



KINGS OF ISRAEL II: 1 & 2 KINGS

WEEK 1

Patrick Reeder

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OUTLINE

COURSE LOGISTICS

INTRODUCTION, CRITICAL MATTERS

The Author and Date

Theology and Themes

Historical Evidence

Literary Features



COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is the second of a three part series, running from 1 Samuel through 2 Chronicles, exploring the history of the Kings of Israel. This massive stretch of the Old Testament contains shocking family dramas, gruesome violence, court intrigue and interminable struggles for power. Behind it all stands God's sovereignty over Israel and the nations. In part 2, we will examine the second "chapter" of the kingship in 1st and 2nd Kings, running from David's death, through the divided kingdom, to the exile. Together with the (in)famous behavior of the kings, these books record what God accomplished through the unique ministries of Elijah and Elisha. In Bruce Waltke's words, "The books of Kings shows beyond question that the prophetic word is mightier than the king's sword."



COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- ▶ **Attendance** You must attend 4 of 5 classes to receive credit.
- ▶ **Readings** You must turn in 3 of 4 of the reading assignments.



COURSE OUTLINE

Date	Week	Topic	Read
8/14	1	Introduction, Solomon	–
8/21	2	Divided Kingdom	I Kings 1-16
8/28	3	Omrid Dynasty, Elijah	I Kings 17–II Kings 2
9/4	4	Omrid Dynasty, Elisha	II Kings 3-11
9/11	5	Towards Exile	II Kings 12-25



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WHO WROTE I & II KINGS?

Nearly a hundred years of (liberal) biblical scholarship attempted to splinter the Old Testament into numerous sources that developed along an “evolutionary” religious pathway. That line of thinking has diminished in influence starting in 1960s-70s. More scholars have moved towards unified readings (or at least remain agnostic). Many have swung too far in the other direction, following Martin Noth in lumping all books from Joshua to II Kings together. Given the prominence of the theology and ethics of Deuteronomy, this is referred to as the Deuteronomist History. Some issues:

- ▶ Both lumping and splitting hypotheses tend to reject *a priori* traditional secondary sources.
- ▶ An equally (more?) natural explanation is that the authors had possession of (Mosaic) Deuteronomy and used it to structure their histories and self-understanding. Only certain of the traditional books heavily emphasize Deuteronomy, viz. Joshua and I,II Kings.



WHO WROTE I & II KINGS?

Here is a parallel version of Noth's ideas. Imagine a textbook, *American History*, written in 2019 by (imaginary) author Smith. Suppose a future historian, Jones, possesses a copy of Smith's *American History* and surmises that the Declaration of Independence was actually written by Smith given its prominence in his history and in America's national/moral identity as represented by Smith.



WHO WROTE I & II KINGS?

Consider these parallel absurdities for Jones to make:

- ▶ We can't know whether Thomas Jefferson was a historical figure, but he at least serves as a legendary figure to make 21st C American feel better about themselves as the country faces a kind of democratic crisis.
- ▶ When Abraham Lincoln refers to the Declaration of Independence in the Gettysburg Address, this is Smith interpolating his speech. Also, Lincoln didn't free slaves because he actually believed it was wrong or inconsistent with American values. As a Northerner, he mainly wanted to consolidate power over the South by destroying its economy.
- ▶ Smith, writing from the 21st C, injected his moral vision into the foundation of America, since Jones knows early American history was inconsistent with the core message of the Declaration.
- ▶ Likewise, MLK Jr. didn't really quote the Declaration in "I Have A Dream." His writings were among the fragmented sources that Smith used. Any evidence that he did quote from the declaration was Smith's redaction.



WHO WROTE I & II KINGS?

The absence of any means of verification tends to encourage the proliferation of theories, and inevitably leads to a certain scepticism regarding any possibility of 'assured results' in this field (Baldwin, 31).

That many scholars accept such approaches as the focus of their attention—speculations built upon speculations with only a smidgen of actual evidence—partially explains the irrelevance and the bankruptcy of much of biblical scholarship today (Waltke, 54).



WHO WROTE I & II KINGS?

There is some evidence favoring **Jeremiah** as the primary author.

1. Jewish tradition (Baba Bathra, Babylonian Talmud) points to Jeremiah.
2. Jeremiah was the son of the high priest Hilkiah and would therefore have access to the relevant sources needed for such a complex text (royal annals, Scriptural scrolls and other theological material).
3. The text fails to mention Jeremiah anywhere. Jeremiah was a major prophet, frequently interacting directly with the final kings of Judah. Other than a mark of modesty on the part of the book's author, it is hard to find a satisfying explanation for why he would be excluded.
4. Some language peculiar to Jeremiah appears in the moral summary of the Northern Kingdom in II Kings 17.

This places the final composition in the early sixth century BC.



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THEOLOGY

1. The whole saga of kings highlights the doctrine of **total depravity**. We read explicit statements of this doctrine in Genesis 8:2; Ps 53:2-3, 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9 (cf. Romans 3:23 and more). Yet there is nothing that so vividly displays this as the endless cycles of foolishness from the very people God rescued from slavery, nor as tragically as in David's family.
2. Likewise, the kings of Israel exhibits **God's sovereignty** with an uncommon depth (cf. Psalm 103:19). This is both *because of* (in the form of judgment) and *in spite of* the wild deviations from his law from those called to guard it (cf. Deut 17:18ff). God's plan and word are tested and approved by centuries of chaos and opposing plans of the narrow-minded arrogant.
3. There are numerous episodes of heart-felt **personal prayers**, from Solomom (I Kings 8), Elijah (I Kings 18), and Hezekiah (II Kings 19). These intimate pictures stand in striking relief to the transcendent sovereignty and omnipotence of God throughout the book(s).



