We return to the books of Samuel and will segue from them into Kings.  
I wish to start by sketching out in visual form the layers of the DH we've 
explored to date.  We began with the book of Deuteronomy, at whose center stands 
the legal code of chapters 12-26, largely a reinterpretation of the Covenant Code of 
Exodus 21-23, together with the infusion of new and distinctive demands, such as 
centralization of worship.  That code is introduced in 4:44-11:32 with a speech by 
Moses that begins with a recitation of the Decalogue and then exhorts the people to 
keep all the law that Moses now reveals to them for how they should live in the 
land.  He tells them of the successes they will have if they do, and warns them of 
disaster if they do not. 
Correspondingly, at the end of the code (in chapters 27 & 28) stands a set of 
blessings the people will inherit if they are compliant and a set of curses that will 
befall them if they are not. 
But that “core” of Deuteronomy was subsequently encased in a secondary 
introduction and conclusion that introduced new themes, such as the innocence of 
Moses and the elevation of Joshua to the status of Moses' assistant, not to mention 
its emphasis on Deuteronomy as a book.  In addition, these chapters for the first 
time use turns of phrases that are found also in the book of Joshua and even 
beyond that, in the rest of the Deuteronomistic History, as we'll see today. 
I'll pass over the concluding chapters of Deuteronomy, which are still later 
additions, and turn to the books that work from Deuteronomy's standards to tell the 
story of Israel's life in its land. 
Joshua 1-11 tells of Joshua leading the people in a series of (primarily) victories 
over their foes, with chapter 12 constituting a list of cities captured, although it is 
unlikely that chapter was part of the Deuteronomist's composition.  The same is 
true of chapters 13-22, which speak of the distribution of the land, with Eleazar the 
priest prominent.  Chapter 23, Joshua's farewell address, is the original conclusion 
to this narrative, following which the narrator related the death of Joshua in what 
we know as Judges chapter 2.  Following that stands the narrative of the local 
champions (called judges) who were sent to the deliver the people as they fell 
repeatedly into apostasy.  Then the author shifts the focus to exemplars of the 
societal discord implied in those stories, but with the aim of showing the ill-affects 
on society of not having a king, thus paving the way to the story of the rise of the 
monarchy via the hand of Samuel in the early chapters of 1 Samuel, after a set of 
stories of Samuel's birth and youth. 
The narrative of the rise of the monarchy appears to have originally concerned
the demand for a king to execute justice, given the failure of Samuel's sons to prove themselves reliable judges. However, examination of those chapters makes it evident that a reviser has heightened the opposition between Samuel and Saul, and injected a note of disapproval to the monarchy.

Similarly, the story of Saul's reign contains vestiges of an earlier narrative much more positive in its evaluation of the first king (including ways he complied with Deuteronomy's requirements). But that story, also, has been overwritten into a narrative viciously critical of Saul, not on charges that he failed to fulfill the demands of the book of the law, but due to his failure to heed the prophet's voice.

Thus the Deuteronomist's story of the rise of the monarchy and its first king has been reshaped to emphasize the priority of prophets over kings and to cast a pall over the monarchy from the very start. This, as I suggested, appears to be the work of an editor much later than the initial Deuteronomistic historian. In fact, as we'll see, it is likely an editor who revised the work during the time of the exile.

The remainder of 1 Samuel details the rise of David and the growing paranoia of Saul about David's intentions, with the outcome being the death of Saul and his son, Jonathan, in the final chapter of the book. The dynamics between David and Saul undoubtedly go back to the sources the Deuteronomist inherited, although there are occasional scenes attributable to the same writer who reworked the earlier narratives to infuse them with the theme of the prophets' domination of kings.

On the other hand, prophets do play a prominent role in the story of David's reign in 2 Samuel, although typically not with the sort of harsh image borne by Samuel. Indeed, it would be fruitless to deny that prophets played a role in the Deuteronomist's story prior to the supplements made by a pro-prophetic editor. It's simply that that later editor elevated the role of prophets as opponents of kings, with the kings being unwilling to obey the voice of the LORD through the prophets.

This brings us, then, to where we left off last time: the question of what role prophets play once it is not up to them to appoint and depose kings when David's dynasty secures the throne.

At the end of the hour we were exploring a key text regarding this: 2 Samuel 7, which addresses two issues. The first is David's proposal to build a temple, which the narrative has the LORD object to via the question, “Will you build me a house?” At stake is the appropriateness of the proposal itself, as is evident from the LORD’s observation that he has lived in tent and tabernacle without taking Israel’s leaders to task for failing to provide better accommodations.

