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Chapter 19
Unity and Diversity in the Book of Kings

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In recent years, students of the Hebrew Bible have been engaged in heated debates about the methods which are most appropriate for the literary, historical, and theological study of the text. Although there are many reasons for these debates, certainly one of the major causes is the feeling of an increasing number of scholars that traditional historical-critical approaches to the Bible are limited, inadequate, or simply irrelevant. So, for example, biblical theologians such as Brevard Childs and James Sanders have charged that traditional scholarly analyses of the biblical text often engage in obscure arguments over the literary history of the text and at the same time ignore the text's final or "canonical" shape, the text as it now stands, the text which was read by synagogue and church and therefore the text in which theological meaning actually resides.\(^1\) Approaching the same set of problems from another direction, scholars such as Moshe Greenberg have not neglected the historical and cultural background of the text altogether but have pointed to the hypothetical character of much historical-critical work and have advocated a "holistic" reading that is based on the Hebrew text as we now have it rather than on a hypothetical reconstructed text.\(^2\) A similar approach is being taken by literary critics such as Robert Alter and an increasing number of biblical scholars, who argue that the original setting of a text, its literary history, and even the intentions of its author(s) are all irrelevant to the text's interpretation. According to this argument, any reader who is "competent" can interpret a text. The interpreter does not

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need to have any special knowledge about the text or its history but needs only to be a sensitive reader of the text as it now stands.\

It is not surprising that these challenges have provoked responses from practitioners of the more traditional historical-critical methods, who not only feel that their own approach to the field is being challenged, but also suspect that the "gains" of modern scholarship are in danger of being lost. Over the past few years this debate over method has become increasingly acrimonious and shows no signs of being resolved in the near future. Certainly one of the reasons for this impasse is that there has been a tendency to carry on the debate at the level of generalities or to work with a specific text and then to project the results of that work onto the Bible as a whole, as if the whole of scripture shared a common set of literary characteristics. In the end, biblical literature is not likely to turn out to be so uniform. As a result, the debate might take a more productive turn if scholars were to try out different methods on different types of literature in an effort to build up a comprehensive collection of cases that would separate fruitful methods from unfruitful ones. Such an approach may not result in the discovery of a single method that can be applied to all types of biblical literature, but it may result in isolating a range of interpretive options.

An excellent beginning on this sort of investigation has already been made by Burke Long, who, like many of his scholarly generation, has been actively involved in these debates over method. Beginning his career as a form and tradition critic with a dissertation on etiology in the Hebrew Bible, he began to realize as he worked on the Book of Kings that traditional form-critical approaches to this book missed much of the richness of the biblical narrative. As a result, as his two-volume treatment of Kings progressed, he increasingly lost interest in the editorial layers and formulas that went into the text's formation, and put more and more stress on reading the individual stories in the book as complete narratives. By shifting the focus of his work in this way, he provided his readers with a new ap-

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precipitation of the literary skill of the biblical writers and gave new depth to some of the Bible’s most familiar stories.

In appreciation for Burke Long’s work on the individual stories in Kings, this essay will consider an issue which the format of his volumes did not allow him to take up: the problem of how to read the entire Book of Kings as a single literary unit. At first glance this problem does not seem to be a major one, but a brief look at the history of the book’s interpretation will serve to illustrate some of the difficulties.

Before the rise of modern biblical scholarship, the Book of Kings was, of course, read as a single literary unit. There were, and are, excellent reasons for taking this approach. The book presents itself as a coherent history that traces the fortunes of Israel’s kings from the end of David’s reign to the exile of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, following the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Events are presented more-or-less in chronological order, a chronological order that is often marked by the inclusion of specific or relative dates. This chronological organization gives the work a clear direction and suggests that it is to be read, like any chronicle, from beginning to end.

Now to say that pre-modern readers read Kings as a unified whole is not to say that they read it uncritically. Early on, both Christian and Jewish interpreters recognized the importance of a number of features of the text that would later play a role in historical-critical interpretations. Thus, for example, although Kings was read as a whole, it was not read in isolation. It was clearly recognized to be a continuation of the story of the monarchy that began in 1 Samuel with the story of the rise of kingship in Israel and was part of an even larger history that began with Joshua’s account of Israel’s entry into the land. Furthermore, early interpreters recognized that although Kings had literary cohesion, it was not, strictly speaking, the work of a single author. On chronological and linguistic grounds, Jewish tradition attributed the book to the prophet Jeremiah (b. B. Bat. 14b–15a), but it

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was clear even to ancient readers that the author or authors of Kings used a number of literary sources in compiling the work. The book itself mentions some of these sources and refers the reader to them for further information. So, for example, there are references to the "Book of the Chronicles of Solomon" (1 Kgs 11:41), the "Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" (1 Kgs 14:19 and sixteen other references), and the "Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah" (1 Kgs 14:29 and fourteen other references). Unfortunately, it is not precisely clear just what these books contained, but Kings seems to imply that they were sources for the writer of the book as well as deposits of additional information. The author obviously considered historical information to be important and encouraged the reader to acquire more of it, presumably as an aid to understanding the book as a whole.

