

TYNDALE



CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

1–2 Kings

William Barnes

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort



New Living
Translation.

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featuring the text of the

NEW LIVING TRANSLATION



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC. CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 4b

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cornerstone biblical commentary.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4143-2206-3 (hc : alk. paper)

1. Bible—Commentaries. I. Barnes, William H.

BS491.3.C67 2006

220.77—dc22

2005026928

Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 13 12
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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VOLUME 4b:1-2 Kings

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2013). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and laypeople understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT
GENERAL EDITOR

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Gemara	<i>ibid.</i>	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	OL	Old Latin
<i>bar.</i>	baraita			OS	Old Syriac
<i>c.</i>	<i>circa</i> , around, approximately	<i>i.e.</i>	<i>id est</i> , that is	OT	Old Testament
<i>cf.</i>	<i>confer</i> , compare	<i>in loc.</i>	<i>in loco</i> , in the place cited	<i>p., pp.</i>	page, pages
<i>ch, chs</i>	chapter, chapters	<i>lit.</i>	literally	<i>pl.</i>	plural
<i>contra</i>	in contrast to	LXX	Septuagint	Q	Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls	M	Majority Text	<i>rev.</i>	revision
<i>ed.</i>	edition, editor	<i>m.</i>	Mishnah	<i>sg.</i>	singular
<i>e.g.</i>	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	<i>masc.</i>	masculine	<i>sv.</i>	<i>sub verbo</i> , under the word
<i>et al.</i>	<i>et alii</i> , and others	<i>mg</i>	margin	<i>t.</i>	Tosefta
<i>fem.</i>	feminine	<i>ms</i>	manuscript	TR	Textus Receptus
<i>ff</i>	following (verses, pages)	<i>mss</i>	manuscripts	<i>v., vv.</i>	verse, verses
<i>fl.</i>	flourished	MT	Masoretic Text	<i>vid.</i>	<i>videtur</i> , it seems
Gr.	Greek	<i>n.d.</i>	no date	<i>viz.</i>	<i>videlicet</i> , namely
Heb.	Hebrew	<i>neut.</i>	neuter	<i>vol.</i>	volume
		<i>no.</i>	number	<i>γ.</i>	Jerusalem Gemara
		NT	New Testament		

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version	NAB	New American Bible	NKJV	New King James Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NASB	New American Standard Bible	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
ESV	English Standard Version	NCV	New Century Version	NLT	New Living Translation
GW	God's Word	NEB	New English Bible	REB	Revised English Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NET	The NET Bible	RSV	Revised Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible	NIV	New International Version (1984)	TEV	Today's English Version
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Translation (<i>Tanakh</i>)	NIRV	New International Reader's Version	TLB	The Living Bible
KJV	King James Version	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible		
		NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation (<i>Tanakh</i>)		

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]	BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]	BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (Pritchard) [1965]	BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]	BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Pritchard) [1969]				

- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]
- CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]
- COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols., Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]
- DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]
- DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd ed., Leon-Dufour) [1972]
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (7 vols., D. Clines) [2000]
- DLNTD *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development* (R. Martin, P. Davids) [1997]
- DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]
- DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]
- DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]
- DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]
- DTIB *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Vanhooser) [2005]
- EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]
- GKC *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Gesenius, Kautzsch, trans. Cowley) [1910]
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]
- IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]
- IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]
- ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]
- KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed., Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]
- MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]
- NA²⁶ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1979]
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1993]
- NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed., Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]
- NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]
- NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]
- NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]
- PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]
- PGM *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. (Preisendanz) [1928]
- TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (15 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]
- TLNT *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols., C. Spicq) [1994]
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]
- TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]
- UBS³ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3rd ed., Metzger et al.) [1975]
- UBS⁴ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed., Metzger et al.) [1993]
- WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	Deut	Deuteronomy	1 Sam	1 Samuel
Exod	Exodus	Josh	Joshua	2 Sam	2 Samuel
Lev	Leviticus	Judg	Judges	1 Kgs	1 Kings
Num	Numbers	Ruth	Ruth	2 Kgs	2 Kings

1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Song	Song of Songs	Obad	Obadiah
2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah	Jonah	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Jer	Jeremiah	Mic	Micah
Neh	Nehemiah	Lam	Lamentations	Nah	Nahum
Esth	Esther	Ezek	Ezekiel	Hab	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Dan	Daniel	Zeph	Zephaniah
Ps, Pss	Psalms, Psalms	Hos	Hosea	Hag	Haggai
Prov	Proverbs	Joel	Joel	Zech	Zechariah
Eccl	Ecclesiastes	Amos	Amos	Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	Jas	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Phlm	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

Deuterocanonical

Bar	Baruch	1–2 Esdr	1–2 Esdras	Ps 151	Psalms 151
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel	Add Esth	Additions to Esther	Sir	Sirach
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah	Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah	Tob	Tobit
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Jdt	Judith	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sg Three	Song of the Three Children	1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees		
		3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees		
Sus	Susanna	Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh		

MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD	Cairo Geniza copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>	1QIsa ^b	Isaiah copy ^b	4QLam ^a	Lamentations
		1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>	11QPs ^a	Psalms
		1QpHab	<i>Peshar Habakkuk</i>	11QTemple ^{ab}	<i>Temple Scroll</i>
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>	11QTgJob	<i>Targum of Job</i>
1QIsa ^a	Isaiah copy ^a				

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

P1 Matt 1; early 3rd	same codex)	1 Cor 7–8,	P30 1 Thess 4–5; 2 Thess 1;
P4+P64+P67 Matt 3, 5, 26;	Phil 3–4; late 3rd		early 3rd
Luke 1–6; late 2nd	P20 Jas 2–3; 3rd		P32 Titus 1–2; late 2nd
P5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd	P22 John 15–16; mid 3rd		P37 Matt 26; late 3rd
P13 Heb 2–5, 10–12; early 3rd	P23 Jas 1; c. 200		P39 John 8; first half of 3rd
P15+P16 (probably part of	P27 Rom 8–9; 3rd		P40 Rom 1–4, 6, 9; 3rd

- P45 Gospels and Acts;
 early 3rd
 P46 Paul's Major Epistles (less
 Pastorals); late 2nd
 P47 Rev 9–17; 3rd
 P49+P65 Eph 4–5; 1 Thess
 1–2; 3rd
 P52 John 18; c. 125
 P53 Matt 26, Acts 9–10;
 middle 3rd
 P66 John; late 2nd
 P70 Matt 2–3, 11–12, 24; 3rd
 P72 1–2 Peter, Jude; c. 300
 P74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th
 P75 Luke and John; c. 200
 P77+P103 (probably part of
 same codex) Matt 13–14,
 23; late 2nd
 P87 Philemon; late 2nd
 P90 John 18–19; late 2nd
 P91 Acts 2–3; 3rd
 P92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300
 P98 Rev 1:13–20; late 2nd
 P100 Jas 3–5; c. 300
 P101 Matt 3–4; 3rd
 P104 Matt 21; 2nd
 P106 John 1; 3rd
 P115 Rev 2–3, 5–6, 8–15; 3rd

Significant Uncials

- Ⲙ (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th
 A (Alexandrinus) most of NT;
 5th
 B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th
 C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most
 of NT with many lacunae;
 5th
 D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th
 D (Claramontanus), Paul's
 Epistles; 6th (different MS
 than Bezae)
 E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th
 F (Augensis) Paul's
 Epistles; 9th
 G (Boernerianus) Paul's
 Epistles; 9th
 H (Coislinianus) Paul's
 Epistles; 6th
 I (Freerianus or Washington)
 Paul's Epistles; 5th
 L (Regius) Gospels; 8th
 P (Porphyrianus) Acts—
 Revelation; 9th
 Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke,
 John; 5th
 T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th
 W (Washingtonianus or the
 Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th
 Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th
 037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels;
 9th
 038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels;
 9th
 040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th
 043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matthew,
 Mark; 6th
 044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae)
 Gospels, Acts, Paul's
 Epistles; 9th
 048 Acts, Paul's Epistles,
 General Epistles; 5th
 0171 Matt 10, Luke 22;
 c. 300
 0189 Acts 5; c. 200

Significant Minuscules

- 1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles;
 12th
 33 All NT except Rev; 9th
 81 Acts, Paul's Epistles,
 General Epistles; 1044
 565 Gospels; 9th
 700 Gospels; 11th
 1424 (or Family 1424—a
 group of 29 manuscripts
 sharing nearly the same
 text) most of NT; 9th–10th
 1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th
 2053 Rev; 13th
 2344 Rev; 11th
 f¹ (a family of manuscripts
 including 1, 118, 131, 209)
 Gospels; 12th–14th
 f¹³ (a family of manuscripts
 including 13, 69, 124, 174,
 230, 346, 543, 788, 826,
 828, 983, 1689, 1709—
 known as the Ferrar group)
 Gospels; 11th–15th

Significant Ancient Versions

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p> SYRIAC (SYR)
 syr^c (Syriac Curetonian)
 Gospels; 5th
 syr^s (Syriac Sinaiticus)
 Gospels; 4th
 syr^h (Syriac Harklensis) Entire
 NT; 616 </p> | <p> OLD LATIN (IT)
 it^a (Vercellensis) Gospels; 4th
 it^b (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th
 it^d (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin
 text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts,
 3 John; 5th
 it^e (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th
 it^k (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark;
 c. 400 </p> | <p> COPTIC (COP)
 cop^{bo} (Boharic—north Egypt)
 cop^{fas} (Fayyumic—central Egypt)
 cop^{sa} (Sahidic—southern Egypt) </p> <p> OTHER VERSIONS
 arm (Armenian)
 eth (Ethiopic)
 geo (Georgian) </p> |
|--|---|--|

TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

Note: For words and roots from nonbiblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

HEBREW/ARAMAIC

Consonants

א	aleph	= '	מ, ם	mem	= m
ב, ן	beth	= b	נ, ן	nun	= n
ג, ן	gimel	= g	ס	samekh	= s
ד, ן	daleth	= d	ע	ayin	= '
ה	he	= h	פ, ן, ף	pe	= p
ו	waw	= w	צ, ן	tsadhe	= ts
ז	zayin	= z	ק	qoph	= q
ח	heth	= kh	ר	resh	= r
ט	teth	= t	ש	shin	= sh
י	yodh	= y	שׁ	sin	= s
כ, ן, ף	kaph	= k	ת, ן	taw	= t, th (spirant)
ל	lamedh	= l			

