

The Shape of Hope in the Book of Kings: The Resolution of Davidic Blessing and Mosaic Curse

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The issue of hope in the book of Kings has long been a focal point of debate. This paper approaches the question from the standpoint of the final form of the book, rather than attempting to discern the voice of the Deuteronomist(s) within the text. I argue that the message of hope is exposed by a central theological tension within the book: that Yahweh has promised both blessing to David and curse for Mosaic breach. I conclude that in the resolution of this tension the book encourages hope in its exilic readership, but precludes a return to the monarchy as it was formerly. Rather, the purpose of Kings as it now stands is to reshape exilic hope towards a different type of kingdom, and to demonstrate to the exiles the new shape that this kingdom will take through the prophetic ministry amongst the powerless to gather a remnant. Messianic and nationalistic hope in Kings is shaped by the exile, which represents a new beginning for Yahweh's people.

KEYWORDS: *1–2 Kings, Davidic promise, Mosaic covenant, Messianic hope, Remnant, Exile, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, Elijah, Elisha, Jehoiachin*

In this paper I revisit the question of what hope for restoration the book of Kings offers its exilic readership.¹ For over half a century this question has been central to an analysis of the message of Kings, and answers have ranged across a spectrum: from hope for complete restoration of the Davidic monarchy, to no hope whatsoever.² The question was first posed

1. I am assuming an exilic composition of Kings, which is implied by the account of Jehoiachin's release in 561 B.C. (2 Kgs 25:27–30).

2. I outline some of the positions here, but see Michael Avioz, "The Book of Kings in Recent Research (Part 1)," *Currents* 4 (2005): 18–20.

by Martin Noth in 1957 in the context of his larger proposal for a Deuteronomistic History.³ He argued that the Deuteronomist offered no hope of restoration at all, but rather that the purpose of Kings was to explain the exile as the outworking of the breach of the Mosaic covenant in Israel's history. Gerhard Von Rad, on the other hand, proposed that Jehoiachin's release from Babylonian prison (2 Kgs 25:27–30) offered hope for a full restoration of the Davidic monarchy because it could be read in the light of the Davidic promise (2 Sam 7:1–17).⁴ Both answers have found adherents since that time, as well as a range positioned between these two poles.⁵ The difficulty of the question has driven some to propose that no answer is even possible, that rather the book is best accounted for by a series of Deuteronomistic editors, each with their own agenda for the material.⁶

3. Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (2nd ed.; trans. D. J. A. Clines; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1981), 97–99.

4. Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 341–43.

5. Most recently, Janzen has argued that it is a message of hope and warning for Jehoiachin. See David Janzen, "The Sins of Josiah and Hezekiah: A Synchronic Reading of the Final Chapters of Kings," *JSOT* 37 (2013): 351–52 and idem, "An Ambiguous Ending: Dynastic Punishment in Kings and the Fate of the Davidides in 2 Kings 25.27–30," *JSOT* 33 (2008): 57. Provan is positive about the message of the book, finding in it hope for a Davidic messiah like Solomon, Hezekiah, or Josiah. See Iain W. Provan, *1 & 2 Kings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 87–93 and idem, "The Messiah in the Book of Kings," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 76–81. Hobbs, likewise, is positive about the possibility of restoration. See Thomas R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 268–69. Wolff is more reserved in his assessment, believing that Noth had the better of the argument, but that he overlooked the possibility of repentance. He proposed that Kings was compiled as an encouragement to the exiles to turn to Yahweh in hope of restoration. See Hans W. Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work," in *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (2nd ed.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 93–97. The repentance position has also been defended by Donald F. Murray, "Of All the Years the Hopes—or Fears? Jehoiachin in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27–30)," *JBL* 120 (2001): 263–65 and Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1968), 79–81. Others see various formulations of qualified hope. McConville, for example, sees a reason for hope in the book, but not hope for a return to the former *status quo*. See J. Gordon McConville, "Narrative and Meaning in the Books of Kings," *Bib* 70 (1989): 48. Galil argues for reading the Deuteronomistic history as continuing into Jeremiah and projects hope forward through that book. See Gershon Galil, "The Message of the Book of Kings in Relation to Deuteronomy and Jeremiah," *BibSac* (2001): 413–14.

6. Frank Moore Cross championed this position with what has now become a classical double-redaction explanation (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History*

The reason that a definitive answer has proved so elusive is because tension arises in the narrative between two promises of Yahweh. On the one hand, Yahweh has promised blessings to Israel (later Judah) because of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:1–17). But on the other, Yahweh has promised curses through Moses for covenant breach (e.g., Deut 27:9–26; 28:15–68). If history had proceeded along a different line there would be no tension. The covenant at Horeb promised blessings for obedience which would align with the blessing promised to David (e.g., Deut 28:1–14). This hope is revealed from the outset as futile because “there is no one who does not sin” (1 Kgs 8:46). As the narrative progresses it becomes inevitable that the curse of the Mosaic covenant will be enacted in both kingdoms. What then of the promise to David?

The thesis of this paper is that this tension is intentionally exploited to create a message of hope for the exilic readers of Kings.⁷ Some definitions will be necessary to begin. The book of Kings shares

of the Religion of Israel [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973], 274–78, 287–89). The first redaction supported Josiah’s reforms and had a positive assessment of the Israelite monarchy, but was later modified by a second Deuteronomist explaining the exile. Although Cross’s proposal of multiple redactions of the material has been broadly accepted (Avioz, “The Book of Kings,” 14–16), his scepticism about the coherence of Kings as the book now stands has not. Much recent scholarship agrees that the final form of Kings presents a more or less coherent message, whatever its literary history. See, e.g., Jon D. Levenson, “The Last Four Verses in Kings,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 354–56; Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 8–10; Walter A. Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 1–5; and Jerome T. Walsh and David W. Cotter, *1 Kings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996), xii. All these find coherence in the message of the book, despite their disparate approaches. Janzen critiques the whole approach in Janzen, “The Sins of Josiah and Hezekiah,” 351–55.

7. This demands that the narrative be considered a cohesive whole, and this will be a feature of my approach, rather than explaining the tension as the result of a series of editions. The history of the debate has often focussed on the message of the Deuteronomist, rather than the book itself, and so the discussion has usually revolved around a small number of key texts considered “Deuteronomistic.” Such texts include Solomon’s prayer of dedication (1 Kgs 8:22–61), Jeroboam and Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12–13), the release of Jehoiachin (2 Kings 25:27–30), and the Deuteronomistic endorsement of Josiah (2 Kgs 22–23). See, e.g., McConville, “Narrative and Meaning,” 31–34, and J. Gordon McConville, “1 Kings VIII 46–53 and the Deuteronomic Hope,” *VT* 42 (1992): 67–71. There are, however, a number of non-Deuteronomistic texts that are usually omitted from consideration, but that comprise large sections of the book, especially: the Elijah/Elisha narratives (1 Kgs 17–19, 2 Kgs 3–13), some of the Solomon narratives (1 Kgs 3–4), material from Ahab, Jezebel, and Jehu (2 Kgs 9–10), as well as the Isaianic material in the Hezekiah narrative (2 Kgs 18:13–20:21). See Susanne Otto, “The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories and the Deuteronomistic History,” *JSOT* 27 (2003): 487–90. This essay outlines a reading of Kings that relates the broader narrative to its central theological tension.

with Old Testament theology a conception of a series of covenants that govern Israel's history, initiated by Yahweh with Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–14), then with Israel through Moses (Ex 20–35, Deut 5–30), then expanded with David (2 Sam 7:1–17).⁸ However the presentation of covenant in Kings is more nuanced than this. The book uses the word “covenant” (ברית) 22 times to refer to a covenant between Yahweh and Israel, and 20 times with the Mosaic covenant in mind (1 Kgs 3:15; 6:19; 8:1, 6, 21, 23; 11:11; 19:10, 14; 2 Kgs 17:15, 35, 38; 18:12; 23:2–3, 21).⁹ Of the two instance of ברית that are not explicitly Mosaic, one is Jehoiada's covenant in 2 Kgs 11:17, which in context is also likely to be a Deuteronomic renewal. The other is 2 Kings 13:23, which refers to Yahweh's covenant with Abraham. This is the only mention of the Abrahamic covenant in the book, the importance of which I will explore below. In every other case, covenant-related language is reserved to highlight Israel's failure to Yahweh's commands given through Moses.¹⁰ Thus, covenant language in Kings becomes associated with the curse promised in the eventuality of covenant breach.

