Among biblical books Kings is not often celebrated for its literary qualities. Although it includes some finely constructed stories and story cycles, the book as a whole has mostly elicited commentaries that utilize it to reconstruct Israelite history. Indeed, Kings’ use and citation of sources, selectivity of material, and interpretation of events have won it due acknowledgment as one of the first real works of history writing.¹ Yet Kings’ rhetoric of historicity need not prevent us from recognizing the creative choices and skills of its authors and editors. In fact that rhetoric itself is a literary strategy with which its writers seek to authenticate various traditions and claims by enveloping them in an historical framework.

This chapter is concerned with but one literary element: structure. Literary structure refers to the relationships of the various parts of the book to each other and to the whole and the literary means by which those relationships are achieved. Structure in this sense is not simply a mechanical matter though one can identify some objective structural markers such as formulaic opening and concluding statements, dating devices, and shifts in location. Rather structure is intimately related to meaning: the balances, progressions, symmetries and repetitions that one finds among the book’s literary units may reveal relationships between events, characters, places, and times that suggest particular interpretations. As a dimension of interpretation, then, literary structure is ultimately subjective.

Literary structure here is to be distinguished from what older biblical studies called literary criticism, the identification of the antecedent written sources of the present text. Beginning with Martin Noth’s pioneering hypothesis of a Deuteronomistic history, of which Kings constituted the concluding book, the debate about the sources and

recensions of Kings has been rich and spirited. Powerful arguments have been mounted to support Hezekian, Josian, exilic, and post-exilic versions of Kings. And one’s view of the history of composition does have an impact on the literary structure that one finds. If, for instance, one holds to an original composition in the heyday of Hezekiah, one is likely to take the statement praising the incomparability of Hezekiah as the mark of the original ending of Kings. Clearly that contention affects how one reads the rest of the book, whether as a completion, updating, or a revisioning. Furthermore, the seams in the text that source critics posit reveal not only potential structural markers but also sites that the final author/editor needed to smooth over in creating the narrative as we have it. Finally, though, the literary structure of the Hebrew text of Kings can describe only the text that we have and not its putative antecedents.

More than any other biblical book Kings bears explicitly the marks of its author. While the omniscient narrator of much biblical prose stays in the background, the narrator in Kings tips his hand in a number of ways. By making continual reference to his sources (e.g., Annals of Solomon [1 Kgs 11:41]; Annals of the Kings of Judah; Annals of the Kings of Israel), the narrator calls attention to the novum of his own composition and challenges the reader to verify and extend his information by consulting those sources. Moreover, the narrator arrogates to himself the repeated judgment that events fulfill past prophecies. In addition, he offers a comparative evaluation of each king of Israel and Judah frequently without data to back it up; compared to other biblical narrators he wields a heavy hand.

That hand also appears in the complex method of organization that is the most obvious key to the structure of the book. After Solomon’s kingdom, upon his death, divides into two parts, the text synchronizes their histories by systematically shifting between them. The accession of each king is dated by the regnal year of his older contemporary in the other kingdom and the narrative proceeds with his story until his death. If his reign extends beyond that of his older contemporary, the text shifts back to the latter’s kingdom to pick up the reign of his successor. If not, the text proceeds with the former’s successors still dated by the regnal year of the still living, longer reigning, contemporary.

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This system results in a back and forth alternation between the story of Israel and the story of Judah until Israel’s demise permits a focus on Judah alone.

Yet as thorough-going and consistent as this structuring technique is, it is not the only and not necessarily the most important structural feature of the book. In a manifestly composite work like Kings, the quest for a single unambiguous structure is probably futile. Better is the approach of Richard Nelson who finds in Kings “a complicated network of overlapping patterns.” Among these, in addition to the chronological synchronization of reigns, Nelson briefly discusses parataxis, analogy, prophecy and its fulfillment, the editorial perspective on each king, and apostasy and reform. I would add to this list type-scenes, verbal repetitions and refrains, and thematic links. These various patterns, perhaps having entered the book at different points in the history of its composition, work together and sometimes in tension with each other to create its thick intertextual quality.