As I pointed out, one of the clues that this narrative (to this point) was inherited by the Deuteronomistic historian (rather than composed by him) is that the proposed temple is referred to by the LORD as “a house to live in,” or (closer to the Hebrew) “a house for me to live in.” The notion that the LORD might dwell in a house is not Deuteronomistic, since Deuteronomy and the literature associated with
it does not conceive of the temple as the place the LORD inhabits; he lives in heaven. Rather, the temple is the place where the LORD causes his name to dwell.

Moreover, it is unlikely that the Deuteronomistic historian would have the LORD decline the construction of a temple, since the worship of the LORD in a single place is a central demand of Deuteronomy. Indeed later, in Solomon’s request to the Phoenician king for cedar for the temple, the Deuteronomist offers another explanation of why David didn’t build the temple: he was too busy fighting off his foes — even though 2 Sam 7 set the scene for David’s proposal with the report that “the LORD had given David rest from all his enemies around him.”

However, in 2 Samuel 7 the Deuteronomistic historian finds a way to overshadow the LORD’s reasoning in rejecting David’s proposal. In the second half of chapter 7, where the LORD promises to build a house for David, he pledges the following: “12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.” — To that promise the Deuteronomistic historian adds the statement, “13 He [the pronoun is in an emphatic position in Hebrew] shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” — I.e. what began as a question of whether David’s proposal was legitimate has now been modified to make the issue about who should build the house for the LORD.

The clue that this verse has been inserted by the Deuteronomistic historian is the description of the temple as “a house for my name,” consistent with what we noted in 1 Kings 5 and over against the LORD’s characterization of the temple “a house for me to dwell in” earlier in the passage.

So the focus of the first half of chapter 7 on David’s proposal which the LORD rejects as impertinent is modified by the Deuteronomist by transforming it into a delay: Solomon, not David, will build “a house for the LORD’s name.”

Of course, the bulk of the second half of 2 Samuel 7 deals with the LORD’s promise to build a house for David. And here also the Deuteronomist is present, expanding the LORD’s vow that he would establish the kingdom of David’s son into a promise to establish “the throne of his kingdom forever.” — The establishment of the kingdom spoken of in v. 12, on the other hand, simply confirmed that David’s son would assume the throne. Consistent with that is the description of the LORD’s policy towards David’s son in vv. 14-15: “14 I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. 15 But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.” Accordingly, the promise has to do with the stability of Solomon's rule, even if disciplinary action proves necessary. David’s son will not suffer Saul’s fate.

By comparison, the expansion of that into an assertion of the establishment of “the throne of his kingdom… forever” — which is part of the Deuteronomist’s
insertion (v. 13) – creates the promise of a dynasty, something stated even more clearly in v. 16, which again speaks of the enduring throne of the kingdom:

“16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” Notice it is now a matter of the eternal establishment of David's dynasty.

I.e. the story the Deuteronomistic historian inherited reported an interaction between prophet and king having to do with the relationship between the LORD and the king, in the light of David's proposal to build a house, to which the LORD responds with a promise to build David a house by establishing his son as king. To this the Deuteronomistic historian supplied an assertion that while David would not build a house for the LORD's name, his son would. Moreover, he expanded the original promise of a stable reign for David’s son by promising the throne to David’s descendants in perpetuity. Thus, the Deuteronomistic historian deals with the reality of a Davidic dynasty by having it established through Nathan, the prophet. The monarchy gains its footing from the prophetic office and thus is dependent upon it.

So how does the Deuteronomistic historian treat the line of kings descended from David? In order to answer that, we need to notice (as we already did in dealing with Chronicles) that David never fully exits the scene, in spite of his death. For his name is repeatedly invoked in the evaluation of subsequent kings. E.g. at the start of the story of Solomon’s rule the narrator tells us, “Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.”

David thus becomes the measure for his son and ultimately becomes the standard by which Solomon is denounced: “For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.” And a couple of verses later we get this final assessment of Solomon’s reign: “So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not completely follow the LORD, as his father David had done.” But Solomon is not the only king of Judah to receive comparison with David.

Upon Solomon’s death, he was succeeded by his son, Rehoboam, who made the fateful decision to ignore northerners’ pleas for tax relief, resulting in the secession of the northern tribes from the league that constituted the kingdom under David and Solomon.

