

INTRODUCTION TO 1 and 2 KINGS

by

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Note: Author's introduction in *The First Book of the Kings* (Cambridge: University Press, 1890). The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized, and long paragraphs have been divided.

I.

Title and Divisions, Date, Author, Canonicity, and Sources of the Books of Kings

What we name 1 and 2 Kings was anciently only one book, called by the Jews "the Book of Kings." It was broken into two parts by the Greek translators of the Septuagint, who did the same by the book of Samuel and the book of Chronicles, which also at first were both single books. The division between 1 and 2 Kings is made in the middle of the short reign of Ahaziah, king of Israel, a severance which would never have been made by the compiler. Having made two parts out of Samuel and two out of the Kings, the Greek translators named the four portions thus formed the first, second, third and fourth books of the kingdoms, or, of the kings. The Latin versions followed the divisions but not the names of the Greek. The two portions of Samuel they called 1 and 2 Samuel, and our books 1 and 2 Kings. Jerome, though he knew that each of these pairs was but one book, did not attempt to change titles which had been so long accepted. And the whole of the Western Church has followed the Vulgate.

The Jews did not for many centuries adopt the division which had thus become current among Christians. They were led to do so at last for readiness of reference in the frequently recurring controversies between the Christians and themselves. The earliest adoption by the Jews of the Christian chapters in the Old Testament has generally been attributed to Rabbi Isaac Nathan, who began a Concordance in 1437. But in the Cambridge University library there is a Hebrew Ms. of at least a century earlier date, in which the Christian divisions are marked all the way through. Into printed Hebrew Bibles they were introduced by Daniel Bomberg in 1518.

To the date of the compilation of the Book of Kings we are guided by the latest events that are mentioned in it. The last chapter (2 Kings 25) concludes with the 37th year of Jehoiachin's captivity, when Evil-Merodach released him from prison. This happened B.C. 562. But this last chapter and a few verses (18-20) of chapter 24 are identical with chapter 52 of the prophecy of Jeremiah. There however the closing words of chapter 51, "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah" plainly show that what follows was added by one who thought it no integral part of the prophecy, but added it to complete the historical notices found in other parts of that book, and added it most likely from this Book of Kings. We may therefore conclude that this book was compiled after B.C. 562.

But the compiler has no word, even of hope, to record concerning the final deliverance of

the nation from captivity. That deliverance commenced with the decree of Cyrus, B.C. 536, though the final migrations did not take place till the days of Nehemiah nearly a century later, B.C. 445. Had he known of any movement in the direction of a return, the compiler of Kings would surely have made mention of it. He is cheered, apparently, at the close of his work by the clemency shown to Jehoiachin. He would hardly have passed over any agitation for the national redemption without a word of notice. The book was therefore finished before B.C. 536, and its date lies between that year and B.C. 561.

Who the compiler was we have no means of deciding. The Jewish tradition ascribes it to Jeremiah. But this is exceedingly improbable. The closing events recorded took place in Babylon. But at the overthrow of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was carried by the anti-Babylonian faction into Egypt (Jer. 43:6,7), and after his arrival there we know not what befell him. His outspoken prediction, however, of evils to come on Egypt and on those who sought shelter there, was not likely to go unpunished by the Jews who had brought him with them. Jewish writings speak of his escape to Babylon. But the statement is merely an opinion in support of the current tradition. Nothing whatever is known of his fate, and there is no ground whatever, beyond tradition, for supposing him to have been the compiler of the Kings.

In the Hebrew Bible the book stands as part of the division called by the Jews *'the Earlier Prophets'*. From the Jews it was received into the Christian Canon, and there has never been any question about its acceptance.

