

# The Josiah and Hezekiah Reforms: Evidence of Biblical Textual Editing and Religious Centralization

## A Critical Examination of Deuteronomistic Redaction and the Suppression of Alternative Priesthood Traditions

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### Introduction: The Question of Biblical Inerrancy

Evangelical Christianity has long maintained that the Bible is **inerrant**—without error in its original manuscripts, historically accurate, and divinely preserved throughout transmission. However, modern biblical scholarship has uncovered substantial evidence of **editorial layers, textual revisions, and theological suppression** within the Hebrew Bible, particularly surrounding the religious reforms of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah in the 7th-8th centuries BCE.

This document examines the scholarly evidence for: 1. **Intentional textual editing** during and after the Josiah reforms 2. **Centralization of religious authority** in Jerusalem 3. **Suppression of alternative priesthood traditions** and temple theologies 4. **Documentary sources and redactional layers** in the Pentateuch and Historical Books 5. **Archaeological data** that both supports and challenges the biblical account

## **The Central Question:**

If the biblical texts were systematically edited, revised, and reshaped to support the centralization agenda of Josiah's reforms, how can claims of biblical inerrancy be sustained? This is not merely a theoretical question—it has direct implications for how we understand the development of priesthood, prophecy, and religious authority in ancient Israel.

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# **Historical Background: The Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah**

## **The Two Reform Kings**

Two kings of Judah are credited with major religious reforms that fundamentally reshaped Israelite worship:

### **1. King Hezekiah (c. 715-686 BCE)**

#### **Biblical Account:**

**2 Kings 18:3-4** – “And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.”

**2 Chronicles 29-31** provides an expanded account of Hezekiah's reforms: - Purified Solomon's Temple - Reformed the priesthood - Centralized worship in Jerusalem - Destroyed high places (bamot) throughout Judah - Abolished idolatry and Asherah poles - Reinstated Passover celebration

**Historical Context:** - Reigned during the Assyrian crisis (Sennacherib's invasion in 701 BCE) - Jerusalem underwent massive expansion as refugees fled from the northern kingdom - Political pressures to consolidate power in Jerusalem - Economic motivations for centralizing religious offerings

### **2. King Josiah (c. 640-609 BCE)**

#### **Biblical Account:**

**2 Kings 22:3-23:25** – The most detailed reform account in the Hebrew Bible:

**The Discovery: 2 Kings 22:8** – “And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD.”

**The Response: 2 Kings 23:4-20** describes systematic destruction: - Removed vessels made for Baal and Asherah from the temple - Deposed idolatrous priests - **Destroyed the high places** from Geba to Beersheba - Defiled Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom - Removed horses dedicated to the sun - Destroyed altars on the roof of Ahaz's upper chamber - **Broke down the high places at the gates** - **Brought all the**

**priests from the cities of Judah - Defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense** - Extended destruction into former northern kingdom territory - Slaughtered priests of the high places on their own altars

**The Culmination: 2 Kings 23:21-23** – Josiah celebrated the Passover “as it is written in this book of the covenant”

**2 Kings 23:25** – “And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.”

## What Was the “Book of the Law”?

### Scholarly Consensus:

The “Book of the Law” discovered in the temple is widely identified by scholars as an **early version of the Book of Deuteronomy**, specifically chapters 12-26, which contain:

1. **Deuteronomy 12:1-14** – The centralization command:
  - “These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do... Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree... But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come.”
2. **Law codes** covering social welfare, justice, festivals, dietary laws, and ritual purity
3. **Blessings and curses** for covenant obedience/disobedience

**W. M. L. de Wette** first proposed in 1805 that Deuteronomy was composed during or shortly before Josiah’s reign specifically to justify his centralization program. This theory, now called the “**Deuteronomistic Reform**,” is accepted by the majority of biblical scholars today.

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## Evidence for Textual Editing and Redaction

### The Documentary Hypothesis: Four Sources

The **Documentary Hypothesis**, developed by Julius Wellhausen and refined by subsequent scholars, proposes that the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) was compiled from four primary documentary sources, each with distinct theological perspectives and historical contexts:

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Source	Name	Date	Characteristics
J	Jahwist	~10th-9th century BCE	Uses “YHWH” for God, southern (Judah) perspective, narrative-focused

Source	Name	Date	Characteristics
<b>E</b>	Elohist	~9th-8th century BCE	Uses “Elohim” for God, northern (Israel) perspective, emphasizes prophets
<b>D</b>	Deuteronomist	~7th century BCE (Josiah’s time)	Centralization theology, covenant focus, “choose to place his name” formula
<b>P</b>	Priestly	~6th-5th century BCE (Exile/post-Exile)	Ritual law, genealogies, creation account, priestly concerns

## The D Source and Josiah’s Reform

### Key Indicators of Deuteronomic Composition During Josiah’s Reign:

#### 1. Perfect Alignment with Reform Agenda

- Deuteronomy 12 commands destruction of high places
- 2 Kings 23 reports Josiah doing exactly that
- The “discovered” book provides divine sanction for Josiah’s political program

#### 2. Centralization Formula

- Deuteronomy repeatedly uses the phrase “the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there”
- This formula appears nowhere in earlier texts (J, E sources)
- It’s clearly referring to Jerusalem, though Jerusalem is never explicitly named
- This allowed the text to be “discovered” as ancient while supporting current policy

#### 3. Anachronistic Elements

- Deuteronomy commands centralization that would have been impossible in Moses’ time (c. 1400 BCE)
- The Israelites were nomadic in the wilderness—centralization at a fixed location makes no sense
- The command assumes a settled land with multiple competing sanctuaries

#### 4. Contradiction with Earlier Texts

- **Exodus 20:24-25** – “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings... **in all places where I record my name** I will come unto thee”
- J and E sources assume **multiple legitimate altars** throughout the land
- D source **contradicts** this, demanding one central sanctuary

## The Deuteronomistic History (DtrH)

The **Deuteronomistic History** refers to the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings as a unified historical work composed/edited by the same school of writers (the “Deuteronomists”) with a consistent theological agenda.

## Evidence of Deuteronomistic Editing:

### 1. Consistent Theological Framework

- Judges' cycle: sin → punishment → repentance → deliverance
- Kings evaluated by whether they "did evil/right in the sight of the LORD"
- **Primary criterion:** Did they remove the high places?

### 2. Editing of Earlier Material

- The Deuteronomistic historian(s) took earlier sources and **reinterpreted** them
- Added commentary, explanations, and theological judgments
- **Shaped the narrative** to support centralization

### 3. Two-Redaction Theory

- **First edition (DtrH1):** Composed during Josiah's reign (c. 620 BCE), optimistic, presents Josiah as the ideal king
- **Second edition (DtrH2):** Edited during the Exile (c. 550 BCE), more pessimistic, explains why Judah fell to Babylon

## Example of Deuteronomistic Editing:

**1 Kings 3:2** – "Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days."

→ This verse is an **editorial insertion** by the Deuteronomist, justifying why Solomon and earlier figures worshiped at high places. The original J/E sources saw nothing wrong with high places. The Deuteronomist had to **explain away** what earlier texts presented as normal and legitimate worship.