Scholarly approaches to Kings began to change with the advent of critical biblical scholarship. Not long after Wellhausen suggested that the Pentateuch contained four distinct literary strands, scholars began to wonder if these same strands continued beyond the Pentateuch. To explore this hypothesis, they began to apply to Kings the same methods that they had used in the Pentateuch. They looked for "rough spots" in the text, differences in linguistic usage and vocabulary, gaps in literary continuity, breaks in logic, and narrative contradiction—all of which, when found, were taken to be evidence of editorial activity. In this way some scholars extended the classic Pentateuchal sources into Joshua, Judges, and, in some cases, into Kings. Eventually most scholars abandoned the enterprise, but the literary observations that they had made remained. As a result, there was general agreement that Kings was composed of distinct literary layers which could be disentangled through diligent effort, even though those layers were not continuations of the Pentateuchal sources. The book was considered to be the product of editorial activity that combined previously existing material.

A major challenge to this atomistic approach was mounted by Martin Noth, who advocated a unified reading of Kings, but one that was solidly based on historical-critical principles. Noth argued that the bulk of the present Book of Kings was written in the exilic period by a single author,

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8 For the purposes of this discussion, it does not matter whether or not these cited sources actually existed or could have easily been consulted by the text's original readers. Even if these references are fictitious, as some modern scholars have claimed, the fact remains that the text gives the unambiguous impression that it does not contain everything that had been written down concerning the monarchy.

9 For an example of this sort of approach to Kings, see Immanuel Benzinger, *Jahvist und Elohist in den Königsbüchern* (Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1921).

10 Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981 [German original 1943; 2nd German ed. 1957]).
who collected various historical sources and traditions and creatively wove them into a comprehensive history stretching from Israel's entry into Canaan in Joshua to the fall of Jerusalem in Kings. To this so-called Deuteronomistic History the author then prefixed an early form of the present Book of Deuteronomy and wrote a general introduction to the whole work, an introduction now found in the first four chapters of Deuteronomy. In Noth's view, then, the writer of Kings was a genuine author and not simply a compiler or editor, as earlier scholars had suggested. Furthermore, Noth thought that later editors may have made minor changes at a few spots in the History, but that these alterations did little to modify the cohesive literary work which the original exilic author had created. The original purpose of the entire work was not simply to present to future readers the basic facts of Israel's history but to provide a theological explanation first for the fall of Samaria and the dispersion of Northern Israel and second for the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the Babylonian exile. As Noth interpreted the Deuteronomistic Historian, these traumatic events were God's just punishment on the kings and the people, who had rejected the God of Israel, worshiped other gods, and failed to live according to the covenant laws contained in the Book of Deuteronomy. Noth saw this bleak message of hopeless doom throughout the History in the author's selection and organization of traditional material, but the History's theological message was most apparent to Noth in the speeches, prayers, and editorial comments which the author composed and inserted at crucial points in the History (Deuteronomy 1–4; Joshua 24; Judg 2:11–23; 1 Samuel 12; 1 Kgs 8:22–53; 2 Kgs 17:7–23). While Noth's argument for a unified reading of Kings within the context of the larger Deuteronomistic History was immediately persuasive for a large number of scholars, there were almost immediately several dissenting voices. Initial objections to Noth's thesis did not challenge his theory that the History was the unified work of a single author but rather claimed that Noth's analysis of the themes of the work was not sophisticated enough. Gerhard von Rad, for example, argued that while Noth's analysis of the Deuteronomistic theology of sin and punishment was largely correct, his picture of the History overlooked the note of hope that the writer inserted by stressing the inevitable fulfillment of God's prophetic word. In Kings this prophecy-fulfillment schema is seen frequently in the accounts of confrontations between various prophets and the Ephraimite kings. In these stories the prophet condemns the king for a particular sin and then predicts the end of the king's dynasty. When the king's dynasty does end, the Historian points out the fulfillment of the original prophecy (1 Kgs 14:7–11 and 1 Kgs 15:25–30 are typical examples).

