

1 Kings 12-22

1 Kings

Kings, the last book of the "Former Prophets," relates the history of Israel from the declining days of David through the beginning of the Babylonian exile. Its last verses describe the release of Jehoiachin, exiled king of Judah, from prison in Babylonia during the reign of Evil-merodach son of Nebuchadnezzar, an event datable through Babylonian sources to 562-561 BCE.

The division of Kings into two books is first attested in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Bible, where it is combined with Samuel into a single four-part composition, *Basileiai* ("kingdoms" or "dynasties" or "reigns"). The division of Kings into two books was later followed in the Latin Vulgate version, and was adopted from there to vernacular Bible translations.

The narrative of Kings falls naturally into three sections followed by two brief appendices. The first section (1 Kings chapters 1-11) narrates the circumstances of Solomon's ascent to the throne and describes the source of his wisdom, his reign over all Israel in a united kingdom, and the building and furnishing of the Temple and other structures; it also evaluates his religious behavior. The second section (1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 17) begins by recounting the circumstances under which the northern tribes rejected the authority of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, withdrew from his kingdom (henceforth called Judah), and formed another, called Israel, with a king of their choosing. From that point the narrative provides a synchronistic, overlapping history of the kings of Judah and Israel for almost two centuries until the Northern Kingdom was destroyed by Assyria in 722. The third section (2 Kings 18.1-25.21) describes the reigns of Davidic dynasts in Judah, the Southern Kingdom, until Babylonia conquered Judah, ruined Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and executed some and exiled others from among its leading citizens in 586. The first brief appendix (2 Kings 25.22-26) tells of the appointment and assassination of Gedaliah, a native Israelite appointed administrator of Judah by the Babylonians; the second (2 Kings 25.27-30) appends a notice that Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah, was released from a Babylonian prison in the thirty-seventh year of exile.

Kings is not a history in the contemporary sense of the word, that is, a factual description of past events and an explanation for their occurrence that a modern reader might expect. **It is, in the main, an extended theological essay written by a person or persons with passionately held beliefs, convinced that the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the fall of the southern one were due to the misguided policies of their kings.** The author described past events selectively, commenting or summarizing them as illustrations of the lessons that he believed they taught.

The author maintained that **the Lord**, the God of history, **made His will known to Israel** with regard to specific key issues, that punishments are preceded by warnings **through prophets**, and that **people are responsible for the consequences of their choices. He further maintained that kings were responsible for the fate of their people.** For him, it was axiomatic that those ruling over the tribes of Israel were obligated to maintain the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple as the unique place where offerings acceptable to God might be made and to eliminate the illegitimate worship of any deity other than the Lord. **The author's composition demonstrated how all northern and most southern kings failed to meet their obligations and how all adversity, from minor disasters to the final catastrophe, followed as a consequence of this failure.** Somewhat contradictorily, he also took pains to note that despite this, the

divine promise of **an eternal dynasty to David** (2 Sam. 7.11) **was maintained out of God's love** for David ("for the sake of David," 1 Kings 11.13; 2 Kings 8.19; 19.34).

The author expressed his axiomatic notions, described Josiah (2 Kings 22-23) whom he regarded as best exemplifying what a king should be-and expressed his theme of the uniqueness of the Jerusalem Temple, in language closely tied to that of Deuteronomy 12. Deuteronomy is the only book in the Torah to project an image of the ideal king (Deut. 17.14-20), who bears a striking resemblance to Josiah as depicted in Kings. The author's ideas about how God works in history parallel those of Deut. 28. For these reasons, **contemporary scholarship refers to the author of Kings as a Deuteronomistic historian**, i.e., as one who wrote under the influence and reflecting the concerns and ideology of Deuteronomy. In addition to sharing phrases found in Deuteronomy, **the author also developed some unique expressions** of his own that are repeatedly used throughout Kings: worshipping foreign gods and serving them (1 Kings 9.6; 16.31; 2 Kings 17.35; 21.3, 21); on every high hill and under every leafy tree (1 Kings 14.23; 2 Kings 16.4; 17.10); idolatry as abhorrent (1 Kings 14.24; 2 Kings 16.3; 21.2, 11); detestable things (1 Kings 11.5, 7; 2 Kings 23.24); the city that the Lord has chosen (1 Kings 8.16, 44, 48; 11.13, 32, 36; 14.21; 2 Kings 21.7; 23.27); to build a House for the name of the Lord (1 Kings 3.2; 5.17, 19; 8.17, 18, 19, 20, 44); to sacrifice and offer at the open shrines (1 Kings 3.2, 3; 22-44; 2 Kings 12.4; 14.4; 15.4, 35; 16.4); to revere the Lord, i.e., serve God from a sense of awe (1 Kings 8.40, 43; 2 Kings 17.32, 33, 34, 39, 41).