By contrast, Kings never uses covenant language to refer to the Davidic covenant (cf. 2 Sam 7:1–17, 2 Sam 23:5). Rather, Kings speaks of Yahweh establishing the “word” (דבר) that he spoke to David, and uses language that highlights the unilateral nature of that agreement. Yahweh's word to David has or will be “fulfilled” (1 Kgs 8:15, 24; מלא), “established” (1 Kgs 8:20; קום), “kept” (1 Kgs 8:25; שמר), and “confirmed” (1 Kgs 8:26; אמן), “just as he spoke” (1 Kgs 2:24; 5:5; 6:12; 9:5; כִּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר).¹¹ Kings uses this “word” language to emphasise

8. See Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 147–56.

9. Apart from explicit mention, there are numerous allusions to the Horeb covenant through mention of Moses (e.g., 1 Kgs 2:3; 8:53, 56; 2 Kgs 8:6; 14:6; 21:8; 23:25), Torah (2 Kgs 10:31; 17:13, 34, 37; 23:24), or other Deuteronomic language (e.g., 1 Kgs 3:6). The Ark of the Covenant explicitly refers to the Horeb covenant (1 Kgs 8:21); the Book of the Covenant found by Josiah (2 Kgs 22:8) is very likely to be some form of Deuteronomy.

10. Solomon's prayer of dedication reflects on how Yahweh's faithfulness to Moses has established Israel within the land (1 Kgs 8:56). This is the only positive use of the Mosaic covenant in the book, but it is not a future promise of blessing.

11. This is not to imply that 2 Sam 7 is something other than a covenant, since the book understands the fulfilment of the Mosaic blessings and curses in these terms also (1 Kgs 8:56; 2 Kgs 17:23). Nor does it imply that the two are unrelated. One of the features of Kings' presentation of the Davidic covenant is to make it conditional on covenant obedience to the Mosaic covenant. I will return to this below.

Yahweh's action in history.¹² The word spoken to David is mentioned or alluded to 26 times in Kings. The prophet Ahijah's speech to Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:31–39) introduces a motif that recurs throughout the book: that Yahweh would *act* so that David might “always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem” (1 Kgs 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:19). This *leitmotif* occurs in response to Judah's disobedience to the Mosaic covenant, and therefore the word to David is a promise that stands independent of the Mosaic covenant. I will reflect this distinction in this essay by referring to the Mosaic *covenant*, along with its inevitable *curse*, in contrast to the Davidic *promise*.¹³

By framing the covenants in this way, the book of Kings positions itself to explore the outcome of Israel's history as a function of the tension that exists between promise and curse. It asks, for example, whether Israel's disobedience to Moses threatens the fulfilment of Yahweh's promise to David, whether the promise to David supersedes the Mosaic covenant entirely, and whether Israel should expect the fulfilment of the Davidic promise only in the case that they are able to obey Moses. Ultimately, as we shall see, Kings does not expect either covenant curse or Davidic promise to be undone, and it is precisely in this theological dilemma that hope arises in the book. When Israel, from the context of the exile, reflects on their history through the narrative of Kings, they realise that their curse has been enacted, and therefore the demands of the Mosaic covenant have been met. From exile, then, hope is found because the exile represents a new beginning, free from the curse of the Mosaic covenant. Since the promise to David has not been

12. Every prophetic utterance recorded in the book (eventually) happens “according to the word of Yahweh” (כדבר יהוה) during the course of the narrative (1 Kgs 12:24; 13:26; 14:18, etc.). Therefore, fulfilment of Yahweh's word has long been recognised as a theme of Kings. Von Rad tabulated the predictions and fulfilments in Kings and notes that Kings also fulfils some prophetic announcements from the Deuteronomistic history more generally (e.g., 1 Kgs 2:27 fulfils 1 Sam 2:27–36.) Gerhard Von Rad, *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 157–59.

13. Strictly speaking, the curse is a *promise* as well. Indeed, this is the point, because the two promises of God are in opposition, which creates the narrative tension. However, to understand the promise of curse and the promise of blessing as alternate outcomes of the one covenant misses the point of Kings because it undoes the tension that requires both. The language the book uses in association with David implies that, conceptually at least, it is possible that this word of blessing will stand even after the covenant curse has been enacted. Because “word” is awkward in English, I have chosen to use language of “promise,” in opposition to “covenant” and “curse,” as a way to better reflect the underlying theology of the book.

fulfilled, it shapes what Israel might hope for in this new beginning. I will explore the shape of this hope both in messianic and nationalistic terms.

IS THE DAVIDIC PROMISE NULLIFIED BY COVENANT DISOBEDIENCE?

The 2 Sam 7 version of the Davidic promise was explicitly not conditioned on obedience to Moses (2 Sam 7:14–15), but in Kings it is always linked to the covenant and its fulfilment always requires obedience (1 Kgs 2:4; 6:12; 8:25; 9:5–7). Therefore, one possibility for resolving the tension between promise and curse is to read the narrative as an explanation of why the promise has been nullified.¹⁴ Although this interpretation has been common,¹⁵ there are several reasons why it is unsuitable.

First, although the promise is stated in conditional form, its continued unconditional nature is reflected in other ways. The “burning lamp” *leitmotif* (1 Kgs 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:19) reaffirms Yahweh’s purpose to preserve Judah because of his commitment to David, and Yahweh continues to deal favourably with the southern dynasty “for the sake of David” (1 Kgs 11:12–13, 32–36; 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). Also, phrases like those in 11:36, “that David might always (כל־הַיָּמִים) have a lamp before me,” are universal and unconditional (see also 11:32, 39). There is no explicit abrogation of the Davidic promise in the book of Kings, but there is explicit reaffirmation of Yahweh’s choice of David (1 Kgs 8:16; 11:34).¹⁶

Second, other positive factors in the book can be understood as indicators of the continued validity of the Davidic promise into the exile. These include the ongoing commitment to David’s city as Yahweh’s chosen habitation (1 Kgs 8:44, 48; 14:21; 23:27),¹⁷ in some cases *forever* (1 Kgs 8:13; 9:3; 10:9; 2 Kgs 21:7), and the continued role of Zion during exile (1 Kgs 8:46–51).

14. As per the priestly lineage of Eli (1 Sam 2:30).

15. E.g., Wolff, “Kerygma,” 86.

16. Janzen argues that the compiler of Kings both knew 2 Sam 7 and intentionally refused to abrogate it, and that this is true whether the book stands independently of the rest of the Deuteronomistic history or not (“An Ambiguous Ending,” 50–51).

17. 2 Kgs 23:27 indicates that Yahweh has “cast off” (שָׁלַח) Jerusalem, but I will discuss this text below.