Before examining any of these patterns in detail, however, let us look at the book as a whole to see how its content alone offers the most basic view of its structure. Much of the book is comprised of story sequences or cycles that revolve around particular kings, prophets, or movements. In his commentary on 1 Kings, Jerome Walsh divides the book into the stories of Solomon (1-11), Jeroboam (11:26-14:20), Elijah (17-19), and Ahab (20:1-22:40). Although chapters 14:21-16:34 and 22:41-53, which both speed through the reigns of unremarkable kings of Israel and Judah, are omitted from this breakdown, the literary units of each of the major sections show a clear focus on a single figure. So even if David is the first concern of “the Solomon story” and Ahab appears in “the Elijah story” and vice versa, Walsh successfully demonstrates how those appearances are subordinated to the presentation of the careers of the main figures. The organization of the narrative into four major “biographical” complexes provides a first reading of the structure of 1 Kings. The narrative blocs of 2 Kings are somewhat more difficult to parse out; most commentaries simply divide the book by the reigns of the kings. A few kings—Jehu, Hezekiah, and Josiah—are the subjects of short narrative cycles, but these cannot

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constitute the primary sections of the book given its aim to cover the reigns of all of the kings. The first section is clearly the story of Elisha (1:1-8:6); he is the main character in all but the first episode, and in the last episode the king asks Gehazi to recite an account of Elisha’s great deeds as if his career were over (8:4). Next come three blocs distinguished by theme: revolutions and their consequences in Aram, Israel, and Judah (8:7-13:25); turmoil and tragedy for Israel (14-17); renewal and catastrophe for Judah (18-25). The second section is framed by Elisha’s appearances at the beginning and the end, but this Elisha is less a wonder-worker than a maker of revolutions. The third section, though still alternating between North and South, contrasts the stability in Judah with the deterioration and, finally, destruction of Israel. And the last bloc both encompasses the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah and accounts for Judah’s fall.

If, in a linear reading, the material in 1 and 2 Kings falls into a chronological sequence of narrative complexes, when viewed as a whole Kings exhibits a balance not otherwise apparent. George Savran suggest a chiastic structure for the whole book, accepted and modified slightly by Walsh, as illustrated in this diagram:6

   B. Jeroboam and the division of kingdom (1 Kgs 11:26-14:31) (Walsh: 12)
   C. Kings of Israel and Judah (1 Kgs 15:1-16:22) (Walsh: 13-16)
      D. The Omride dynasty (1 Kgs 16:23-2 Kgs 12) (Walsh: 1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 11)
   C’. Kings of Israel and Judah (2 Kgs 13-16) (Walsh: 12-16)
   B’. Fall of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kgs 17)
A’. Kingdom of Judah (2 Kgs 18-25)

In this analysis the focus on Judah and Jerusalem in the first and last sections (A, A’) is clear. Beginning with the United Kingdom and end-

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ing with Judah alone serve to establish Jerusalem and the Davidic dynasty as the norm against which the Northern Kingdom appears temporary and aberrant. The building of the temple in A is balanced by its destruction in A'. Savran notes as well that the order in which the temple vessels are destroyed in 2 Kgs 25:13-17 matches the order in which they are produced in 1 Kgs 7. Within this outer ring are the two critical events that establish and then disestablish the separate kingdom of Israel: B, especially as Walsh defines it, focuses on Jeroboam’s revolt against the Davidic dynasty, and B' narrates the Assyrian conquest of Israel and its theological justification. B' blames Israel’s destruction on the idolatry begun by Jeroboam thus linking directly to B where Jeroboam’s building of the golden calves is emblematic of his separation from Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:26-30). C and C', parallel pale prose summaries of reigns north and south, surround the long central section D that depicts the northern Omride dynasty during which the Baal cult was firmly established and just as firmly destroyed in the revolution of Jehu. Here the prophetic battle by Elijah and Elisha against false worship is mounted, and everywhere royal subordination to the prophetic word and action is demonstrated. At the very center of this section (2 Kgs 2), and thus of Kings as a whole, is the succession of Elisha to Elijah’s prophetic role, the only such prophetic succession reported in the Bible.

