

ABSTRACT

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RETRIBUTION IN THE BOOK OF KINGS

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The doctrine of divine recompense and retribution (or reward and punishment) is well known in the Hebrew Bible. Questioning the combination of individual retribution (whereby a person receives punishment in accord with his own actions) with collective retribution (whereby the fate of some is determined by the behavior of others) is reflected in a variety of texts throughout the Bible, including Abraham's challenge of God, 'Will you sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?' (Gen 18:23), and the cry of Moses and Aaron to God, 'When one man sins, will you be wrathful with the whole community?' (Num 16:22). The story of Achan, whose wrongdoing causes suffering to others, illustrates the complexity of the issue, since Josh 7:1a, 11 accuses the Israelites in general of violating the ban, while in the rest of Chapter 7, as well as in 22:20, the original violation is portrayed as having been as committed by Achan alone.

Throughout most of the Book of Kings, the kings of Israel and Judah are condemned for cultic sins: worship at the high places, the worship of the calves in the North, and apostasy – all without any reference to the people's behavior. It appears that the primary redactor of the book was not concerned with the question of the entire people being punished for the sins of their kings. Rather, he saw his main task as that of telling the story of the central events in the kings' lives. An exception to this principle is the recurring formula unique to his account of the kingdom of Judah, 'The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to sacrifice and offer at the high places'.

Nonetheless, a number of passages in the book indicate that certain scribes decided to insert the participation of the people as sinners in descriptions of a king's sin. Some of these additions are awkwardly phrased or even inept, and many are missing from the ancient textual witnesses. This article shows how these additions were integrated into the original text and attempts to date them. The most important reference to collective retribution in the Book of Kings is the summary review of the history of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:7–23), which, in contrast to most of Kings, portrays the collective sins of Israel. A meticulous analysis of these verses shows that they contain an earlier stratum, which preceded the destruction of Judah. This finding indicates that the earliest editions

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of the Book of Kings already referred to the participation of the people in the cultic sin, whether independently (2 Kings 17:7–18) or incited by the kings (cf. the recurring refrain, ‘the sins he committed and caused Israel to commit’). Under the influence of these passages, along with the impact of later scribes whose presence is detectable in Jeremiah 37–44, other sections were added, which also accuse the people of collaboration in the sin, whether due to the evil influence of the kings or of their own free will. The dating of these interpolations ranges from the edition of Kings produced in the aftermath of the destruction to the last sections appended during the Persian period – well after the first editions of the Book of Kings had been disseminated.