The author cites by name **three sources** to which the original readers might refer for additional information about the kings discussed: Annals of Solomon (1 Kings 11.41); Annals of the Kings of Israel (1 Kings 14.19); Annals of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 14.20). The formula used by the author to introduce individual kings in the second section of Kings most likely draws regularly on information from the second and third of these sources: "In the ___ year of king ___ son of ___ of Israel/ Judah, ___ son of ___ became king of Judah/ Israel. He was ___ years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for ___ years. He did what was pleasing/ displeasing to the Lord." The source also includes the names of the mothers of the kings of Judah (the queen mother).

Although no scholarly consensus exists concerning the nature of these documents, the author, by mentioning them, challenged readers to deny the veracity of the facts that he was evaluating and interpreting. In addition to these, he had access to documents bearing on the Davidic court (1 Kings 1-2) and the history of the Temple (1 Kings 6-7; 2 Kings 23), as well as to some form of edited materials by and about the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 19.20-20.11), and to collections of prophetic stories that he interspersed in his narratives about the Northern Kingdom: Ahijah (1 Kings 11.29-14.18), Elijah (1 Kings 17. 1-2 Kings 2.18), Micaiah (1 Kings 22. 1-40), and Elisha (2 Kings 2.1-13.21). Although no copies of these sources survive, documents that match each type or genre of document are known from other ancient Near Eastern sources.

The author's sustained lesson about God's justice in history continues through the untimely death of Josiah in 2 Kings 23.25. This death stilled his voice. **According to the author's philosophy, Josiah should not have died as he did. The deeds of that good king should have set things right, but did not. A second person, writing during the Babylonian exile, completed the book through 2 Kings 25.26. This writer attributed Josiah's death and every bad thing that happened subsequently to the sins of King Manasseh, a 7th-century Judean monarch.** Passages expressing this notion, combined with a prophetic idea that Israelites as a people bore responsibility for the fate of their kingdoms, were inserted into

earlier parts of the book, contradicting the first author's original axiom of royal responsibility (2 Kings 21.10-15; 22.16-17). The second writer continued the narrative, appending terse notices about the last kings but describing only political events, not religious ones. The Annals of Judah are not cited after 2 Kings 24.5 and were most likely not needed; he was noting current events. This writer made no comments and found no lesson to teach in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The combined efforts of the original author and the second writer produced a document relevant to the post-destruction communities in both Judah and Babylonia. Their situation was explained as the outcome not only of the religious policies of their kings, who had violated ancient revealed teachings, but also of the behavior of their own ancestors. The implication of this didactic text was that the very facts of destruction and exile demonstrated the power of God, the validity of His covenant with Israel, and His meticulousness in maintaining it. Therefore, when the punishment of ruin and exile had run its course, His promises of restoration made in Deut. 30.1-5 and by different prophets could reasonably be expected to come to fruition.

At least 25 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, a third person appended a few sentences to the composition, now the last three verses of the book. This person may have hoped that the event recorded, King Jehoiachin's release from prison, was the harbinger of coming changes in the fortunes of his people. Jewish tradition has maintained, on the basis of statements in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. B. Bat.* 14b-15a), that the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied from the time of Josiah until the exile, but lived beyond that (Jer. 1.2-3; chapters 40-41), wrote Kings. This tradition may be based on the similarities between the final chapter of Kings and Jeremiah 25 and 52. As noted above, however, **Kings has a much more complex history, and may not be attributed to a single individual; like most ancient Near Eastern compositions, its author is anonymous.**¹

1 Kings 12: The Division of the Kingdom – Rehoboam (Judah) versus Jeroboam (Israel)

The secession of northern tribes from the united kingdom and the creation of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

1. The negotiation at Shechem (1 Kgs. 12.1).² Although prophets, acting on instructions from God, might anoint individuals as kings, the authority of any persons so anointed had to be publicly acclaimed by those over whom they ruled, as in the case of Saul (1 Sam. 11.14-15), David over Judah (2 Sam. 2.4, 7), David over all the tribes (2 Sam. 5.1-5), and Solomon (1 Kings 1.39-40). The northern tribes were ready to acclaim Rehoboam as their king, but only if he agreed to certain general conditions. The text has a clear polemical slant, and makes Rehoboam look foolish, thereby justifying the establishment of the Northern Kingdom.³

¹ Ziony Zevit, *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 668-671, emphasis added.

