

“The Christology of 1 and 2 Kings”
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Jesus said, “... the Scriptures ... testify of Me” (John 5:39). Martin Luther firmly believed in the Christocentricity of sacred Writ. In his study of the last words of David, the Reformer stated: “... God is particularly concerned about our knowledge of the revelation of His Son, as seen throughout the Old and the New Testament. All points to the Son. For Scripture is given for the sake of the Messiah ... who is to remedy all that the serpent has corrupted ...” (1) On another occasion Luther wrote, “Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what else will you find in them?” (2) Indeed, conservative Lutheran exegetes since the time of Luther have recognized that Christ is the golden thread running through each of the books of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation.

This golden thread is obvious, easily seen, in the majority of the biblical books. In the Old Testament the parade example would be Isaiah, with its several direct, explicit, detailed Messianic prophecies. The author, the prophet Isaiah, has rightly been called the Evangelist of the Old Testament, with his clear, powerful proclamations concerning the virgin birth of Christ; the Savior’s two natures; His earthly ministry; His suffering, death, and resurrection; and His continuing work as head of the Christian Church.

The golden thread, however, does not appear with such lucidity in a few of the Old Testament books; for example, 1 and 2 Kings. These two books make no mention of the Messiah, nor do they contain any obvious reference to His work or kingdom. What this portion of Scripture does is to provide a record of the Hebrew monarchy, beginning with the last portion of David’s reign. For the most part this is a sad history, as it relates the

division of the United Monarchy into two kingdoms, and the eventual ending of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms due to the wickedness of the people. The question is not merely, “How does Kings present Christ,” but, more than that, “Can one speak of a Christology in Kings?”

An affirmative answer to the latter question has already been indicated by the title of this presentation. The task before us, then, is to uncover the Christology of Kings; to make evident the golden thread running through this history; to see how Kings does present Christ.

Kings directs the view of its readers to the Messiah, first of all, by providing a large segment of the history of Israel. The author (we cannot say for certain who authored Kings) directs his, and our, attention primarily to this particular nation of the ancient Near East, and not to Egypt, Syria, Assyria, or Babylonia, because Israel was the Messianic nation. From Israel would come, according to His human nature, the Savior promised in Gen. 3:15. The fundamental purpose of Kings is to continue what Genesis started: a record of the chosen people, and of God working out His plan of salvation through them. They, out of all the nations, were selected by God’s undeserved kindness, according to His mysterious will, but chosen nevertheless, to be used by God to produce the Deliverer.

At various points throughout the history the reader is reminded that this is the importance of Israel, and that this therefore is the reason for 1 and 2 Kings. In 1 Kgs. 3 Solomon, talking with God in a dream, refers to himself as “Your servant ... here among the people You have chosen ...” Solomon then prays, “So give Your servant a discerning heart to govern Your [God’s] people ...” In praying to Yahweh at the dedication of the temple Solomon repeatedly refers to Israel as “Your people.” He specifically confesses

to Yahweh concerning the Israelites, "... they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out of Egypt ... For You singled them out from all the nations of the world to be Your own inheritance, just as You declared through Your servant Moses..."

During the Old Testament era God established covenants with His chosen people out of His grace, on the basis of the coming Messiah. In these covenants God promised to bestow blessings on them. Solomon concludes his dedicatory prayer by saying, "Praise be to Yahweh, who has given rest to His people Israel just as He promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave through His servant Moses."

God's declarations to Moses had their origin in what God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that is, in the covenant He made with Abraham, and renewed with Isaac and Jacob. Any mention of the patriarchs, or of God's covenant with them, would and does recall for readers the chief aspect of the patriarchal covenant. This primary aspect was that in Abraham, and also Isaac and Jacob, "all the families of the earth would be blessed," because from them and their descendants would come the Messiah. 1 Kgs. 18, recounting the showdown on Mt. Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, preserves Elijah's prayer, which begins with these words, "O Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel ..." Later in his history the author explains that Yahweh, during the reign of Jehoahaz, was gracious to the people of the Northern Kingdom, had compassion on them, and showed concern for them "because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (2 Kgs. 13:23).

