

FIRST AND SECOND KINGS

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INTRODUCTION

The Books of Kings cover about five hundred years of the history of Judah and Israel. They start with the last days of King David, the founder of Israel, and end with the last days of Jerusalem and its destruction by the Babylonians. The long history of the “Two Kingdoms,” sometimes also called the “United and Divided Kingdoms,” like any human history, contains moments of glory and moments of decay. Such reflection on the past, like any, represents one of the greatest challenges every nation must face. One nation can be ashamed of its own past, another can boast of its past glory. One nation learns from it, the other refuses to face it. One nation presents its past as honestly and faithfully as possible, the other manipulates it. For one nation, its own past becomes a nightmare; for the other, it is a source of deep spiritual or political awakening. The Books of Kings are best viewed as the intellectual endeavor of ancient scribes to deal with high points and low points of their history.

AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND AUDIENCE

The view that the Books of Kings were written by one author who lived and wrote in the exilic period is no longer sustainable in the view of numerous studies on the redaction of this literary corpus. The history of Judah and Israel and their mutual relations are presented through the pen of numerous scribes who lived in different periods. The scribes used various sources and did not hesitate to modify them or to add their own interpretation of the past. As a result, the Books of Kings contain not so much an “objective description” of facts concerning the history of Israel, but rather the scribal interpretation of that past. So when we study the Books of Kings, we are not gaining access to the historical events directly, but rather accessing “the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians” (Furay and Salevouris 1988 223). For this reason, it is better to see the Books of Kings as historiographic literature rather than a manual of the history of Israel. The essence of any historiographic work is not only the presentation of bare

facts, but the examination of how past events were selected—which were omitted and which were presented in detail. This becomes more complex when we realize that there is no single and unified interpretation of the past in 1 and 2 Kings, but rather constantly changing interpretations of the past, that is, different historiographic models and schools. Before we start reading the Books of Kings, we should keep in mind that we are immersing ourselves into tangled and often contradictory opinions and schools, which for better or worse deal with the past of both kingdoms.

Similarly, we cannot speak about a single audience or group for which the books were written. Since scribes and redactors constantly edited and updated the collection, 1 and 2 Kings contain multiple interpretations of the Two Kingdoms, which were aimed at answering the questions and concerns of their peers. So the questions of the Judeans living in the moments of glory during Hezekiah’s and Josiah’s period were different from those of the people living in Assyrian and Babylonian exile, or those in the Persian period when the returnees from the exile started rebuilding the destroyed capital and temple. In sum, new political and religious conditions generated new questions that in their turn required new answers. Some answers were incorporated into 1 and 2 Kings and were reworked by new redactors attentive to concerns and questions generated by the political, social, and religious situations of a later period. This process of a continuous reinterpretation of the past in the light of later questions and dilemmas did not stop with the formation of the canon, but continued with the church fathers and rabbis, who used the Israelite past to address the problems of their present. Consequently, we can speak of a continual process of reinterpreting the past lasting till now. This process will in fact continue while human beings are interested in finding answers to modern challenges in the past of the elect nation.

To understand this ongoing process of reinterpretation of the Israelite past, it is helpful to divide it into four periods: (1) formation of the content; (2) formation of the text; (3) rewriting the past according to new standards; and (4) reinterpreting the past in accordance with the needs of a given community.

FORMATION OF THE CONTENT

Despite different and, for the nonspecialist, seemingly contradictory theories on the formation of the Books of Kings, the books had to be put into writing in certain moments, and authors had to decide what would be included and what would be omitted. In other words, certain scribal groups had to make decisions regarding the content of 1 and 2 Kings.

Since Martin Noth's hypothesis of a single redactor responsible for the composition of the Deuteronomistic History proposed in the 1940s, several more nuanced models have been advanced. Among the theories focusing on the strata of the biblical text, the theories that have gained the most adherents are those proposing double or triple redaction. The double redaction, which is often termed Deuteronomist 1 and Deuteronomist 2, was advanced by Cross, Dutcher-Walls, and Knoppers. It competes with a parallel model advocating a triple redaction. The triple redaction theory, known also as a Schichten model (German "layers"), has been advanced by Smend, Dietrich, and Veijola; these scholars propose three strata of the Books of Kings: Deuteronomist-History, Deuteronomist-Prophecy, and Deuteronomist-Law. A different model proposed by Gray proposes as possible sources Northern and Southern textual material, interventions of a compiler and of a redactor. Recently, more complex models combine the pluses of the previous three groups. Among the most prominent scholars in this field that can be mentioned are Rofé, Römer, Lohfink, Campbell, Halpern, Carr, and Schmid.

Even though full agreement as to the division of the text into textual strata will probably never be reached, the diachronic approach dominating Western exegesis for the last two centuries has managed to survive the doubts, suspicions, and even attacks of numerous scholars. Despite the diversity of the opinions, there is scholarly agreement that the content of the historical books was shaped and reshaped over several centuries, reflecting the theological, political, and cultural trends of the compilers and redactors.

The literary theory has been enriched by recent Mesopotamian studies. Numerous clay tablets containing writings from the first millennium BCE give us not only the possibility to reconstruct some historical events, but also to see how Mesopotamian historical writings were compiled, edited, and abridged. The advantage of the Mesopotamian sources lies in the fact that we do possess not only the final redaction of historical narratives but the numerous fragments and versions that went into the final redaction. We can therefore follow how a text developed, but also how it was incorporated into the Babylonian Chronicles

some centuries later. Comparative studies on the formation of the Books of Kings and of Mesopotamian literary corpora show that many techniques postulated by biblical source criticism were well-known techniques that the Mesopotamian scribes employed for historical texts in the first millennium. Generally, we can observe that the scribes felt quite free to reword, abridge, lengthen, or elaborate the *Urtext* (or original text). The Mesopotamian scribes freely combined different textual materials that originally existed independently or added direct speeches, divine oracles, comments, or their own evaluation of failures and disasters. They also produced different versions of the narrative that the next generation of scribes faithfully copied. Similarly, study of the diachronic methods showed that biblical scribes felt free to insert later additions to the text or combine originally independent sources.

Some texts fell into oblivion, others gained more importance and became almost standardized. Moreover, sources used by the compilers often became less important than a new composition. This conclusion can shed light on the relation between the sources and the final text of the Bible. In this sense, the canonical and hence the inspired texts are not only the original sources but also new compositions.

The result of this phase of the formation of 1 and 2 Kings was a text that compiled diverse sources and narratives. Consequently, the method best suited for studying the processes underlying this phase is the historical-critical method. It aims at understanding the formation of the content of the biblical text and at separating different layers and sources that were incorporated into the final text.

FORMATION OF THE TEXT

A new wave of textual criticism has recently become dominant among biblical scholars studying 1 and 2 Kings. This interest has influenced new editions of the Bible, such as the Oxford Hebrew Bible, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, critical editions of Greek, Syrian, Armenian, and other manuscripts. This new wave of textual criticism reflects the second phase of the formation of 1 and 2 Kings: to have the content of the Books of Kings fixed did not mean that the text became fossilized and untouchable. Once again, a parallel from the ancient Near Eastern world can illuminate this stage of the development of the biblical text. Whereas legal and ritual texts functioned as ritual objects in Mesopotamia and were quite faithfully transmitted, the contrary was true for Mesopotamian historical texts. The scribes "felt free to change the order of certain events, to omit certain material they considered superfluous, and to reorder or exchange with contextually synonymous equivalents

various lexemes and phrases in the exemplar before him.” (Hobson 2012, 32). This freedom of the scribes can also be observed in the multiplicity of the manuscripts in which the Books of Kings have been preserved. The numerous manuscripts of the Books of Kings preserved in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Greek demonstrate that the text continued to be developed. Some changes represent only variants, alternative forms of the text.

At this level, the original sources that the scribes used to form the content of the books became less important and had little bearing on the understanding of the text. Different narratives and sources enriched by compilers’ comments and insertions represented a kind of a compiled text that became independent from its original sources and had its own life. The Mesopotamian scribes copying the compiled text, however, still felt free to clarify and to rearrange it. This conclusion has a significant importance for understanding the interpretation of 1 and 2 Kings. Biblical scribes translating the Hebrew text into other languages sometimes used texts different (German *Vorlage*, “the version being copied”) from the MT we possess now. Moreover, scribes felt free to smooth out textual problems, to rearrange textual material from different sources, and to insert new material unknown in MT. As a result, ancient scribes and later copyists produced numerous manuscripts throughout the centuries. Modern scholars thus have at their disposal hundreds of textual witnesses. Using appropriate tools, we can with a certain level of probability reconstruct the *Urtext*.

However important the earliest reconstructable text might be for modern scholars, it had less or no importance for a given community. The normative value of textual variants is not to be undervalued. Some communities accepted as their inspired text one textual variant, whereas others accepted another variant. Thus, for example the Antiochian community studied and prayed the Antiochian Greek text, whereas the Palestinian community used for their teaching and exhortation their own Greek translation of the text. In sum, during the second phase the “compiled text” was copied and partially edited. The earliest reconstructable texts were copied and the manuscripts were used by communities. Consequently, a manuscript such as Codex Alexandrinus, which from the scholarly point of view has less value, became the normative text for the Alexandrian community.

REWRITING THE PAST ACCORDING TO NEW STANDARDS OF THE TEXT

A recent trend in the study of 1 and 2 Kings concerns what is called the “rewritten Bible.” This term is often used when scholars speak about the Chronicles,

which are a later version of Samuel–Kings. Recent scholars have studied certain features of 1 and 2 Chronicles, such as their language, historical questions, literary issues, and theology. Rewriting of the Bible did not concern itself with only the history of ancient Israel, but also its laws and foundational stories. Some deuterocanonical books and pseudepigrapha also refer to some historical events described in the Books of Kings.

These studies showed that, on the one hand, the Books of Kings had different textual variants (phase 2) and, on the other, scribes composed new texts inspired by the Books of Kings. Thus, the Chronicler living in a different historical period felt the need to narrate the history of his nation from a different point of view. So he added new pieces of information that were not included in the Books of Kings. Moreover, he reinterpreted some major events of the history as well as some prominent figures. The best example is the figure of King Manasseh. In 2 Kings 21–24, Manasseh is the worst king in the history of Judah, and is held ultimately responsible for the fall of Jerusalem. In 2 Chronicles 33, however, Manasseh repented and the Chronicler transferred the role of the worst king to Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28). Similarly reinterpreted were David and Solomon. Moreover, some events were enlarged, such as the reform of King Hezekiah that is described in 2 Kgs 18:3–4; it occupies three chapters in the Chronicles (2 Chronicles 29–31).

The two best-known rewritten versions of 1 and 2 Kings are 1–2 Chronicles and Josephus’s *Antiquities of the Jews*. Both used independent sources, both offered new interpretations of the past, both introduced significant changes, and both modified theological interpretations of the standard events. However, whereas the former became a normative version and became part of the canon, the latter, despite its higher literary and historical quality, never made it into the canon.

REINTERPRETING THE PAST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEEDS OF A GIVEN COMMUNITY

The multiplicity of the textual witnesses and the rewritten versions is only one aspect of the development of the Books of Kings. The need to reinterpret the past according to the new challenges of the present time and the attempts to illuminate the present in light of the past were an ongoing process that cannot be limited to one historical period. Each generation reconnects in its own way to the past of ancient Israel. From this perspective, we can discern two major streams of reinterpretations of 1 and 2 Kings. The first

stream tends to reconstruct the past with the goal of having a description of the events that is as objective as possible. Thus, we can observe a multiplicity of histories of ancient Israel. This is not a new discovery of modern scholars; it has always been present in the history of interpretation. The reconstructed history of ancient Israel is not only an inspiration for the problems and dilemmas of the modern age, but it also reflects the religious and ideological debates of the modern age. Evidently, such an enterprise is not without problems and tensions. Thus, some scholars consider the Books of Kings only as a late creation to justify the status of the Judean community in the Persian and Hellenistic period, whereas others try to use the Books of Kings as a historical source.

The second trend is less interested in an objective reconstruction of historical events. Rather, the biblical texts are used to illustrate the history of salvation, to interpret present events in the light of the past, and to justify by means of history certain political and theological claims, and so on. An excellent example is the way in which the episode of Solomon and queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10) was interpreted. Venerable Bede (seventh century CE) connected the story with Psalm 45, which describes the Lord as desired by princesses. In his interpretation, both queens were from Ethiopia, both brought or sent their gifts to Jerusalem, and both fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 45. Their acts became the symbol of what the church should do, that is, to bring gifts of the virtues and of faith to the LORD. Art and music go even further: the queen of Sheba, after arriving in Jerusalem, fell in love with Solomon, and artists saw her as the composer of the Song of Songs to express her love for Solomon. In Christian art, the queen represented the Gentiles bearing rich gifts, foreshadowing the magi. The second motif follows the popular tradition according to which the queen of Sheba became the wife of Solomon and was enthroned next to him. The queen of Sheba represented the coronation of Mary, Mother of God. These examples show that the stories described in 1 and 2 Kings continued to be used in numerous ways in theology, art, and exhortations.

LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

The Books of Kings organized the history of both kingdoms in a special literary form. The skeleton of the whole composition is the introductory and concluding regnal résumés that open and end the narration on a given king. The authors coordinated the kings of Judah and Israel, creating a synchronistic chronicle so that the reader can understand how

the history of both kingdoms unfolded. Into this skeleton are inserted different narratives. Some are shorter, such as annalistic accounts of military invasions and building activities; others are longer, such as the Elijah and Elisha cycles or Isaiah's prophecies. This synchronistic chronicle starts with the last days of David and ends with the fall of Jerusalem, which is not a typical way of starting and ending chronicles or annals in the ancient Near East. For this reason, some scholars think that the original version of Kings began with Solomon's glory and ended with Hezekiah's victory over Assyria. After the fall of Jerusalem, the originally positive narrative was adjusted to account for the national trauma, and so the final text begins with the death of the founder of Jerusalem and ends with the end (death) of Jerusalem.

Continual updating of the Books of Kings can still be observed in different translations. Later editors and translators added their own interpretations of ancient historical events. Interweaving theological reflections and annalistic accounts into the skeleton of a synchronistic chronicle demonstrates that the final composition was destined to give readers not only the details of Israelite history, but above all the criteria of how to interpret the Israelite past. The readers must first learn how to interpret the metaphors, literary genre, and theological comments of Books of Kings to acquire the interpretive tools for understanding the trauma of both Israel and Judah. Once the readers have grasped this logic, they indeed acquired the tools for interpreting their own past through the eyes of faith.

OUTLINE

- Solomon's Reign (1 Kings 1—11)
 - Solomon's Rise to Power (1—5)
 - Solomon Builds the Jerusalem Temple (6—8)
 - Solomon's Rise and Fall (9—11)
- Israel and Judah as a Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17)
 - Northern Israel's Apostasy (12—16)
 - Elijah Confronts Israel's Idolatry and the First War against Aram (17—20)
 - Naboth's Vineyard (21)
 - A Lying God (22:1—51)
 - The Reign of Ahaziah (1 Kgs 22:52—2 Kgs 1)
 - Elisha Confronts Israel's Kings (2—8)
 - Jehu's Revolt (9—10)
 - Joash Restores the Temple (11—12)
 - Israel and Judah's Apostasy (13—16)
 - The Fall of Samaria (17)
- Judah's Rise and Fall and Exile (18—25)
 - Hezekiah and the Assyrian Threat (18—20)
 - Manasseh a Scapegoat (21)
 - Josiah Restores True Worship in Judah (22—23)
 - Apostasy Again Leading to the Babylonian Exile (24—25)

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COMMENTARY

SOLOMON'S REIGN
(1 KINGS 1–11)

SOLOMON'S RISE TO POWER (1–5)

Succession problems (1). The chronicle of the Southern and Northern Kingdoms starts with a presentation of the dying king David. The uncommon beginning of 1 Kings 1 creates a narrative frame for the Books of Kings, since 2 Kings 24–25 ends with the death of the last kings of the Davidic dynasty and the destruction of the city. As the end of the Saul-David kingship (1 Samuel—1 Kings 1) opens a new chapter in kingship in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Kings 2–3), so a partial rehabilitation of Jehoiachin foreshadows new leadership in Jerusalem after the exile.

The first four verses describe the last attempt of David's servants to rescue the king by means of a beautiful virgin, but not even Abishag could warm up the dying king. David's situation had become deplorable: he was unable to govern the country and to "know" in both

the sexual and intellectual senses of the Hebrew verb (1:4, 11, 18). So, the battles of succession began to shatter the court and kingdom. The throne claimants were divided into Hebron and Jerusalem factions. Adonijah, the fourth and probably the only remaining son born in Hebron (cf. 1 Sam 3:2–5; 1 Chr 3:1–4) was sustained by the old commander-in-chief Joab and the priest Abiathar, whereas Solomon, David's first son born in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 5:13–16; 12:24–25) was supported by the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and the commander Benaiah. Two carefully thought-out intrigues were underway to seize the throne. Adonijah, aware of David's weakness for him and the rights of the eldest son, campaigned to gain the favor of the people. The campaign culminated in a gathering of the royal family and court officials at the stone called Zohelath, where Adonijah offered a sacrifice. During the celebration, he was proclaimed king. He intentionally excluded the Jerusalem faction from the feast (1 Kgs 1:5–10). Once the Jerusalem faction learned about Adonijah's attempt to seize the throne, the prophet Nathan devised an

impressive stratagem. Once again, Bathsheba played a seemingly secondary role. David was indirectly accused of supporting Nathan's and Bathsheba's side and of breaking the oath. Which stratagem would prevail?

An unexpected intervention of the infirm king David turns the direction of the narrative, creating high suspense. David, who sided with the Jerusalem faction, arranged a new enthronement ritual according to which Adonijah never became king. The prophet and priest of the Jerusalem faction performed the new ritual and enthroned Solomon as the legitimate successor of David. Adonijah's coalition quickly dissolved and Solomon performed his first royal act—he granted Adonijah pardon on the condition of behaving loyally, literally “being a son of strength.”

David's Testament and its fulfillment (2). After Solomon had been enthroned, David imparted to him instructions in the form of a testament. Verses 2–4 represent the first Deuteronomic discourse in Kings. David emphasized the conditional nature of the covenant, referring to the Book of Deuteronomy and faithfulness to the law given to Moses. It not only sets up the standards for the evaluation of future kings of Judah and Israel, but also gives the reader a clue how to interpret the end of the Davidic dynasty (cf. 2 Kings 25).

In 1 Kgs 2:5–9, David instructs Solomon how to use his wisdom in order to secure his throne, namely to execute justice by punishing the two transgressors Joab and Shimei, and to reward the sons of Barzillai. “Wisdom,” here, means finding the right way to eliminate David's and Solomon's enemies. So, the wise king according to David is a king able to distinguish “good guys” from “bad guys” and to eliminate the latter.

The rest of the chapter illustrates Solomon's wisdom and determination to carry out David's last will. This bloody procedure is presented not as bloodletting (cf. 2 Kgs 24:3–4), but as an execution of justice. The legitimate elimination of the throne opponents was a socially and religiously acceptable practice of securing the throne and guaranteeing peace in the kingdom (cf. Esarhaddon's elimination of his brothers, and Jehu's elimination of royal families in 2 Kings 9–10). The biblical writers indeed understood it as a legitimate way of confirming the throne.

The first group to be eliminated were the representatives of the Hebron faction. The throne claimant, Adonijah, is executed because of his request to get Abishag as his wife. Bathsheba mediates the request. She did something similar in 1 Kings 1. She says only what she was asked to say. The author presents her in a completely neutral way without betraying any feelings of her own. Was she not aware that such a request might trigger Solomon's fury? The priest Abiathar is confined to exile in Anathoth, and the commander-

in-chief Joab is executed while holding on to the altar. Once the Hebron faction was eliminated, Solomon places his people in charge: Benaiah takes the place of Joab, and Zadok becomes the priest instead of Abiathar. The final task of David's testament is to execute Shimei. As for Adonijah, so for Shimei; Solomon, in “wisdom,” set forth the conditions he had to live by. Were these conditions a sophisticated trap that required a superior level of wisdom? When Shimei transgressed them, he was executed and so David's testament was fulfilled. The biblical writers do not mention whether Barzillai's family was rewarded as asked by David.

Apparition in Gibeon and two prostitutes (3). The first three verses are a narrative introduction into the apparition in Gibeon. On the one hand, they depict Solomon not only observing the laws but also loving the LORD; on the other hand, they introduce a ticking bomb into the narrative. Not only did Solomon not eliminate the high places, he also married the pharaoh's daughter. The latter assertion attributes to Solomon a transgression he in fact did not commit, since according to Egyptian documents no pharaoh's daughter ever married a foreign king.

The LORD appears to Solomon in an unusual form: he asked a question. Solomon's answer matched his wisdom: first, he looked back upon the deeds the LORD accomplished in the past and then he presented his own situation. Solomon called himself a little boy, unable to “go out and come” in a military campaign. Solomon presents himself as a successor of David, who, however, lacked one of David's main characteristics—the ability to conduct military campaigns. To declare himself a king unable to conduct military campaigns did not match the ideal king-warrior represented by Saul and David. In fact, the first deed of Saul was the formation of a royal army (1 Samuel 11). Saul's entire reign was marked by military campaigns (1 Samuel 13–15; 2 Sam 5:2). Similarly, David was a successful military leader before and after taking the throne (1 Sam 17; 18:5, 13–16; 19:8; 29:6; 2 Samuel 5). So, what kind of king did Solomon want to be?

The key to his new way of ruling the nation was “the listening heart.” The term, *šômēa'*, means to listen not only to what is said, but also in a technical sense to hear parties in court. It also means to listen and discern, as well as to listen and then to follow what is said. The second part of Solomon's request, “to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?,” emphasizes the legal context of the verb *šama'*. Therefore, whereas David's testament marked the first step in changing the perspective of Saul's and David's belligerent concept of kingship, Solomon's dream represents a further step, namely, a shift from a king-warrior to a king-judge.

Solomon's dream represents a watershed in the description of an ideal king. After Solomon's dream, royal military campaigns indeed played a minor role in 1-2 Kings, and all campaigns led by the Israelite or Judean kings ended in defeat or were condemned by the narrator. Pushing into the background the king-warrior model, the concept of king-judge became prominent. So, after the apparition in Gibeon, Solomon's wisdom assumed a new feature: he became the judge par excellence able to resolve the most complicated cases. The story of the two prostitutes fighting over a dead son illustrates Solomon's juridical wisdom. The narrative presents a legal riddle, supplying details that make impossible an easy solution based on the different gender or age of the children, and so on. Solomon used his knowledge of motherly feeling to shed an unexpected light on the dilemma.

Aspects of Solomon's wisdom (4–5). These two chapters illustrate Solomon putting his wisdom into practice. First, Solomon's wisdom had practical aspects. 4:1–19 describe his ability to organize the royal court in accord with the standards of well-organized and rich ancient Near Eastern courts. Second, the new organization of the court made it necessary to divide the kingdom into districts that regularly provided for the court. Solomon's organization of the kingdom brought prosperity and happiness to the whole nation (v. 20) and fulfilled the promises to the patriarchs (Gen 22:17; 32:13; Deuteronomy 8). Third, not only Judah and Israel but also the entire world benefited from Solomon's wisdom, which resulted in peace, wealth, and an excellent army (1 Kgs 5:1–8). Fourth, Solomon's wisdom was not limited to state affairs. He composed proverbs and songs and was versed in natural sciences. His wisdom not only surpassed the wisdom of Egyptian and Mesopotamian sages, but the entire world came to listen to him (vv. 9–14). The fifth aspect of Solomon's wisdom was his ability to build upon David's good international relations. Thus, he confirmed a treaty with Phoenicia (vv. 15–28).

SOLOMON BUILDS THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE (6–8)

Solomon's building activities (6–7). A final aspect of Solomon's wisdom regarded his building activities. He constructed the temple and royal palaces. The Hebrew and Greek manuscripts do not agree on the dimensions and layout of the temple. Moreover, both the Hebrew and the Greek texts contain many syntactical and lexical problems that all modern translations tend to emend. Some recent studies have demonstrated that the description of the temple building does not correspond to one edifice built in Solomon's

time; differences between the Greek and Hebrew texts rather indicate at least three phases of the reconstruction of the temple (Dubovský 2015). In its first phase, circa the tenth to ninth centuries BCE, the temple was a freestanding building. It had one room and its walls were constructed of cedar. The walls were decorated, outside and inside, with figures of cherubs and palm trees. The temple was surrounded with supportive walls or buttresses about five cubits high, and it had a shallow porch. The inner room of the temple was called "the inner house." Inside the inner house there were two identical ten-cubit-high statues of cherubs. In the second phase, circa the ninth to eighth centuries BCE, the temple was rebuilt. The cedar walls were torn down and replaced with walls of stone. The temple was enlarged. It was divided into three parts: the *debir*, *hekal*, and *ulam*. During this phase or the following one, the two statues of cherubs were replaced with a monumental wooden sculptural group of two cherubs located in the *debir*. The surrounding structure and the courtyards were also modified. The third phase lasted until the destruction of the temple in 586 BCE. During this phase, the temple was transformed into an urban temple and completely incorporated into the architecture of the densely constructed Temple Mount. This temple had an upper floor. Its furnishings and decoration were changed several times in response to changing religious currents. It was surrounded by chambers, houses, courts, and gardens. The visually dominant part of the temple became its tower-like *ulam*. The temple in this phase functioned as a full-fledged national shrine.

The studies focusing on the decoration motives such as cherubs and palm trees on the walls and capitals of the temple columns demonstrate that the temple represented a place similar to the garden of Eden (Sonnet 2003). The symbolism of the garden of Eden was the iconographic expression of a new garden in which God or his name (cf. 1 Kings 8) could dwell. The lost paradise was reconstructed on the earth thanks to Solomon's wisdom. The temple, called the house of the LORD, became the symbol of God's presence among the people.

Consecration of the temple (1 Kings 8). The narrative in chapters 1–7 shows that, thanks to a favorable internal and external political situation and Solomon's wisdom, the time was ripe for the most important change in the history of humanity: for the first time, there was not only a place but also all the conditions were met so that God might come to dwell among his people. But would God accept Solomon's building as his own temple?

