

The Book of Kings (1 & 2 Kings)

Just as every cloud has a silver lining, so even the darkest moments in the history of Israel's monarchy contained the seeds of hope. For the exiled remnant of Judah living in Babylon, the human author of the inspired account of Israel's tragic plunge into successive waves of judgment had a message of hope. Though God had been angry with His people, the fact that they even still existed and that they were being cared for in captivity was a genuine token of His steadfast loyalty to the covenant promises of blessing, not the least of which was the preservation of the house of David from which would arise a king capable of finally leading the nation into the blessing of obedience. Though all kings so far had somehow failed, there was still hope.

Authorship

It is certain that these two books of the kings, so divided beginning with the Septuagint, should be considered as one work. In the Hebrew Bible these books were considered part of the "Former Prophets" which included Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. There is no explicit statement in the Books of the Kings about its authorship. Ancient Jewish tradition assigns it to Jeremiah (along with his prophecy and Lamentations). Scholars have noted similarity of style and vocabulary between Jeremiah and Kings. With the possible exception of the notice about Jehoiachin's release from a Babylonian prison in 560 B.C. there is no real reason to definitely exclude Jeremiah as the author, though certainty is not possible. That this is a work based on a number of written sources is obvious, covering a period of over four hundred years.¹ However, this

¹ For a discussion of the theories of composition see Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 152-

is not to deny that an author was at work with this material.² Structural analysis supports the unity of Kings as a carefully crafted commentary on the history of Israel leading up to the Babylonian captivity.³

Date

The last recorded event, Jehoiachin's release from a Babylonian prison (2 Kings 25:27–30), occurred in 560 B.C. While this may have been appended by a later hand (especially if Jeremiah is assumed to be the author) it is likely that the book took its final form some time well into the Babylonian captivity, perhaps by about 550 B.C.

Historical Setting

The events described in Kings occurred between the very end of David's reign and Jehoiachin's release from a Babylonian prison, that is, from c. 970 B.C. to 561 B.C., a period of over four hundred years. This is the time of Israel's monarchy during which there was much internal strife and division as well as great external threats from the likes of Egypt, Syria, Assyria, and Babylon. Hence, Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh is being played out on the stage of international affairs, a milieu well attested in extra-biblical history.

56 and on the use of sources see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 722-29.

² Howard's statement captures well the issue of authorship: "We use the term *author* advisedly. That is, we assume that the books, in their final form, were written by one person. However, the author used many sources . . . and in many cases he probably incorporated these into his work verbatim. But his additions, his creation of a coherent and consistent framework, the very process of selection and omission of materials, and the integrated viewpoints throughout his work give this person a rightful claim as "author," not merely "editor," "compiler," or "redactor." (David M. Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 171)

³ See David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 137-44.

Original Readers

From the repeated phrase “to this day” (“until now”) it should be concluded that the readers were experiencing conditions that had their genesis during the events described in the Book of Kings. Since one of the main purposes is to explain the reason for Israel’s and Judah’s defeat and deportation, it is reasonable to posit an exilic readership.

Occasion

There is no historic occasion stated for writing. Rather, one must assume a “logical occasion” such as might be extrapolated from the situation described in Ezekiel: “‘Thus you say, ‘If our transgressions and our sins *lie* upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?’” “Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ (Ezek 33:10–11). Kings addresses that question from the historical standpoint by showing the consequences of being unrepentant while affirming the covenant faithfulness of Yahweh.

Special Issues

Relationship to Deuteronomy. From the way in which the author of Kings chronicles the history of the monarchy it is obvious that the fates of monarch and people are directly related to their obedience or disobedience to the stipulations set forth in the Mosaic Covenant, particularly in the expression of it found in the book of Deuteronomy. Because the whole of Kings is in one sense an outworking of the blessings and cursings section (Deut 28), it is obvious that the author approaches history with Deuteronomy in mind and writes with that as the basis for evaluating king and subject and for defending

Yahweh's judgments. However, modern scholarship, following the "Wellhausenian monolinear evolutionary theory,"⁴ assumes that Deuteronomy was actually written in the seventh century in order to support Josiah's reform movement and that the very same author(s) were responsible for Joshua through 2 Kings as well. This device is not necessary in order to account for the production of these literary-historical works as much recent criticism has demonstrated.

Chronological Scheme. Kings is structured around a chronological scheme involving both relative and absolute dating. Absolute dates are arrived at when extra-biblical records date the same event as recorded in Kings, for example, certain military feats of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians. Relative dating has to do mostly with the fixing of the beginning and ending of reigns of Judean kings by their counterpart in Israel, and vice versa. The problem is that these dates do not compute in many cases. Various schemes of harmonization have been proposed though none are without difficulties. However, there is, enough confirmation that we are dealing with real history to accept the numbers of the Hebrew kings as one of the basic structural features contributing to the author's purpose.⁵

⁴ Harrison, *Introduction*, 732; for a discussion see *ibid.*, 730-32 and Howard, *Historical Books*, 179-82.

⁵ For a comprehensive reconciliation of the chronological data in kings see Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951, rev. 1965). See also Thiele's "Coregencies and Overlapping Reigns Among the Hebrew Kings," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 174-200 and *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, in Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives series. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981. Though Thiele's scheme has come under criticism, there is still strong conservative support for his basic approach (see Howard, *Historical Books*, 185-86 and Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987, 1996), 320). For an update of Thiele's work, see Leslie McFall, "A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (January-March 1991):3-45.

The miracle working of Elijah and Elisha. The only other place in the Old Testament where such a grouping of miracles occurs is in conjunction with the ministries of Moses and Joshua. These two periods were critical times of transition and decision in the life of the nation of Israel. The nature of these miracles and their purpose in the narrative will be discussed in the argument section below.

Message

When the people of Israel and their kings spurned Yahweh's law, repudiated His messengers, and turned to foreign gods, He judged them; however, they were not without hope because through repentance and faith restoration was possible since God had promised to raise up the Son of David.