Vowels

ֿ	patakh	= a	ֿ	qamets khatuf	= o
ֿ	furtive patakh	= a	ֿ	holem	= o
ֿ	qamets	= a	ֿ	full holem	= o
ֿ	final qamets he	= ah	ֿ	short qibbutz	= u
ֿ	segol	= e	ֿ	long qibbutz	= u
ֿ	tsere	= e	ֿ	shureq	= u
ֿ	tsere yod	= e	ֿ	khatuf patakh	= a
ֿ	short hireq	= i	ֿ	khatuf qamets	= o
ֿ	long hireq	= i	ֿ	vocalic shewa	= e
ֿ	hireq yod	= i	ֿ	patakh yodh	= a

GREEK

α	alpha	= a	ι	iota	= i
β	beta	= b	κ	kappa	= k
γ	gamma	= g, n (before γ, κ, ξ, χ)	λ	lamda	= l
			μ	mu	= m
δ	delta	= d	ν	nu	= n
ε	epsilon	= e	ξ	ksi	= x
ζ	zeta	= z	ο	omicron	= o
η	eta	= ē	π	pi	= p
θ	theta	= th	ρ	rho	= r (ῥ = rh)

σ, ζ	<i>sigma</i>	= s	Ψ	<i>psi</i>	= ps
τ	<i>tau</i>	= t	Ω	<i>omega</i>	= ō
υ	<i>upsilon</i>	= u		<i>rough</i>	= h (with
φ	<i>phi</i>	= ph		<i>breathing</i>	vowel or
χ	<i>chi</i>	= ch		<i>mark</i>	diphthong)

THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.¹

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

TG	Tyndale-Strong's Greek number	ZH	Zondervan Hebrew number
ZG	Zondervan Greek number	TA/ZA	Tyndale/Zondervan Aramaic number
TH	Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number	S	Strong's Aramaic number

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [^{TC}26, ^{ZC}27], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

The indexing of Aramaic terms differs slightly from that of Greek and Hebrew. Strong's original system mixed the Aramaic terms in with the Hebrew, but the Tyndale-Strong's system indexes Aramaic with a new set of numbers starting at 10,000. Since Tyndale's system for Aramaic diverges completely from original Strong's, the original Strong's number is listed separately so that those using tools keyed to Strong's can locate the information. This number is designated with an S, as in the example, "son" *bar* [^{TA/ZA}10120, ^S1247].

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by a capital letter (e.g., ^{TC}1692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., ^{TC}2013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.



1-2 Kings

WILLIAM H. BARNES

INTRODUCTION TO *1–2 Kings*

“IN THOSE DAYS Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.” This is what the last verse in the book of Judges tells us (Judg 21:25; cf. Judg 17:6). In what is usually considered to be the second appendix to that book (the two appendices are usually delineated as Judg 17–18, 19–21), Judges gives us some grotesque examples of such lawlessness—idolatry, kidnapping, rape and dismemberment, tribal warfare—unforgettably reminding us of how horrible things were before the institution of the monarchy was established in the land of Israel. No question about it, times were terrible before there were kings in the land, but when we turn to the books of 1–2 Kings, we soon learn that times were often terrible when there *were* kings in the land, too. For that is what the books of Kings are about—kings. Some 19 of them in the northern kingdom of Israel after the division of the united monarchy following the death of Solomon (see 1 Kgs 12), and some 19 of them after Solomon (plus Queen Athaliah) in the southern kingdom of Judah. Kings—good, bad, and ugly; we are sometimes spared some of the details, but we are rarely spared honest, harsh, even brutal theological evaluations. Fifteen of the northern kings explicitly “did what was evil in the LORD’s sight,”¹ as did eight or nine of the southerners.² Indeed, it was the sins of the people, including the sins of the kings, which eventually led to the exile of the northern kingdom in 722 BC (see the lengthy editorial in 2 Kgs 17:5–23 concerning this subject), as well as the later exile of the southern kingdom in 586 BC (see 2 Kgs 24:20; 25:21). In essence, even when there were kings in the land, they and the people *still* “did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.”³

The books of Kings are about prophets, as well. In fact, in the Hebrew tradition, the books of 1–2 Kings (reckoned as one book in the Hebrew Bible) are labeled “Former Prophets” (as are the books of Joshua, Judges, and 1–2 Samuel). The interplay of prophet against prophet, and especially prophet against king, is a major feature of the books of Kings. (For example, 2 Kgs 24:2 tells us that Yahweh⁴ “sent bands of Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite, and Ammonite raiders against Judah to destroy it, just as [Yahweh] had promised through his prophets.”) Among them were the major, writing prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, and indeed, significant sections of 2 Kings are found in Isaiah 36–39 and in Jeremiah 39 and 52. The prophet Ezekiel should probably be added as well. Among the minor prophets, Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah also come to mind. And who can forget the earlier northern prophets Elijah and Elisha? Major portions of 1–2 Kings are dedicated to their unforgettable exploits; indeed this is the only place where their narratives are to be found in the entire Old Testament.⁵

Priests and Levites are also found in 1-2 Kings, although references to these cultic officials⁶ are relatively sparse. For example, in sharp contrast to their prominent status in 1-2 Chronicles, we find only two specific references to the Levites throughout the entirety of 1-2 Kings.⁷ Individual priests of note include the rivals Abiathar and Zadok in the days of David and Solomon (1 Kgs 1-2), Jehoiada in the days of Joash (2 Kgs 11-12), Uriah in the days of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16), and Hilkiah in the days of Josiah (2 Kgs 22-23). The only other priests mentioned by name in 1-2 Kings are Seraiah and Zephaniah (2 Kgs 25:18), prisoners of the Babylonians during the fall of Jerusalem. (Nevertheless, as will be noted at length in the commentary proper, there is intermittent but significant focus on the Temple, its personnel, and its furnishings found throughout 1-2 Kings.)

But the books of Kings are, in the end, mostly about kings—their many failings, their occasional successes, and the eventual, seemingly inevitable demise of their dynasties. These books, like the book of Judges, end on a dismal note, with the fall of the city of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon’s Temple ringing in the ears of the hearer. (I mention “hearer” because all ancient books were read aloud, even when the reader was alone.) Yet, in contrast to Judges, the book of 2 Kings concludes with a “note of modest hope” in 2 Kings 25:27-30 (see Barnes 1991:146-149). The exiled King Jehoiachin, in his 37th year of exile (he had been on the throne of Judah only three months before being deposed and exiled by Nebuchadnezzar), was released from prison and given “a higher place than all the other exiled kings in Babylon.” He dined in the presence of the Babylonian king “for the rest of his life.” Hardly a testimony of ringing triumph, but a testimony of modest hope. Contrary to the era of the judges (and the book of Judges), the era of the kings (and the books of Kings) ended on an optimistic note. Yes, the Davidic hope was still alive. Descendants of that line would still exist and still make a difference. And for the Christian believer, who follows Jesus the Christ, “son of David, king of the Jews,” this makes *all* the difference in the world.

AUTHOR

As is the case with many of the books of the Old Testament, the author (or authors) of the books of 1-2 Kings is unknown (hereafter, the term “author” or “editor,” used in the singular, can be construed to be in the plural as well, when appropriate). The title “Kings” (Heb., *melakim* [TH4428, ZH4889]) clearly has to do with the contents of Kings, not with the identity of the author. (This is also the case, for example, with 1-2 Samuel, in which Samuel the prophet himself is last mentioned in 1 Sam 28, when he is already dead and called up from the grave!) The anonymity of these biblical writers, however, is not necessarily typical of historical works elsewhere in the ancient world: The authors of classical works of history are sometimes quite well known. Two examples that immediately come to mind are Herodotus and Josephus, both unmistakable in identity even though they both heavily redacted earlier oral and written traditions. Regarding the books of Kings, evangelical scholars tend to speak of anonymous compilations of sources (Harrison 1969:723), and nonevangelical scholars usually resort to so-called Deuteronomists compiling earlier written and oral traditions before and during the Judahite exile in the

mid-sixth century BC (ABD 2.160-167).⁸ (The Deuteronomists are thought to have shaped Joshua—Kings, which constitute the “Deuteronomistic History”; see the judicious comments of Howard [1993:179-182], an evangelical scholar, about this.) The Talmud (*b. Bava Batra*, 15a), however, was not so circumspect concerning the identity of the author of Kings, maintaining that it was the prophet Jeremiah who wrote the book that bears his name, the book of Kings (our 1–2 Kings), and the book of Lamentations. There is, I would submit, much wisdom in this suggestion, as we soon will see.

In general, specific authorship of lengthy and heavily edited Old Testament books often remains problematic. Whether it be the Pentateuch or the canonical book of Isaiah, scholarship often differs on putative authorship, although such differences often hearken back more to prior theological assumptions or biases than to the actual historical data. In the case of the Pentateuch (the “Books of Moses”), for example, it is still hotly debated whether Moses is in some sense the “author” of each of these five books. In my own view, for example, the actual language of the present book of Deuteronomy seems more comfortably placed in the monarchic period of Israel rather than in the time of Moses, but the theology and authority of the book is unquestionably Mosaic. Why else, after all, would it have been accepted as Scripture? In any case, Moses remains the clear focus of the entire book, and his unique authority (the greatest of the prophets, whom Yahweh knew “face to face,” as Deut 34:10 affirms) pervades the text from beginning to end. To a major degree this can also be said of Joshua in the book of Joshua, and to a lesser degree of Samuel in 1–2 Samuel. But this is certainly *not* the case for the books of Kings. The focus is not on the author(s) but on the kings themselves; and as I will develop below, focus should be seen as being placed on *all* the kings of *both* kingdoms of the divided monarchy of Israel. But kings did not write the books of Kings.

Friedman (1997:146-149) suggests that Baruch son of Neriah (the famous scribe of Jeremiah) was the author of Kings (and indeed author/editor of the Deuteronomistic History in general). He accepts the suggestion of Frank Moore Cross Jr. that there were two editions of Kings (see below), and that the second, exilic edition was a lightly retouched reworking of the earlier, Josianic edition. So Friedman naturally would posit that there probably was one and the same author for both editions, and Baruch could well have been that author. I confess that I myself am attracted to this position.