Solomon formally inaugurated the temple by bringing the ark into the holy of holies. The incident concerning Uzzah (2 Samuel 6) shows how extremely delicate the transfer of the ark was. Using his wisdom,

Solomon transferred the ark in the propitious month of Ethanim. This month was characterized by a perennial flow of water (cf. Deut 21:4) and watered pastures (cf. Jer 27:44). Thus, the name Ethanim points to another aspect of the temple as the garden of Eden watered by four rivers (Gen 2:14). Solomon chose the appropriate month for the transfer of the ark. Moreover, Solomon gathered all the traditional groups of Israel—no group was excluded. He had the priests (and the Levites) carry the ark. Finally, Solomon offered numerous sacrifices to guarantee the successful transfer. At last, he succeeded. The cloud descended upon the temple and God's glory filled it.

Once the most delicate operation in the ark's history was completed and God accepted the temple, Solomon pronounced four prayers, in which are encoded different theologies of the temple. The first prayer (1 Kgs 8:12–13) voices a typical ancient Near Eastern temple theology according to which the temple was a house in which God actually lived. The prayer, however, specified that God dwelled in the darkness. The theology of deep darkness was most likely based on the construction of temples that had no real windows or had false windows, so that the inside of the temple was dark. God's dwelling in the darkness symbolically refers to the theology reflected in Deut 5:22; Ps 97:2; Exod 20:21, according to which God was accompanied by darkness, a wall that separated God from his creation and that made him inaccessible. LXX reinterprets the darkness as an uncreated space where God could dwell. The second prayer (1 Kgs 8:15–21) understands the temple as the place in which God's name dwells. This prayer links the Jerusalem temple with the most notable events of the history: exodus, promise/fulfillment theology, and kingship—especially with David's election and his accession on the throne. The third prayer (vv. 22–27), while omitting the exodus theme, emphasizes the link between the temple and kingship theology and inserts it into a concept of divine transcendence similar to Isa 66:1–4. The fourth prayer (1 Kgs 8:28–53) is radically different. It is composed of seven sections presenting prototypes of the prayers uttered in the temple and outside the temple. The prayers list not only what to pray for but also how to formulate a petitionary prayer. The temple is understood as a special place from which God listens to the supplication of his people in a specific way. The postexilic redaction of these seven prototype prayers serves as the guide not only for those living in Jerusalem but also for the exiles.

SOLOMON'S RISE AND FALL (9—11)

Solomon's second dream and building activities (9). The second dream presupposes the first dream (ch. 3),

the construction of temple and royal palaces (chs. 6–7), and Solomon's dedicatory prayers (ch. 8). Its longest part explains why "all this evil" befell Israel (9:6–9). This has led most exegetes to conclude that the final text was written after the exile, and retrojected into the text to explain the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the exile in the light of chapters 3–8. Thus, the second dream illustrates the attempt of later generations to interpret the difficult moments of history by updating biblical texts. Note, however, that not all postexilic interpretations of the fall of Jerusalem were later insertions into the canon and considered inspired. According to this interpretation that was accepted into the canon, God confirmed that the temple was rightly consecrated. Therefore, the exiles should not entertain the possibility that the temple never became the place in which God's name, glory, and heart dwelled. God, however, linked his presence to the conditions expressed in terms of law and its observation: if the king and his people followed the LORD, then God's presence would be guaranteed in the temple, and consequently there would always be a successor on the throne and the Israelites would possess the land with its capital in Jerusalem. If not, they would lose the land and the temple and they would become a proverb for other nations (cf. Psalm 80). This theology had the advantage of explaining in simple terms the problematic chapters of Israelite past, but it evidently had many shortcomings, which were brought into focus in Job, Qoheleth, and partially also in 1–2 Kings.

First Kings 9:10–28 has caused a heated discussion between archaeologists and biblical scholars. The section describes the building projects attributed to Solomon both in Jerusalem and in other cities. Many of these building projects took place in the ninth century BCE, and therefore could not have been done by Solomon, but rather by the Omride dynasty. Similarly, Phoenician maritime expeditions took place between the ninth and sixth centuries BCE. The question divided scholars into maximalist and minimalist camps, depending on whether they championed an upper or lower chronology. The positive result of this discussion was that many archaeological sites were studied in detail; for example, for Megiddo it was shown that the "tenth" century strata contain both tenth and ninth century BCE material. Similarly, the first archaeological traces of Phoenician maritime trade can be dated to the tenth century BCE, but they were only sporadic expeditions in comparison with the fully developed trade between the ninth and sixth centuries BCE. As a result, most scholars agree that the presentation of Solomon in his full glory cannot be taken literally, but rather he is a prototype of a wise king able to govern the country properly.

Despite the general approval of Solomon's reign, the Deuteronomistic writer inserts already in this chapter accounts of some problems, that is, along with the pharaoh's daughter, the pharaoh's soldiers also came and destroyed Gezer (9:16). Moreover, the first problems with Hiram are also recounted: Solomon had to give him cities, not only giving away the territory that God allotted to Israel, but also selling his own kinspeople.

The queen of Sheba and Solomon's wealth and wisdom (10). All extant versions, including 2 Chronicles 9, have the tale about the queen of Sheba, which are all organized like 1 Kings 9:26–10:14. Solomon with the help of Hiram built a fleet in Ezion-Geber on the Elath shore. The fleet went to Ophir, located somewhere in the east. The joint expedition brought to Solomon gold (9:28) and precious timber (10:11). This maritime expedition was, however, different from that to Tarshish to the west (10:22). Both expeditions describe how gold and timber reached Jerusalem. The queen of Sheba narrative (10:1–13) interrupts the account of the naval expedition to Ophir (9:26–28; 10:11–12) and by intertwining two stories, describes two ways in which wealth reached Jerusalem: maritime expeditions and courtesy visits, such as that of the queen. During diplomatic visits, one king would bring gifts and the other king would return the courtesy (10:2, 10, 13). Kings usually tried to impress their visitors with their wealth and power (10:5a; cf. also 2 Kgs 20:12–19) to intimidate enemies, make profitable deals, and urge vassal kings to pay tributes, and so forth. In this case, gift exchange forms the plot; the Queen of Sheba narrative reflects the commercial and diplomatic contacts between ancient kingdoms.

Whereas other kings and servants were in a sense compelled to bring gifts to Solomon (1 Kgs 10:15), the queen of Sheba was motivated by curiosity and wanted to put Solomon's wisdom to the test by means of riddles. Solomon passed the test without any problems. Though the final context of this story connects Solomon's wisdom with his wealth, 10:1, 3–4, 6–9 relegates Solomon's riches to the background. On hearing Solomon's answers and seeing his wealth, the queen is rendered speechless and praises his wisdom (10:9; cf. 3:16–28).

Even though it seems that the main goal of the story is to show the flow of wealth to Jerusalem and the resolution of enigmas, these things remain in the background of the narration. The narrative intentionally does not reveal the content of the enigmas and how Solomon resolved them, but describes only the impact of Solomon's wisdom upon the queen. Thus, the narrative itself becomes an enigma. Its focus is hidden in some easily overlooked details. These details

direct the reader's attention to the divine sphere and show that true wisdom leads to the worship of the LORD (10:1, 9, 12). The queen came to Jerusalem for the sake of the LORD's name, she saw the wisdom of the LORD's elected one, and at the end she blessed the LORD. She indirectly confirms the dreams in 1 Kings 3 and 9, suggesting to Solomon how to consolidate his kingship: keep in mind God's eternal love and his election of Solomon on the one hand, and on the other hand, fulfill the king's duty to administer justice and righteousness. So, Solomon's wealth should not be used only for his pleasure, but above all for the construction and embellishment of the temple (10:12).

The beginning of the fall (11). The ticking bomb inserted into the narrative in the forms of Solomon's marriage to the pharaoh's daughter (3:1) and problematic international relations (9:12–13) explodes in chapter 11. The first thirteen verses are a late postexilic interpretation of the decline of the elderly Solomon and disruption of the kingdom caused by his disobedience of the command not to marry foreign women (cf. Deut 7:1–4; Ezra 9). The narrative brings these problems to a head. While in 1 Kgs 3:1–3, when Solomon married the pharaoh's daughter, he still loved the LORD and followed his commandments, in 11:1 his love shifts toward his wives. The number of Solomon's wives also escalates. He started with one foreign wife and ended with one thousand wives and concubines (v. 3). Moreover, Solomon kept the pharaoh's daughter out of the city till he finished the construction of the temple and then brought her to the city and built a palace for her. According to verses 1–13, Solomon not only built houses for his wives, but also places of worship for foreign gods. As a result, the city and its surroundings were filled with foreign women and their divinities.

The fourfold repetition of the expression "incline your heart" and "turn away one's heart" (vv. 2, 3, 4, 9) points to the interior process of abandoning the LORD and following other gods. The expression is unique in the Bible and has its equivalent in Deut 7:4 and 17:17 ("his heart will turn away"). By means of the verb "to turn away," the author points out a gradual process of changing Solomon's heart: the deviation from true values and preferences resulted in external actions—the construction of sanctuaries for other gods. This deviation from the LORD naturally prompted the LORD's reaction. God became angry and through a prophet foretold the division of Solomon's kingdom, but the punishment would be delayed because of God's and David's sake (cf. 1 Kgs 21:27–29; 2 Kgs 22:18–20).

God's anger took the form of raising up three adversaries (Heb. *sātān*, "adversary"). The first adversary was Hadad, an Edomite refugee in Egypt. The narrative

displays a pattern used in the description of Joseph, Moses, and Jesus (refugees in Egypt), that is, a pattern of a young king who had to escape and be hidden (2 Kings 11). The second adversary was Rezon of Zobah, who escaped to Damascus. Both Hadad and Rezon represent the unintended consequences of David's and Joab's violent raiding of neighboring countries. The survivors escaped Israelite slaughter, and found refuge with other kings who let them harass Solomon and his kingdom. There is no extrabiblical evidence proving or disproving the existence of Hadad and Rezon. The short account on Rezon may come from an ancient source cited by later editors. Though the first two adversaries disappear from the narrative, the third adversary, Jeroboam, becomes the point of reference for all Northern kings. His access to the throne seems to be approved by God through the prophet Ahijah, just as Nathan approved David. Jeroboam's success was linked to the Deuteronomist conditional covenant, like that of Solomon. The last part of the narrative thus gives the impression that Solomon's reign collapses suddenly like Saul's. As Saul was replaced by David, so Solomon will be replaced by Jeroboam. However, the phrases "(I) will make him ruler all the days of his life," "so that my servant David may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem," "I will punish the descendants of David, but not forever," foresee the rise of Judah in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah.

ISRAEL AND JUDAH AS A DIVIDED KINGDOM (1 KINGS 12—2 KINGS 17)

NORTHERN ISRAEL'S APOSTASY (12—16)

The end of the United Kingdom (1 Kings 12). The Bible presents not only the ideal United Kingdom based upon Solomon's wisdom, but also lists several reasons that destabilized it. The first reason was the tension between the tribes (12:16, 19), that is, a sort of "regionalism" that fed on the differences and tensions between tribal groups. The second reason was abuse of power (v. 4), especially the burden put upon the people by the leadership class. The third reason was the bad advice given to Rehoboam by the young men who grew up with him. Finally, verse 7 goes beyond the traditional reasoning and suggests that the disagreement between the young and old advisors touched the nature of kingship. Should the king be a ruler or a servant? Should the king take care of the people or oppress them with a heavy hand (v. 11)? Should the king have a "listening heart" (3:9) or be an arrogant despot (12:10)?

The second part of the narrative shows that separating the Northern and Southern tribes was not a solution; on the contrary, separation caused more problems than solutions. King Jeroboam became afraid and did everything to consolidate his power. He rebuilt a new administrative structure and cultic centers. These required new personnel, that is, new expenses, new feasts, and celebrations. So the political division shortly became a religious one.

The strange behavior of two holy men (13). The story narrates the episode of the man of God who was punished for his gullibility and the prophet who apparently cheated and went unpunished. The narrative functions as a *mise-en-abyme* (French term derived from heraldry, lit. "placed into an abyss"), a narrative technique that in a form of a story, picture, or episode summarizes and alludes to a larger narrative. Based on this analysis, David Bosworth concludes that in this chapter the old prophet represents Jeroboam and the man of God can be identified with Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 23:15–20). Reading the chapter as a narrative within the main narrative brings forward the relations between two heroes that represent the relations between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Thus, the whole political history and religious tensions between Judah and Israel can be interpreted in the light of this *mise-en-abyme*. The relations were full of intrigues, incomprehension, and bloodshed. Moreover, comparing 1 Kings 13 with other prophetic episodes, the author by means of this device suggests that Judah cannot claim monopoly on true prophecy and that Israel's contributions should not be easily dismissed (Bosworth 2008, 118–57).

Jeroboam's condemnation (14). The story of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in 1 Kings resembles the plot of Genesis 1–11. The division and sin began with Adam and Eve, continued, and gradually became larger. Cain killed his brother and his descendant Lamech's anger was even greater. Then the corruption reached such a level that God could no longer tolerate it and sent the flood. Not even this stopped humanity's multiplication of evil; the story of the tower of Babel narrated the confusion of the languages and dispersion of people throughout the entire world. Similarly, after the division of the United Kingdom, problems and transgressions gradually grew in scope. First Kings 14 illustrates how far the king could deviate from the ideal; the chapter ends by foretelling the end of Samaria.