Outline

	<u>1 Kings</u>
I. Solomon's kingdom: Yahweh's presence to bless is powerfully manifested and tragically repudiated by David's son, Solomon.	1:1—11:43
A. Yahweh establishes Solomon over the kingdom in accordance with His covenant with David.	1:1—2:46
1. Adonijah proclaims himself king, thus provoking David to act on Solomon's behalf.	1:1—27
2. David proclaims Solomon king and instructs him with regard to establishing the kingdom.	1:28—2:12
3. Solomon obeys David's instructions, establishing the kingdom.	2:13—46
a. Adonijah is executed for his treachery.	2:13—25
b. Abiathar is removed as high priest and exiled.	2:26—27
c. Joab is executed for his shedding of innocent blood.	2:28—35
d. Shimei is executed for spurning Solomon's mercy for the wrongs done to David.	2:36—46
B. Yahweh blesses Solomon in his kingdom in accordance with His covenant with Moses.	3:1—11:3
1. A summary statement of Solomon's character is reported.	3:1—3
2. Yahweh's blessing of Solomon is detailed.	3:4—10:13
a. Solomon pleases Yahweh by asking for wisdom to rule.	3:4—28
b. Solomon displays his abilities to reign.	4:1—34
1) Solomon proves an able administrator.	4:1—19
2) Solomon rules over a kingdom at peace.	4:20—25

- 3) Solomon requires vast resources. 4:26–28
- 4) Solomon manifests great wisdom. 4:29–34
- c. Solomon establishes the central sanctuary. 5:1—8:66
 - 1) He builds the temple and makes its furnishings. 5:1—7:51
 - 2) He brings the ark into the temple, at which Yahweh manifests His Shekinah. 8:1–13
 - 3) He dedicates the temple. 8:14–66
 - a) He praises Yahweh for keeping His word to David regarding a dynasty and a temple. 8:14–21
 - b) He prays to Yahweh to fulfill His covenant with David. 8:22–26
 - c) He pleads with Yahweh to restore His people when they cry out to Him in repentance. 8:27–53
 - d) He blesses the people wishing for them a heart to serve and obey the Lord. 8:54–61
 - e) He dedicates the temple with sacrifices. 8:62–66
- d. Yahweh exhorts Solomon to faithfulness and integrity, promising blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. 9:1–9
- e. Yahweh’s blessing of Solomon is attested to internationally. 9:10—10:13
 - 1) Solomon’s accomplishments are summarized. 9:10–28
 - a) Hiram expresses displeasure with Solomon. 9:10–14
 - b) Solomon’s building accomplishments are noted. 9:15–19
 - c) Solomon’s labor force is noted. 9:20–23
 - d) Pharaoh’s daughter’s house and Yahweh’s house are mentioned. 9:24–25
 - e) Solomon’s fleet is noted. 9:26–28
 - 2) Solomon’s worldwide reputation is praised by the queen of Sheba who gives Yahweh the credit. 10:1–13
- 3. A summary statement of Solomon’s performance is reported. 10:14—11:3
 - a. He multiplied riches. 10:14–25
 - b. He multiplied horses. 10:26–29
 - c. He multiplied wives. 11:1–3
- C. Yahweh judges Solomon’s kingdom according to His covenants with Moses and David. 11:4–40
 - 1. Solomon’s heart is turned to the gods of his wives. 11:4–8
 - 2. Solomon incurs Yahweh’s displeasure and discipline. 11:9–40
 - a. His heir will lose most of the kingdom for his failures. 11:9–13
 - b. He is plagued with adversaries. 11:14–40

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| | 1) Hadad the Edomite becomes an adversary. | 11:14–22 |
| | 2) Rezon the Syrian becomes an adversary. | 11:23–25 |
| | 3) Jeroboam rebels and is promised the kingdom. | 11:26–40 |
| D. | Solomon's reign ends through death. | 11:41–43 |
| II. | The Divided kingdom: Yahweh's righteous standards for his appointed rulers are grievously violated and severely judged. | 12:1—
<u>2 Kings</u> 17:41 |
| A. | The rulers of Israel establish their kingdom upon false religion. | 12:1—16:34 |
| | 1. Jeroboam receives the kingdom of Israel but forsakes Yahweh. | 12:1—14:20 |
| | a. Rehoboam provokes the rebellion of the people. | 12:1–15 |
| | b. Jeroboam leads ten tribes in cessation from Judah. | 12:16–24 |
| | c. Jeroboam forsakes Yahweh and is judged. | 12:17—14:20 |
| | 1) He establishes a false religion in the north. | 12:17–33 |
| | 2) He refuses to repent at a prophet's warning. | 13:1–34 |
| | a) A prophet predicts judgment on his altar. | 13:1–10 |
| | b) The prophet dies as an object lesson of the consequences of disobedience. | 13:11–32 |
| | c) Jeroboam continues in his evil ways. | 13:33–34 |
| | 3) His son dies as a sign of judgment on his house. | 14:1–18 |
| | d. Jeroboam's reign ends through death. | 14:19–20 |
| | 2. Rehoboam reigns in Judah and is judged for his wickedness. | 14:21–31 |
| | a. The nation falls into perversion. | 14:21–24 |
| | b. The temple is ransacked by Shishak of Egypt. | 14:25–28 |
| | c. Rehoboam's reign ends through death. | 14:29–31 |
| | 3. Abijam reigns wickedly in Judah, yet receives a lamp for David. | 15:1–8 |
| | 4. Asa reigns righteously in Judah but makes an ill-advised alliance with Ben-Hadad of Syria. | 15:9–24 |
| | 5. Nadab reigns in Israel and does evil in the sight of Yahweh, whose judgment ends the house of Jeroboam. | 15:25–32 |
| | 6. Bassha reigns wickedly in Israel according to the sins of Jeroboam and incurs judgment against his house. | 16:1–7 |
| | 7. Elah reigns wickedly in Israel and is assassinated by Zimri. | 16:8–14 |
| | 8. Zimri reigns briefly in wickedness and destroys himself. | 16:15–20 |
| | 9. Omri reigns wickedly and builds idolatrous Samaria. | 16:21–28 |
| | 10. Ahab reigns over Israel more wickedly than all before him. | 16:29–34 |
| B. | The prophets of Yahweh demonstrate that He alone is history's sovereign and the one who is present to restore and sustain. | 17:1—
<u>2 Kings</u> 13:25 |
| | 1. The prophets demonstrate that Yahweh, not Baal, is sovereign among the nations to establish His rule. | 17:1—
<u>2 Kings</u> 1:18 |
| | a. Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal to demonstrate Yahweh's sovereign, all-powerful presence. | 17:1—19:21 |

