

CHAPTER I

THE BIBLICAL SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF THE MONARCHY

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A. THE PAUCITY OF THE SOURCES

THE SOMEWHAT LESS than half a millennium when there was a Monarchy in Israel is only meagerly documented. This period, so rich in national and international experience, so fertile in literary creativity, so strikingly original in the life of the spirit, so momentous and clamorous in the expression of its social conscience, so imperious in its demands upon the future, has not disclosed its history to a degree commensurate with its time-span and importance.

The corpus of canonical sources dealing directly with the period of the Monarchy comprises no more than one hundred and fifty chapters in the books of Samuel¹ (I Sam. 9–31; II Sam.), Kings², and Chronicles³ (I Chron. 10–29; II Chron.), supplemented by narrative appendages to Isaiah 36–39 and Jeremiah 51. Much additional information can be culled from the literary prophets in whose reactions to contemporary events solid historical data are presumably embedded. All in all, however, the biblical sources available for detailed reconstruction of the period of the Monarchy are not bulky and, as will be seen, are limited in scope, due to their particular nature.

B. CONTENTS OF THE BIBLICAL SOURCES

The material about the Monarchy in the book of Samuel begins with the election of Saul (c. 1020 B.C.E.) and closes with events in the life of David, a period of about sixty years. It divides naturally into four groupings:

I Sam. 8–15 deals with the demand for monarchic government and the fortunes of Saul from his election as king, his military campaigns, and his rejection by the prophet Samuel after the war with Amalekites.

I Sam. 16–II:1 covers the rise of David and his checkered relationship with Saul until the disastrous defeat of Israel by the Philistines at Gilboa, where Saul and three of his sons met their deaths.

II Sam. 2–8 treats David's succession to the throne of Judah and Israel, the

consolidation of his kingdom, the capture of Jerusalem and its conversion into the religious and political center of the nation, and Nathan's oracle to David promising an eternal Davidic dynasty.

II Sam. 9–24 describes events at the court of David, the rebellion against him, and some of his wars of conquest. The last four chapters are only appendixes with varied contents.

The book of Kings opens with the last days of David (c. 960 B.C.E.) and closes with the release of King Jehoiachin from prison on the accession of Evil-merodach to the throne of Babylonia in 561 B.C.E., thus covering about 400 years in the history of the nation. This work, too, falls into several natural divisions.

I Kings 1–11 is the story of Solomon's forty-year reign from the struggle for succession until his death. His efforts to consolidate his power, organize his empire, erect great buildings, and cope with the growing internal and external problems are recorded at length. The narrative is interspersed with popular material illustrating the wealth and grandeur of Solomon's court and his reputation for shrewdness and wisdom.

I Kings 12–II Kings 17 is an interlocking, synchronized account of the Divided Monarchy, the vicissitudes of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel until the destruction of the latter in 722 B.C.E. It presents first the events precipitating the secession of the north and through the affairs of its first king, Jeroboam. From here the narrative returns to Rehoboam of Judah and continues with the kings of the south contemporaneous with Jeroboam. When Asa, the last of these, dies, the account once again turns to the northern kings, including the successors of Jeroboam who had been contemporaneous with Asa. Returning to Judah, the story progresses in this fashion back and forth. Besides information about the kings, much popular prophetic tradition, especially about Elijah and Elisha, is recounted.

II Kings 18–25 concentrates exclusively on the fortunes of the Judean kingdom from the accession of Hezekiah in 715 B.C.E., especially upon the reform of the cult, Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, and the king's illness. The personality of Isaiah is interwoven into these two latter events. After recording the abominations of Manasseh and the great reforms of Josiah, the narrator tells of the decline and fall of the kingdom in the succeeding forty years and concludes with the murder of Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah after the destruction of 587 B.C.E. The last four verses are really an appendix to supply a note of hope.

The third biblical source is of quite a different nature. While Samuel and Kings form a continuous history, Chronicles is a parallel presentation of the two with numerous passages duplicated exactly or with minor variants relating to matters of orthography, grammar, syntax, or vocabulary.⁴ But it is much more than this, both adding and subtracting material and occasionally even contradicting

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the book of Kings.⁵ Because of its own special emphases and distinctive approach, Chronicles really constitutes an independent historical work.

The history of the Monarchy commences with I Chron. 10 and continues to the end. Its main divisions are as follows:

I Chron. 10–29 retells the history of David after he ascends the throne. Its interest lies mainly in the organization of the kingdom, about which it is remarkably detailed, and in the preparations for building the Temple and establishing the cult.

II Chron. 1–9 contains the history of Solomon, focusing especially on the Temple.