However, for von Rad, even more important than these examples of prophecy and fulfillment is the prophetic promise given to David by Na-
than in 2 Samuel 7. In this crucial oracle, David is promised that his dynasty will be an eternal one. Although later editors modified this promise somewhat to allow for the just punishment of sinful kings, von Rad felt that the Historian never rejected the idea that the Davidic line would be eternal. Von Rad therefore interpreted the last verses of 2 Kings, which describe the Babylonians’ release of the imprisoned king Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 25:27–30), as an understated expression of the hope that God had in fact been faithful to the promise to David and that the Davidic line had not come to an end with the exile.11

Similar thematic objections to Noth’s thesis were made by Hans Walter Wolff, who pointed out that Noth also overlooked the prominent references to repentance that appear in the history. The theme of repentance appears in a major way for the first time in the History in the writer’s summary of the period of the Judges (Judg 2:11–23), where it is said that the people did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and rejected the Lord to worship other gods. God then sent oppressors against the people as punishment for their sins. However, when the oppression became too great, the people cried out to God, who took pity on them and sent a deliverer to relieve the oppression. Wolff points out that this motif of sin, punishment, repentance, and forgiveness appears elsewhere in the History. Repentance figures prominently in Kings in 1 Kgs 8:46–53, where Solomon prays that God will listen to the people’s penitential prayers in exile. Thereafter, the call for the people’s repentance appears periodically in Kings and is prominent in the Historian’s theological reflection on the fall of the Northern Kingdom. In 2 Kgs 17:13–15, the Historian claims that the people had repeatedly been warned by the prophets to repent but that Israel had ignored the warning. According to Wolff, the Historian thus gave exilic Israel the hope that repentance would lead God to end their captivity.12

Although both von Rad and Wolff offered important supplements to Noth’s analysis of the major themes of the Deuteronomistic History, they seem to have accepted his basic point that most of the History was the creation of a single author writing in the exile. In the end, their discussion of additional themes in the History simply strengthened Noth’s thesis that Kings should be read as a whole book. A different tack has been taken by Frank Moore Cross, who has incorporated von Rad’s and Wolff’s observations into a comprehensive theory of the editing of Kings.13 According to

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Cross, Noth was essentially correct in his analysis of the theme of sin and judgment in the History but erred in his dating of the material. Cross feels that the bulk of the history was produced in the time of Josiah. This pre-exilic edition of the work was unified by two great themes. The first theme was that the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians because all of the Israelite kings "walked in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin." This theme is introduced in 1 Kgs 13:34, the evaluation of Jeroboam’s establishment of the shrines and the cults at Dan and Bethel, and is repeated in the Historian’s evaluation of each successive Israelite king. The theme reaches its climax in 2 Kings 17, where the historian explicitly traces the destruction of Samaria to the fact that Jeroboam enticed the people of Israel to desert God. In spite of numerous prophetic warnings, the people continued to walk in the way of Jeroboam until they were taken into exile in Assyria (2 Kgs 17:20–23).

According to Cross, the second great theme of the preexilic edition of Kings is that God is ultimately faithful to the promise of an eternal Davidic line. Cross points out that even when Judah’s kings do not walk in the way of their father David, God nevertheless preserves the dynasty “for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen” (1 Kgs 11:12, 13, 32, 34, 36; 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). This second theme reaches its climax in the Historian’s account of the reform of Josiah (2 Kgs 22:1–23:25). As predicted in 1 Kings 13, Josiah destroys the idolatrous sanctuary at Bethel, renews God’s covenant in the land, and restores the old Davidic empire by reincorporating Ephraim into the nation of Israel.

According to Cross, the preexilic edition of the Deuteronomistic History had to be updated when Josiah’s untimely death and the Babylonian captivity raised serious questions about the credibility of the Historian’s claim of an eternal Davidic line. The editor responsible for the second, exilic edition of the History made few changes in the first edition but did attempt to explain the destruction of Jerusalem by claiming that the sins of Manasseh were so great that the evil that he did and that he caused the people to do had to be punished (2 Kgs 21:2–15). The editor also added the brief historical notes that now follow the first edition’s account of Josiah’s reign and may have also been responsible for adding the repentance motif that Wolff traced so successfully.

