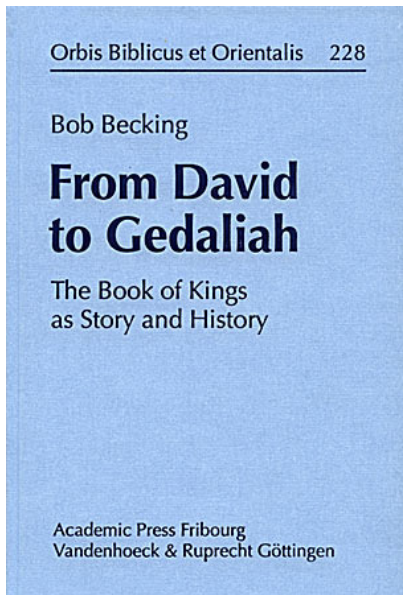


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**Becking, Bob**

***From David to Gedaliah: The Book of Kings as Story and History***

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Becking's ten essays in this volume represent some thirteen previously published essays on various texts from the book of Kings that appeared originally in English and Dutch from 1987 through 2005. Some have been translated, some have been updated, and some have been combined into larger essays. In general, he employs narratological study, historical criticism, theological analysis, and examination of extrabiblical evidence in an attempt to steer a mediating course between the minimalist and maximalist approaches to the interpretation of historical literature in the Bible. Selected texts from Kings are therefore read on a three-dimensional basis, including the narrative character of the story or stories, the value and function of extrabiblical epigraphical and archeological materials for the interpretation of Kings narratives, and the art of history writing in both the ancient and modern worlds. Becking views the authors of these narratives as historians, not in the sense of authors who present a reconstruction of what really happened, but as narrators who present an organization of past sources, whether written or oral, available to them according to their own belief systems.

“Is the Book of Kings a Hellenistic Book?” appeared originally as “Is de Hebreeuwse Bijbel een hellenistisch boek?” *NNT* 54 (2000): 1–17 and “‘Until this Day? On an Adverbial Adjunct and Biblical Historiography,” in *Historie og Konstruktion: Festschrift til*

*Niel Peter Lemche in anledning of 60 års fødselsdagen den 6. September 2005* (ed. M. Möller and T. L. Thompson; Forum for Bibelsk Exegese 14; Copenhagen, 2005), 19–29. Becking argues against the view that the Bible was written in the Hellenistic period by arguing that interpreters must seek a balance between trust and suspicion in the reading of biblical books, that the final redaction of biblical books presupposes earlier material to be isolated by literary-critical analysis, that correspondence between biblical narratives and the circumstance of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires does not ensure that biblical texts were not written in earlier periods, that interpreters must account for the shift from Y-hwism to Judaism, that the development of the Hebrew language must be taken into account, that the formula “until this day,” which so frequently refers to pre-Hellenistic periods, must be considered, that biblical literature lacks reference to Greek-Hellenistic authors, and that parallels between Herodotus and the Hebrew Bible are too general to posit the former as the source or inspiration for the latter. Becking’s argument is very powerful, although the differentiation between Y-hwism and Judaism requires further reflection.

“Elijah at Mount Horeb: Reading 1 Kings 19:9–18” originally appeared as “Elia op de Horeb,” *NedTT* (41 (1987): 177–86. Becking interprets the repetitive dialogues between the prophet and YHWH in verses 9b–10 and 13b–14 not as a literary-critical redactional device but as an example of *Nachholende Erzählung*, or “retrospective achrony,” that attempts to counter claims of YHWH’s failure by allowing Elijah to express his bitter feelings of failure prior to the revelation of divine presence that answers his questions. By stressing that YHWH is revealed in the so-called “still, small voice,” the narrative pointedly disassociates YHWH from Baal-like identification with the forces of nature as suggested by some readings of 1 Kgs 18. Becking is quite on target here, although one must consider that the portrayal of Canaanite religious practice and concepts here are portrayed in polemical context.

“No More Grapes from the Vineyard? A Plea for a Historical-Critical Approach in the Study of the Old Testament” originally appeared in *Congress Volume: Oslo, 1998* (ed. A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø; VTSup 80; Leiden, 2000), 123–41. Becking correctly challenges the notion that a reader-oriented reading of biblical narrative excludes historical readings by noting the need to differentiate ancient and modern societal and cultural differences and by stressing the need to recognize the *form* of a given text in relation to societal and cultural context. His analysis of 1 Kgs 21 emphasizes the text as commentary on the transition from tribal to tributary society, although the charge of murder against Ahab has implications for reading the so-called Deuteronomistic History as a whole, particularly in relation to David’s role in the murder of Uriah and Manasseh’s reputation for murder in general; that is, to what degree do the actions of monarchs such as Ahab

(and David) have a bearing on the question of the collapse of dynasties in the historiography of the Deuteronomistic History?

“Did Jehu Write the Tel Dan Inscription?” is an updated version of a paper that originally appeared in *SJOT* 13 (1999): 187–201. Becking’s detailed analysis rebuts arguments put forward by J. W. Wesselius in favor of Jehu’s authorship of the inscription and concludes that Jehu’s authorship is improbable.

