

THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF KINGS

1 and 2 Kings unfolds an epic narrative that concludes the long story of Israel's experience with institutional monarchy, a sequence of events that begins with the accession of Solomon and the establishment of the Jerusalem temple, moves through the partition into north and south, and leads inexorably toward the nation's destruction and the passage to exile in Babylon. Keith Bodner's *The Theology of the Book of Kings* provides a reading of the narrative attentive to its literary sophistication and theological subtleties, as the cast of characters – from the royal courts to the rural fields – are variously challenged to resist the tempting pathway of political and spiritual accommodations and instead maintain allegiance to their covenant with God. In dialogue with a range of contemporary interpreters, this study is a preliminary exploration of some theological questions that arise from the Kings narrative, while inviting contemporary communities of faith into deeper engagement with this enduring account of divine reliability amid human scheming and rapaciousness.

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OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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THE THEOLOGY OF THE
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KEITH BODNER

Crandall University



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Prayer Before Reading St. Mark's Gospel

Please attack my colonialist ego,
o lion-face, o ancient evangelist.
The carcinogenic self, gleeful
but cruel in its unhealthy glow,
needs every means of resistance,
nor do I expect your treatment to be
remotely easygoing, if any freedom
is to be won from tumor, polyp, cyst.
Don't let my withheld forgiveness
be among the glittering cargo
of my sickly little boat, battered, kissed
by fortune's surges. Let me bestow
instead regard to every fellow narcissist,
to thief and punk, humbug and arsonist.

Brett Foster (1973–2015)

Contents

<i>General Editors' Preface</i>	<i>page</i> xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xxi
1 TOWARD THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF KINGS	1
Charting the Theological Plot	3
Navigating the Terrain	11
From Entry to Exile: Exploring Kings in Context	21
2 DYNASTY AND SUCCESSION	25
Aged Monarch	26
Fraternal Factions	29
Prophetic Collusion	32
The Interview	35
Some Conditions Apply?	39
Process of Elimination	43
3 PALACE AND TEMPLE	52
Foreign Alliance	53
Dispensing Wisdom	57
Administrative Moves	60

	The Temple Complex	65
	Dedication Ceremony	68
	Gold and Horses	74
4	KINGDOM AND DIVISION	80
	Disintegrations	81
	Forces of Opposition	86
	Fragments at Shechem	90
	Golden Innovations	93
	Incendiary Times	98
	Rise of the Omrides	103
5	PROPHETS AND APOSTASY	109
	Arrival(s) of Elijah	110
	Ahab and Aram	119
	Fire and Water	128
	Elisha Acts	138
	Royal Entanglements	145
6	UPHEAVAL AND REPRIEVE	156
	Seditious Appointment	157
	Circle of Treason	164
	Losing Ground	169
	Behind the Curtain	180
	Stay of Execution	183
7	DEMOLITION AND EXILE	192
	Visiting Time	193
	Manasseh's Memory	199
	Lost and Found	205

CONTENTS

xi

The Journey of Kings	213
Unchained Promise	221
8 THE THEOLOGY OF KINGS PAST AND PRESENT	227
Lasting Guarantee	228
The Two Towers	231
Other Intersections	234
The Legacy of Kings in the New Testament	237
<i>Further Reading</i>	243
<i>Author Index</i>	248
<i>Scripture Index</i>	251

General Editors' Preface

Some years ago, Cambridge University Press, under the editorship of James D. G. Dunn, initiated a series entitled New Testament Theology. The first volumes appeared in 1991, and the series was brought to completion in 2003. For whatever reason, a companion series that would focus on the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible was never planned or executed. The present series, Old Testament Theology, is intended to rectify this need.

The reasons for publishing Old Testament Theology are not, however, confined solely to a desire to match New Testament Theology. Instead, the reasons delineated by Dunn that justified the publication of New Testament Theology continue to hold true for Old Testament Theology. These include, among other things, the facts that (1) given faculty and curricular structures in many schools, the theological study of individual Old Testament writings is often spotty at best; (2) most exegetical approaches (and commentaries) proceed verse by verse such that theological interests are in competition with, if not completely eclipsed by, other important issues, whether historical, grammatical, or literary; and (3) commentaries often confine their discussion of a book's theology to just a few pages in the introduction. The dearth of materials focused exclusively on a particular book's theology may be seen as a result of factors like these; or, perhaps, it is the

cause of such factors. Regardless, as Dunn concluded, without adequate theological resources, there is little incentive for teachers or students to engage the theology of specific books; they must be content with what are mostly general overviews. Perhaps the most serious problem resulting from all this is that students are at a disadvantage, even incapacitated, when it comes to the matter of integrating their study of the Bible with other courses in religion and theology. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a series to bridge the gap between the too-slim theological précis and the too-full commentary where theological concerns are lost among many others.

All of these factors commend the publication of Old Testament Theology now, just as they did for New Testament Theology more than two decades ago. Like its sister series, Old Testament Theology is a place where Old Testament scholars can write at greater length on the theology of individual biblical books and may do so without being tied to the linear, verse-by-verse format of the commentary genre or a thematic structure of some sort imposed on the text from outside. Each volume in the series seeks to describe the biblical book's theology as well as to engage the book theologically – that is, each volume intends to *do* theology through and with the biblical book under discussion, as well as delineate the theology contained within it. Among other things, theological engagement with the composition includes paying attention to its contribution to the canon and appraising its influence on and reception by later communities of faith. In these ways, Old Testament Theology seeks to emulate its New Testament counterpart.