- 1) Elijah proclaims a drought upon Ahab in Samaria. 17:1–7
- 2) Elijah performs miracles of sustenance and restoration to show Yahweh’s gracious presence. 17:8–24
- 3) Elijah confronts Ahab’s prophets of Baal. 18:1–46
 - a) Elijah charges Ahab with apostasy. 18:1–19
 - b) Elijah challenges the prophets of the storm god Baal, defeating and destroying them. 18:20–40
 - c) Elijah calls forth rain, signaling Yahweh’s complete and total sovereignty. 18:41–46
- 4) Elijah reacts to Ahab and Jezebel’s failure to repent. 19:1–21
 - a) He becomes despondent and flees. 19:1–4
 - b) He is sustained by Yahweh. 19:5–10
 - c) He is recommissioned and encouraged, anointing Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha to their respective roles. 19:11–18
 - d) He is provided with a servant, Elisha. 19:19–21
- b. Elijah and the prophets continue to reveal Yahweh’s righteous sovereignty over the house of Ahab. 20:1—
2 Kings 1:18
 - 1) Prophets deliver Ben-Hadad to Ahab, showing that Yahweh is more than a god of the hills and plains. 20:1–30
 - 2) A prophet condemns Ahab for failing to destroy the enemies of Yahweh. 20:31–43
 - 3) Ahab meets his demise by the word of the prophets. 21:1—22:40
 - a) Elijah condemns Ahab for his wickedness in the matter of Naboth’s vineyard. 21:1–29
 - b) Micaiah ben Imlah predicts Ahab’s death. 22:1–40
 - 4) Jehoshaphat reigns righteously over Judah. 22:41–50
 - 5) Ahaziah reigns wickedly over Israel and is judged through the word of Elijah. 22:51—
2 Kings 1:18
2. Elisha demonstrates that Yahweh is present to judge the nations and to sustain His people. 2 Kings 2:1—13:25
 - a. Elisha assumes leadership of Yahweh’s prophets. 2:1–18
 - b. Elisha acts as the agent of Yahweh’s universal presence to bless with life. 2:19—6:7
 - 1) He heals water from death and barrenness. 2:19–22
 - 2) He acts as agent of judgment against mockers of Yahweh. 2:23–25
 - 3) Jehoram begins his reign over Israel by putting away his father’s pillar of Baal. 3:1–3

- 4) He delivers Moab to Jehoram, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom. 3:4–27
- 5) He provides the wife of a prophet with oil to dispense a debt, avoiding slavery for her sons. 4:1–7
- 6) He grants a Shunammite woman a son and then restores him from death. 4:8–37
- 7) He purifies a death-dealing pot of stew. 4:38–41
- 8) He miraculously feeds one hundred men. 4:42–44
- 9) He cures the Syrian Naaman of leprosy. 5:1–27
- 10) He restores a borrowed axe that had been lost. 6:1–7
- c. Elisha acts as Yahweh’s agent against those who spurn His rule in following Baal. 6:8—13:13
 - 1) Through Elisha Yahweh acts in sovereignty and mercy toward the Syrians. 6:8–23
 - 2) Through Elisha Yahweh delivers Samaria from its siege by Ben-Hadad of Syria. 6:24—7:20
 - 3) Elisha delivers the Shunammite’s household from famine. 8:1–6
 - 4) Elisha predicts the death of Ben-Hadad and confirms Hazael as the next Syrian monarch. 8:7–15
 - 5) Jehoram wickedly reigns in Judah, which is not destroyed for the sake of Yahweh’s servant David. 8:16–24
 - 6) Ahaziah wickedly reigns in Judah and allies himself with Joram of Israel. 8:25–29
 - 7) Elisha oversees the destruction of Ahab’s house through Jehu. 9:1—10:36
 - a) He commands Jehu’s anointing as king. 9:1–13
 - b) Jehu slays Jehoram as judgment on Ahab. 9:14–26
 - c) Jehu slays Ahaziah of Judah. 9:27–29
 - d) Jehu slays Jezebel, fulfilling Elijah’s word. 9:28–37
 - e) Jehu slays Ahab’s sons, fulfilling Elijah’s word. 10:1–11
 - f) Jehu slays Ahaziah’s brothers. 10:12–14
 - g) Jehu slays the remainder of Ahab’s family, according to Yahweh’s word by Elijah. 10:15–17
 - h) Jehu slays all the worshippers of Baal. 10:18–28
 - i) Jehu concludes his reign as Yahweh’s sword. 10:29–36
 - i) He continues in the sins of Jeroboam, yet receives four generations of heirs. 10:29–31
 - ii) Israel begins to lose territory. 10:32–33
 - iii) Jehu dies and is buried in Samaria. 10:34–36
 - 8) Athaliah unsuccessfully seeks to replace the dynasty of David. 11:1–21
 - a) Ahaziah’s sons are killed except for Joash. 11:1–3