II Chron. 10–36 is a history of the kings of Judah with little about the northern monarchs and no synchronisms. By way of contrast, the Chronicler often reports expansively on the kings of Judah and adds a great deal about their military, political, and economic activities that appears in no other biblical sources. An appendix tells how Cyrus permitted the exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

C. THEIR COMPOSITION

1. THE BIBLICAL SOURCES AND MODERN RESEARCH

The complex known as the Former Prophets is a continuous expansion of the Pentateuchal narratives from the beginnings of the conquest through the settlement until the Destruction of the Temple and the Exile. The entire work is clearly animated by a single spirit and events are treated with a uniformity that makes it possible to speak of a unified body of historical material covering Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; the latter two are roughly three-fifths of the whole. The Greek Bible indicates that the present division into separate books is a secondary development and the fact that I Kings 1–2 is the sequel to II Sam. 9–20 further supports this conclusion.

Modern scholarship has increasingly focused on isolating the various literary types (*Gattungen*) embedded in the compositions, on distinguishing the blocs of material at the disposal of the editors or compilers, and on examining the literary techniques to learn how the works achieved their extant form. Research has made it clear that Samuel–Kings (and to a lesser extent, Joshua–Judges) bear the characteristic imprints of the Deuteronomistic school, and that reference to Deuteronomistic compilers or editors is therefore appropriate.⁶

The initial clue comes, of course, from the extraordinary amount of space accorded the story of the discovery of the Book of the Law and Josiah's reform of the cult (II Kings 22:3–23:24). Beyond this, the two specific references to

the "Book of the Law of Moses" really identify with Deuteronomy (I Kings 2:3; cf. Deut. 6:1 f.; II Kings 14:6; cf. Deut. 24:16), and the distinctive phraseology of the work saturates the language of Samuel and especially Kings.⁷ The narratives of these two books, moreover, are embellished with prophetic sermons and discourses (e.g., I Kings 11:31-39; 14:7-11, 13-16) and with historical summaries of a reflective nature (e.g. I Sam. 12; II Kings 17:7-23; 21:10-16; 22:15-20), clearly patterned after the book of Deuteronomy, itself constituting the moralistic and exhortatory speeches of Moses' farewell address.⁸ Finally, and above all, it is in their leading and recurrent themes that the Deuteronomic influence is overwhelmingly manifest. The emphasis on the divine election of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple (I Kings 8:16, 44, 48; 11:13, 32, 36; 14:21; II Kings 21:7; 23:27) only expands upon the "place that God will choose" concept of the earlier work (cf. Deut. 12, *passim*; 14:23-25; 15:20; 16, *passim*; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11) which also is the ideological inspiration for the pervasive doctrine of centralization of worship, while the notion of destruction and exile as punishment for the national sin of idolatry (e.g. II Kings 17:23; 21:2-15; 22:16 f.; 23:26 f.; 24:3) is drawn directly from Deut. 4:25-27; 28:15-69.

If the extant historiography of the Monarchy is part of a larger, continuous, Deuteronomistic history, some fundamental issues concerning its composition must be raised. How was the previous material utilized by the writers? Did they correlate an unorganized collection of individual facts and compose a literary work, or did they reshape earlier narrative blocs? If the latter, what did the older history include and how did it relate to the Pentateuchal sources?

No scholarly unanimity exists. Some regard the Former Prophets as a Deuteronomistic redaction of the JE narratives extended beyond the Pentateuch, although opinion differs as to whether Kings belongs in this category.⁹ Those who accept the three-source theory are similarly uncertain, adding a L(ay) document to JE and thus considering that the historical compositions combine three parallel strands.¹⁰ The most widely held view sees (Joshua-) Samuel-Kings, not as parallel sources interwoven, but as originally independent sagas juxtaposed chronologically by the compilers and supplied with connectives and an ideological framework.¹¹

2. THE SOURCE MATERIALS

Is it possible to isolate and delineate the blocs of tradition the writers used? The relative sparseness of the biblical historiographic material cannot be charged to a paucity of sources, for the books themselves disclose rich documentation to

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which the reader is referred for further information. The frequency of these source citations decreases dramatically with the antiquity of the books.

The book of Samuel ascribes David's lament over Saul and Jonathan to a presumably poetic work known as the "Book of Jashar"¹² (II Sam. 1:18; cf. Josh. 10:13), but does not again mention any other source. The book of Kings states that Solomon's history is supplemented by the "Book of the Acts of Solomon"¹³ (I Kings 11:41), and that the deeds of seventeen of the nineteen monarchs of Israel are described at greater length in the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel"¹⁴ (*ibid.*, 14:19; 15:31 etc.). The "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah" offers additional information about all but four of the Judean kings¹⁵ (*ibid.*, 14:29; 15:7 etc.).