Comparing this analysis to the linear division offered first, it appears that A and A', with somewhat different emphases, are common to both. But the complexes of stories outlined above get subsumed under other rubrics in order to establish structural symmetries. So the Elijah and Elisha stories are included within and identified by the name of the dynasty against which they both brought divine judgment. The wonder-working tales of these prophets play no role in this structure. Similarly the structure does not play up the nearly simultaneous revolutions in Aram, Israel, and Judah, focusing instead on the rise and fall of the Omrides (in Israel) as the centerpiece of northern corruption. However, when the book is viewed as one work rather than as a series of narrative blocs, new relationships emerge that were not visible in a linear reading. Inevitably, by highlighting some dimensions of the narrative, any analysis of literary structure down plays others. Yet, together they begin to illuminate the rich web of relationships between elements of the text.

With these two broad structural pictures in hand we can investigate that network of patterns that supports those relationships. Foremost
among them are two: the formulaic opening and concluding summaries of kings’ reigns, and prophecies and subsequent announcements of their fulfillments. Each instance of each pattern thus has two elements separated from each other by narratives or reports of various lengths. In the cases of some kings, the concluding summary follows hard upon the opening: hapless Shallum of Israel, for instance, assassinated after only one month in office, is allotted but three verses (2 Kgs 15:13-15). Analogously, some prophecies are short-term while others look toward the distant future with confirmations of their fulfillment coming long after their enunciation, the longest linking Josiah (2 Kgs 23: 16) to the man of God from Judah (1 Kgs 13:2). Both patterns also have overlapping elements. During the Divided Monarchy, as noted, alternation between north and south interlocks the reigns and, hence, regnal summaries of contemporary kings. And prophecies sometimes leapfrog over each other, a new one sent forth before an older one is fulfilled. These two patterns, wholly independent of each other, seem to vie for primacy thus mirroring and, in some sense, enabling the struggle between kings and prophets that the book repeatedly portrays.

The opening of royal reigns follows a more or less set outline including the following information for each king: his year of accession synchronized by the regnal year of the king in the other kingdom; his age at accession (kings of Judah only); the length of his reign and, usually, his capital; his mother’s name (kings of Judah only). Following is an evaluation of his reign that typically compares him to his royal ancestors, and recounts his achievements or failures. The concluding summary for each king makes reference to more detailed information to be found in the annals of either the kings of Judah or Israel, reports his death and burial, and announces the name of his successor. Then, as noted above, if this king (A) has outlasted his contemporary in the other kingdom (B), the author then shifts to B’s kingdom and backtracks to pick up the reign of B’s successor. If not, he proceeds with the reign of the successor to A.

As a biblical mode of representing simultaneity between happenings in two places, alternation as a technique has biblical precedents. Think, for instance, of the switching between Joseph in Egypt and Jacob in Canaan or the shifting between the camps of David and Absalom as

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7 See the more detailed description in Walsh, 1 Kings, 206-08.
they prepare for battle. But in Kings, the scope and scale of the pattern produce what Meir Sternberg dubs “Kings-size alternation.” He argues that it makes for unity and interaction between the two narrative lines. To appreciate further the effects of alternation, we can contrast it to two other approaches that might have been taken. One such approach would be strictly chronological in which royal accessions, achievements, and deaths, North or South would be keyed to a single timeline. Another would be successive in which the whole history of Israel would be followed by the whole history of Judah. Strict chronology would maximize the rendering of simultaneity of events in both kingdoms but at the price of each kingdom’s own continuity. Successive histories would have the reverse effect, sacrificing coordination of time lines for completion of one history before the other. But alternation between kingdoms permits a rough juxtaposition of events in one with those in the other. By intertwining their histories in this way, Kings also makes a claim about the interrelated stories and fates of the two kingdoms. Though ruled by different dynasties, they are yet “two nations under God.” The now Israel, now Judah alternation sets up an equivalency between them with the kings of both subject to the narrator’s evaluation and to divine judgment. Even if the system sometimes requires running far ahead in one kingdom to follow a long reign to its conclusion before doubling back to pick up the trail in the other kingdom, the overall effect is one of simultaneous happenings.