One issue about which postexilic scribes were very sensitive was the correct way of consulting God. Unfortunately, the separation of the kingdoms not only gave rise to new sanctuaries, and the Israelite kings often consulted God in a wrong way. Though

various modalities of consulting God were permitted in the ancient Levant, for example, reading stars, examining sheep livers, and observing the flight of birds, in Israel, prophecy became the privileged way of consulting God. Jeroboam, however, wanted to manipulate a blind prophet by disguising his wife (1 Kings 14). The narrative leads the reader through the tense plot when first the prophet Ahijah is warned by God. A reader can easily imagine the shock of Jeroboam's wife when the blind prophet recognizes her. This incident gave rise to one of the most elaborate speeches in 1-2 Kings. Jeroboam's trick is turned against him and brings a severe condemnation not only upon his head but upon the entire nation. The royal dynasty will be eliminated and Israel will end up in exile. The hope given to Israel by Ahijah a few verses before is revoked and Northern Israel is no longer the subject of God's promises.

According to verses 21–31, the situation in Judah was not much better. The Judeans committed similar sins. In this negative context, the invasion of the pharaoh Shishak represents the first serious punishment of Judah. Judah seemingly recovers quickly. But the removal of the temple vessels becomes the first warning sign of the later destruction of the temple.

The first generation of kings (15). The fratricidal war (cf. 1 Kings 14) between Judah (the house of Rehoboam) and Israel (the house of Jeroboam), which had started in 1 Kings 12, becomes a military conflict (1 Kgs 15:6). The conflicts between Judah and Israel continue into the reigns of two Judean kings, Abijah (915–13 BC) and Asa (912–872 BC), who overlap with the first Israelite dynasty, that is, Jeroboam I (933–11 BCE) and Nadab (911–10 BCE). While Nadab was campaigning in Philistia, Jeroboam's dynasty was overturned by Baasha, who orchestrated a coup d'état and eliminated all the throne pretenders. Baasha's new dynasty did not improve its relationship with Judah; on the contrary, Baasha organized the first Israelite campaign aimed at the conquest of Jerusalem.

The second Judean king, Abijah, receives a negative evaluation, and the account on his reign notes David as a point of reference. A note on David's killing of Uriah shows that even the best king could fail, but what made him the point of reference was his obedience and observance of the Mosaic law. The negative evaluation of the first Judean kings stops with Asa. He was the first king to put in practice a religious reform geared toward the cleansing of the temple and Jerusalem from idolatry. He deprived his mother of the privileges and power of the queen-mother (cf. the removal of Athaliah in 2 Kings 11) and destroyed the idols in the way Josiah did (cf. 2 Kings 23). Like David, Asa had his "nevertheless," since he was not able to eradicate high places. As well as being a religious reformer,

Asa proved to be a skillful strategist. When Baasha was preparing an offensive against Jerusalem, Asa bribed Aram and enticed King Ben-Hadad to break his treaty with Israel. Ben-Hadad agreed and conquered the northern regions of Israel. So Baasha had to retreat. The importance of this account is not only in the description of military tensions between Judah and Israel, but also in its literary form. First, Asa's strategic move is described similarly to that of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16. Both bribed a foreign power and saved their country. However, Asa was a good king and Ahaz receives a bad evaluation. Second, the cities conquered by Aram are similar to those conquered by the Assyrians in 2 Kgs 15:29. This shows that when Judah was in dire straits (which it was from its beginnings), it relied on gifts and a submission strategy to save itself; when this strategy failed, God took the initiative and intervened (cf. 2 Kings 18–19). The decision not to continue this strategy when attacked by the Babylonians brought on the destruction of Jerusalem.

The new kingdom in Samaria (16). Thirty-four verses of this chapter cover sixty years of history in which Israel passed from one crisis to another until Omri consolidated power in his hands and founded one of the most powerful and prosperous dynasties in the history of Israel.

Baasha's dynasty ended as it began. A military commander Zimri conspired against Baasha's son, Elah, and eliminated the entire dynasty of Baasha. However, Zimri lost the throne after seven days. Instability in Israel reached its peak and the country was immersed in a bloody civil war. Two military commanders, Tibni and Omri, claimed the throne. The civil war ended in victory for Omri. He founded not only a new dynasty but also a new capital, Samaria. Archaeological excavations have unearthed palaces and luxury objects in Samaria, indicating a thriving trade during his dynasty. The stability brought by Omri's dynasty, its skillful managing of international relations, and its decision to move the capital to Samaria made Israel a kingdom that played a key role for two hundred years.

ELIJAH CONFRONTS ISRAEL'S IDOLATRY AND THE FIRST WAR AGAINST ARAM (17–20)

Elijah in God's hands (17). Elijah's first words are an oath. Hebrew normally omits some words from oath formulas; the full formula would be, "(By) the life of the LORD, God of Israel, before whom I stand [I swear that,] if there is dew or rain these years except at my word [may I be cursed]." Elijah's oath determines his mission. First, he will stand before God, that is, he will be his servant. Second, Elijah's word will be endowed by the power similar to God's words

(cf. 17:24). Third, the veracity of Elijah's words will be proved by nonmanipulable natural elements—rain, dew, and fire (cf. 18:20–38). Fourth, his mission involves life or death for him and others. If his oath proves false, then Elijah's life will be cursed.

The first story opens with God's speech addressed to Elijah (17:2). Whereas in verse 1, Elijah speaks and God is silent, in verses 2–7, God speaks and Elijah listens. The section has the double command-fulfillment structure. First, God commands Elijah (v. 3) and commands the ravens to nourish Elijah (v. 4). As Elijah did what God asked him to do (v. 5), so nature itself provides nourishment for Elijah, who trusted God (v. 6).

The whole passage concerns nourishment. As God provided meat and water from the rock for the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16–17), so God will provide Elijah with meat and water. The verb "to nourish" occurs in Gen 45:11; 47:12 when God provided food for Joseph and his family during the years of famine, and in 2 Sam 19:33–34 when Barzilai provided food to David hiding from his son. But it was also used in relation to providing abundant food for Solomon's court (1 Kings 4–5). By the Wadi Cherith, Elijah had to learn what it meant to stand before God by experiencing God's care as Joseph, David, and the Israelites in the desert had experienced it.

The transitional verse 1 Kgs 17:7 casts doubts on Elijah's experience. Water—the sign of God's promise—was lacking. The crisis is resolved with God's second command. 17:8–16 also build upon the double command-fulfillment structure of the previous episode, but with some differences. God commanded Elijah to move to Zarephath distant by more than 200 km (124 miles), where a woman would nourish him. Elijah obeyed and went to Zarephath. The fulfillment of the second part of the command presents some problems. God did not command the woman directly; Elijah had to ask her (vv. 10, 13). The widow, without any objection, accepted to provide Elijah with water (v. 11a). However, Elijah's request for food was clouded by her objections. Only when Elijah switched from ordinary discourse to a prophetic oracle did the woman act "according to the word of Elijah" (cf. the parallel in v. 5: "[Elijah] did according to the word of the LORD"). The miracle took place according to Elijah's oracle.

The third episode (vv. 8–16) brought Elijah to another level of trust in God. Elijah was asked to mediate God's word, even though humans would resist (cf. the dialogue in 18:1–15); but Elijah learned that God was able to fulfill the prophet's oracle (17:16) and the people trusting in it would be blessed. As verse 7 called into question the experience by the Wadi Cherith, so the illness and the death of the widow's son (vv. 17–18) challenged the blessing mediated through Elijah.

To be a man of God and to stand before God (cf. v. 1) sometimes meant to reveal others' sins. Here Elijah's presence brought the woman to a worse state than before—she lost her son. Elijah first *went up* to the upper room—the horizontal movement (Cherith-Zarephath) was transformed into vertical movement. Then he cried out to God. He first accused God (v. 20) and then interceded for the widow's son. The resuscitation of the son confirmed that God's word uttered through Elijah was ultimately trustworthy (Heb. *'emet*, from which is derived English "Amen"). Through the widow and her objections, Elijah not only learned that the word of God was trustworthy but he also discovered the power of an oracle and a prayer.

Elijah's return (18). In the third year, the word of God came to Elijah for the third time. Elijah carried out God's command, which ultimately supported Obadiah's loyalty to the LORD. His speech revealed what was happening in Israel over the last three years. Since Elijah's prophecy of the drought had come true, the whole country suffered severe famine. The king was in search of Elijah and for water for his cattle. Meanwhile, Jezebel was killing prophets and Obadiah was secretly protecting them. Obadiah's speech also revealed that what God and the widow had done for Elijah, Obadiah was doing for other prophets. Obadiah hid them and provided them with water and food. Seeing this, Elijah swore (cf. 17:1) to meet Ahab.

Elijah fulfilled the oath and appeared to Ahab (18:16–18). The dialogue between Elijah and Ahab immediately shifted into an accusing question—who really brought trouble upon Israel? Ahab accused Elijah and Elijah accused Ahab. Apparently, Ahab was right, the famine came because of Elijah's bigotry. However, Elijah insisted that Ahab's international policy and religious attitudes brought disaster upon Israel (Heb. *'akar* in 18:18 means "to entangle, put into disorder, bring disaster, throw into confusion, ruin"). Who was right?

Several themes are interwoven into the contest about who was the true God (vv. 21–24). After God's intervention in verse 38, it became clear that the true God was the LORD. He was the territorial God (God *in* Israel, cf. 2 Kgs 17:24–28) and God of nature who not only provided food and water for his prophets, but also governed the untamable heavenly fire (cf. 2 Kings 1). Whereas 1 Kgs 18:19–40 show that the territorial God in Israel is God expressing himself in fire, verses 41–46 affirm that this God is also the God providing rain. This epiphany of God leads the people to conversion (v. 37), which is depicted in terms of the covenantal relation with God: all people gathered (vv. 19–20), in agreement (v. 25), confessing their faith, and worshipping God (v. 39).

Within this basic plot, liturgical elements are also inserted: the verb *pissab*, “limp,” in verses 21, 26 is associated with Pesach, English “Passover”; the day was divided according to liturgical offerings (vv. 27, 29, 36); the prophets of Baal performed ritual actions and Elijah prayed (vv. 28, 36–37); the contest involved a liturgical act—slaughtering bulls, Elijah’s first act was to “heal” the altar, and then he offered a sacrifice. These liturgical elements suggest that the contest was not only about who was the true God in Israel, but also about how this God was to be worshipped. To “heal” Israel devastated by Ahab’s policy meant above all to “heal the altar” —to restore the covenant and true worship in Israel.

The plot is full of irony and hyperbole. Eight hundred fifty prophets confront one prophet of the LORD. The prophets could choose the bulls and had the complete day at their disposal. Elijah mocked the prophets (vv. 27–28), asked to put water on his altar, and slaughtered with his own hands 450 prophets. Finally, the fire of the LORD devoured not only the bull but everything else.

The despairing Elijah encounters the LORD (19). The contest was no longer between Ahab and Elijah, but between Jezebel and Elijah, who executed her prophets; ultimately the contest was between Jezebel and God. The contrast between Jezebel and God is underlined by the word “messenger.” Jezebel sent to Elijah the messengers of death, God sent the messenger of life.

Just as in 1 Kings 17, Elijah was prepared for the epiphany on Mount Carmel (ch. 18) by the loneliness of desert and by the faith of a widow, so in 19:1–8 God prepared him in a deserted place for a new epiphany on Mount Horeb (vv. 9–18). Elijah escaped from Jezebel into a deserted place (17:2–7; 19:3–4) to be nourished twice by God (17:6, 12–16; 19:5–6, 7) and finally to receive a new mission: get up and walk to Horeb (18:1; 19:8). This preparatory scene connects the Elijah story with major biblical themes such as Abraham’s offering of Isaac (Abraham leaves his servants behind before offering his son [cf. Gen 22:5]); angels talk twice to Abraham and Elijah (Gen 22:12, 15; 1 Kgs 19:5, 7); Exodus features reappear (forty days/years wandering and being nourished in the desert; cf. Numbers 11), and Jonah’s mission in Nineveh is alluded to (Jonah desires to die under a bush; cf. Jonah 4:3). The similarities show that Elijah enters a new revelation of God like those experienced by Abraham, Moses, and Jonah.

In 1–2 Kings, the term “cave” occurs only in the Elijah cycle (18:4, 13; 19:9, 13). The final redactor uses the same term “cave” in 18:4, 13 to describe where the true prophets were hidden. Thus, Elijah coming to a “cave” was associated with the prophets of the LORD

who hid from Jezebel (cf. 19:1); Elijah experienced what those prophets went through.

The epiphany on Horeb contrasts with that of Moses on Mount Sinai, when God’s presence was accompanied by fire and thunder (Exod 19:16–19; 24:16–17). The Bible thus preserves different seemingly contradictory traditions on epiphany. Both traditions appear in the NT and in Christian iconography, which depict both Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration.