² Shechem was a frequent assembly point in the tribal period. One might have expected, however, that the coronation would take place in Jerusalem. In this national meeting at Shechem there appears to be an intimation that Rehoboam's succession to the throne was not an automatic matter, or, to put this differently, that the Davidic rule over what had been, barely half a century earlier, a federation of tribes was not entirely assured. Thus Rehoboam comes out from Jerusalem to an assembly that he hopes will acclaim or ratify his succession. His knowledge of Jeroboam's ambitions for the throne may be a motivator. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Translation with Commentary, Volume 2*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019, p. 483.

³ *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 700.

2. Your father made our yoke heavy! (1 Kgs. 12.4).⁴
3. Rehoboam counsels with the elders (1 Kgs. 12.6-9).⁵
 - a. Serve them! (1 Kgs. 12.7). (Compare to Mosiah 2.17)
4. Rehoboam counsels with the young men (1 Kgs. 12.10-11).⁶
 - a. They tell Rehoboam to threaten the north with an increase in taxation.⁷
5. Rehoboam takes the advice of his childish counsels and decides to lead with threats and unrighteous dominion instead of the wise advice of the sages (1 Kgs. 12.12-15).
 - a. (The king did not listen to the people; for the Lord had brought it about in order to fulfill the promise that the Lord had made through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.) (1 Kgs. 12.15 JPS translation)⁸
6. Israel rejects Rehoboam as king, shouting, "To your tents, O Israel!" (1 Kgs. 12.16).⁹
 - a. The man sent to collect tribute is killed by the northern rebels (1 Kgs. 12.18).
 - b. "So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day" (1 Kgs. 12.19).
 - c. Judah and Benjamin are allies (1 Kgs. 12.21).
 - d. The prophet Shemaiah tells Rehoboam not to attack the north (1 Kgs. 12.22-24).¹⁰
7. Jeroboam's fear and the establishment of alternate holy sites (1 Kgs. 12.25-33).¹¹
 - a. If my people go to Jerusalem to the temple, "they shall kill me" (1 Kgs. 12.27).
 - b. Two calves of gold¹²... behold thy gods, O Israel! (1 Kgs. 12.28).

⁴ The people refer, of course, to the punishing taxation through forced labor necessitated by Solomon's vast building projects. Requests for remission of taxes and obligations to the crown when a new king assumed the throne were common in the ancient Near East. Alter, p. 483-484.

⁵ These would be a group of state councillors, experienced men who are not necessarily aged but knowledgeable. Ibid. וַיִּנְעֹץ הַמֶּלֶךְ רְחֹבָם אֶת-הַזְּקֵנִים "And Rehoboam the king exchanged counsel with the elders" (1 Kgs. 12.6).

⁶ וַיִּנְעֹץ אֶת-הַיְלָדִים "And he consulted with the young men" (1 Kgs. 12.8). The word for "young men," *yeladim*, usually means "child" or even "infant." Since we later learn that Rehoboam was forty when he became king, these are actually middle-aged men. The term may have been chosen to underscore their puerile behavior. In any case, the episode surely reflects the ancient predisposition to seek wisdom from elders, as Job's three friends repeatedly stress. Alter, p. 484.

⁷ "Little finger is thicker than my father's loins" - This extravagant metaphor is the advice of arrogance. In the event, Rehoboam deletes these words in his response to the people. A few interpreters have seen a sexual allusion here, perhaps because of the proximity to loins, with "little finger" a euphemism for the male member (in rabbinic Hebrew, "little member" means the male reproductive organ. That would be in keeping with the macho brashness of these words. Ibid.

⁸ This has reference to the prophecy that Ahijah made to Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11.29-39. This was also told to Solomon by God according to 1 Kings 11.11.

⁹ This also happens in 2 Sam. 20.1 with Sheba's rebellion.

¹⁰ This is an example of the Deuteronomists' belief that kings are limited in power. See Deut. 17.14-18; 1 Kgs. 22.6.

¹¹ In a highly polemical passage, the author describes a series of cultic actions taken by Jeroboam that he considers spiteful violations of divine will. Consequently, he refers to them throughout Kings as the "sins of Jeroboam" that caused northern tribes to abandon Jerusalem. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 702.