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son, Abijam, about whom the following is reported: “He committed all the sins that his father did before him; his heart was not true to the LORD his God, like the heart of his father David.” Succeeding Abijam was his son, who earned this evaluation: “Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD, as his father David had done.”
A similar comparison of a Judean king to the standard of David appears in 2 Kings 14, where Amaziah receives the following commendation: “[Amaziah] did what was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like his ancestor David; in all things he did as his father Joash had done.”

The last time David is adduced as a standard is in this statement about the late 7th century king, Josiah: “[Josiah] did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.”

If David becomes a standard by which at least some kings are measured, then what did David do right (in the opinion of the narrator) to achieve this status? We can find clues in some of the descriptions that accompany these evaluations, as in the case of the commendation of Asa for having done what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as David had: “He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his ancestors had made. He also removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah; Asa cut down her image and burned it at the Wadi Kidron.” Doing right like David here has to do with eliminating worship of foreign deities.

In fact, it is for doing the opposite that Solomon is unfavorably compared to David: “For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not completely follow the LORD, as his father David had done.” It is Solomon’s following other gods, under the influence of his foreign wives, that prompts the verdict that “his heart was not true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.”

These observations correlate with the condemnation spoken by the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam, the first king of the north following its split with the south: “you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my sight, but you have done evil above all those who were before you and have made for…yourself other gods, and cast images, provoking me to anger, and have thrust me behind your back.” – The crime distinguishing Jeroboam from David concerns worshipping other gods.

Not surprisingly, this theme is prominent in Deuteronomy, such as in 6.14: “Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you.” Notice also 8.19: “If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish,” or, again, this caution that the LORD’s promises will materialize only “if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I am commanding you today, either to the
right or to the left, following other gods to serve them.” – To follow after other gods is the chief crime according to Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history.

In fact, in 1 Kings 11, responding to Solomon’s apostasy, the LORD modifies the promise of 2 Samuel 7 that David’s throne would be established forever: “9The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, 10and had commanded him concerning this matter, that he should not follow other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD commanded. 11Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, “Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant. 12Yet for the sake of your father David I will not do it in your lifetime; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13I will not, however, tear away the entire kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.”

According to the narrator, the LORD makes good on this threat after the death of Solomon. In fact, we are given two reasons for the parting of the ways between north and south. One is the issue I mentioned earlier: the northern tribes petitioned Rehoboam to lighten the tax burden, but Rehoboam declined, saying he would tax them even more heavily than had his father. The result was the secession of the northern tribes.

The other reason cited is the punishment we just read in 1 Kings 11, as played out again in a subsequent conversation between the prophet Ahijah and Jeroboam son of Nebat, a former aid of Solomon’s now fleeing because he has betrayed the king: “29About that time, when Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Ahijah had clothed himself with a new garment. The two of them were alone in the open country 30when Ahijah laid hold of the new garment he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. 31He then said to Jeroboam: Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “See, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and will give you ten tribes…. 36Yet to his son I will give one tribe, so that my servant David may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. 37I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires; you shall be king over Israel. 38If you will listen to all that I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you an enduring house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.” (By the way, notice the language here is about statutes and commandments, not obeying the voice of the prophets.)

This theme of preserving a ruler in Jerusalem for David is appended to the report we read earlier of Abijam having walked in the sins of his father, so that his heart
was not true to the LORD, like the heart of his father David: “Nevertheless, for David’s sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem; 5 because David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life.”

This theme arises again in 2 Kings 8, with the report of the rise of a new king of Judah, named Jehoram: “18 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. 19 Yet the LORD would not destroy Judah, for the sake of his servant David, since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his descendants forever.”

The theme of the promise to David uttered by Nathan in 2 Samuel 7 is portrayed as a long-term guarantee shielding Jerusalem from judgment that would otherwise befall it due to the wickedness of its kings.

But it is equally important to note that the Deuteronomistic History also contains an antitype to David: Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, to whom we heard Ahijah announce the gift of the ten northern tribes, together with the promise that, if he listened to the LORD’s commands, walked in his ways, and did what is right in his sight by keeping his statutes and commandments, as had David, he would enjoy an enduring house, à la David.

As you know, however, that was not the outcome. Ahijah, the same prophet who offered this possibility to Jeroboam, also delivered these words shortly after Jeroboam took office: “7 Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because I exalted you from among the people, made you leader over my people Israel, 8 and tore the kingdom away from the house of David to give it to you; yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my sight, 9 but you have done evil above all those who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods, and cast images, provoking me to anger, and have thrust me behind your back; 10 therefore, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will consume the house of Jeroboam, just as one burns up dung until it is all gone…. 14 Moreover the LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam today, even right now!”