## Redactional Layers in Specific Texts

### Example 1: The High Priest vs. Multiple Priests

**Leviticus 16** (P source) assumes a **single high priest** officiating on the Day of Atonement.

But earlier texts show **multiple priests** serving at **multiple locations**: - **Judges 17-18** – Micah had his own priest and household shrine, later taken by the tribe of Dan - **1 Samuel 1-3** – Eli and his sons served at Shiloh - **1 Samuel 21:1-6** – David ate showbread from the priest at Nob

These stories were originally **non-controversial**. The Deuteronomist/Priestly editor had to **reinterpret** them as aberrations or as permissible "before the temple was built."

### Example 2: The Passover Contradiction

**Exodus 12:21-27** (J/E source) – Passover is a **household** festival celebrated in individual homes.

**Deuteronomy 16:1-8** (D source) – Passover **must be celebrated** at the central sanctuary (Jerusalem), not at home.

**2 Kings 23:21-23** – "And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged

Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem.”

→ This text explicitly says **no such Passover had been kept before**—because the **Deuteronomic version** requiring centralization was a **new innovation!**

### **Example 3: Deuteronomy’s Own Admission of Later Editing**

**Deuteronomy 4:1-40** – Contains references to **exile**: - Verse 25-28: “When thou shalt beget children... and shall do evil... I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land... And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations” - This is clearly written **after** the Babylonian exile began (586 BCE)

**Deuteronomy 28:63-68** – Detailed curses describing exile and dispersion

**Deuteronomy 29:21-28** – Looks back on exile as already having happened

**Deuteronomy 30:1-10** – Describes return from exile and restoration

→ These sections show **later redactional layers** added to Deuteronomy **after** Josiah’s time, updating it in light of the Babylonian exile.

### **Scholarly Assessment**

**Dr. Richard Elliott Friedman** (Biblical scholar, author of *Who Wrote the Bible?*): > “The book of Deuteronomy was composed over the course of three centuries, from the eighth century to the exile and beyond, and gives evidence of later editing.”

**Dr. Marc Zvi Brettler** (Professor of Biblical Studies, Brandeis University): > “It is now widely accepted that the Deuteronomistic History is a highly edited work... The Deuteronomistic historian(s) shaped Israel’s history to fit a particular theological perspective centered on centralization of worship and loyalty to the Davidic covenant.”

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## **The Centralization Program: Destroying the High Places**

### **What Were the High Places (Bamot)?**

**Hebrew:** בָּמוֹת (bamot), singular בָּמָה (bamah)

**Definition:** Simple hilltop installations with instruments of religion: platforms, altars, standing stones (masseboth), and cairns. Along with open courtyard shrines and sacred trees or groves (Asherim), they were the **most common public places of worship** in ancient Israel and Judah.

**Functions:** - Local sacrifice and offerings - Festival celebrations - Covenant ceremonies - Prophetic activity (1 Samuel 9:11-14, 10:5-13) - Communal meals - Petitionary prayer

## **Biblical Evidence That High Places Were Originally Legitimate:**

### **1. Samuel anointed Saul at a high place**

- **1 Samuel 9:12-14, 19** – Samuel was going to the high place to bless a sacrifice
- No condemnation, presented as normal worship

### **2. Solomon sacrificed at Gibeon**

- **1 Kings 3:3-4** – “Solomon loved the LORD... only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place”
- God appeared to Solomon at this high place and gave him wisdom
- The text says Solomon “loved the LORD” while sacrificing at high places

### **3. Prophets operated at high places**

- **1 Samuel 10:5** – “Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place”
- Prophetic bands were associated with high places

### **4. Multiple legitimate altars in the Law**

- **Exodus 20:24** – “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me... **in all places where I record my name** I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee”
- Plural “places” – multiple altars were commanded, not forbidden

## **The Deuteronomic Innovation: One Place Only**

**Deuteronomy 12:2-14** represents a **radical departure** from earlier practice:

**Verse 2-3** – “Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.”

**Verse 5-6** – “But unto **the place which the LORD your God shall choose** out of all your tribes **to put his name there**, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes...”

**Verse 13-14** – “Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: But **in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes**, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings.”

**Key Phrases:** - “The place which the LORD shall choose” (appears 21 times in Deuteronomy) - “To put his name there” (centralization formula) - **Never explicitly names Jerusalem** (allows it to appear ancient)

## **What the Centralization Actually Meant**

**Religious Consolidation:** 1. **Destroyed local sanctuaries** where Israelites had worshiped for centuries 2. **Eliminated local priesthoods** and their traditions 3. **Concentrated religious authority** in Jerusalem temple elite 4. **Forced pilgrimage** to Jerusalem for all major festivals 5. **Created economic dependency** on Jerusalem (offerings, tithes, sacrifices)

**Political Consolidation:** 1. **Strengthened royal control** over religious life 2. **Eliminated competing centers** of religious authority 3. **Consolidated economic resources** flowing to capital 4. **Unified national identity** around Jerusalem and Davidic dynasty 5. **Suppressed regional traditions** and alternative theologies

**Social Impact:** 1. **Displaced local priests** (Levites from high places) - **2 Kings 23:8-9** – “And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah... And the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren” - Local priests were **not allowed** to serve in Jerusalem - They became a **second-tier priesthood**, subordinate to Aaronide priests

**1. Disrupted communal worship patterns**

- Ordinary Israelites could no longer offer sacrifices locally
- Had to travel to Jerusalem for festivals (expensive, time-consuming)
- Created barrier between people and worship practices

**2. Eliminated prophetic diversity**

- Prophets associated with local high places lost their platforms
- Centralized prophetic authority in Jerusalem court prophets
- Alternative prophetic traditions suppressed

## **Archaeological Evidence of Destroyed Sanctuaries**

Archaeologists have discovered multiple sanctuary sites that were **systematically decommissioned** during this period:

**1. Tel Arad** (southern Judah)

- Two altars discovered
- Deliberately buried/covered over
- Dating suggests decommissioning during late 8th-early 7th century BCE

**2. Beersheba** (southern Judah)

- Horned altar dismantled
- Stones reused in building construction
- Suggests intentional desacralization

**3. Tel Motza** (near Jerusalem)

- Large temple complex discovered in 2012
- Active during 9th-8th centuries BCE
- Filled in and abandoned during reform period

**4. Lachish** (Judean city)

- Sanctuary gate shrine destroyed
- Archaeological layers consistent with Hezekiah's reign

**However:** Scholars debate whether these destructions resulted from: - **Hezekiah/Josiah's religious reforms** (biblical explanation) - **Assyrian military campaigns** (701 BCE under Sennacherib, earlier under Tiglath-pileser III) - **Combination of both** (military destruction followed by deliberate non-rebuilding)

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# What Was Suppressed? Alternative Priesthood Traditions

## Multiple Priesthoods in Ancient Israel

The biblical texts preserve **traces** of multiple competing priesthood traditions, despite Deuteronomistic editing attempting to present a unified narrative:

### 1. Mushite (Mosaic) Priesthood

- Descended from **Moses** through his sons Gershom and Eliezer
- **Judges 18:30** – “And Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh [scribal alteration from “Moses”], he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land”
- Served at **Dan** (northern sanctuary)
- Associated with prophetic tradition and direct divine revelation

### 2. Aaronide Priesthood

- Descended from **Aaron**, Moses’ brother
- Served at **Jerusalem temple** and became the dominant priestly line
- Emphasized ritual purity, sacrificial system, hereditary succession
- Eventually claimed **exclusive** legitimacy

### 3. Zadokite Priesthood

- Descended from **Zadok**, high priest under Solomon
- Sub-group within Aaronide line
- After the Exile, claimed to be the **only legitimate** priests
- **Ezekiel 44:15-16** – “But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me”

