



I KINGS



Dale Ralph Davis





'The range of scholarship is extraordinary (is there any learned book or paper on First Kings that this writer has not winkled out?), His humour and humanity, plus a priceless American-style turn of phrase, add relish to the dish. Here is a safe and strong pair of hands to guide new, and older, readers through the treasure – and the uninspiring bits – of First Kings.'

Dick Lucas

'Robust – that's the word ...a robust understanding, defence, explanation and application of First Kings as the Word of God. Here is no "First Kings in my own words" – the boring, fruitless fate of most commentaries on Bible History – but a delicious feast of truth, proof that the ancients were right to call the historians "prophets".'

Alec Motyer

'...this exposition enables the contemporary reader to breathe the air of 1 Kings, re-live its challenges, and above all, to encounter the personally the God who speaks and acts throughout its pages. This is a book to unsettle spiritual complacency and challenge us to a deep integrity in our relationship with the living God.'

David Jackman





I KINGS

The Wisdom and the Folly



Dale Ralph Davis

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





Dale Ralph Davis is pastor of Woodland Presbyterian Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Previously he taught Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson Mississippi. He has also written commentaries on:

Joshua (1-84550-134-3)

Judges(1-85792-578-5)

1 Samuel(1-85792-516-5)

2 Samuel(1-85792-598-X)

2 Kings(1-84550-096-2).

ISBN 1-84550-251-5
ISBN 978-1-84550-251-5

© Dale Ralph Davis

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First published in 2002
Reprinted in 2003 and 2007

in the

Focus on the Bible Commentary series

by

Christian Focus Publications, Ltd.,
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Great Britain.

www.christianfocus.com

Cover design by Danie Van Straaten

Printed by CPD Wales

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher or a license permitting restricted copying. In the U.K. such licenses are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.





Preface

First Kings covers such a swath of history, in royal time from the death of David to the death of Ahab, or in prophetic time from Nathan to Micaiah, blending together royal records, detailed descriptions, repetitive formulas, and tense narratives in the whole effort. I try to avoid both being aridly historical and sentimentally devotional. As with my previous commentaries, I seek to grasp the theological nerve of the text and cast it in an expository form, without being allergic to application.

One always owes thanks. I pushed one of my Hebrew exegesis classes through some of the least interesting material in 1 Kings just to see if we could preach it. They did grandly and proved an immense help to me. The powers that be at Reformed Seminary have accelerated the pace of writing by granting an eight-month sabbatical. Ken Elliott and John McCarty have been more than gracious with research space in 'their' library. And Ruth Bennett's sharp eye nailed numerous glitches and follies before the manuscript was in the mail.

The appearance of this volume coincides with a milestone. Knox Chamblin, my colleague in New Testament, will soon retire from full-time teaching duties at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi. He is both Jesus' disciple and Paul's admirer, as one should be. This book goes forth as a small tribute to Dr. Chamblin, for we have found and enjoyed him as a rigorous scholar, moving preacher, mischievous colleague, and gracious friend.

Dale Ralph Davis
Reformation Day 2000





Abbreviations

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> , 3 rd ed.
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> (ed. D. J. A. Clines)
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
IDBS	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible/ Supplementary Volume</i>
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KJV	King James Version
LXX	The Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBD	<i>New Bible Dictionary</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis</i>
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Traditional Hebrew Text (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TEV	Today's English Version
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
ZPEB	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>



Introduction

Sorry about the title. It would be nice to call this volume *The Power and the Glory*, but 1 Kings' story of the sadness and stupidity of sin forbids it. The power and the glory is not yet. There is, to be sure, a flash of glory (Solomon) but it fades.

Bible readers who have braved their way through 1 and 2 Kings are sometimes dazed by the apparent maze of detail, especially when the writer takes us through the various kings of Israel and Judah, switching back and forth along the way. We can handle two Jeroboams in one kingdom and a Rehoboam in the other contemporary with one of the Jeroboams, but when there is a Jehoram (or Joram) in each kingdom at about the same time, not to mention double Ahaziahs, we go into historical overload. Like warm jello it all seems to melt into hopeless confusion. 'Too much history!', we sigh.

Not really. Actually, the writer has been very kind to us, deliberately trying to prevent cranial fatigue. No one has said it better than Charles Martin:

1 and 2 Kings ... give a continuous narrative of the Hebrew monarchy from the time when David handed on a rich and extensive kingdom to the time of its final destruction. Four hundred years in little more than 50,000 words means a drastic reduction of detail.¹

In other words, the writer of Kings left out most of what he could have said! Four hundred years in little more than 50,000 words. The history of my own country (USA) extends a little over half that long but its history is written in thick tomes not brief booklets (like 1–2 Kings). This means, as Martin says,

1. '1 and 2 Kings,' *The New Layman's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 425.





a drastic reduction of detail.' The writer of (1–2) Kings must be very *selective*, which implies that what he *does* include must be of vital importance. It also means the writer has no intention of providing us with an exhaustive history but maybe with a prophecy – a God-authorized version of how we should view that history.

I have imposed a policy of planned neglect on this treatment of 1–2 Kings. Temptation lurks in the text at every turn; one can easily get sucked into all the chronological, historical, and critical matters that beg attention and solution. But one must be rather ruthless about excluding these unless they directly affect the expositional task. In any case, such matters have been covered elsewhere.²

I should, however, explain a bit of terminology. The Books of Kings are part of what scholarly jargon calls the Deuteronomistic History, said to encompass the books of Deuteronomy–2 Kings (excluding Ruth). One influential view holds that this 'history' came out in two editions, one in King Josiah's time (ca. 622 BC), which may have been more hopeful, and one in the exilic period (ca. 550) in which the theme of condemnation was prominent. Most do not think of a single Deuteronomist living at one address. Scholars often posit a Deuteronomistic 'school' – these Deuteronomistic editors being at work from the late seventh century on into the exilic period. Now the 'Deuteronomistic History' is only a hypothesis and this is not the place to evaluate it. I myself have problems with its assumptions and its application. Usually (note the qualifier), those who follow this theory assume that the Book of Deuteronomy itself is a product of the seventh century BC rather than coming substantially (according to its own claim) from Moses. However, I primarily object to the way the theory's practitioners mangle the biblical text when using the theory allegedly to explain the text. One then realizes that one is dealing with a pool of deuteronomists, a 'prophetic' deuteronomist adding this snip, a legalistic one responsible for this verse or half-verse, and so on. The text becomes a collage,

2. See, to begin, David M. Howard, Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1993), 169–229.





Introduction

11

a product of multiple contributors grinding their specialized deuteronomistic axes. Such detailed theorizing is largely guesswork. Even that might be stomachable if, at the end of it all, such writers looked at the text as a whole and told us how it addresses us as the word of God. This they rarely do.

Readers will run into other terminology, which I hope will be clear in the context. Occasionally, one will bump into terms like 'hermeneutics' or 'hermeneutical,' which I use in a non-technical sense, the former referring to the process of interpretation, the latter as synonymous with 'interpretive.'

First and Second Kings were originally one book. We don't know who the author was (some prefer to speak of authors). He used earlier materials for his work, but the whole work cannot date earlier than 560 BC since the final composition must post-date Babylon's smashing of Judah and Jerusalem in 2 Kings 24–25. The material of 1–2 Kings falls into three major chunks:

- I. The Golden Age, 1 Kings 1–11
- II. The Torn Kingdom, 1 Kings 12–2 Kings 17
- III. The Last Days, 2 Kings 18–25

Let us hurry to the text.