¹² Images of bulls, such as have been found in excavations, also deemed to be in violation of Torah as found in Deuteronomy 5.8-9: "Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Robert Alter explains, "**Calves or bulls were often conceived as a mount or a throne of God**, precisely like those winged leonine figures, the cherubim. **In all historical likelihood, Jeroboam's intention was not to displace the worship of YHWH but merely to create alternate cultic centers to Jerusalem with an alternate temple iconography.** But the narrator pointedly represents

- c. One in Dan, one in Bethel (v. 29).
- d. He made priests of the lowest people, which were not of the sons of Levi (1 Kgs. 12.31).¹³
- e. He offered “on the eighth month” (1 Kgs. 12.32-33).¹⁴

1 Kings 14-16

1. Abijah, son of Jeroboam is ill, so he sends his wife to Shiloh to inquire of the Lord of the prophet Ahijah.
 - a. Ahijah’s prophecy: You have done evil (1 Kgs. 14.9), your male heirs will die (1 Kgs. 14.10), wild animals will eat them (v. 11), a king will cut off Jeroboam’s seed (v. 14), Israel will be scattered (v. 15).
 - b. Abihah dies (1 Kgs. 14.17).
2. Jeroboam dies and Nadab (his son) reigns (1 Kgs. 14.20).
3. Judah does evil in the days of Rehoboam, building high places, *asherim*. There were also “sodomites” in the land (1 Kgs. 14.21-25).
4. In the 5th year of Rehoboam, the Egyptian armies come into the city of Jerusalem and sack the temple, for Shishak king of Egypt “took away all” (1 Kgs. 14.25-26).¹⁵

all this in precisely the terms, with an explicit quotation, of Aaron’s golden calf (Exodus 32). Alter, p. 486-487, emphasis added. Amihai Mazar discusses the archaeological finds of bull figurines in: [The "Bull Site": An Iron Age I Open Cult Place, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Summer, 1982, No. 247 \(Summer, 1982\), pp. 27-42.](#) I would assume that the figurines are just small examples of the larger bulls that were construction in Iron I Israel during the reign of the northern kings.

¹³ Alter translates verse 31 thus, “And he made buildings for the high places and made priests from the pick of the people who were not from the sons of Levi” (1 Kgs. 12.31). He explains, “This is what this Hebrew phrase indicates elsewhere, **though others understand it in an opposite sense, “the common people.” Jeroboam, however, would have had no motivation to enlist priests from the peasantry.** His waywardness is rather reflected in bypassing the priestly caste. See Genesis 47:2, where this same expression appears to mean “the pick” or “the best.” The exact phrase is וַיַּעַשׂ שָׂרְפָתִים מִקְצוֹת הָעָם “And he made priests from the *qetzot* of the people” הַקָּצָה, the noun from which we are working with in this verse, can mean several things: “end, extremity” or “from the whole of” meaning what Alter is arguing, meaning that he took his pick. I can see why the KJV translators used the phrase “from the lowest of the people,” as this group would be seen by them as low, as they were in a state opposite of the authorities in Jerusalem. Mosiah 11, in describing a similar event in the life of wicked King Noah, states, “For he put down all the priests that had been consecrated by his father, and consecrated new ones in their stead, such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts” (Mosiah 11.5)

¹⁴ Calendric differences have often been the lever of sectarian or political divisions among Jews. The festival referred to is **Succoth, the most densely attended of the three pilgrim festivals.** Its designated date is on the fifteenth of the seventh month, so Jeroboam, by pushing it a month later, is marking a pointed difference between his realm and the southern kingdom. Alter, p. 487, emphasis added.

¹⁵ This verse begs the question: **what of the Ark of the Covenant?** Was this taken by Shishak king of Egypt? [2 Maccabees 2.4-8](#) seems to indicate that Jeremiah placed the Ark in hiding to keep it out of the hands of the enemies of the Jews: “These same records also tell us that **Jeremiah, acting under divine guidance,** commanded the Tent of the Lord’s Presence and **the Covenant Box** to follow him to the mountain where Moses had looked down on the land which God had promised our people. When Jeremiah got to the mountain, **he found a huge cave** and there he hid the Tent of the Lord’s Presence, the Covenant Box, and the altar of incense. Then he sealed up the entrance. Some of Jeremiah’s friends tried to follow him and mark the way, but they could not find the cave. When Jeremiah learned what they had done, he reprimanded them, saying, **‘No one must know about this place until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy.** At that time he will reveal where these things are hidden, and the dazzling light of his presence will be seen in the cloud, as it was in the time of Moses

- a. It is important for us to see that the Nephites also created an Ark, with sacred implements associated with kingship and God's presence. See: [The Nephite Ark](#), 11.14.2018.
5. Continual war between Israel and Judah all the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 14.30).
6. Northern Kingdom: Baasha wipes out the house of Jeroboam as prophesied (1 Kgs. 15.25-31).
7. Southern Kingdom: Asa "did right" by taking away the "sodomites" out of the land (v. 12), but he did not remove the high places (1 Kgs. 15.14).
8. Jehu (in the north) prophesies against Israelite king Baasha, that his posterity will be no more (1 Kgs. 16.1-6).
 - a. This prophecy is fulfilled, as Zimri, servant of Baasha, assassinates the king and "slew all the house of Baasha" (1 Kgs. 16.11-13).
9. Civil War in Israel (1 Kgs. 16.15-22).
 - a. Zimri doesn't last long, only 7 days, as Omri lays siege to his forces (1 Kgs. 16.17).
 - b. After Zimri's death, the kingdom is split in half between Omri and Tibni, but after conflict, Omri takes power and rules over Israel (1 Kgs. 16.23). He does evil,¹⁶ as does his son Ahab, which sets up the conflict between Ahab and Elijah in 1 Kings 17.
 - i. Ahab has a wife named Jezebel (1 Kgs. 16.31).¹⁷
 - ii. In his days Hiel the Bethelite built up Jericho. At the cost of Abiram his firstborn he laid its foundation and at the cost of Segib his youngest he put up its gates, according to the word of the LORD that He spoke through Joshua son of Nun (1 Kgs. 16.34, Robert Alter translation).¹⁸