In the intervening years since New Testament Theology was first conceived, however, developments have taken place in the field that provide still further reasons for the existence of Old

Testament Theology; these have impact on how the series is envisioned and implemented and also serve to distinguish it, however slightly, from its companion series. Three developments in particular are noteworthy:

1. *The present hermeneutical climate*, often identified (rightly or wrongly) as “postmodern,” is rife with possibility and potential for new ways of theologizing about scripture and its constituent parts. Theologizing in this new climate will of necessity look (and be) different from how it has ever looked (or been) before.
2. *The ethos change in the study of religion, broadly, and in biblical studies in particular*. No longer are the leading scholars in the field only Christian clergy, whether Catholic priests or mainline Protestant ministers. Jewish scholars and scholars of other Christian traditions are every bit as prominent, as are scholars of non- or even anti-confessional stripe. In short, now is a time when “Old Testament Theology” must be conducted without the benefits of many of the old consensuses and certainties, even the most basic ones relating to epistemological framework and agreed-upon interpretative communities along with their respective traditions.
3. Finally, recent years have witnessed a *long-overdue rapprochement among biblical scholars, ethicists and systematic theologians*. Interdisciplinary studies between these groups are now regularly published, thus furthering and facilitating the need for books that make the theology of scripture widely available for diverse publics.

In brief, the time is ripe for a series of books that will engage the theology of specific books of the Old Testament in a new climate

for a new day. The result will not be programmatic, settled, or altogether certain. Despite that – or, in some ways, *because of* that – it is hoped that Old Testament Theology will contain highly useful volumes that are ideally poised to make significant contributions on a number of fronts including the ongoing discussion of biblical theology in confessional and nonconfessional mode as well as in postmodern and canonical contexts, the theological exchange between Old Testament scholars and those working in cognate and disparate disciplines, and the always-pressing task of introducing students to the theology of the discrete canonical unit: the biblical books themselves.

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Preface

The book of Kings has an abiding relevance to the community of faith, not least because it makes a series of compelling theological claims about the durability of the Davidic promise, the role of the temple, the power of the prophetic word to undermine empires, and the consequence of exile as an opportunity for restoration and potential hope. Far from static, the divine characterization in Kings is more three-dimensional than has often been recognized, and, combined with the people of God's capacity for self-destructive political choices, presents an absorbing drama and an evocative arena for theological analysis. This book is a provisional undertaking that explores the theology of Kings within its own narrative consecution, and in his biography of Jonathan Edwards, George Marsden articulates a similar goal: "My aspiration, which I am sure has been only partially realized, is to make Edwards intelligible to widely diverse audiences by first attempting to depict him in his own time and in his own terms."¹ Of course, attending to the details of the narrative forces the interpreter to confront a text that is often disturbing, as opposed to retreating to an easier place of more comfortable abstractions. I would further

¹ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 2.

submit that literary attentiveness to the details of the narrative can open the door to a number of nuanced theological reflections, ranging from the nature of the temple and institutional kingship, to the ethics of leadership and accountability of the prophets.

In this study, I interact mainly with other biblical scholars because of space limitations and the nature of this project, but there is a rich history of interpretation, and others are encouraged to pursue such discussions. James Barr expresses an intent that parallels my own: “It was never my intention to provide in this volume a full account of the complex questions involved in the title, or to review the relevant literature in full. Nor was it possible, within the limited space available, to offer my own version of a right answer to all these questions. My plan has been rather to discuss examples that will illustrate certain contemporary discussions.”² Some of my vigilant acquaintances in the academic guild might accuse me of eschewing the *theologies* of Kings in favor of an overarching meta-theology – opting for unity amid a diversity – but again, the primary interest in this study is an introductory probing of some important questions, not the final statement by any means.³ Those scholars who maintain, for instance, a dual-redaction hypothesis of the Deuteronomistic History are welcome to compose their own books. However, I imagine that the target audience of this study are preachers and teachers in a number of traditions searching for enhanced understanding, along with students and interested parties seeking a theological reading of the

² James Barr, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), vii.

³ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 206: “Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict,” cited in Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, rev. edn. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

story. Such an endeavor where there is no agreement on method can be formidable, and one recent writer comments on the difficulties of participating “in an enterprise – namely, biblical theology – that since the mid-1990s has often been declared difficult or impossible, and an enterprise that has been somewhat officially declared ‘in crisis’ since 1970. In other words, does the study of the Bible have implications for modern people seeking wisdom for modern Christian faith and practice?”⁴ As a Christian reader, I am certainly interested in points of application for contemporary audiences who take the text seriously, but I hope that such forays are more indirect rather than heavy-handed, trusting that intelligent readers can take my comments in a host of directions (many of which are unforeseen to me). Unless otherwise indicated, translations of the Hebrew text are my own, and proper names are usually standardized (so, a variant between Joash and Jehoash is not always noted, but I am confident that readers can follow clearly enough).

The initial invitation from Brent Strawn and Patrick Miller to write this book was an immense privilege; Pat graciously wrote an endorsement for my book on Jeremiah (the writing of which caused a delay in this project), while Brent has been indefatigable in his support, with editorial notes that are Freedmanesque in quality and scope. I am grateful that a number of colleagues read or discussed portions of the manuscript, including Francis Landy, Jeremy Schipper, Ben Johnson, Rachelle Gilmour, Lissa Wray Beal and Mark Leuchter. The faculty and senior administration at Crandall University deserve a lengthy word of thanks for their

⁴ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 1.

support at every turn, especially the dean of faculty development, Dr. John Stackhouse. The poem by Brett Foster originally appeared in *Books & Culture* under the editorship of John Wilson, and I am glad to honor the memory of a faithful savant of the finest literature.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (1907)
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ESHM	European Seminar in Historical Methodology
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary

<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSJSup	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism: Supplement</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament)
MT	Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)
NCB	New Century Bible
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
OTT	Old Testament Theology

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

xxiii

RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>ÜSt</i>	<i>Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>