The reason there would be no dynasty for Jeroboam is a familiar one: he had made for himself other gods, provoking the LORD to anger. The first act of Jeroboam upon taking the throne of the north is reported as follows at the end of chapter 12: “26 Then Jeroboam thought, “The kingdom may well revert to the house of David. 27 If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah.” 28 So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the
people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” 29 He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 And this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan.”

Campbell's comment that viewing this as "the fundamental sin" of Jeroboam would be easier "if only 12:30 said that this became a sin for Israel” is easier to understand if we note that the NRSV’s decision to use "for" to connect the clauses is its own judgment on how best to relate two separate statements that (in Hebrew) read simply, “And this thing became a sin, and the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan.” Nevertheless, I think it is reasonable to conclude, as Campbell himself eventually does, that the author means to say that the making of the images themselves was the great sin.

Indeed, as I mentioned in the notes I gave you for reading Campbell for today, we'll see evidence that Exodus 32 bases its story of Aaron casting a golden calf on this incident from Kings, in which case that author understood the casting of the calves themselves as the great sin.

In any case, for the narrator, these religious innovations by Jeroboam amount (in the narrator's eyes) to nothing less than trading worship of the LORD for worship of other gods. And for that reason, Jeroboam is denied a successor on his throne, let alone a dynasty.

And yet, the reason I suggest Jeroboam is David’s anti-type is not simply that he fails to gain a dynasty, nor is it simply that he fails the test of obedience David passed. Rather, it is because Jeroboam becomes for the north what David becomes for the south: the one who sets the course of its history and the one to whom its kings are compared.

For example, following on the LORD’s assertion that he would raise up a new king who would “cut off the house of Jeroboam” appears this statement of the consequences of Jeroboam’s actions for the northern kingdom: “15 The LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; he will root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their ancestors, and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their sacred poles, provoking the LORD to anger. 16 He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and which he caused Israel to commit.”

The “sins of Jeroboam” established the trajectory of Israel’s history. Moreover, they set the pattern of behavior for all its kings. Without exception the summary statement for each northern king reads like this one regarding Baasha, who took the throne after assassinating Jeroboam’s son: “He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, walking in the way of Jeroboam and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.” Likewise, the summary of the reign of the next king, Omri, is that “he walked in all the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and in the sins that he caused
Israel to commit, provoking the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols” – namely, the two calves Jeroboam set up in Dan and Bethel.

Even Jehoram, who merits some positive marks, receives a negative rating overall because he continued the policies of Jeroboam: “2[Jehoram] did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, though not like his father and mother [Ahab and Jezebel], for he removed the pillar of Baal that his father had made. 3Nevertheless he clung to the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit; he did not depart from it.”

In keeping with this pattern, even Jehu, authorized by a prophet to execute a coup d’état of Ahab’s house, while commended for eliminating Baal worship, is faulted for adhering to Jeroboam’s sins, which the narrator defines clearly: “28Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. 29But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit – the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan.”

The final verdict on Israel, given after the report of its fall to Assyria, includes a recollection of Jeroboam’s sins: “21When [the Lord] had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat king. Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them commit great sin. 22The people of Israel continued in all the sins that Jeroboam committed; they did not depart from them 23 until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight…. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.”

Let’s notice also the broader verdict that stands before this reference to Jeroboam: “7This [exile] occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God… 8and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced…. 15They followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do as they did. 16They rejected all the commandments of the Lord their God and made for them-selves cast images of two calves…. 20They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire [viz. offering their children as sacrifices]; they used divination and augury; and they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.”

You’ll notice the prominence of the charge that the people have followed in the ways of the nations around them, punctuated with the note that the Lord had specifically ordered them not to do so. As you know, that is a preeminent concern of the book of Deuteronomy.

Notice also the mention of making “their sons and their daughters pass through fire” and of their adoption of “divination and augury” – both clear references to Deuteronomy 18.10: “No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an
augur, or a sorcerer.” Quite obviously, Israel’s life is being evaluated by the standards of Deuteronomy.

But notice also the general characterization of their behavior as “selling themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD.” The phrase, “do evil in the sight of the LORD,” appears as well in many of the evaluations of kings we have read. In fact, the statement in 1 Kings 16 that Omri followed in the ways of Jeroboam is preceded by the verdict that “Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did more evil than all who were before him.”