and on the occasion when Solomon prayed that the Temple might be dedicated in holy splendor." If this story is true, then the Egyptian monarch did not take the Ark, rather he took other things made of gold, possibly as tribute to not sack the city. Opinions differ. Robert Alter sees this as a payment by Rehoboam to Shishak to lift his siege of the city of Jerusalem. Alter, p. 496. The gold paid to Shishak may have also been a payment to incite the Egyptians to finance the Egyptian raid of Israel, for fragments of Shishak's name were excavated in Megiddo. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 707.

One thing seems to be certain, and that is that the Second Temple did not have the Ark of the Covenant. When the Roman [General Pompey laid siege to Jerusalem](#) and conquered it around 63 B.C., he demanded the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies. When he did, he came out saying that he could not understand what all the interest was about the sanctuary, when **it was only an empty room**. Margaret Barker puts it this way:

The Holy of Holies in the second temple was empty; there was no ark (*m. Yoma* 5.2). When Josephus described Pompey's entry into the temple and into the holy of holies, which none but the high priest was permitted to enter, he said that Pompey saw the menorah and the lamps, the table, and the libation vessels and censers of solid gold. There is no mention of anything that could have been in the holy of holies (Flavius Josephus, [The Wars of the Jews 1.152](#)). Margaret Barker, [The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy](#), T&T Clark, 2003, p. 146.

¹⁶ The story of the kings, in keeping with the Deuteronomistic perspective, is more focused on cultic dereliction, always seen as the cause of historical disaster, than on political history. Alter, p. 495.

¹⁷ Her name and lineage proclaim her roots in the world of idolatry. She is a Phoenician (Sidon being a principal Phoenician city); her father's name contains the pagan theophoric element "Baal"; her name means "Where is the prince." The Masoretic Text polemically revocalizes the name of the Phoenician god Zebul as zebel, "dung." Alter, p. 502.

¹⁸ Joshua, after the destruction of Jericho, had **pronounced a curse (Joshua 6:26) on whoever might presume to rebuild Jericho**. The violation of that solemn prohibition by one of Ahab's people is of a piece with Ahab's building

1 Kings 17-19

1. Elijah seals the heavens
2. "Arise, get thee to Zarepath" (1 Kgs. 17.9).
3. Elijah and the widow (1 Kgs. 17.9-24).
4. Ahab, Obadiah, Elijah, and the contest at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18).
 - a. Obadiah, a prophet, is a high official in Ahab's court (1 Kgs. 18.3).
 - b. Obadiah hid prophets "by fifty in a cave" (1 Kgs. 18.4).¹⁹

a site of worship to a pagan god. **At the cost of Abiram his firstborn he laid its foundation.** The probable meaning is that according to the terms of Joshua's curse, **his firstborn died when he laid the town's foundations and his youngest when the gates were put up**, marking the completion of the building. But the ghost of the **ancient Near Eastern practice of a foundation sacrifice**, in which a ruler sacrificed his firstborn to ensure the well-being of the city, flickers through this grim verse. Alter, p. 502.

