

Introduction

Background

Name: The books of 1st and 2nd Kings were originally one book in the Hebrew bible, named “Kings.” In the 2nd century translation into Greek known as the Septuagint, the books were split and called 3rd & 4th Kings (with 1 & 2 Samuel being named 1st and 2nd Kings).

The name is appropriate as it highlights the spiritual history of the kings of Israel and Judah. However, the book is not just about kings, but also prophets. The Hebrew bible places Kings in the “former prophets,” for this reason. Indeed, every major king in these books has a prophet who serves as the conscience of the king (e.g. Solomon and Nathan, Jeroboam and Adijah, Ahab and Elijah, Hezekiah and Isaiah.)

Author: The author is anonymous. However, the author clearly was concerned about the causes of the demise of Israel and Judah, and may have even been an eyewitness to the events of the Babylonian exile. In addition, the author is written from the perspective of one sympathetic to the ministry of the prophets of the time.

There is strong traditional support for the authorship of Jeremiah. Certainly Jeremiah was an eyewitness to most of the latter events in the book. In addition, Jeremiah, as son of a priest, had access to the priestly and royal records, and was a prophet who was very involved in the history of Judea at the time of its fall¹. His entire ministry proclaimed to the nation the causes of their captivity.

Some scholars have suggested that Ezra wrote the book of Kings after the return of the exiles². This seems less likely as the return would likely have been mentioned in the epilogues of chapter 25. Furthermore, Kings is written from the prophets perspective. Ezra, a priest, more likely wrote Chronicles, which is written from the priests perspective.

Date: The events recorded in the book cover almost five centuries from the reign of Solomon (1000 BC) to the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC).

The book was most likely written sometime during the Babylonian exile, under the reign of the Babylonian emperor, Evil-merodach. This would place the date of the book in the sixth century BC.

¹ Hermann J. Austel. “1 & 2 Kings.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998.)

² Thomas Constable. “Kings.” *Bible Knowledge Commentary*. John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, ed. (Victor Books, 1997). Electronic edition STEP file.

Audience: Most likely the book was written to the Judean in exiles in Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Structure

The books of 1st and 2nd Kings are broken into five major sections:

Reign of Solomon	Kingdom Divides (Jeroboam & Rehoboam)	Reign of Ahab (Elijah & Elisha)	Fall of Israel	Fall of Judah
1	11	12	16	16
			8	9
				17
				18
				25
1 Kings			2 Kings	

The Template

The book of Kings follows a standard formula in the presentation of the various kings. The template is as follows:

1. The date of ascension, given relative to the king in the other kingdom.

In the 37th year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel... (2 Kings 13:10a)
2. Biographical Details
 - a. For the kings of Israel, this includes the length of the reign and the king's capitol city.

...in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years (2 Kings 13:10b).
 - b. For the kings of Judah, this includes the age at which he became king, the length of the reign and the name of the kings mother.

He was 16 years old when he became king, and he reigned 52 years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem (2 Kings 15:2)
3. Assessment of the king's spiritual leadership.
 - a. For the kings of Israel, this usually includes a reference back to the sin of Jeroboam.

He did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not turn away from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel sin, but he walked in them (2 Kings 13:11)
 - b. For the kings of Judah, the assessment often referred back to David or to a previous king.

Asa did what was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father (1 Kings 15:11a)

...he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, as his father David had done (2 Kings 16:2b)
4. Record of significant events. Sometimes these events are very brief. Other times these events take several chapters.

Now the rest of the acts of Joash and all that he did and his might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah... (2 Kings 13:12a)

5. Reference source for additional information:

...are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? (2 Kings 13:12b)

6. Death and burial facts:

So Joash slept with his fathers... and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel (2 Kings 13:13).

The key element of the template is the spiritual assessment. The kings are judged not on their military success or the length of their reign, but on whether or not they did right in the sight of the Lord. For the kings of Judah, this standard is found in King David.

Two kings transcend the normal spiritual assessment and rise above the kings that came before them: King Ahab of Israel and King Hezekiah of Judah. These two kings serve as a stark contrast. Ahab was more evil “than all who were before him (1 Kings 16:30),” while Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, “so that after him there was none like him among the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him (2 Kings 18:5).”

