It commends his deeds (v. 26) and names his disobedience (v. 22) in the same breath. Josiah must be presented whole — genuinely great, genuinely disobedient, genuinely consequenced.
- **Softening the identification of Neco's message as God's word.** Verse 22 is explicit: Josiah “did not listen to the words of Neco *from the mouth of God*.” The Chronicler does not say Josiah made a bad strategic decision or misread the geopolitical situation. He says Josiah rejected God's word delivered through Neco.

Any exposition that reduces Josiah's failure to military or political miscalculation has not read verse 22 carefully enough.

- **Drawing from the Passover section only behavioral applications about liturgical order or generous giving without grounding them in the chapter's governing claim.** The Passover section is not primarily a template for worship planning. It is a display of what covenant faithfulness looks like when it is whole-hearted and ordered — and that display sets up the chapter's real claim: that even this standard of faithfulness does not exempt the faithful from the obligation to keep listening. Extract the applications accordingly.
- **Implying that Josiah's death means his life's work was wasted or that God abandoned him.** The sustained national lamentation, Jeremiah's mourning, and the Chronicler's commendation of his deeds all resist this reading. Josiah died under temporal consequences for disobedience; he was not rejected. The Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not mean God's people escape consequences, and this distinction is pastorally critical — the congregation needs to hear that disobedience has real costs *and* that God's covenant does not finally abandon His own.
- **Missing the structural echo with the Chronicler's judgment formula elsewhere.** The Chronicler consistently distinguishes kings who "sought the LORD" from those who did not. Josiah's failure at Megiddo maps precisely onto the Chronicler's language of not inquiring of the LORD (cf. Saul's death, 1 Chr. 10:13–14). Making this connection explicit for a congregation familiar with Chronicles helps them see that this is not an isolated tragedy but a pattern the Chronicler is tracking across the whole narrative: the life-or-death question is always whether the king — and God's people — are listening.