

## 1 & 2 KINGS: *Yahweh is the Lord of History*

### *Israel at the crossroads*

**Kings** (*Melechim*) or “The Book of the Kings” was the original title in Hebrew of the one book that was later divided into what are now 1 and 2 Kings by the translators of the Greek Old Testament, *Septuagint* or *LXX*. They trace the history of the kings of Israel and Judah from the time of Solomon (970-931 B.C.) to the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.). The author wrote the account as one volume, to be read through from beginning to end in one setting. Clyde T. Francisco says, “The Jews did not make the division until controversies with Christians made it necessary for readiness of reference.”

**AUTHOR:** of 1 and 2 Kings is unknown even though the Jewish Babylonian Talmud attributes Kings to the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah. However, someone living in Babylon rather than in Egypt must have written the last chapter of 2 Kings. The author was likely one of the exiles who lived in Babylon. S. R. Driver suggested a “man like minded with Jeremiah and almost certainly a contemporary who lived and wrote under the same influences.” David Hubbard said, “The God who shaped the course of history guided the hand that wrote it.”

**STYLE:** is a “highly stylized presentation of history and uniform theological outlook throughout the two books of Kings.” It is a prophetic interpretation of the history of Israel. There is a general prophetic tone, with no court apologies glorifying the king. It holds the kings to an evaluation according to prophetic standards. The author has weaved prophetic materials into court journals with dexterity and has taken great pains to combine the records from both Northern and Southern Kingdoms into a synchronized historical narrative.

The author makes frequent reference to his sources which existed in his day: *The Book of the Acts of Solomon* (1 Kings 11:41), *The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel* (14:19, 29) and *The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah* (15:7, 23, 31) as well as other sources (16:5, 14, 27).

The formula used to describe the kings and their reigns is quite consistent in the books. An example of the formula used for the Judean kings is found in 1 Kings 14:21, 22, 29-31. The formula the author uses to describe the kings of Israel is illustrated in 1 Kings 15:33, 34; 16:5, 6. With slight variation this forms the basic framework for the history of the divided kingdom.

**PURPOSE:** is to give the reasons for taking away of the kingdom, captivity and exile. Why and how did it happen? Why didn't God keep His promises to David and his descendents? Can the LORD God be trusted? It is a history written with a religious and practical aim to communicate the lesson of God's discipline of His chosen people. Kings opens with the stable, United Kingdom under a strong king and ends with total collapse and deportation of Judah to Babylon. The success of the kingdom depended upon the measure of faithfulness to God's covenant.

The primary concern of the author is the worship of Yahweh. The rival altars with the golden calves at Dan and Bethel in the northern kingdom led to its downfall. Moreover, the kings of Judah never removed the high places. The LORD God has been faithful to His covenant with David, however the house of David was not faithful. The problem was not with God, but with the unfaithfulness of Israel. God remains just even though his people continue in idolatry. On the other hand, the end of the state does not equal the end of the house of David and the people of Israel. God still has not abandoned His promises to David and His chosen people.

**THEME:** is Yahweh is Lord of history who is actively involved in the affairs of men and nations. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Prov. 14:34).

The prophets dominate the action in the Kings. Elijah's ministry dominates 1 Kings and the influence of the prophets is seen on almost every page of the books. The author or compiler might well have been one of

the writing prophets such as Jeremiah. The author evaluates incisively each king according to prophetic standards based on God's covenant recorded in Deuteronomy.

The books of kings divides into three parts: (1) the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 1-11), (2) the history of the divided kingdom (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17), and (3) the history of the surviving kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-25).

**TIME:** The total time period covered in the two books is about 400 years of Hebrew history. A good guess as to the date of writing is about 550 B.C. because the book mentions Evil-Merodach who did not begin to rule until after 561 B.C. The author does not mention the return of the Jews of Judah from Babylon to Jerusalem under Cyrus (538 B.C.).

## SOLOMON

“God's promise of a Redeemer becomes still more specific in the covenant He made with David that his seed would sit upon his throne forever. The Seed of the Woman is to be the Seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the tribe of Judah, and of the line of David. David was a type of the Greater King, the Messiah to come. The Kingdom of Israel was a type of the Messianic Kingdom to come,” writes Russell B. Jones. The apostle Peter called attention to the fulfillment of this covenant in Acts 2:30-36.