### 4. Levitical Priesthood (Non-Aaronide)

- Other members of tribe of Levi not descended from Aaron
- Served at **local high places** throughout Israel and Judah
- Performed sacrifices, taught Torah, judged disputes
- **Deuteronomy 18:6-8** acknowledges their legitimacy
- **But 2 Kings 23:8-9** says they were **excluded** from Jerusalem altar after Josiah’s reform

### 5. Elide Priesthood

- Descended from **Eli**, priest at Shiloh
- **1 Samuel 1-4** – Major priestly family before Solomon
- **1 Kings 2:26-27** – Abiathar (Elide priest) deposed by Solomon in favor of Zadok
- Fulfilled prophecy in **1 Samuel 2:27-36** that Elide line would be cut off

## Evidence of Suppressed Temple Theology

**Margaret Barker** (British Methodist scholar, expert in temple theology) has documented substantial evidence that **Josiah's reforms suppressed an older temple theology** that included:

1. **Divine Council and Heavenly Court**
  - Pre-reform theology included a **heavenly hierarchy**
  - YHWH presided over a council of divine beings (Psalm 82:1, Job 1-2)
  - Post-reform theology emphasized **strict monotheism**
2. **Asherah as Consort of YHWH**
  - Archaeological evidence: inscriptions reading **“YHWH and his Asherah”**
  - Found at Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom
  - Suggests Asherah was viewed as YHWH's consort in popular religion
  - Josiah's reforms **violently suppressed** this tradition
  - **2 Kings 23:6** – “And he brought out the grove [Asherah] from the house of the LORD”
3. **Temple Mysticism and Heavenly Ascent**
  - Original temple theology emphasized **visionary experience**
  - Prophets entered heavenly throne room (Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, 1 Kings 22:19-22)
  - Deuteronomic reforms emphasized **written law** over direct revelation
  - Post-reform texts de-emphasize mystical/visionary elements
4. **Son of God Theology**
  - Pre-reform theology may have included a **divine Son** figure
  - References to “sons of God” (Genesis 6:2, Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7)
  - Deuteronomic reforms promoted **strict monotheism** that minimized these references
  - Later editing may have **removed or obscured** texts about divine plurality
5. **Wisdom as Divine Female Figure**
  - **Proverbs 8:22-31** – Wisdom (Hokmah) personified as female, present at creation
  - May represent remnant of earlier goddess theology
  - Suppressed in Deuteronomic tradition, partially preserved in Wisdom literature

## The “Temple Cult” That Was Centralized

The phrase **“temple cult”** is used by scholars to describe the **organized system of worship, priesthood, sacrifice, and ritual** centered at the Jerusalem temple after the reforms.

**What was centralized:**

1. **Sacrificial System**
  - All animal sacrifices for sin, thanksgiving, vow fulfillment had to occur in Jerusalem
  - Local altars were **forbidden**
2. **Priesthood**
  - Jerusalem priests (Aaronides/Zadokites) gained **monopoly**
  - Local Levitical priests were **subordinated or excluded**
3. **Festival Calendar**
  - Passover, Tabernacles, Weeks (Pentecost) had to be celebrated **in Jerusalem**

- **2 Chronicles 30** – Hezekiah’s Passover invitation to northern tribes
- 4. Tithes and Offerings**
- Economic resources flowed to **Jerusalem temple**
  - Supported temple priesthood and royal court

**What this displaced:**

- 1. Prophetic Bands**
  - Prophets associated with local high places (1 Samuel 10:5)
  - Independent prophetic tradition outside royal/temple control
- 2. Local Religious Leaders**
  - Community elders who led worship
  - Non-Levitical priests (like Micah’s priest in Judges 17)
- 3. Family/Clan Traditions**
  - Household altars and sacrifices (Genesis 12:7-8, 13:18, etc.)
  - Regional variations in worship practice
- 4. Alternative Theological Traditions**
  - Northern Israelite traditions (E source)
  - Wisdom traditions
  - Mystical/visionary temple theology

## **THE LDS PERSPECTIVE: Did Josiah Kill Legitimate Priesthood Holders and Rewrite History?**

### **The Central Question from an LDS Theological Lens**

**From a Latter-day Saint perspective, the Josiah reforms raise a disturbing possibility:**

**What if Josiah wasn’t purifying worship—but rather systematically executing legitimate Melchizedek priesthood holders who held authentic temple knowledge, and then his scribes rewrote history to make him the hero?**

This is not just speculation. The textual and archaeological evidence, when viewed through the lens of LDS temple theology and priesthood restoration, suggests something far more sinister than “religious reform.”

### **Who Were the People Josiah Killed?**

**2 Kings 23:20** – “And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men’s bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.”

**The Standard Interpretation:** - These were “idolatrous priests” serving false gods  
- Josiah was purifying worship - He was righteous to execute them

**The LDS Question:** What if these “priests of the high places” were actually legitimate priesthood holders?

## **Evidence They Were Legitimate:**

**1. Samuel ministered at high places WITHOUT condemnation - 1 Samuel 9:12-19** – Samuel was presiding at a high place sacrifice - Samuel anointed Saul at a high place - No condemnation—it was presented as normal, legitimate worship

**2. Solomon worshiped at high places and God APPEARED TO HIM there - 1 Kings 3:3-5** – “Solomon loved the LORD... only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there... And the LORD appeared to Solomon” - If high places were inherently evil, would God appear there?

**3. Prophets operated at high places - 1 Samuel 10:5** – “Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place” - Prophetic tradition was connected to high places

**4. The Law COMMANDED multiple altars - Exodus 20:24** – “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon... **in all places where I record my name** I will come unto thee” - Plural “places” = multiple legitimate altars - Deuteronomy 12 **contradicts** this earlier command

## **The Priesthood Question:**

**What priesthood did these “priests of the high places” hold?**

**Possible answer from Margaret Barker’s research:** - They may have held **Melchizedek priesthood** authority - They presided over local temples/high places throughout Judah - They maintained **older temple theology** including: - Divine council and plurality of gods (Psalm 82:1, 6) - Heavenly Mother/Asherah as YHWH’s consort - Visionary temple experience and heavenly ascent - Son of God theology - Wisdom as divine female figure

**What Josiah destroyed:** - Not just “idolatry,” but **alternative priesthood traditions** - Not just “false worship,” but **competing temple theology** - Not just “pagan practices,” but **older authentic traditions** that threatened centralized power

## **Why Call Them “Cult”? The Victors Write History**

**The word “cult” is loaded:**

In modern scholarship, “**temple cult**” just means the organized system of worship, priesthood, and ritual. But when Josiah’s scribes labeled local priests as “idolatrous,” they were **delegitimizing** their rivals.

**Classic propaganda technique:** 1. **Demonize your enemies** – Call them idolaters, pagans, cult members 2. **Justify violence against them** – “God commanded it” 3. **Rewrite history** – Make your power grab look like divine mandate 4. **Suppress their version** – Burn their records, kill their priests 5. **Control the narrative** – Only your version survives

**Consider:**

**2 Kings 23:4-5** – “And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove [Asherah], and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them... And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places”

**Question:** Who decided these priests were “idolatrous”? - **Answer:** Josiah and his Deuteronomistic scribes

**What if:** - These “idolatrous priests” were actually **legitimate priesthood holders**? - They maintained **older temple traditions** that included Asherah (YHWH’s consort)? - Josiah **killed them** and then labeled them “cult” to justify it?