The contents of these two chronicles upon which the biblical historian relied cannot be reconstructed, but they must have been far more extensive than our canonical works since they described at length military affairs (*ibid.*, 14:19; 15:23 etc.), political events (*ibid.*, 16:20; II Kings 15:5), royal building projects (I Kings 22:39), and engineering feats (II Kings 22:20). Probably, however, they were not primary sources like royal memoirs or contemporary annals, because they are always described as well-known writings, easily accessible to the public for whom the book of Kings was aimed; that is, the generation after the destruction of the kingdom of Judah. It is hardly feasible that original palace or Temple archives either survived the Babylonian destruction or, if they did, were widely known and readily available. Furthermore, the numerous dynasties in northern Israel which volently succeeded each other must have been inimical to the continuous production of a connected court history from Jeroboam to the fall of Samaria, especially in view of the source-formula citation even for reigns of such brief duration as Zechariah's six months (*ibid.*, 15:11), Shallum's one month (*ibid.*, v. 15), and Zimri's seven days (I Kings 16:20). It is far more plausible to assume that the two chronicles were historiographical developments from original sources. That of the kings of Israel was probably written soon after the destruction of the northern kingdom, was circulated among the Judeans and the exiles, and inspired a parallel chronicle for the southern monarchy. Both documents must have at one time been popular enough for the author of Kings to consult them and suggest that his readers do so as well.

By far the most varied and extensive series of source citations is in the post-exilic canonical book of Chronicles. It is uncertain whether the so-called "Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel" (I Chron. 9:1; II Chron. 27:7; 35:26; 36:8) or the "Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel" (*ibid.*, 16:11; 25:26; 28:26; 32:32) or the "Book of the Kings of Israel" (*ibid.*, 20:34) or simply the "[midrash of] the Book of the Kings" (*ibid.*, 24:27) refer to a single work or to several books which may or may not be identical with the sources cited under somewhat different titles in the

book of Kings. Why does the nomenclature vary and why is the phrase, *dibrei ha-yāmim*, frequently employed in Kings, replaced with other phrases in Chronicles? Why again, despite the reference to "Israel" in these titles, is every citation concerned only with a Judean king?

The Chronicler's other source has the same characteristic. The prophetic historic compositions of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad deal with the United Kingdoms of David and Solomon (I Chron. 29:29; II Chron. 9:29). Beyond this, however, the focus of interest is exclusively Judah. Ahijah, Iddo, and Shemaiah are cited for the period of the division of the kingdom (*ibid.*, 9:29; 12:15; 13:22), and Jehu son of Hanani for the reign of Jehoshaphat (*ibid.*, 20:34). A work by Isaiah is given as the source for information about Uzziah and Hezekiah (*ibid.*, 26:22; 32:32). Whether all these compositions had been previously available to the compilers of the Former Prophets is unknown, but certainly the biblical references could not have exhausted the literary treasury available to the historiographers, who must have had access to a vast amount of material neither explicitly nor independently mentioned in the Bible.

First, and most obvious, would have been various archival records, whose existence is assumed not only on the basis of contemporary Near Eastern custom, but by certain grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic eccentricities in our narratives which betray the direct use of archival data.¹⁶ The lists of high officials in the administrations of David and Solomon (II Sam. 8:16-18; 20:23-26; I Kings 4:1-6) clearly derive from archives, although integrated into the narratives, just as the relatively extensive treatment of Temple themes can be traced to Temple annals. Details about construction, furnishings, and dedication (*ibid.*, 6; 7:13-51; 8), its despoiled treasury in the days of Rehoboam (*ibid.*, 14:26-28), Asa (15:18), Jehoash (II Kings 12:19), Amaziah (14:14), Hezekiah (18:16), Jehoiachin (24:13), and Zedekiah (25:13-17), the Temple repairs initiated by Jehoash (12:5-16) and Josiah (22:3-7), and the innovations of Ahaz (16:10-18) can probably all be assigned to Temple priests or scribal schools. Throughout the Near East, such temple-affiliated scribes were responsible for temple records and annals.¹⁷

Two long self-contained compositions, widely accepted as having been incorporated more or less in their entirety into Samuel—Kings, tell of the rise of the Monarchy and the problem of David's succession. The latter would have comprised all the incidents preceding the central theme (cf. I Kings 1:20) and the final formula asserting Solomon's unchallenged supremacy (*ibid.*, 2:46).¹⁸

The conspicuous and pervasive role of the prophet in the book of Kings makes it clear that the historiographers used cycles of prophetic legends. Not only is he intensively involved in state affairs, delivering the word of God as an active force in history at critical moments in the life of the nation,¹⁹ but he becomes part of

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the folkloristic embellishment. The stories about Ahijah of Shiloh (*ibid.*, 11:29-39; 14:1-18), Shemaiah (*ibid.*, 12:22-24), and the anonymous "man of God" at Bethel (*ibid.*, 12:32-13:32) all seem to be self-contained units, as do the tales of Elijah (*ibid.*, 17-19; 21; II Kings 1) and Elisha (*ibid.*, 2-13), which originated in northern Israel.²⁰ An independent Judean collection of legends about Isaiah similarly draws upon and is integrated into the history of Hezekiah²¹ (*ibid.*, 18:13-20:19). It can also be postulated that an ancient collection of songs, mentioned not in the Hebrew Bible but in the Greek translation,²² was the source for the several poetic compositions in the prose narration.²³

3. DATE OF COMPOSITION

It is certain that the historiography of the monarchic period was finally redacted in the Babylonian Exile. The last event recorded is the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in 561 B.C.E. when Evil-merodach ascended the throne of Babylonia (*ibid.*, 25:27-30). Since there is not another word about the life of the Jews in exile, this epilogue can only be interpreted as a desire to conclude optimistically. The absence of any reference to the downfall of Babylon and to the actions of Cyrus means, therefore, that Kings was edited well before 538 B.C.E., probably not long after 560 B.C.E.