Simply the existence of a written history of Israel, as recorded in 1 and 2 Kings, reminded the readers of the Old Testament era of the promised Deliverer. In a similar manner this highlights for readers today the special position Israel occupied in God's plan

of salvation, which was fulfilled by an Israelite, the Messiah. However, not only is the mere existence of such a history Christological. Aspects of that history, or elements contained therein, point ahead to the coming Savior. What is reported in Kings conveys Christology.

We have already observed this, in part, with the references to Israel as God's chosen people. The Christological dimension greatly expands with the consideration of types. A type in the Old Testament may be defined as the biblically indicated, divinely preordained representative relation which certain persons, actions, events, offices, and institutions of the Old Testament bear to corresponding future persons, actions, events, offices, and institutions in the New. Types were realities in Old Testament history which were foreshadowings of New Testament realities, also referred to as antitypes.

There are six elements in a type-antitype correlation.

- 1) There must be at least one notable point of resemblance, a similarity, between the type and antitype.
- 2) There must be points of dissimilarity between the type and antitype. They are not identical.
- 3) The type must prefigure, or foreshadow, something in the future. The type is first, the antitype second.
- 4) In the antitype there is always something higher than in the type. There is a proceeding from the lower (the type) to the higher (the antitype).
- 5) There must be definite Scriptural indication that a person, action, event, office, or institution is a type. This may, for example, be stated directly, or by calling the type a

“shadow,” or by using the word “as” to connect the type with the antitype, or in some other manner.

- 6) The type requires the presence and action of a living, intelligent agent, that is, of a human being.

One type in the Old Testament is the office of king; this pointed ahead to, foreshadowed, the Messiah in His office as King. That the Messiah would be a king was foretold by Jacob in Gen. 49. There the patriarch predicts that the tribe of Judah would hold kingship, that this rule would remain with the tribe, and come to a climax in the everlasting, perfect rule of Shiloh, descendant of Judah, who would have the obedience of the nations (vv. 8-10). “Shiloh,” a descriptive name of the Messiah, means “Man of Rest,” or “Rest-giver”; those in His kingdom enjoy blessed rest. In Matt. 11 Jesus says: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (v. 28).

Subsequent passages of the Old Testament also portray the Messiah as King, including these examples.

Ps. 2 – Here David relates the words Yahweh would speak concerning the Messiah: “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill” (v. 6).

Ps. 110 – David, in verse 1, relates what Yahweh would speak to the Messiah: “Sit at My right hand,” which in essence means, “Share with Me in My rule.” Verse 2 refers to the Messiah: “Yahweh will send the rod of Your strength from Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!”

Is. 9 – Here the prophet says concerning the Messiah, “the government will be upon His shoulder” (v. 6), that is, He will be a ruler. Isaiah goes on to describe the Messiah’s rule: “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of

David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice...” (v. 7).

Jer. 23 – God, through the prophet, promises to send the Messiah: “... I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth” (v. 5).

Many New Testament passages exhibit Jesus, the Messiah, as King; a few illustrations will have to suffice. In the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel informs Mary concerning the Son she will bear: “... the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). In 1 Cor. 15:25 Paul states that Christ “must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.” The apostle describes Christ in 1 Tim. 6:15 as “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords.” That description is reminiscent of phrases used by John in Revelation. In 1:5 John refers to Christ as “the ruler over the kings of the earth,” and in 17:14 the apostle writes: “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.”

The office of king in the history of Israel therefore was a type of a New Testament, Messianic reality. 1 and 2 Kings present the fullest account of the Hebrew monarchy. This account extends, as already noted, from the conclusion of David’s reign through the last king of Judah. Granted, most of the Old Testament individuals who reigned were miserable, despicable human beings. Yet the office of king was typical, and so the narration of the history of the Israelite kingship is a crucial part of the Christology of Kings.

Another typical Old Testament office was that of prophet. God established this office in order to communicate with His chosen people. A prophet was God's spokesperson, God's messenger, God's mouthpiece (so to speak). A prophet delivered revelation received from Yahweh to the people, presenting the Word of Yahweh in oral form, and very often in written form, as well.

In Deut. 18 Moses, the prophet responsible for the first portion of the Old Testament, indicated that the Messiah would likewise be a prophet. Confirmation of Christ holding the prophetic office comes from the New Testament in various ways. Christ explained that He had been sent by God the Father to proclaim the Word of the Father. He identified Himself as a prophet also when He says in Luke 13 (v. 33): "... I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem." The people who heard the authoritative teaching of Christ correctly understood Him to be a prophet. The well-known verse from Heb. 1 harmonizes with this testimony from the Gospels: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..."