Purpose

The books of Kings provide a history of Israel and Judah from its apex under King Solomon to its eventual demise at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians. However, this merely a history, but an exploration of the spiritual decline of the nations under their kings. The author has written this history to demonstrate that the exile is a result of kings who did “evil in the sight of the Lord.”

Assuming that the book was written by Jeremiah or a contemporary of Jeremiah to the people in exile, then the purpose of the book would be to explain to the exiles the causes of their captivity and to encourage them to return to the Lord in anticipation of the end of the exile (1 Kings 8:46-50).

A final purpose is to reaffirm that Yahweh is the only true God, and that the god and goddess of Israel and Judah’s neighbors are false gods not worthy of worship. We see this affirmation proclaimed by Solomon at the dedication to the temple, proven by Elijah at the battle at Mount Carmel, and affirmed by Naaman the Aramean leper after he is cleansed.

Theme

1. Those who reject the Lord will lose the blessing of the Lord and face the consequences of their sin.

The sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them until the LORD removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke through all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day (2 Kings 17:22-23 NASB)

2. There is no God but Yahweh, the God of Israel.

O Yahweh, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or the earth beneath. (1 Kings 8:23)

Reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 1-11)

The Rise of Solomon (1 Kings 1-2)

David's Last Days (1 Kings 1)

The Arrogance of Adonijah

The book of 1 Kings begins in the last days of King David's life. He is so old that he can not stay warm. So David's servants seek out a beautiful virgin to be his nursemaid and keep him warm. David does not have relations with Abishag the Shunammite girl, but her relationship with the king will become important later in the narrative.

David is at his deathbed, and everyone knows it. After consulting with Joab, David's general, and Abiathar the priest, David's eldest living son, Adonijah, decides to assume the throne before his father's death. Adonijah "exalts himself" (1 Kings 1:5) with a parade through the city and by offering sacrifices. Unlike his father, David, Adonijah is making an arrogant grab for power which will result in his downfall (1 Samuel 2:3).

Anointing of Solomon

Adonijah, however, has not consulted with Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, nor Benaiah and David's other *mighty men*. Nathan approaches Bathsheba and asks her to go to David and tell him of Adonaji's plot to take the throne. Evidently Nathan and Bathsheba knew that David had intended for Solomon, Bathsheba's son, to succeed him, but had not taken steps to ensure that this would happen.

When David learns of Adonaji's plot, he calls Zadok and Nathan and tells them to anoint Solomon as the king and to parade him around Jerusalem on David's own donkey, led with a trumpet and the shouts of "Long live King Solomon."

In Israel, the rule of the nation was divided among three offices: the king, the priest, and the prophet. Here all three have come together to ensure the succession of Solomon. The prophet, priest and king were the "check-and-balance" of the governance to ensure that no one group gained too much power.

When Adonijah and his followers learn that David had made Solomon the king, they become concerned for their lives. Adonijah goes to Solomon and begs for his life, which is granted to him on the condition that "no wickedness is found in him."

Solomon Consolidates His Power (1 Kings 2)

David's Last Instructions

As David is about to die, he calls for Solomon to give him some last words.

First, David calls on Solomon to walk in the way of the Lord and to keep the Law. He reminds his son that if he obeys the Lord, that the throne will remain with him and his sons. David is reminding Solomon of the Davidic covenant that the Lord had made with him in 2 Samuel 7. This is a reiteration of the theme of the book of Kings, that if the king disobeys God, there will be consequences for the nation.

Secondly, David tells Solomon to kill his enemies. Namely, Solomon is to kill Joab, not because he sided with Adonijah, but because in 2 Samuel 4, Joab murdered Abner in cold blood. Furthermore, Solomon is to kill Shimei the Benjamite for having cursed David. David had promised not to kill Shimei at the time, but now Solomon could bring judgment for having cursed the Lord's anointed.

Then David died, having reigned 40 years over Judah and 33 years over the rest of Israel.

Death of Adonijah

After David's death, Adonijah came to Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, and asked her to request that Solomon give Abishag the Shunammite as his wife. Bathsheba took the request to Solomon, who became enraged at the request.