It is difficult to go beyond this, however, with any degree of certainty because the materials are composite and the issues involved complex. The view that the entire Former Prophets is a historical continuum written about the middle of the sixth century B.C.E., seems less plausible than that there were multiple editions, the bulk pre-exilic, from the period not long after Josiah's great reform of the cult.²⁴

Whether a comprehensive pre-Deuteronomistic history was utilized and transformed is debatable, as is the amount of expansion and redaction made in the exile to bring it up to date and achieve a retrospective examination of the monarchic period that would vindicate divine justice after the great national catastrophe.²⁵

D. HISTORY AND FAITH

The historiographers, then, had many sources at their disposal, thus raising a question about the relatively sparse biblical documentation of the half a millennium between Saul and Zedekiah. Scrutiny of the works of the scriptural writers may explain the fact.

This leads to one of the most extraordinary features of biblical religion: that its verities are communicated through the forms of history. The historical writings

are actually documents of faith. Their theocentricity, however, lies less in interest in God's essence than in concern for His activities among men. If the historical framework of biblical literature is inseparable from its religious message, this demands considerable caution, and severely limits the use to which biblical historiography can be put as a means for recovering the past.

The fact is that the biblical writer was not interested simply in preserving for posterity a record of the past, nor with an objective, dispassionate, comprehensive, and integrated delineation of human affairs. He was in fact not detached from but completely involved in the events he described. He had little use for the pursuit of objectivity because he was committed to a particular point of view. He laid no claim to comprehensiveness, but was thoroughly and consciously selective. He was dedicated to the proposition of using historic events to demonstrate, objectify, and transmit truths to which he was passionately committed.²⁶

E. THE PROBLEMS OF BALANCE

How the foregoing affects the understanding of the biblical sources as history becomes apparent if the documentation is examined in relation to the three divisions into which the period of the Monarchy naturally falls.

The 100-year United Kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon is covered in eighty-seven chapters of scriptural historiography. The divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel, which lasted for just over two centuries until the fall of Samaria, are given forty-seven chapters, and Judah alone between 722 B.C.E. and 587 B.C.E. sixteen. This is surely remarkably uneven: well over half of the source material is devoted to less than one quarter of the time involved. Clearly, the United Monarchy holds pride of place for the historiographers, as it does for the prophets, whose messianic vision featured the reunification of Judah and Israel.

Imbalance as a didactic aspect of the scriptural history is most striking in the treatment of David's forty-year reign. Since there are sixty biographical chapters, 40% of the material is devoted to less than 10% of the period. Once again, prophetic themes also suggest themselves. The personality of David, the royal ideal, the dynastic symbol and embodiment of messianic prophetic aspiration, seems to dominate biblical historiography.²⁷

Consistently uneven treatment is exhibited throughout, as a few striking examples from the book of Kings amply illustrate. Several of the nineteen Judean monarchs were blessed with extraordinary longevity. Asa reigned forty-one years (I Kings 15:10), but is given only seventeen verses (*ibid.*, 15:9-25). Jehoshaphat for twenty-five years (*ibid.*, 22:42) and is given fifty-one verses (*ibid.*, 22:1-51), Jehoash for forty years (II Kings 12:2) and receives twenty-two verses (*ibid.*, 12:1-22), Uzziah for fifty-two years (*ibid.*, 15:2) and gets seven verses

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(*ibid.*, 15:1-7), and Manasseh for fifty-five years and merits eighteen verses (*ibid.*, 21:1-18). The Bible says nothing, and only from Assyrian sources do we know that Azariah (Uzziah) led a Syrian coalition against Tiglath-pileser III.²⁸ When we turn to the monarchs of the kingdom of Israel, we discover that eight verses suffice for Baasha's twenty-four years (I Kings 15:3 f.; 16:1-6), seven for the forty-one years of Jeroboam II (II Kings 14:23-29), and five for Pekah's twenty (*ibid.*, 15:27-31).

Imbalance persists not only in the space devoted to a reign, but in the data presented. A case in point is Omri king of Israel, whose only achievement, blandly recorded and not evaluated, was the transfer of the capital of his kingdom to Samaria, newly built for the purpose, and who is otherwise condemned as an evil idolater, whose twelve-year reign is dismissed in six scriptural verses (I Kings 16:23-28). Yet he was undoubtedly one of the greatest and most competent of the Israelite monarchs and left his mark on the international scene. Founder of the first dynasty in the north, three of his descendants sat on the throne in Samaria. The inscription of Mesha king of Moab makes clear that Omri conquered Moab as well as much territory north of the River Arnon in Transjordan. Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.E.) of Assyria even called Jehu, who destroyed the dynasty, an "Omride." During the following century Assyrian records customarily referred to the kingdom of northern Israel as "Omri-land." The biblical record, however, gives no inkling of Omri's stature and importance in the contemporary world.²⁹