- b) Joash is concealed and made king. 11:4–12
 - c) Athaliah is executed and Baal worship halted. 11:13–21
 - 9) Joash (Jehoash) reigns righteously in Judah. 12:1–21
 - a) He repairs the temple. 12:1–16
 - b) He takes treasure from the temple for tribute. 12:17–18
 - c) He is assassinated. 12:19–21
 - 10) Jehoahaz wickedly reigns in Israel. 13:1–9
 - 11) Joash (Jehoash) wickedly reigns in Israel. 13:10–13
 - d. Elisha completes his work as prophet and dies. 13:14–25
 - 1) He empowers Joash against Syria. 13:14–19
 - 2) His dead body imparts life. 13:20–21
 - 3) His word regarding Joash and Syria is fulfilled. 13:22–25
- C. The northern kingdom goes into captivity as Yahweh's judgment for its unrepentant unfaithfulness as His people. 14:1—17:41
 - 1. Amaziah reigns righteously, yet foolishly, in Judah. 14:1–21
 - a. He acted like David and avenged his father by Torah. 14:1–6
 - b. He waged a foolish war against Jehoash of Israel and subjected Jerusalem and the temple to abuse. 14:7–14
 - c. Jehoash dies and is buried in Samaria. 14:15–16
 - d. Amaziah dies and is buried in Jerusalem. 14:17–22
 - 2. Jeroboam reigns wickedly in Israel, yet restores its territory. 14:23–29
 - 3. Azariah reigns righteously over Judah. 15:1–7
 - 4. Zechariah reigns wickedly over Israel. 15:8–12
 - 5. Shallum reigns for one month in Samaria. 15:13–16
 - 6. Menahem reigns wickedly over Israel, paying tribute to the Assyrian Pul. 15:17–22
 - 7. Pekahiah reigns wickedly over Israel. 15:23–26
 - 8. Pekah reigns wickedly over Israel and is assaulted by the Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser (Pul). 15:27–31
 - 9. Jotham reigns righteously over Judah, which begins to experience trouble with Rezin of Syria and Pekah. 15:32–38
 - 10. Ahaz reigns wickedly over Judah. 16:1–20
 - a. He practices the abominations of the kings of Israel. 16:1–4
 - b. He experiences trouble with Syria and Israel. 16:5–6
 - c. He allies himself with Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria and renders him tribute from the temple. 16:7–9
 - d. He establishes a pagan altar and worship in the temple. 16:10–18
 - e. He dies and is buried in the City of David. 16:19–20
 - 11. Hoshea reigns less wickedly in Israel; becoming a vassal of Shalmaneser of Assyria and later rebelling he is imprisoned. 17:1–4
 - 12. Israel is besieged by Assyria for three years and taken into captivity. 17:5–41
 - a. The facts of the captivity are stated: Israel is carried to Assyria. 17:5–6

- b. The reasons for the captivity are enumerated: Israel had continually and unrepentantly violated their covenant relationship with Yahweh. 17:7–23
 - c. The resettlement of Samaria by Assyria is described. 17:24–41
 - 1) They are judged for not fearing Yahweh. 17:24–28
 - 2) They continued to mix the fear of Yahweh with paganism. 17:29–41
- III. Southern kingdom: Yahweh’s ultimate hope for His covenant nation is indicated and illustrated in judgment and restoration. 18:1—25:30
- A. Judah fails to repent. 18:1—23:37
 - 1. Hezekiah reigns righteously over Judah in every way. 18:1—20:21
 - a. He removed false practices and objects from Judah’s worship and followed Yahweh whole-heartedly. 18:1–8
 - b. He averts the Assyrian threat by faith. 18:9—19:37
 - 1) He pays tribute to Sennacherib from the temple. 18:9–16
 - 2) He is threatened by Sennacherib at the Jerusalem. 18:17–37
 - 3) He is assured of deliverance by the prophet Isaiah. 19:1–7
 - 4) He prays to Yahweh for deliverance. 19:8–19
 - 5) He is assured of Yahweh’s answer by Isaiah. 19:20–34
 - 6) He is delivered from Sennacherib’s threat. 19:35–37
 - c. He stumbles through pride in his possessions. 20:1–19
 - 1) Yahweh extends his life in answer to prayer. 20:1–11
 - 2) Hezekiah errors by showing off his possessions. 20:12–19
 - d. He rested with his fathers. 20:20–21
 - 2. Manasseh reigns wickedly over Judah. 21:1–18
 - a. Manasseh restored all the evil and idolatrous practices of all the kings of Israel before him. 21:1–9
 - b. Prophets of Yahweh predicted destruction on Judah for its sins under Manasseh. 21:10–16
 - c. Manasseh rested with his fathers. 21:17–18
 - 3. Amon reigns wickedly over Judah like Manasseh his father. 21:19–26
 - 4. Josiah reigns righteously over Judah, seeking to re-establish true worship of Yahweh. 22:1—23:30
 - a. Josiah’s reign is characterized as being like David’s. 22:1–2
 - b. Josiah grieves over Judah’s sin upon reading the recently discovered Book of the Law. 22:3–20
 - c. Josiah restores true worship in Judah; cleansing of everything offensive and observing Passover. 23:1–25
 - d. Yahweh refuses to turn from His intended judgment. 23:26–27
 - e. Josiah is killed contending with Pharaoh Neco. 23:28–30
 - 5. Jehoahaz reigns wickedly over Judah and is imprisoned by Pharaoh Neco. 23:31–34
 - 6. Jehoiakim (Eliakim) reigns wickedly, paying tribute to Neco. 23:35–37

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| B. | Judah goes into captivity. | 24:1—25:26 |
| 1. | Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon makes Jehoiakim his vassal. | 24:1–7 |
| 2. | Jehoiachin reigns wickedly in Jerusalem and is carried captive to Babylon with others and treasure from the temple. | 24:8–16 |
| 3. | Zedekiah (Mattaniah) reigns wickedly in Jerusalem and rebels against Babylon. | 24:17–20 |
| 4. | Nebuchadnezzar besieges and destroys Jerusalem and the temple, taking captives and spoil to Babylon. | 25:1–21 |
| 5. | Gedaliah is made governor of Judah but is assassinated. | 25:22–26 |
| C. | Jehoiachin is released from prison and honored in Babylon. | 25:27–30 |

Argument

I. Solomon's kingdom: Yahweh's presence to bless is powerfully manifested and tragically repudiated by David's son, Solomon (1:1—11:43).

The monarchy had been established in Saul (1 Samuel) and had been guaranteed in David by means of covenant (2 Samuel 7). David had become the paradigmatic king and yet had not brought Israel into the fullness of its inheritance. Kings records the downward plunge from the greatness of the kingdom under David and his son Solomon. It is an account of the outworking of Yahweh's covenant arrangement with His people (cf. Deut 28). This section about Solomon displays Yahweh's blessing as a positive response to His anointed's righteous response to Torah. It also reveals his judgment for disobedience to the same. In this manner the two opposite courses of the monarchy are set forth in one person, who dramatically exemplifies both.