Baruch lived in the mid- to late seventh century BC, and he survived up to and beyond the Judahite exile in the early sixth century, after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 BC (Barnes 1991:158). Walter Brueggemann has identified a “Baruch Document” comprising chapters 36–45 of the present book of Jeremiah (1998:413-414), and Baruch’s influence on the Jeremiah traditions can be felt throughout Jeremiah. Baruch’s existence is not in dispute, for two bullae (clay seal impressions) have been found in excavations in Israel (see Friedman 1997:147-149, especially the photograph on p. 148; cf. Lundbom 1999:876-877). The fact that the final chapter of 2 Kings finds an almost exactly parallel text in Jeremiah 52 only strengthens the case. (Of course, many would use this very fact to diminish the likelihood of Jeremiah or Baruch being the writer of the text, since both presumably ended up in exile in Egypt, and the writer of 2 Kgs 25, or at least the last part of this

chapter, presumably ended up in exile in Babylon.)⁹ The fact that Jeremiah himself was quite clearly estranged from the later Judahite kings also appears problematic, but Jeremiah's seeming estrangement worked both ways—he clearly and repeatedly denounced the actions of both Jehoiakim (Jer 22:13-23; cf. Jer 26) and Zedekiah (Jer 34; cf. Jer 37-38), but on the other hand, he was obviously on speaking terms with at least Zedekiah (Jer 37:3-10; 38:14-28; cf. Leuchter 2006:172). And where Jeremiah was, presumably so was Baruch.

In the final analysis, the wisest course at present (and the tendency in both evangelical and nonevangelical scholarship) is to counsel hesitation in identifying the author of 1-2 Kings. But I suspect there is more evidence for Baruch as author (or at least significant editor) of much of 1-2 Kings than present scholars tend to acknowledge.¹⁰ Yet, ultimately, the issue of authorship is secondary. The focus of any sympathetic reader of 1-2 Kings must be on its theology—what its retelling of the monarchical villains and heroes of the Old Testament faith conveyed to its original readers, and what it means for people of faith today.

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

On the one hand, the related issues of date and occasion are easier subjects to address than that of authorship, since we are told the precise date of the last event described in the books (the releasing of the long-exiled Jehoiachin from prison in 561 BC), and we hear *nothing* about the next major event in Judahite history—Cyrus's arrival on the world scene some 22 years later. Arguments from silence (that is, arguments supported by what is *not* found in a text) are usually quite weak, but I submit that we find here a clear exception—for the stark absence of reference to Cyrus's takeover of Babylon (539 BC) or to his edict for the exiled Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple stands in sharp contrast to both 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1, which deal with the same general time period. So we are left with a remarkably small chronological window to date the final editing of 1-2 Kings (between 561 and 539 BC) with the likelihood of an earlier rather than a later date in this period. (The book of Lamentations, filled with "lament poetry" from an eyewitness of the destruction of the first Temple, would also date roughly to this period of time.)

However, the issue of the *unity* of these books of Kings is much more convoluted, as we will see below. In the strict sense, the "occasion" of the writing of Kings should probably be considered the "occasions" for its several layers of editing. But the *final* editing, or if you wish, its *canonical* editing, is relatively straightforward and will be addressed presently.

The books of Kings are again just that, books about kings. More specifically, they are about the kings who reigned between David (around 1000 BC) and the Judahite exile (586 BC)—and that means all of them, the good, the bad, and the ugly. The format of the books is relentlessly chronological, with brief (or not so brief) accession notices, theological evaluations, representative stories or summaries of events, occasional references to written sources containing more information for the motivated reader, and finally, burial notices for each and every king. Also, and most importantly, *all* the kings from *both* the northern and the southern kingdoms are

included. This is a feature notably absent in the otherwise largely parallel accounts found in 1-2 Chronicles, whose focus and concern largely rest upon the southern Davidic dynasty.

First Kings focuses on King Solomon (as 1-2 Samuel focuses on Saul and even more, David), and significant sections of 1-2 Kings include lengthy narratives concerning prophets, most notably Elijah and Elisha, but also Micaiah (1 Kgs 22), two unnamed prophets (1 Kgs 13; the end of 1 Kgs 20), and an unnamed disciple of Elisha, sent to Jehu (2 Kgs 9). (Other significant prophetic accounts include those of Ahijah concerning Jeroboam I and his family [1 Kgs 11:29-39; 14:1-18], the brief but significant word of Shemaiah [1 Kgs 12:21-24], and the judgment oracle of Jehu [1 Kgs 16:1-7]. And let us not forget the prophet Jonah son of Amittai mentioned briefly in 2 Kgs 14:25.) After the northern kingdom of Israel falls in 722 BC (see 2 Kgs 17 with its lengthy editorial comments on why the north fell), attention naturally falls only on the southern kingdom and its Davidic pedigree. But both the north and the south matter to our authors—a feature generally downplayed in scholarly treatments of this issue—and both the north and the south represent kingdoms still under the sovereignty of Yahweh.¹¹ I will emphasize that the final editing of the books of Kings points to the southern or Judahite kingdom as particularly embracing Yahweh's blessing of his people and the nations; but at this juncture, it must be emphasized that 1-2 Kings includes kings from both kingdoms, and God's saving activity among his people takes place repeatedly in both kingdoms.

To summarize: The date of final composition of 1-2 Kings falls sometime between 561-539 BC,¹² and its occasion, the releasing of King Jehoiachin from prison in the first year of Evil-merodach of Babylon (2 Kgs 25:27), gives cause for the "note of modest hope" that concludes the book (Barnes 1991:146-149). This status of Jehoiachin represented no trivial occasion in the eyes of the writer(s) of Kings, for this king continued the Davidic covenant memorably described in 2 Samuel 7 (which in the words of Kaiser 1974:315; cf. 1978:152-155 contains nothing less than the "charter for humanity" [i.e., akin to the blessing of all the families on earth connected with the Abrahamic covenant in Gen 12:3], as reflected in 2 Sam 7:19; cf. Vannoy 2009:305-306; cf. also Leithart 2006:22-23). I will have occasion to return to the importance of the chronological marker of the "37th year of exile" later; suffice it for now to indicate that the focus of the final editor of Kings is on a *king*—a Davidic king, in whom the whole world is to place its hope. (It must be acknowledged that we Christians have here an example of *sensus plenior*, a "deeper meaning" to the text that would not be fully realized until the New Testament era when Jesus the Christ came into the world as "son of David, king of the Jews.")

Earlier Editions of Kings? All scholars will agree that prominent sections of 1-2 Kings, such as the Elijah and the Elisha cycles (usually specified as 1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 2, and 2 Kgs 2-9, 13, respectively), existed separately from the other material in the book and were inserted in Kings relatively unchanged from their original forms. But there is debate about the other portions. As already noted, scholars of all theological persuasions generally recognize the complicated nature of the editing of the books of Kings. Frank Moore Cross Jr. has suggested (1973:274-289) that there were two major editions of Kings (or of the entire Deuteronomistic History, i.e., most or all of

the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, as well as 1-2 Kings), with the first edition intended to support King Josiah's reforms and the second adding to it to deal with issues raised by the fall of Jerusalem and the Exile. This has, in my opinion, been a clear step forward in the debate. (For a brief, accessible description of Cross's theory and his scholarly antecedents, see ABD 4.72-73; for skepticism concerning the existence of the "Deuteronomists," see Harrison 1969:730-732.) Even if such a proposal is not accepted, the primacy of King Josiah of Judah in the Kings account (see 2 Kgs 22-23; cf. 1 Kgs 13:1-2), as well as the brevity of the accounts of the kings after him, reminds the reader of the influential nature of his reforms, and the optimism of the writers concerning his status before Yahweh. And it is to that topic that we must turn.

The books of Kings include stark evaluations of nearly all the kings of both kingdoms, usually in formulaic terms.¹³ The majority of the kings are evaluated negatively—this is nearly always the case for the northern kings, and about half the number of the southern kings must be included here as well. But a number of the southern kings are evaluated quite positively (eight of the southern kings "did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight," although, in the case of Amaziah, this is qualified by the additional statement "but not like his ancestor David"). And two of the southern kings are given exalted status, the "best in show," so to speak.

Which king of Israel or Judah is the "best of all"? Contemporary evangelical Christians often focus on David, of course, since we are reminded in Acts 13:22 that David was a "man after [God's] own heart" (a clear reference to 1 Sam 13:14). No other king of either kingdom is spoken of in such exalted terms. But the books of Kings do feature two other kings who also may merit the title of "best of all." Both King Hezekiah of Judah and his great-grandson King Josiah are given remarkably high praise by the authors of Kings. In 2 Kings 18:5 we are told that "Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time." In 2 Kings 23:25, however, we are a bit surprised to read, "Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the laws of Moses. And there has never been a king like him since."

Some time ago, scholars such as Nicholson (1967:113-118; cf. Barnes 1991:140 n. 12) suggested that already by the time of King Hezekiah (late eighth century BC) scribes of the Deuteronomistic school were compiling a comprehensive history of the two kingdoms, which included northern royal and prophetic traditions along with their southern, Davidic counterparts (and with no small measure of critique of them). The careful study of Halpern and Vanderhooft seems to confirm this Hezekiah stratum in 1-2 Kings (1991:182-183, and *passim*) in light of changes in the death and burial formulas for the Judahite kings, as well as the references to the queen mothers (and to a lesser degree, the regnal evaluation formulas and the source notes). In any case, as even the Isaianic parallels to 1-2 Kings (Isa 36-39) attest, King Hezekiah was a remarkable king, and entirely worthy of an edition of Kings lending support to his radical reform efforts.

Be that as it may, a significant number of scholars have more conventionally divided the books of Kings into two major editions, a Josianic edition ("Dtr1") from the late seventh century BC (Josiah was on the throne c. 640-609), and an exilic edi-

tion ("Dtr2"), published after the year 561 in light of the last chronological datum found in the book (2 Kgs 25:27-30). That King Josiah was a very important king for the so-called "Deuteronomists," the putative writers of the books of Kings, seems entirely plausible. Both Kings and Chronicles wax eloquent on the remarkable revival Josiah brought about in the 18th year of his reign (see 2 Kgs 22:1-23:30, and especially 23:21-25; cf. 2 Chr 34-35). The prophet Zephaniah may well have provided clear impetus for the revival (Sweeney 2001:185-197). Many scholars would see the youthful Jeremiah also as being significantly influenced by its effects (e.g., Rowley 1963:205-208; and recently, Leuchter 2006:50-86; cf. the reference in 2 Chr 35:25 to Jeremiah composing laments over the death of Josiah). But the extant book of 2 Kings ends on a note of modest hope at best. The tone of the present edition of 1-2 Kings, with its heavy foreshadowing of exile in Solomon's prayer of dedication for the Temple (1 Kgs 8:23-53; cf. Yahweh's response in 1 Kgs 9:3-9) and its repeated insistence that it was the wickedness of King Manasseh which ensured that the Exile must take place (2 Kgs 21:10-15; 23:26-27; 24:2-4; cf. Jer 15:4), seems far away from any optimistic program of support for Josiah's reform efforts. Scholars have long noticed this, of course. Some remain unconvinced that there was any separate Josianic recension of the books of Kings.¹⁴ But a close reading of the recurring regnal formulas throughout 1-2 Kings does lend support for multiple editions of the book (Halpern and Vanderhooft [1991:179-244] argue for not only two, but three layers of editing), and scholars such as Friedman (cf. my citations above; also note his "From Egypt to Egypt: Dtr1 and Dtr2," 1981:167-192) have strengthened Cross's original hypothesis of two editions of the Deuteronomistic work.

