Samuel-Kings Resources

# (a) 1 and 2 Samuel: Responses to Questions

*Why should David be valued over Saul? Is God’s favor really so arbitrary?*

\*\*Yes, God’s favor is arbitrary in the sense that it does not relate to human deserve. For another example, there was nothing deserving about Saul of Tarsus that made Christ appear to him. But God decided to use David and decided to use Saul of Tarsus. This tells you nothing about whether Saul or David or Saul or Tarsus were saved or whether they were happy. It’s about the way God in God’s sovereignty decides to use them. So maybe “favor” is the wrong word.

*Is God ruling in Saul’s time—through him, in spite of him, alongside him, or what?*

\*\*All those from time to time, I would say; and sometimes God is ruling in the sense that his positive purpose is achieved, sometimes he is ruling in the sense that he is letting reverses happen.

*What are these prophetic frenzies? And does music have power in the spiritual realm?*

\*\*I think that translation is misleading. More literally they are “behaving like a prophet,” which doesn’t have to mean they are out of control. I think of it as more like speaking in tongues and that 1 Cor 14:32 applies. I would have thought that Scripture and human experience suggest that music has power in the spiritual realm.

*“You will be changed into a different person (1 Sam 10:6).” In what sense?*

\*\*See the context in vv. 9-11, and see ch. 11.

*God repented of making Saul king?*

\*\*Maybe “had a change of mind” is gives more the impression. There are lots of occasions when God has a change of mind in Scripture. It arises from the fact that God lives in real relationship with us, so that our attitude makes a difference to what God does. It doesn’t mean God is arbitrary or doesn’t make some decisions that he won’t change (1 Sam 15:29). God’s having a change of mind is usually good news—it refers to changing his mind about punishing. (You can say if you like that of course God knew he was going to change his mind.)

*Why didn’t God choose someone who would be more obedient than Saul? Why not go straight to David? Why work through kings at all? Why not go straight to democracy? Did Saul have a chance or was he doomed from the start?*

\*\*One could ask why God didn’t choose someone more obedient about many of God’s choices, and that includes David (and Solomon)! The way the Bible tells the story, God finds out who will be obedient only by giving them the chance to show it. You could say with hindsight that Saul didn’t have a chance because of the person he was, but that fact emerges only by letting the story roll. God worked through kings because the people wanted it. They already had democracy, and that didn’t work. But one factor in the Saul-David sequence is that it gives chance to demonstrate that kingship is a bad idea, before God makes his great commitment to it anyway.

*In 1 Sam 17, Saul seems oblivious of 1 Sam 16.*

*2 Samuel 21:19: Elhanan killed Goliath!?*

\*\*I assume this is an example of the way stories come to be attached to heroes—2 Sam 21:19 gives you the historical truth but 1 Sam 17 gives you a true impression of the sort of person David was (if you think that can’t be the right answer, you can follow 1 Chron 20:5). That is then also why the stories don’t fit neatly together.

*Saul and David were anointed but later kings weren’t. Why?*

\*\*Because 2 Sam 7 established that principle that the kings will come from David’s line (it’s a lesser question which one of the Davidic line succeeds).

*David keeps being deceptive…*

\*\*The OT doesn’t think deception is wrong when you are a victim, only when you are a powerful person (compare the midwives in Exodus). It understands truthfulness as a matter of the relationship as a whole, and there is no truthfulness in the way Saul is treating to David.

*Were Jonathan and David homosexual lovers?*

\*\*There’s no hint of that in the story. They were buddies.

*The witch of Endor story seems to justify witchcraft. Was it really Samuel? What does the story tell us about the afterlife?*

\*\*I wouldn’t call her a witch—she’s a medium. The story doesn’t imply that divination is okay—rather the opposite. But the fact that it is forbidden doesn’t mean it can’t work. If it didn’t work, there’d be less need to forbid it. So I see no reason to question whether it was Samuel. The story illustrates the regular biblical teaching about the afterlife—when you die, you carry on existing, but it’s like being asleep (hence Samuel’s tetchiness about being awoken). The NT adds that you will eventually be awoken on resurrection day and given a new body.