Solomon's reign is established on the basis of the Lord's dealings with his father David and not his own devices. King David, supported by Nathan the prophet, makes sure that God's choice receives the throne rather than the usurper Adonijah (1:1–27). In this way Yahweh's sovereignty is established as the operative factor in the progress of the monarchy, as defined by the Davidic Covenant and interpreted and facilitated

by His messengers the prophets. David makes it clear to his son Solomon that the success of his kingdom depended on his sincere obedience to the Law of Moses (2:1–4). This statement sets the standard by which each king will be judged. The whole of the account of Solomon’s reign will look back to this standard both positively and negatively.

First, the writer details Solomon’s faith and obedience, and the resulting blessing (3:1—10:29). Yet even in this positive section the seeds of failure are hinted at; the monarch provides for his foreign wife and worships at the high places (3:1–3). Solomon pleases the Lord by asking for wisdom to rule His people, which Yahweh is delighted to grant him (3:4–28). As further indication of obedience he also receives both riches and honor (3:13). Solomon proves to be an able leader and enjoys a peaceful reign over a vast realm (4:1–34). Emphasized above all is his building of the temple according to God’s instructions through David (5:1—8:66). The purpose for Yahweh’s blessing upon His special people was so that the rest of the nations might see what a great God dwelt among them. The central sanctuary was critical to revealing the nature of Israel’s God. With the aid of his father’s friend Hiram of Tyre, Solomon completes the temple in seven years (though he spent thirteen years on his own house—5:1—7:51). When the priests deposit the Ark of the Covenant in the newly completed structure Yahweh’s Shekinah fills it, thus indicating His presence (8:1–13). Next, Solomon dedicates the temple, reciting the basic tenets of the Davidic and Mosaic Covenants, again indicating the basis upon which God would deal with people and king from that point forward. He praises Yahweh for remembering His promises to David to make a house (dynasty) for him as well as build a house (temple) for Himself through David’s son (8:14–21). He then prays for Yahweh to fulfill the Davidic promises by providing an heir to sit on

David's throne (8:22–26). He pleads with Yahweh to restore the people when they fall away and then repent, anticipating the actual history that lay ahead (8:27–53). Finally, Solomon blesses the people, wishing for them a heart to be loyal to Yahweh their God (8:54–61). Though this prayer seemed to fail utterly over the next four hundred years, one day it will be answered, when the Son of David finally leads Israel into a perfect and lasting obedience. The dedication is completed with appropriate sacrifices (8:62–66) upon which Yahweh appears a second time to Solomon exhorting him to a life of faithfulness and integrity, promising blessing if he obeys the covenant and cursing if he disobeys (9:1–9). This was to serve as an encouragement and warning not only to Solomon but also to the whole line of royal heirs (cf. 9:6–9).

A summary of Solomon's international stature and reputation follows, though it is not all positive as witnessed by Hiram's displeasure with a gift of cities (9:10–14). Perhaps this introduces the idea that not all was right about Solomon's success. Yahweh had intended for the nations to be impressed with His blessing of the nation of Israel so that they might know Him as their own God. The queen of Sheba's visit demonstrates that this was the effect under Solomon's reign (though there is no indication of her belief—10:1–13). However there is also the undercurrent of disobedience and unbelief in this section (cf. 9:24). In fact the final word on Solomon's reign is that he violated all three prohibitions given through Moses for the king in that he multiplied riches, horses and wives (10:14—11:3; cf. Deut 17:16–17).⁶

Like David, Solomon had manifested aspects of the ideal king in that he ruled with supernatural wisdom. However, again like David, the seeds of failure were present.

⁶ Note that even his gift of wisdom became a source of income (10:24–25).

Though David's failure did not involve spiritual unfaithfulness, Solomon's did. His foreign wives, whom the king was not to multiply, turned his heart to the worst kinds of paganism (11:4–8). As a result Yahweh judges him. Personally, he is plagued with adversaries (11:14–40). Dynastically, he is told that the kingdom will be stripped from his son, but not entirely because of Yahweh's covenant with David (11:9–13). Thus ends the greatest and yet most tragic reign of any of Israel's kings. Obedience brings blessing and disobedience cursing.

II. The Divided kingdom: Yahweh's righteous standards for his appointed rulers are grievously violated and severely judged. (1 Kings 12:1—2 Kings 17:41).

Solomon represents both the high and low points of the monarchy. He ruled a vast kingdom at peace and enjoyed the privilege of being Yahweh's showpiece to the nations. However, at the end of his life he fell into abject paganism, thus sewing the seeds for Israel's ultimate demise. The rest of Kings traces out that demise through the Assyrian and into the Babylonian captivities, all the while making sure to communicate that God's judgment resulted from the cumulative failure of the nation and its kings. Since the northern kingdom, Israel, most exemplifies departure from the covenant, they are the central focus of the book of Kings (whereas Chronicles deals almost exclusively with Judah). Though all of the kings of both north and south are listed and, at least briefly, commented upon, it is the north that comes in for the greatest treatment as it gave itself to false religion and Baalism.

A. The rulers of Israel establish their kingdom upon false religion (12:1—16:34).

Just as David's kingship became the positive paradigm for all future kings of Israel (in north and south), so Jeroboam becomes the negative paradigm with whom all wicked kings would be compared. Though he received the ten tribes of the north according to Yahweh's sovereign purpose (12:1–24; cf. 11:29–37) he did not honor Him in worship. Though the Lord had told him that his house would continue if he kept covenant (11:38), Jeroboam set about securing his kingdom by severing Israel's affections from Jerusalem through the establishment of a competing religious system, complete with its own gods, priests, feasts, and central sanctuary (12:25–33). Despite prophetic warning (13:1–9) and a dramatic illustration of the consequences of disobeying Yahweh (13:11–32) Jeroboam "did not turn from his evil way" thus sealing the ultimate fate of the northern kingdom (13:33–34). The direct consequence for his house was the immediate death of his son Abijah according to prophecy and the guarantee that his dynasty would end immediately (14:1–18).