We noted earlier that Solomon received the same negative assessment: “he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” And yet, much more common in the assessments of southern kings is the type of commendation we find for Asa, Amaziah and Josiah – they did what was right in the sight off the LORD – even if Amaziah is judged to have fallen short of the standard set by David.

This phraseology of doing good or evil in the eyes of the LORD is significant, inasmuch as it is characteristic of the book of Deuteronomy. In the Torah this language occurs only once prior to Deuteronomy (Numbers 32.13), but then 8x throughout Deuteronomy. Representative is 4.25-26: “25 When you have had children and children’s children, and become complacent in the land, if you act corruptly by making an idol in the form of anything, thus doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, and provoking him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to occupy; you will not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed.” That phraseology occurs 7x in Judges (in the "mortar" that links the stories), once in 1 Sam 12, and then 42x in 1 & 2 Kings. That large number underscores the degree to which 1&2 Kings base their evaluations on the ideology of Deuteronomy.

I also want to bring into play Moses’ words at the conclusion of his farewell address in Deuteronomy 31: “29 For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, turning aside from the way that I have commanded you. In time to come trouble will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands.”

The reason I bring this up alongside 4.25 is that both of them (part of the “outer frame” of the book) contain not only the phrase “do what is evil in the sight of the LORD,” but also language about “provoking him to anger,” which appears only in these verses in the Torah, but then twice in Judges 2.12, twice in 1 Samuel, and a whopping 20x in 1 and 2 Kings, 4x following the phrase, “in the eyes of the LORD,” just as it does in Deuteronomy. This also evidences the influence of Deuteronomy on the way this historian evaluates the role of the various kings.

Now, while the majority of Judah’s kings are commended for doing what is right in the sight of the LORD, the exceptions are noteworthy. The first to incur a
negative evaluation is, of course, Solomon, who does what is evil in the LORD’s sight by allowing his foreign wives to lead him into worship of their gods. Then, under Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, “...Judah did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their ancestors had done....” They committed all the abominations of the nations that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.” Notice not only the phrase about “doing what was evil in the LORD’s sight,” but also the theme of provoking the LORD, as well as the specific mention of abominations commonly committed by the nations the LORD displaced to make room for them. Clearly we are reading words penned under the influence of the book of Deuteronomy.

Likewise, Rehoboam’s son, Abijam, is reported to have “committed all the sins that his father did before him.” What saves Judah from destruction at this point, you’ll recall, is the obedience of David: “Nevertheless for David’s sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem; “because David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life.” Intriguingly, the historian notes the one variance from this during David’s career: “except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” The point, though, is that David had such an exemplary character as to offset this and the sins of Solomon’s sons.

What’s curious about this theme, if it hasn’t already struck you, is that the south has an advantage the north does not: a founding king with a nearly sterling record whose uprightness saves them time and again. And the peculiarity of this becomes apparent when we consider that David was not the first king, like Jeroboam was for the north; Saul was the first king. And yet, Saul’s dismal record did not condemn the nation to rejection the way Jeroboam’s did.

It's worth noting an additional incongruity in this contrast between north and south: even though the north is repeatedly castigated for its two calf images, the inner sanctum of the temple Solomon built in Jerusalem was fitted with two Cherubim, winged creatures of a sort common throughout the ANE to symbolize the deity’s presence. The fact of the matter is that calf images, throughout the area of Canaan, had a similar function: they serve as pedestals for the deity; they were not understood as images of the deity himself. So what made those cast images (also borrowed from the iconography of other nations) legitimate and the cast calves of the north idolatrous? The anti-northern bias is apparent in the different evaluation of the two sets of images, which function identically.

Noticing these things, you begin to detect a bias: the north is a ne’er-do-well. In fact, the narrator characterizes its breach with the south this way: “So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.” Recall, however, that 1 Kings also describes the north’s secession as the LORD’s judgment on Solomon’s apostasy. It is clear, however, that the sympathies of the historian are with the
south, whose rulers ride David’s coattails and who are not universally described as “doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord.”

In fact, Abijam’s son, Asa, reverses the pattern of his father and grandfather by doing “what is right in the sight of the Lord, as his father David had done.” What that means is specified in the next verses: “\(12\) He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his ancestors had made. \(13\) He also removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah; Asa cut down her image and burned it at the Wadi Kidron.” Again the abominations eliminated by Asa have to do with the illicit worship of other gods introduced by Solomon’s foreign wives. It’s possible for a Judean king to turn things around.