¹⁹ Lundwall writes, "It is well known that **the earliest number of choral participants in Greek theater was fifty.** Aeschylus used fifty choral dancers in his plays. By the time Sophocles presented his dramas, this number had been reduced to twelve. As Jane Harrison has noted, the history of the theater is the history of the stage overtaking the orchestra, this latter term signifying the choral dance. Remarkably, despite the large amount of materials written on ancient Greek theater, I have yet to encounter a single explanation as to why **fifty members were utilized in the earliest Greek chorus.** Why so many people in a ring dance? **The earliest tradition is the closest to the tradition of temple cult.** It should not surprise us, then, to find that **fifty attendants**, much like our attendant Greek chorus, often **accompany our mystery heros** through the celestial axis in ancient myth. Perhaps the most well-known of these attendants are none other than the Anunnakku (also called Anunna) **who accompany Gilgamesh to the Underworld... Significantly, the Anunnakku are "knowers of the way."** In the tablet **Gilgamesh and Huwawa B we learn of them: "In heaven they sparkle, on earth they know the path.** Lundwall, p. 113-114. Lundwall cites other examples, like Jason and the Argonauts (p. 115), he then writes, "Of central interest to this Greek myth is that Jason must sail to the land of the fleece on a boat **oared by fifty sailors.** At the head of the deck is none other than Orpheus, who leads the sailors along with his music. **To accomplish their task all fifty sailors must be initiated into the Mysteries of Persephone** at Samothrace (Graves 532). Along their journey Jason and the Argonauts must sail through the clashing stones called the [Symplegades](#) (the entrance to the Underworld). Furthermore, in order to obtain the fleece, Jason bridles fire-breathing, bronze-footed bulls and plows a field while sewing dragon's teeth. Jason defeats the dragon and obtains the golden fleece. On their return trip the Argonauts must pass the singing Sirens. Their song is so alluring that all who hear it swim to the rocky outcrop where they are perched and perish. In order to pass the Sirens Jason employs the music of Orpheus which is the only thing that can "out-dance" the melody of the Sirens. **In both myths we have an Underworld quest which is accompanied by fifty sailors or partners who aid the hero.** In the Epic of Gilgamesh the Anunnakku are especially the "knowers of the way" who lead Gilgamesh through the seven mountains. In the myth of Jason the Argonauts are the fifty sailors who, led by the music of Orpheus, and initiated into the mysteries, are the only heros who can descend into the Underworld to obtain the golden fleece. Yet these are not the only examples of the famed fifty attendants who help heros pass between the worlds (p. 116). It is noteworthy that Elijah travels with "fifty men of the sons of the prophets" (2 Kgs. 2.7), and that these individuals are there at the river crossing and Elijah's ascent into heaven. Lundwall later explains, "The number fifty is also part of the Jewish festival "code," as in fifty days after Passover the Festival of Shavuot is performed celebrating the deliverance of the Torah from Mount Sinai. This celebration would eventually be called Pentecost by Hellenistic Jews and Christians. In the Christian tradition, Pentecost is celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Easter. Again, there is a harmonic relevance to these numbers" (p. 355)... John Knight Lundwall, *Oedipus and the Underworld: Mystery Cosmography in Ancient Myth and Ritual*, dissertation, Pacifica Institute, 2011.

- c. Ahab commands Obadiah to find grass, and “they divided the land between them” (1 Kgs. 18.5-6).²⁰
 - d. Obadiah and Elijah meet up (v.7), and Elijah tells Obadiah to inform the king that “Elijah is here” (1 Kgs. 18.8), and Obadiah is scared, saying “What? Have I sinned?” (1 Kgs. 18.9).²¹
 - e. Again, Obadiah expresses fear (v.14), and Elijah says “I will appear before him this very day” (1 Kgs. 18.15). Obadiah informs Ahab that Elijah is near, and Ahab sees Elijah and says, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?” (v. 17).
 - f. Elijah issues the challenge: meet me at Mount Carmel, with the prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kgs. 18.19).
5. How long halt ye between two opinions? The Contest at Mount Carmel²² (1 Kings 18.21-46).
- a. Give us two bullocks (1 Kgs. 18.23).
 - b. Baal versus Yahweh (1 Kgs. 18.25-39).
 - i. “O Baal hear us!” (1 Kgs. 18.26).
 - ii. Elijah mocked them (1 Kgs. 18.27).
 - iii. Baal does not answer (1 Kgs. 18.29).
 - iv. Elijah, his altar, 12 stones, barrels of water and the fire of Yahweh (1 Kgs. 30-39).
 - 1. “The Lord, he is the God!” (1 Kgs. 18.39).²³
6. Carmel: The Aftermath
- a. Elijah kills the priests of Baal (1 Kgs. 18.40).²⁴
 - b. Elijah tells Ahab to go “eat and drink,” after which Ahab descends in his chariot into the Valley of Jezreel (1 Kgs. 18.41).
 - c. Elijah “girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel” (1 Kgs. 18.46).²⁵

²⁰ The cause of their separation is the pressing severity of the drought, but it is also important that they be separated—Obadiah would normally have remained in the palace—so that Elijah can speak to him in Ahab’s absence. Alter, p. 506.