THEMES

1. *Word of the Lord*—The expression, “the word of the Lord,” occurs roughly fifty-three times between I & II Kings. (Note: the only other book with so many—and more!—is Jeremiah.)
2. *King of kings*—Like Samuel, the image of God as king is prominent. His sovereignty alone makes the case but it comes out in the throne room vision (I Kings 21), the armies of God vision (II Kings 6), and that only one king survives the whole half millenium. (Cf. Esther on sovereignty.)
3. *Women*—Judah’s kings’ mothers are frequently mentioned in regnal formula. Godly women are highlighted in both Elijah and Elisha’s ministries. Josiah consults a female prophetess.
4. *Miracles*—It’s a common mistake to believe that miracles proper (grand displays of God’s power through some agent, like the plagues of Moses) are everywhere in the Bible. They actually appear almost exclusively during special seasons (why?). The ministries of Elijah and Elisha involve tons of miracles proper.



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INTRODUCTION

The historical evidence from this time in Israel is abundant for a few reasons:

1. Kings stretches over 5 centuries lengthening the amount of information that could be available.
2. During a time where Israel and Judah entered exile and were conquered by neighboring groups, we should expect to find references to biblical figures in extrabiblical literature.
3. The text deals largely with political matters that are much easier to verify. This excludes, of course, the long stretches concerning the prophets' ministries



ARTIFACTS

Here is a sampling of some archaeological discoveries relevant to this period:

1. Mesha stele—This stele is written by eponymous King Mesha of Moab. It most likely details the episode in II Kings 3: Moab was a vassal nation of Israel under Ahab, they rebel, defeat the Israelites and reclaim certain towns.
2. Tell-Dan stele—This is damaged but reconstructions suggest the defeat of Joram, of the house of Omri, and Ahaziah, of the house of David, by Aramean armies of Hazael. Cf. II Kings 8:25-9:29. K.A. Kitchen argues that the disparity between the Bible and the stele can be accounted for by the ancient near eastern convention of kings taking credit for others' actions. "In the Balih region a man Giammu is killed by his nobles in an early text of Shalmaneser III, but in a later text Shalmaneser III claims credit for killing Giammu." (Kitchen, 510)



ARTIFACTS

Relevant archaeology cont'd:

3. Black Obelisk of Shalmenesar—This shows Jehu (or his emissary) paying tribute to the Assyrian king, Shalmenesar III; cf. II Kings 9-10.
4. Sennacherib's Annals—These are Assyrian records inscribed in cuneiform on three separate clay prisms. They mention Hezekiah and the siege of Lachish. They *do not* mention (surprise!) the deaths described in II Kings 19:35. Sennacherib's own murder (II Kings 19:37) and succession is corroborated by other Assyrian sources.
5. Lachish Reliefs—Discovered in Nineveh, shows Sennacherib's capture of the Judean city, Lachish (cf. II Kings 18:13-15). This capture is supported by discoveries of siegeworks at the site of Lachish.



OTHER HISTORICAL REMARKS

Here is a noteworthy comment from an otherwise secular author, Robert Alter:

The royal narrative appears to be historical, at least in its broad outlines. The kingdom did split in two after the death of Solomon around 930 BCE. There is no reason to doubt the reports of chronic political instability, especially in the northern kingdom where there was no authorized dynasty . . . Israel's and Judah's struggles with the Arameans, the Assyrians, and finally the Babylonians were actual historical events, many of them attested in the Assyrian and Babylonian annals that have been uncovered by modern archaeology. (Alter, 592)

He essentially goes on to say that the Elijah-Elisha stories are total legend. Nevertheless, he endorses much more than other scholars.



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CONCENTRIC FORMAT








Hebrew literature frequently (not necessarily universal) exhibits a concentric narrative format, sometimes called “chiastic” after the X-like Greek letter “chi,” (χ). This occurs at the scale of whole books and also within individual pericopes.

A	I Kings 1-11	Solomon and United Monarchy
B	I Kings 12	Severed Northern Kingdom
C	I Kings 13-16	Kings of Israel and Judah
X	I Kings 17–II Kings 11	Omrid Dynasty
C'	II Kings 12-16	Kings of Israel and Judah
B'	II Kings 17	Severed Northern Kingdom
A'	II Kings 18-25	Kingdom of Judah Alone




REGNAL FORMULA

Almost every king appears with this formula:

In the n^{th} year of  son of  king of Israel [Judah],  son of  king of Judah [Israel] began to reign.  was m years old when he became king, and he reigned k years in Jerusalem [Samaria]. And his mother's name was , daughter of . He did right [evil] in the eyes of the Lord.

A brief explanation of the king's moral contribution follows. The formula concludes with a variant on this:

The rest of the acts of  and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah [Israel]?

What lessons can we draw from the formula?



REGNAL FORMULA

1. While pedantic, the formula hammers into place the book's purpose as a spiritual, moral history; annals are elsewhere (when written).
2. The regnal formula repeats 20 times for both Judah and Israel and each deals with long stretches of time. This signals a massive timescale:
 - ▶ These men ruled over hundreds of thousands of people for decades. They're all dead and mostly forgotten. This should put our delusions of grandeur in check.
Psalm 103:14,19—for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. . . The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.
 - ▶ God's work continues in spite of the (perceived) mountain-sized problems of everyday life.
3. The author boils these kings lives down to a dense precipitate. If your life were summarized in one sentence, what would it say?



REFERENCES

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