As a bonus, alternation enables a certain economy of presentation: where North and South interact in war or peace the account need be narrated only once thus tightening their joint destinies even more. Consider the case of Jehoshaphat of Judah named as King Asa’s successor in 1 Kgs 15:24 and reintroduced in 22:2 as an ally of Ahab of Israel in a war against Aram, still before his own reign is officially opened in 22:41. In this episode Jehoshaphat, who insists on inquiring of the prophet Micaiah before battle, appears as a model of caution and piety in contrast to Ahab. By the inclusion of Jehoshaphat the

9 Sternberg, “Time and Space,” 110.
writer is able to score a moral point for Judah while still describing Ahab’s behavior. In Jehoshaphat’s own regnal summary, by contrast, this alliance is only alluded to (22:15); it need not be spelled out again. In fact, it is only after the conclusion of Jehoshaphat’s reign, when Ahab’s successor, Ahaziah, is introduced, that we learn that the battle against Aram in which Ahab died took place in Jehoshaphat’s seventeenth year. Thus, only in hindsight do we realize that after relating that battle, the narrative had backed up seventeen years to begin formally Jehoshaphat’s reign.

Alternation, while providing a context of orderliness and evenhandedness, permits great flexibility for the history to run ahead or double back in time to emphasize the affairs in one kingdom rather than the other. In one case, in fact, the writer departs from the rule of alternation altogether in order to account for an unprecedented crisis that strikes both North and South: the revolt of Jehu. So, with the directory of Jehoram of Israel still open, the narrator turns to Judah to introduce first Joram, son of Jehoshaphat (2 Kgs 8:16-24) and then Joram’s son, Ahaziah (vv. 25-29). Next the narrator links the two kingdoms by having Ahaziah go to Jezreel to visit the ailing Jehoram. With the two kings in the same location, the writer introduces a third story line, Elisha’s anointing of Jehu and Jehu’s subsequent conspiracy against Jehoram. All three lines meet near Jezreel where the kings ride out to meet Jehu who kills them both (9:24, 27). Because of their violent deaths, neither Jehoram nor Ahaziah merits a standard conclusion, though Ahaziah’s burial is reported and the year of his succession added as an afterthought (v. 29). Having disposed of the two reigning monarchs in a common story, the narrative returns to the separate histories of North and South, detailing the consequences of Jehu’s revolt on each. The disruption of the orderly succession in both kingdoms gets expressed in the disruption of the rule of alternation.

The other most prominent pattern in Kings, prophecy and fulfillment, overarches, intersects, and sometimes subverts the regnal pattern. Like missiles, predictions by named and unnamed prophets and even by the divine voice directly are launched into history to find their targets at some future moment. The prophecy with the longest range links Josiah with Jeroboam: the man of God from Judah promises Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13:2) that a certain Davidide named Josiah would, in the distant future, defile the illegitimate altar at Bethel, a prophecy declared fulfilled (2 Kgs 23:16) almost at the end of Kings. This vaticinium post eventum prophecy spans nearly the entire post-Solomonic period of
Kings linking the arch-apostate to the incomparable reformer (2 Kgs 23:25). Under the high trajectory of this prophecy, other shorter-term predictions are issued during the reigns of the kings, bringing the whole under repeated and overlapping divine judgments. Prophetic oracles disturb the orderly sequence of regnal formulas, roil the royal history. They structure Kings in a different way, not according to the unrolling of kings and dynasties, but by the dramatic intervention of Yhwh bringing about the future by his word.