Third and perhaps most decisively, is the evidence of the contrasted fate of the two kingdoms. Throughout the book, the Davidic dynasty is maintained despite the continued sin of the Davidic kings, the best efforts of Athaliah to annihilate the Davidic line (2 Kgs 11:1–6), and even the exile (2 Kgs 25:27–30). By contrast, the northern kingdom experiences eight dynasties. In turn each “walks in the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat,”¹⁸ and so suffers the fate of Jeroboam’s dynasty: every male in the dynasty is “cut off” (1 Kgs 14:10; see also 1 Kgs 16:11 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8). This phrase recurs for each of the major northern dynasties, indicating a pattern in the way Yahweh deals with Israel that parallels and reverses the “burning lamp” *leitmotif* of the southern kingdom. What accounts for the different ways that Yahweh deals with the two kingdoms?¹⁹ The mitigating factor is the Davidic promise. The only equivalent promise offered to the northern kingdom was entirely conditional on obedience and breached almost immediately (1 Kgs 11:37–38).²⁰ Ultimately the exile of the northern kingdom is not only attributed to covenant disobedience (2 Kgs 17:7–23), but also to their separation from David. References to this separation frame the history of the North (“What portion do we have with David?” 1 Kgs 12:16; 2 Kgs 17:21), and sit alongside covenant disobedience as a reason for their exile (see 1 Kgs 12:19). In juxtaposing the two histories in this way, the book of Kings affirms the continuing validity of the Davidic promise.

DOES THE DAVIDIC PROMISE ABROGATE THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COVENANT?

The Davidic promise stands in Kings whether David’s descendants are faithful to the Mosaic covenant or not. But if the promise is certain, what

18. Apart from Jeroboam I there are 20 such verdicts: 1 Kgs 15:26, 30, 34; 16:2, 13, 19, 26; 21:22, 52; 2 Kgs 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28.

19. One possibility is Janzen’s suggestion that the sin of the South is of a different kind than the sin of the North. This argument depends on a distinction between the sins of northern kings, who *cause* Israel to sin (hiphil of אָנַח), and those of the South who do not. Janzen proposes that the northern kings suffer the punishment associated with this sin (1 Kgs 15:29; 16:12–16; 2 Kgs 9:14–10:17), but David’s line simply continues until this type of sin is committed, which happens first with Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:11). Yet, when Manasseh causes Judah to sin the punishment is not met. In the end, the release of Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 25:27–30) is a decisive break of grace in the well-established pattern, as Janzen also recognizes (*ibid.*, 49–54).

20. Note that this promise also avoids covenant language, preferring to use the “word” language that has until now been associated with the Davidic promise.

role does the Mosaic covenant play in the message of the book? The key question is why the compiler of Kings reframed the Davidic promise as dependent on obedience to Moses when he did not intend to undo the unconditional promise of 2 Sam 7. What is gained by adding conditions to an unconditional covenant?²¹

It accomplishes two things. First, it creates space for the Deuteronomistic assessment of individual kings without jeopardising the ultimate fulfilment of the promise. The continued validity of the Davidic promise does not imply that every Davidic scion will be automatically blessed,²² and not every Davidic scion must be obedient in order for God to ultimately fulfil his promise. Rather, God is free to enact the covenant curses for disobedience, knowing that one of David's future offspring will yet receive the blessings. This is possible even from exile (2 Kgs 25:27–30), which is the ultimate curse for covenant breach (Deut 29:22–28).

Second, it shapes the overall messianic expectation of the book. McConville notes that as the story progresses, “it becomes clearer that there is a deep tension in the narrative, whose resolution will not be in terms of unqualified hope for Judah in contrast to menace for the north only.”²³ Rather, both covenant and promise remain in effect: punishment for any dynasty in breach of Moses's, including David's, but ultimate blessing for David nevertheless. The tension gives the overall narrative a messianic overtone as it awaits its only possible resolution: a righteous covenant-keeping king to sit on the throne of David.

Solomon is a fine example of the way the Mosaic covenant critiques the Davidic kings despite the Davidic promise. References to the Davidic promise are clustered around Solomon,²⁴ and he is explicitly portrayed as the promised Davidic scion on multiple occasions: from his own lips (1 Kgs 2:24, 33, 45; 3:6; 5:5 [Heb. 5:19]; 8:20, 24–26), by his father (1 Kgs 2:4), by Hiram of Tyre (1 Kgs 5:7 [Heb. 5:21]), by Yahweh

21. McConville has explored this question in relation to the book of Deuteronomy where there is a parallel tension. See J. Gordon McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomistic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 134–39. In the book of Deuteronomy, the question is whether the conditionality of the Mosaic covenant supersedes the certainty of the promised blessing to Abraham, and I am indebted to his line of reasoning for the argument I use here with respect to Kings.

22. McConville, “1 Kings VIII,” 77–79.

23. McConville, “Narrative and Meaning,” 38.

24. Of the 26 allusions to the Davidic promise in Kings, 22 are found in the Solomon narratives.

(1 Kgs 6:12; 9:5; 11:12–13), and the narrator (1 Kgs 2:12). On the surface, the account of Solomon's achievements seems overwhelmingly positive. His kingdom is presented as idyllic (1 Kgs 4:25): the fulfilment of patriarchal promises for a multitudinous nation (1 Kgs 3:8, Gen 15:5; 1 Kgs 4:20, Gen 22:17), the land of Canaan (1 Kgs 4:21, Gen 15:18–19), and the blessings of the Mosaic covenant (1 Kgs 8:56, Deut 12:10–13). It is understandable, then, that many interpret Solomon's kingdom as a foreshadowing of the kingdom of God, and Solomon as a prototype of God's ideal, wise king.²⁵

Yet, this is an unbalanced portrait of Solomon in Kings. Even throughout the early chapters of the book, prior to his explicit apostasy in 1 Kgs 11, there is a subtext that critiques Solomon's reign.²⁶ The Deuteronomic laws of kingship (Deut 17:14–20) read like a checklist of anti-Solomonic rhetoric: forbidding the acquisition of horses (1 Kgs 10:26), trade with Egypt (1 Kgs 10:28), accumulation of gold (1 Kgs 10:27), and collection of wives (1 Kgs 11:1). And even though Deuteronomy enjoins Israel's king to read, copy, and recite the law, Solomon is never portrayed as doing this.

Solomon's failure is broader than explicit disobedience.²⁷ His use of his wisdom comes under narrative critique, even though it is a divine gift (1 Kgs 3:10–14). He is charged by David to establish the kingdom according to his wisdom (1 Kgs 2:6, 9), which results in the assassination of his political enemies (1 Kgs 3:13–46). His alliance with Hiram of Tyre is portrayed as a result of his wisdom (1 Kgs 5:12), and yet requires the forced labour of thousands of his own people (1 Kgs 5:13–18). The same treaty jeopardises Israelite territory (1 Kgs 9:10–11)²⁸ and results in a further breach of Deuteronomic law (Deut 17:15).

25. E.g., Provan, "The Messiah in the Book of Kings," 76–77. His eventual demise (1 Kgs 11) has done little to detract from this image, in many eyes he has simply succumbed to the weakness of human failure at the end of his life.

26. There is a recent trend in scholarship to explore the ambiguity of Solomon's character. E.g., Walter A. Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon of Human Achievement* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 153–59; J. Daniel Hays, "Has the Narrator Come to Praise Solomon or to Bury Him? Narrative Subtlety in 1 Kings 1–11," *JSOT* 28 (2003): 155; Hugh S. Pyper, "Judging the Wisdom of Solomon: The Two-Way Effect of Intertextuality," *JSOT* (1993): 35; and Kim I. Parker, "Solomon as Philosopher King: The Nexus of Law and Wisdom in 1 Kings 1–11," *JSOT* (1992): 76.

27. I am indebted to Davies and Hays here, who outline the different ways that the narrative subtly presents Solomon as a failure in his foreign alliances. See John A. Davies, "'Discerning Between Good and Evil': Solomon as a New Adam in 1 Kings," *WTJ* 73 (2011): 52–53 and Hays, "Has the Narrator," 163.