Since Cross propounded his theory of a two-staged editorial history for Kings, several scholars have examined his proposal in detail and have generally supported his original conclusions. For the purposes of this discussion of the impact of scholarly research on the problem of reading the Book of Kings as a whole, it is not necessary to review in detail the arguments of the scholars writing in reaction to Cross’s proposal. However, it is important to note the kinds of evidence which these later studies brought to bear on the investigation. Rather than focusing primarily on the themes in
Kings as a clue to the unity or disunity of the text, as did Noth, von Rad, Wolff, and, to a certain extent, Cross himself, subsequent scholarship has paid increasing attention to editorial markers found in distinctive vocabulary and in the various formulas that signal the beginning and end of the book's regnal accounts. Thus, for example, Richard Nelson has reinforced Cross's thematic observations with a careful linguistic study of terms that he takes to be characteristic of each of the two editors of Kings, and has correlated the study of this vocabulary with a close examination of the formulas used in the editorial process. Changes in both of these items are thought to support Cross's argument for an original Josianic edition of Kings followed by an exilic edition. Similar signs of editorial activity have been collected by Gary Knoppers, whose massive study of the question also vindicates the basic outlines of Cross's position. Finally, Steven McKenzie has reexamined all of the evidence adduced in the debate and agreed that Cross was correct in positing a Josianic edition of Kings, but McKenzie feels that the exilic editorial expansions of this original edition were not as systematic as Cross suggested.

Using the same types of evidence but reaching somewhat different conclusions, Iain Provan has focused on the formulas used to evaluate the reigns of the Judean kings and has noted in this material the importance of the removal or non-removal of the high places. He has then suggested that the disappearance of this motif with the account of Hezekiah's reign indicates an initial edition of Kings in or shortly after Hezekiah's time, with later editorial additions designed to bring the book up to date. Similar conclusions, based on a careful analysis of the formulaic evidence, have been reached by Baruch Halpern and David Vanderhooft, who suggest an initial edition in Hezekiah's reign, with later editorial updates in the time of Josiah and in the exile.

Taking a somewhat different approach from those scholars reacting to Cross's proposal, several German scholars have used linguistic and formulaic analysis to propose a three-redaction hypothesis that does not resemble the ones discussed above. According to this way of reconstructing the editorial history of Kings, the basic text of Kings was created about 580 BCE by a Deuteronomistic writer designated DtrG. Not long after this first edi-

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14 Nelson, Double Redaction.
16 McKenzie, Trouble with Kings, esp. 135–145.
tion, a second Deuteronomistic writer with particular interests in prophecy (DtrP) added to the book a number of passages dealing with this theme. Finally, about 560 BCE a third Deuteronomist with legal interests (DtrN) made further additions and gave the book its final form. Rather than seeing the additional editing confined to passages after the Kings accounts of Hezekiah or Josiah, as in the theories discussed above, the German proposals locate the editing throughout the book.  

Rather than try to adjudicate the various proposals that have been made concerning the editorial history of Kings, the remainder of this study will grant the argument that our present book is an edited text composed of several editorial layers and will concentrate on the question of how, if at all, this situation facilitates or hinders an overall reading of the book as a whole. As a background to dealing with this question, it will first be useful to say something about the nature of edited texts and then to simply describe the nature and extent of the evidence for editorial activity that scholars have introduced into the debate.

Given the frequency with which biblical scholars appeal to the notion of edited texts, there has been relatively little attention given to the question of how one recognizes an edited text and distinguishes it from texts that are the product of a single author. The usual practice among biblical scholars has been to look for certain clues that indicate editorial activity. Among these clues are features such as shifts in characteristic vocabulary or idiom, breaks in literary or logical continuity, or contradictions in content, although much work remains to be done on the question of whether or not these items are adequate markers. Unfortunately, critics who deal with modern literature, which is mostly not composite, have not often worried about the issue, but the few studies that have been done suggest that the issue of recognizing signs of editing is more complicated than biblical scholars have usually assumed.

In one of the few thorough discussions of this issue with respect to modern literature, Jerome McGann has suggested that editors work on a text for two basic reasons. First, editorial work on a text may simply involve the correction of errors. Editors correct the mistakes that the authors have made or that have been accidentally introduced in the process of publication. Second, editors may revise a text in order to improve its effectiveness or to sharpen its impact on the reader. The editor may delete material that is considered harmful to the argument or to the cohesion of the text. Changes may be made to take into account new material that is relevant to the text, to incorporate the second thoughts of the author, or to respond

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19 For an example of this approach, see Walter Dietrich, *Prophetie und Geschichte: eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* (FRLANT 108; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972).
to changed conditions in the study of particular subject matter. In the case of editions after the first, the editor, or even the author, may make changes in response to criticisms or questions raised by the readers or hearers of the text, and when the editor is successful in doing this, then the editor's hand should not be visible at all. Even when the reader knows that editorial changes have been made, those changes should not be visible unless the reader is able to compare the most recent edition with previous ones.