King David died c. 970 B.C. and his son Solomon reined from 970-931 B.C. At first “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father.” King Solomon was an unparalleled architect, songwriter, artist, author and inventor. However, “Solomon drove too fast and traveled too far. . . . The monarch became debauched and effeminate; an egotist and cynic, so satiated with the sensual and material affairs of life that he became skeptical of all good.” He succumbed to materialism, polygamy, brutality and idolatry. And it didn't happen just suddenly. F. B. Meyers said, “No man suddenly becomes base.” Solomon forgot God's law and “loved many strange women” who turned his heart away from Yahweh to serve other gods (Deut. 17:14-20; 1 Kin. 11:1-13).

Although Solomon was born with a silver spoon in his mouth he brought Israel to the verge of bankruptcy. The empire that David built was already beginning to disintegrate under Solomon. He was so deeply in debt writes Charles Pfeiffer, “that the Israelite king ceded twenty cities of Galilee as a means of repayment (1 Kings 9:10-14). Forced labor, used on Solomon's building projects, further added to the discontent (1 Kin. 9:15-22). The orthodox in Jerusalem were scandalized because of Solomon's attachment to this foreign wives and his willingness to worship their gods” (1 Kin. 11:7-8).

“Although Solomon had a thousand wives and concubines in his harem, we read of but one child, Rehoboam, who succeeded his father to the throne. . . . The division of the kingdom marked the end of the empire which David had built and Solomon, in part, had dissipated,” notes Pfeiffer.

Leon Wood writes, “The people had never had such a good life as during the reigns of both David and Solomon, though taxes continued to rise, which produced dissatisfaction by the close of Solomon's rule. . . . Religiously, however, Solomon brought the disfavor of God upon himself. He had started well. Divine approval had been uniquely signified by Yahweh's promise of wisdom, riches, and honor, but Solomon did not remain faithful to his early religious commitments. He compromised the convictions he had expressed in his prayer at the temple dedication. When he experienced this spiritual decline himself, his country was influenced as well” (*A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 252).

## KINGDOM DIVIDED

Upon his death in 931 B.C. the kingdom divided. Solomon forsook the LORD God for the false gods of his many pagan wives. Jeroboam led a successful revolt and with the ten northern tribes established the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Levites and others fled from the north to the Southern Kingdom shortly after the division.

Jones notes, “The doom of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was sealed at the very beginning of its history when the first king undertook to mix idolatry with the worship of the true God, Jehovah.” Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, laid siege of Israel for three years, and his successor, Sargon carried the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 B.C. God sold the kingdom of Israel into captivity to the Assyrians because of their sins of idolatry (2 Kin. 17:7-41; 18:12). An Assyrian governor was placed over the land

incorporating all of Israel into Assyria's provincial system. Many of the residents of the Northern Kingdom were taken captive by Assyria and in their place a foreign upper class of people was imported to Israel. Thus Tiglath-pileser III mixed the populations of conquered countries and reduced the chances of rebellion in the subjugated nations. Of course, this worked religious havoc for Israel. The foreigners brought their own false gods and idols. The mixing of the population resulted in intermarriage between the poor Israelites who were left in the land and the new foreign people. These descendents were called Samaritans.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah continued in its decline, with the exception of three revivals, until 586 B.C. The prophets of Israel insisted that the exile to Babylon in 586 B.C. was Yahweh's punishment upon His people because of their idolatry. The walls of Jerusalem were broken down, her treasures plundered, and the Temple and all of Jerusalem burned to the ground. The LORD God who is sovereign over nations permitted Nebuchadnezzar to gain a temporary victory in order to chastise idolatrous Israel. King Jehoiachin and ten thousand leading men were taken into captivity in Babylon. The remaining nobles of Judah were slain and the rest of the people carried away captive to Babylon. Only the poorest were left in the land of Judah and later many of them fled to Egypt (2 Kin. 25:23-30). The prophets assured Israel that Yahweh would bring His people back to their own land after 70 years of exile. Some of the Jewish people living in exile settled permanently and profitably in Babylon, others longed for the return to Jerusalem.

The city of Jerusalem lay in ruins after the Babylonian invasion. The leading citizens were either killed or deported to Babylon. The poorer peasants were regarded as too weak to cause trouble for Babylon (2 Kin. 25:12). The reason for Judah's fall is carefully stated in 2 Kings 24-25 and 2 Chronicles 36:14-16.

Silver, sex, sloth and self will destroy any nation.

But as we shall see even the captivity was a part of God's eternal plan of redemption.

Title: Introduction to 1 & 2 Kings

Series: [A Look at the Book](#)

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