Thus the Old Testament office of prophet was a type, foreshadowing the Messiah as Prophet. Kings presents a substantial section of the history of this office, from the end of David's reign down to the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, a period of about three hundred and fifty years. Here is a record of some of the words Nathan, Elijah, Micaiah, Elisha, Isaiah, Hulda, and other such messengers of God spoke during their prophetic ministries to their contemporaries.

Forth-telling Word from God always characterized the work of a prophet. An occasional characteristic of this office, not seen in every account of a prophet's ministry, was the performing of mighty deeds, or miracles (of course, always by the power of Yahweh). One purpose of these miracles was that a prophet could demonstrate that he was a genuine messenger of the Lord by carrying out such a deed, as Ex. 4 and Deut. 13 indicate. That miracles, too, were an aspect of the prophetic office being a type is shown by New Testament evidence. Jesus urged His opponents to view His miracles as proof that He was sent by the Father, and that what He spoke was the truth. In John 10 Jesus declares, "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works..." (vv. 37-38). The two disciples walking (unknowingly) with Christ on the road to Emmaus gave an accurate description of Jesus of Nazareth as "a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people... (Lk. 24:19).

With the ministry of Moses there is the first outstanding period in Old Testament history of miracles performed by a prophet. The second such period occurs with the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, as narrated in 1 and 2 Kings. The mighty deeds God performed through these two men – including the multiplication of food supplies, the healing of a leper, and raising the dead – were wonderful foreshadowings of the miracles which would be accomplished by the Greatest Prophet. Concerning Elijah's bringing the widow's son back to life, Carl Keil comments that the prophet "showed himself as the forerunner of Him who raiseth all the dead to life..." (3) That incident also is an example of how a miracle could serve to authenticate a prophet as a true spokesman of God. Receiving her living son from Elijah, the widow confesses: "Now by this I know that you

are a man of God, and that the word of Yahweh in your mouth is the truth” (1 Kgs. 17:24).

Thus, we see that another Christological element in Kings is the prominence given in the narrative to the role of prophets in the history of Israel. The Old Testament prophetic office – characterized by speaking forth the Word of God, and at times involving the working of miracles – pointed ahead to the prophetic ministry of the Messiah.

A third office functioning as a type in the Old Testament was that of priest, especially that of the high priest. The priests taught the people from the written Word of God, prayed for the people to God, and offered up the sacrifices.

In Ps. 110 David’s quotation of Yahweh’s words to the Messiah showed that the coming Deliverer would hold the priestly office: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (v. 4). Indeed, the priest-king Melchizedek of Gen. 14 was a type of Christ. In similar fashion, the Israelite priestly office, formally established by God through Moses, was a continual reminder to the people of the Future Priest who would teach from the Word of God (think how often Christ appealed to, and quoted from, the Old Testament), make intercession for others to God the Father, and offer up the sacrifice which actually would atone for the sins of the world. The Book of Hebrews gives abundant testimony to the fact that this office in the life of Israel was typical of Christ as Priest.

1 Kings provides two important pieces of information regarding the Israelite priesthood. 1 Kgs. 2 relates how Solomon corrected an irregularity that occurred during the reign of David: there were two high priests. Solomon removed Abiathar from the

priesthood (vv. 26-27), and Zadok alone continued as high priest. The rule God handed down through Moses was one high priest, as a clear foreshadowing of the Messiah, the one Great High Priest.

1 Kgs. 8 reports that the priests brought up the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle, and the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle, to the completed Solomonic temple (vv. 3-4, 6). In giving this information the author is letting his readers know what happened during the dedication of the temple, and also bringing to mind for them the leading role of the priests in Israelite worship, which had so many Messianic aspects, including the office of priest itself. Thus even these two brief sections about the priesthood in Chs. 2 and 8 contribute to the Christology of Kings.