*Why does Saul commit suicide?*

*There seem to be two contradictory accounts of Saul’s death—whether or not it was suicide.*

\*\*No, there is only a contradiction between what happened and what the Amalekite says happened! Saul commits suicide because he knows he is doomed and he prefers to end his own life to letting the Philistines do it. And the way they treat the bodies of Saul and Jonathan shows he knew what he was doing.

*What does God want us to take away from Saul’s story?*

\*\*That if you don’t succeed in hiding among the baggage, accept the loss of you job with gratitude when you have the chance rather than wanting to hold onto it?

*Why mention the king’s good looks?*

\*\*Because you expect there to be harmony between inner qualities and gifts and outer qualities. After all, God gives both.

*God took away his love (hesed) from Saul (2 Sam 7:15). Is that God’s character? What about “Nothing can separate us from God’s love” and God being the same yesterday, today, and forever?*

\*\*I guess alongside those references from Romans and Hebrews you’d have to set what happens to Judas and what Jesus says in John 15:1-2 and 6. Maybe they imply that we can separate ourselves from God’s love and that God doesn’t force his love on us. But anyway, I take it that 2 Samuel is referring to Yahweh’s commitment to him as king. It isn’t talking about his “eternal salvation.”

*What’s the relationship between this covenant with David and the other OT covenants?*

\*\*David’s covenant is a kind of reworking of the Abraham covenant in that it is not said to depend on the king’s response—it’s a covenant of promise. But it looks as if God had a change of mind, because there were Davidic kings for only 400 years, until 587 B.C. The Sinai covenant involves the whole people, so the Davidic covenant rather distances the people from the covenant relationship. And the Sinai covenant is two-sided. Israel’s response is essential to it.

*Why is there such inconsistency between God’s treatment of Saul and of David? Both act shamefully, but David’s kingship continues. God doesn’t take his spirit from David.*

\*\*Because God was making his point, in Saul’s case. It was one of the ways God was making the point that he didn’t approve of kingship. There is no reference to God’s spirit in David’s story after his initial anointing.

*What’s the point about bringing the covenant chest to Jerusalem?*

\*\*There are two sorts of point. One is that the covenant chest is what it implies—the symbol of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel (it contains the Ten Commandments). So it’s important to Yahweh’s relationship with Israel. The other is it therefore has political importance—David is establishing the validity of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

*Why was Bathsheba bathing in the open?*

\*\*More likely the implication is that the roof was a private place. There was no bathroom within the house. Her misfortune was that the palace is high up the hill so the king can see everything.

*Are we to use the Bathsheba story as a template for pastors’ sin? Are there sins that should disqualify people from leadership?*

\*\*I like that template notion. But the problem lay not merely in the sin but in what happened afterwards. David never really dealt with the issues the sin raised, and his story unraveled.

*If David was forgiven (1 Sam 12:13), why was he still punished?*

\*\*It doesn’t say “Yahweh has forgiven your sin.” It says “Yahweh has caused your sin to pass over.” It’s a strange expression; it doesn’t come anywhere else in this connection. God goes on to say “You will not die,” which I take to indicate that Yahweh’s causing the sin to pass over means Yahweh doesn’t exact a death penalty for it. But he does experience other punishment.

*It seems immoral for God to punish David’s sin by killing his son. What justice is there in multi-generational punishment?*

\*\*If by multi-generational punishment you mean the kind of thing the Ten Commandments refer to, I don’t think this is an example. The Ten Commandments are referring to a reality that we are familiar with, that the sins of parents take a toll on children. It’s a consequence of the fact that human beings are not all independent units. The positive actions of parents bring blessing to children; the negative actions bring trouble. What happens to David’s child is a once-off thing in Scripture, as far as I remember, and I guess it’s related to David’s being king—this child would stand for God’s promise that David’s son would succeed him. The nearest I have to an answer about God’s action being immoral is that it’s an example of a theme that recurs in Scripture, that God is prepared to override the “rights” of the individual for the sake of his bigger purpose. Which (come to think of it) is what God says to Job.