Thus, we can explain how King Josiah could be called the best king of all, one "who turned to the LORD with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the laws of Moses" (2 Kgs 23:25; cf. Deut 6:5). We can assume that this was the evaluation of the earlier, Josianic edition of Kings left largely intact by the later editor. Yet we soon find out that the land fell into exile relatively soon after Josiah's death, and that was the fault of the evil King Manasseh (as repeatedly asserted by the present, exilic edition of Kings). Was Manasseh really the main reason for an apparently inevitable exile? And if even good King Josiah seemingly proved insufficient, how can there be any hope for the future? These are the questions that the present edition of 1-2 Kings posed to its exilic readers and poses to us today.

AUDIENCE

In light of the above discussion, we might want to specify "audiences" for the two or more putative editions of the books of Kings. But once again, what matters for the person of faith today must be, above all, the canonical books of Kings, the books we actually have today (see "Canonicity and Textual History," below). And the "audience" for the canonical work is rather easily specified, at least more so than for other Old Testament works such as 1-2 Samuel, or Joshua and Judges (which, if the "Deuteronomistic Edition" theory be embraced, may prove to be quite similar to the audience of Kings). The audience for the final form of 1-2 Kings is necessarily exilic—Jews living in exile in Babylon (and perhaps elsewhere, such as Egypt).¹⁵ The books of Kings address an audience that has no kings, at least no Jewish ones. The Davidic dynasty

OUTLINE

The following outline generally includes the helpful subdivisions of the text found in the NLT headings, with the overall divisions informed by the comments of Childs (1979:288). As Childs notes, the first two sections conclude with an appropriate summary by the editor (see 1 Kgs 11; 2 Kgs 17:5-41). The final section describes the destruction and exile of Judah, along with the additional note on the release of King Jehoiachin from prison.

- I. King Solomon (1 Kgs 1:1–11:43)
 - A. Conclusion of the "Throne Succession Narrative" (1 Kgs 1:1–2:46)
 1. David in his old age (1:1-4)
 2. Adonijah claims the throne (1:5-27)
 3. David makes Solomon king (1:28-53)
 4. David's final instructions to Solomon (2:1-12)
 5. Solomon establishes his rule (2:13-46)
 - B. Solomon's Proper Priorities (1 Kgs 3:1-4:34 [3:1-5:14])
 1. Solomon asks for wisdom (3:1-15)
 2. Solomon judges wisely (3:16-28)
 3. Solomon's officials and governors (4:1-19)
 4. Solomon's prosperity and wisdom (4:20-34 [4:20-5:14])
 - C. Temple and Palace Building (1 Kgs 5:1-8:66 [5:15-8:66])
 1. Preparations for building the Temple (5:1-18 [5:15-32])
 2. Solomon builds the Temple (6:1-13)
 3. The Temple's interior (6:14-38)
 4. Solomon builds his palace (7:1-12)
 5. Furnishings for the Temple (7:13-51)
 6. The Ark brought to the Temple (8:1-11)
 7. Solomon praises the LORD (8:12-21)
 8. Solomon's prayer of dedication (8:22-53)
 9. The dedication of the Temple (8:54-66)
 - D. Solomon in All His Glory: Mixed Results (1 Kgs 9:1-10:29)
 1. The LORD's response to Solomon (9:1-9)
 2. Solomon's agreement with Hiram (9:10-14)
 3. Solomon's many achievements (9:15-28)
 4. Visit of the queen of Sheba (10:1-13)
 5. Solomon's wealth and splendor (10:14-29)
 - E. Solomon's Improper Priorities and Their Aftermath (1 Kgs 11:1-43)
 1. Solomon's many wives (11:1-13)
 2. Solomon's adversaries (11:14-25)
 3. Jeroboam rebels against Solomon (11:26-40)
 4. Summary of Solomon's reign (11:41-43)
- II. History of the Kings of Israel and Judah until the Destruction of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kgs 12:1–2 Kgs 17:41)

- A. Division of Solomon's Kingdom (1 Kgs 12:1-14:20)
 - 1. The northern tribes revolt (12:1-20)
 - 2. Shemaiah's prophecy (12:21-24)
 - 3. Jeroboam makes gold calves (12:25-33)
 - 4. A prophet denounces Jeroboam (13:1-34)
 - 5. Ahijah's prophecy against Jeroboam (14:1-20)
- B. Synchronistic History of the Early Divided Monarchy (1 Kgs 14:21-16:34)
 - 1. Rehoboam rules in Judah (14:21-31)
 - 2. Abijam rules in Judah (15:1-8)
 - 3. Asa rules in Judah (15:9-24)
 - 4. Nadab rules in Israel (15:25-31)
 - 5. Baasha rules in Israel (15:32-16:7)
 - 6. Elah rules in Israel (16:8-14)
 - 7. Zimri rules in Israel (16:15-20)
 - 8. Omri rules in Israel (16:21-28)
 - 9. Ahab rules in Israel (16:29-34)
- C. Prophetic Stories from the Elijah Cycle (1 Kgs 17:1-19:21)
 - 1. Elijah fed by ravens (17:1-7)
 - 2. The widow of Zarephath (17:8-24)
 - 3. The contest on Mount Carmel (18:1-40)
 - 4. Elijah prays for rain (18:41-46)
 - 5. Elijah flees to Sinai (19:1-9a)
 - 6. The LORD speaks to Elijah (19:9b-18)
 - 7. The call of Elisha (19:19-21)
- D. Prophetic Stories about the Syro-Israelite Wars (1 Kgs 20:1-22:40)
 - 1. Ben-hadad attacks Samaria (20:1-12)
 - 2. Ahab's victory over Ben-hadad (20:13-22)
 - 3. Ben-hadad's second attack (20:23-34)
 - 4. A prophet condemns Ahab (20:35-43)
 - 5. Naboth's vineyard (21:1-29)
 - 6. Jehoshaphat and Ahab (22:1-9)
 - 7. Micaiah prophesies against Ahab (22:10-28)
 - 8. The death of Ahab (22:29-40)
- E. Synchronistic History of the Divided Monarchy, Resumed (1 Kgs 22:41-53 [22:41-54])
 - 1. Jehoshaphat rules in Judah (22:41-50 [22:41-51])
 - 2. Ahaziah rules in Israel (22:51-53 [22:52-54])
- F. Another Prophetic Story from the Elijah Cycle: Elijah Confronts King Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:1-18)

- G. Stories from the Elisha Cycle (2 Kgs 2:1-8:15)
 - 1. Elijah taken into heaven (2:1-18)
 - 2. Elisha's first miracles (2:19-25)
 - 3. War between Israel and Moab (3:1-27)
 - 4. Elisha helps a poor widow (4:1-7)
 - 5. Elisha and the woman from Shunem (4:8-37)
 - 6. Miracles during a famine (4:38-44)
 - 7. The healing of Naaman (5:1-19)
 - 8. The greed of Gehazi (5:20-27)
 - 9. The floating ax head (6:1-7)
 - 10. Elisha traps the Arameans (6:8-23)
 - 11. Ben-hadad besieges Samaria (6:24-7:2)
 - 12. Lepers visit the enemy camp (7:3-11)
 - 13. Israel plunders the camp (7:12-20)
 - 14. The woman from Shunem returns home (8:1-6)
 - 15. Hazael murders Ben-hadad (8:7-15)
- H. Synchronistic History of the Divided Monarchy, Resumed (2 Kgs 8:16-29)
 - 1. Jehoram rules in Judah (8:16-24)
 - 2. Ahaziah rules in Judah (8:25-29)
- I. Prophetic Stories about the Coup of Jehu (2 Kgs 9:1-10:36)
 - 1. Jehu anointed king of Israel (9:1-13)
 - 2. Jehu kills Joram and Ahaziah (9:14-29)
 - 3. The death of Jezebel (9:30-37)
 - 4. Jehu kills Ahab's family (10:1-17)
 - 5. Jehu kills the priests of Baal (10:18-31)
 - 6. The death of Jehu (10:32-36)
- J. Synchronistic History of the Late Divided Monarchy (2 Kgs 11:1-13:13)
 - 1. Queen Athaliah rules in Judah (11:1-3)
 - 2. Revolt against Athaliah (11:4-12)
 - 3. The death of Athaliah (11:13-16)
 - 4. Jehoiada's religious reforms (11:17-21 [11:17-12:1])
 - 5. Joash repairs the Temple (12:1-16 [12:2-17])
 - 6. The end of Joash's reign (12:17-21 [12:18-22])
 - 7. Jehoahaz rules in Israel (13:1-9)
 - 8. Jehoash rules in Israel (13:10-13)
- K. A Prophetic Story from the Elisha Cycle: Elisha's Final Prophecy (2 Kgs 13:14-25)
- L. Synchronistic History of the Late Divided Monarchy, Concluded (2 Kgs 14:1-17:41)
 - 1. Amaziah rules in Judah (14:1-22)