“‘Touch for Health...’ Magic in 2 Kings 4:31–37 with a Remark about the History of Y-hwism” appeared originally in *ZAW* 108 (1996): 34–54. Becking compares the portrayal of the actions of Elisha in bringing the dead son of the woman from Shunem back to life with a number of Mesopotamian magical incantation rituals. He argues that the similarities point to a pre-orthodox form of Y-hwism that has been recontextualized into Kings by stressing Elisha’s prayers to YHWH. The continued presence of magical rituals in rabbinic, medieval, and premodern Judaism (Christianity and Islam share such rituals as well) points to a continued interplay between so-called magic and prayer that must prompt interpreters to question the notion and character of an orthodox “Y-hwism” (or Judaism, for that matter) in opposition to magical practice.

“From Exodus to Exile: 2 Kings 17:7–20 in the Context of its Co-Text” is based on a paper of the same title that appeared originally in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography Presented to Zecharia Kallai* (ed. G. Galil and M. Weinfeld; VTSup 81; Leiden, 2000), 215–31. Becking argues against the redaction-critical differentiation of layers within this text to posit a coherent text that addresses both Israelites and Judeans concerning the theological interpretation of the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem. The great strength of this article is Becking’s focus on the theological presentation of history and its possibilities in this text.

“From Apostasy to Destruction—2 Kings 17:21–23: A Josianic View on the Fall of Samaria” appeared originally in *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature: Festschrift C. H. W. Brekelmans* (ed. M. Vervenne and J. Lust; BEThL 133; Leuven, 1997), 279–97. Becking points to the polemical treatment of Samaria and the northern kingdom in this text in an effort to demonstrate its place in the Josianic redaction of Kings. A key argument (among others) is the presence of this formula “until this day.”

“Chronology: A Skeleton without Flesh? Sennacherib’s Campaign as a Case-Study” appeared originally in *‘Like a Bird in a Cage’: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; ESHM 4; JSOTSup 363; Sheffield, 2003), 46–72. Becking examines the narratological presentation of a well-known historical event in an effort to demonstrate the subjective character of history writing as an art rather than as a science. Although his

basic argument demands serious consideration, several subtheses, such as his conclusion that Sennacherib invaded Judah twice, his view that Hezekiah was not the leader of the anti-Assyrian coalition, and his attribution of 2 Kgs 18–20 to the exilic Deuteronomistic History must be challenged.

“Gedaliah and Baalis in History and as Tradition: Remarks on 2 Kings 25:22–26, Jeremiah 40:7–41:15, and Two Ammonite Seal-Inscriptions” is based on three earlier publications: “Baalis, the King of the Ammonites. An Epigraphical Remark on Jeremiah 40:14,” *JSS* 38 (1993): 15–24; “Inscribed Seals as Historical Sources for ‘Ancient Israel’? Jeremiah 40.7–41.15 *par exemple*” in *Can a ‘History of Israel’ Be Written?* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; ESHM 1; JSOTSup 245; Sheffield, 1997), 65–83; and “The Seal of Baalisha, King of the Ammonites: Some Remarks,” *BN* 97 (1999): 13–17. Becking considers the question as to whether or not a history of Israel can be written by examining the roles of the Hebrew Bible and extrabiblical inscriptions in such an enterprise. His analysis of the biblical texts correctly stresses the importance of the memory and perspectives of those who witnessed or knew of the assassination of Gedaliah in the narrative presentation of the Kings and Jeremiah accounts. His analysis of epigraphical materials that mention names such as Gedaliah, Ishmael, and Baalis/Baalisha correctly points to the improbability that the references to Gedaliah or Ishmael refer to the major characters of the biblical accounts, but it also correctly points to the likelihood that Baalisha had a role in instigating the assassination of Gedaliah. The essay is especially important for its interplay in the use of narratological and epigraphic material in the study of biblical historical narrative.

“Jehoiachin’s Amnesty, Salvation for Israel? Notes on 2 Kings 25:27–30” is a revised version of a paper originally published in *Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic Studies: Papers Read at the XIIIth IOSOT Congress Leuven 1989* (ed. C. Brekelmans and J. Lust; BEThL 94; Leuven, 1990), 283–93. Becking examines various ancient Near Eastern texts, such as those associated with the Babylonian *Akitu* festival, to demonstrate that amnesty, such as that granted to Jehoiachin, is a known practice in the ancient world and that Jehoiachin’s release from prison must be viewed as a historical event. He correctly cautions readers against the view of von Rad that Jehoiachin’s release portends messianic hope, and he correctly maintains that the incident does not portend the end of the exile. He instead adopts the kerygmatic view of Wolff that repentance is necessary. It would be wise for him to consider the analogy of Jehoiachin’s release to eat at the Babylonian king’s table with Mephibosheth’s relation to David in 2 Sam 9 and 19. Does Jehoiachin’s release portend the end of the house of David?

The volume concludes with a full bibliography and index of textual citations.

In sum, Becking's volume is a very useful and thought-provoking work that brings together some essays that are otherwise difficult to find. His work represents a substantial contribution to the study of Kings that demands consideration by all scholars working in the field.