

Problems with the Old Testament

Credit to 'The Hundreth Sheep'

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Contents

- [Two different Creation stories](#)
- [How many animals did Noah take into the Ark?](#)
- [How many languages were there after the Flood?](#)
- [Were Abraham and Lot related?](#)
- [How many sons did Abraham have?](#)
- [Who sold Joseph to Potiphar?](#)
- [Did Abraham know God's Name?](#)
- [How long were the Israelites in Egypt?](#)
- [Why was God angry with Balaam?](#)
- [How long was the ark in Kiriath-Jearim?](#)
- [How many sons did Jesse have?](#)
- [When did Saul meet David?](#)
- [Who killed Goliath?](#)
- [Who tempted David?](#)
- [When did Baasha die?](#)
- [Did Asa remove the high places?](#)
- [Jehoram and Jehoram](#)
- [How old was Ahaziah?](#)
- [Did Jehu do right in God's eyes?](#)
- [Where did Josiah die?](#)
- [The Greatest King?](#)

Two Different Creation stories

A close examination of Genesis chapters 1 and will show that there are in fact two different Creation myths recorded. The first, which begins at Genesis 1:1 and ends at Genesis 2:3, has

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Creation partitioned into six days, with various classes of beings and objects created on each day. The second story, which begins at Genesis 2:4, does not mention the six days at all, and seems to reverse the order of creation for some species.

In Genesis 1, Man and Woman are created together on the sixth day (1:26-27), following the creation of the animals. In the second story, however, a single man, Adam, is created after the plants and placed in the Garden to dress it. (2:4-8). However, the man was lonely. In order to provide companions for him, the animals are created and brought to Adam (2:18-19). After naming all the animals, a companion is still not found for Adam, so God creates a woman (Eve) out of one of Adam's ribs (2:20-23).

The order of creation, according to Genesis 1, is therefore plants (1:12), Sun, Moon and stars (1:16), sea and air creatures (1:21), land animals (1:25) and humans (1:27). In Genesis 2, the order of creation is plants (2:5), the man Adam (2:7), animals (2:19) and finally the female Eve (2:22).

Another feature that distinguishes the two stories may provide a clue to their origin. In the first story, the Deity is always called by the Hebrew Elohim (usually translated God), while the second story uses the name Yahweh Elohim (translated Lord God in the King James Version). It appears that the first story was written by someone who used only the generic term for God, while the second was written by someone who used God's personal name (Yahweh). This feature is actually repeated a number of times in the Old Testament.

How many animals did Noah take into the Ark?

In Genesis 6, Noah is instructed to take two each (male and female) of all animals onto the ark:

Genesis 6:19,20 And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive.

In the next chapter, however, the instructions are different:

Genesis 7:2,3 Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

How many languages were there after the Flood?

In Genesis 10, the Bible describes how the lands were divided up among Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japeth after the Flood. Note that they were divided by their language:

Genesis 10:5 By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

Genesis 10:20 These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations.

Genesis 10:31 These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.

However, when the next chapter begins with the story of the tower of Babel, we find that the entire earth actually speaks one language only:

Genesis 11:1 And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

Were Abraham and Lot related?

In Genesis 14, Lot is referred to as Abraham's nephew:

Genesis 14:12 And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

Just two verses later, however, Lot becomes Abraham's brother.

Genesis 14:14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

How many sons did Abraham have?

According to the Old Testament, Isaac, Abraham's son, had an older brother called Ishmael.

Genesis 16:15 And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael.

Genesis 21:3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

In several places in the Old Testament, however, Isaac is referred to as Abraham's only son:

Genesis 22:2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

What happened to Ishmael? According to the Bible, he was still part of Abraham's family until the day that Abraham died:

Genesis 25:9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre...

One possible answer to the problem concerns the meaning of the word translated "only" in the King James Version. This is the Hebrew word *yachiyd*. Although derived from a root word that means "one", the word has a secondary meaning of "beloved", or "favored".

Psalms 22:20 Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling [*yachiyd*] from the power of the dog.

The Septuagint appears to support this view, using the Greek word *agapatos* ("beloved") to translate *yachiyd* in Genesis 22.

On the other hand, when the word is used in conjunction with "son" or "daughter", it generally means "only child".