Our knowledge of editorial techniques in the ancient Near East is almost non-existent, but the few studies that have been done suggest that the goals of ancient editors were similar to those of their modern counterparts. For example, studies of Mesopotamian king lists indicate that some of them were periodically updated, and the Sumerian King List was enlarged at some point in its history by the addition of a list of antediluvian kings. In some instances these changes seem to have been motivated by historiographic interests, and in other cases the scribal editors seem to have been advancing a political argument. However, the important point to notice is that the editorial changes cannot be detected without comparing the edited list with one of its predecessors. The same thing seems to have been true in the case of royal inscriptions, which were periodically updated to stress new or at least different accomplishments of the king. The editors employed a variety of techniques: abbreviation, paraphrase, deletion, interpolation, harmonization, or even complete rewriting. Again, the editorial changes cannot usually be detected without comparison with earlier texts. The same seems to have been true in the case of ancient Greek historians, who organized the historical material that they received by using formulaic, stylistic, and thematic devices to unify their works and give them a sense of purpose and direction.

On the other hand, some ancient Near Eastern texts show clear marks of editorial activity. The twelfth tablet of the Gilgamesh epic is an obvious example. In this case the tablet contradicts events narrated earlier in the epic, and little effort has been made to resolve the contradictions.

The little evidence that is available from the ancient Near East thus suggests that when ancient editors worked on a text in a systematic way, they

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22 For a convenient discussion of the Near Eastern evidence, as well as some useful bibliography, see Long, *1 Kings*, 17–20.
left no tracks. Their interest was in the cohesiveness of the text and in tightening its structure and sharpening its purpose. This would seem to suggest that thorough-going editing is impossible to detect. What then is to be made of the texts that contain contradictory material and that lack a cohesive structure or sharp focus? That issue still remains to be resolved and must be the subject of further study. However, it is possible that such texts follow principles of composition that are still not yet fully understood or that the texts have not been thoroughly edited. In the latter case it may be that the editors worked on certain parts of the text but left the rest of the text alone.

Against this background of what edited texts might be expected to look like, let us examine the sorts of evidence that scholars have introduced into the discussion of the composition of Kings. In general, this evidence has been of three sorts: (1) evidence of linguistic consistency, (2) evidence of structural consistency, and (3) evidence of thematic consistency.

Scholars have often attempted to use linguistic criteria to disentangle one editorial layer in Kings from another. Certain editors are said to prefer certain words and idioms that are not used by other editors, and on these grounds the work of the various editors is distinguished. Of all of the criteria employed to separate editorial layers, this one seems to be the least satisfactory. Scholars simply cannot agree in their identification of those linguistic features that are distinctive. Furthermore, the isolation of distinctive terminology is almost impossible in a book where all of the hypothetical editors are thought to be members of the same party or school. If the editors of the Deuteronomistic History were in fact all members of a Deuteronomistic movement of some sort and were all involved in carrying Deuteronomistic traditions, then it is to be expected that they would employ language that is characteristic of that tradition. The chances of a particular editor employing a radically different vocabulary are almost zero. Certainly their writing would not exhibit enough linguistic distinctiveness to permit vocabulary or idiom to be used to separate one editorial layer from another unless the items in question could be linked to separate geographical locations or time periods. Finally, it is necessary to assume that writers in any culture are quite likely to vary their linguistic usage somewhat in the course of their work. They are seldom rigidly consistent, and for this reason it is risky to use variation in the employment of language as a tool for distinguishing the work of a particular editor.

The second set of arguments that scholars have introduced into the discussion of the unity or disunity of Kings has to do with the book's structural features, particularly the formulas that are used to introduce and conclude each regnal account and those that are used to evaluate individual kings. There are three of these features that are worth noting.
First, Kings is clearly unified by the chronological notes that appear in connection with the account of each king’s reign and with the reports of certain important events, such as the destruction of the Temple. Most of these notes have roughly the same form and help to give the book a coherent structure. They would fit well into Noth’s theory that Kings is the work of a single author, although it is not possible to determine at what point in the growth of the book they may have been added to the present text. They could be the work of the original author, or they could just as easily be the work of later editors. In either case they clearly define the genre of Kings as historiographic literature of some sort, regardless of the historical accuracy of the material the book contains. We will return to this point below.