In his wisdom (1 Kgs 10:23–24) he trades military hardware to the Hittites and the Arameans (1 Kgs 10:29), who will be Israel’s enemies in years to come. He divides his kingdom into twelve taxation districts (1 Kgs 4:7–19), leaving the province of Judah exempt, and extracts an exorbitant royal provision from each on a monthly basis (1 Kgs 4:22–28). Although this is portrayed as another act of wisdom (1 Kgs 4:29–34), it closely matches Samuel’s warning that the people would become “slaves” (עבדים) to the king (1 Sam 8:10–18), and it left his people complaining about the “hard service” (העבודה הקשה) that he imposed (1 Kgs 12:4), which is something that they had not suffered since Egypt (Ex 1:14).²⁹ In a play on words, the glory (כבוד) of Solomon’s kingdom is at the same time “his heavy yoke” (עליו הכבד) that hangs around the necks of his people (1 Kgs 12:4). In the end, Solomon’s wisdom results in an intolerable kingdom.

As Leithart comments, Solomon fails “precisely at the height of his wisdom . . . precisely in his exercise of wisdom.”³⁰ This is a critique of the ability of wisdom to build the kind of kingdom that Yahweh can bless, and shows that wisdom does not necessarily lead to obedience. The Solomon presented in Kings was a fulfilment of Davidic hope (1 Kgs 3:6), and blessed in ability, power, and resources, but his kingdom failed because he was unable to keep the Mosaic covenant (1 Kgs 11:11). Ironically, Solomon did not request wisdom in the first place, but a “listening heart” (לב שמע; 1 Kgs 3:9). If that request had been granted in the Deuteronomic sense, it would have yielded the covenant obedience required of him (Deut 5:27–29, 6:4–5). But Yahweh instead answered his request by giving him “a wise and discerning heart” (לב חכם ובוין; 1 Kgs 3:12), a gift that granted him “discernment between good and evil” (להבין) (לבין טוב לרע; 1 Kgs 3:9): a foreboding allusion to Gen 3:5.³¹ Through this divine gift of wisdom Solomon was able to construct a glorious kingdom, but was unable to yield obedience. And so the most promising of Davidic candidates is judged inadequate in the end according to the standards of the Mosaic covenant.

28. Compare Naboth’s attitude to Israelite land in 1 Kgs 21:3.

29. Peter J. Leithart suggests that Solomon increasingly becomes more Pharaonic as the narrative progresses, until Israel finds themselves symbolically back in Egypt under his rule (*1 & 2 Kings* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006], 76).

30. *Ibid.*, 82.

31. See Davies, “Discerning Between Good and Evil,” 41–44.

WILL THE DAVIDIC PROMISE BE FULFILLED
BY MEANS OF THE COVENANT?

Kings, therefore, expects the fulfilment of the Davidic promise, but refuses to override the demands of the covenant in order to do so. The only resolution is that a righteous king must appear. Thus, messianic hope is sharply focused in Kings on Josiah who is presented as the righteous King *par excellence* (2 Kgs 23:25). This hope is established prior to Josiah's actual appearance by 31 chapters. The prophecy of the unnamed "man of God" from the South against Jeroboam I mentions Josiah by name (1 Kgs 13:1–6). It comes precisely at the point when the North decisively breaks away from David (1 Kgs 12:16), transgressing their own dynastic covenant (1 Kgs 11:38, see also 1 Kgs 12:30). The key component of the prophecy is that the apostate religion created by Jeroboam I will be undone only by the scion of David named Josiah (1 Kgs 13:2), and therefore by implication, hope for the northern kingdom will only be found in reunification with the Davidic dynasty (see 1 Kgs 12:16).³²

Josiah succeeds precisely where Solomon failed. In contrast to Solomon, Josiah is the king who does "listen" (שמע) to the Law of Moses (2 Kgs 22:11, 18–19), who "reads" (קרא) it (2 Kgs 22:10, 16; 23:2; Deut 17:19), who "keeps" (שמר), and "does" (עשא) it (2 Kgs 22:2, 13; 23:3, 21; Deut 17:19). Unlike Solomon, there is no subtextual critique here. Rather, the endorsement of the book toward Josiah can hardly be overstated (2 Kgs 22:2; 23:25; Deut 6:4–5). Josiah renews the covenant (2 Kgs 23:1–3), destroys idol worship in Judah (2 Kgs 23:4–14), begins to do so in the former northern kingdom (2 Kgs 23:15–20), and reinstates the Passover (2 Kgs 23:21–27).

If one were to pause the narrative at 2 Kgs 23:25 to ask what kind of kingdom is expected from Josiah, then the answer would come unequivocally: one based not on wisdom, power, or wealth like Solomon's kingdom, but on hearing and obeying the law of Moses. At this point, then, the hope offered by Kings seems to be contingent on repentance. Many have proposed that this might be the larger message of the book of Kings,³³ and it is not without wider textual support. The word שׁוּב, used in the sense of repentance, is thematic in Solomon's prayer of dedication (1 Kgs 8:22–53, used six times). This passage is widely

32. This is paralleled in nearly all of the prophetic literature. See Hos 3:4–5, Amos 9:11–15, Jer 33:23–26, Ezek 37:15–28.

33. This is Wolff's thesis, that future hope in Kings is based on repentance. Wolff, "Kerygma," 91–93. See more recently Janzen, "The Sins of Josiah and Hezekiah," 370.

understood to be indicative of the Deuteronomist's purpose.³⁴ Similarly, Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal has been understood as a case study in the hope that repentance offers, that "after the time of judgment, the way to live in peaceful communion with God is open for everybody—one needs only to give up the other gods and return to the way of Yahweh."³⁵

However, understanding the message of the book as a call to repentance requires qualification in terms of the overall shape of the book. As right as repentance might be in response to covenant breach (Deut 30:2), every instance of repentance in the book fails to usher in the promised kingdom in the longer term. The story of Elijah's victory over Baal and the repentance of the people (1 Kgs 18:39–40) is undone just one verse later (1 Kgs 19:1) with Elijah's failure, the return of the Baal cult through Jezebel, and Elijah's flight to Horeb (1 Kgs 19:1–3). Kings from the North who repent invariably have their dynasty extended by several generations (e.g. 1 Kgs 21:25–29; 2 Kgs 22:19), but judgment still comes in the end.³⁶ Even when Hezekiah repents and Jerusalem is delivered from Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19:20), judgment is only suspended for a time (2 Kgs 20:10–19). Even though repentance is the right response to a breach of the Mosaic covenant, as Solomon prayed (1 Kgs

34. Solomon's final petition in particular (1 Kgs 8:46–53) is commonly thought to be a message addressed directly to the exiles (e.g., McConville, "Narrative and Meaning," 36).

35. Otto, "The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories," 504. Despite this, many who would understand a call to repentance as the core message of the book have not been inclined to examine 1 Kgs 18 for support. Wolff, for example, does not mention Elijah or Elisha anywhere in his "Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work" because of his focus on the purposes of the Deuteronomist. Even though Elijah's confrontation with the cult of Baal might have aligned with Deuteronomistic interests (1 Kgs 19:10, 19:14), Otto points out that "... stories of Elijah and Elisha seem to have no particular purpose within the Deuteronomists' conception of history and theology" and that "the Deuteronomists seem to pay no attention to the happenings in 1 Kgs 17–19 at all" (*ibid.*, 494). He outlines several problems with the portrayal of Elijah and the stories concerning him if indeed they were pre-exilic stories incorporated into the book by the hand of the Deuteronomist(s), and goes on to propose that they were likely inserted sometime later; either late in or shortly after the exile. Interestingly, this means that there are two schools of thought, both of which argue that repentance is the message of Kings, but that ultimately disagree with each other as to where that message is found. Wolff and those who follow him find the message within the work of the Deuteronomist, but Otto argues that it was inserted *after* the work of the Deuteronomists, presumably because they did not find within the Deuteronomistic version of Kings the message of repentance that they wished to convey!