The expression “a sound of sheer silence” (NRSV) in 19:12 is translated in LXX as “the voice of a gentle breeze,” which connects the revelation with the breeze in Eden (Gen 3:8). The Targum translates the phrase as “the voice of those praising [the Lord] in silence,” referring to the prophets hidden in the caves from Jezebel. But it is also possible to translate it as “a roaring and thunderous voice,” showing that the epiphany of the LORD was more powerful than that of Baal, the Canaanite god of lightning and thunder.

The story concludes with Elijah’s return to the place where he had escaped from Jezebel. He receives the order to anoint a new king in Israel, Jehu (involving a new dynasty), Hazael (known for his expansionistic policy), and his own prophetic successor. So the episode ends with a vocation story.

First war against Aram (20). First and Second Kings interpret King Ahab in diverse ways. The first biblical “portrait” depicts Ahab as a young king who defeated the Aramean king Ben-Hadad. Ahab, confronted with the arrogant request of the Arameans, denied it. Encouraged by a prophet, the Israelite army chose to face the overwhelming Aramean army. After three battles, the Arameans were defeated and Ahab generously spared the king’s life and made a treaty with him. In their view, Ahab was a good king like Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kings 18–19). But a prophet confronted Ahab, using a parable to criticize Ahab for letting an enemy of Israel go free. The prophet’s action was similar to the prophet Nathan’s use of a parable to condemn David’s murder of Uriah. Ahab indeed wanted to make a treaty with Aram as he did with Phoenicia. Such treaties, as Elijah claimed, compromised fidelity to the LORD. Thus, the victorious King Ahab became in the prophet’s eyes a disobedient king.

NABOTH’S VINEYARD (21)

The injustice connected with the transfer of Naboth’s property into royal hands is described in 1 Kings 21 and 2 Kgs 9:21–26. According to the latter text, Ahab was fully responsible for Naboth’s murder; according to the former text, the responsibility can be pinned on Jezebel. Scholars suggest that the Ahab

story was edited several times over the centuries. The version in 2 Kgs 9:21–26 was probably composed in the preexilic period. Then it was rewritten in the Persian period when the responsibility was pinned on a foreign woman—Jezebel (1 Kings 21). Then the story was incorporated into the Elijah cycle, which used an ancient story to explain the end of the Omrides, the most powerful dynasty in the history of the Northern Kingdom, and to condemn Israelite foreign policy that resulted in wrongdoing like that of Judah before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

The different editions of the story combined greed, power, dispossession, and injustice, resulting in oppression of the powerless by the powerful. The condemnation of the just Naboth thus represents one of many instances of manipulated legal proceedings condemning innocent people, including that of Jesus.

However, the story 1 Kings 21 concludes with the accusation of Ahab and his conversion, which results in the delay of his punishment (cf. the case of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20, Josiah in 2 Kings 22, and Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33). The episode of Ahab's conversion shows that certain scribal circles wanted to rehabilitate Ahab as they did Manasseh.

A LYING GOD (22:1–51)

Thanks to Omride foreign policies, Israel and Judah stopped fighting each other (cf. 1 Kings 12–16) and became treaty partners. Their collaboration took the form of joint military campaigns. Chapter 22 describes the new relationship between Judah and Israel in verse 22:4 “I am as you are; my people are your people, my horses are your horses.” Before both armies took to the field against Aram, the kings consulted prophets. While all the kings' prophets supported the campaign against Aram, the prophet Micaiah alone foretold its failure. He told a story in which God intentionally enticed Ahab and Jehoshaphat by putting a lying spirit in the mouth of their prophets. The divinity is depicted according to the standards of the royal court, as often engaged in the battle. In this context, it was not a problem to deceive a king in order to punish him by sending him wrong messages. The impressive dialogues between the kings and the prophet Micaiah ended in the rejection of Micaiah's prophecy and the death of both kings.

THE REIGN OF AHAZIAH (1 KGS 22:52—2 KINGS 1)

Three narratives, originally coming from various sources, are inserted into the reign of Ahaziah (1 Kgs 22:52–54; 2 Kgs 1:17b–18). A short notice (2 Kgs 1:1

describes a worrisome situation in Israel. The powerful King Ahab was dead, Moab had revolted against Israel, and the new king, Ahaziah, took sick (2 Kgs 1:2a). This situation did not bring the Israelites to understand what and who really ruined Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 18:17–18). On the contrary, opposition to monolatrous religion became stronger. Ahaziah queried the Philistine god Baal-zebul (2 Kgs 1:2–8) and thus not only consulted “other” gods, but also had recourse to illegitimate tools of consultation. The story about the destruction of Ahaziah's troops in chapter 1 depicts not only a verbal but a military confrontation between the royal court in Samaria and Elijah sitting on the top of a hill (2 Kgs 1:9–17a). Elijah's God manifests his power through fire, as in 1 Kgs 18:34–38, and proves to be the God of life and death, as in 1 Kings 17. This God not only protected Elijah, but also spared an official who had recognized God (2 Kgs 1:13–14) in the same way as he had protected Obadiah and spared the prophets of the LORD (1 Kgs 18:1–15).

This chapter portrays Elijah as “a hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist” (1:8) and living on the top of a hill; both features are the symbols of an untamed outsider (Brueggemann 2000, 285). Far from the comfort and facilities provided by the royal court, the austere lifestyle made Elijah free to oppose the king and be obedient only to God's messenger. This portrait of Elijah became the base for the depiction of John the Baptist (Matt 3:4). The author creates a contrast between Elijah, literally “the Lord of hair,” and Baal-zebul, literally “the Lord of flies” (1:6). Whereas “hair” is the symbol of power (cf. Judg 16:22 and 2 Sam 14:26), “the Lord of flies” satirizes the divine title Baal-zebul, “Baal is the Prince.” In Isa 7:18 the flies are related to death. Ironically, Ahaziah consulted the God of flies, pests who gather around a dead body.

ELISHA CONFRONTS ISRAEL'S KINGS (2—8)

Assumption of Elijah to heaven and the first set of Elisha's miracles (2). The hiphil form of the Heb. verb “to go up” in 2:1, 11 emphasizes that God was the cause of Elijah's transition to heaven. We can speak about Elijah's assumption to heaven, but not about his ascension to heaven. (This distinction reflects a difference in Catholic dogmatic theology between Jesus' ascension to heaven and the assumption of Mary to heaven.)

This chapter focuses on the movements of Elijah before his assumption to heaven, which has three dimensions. First, Elijah reversed the route of Joshua during the conquest, stopping at the most important cities—Bethel and Jericho. Elijah miraculously split

the Jordan in two, recapitulating the wonders performed not only by Joshua (Josh 4:21–24) but also by Moses (Exod 14–15). Second, Elijah left the Holy Land and died beyond the Jordan as Moses did, providing the opportunity for his successor to (re)enter the Holy Land (cf. Joshua and Elisha). These two dimensions of Elijah's movements point to the tradition begun by Moses and Joshua and repeated by Elijah and Elisha. They also underline the transitional character of the Holy Land, which must be left behind to enter heaven. The third dimension is the shift from a horizontal to a vertical movement. The apex of the passage is in 2 Kgs 2:9–13. Elijah stopped walking in order to be taken up. A similar shift can be found in 1 Kings 19, when Elijah stopped walking and climbed the mountain to meet God (cf. also 1 Kgs 18:42).

Elijah's assumption to heaven is accompanied by fire, which was a distinguishing sign of his prophetic activity (cf. 1 Kgs 18:20–39; 2 Kgs 1:9–14). Fire was the proof of God's presence and identified Elijah as a true prophet. As in 1 Kgs 19:12, the LORD was not in fire, so the chariot of fire was only a tool for transferring Elijah to God.

The double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kgs 2:9) became palpable in Elisha's capacity to perform miracles similar to Elijah's, and some even more spectacular (vv. 19–25). Elisha split the Jordan in two (v. 8), he healed the water, demonstrating his power over water resources (cf. 1 Kgs 17:1; 18:41–45), and he brought death by his sheer personality upon anyone who despised God (2 Kgs 1:9–14).

War(s) with Moab (3). Verse 5 resumes the note on Israelite conflicts with Moab first mentioned in 1:1. The tensions between Moab and Israel during the Omride period is also mentioned in the ninth-century BCE Mesha Stele. The armed conflicts mentioned in the Mesha Stele and in 2 Kings illustrate the changing power balance taking place in the western Levant prior to the Neo-Assyrian period; one kingdom expanded at the expense of the others.

The chapter focuses on Elisha as a true prophet like Micaiah in 1 Kings 22. As in Exodus 14, Joshua, and Judges, here the Israelite victory was due not to the military superiority of the Israel-Judah-Edom coalition but to the confusion caused by the erroneous interpretation of the Moabite soldiers, which ultimately demonstrated the superiority of Israel's God over the nations.

Meshah's offering of his son was not normal practice; however, similar acts took place only in moments of great constraint when the people were seeking a special help from god(s). An extrabiblical example is in the Merneptah relief depicting the siege of Ashkelon (cf. also Judg 11:30–31; Num 21:2).

A second set of Elisha's miracles (4). The first miracle (4:1–7) resembles Elijah's miracle in 1 Kgs 17:8–16. Both stories share the miracle of oil and in both a widow and her faith in the prophet are highlighted. Whereas in 1 Kings 17 the story showed how God prepared Elijah for his mission, 2 Kings 4 emphasizes a new aspect of a prophet's role. Elisha, after descending from Mount Carmel (2:25), leapt into the midst of human problems. He performed miracles not only to prove that the LORD was the only God, but also to help people in need. Thus, Elisha performed a miracle of oil to save a widow and orphans from being sold into slavery. The second miracle (2 Kgs 4:8–37) has a plot similar to Elijah's miracle in 1 Kgs 17:17–24. Elisha assumes another new trait—interceding with the king and the commander-in-chief. The hostility between king and prophet in the Elijah cycle virtually disappears (cf. 2 Kings 8). The last two miracles in chapter 4 have no counterparts in the Elijah cycle, and display popular devotion similar to the miracles of St. Francis and St. Benedict.

The healing of Naaman (5). Elisha's portrait becomes much more colorful than Elijah's. Besides performing miracles and taking care of the poor and people in need (cf. 2 Kings 4), Elisha was also engaged in international politics, military campaigns, and defense of the country. The story points to three rules of Elisha's miraculous intervention. First, he did not exclude anyone: he performed miracles for the rich and the poor, for the Israelites as well as for their enemies. Second, the nature of his miracle contrasted with the sophisticated manner of invoking foreign gods (5:11–13) and his miracles were geared toward revealing God's power (v. 5). Third, the miracles were done for free, not in exchange of gifts (v. 5). The inappropriate recompense of the greedy Gehazi was severely punished.

The last set of Elisha's miracles and Aramean wars (6–7). Second Kings 6:1–7 presents the miraculous recovery of an ax head, which became the pattern of a similar miracle in St. Benedict's life. The second part of the narrative describes two originally independent stories. One story describes the generous treatment of the Arameans after being handed over to an Israelite king. The other narrative depicts Aram as an oppressor that reduced the people in besieged Samaria to unbearable famine that resulted in cannibalism. The final organization of the stories presents Aram as an ungrateful and arrogant oppressor. Elisha healed Naaman and then the Israelites organized feasts for the captured Arameans, but the Arameans did not understand these things, so God intervened and the Arameans killed each other (cf. 2 Kings 18–19).

The ending of the Shunammite's story and a new king in Aram (8). The chapter resumes the story of the Shunammite woman and her son, who was resuscitated following his mysterious death (see 2 Kgs 4:8–37). The author, however, made some significant changes. The prophet does not speak at all, the king is depicted in a positive light, the Shunammite woman is elevated on the expense of the prophet, Elisha's servant Gehazi is rehabilitated and has direct access to the king (Rofé 1982). Some scholars find in these differences, which the final redactor wove into the Elisha cycle, a subtle critique of the power of early prophets, their miracles, and their harsh opposition toward the royal court. This critique marked an important shift in Israelite prophecy: from prophets who were substantially healers and miracle makers to the word- and book-oriented prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and from prophets living in the wilderness to prophets living in cities and having good relations with the royal court.

The second part of the chapter describes the fulfillment of 1 Kgs 19:17–18. Hazael's usurpation of the throne had terrible consequences not only for Israel, but also for all of Aram, and it led to the disintegration of Aramean supremacy in the western Levant (cf. 2 Kings 9–10).

JEHU'S REVOLT (9–10)

Jehu's coup d'état marked a watershed in the history of the Northern Kingdom. Omri's dynasty, according to the biblical sources, allied itself with the Phoenician states through a diplomatic treaty sealed by the marriage between Jezebel and Ahab (1 Kings 16–19). According to the Assyrian sources, Israel and the Phoenician states joined an anti-Assyrian coalition led by Aram, which opposed Assyrian forces at Qarqar in 853 BC. Assyria had only limited success in fending off the attackers, for the Assyrian king Shalmaneser was forced to lead four more campaigns against the west. The decisive turn in the Assyrian control of Syria-Palestine was the year 841 BC. After the death of Hadad, Hazael "the son of a nobody" usurped the Aramaean throne (cf. 2 Kgs 8:7–15). The dynastic change resulted in the disintegration of the anti-Assyrian coalition in Syria-Palestine. This event overlapped with Jehu's coup d'état (2 Kings 9–10). Shalmaneser III took advantage of these changes and the Assyrian troops marched against Damascus, the seat of the Aramean king Hazael. The Assyrian annals report that this time the Assyrians did not have to face an anti-Assyrian coalition; Hazael had to face the Assyrian troops alone. He was defeated and his land devastated. The inscription on two monumental bulls

found in Nimrud relate that the Israelite king, Jehu, together with other kings, paid tribute to Shalmaneser III; that is, Jehu became an Assyrian vassal. Evidently, the Assyrian defeat of Hazael changed the power equilibrium in the Levant. Anti-Assyrian resistance was broken and Aram-Damascus supremacy in the southwestern Levant was undermined. Clearly, this was an ideal moment for Jehu's dynasty in Samaria to recover while having the support of Assyria. From this moment on, the Assyrian royal annals present Samaria as a loyal vassal of Assyria (Hasegawa 2012).