A person mentioned throughout Kings, long past the time of his death, is David. This mention takes place both in editorial comment by the author of Kings, and in the author's direct quotation of divine or human speech (quoting what God or people said). David naturally appears at the beginning of the history, in 1 Kgs. 1 and 2, since Kings commences with a report about the final days of David's reign. However, after 1 Kgs. 2 David's name repeatedly appears, as the following examples illustrate. Solomon emphasizes promises God made to his father David. David is the standard of godliness and covenant faithfulness by which the subsequent kings are measured. God at different times preserves Jerusalem and the Davidic dynasty in that city for the sake of David His servant. The prophet Isaiah introduces his announcement to King Hezekiah, that God will extend Hezekiah's life, by saying, "Thus says Yahweh, the God of David your father."

What did the author of Kings intend for his readers to remember with this highlighting of David? Certainly his intention was, in part, to have them recollect that David was zealous for Yahweh, a man after God's heart, and that he was a great king with lasting influence. More than that: the author was leading his readers to recall that David's special place in the history of Israel also was due to God's covenant with David, recorded in 2 Sam. 7. Yahweh, promising through this covenant formulation that kingship would forever be associated with the line of David, revealed that the Messiah would come from his line. The future Savior would be a Son of David. The Messianic hope of Israel from that point on was bound to the line of David.

This expectation explains the ending of Kings. By then the author has given an account of the fall of Judah, the exile of many to Babylonia, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the conclusion of the Davidic secular, political, kingship. But, surprisingly, the history ends on a positive note. Jehoiachin, a former king of Judah and now the representative of the house of David, who had been taken into exile and imprisoned by the Babylonians, is released from prison. The text states that the Babylonian king spoke kindly to Jehoiachin, "gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon," and that Jehoiachin "ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life" (2 Kgs. 25:28-29). The theological message conveyed by this historical notice was that David's royal line, although having been brought low, would never be utterly rejected by Yahweh. The Messianic promise connected with the house of David had not been abandoned by God, despite the necessary judgments His people had to experience.

There is one other observation to be made regarding David: he himself was a type of Christ. This is established by Christ's citation of Ps. 41. In that Psalm David describes the suffering he, David, endured, writing in verse 9, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." In John 13 (v. 18) Jesus uses the psalm verse as typical of Himself, He who would be betrayed by His disciple Judas. That David, the shepherd who became king, was a type of Christ, is emphasized by Ezek. 34 and 37, where the name "David" is used symbolically to designate the Messiah. The Coming One would be a second, and greater, David. Therefore, the repeated references to David, the allusions to the covenant God made with him, and the stress on the Davidic line underlying the entire history from start to finish, are all key components of the Christology of Kings.

In his selective history the author draws the reader's attention in 2 Kgs. 23 to the Passover celebration which took place during the eighteenth year of King Josiah, in 622/1 B. C. Josiah, the last godly king of Judah, carried on a much-needed religious reformation, which took on added impetus during his eighteenth year with the discovery of the Book of the Law in the Jerusalem temple. According to the author, "such a Passover had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah" (v. 22). This celebration was a highpoint in Josiah's reforming efforts and its mention in Kings, with such bold language, sounds a strong Christological note. For the Passover observance caused the Israelites not only to look back to the night of the exodus from Egypt, but also to look forward to the Lamb whose shed blood would redeem all people. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 5 (v. 7) that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

Part of the reformation of Josiah involved repairing and cleansing the Jerusalem sanctuary (2 Kgs. 22 and 23). A basic theme throughout Kings is that of the temple as the center of proper Israelite worship. This theme runs from the description of the temple's construction under Solomon in 1 Kings (6 and 7), to the accounts of its repair under Joash (2 Kgs. 12) and Josiah, to the report of its destruction by the Babylonians at the end of 2 Kings (25). The Solomonic temple, as the successor to the tabernacle of Moses, was the place where the guilt offerings were to take place, and did take place, these offerings foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ. Here the people prayed for forgiveness on the basis of the promised Deliverer (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:34, 50; Joel 1 and 2). Here faithful priests taught the people from Scripture, proclaiming to them both Law and the good news of salvation through faith in the Messiah.

Further, the temple itself was a symbol of Christ. A symbol differs from a type "in being a suggestive sign rather than an image of that which it is intended to represent." (4) Moreover, a symbol does not require the presence and activity of a human being, as does a type. The Israelite monarchy was a type, not a symbol, of the kingly office of Christ. The temple was a symbol, not a type, of the Savior.