36. Leslie J. Hoppe, "The Death of Josiah and the Meaning of Deuteronomy," *LA* 48 (1998): 31–47.

8:33, 34, 35, 47, 48), it is not the ultimate source of hope for the future. Solomon's prayer may encourage repentance of its exilic readership, but it does not encourage a belief that repentance will restore Israel from exile. It only asks for forgiveness from sin and compassion from their captors (1 Kgs 8:46–53). Something more than repentance is ultimately required if the Davidic promise is to be fulfilled.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than the Josiah narrative. The dust from Josiah's conquest has not even settled (2 Kgs 23:6, 12, 15) when the reader is abruptly reminded that Josiah too will fail. Josiah has turned (שׁוּב) to Yahweh (2 Kgs 23:25), but Yahweh has not turned (שׁוּב) from his anger (2 Kgs 23:26–27). National repentance has not atoned for the former breach of covenant,³⁷ as Josiah understands (2 Kgs 22:13). Neither is the prophetic message from Huldah one of blessing and restoration following repentance, but rather one of certain judgment despite it (2 Kgs 22:16–18).

Since Josiah is the archetypal covenant-keeping ruler in Kings,³⁸ his untimely death (2 Kgs 23:29–30) at once lays to rest any hope that Mosaic reform will establish the kingdom promised to David, and removes any notion that the message of the book might be that reform in exile will trigger the fulfilment of the Davidic promise.

But what then of the messianic arc that began in 1 Kgs 13:2?³⁹ Despite the imposing volume of scholarly attention devoted to Josiah, comparatively little attention has been given to the role he plays in the narrative as it now stands.⁴⁰ Simply by its context within a wider narrative of ultimate failure, the Mosaic reforms of Josiah take their place among a long list of things that do not work to fulfil Davidic hope. Therefore, in the end, the covenant is seen to be an unsuitable vehicle for

37. Janzen, "The Sins of Josiah and Hezekiah," 361.

38. Unlike Solomon, Josiah's relationship to the Davidic promise is underplayed. Only once does the narrative remind us that Josiah is a Davidic heir (2 Kgs 22:2). By contrast Hezekiah, Judah's other great reformer, is explicitly portrayed as Davidic several times (2 Kgs 18:3; 19:34; 20:5). Kings primarily understands Josiah in relation to covenant, and Hezekiah, as we shall see, in relation to promise, and then examines them in that light.

39. This question is precisely what drove Cross to propose his double-redaction theory. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 274–78.

40. Even if, as Cross asserted (*ibid.*, 274–78), the book of Kings developed from a document intended to support Josianic reform, the role of Josiah in the final narrative is neither to demonstrate a successful king (according to the hopes of the Davidic promise), nor a successful kingdom. See Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, 266–71 and James R. Linville, *Israel in the Book of Kings: The Past as a Project of Social Identity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 229–35.

the realisation of the promises to David. Even in the hands of the most law-abiding of kings, the Mosaic covenant is unable to usher in the kingdom of promise simply because the covenant lacks what is needed most: a means by which former sin might be forgiven (2 Kgs 23:26–27; see 1 Kgs 8:46).⁴¹

THE EXILE AS YAHWEH'S NEW BEGINNING

If the Mosaic covenant is unable to realise the Davidic promise then the exile itself becomes a symbol of hope because it fulfils the curses of the Mosaic covenant (2 Kgs 17:7–23, Deut 29:24–28),⁴² but leaves Israel with the promise that a righteous, covenant-keeping Davidic king will yet come. The exile is not simply Yahweh's judgment, but the chance for him to now act according to the blessings he has promised, unrestricted by the demands of the curses (see Deut 30:1–6).

Although, strictly speaking, the exiles of the northern and southern kingdoms occur finally in 2 Kgs 17 and 24–25 respectively, they have been foreshadowed in the narrative long before that.⁴³ Kings begins with an account of Yahweh establishing and blessing the united kingdom by fighting against their enemies (1 Kgs 2:12, 24, 45, 46), and ends with Yahweh having set those enemies against his own people to destroy them (2 Kgs 24:2–3). The turning point in the exercise of Yahweh's power is not the exile itself; it is Elijah's flight to Horeb, and particularly 1 Kgs 19:15–18. Two events occur within these verses that are of interest.

First, Yahweh will bring judgment on the house of Ahab (1 Kgs 19:17). He not only intends to raise up Jehu, but Hazael—a *Syrian*—against Ahab's dynasty. This important moment marks the only occasion in Israel's historical literature that a non-Israelite is anointed (משח).⁴⁴

41. Kings makes a similar point as Jer 31:31–34 through the narrative theology of the book. In the context of exile, Jeremiah also reaffirms the Davidic promise (Jer 33:14–17), but envisages the need for a new covenant unlike the Mosaic covenant (Jer 31:32) whereby sin might be forgiven (Jer 31:34). Neither Kings nor Jeremiah implies that the Mosaic law is no longer important for the exiles (Jer 31:33), but rather the modification of the covenant terms whereby Israel might “live” (Deut 5:33).

42. Note the way the narrator relates the exile to the Mosaic covenant (v. 7): . . . כִּי־חָטְאוּ לַיהוָה . . . הַמַּעֲלָה אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

43. The fate of the northern kingdom was sealed from the time of Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 14:16).

44. This is paralleled in the prophetic corpus as a sign of Yahweh's sovereignty over the foreign powers, and that even the mighty Cyrus unwittingly serves Yahweh (Is

Hazael will serve Yahweh's purpose. He will be a thorn in the side of Ahab and a means of destruction for Israel, and in doing so he foreshadows Yahweh's later use of Assyria and Babylon for the same purpose. Therefore, within the narrative of Kings, Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18) represents a final offer by Yahweh to call the northern kingdom to repentance and covenant faithfulness through his prophet (1 Kgs 18:21). Having won the battle (1 Kgs 18:39–40), but losing the war (1 Kgs 19:1–3), Elijah travels to Horeb where Yahweh instructs him to commission Elisha with a different purpose: the judgment of the northern kingdom. It is tempting to see Elisha's numerous similarities to Elijah as the controlling factor in understanding the narratives in 2 Kgs 4–13 (see 2 Kgs 2:9), but despite similarities in the miracle stories, Elisha's overall purpose is different. Where Elijah calls Israel to repent (1 Kgs 18:21), Elisha is to prepare their burial (1 Kgs 19:17).⁴⁵ Yahweh has now turned against Israel, and so the exile has effectively, if not literally, begun. Judah will follow Israel in due course (2 Kgs 20:12–18).

The second thing of interest at Horeb is Yahweh's answer to Elijah when he protests that "the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant" (1 Kgs 19:14). Yahweh informs him that "I will cause 7,000 to remain" (*hiphil* of שָׂאֵר). This introduces to the narrative the concept of a remnant (שָׂאֵר) of Israel who will survive the coming judgment of Yahweh (1 Kgs 19:18).⁴⁶ Following this story the narrative introduces an enigmatic group identified repeatedly as the "Sons of the Prophets" (1 Kgs 20:35, 2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1), who are closely tied with the ministry of Elisha.⁴⁷ The often maligned incident in 2 Kgs

44:28–45:1). Hazael is strictly speaking the only *anointed one* in Kings.

45. Wesley J. Bergen fails to see this shift in the nature of prophetic ministry and argues, instead, that Elisha failed in his prophetic duty to call Israel to any real kind of repentance (*Elijah and the End of Prophetism* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999], 176). See also Philip E. Satterthwaite ("The Elisha Narratives and the Coherence of 2 Kings 2–8," *TynBul* 49 [1998], 1–28), who makes the same assumption.