2. Jeroboam II rules in Israel (14:23-29)
 3. Uzziah rules in Judah (15:1-7)
 4. Zechariah rules in Israel (15:8-12)
 5. Shallum rules in Israel (15:13-15)
 6. Menahem rules in Israel (15:16-22)
 7. Pekahiah rules in Israel (15:23-26)
 8. Pekah rules in Israel (15:27-31)
 9. Jotham rules in Judah (15:32-38)
 10. Ahaz rules in Judah (16:1-20)
 11. Hoshea rules in Israel (17:1-4)
 12. Samaria falls to Assyria (17:5-23)
 13. Foreigners settle in Israel (17:24-41)
- III. History of the Kings of Judah up to the Exile (2 Kgs 18:1-25:30)
- A. Hezekiah: Good, Successful King of Judah (2 Kgs 18:1-20:21)
 1. Hezekiah rules in Judah (18:1-12)
 2. Assyria invades Judah (18:13-18)
 3. Sennacherib threatens Jerusalem (18:19-37)
 4. Hezekiah seeks the LORD's help (19:1-19)
 5. Isaiah predicts Judah's deliverance (19:20-37)
 6. Hezekiah's sickness and recovery (20:1-11)
 7. Envoys from Babylon (20:12-21)
 - B. Manasseh and Amon: Evil Kings of Judah (2 Kgs 21:1-26)
 1. Manasseh rules in Judah (21:1-18)
 2. Amon rules in Judah (21:19-26)
 - C. Josiah: Good Reformer King of Judah (2 Kgs 22:1-23:30)
 1. Josiah rules in Judah (22:1-7)
 2. Hilkiah discovers God's law (22:8-20)
 3. Josiah's religious reforms (23:1-20)
 4. Josiah celebrates Passover (23:21-30)
 - D. Four Evil Successors to Josiah (2 Kgs 23:31-24:20a)
 1. Jehoahaz rules in Judah (23:31-33)
 2. Jehoiakim rules in Judah (23:34-24:7)
 3. Jehoiachin rules in Judah (24:8-17)
 4. Zedekiah rules in Judah (24:18-20a)
 - E. The Fall of Jerusalem and Its Aftermath (2 Kgs 24:20b-25:30)
 1. The fall of Jerusalem (24:20b-25:7)
 2. The Temple destroyed (25:8-21)
 3. Gedaliah governs in Judah (25:22-26)
 4. Hope for Israel's royal line (25:27-30)

COMMENTARY ON

1 Kings

◆ I. King Solomon (1 Kgs 1:1–11:43)

A. Conclusion of the "Throne Succession Narrative" (1 Kgs 1:1–2:46)

1. David in his old age (1:1–4)

King David was now very old, and no matter how many blankets covered him, he could not keep warm. ²So his advisers told him, "Let us find a young virgin to wait on you and look after you, my lord. She will lie in your arms and keep you warm."

³So they searched throughout the land of Israel for a beautiful girl, and they found Abishag from Shunem and brought her to the king. ⁴The girl was very beautiful, and she looked after the king and took care of him. But the king had no sexual relations with her.

NOTES

1:1 King David was now very old. As noted in the commentary below, many see this verse as continuing a lengthy story from 2 Samuel. Be that as it may, the verse now begins a new book, and the NLT correctly conveys the flavor of the Hebrew disjunction. The story begins where David's life ends.

blankets. Lit., "clothes," but the accompanying verb "to cover" would imply the ancient equivalent to today's blankets.

he could not keep warm. DeVries (1985:12) suggests that David's condition was advanced arteriosclerosis. The Hebrew verb "to keep warm" could imply sexual passion, but that is probably not the main import of the present text.

1:2 a young virgin. This is the literal translation of the phrase *na'arah bethulah* [TH5291/1330, ZH5855/1435], but the sense of the phrase is to indicate a young, unmarried woman. Again, the sexual connotation of the term "virgin" in contemporary English is not a major feature of the text (although, to be sure, it is not entirely absent from the text either).

look after you. The NLT here reflects the noun *sokeneth* [TH5532C, ZH6125], "housekeeper," i.e., manager of a household (Cogan 2001:156; Seow [1999:14] notes that the masculine form of the term denotes a position of power and responsibility). Abishag was more than a pretty face.

lie in your arms. Seow (1999:14) points out that this expression recalls Nathan's parable in 2 Sam 12:1-4, where the little lamb also "used to cuddle in the arms" of the poor man (who in the parable represented Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, whom David later arranged to have killed in battle).

1:3 *Abishag from Shunem.* This was a town in the territory of Issachar (cf. Josh 19:18; 2 Kgs 4:8). Sweeney (2007:53) notes its ties to the house of Saul. The “Shulammitte” heroine of Song 6:13 has often been connected with this Abishag “the Shunammite” by the rabbis (the Hebrew letters “n” and “l” are sometimes interchanged), but Cogan (2001:156) terms this merely “unfounded romantic speculation.” The name Abishag probably means “my father is (was) a wanderer” (BDB 4d).

1:4 *very beautiful.* This could be translated “extremely beautiful” (*yapah* [TH3303, ZH3637] ‘*ad-me’od*), lit., “beautiful up to abundance”; the last two words denote an “absolute superlative” (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:268). Physical attractiveness is clearly meant.

But the king had no sexual relations with her. Lit., “but the king did not know her”—where the metaphor “to know” (*yada’* [TH3045, ZH3359]) can connote sexual intercourse, as in “Adam knew Eve his wife” (Gen 4:1, KJV) (cf. Leithart 2006:30). Much speculation has attended this statement. The question is whether David’s sexual impotence (for that is what is surely implied here) is a major feature of the narrative, which progresses directly to Adonijah’s bold rebellion against his father’s expressed wishes (cf. 1:29-30) that Solomon succeed him to the throne. The understated nature of the details of the narrative, coupled with the author’s unquestioned mastery of the art of storytelling, would probably imply that the answer to this question should be “yes.” David appears remarkably impotent, literally and figuratively (see ABD 1.24 for details), throughout much of the rest of the chapter. This stands in stark contrast to the original Bathsheba narrative back in 2 Sam 11:1–12:25.

COMMENTARY

What a way to start off a book! David, the hero of much of 1–2 Samuel, has grown old, apparently in more ways than one. In contrast to modern Hollywood fare, any implications of sexual intrigue are delicately expressed by the narrator here—as is often the case in Hebrew storytelling (the verbs “to keep warm” and “to lie with” can certainly convey subtle sexual nuances). But sexuality is not the main focus of the text here. David couldn’t get warm! The warmhearted if impetuous warrior of 1–2 Samuel, the charismatic hero who had often had an eye for an attractive woman (cf. 1 Sam 25:3; 2 Sam 11:2), is here literally impotent. Crisis is in the air.

Many commentators understand the first two chapters of 1 Kings as the ending of the so-called Throne Succession Narrative (see DeVries 1985:8-11; McCarter 1984:9-13; cf. Cogan 2001:165-167; Wiseman [1993:67] suggests, I think correctly, that Nathan the prophet may well have been the author of this “narrative”). As we now find these two chapters, however, they directly follow the six Davidic appendices of 2 Samuel 21–24, and thus stand alone as an effective introduction to the Solomon stories. How is it that Solomon, son of Bathsheba, was able to succeed his father David to the throne? What was the will of God in this transfer of power—the first successful transfer of monarchical power in the history of Israel, no less? These will be the questions we will ponder throughout the next several sections of the present narrative. One thing is certain: David himself was clearly in no condition to effect the transfer. And let us not forget that this was no ordinary petty kingdom in the Fertile Crescent of the ancient Near East, for salvific blessings on all humankind, then and in the future, had been promised to flow from the Davidic dynasty (see 2 Sam 7, especially v. 19, as noted above in the “Date and Occasion of Writing” section of the Introduction). Then, as now, God’s ways are most mysterious.

◆ 2. Adonijah claims the throne (1:5-27)

⁵About that time David's son Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, began boasting, "I will make myself king." So he provided himself with chariots and charioteers and recruited fifty men to run in front of him. ⁶Now his father, King David, had never disciplined him at any time, even by asking, "Why are you doing that?" Adonijah had been born next after Absalom, and he was very handsome.

⁷Adonijah took Joab son of Zeruiah and Abiathar the priest into his confidence, and they agreed to help him become king. ⁸But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and David's personal bodyguard refused to support Adonijah.

⁹Adonijah went to the Stone of Zoheleth* near the spring of En-rogel, where he sacrificed sheep, cattle, and fattened calves. He invited all his brothers—the other sons of King David—and all the royal officials of Judah. ¹⁰But he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the king's bodyguard or his brother Solomon.

¹¹Then Nathan went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and asked her, "Haven't you heard that Haggith's son, Adonijah, has made himself king, and our lord David doesn't even know about it? ¹²If you want to save your own life and the life of your son Solomon, follow my advice. ¹³Go at once to King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, didn't you make a vow and say to me, "Your son Solomon will surely be the next king and will sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' ¹⁴And while you are still talking with him, I will come and confirm everything you have said."

¹⁵So Bathsheba went into the king's bedroom. (He was very old now, and Abi-

shag was taking care of him.) ¹⁶Bathsheba bowed down before the king.

"What can I do for you?" he asked her.

¹⁷She replied, "My lord, you made a vow before the LORD your God when you said to me, 'Your son Solomon will surely be the next king and will sit on my throne.' ¹⁸But instead, Adonijah has made himself king, and my lord the king does not even know about it. ¹⁹He has sacrificed many cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and he has invited all the king's sons to attend the celebration. He also invited Abiathar the priest and Joab, the commander of the army. But he did not invite your servant Solomon. ²⁰And now, my lord the king, all Israel is waiting for you to announce who will become king after you. ²¹If you do not act, my son Solomon and I will be treated as criminals as soon as my lord the king has died."

²²While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived. ²³The king's officials told him, "Nathan the prophet is here to see you."

Nathan went in and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. ²⁴Nathan asked, "My lord the king, have you decided that Adonijah will be the next king and that he will sit on your throne? ²⁵Today he has sacrificed many cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and he has invited all the king's sons to attend the celebration. He also invited the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest. They are feasting and drinking with him and shouting, 'Long live King Adonijah!' ²⁶But he did not invite me or Zadok the priest or Benaiah or your servant Solomon. ²⁷Has my lord the king really done this without letting any of his officials know who should be the next king?"

1:9 Or to the Serpent's Stone; Greek version supports reading Zoheleth as a proper name.

NOTES

1:5 *chariots and charioteers* . . . *fifty men to run in front of him*. This is similar to the royal escort Absalom had procured (2 Sam 15:1; cf. 1 Sam 8:11). Other parallels to Absalom include being described as "very handsome" (1:6b; cf. 2 Sam 14:25-26) and having an

indulgent father (1:6a; cf. 2 Sam 13:21, LXX [see NLT mg there]; and Joab's comments in 2 Sam 19:5-8). As Seow (1999:17-18) notes, Nathan's prediction that trouble would arise from within David's own household (2 Sam 12:11-12) had, sadly, once again, come to pass.

