

King Solomon

The Deuteronomistic History

The book of Kings is part of the “Deuteronomistic History;” a collection of stories that attempt to make sense of Israel’s history in light of the theology expressed in Deuteronomy. According to Deuteronomistic theology, terrible things happen when the Israelites disobey God’s law. As such, the series of unfortunate events that unfold in Kings are portrayed as a direct result of Israel’s disobedience. The Deuteronomistic Historian explains that the people and their leaders are to blame when both kingdoms are finally destroyed in the end.

The book of Kings draws its material from a wide range of sources, including prophetic legends, royal analytic reports, historiography, and more. Lists of court officials’ names provided throughout imbue the text with a sense of realism and trustworthiness. Unlike Genesis and other earlier biblical books, the names and events referenced in Kings can be historically verified to an extent. It is important to remember, however, that these are biased accounts of history given their selective source material and Deuteronomistic overlay.

Who was King Solomon?

The book of Kings begins with David’s death and documents the monarchy’s transition to Solomon. King Solomon is a multilayered character who inaugurates a more “modern” kingship in Israel. The text contains threads of both pro-Solomon and anti-Solomon sentiments throughout. The Deuteronomistic Historian is particularly concerned about Solomon’s many marriages (about 700 in all). From a theological perspective, the king’s behavior was responsible for the nation’s fate. Although having many wives was considered a sign of wealth for ancient kings, the Deuteronomistic Historian views Solomon’s marriages as problematic because they lead him to worship foreign gods. For this reason, the story partly blames Solomon’s indiscretions for the eventual split that occurs between Israel’s northern and southern kingdoms.

Despite his indiscretions, Solomon still comes off as a hero in the book of Kings. Some scholars argue that he was responsible for expanding Israel’s footprint, making it a stronger political and economic power in the region. Although we cannot know the full historical scope of Israel’s economic development, it is possible that Solomon made some administrative changes during his reign that contributed to the kingdom of Israel’s growth. Suffice to say, Solomon is cast in

both flattering and unflattering lights at different times throughout the book of Kings. As is so often the case, the historical truth behind his character likely falls somewhere in between.