46. The verb is a *wegatal* (הִשְׂאִירָהּ), which places it in logical (but not necessarily temporal) sequence with the judgment verbs of the previous verse (v. 17). Hazael will "put to death" and Elisha will "put to death," but Yahweh will "cause to remain." That is, this should not be understood simply as Yahweh's answer to Elijah's complaint that "Israel has forsaken your covenant and only I am left" (v. 14). Yahweh is not saying, "It's OK, there are 7,000 after all!" Rather, this is an exilic promise: a group who will survive the coming judgment of Hazael and Jehu.

47. Scholarship on this group has been concerned with identifying a historical sub-community of Israel to whom to attach the label בני־הנביאים. See Michael Avioz, "The Book of Kings in Recent Research (Part 2)," *Currents* 5 (2006): 72. While this is an interesting question, it is not necessary in order to understand the role of the group within the narrative of Kings.

2:15–25 illustrates the relationship between Elisha and this group well. Immediately following Elijah’s ascension, Elisha performs two miracles that reveal the nature of his ministry. The first is a deliverance miracle, directed specifically towards this group (2 Kgs 2:15–22). The second is a judgment miracle directed against some Israelite boys (2 Kgs 2:23–25). Throughout his ministry, Elisha’s deliverance miracles are not directed for the benefit of Israel generally, but only for this group (see 2 Kgs 4:1–7, 38–44; 6:1–6),⁴⁸ or for the benefit of Israel’s enemies (2 Kgs 3:1–27; 5:1–14; 6:8–23).⁴⁹

Although Elisha’s ministry is focused particularly on the house of Ahab, it illustrates the wider point. Through his ministry we see that Yahweh will no longer direct his energy toward building and maintaining the old Israelite kingdoms because Israel has “forsaken the covenant” (1 Kgs 19:10, 14) and all that remains is the curse. Yahweh continues to exercise patience, especially when confronted with a penitent king (1 Kgs 21:25–29; 2 Kgs 22:19), but the curse will not be undone. Exile is inevitable. However, precisely in this exile there is hope because Yahweh will do something new, and the Davidic promise is not the only indication we have from Kings as to what that new thing will be. We now also understand this new Israel through the prophetic concept of remnant.

The question of hope in the book of Kings has now taken us in two directions. First, the book continues to expect a Davidic scion, even into the exile. And second, in light of the covenantal failures of Israel and Judah, the book refocuses the reader’s attention away from those kingdoms and toward the prophetic ministry and the remnant that will survive exile. I now turn to assessing those two strands of hope.

THE SHAPE OF MESSIANIC HOPE IN THE BOOK OF KINGS

What would the Messiah of God’s new beginning look like? Obviously messianic hope is grounded in the Davidic promise (2 Sam 7:12–16), so

48. Although not explicitly identified as part of this group, the narrative placement of the miracle in Shunem (2 Kgs 4:8–10), sandwiched between two “Sons of the Prophets” miracles (4:1–7, 38–44), as well as the indication that the woman fears Yahweh (4:9), indicates that this is not a break in the pattern. Elisha is still directing his energy toward those who “have not bowed the knee to Baal” (1 Kgs 19:18). It is the same woman in 2 Kgs 8:1–6.

49. The story of the siege of Samaria (2 Kgs 6:24–7:2), which involves only an oracle (rather than a miracle) from Elisha, appears to be an exception to the pattern. It can be explained because Hazael, rather than Ben-hadad, was to be Yahweh’s anointed (מָשִׁיחַ) against Israel (1 Kgs 19:17), and Hazael will not become king of Syria until 2 Kgs 8.

the Messiah will be a Davidic scion. Beyond this, I have argued above that the only possible resolution to the tension between covenant and promise is that a king must appear who is righteous by Mosaic standards. Since the promise is certain, the book encourages hope for this kind of Messiah. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 outlines the expectation: an Israelite who does not rely on military power, who is not prone to accumulating wives and money, who is subject to the law of Moses, and who is humble. There are no kings like this in the book of Kings.⁵⁰

Usually, discussions of messianic hope in Kings examine as case studies those few southern kings that the narrative endorses. For example, Provan's study understands Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah to function messianically when read in the wider context of the Former Prophets.⁵¹ There is some truth to this—the Messiah that Kings expects should be wise, faithful, and righteous. However to understand Judah's good kings as messianic case studies requires a reading of the book that overlooks the overall shape of the narrative because ultimately each of these kings failed. Solomon did not fail because he stopped being wise, Hezekiah did not fail because he stopped trusting, and neither did Josiah fail because he transgressed the covenant. Furthermore, none of these kings live up to Deut 17:14–20 despite their endorsement from the narrator. It can hardly be the argument of the book that the hoped-for Messiah will be a king like these.⁵² Rather, the book hopes that “someone greater than Solomon” might one day appear.⁵³

The key to messianic hope in the book is to ask how it is shaped by the failure of these kings and their kingdoms, as the account of Jehoiachin demonstrates (2 Kgs 25:27).⁵⁴ Jehoiachin is released in the thirty-seventh year of the exile, but regains neither kingdom nor crown. Rather, he lives indebted to the king of Babylon, who “lifts his head” and “speaks kindly too him” (וידבר אתו טובה; 2 Kgs 25:27–28).⁵⁵ Thus

50. Even Josiah does not meet this standard, despite his endorsement. See J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 216–17.

51. Provan, “The Messiah in the Book of Kings,” 80–81.

52. I do not have the space here to do full justice to Provan's reading, which is more nuanced than my brief portrayal here suggests; however, I think the critique stands.

53. I allude, of course, to Matt 12:42.

54. The release of Jehoiachin has been the interpretive crux of the whole debate on hope in the books of Kings. See Gerhard Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; London: SCM, 1953), 90–91. Here I am indebted here to Levenson's careful reading of Jehoiachin's release (“The Last Four Verses,” 356–58).

55. Levenson argues that this phrase (וידבר אתו טובה) should be understood as the

Jehoiachin becomes an example of something new. He is a Davidic heir without a throne. Unable to reign from David's city, Jehoiachin lives in exile, under the dominion of his enemy and dependent on his welfare. But the Davidic hope is not extinguished in the strangeness of this new situation. The historical reality of exile is neither antithetical to the wider purposes of Yahweh for Israel, nor is it detrimental to his ability to fulfill the promise that he made to David.⁵⁶

In fact, more than this, Jehoiachin in exile represents no less hope than Solomon did in the glory days of Israel's past. The Solomon of Kings was a failed David, and the Davidic promise was as uncertain in his kingdom as it is in exile. In both cases the accomplishment of the promised kingdom relied solely on Yahweh's ability to work through, and in spite of, human failure. The shape of messianic hope in Kings remains the same in exile: a Davidic heir on the throne of David. However, it is complemented here by the surprising message that, for a time at least, it is acceptable to Yahweh that such a king find himself in the hands of the nations. From a human point of view, this is perhaps even demanded by Deut 17:14–20. Could a humble monarch of this type, with neither military power nor excessive wealth and status really expect to meet the needs of state?⁵⁷ The difference between the two types of monarch is nowhere better illustrated than Rehoboam, who when challenged by his father's advisors to choose humility over power, opts instead to become a king like his father (1 Kgs 12:1–15). But the advisors' words are telling: "If you will be a servant (עבד) to this people today and serve them (ועבדתם), and speak good words to them (דברתם) אלהים דברים טובים⁵⁸ when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever (כל-הימים)" (1 Kgs 12:7). This is what is required if

beginning of a treaty of subjugation between Evil-merodach and Jehoiachin, which is plausible (*ibid.*, 361). He concludes from this that the message of hope in Kings "represents part of an effort by an exilic Deuteronomistic source to bring the legacy of the promissory covenant with David into line with the new historical reality effected by the events of 587 B.C.E. and with the novel social and political situation of the continuing Diaspora."

56. The exilic prophets agree with this sentiment, See Jer 29, esp. v. 7. The result of the exile is that messianic hope in ancient Israel shifts in the direction that Israel's post-exilic literature will eventually take, in which a messianic figure, like Zerubbabel, can be understood as a governor who "reigns" only at the pleasure of a foreign overlord (see Hag 2:20–23; Zech 5:6–10; 9:9–13).