Judges 11:34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only [*yachiyd*] child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

Supporting this view, and in contrast to the Septuagint, the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews used the Greek word *monogenes* ("only-born") to translate *yachiyd*.

Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten [*monogenes*]...

Who sold Joseph to Potiphar?

In Genesis 37, Joseph is sold as a slave to the Egyptian Potiphar by a group of Midianites.

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Genesis 37:36 And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

Just two chapters later, however, the Bible seems a little confused about the identity of Joseph's captors.

Genesis 39:1 And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither.

Did Abraham know God's Name?

When God appeared to Moses in Egypt, he gave him some information about his personal name, Jehovah.

Exodus 6:2,3 And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am [Jehovah]: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them.

However, there can be no doubt that Abraham and Jacob, at least, did address God by his personal name:

Genesis 22:14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of [Jehovah] it shall be seen.

Genesis 28:20,21 And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall [Jehovah] be my God...

How long were the Israelites in Egypt?

At the beginning of the Exodus story, the Israelites were said to have been in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years.

Exodus 12:40 Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years.

The sixth chapter of Exodus gives a genealogy of Moses which seems to contradict this statement.

Exodus 6:16-20 And these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari: and the years of the life of Levi were an hundred thirty and seven years...And the sons of Kohath; Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel: and the years of the life of Kohath were an hundred thirty and three years...And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses: and the years of the life of Amram were an hundred and thirty and seven years.

Levi, of course, was one of Jacob's sons, who relocated to Egypt with his father.

Genesis 47:11 And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

This marks the beginning of the Egyptian sojourn. Since Kohath had already been born before Jacob moved to Egypt (Genesis 46:11), we can start the count from his birth, if we assume that he was an infant when he arrived in Rameses.

According to the book of Exodus, Moses was eighty years old when the Exodus began.

Exodus 7:7 And Moses was fourscore years old, and Aaron fourscore and three years old, when they spake unto Pharaoh.

The maximum amount of time that the Israelites spent in Egypt, according to Exodus chapter six, would therefore have been one hundred and thirty-seven years for the life of Kohath, one hundred and thirty-three years for the life of Amram, and another eighty years to the point of Moses' calling, for a total of three hundred and fifty years. This is almost eighty years short of the total given in Exodus 12:40.

Why was God angry with Balaam?

Numbers 22 records the story of Balaam, the Canaanite prophet, who was called by Balak, the Moabite king, to curse the Israelites. It appears that something has gone wrong with the retelling of this story, however, because as it stands it makes very little sense.

Throughout the story, Balaam appears as a God-fearing man, and does only as he is told.

Balak sends one delegation to Balaam, to ask him to curse the Israelites.

Numbers 22:6-7 Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed. And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.

Balaam decides to seek God's counsel, and is told not to go with the men.

Numbers 22:12 And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.

Balaam obeys, and sends the Moabites away the next morning. Balak refuses to give up, however, and sends a second delegation to Balaam.

Numbers 22:15 And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they.

Again Balaam seeks God's advice. This time he is told to go with the men, and await further instructions.

Numbers 22:20 And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.

Again, Balaam obeys. But the next morning, a very strange thing happens.

Numbers 22:21-22 And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him...

Incredibly, God is now angry with Balaam. It is very difficult to see why, because all this time, Balaam has simply followed God's orders. Note that the text specifically states that God was angry because Balaam had gone with the Moabites, and yet this was precisely what he commanded.

How long was the ark in Kiriath-Jearim?

After the ark of the covenant was recovered from the Philistines, it was placed in a town called Kiriath-Jearim for safekeeping. According to the book of first Samuel, the ark spent twenty years in this town.

I Samuel 7:1-2 (NIV) So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the Lord. It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord.

The ark was recovered from Kiriath-Jearim by David, and brought to Jerusalem. This event is recorded in the book of second Samuel.

II Samuel 6:1 (NIV) David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all. He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark.

(Baalah was another name for Kiriath-Jearim, according to Joshua 15:9, and the parallel account in I Chronicles 13:5-7.)