The temple had this significance because it was, again, the successor to the tabernacle. Words and phrases by which the tabernacle was designated serve as a clue to what it symbolized. These include "dwelling," "the house of Yahweh," and "the sanctuary of Yahweh."

Such designations of the tabernacle show that it was a symbol of God's meeting and dwelling with His people, which takes place in time and eternity. Thus the tabernacle, by extension, symbolized Christ dwelling among men. John 1:14 states that "the Word

became flesh and tabernacled among us.” The temple inherited, took on, all this symbolism.

In addition, the author of Kings makes reference to objects associated with the temple. Many of these – for example, the altar, the metal sea, and the ark of the covenant – had Christological overtones. The altar and metal sea were located in the courtyard of the temple, and the ark of the covenant in the temple’s most holy place, or holy of holies.

The altar, where the offerings took place, symbolized that there could be no approach to the holy God on the part of sinful men, no possible meeting or dwelling with Him, except on the basis of substitutionary sacrifice. The metal sea was the large basin where the priests washed their hands and feet in preparation for their ministering at the altar or in the sanctuary. This basin symbolized that a person needed to be clean in God’s sight (through faith in the Messiah) before he could have fellowship with God (cf. Ps. 24:3-4; 51:7). As the offering up of a lamb (the lamb being a symbol of Christ) was a type adumbrating the sacrifice of Christ, so the priestly washings were a type adumbrating baptism, the washing of regeneration, through which a person enters the kingdom of God (John 3:5; Hebrews 10:10-14, 22).

Over the ark of the covenant was the atonement cover, located between the tables of the law (below in the ark) and God (who dwelt above the ark). This cover symbolized the atonement made by Christ, which “stands between” man’s sinfulness and the holy, righteous God, and which “covers over” sin (see the LXX for “atonement cover” and Rom. 3:25). On the Day of Atonement the High Priest entered the holy of holies to make ritual atonement for himself and all Israel by sprinkling sacrificial blood on the atonement cover.

Thus, by showing a strong interest in the temple throughout his history the author of Kings is, in part, holding before the eyes of his readers the Savior. Such attention given to the sanctuary, and the sacred objects and activity associated with it, served as a multi-faceted, Christological reminder.

Finally, the author presents Christ to his readers through his narration concerning the saints, the believers living during the time covered by his history. They gave proof of their faith in Yahweh by the words they spoke in conversation, confession, and prayer. Faith in Yahweh meant believing His Word, and in particular the foremost promise contained therein, that of the future Redeemer. To confess Yahweh was to confess the Messiah.

The Old Testament believers mentioned in Kings also demonstrated their faith through their actions, which may be considered a “practical Christology.” They were motivated and empowered for godly living, as believers are today, through the Gospel, the good news of the Christ, the Deliverer of fallen humanity. These saints are an inspiration to us, living the fruitful lives they did, despite manifold attacks on the true religion coming both from within, and without, Israel. To use the language of Heb. 12, they are part of the “cloud of witnesses” surrounding us, and encouraging us to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,” and to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus” – as they did – “the Author and Finisher of faith.”

In summary, though Kings does not explicitly mention the Messiah, this portion of Scripture still contributes to the Church a powerful Christology. Because it is a history of Israel, and because of certain features of that history, readers are subtly and indirectly, yet

effectively, reminded of, and pointed to, the promised Savior. The author has taken various strands and woven them together into a rich, beautiful Christological tapestry. Jesus said concerning the Old Testament Scriptures, that “these are they which testify of Me,” and this would most certainly include 1 and 2 Kings. (5)

Endnotes

1. Martin Luther, “Treatise on the Last Words of David,” trans. Martin H. Bertram, in Vol. 15 of Luther’s Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, p. 338. St. Louis: Concordia, 1972.
2. Luther, in What Luther Says, compiled by Ewald M. Plass, p. 148, #437. St. Louis: Concordia, 1959.
3. Carl F. Keil, I and II Kings, trans. by James Martin from 1876 work, in Vol. 3 of Commentary on the Old Testament, p. 240. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.
4. Milton Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments (1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), p. 335.
5. The paucity of notes is due to the fact that there was not much discussion about the topic of this paper in the commentaries and other resources.

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