57. J. Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology, Genesis–Kings* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 80–81.

58. Which is something even Evil-merodach managed to do (2 Kgs 25:28)!

David is truly to “always (כל־הַיָּמִים) have a lamp before me” (1 Kgs 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:9): a *servant king*.

THE SHAPE OF THE NEW ISRAEL IN THE BOOK OF KINGS

I turn now to the second strand of hope that arises in exile: the prophetic ministry and the remnant. This hope is closely intertwined with the concept of Israel in the book because it is the remnant from which the new post-exilic Israel will emerge. The question of *who is truly Israel* in Kings is a difficult one, and most who address it conclude that neither the united monarchy, nor either the northern or southern kingdoms fully embodies what it means to be Israel.⁵⁹ However, the remnant has been neglected as a possible answer,⁶⁰ and I wish to redress that here. What does the ministry of the prophets to gather a remnant indicate about the nature of the new Israel?

Within Kings, the prophets are the channels through which Yahweh enacts blessing on his people. This includes the obvious instances of miraculous sustenance (e.g., 1 Kgs 17:8–16; 2 Kgs 2:15–22; 4:1–7; 4:38–44; 6:1–7), healing (2 Kgs 5:1–14), childbirth (2 Kgs 4:8–17), and resurrection (e.g., 1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 13:20–21). But it goes further than this. The prophets mediate the word of Yahweh, which makes them the means by which Yahweh works to accomplish his purpose in history.⁶¹ The narrative establishes this in several ways. The prophets alone have access to the word which comes (וַיִּהְיֶה) only to them (1 Kgs 6:11; 13:20; 16:1, 7; 17:2, 8; 18:1; 21:17, 28; 2 Kgs 20:4). Likewise, in the book of Kings the spirit of Yahweh rests only upon the prophets (1 Kgs 18:12; 22:24; 2 Kgs 2:16), and the prophets alone have access to heaven where Yahweh dwells (1 Kgs 22:19–23; 2 Kgs 2:11; 1 Kgs 8:30). The prophets are in the unique position both to address kings and to petition Yahweh (1 Kgs 13:6; 17:22; 2 Kgs 4:33; 6:17–18). After 1 Kgs 19, as we have seen, all of these blessings belong to the remnant rather than national Israel.

The theology of the temple in Solomon’s prayer of dedication

59. See Linville, *Israel in the Book of Kings*, 29–30.

60. This neglect is because most of the stories in Kings concerning prophetic figures are not considered Deuteronomistic, and scholarship on the meaning of Kings has been largely focussed on the message of the Deuteronomist. See Otto, “The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories,” 487–90 and Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 6–8.

61. I noted the connection between “word” language and Yahweh’s action in history above.

indicates that these blessings should be a function of the temple (1 Kgs 8:22–61), which is to say that they belong to national Judah. However, in the course of the narrative it becomes obvious that the temple will not often be used for this purpose. The kings of Judah are far more likely to plunder the temple than pray toward it (1 Kgs 14:26; 15:18; 2 Kgs 11:10). In any case the temple is unavailable to mediate Yahweh to the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 12:27). Even though the temple remains a potential source of blessing for Judah, in the course of the narrative what is promised through the temple usually occurs through the prophets:

| | Sought at the Temple | Delivered by Prophets |
|---------------|--|---|
| 1 Kgs 8:28–30 | God will hear cries and pleas | 1 Kgs 13:6; 17:22; 18:36–37; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 6:1–7 |
| 1 Kgs 8:31–32 | Condemning guilty, vindicating righteous | 1 Kgs 13:21–22; 14:7–16; 18:20–40; 20:35–43; 21:17–24; etc. |
| 1 Kgs 8:33–34 | Salvation after military defeat | 2 Kgs 7:1–2; 13:14–19 |
| 1 Kgs 8:35–36 | Rain in time of drought | 1 Kgs 18:41–46; 2 Kgs 3:17 |
| 1 Kgs 8:37–40 | Supply in time of famine | 1 Kgs 17:8–16; 2 Kgs 4:1–7, 38–44 |
| 1 Kgs 8:41–43 | Prayers of foreigners heard | 1 Kgs 17:8–16; 2 Kgs 5:1–14 |
| 1 Kgs 8:44–45 | Victory in battle | 1 Kgs 20:13, 28; 2 Kgs 7:1–20 |
| 1 Kgs 8:46–53 | Compassion in exile | |

Who then is Israel within Kings? Is it those who have the temple or those who receive the blessings of the temple? For the exilic readers who are without a temple, it is surely the latter. After 1 Kgs 19, the message of hope in the book of Kings is to be found within the remnant who receive Yahweh’s provision and blessing, and not within nationalist Israel and Judah, even if these two groups overlap at times.

What shape does this new Israel take in the story of Kings? There are several clues in the narrative, the most prominent of which is the role of faith, which is the correct response to the prophetic word.⁶² Nowhere in the historical literature does the concept of faith arise so frequently as 2 Kgs 18–19, where it is closely linked with deliverance of the remnant (2 Kgs 19:30–31).⁶³ All eight instances of the verb “trust”

62. It has become clear that Israel is unable to yield *obedience*, which is the correct response to covenant.

63. This is the only other explicit occurrence of remnant in 1–2 Kings.

(בטח) in Kings occur in these chapters, and nine of the 10 instances of “deliver” (נצל).⁶⁴

The issue of these chapters is Isaiah’s assurance to Hezekiah in the face of Sennacherib’s imposing army, and this conflict is framed in covenant-promise terms. The Rabshakeh’s speech uses language highly suggestive of Deuteronomy to confront Hezekiah with an alternative covenant: each man at rest under his vine and fig tree, in a land of grain and wine, olives and honey (2 Kgs 18:31–32; Deut 8:7–9), bringing life and not death (2 Kgs 18:32, Deut 30:19–20).⁶⁵ Hezekiah’s choice is between the covenant of Yahweh on the one hand and the covenant of the Rabshakeh on the other (2 Kgs 18:19–25). It is a powerful strategy because the very presence of the Rabshakeh outside Jerusalem reminds Judah that they are *not* recipients of the blessings of the Mosaic covenant (see Deut 28:7). Perhaps they would do better with Assyria?

Isaiah’s assurance to Hezekiah, however, follows a different strategy. Rather than assuring Hezekiah of covenant blessing, he attacks the pride of Assyria (2 Kgs 19:21–28) and reminds Hezekiah of Yahweh’s promise to David (2 Kgs 19:34). In an event remarkable for its peculiarity, Hezekiah listens to Isaiah and turns to Yahweh in faith (2 Kgs 19:6–7; 19:14–19; see also 2 Kgs 18:5).⁶⁶ The ministry of Isaiah results in deliverance for Hezekiah and the postponement of judgment for the sins of Judah (2 Kgs 20:16–19). The reader of the book now understands that the new Israel is the remnant that have faith in Yahweh’s promise (2 Kgs 19:30–31).

Glimmers of hope for national Israel and Judah occasionally occur this way (e.g., 1 Kgs 20:1–25), but for the most part the kings of the two nations trust in anything other than Yahweh, thus finding themselves opposed to the ministry of the prophets. While the two nations decline, and while those with power refuse to listen, the prophets go to the powerless (e.g., 1 Kgs 17:8–24; 2 Kgs 4). The Deuteronomic blessing of oil, food, and life (Deut 7:13, 32:47) comes through the word of the prophets to the desperate and the weak (1 Kgs 17:14, 23–24; 2 Kgs

64. The lexical peculiarity can be explained if these chapters are the product of Isaiah’s hand rather than the compiler of Kings. Isaiah 36–39 is nearly identical to 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37. John W. Olley (“‘Trust in the Lord’: Hezekiah, Kings and Isaiah,” *TynBul* [1999]: 77) ascribes them to a wisdom school operating in close proximity to Isaiah in Hezekiah’s court. Even so, their inclusion here plays an essential role in the narrative of Kings.