Second, various attempts have been made to separate editorial layers in Kings by analyzing the formulas that are used to evaluate the kings of Ephraim and Judah. Nelson has argued that most of the formulas exhibit too much variation for them to be used to distinguish particular editorial layers except in the case of the formulas that evaluate the kings of Judah who reigned after Josiah. These formulas at the end of Kings show a striking regularity, which Nelson interprets as support for Cross’s theory of a Josianic and an exilic edition of the book. However, Nelson’s argument may be overstated a bit. In fact, the formulas evaluating the northern kings are quite regular. All of them are said to have done evil in the sight of the Lord and to have walked in the ways of Jeroboam and in the sin which he made Israel to sin. The wording does vary a bit, but in each case the point is the same. All of the northern kings are part of a single “dynasty” or line of evil kings, who not only inherited the founder’s deadly characteristics but caused the people to sin as well. This structural feature seems to be part of a consistent explanation that the fall of the north was due in the first instance to the sins of Jeroboam and in the second instance to the cumulative sins of all of the northern kings and the people. Both dimensions of this explanation appear in their clearest form in 2 Kings 17, the writer’s theological reflection on the exile. However, it is not clear when this feature became part of the History. It is probably no earlier than the fall of Samaria, although it could of course be part of the final redaction of the book.

The formulas dealing with the southern kings show more variation, particularly in the language that they employ, but there are some interesting patterns. Many of the kings following David receive positive evaluations, although those closely connected with the north are evaluated negatively. Contrary to what might be expected on the basis of Cross’s analysis, not all of the good kings are explicitly compared with David. Rather, good kings whose fathers were also good are said to have walked in the way of their father, while those kings whose fathers were evil are said to have walked in the way of their father David. As Provan has noted, until the time of Hezekiah all of the good kings are said not to have re-
moved the high places. On the other hand, the evaluation formula for Hezekiah is expanded to include an explicit description of his removal of the high places. Such a note is lacking in the formulas of later Judahite kings, including Josiah, although the narratives of Josiah's reforms do describe his destruction of high places in both the south and the north. The point at which the evaluation formulas for the southern kings change in a significant way thus parallels the point at which the evaluation formulas for the northern kings end. This leaves open the possibility that at one time there was a version of the history that traced the royal lines of the north and the south as far as Hezekiah, as Provan, Halpern, Vanderhooft, and others have suggested. In the north, all of the kings were the spiritual descendants of Jeroboam, who set up the shrines at Dan and Bethel and thus caused Israel to sin and ultimately to be destroyed. In the south, in contrast, the kings did not act in a way to destroy the people, and in fact Hezekiah removed the high places and acted in accordance with God's law, thus saving the people during the Assyrian invasion of 701.

The third structural feature of Kings that requires comment is the so-called prophecy and fulfillment motif. Von Rad places great stress on this motif as a unifying element in the History, but it is important to note that in its most common form it extends only as far as the account of Jehu's revolution in the north. In this part of the History, it provides a unifying element in the Historian's account of the northern kings by demonstrating the principle that sin on the part of an individual king inevitably leads to the destruction of that king's dynasty. In each case, a prophet addresses only the king involved and does not concern himself with the people. When the prophet's word is fulfilled and the king's dynasty comes to an end, the Historian duly notes its fulfillment. Examples of prophecy and fulfillment that fall outside of the period from Jeroboam to Jehu do not fit this pattern and do not seem to be part of the basic structure of the book. They may be a part of individual prophetic stories or, as in the case of 1 Kings 13, they may deal with something other than the king.

In the accounts of the southern kings, the parallel to the prophecy-fulfillment motif is the motif of the promise to David that he will always retain a fief in Jerusalem. Although Cross highlights this motif as one of the unifying themes of the History as a whole, in fact it appears only until the time of Jehoram, who is the last evil king of whom it is said that for the sake of David God did not destroy Judah (2 Kgs 8:19). The motif drops out of the history after this point, and the later references cited by Cross (2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6) deal with God's fidelity to the city of Jerusalem and not with God's fidelity to the Davidic dynasty. It is therefore difficult to sustain the argument that the motif of preserving the Judahite dynasty "for the sake of David" was a unifying motif of a Josianic edition of Kings. However, the use of the motif in the evaluations of the southern kings through Jehoram
does provide an interesting contrast to the point being made by the prophecy-fulfillment notices. Up to the time of Jehu, northern kings who do evil are punished by the destruction of their dynasties. In contrast, in the south, during the same period, evil Judahite kings are not punished in the same way. Their dynasty is continued for the sake of David. Thus the prophecy-fulfillment motif and the promises-to-David motif can be said to provide structural unity to the parallel histories of the northern and southern kingdoms but not to the book of Kings as a whole, and it is possible that both motifs once played this role in a Hezekian edition of the book. However, it is equally possible that these structural features were originally part of a pre-deuteronomistic narrative of some sort.