The pattern of moving back and forth between reigns of the northern and southern kings is begun at this point. The writer follows through successive regencies in one realm until it passes the ascension of a king in the other and then carries through with the ascensions in that realm until another change in its counterpart. Each change is dated with respect to the year of the king in the other kingdom. Since there were variations in how reigns were dated between the two realms, and because there were other changes that took place over time, the resulting chronological scheme is quite complex and, to this

point, without a solution upon which all can agree.⁷ Structurally, this device is intended to show that there is a progression toward the dissolution of both kingdoms and that the two kingdoms were interrelated in this march toward destruction.

According to this chronological scheme Rehoboam's reign in Judah is summarily evaluated and found wanting (14:21–31). Solomon's seeds have sprouted and are beginning to flourish (cf. 14:23–24). The temple is abused by a foreign power (Egypt), thus suggesting a pattern for the rest of the narrative. The reigns of the Judahite kings Abijam (15:1–8) and Asa (15:9–24) are treated briefly. The former rules wickedly, yet receives a promise that David will always have a lamp, that is, an heir, because of his faithfulness. Though Asa was loyal to Yahweh, he errs in securing the aid of Ben-Hadad of Syria with treasure from the temple. This will be true of the rest of the history of the southern kingdom; the evil kings will not be bad enough to nullify Yahweh's covenant promises and the good kings will not be good enough to see the promises completely realized.

The next four kings in the north serve to demonstrate the reliability of Yahweh's word to Jeroboam concerning the continuance of a king's dynasty depending upon his adherence to Torah (cf. 11:38). Nadab is assassinated, thus ending the dynasty of Jeroboam (15:25–32). Baasha fails (15:33—16:7) and has his house cut short through the assassination of his son Elah by Zimri (16:8–14). Zimri destroys himself after a brief reign (16:15–20) clearing the way for the Omride dynasty. Though this dynasty lasted three generations (Omri, Ahab, and Jehoram) and considerably longer than the first three (over forty years) it was not because they were more righteous. In fact under the Omride

⁷ Ibid.

dynasty rebellion against Yahweh reached its pinnacle. Rather, the length of this family's rule allows God to fully and decisively demonstrate, through the prophets Elijah and Elisha, His superiority to Baal.

Though Omri's renown was international⁸, from the standpoint of the biblical historian Omri's main contribution is the transfer of Israel's capital from Tirzah to Samaria, which he himself had built (16:21–27). Samaria became the center of Israel's worship of Baal, established by Omri's son Ahab and his wicked wife, the Sidonian Jezebel (16:29–34). The introduction of Baalism into the narrative sets the background for an extended section centered on the exploits of Elijah, Elisha, and other prophets.

B. The prophets of Yahweh demonstrate that He alone is history's sovereign and the one who is present to restore and sustain (17:1—2 Kings 13:21).

The structuring of this material makes it clear that the central issue is Yahweh's conflict with, and resulting supremacy over, the Canaanite deity Baal.⁹ Elijah and Elisha are clearly the two central figures representing Yahweh's servants, the prophets. However, there are a number of other prophets involved in this critical conflict, a conflict that occupies the emphasized center of Kings.¹⁰ This conflict is not fully resolved until Elisha passes from the scene and so there are a number of notices of kings' reigns interspersed, especially toward the end.

In the first half of the section a number of prophets, with Elijah leading the way as the "master," demonstrate that Yahweh, not Baal, is the one who governs the

⁸ See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 339-40.

⁹ See Leah Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha: As Polemics Against Baal Worship* (Leiden: Brill, 1968).

¹⁰ See Dorsey, *Literary Structure*, 137-44.

nations and works His sovereign will on the earth (1 Kings 17:1—2 Kings 1:18). Rather than building up to an all out confrontation with Baalism, the conclusive demonstration of Yahweh's preeminence takes place right at the beginning as Elijah challenges Ahab and his pagan diviners over the matter of Yahweh's proclaimed drought (17:1—18:46). Though Baal is "rendered impotent" in the matter, Ahab and Jezebel refuse to repent and bow to Yahweh (19:1–2). When Elijah sees this he sinks into despair over the disappointment of failing to renew the northern monarch to the worship of the Lord (19:3–10).¹¹ This response no doubt mirrored God's heart for His wayward people and anticipated Jesus Christ's similar feelings over Israel's failure to respond to His own message of repentance.¹² God's solution to Elijah's despondency is to recommission him to service and assure him that not all have bowed to Baal (19:11–18), and to provide him with a servant who will carry on his ministry (19:19–20).

Since repentance was not forthcoming from Ahab and Jezebel then judgment would be. Hence, Elijah and the prophets direct Yahweh's recompense to Ahab for his callous rebellion (1 Kings 20:1—2 Kings 1:18). Interestingly enough, Ahab is not immediately judged. Instead Yahweh delivers Ben-Hadad of Syria into his hand twice (20:1–30). But instead of submitting to Yahweh in His governance of the nations Ahab makes a treaty with the heathen king (20:31–34) thus incurring a definitive pronouncement of judgment through one of the prophets (20:35–43). The wickedness in the matter of Naboth's vineyard seals Jezebel under the same condemnation (21:1–26). Ahab's

¹¹ For a conclusive argument that Elijah was disappointed not fearful see Ronald Barclay Allen, "Elijah the Broken Prophet," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 no. 3 (September 1979): 193-203.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 201-2 and Isaiah 49:4.

repentance only forestalls the calamity on his house (21:27–29), Micaiah ben Imlah being assigned to announce the manner of his demise (22:1–40). By contrast Jehoshaphat had exercised an enlightened rule of righteousness in Judah (22:41–50). However, for all the manifestation of Yahweh’s sovereign goodness that Ahaziah had witnessed he still followed his father Ahab in worshipping Baal and dies without an heir (1 Kings 22:51—2 Kings 1:18).