The compiler specifies three sources from which his narrative is drawn:

1. The Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41) as the authority for Solomon's reign.
2. The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, mentioned *fifteen* times: for the acts of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:29); of Abijam (15:7); of Asa (15:23); of Jehoshaphat (22:45); of Joram (2 Kings 8:23); of Joash (12:19); of Amaziah (14:18); of Azariah (15:6); of Jotham (15:36); of Ahaz (16:19); of Hezekiah (20:20); of Manasseh (21:17); of Amon (21:25); of Josiah (23:28) and of Jehoiakim (24:5).
3. The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel¹, quoted *seventeen* times: in the history of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (1 Kings 14:19); of Nadab (15:31); of Baasha (16:5); of Elah (16:14); of Zimri (16:20); of Omri (16:27); of Ahab (22:39); of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:18); of Jehu (10:34); of Jehoahaz (13:8); of Joash (13:12); of Jeroboam II (14:28); of Zachariah (15:11); of Shallum (15:15); of Menahem (15:21); of Pekahiah (15:26); and of Pekah (15:31).

We have but to turn to the Books of Chronicles to find out the character of the writings to which these three general titles are given. The Chronicler adheres so closely to the language of Kings throughout the history of Solomon that a comparison at once convinces us that he drew his narrative from the same documents as the earlier compiler. But he (2 Chr. 9:29) describes his authorities as "the Book" (R.V. history) "of Nathan the prophet, the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and the visions of Iddo the seer."

We find here the key to the origin and character of all the three sources of information accessible to the compiler of Kings. The Book of the Acts of Solomon comprised three works

¹ For simplicity, we have throughout this introduction capitalized the words *Book* and *Kings* when referring to these sources.

written by prophets contemporary with Solomon and which, embracing the whole period of his reign, were naturally soon gathered into one treatise and called by one collective name. The prophetic spirit and the religious drift of all we read in the history is thus accounted for. In the notes it has been remarked that the whole purpose of the narrative is to picture Solomon's life a success, and the building of the Temple as acceptable, insofar only as the one was led in the fear of Jehovah and the other stood as a token of obedience to the divine will; and that when Solomon's decline began, it is God who is represented as raising up the adversaries against him. A record of such a character is the composition of no mere historiographer, but bears on the face of it the imprint of prophetic hands.

When we turn to the second authority which the compiler quotes, the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, and compare with it the works cited by the Chronicler, the same conclusion is arrived at. "The Book" (R.V. histories) "of Shemaiah the prophet and Iddo the seer" are quoted by him (2 Chr. 12:15) as containing the events of the reign of Rehoboam; and his narrative, drawn from thence, is practically identical with the record in Kings. The same may be said concerning Abijam's reign, for which the Chronicler refers (2 Chr. 13:22) to "the story" (R.V. commentary) "of the prophet Iddo." The authority which he gives for Jehoshaphat's reign (2 Chr. 2:34) is "the Book" (R.V. history) "of Jehu, the son of Hanani," and after this reference a sentence follows, translated in R.V. thus: "which is inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel."

This is precisely the explanation to which all the evidence tends. The prophets wrote their several books; and as time went on, they *were taken up* and included in the large collection which at last acquired the title "the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel (or Judah)." We find it noticed further (2 Chr. 26:22) that Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz was the writer of the history of Azariah (Uzziah) and also (2 Chr. 32:32) of the acts and good deeds of Hezekiah. But here again it is stated expressly that "the vision of Isaiah" is included in "the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel." Once more concerning Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, the Chronicler tells us that his acts are to be found partly "in the Book of the Kings of Israel" (2 Chr. 33:18) and in the following verse that other things concerning him are written "in the history of Hozai", as the R.V. renders, but the LXX which the A.V. follows translated "among the sayings of the seers."

With regard to the other kings whose history is recorded in Chronicles, the writer is content with referring to "the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel," as he does (2 Chr. 16:11) for Asa, and (2 Chr. 25:28) for Amaziah, and (2 Chr. 28:26) for Ahaz; or, with the names of the kingdoms in reverse order, to "the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah," as (2 Chr. 27:7) for Jotham, (2 Chr. 35:27) for Josiah, and (2 Chr. 36:8) for Jehoiakim. In one case, that of Joash (2 Chr. 24:27) he merely calls his authority "the story" (R.V. commentary) "of the book of the kings." The three modes of reference last mentioned seem to indicate that before the Chronicler undertook his work, the process of combination had gone on so far as to convert all these separate "commentaries," "histories," "visions," and "stories" into one comprehensive work which could be cited indifferently as "the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel," or "of Israel and Judah," or simply as "the book of the kings."