Prophecy plays the most central role in the center of Kings, the period of the Omride dynasty. Here the stories of Elijah and Elisha dominate and overshadow the careers of the kings who are their contemporaries. At times, in fact, the name of the king of Israel fades from stories, so focused are they on the prophetic word and deed (2 Kgs 3:9-27; 6:8-7:20). The prophecies associated with Elijah are fulfilled both within and beyond his own career. His prediction that the dogs would lick up Ahab’s blood (1 Kgs 21:19) comes true but one chapter later (22:37-38), while his calling down of disaster upon Ahab’s dynasty with special attention to the wicked Jezebel (1 Kgs 21:21-24) takes two more generations to be enacted (2 Kgs 9:24-26, 30-37; 10:1-11). The trigger for the downfall of the Omride dynasty is not Elijah, however, but Elisha whose role Yhwh mandated in a prophetic word spoken earlier to Elijah (1 Kgs 19:15-17). Named then to be Elijah’s successor, Elisha fulfills the mandate given to Elijah to anoint Hazael as king of Aram and Jehu as king of Israel.

These prophecies crisscross and complicate the narrative with fulfillment not always matching prediction precisely. The narrator adds to the expected blood lapping of the dogs the unanticipated bathing of the whores in Ahab’s blood (v. 38), for example, and the locale of the bloodletting turns out to be Samaria, not Jezreel as predicted. More interestingly, Jehu’s actions against Jehoram are fueled not only by the prophetic word transmitted by Elisha’s servant (2 Kgs 9:6-10) but also by his own surprise recollection of Elijah’s condemnatory words to Ahab (vv. 25-26). Jehu acts as witness, interpreter, and executor of the original oracle to Ahab, presenting himself as having been providentially present, Forrest-Gump-like, at Naboth’s field when it was first uttered.

The primacy of the prophetic word in directing the action in Kings is given special structural representation in the story of Elisha’s inheriting, both literally and figuratively, the prophetic mantle of Elijah (2 Kgs 2). This tale comes not only at the very center of the book of
Kings but also outside the reigns of any kings. The summary of the reign of Ahaziah has concluded (2 Kgs 1:17-18) and that of Jehoram has not yet begun (2 Kgs 3:1-3). In this time outside of royal time, the only prophetic succession in the Bible takes place. This placement signals the independence of the prophetic word and mission from the royal rhythm.

The prophecy-fulfillment pattern is much in evidence elsewhere in Kings as well. The story of Solomon, first, is anchored by three predictions (1 Kgs 3:11-14; 9:1-9; 11:11-13) communicated directly by Yhwh to Solomon. The first two promises of long life and an eternal dynasty are made conditional upon Solomon’s obedience to Yhwh commandments, while the third predicts the sundering of the kingdom because Solomon had followed other gods. By asking the reader to read these three appearances together (11:9), the narrator indicates their structural and strategic importance. Second, the prophecies of promise and destruction by Ahijah from Shiloh frame the Jeroboam story (1 Kgs 11:29-39; 14:7-16) while the rivalry between the man of God from Judah and the old prophet in Bethel occupies its center (1 Kgs 13). Other notable prophetic interventions come with Jonah to Jeroboam II, Isaiah to Hezekiah, and Huldah to Josiah. In addition, anonymous prophets play a role in Kings. The narrator blames the Assyrian conquest on Israel’s ignoring Yhwh warning “by every prophet and seer” and quotes the formulaic oracle (2 Kgs 17:13) that he now proclaims to be fulfilled. A much lengthier oracle comes in the name of “[the Lord’s] servants the prophets” (21:10) to Manasseh (21:11-15) specifying the king’s wickedness and promising disaster to Judah and Jerusalem. Finally the ascent of Nebuchadnezzar and raids by nearer peoples are justified as in accord with “the word that the Lord had spoken through his servants the prophets” (24:2). It is as if the foretelling of the conquests of Israel and Judah are too momentous to tie to a specific prophet; instead these events are viewed as the culmination and fulfillment of the predictions of the collectivity of the prophets.

The fundamental structural dynamics of Kings, then, is a product of the intersection or, better, collision of two very different views of the order of history. On the one hand, the regnal summary pattern and alternation between North and South represents an evenhanded, workmanlike effort at more or less simultaneous coverage of the course of events in two kingdoms viewed still as one people. The rise and fall of kings and dynasties is explicable; royal faithfulness or non-faithfulness to Yhwh is the key to the explanation. On the other
hand, by means of the prophecy-fulfillment pattern the unpredictable and unanticipated word of Yhwh intrudes into history. Without warning Ahijah of Shiloh and Elijah of Gilead burst on the scene, challenging kings and overturning dynasties. In Hezekiah’s moment of despair, Isaiah offers comfort; in Josiah’s time of mourning, Huldah confirms his worst fears. In its appearance, sudden or sought, the prophetic word exposes Yhwh as the real force behind human history. The human rhythm of the death and accession of kings must march to the beat of the divine rhythm of prophecy.