Though Elijah becomes the proto-typical prophet, in many ways Elisha’s ministry is much more complex and involved. It is clear that Elisha carries on Yahweh’s confrontation with the rampant Baalism of the north, his last major work being the direction of Jehu in the destruction of Ahab’s house for his worship of Baal. This forms an *inclusio* with Elijah’s defeat of the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel. However, Elisha carries on a much more extensive miracle-working ministry than Elijah, especially with regard to personal, life-giving and life-sustaining works. This serves to show that, whereas Yahweh was present to judge individuals, houses, and nations for their repudiation of His rule, He was also present in mercy and grace to individuals both within and outside of the nations of Israel and Judah.

Upon inheriting the role of leader of the prophets (the significance of receiving a double portion of his master’s spirit—2:9) Elisha performs a miracle of restoration (the healing of bad water—2:19–22) and pronounces a curse against some who were repudiating Yahweh’s manifestation through his predecessor Elijah (2:23–25). These are the two main types of ministry that he would engage himself in for the remainder of his life. Jehoram’s partial repentance indicates that the prophets were not completely ineffectual in their confrontation with Israel’s waywardness (3:1–3). In fact the southern

kingdom, Judah, had not yet fallen away, as the next incident shows. Jehoshaphat of Judah is respected by Elisha who grants the three-nation coalition of Israel, Judah, and Edom success against Moab (3:4–27). Yahweh often blesses the wicked through their association with the righteous. The subsequent series of miracles all contain some aspect of this concept of blessing through association with those who honor God (4:1—6:7), including non-Israelites like the Shunammite woman and Naaman, a leprous Syrian commander. There are also polemic aspects with respect to Baalism.¹³ The sum effect of this series of miracles is to demonstrate that Yahweh is the giver and sustainer of life for those who come to him in faith, whether Jew or Gentile.

Elisha also acts as a prophetic agent of judgment (6:8—13:25). Though he is not involved in every incident in this section, the fact that his ministry brackets the whole indicates that Yahweh's administrative presence on earth is being carried forward in significant ways through His prophets, especially in view of the increasing apostasy of the monarchy. Through Elisha Yahweh continues to work with Samaria toward a genuine recognition of His sovereignty and grace. Israel is repeatedly delivered from the Syrians (6:8—7:20) and yet there is no repentance (therefore the sending of a famine—8:1–6). In fact the kings of Judah begin to emulate the north, as indicated by the evaluation of Joram, Jehoshaphat's son, who had married into the house of Omri (8:16–24). However, unlike the situation in the north, David's dynasty would not be deposed; Yahweh is faithful to the covenant (8:19). This situation continues with Ahaziah who was related to the house of Ahab by birth and marriage (8:25–29). So serious was the encroachment of Baalism, that Yahweh directed Elisha to have Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat of Judah,

¹³ Cf. Bronner, *Stories of Elijah and Elisha*.

anointed as the next king of Israel (9:1–3). Jehu will become the sword of Yahweh to strike down the house of Ahab and Jezebel for its killing of the prophets and servants of the Lord (9:1–10). Jehu accepts his role with enthusiasm and puts an end to the house of Ahab (killing as well Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah in the process), thus fulfilling Yahweh’s word through Elijah (9:11—10:17). Jehu “destroyed Baal from Israel” but unfortunately did not restore the worship of Yahweh (10:18–31). Instead he resorted to Jeroboam’s false religion (10:29–31), which resulted in Yahweh’s beginning to lop off parts of Israel’s territory (10:32–33).

Jehu’s dynastic purge in the north was mirrored by a similar crisis in Judah. Upon the death of Ahaziah and all his brothers, his mother Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, decided that it was time for a new dynasty in the south and set about destroying all the potential heirs of the Davidic line (11:1–3). However, since God’s covenant with David could not allow this, one baby, Joash, was providentially saved and hidden for six years and then installed as king under the supervision of Jehoiada the priest, Athaliah being executed for treason in the process (11:4–21). Thus, the house of David was preserved, not because the kings of Judah were more righteous but because Yahweh had made a covenant with His servant David. Under Jehoiada Joash ruled well, giving special attention to the repair of the temple, though eventually he plundered its treasury to secure Hazael of Syria’s favor (12:1–18).

As the chronological narrative passes back to Israel, it is stated that the next two sons of Jehu to rule over the northern kingdom continued in the sins of Jeroboam, that is in the pursuit of the false cult of Samaria (13:1–13). Though God provided relief for both from the threat of Syria, neither properly appreciated it by submitting to Him.

Jehoash's (a.k.a. Joash, Jehoahaz) squandered opportunity to strike Syria once again shows that the kings of the north were woefully deficient in their understanding of Yahweh and His ways and purposes (13:14–25).

C. The northern kingdom goes into captivity as Yahweh's judgment for its unrepentant unfaithfulness as His people (14:1—17:41).

With the passing of Elisha (13:1–21) reference to the ministry of the prophets is almost completely absent until after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. (the sole exception being a passing reference to Jonah's prophecy of restoration of territory within Israel—14:25). The pace quickens as the narrative plunges inexorably toward the Assyrian destruction and captivity. It is as if to say "Yahweh has done all that He can to renew Israel to repentance and thus save them from judgment; let judgment come."

This section leads off with the unfortunate war between Amaziah of Judah and Jehoash of Israel who defeats his presumptuous neighbor, breaks into Jerusalem, and plunders the temple (14:1–14). Jeroboam II reigns in Israel, perpetuating the sins of his namesake while at the same time restoring lost territory due to Yahweh's compassion for His hapless people (14:23–29). He is the last king of the north to reign for any significant length of time. The lengthy reign of Azariah (Uzziah) in Judah (52 years—15:1–7) highlights the instability of the north as Zechariah rules six months (15:8–12) and Shallum only one month (15:13–16). At this point (743 B.C.) the Assyrian incursions begin under Pul (Tiglath-Pileser III), during the reign of Menahem, resulting in the payment of tribute (15:17–22). Pekahiah reigns for just two years (15:23–26) followed by Pekah who experiences the invasion of Assyria in earnest and the first deportation of citizens from its northern territories (15:27–31). The reigns of Jotham and Ahaz of Judah

are interjected according to the chronological scheme at this point. Jotham ruled well, though he did not remove the high places, a common fault of the southern monarchy (15:32–38). Ahaz’s rule, by contrast, was particularly evil. Not only did he participate in idolatry at the high places, he also resorted to a self-serving alliance with Assyria and copied a pagan altar from Damascus for use in the house of Yahweh, further undermining in a serious way true worship in Jerusalem (16:1–20). From one standpoint Judah well deserved to go into captivity at this time. However, Yahweh’s patience was not yet at an end with the kingdom of the house of David. On the other hand, Israel could find no more mercy, even though its last king, Hoshea, was less wicked than those before him (17:1–4).