The final collection of evidence on the unity or disunity of Kings has to do with thematic consistency in the book. Over the course of the debate on the book's editorial history, scholars have pointed to three clusters of themes thought to be useful in distinguishing the various editorial layers. The first of these is God's fidelity to the promises to David, a theme which is carried primarily by the formulaic language that we have already discussed. Two other themes can be treated more briefly. The first of these is the collection of themes concerned with explaining the destruction of Samaria and later the destruction of Jerusalem. It is in this collection that the greatest thematic inconsistencies are to be found. For the north, the explanation is complex but consistent. Samaria fell because of the sins of Jereboam and his spiritual descendants, all of whom made Israel to sin. In the south, however, the explanations are more varied and are not easily harmonized with a history that seems to be leading up to an account of the reign of Josiah, the ideal king. On the one hand, Kings implies that Jerusalem fell because of the evils which the people had committed, although the text is never too clear on the specifics of those evils. On the other hand, the fall of Jerusalem is clearly traced to the sins of Manasseh (2 Kings 21). These two explanations are finally integrated in the same way that they are in the explanation for the fall of Samaria. Part of Manasseh's sin was that he caused the people to sin. However, in the case of Judah the literary integration of these two explanations is not as smooth as it is in 2 Kings 17. In opposition to both of these explanations is the curious notion that the exile was due to the fact that Hezekiah showed the messengers of the king of Babylon all of the Judahite royal treasures (2 Kgs 20:16–19).

The second theme that does seem to unify the History is the notion that repentance can reverse a threatened judgment or cause God to end just punishment. This theme, which has been analyzed by Wolff, appears in a number of different forms. On the one hand, it can apply to individuals, such as David or Josiah, whose repentance is rewarded with mitigated punishment. On the other hand, it may apply to the people as a whole and have the function of providing hope to the exiles from Judah. It is probable
that these different uses of the repentance theme do not come from the
same editorial level of the History, although much additional research will
need to be done in order to resolve this issue.

Against this survey of scholarly evidence designed to demonstrate the
unity or disunity of Kings, we may return to our original question of
whether or not the book can be easily read as a whole literary work. Much
more research would be required in order to give a fully satisfying answer
to this question, but the discussion up to this point does suggest some gen-
eral conclusions. As one might expect on the basis of the work of literary
critics who have studied edited texts and on the basis of the few existing
studies of ancient Near Eastern editorial techniques, much of the editorial
work that may have gone into the composition of Kings has been carefully
hidden to the point that scholars have a hard time agreeing on whether or
not the signs of the editors’ work exist at all. As a result, little of the literary
evidence that scholars have adduced to demonstrate editorial layers in
Kings has the effect of impeding a holistic reading of the book. This would
certainly be true in the case of the arguments based on distinctive vocabu-
lary, even if they were persuasive. Such vocabulary, unless it were very
unusual, would not likely register on the average reader.

Many of the structural features in the book fall into the same category.
As we have already noted, the chronological notes in the book definitely
help to unify it and also provide the reader with clues about the literary
genre into which the authors intend the book to fall. It is to be read as his-
tory, albeit a selective history and one that may not share modern stan-
dards of historiography.

The evaluation formulas are also unifying features of the book, al-
though they may work in different ways in different parts of the narrative.
They seem to be most tightly structured in the section of the book that deals
with the parallel histories of the northern and southern kingdoms, and
indeed, because of the small quantity of narrative material dealing with Ju-
dah before Hezekiah, the formulaic introductions, conclusions, and evalu-
ations attached to each king sometimes carry the bulk of the historical
reporting. In this portion of Kings the evaluation formulas serve to con-
trast the fates of the northern and southern dynasties and to give a theolog-
ical explanation for that contrast. After the fall of Samaria, the function of
the evaluation formulas is less clear, but it is important to note that they are
still included, even though their form may change. Their presence alone
gives the impression of literary unity. The same is true of the change-of-
reign formulas and the death and burial notices. The small differences
which scholars have detected in these formulas may well point to editorial
activity, but these differences in and of themselves do not give the text a
feeling of disunity. However, the same cannot be said of the prophecy-
fulfillment formulas, which are quite localized and are a structural motif
primarily in the long account of prophetic opposition to the dynasty of Omri. After the fall of Samaria, both the formulas and narratives focusing on prophets cease to play a major role in Kings. This suggests that the formulas and the prophetic stories themselves may have been part of an underlying narrative used by the writer(s) of Kings and should not be considered a unifying structural feature in the book as a whole.