1:7 Joab son of Zeruiah and Abiathar the priest. Joab was David's nephew and veteran commander of the army (2 Sam 2:18; 8:16; 1 Chr 2:16); he was the one who had killed Absalom against David's expressed wish (2 Sam 18:14-17). Abiathar was a son of the priest Ahimelech (cf. 1 Sam 22:20-23; 23:6) and a brave supporter of David in his struggles with Saul. Seow (1999:18; also cf. Cogan 2001:168) describes these individuals as representing the "old guard," conservative elements dating back to David's days in Hebron (2 Sam 2).

1:8 Zadok the priest. He was the ancestor of a very important priestly family in Israel, and one of two priests on David's palace staff (2 Sam 8:17; cf. 2 Sam 20:25). Often considered Jebusite in origin, thus not Israelite (the Jebusites were the original Canaanite inhabitants of Jerusalem [2 Sam 5:6; cf. DeVries 1985:14 for references]), he was possibly also from Hebron (see Cogan 2001:158; Cross 1973:207-215). In any case, he likely would have been a natural rival of Abiathar.

Benaiah son of Jehoiada. He was one of David's "Thirty Mighty Men" (see 2 Sam 23:20-23), captain of David's bodyguard (see 1:38).

Shimei, Rei, and David's personal bodyguard. Shimei and Rei are otherwise unknown and oddly, their fathers' names are not given. "Shimei" is not the Benjamite Shimei son of Gera mentioned in 2 Sam 16:5-14 (cf. 1 Kgs 2:8-9). Some, however, do equate the present Shimei with the "Shimei son of Ela" of 4:18. "Rei," in fact, may be a corruption of the similar term for "friend" (for possible emendations of this difficult text, see DeVries 1985:14). The "personal bodyguard" is made up of David's "mighty men" (*haggibborim* [TH1368A, ZH1475]), probably remnants of the famous "Three" and the "Thirty" listed in 2 Sam 23:8-39. Seow (1999:18) plausibly suggests that David's fragile coalition of old guards from Hebron (see note on 1:7) and new personnel from various locations connected with Jerusalem was apparently breaking down (cf. Jones 1984:91-92).

1:9 Stone of Zoheleth near the spring of En-rogel. Cogan (2001:159) connects this with the major spring called Bir Ayyub ("Job's well") some 500 meters south of the "City of David" (see note on 3:1), where the Kidron and the Hinnom valleys meet; he also discusses the possible rendering "Serpent's Stone" (cf. NLT mg). This location, on the boundary between the tribal territories of Benjamin and Judah (cf. Josh 15:7; 18:16), would have been well known (cf. 2 Sam 17:17), and the open area around the spring could easily accommodate the crowd commemorating the hasty coronation.

sacrificed sheep, cattle, and fattened calves. Adonijah and his confederates were ready for a public celebration, costly but savory to the smell. Modern Western culture often forgets how delightful such a "barbecue" would have been to the average Israelite, who would probably eat meat only three times a year (during the pilgrim feasts of Passover, etc.). It was not only Yahweh who would enjoy the "pleasing aroma" of the sacrifices placed on the altar. Cogan (2001:158) makes the important observation that all the action through the end of this chapter takes place on a single day—and what a momentous day it was.

1:10 did not invite Nathan . . . Benaiah . . . king's bodyguard . . . Solomon. The invited crowd, though large, was exclusive, as the narrator takes pains to note. Solomon in particular, who was born later in Jerusalem (cf. the separate lists found in 2 Sam 3:2-5; 5:13-16; cf. 1 Chr 3:1-9), could not be trusted. Not inviting "Nathan the prophet," however, would soon prove to be a tactical error (even though inviting him would probably have precluded any later hostile action against him and his interests, under the laws of Middle Eastern hospitality; cf. Wiseman 1993:70).

1:12 follow my advice. What follows is a carefully choreographed procedure, designed to awaken even the most uninvolved monarch. Nathan quickly made plans to bring about, as it were, the promised succession he himself seemingly prophesied back in 2 Sam 7. Believers in any age stand amazed at the remarkably contingent nature of God's will being accomplished. Note that Nathan scarcely exaggerates when he states that both Solomon's and Bathsheba's lives hang in the balance.

1:13 didn't you make a vow . . . "Your son Solomon will surely be the next king"? We have no previous record of this vow (but see below on 1:29-30 for apparent confirmation). We were told back in 2 Sam 12:24-25 that "[Yahweh] loved the child [named Solomon]," and that Nathan the prophet declared that David and Bathsheba name him Jedidiah, which meant "beloved of [Yahweh]." Cogan (2001:167) makes much of biblical storytelling describing "the wily ways of heroes" (here Nathan and Bathsheba) and how they, against all odds, outsmart the competition (cf. Seow 1999:19). Certainly such is the case in Genesis, especially in the stories about Jacob (see Gen 25-33; also the commentary on 1:28-53). But I suspect that what is particularly celebrated in the present passage is Nathan's quick thinking—his ability to turn a sudden crisis into a remarkable opportunity to wake up a king (the aged David), who was now sadly immune even to the charms of an extraordinarily beautiful woman (Abishag). Surely David had already given some thought to who would succeed him to the throne and brought up the subject in Bathsheba's presence. Walsh (1996:11) points out the hidden irony in Bathsheba's question about the vow inasmuch as her name probably means "Daughter of an Oath." However, Harvey (IDB 1.366) prefers the etymology "Daughter of Abundance."

1:14 I will come and confirm everything. In classical biblical style, Nathan's actual speech (1:24-27) "confirms" something quite different, seemingly asking the very aged King David (see the way the hearer/reader is reminded of this once again in 1:15) if he had peradventure authorized Adonijah's coronation without letting his officials in on the decision. A clever stratagem indeed!

1:15 the king's bedroom. This was surely a bittersweet location for Solomon's mother to enter. "Bathsheba, who had been desired by David even though she was in the bosom of another man, now speaks to the old king in front of the young and beautiful Abishag, who was brought to lie in his bosom" (Seow 1999:18).

1:20 all Israel is waiting for you to announce who will become king after you. Surely one of the most basic decisions any king would make is who will succeed him on the throne. David recognized (or at least once did recognize) the court intrigue such a decision (or the postponing of such a decision) could lead to. But again, for the hearer/reader of 1-2 Kings, this is not just another petty kingdom in the ancient Near East—rather, this is the vehicle of salvation for all humanity (see 2 Sam 7, especially David's own words of praise in 2 Sam 7:18-19).

1:21 treated as criminals. This is scarcely hyperbolic in the present context (see note on 1:12). As will be amply illustrated in the next chapter (2:1-12), the penalty for being on the losing side of this royal contest could well be sudden death, or at least banishment. Apart from such measures, the "losers" would represent a clear and abiding potential for usurpation, and at this time in history there had never been a successful transfer of power from father to son in Israel.

1:24 have you decided that Adonijah will be the next king? As noted above, Nathan took an independent tack in his speech to the king. He got to the gist of the matter: Had David really decided that Adonijah would sit on his throne? If David had avoided this decision in the past, he could avoid it no longer.

1:25 Long live King Adonijah! This is standard rhetoric for the occasion. The Hebrew reads, “May King Adonijah live!”—that is, “May Adonijah prosper.” For the same statement concerning Solomon, see 1:34. (For Saul, this acclamation was given in 1 Sam 10:24; and for Joash, see 2 Kgs 11:12.) Bathsheba will soon use an even stronger expression (see 1:31).

1:27 Has my lord the king really done this without letting any of his officials know who should be the next king? This is a powerful conclusion to Nathan’s speech (see note on 1:14). Here we see that “Nathan takes up the guise of the offended loyal servant” (Cogan 2001:160).

COMMENTARY

In this section we see Adonijah claiming to be king (1:5). He was David’s fourth son (cf. 2 Sam 3:3-4); his name means “Yah(weh) is my Lord.” Absalom, David’s third son, had previously killed Amnon, David’s first son, for raping Tamar (see 2 Sam 13; Tamar was Absalom’s full sister and Amnon’s half sister). Absalom had been killed for fomenting rebellion against his own father. The fate of the second son, Kileab/Daniel (see NLT mg at 2 Sam 3:3), is unknown; he perhaps died in childhood. Therefore, Adonijah presumably was the oldest surviving heir to the throne; he would naturally expect to inherit the throne by primogeniture (cf. 2:15). As for his mother, Haggith (whose name probably means “born on a feast day”; cf. the name “Haggai”), nothing further is known about her. Cogan (2001:157) cautions against interpreting the repeated references to her name in the present chapter as indicating a rivalry between her and Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother.

Nathan went to Bathsheba to tell her that Adonijah had proclaimed himself king. He was the brave prophetic critic of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent arrangement for the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 11). He also was the prophet who announced Yahweh’s blessing on David’s dynasty (2 Sam 7:5-16), with repercussions both international and eternal. I think a remarkable amount of focus should be placed on Nathan the prophet at this juncture in the narrative. As Cogan has noted (see note on 1:9), all these actions and reactions occurred on a single day—and Nathan was equal to the task of “crisis management.” The same prophet who gave David a message clearly *out of* God’s will back in 2 Samuel 7:3 (although probably unintentionally so) and bravely *in* God’s will in 2 Samuel 12:1-12, addressed the current crisis with masterful strategy and probing questions. Some time ago, Halpern (1981:59-96) studied the relationship between prophet and king in the early monarchical period, and his conclusions are germane here. Following his (and my) mentor, Frank Moore Cross Jr., he developed Cross’s observation that “the institution of prophecy arose and declined with monarchy” (1981:83). It was the prophet who appointed the *nagid* [TH5057, ZH5592] (Hebrew for “designee for kingship” according to Halpern—the term is traditionally translated “prince” or “leader”), the candidate for king, and anointed him as designated king (e.g., Saul in 1 Sam 10:1, and David in 1 Sam 16:13). It was the prophet who denounced the king’s excesses, and it was the prophet who initiated holy war. As Halpern (1981:83) concludes,

Thus the prophet in the monarchy imposed a sacral restraint—in theory—on the king’s secular power. Such an office represents precisely the concession one would expect the priestly establishment to extract from the [tribal] assembly in return for the erection of a monarchy.