The problem with this chronology is that David only became king more than forty years after the ark was taken to Kiriath-Jearim. The ark was captured by the Philistines before Saul became king of Judah (I Samuel 10:24). According to Acts 13:21, Saul reigned for forty years, when he was succeeded by David. It was only some time after his succession to the throne that David retrieved the ark. Thus, the ark had to have been in Kiriath-Jearim for forty years at the very least, and probably longer. Why does the Bible then say that the ark spent only twenty years in the town?

How many sons did Jesse have?

In first Samuel 16, David is said to be Jesse's eighth and youngest son.

I Samuel 16:10-11 Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel...And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep...

In first Chronicles, however, David is listed as Jesse's seventh son.

I Chronicles 2:13-15 And Jesse begat his firstborn Eliab, and Abinadab the second, and Shimma the third, Nethaneel the fourth, Raddai the fifth, Ozem the sixth, David the seventh...

When did Saul meet David?

The book of first Samuel, chapter 16, records that David was brought to Saul to soothe his depression through his music. Saul was impressed with the young David, and gave him a position of high honor:

I Samuel 16:21 And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armourbearer.

Curiously, in the very next chapter, Saul appears to have no idea who David is.

I Samuel 17:55-56 And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. And the king said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling is.

It has been argued that Saul was simply asking who David's father was, presumably in order to honor him in some manner. However, in the previous chapter, the Bible claims that Saul had personal correspondence with Jesse, David's father.

I Samuel 16:19 Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep.

I Samuel 16:22 And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight.

Who killed Goliath?

The story of David and Goliath is one of the most famous in the Bible. The first book of Samuel records how David killed the giant, Goliath of Gath.

I Samuel 17:50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him...

Curiously, however, the Old Testament records another battle, in which Goliath the Gittite was slain yet again:

II Samuel 21:19 And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim, a Bethlehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

(The words 'the brother of' were added by the King James Translators in a very transparent attempt to get around the problem).

Who tempted David?

In second Samuel, the Bible relates that David was incited to conduct a census of the Israelites.

II Samuel 24:1 *And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.*

In the parallel account of first Chronicles, the story is a little different.

I Chronicles 21:1 *And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*

The discrepancy is significant - second Samuel dates from a time before the Israelites were exiled to Babylon, and then to Persia. First Chronicles dates from some time after the Jews returned from Persia. The concept of Satan as a powerful adversary of God did not exist in Judaism prior to the Exile. There was a similar being in the Persian religion, however. The high God, Ahura-Mazda was opposed by a powerful, evil being known as Ahriman, or Angra-Mainyu. It appears that this concept was assimilated into the Jewish religion, where it grew into the Satan of the New Testament.

When did Baasha die?

In first Kings, Baasha, king of Israel, dies in the twenty-sixth year of Asa, king of Judah, and is succeeded by his son Elah.

I Kings 16:6-8 *So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah: and Elah his son reigned in his stead...In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years.*

Strangely enough, in the book of second Chronicles, we find Baasha conducting a campaign against Judah ten years after his death.

II Chronicles 16:1 *In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.*

Did Asa remove the high places?

While recounting the reign of good king Asa, the first book of Chronicles lists the removal of the "high places" as one of his accomplishments.

II Chronicles 14:2 And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God: For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves...

The "high places" are thought to be shrines to the ancient Canaanite gods, Baal, El or Asherah. In the parallel account of Asa's deeds in first Kings, the situation is a little different.

I Kings 15:11,14 And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father...But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.

Did Asa remove the ancient shrines or not?

Jehoram and Jehoram

At one time during the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel, there were two kings with the same name (Jehoram) who reigned at roughly the same time. (Some modern translations use Joram for one of the kings to aid clarity). It seems that this situation caused no end of confusion for the Old Testament chronologers, because a close examination of the text will reveal that it is basically impossible to determine when either of them began to reign, or even who preceded whom.

The first text seems straightforward enough. We are told that Jehoshaphat died, and his son Jehoram succeeded him:

I Kings 22:50 (NIV) Then Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the city of David his father. And Jehoram his son succeeded him.

While Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, Jehoram (or Joram) son of Ahab was king of Israel (i.e. the Northern Kingdom):

II Kings 3:1 (NIV) Joram son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years.