*How do we relate to these stories about powerful people with multiple wives? Why was polygamy acceptable to God then but not now? Why didn’t God condemn it? Likewise concubines?*

\*\*Concubines is a misleading word—these are women who are also wives, but wives who somehow have a different status (we don’t know exactly how, but it’s assumed to be something to do with their children’s inheritance rights). There’s no basis for saying that polygamy was acceptable to God then and no basis for saying that it’s unacceptable now. It’s just a thing that happens, like divorce. It falls short of God’s creation expectations, but God doesn’t make a great issue of it. In particular, having multiple wives is a sign of power. So potential leaders relate to the stories by noting the temptations of power and asking what are our equivalents to multiple wives. And non-leaders relate to the stories by noting the same dynamics and watching for the way their leaders give in to these temptations.

*Yhe Dictionary of the OT says that “David’s sin with Bathsheba and his inability to control his family call into question the program detailed by God in 2 Samuel 7” (p. 874). Do human beings have the ability to frustrate God’s plans? If yes, up to what level? God being aware of the condition of his people’s heart, did He purposely let this happen to show, later on, that the only king that can deliver his people is Jesus the Christ?*

\*\*I think to say that God purposely let this happen is not incompatible with David’s sin calling into question that program. You could reckon that God foreknew events that were incompatible with his ideal will and worked them into the plan ahead of time. But I don’t see any indication in scripture that this is so. I would have thought that scripture suggests we can frustrate God’s plans., but that God will always find a way of formulating another plan, another way of achieving the ultimate divine purpose.

*Does God tell David to take the census? If so, why was it wrong?*

\*\*I imagine that question lies behind the way 1 Chron 21 tells the story differently. 2 Sam 24 doesn’t say God told him but that God incited him or allured him. I take it to be a bit like the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. It’s not that God forces someone to do something against his will. I picture it as God putting an idea into David’s head, which tests him and tempts him—the question is, what will he do with the idea.

*It’s hard to engage with the vision of women in these stories in a conversation with our culture and church context.*

*What justification is there for the way women are treated? How is this befitting “Scripture”?*

*Are women their husbands’ property?*

*Did women have less power? Or did they have to wield it more shrewdly than they need to now?*

\*\*They were shrewder. And remember that in most parts of the world through most of history (and even now) it’s like that. Talk to some women in churches now. But maybe what it illustrates is the way different cultures are nearer or further away from biblical vision. We might be nearer over the position of women, but further away over the nature of family and of work. There’s no justification fir the way many women are treated. The accounts of their treatment befit Scripture because that is how they were treated. It’s the facts about how things have usually been. It doesn’t mean Scripture approves of what happens. It does mean Scripture is not escapist literature. But I don’t think Scripture gives the impression that in general wives were their husbands’ property, except in the sense that she is “his” wife and he is “her” husband. These are mostly stories about kings and their possessions, not about ordinary people.

*The scholars refer to the story in 2 Samuel 9—1 Kings 2 as a story told to justify Solomon’s succession. Is that all it is?*

\*\*It’s of rather mixed value in that connection, I would have thought, and there’s much more to it than would be necessary. It’s been thought to be a kind of critique of the idea of having kings, which is more plausible. Or it’s a bit like a story illustrating truths about wisdom (and stupidity).

*What do the books tell us about God?*

\*\*The most prominent truth about God is the way God’s action interacts with human action. To a fair extent God submits himself to what his people wants and works with and through that. They want to have an individual leader (a king or senior pastor)—he doesn’t really want that, but he goes with it. Saul and David act as the people they are, for good and for ill, and God works with that.

# 1 and 2 Kings: Outline, Origin, Characteristics, Emphases, Message, Implications

The books of Kings form the closing part of the narrative which begins in Genesis and focuses on the story of Israel from her origins in Egypt to the ending of her political inde­pendence by the Babylonians. The division of the books of Kings from the books of Samuel is an artificial one, as is the further division of Kings itself into two books, which was introduced by the lxx.

**I. Outline of contents**

Kings consists of an account of the Israelite monarchy written from a theological perspective and taking the history from its high point in the united monarchy to its low point in the Exile.