Concerning the issue of “holy war,” we will have much to say below (see especially ch 22). But my point here is more basic: It is the *prophet* who takes the initiative, who indeed is *expected to take the initiative* in reference to things monarchical. And Nathan certainly did not shrink from the challenge. Nathan was unafraid of confronting the king—speaking truth to power—that we already know (see 2 Sam 12). That is the bravery of *reaction*. He addressed a crisis others had caused. But here Nathan does more than react—he is proactive. Yes, he reacted to Adonijah’s coronation party, but he also “pro-acted” to force David to react to the crisis. This will not be the last time that a godly prophet acts decisively to save the monarchy. (Some commentators, perhaps of a more cynical bent, suggest that Nathan fabricated the story of David’s oath concerning Solomon as chosen successor, preying on the aged king’s mental frailty. But I doubt that such a blatant falsehood could have successfully stood the test of time—not to mention the clear will of God [cf. 2 Sam 12:24-25; but note that God can effect division and strife, too; cf. 2 Sam 12:11-12; 1 Kgs 12:23-24].)

◆ 3. David makes Solomon king (1:28-53)

²⁸King David responded, “Call Bathsheba!” So she came back in and stood before the king. ²⁹And the king repeated his vow: “As surely as the LORD lives, who has rescued me from every danger, ³⁰your son Solomon will be the next king and will sit on my throne this very day, just as I vowed to you before the LORD, the God of Israel.”

³¹Then Bathsheba bowed down with her face to the ground before the king and exclaimed, “May my lord King David live forever!”

³²Then King David ordered, “Call Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.” When they came into the king’s presence, ³³the king said to them, “Take Solomon and my officials down to Gihon Spring. Solomon is to ride on my own mule. ³⁴There Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet are to anoint him king over Israel. Blow the ram’s horn and shout, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ ³⁵Then escort him back here, and he will sit on my throne. He will succeed me as king, for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah.”

³⁶“Amen!” Benaiah son of Jehoiada replied. “May the LORD, the God of my lord the king, decree that it happen. ³⁷And may the LORD be with Solomon as he has been

with you, my lord the king, and may he make Solomon’s reign even greater than yours!”

³⁸So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the king’s bodyguard* took Solomon down to Gihon Spring, with Solomon riding on King David’s own mule. ³⁹There Zadok the priest took the flask of olive oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon with the oil. Then they sounded the ram’s horn and all the people shouted, “Long live King Solomon!” ⁴⁰And all the people followed Solomon into Jerusalem, playing flutes and shouting for joy. The celebration was so joyous and noisy that the earth shook with the sound.

⁴¹Adonijah and his guests heard the celebrating and shouting just as they were finishing their banquet. When Joab heard the sound of the ram’s horn, he asked, “What’s going on? Why is the city in such an uproar?”

⁴²And while he was still speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. “Come in,” Adonijah said to him, “for you are a good man. You must have good news.”

⁴³“Not at all!” Jonathan replied. “Our lord King David has just declared Solomon

◆ F. Another Prophetic Story from the Elijah Cycle:
Elijah Confronts King Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:1-18)

After King Ahab's death, the land of Moab rebelled against Israel.

²One day Israel's new king, Ahaziah, fell through the latticework of an upper room at his palace in Samaria and was seriously injured. So he sent messengers to the temple of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron, to ask whether he would recover.

³But the angel of the LORD told Elijah, who was from Tishbe, "Go and confront the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, 'Is there no God in Israel? Why are you going to Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron, to ask whether the king will recover?' ⁴Now, therefore, this is what the LORD says: You will never leave the bed you are lying on; you will surely die.'" So Elijah went to deliver the message.

⁵When the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, "Why have you returned so soon?"

⁶They replied, "A man came up to us and told us to go back to the king and give him this message. 'This is what the LORD says: Is there no God in Israel? Why are you sending men to Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron, to ask whether you will recover? Therefore, because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on; you will surely die.'"

⁷"What sort of man was he?" the king demanded. "What did he look like?"

⁸They replied, "He was a hairy man,* and he wore a leather belt around his waist."

"Elijah from Tishbe!" the king exclaimed.

⁹Then he sent an army captain with fifty soldiers to arrest him. They found him sitting on top of a hill. The captain said to him, "Man of God, the king has commanded you to come down with us."

¹⁰But Elijah replied to the captain, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from

heaven and destroy you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and killed them all.

¹¹So the king sent another captain with fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, the king demands that you come down at once."

¹²Elijah replied, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and destroy you and your fifty men!" And again the fire of God fell from heaven and killed them all.

¹³Once more the king sent a third captain with fifty men. But this time the captain went up the hill and fell to his knees before Elijah. He pleaded with him, "O man of God, please spare my life and the lives of these, your fifty servants. ¹⁴See how the fire from heaven came down and destroyed the first two groups. But now please spare my life!"

¹⁵Then the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him, and don't be afraid of him." So Elijah got up and went with him to the king.

¹⁶And Elijah said to the king, "This is what the LORD says: Why did you send messengers to Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron, to ask whether you will recover? Is there no God in Israel to answer your question? Therefore, because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on; you will surely die."

¹⁷So Ahaziah died, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah. Since Ahaziah did not have a son to succeed him, his brother Joram* became the next king. This took place in the second year of the reign of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

¹⁸The rest of the events in Ahaziah's reign and everything he did are recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel*.

1:8 Or *He was wearing clothing made of hair.* 1:17 Hebrew *Jehoram*, a variant spelling of Joram.

NOTES

1:1 *After King Ahab's death.* The reference is to the preceding chapter (1 Kgs 22), where Ahab dies tragically, and to some degree heroically, on the battlefield (see 1 Kgs 22:34-38).

Moab. The Mesha Stela from ancient Moab states, "Omri, king of Israel, oppressed Moab many years" (cf. the commentary on 1 Kgs 16:21-28). Presumably this would include the 22 years of his son Ahab as well. We will read much more about Moab and its king Meshah in ch 3.

rebelled against Israel. In clear contrast to Jehoshaphat's presumed control over Edom (1 Kgs 22:47), Ahaziah is not able to retain control over Moab. Leithart (2006:166) succinctly points out the contrast: "While Jehoshaphat controls Gentiles, Ahaziah loses control over Gentiles . . . the kingdom is as sick as the king, and the dynasty is dying."

1:2 Ahaziah. See 1 Kgs 22:51 for an introduction to this successor to Ahab. The "lattice-work of an upper room at his palace" probably refers to wood slats found in clerestory windows or roof skylights protecting the interior room from the rays of the sun, yet giving access to free-flowing air; the "upper room" would probably represent the second-floor throne room (or possibly bedroom) of a *bit hilani* or colonnaded palace structure (see Sweeney 2007:269, and his reference to Halpern 1988:45-54; cf. especially Halpern's diagram on p. 53; also cf. Cogan and Tadmor 1988:24).

Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron. The Hebrew "name" for this god means "lord of the flies," but this was not his original name or title! Presumably, the deity in question is a local manifestation of Baal Hadad (cf. the commentary on 1 Kgs 18:41-46 for details), otherwise known in Phoenicia as Baal Zebul ("Baal the prince"). The Hebrew here thus employs the similar-sounding pejorative word *zebul* ("flies") for the original epithet *zebul* ("prince"). This mocking substitution is also attested in the New Testament references to Satan as "Beelzeboul" and "Beelzebub" (cf. the NLT mg for Matt 10:25; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15). A comparable phenomenon in the OT is the sarcastic pattern of substituting the term *bosheth* [TH1322, ZH1425] (shame) for Israelite names containing references to Baal. See, e.g., "Ishbosheth" for Esh-baal in 2 Sam 4:1 (cf. NLT mg); "Mephibosheth" for Merib-baal in 2 Sam 4:4 (cf. NLT mg); and "Jerub-besheth" for Jerub-baal (another name for Gideon) in 2 Sam 11:21 (cf. NLT mg).

Ekron. This is one of the five Philistine cities, located on the border between Judah and Philistia (cf. Josh 13:3), thus some distance southwest of Samaria. Perhaps the unexpectedness of this location (Baal Zebul was worshiped particularly in the land of Phoenicia, northwest of Israel) was an attempt to confuse Elijah and his God (cf. the similar pattern, in a number of respects, found in 1 Kgs 14:1-18, which also involved the life-threatening illness of a royal personage and an analogous attempt to disguise the nature of the formal inquiry being made to the deity as to the likelihood of his recovery). Wiseman (1993:192) proffers the intriguing suggestion that this god may also have been renowned for his healing qualities.

to ask. The verb *darash* [TH1875, ZH2011] is used here, in 1:3, 6, and twice in 1:16, as well as in the similar context of 1 Kgs 14:5. This verb is a technical term signifying making an oracular inquiry of the deity (see Cogan and Tadmor 1988:24-25); that such a formal inquiry is made of a *foreign* god in the present passage helps explain the extreme anger of Yahweh, as well as of his prophet Elijah, which is conveyed to the emissaries of the king.

1:3 Elijah. See the first note on 1 Kgs 17:1 for the meaning of his name, as well as the reference here to "Tishbe." The present chapter is usually considered to be the last chapter of the so-called "Elijah cycle" (see the "Elijah and Elisha Cycles: Comparisons and Contrasts" chart on p. 204). Elijah's translation into heaven in the next chapter, then, is considered part of the "Elisha cycle," which includes 2:1-8:15 and the concluding story in 13:14-21. (For a later, curious reference to a letter sent from Elijah to King Jehoram of Judah, see 2 Chr 21:12-15. About this, see Boda 2010:337-338.)

Is there no God in Israel? This famous query is also found in 1:6, 16 (see the third and fourth notes to 1:2, above, for reasons for Elijah's righteous anger as displayed here). The close parallelism of Elijah's repetitive answers to the various groups of emissaries sent by the king (cf. 1:3-4, 6, 16) is characteristic of folkloristic storytelling (see the various notes on 1 Kgs 20; cf. Hobbs 1985:4-5).

1:8 He was a hairy man. Lit., "a man, baal [i.e., owner] of hair" ('*ish ba'al se'ar* [TH8181, ZH8552]), which some take as indicating a garment or clothing of hair (i.e., a hairy garment or mantle; cf. the NLT mg, also John the Baptist as described in Matt 3:4; Mark 1:6). Cogan and Tadmor (1988:26), however, argue convincingly for the traditional translation found here (also see Hobbs 1985:10); Leihart (2006:168) nicely contrasts Elijah as a "Baal of Hair" in place of the "Baal-zebul" mentioned earlier in the chapter. I myself would further contrast the apparently quite "hairy" Elijah with the relatively "hairless" Elisha mocked by the insolent boys ("Go away, baldy!") in 2:23-25. In any case, the king immediately recognized which famous person his emissaries had encountered, based only on a simple description of his physical appearance.

