



Preface

When I taught in seminary I was always glad when I had a class on November 10, Martin Luther's birthday. We would do a 'Luther' cheer to begin class that day. I would holler, 'Give me an "L"!' and they would shout it back, and so on through Brother Martin's surname until I could yell, 'What does it spell?' and they would thunder back 'Luther!' It was a rousing way to begin class and forty or so, mostly male, voices easily rose to the invitation for mounting bedlam. I've far fewer opportunities for rowdiness now that I'm serving a congregation again, but I was especially delighted over Luther's birthday this year because it was the very day I finished the rough draft of this 2 Kings commentary. Twenty years ago I began writing, hoping to produce expositional commentaries on the 'Former Prophets' (Joshua-2 Kings minus Ruth) and it is gratifying to finish that course.

I am especially thankful to the kind folks at Christian Focus, who picked up an 'orphaned' series halfway through. I have never forgotten Malcolm Maclean's visit one March day and his willingness to take a rejected 2 Samuel manuscript back to Scotland with him. And I owe a huge debt to the elders at Woodland Presbyterian where I now serve. Any number of times they have asked me if I was 'getting enough time to work on the commentary.' They even offered to relieve me of preaching the evening services for a while in order to free up





time to write. (Actually, there may have been more behind that offer than I'm willing to admit.) I get to serve with such generous and encouraging men.

This book goes out as a tribute to Derek and Rosemary Thomas and to David and Andrea Jussely, former and esteemed colleagues while at Reformed Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, and special friends always. David did me (and others) the immense favor of pastoring Woodland Presbyterian some years before I arrived here. Because he poured some ten years of his sweat and prayers into this congregation, my work is so much easier now. One of the privileges I now miss is having an office door fifteen feet from Derek's, where I could find sense, hilarity, and helpfulness, usually all at one time. Not that I didn't help him. I still remember the days he would arrive at the seminary very early but forget his keys and wait, woebegone-like, until I arrived to let him in. It is my delight to send off *Power and Fury* in honor of these dear brothers and elect ladies.

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Introduction

When I was serving in theological academia we would occasionally have a student who couldn't begin studies at the start of the term. He might arrive, say, three weeks into the semester. Such students drop into the middle of things and that is a hard place to begin; they have to play catch-up and get their academic sea legs quickly. Generally, we don't like to begin in the middle of things. We want to see the whole play or read the whole novel.

2 Kings, however, makes us begin in the middle of things. It opens with the paramedics inspecting mangled King Ahaziah after a brutal second-storey fall. Rather abrupt.

Actually, this undesirable situation was not always the case because 2 Kings has not always been 2 Kings! Originally our 1 and 2 Kings were simply the single book of Kings. However, Greek translations of the Old Testament (after ca. 200 BC) divided the book into two segments, probably because of its length. This division then appeared in printed editions of the Hebrew text (1500s) and continues in, among others, our English Bible tradition.

So we must go back, at least momentarily, to pull 1 Kings into the picture and to see 1–2 Kings as one overall document. In a previous volume,¹ I laid out the major divisions of 1–2 Kings like this:

¹ *The Wisdom and the Folly: An Exposition of the Book of First Kings* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2002), 11.





- I. The Golden Age, 1 Kings 1–11
- II. The Torn Kingdom, 1 Kings 12–2 Kings 17
- III. The Last Days, 2 Kings 18–25

The first segment focuses on the splendor of Solomon's reign, the second on the 'divided' kingdom(s) (north and south, Israel and Judah) with far more attention to the northern kingdom and its apostasy, and the third on Judah (the southern kingdom) by itself as it slides, only slightly hindered, into divine judgment and Babylonian exile.

Now that is the big view of the 'book' of Kings. And yet, in spite of the artificial division of Kings, one can almost say that 1 Kings and 2 Kings each carries its own distinct emphasis; in fact, they follow a similar pattern, moving from generally positive to terribly negative. 1 Kings begins with the blessing and wisdom of Solomon's kingship (1 Kings 1–10) only to continue with the folly of both Solomon and of the northern kings—especially Jeroboam I in his slick syncretism and Ahab in his raw paganism (1 Kings 11–22). 2 Kings moves similarly, beginning with an interlude of grace under the ministry of Elisha, through whom Yahweh displays the power he would lavish on Israel (2 Kings 1–8); with grace despised, however, the process of judgment presses on until Yahweh consigns his people to the tender mercies of the Assyrians and Babylonians (2 Kings 9–25). Hence I dub this study of 2 Kings, *The Power and the Fury*.