## **The Archaeological Evidence: “YHWH and His Asherah”**

**Kuntilet Ajrud inscriptions (8th century BCE):** - “YHWH of Samaria and his Asherah” - “YHWH of Teman and his Asherah”

**Khirbet el-Qom inscription (8th century BCE):** - “Blessed be Uriyahu by YHWH... and by his Asherah”

**What this proves:** - **BEFORE Josiah’s reforms**, Asherah was openly worshiped **alongside YHWH** - This wasn’t “pagan contamination”—it was **mainstream Israelite religion** - Even in **Judah**, not just northern Israel

**What Josiah did:** - **2 Kings 23:6** – “And he brought out the grove [Asherah] from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it” - Asherah was **IN THE TEMPLE** in Jerusalem - This wasn’t some fringe practice—it was **official temple worship**

### **The LDS Connection:**

LDS theology includes: - **Heavenly Mother** (implied in doctrine, explicit in hymns and teachings) - **Divine plurality** (Father, Mother, Son, Holy Ghost, exalted beings) - **Temple as place to enter God’s presence** (not just sacrifice location)

**What if the “Asherah” worship Josiah suppressed was actually legitimate worship of Heavenly Mother?**

What if Josiah’s “reform” was actually **removing authentic doctrine** and replacing it with **strict monotheism** that denied divine plurality?

## **The Deuteronomists Fabricate History: How Much Can We Trust?**

### **The “Book of the Law” — Conveniently Discovered**

**2 Kings 22:8** – “And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD.”

**How convenient:** - Josiah wants to centralize power in Jerusalem - Suddenly a “lost book” is “discovered” that commands centralization - This book (Deuteronomy) perfectly aligns with Josiah’s political agenda - It claims to be written by Moses 800 years earlier

**Critical scholarship consensus:** - This was **NOT** an ancient book lost and rediscovered - It was **recently composed** (7th century BCE, Josiah's time) - The "discovery" was a **pious fraud** to give the reforms divine authority - **W.M.L. de Wette** (1805) first proposed this, now widely accepted

**What the Deuteronomists Added:**

### 1. The Centralization Command (Deuteronomy 12)

**Deuteronomy 12:13-14** – "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer"

**Problem:** - **Contradicts Exodus 20:24** – "in all places where I record my name" - Makes earlier patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) **violators** of God's law - Makes Samuel and Solomon **sinner**s for worshipping at high places - Creates **theological chaos**

**The truth:** - This command **didn't exist** before Josiah - It was **fabricated** to justify centralization - Earlier sources (J, E) assumed **multiple legitimate altars**

### 2. The Passover Reinterpretation (Deuteronomy 16)

**Exodus 12:21-27** (earlier source) – Passover is a **household** festival

**Deuteronomy 16:1-8** (D source) – Passover **must** be at the central sanctuary

**2 Kings 23:21-23** – "Surely there was **not holden such a passover from the days of the judges...** But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah"

→ **Admission:** This version of Passover **never existed before!**

**Why change it?** - Force pilgrimage to Jerusalem - Centralize offerings and tithes - Create economic dependence on Jerusalem temple

### 3. Prophecies Written After the Fact

**Deuteronomy 28-30** describes exile in **past tense details:**

**Deuteronomy 28:63-68:** - Verse 64: "The LORD shall scatter thee among all people" - Verse 65: "Among these nations shalt thou find no ease" - Verse 68: "The LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships"

→ This describes the **Babylonian exile** (586 BCE) and aftermath → Written **AFTER** it happened, not prophecy **BEFORE**

**Deuteronomy 30:1-3** – Return from exile described as past event

→ These chapters were added **during the exile** (6th century BCE) → Not written by Moses in 1400 BCE

#### 4. Rewriting Earlier Kings' Reputations

The Deuteronomist **judged every king** by whether they removed high places:

- **1 Kings 15:14** – Asa did right, “Nevertheless the high places were not removed”
- **1 Kings 22:43** – Jehoshaphat did right, “Howbeit the high places were not taken away”
- **2 Kings 12:3** – Jehoash did right, “But the high places were not taken away”

**The problem:** - These kings were originally viewed as **righteous** - High places weren't considered **wrong** in their time - The Deuteronomist **imposed later theology** on earlier history - **Rewriting history** to make Josiah look better

#### 5. Changing Moses' Descendants

**Judges 18:30** – Originally: “Jonathan, the son of Gershom, **the son of Moses**”

But Masoretic text changed it to: “the son of **Manasseh**”

→ **Scribal alteration** to dissociate Moses from priests at Dan → **Falsified genealogy** to delegitimize rival priesthood

**This is textual fraud.**

#### The Canonical Question: Should Deuteronomy Be in the Bible?

**Jonah Barnes and other scholars argue: Deuteronomy should NOT be counted among the “5 Books of Moses”**

**Why?**

1. **Different style** from Genesis-Numbers
2. **Contradicts earlier books** (centralization vs. multiple altars)
3. **Later composition** (7th century BCE, not 15th century BCE)
4. **Political agenda** (supports Josiah's reforms)
5. **Not part of original Torah** but added later

**The Original “Torah” (Law) may have been:** - Genesis - Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - (NOT Deuteronomy)

**Deuteronomy was:** - A **political manifesto** dressed as ancient law - **Fabricated** to justify Josiah's power grab - **Falsely attributed** to Moses - Later **forced into** the canon

**Evidence:**

**Scholarly consensus on Deuteronomy's dating:** - **J source** (Genesis-Numbers): 10th-9th century BCE - **E source** (Genesis-Numbers): 9th-8th century BCE - **D source** (Deuteronomy): 7th century BCE (Josiah's time) - **P source** (editing of Genesis-Numbers): 6th-5th century BCE

→ Deuteronomy is **centuries younger** than the other books → It was **inserted** into the collection later

### **The LDS Implication:**

If Deuteronomy is: - **Falsely attributed** to Moses - **Contradicts** earlier revelation - **Fabricated** to support a political agenda - Used to **justify killing** legitimate priesthood holders

**Then:** - It's an example of **apostasy** - It's evidence of **scripture being corrupted** - It supports LDS claims about the **Great Apostasy** - It validates the need for **restoration** through modern prophets

### **How Much Deuteronomy Can We Trust?**

**Conservative evangelical position:** All of it—Moses wrote it

**Critical scholarly consensus:** Almost none of it is Mosaic

**From an LDS perspective:**

**What might be authentic:** - Some core legal material may preserve older traditions - Moral teachings consistent with earlier revelation - Commands emphasizing covenant loyalty and justice

**What is likely fabricated:** - Centralization theology (Deut 12) - Claims to Mosaic authorship - Prophecies “predicting” exile (written after it happened) - Condemnation of high places (contradicts Exodus 20:24) - Exclusion of local priesthoods

**The pattern:** - **Truth mixed with falsehood** - **Authentic tradition corrupted** for political ends - **Divine commands fabricated** to justify human agendas - **History rewritten** by those who won

**This is exactly what LDS theology predicts during periods of apostasy.**

### **The Melchizedek Priesthood Connection**

**LDS doctrine teaches:**

**D&C 84:6-16** traces Melchizedek priesthood from: - Moses → Jethro → Caleb → Elihu → Jeremy → Gad → Esaias → God → Abraha → Melchizedek → ... → Adam

**Key point:** Moses held **Melchizedek priesthood**, not just Aaronic/Levitical

**Alma 13:14-19** – Melchizedek was a great high priest who presided over Aaronic priesthood

**What if:** - The “priests of the high places” Josiah killed held **Melchizedek priesthood**? - They presided over Aaronic/Levitical priests at local temples (like Melchizedek presided over Abraham)? - Josiah’s centralization **eliminated Melchizedek priesthood** from Israel? - Only **Aaronic/Levitical priesthood** remained (limited, preparatory)? - This is why Israel **lost** higher priesthood and temple ordinances?