1:9 an army captain with fifty soldiers. A repetitive motif of "fifties" will pervade both this chapter (1:10-14) and the next (cf. 2:7, 16-17; cf. also 1 Kgs 18:4, 13, where Obadiah hid the Yahwistic prophets in two caves, fifty in each). Fifty men typically comprise a military unit, headed, as here, by an "officer" or "captain" (*sar* [TH8269, ZH8569]; cf. Cogan and Tadmor 1988:26).

1:11 demands. This is an effective, if periphrastic, translation, conveying the harsher language found here in the second command (*meherah redah* [TH4120/3381, ZH4559/3718], "hurry, come down!") in contrast to the first command in 1:9.

1:13 Once more. As is commonly the case in folkloristic literature, the third time proves to be the charm (see further the commentary below). Another folkloristic motif is also illustrated by the approach taken by the third "captain of fifty": "Honey attracts more flies than vinegar." The second captain (1:11-12) had tried arrogance and assertiveness to get his way, with disastrous results, but the third captain showed more wisdom than that—he appealed to Elijah's concern over loss of innocent life, and his "honey" of a request proved far more effective than the "vinegar" that the first and especially the second commander had to offer.

1:15 the angel of the LORD. This presumably is the same angel who first apprised Elijah of the king's secret mission (1:3); now he ironically confirms that it is indeed God's will to follow the first two captains' messages to "go down" to meet the king. Considering the fate of the king's emissary's two predecessors, I assume Elijah did have some reason to fear him; but even if not, the angel's reassurance to the prophet, "don't be afraid of him," was surely a welcome addition.

1:17 Joram. Here is the first example of what will be a repeated phenomenon: the interspersing of the names "Joram" and "Jehoram" (basically, two different pronunciations of the same name), referring to both the king of Israel and the concurrent king of Judah (see the NLT mg note to 8:21a for variations in the naming of the Judahite monarch). The name Joram/Jehoram means "Yah(weh) is high, exalted."

second year of . . . Jehoram. As Shenkel (1968:74) notes, this synchronism is at variance with the one found in 3:1; it probably represents an alternate chronological system elsewhere preserved mostly in the Old Greek translation of Kings (see the note on 1 Kgs 16:28 and "Canonicity and Textual History" in the Introduction). Codex Vaticanus here omits this reference, instead inserting 1:18a-d, which is largely a doublet of 3:1-3. To state the obvious, the chronological data represented by the varying synchronisms in the MT

and LXX here and elsewhere rule out any dogmatism as to which dates are primary and which are secondary. I do suspect, however, that here the MT attestation of Joram's accession as taking place in the "second year of . . . Jehoram [of Judah]," although betraying the Hebrew syntax of a later, secondary insertion into the text (see Hobbs 1985:3-4; cf. Cogan and Tadmor 1988:27), may well attest an earlier (and more accurate?) comparative chronology also attested in the otherwise aberrant synchronism found in 1 Kgs 16:23 (MT and LXX), which the Masoretes also retained in the text. (See also my comments on the varying locations of Jehoshaphat's accession formula in the MT and the LXX, as discussed in the note on 1 Kgs 16:28.)

1:18 are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel. See "Literary Style" in the Introduction.

COMMENTARY

The major transgression presented in this chapter is King Ahaziah's "making formal inquiry of" Baal, the god of Ekron, instead of Yahweh, the God of Israel (see fourth note on 1:2). It has become commonplace in commentaries on Kings to highlight Yahweh's strong jealousy of any worship of any other god (see, e.g., the commentary on 1 Kgs 12:25-33). This basic observation must once more be emphasized here. Yahweh simply will not tolerate (for the good of his people) any formal religious "inquiries" of any other deities (who, after all, do not even exist; cf. Isa 43:10-13; 44:6-8; 45:14). Whether it be the notorious Baal Hadad of Phoenicia, the patron god of Jezebel the queen mother (cf. the note on 1 Kgs 16:31), or the otherwise unknown "Baal of Ekron" mentioned in the present passage (and mockingly entitled "Baal-zebul" by the Hebrew writers; cf. the second note on 1:2), or any other alleged deity or ideological system of ancient or modern times (e.g., astrology, secularism, materialism), Yahweh will not be mocked. His people and their leadership, if they try to sneak off to seek direction from such "deities," had better be ready to face disaster as severe as any described in the present chapter. It cannot be otherwise. Of course, our God is a God of love, incredible patience, and amazing grace; but even in the New Testament, lies and subterfuge on the part of God's people (such as Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11) may lead to sudden death and severe fear falling upon "the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened" (Acts 5:11). That is surely the primary message of the present chapter of 2 Kings.

But there is more. As Gina Hens-Piazza (2006:230-232) has effectively argued, King Ahaziah participated in a kind of dangerous deception even beyond his attempt to fool Elijah and Elijah's God:

[The] refusal to acknowledge God's ultimate reign in all matters encourages delusions that one can manipulate reality. It supports our inclinations to serve our self-interests and to use others to do so.

Ahaziah participated in this kind of deception. First, he believed he could be privy to what is beyond human capacity to know. He refused to acknowledge his human limitations regarding the ultimate questions surrounding life and death. . . . Confronted by his officers with evidence of an alternative power in the form of the word of the Lord through Elijah, the king must make a choice. Either he must give

up his self-deceiving belief system, acknowledge his vulnerability, and embrace the Lord, or he must become even more fixed and adamant in his false sense of being in charge. . . .

When human power competes with divine power it often yields tragic outcomes. The first two companies of men that Ahaziah sends up the mountain are destroyed. Innocent lives are put in harm's way. But to keep the delusion alive, the abuse of power becomes imperative. . . . Thus a third company of men is sent.

Such power that functions without controls, believing it can manipulate reality—even ultimate reality—eventually self-destructs. Ahaziah's death confirmed the prophet's word and thus became a witness to the ultimate truth and power of God's word. But it also teaches something else. It illustrates the relationship between lack of faith in the omnipotent Lord and the human potential for abuse of power. When we lose sight of the all-powerful God who controls matters of life and death, we are drawn to other false groundings for our hope. In turn, putting trust in other false controls over our destiny can breed a misuse of power. Keeping such delusions alive not only leads to using or sacrificing others for our self-interests, but can eventually cost us our own lives as well. Ahaziah's story serves as a witness.

This story is a simple, repetitive tale, with characteristic folkloristic flourishes. (Let the reader be reminded that “folklore” can contain as much literal truth as any other storytelling technique—the truthfulness of the tale is *not* the issue here, but rather the technique that the divinely inspired author used to convey such truth.) The simple sequencing of threefold repetition (with subtle variations) can be most effective in storytelling, as D. N. Freedman has pointed out regarding the analogous folkloristic retelling of the story of Queen Esther: “The third time is the charm in literary accounts. It is like the acrobat or magician who deliberately fails twice in trying to perform his most difficult feat, before succeeding on the third try. This enhances the suspense and the expectation of the audience, as well as winning for the performance the applause he deserves but is not likely to get if the audience thinks that there is no danger or limited need of skill to succeed” (cited in Moore 1971:58, in reference to Esth 4–5). So it is here in chapter 1 (as well as in the very next chapter, where we again find a threefold repetition in 2:2, 4, and 6). But in Elijah's threefold threat of fire from heaven, who is the “winner” (besides the third captain and his fifty men!)? Certainly not King Ahaziah, as we have just seen—he does ironically get his wish that Elijah come “down” and be “captured” (of course, it took the reassuring words of the “angel of the LORD” to help effect that accomplishment [see the note on 1:15]), but all the king gets for his efforts is the repeated refrain of judgment and death found in 1:16 (cf. 1:3-4, 6). No, I guess the “winner,” if there is one, is Elijah, who succeeds in going “down” to the king (presumably to Samaria), but eventually “up” with a flourish, as he is translated into heaven in the very next chapter. Thus, Elijah's ministry ends on a high note. The God of Elijah will literally and literarily have the last word here: “you [King Ahaziah] will surely die.” So the king does die, and his brother takes over the throne (1:17). The fact that Elijah, in turn, does not die (here, or ever!) will of course be the major focus of the next chapter.

Finally, the Christian reader will recall that the New Testament makes curious use

of the present story, as follows: In Luke 9:51-56, James and John ask Jesus if they should call down “fire from heaven” upon some Samaritans who did not welcome them (some of the later Greek mss add the phrase “as Elijah did” in 9:54, making the parallel with the present passage even more explicit). Jesus totally disagrees, rebuking them and, in some manuscripts, explicitly reminding them that he had come to save people’s lives, not to destroy them! It is tempting to wish violence and destruction upon our enemies when our efforts at bringing in the Kingdom meet unreasoning opposition, but we know that Jesus promoted a “higher way” than this, instructing us to bless those who curse us, and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:28).

In light of such teachings, I wonder if the “fire from heaven” motif in the present chapter is brought under subtle critique even by the narrator of the passage, for it takes the words of a gently persistent angel and a honey-tongued captain to tame the fiery, rash actions of the enraged prophet. Neither the hot temper of Elijah, nor that of his greater predecessor, the prophet Moses, won them all that much favor from their God.

◆ G. Stories from the Elisha Cycle (2 Kgs 2:1–8:15)

1. Elijah taken into heaven (2:1–18)

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were traveling from Gilgal. ²And Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to Bethel.”

But Elisha replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you!” So they went down together to Bethel.

³The group of prophets from Bethel came to Elisha and asked him, “Did you know that the LORD is going to take your master away from you today?”

“Of course I know,” Elisha answered. “But be quiet about it.”

⁴Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to Jericho.”

But Elisha replied again, “As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you.” So they went on together to Jericho.

⁵Then the group of prophets from Jericho came to Elisha and asked him, “Did you know that the LORD is going to take your master away from you today?”

“Of course I know,” Elisha answered. “But be quiet about it.”

⁶Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to the Jordan River.”

But again Elisha replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you.” So they went on together.

⁷Fifty men from the group of prophets also went and watched from a distance as Elijah and Elisha stopped beside the Jordan River. ⁸Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it. The river divided, and the two of them went across on dry ground!

⁹When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away.”

And Elisha replied, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit and become your successor.”

¹⁰“You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah replied. “If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won’t.”

¹¹As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove