

Adam Clarke:

Preface to the First Book of the Kings Otherwise Called the Third Book of the Kings

In the most correct and ancient editions of the Hebrew Bible, the two books of Kings make but one, with sometimes a little break, the first book beginning with 1 Samuel 22:40. Some of the ancient fathers seem to have begun the First Book of Kings at the death of David, 1 Kings 2:12. The more modern copies of the Hebrew Bible have the same division as ours; but in the time of the Masoretes they certainly made but one book; as both, like the books of Samuel, are included under one enumeration of sections, verses, etc., in the Masora.

The titles to these books have been various, though it appears from Origen that they had their name from their first words, **והאממלך דוד** (vehammelech David), **והאממלך דוד** as Genesis had its name from **והאממלך דוד** (bereshith), **והאממלך דוד** in the beginning. The Septuagint simply term it **βιβλος βασιλειων**, of reigns, or kingdoms; of which it calls Samuel the first and second, and these two the third and fourth. The Vulgate has **Liber Regum tertius; secundum Hebraeos, Liber Malachim: The Third Book of Kings; but, according to the Hebrews, the First Book of Malachim.** The Syriac has, **Here follows the Book of the Kings who flourished among this ancient people; and in this is also exhibited the history of the prophets who flourished in their times.** The Arabic has the following title: **In the name of the most merciful and compassionate God; the Book of Solomon, the son of David the prophet, whose benedictions be upon us. - Amen.**

The author of these books is unknown: that they are a compilation out of public and private records, as the books of Samuel are, there is little doubt; but by whom this compilation was made nowhere appears. Some have attributed it to Isaiah and to Jeremiah, because there are several chapters in both these prophets which are similar to some found in the first and second books of Kings; compare 2 Kings 18, 19, and 20, with Isaiah 36, 37, 38, and Isaiah 39:1-8; and 2 Kings 24:18; 2 Kings 25:1, etc., with Jeremiah 52:1, etc.

But rather than allow those prophets to be the authors or compilers of these books, some very learned men have judged that the chapters in question have been taken from the books of Kings in after times, and inserted in those prophets. It is worthy of remark that the fifty-second chapter found in Jeremiah is marked so as to intimate that it is not the composition of that prophet; for at the end of Jeremiah 51 we find these words, **Thus far are the words of Jeremiah; intimating that the following chapter is not his.**

But the most common opinion is, that Ezra was the author, or rather the compiler of the history found in these books. Allowing only the existence of ancient documents from which it was compiled, it appears,

1. That it is the work of one person; as is sufficiently evident from the uniformity of the style, and the connection of events.

2. That this person had ancient documents from which he compiled, and which he often only abridged, is evident from his own words, **The rest of the acts of such and such a prince, are they not written in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, or of Israel, which occur frequently.**

3. These books were written during or after the Babylonish captivity, as at the end of the second book that event is particularly described. The author states also, 2 Kings 17:23, that Israel was, in his time, in captivity in Assyria, according to the declaration of God by his prophets.

4. That the writer was not contemporary with the facts which he relates, is evident from the reflections he makes on the facts that he found in the memoirs which he consulted. See 2 Kings 17:6-24.

5. There is every reason to believe that the author was a priest or a prophet; he studies less to describe acts of heroism, successful battles, conquests, political address, etc., than what regards the temple, religion, religious ceremonies, festivals, the worship of God, the piety of princes, the fidelity of the prophets, the punishment of crimes, the manifestation of God's anger against the wicked, and his kindness to the righteous. He appears everywhere strongly attached to the house of David; he treats of the kings of Israel only accidentally; his principal object seems to be the kingdom of Judah, and the matters which concern it.

Now, all this agrees well with the supposition that Ezra was the compiler of these books. He was not only a priest, a zealous servant of God, and a reformer of the corruptions which had crept into the Divine worship, but is universally allowed by the Jews to have been the collector and compiler of the whole sacred code, and author of the arrangement of the different books which constitute the Old Testament. If some things be found in these books of Kings which do not agree to his time, they may be easily accounted for on his often taking the facts as he found them in the documents which he consults, without any kind of alteration; and this is so far a proof of his great sincerity and scrupulous exactness.

The First Book of Kings contains the history of one hundred and nineteen years, from A.M. 2989 to A.M. 3108. It contains a great variety of interesting particulars, the chief of which are the following: The death of David; the

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reign of Solomon; the building and dedication of the temple; the building of Solomon's palace; an account of his great wisdom; his magnificence, and his fall; the division of Israel and Judah under Rehoboam; the idolatry of the ten tribes over whom Jeroboam became king. It states how Judah, Benjamin, and Levi attached themselves to the house of David; how Rehoboam was attacked by Shishak, king of Egypt, who pillaged the temple; how Baasha destroyed the house of Jeroboam, and seized on the government of Israel; how Jehu predicted the ruin of Baasha; how Ahab married the impious Jezebel, and persecuted the prophets of the Lord. It relates the acts of Elijah; the destruction of the prophets of Baal; the cruel death of Naboth; the death of Ahab; the good reign of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah; and the wicked reign of Ahaziah, king of Israel, etc. See Calmet's preface to the first and second books of Kings.