**Biblical hints:**

**2 Kings 23:8-9** – “And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah... And the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren”

→ Local priests were **excluded** from Jerusalem altar → They became **second-class**, subordinate to Jerusalem priesthood → **Two-tier system**: Jerusalem priests vs. displaced local priests

**What if this records:** - Melchizedek priesthood holders (local priests) being **displaced**? - Aaronic priesthood (Jerusalem) gaining **exclusive control**? - Higher priesthood being **removed** from Israel?

**This would explain:** - Why Jesus had to **restore** priesthood (it was lost) - Why John the Baptist had **Aaronic** priesthood but not Melchizedek - Why Peter, James, and John had to restore **Melchizedek** priesthood later - Why the “keys of the kingdom” were **given** to Peter (not already present)

## **The Bottom Line: Josiah as Apostate, Not Reformer**

**From an LDS theological perspective, Josiah’s “reforms” look like:**

- 1. Killing legitimate priesthood holders**
  - Men who held Melchizedek priesthood
  - Priests who maintained older temple theology
  - Leaders who taught about Heavenly Mother (Asherah)
  - Prophets connected to high places
- 2. Destroying sacred worship sites**
  - High places where prophets ministered
  - Altars that had been legitimate for centuries
  - Local temples throughout Judah
  - Sacred groves and standing stones
- 3. Centralizing power**
  - Consolidating religious authority in Jerusalem
  - Creating economic dependence through mandatory pilgrimages
  - Eliminating competing priesthood lines
  - Strengthening royal control over religion
- 4. Fabricating scripture**
  - “Discovering” Deuteronomy (really recently composed)
  - Claiming Mosaic authority for new innovations
  - Contradicting earlier revelations
  - Rewriting history to justify violence
- 5. Suppressing authentic doctrine**
  - Divine plurality (council of gods)
  - Heavenly Mother (Asherah)
  - Temple mysticism and heavenly ascent
  - Multiple priesthood lines
  - Wisdom traditions

**This is not “reform”—this is APOSTASY.**

**And the Deuteronomists writing the history made Josiah the hero.**

**Classic case of the victors writing history.**

## Textual Evidence of Suppression

### Example 1: The Mushite Priesthood

**Judges 18:30** – Original text likely read: “Jonathan, the son of Gershom, **the son of Moses**”

But the Masoretic text has: “the son of **Manasseh**” (מנשה instead of משה)

→ A **scribal alteration** (called a *tiqqun sopherim* or “correction of the scribes”) changed “Moses” to “Manasseh” to **dissociate Moses from the priesthood of Dan**, which the Deuteronomist viewed as illegitimate.

### Example 2: Samuel’s Legitimacy

**1 Samuel 7:9-10** – Samuel offers burnt offering

But **1 Samuel 13:8-14** – Saul is condemned for offering burnt offering (only priests can do this)

→ Tension in the text: Samuel (not a Levite) offered sacrifices and was praised, but later theology said only Aaronide priests could do this. The Deuteronomist **preserved both traditions** but couldn’t reconcile them.

### Example 3: The High Place Contradiction

The Deuteronomist condemns high places throughout Kings: - **1 Kings 15:14** – Asa’s heart was perfect, “Nevertheless the high places were not removed” - **1 Kings 22:43** – Jehoshaphat did right, “Howbeit the high places were not taken away” - **2 Kings 12:3** – Jehoash did right, “But the high places were not taken away” - **2 Kings 14:4** – Amaziah did right, “Howbeit the high places were not taken away” - **2 Kings 15:4, 35** – Similar statements about Azariah and Jotham

→ The repeated formula shows the Deuteronomist **imposing his theology** on earlier material. These kings were originally viewed as righteous; the Deuteronomist adds the caveat that they failed to remove high places, which **wasn’t considered a failing** in the original sources.

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## The Documentary Hypothesis and Deuteronomistic History

### Overview of Critical Methodology

**Source Criticism** examines the biblical text to identify different source documents compiled by later editors.

**Redaction Criticism** studies how these sources were edited, arranged, and shaped by redactors (editors) to create the final text.

**Form Criticism** analyzes the literary forms and genres to determine their original setting and purpose.

## The Four Sources of the Pentateuch

<b>J Source</b>	<b>E Source</b>	<b>D Source</b>	<b>P Source</b>
<b>Date:</b> 10th-9th cent. BCE	<b>Date:</b> 9th-8th cent. BCE	<b>Date:</b> 7th cent. BCE	<b>Date:</b> 6th-5th cent. BCE
<b>Origin:</b> Judah (southern kingdom)	<b>Origin:</b> Israel (northern kingdom)	<b>Origin:</b> Jerusalem court/temple	<b>Origin:</b> Babylonian exile
<b>Name for God:</b> YHWH (Yahweh)	<b>Name for God:</b> Elohim	<b>Name for God:</b> YHWH, “the LORD your God”	<b>Name for God:</b> Elohim, “the LORD”
<b>Characteristics:</b> Narrative, anthropomorphic God, earthly focus	<b>Characteristics:</b> Prophetic emphasis, God in dreams, ethical	<b>Characteristics:</b> Covenant theology, centralization, blessings/curses	<b>Characteristics:</b> Ritual law, genealogies, priestly concerns
<b>Examples:</b> Gen 2:4b-4:26, much of Genesis narrative	<b>Examples:</b> Parts of Exodus, Gen 15, 20-22	<b>Examples:</b> Most of Deuteronomy	<b>Examples:</b> Gen 1, Leviticus, priestly sections of Exodus/Numbers

## How the Sources Were Combined

**Stage 1 (c. 8th century BCE):** J and E sources combined into **JE**

**Stage 2 (c. 7th century BCE):** D source composed during or just before Josiah’s reign

**Stage 3 (c. 6th century BCE):** P source composed during Babylonian Exile

**Stage 4 (c. 5th century BCE):** Final redactor(s) combined JE, D, and P into the **Torah** as we know it

## The Deuteronomistic History (Joshua through Kings)

**Proposal:** The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings form a unified history compiled/edited by the same Deuteronomistic school that produced Deuteronomy.

**Structure:** - **Deuteronomy** – The theological introduction (covenant law) - **Joshua** – Conquest and distribution of the land - **Judges** – Cycle of apostasy and deliverance - **Samuel** – Transition to monarchy - **Kings** – Rise and fall of the kingdoms, ending in exile

**Theological Framework:** 1. Covenant obedience brings blessing 2. Covenant disobedience brings curse (exile) 3. Centralized worship in Jerusalem is required 4. Failure to remove high places leads to judgment 5. Davidic covenant is central 6. Prophets warn and kings either obey or disobey

**Two Editions Theory:**

**DtrH1 (Josianic Edition, c. 622-609 BCE):** - Written during Josiah's reign - Optimistic tone - Josiah presented as the **ideal king** who fulfills Deuteronomic law - **2 Kings 23:25** – “And like unto him was there no king before him” - Purpose: Justify and support Josiah's reforms

**DtrH2 (Exilic Edition, c. 560-550 BCE):** - Edited during Babylonian Exile - Pessimistic tone added - Explains **why** Judah fell to Babylon (covenant disobedience) - **2 Kings 23:26-27** – “Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath... And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight” - Added material about exile as punishment - Purpose: Explain the catastrophe and call for repentance

## Evidence for Multiple Editions

### Example: The Fate of Josiah

**2 Kings 23:25** (DtrH1?) – “And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.”

→ This sounds like a **conclusion** to the history, presenting Josiah as the climax.