²¹ The exchange between Obadiah and Elijah is one of the most spectacular deployments of the biblical technique of contrastive dialogue, in which the two speakers are sharply differentiated by antithesis in tone and attitude and, often, by an opposition between brevity and prolixity. Elijah expresses a concise imperative, “Go and say to your lord, ‘Elijah is here,’” and then the steely resolution at the end of the dialogue, “As the LORD of Armies lives, Whom I have served, today I will appear before him.” **Obadiah, on the other hand, terrified** by the prospect of conveying this message to Ahab, spouts a stream of highly nervous volubility, anxiously repeating twice what he regards as Elijah’s impossible order to him and at the same time defending his own record as a God-fearing man. **The effect is almost comical: he is a good man and has incurred danger in his loyalty to the LORD, but he is also an ordinary man, susceptible to fear.** The contrast to the iron-willed Elijah is striking. At the same time, **Obadiah’s terror vividly reflects Ahab’s ruthlessness as a paganizing monarch.** Ibid, p. 507, emphasis added.

²² [Mount Carmel](#), at the south end of modern Haifa, is at the seaward end of a range that rises to 530 m (1,600 ft).

²³ The same words are found elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Deut. 4-35, 39), and were later used as the culminating confession of faith at the conclusion of Yom Kippur. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 716.

²⁴ The verb used is singular, so the slaughterer is Elijah. There are other verbs for killing—this particular verb is generally used for animals. Elijah is as ruthless in his zealotry for YHWH as Ahab in his pagan despotism. Alter, p. 510.

²⁵ Some interpret Elijah’s running ahead of Ahab’s chariot as a gesture of alliance with the king. More probably, he is again demonstrating a power superior to the king’s: filled with the divine afflatus, he sprints ahead of the king’s

7. The still small voice (1 Kings 19).
 - a. Exhausted, Elijah cries out to God, "Enough! Now, O Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kgs. 19.4).
 - b. He sees an angel, eats and drinks, and walks 40 days as far as the Mountain of God at Horeb (1 Kgs. 19.5-9).
 - c. Elijah has a discussion with the Lord (1 Kgs. 19.9-18).

chariot all the way to Jezreel, outstripping the galloping horses. Alter, p. 510.

וַיִּתְּפְשׂוּם וַיּוֹרְדוּם אֶל־הַוַּדִּי וַיִּשְׁחָטֵם שָׁם
 "And they took them, and Elijah took them down to the wadi
 Kishon, **and he slaughtered them** there" (1 Kgs. 18.40b my translation).

- i. “The still small voice”²⁶ (1 Kgs. 19.12) קול דְּמָמָה דְּקָה *qol demama daqa*²⁷
- d. Elijah is commanded to go and anoint another king – Jehu son of Nimshi, as well as Elisha to succeed him in the prophetic role (1 Kgs. 19.16).²⁸
- e. Elijah goes and finds Elijah and casts his mantle upon him (1 Kgs. 19.19-21).

²⁶ There are two main ways an individual can hear the word of the Lord. He can hear the earthquake, the wind, and the fire; or he can hear the still, small voice. Obviously, the wicked choose to hear the word of the Lord through the violence of the elements. Especially prior to the Second Coming, the wicked will hear the voice of the Lord from “the testimony of earthquakes, that shall cause groanings in the midst of her... [and from] the testimony of the voice of thundering, and the voice of lightnings, and the voice of tempests, and the voice of the waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds” (D&C 88:89-90). That is one way to hear the voice of the Lord. Latter-day Saints should be familiar enough with spiritual things that they can recognize the “still small voice.” Helaman heard the voice, “It was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul.” (Hel. 5:30.) Sometimes, members of the church want something more. For them the “still small voice” isn’t enough. The First Presidency in the Nauvoo days warned these:

The Lord cannot always be known by the thunder of His voice, by the display of His glory or by the manifestation of His power; and **those that are the most anxious to see these things, are the least prepared to meet them**, and were the Lord to manifest His power as He did to the children of Israel, such characters would be the first to say, “Let not the Lord speak any more, lest we His people die.” James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. Bookcraft, 1965-75, 1: 148, June 1842.

Boyd K. Packer stated, “The Spirit does not get our attention by shouting or shaking us with a heavy hand. **Rather it whispers.** It caresses so gently that if we are preoccupied we may not feel it at all.” “The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1983, 53.

Gordon B. Hinckley shared the following:

Somebody asked Brother Widtsoe once, “When are we going to have another revelation? How is it that we haven’t had any revelations since the Doctrine and Covenants was compiled? How long has it been since we’ve had a revelation?” Brother Widtsoe replied, “**Oh, about last Thursday.**” Now, that’s the way it goes. Each Thursday, when we are at home, the First Presidency and the Twelve meet in the temple, in those sacred hallowed precincts, and we pray together and discuss certain matters together, and the spirit of revelation comes upon those present. I know. I have seen it. I was there that June day in 1978 when President Kimball received revelation, surrounded by members of the Twelve, of whom I was one at the time. This is the work of God. This is His almighty work. No man can stop or hinder it....