The Bible states that Joram became king in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat, the father of Jehoram. Since Jehoshaphat reigned for twenty-five years (I Kings 22:42), this seems to indicate that Joram preceded Jehoram by about seven or eight years. However, the Bible seems to indicate a different situation:

II Kings 1:17 (NIV) So he [i.e. Ahaziah] died, according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken. Because Ahaziah had no son, Joram succeeded him as king in the second year of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah.

This is curious. According to this verse, Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat was already king of Judah when Joram, son of Ahab, began his reign. This is in apparent conflict with II Kings 3:1, which states that Joram became king when Jehoshaphat was still alive.

The usual solution to the problem is to propose a co-regency between Jehoshaphat and his son, Jehoram. This theory states that Jehoram shared the kingdom with his father, and thus there were two kings reigning in Judah at the same time.

To make this theory work, then, we will assume that the year that Joram ascended to the throne was at the same time the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat (II Kings 3:1) and the second year of Jehoram (II Kings 1:17). This would then mean that Jehoram started his coregency in the seventeenth year, at the latest, of his father, Jehoshaphat's, reign.

There are two problems with this approach, however. First, the Bible states that Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, reigned for eight years:

II Kings 8:17 He [i.e. Jehoram] was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years.

If Jehoram indeed started his reign in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat, and since Jehoshaphat reigned twenty-five years (I Kings 22:42), this would mean that Jehoram's reign ended at about the same time, or earlier than did his father's. It is therefore improbable that Jehoram could have succeeded his father, as claimed by both I Kings 22:50 and II Chronicles 21:1.

The second problem is even more intractable. The Bible indicates in yet another place that Joram, son of Ahab, was already king when Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, began to reign:

II Kings 8:16 In the fifth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat began his reign as king of Judah.

It should be obvious by now that there is no way to reconcile the various statements made about the reigns of Jehoram and Joram, and we are left with an unbridgeable gap in the chronology of the kings.

How old was Ahaziah?

Ahaziah, son of Jehoram, king of Judah, was forty-two years old when he began his reign.

II Chronicles 22:2 **Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri.**

Ahaziah's father, Jehoram, reigned for eight years, beginning at the age of thirty-two.

II Chronicles 21:5 **Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.**

II Chronicles 21:19 **And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers.**

II Chronicles 22:1 **And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead...**

This means that Jehoram was forty years old when he died, and was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who was forty-two at the time. Thus, Ahaziah was two years older than his father.

The parallel account in II Kings makes more sense.

II Kings 8:26 **Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem...**

Did Jehu do right in God's eyes?

Soon after being anointed king of Israel, Jehu engaged in a killing spree in Jezreel, directed against the descendants of king Ahab.

II Kings 10:11 So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining.

II Kings 10:17 And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the Lord, which he spake to Elijah.

According to the Bible, this act of mass murder was commanded by God himself.

II Kings 9:6-7 ...Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel.

Although Jehu was not a good king by God's standards (II Kings 10:31), it appears that Yahweh still approved of his obedience.

II Kings 10:30 And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.

However, it appears that God changed his mind, because we find this curious statement in another book of the Old Testament.

Hosea 1:4 And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.

Why was God going to avenge Jezreel by punishing the house of Jehu, if Jehu only did that which God commanded him? Is it not more likely that what we see here is simply a case of God being invoked to support partisan politics?

Where did Josiah die?

According to the book of Second Kings, Josiah was killed in battle with the king of Egypt at Megiddo. His body was carried to Jerusalem, where he was buried.

II Kings 23:29-30 In his days Pharaohnechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre...

In the parallel account in II Chronicles, however, we find that Josiah was still alive when he left the battlefield at Megiddo.

II Chronicles 35:2-243 And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers...

The Greatest King?

King Hezekiah earned a place in Biblical history as the most righteous of all the Kings of Judah. In fact, the Bible specifically states that there was no king before or after Hezekiah who equaled him in following God's commandments.

II Kings 18:1-6 Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign...And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did...He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.

Unfortunately, Hezekiah was not the only king to earn this distinction.

II Kings 23:23-25 But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the Lord in Jerusalem. Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord. 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.

Note that Josiah is also said to be unequalled in his obedience to God. It should be fairly obvious that II Kings 18:6 and II Kings 23:25 are mutually exclusive.

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