**2 Kings 23:26-27** (DtrH2?) – “Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.”

→ This **contradicts** the previous verse, saying Josiah's reforms didn't matter because **Manasseh's sins** (Josiah's grandfather) already sealed Judah's fate.

**2 Kings 23:29-30** – Josiah is killed by Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo

→ **Problem:** If Josiah was the most righteous king, why did God allow him to die young in battle? This created a theological crisis requiring further editorial explanation.

**2 Chronicles 35:20-24** – Later Chronicler adds detail that Josiah disobeyed God by attacking Neco

→ **Later theological solution:** Josiah must have sinned somehow to deserve this fate.

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## Archaeological Evidence: What the Ground Reveals

### Sites Supporting the Reform Narratives

#### 1. Tel Arad Sanctuary

**Location:** Southern Judah, near Beersheba

**Findings:** - Temple/sanctuary with altar and standing stones - Two burnt offering altars discovered - **Deliberately decommissioned** – altars buried/covered - Pottery and stratigraphy date decommissioning to late 8th century BCE

**Interpretation:** - Consistent with Hezekiah's reform (c. 715-686 BCE) - May represent **centralization of cult** in Jerusalem - Alternative: Could be due to Assyrian destruction threat

**Scholarly Debate:** - Some scholars: Direct evidence of Hezekiah's high place removal - Others: Military/political reasons, not religious reform - Dating debates: Was it Hezekiah or Josiah?

## 2. Beersheba Horned Altar

**Location:** Southern Judah

**Findings:** - Large horned altar stones **dismantled** - Stones reused in city wall construction - Dating to reform period (late 8th-early 7th century BCE)

**Interpretation:** - Altar deliberately desacralized - Stones reused shows **intentional removal**, not destruction by enemy - Consistent with biblical account of removing altars

## 3. Tel Motza Temple

**Location:** Just west of Jerusalem (4 miles)

**Findings:** - **Large temple complex** discovered in 2012 - Active during Iron Age II (9th-8th centuries BCE) - Rectangular structure with courtyard - Finds included: figurines, clay vessels, massive walls - **Deliberately filled in and abandoned** around 7th century BCE

**Interpretation:** - Rival temple to Jerusalem, operating nearby - Centralization reforms required its closure - Too close to Jerusalem to allow continued operation

## 4. Lachish Gate Shrine

**Location:** Major Judean city

**Findings:** - Six-chambered gate with shrine room - Cult objects including altars, incense stands - **Destroyed and not rebuilt** during late 8th century BCE - Toilet installed in shrine room (**desecration**)

**Interpretation:** - Deliberate desecration consistent with **2 Kings 10:27** (Jehu put "draught house" in Baal temple) - Timing consistent with Hezekiah's reforms - Shows **intentional religious desecration**, not just military destruction

# Archaeological Challenges to the Reform Narrative

## 1. Timing Disputes

**Problem:** Many destroyed cult sites were destroyed by **Assyrian military campaigns**, not Israelite religious reforms:

- **Tiglath-pileser III** (745-727 BCE) – Conquered much of northern Israel
- **Shalmaneser V** (727-722 BCE) – Destroyed Samaria
- **Sennacherib** (704-681 BCE) – Devastated Judah in 701 BCE campaign

**Question:** Were these sites destroyed by **Hezekiah's reforms** (religious) or **Sennacherib's invasion** (military)?

**Scholarly Assessment:** - Sites like Arad, Beersheba, Lachish were in the path of Assyrian forces - Archaeological destruction layers date to 701 BCE - May be **coincidence** rather than religious reform - Or: Military destruction provided **opportunity** not to rebuild pagan sites

## 2. Lack of Evidence for Josiah's Destruction

**Problem:** Archaeological evidence for Josiah's reforms is **surprisingly limited**:

- No clear destruction layer from 622 BCE (date of Josiah's reform)
- Sites destroyed in 701 BCE (Hezekiah's time) were **not rebuilt**
- But new destructions in 622 BCE are **not widely attested**

**Possible Explanations:** 1. Josiah's reforms were **literary/theological** rather than physical destruction 2. The reforms **did occur** but left minimal archaeological footprint (dismantling rather than burning) 3. Hezekiah did the major physical destruction; Josiah completed/enforced the centralization 4. The biblical account is **exaggerated** or **idealized**

## 3. Continued Use of High Places

**Problem:** Despite biblical claims of complete destruction, archaeological evidence shows **continued cultic activity**:

- Figurines (especially female/fertility figures) found in contexts **after** reform dates
- "Pillar figurines" (possibly representing Asherah) continue into 7th-6th centuries BCE
- Suggests **popular religion** continued practices the reforms supposedly eliminated

**Scholarly Assessment:** - Official royal/temple policy ≠ actual practice - Reforms may have been **Jerusalem-centric propaganda** - Rural areas continued traditional practices - **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel** (post-Josiah prophets) still condemn idolatry, suggesting reforms failed

## 4. The Bethel Problem

**2 Kings 23:15-20** – Josiah destroys the altar at Bethel (northern kingdom)

**Problem:** - Bethel was in **Assyrian-controlled territory** - Josiah (king of Judah) shouldn't have had authority there - No archaeological evidence of destruction by Josiah

**Possible Explanations:** 1. Assyrian power had weakened by 620s BCE, allowing Josiah brief control 2. The account is **exaggerated** or **idealized** 3. Later editors added this to show Josiah fulfilling prophecy of **1 Kings 13:2**

## **Epigraphic Evidence: Inscriptions and Texts**

### **1. Kuntillet Ajrud Inscriptions**

**Location:** Sinai desert, trade route site

**Date:** Late 9th-early 8th century BCE (before reforms)

**Content:** - Inscriptions reading: “**YHWH of Samaria and his Asherah**” and “**YHWH of Teman and his Asherah**” - Drawings of figures (possibly divine couple)

**Significance:** - Shows **popular religion** included Asherah as YHWH's consort - This is what Josiah's reforms **suppressed** - Proves biblical editors didn't invent the Asherah problem—it was real

### **2. Khirbet el-Qom Inscription**

**Location:** Judean hills

**Date:** 8th century BCE (before reforms)

**Content:** - Tomb inscription: “Blessed be Uriyahu by YHWH... and by his Asherah”

**Significance:** - Even in **Judah** (not just northern Israel), Asherah worship was mainstream - Centralization reforms had to **suppress** this widespread practice

### **3. Lachish Letters**

**Date:** c. 587 BCE (just before Babylonian destruction)

**Content:** - Military correspondence - References to **prophets** and **signals** between fortified cities - No mention of centralized cult or exclusive Jerusalem worship

**Significance:** - Even at the end of Judah's existence, the letters don't reflect Deuteronomic theology - Suggests reforms may not have been as complete as biblical account claims