When Absalom slept with David's concubines (2 Samuel 16:21) it was a statement that he was now the king. It seems to take the king's concubines is a way to proclaim that you have inherited the king's authority. As such, David sees Adonijah's request for Abishag as an attempt to undermine Solomon's authority as king.

Solomon therefore kills Adonijah for his act of rebellion. In addition, Solomon has Benaiah kill Joab and Shimei, as per the wishes of his father. As a result of these deaths, Solomon has removed all the threats to his throne.

Thus the kingdom was established in the hands of Solomon. (1 Kings 2:46b)

The Greatness of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 3-4)

The Vision and Request of Solomon (1 Kings 3:3-15)

Solomon began his reign, following in the footsteps of his father David. He loved the Lord and obeyed His law. However, Solomon did sacrifice to God in the high places, which was inappropriate, for all sacrifices were to take place at the tabernacle. Nonetheless, while offering a sacrifice at the high places, God appears to him in a dream, and offers to Solomon to grant him whatever he desired.

Solomon responded first by praising God for his lovingkindness to David. He then asks that God would grant him wisdom so that he could be just and fair judge of God's chosen people.

Solomon could have asked for long life or wealth or the death of his enemies. But because Solomon selflessly requested the wisdom necessary to be a righteous judge, God granted him his request for wisdom, and also promised him that he would have wealth and fame. God then reiterates the theme of the book by telling Solomon that if he keeps the commandments of the Lord he would also have the blessing of long life.

Demonstration of Solomon's Wisdom (1 Kings 3:16-28)

The narrative then tells of a story which demonstrates that God fulfilled his promise of wisdom to Solomon. Two prostitutes present a custody case regarding a small baby they both claim as their own. Solomon, in his wisdom, says that the baby should be cut in two and half given to each of them. The true mother of the child cries out and relinquishes her claim on the baby rather than see him killed. Solomon thus determines who the true mother is and grants her custody.

Solomon's wisdom is also illustrated by his literary accomplishments: he wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32). Furthermore, he had great knowledge of biology as he could describe the various species of plants and animals (1 Kings 4:33).

The Peace of Solomon

Domestic Peace

Solomon set up a government with deputies in charge of the various bureaus of government (1 Kings 4:1-6). In addition, he set up twelve regional districts, each with a governor to help with the administration of his kingdom (1 Kings 4:7-19). These districts also provided an simple means of taxation to support the tremendous needs of the court (1 Kings 4:20-28). As a result of this administration, Judah and Israel experienced a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity (1 Kings 4:20)

Foreign Peace (1 Kings 4:21-26)

In addition, Israel lived in safety from all its neighboring countries. Israel had expanded geographically from the Euphrates river to Egypt. This territory was controlled through a large standing army with 40,000 chariot horses and 12,000 horsemen.

Finally, Solomon furthered this peace by entering into treaties with neighboring nations and then marrying the daughters of the neighboring kings. He first did this with the Egyptian Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings 3:1), but then continued the practice with Moab, Edom, Ammon, Sidon and the Hittites (1 Kings 11:1). While at first this seemed to be good foreign policy, it would later cause problems for Solomon.

The Wealth of Solomon (1 Kings 10:14-29)

Through this peace, Solomon grew tremendously wealthy. Each year he earned 25-tons of gold from taxation. In addition, Solomon was an arms merchant with a monopoly on chariots and horseman. This trade brought even more wealth to him.

Solomon's throne was made of ivory and overlaid with gold. All his drinking cups were made of pure gold. He imported from Spain all sorts of goods, including apes and peacocks.

Solomon's wealth brought prosperity to all of Israel.

*The king made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamore trees that are in the lowland.
(1 Kings 10:27 NASB)*

The Fame of Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13)

Solomon's wisdom was well known and people from all over the earth would come to hear his wisdom (1 Kings 4:34). Probably the most famous individual to come and hear his wisdom was the Queen of Sheba, who came to see if the stories of his wisdom were true. The queen arrived with quite a "retinue," bringing spices and gold. Solomon was able to answer all her questions and was struck by his words and his wisdom, as well as by his wealth. As a result, she praises Yahweh for the blessings he has granted to Solomon and to Israel.