Now we have a great body of revelation which guides us in the everyday conduct of the affairs of the Church. Situations arise where we feel we need guidance. **When those conditions happen, we discuss the matter, pray about it, perhaps fast about it, and go to the Lord about it.** It is like the experience recounted by Elijah, who needed help on a problem and went to the Lord, and a great wind occurred and the Lord was not in the wind. Then an earthquake, and the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then a fire, and the Lord was not in the fire. And then a still, small voice. That is the way it works. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, Deseret Book, 1997, p. 556.

²⁷ The JPS translators render this as “a soft murmuring sound,” while Robert Alter translates 1 Kings 19.12 as “a sound of minute stillness.” *Qol* can be voice, sound, or noise, and is used throughout the Hebrew Bible. I generally translate this as “voice.” *Demama* is not used frequently in the Bible, just a few times, and can be translated as “whisper, calm.” *Daqa*, an adjective, means “thin, small, or fine.”

²⁸ No other prophet is recorded to have designated his own prophetic replacement, though here too there may be some echo of Moses choosing Joshua as a replacement in his own lifetime (Numbers 27.15-23). *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 717.

8. Ahab is told by an unnamed prophet that he will defeat the Syrian forces (1 Kgs. 20.13-14, 28).
 - a. The children of Israel “slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day” (1 Kgs. 20.29). It should be remembered that *eleph*, the word for “thousand,” can mean many things.²⁹
 - b. Ahab spares the king of Aram Damascus³⁰ (1 Kgs. 20.30-33)
9. Ahab desires the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kgs. 21).
 - a. Ahab, unable to procure Naboth’s vineyard, complains to his wife Jezebel (1 Kgs. 21.5-7).
 - b. Jezebel finds a way to have Naboth killed (1 Kgs. 21.8-14).³¹
 - c. Ahab takes possession of the vineyard (1 Kgs. 21.15).
 - d. Elijah curses both Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs. 21.17-29).
 - i. “Jezebel shall the dogs eat” (1 Kgs. 21.23). This is fulfilled in 2 Kings 9.
10. Judah and Israel fight against Syria, Ahab dies (1 Kgs. 22).
 - a. Micaiah, having had a vision of the heavenly council, is instructed by God to lie to Ahab in order that Ahab will go and fight Syria (1 Kgs. 22.10-28).
 - i. Micaiah had a “lying spirit” so as to deceive Ahab in order that he may die. This is an interesting yet troubling portrayal of the Divine Heavenly Council.
 - b. Ahab dies in battle, and the dogs lick up his blood (1 Kgs. 22.29-40).
 - c. Ahab’s son Ahaziah succeeds him, but is also wicked (1 Kgs. 22.40-53).

²⁹ אֶלֶף can mean “thousand,” but it can also mean “family,” or “clan” as in Judges 6.15: (הִדַּל בְּמִנְשָׁה) הִנֵּה אֶלְפֵי הַדָּל בְּמִנְשָׁה “behold my family/clan is poor in Manasseh!”) or perhaps even a military unit. אֶלֶף *alluph* is translated in the KJV as “dukes,” but it can also be translated as “chieftains” or “clan leaders,” as found in Genesis 36.15-43. Flanders put it this way: “However, the majority of scholars do not accept these figures as literal. In addition to population data gleaned from archaeological surveys which suggest much lower population figures, there are other reasons to believe many of the large numbers are implausible. For example, **in the DH, one regularly finds battle casualties in the tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands. These numbers are far larger than casualty estimates for many modern-day battles where technology and modern weaponry has ostensibly made increased casualties more likely.** One solution that several scholars have taken to this problem is to posit that אֶלֶף normally translated “thousand” actually refers to a “contingent or armed group” where “thousand” would be out of the question historically. A form of this proposal was articulated in 1906 by Petrie in an attempt to make sense of the large numbers in the census lists in Numbers 1 and 26. Petrie noted that in addition to meaning “thousand” אֶלֶף also meant “family” or “group.” Denise Flanders, “Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands: The rhetorical use of numbers in the Deuteronomistic History,” p. 50-51, emphasis added. See also: Alexander and Alexander, *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the Bible*, p. 191.

³⁰ [This map](#) shows Aram Damascus as just east of Galilee and Samaria.

³¹ Blapheming God and the king was punishable by death (1 Kgs. 21.10 & Exodus 22.28) “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.” Berlin and Brettler argue, “**The crime of which Naboth is accused, and its prescribed punishment, is only partially known from the Torah** (Lev. 24.15-16). **No Torah legislation explicitly criminalizes cursing the king** (but see Exod. 22.27).” *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 721, emphasis added.