The other overlapping structural patterns in the book of Kings may all be classified as forms of repetition: verbal, scenic, and thematic. In more-or-less subtle ways these repetitions help to unify the book by creating analogies between separated and distinct elements. They invite comparison and contrast that mutually illuminate those elements. And since repetition is rarely exact, variation demands explanation. Take the most prevalent example of verbal repetition, the formulaic openings and closings of king’s reigns. The narrator castigates nearly every king of Israel for following in the footsteps of Jeroboam or not departing from the sins of Jeroboam. In the case of Ahaziah, son of Ahab, however, the narrator adds the charge that he “followed in the footsteps of his father and his mother” (1 Kgs 22:53), referring to Ahab and Jezebel. The addition highlights the wickedness of the Omrides and the Tyrian queen mother. For kings of Judah, to take another instance, the name of the queen mother is routinely listed in the summary, but for Ahaziah, son of Joram of Judah, the standard inclusion is followed by the pedigree of the mother Athaliah: “daughter of King Omri of Israel” (2 Kgs 8:27). Whereas normally we never hear about the queen mother again (Bathsheba in 1 Kgs 1 being a notable exception), here the inclusion of name and the pedigree serve proleptically to introduce a major player in a later chapter.

Much of the verbal repetition is language usually identified as Deuteronomistic, though that identification does not necessarily speak to its structural function. The indictment against Israel explaining its exile (2 Kgs 17:7-18) echoes language from the account of the origins of Israel in the era of Jeroboam. Interestingly, though, except for the reference to Jeroboam’s golden calves (v. 16; cf. 1 Kgs 12:28-29), it

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is Judah’s offenses under Rehoboam that are repeated in the charge against Israel. That Israel “followed the customs of the nations which the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites” (2 Kgs 17:8) and “set up pillars and sacred posts for themselves on every lofty hill and under every leafy tree” (v. 10) recalls the exact acts attributed to Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:23-24). The repetition ties the beginning of the divided monarchy to its end and links Judah to the fate now befalling Israel.

As another example, consider the refrain that describes Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah. To Solomon, Yhwh says, “There has never been anyone like you before, nor will anyone like you arise again” (1 Kgs 3:12). Of Hezekiah, the narrator avers, “There was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those before him” (2 Kgs 18:5). And of Josiah: (“There was no king like him before who turned back to the Lord with all his heart and soul and might, in full accord with the teaching of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him” (2 Kgs 23:25). Because it seems obvious that not all three can be incomparable in the same way, scholars have assigned these formulas to different authors or redactors and used them to mark off textual layers. According to this understanding, for instance, the writer who spoke superlatively about Hezekiah could not have anticipated Josiah and thus must have written before Josiah’s accomplishments. Yet the writer who so praised Josiah apparently did not see fit to eliminate the praise of Hezekiah and thus remove the seeming contradiction between two kings each claimed to be superior to all others. Moreover, Gary Knoppers has argued that the incomparability formulas do not contradict each other because each refers to a different strength of a different king: Solomon, wisdom and wealth; Hezekiah, trust in God; Josiah, reform. Rather than pointing to separate layers, the formulas unify the past. Finally, in the case of Hezekiah and Josiah, the refrains both follow descriptions of reformations even though the evaluation comes at the beginning of Hezekiah’s reign and at the end of Josiah’s.

In terms of the overall structure of Kings diagrammed earlier, the refrain contributes another element of symmetry between sections A and A’: the two incomparable kings who both reform Jerusalem balance the incomparably wise Solomon.