Similar is the scriptural treatment of Ahab. During his twenty-two-year rule he pursued his political, commercial, and military policies with such daring, imagination, and farsightedness that his kingdom became one of the most important in the area. Assyrian records show that Ahab was a leader of a coalition of western monarchs who, in the climactic battle of Qarqar against Shalmaneser III in 853 B.C.E., upset the Assyrian advance on the west.³⁰ Not a word of this is mentioned in the biblical sources. The verdict about Ahab is unqualifiedly negative and attention is focused almost exclusively on his tolerance of idolatry and his immoral and murderous expropriation of the ancestral vineyard of one of his subjects, thus, in the eyes of the writer, disqualifying the entire house of Ahab and dooming it to perdition (*ibid.*, 21).

The technique of highlighting those episodes that suit the theological purposes of the scriptural writers is exemplified by the story of Josiah. Of the numerous events in his thirty-one-year rule, attention is expressly called to his eighteenth year when his religious reforms reached their climax, although incidental intelligence, now supported by archaeological evidence, reveals Josiah's bold political maneuvers and important military activities.³¹

F. INDIFFERENCE TO INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

From the viewpoint of the modern historian, it is curious that biblical historiography disregards the impact of the world situation upon the Land of Israel. Only from external sources do we know, for instance, that the mighty empire of David and Solomon was expedited by successfully exploiting a unique international situation, the power vacuum then prevailing in the Near East.³²

This, and the international situation behind the truncation of the empire, is ignored by the biblical historiographer. Not by chance did the contraction coincide with the resurgence of the Egyptian power and the reawakening of interest in Palestine among the XXIInd Dynasty kings. This is clearly the reason why a number of facts are recorded incidentally and disconnectedly: Solomon's marriage alliance with the Egyptian royal house (*ibid.*, 3:1), Pharaoh's mysterious invasion of Philistia and his presentation of Gezer to Solomon as a dowry (*ibid.*, 9:15-16), the harboring and sponsoring of Solomon's political enemies by the Egyptian court (*ibid.*, 11:14-22, 26-28, 40), and Shishak's invasion of Palestine and his plundering of the Temple in the fifth year of Rehoboam³³ (*ibid.*, 14:25-26; II Chron. 12:2-9).

This lack of international perspective and the introverted, theological presentation of events sometimes suggest that episodes are separate from each other and they sometimes turn integrated and coordinated actions into diffuse ones. An example of the former is the assassination of Sennacherib, which appears to follow his return to his land after his Judean fiasco (II Kings 19:36-37). In actual fact, it happened twenty years later. An instance of diffusion is the story of Hezekiah's neutralization of Philistine and other hostile military potential (*ibid.*, 18:8; I Chron. 4:41-43), his measures to secure Jerusalem's water supply in event of siege (II Kings 20:20; II Chron. 2:30), his bolstering of the city's defenses (Isa. 22:8-11), the reinforcement and provisioning of cities in central Judah (II Chron. 32:28), and the survey of national resources (I Chron. 4:38-41). All these precautions certainly anticipated an Assyrian invasion, which gave rise to the diplomatic activities described in II Kings 20:12-13 (Isa. 39:1-2), but the biblical writers have reported his activities in many sources as disconnected incidents. Similarly, nothing is said of Hezekiah's political activities that provoked Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C.E., nor is his reform of the national cult (II Chron. 29-31) equated with the world situation as it undoubtedly must be.³⁴ By contrast, the story of Hezekiah's illness and his treatment by Isaiah with a fig-plaster is featured at length (II Kings 20:1-11; Isa. 38).

The handling of Josiah's thirty-one-year reign, already mentioned, further exemplifies disregard for the international background to internal Judean affairs. Egypt and Assyria are briefly mentioned, but merely to describe how Josiah met

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his death (II Kings 23:29; II Chron. 35:20-21). The biblical historiographer does not suggest that Josiah's sweeping reform of the cult (II Kings 22-23; II Chron. 34-35) might be understood in the light of the decline of Assyrian power in the west and evaluated better in terms of cultural developments in Egypt, Phoenicia, and Mesopotamia.³⁵

G. CHRONOLOGICAL DATA

The scriptural authors were nonetheless aware of the historic truths they were dealing with and that they were rooted in a specific time and place. This is especially evident in their concern, for the first time in biblical historiography, with precise chronological information, and the data given is rich and varied. The lengths of the reigns of the kings are carefully recorded and throughout the divided kingdom the initial year of each king is coordinated with that of his rival. His age at accession is noted and sometimes the year of a particular episode. One event is occasionally dated by another or by the time between incidents. There are even synchronisms with the reigns of neighboring kings.