(a) The reign of Solomon (1 Kings 1-11): his accession (1-2), his successes (3-10), his failures (11).

(b) The divided kingdom (1 Kings12-2 Kings 17): Judah under Rehoboam, and the majority N tribes under Jeroboam who retain the title Israel, separate from each other. Israel comes under considerable pagan influence from the beginning and experiences many bloody coups before finally being exiled. Judah is less paganized, though only preserved because of Yahweh's faithfulness to his promise to David. The prophets Elijah and Elisha are heavily involved especially in the story of Israel.

(c) The kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-25): despite the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, the paganizing policy of Manasseh finally bears fruit in the fall of Judah too. But the conclusion of the books sound a possible note of hope (25:27-30).

**II. Origin**

The last event to which Kings refers is the exiled king Jehoiakin’s release from prison in Babylon in 561(2 Kings 25:27), and clearly the books in their final form must come from after this time. There may be elsewhere hints of even later situations: notably, the dating of the building of the Temple (1 Kings 6:1) perhaps reflects a chronological scheme which places that event midway between the exodus and the rebuilding of the temple after the exile.

The main composition of the work is to be dated earlier, however. This may have been in the early years of the Exile (P R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration, OTL,* 1968, ch. 5). Alternatively, it may have been after the release of Jehoiakin in 561 (R. K. Harrison, *IOT,* 1970, pp. 730f., following M. Noth). Another view dates the 'first edition' of Kings in the reign of Josiah (J. Gray, *I and II Kings*, *OTL,* 1970). But while much of the material in Kings dates from long before the Exile, and some reflects its pre-exilic perspective, the evidence for an actual 'first edition’ of Kings in the reign of Josiiah, or for a pre-Deuteronomistic earlier version of the history, is scant.

Any pre- or post-exilic work on the books must have taken place in Palestine. Work during the exilic period itself might have t; in Babylon or Palestine (the arguments for each location are discussed by Ackroyd, pp. 65-68 and by E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah,* 1970, pp. 117-122).

We do not know the names of theauthor(s) of Kings, though the group which was responsible for the work is often described as the‘Deuteronomists'. This description reflects the view that Kings is not merely the last part of the story begun in Genesis; it is more specifically the last part of the 'Deuteronomistic history', which begins with the Book of Deuteronomy. On this view, the story from Joshua to Kings, known in the Hebrew Bible as the ‘Former Prophets', has been written or edited as a whole to show how principles declared in Deuteronomy worked out in Israel’s history from the conquest, via the period of the judges and the united monarchy, to the Exile. The view usually presupposes a belief that Deuteronomy itself was written in the late pre-exilic period, though it need not involve this. It is to be noted, however, that the em­phases of the Deuteronomic law by no means coincide with those of Kings. On the one side, the humanitarian, social and moral concerns of Deuteronomy are not reflected in Kings. Conversely, while Deuteronomy stresses the central sanctuary (though without refer­ring explicitly to Jerusalem) and refers to the monarchy (though without ascribing to it the theological significance it receives in Judah), these do not have the importance they receive in Kings.

**III. Literary characteristics**

The formal structure of Kings is provided by a reign-by-reign treat­ment of the history. During the period of the divided monarchy, the accounts of N and S kings are allowed to interweave in order to preserve a broadly chronological treatment. Each king is summarily described and evaluated according to a fairly consistent pattern, which may be perceived by examining the short accounts of the reign of Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41-50) or Amon (2 Kings 21:19-26). Usually, however, this summary description and evaluation is the framework within which other material is en­closed, so that its opening and closing elements may be separated by several chapters (see, *e.g.,* the account of the reign of Hezekiah, 2 Kings 18-20). Thus the accounts of Solomon, Rehoboam, Ahab, Jehoram, Jehu and Joash, for in­stance, include considerable narra­tive material centring on royal and political matters. Other narratives centre on prophets, especially Elijah, Elisha and Isaiah. Some­times these prophets are involved in royal and political matters (revealingly, however, the Israelite king is not even named in 2 Kings 5-7: he is not the real centre of interest). Other narratives concern the pro­phets' personal lives and ministries *(e.g. 2* Kings 4). The 'Deuteronomistic' perspective of the work as a whole is expounded most system­atically in Kings in an extensive theological comment which closes off the history of the N kingdom (2Kings 17).