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A second level of repetition is scenic. Quite a number of episodes are echoed in subsequent analogous episodes. There are two stories, for example, of two mothers and their sons (1 Kgs 3:16-28; 2 Kgs 6:26-31). In the second the despair of the unnamed (but in context, Jehoram) king of Israel is implicitly contrasted to the wisdom of Solomon. Closer in subject and in sequence are the murder of the second Baalist queen, Athaliah (2 Kgs 11:13-16) that follows seven years but only two chapters after the murder of the first, Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:30-37). Another striking analogy suggests comparison between Jehoash and Josiah, both child-kings who initiate repair of the Jerusalem temple and see to it that the workers are properly compensated (2 Kgs 12:5-16; 22:3-7).

A tighter network of analogies links the Elijah and Elisha cycles of stories. They may be diagrammed as follows:14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elijah cycle</th>
<th>Elisha cycle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings</td>
<td>2 Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:2-6 Elijah drinks from a wadi</td>
<td>3:9-20 Israel drinks from a wadi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:8-16 Elijah multiplies oil and grain for widow</td>
<td>4:1-7 Elisha multiplies oil for a widow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:17-24 Elijah resuscitates boy</td>
<td>4:3-37 Elisha resuscitates boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:20-39 Famine and the true god; miracle precipitates conversion</td>
<td>5:1-27 Leprosy and the true god; miracle precipitates conversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:1-3 Pursuit of Elijah; oath by pursuer</td>
<td>6:8-14,31-32 Pursuit of Elisha; oath by pursuer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:1-29 False witness denies man his land by royal directive</td>
<td>8:1-6 True witness rewards woman her land by royal directive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kings 1:1-18 Elijah sends oracle to mortally ill king</td>
<td>8:7-15 Elisha sends oracle to mortally ill king</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This carefully wrought sequence of correspondences has Elisha repeat, and in the same order, the feats of Elijah, the doubling perhaps manifesting the “double (pi-šnayim)” portion of Elijah’s spirit that Elisha requested before his master’s departure (2 Kgs 2:9). These repetitions, falling on either side of the structural center of Kings, reinforce the dynamics of the prophetic succession.

14 After Cohn, *I Kings*, 91-95.
The last of these parallels points to an even more extended form of scenic analogy, the

*type-scene*, a repeated episode that follows a fixed sequence of actions marking an important

rite of passage for a biblical figure. Against the background of convention, each instance of the

type-scene exhibits some “tilt of innovation” in its particular literary context.15 In our case the

episodes of Elijah sending an oracle to Ahaziah and of Elisha to Ben-Hadad constitute two of

four versions of a type-scene in which a deathly ill king sends his royal messengers to a prophet
to inquire whether or not he will recover, and the prophet returns with an oracle promising a
death that then occurs. The other two versions ring significant variations on this pattern.16 In the

case of Jeroboam, it is his son, not the king, who is ill, and the messenger he sends to the

prophet Ahijah is his wife, not his servant (1 Kgs 14). In the case of Hezekiah, the prophet

Isaiah promises death but Hezekiah, because of his repentance, lives (2 Kgs 20). Even the

Elijah and Elisha versions diverge from the pattern: Elijah intercepts Ahaziah’s messengers on
their way not to Yhwh but to the foreign god Baalzebub, while Elisha is the object of not an
Israelite but a foreign king’s inquiry. In addition, Elisha tells the messenger Hazael that Ben-

Hadad will live, but Hazael kills him instead. Each instance of the type-scene stretches the
pattern, resulting in successive emphases in the four episodes on oracle, prophet, messenger,
and king. Taken in sequence the stories chart a progressive diminution in prophetic authority
but, with Hezekiah, a recognition of Yhwh as the true source of that authority (2 Kgs 20:3).

Besides their rich intertextual comparativity, these four stories constitute an important structural
nexus of Kings. Except for those kings who die in battle, the deaths of only these four receive
attention. Their deaths promised in prophetic oracles, they are each attached by their parallel
partings to the repeated moments of a divinely ordained history.