All this information, however, presents serious problems for the modern historian, since the different data and chronological systems do not interlock and, in fact, seem inconsistent.³⁶ Nor do they always accord with established Assyrian chronology, thus making it difficult to reconstruct history by using the biblical sources. Possibly we are dealing with a late, artificial, and perhaps schematized chronological system imposed by the editors, although it seems unlikely. The synchronistic method of dating can now be shown to have been a feature of Assyrian-Babylonian king lists as early as the twelfth century B.C.E., and it may well have been an attribute of the royal annals utilized by the author of Kings.³⁷ Moreover, even though there were 480 regnal years between the building of the Temple and the Cyrus Declaration and the same number between the Exodus and the Temple (I Kings 6:1), this must nevertheless be regarded as coincidence and not the result of the deliberate schematizing of a late Deuteronomistic redactor. Such a possibility is negated by the absence of references to the Restoration in the book of Kings, and by the inconsistencies themselves, which are incompatible with an artificially constructed system.

We can resolve the chronological problems in the biblical sources only by establishing certain facts, presently unknown. Until definitive answers to the problems are forthcoming, the chronological information in our biblical sources cannot be said to have yielded its mysteries and its value as history must remain limited.

H. THE THREE MOTIFS

1. THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

Biblical historiography about the Monarchy is characterized by three dominant motifs—the divine election of Israel, the Davidic Dynasty, and Jerusalem and its Temple—all of which illustrate the high degree of selectivity.

The first, basic to the Torah and the Prophets, is expressed by the multitudinous references to Israel as God's people, and the explicit assertion that God redeemed Israel, a singular nation which He took as His very own for all eternity (II Sam. 7:23–24) to be His chosen people (I Kings 3:8). This is also the reason for the frequent references to the Exodus.³⁸

The divine election of Israel affects the presentation of historical data, for the historiographers were less interested in recording the past than in demonstrating how Israel, by virtue of its special relationship with God, became responsible for its own history, its fate being determined by its fealty or disloyalty to demands of that relationship.

2. THE ELECTION OF DAVID

The second pillar upon which scriptural historiography rests is the symbol of David. The texts stress his divine election (II Sam. 6:2; I Kings 8:16, 11:34) and elevate to the level of doctrine the unchallengeable and exclusive right of the Davidic line to the throne of Judah for all eternity (II Sam. 7:11–16, 25; I Kings 2:33, 45; 8:25; 9:5). David becomes the dynastic symbol and the ideal model of kingship for all subsequent monarchs.³⁹ For this reason, as we have said, David is allotted space entirely disproportionate to the length of his reign.

3. THE ELECTION OF JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE

Woven into the previous motifs and their most tangible expression is the divine election of Jerusalem and its Temple. The motif originated with David's conquest of Jerusalem, establishing it as his capital (II Sam. 5:6–11), and reinforcing and validating its political role by transferring there the Ark of the Covenant (*ibid.*, 6). David's desire to build the Temple is strongly emphasized even though Solomon carried out the project (*ibid.*, 7; I Kings 5:7; 8:17–18). Jerusalem and its Temple as God's chosen place, to the exclusion of all others, is repeatedly eulogized (*ibid.*, 8:16, 44, 48 etc.). Like the preceding themes, this is a major selective and evaluative criterion. The impact of the three themes upon the material becomes clear upon examination of several of the narratives.

a. The Treatment of Saul

From a factual standpoint, the biography of Saul, first king of Israel, is so brief that it is difficult to evaluate his place in Israelite history. We do not even know how long he reigned (cf. I Sam. 13:1). It is the failures that arrest the attention of the writer because they pave the way for the Davidic succession. Similarly, the narratives focus so heavily upon the rivalry between Saul and David that it encompasses three-quarters of the book of Samuel, although it involves no more than one-third of his reign. The Chronicler even omits Saul's biography, except his death, which is attributed to his sins (I Chron. 10:2-14). Only bare and scattered hints supply an image of Saul as a strong ruler of military, administrative, political, and religious importance.⁴⁰ For the biblical writers, the towering personality and symbolic role of David has obscured Saul in biblical historiography.

b. The Treatment of Solomon⁴¹

Solomon's glittering reign undoubtedly marks the golden age of the Monarchy, and the frequent occurrence of his name in Hebrew Scripture—nearly 300 times—is an index of the mark he made on tradition. Although he ruled Israel for forty years, nearly half of what is written, however, deals with his Temple project (I Kings 5:16-32; 6; 7:12-51; 8). That the Temple enterprise largely fired the historian's imagination is consistent with the circumscribed interests and didactic purposes of the book of Kings and illustrates and exemplifies once again the principle of selectivity.

c. Jerusalem and the Cult

Narrative after narrative is overwhelmingly preoccupied with Jerusalem, the Temple, and the cult. Jeroboam's motivation for the introduction of novel forms of worship and for the establishment of new cultic centers in northern Israel is portrayed as grounded in his fears of the attractiveness of Jerusalem (*ibid.*, 12:26-33). These acts constitute the cardinal sin of that kingdom, and their perpetuation stigmatizes practically every one of its monarchs. In fact, this is often all that the writer has to report about them.