Various views are held as to the historical value of Kings. Clearly it is no attempt to write 'objective' or 'critical' history of a post-Enlightenment kind. It is history with a message, and the events it relates are chosen in accordance with their relevance to the message. It is thus not a political history, and some periods of great political significance (such as the reign of Omri) are passed over relatively briefly because they are of little sig­nificance in relation to the writer's concern with the history of Israel's relationship with Yahweh.

Within the Deuteronomistic framework, however, material of recognized historical value is included. The summary frameworks refer the reader to 'the book of the acts of Solomon' and to the annals of the kings of Judah and of Israel for further information on the vari­ous reigns, and it seems likely that these were the sources of many of the bare historical facts passed on by Kings (such as the name of a king's mother and the brief refer­ences to specific events). Complex chronological problems are raised by the dates provided for the kings(one basic solution for these is provided by E. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings,* 1965). Beyond these royal annals, it is widely accepted that 1 Kings 1-2 forms the original ending of an account of how Solomon came to the throne, which extends back at least to 2 Sa. 9. As for the other narratives incorporated into Kings, Gray (for instance) accepts the fun­damental historical value both of the material more concerned with political and military events and that concerned with the prophets, though he regards the more per­sonal stories about Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 1-6 as folkloristic, in part simply because of the miraculous element in them. But the precise nature of the author's sources, beyond the royal annals to which they actually refer, is not clear *(cf.* Gray, pp. 14-35). Considerable archaeological mat­erial from the Iron Age in Israel and Judah is relevant to Kings.

The authors' method of com­position means that their work is not a smooth literary whole, but it both gives us access to the material they pass on from their sources in a largely unredacted form, and impresses a degree of unity on the whole by the distinctive framework in which they set this material. Sometimes the source material, or the collected form of a section of the material, may fruitfully be treated by a literary critical ap­proach, and this is likely to be a subject of increasing study *(Semeia* 3, 1975; 8, 1977).

The text of Kings in MTpresents relatively few problems. But the Qumran discoveries (com­bined with evidence from Chron­icles and the lxx) have implications for the state of the pre-MTtextual traditions of Kings, as of other books .

**IV. Emphases**

(a) We have noted that Kings begins at the high point of the period covered by the Deuteronomistic history, the united monarchy. The fact that this is the high point reflects the importance of the Davidic monarchy and the Temple of Solomon. Yahweh's commit­ment to David (2 Sa. 7:11-16) is often referred to by Yahweh and by the narrator as the explanation for Yahweh's faithfulness to Judah and to David's successors (1 Kings 6:12; 11:12-13, 36; 2 Kings 8:19; 19:34), and David's lovaltv to Yahweh is frequently (and slightly surprisingly) a standard by which later kings are judged *(e.g.* 1 Kings 9:4; 2 Kings 22:2). But the repercussions of one king’s reign in later times can also be negative: the sins of Manasseh are ultimately the cause of the Exile (2 Kings 24:3-4). Thus the well-being of the people as a whole is tied up with the behavior of the king (2 Kings 21:11-15).

The building of the Temple is the climax of the opening chapters of Kings. 1 Kings 8 focuses the Kings' theology of the Temple, which is the dwelling-place of Yahweh's name. W. Eichrodt *(Theology of the OT,* 2, 1967, pp. 23-45) sees Yahweh's name as the most sophis­ticated OT form of 'the spiritualization of the theophany'—a way of talking of the real revelatory presence of God without com­promising his transcendence. The importance of the Temple makes it a crucial touchstone for the evaluation of the kings. Jeroboam I is condemned for devising alternative places and forms of worship for the N kingdom (1 Kings 12-13), and his successors are condemned for continuing to have recourse to these; Josiah, the antitype to Jeroboam, appearing near the end of the story as Jeroboam appears near its beginning, is commended for his reform of temple worship and for his destruction of high places generally and of the shrine at Bethel in particular (2 Kings 22-23).