Finally, thematic repetition connects various narratives in Kings. Rather than appearing
only at crucial junctures of the book these themes are sounded now and then, more or less, and
are expressed in various literary forms. Though they may not be consistent throughout the book,
they do contribute to an impression of unity. The major


16 See my discussion in article. Cohn, “Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: The Case of the Dying
two themes frequently emphasized in the scholarship of Kings actually oppose each other: Yhwh’s faithfulness to his promise to David of an eternal dynasty; and the faithlessness of kings and people bringing on the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem. Already in his response to Solomon’s temple dedication speech, Yhwh conditions the fulfillment of his promise upon faithful obedience to his commandments and especially avoidance of other gods by Solomon and his descendants on the throne (9:3-9). Yhwh blames Solomon’s failure to meet this condition for the dividing of the kingdom, yet preserves the dynasty and Judah “for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen” (11:11-13). This theme is sounded repeatedly (11:32-36; 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:19; 19:34), but for the last time to Hezekiah (20:6). Meanwhile, northern kings are castigated for following in the footsteps of Jeroboam. In the climactic 2 Kings 17, Jeroboam leads Israel astray, so it is the people’s sin as well that brings about the disaster (vv. 21-23). Similarly, the people of Judah are blamed for their apostasy as early as the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:23-24), are indicted again along with Israel (2 Kgs 17:13-20), and are condemned for the last time along with the wicked Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:9-16).

Related to this theme of the dire consequences of faithfulness are the twin notions that the only legitimate form of worship is of Yhwh in Jerusalem and that treaties with foreign nations and marriages with their princesses lead to apostasy. Though Jeroboam’s break with the house of David was divinely mandated, it becomes his original sin in the last analysis (2 Kgs 17:21) and his erection of the golden calves only compounds the apostasy. Foreign women and their gods corrupt Solomon, Ahab of Israel, Joram of Judah (2 Kgs 8:18) and Ahaziah of Judah (2 Kgs 8:27), while foreign alliances and worship at high places ground negative evaluations of many kings of Judah (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:44; 2 Kgs 12:4; 14:4; 15:4; 16:4,7-17). Yet another theme, the power of repentance to delay punishment, links the stories of individuals as diverse as Ahab (1 Kgs 21:27-29), Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:1-6), and Josiah (2 Kgs 22: 16-20). Wilson points out a related idea, that though

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18 Wilson, “Unity and Diversity in the Book of Kings,” 308-309.
repentance may postpone judgment, it cannot eliminate it. In fact, an oracle of judgment delayed until future generations is delivered to Solomon (1 Kgs 11:12), Jeroboam (I Kgs 14:14), and Jehu (2 Kgs 10:30). None of these related themes alone makes a great impression, but together they implicate many of the narratives of Kings in a loose pattern of apostasy, reform, repentance, and judgment.

For a book so clearly the product of multiple redactions and containing such a variety of materials and genres (e.g., legends, speeches, lists, reports, resumes, oracles, history), the most basic structural principle may be one not yet discussed. I refer to parataxis, the simple joining of short pieces side by side to create larger narratives without subordinating one piece to another. The chain of tales about Elisha and the concatenation of traditions about Solomon are, perhaps, the clearest examples. Yet, in the case of the Elisha stories, as we have seen, the parallels with those of Elijah bespeak purposeful ordering, and Walsh shows that the Solomon story manifests a rigorous concentric ordering. In fact, chiastic structures organize much of the material in the rest of Kings as well. That is not to deny parataxis as a structural key, only to suggest that it is superceded by more complex structures built up from the paratactic pearls. Here I have identified a number of those structures most central: the linear structure of the story cycles; the chiastic structure of the book as a whole; the pattern of regnal alternation; the prophecy-fulfillment pattern; and the structures of repetition on the verbal, scenic, and thematic planes. No single technique tells the whole story, but taken together they describe the multi-dimensional structure of a biblical book more literary than one might expect.

19 Wilson, “Unity and Diversity in the Book of Kings,” 309.
20 Nelson, First and Second Kings, 10.
21 Walsh, 1 Kings, 150-156.
22 In addition to Walsh and Cohn, see B. O. Long, 1 Kings, with an Introduction to Historical Literature (FOTL, 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); B. O. Long, 2 Kings (FOTL, 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1991).