The numerous occasions on which the Temple was plundered are carefully recorded; the cultic innovations of Ahaz occupy nine of the eighteen verses devoted to the sixteen years of his reign (II Kings 16:2-19); renovations of the Temple and reforms of the cult receive special prominence, as do Manasseh's cultic aberrations and their consequences (II Kings 21:21; 23:26; 24:3f). The fate that befell the Temple, its appurtenances, and its officers constitutes a major part of the story of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem (II Kings 25:9-18).

Perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the historiographer's preoccupation with cultic matters is in the judgments passed on the rulers of the two kingdoms.

d. The Judgments on the Kings

Israelite historiography is unusual in that it generally does not glorify the kings, but criticizes a majority of them. This strongly contrasts with the adulatory tone of documents from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Of nineteen Judean monarchs, eleven are called by the author of the book of Kings "evil in the eyes of the Lord." Only two, Hezekiah (II Kings 18:3-6) and Josiah (*ibid.*, 22:2), are adjudged wholly virtuous, while the other six merit qualified approval. Israel's nineteen monarchs predictably fare worse. Not one is wholeheartedly endorsed. Jehu, the most fully accepted, is criticized for tolerating the "sins of Jeroboam" (*ibid.*, 10:29-31). Some meager virtue is detected in Jehoram (*ibid.*, 3:2), but the rest are dismissed as unregenerate reprobates.

To what extent do these estimates conform to historic reality? The stereotypic nature of the condemnatory formulae is immediately suspect. Zimri, for instance, is said to have died because he sinfully followed the path of Jeroboam (I Kings 16:19), but his reign lasted only seven days. The criteria for judgment are definitely not those of the modern historian. Native intelligence, statesmanship, political wisdom and administrative skill, military prowess, and material contribution to the nation are not taken into account. Such virtues and achievements are not belittled but found wanting from the historiographer's viewpoint of eternity. Censure or approval of the kings is generally given on the basis of fidelity or infidelity to the demands of the Covenant and thus is expressed in terms of the purity of the national cult and its exclusive concentration in the Jerusalem Temple.

This extraordinary feature of the scriptural sources offers further proof that the aim of the historiographer was not to produce a history of the Monarchy, but to provide an explanation for the disasters that befell the nation in the form of the original division of the kingdom, the destruction of the northern state, and the downfall of Judah. The final editor of Kings did his work in the Babylonian Exile and, as has been pointed out, it constitutes a retrospective criticism, in the spirit of the Deuteronomic revolution, of the period of Hezekiah to Josiah. To this extent, the judgments on the kings are really based on standards that were not yet operative in the days of most of them, for it cannot be accidental that Hezekiah was the first monarch to remove the *bamoth* (II Kings 18:3-4, 22) and that no fewer than six of his predecessors are characterized as virtuous and one or two even reformistic, although they did not act against this particular cultic practice.⁴² On the one hand, the judgments on the Judean kings provide

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valuable historical raw material for reconstructing the real history of the *bāmāh* institution:⁴³ on the other, they constitute important evidence for determining the historiosophic nature of the book of Kings.

The Attitude to the Northern Kingdom

The Judean origin of the scriptural historiographer is sufficient to account for the fact that none of the northern monarchs is regarded as truly virtuous and that the kingdom is considered sinful from its inception because of the illegitimacy of its cult (I Kings 13:33–34). Destruction and exile are, in fact, inevitable (*ibid.*, 14:15–16) because of the cumulative cultic sin (II Kings 17).

Nevertheless, practically all our information about the northern kingdom springs from the book of Kings which, surprisingly, devotes more space to its affairs than to the history of the south. That it does not regard the kingdom of Israel itself as illegitimate is clear from the royal synchronisms which give the kings of the north all but equal status with those of the Davidic dynasty.⁴⁴ Most of the prophetic narratives in Kings focus upon the north, and a prophet never pleads for reunification or asserts the exclusive political and religious hegemony of Jerusalem while the kingdoms are separate. The prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord were, after all, often involved in anointing, selecting, or destroying the northern king. After Ahijah of Shiloh appointed Jeroboam (I Kings 11:29–31), he apprised him of the destruction of his dynasty (*ibid.*, 14:1–16); Jehu son of Hanani foretold the downfall of Baasha (*ibid.*, 16:1–7, 12) as did Elijah the house of Ahab (*ibid.*, 21:17–24); Elisha actually had another prophet seditiously anoint Jehu king of Israel (II Kings 9:1–10).

All this must mean that the Judean writer of Kings saw the people of Israel as one in spite of the schism, and looked upon northern history no less than southern as the unfolding of the word of God.

Prophecy and History

It is this aspect of biblical historiography that provides its prophetic flavor. The writers admittedly drew upon prophetic source material, and emphasized the decisive role of the prophets in the fortunes of Israel by repeatedly showing how God's will, expressed through His appointed agents, was exactly fulfilled.⁴⁵ So important to them is the prophetic ingredient that predictions later modified or withdrawn are recorded in their original form.⁴⁶

This is not to say that scriptural historiography derives from prophetic circles. The prophet is restricted to the northern kingdom, appearing in Judah only after the fall of Samaria.⁴⁷ In any case it is not the literary but the popular type who is the center of attention. There is, besides, a great difference between the historiographic and the classical-prophetic evaluation of the national-historic

sin, the former blaming cultic corruption for Israel's misfortunes, the latter, Israel's infidelity to the Covenant on the socio-moral plane.