The Temple of Solomon

Construction of the Temple (1 Kings 5-7)

Solomon's greatest accomplishment was the construction of a temple to Yahweh. Up to this point, the center of the worship of Yahweh was in a tent which had been constructed when the nation was wandering in the desert. King David first brought the tabernacle to Jerusalem, and then intended upon building a permanent temple. But God told David not to build the temple. Now Solomon would fulfill his father's greatest wish and was ready to build the first great temple unto the Lord.

The materials of the temple included, first, cedar wood from the great forests of Lebanon. King Hiram of Tyre provide the cedar, which was floated down the coast and then hauled up to Jerusalem, in exchange for wheat and oil. The temple was built out of great stone blocks which were hewn into perfect fitting blocks at the quarry, so that no noise would be heard at the building site. Finally, the interior of the temple was overlaid in gold paneling.

However, to construct this great temple, Solomon had to draft laborers. It took 30,000 men to go to Lebanon to harvest the cedar. It took 80,000 men to quarry the stone and another 70,000 to transport it to the building site.

After seven years of construction, the temple was complete. It was one of the amazing construction projects of the ancient world. While not particularly large by modern standards, the riches it contained and the detail of its decoration were unmatched.

Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8 - 9)

The Glory of Yahweh

The real glory of the temple, however, is not the gold and cedar, but the presence of the God himself in the temple. Upon the completion of the temple, Solomon gathered all of Israel together for a dedication service. It began with the ark of the Lord being moved by the Levite priests from the tabernacle into the holy of holies and placed beneath the cherubim.

When the ark was placed in the temple, the glory of Yahweh filled the temple, and a great cloud filled the temple so that the priests were unable to remain in the temple. This is exactly what happened upon the completion of the tabernacle in Exodus 40. The glory of God filled the tabernacle such that not even Moses could enter. God's glory had filled both the tabernacle and the temple as a sign of God's pleasure with the people and as a sign that he dwelled among them as his people.

Solomon Addresses the nation

This visual image of the glory of the Lord filling the temple is an important motif throughout the Old Testament, and represents God's presence among the people. Solomon understood this and said,

*The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud.
I have surely built You a lofty house, A place for Your dwelling
forever.*

(1 Kings 8:12-13 NASB)

Solomon then addresses the people, offering a blessing to all of Israel. He also blesses Yahweh, the God of Israel. For when David desired to build a house to the Lord, God responded by instead building David's house as an everlasting royal line. Now Solomon has been able to demonstrate his thanksgiving for the unconditional promises of the Davidic covenant by building the temple his father desired to see.

Solomon's Prayer (1 Kings 8:22-61)

Solomon's Theology

Solomon then offers a very powerful and theologically important prayer to Yahweh in front of all the people. He begins by proclaiming, "there is no God like You," for he is a God of lovingkindness who fulfills his promises. Secondly, Solomon proclaims that, while the temple was built as the dwelling place of God, that Yahweh doesn't live in a temple made by human hands.,

*"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the
highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which
I have built! (1 Kings 8:27 NASB)*

Solomon understands the transcendence of Yahweh, who dwells not in temples. Yet this transcendent God has chosen to bless this people and this family among all those in the world. This is the great paradox of the true God, who is all powerful and yet full of lovingkindness.

The Purpose of the Temple

While Yahweh does not live in the temple, for no temple can contain God, Solomon does ask that Yahweh see the temple as the place where He meets the people of Israel. Solomon asks God to make the temple the physical focus of Israel's worship, such that when they pray there, he might hear them from his true temple in heaven. The temple is to be the focus of Israel's worship, for it is there where the glory of God dwells.

The purpose of the temple is to provide the people a place to meet and pray to God. Therefore, if one sins against his neighbor, he can go to the temple and pray for forgiveness (vs. 31). When Israel is defeated by foreign armies because of their sin, they can come to the temple to repent (vs.33).

When God sends a drought, or pestilence, or plagues of locusts, the nation can come and repent of their sins by making supplication at the temple (vs. 35-40).