(b) Kings' attitude to the monarchy and to the Temple, however, shows that these are not to be seen as absolutes. They are subject, first of all, to the Torah. 'The Deuteronomist sees the main problem of the history of Israel as lying in the question of the correct correlation of Moses and David’ (G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology,* 1, 1968, p. 339). The Davidic promise can be relied on only as long as the Mosaic covenant demand is accepted. Thus the great villain of the story of Judah in Kings is Manasseh; the list of his acts corresponds closely to what Deuteronomy says Israel should not do *(cf.* 2 Kings 21:2-9 with Dt. 17:2-4; 18:9-12). Conversely in the story of its great hero Josiah, Kings emphasizes the significance of his discovery of the 'book of the covenant' by giving it first mention inits account of his reign (contrast the account in 2 Ch. 34), and the list of his acts corresponds closely to what Deuteronomy says Israel should do. Thus the requirements and sanctions of the Torah (specifically of Deuteronomy) provide the principles for understanding Israel's history. When kings obeyed the Torah (especially its demand for faithful worship at the central shrine), they generally prospered. When they ignored it, they did not.

But the spoken word of the prophet is thought of as succeeding and supporting the written word of Moses (cf. the role of Huldah in the discovery of the lawbook in 2Kings 22:13-20), and also de­manding the attention of king and people. 'What fascinated [the Deuteronomist] was, we might say, the functioning of the divine word in history' (cf. 1 Kings 8:24) (G. von Rad, The Deuteronomistic Theo­logy of History in the Books of Kings', in *Studies in Deutero­nomy*, *SBT* 9*,* 1961, p. 91). Thus Kings pictures 'a course of history which was shaped and led to a ful­filment by a word of judgment and salvation continually injected into it’ (von Rad, *Old Testament Theology,* 1, p. 344). This point is made by including lengthy stories about various prophets, especially as regards their involvement in thenation's political life. ‘In the decisive political events the initiative stems from prophets, who ‘change the gears of history with a word of God’ (*ibid*., p. 342). It is also made by criss-crossing the story with prophecies and their ful­filment *(e.g.* 1 Kings 11:29-39 and 12:15; 1 Kings 13:1-10 and 2 Kings 13:15-18; 2 Kings 20:16-17 and 24:13). The stress on how true prophecies were fulfilled may reflect concern with the problem of false prophecy during the Exile. Thus a king's attitude to the prophet's word forms another index of his altitude to God (Hezekiah, Josiah).

(c) One of the characteristic emphases of the covenant as ex­pounded in Deuteronomy is that God blesses those who are faithful to him but brings trouble to those who disobey him (Dt. 28-30). Thus in Kings the material concerning Solomon's reign is arranged so that Solomon's setbacks are seen as consequences of his association with foreign women (1 Kings 11). On the other hand, Kings recognizes that God's justice does not work out in this way in every reign. Manasseh enjovs a long reign, and his apostasy only brings its fruit decades later (2 Kings 21; 24: 1- 4). Josiah is responsive to Yahweh’s word, but dies an early and tragic death (2 Kings 23:29).

**V. Message and purpose**

The function of Kings' review of the history which led up to the Exile is to explain why the Exile came about and to express an admission that there was ample cause for God to judge Israel. It is a form of confession, or 'an act of praise at the justice of the judg­ment of God'; 'this statement with its apparent lack of hope for the future lays the only possible foundation for the future' (Ackroyd, p. 78, following von Rad) because it throws the people of God totally back on the grace of God.

The possibility of hope for the future is hinted at in the way the theological emphases of Kings, de­scribed above, remain open to the future. Perhaps God's commitment to David still holds: it may be that the release of Jehoiakin, related in the final paragraph of Kings, makes this hope explicit. Although the Temple has been pillaged and burnt, prayer is still possible in the temple, or towards it on the part of people who are cut off from it, and God has undertaken to hear such prayer (see 1 Kings 8-9). Although judgment has come in accordance with the sanctions of the covenant, the same covenant allows for the possibility of repent­ance and restoration after judg­ment (see 1 Kings 8:46-53; *cf.* Dt. 30). Although the prophetic words which Israel ignored form a further reason for her punishment, the fact that those prophetic words of judg­ment have come true may encour­age the hope that the prophetic promises of restoration *(e.g.* those of Jeremiah) may come true, too.