The Bible does not mention the Assyrians at this point, and the narrative focuses rather on Jehu's bloody coup d'état, which is presented as the execution of divine justice. The first type of justification for Jehu's violence relies on Naboth's innocent blood shed by Ahab and his wife. Innocent blood must be avenged, otherwise the land could become polluted and would need to be purified by fire (cf. 2 Kings 21; 24–25). Since Judean kings were also allied with the murderous dynasty of Samaria, both were symbolically exterminated in Naboth's property (9:21).

The second problematic aspect of the story concerns the brutal execution of Jezebel and her dismembering. A similar story of a dismembered woman is in Judges 19, as well as in a Ugaritic poem describing the dismembering of the goddess Anat. Anat slaughtered her enemies and wore their body parts, showing the goddess completely in control. The Levite in Judges displayed the limbs of his murdered concubine to summon tribes for a war of vengeance. Similarly, Jezebel's body is reduced to a skull, hands, and feet. Comparison of these stories shows that the dismembering of a perpetrator's body functioned as a tool for stabilization and reestablishing justice (Parker 2015, 189). The last instance of justification for Jehu's bloody coup is the Deuteronomistic approval of Jehu's premeditated massacre of Baal's priests. The Deuteronomistic theologians had a simple evaluation of kings: those who compromised strict Yahwism betrayed the very nature of the promises that guaranteed God's support, and therefore brought God's anger upon the nation. To eliminate the idolatry that brought God's anger upon the people, all the cult personnel and cult objects had to be destroyed (cf. 1 Kings 19), for they functioned like a contagious disease (cf. 2 Kings 23). So the Deuteronomist presented the elimination of Baal's priests as part of the process purifying the country from idolatry. Finally, the narrative describes the elimination of the whole royal family, that is, all potential pretenders of the throne. However problematic such an execution may seem to a modern reader, it must be read in the context of ancient Near Eastern ethics. In fact, elimination of the entire royal

family was a normal practice in the ancient Near East, since this was a way of preventing civil war and bringing peace and stability into a kingdom.

JOASH RESTORES THE TEMPLE (11—12)

The death of Athaliah and the reform of Jehoiada and Joash (11). Biblical authors attributed the first religious reform to the priest Jehoiada. The Omride dynasty formed political alliances through marriage not only with Phoenicia by the marriage of Ahab to Jezebel, but also with Judah through the marriage of Athaliah to Jehoram. After the death of the Judean king Ahaziah, the queen mother Athaliah seized power. By eliminating potential claimants to the throne, Athaliah interrupted the Davidic dynasty (the house of David) and replaced it with the house of Omri. This dynastic interruption lasted for six years. The priest Jehoiada, with the help of temple and palace guards, organized a putsch and installed on the throne young Joash (836–798 BC), who had escaped Athaliah's deadly clutches. The execution of the queen mother and the installation of Joash not only reestablished the Davidic dynasty on the throne, but also triggered the second major religious reform in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Kings 15 and 2 Kings 12). The priest Jehoiada renewed the treaty between the king and God, destroyed the temple of Baal, and executed his priests (2 Kgs 11:17–20).

Several scholars have argued that the text in its final form is a compilation of various layers. One scholar has concluded that the verses mentioning the temple (2 Kgs 11:3a, 4a β , 4b α , 7, 11a, 13b, 19a) do not belong to the original annalistic account but to a later redaction. By introducing the temple layer into the text, the final redactor not only connected the putsch with the temple, but by the mention of the temple (the house of the LORD) also with the Davidic dynasty (the house of David). Once Athaliah had eliminated the royal offspring, the house of David seemingly ceased to exist and was replaced by the house of Omri. Such an interruption of the Davidic succession would, however, have contradicted God's promise to keep David's offspring on the throne. The temple stratum casts a new light on the "interrupted dynasty of David." Since Athaliah was never accorded the literary trappings of monarchy, in the form of introductory and closing regnal résumés, the text does not treat her as the founder of a new dynasty. The house of David only seemingly ceased to exist—in fact, it continued through the child Joash, who was hidden in the temple. The temple (the house of the LORD) sheltered Joash (the house of David). In this sense, the temple played a crucial role in preserving the continuity of the Davidic dynasty. In

other words, by introducing the temple layer, the biblical redactor "defines the temple as the dominant space within which the really significant actions gain their authority and power" (Long 1991, 150)

Reconstruction of the temple (12). The first part of the chapter (vv. 5–17) describes the dilapidated condition of the temple and Joash's attempt to repair it. The large list of specialists demonstrates that the reconstruction of the temple was not simple maintenance work but required highly specialized workers. A similar group of specialized workers appears in 1 Kings 5–8 (Solomon's construction of the temple), in Ezra 3 (the reconstruction of the destroyed city and temple), and in 2 Kings 22 (Josiah's reconstruction of the temple). By listing similar specialists, the final redactor showed that Joash's and Josiah's reconstructions of the temple were on a par with Solomon's original construction of the temple and with the postexilic reconstruction of the ruined Jerusalem and its temple. There is a good reason to conclude, therefore, that around Joash's time the temple was not only reconstructed but also significantly rebuilt.

The lists of specialists and exclusive materials demonstrate that the reconstruction of a temple was an expensive enterprise, and therefore the extent of the work depended heavily on both the importance of the temple and the economic resources of a reigning king. For this reason, the biblical narrative focuses on a fiscal reform that guaranteed the successful reconstruction of the temple. The crucial verses for understanding Joash's reform are 12:11–12, where the temple (the high priest) and the palace (the royal scribe) together counted money and distributed it to the overseers of the work. One consequence of this reform was greater clarity in the rules for the use and distribution of the temple income that went to the priests, was earmarked for temple repairs, and had restrictions on how the funds were used (e.g., the income could not be spent on temple utensils). There are very few extant documents demonstrating the financial and economic transaction of the preexilic temple. Despite the lack of evidence from Jerusalem, extant archives from Mesopotamia permit contextualizing the control and distribution of the temple finances. A study of Neo-Assyrian letters demonstrates that a new model of controlling the temple income became popular in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, whereby the royal court and the temple personnel jointly oversaw temple income. More than forty thousand tablets were unearthed in Nippur, Sippar, Babylon, and other sites documenting the financial and legal transactions of Neo-Babylonian temples. These studies allow us to imagine the complexity of the financial transactions behind 2 Kings 12 and to conclude that, according to the final

redactors, Joash would represent a king-reformer who brought the temple finances under a new arrangement. Finances were placed under the joint control of both the crown and the temple, and its distribution was supervised. In this way, Joash made the control of finances comply with “international” standards. Moreover, Joash’s assumption of responsibility for the temple corresponded to the general ancient Near Eastern mentality, according to which it was the duty of a king to maintain temples. Joash was a just king not only according to the Israelite standards, but according to international standards.

The narrative concludes in an unusual way. The good king Joash and his reconstruction of the temple in one sense was for nothing, since the Arameans came and looted the temple. Thus, the pattern of the reconstruction and looting of the temple points ahead to Josiah’s reconstruction of the temple and his religious reform followed by the Babylonian looting of the temple.

ISRAEL AND JUDAH’S APOSTASY (13—16)

Jehu’s dynasty (13—14). Shortly after Jehu’s coup d’état (cf. 2 Kings 9—10), Israel became a prosperous kingdom, expanding its territory in all directions. The expansion of Israel went hand in hand with international changes in the Levant of the ninth to eighth centuries BCE. Jehu’s coup d’état turned an anti-Assyrian Samaria into a loyal vassal of Assyria (cf. 2 Kings 9—10). The inscription found in Tell al-Rimah confirms that Jehu’s successor Joash (800-784 BCE) brought tribute to the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III, whose major achievement was the defeat of Damascus in 796 BCE. This victory and the reorganization of the Assyrian Empire turned the Levant into a region free from rebellion, which enabled Adad-nirari III to concentrate on the northern and eastern regions in his reign. Jehu’s dynasty played a significant role in this development. The kings of Samaria, while being loyal to Assyria, enjoyed great freedom, and their independence was part of Adad-nirari III’s strategy to keep the Levant calm to conduct the campaigns in other parts of Mesopotamia. Moreover, the defeat of Aram-Damascus in 796 BCE marked the complete end of the long Aramean dominance over Israel. Obviously, this new political situation was a fresh opportunity for the Israelite king Joash (800-784 BC) to recover territories lost to Aram and to undertake his own campaigns, all under the auspices of Assyria.

Second Kings 13—14 partially reflects the excitement of the Israelite renewal after a lengthy period of Aramean oppression (13:1–9; 14:26–27). The latter passages are the only two passages in 1-2 Kings that

refer to a savior who liberated oppressed Israelites from the hands of their oppressors. Aram’s oppression of Israel and the rise of a savior is described in the language used in Judges 2—3 (cf. also 1 Sam 9:16). Israel, humiliated and oppressed, cried to God, who saw its oppression and gave them a savior—Joash and Jeroboam II. The liberation from the oppression of Aram and Israelite expansion was supported by prophets (Elisha and Jonah) and approved by God. The positive description of Israel was in sharp contrast to the negative appraisal of Judah. Judah, having disobeyed God, was punished. It was torn apart by two revolts and bloodsheds. Judean foolish expansionistic policy (2 Kgs 14:8–14) was compared to that of Abimelech in Judg 9:7–20 and resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and looting of the temple. As a result, Israel dominated the whole western Levant. Judah, even though maintaining some independence, was under the control of the Northern Kingdom. Thus, Jeroboam II was depicted as a king similar to Solomon (cf. 2 Kgs 14:25 and 1 Kgs 8:65). Another literary sign of the positive interpretation of this new unified kingdom was the incorporation of closing formulas of northern kings into the description of the southern kings and the creation of a new type of synchronism between Israel and Judah (cf. 14:15–16 within 14:1–20). The biblical texts still preserve a positive interpretation of Joash’s and Jeroboam II’s military campaigns, including the conquest of Jerusalem and the economic and political growth of the Northern Kingdom.

After the fall of Samaria, this positive interpretation of the Israelite domination of Judah evidently became problematic. Some Greek manuscripts watered down the positive evaluation of Jehu’s dynasty by reorganizing both chapters and changing some verses. The final text of 1 and 2 Kings places 2 Kings 15 after chapters 13—14 as describing the disruption of the North. In the light of 2 Kings 15, the expansion of the Northern Kingdom turned out to be an illusory enterprise. Israel endured the same revolts and bloodsheds as Judah in chapters 13—14.

In a further stage of interpretation, Deuteronomistic redactors condemned the Northern Kingdom by saying of the kings of Israel, “He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin” (15:24). This anti-Northern attitude is further developed in 2 Chronicles 25, in which a positive interpretation of Jehu’s dynasty that created a new unified kingdom controlling both Israel and Judah completely disappears.

In sum, 2 Kings 13—14 show how biblical historiography changed. What was originally considered positive politics (Joash’s conquest of Judah and Jeroboam

II's expansion) was, in the light of the fall of Samaria and the Deuteronomistic theology, reinterpreted as the futile ambition of the kings of Samaria. The savior (Jeroboam II) proved to be an incomplete savior and the Northern political and economic renewal turned out to be the beginning of the fall of Samaria. What was previously interpreted as an arrogant expansion (Judah) became part of God's project.

Disruption of Israel (15). Chapter 15 covers the reigns of two Judean kings (Azariah and Jotham) and five Israelite kings (Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah), that is, the first part of the eighth century BCE. The final version of MT is a compilation of various sources, yet the final redactor organized the material to promote his own interpretation of the last days of the Northern Kingdom, which can be deduced from the motifs and structure of chapter 15. The literary motif that permeates 2 Kings 15 is a coup d'état (15:10, 14, 25, 30), which is expressed by means of a fixed formula: PN1 conspired against PN2...struck PN2 down...killed PN2...and became king in PN2's stead. The occurrences of this formula and its variants show that the final number of coups d'état in the Northern Kingdom amounts to seven. Though the first three coups d'état were spread over two hundred years, the last four took place within twenty years. By means of this literary technique the final redactor conveyed the idea that the instability of the kingdom reached its peak. The coups d'état spread over the whole country and they reached even to the safest place of the kingdom—the royal keep. Intrigues and murders penetrated all social strata. Not only the mob but also the king's most trusted people turned out to be murderers. Moreover, the expansion of Menahem's empire was achieved by means of unprecedented violence. He did not stop at destroying cities, but also ripped open pregnant women (15:16). By putting this episode into the center of chapter 15, the final redactors demonstrated that the "badness" of the Israelite kings reached an unprecedented level. So, the chapter presents latent tensions that ultimately culminated in the fall of Samaria. On the one hand, the personal aspirations and tribal rivalries were tearing the kingdom apart from within. On the other hand, the Assyrian invasions were mutilating the kingdom and fomenting internal tensions (cf. ch. 16). While the first invasion of Tiglath-pileser III drained the country financially, the second resulted in the deportation and the destruction of the northern part of the kingdom. In sum, the final composition of this chapter shows that the collapse of the Northern Kingdom was due to the combination of multiple external and internal factors that were a ticking bomb. The explosion is described in chapter 17.