65. For an extended comparison, see Dominic Rudman, “Is the Rabshakeh also among the Prophets? A Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings XVIII 17–35,” *VT* 50 (2000): 106–9.

66. This is the first time in the narrative since Solomon’s dedication that the temple has been used for its intended purpose of prayer.

4:32–35) and to the remnant who would not bow the knee to Baal (2 Kgs 2:19–22; 4:38–44; 6:1–6).

In the prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha it matters very little whether these people are Israelite or not, as the Naaman narrative demonstrates (2 Kgs 5, see also 1 Kgs 17:8–24). It is a story of reversals. An oppressor of Israel become one of the oppressed, powerful Naaman becomes helpless with leprosy (2 Kgs 5:1). His restoration involves learning to trust the powerless (2 Kgs 5:4, 13) rather than appealing to the powerful (2 Kgs 5:5–7, 11–12). Naaman becomes like a child (2 Kgs 5:14) and becomes a servant himself (עַבַּד is used five times in 2 Kgs 5:15–18). In doing so he joins the new Israel of those who are blessed by Yahweh (2 Kgs 5:15–17). It is significant that Naaman leaves with a gift of the land; not because Yahweh is localised in Israel as some have supposed,⁶⁷ but because the land is the promised inheritance of Israel, as Naboth protested to Ahab (1 Kgs 21:4).⁶⁸

By 2 Kgs 5 the kingdom of promise is now clearly found amongst the remnant, who are the servants, the humble, the poor, and the lowly. As Naaman becomes one of those, he too inherits the earth, and hope for blessing comes to the Gentiles. This is not to imply that Naaman becomes a national Israelite; clearly he does not. It is as a Gentile that he comes to inherit the Israelite blessing, but this too is Deuteronomic: the blessings of Yahweh go to the Gentiles when the wrath of God turns against national Israel (Deut 32:21).

The curious and short account of Elisha's death, or at least his bones (2 Kgs 13:20–21), is also noteworthy in the discussion of the new Israel.⁶⁹ There are strong textual links with the narrator's comment that follows it (2 Kgs 13:22–23), so that the placement of the two becomes highly suggestive of exilic themes.⁷⁰ The word "cast" in v. 21 (שָׁלַח) is the same word as used in v. 23, and throughout the book, to refer to Yahweh's action of removing Israel from the land (2 Kgs 17:20; see also 1 Kgs 9:7; 2 Kgs 24:20). On its own, the repetition of this word is

67. E.g., Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 67; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 66. The book of Kings itself rejects this conclusion by portraying Yahweh as sovereign over foreign kings and nations, anointing them (1 Kgs 19:15), and using them for his purposes (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:7–18).

68. See Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 154–55; Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, 195–97.

69. The episode has confused commentators who see it as essentially humorous or inexplicable (e.g., Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 432–33).

70. See Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 184.

unremarkable. However, 2 Kgs 13:22–23 is also a very unusual passage. The narrator gives numerous reminders that Yahweh would not destroy the southern kingdom completely because of his promise to David, but this is the only equivalent statement for the northern kingdom. This is also the only recollection within Kings of the covenant with Abraham that was inherited equally by the North and the South. Despite the use of the term “covenant” (ברית), the context closely mirrors the way the book has spoken of the promise to David, so this sole reference to the Abrahamic covenant provides the same basis for hope in the North as the Davidic promise does in the South. By it the reader understands that the northern kingdom was also an heir to a promise and a future, despite its covenant disobedience and alienation from the Davidic promise. It is not simply a narrative foil by which the progress of the South might be assessed.

What would have the “cast off” readers in exile understood when the northern kingdom is “cast” from Yahweh’s presence (2 Kgs 17:20)? It is only because of 2 Kgs 13:22–23 that they have been reminded of the promises to Abraham. By its juxtaposition with 2 Kgs 13:20–21 they have also been reminded of the power of God to raise to life those who were once “cast off.”⁷¹

In a sophisticated way, the book moves beyond a simple message of either hope for national restoration or explanation of destruction. Nor is it hope conditioned on repentance. Rather, with the other exilic literature, Kings portrays both a certain and complete destruction according to the curses of the Mosaic covenant, and a sure hope based theologically in resurrection,⁷² which occurs historically through the preservation of a humble and faithful remnant⁷³ so that the promises made to Abraham and David may be fulfilled.

CONCLUSIONS

The theology of the book of Kings is underpinned by two promises of

71. There are several resurrections in the book of Kings. It is the narrative placement of this unit that gives this one its symbolic significance.

72. This is a shared theological theme with Ezekiel (37:1–14) and with the prophetic literature more generally. See Donald E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death and Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 1–21. McConville (“1 Kings VIII,” 79) suggests that the message of Kings takes a “different cue” from Deuteronomy concerning the issue of hope for the exiles than do the prophetic books, but there is much more in common than he suggests.

73. See Zeph 3:11–12 and Hab 2:4.

God: on the one hand, certain hope for David's dynasty, and on the other, certain destruction for disobedience to the Mosaic covenant. The narrative of Kings explores this tension in order to see how these two seemingly contradictory promises might be reconciled, and what, if any, hope might be offered for the first readers of the book in the Babylonian exile.

The book forbids the conclusion that either of the promises undoes the other, so there is only one resolution left. The curses must be enacted for covenant breach, as indeed it had been for the first readers of the book, which then leaves only hope that the promise might be fulfilled. Thus, the exile becomes a symbol of hope in itself: that now Yahweh might begin something new.

The messiah that Kings expects is unlike any of the Davidic kings in Judah's or Israel's history because, despite having abundant blessing from Yahweh, their kingdoms failed. Rather, the release of Jehoiachin during exile confirms that Yahweh is able to raise a Davidic heir even without David's throne. Israel's exilic situation does not preclude the fulfilment of Yahweh's promise, and so the book encourages the exiles to hope for the appearance of a righteous, covenant-keeping king, even from exile, who will inherit the promise to David.

Likewise, the nationalistic kingdoms of Israel and Judah have failed, but the ministries of the prophetic figures of the book have shown that exile is not Yahweh's final word for Israel. The book expects a remnant who will survive the coming destruction, through whom Yahweh's new Israel might yet be raised from the dead. But this new Israel will not look like the power structures of national Israel. Instead, they will be the widows, the orphans, the humble, and even the Gentiles. They will be those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. They will be those who hear the word of Yahweh as it comes through the prophetic ministry and respond with faith.

To conclude, that hope in the book of Kings is shaped in this way certainly moves us beyond the interests of the so called Deuteronomist. Indeed, if it is correct, it may require a reassessment of some of the proposed literary history of the book, which after all relies heavily on the presupposition of the book's purpose.⁷⁴ But it does give a reading of the book that is more closely aligned with the theology of its contemporary exilic literature, as well as one that plays a definite role in the canonical shape of Scripture and the flow of the overarching story of

74. Janzen has recently also called for a revision of the source-critical hypothesis in light of his more synchronic reading ("The Sins of Josiah and Hezekiah," 370).

the Bible. The hope is firmly placed in God, for every human king and institution in the book has failed. Kings becomes a story of the hope that remains after Israel moves from the nationalistic and glorious roots of Solomon to the reality of exile—a scattered people and a subjugated king. But such a reality is not antithetical to the purpose of God for Israel. In fact, it is cogent with God's overall plan. The book tells the story of how the kingdom of Israel might move from Solomon's kingdom to something greater than Solomon; to a people who will not bow the knee to Baal. It tells the story of how Yahweh might yet, even from exile, raise up a servant king.