### **4. Elephantine Papyri**

**Location:** Jewish military colony in Egypt

**Date:** 5th century BCE (after exile)

**Content:** - Letters from Jewish community - Mention of “**the temple**” at Elephantine (local Jewish temple) - Worship of **YHWH** but also mention “Anat-Yahu” (possibly goddess) - Ask permission from Jerusalem to rebuild their temple

**Significance:** - Diaspora Jews **didn’t follow** centralization theology - Shows Deuteronomic reforms were **Judean/Jerusalem-specific**, not universal Jewish practice - Even after exile, Jews built temples outside Jerusalem

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## Scholarly Consensus and Debates

### Points of Broad Agreement

Most biblical scholars (across the theological spectrum) agree on the following:

#### 1. Deuteronomy Was Composed During/Before Josiah’s Reign

- The “Book of the Law” found in the temple (2 Kings 22) was an early version of Deuteronomy
- The perfect alignment between Deuteronomy 12-26 and Josiah’s reforms is not coincidental
- Whether it was actually “discovered” or deliberately produced is debated

#### 2. The Pentateuch Is Composite

- The Torah shows clear evidence of multiple sources
- Different names for God, duplicate stories, contradictory laws, varying styles
- These were combined by later editors/redactors
- Exact dating of sources and redaction is debated

#### 3. The Historical Books Show Editorial Shaping

- Joshua through Kings reflect a **Deuteronomistic theological perspective**
- These books were compiled/edited, not written by eyewitnesses
- The editor(s) had a clear theological agenda (centralization, covenant obedience)

#### 4. Centralization Was a Late Development

- Early Israel had **multiple legitimate sanctuaries**
- Centralization in Jerusalem was an **innovation**, not restoration of ancient practice
- Political and religious motivations were intertwined

#### 5. Reforms Had Limited Success

- Archaeological evidence suggests **continued diversity** in religious practice
- Prophets after Josiah still condemned idolatry
- Popular religion didn’t fully conform to Deuteronomic ideal

## Points of Scholarly Debate

### 1. Date of D Source

**Majority View:** Composed during Josiah's reign (c. 640-609 BCE) or shortly before

**Alternative Views:** - **Later dating:** Composed during Exile (6th century) and **retrojected** back to Josiah - **Earlier dating:** Composed during Hezekiah's reign (8th century), discovered in Josiah's time - **Multiple stages:** Core composed earlier, expanded during Josiah's time, final form during Exile

### 2. Historicity of the Reforms

**Maximalist View:** The biblical account is largely accurate; the reforms occurred as described

**Minimalist View:** The account is largely **ideological fiction**; little or no actual reform happened

**Middle View (Most Common):** Some reforms occurred, but the biblical account is **exaggerated** and **theologized**

### 3. Motivation for the Reforms

**Religious Motivation:** Genuine desire to purify worship and follow newly discovered law

**Political Motivation:** Consolidate power, centralize economy, strengthen national identity

**Combination:** Both religious conviction and political pragmatism

### 4. Was the Book "Discovered" or Produced?

**Traditional View:** Ancient book actually found during temple renovations

**Critical View:** Book was **recently composed** and "discovery" was a **pious fraud** to give it authority

**Middle View:** Core may have been older, but was **edited and expanded** to fit Josiah's agenda

### 5. The Role of Multiple Editions

**One-Edition View:** Deuteronomistic History written in one stage (either Josiah or Exile)

**Two-Edition View:** First edition during Josiah, second edition during Exile

**Multiple-Edition View:** Continuous editing over centuries

## Conservative Evangelical Responses

Conservative scholars who hold to biblical inerrancy have developed various responses to critical scholarship:

### 1. Mosaic Authorship with Later Updates

**Argument:** - Moses wrote the core of Deuteronomy - Later scribes made minor **updates** (place names, clarifications) - These updates were also **inspired** by God - Not “editing” but “textual updating” under inspiration

**Problem:** - Doesn't explain major contradictions between Deuteronomy and earlier sources - Doesn't address centralization theology incompatible with Mosaic period - Still requires **significant later composition**, not just updating

### 2. Deuteronomy as Ancient Text Misunderstood

**Argument:** - Deuteronomy is actually ancient (Mosaic era) - It was **misunderstood** and **not followed** for centuries - Josiah “discovered” it and implemented what had always been required - High places were always sinful; the text just records Israelite disobedience

**Problems:** - 1 Kings 3:2 explicitly says high places were acceptable “because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD” - Samuel and Solomon worshiped at high places without condemnation - Exodus 20:24 commands multiple altars (“in all places where I record my name”)

### 3. Progressive Revelation

**Argument:** - God progressively revealed truth over time - Multiple altars were acceptable **temporarily** - Centralization was always God's **ultimate plan** - Deuteronomy represents the **full revelation** of God's will

**Problems:** - Creates theological issue: Did God change His mind, or command sin temporarily? - Doesn't address evidence of redaction and editing - Still requires Deuteronomy to be later than J/E sources

### 4. Rejection of Critical Scholarship

**Argument:** - Documentary Hypothesis is **unproven theory** - Based on **anti-supernatural bias** - Traditional authorship should be trusted - Critical scholarship is **destructive** to faith

**Problems:** - Doesn't engage with textual evidence (doublets, contradictions, style differences) - Doesn't explain archaeological findings - Reduces to **faith commitment** rather than textual analysis

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# Implications for Biblical Inerrancy

## The Central Tension

**Evangelical Doctrine of Inerrancy:** > The Bible, in its **original manuscripts**, is without error in all that it affirms, including history, theology, and science.

**Evidence from Josiah/Hezekiah Reforms:** 1. The biblical text shows clear **editorial layers** spanning centuries 2. Texts were **redacted** to support centralization agenda 3. Earlier sources were **reinterpreted** or **suppressed** 4. Historical books were **shaped** by theological perspective 5. Archaeological evidence shows the biblical account is **partial** and **idealized**

**The Question:** If we don't have the "original manuscripts" but rather **compiled, edited, redacted texts** shaped by political/religious agendas over centuries, what does "inerrancy" mean?

## Three Possible Responses

### 1. Redefine Inerrancy

**Approach:** Inerrancy applies to the **final form** of the text as compiled

**Argument:** - The redactors were **inspired** by God - Each stage of editing was **divinely guided** - The final text is what God **intended** us to have - Redaction doesn't equal error; it's part of the process

**Problems:** - Earlier stages (J, E sources) were also considered Scripture - Redactors **changed** meaning of earlier texts - **Contradictions** remain in final form (high places acceptable vs. forbidden) - When did inspiration stop? (After P? After Exile? After Masoretic Text? After canonization?)