The next Judean king condemned is some time later, when the reign of Jehoram is summarized as follows: “\(18\) He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

Notice that Jehoram’s behavior is described as “walking in the way of the kings of Israel,” and this is said to have been due to the influence of his wife, the daughter of Ahab, the northern king said to have done great evil in the eyes of the Lord. But notice again the narrator’s use of David to offset Jehoram’s evil: “\(19\) Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah, for the sake of his servant David, since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his descendants forever.”

Jehoram’s son, Ahaziah, is said to have perpetuated his father’s policies: “\(26\) Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of King Omri of Israel. \(27\) He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab, doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab.”

Again the king’s wicked behavior is described as “walking in the way of the house of Ahab.” I.e. his behavior is reported as uncharacteristic of Judah; it is tantamount to an infection brought by a queen and a queen mother from Ahab’s house in the north. In fact, the apostasy of this period comes to an end only when Athaliah (who seizes the throne after her son’s death) is slain and a seven-year-old son of Ahaziah, named Jehoash, is placed on the throne, and all the symbols of Baal are removed. The narrator then tells us: “Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all his days, because the priest instructed him.”

The next Judean king to receive a failing grade, Ahaz, comes along some time later: “\(2\) He did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, as his ancestor David had done, \(3\) but walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even made his son pass through fire, according to the abominable practices of the nations the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.” Notice that this behavior
is also described not simply in terms of practices prohibited (by Deuteronomy, of course), but especially as a matter of “walking in the way of the kings of Israel.”

The author’s southern bias is thus evident in his description of the southern kings he brands “wicked.” In effect he says, “they didn’t behave like true Judean kings; they acted like the northern variety.” Moreover, while the majority of the southern kings receive the benediction of having “done what was right in the sight of the LORD,” every single northern king is censured for having done what is evil.

There is, however, one qualification to add to the case of the kings judged to have done what was right in the sight of the LORD. Even those who receive passing marks to this point receive an addendum qualifying their obedience.

First let’s recall the installations said to have been built in Judah during the reign of Solomon’s son, Rehoboam: “They also built for themselves high places, pillars, and sacred poles on every high hill and under every green tree; there were also male temple prostitutes in the land. They committed all the abominations of the nations that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.”

The report of the reversal of such practices by Asa, grandson of Rehoboam, reads this way: “Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD, as his father David had done. He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his ancestors had made. He also removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah; Asa cut down her image and burned it at the Wadi Kidron. But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was true to the LORD all his days.”

There is something peculiar about the verdict that Asa did what was right in the LORD’s sight and that his heart “was true to the LORD all his days” in spite of the fact that he left standing chief offending installations ostensibly built under Rehoboam: the high places, which (by definition) incorporated standing stones and sacred poles of the sort he is said to have cut down: the image of Asherah.

And the same peculiarity is to be found attached to the commendation of every Judean king who did right, as in the case of Jehoash, brought to the throne at the age of 7: “Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all his days, because the priest Jehoiada instructed him. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people continued to sacrifice and make offerings on the high places.” Every king to the point we have reached in the line of rulers who do what is right in the LORD’s sight endure the detraction that “the high places were not taken away.”

The first king not to receive that diminution of the praise given him is the king following Ahaz, the king we saw described as “walking in the way of the kings of Israel.” Here is the more-than-favorable summary of Hezekiah’s rule: “[Hezekiah] did what was right in the sight of the LORD just as his ancestor David
had done. He removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan. He trusted in the LORD the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following him but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses.”

Not only does Hezekiah do what is right in the eyes of the LORD, but he also proves to be the best ruler ever: no one was comparable before or after him. In keeping with that, we do not find the detraction we find with other kings. Indeed, Hezekiah is said to have “removed the high places, broken down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole.”

Only one other Judean king accomplishes the same feats and attains like praise: Josiah, who comes to the throne after the rule of Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, a king who reintroduced all the illicit practices prevalent before Hezekiah. Here is the summary record for Josiah: “He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” But that’s not the end of the report.

The remainder of chapter 22 and the first twenty-four verses of chapter 23 narrate in detail Josiah desecrating the high places and dismantling all the other illicit institutions reintroduced by Manasseh. Then we find these accolades: “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.”

But this creates a problem: we now have two kings said to be the best ever. Both Josiah and Hezekiah are said to be unprecedented in their behavior, and equally unrivaled by those who followed them. How can you have two “best kings ever”? Each cancels out the other: “no greater king after Hezekiah” excludes Josiah, while “no greater king before him [Josiah]” rules out Hezekiah. How do we explain this? That's the question we'll pursue next session.