Tiglath-pileser III's invasion and Ahaz's cultic reform (16). 16:5–9 represent the Southern version of Tiglath-pileser III's invasion that was first mentioned in 15:29. After 738 BCE, Syria and Palestine were divided into Assyrian provinces and Assyrian vassals. This period of peace did not last very long, for Damascus organized a strong anti-Assyrian block. The coalition consisted of Rezin, king of Damascus; Hiram, king of Tyre; Pekah, king of Samaria; Hanunu, king of Gaza; and Samsi, queen of the Arabs. The coalition formed an impenetrable bloc controlling southern Syria and the Arabian desert. It took Tiglath-pileser III three years to defeat the rebels (734–32 BC). In response to the rebellion, Tiglath-pileser first attacked the weakest link of the coalition—Tyre. Before Damascus could come to the rescue of Tyre, Hiram, its king, surrendered. The surrender of Tyre opened to the Assyrians the road along the Mediterranean coast. The Assyrians quickly moved southward along the Philistine coast. One city after another surrendered, and Judah and the trans-Jordanian kingdoms paid tribute. Thus, Tiglath-pileser prevented the possibility of any help coming from Egypt. In the following year (733 BCE), the Assyrians approached Damascus. They defeated Rezin's troops and plundered the region. They then defeated the Arabs heavily in the desert. After having disrupted the coalition in the following year (732 BCE), Tiglath-pileser attacked Damascus directly. The city quickly fell, Rezin was executed, and Damascus became an Assyrian province.

The Bible refers to these events in 15:29 and 16:5–13. Assyrian inscriptions and the Bible both agree on the destruction of cities in Northern Israel as well as on a massive deportation from Israel. The Southern version is modeled on 15:16–22. According to this model, Ahaz bribed Tiglath-pileser who came with help and eliminated his enemies, that is, it presents a version different from the Assyrian sources. A similar strategy was not an invention of Judah, but was employed often in the ancient Near East. Thus, the king of Sam'al (southeastern Turkey) bribed Assyria to obtain its support against his enemies. From a diplomatic point of view, Ahaz saved Judah by this decision, for he preferred not to adhere to anti-Assyrian coalition. In recompense, Tiglath-pileser III left him on the throne, no Judeans were deported, and the country was spared the massive devastation and looting inflicted on Damascus and Northern Israel. Despite Ahaz's excellent diplomatic move, Isaiah severely criticized him (Isaiah 7).

Second Kgs 16:10–18 shift the focus to the reconstruction of the temple. Despite many unresolved exegetical questions, the reign of Ahaz marked a key step in the temple architecture and its cult. His submission to Assyria, on the one hand, resulted in the payment of an

initial heavy gift or bribe, followed by Judah's payment of regular tribute to Assyria. On the other hand, his submission to Assyria gave him the liberty to undertake important construction projects. While paying a visit to Tiglath-pileser III, Ahaz was inspired by the altar he saw in Damascus and asked the priest Uriah to replicate it. The introduction of the new altar, most likely made of stone, resulted in the displacement of the traditional bronze altar. Analysis of the biblical texts showed that the biblical authors did not condemn this new altar. On the contrary, it became the altar for burnt and daily offerings. Moreover, Ahaz reconstructed some parts of the temple (cf. v. 18) and around his reign the temple court was paved with cobblestones (cf. v. 17). The new pavement and other interventions in the temple complex changed significantly the appearance of the temple precincts. These changes the biblical authors connected with Ahaz. Seen in the light of other biblical text in this period the temple, which originally served as a royal shrine, became like a national shrine.

THE FALL OF SAMARIA (17)

17:1–6 describes the last days of Samaria and its conquest by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (Becking 1992). The tumultuous years after Tiglath-pileser III's campaigns in 733–31 BCE destabilized the royal court and turned Samaria into a full-fledged vassal of Assyria. Hoshea (ca. 735–23 BCE), the last Israelite king, began as a pro-Assyrian vassal but, shortly after becoming king, rebelled against Assyria. According to the Babylonian Chronicle (*ABC* 1), the first punishing expedition took place during Shalmaneser III's reign. Archaeological evidence shows that Samaria was not destroyed, but probably surrendered and thus avoided a massive destruction. The royal inscriptions from Sargon II's reign attest that Sargon II conquered Samaria and deported its inhabitants. The result of Shalmaneser's and Sargon's campaigns was that the Northern Kingdom ceased to exist and the territory was divided into two Assyrian provinces (Samaria and Megiddo) governed by Assyrian governors. A similar process of gradual destabilization of the country, in conjunction with Assyrian campaigns that resulted in vassal kingdoms becoming Assyrian provinces, is attested in the Neo-Assyrian period, for example, in Bit-Adini, Egypt, Elam, and other places.

17:23b–41 depicts life in Samaria after the Assyrian conquest. The Hebrew text reports that the inhabitants of Israel were mixed with the people deported from other parts of the empire, resulting in syncretism, and reports also that the Israelite deportees living in various parts of the Assyrian Empire continued to reject the LORD and his commandments. The story of lions attacking new settlers

reflects an Assyrian way of reading the divine signs, the attack of fierce animals being one of them, which led court officials to the conclusion that the God of Israel was a territorial god, who stayed in the land even after the deportation of most of its inhabitants (cf. ch. 18).

The fall of Samaria represents the end of the Northern Kingdom, which had lasted about three hundred years. The central part of the chapter provides theological explanations of this traumatic moment. The first possible explanation is in the first verses of the chapter, which evaluate Hoshea according to Deuteronomic standards. At first glance, the author's judgment of Hoshea is negative, though according to 1–2 Kings he is the second-best Northern king. So Hoshea was not the direct reason of the fall. Why then did it happen? According to 17:21–23, the first reason was the sin of Jeroboam I and his successors on the throne; Jeroboam I is mentioned three times. He had caused Israel to sin by establishing the cultic centers at Bethel and Dan. The king was supposed to make his people observe the covenant so that they could live in the promised land. But Jeroboam I and his successors had failed to do so, and hence they were ultimately responsible for the apostasy of Israel and its demise. But why did innocent people have to go into exile?

17:9 introduces the sin of the people of Israel. The fall of Samaria was not only the fault of kings, but also the responsibility of the whole nation. The theological reflection explaining the fall covers the time span of the whole monarchy; it goes far beyond the parameters of the Israelite kings in both directions (from the exodus to the fall of Jerusalem). It points out the decisive moments when the Israelites and their leaders went astray. In sum, the theological reflection shows that the infidelity of the king and the people, their disobedience and unwillingness to follow the admonitions of the prophets, had always been an integral part of human history. This reflection shows that though it was a good thing to be elected by God and to enter in a covenant with him, the history of Israel proved that neither the king nor the people were and ever will be able to observe the covenant. The failure suggests that long-lasting prosperity and peace can only come about when there is a divine inner transformation of the people, as suggested by Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26; and by Pauline theology.

JUDAH'S RISE AND FALL AND EXILE (18–25)

HEZEKIAH AND THE ASSYRIAN THREAT (18–20)

Hezekiah's reform and Sennacherib's invasion (18–19). Chapter 18 starts with a brief description of

Hezekiah's reform. Even though it is difficult to prove the historicity of such a reform, both archaeological data and analysis of different biblical texts show that in the last decades before the fall of Judah, Jerusalem, its temple, and both the royal and temple administrations played a much more significant role than before. So it is possible to presuppose some religious reforms that would strengthen the central position of Jerusalem (Young 2012).

The story is inserted within the historical context of Sennacherib's invasion in 701 BCE. Despite a few historical problems, Sennacherib's invasion is extensively described in Assyrian royal annals and attested by archaeological data. Sources agree on the devastating impact of Sennacherib's campaign, which left a good part of Judah in ruins and that Hezekiah had to pay a tribute. However, the biblical and Assyrian documents disagree on the results. According to Assyrian sources, the recalcitrant King Hezekiah learned his lesson and after Sennacherib's campaign Judah was a loyal vassal, regularly paid tribute, and never again participated in any anti-Assyrian rebellion. On the contrary, the biblical sources describe a huge defeat of the Assyrian army, its retreat, and the murder of Sennacherib. It is true that the Assyrian army left Judah without conquering Jerusalem, but they brought a huge booty to Nineveh, and Sennacherib's army did not suffer any serious defeat in 701 BCE. It is also true that Sennacherib was murdered, but it had nothing to do with Judah. Finally, according to the Bible, Assyria virtually ceased to exist after its defeat at the gate of Jerusalem. The contrary was true. After 701 BCE, Sennacherib and his successors continued expanding the Assyrian Empire and in the first half of the seventh century BCE, Assyria conquered its two archenemies, Egypt and Elam, and controlled virtually the entire known world.

To explain these differences, it is important to note that the Bible dedicates much more space to the dialogue between Hezekiah and Sennacherib through their ambassadors than to the description of the war. Long dialogues carried out on the walls of Jerusalem display powerful Assyrian propaganda and show how the Assyrians skillfully employed the tools of psychological warfare. They did not hesitate to undermine the authority of God and king, to make promises, to frighten people by their successes and irresistible military power, and to insert divisions and doubts among the people as well as the ruling class. The Assyrians even assured a new promised land and happiness if Jerusalem surrendered. In contrast to their new promised land, the Assyrians described the actual situation of Jerusalem in vulgar terms. Isaiah's interpretation of Assyrian speeches showed

that the Assyrians were not attacking Hezekiah, but God himself. Their boasting and attacks, in fact, were blasphemy against God. Therefore, God had to intervene.

The crucial moment in changing the flow of history was Hezekiah's prayer (2 Kgs 19:14–19). In a moment of absolute distress, Hezekiah went to the temple and prayed to God. Thus, the two great prayers in 1 and 2 Kings come together. Solomon's prayer describing the temple as a place in which God listened to this people in specific ways (1 Kings 8) was fulfilled in Hezekiah's prayer. Hezekiah's prayer became the pattern for any prayer in distress (cf. 2 Macc 15:22). God listened to Hezekiah's supplication and answered through Isaiah: an angel exterminated 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, that is, the entire Assyrian army. Using the historiography of representation, Judean scribes chose to "represent" reality, that is, to interpret it rather than describe it. To accomplish this aim, they telescoped different historical events into the account of Sennacherib's invasion. The historiography of representation did not focus on when, where, and by whom the Assyrian army was decimated, but on showing that the destruction of Assyria was part of the divine plan. Just as the prophet Isaiah said in his oracle (Isa 10:5–19), the LORD "will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride." According to Isaiah's song the real cause of the Assyrians' downfall was their hubris. Since Assyrian hubris according to the biblical law required the death penalty, then it was only a question of time when it would take place. From this point of view, it really did not matter whether the fall of Assyria took place in 701 or 612 BCE; what really mattered was to understand why it happened.

Hezekiah's last days (20). The story of Hezekiah did not end with the defeat of Assyria, but continued in chapter 20. Hezekiah passed the first test of being a good king—he eradicated idolatry in Judah. Then he passed the second test—when Sennacherib was destroying fortified Judean cities, he, like all wise Judean kings, opted for paying tribute. The third test was more difficult. The payment strategy did not work and Sennacherib threatened to attack Jerusalem. Hezekiah went to the temple and prayed and the LORD saved him; so, he evidently passed the most difficult test.

The fourth test was similar to what occurs in Job 1–2. Not only Hezekiah's city but also his own body was touched. The narrator simply announces that Hezekiah became sick and was about to die. In contrast to other deadly sicknesses in 1 Kings 14 and 2 Kings 1, Hezekiah was healed. Why? Contrary to the case of Jeroboam's sick son in 1 Kings 14 and the sick king Ahaziah in 2 Kings 1, Hezekiah did not seek help from foreign gods or magic; after receiving the

verdict from Isaiah, Hezekiah prayed. In his prayer, he reviewed his life in the light of his deeds; his short prayer in 2 Kgs 20:3 was turned into a psalm in Isaiah 38. As Hezekiah prayed when the Assyrians attacked the city, so he prayed when illness attacked his body and once again God saved him. So, Hezekiah passed the last test of his fidelity to God.

Second Kings 20:12–19 show that even Hezekiah could make a mistake, as happened when he showed the treasure to the Babylonian ambassadors; Isaiah severely condemned his deed. The historicity of these verses is difficult to prove, but the narrative places the condemnation of Hezekiah just before his death. It shows that no good king could ever meet the requirements of the Deuteronomistic theology. As Solomon failed at the end of his life, so did Hezekiah. The condemnation of Hezekiah, the failure of Saul, Solomon, Jeroboam I, and even Josiah introduce tragic elements into the history of salvation. Tragedies of human lives encourage readers to confront the tragic moments in their own lives, which no theology can fully answer.