### 2. Limit Inerrancy to Theology

**Approach:** The Bible is inerrant in **faith and practice**, not necessarily history

**Argument:** - The historical details may be **shaped** or **idealized** - The **theological message** is what's inerrant - Whether reforms happened exactly as described is less important than the lesson about covenant obedience

**Problems:** - Where to draw the line? Is the Exodus historical? The conquest? David's kingdom? - Biblical authors clearly **intended** to write history - Theology and history are **intertwined** in biblical narrative - Many Christians see this as **abandoning inerrancy**

### 3. Abandon Inerrancy, Retain Authority

**Approach:** The Bible is **authoritative** for faith without being **inerrant** in modern sense

**Argument:** - The Bible is a **human product** inspired by God - It reflects the perspectives, agendas, and limitations of its human authors - God **works through** the human process of composition, editing, and canonization - Authority comes from **encountering God** through Scripture, not from error-free text

**Problems:** - Seen by many evangelicals as **liberal** or **compromising** - Raises questions: How do we know what to trust? What's divinely inspired vs. human agenda? - Requires rethinking traditional doctrines of Scripture

## The Documentary Hypothesis and Inerrancy

### Key Challenge:

If Deuteronomy was **composed** during Josiah's reign (not written by Moses c. 1400 BCE), then:

1. **Deuteronomy 1:1** – “These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel” – is **historically inaccurate**
2. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy as “Moses said” – Did Jesus not know? Or accommodate error?
3. The Pentateuch's **self-testimony** as Mosaic is called into question

### Conservative Responses:

**Response 1:** Documentary Hypothesis is wrong; Moses did write Deuteronomy -

**Problem:** Doesn't address textual evidence (contradictions, style differences, late references)

**Response 2:** “Moses” is a **title** or **school**, not an individual - **Problem:** Text clearly presents Moses as individual speaking - Feels like **reinterpretation** to save the theory

**Response 3:** Deuteronomy contains **Mosaic core** with later expansions - **Problem:** Which parts are Mosaic? How do we determine? Centralization theology is clearly late

**Response 4:** Deuteronomy is **Mosaic perspective** written by later author -

**Problem:** If later author wrote “Moses said,” isn't that **pseudonymous** (falsely attributed)? - How is pseudonymity compatible with inerrancy?

## Margaret Barker's Temple Theology and Suppression

### Barker's Argument:

The Deuteronomic reforms **suppressed** an earlier, authentic temple theology that included: - Divine plurality (Father and Son) - Heavenly ascent and visionary experience - Priesthood with power to bring worshipers into God's presence - Sacred wisdom and mystical knowledge

### Implications:

If Barker is correct (even partially):

1. The biblical text doesn't preserve **all** ancient Israelite theology

2. Some authentic traditions were **deliberately removed** by Deuteronomic editors
3. What we have is **one faction's** version of history and theology
4. Other legitimate perspectives were **suppressed** as “apostate”

**For Biblical Inerrancy:** - Does inerrancy require **complete** preservation of all traditions? - If authentic theological perspectives were removed, is the text still inerrant? - Does canonical status depend on **which faction won** the theological/political battles?

## Rethinking “Original Manuscripts”

### The Textual Problem:

Inerrancy doctrine refers to “**original manuscripts**” (autographa)

But if: - **J source** was a manuscript - **E source** was a manuscript - **D source** was a manuscript - **P source** was a manuscript - And a **redactor** combined them into one...

### Which is the “original manuscript”?

#### Options:

1. **Each source** is an original → But they **contradict** each other
2. **Final redacted form** is the original → But it's a **compilation**, not an original
3. **There are no “original manuscripts”** in the traditional sense → Scripture developed through **communal process**

#### Conclusion:

The concept of “**original inerrant manuscripts**” may be **anachronistic** when applied to texts that were **compiled over centuries** from **multiple sources** by **multiple editors**.

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## Conclusion: Multiple Layers of Biblical Composition

### Summary of Evidence

**The Josiah and Hezekiah reforms provide a clear test case for understanding how the Hebrew Bible was composed:**

#### 1. Historical Reforms Occurred

- Archaeological evidence supports **some level** of centralization
- High places and local sanctuaries were destroyed or decommissioned
- Jerusalem was strengthened as political and religious capital

#### 2. Textual Evidence Shows Editorial Activity

- Deuteronomy aligns too perfectly with Josiah's program to be coincidental

- Earlier sources (J, E) reflect **different theology** than D source
- Deuteronomistic History shows consistent **editorial perspective**
- Multiple redactional layers are evident in the text itself

### 3. Alternative Traditions Were Suppressed

- Local priesthods were displaced
- High places associated with prophets and patriarchs were condemned
- Alternative temple theologies were minimized or edited out
- Inscriptions show popular religion differed from Deuteronomic ideal

### 4. The Biblical Text Reflects Theological Agendas

- The reforms weren't just **recorded**—they were **justified** and **theologized**
- History was **interpreted** through the lens of covenant theology
- Earlier materials were **reframed** to support centralization
- Kings were evaluated by Deuteronomic standards that didn't exist in their own time

## What This Means for Reading the Bible

The evidence suggests:

1. **The Bible is a product of development**
  - Not written at once, but compiled over centuries
  - Multiple perspectives, traditions, and theologies were woven together
  - Human authors shaped the material with specific purposes
2. **History and theology are intertwined**
  - The biblical authors weren't writing "objective history"
  - They were interpreting history through theological lenses
  - Different authors had different theological perspectives
3. **Canonical texts represent one tradition**
  - The texts that "won" (became Scripture) reflect **one faction's** perspective
  - Other legitimate traditions were **marginalized** or **suppressed**
  - What we have is **not necessarily complete**
4. **Inspiration works through human process**
  - If God inspired Scripture, He did so through **real historical processes**
  - Including political agendas, religious reforms, editorial activity, and theological debates
  - The **final form** is what the community recognized as authoritative

## Implications for Faith Communities

**For Those Who Hold Biblical Inerrancy:**

This evidence presents serious challenges that require either: - **Redefining** what inerrancy means - **Limiting** inerrancy to specific aspects (theology, not history) - **Rejecting** critical scholarship (but must still explain textual evidence) - **Developing** new models of inspiration that account for redaction

**For Those Open to Critical Scholarship:**

This evidence supports: - **Human authorship** with divine inspiration working through human process - **Development** of biblical theology over time - **Diversity** within the biblical witness - **Authority** based on community recognition, not mechanical dictation - **Engagement** with the text in its historical context

### **For Restorationist Traditions (Including Latter-day Saints):**

This evidence may support: - Claims of **apostasy** and loss of original teachings - Need for **restoration** of suppressed truths - Recognition that **biblical canon** doesn't contain all ancient revelation - Validity of **modern revelation** to restore what was lost - Understanding that **Scripture is not complete** or sufficient alone

## **Final Observations**

### **The Josiah reforms demonstrate:**

1. **Religious texts are shaped by historical circumstances**
  - Political agendas influence theological formulation
  - Centralization of power affects religious texts
  - “Official” versions may suppress alternative perspectives
2. **Biblical formation was a process, not an event**
  - No single “original manuscript”
  - Continuous editing and updating over centuries
  - Multiple authors and editors contributed
3. **Archaeology provides external check on biblical claims**
  - Sometimes supports biblical account
  - Sometimes challenges or complicates it
  - Prevents purely theological reading disconnected from history
4. **The tension between inerrancy and evidence**
  - Traditional inerrancy doctrine was formulated before modern critical scholarship
  - Evidence of redaction, editing, and suppression is substantial
  - New models of biblical authority and inspiration are needed

### **The Scholarly Consensus:**

While details are debated, the mainstream of biblical scholarship (including many evangelical scholars) accepts: - **Multiple sources** in the Pentateuch - **Deuteronomistic editing** of historical books - **Josiah's reforms** as historical backdrop for D source - **Redactional layers** throughout Hebrew Bible - **Development** of Israelite theology over time

### **The Question Remains:**

Can the Bible be **authoritative** and **inspired** even if it's not **inerrant** in the traditional sense?

Or does recognizing human authorship, editorial activity, and theological development **undermine** the Bible's authority?

Different faith traditions will answer differently. But the evidence from the Josiah and Hezekiah reforms makes clear that **the Bible as we have it is the product of a complex historical process**—and any doctrine of Scripture must account for that reality.

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