

1 and 2 KINGS

Short Version

INTRODUCTION

The Books of Kings are the final two books in what is called the D (Deuteronomistic) History of Israel, a section of the Old Testament that includes Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. They are called D History because they are written from a perspective strongly influenced by the Book of Deuteronomy. In these books, the leaders and kings of Israel are judged on one issue: fidelity to Israel's covenant with God. As we shall see, nearly all the kings were judged to be failures because they ignored the laws of God outlined in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Historical context. Most scholars believe that the Books of Kings were written by an Israelite who had experienced the terrible event called the Babylonian Exile. 2Kings ends with the release of Judah's last king from prison in Babylon. The Books of Kings were written to help the Israelites, especially those in exile, to understand the devastating events surrounding the exile. How could God allow the destruction of David's kingdom of Judah? What about God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 concerning an *eternal dynasty*? Has God gone back on his promise? Why did God allow Solomon's temple to be destroyed? Was Marduk who ruled in Babylon greater than Israel's God?

The author of 1 and 2 Kings sets out to show that the collapse of the nation, the destruction of the temple, and the exile are all due to Israel's infidelity to her covenant with God, and especially the infidelity of her kings. The books are also intended to give hope to the exiles: if they repent and turn back to the Lord, he will forgive them and restore them to his favor (1Kgs 8:46-50).

The period covered in 1 and 2 Kings is about 400 years—from the end of the reign of David (approximately 960BC) to the Babylonian exile (586BC).

The story. David's reign comes to an end, and he is succeeded by his son Solomon, whose reign is described in great detail. After Solomon's reign, the kingdom is divided in two: Israel in the north, with its own centers of worship to rival Jerusalem, and Judah in the south. Twenty kings, all judged unfaithful, rule the northern kingdom over a period of approximately 200 years until the north collapses in 722-721BC, and its population is led into exile. In the south, David's descendants (20 in all, one of whom is known to be a usurper) rule for a period of about 360

years, until the time of the Babylonian exile in 586BC. Several of the southern kings attempt reform but ultimately their efforts are too little, too late.

Division of chapters in 1Kings

As with other books of the Bible, writers divide the chapters of Kings in various ways. One simple way to divide them is:

PART 1: A KINGDOM UNITED

- Chapters 1-1:** Reign of Solomon— a united kingdom
Chapters 12-22: Israel and Judah— a divided kingdom

Finally, it should also be noted that 1 and 2 Kings reflect a clear bias in favor of Judah, the southern kingdom ruled by David's successors. Not a single king from the northern kingdom received a positive evaluation. Only a few kings in the south were praised. In the author's eyes, the majority of the kings promoted or at least allowed pagan worship into their kingdom.

Suggested Texts to Read

- Chapter 2*—David's last words and death
Chapter 3—Solomon asks God for wisdom
Chapter 8—Dedication of the new Temple
Chapter 9:1-9—Promise and warning to Solomon
Chapter 10—Queen of Sheba visits Solomon
Chapter 11—Sins of Solomon; Consequences

PART 2: A KINGDOM DIVIDED

- Chapter 12** Revolt of the northern tribes
Chapters 17-19, 21 Elijah stories

2 KINGS

- Chapter 2** Elisha succeeds Elijah
Chapters 4-6 Elisha stories
Chapters 18-20 Finally a good king
Chapters 22-23 Josiah—a great king
Chapters 24-25 Judah goes into exile

If you have any question on a particular text, see commentary in long version.