Under the heading of thematic evidence for unity and disunity in Kings, the situation is considerably more uncertain, for in fact none of the major themes treated above seem to run consistently through the entire book. References to God’s fidelity to the divine promises to David can be found up to the Hezekiah narratives, but after that point the text contains no indication that the Davidic line will be preserved, unless one wants to read such a claim into the last verses of the book. Similarly, the book provides no consistent explanation for the fall of Jerusalem and the exile, but different explanations are offered in different parts of the narrative. This is in sharp contrast to the explanations offered in 2 Kings 17 for the fall of Samaria. Finally, it seems wise of the mark to suggest that Kings is unified by the theme of repentance leading to a reversal of judgment. This motif may operate in the case of certain individuals, although even here the evidence is mixed. Josiah “repents” and reforms worship in Israel, but he still dies an untimely death. Even more important, the repentance of the people and the king in Josiah’s time can do nothing to prevent the fall of Jerusalem and the exile.

All of this suggests that while many of the structural features of Kings are in the end unifying features, the overall themes of the book are not so clear. When a reader looks for such unifying themes, the book may appear disorganized in terms of its contents and interests. For example, the first part of Kings seems primarily interested in the successful opposition of prophets to the dynasty of Omri, while the story of Judah from 2 Kings 12 to the fall of Jerusalem seems to be interested in the reform of Temple worship and in the political relationships between Judah, Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt.

However, in spite of this impression of disunity in the contents of the book, Kings in fact contains two overall themes that have not previously been analyzed in detail. The first of these themes links together two theological claims: the claim that the worship of God in Jerusalem is the only legitimate form of Israelite worship, and the claim that treaties with foreign powers should be avoided on the grounds that such treaties are likely to lead to apostate worship. This theme is, of course, thoroughly Deuteronomic and appears often in the Book of Deuteronomy in the form of an injunction to avoid contact with the inhabitants of the land, who might entice Israel to worship foreign gods (Deut 7:1–6, for example). This composite theme runs throughout the Book of Kings and is first introduced in the
chapters dealing with Solomon. Solomon is, of course, credited with establishing legitimate worship in the Temple, but he is ultimately condemned for making alliances with foreign nations and cementing those alliances through marriages to foreign women. These political relationships lead to heterodox worship in Jerusalem, and the result is a judgment on Solomon in the form of the loss of most of his kingdom (1 Kings 11). The history of the northern kingdom follows much the same pattern. Jeroboam was originally installed as the legitimate king over the northern tribes, but he also lured the people to worship at sites other than Jerusalem. Later his descendants repeated Solomon's error of making foreign alliances through marriage, and by so doing they introduced the worship of Baal into the royal court. The working out of the judgment against the dynasty of Omri for these violations of Deuteronomic law makes up most of the narrative of the history of the northern kingdom. While the narrative focus remains on the north, the formulaic evaluations of the southern kings keep alive the same two motifs, pointing out which kings allowed worship at the high places and which kings made foreign alliances. In the Hezekiah narratives, the king is praised for restoring unity of worship in Israel, but his flirtation with making treaties with the Assyrians is met with the strong object lesson of the Assyrian invasion of 701. Toward the end of his life the meeting with the Babylonian ambassadors is blamed, however improbably, for the eventual capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

A second theme that runs throughout the book is the idea that repentance may postpone judgment but cannot eliminate it. The notion of the inevitability of judgment runs throughout many of the stories in the book, beginning with the account of Solomon's reign. He is condemned for allowing apostate worship, but the actual judgment falls on his son. The same is true of many of the northern kings, who are condemned by a prophet and told that their dynasties will come to an end, but who themselves are not punished directly. Even relatively good kings cannot turn back a promised judgment. Jehu is portrayed positively in the narrative for eliminating Baal worship in Israel, but he too is condemned for Jeroboam's sins, even though the judgment falls on the fourth generation of his line. Similarly, Hezekiah is said to have committed the sin that led to the exile, even though he himself did not experience any sort of punishment. Even Josiah, who repented and who caused the people to repent, was not able to avoid the judgment on Jerusalem, although he did not live to see it. Huldah's oracle of judgment is given before the reform, and the reform itself can do nothing to change it.

However, calling attention to these themes that help to unify the book does not lessen the feeling of disunity that is achieved by the multiple and contradictory explanations for the fall of Jerusalem and the exile. In this instance, at least, the traces of editorial activity are visible and lead to
difficulties in reading Kings as a long explanation for the exile. Still, even this feature of Kings must be set in the context of the overall genre of the book. It is important to remember that Kings presents itself as historiography. By leaving their fingerprints on the exilic edition(s) of Kings, the editors may have provided a model for dealing with history and the ever-changing social and cultural situation in which Israel found itself. As the book now stands, it is a testimony to the affirmation that Israel reinterpreted its own history as it had new experiences, and it viewed its history in new ways when older interpretations no longer seemed adequate. The apparent contradictions in the text, then, may simply be an indication that history writing in Israel was not static but a continually developing, living art.