MANASSEH A SCAPEGOAT (21)

The chapter gives an extensive list of Manasseh's transgressions. From the historical point of view, Manasseh was a successful king. He ruled for fifty-five years, during which Judah was never exposed to devastating campaigns (cf. chs. 18–19). Archaeological excavations point to numerous building activities dated to this period and to general prosperity. Extrabiblical sources attest that Manasseh was a loyal vassal of Assyria. Against all the extrabiblical evidence, chapters 21 and 24 make Manasseh the worst king in the history of Judah (Stavropoulou 2004). The transgressions attributed to Manasseh are similar to those listed in chapter 17, both of which function as theological explanations of the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem. While chapter 17 pinned the guilt to Jeroboam I, chapter 21 scapegoats Manasseh. The biblical authors attribute to him actions that brought the disaster upon Jerusalem. The first and the most important was idolatry and infidelity to God. The second were problematic practices such as witchcraft and consultation of the dead (cf. also 1 Samuel 28). The third sin does not have a counterpart in 2 Kings 17: Manasseh shed innocent blood that was not expiated. The only way to expiate all these crimes was to burn the city and thus purify the land polluted by innocent blood and idolatry. Later scribes justified Manasseh. Second Chronicles 33:10–15 tells of the repentance of Manasseh; guilt for the fall of Jerusalem was pinned on Ahaz.

The second part of the chapter (2 Kgs 21:19–26) presents the reign of Amon, Manasseh's son. He did

not introduce any new cultic practices but continued his father's reform, which is underlined by the triple repetition of the term "his father" (vv. 20, 21a, 21b). The vicissitudes of his reign resemble the decline of the Northern Kingdom depicted in 2 Kings 15, as is shown by "I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line for Samaria, and the plummet for the house of Ahab" (v. 13). The kingdom of Judah became unstable and, except for a short intermezzo of Josiah's reign, it gradually declined. The first sign of decline was conspiracies. Amon's servants, the members of the royal court, conspired against him and killed him. However, the conspirators were unable to attain power and were killed shortly after.

JOSIAH RESTORES TRUE WORSHIP IN JUDAH (22–23)

Josiah and the prophetess Huldah (22). The final version of MT contains three interwoven narratives. The first narrative (vv. 3–7, 9) describes the reconstruction of the temple, the second narrates the finding of the book (vv. 8, 10), and the third reports the oracle of the prophetess Huldah (vv. 16–20a). The final composition contains links and hinge-verses (vv. 11–14, 16, 20b), which unite three narratives into one plot.

The arrangement of the individual stories into the final account bears traces of clear redactional logic: the most important religious reform did not come out of the blue; rather the redactor carefully made clear that all the conditions for initiating such a reform were fulfilled.

The narration begins with a phrase that does not occur in other introductory formulas: "he [Josiah] did not turn aside to the right or to the left." Like the accounts on Hezekiah's and Manasseh's reforms, the account of Josiah's reform is highly charged with theological language. Josiah is presented as the opposite of Manasseh, and the biblical writers judge him even superior to Hezekiah, his precursor in reform. He is compared to David (2 Kgs 22:2) and to Moses (2 Kgs 23:25), whereas Hezekiah was compared only to David (2 Kgs 18:3). Several references to the Torah (2 Kgs 23:24–25) and to Deuteronomy (2 Kgs 22:2; cf. Deut 17:20), as well as two positive evaluations framing all his activities (2 Kgs 22:2; 23:25), indicate that the biblical writers put Josiah at the head of their list of good kings. He was the best of all the Judean kings and thus he was qualified to administer the most extensive religious reform. So, the first condition—a king that would satisfy the religious requirements—was fulfilled, since the reform could not be carried out by a bad king, not even by a moderately good king.

However, it was not enough to have a just king, a king had to be willing to act. The narration skips ten

years of Josiah's reign and moves directly to his eighteenth year. The first words of Josiah shows his care for the temple (Provan 1997, 270). He began with what a just king should do—repair the temple. Despite his zeal for the temple, he did not want to do it by himself. The royal scribe obeyed the king's commands and the high priest and the troops of workers did their part in the reconstruction of the temple. The discovery of the book was completely unexpected and introduced a shift in the narrative. The reading of the scroll brought into the narrative another temple and palace officials: Ahikam, Achbor, and Asaiah. They, together with the high priest and the royal scribe, were to verify the contents of the scroll. In other words, the incoming reform was not a palace coup. The lengthy list of officials shows that palace and temple administration was involved. The reform needed one more approval. The final confirmation came from the prophetess Huldah, an independent prophetic voice. In sum, the final version shows that for a reform of such scope, it was necessary to have an appropriate king, the collaboration of temple and palace officials, and the approval of a prophetess representing a different voice. The interweaving of three probably independent stories was not casual. It shows that all the conditions were met and therefore the time was ripe to set out the major reform in 1–2 Kings, as was the case when Solomon built the temple (cf. 1 Kings 8).

Josiah's reform and Egyptian control of Judah (23). The chapter continues developing the plot of chapter 22. Whereas the previous scenes situated the king in his palace, in 23:2 the king enters the temple and gives orders from the temple. The gathering of all the people, the reading of the Torah, and the stipulation of the covenant correspond to Deut 31:1–13. After the solemn renewal of the covenant, Josiah begins his reform. The reform was broad: it affected the temple in Jerusalem, the city of Jerusalem and its vicinity, the entire territory of Judah, and even Bethel and Samaria. The description of the cleansing of the temple of Jerusalem follows the same alternation of unspecified and specific locations as was the case in Manasseh's reform. The cleansing of the temple proceeded from the temple building outward: it extended from the *hékāl* to the courts, and even to the structures adjacent to the temple. Moreover, not only idolatrous objects but also the edifices of the idolatrous personnel were destroyed. The substantial number of cultic objects listed and the destruction of the houses of the idolatrous cult personnel lead the reader to the conclusion that Josiah completely cleansed the temple of idolatry.

The violent language describing the reform refers to Deut 7:1–5 and 12:3–5. But the modes of defilement mentioned in 2 Kings 23 have no precedent

in Deuteronomy. In 2 Kgs 23:6, Josiah not only cut down and burnt the asherah, as required in Deut 7:5 and 12:3, but he beat it to dust, and cast the dust on the graves of the people. These were apotropaic rituals similar to those described in Numbers 19 and Leviticus 14 and 18. In this logic, idolatry was similar to leprosy, and the only way to eradicate it was to eliminate the object's potency (Monroe 2011).

Only when the whole promised land was free of idolatry did he return to Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:20) to celebrate the Passover, as Joshua did after entering the promised land (Joshua 5). After Joshua's celebration, there was no celebration of the Passover till Josiah. The narrative suggests that Josiah's religious reform opened a new chapter in the possession of the promised land similar to that of Joshua.

After Josiah's glorious reform, the narrative shifts and describes the gradual fall of Judah that resulted in exile and the destruction of Jerusalem. Two elements in the narrative demonstrate the beginning of the end. First, Pharaoh Necho deposed Jehoahaz and put on the throne Josiah's son Jehoiakim. This was the first time a foreign king intervened in such a drastic way into the internal politics of Judah. Second, the pharaoh assumed the authority to change the name of Josiah's son Eliakim to Jehoiakim. That meant that the pharaoh had complete power over the king (cf. Genesis 2–3, when God and Adam gave names). In a certain sense, it is possible to conclude that the Davidic dynasty ended with Josiah, since Jehoiakim was made king by a foreign king who felt authorized to change even his identity, that is, his name.

Only three Judean kings have no closing formula: Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. All three were deported: Jehoahaz to Egypt, and Jehoiachin and Zedekiah to Babylon. Jehoahaz died in the Egyptian exile, but we do not know when. Jehoiachin was rehabilitated and Zedekiah is no longer mentioned after 2 Kgs 25:7. This raises a question for the biblical reader: Which group of exiles was the continuation of true Israel—Jehoiachin and those deported to Babylon or Jehoahaz and those who escaped to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem? The missing formulas show that there were two diasporas, and both could become the continuation of a true remnant of Israel, one in Babylon and the other in Egypt. To complete the picture, there was a third group of exiles deported from Samaria who also claimed to be heirs of the ancient promises. The Egyptian exiles settled in Elephantine, where they preserved a tradition of an ancient temple of *Yhwh*. However, the Babylonian exiles became the most important group in the Persian period claiming the right to rebuild Jerusalem.

APOSTASY AGAIN LEADING TO THE BABYLONIAN EXILE (24—25)

The first invasion of Jerusalem (24). The fall of Jerusalem echoed political changes elsewhere in the Levant. Assyria collapsed and Babylon attempted to control the Assyrian provinces. In the first phase (616–12 BCE), Babylon aimed at the conquest of the eastern territories and Nineveh. Once Assyria was weakened and partially separated from the rest of its territories, the Babylonians in the second phase focused on the conquest of the most important cities, specifically, Harran, the second capital of Assyria. By expanding westward, Babylonia clashed with Egypt. When Egypt attempted to control the western Levant at the same time, Judah also tried to take advantage of the weakening control of Assyria, and Josiah expanded his territorial control. An independent and prosperous Judean kingdom began to lose its independence after the death of Josiah (610/609 BCE). The Egyptian pharaoh, Necho, did not hesitate to cut for himself a portion of the collapsed Assyria. The new Judean king, Jehoahaz, was deposed by Pharaoh Necho and a new king, Jehoiakim, became an Egyptian vassal and had to pay tribute. The situation changed when the victorious advance of Nebuchadnezzar's troops in the southern Levant transformed Judah from an Egyptian vassal into a Babylonian vassal (604 BCE).

The third phase of Babylonian expansion focused on stabilizing the western Levant and blocking Egypt. Between 604 and 601 BCE the southwestern frontier was set up and the rest of the campaigns, the conquest of Tyre and Jerusalem included, can be considered an internal operation aimed at calming revolts in the new empire. In this period, Jehoiakim was a vassal (lit. "servant"; 24:1) of the Babylonian king. The unsuccessful Babylonian attempt to conquer Egypt in 601 BCE gave rise to a brief period of Judean independence. Jehoiakim took advantage of the situation and rebelled against Babylonia (v. 1), probably with the full support of Egypt. However, the new period of independence did not last long. Nebuchadnezzar waited for a favorable moment and organized the first invasion against Jerusalem in 598/597 BCE. Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin was eighteen years old and after three months on the throne found himself in the city of Jerusalem surrounded by the Babylonians. To control the damage, he surrendered. Given the situation, the result was as positive as possible. The city was looted, but not destroyed. One part of the inhabitants was deported, but Jerusalem still had a king from the Davidic dynasty, Zedekiah. After a few years in the

Babylonian exile, Jehoiachin was partially rehabilitated (2 Kgs 25:27–30).

The end of Judah (25). Babylonia was able to control the western Levant but it never conquered Egypt. Although both Samaria and Jerusalem resisted occupying powers, the main difference between Assyrian control and Babylonian control of Syria-Palestine was in relations with Egypt. It required the best efforts of two Assyrian kings, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, to conquer recalcitrant Egypt. Once Egypt fell into Assyrian hands, the southern Levant, including Samaria, became one among many provinces in an enormous empire extending from Egypt to Elam. By contrast, the extension of the Babylonian Empire was much smaller. The different geopolitical status of Judah entailed different policies regarding Jerusalem in the Babylonian period (Lipschits 2005).

When the pro-Babylonian King Zedekiah rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar had to intervene. Seeing his rebellion in the context of the expansionist tendencies of the Egyptian Pharaohs Psammetichus II and Hophra, the Babylonians could not tolerate the disloyalty of Jerusalemite kings; they decided to turn the buffer state into an entity that would not be capable of revolt against Babylonia. No such measures were needed against Samaria during the Neo-Assyrian period, because Samaria did not border a kingdom comparable to Egypt in military and economic power. Probably this was one of the reasons why Jerusalem was razed to the ground, whereas the city of Samaria was spared from destruction. This decision became a reality in Nebuchadnezzar's second invasion (586 BCE). His general Nebuzaradan carried out the final verdict; the destruction of Judah can be partially reconstructed from the Lachish ostraca as well as from biblical sources. As a result, the Kingdom of Judah was fully incorporated into the Babylonian administrative orbit and ceased to exist, despite an attempt by local rulers to prevent this (25:25–26).

The description of the destruction of Jerusalem focused on some elements while omitting the others. First, the temple was destroyed and the holy vessels deported to Babylon. The burning of the temple ended the presence of God in Jerusalem that had been solemnly inaugurated by Solomon in 1 Kings 6–8. Second, the leading class was deported and the city was left without a priestly hierarchy and ruling class. Therefore, no cult and no government could continue. To underline the end of Jerusalem, the capital of Judah was moved to Mizpah. Finally, the land was left empty, even though the archaeological data showed that it was not completely so. The tragic

end of Judah stands in parallel with the tragic end of Israel. God's elected people ceased to exist. The tragic end of both kingdoms, in contrast to the happy ending of Chronicles, is a powerful rhetorical device forcing the reader to enter the dynamic of human trauma and tragedy. The tragedy of the promised land and of the elected nation does not have a simple answer. Simplified answers do not suffice.