Of the kings of Israel (except in one or two places where their acts are interwoven with and affect the history of the kingdom of Judah) the Chronicler makes no mention. We may safely conclude, however, from the way in which he so often speaks of the "Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah," that he had before him their annals also, though it was foreign to

his purpose to record much of them. And the whole history of both kingdoms had been put together on the same plan and out of like materials, these materials being the writings of the prophets who flourished during the several reigns.

We need not then be surprised to find large sections of "the Book of Kings" devoted to the lives of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha, and to the history of Micaiah's appearance before Ahab. The writings of the prophets were not exhausted by the history of the two kingdoms. And no theme would more commend itself to the prophetic scribe than the mighty works of those two champions, who stood forth at a time when the house of Ahab had led Israel into heathen idolatry, to make known in Israel's darkest days by action and speech that Jehovah had still "a prophet in Israel."

It will be seen then that the Book of Kings must consist in great part of the writings of those who were contemporary with the events of which they wrote, and that we cannot treat the book as a work of the date when the Compiler lived. And being gathered in the main from prophetic histories, there will naturally be a similarity of motive pervading the whole. To the Compiler we may ascribe those portions which compose the framework of each particular reign, i.e., the accounts of the accession and parentage and of the death and character of the several kings, in which there is exhibited hardly any variation of form. But the date of all which is not of this character must be judged of from internal evidence. The uniform setting of the whole work is important to be noticed as it is a proof of the unity of the composition. To its present form the work has been brought all by the same hand.

V.

Character of the Book of Kings and its Relation to other Books of the Old Testament

The Book of Kings was clearly meant to be a continuation of the Books of Samuel. The writer alludes continually in the life of Solomon to the promises which had been made by God to David and which are mentioned in the second of those books. A son was to succeed David whose kingdom should be established of the Lord, who should build a house for the name of Jehovah, to whom God would be a father, and from whom the mercy of the Lord should not depart (2 Sam. 7).

To show that this prophecy was fulfilled is the object of the Compiler of the Book of Kings, and whatever does not conduce thereto is passed over with but little notice. There elapsed, no doubt, a considerable time between the plague in Jerusalem with which the Books of Samuel conclude and the feeble age of David described in the opening paragraph of this Book. But to give historical events in their full and complete order is no part of our writer's aim.

We can see this from every portion of his work. He opens his narrative with so much, and no more, of the story of David's closing life as serves to introduce the accession of Solomon, while to the history of that monarch in whom the promises made to David had so conspicuous a fulfillment, he devotes about one quarter of his whole work. Solomon's glory and prosperity are set forth in the early chapters, and he is exhibited as the king whom God had set up over Israel to do judgment and justice. While he walked in this way it was well with him; but on his decline therefrom, chastisements divinely sent came heavy upon him

and upon his son. Yet God would preserve a lamp unto David; and over and over again we are reminded that this promise was not forgotten (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19).

After the revolt of the ten tribes, and when a forbidden form of worship had been adopted in the northern kingdom, the history follows Israel in her long line of wicked princes till sin has brought destruction; while the fortunes of David's house are traced in such wise as to keep prominently before us the ever-preserved succession. And in the closing sentences of the Book we are told of one of the royal line still remaining to whom, though he is still a prisoner in Babylon, mercy and kindness is shown by the successor of that monarch who had led him away captive. "What God hath promised to the house of David He has thus fulfilled," is the theme of the Book; and except where political and military affairs illustrate his subject, the Compiler concerns himself very little with them. From a comparison with the Chronicles, we find that he has omitted whole sections of such history which lay ready to his hand.