Thus the aim of Kings is in part didactic, 'to present the divine view of Israelite history' (R. K. Har­rison, p. 722). Beyond this, there are at least hints of the kerygmatic (cf. E. W. Nicholson, p. 75). Kings does open up the possibility of there being a future. On the basis of this possibility it further seeks to be paraenetic, in that it implicitly challenges the generation of the Exile to turn back to Yahweh in repentance, faith and commitment to obedience *(cf.* 1 Kings 8:46-50). For 'the judgment of 587 did not mean the end of the people of God; nothing but refusal to turn would be the end' (von Rad, *Old Testa­ment Theology,* 1, p. 346).

**VI. Context and implications**

Kings is thus one of the several responses to the fall of Judah and the Exile. It bears comparison es­pecially with Lamentations (five psalms which express the feelings and tentative hopes of people in Judah after the fall of Jerusalem) and with the book of Jeremiah (whose material was collected and assembled in this same period and manifests many literary and theo­logical points of contact with Kings; see E. W. Nicholson, *op. cit.).* Kings may also be studied in the light of parallel treatments of events it narrates as these appear in Chronicles, Isaiah and Jeremiah (see, *e.g.,* B. S. Childs, 'Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis', *SET 2.* 3,1967).

In a volume of expositions of passages from 2 Kings, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (1972, pp. 13-21), J. Ellul suggests that Kings makes a twofold distinc­tive contribution to the Canon of Scripture. First, it pictures God's involvement in political life, and thus warns both against under­valuing the importance of politics, and against absolutizing this realm (since it shows how God brings judgment on politics). Secondly, it displays the interplay of the free determination of man (who in vari­ous political situations makes his decisions and puts his policies into effect) and the free decision of God (who nevertheless effects his will through or despite these deliberate human acts).

In reaction to an overstress in recent biblical study on the idea of God as the one who acts in history, the importance of this motif in the Bible is in danger of being under-stressed. Kings is a book which itself particularly emphasizes this motif (see J. E. Goldingay,' "That you may know that Yahweh is God": A study in the relationship between theology and historical truth in the Old Testament', *TynB* 23, 1972, pp. 58-93; and on the application of this idea today, see D. N. Freedman, 'The biblical idea of history', *Int* 21, 1967, pp. 32-49). God is one who works out a purpose in history, and his people may use the marks of his footsteps in past history to see what he may be doing in the present.

# 1 and 2 Kings: Responses to Questions

*How can God say that David kept all his statutes and commandments (1 Kings 3:14)?*

\*\*I guess the statement must refer to the fact that David always kept loyal to Yahweh and didn’t worship other gods or facilitate their worship—and Solomon’s failure will lie here.

*How could Solomon be so wise and be so sinful?*

\*\*How indeed! But it’s the pattern of Saul’s life and David’s life, too. It’s a frightening warning about what power can do to people.

*Why were the kings so stubborn and prideful?*

\*\*Because they were human beings. It’s the way leaders in particular tend to be.

*1 Kings 13-14****:*** *While the first prophet is used by God and fixed on not breaking the instructions of God that were given to him, for what purpose would another “prophet” fool him into disobeying God? And why isn’t the second ‘prophet’ who lied to the first prophet punished for his dishonesty?*

\*\*The story is one of a number of scary stories in scripture that make one glad was not around in scriptural times. It was a dangerous time. If you falsified your pledge, you might die (Acts 5). The stakes were high in the early church, as they were high in 1 Kings 13. It was really important for a prophet not to be waylaid into disobeying what he knew God had said to him. Why did the second prophet do that? We don’t know (that’s not relevant to the story), but it might be that he was identified with Bethel, the place the first prophet was sent to condemn. Why wasn’t the second prophet punished? Well, it’s not a story about him. Anyway, most false prophets don’t get punished, as most other kinds of sinner don’t get punished, or most people who falsify their pledges (in the short term or in that spectacular way).