In the ninth year of Hoshea (722 B.C.) Shalmaneser took Samaria, having besieged it for three years, and “carried Israel away to Assyria” (17:6). The writer offers a detailed summary of the theological reasons for the captivity centering upon their idolatrous rebellion and stubborn refusal to repent at the word of Yahweh’s prophets, noting that Judah had also been affected by Israel’s false religion and adoption of Baalism (17:7–23). As a result the northern tribes were deported, the land resettled, and a perpetual amalgamation of religious traditions, including Yahwism, was established (17:24–41). Though the writer is careful to show that Judah was not innocent in this defection, their judgment would be postponed and would not be so final as Israel’s.

III. Southern kingdom: Yahweh’s ultimate hope for His covenant nation is indicated and illustrated in judgment and restoration (18:1—25:30).

To this point in the narrative the evaluation of Judah’s kings is mostly favorable, though there was often a qualification with respect to the existence of high places in

the land. After Israel's demise, Judah's mix of kings moves in a negative direction. As great as Hezekiah and Josiah were, the reigns of Manasseh, Amon, and the rulers at the end demonstrate that Judah had not solved the problem of leadership. Even when good kings ruled, the people did not necessarily follow their lead spiritually, as is seen in the case of Josiah's short-lived and basically ineffectual reform movement. As a result Judah's fate became that of Israel's with respect to defeat, destruction, and captivity.

A. Judah fails to repent (18:1—23:37).

The narrative has already indicated that Judah had become vulnerable to judgment for the same reason that Israel had gone into captivity (cf. 17:19). God would give the southern kingdom one hundred and thirty-six years to learn and apply the lesson of the judgment of the northern nation. The prophets make this connection explicit (cf. Jer 3:6–10). Hezekiah's righteous reign demonstrated that Yahweh was prepared to be the protector of His people when they honored and obeyed Him by faith (18:1—19:37). Hezekiah ruled well, even removing the high places and other things offensive to Yahweh (cf. 18:4). The explicit statement of his trusting in "the Lord God of Israel" reveals the key to the stability of his reign and Judah's aversion of the Assyrian threat under Sennacherib in 701 B.C. (18:13—19:37). However, even Hezekiah stumbles in his faith. In an apparent display of pride, the king incurs Yahweh's displeasure and a prediction that one day Babylon would own all the royal treasure of Jerusalem (20:1–19). The perfect king had still not arrived.

The evil reign of Manasseh demonstrated that righteousness was not hereditary and that a merely human monarchy would always be subject to abject failure (21:1–18). Amon followed in the footsteps of his wicked father (21:19–26) but then a king arose

who would undertake far-ranging reforms. On the basis of the discovery of the Book of the Law (22:8; called Book of the Covenant in 23:2), Josiah comes to realize just how far Judah had departed from their covenant obligations as Yahweh's special people (22:11–20). The reforms he instituted were dramatic and far-reaching, in both negative and positive ways, in that he sought to eradicate all false religion while re-establishing the true worship of Yahweh (23:1–25). However, even Josiah's reforms could not overturn the Lord's determination to judge Judah for the sins committed under Manasseh (23:26–27). As with Hezekiah, Josiah commits an error in judgment in the realm of world politics and forfeits his life as a result (23:28–30).

B. Judah goes into captivity (24:1—25:26).

The narrative moves swiftly to its conclusion by briefly summarizing the character of each king's reign, but in the context of the cataclysmic events transpiring on the world scene with respect to the Babylonian incursion into Canaan. Jehoahaz is deposed by Pharaoh Neco (23:31–34) and his successor Jehoiakim pays tribute to Egypt (23:35–37). It was during the latter's reign that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon began to afflict Judah and bring it entirely under his control (24:1–7). In 598 B.C. Jehoiachin is taken prisoner along with ten thousand other captives and all the treasures of the temple (24:8–16). Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, is made ruler but does evil and rebels against Babylon, thus bringing down God's wrath in the form of Babylon's destruction of the city and temple in 586 B.C. (24:17–25:21). The detailed description of Jerusalem's fall serves to highlight the tragic consequences of disobedience to Yahweh's covenant.

The last two incidents of the book are designed to summarize the two main points of the entire narrative. The murder of Gedaliah (25:22–26), who had correctly

counseled submission to Babylon, demonstrated that judgment alone was not enough to effect obedience in the lives of the people. A deeper work of grace would be required, something that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were to make plain. The release of Jehoiachin from a Babylonian prison confirmed that Yahweh had not abandoned the house of David and that He was still present to turn misfortune into hope (25:27–30).

Conclusion

The book of Kings was intended to serve as a theological justification for the way that Yahweh had treated His covenant people, Israel. It displays in no uncertain terms the reasons for the dissolution of the united monarchy, so glorious under David and Solomon, and then goes on to indicate why both of the resulting nations had gone into captivity. The reason was that both king and people, with the complicity of the priesthood and a large contingent of false prophets, had grievously violated the Mosaic Covenant as set forth in its first renewal document, the book of Deuteronomy. However, this situation was not without hope. Since the Abrahamic covenant was still in force, and new guarantees had been amplified in the Davidic Covenant, the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities were not Yahweh's last word on the matter. Canonically Kings serves as the theological backdrop for this message of hope as developed in the prophets and post-exilic history, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Ezra-Nehemiah.

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