The Work of the Chronicler

The ideology and selectiveness of Samuel-Kings are heightened in Chronicles, where the arguments for late composition are incontrovertible. Both the report of the 'Declaration of Cyrus' of 538 B.C.E. (II Chron. 36:22 f.) and linguistic considerations point to the Persian period, and since the genealogy of the Davidic dynasty is recorded to the seventh generation from Jehoiachin (I Chron. 3:10-26), a date around 400 B.C.E. is reasonable. Nothing warrants a connection with Hellenistic times.⁴⁸

In Chronicles the data relating to the Monarchy have been thoroughly re-worked. Over half the narrative is devoted to the United Kingdom. Of Saul's reign only his last battle and his death are reported (I Chron. 10:1-14). Although there is no word about David's long struggle for the throne, the divine right of his rule (*ibid.*, 11:3, 10; 12:24) and its national, pan-tribal nature (*ibid.*, 11:1, 3, 4; 12:38) are stressed. Anything disparaging to David's reputation is omitted, while detailed information, not found elsewhere, about his administrative and military organization is added (*ibid.*, 27). David is unequivocally called the initiator of the Temple project, the one who made all the preparations and was responsible for fixing the Temple service in its priestly and levitical framework (*ibid.*, 21-26, 28-29:9). Solomon is presented as the natural and, by implication, the sole possible heir to David. Nothing that might reflect adversely on this is recorded and Solomon's accession is depicted as the fulfillment by David of divine decree. Whatever might be denigrating to Solomon is disregarded.⁴⁹

Especially in respect to the northern kingdom is the Chronicler's editorializing apparent. His sweeping negation of Ephraim, on the grounds of God's own rejection (II Chron. 25:7), sets the tone for omitting all prophecies relating to the schism, all Judean-Israelite synchronisms, and all mention of northern kings except when it is essential to the story of a Judean monarch. Even the destruction of Samaria is ignored, and the Exile of the Israelite tribes only incidentally included in genealogical lists (I Chron. 5:25-26). Similarly unrecorded are the activities of northern prophets, but not those in Judah.⁵⁰

Since the Chronicler wants to show that the promise of eternity to the Davidic line (II Sam. 7:15; I Chron. 17:16) was fulfilled despite the schism, he refers to the northern kingdom in order to tell about the Judean recovery of Israelite cities in the days of Jeroboam I (II Chron. 13:2-20) and the southward migration of the legitimate priests of the north (*ibid.*, 11:13-15), and emphasizes that the Temple served all Israel, and that the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah embraced the north. The frequent use of "Israel" as an epithet for Judah speaks for itself.⁵¹

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But the Chronicler's overwhelming concern with Jerusalem and the cult most fully reveals his ideology. He interweaves God's choice of Jerusalem with that of the Davidic line and expands upon the relationship of David and Solomon to the Temple which was begun because of divine revelation and which sanctified the city once it was built. The detailed descriptions of the Temple service and administration, the genealogies of the High Priests and Levites, the full accounts of the various reforms of the cult and of violations of the Temple precincts, and the interest shown in royal-priestly relationships all testify to the Chronicler's fascination with cultic matters. These are the signposts by which the historical value of the book of Chronicles for the period of the Monarchy must be charted.

SUMMARY

The books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles constitute almost our sole means for reconstructing the history of the Monarchy, even though the period was once rich in contemporary documentation. The disproportion between the available and the transmitted material results not from lack of availability but from deliberate and selective editing. There are no royal autobiographical annals, no law codes or documents, no royal decrees. The inner life of the nation, its military, political, diplomatic, social, economic, and intellectual history, and the mechanics of government can just barely be glimpsed.

The material has been selected according to the didactic purposes of the writers, who sought to demonstrate that the life of the people of Israel was equated with the unfolding of God's purpose. History is thus divine self-revelation.

Biblical historiography is largely retrospection, after the Destruction, about the contrast between the golden age of the United Monarchy and the subsequent disasters. Because of their subjectivity, the authors idealized the United Monarchy and considered what followed to be, in effect, a theodicy, a divine punishment for national sin. The scriptural material is therefore interpretive, defining events in terms of their religious significance, thus lending coherence to otherwise discrete incidents and thereby setting off the Israelite historiographical achievement from that of its Near Eastern contemporaries. Archives and annals yielded to a quest for meaning, which, when discovered, was meant to be disseminated and internalized and thus to influence the heart, mind and future of the people of Israel. The ingredients of objective history nevertheless do exist in the vast number of facts preserved in the biblical texts, whose reliability has been repeatedly and impressively verified in recent years by archaeological and epigraphic finds.⁵²