*1 Kings 19:11-14: What’s going on?*

\*\*The way God speaks to Elijah first involves wind, earthquake, and fire, then a low murmuring sound. God wasn’t actually in these impressive things; God is not to be identified with them. But Elijah needs not to forget the power and might of God. He gets the reassurance that God is still the kind of God who appeared to Moses and the Israelites at Sinai. But can also move in less spectacular ways.

*1 Kings 22: God inspires false prophecy?*

\*\*At least, God can do so, as an act of judgment.

*How could a king trust prophets again*?

\*\*Right! He would be wise to test the things a prophet said. And actually it had always been so. The mere fact that someone is a prophet doesn’t mean the person can be trusted to bring a true word from God. It’s the same with pastors!

*How did prophets receive prophecies? Did they hear God’s voice, or what?*

\*\*To judge from the OT more generally, there were several ways. 1 Kings 22 suggests seeing a vision. 1 Samuel 3 suggests hearing what seemed to be an audible voice—Samuel thought it was Eli. Some passage speak of God speaking “by the hand of” someone, which I take to mean using a prophet’s mouth, so that the prophet opens his or her mouth and lets words come out without knowing what they will be. Sometimes a prophet speaks words he or she seems to make up, but behind which the prophet believes lies Yahweh’s action (e.g., Isaiah 7).

*Why did God speak through prophets rather than speaking to the people directly?*

\*\*I guess it’s an example of the way God regularly works—God speaks to us through each other, through pastors, through parents, through children, and so on.

*What were the high places?*

\*\*They were local sanctuaries within reasonable reach of the villages in which many Israelites lived—the temple was too far away for people to go there more than once or twice a year. The problem was that they were often the places where Canaanites had worshiped or still or worshiped, and places where Israelites worshiped in the way the Canaanites did.

*If a king disobeys, do the people suffer too?*

\*\*Often, yes (unless God is merciful). That’s how things work. If the pastor is a dud, his or her people suffer.

*Were there really false prophets—that is, not merely Baal prophets, but false Yahweh prophets? How would you know they were false?*

\*\*The OT only talks about Baal prophets and Yahweh prophets. It doesn’t use the expression “false prophets.” But the way it talks about some of the Yahweh prophets indicates that their prophecies did not actually come from Yahweh but from inside themselves. They were no doubt sincere and they thought they were serving Yahweh but they were mistaken. The OT’s main discussion of how you could tell the difference from a real prophet comes in Jeremiah 23. It implies that they ought to have been able to tell—Jeremiah knows that he has been present when Yahweh’s cabinet has been making decisions, which is the kind of description Micaiah gives in 1 Kings 22. The other prophets have not had that experience. It implies that other people ought to have been able to tell who was a false prophet because of the way they implicitly thought about God and about right and wrong—that is, they said Yahweh was going to bless Israel when one look at Israel’s life showed that Yahweh could hardly do so. Again, the same idea is implicit in 1 Kings 22.

*How do you become a prophet?*

\*\*There are two ways. You can go to prophetic school—2 Kings 2 (for instance) talks about “the sons of the prophets,” which looks like something of that kind. Or you can be taken by the scruff of the neck by Yahweh, as happened to Amos. It’s a bit like speaking in tongues—some people do it through being taught, other people because they find themselves doing it, because God simply arouses the gift in them.

*Why does God allow some people to screw up for a long time and some get judged straightaway?*

\*\*Ah, I don’t know, but I am grateful that I have been in the first category!

*What’s the difference between a prophet and a priest?*

\*\*In Israel, at least, a priest is a man who leads worship, acts as a teacher on the basis of is knowledge of the Torah, is officially recognized, gets paid on a regular basis, and has his position because he belongs to a particular clan. A prophet speaks to the situations of the community and the individual on the basis of what he or she senses God saying, may not be officially recognized, may not get paid on a regular basis, can belong to any clan, can be a man or a woman.

*How is it that Ahab saw God’s miracles but didn’t repent?*

\*\*The same as Pharaoh saw God’s miracles and didn’t repent, and people saw Jesus’ miracles and didn’t repent?