Besides this exposition of the fulfillment of God's promises to David, the writer introduces very few other subjects with any detail, save the histories of Elijah and Elisha. These synchronize with the darkest period of the history of the ten tribes, when Baal-worship had been superadded to the worship of the calves; and they seem to be specially dealt on, that it may be made manifest how great was God's long-suffering to Israel and that His promise to Jeroboam, made in as large terms as that to David (1 Kings 11:38), was only rendered void by a determined persistence in evil doing.

The Book of Kings, then, is not a history properly so called but a selection from the historical documents of the nation, made with a definite purpose. That the Compiler makes his extracts most faithfully we have many indications--notably that frequently-occurring phrase "unto this day," a phrase true enough when the original documents from which our Compiler drew were written, but altogether inexact in B.C. 562, and only preserved because of the entire faithfulness to his copy of him who made the extracts. And the indications of such faithfulness are of the utmost importance when we come to estimate other characteristics of the Book.

The most important question of this kind which arises concerns the relation of the Book of Kings to the Pentateuch. In seeking to give an answer to such a question, we have to remark how thoroughly in nearly every chapter the thread and tissue of the narrative is interwoven with the thoughts and phraseology of the Books of Moses. Such a chapter as that which contains Solomon's dedication prayer is largely expressed in the words of Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Had that chapter stood alone it might have been ascribed to some later writer familiar with the language of the Mosaic books; and if those books or a large portion of them were of late composition, the dedication prayer might also be set down as of late date. But it is not one single chapter which re-echoes the Mosaic diction. Resemblances of a like kind exist throughout in considerable abundance. And it is hard to believe that the Compiler of Kings, taking in hand documents which existed long before his day--some as far back as the time of Solomon himself--changed their whole character by introducing language which, according to some, was not existent before the days of king Josiah. The work is not of such a patchwork character.

We cannot read the long address of David to Solomon--to "be strong and keep the charge of the Lord, and to walk in his ways, &c." (1 Kings 2:2,3), or Solomon's injunction concerning

Joab's death--"that it should take away the innocent blood" (2:31), or the same king's description of his people--"one which God had chosen, a great people that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude" (3:8), without feeling that the thoughts and language of Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy were very familiar to writers of these chapters; chapters which are due in all probability in their substance not to the Compiler of the Books of Kings, but to Nathan the seer, Ahijah the Shilonite and Iddo the seer, quoted (2 Chr. 9:29) as the several authorities for the records of Solomon's reign.

Again in such a history as that of the trial and execution of Naboth, the whole narrative carries us back to the laws, manners and customs which have their rise in the Books of Moses. So too do the frequent phrases which occur of such a kind as, that "the eyes and heart of God shall be perpetually upon His house"; that offending Israel "shall be a proverb and a byword among all people, so that men shall say, Why has the Lord done thus unto this land"; that Israel shall not intermarry with the heathen, "Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in to you, for surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods."

Again that proverbial phrase occurring several times over, "him that is shut up and left in Israel," has its source in Deuteronomy (32:36), whence also comes the phrase "to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger *with their vanities.*" Allusions to the feast of the new moon (2 Kings 4:23); to the meal offerings in the temple (2 Kings 3:20); to the money of the guilt offerings and of the sin offerings as something which by the law belonged to the priests (2 Kings 12:16)--all bring to mind the words of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, where these regulations are recorded.

So too with the recital of the idolatrous practices of Ahaz (2 Kings 16). It is entirely couched in the expressions which are found in the book of Deuteronomy, while that solemn enumeration (2 Kings 17) of those offences for which the northern kingdom was destroyed abounds with the phrases which are to be met with in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

If the faithfulness of the Compiler is to be accepted as equally displayed throughout his whole work, and there is no reason why it should not be, [then] the records from which he drew had been written by those to whom the language found in our present Books of Moses was abundantly familiar.