Finally, when, because of their sin, Israel is delivered unto an enemy and taken captive far off from the land, the captives are to stop and understand that this is a result of the sin of the nation. They are to repent and return their heart to the Lord and they are to pray facing the promised land, facing Jerusalem, and facing the temple of the Lord. Then the Lord will hear their prayer in heaven, he will forgive them, and he will return them to their land.

All of these take place in the time of the kings. In the days of Elijah, God sends a drought. In the days of Joel, there is a plague of locusts. Finally, in the days of Jeremiah, the people are carried away into captivity because of their sin. Solomon, in his prayer, is calling upon the people to repent of their sins when these punishments come upon them and to set their eyes and their hearts towards Jerusalem and towards this temple, and repent of their sin. The temple is to serve as the focal point of Israel's repentance from their sin.

Through the record of Solomon's prayer, the author of Kings is calling upon the people of exile to repent of their sins, turn their hearts to the Lord, and to pray towards the location of the temple, where the glory of the Lord dwells³.

Proclamation to the Nations

Finally, Solomon concludes his dedicatory prayer by asking Yahweh to bless Israel and to not leave or forsake his people. However, as the theme of Kings reminds us, God will not remain with His people if they disobey his commandments. So, Solomon asks that God "incline our hearts to Himself," (8:58), so that they might obey his commandments and the Lord might remain with them.

Solomon does not ask this merely for the benefit of Israel, but he desires that the entire world might know that Yahweh is God and that there is no other God. The obedience of the nation is of importance not just to Israel, but so that they can serve as the light among the nations and spread the truth of who God is to the whole world.

"May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances... so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else. (1 Kings 8:57-58, 60 NASB)

Fall of Solomon (1 Samuel 11)

The Sin of Solomon

Solomon's prayer of dedication is a beautiful statement of theology and an important call for Israel to follow after the Lord. However, Solomon does not heed his own prayer, and in the end of his life he falls away from the Lord.

It begins with his marriage to foreign women. These marriages themselves are a violation of God's commandments, for the people of Israel are not to marry foreign women. Solomon marries 700 women, along with 300 concubines!

God prohibits marrying foreigners for they will lead the nation astray and towards the worship of other gods. That is exactly what happens to Solomon. In an effort to please his wives, he builds temples to their foreign gods and he offers sacrifices at these temples. Solomon's heart was not fully devoted to Yahweh, his God. His heart was divided between God and his wives and it resulted in idolatry.

³ In the time of the Babylonian captivity, we see evidence that indeed at least some of the captive did indeed pray daily facing Jerusalem (Daniel 6:8).

Result of Solomon's Sin

As a result of Solomon's sin, the Lord tells him that the kingdom would be torn away from his family. However, because of the Davidic covenant, God would not take the entire kingdom away from him. Ten tribes would rebel, but the tribe of Judah would remain with Solomon's son.

So God raises up enemies for Solomon as part of the punishment. Hadad the Edomite, who was exiled in Egypt, now has Pharaoh's favor and comes back to harass Solomon. Rezon, the leader of Aram also began fighting against Israel.

Furthermore, the prophet Ahijah is sent by God to Jeroboam to tell him that he would receive part of the kingdom after the death of Solomon. Jeroboam had been Solomon's head of all the forced laborers. When Solomon learned that Jeroboam had been anointed by the prophet, Solomon then sought to kill Jeroboam, causing Jeroboam to flee to Egypt.

The Kingdom Divides (1 Kings 12-15)

The Reign of Rehoboam

The Foolishness of Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1-24)

Upon the death of King Solomon, his son Rehoboam became king. With the change in king, Israel approached the king to request relief from the heavy taxation and forced labor that Solomon had demanded of the nation. While Solomon had brought great wealth and beautiful temples to the nation, it came at the cost of heavy taxation.

Rehoboam first consulted his father's advisors, who told him that if he granted them relief, he would gain the loyalty of the nation. However, Rehoboam also asked his friends, young men who grew up with him, and they responded that he should not show weakness, but should rule with a firm hand.

'Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.' (1 Kings 12:11 NASB)

The result was that, as Ahijah the prophet had predicted, the ten most northern tribes of Israel rebelled against the house of David, choosing Solomon's chief of forced labor as their king. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained with Rehoboam.

This incident invites the age-old theological question of free will and God's sovereignty. For God had told Solomon that his son would not reign over all the tribes of Israel. Yet it was Rehoboam's own foolish policies which cost him part of the kingdom. Had Rehoboam taken the advice given by his father's advisors, would he have lost Israel, and thereby the prophecy of Ahijah not come true? Just as in all choices of human free will, Rehoboam is responsible for his choices, and he can not blame God for forcing him to make a decision which cost him the kingdom. However, God had already preordained that the kingdom would be taken from the house of David due to the sin of Solomon. Both are true, and thus lives on the paradox of free will and the sovereignty of God.

The Idolatry of Judah

Rehoboam's foolishness did not end with his taxation policies. He also led the nation of Judah into idolatry. Under his reign Judah fell into idolatry and committed atrocities in the high places. As a result, God sent Shishak, the king of Egypt to Jerusalem where he attacked the city and stole some of the treasures found into the palace, including the shields of gold made by Solomon.

The Reign of Jeroboam

The Sin of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-33)

Jeroboam moved his capital to Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim. Because the temple of Yahweh was in Jerusalem, which was still under Rehoboam's control, Jeroboam became concerned that if the people made their regular pilgrimages to the temple, that their loyalty would be turned back to Rehoboam. So, Jeroboam built two temples to Yahweh, one in Bethel and one in Dan.

These were indeed temples to Yahweh. However, this was a corruption of the true worship of the Lord. First, sacrifices to Yahweh were to be made only at the temple. Secondly, Jeroboam set up his own priesthood, and these priests did not come from the tribe of Levi as required by the law. Third, Jeroboam set up statues of golden calves in the temples in Bethel and Dan, stating that these statues represented the God who brought them out of Egypt. This should remind us of the golden calf set up by Aaron in Exodus 32, where Aaron told the children of Israel that the calf represented Yahweh, the God who brought them out of Egypt. This image was clearly a violation of the second commandment not to set up graven images to represent God.

Jeroboam's sin is that he co-opted the worship of the true God for his own purposes. He took the proper worship of God and corrupted it slightly, mixing it with the religion of the surrounding nations.

The Prophecies Against Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:1-14:20)

Because of the corruption of the worship of Yahweh, God sent prophets to tell Jeroboam that the kingdom would be taken from his household. The first prophet, who came from Judah, confronted Jeroboam at the temple in Bethel. As Jeroboam yelled out for the prophet to be seized, his hand was shriveled up. The king became convinced that this was a true prophet of God and asked him to restore his hand, which he did. He also asked him to return home with him and to dine with him, which the prophet did not, for he had been told by the Lord not to.

Another prophet living in Bethel, heard of the incident and sent messengers to the prophet from Judah, asking him to eat with him. He would not, for the Lord told him to return without eating. The prophet from Bethel then lied and told him that he had received a word from the Lord, and that it was okay for him to eat with him. As a result, the Judean prophet ate with him and then was killed by a lion on the way home. This narrative illustrates the corruption in Israel was not just with the priesthood and the king, but with the prophets as well.

A final prophecy came from Ahijah, the same prophet who told Jeroboam that he would become king. Ahijah proclaims that Jeroboam's family would suffer violent deaths as the nation rebelled against them. Furthermore, Ahijah prophesies that the nation of Israel would be exiled to a land across the Euphrates due to their idolatry. This is referring to the Assyrian captivity which would take place three centuries hence.

Reign of King Ahab (1 Kings 16- 2 Kings 8)

Ahab's Rule

The Rise of Omri's Dynasty (1 Kings 16:25-28)

Ahijah's prophecy comes true, and Jeroboam's son, Nadab is assassinated by Baasha, who becomes king. Baasha slaughters all the household of Jeroboam. However, Baasha was no better than Jeroboam, so the prophet Jehu declared to Baasha that his family would also lose the kingdom. Baasha was also assassinated and there was a period where a number of people vied for the throne.

Finally, Omri, the commander of the army, was able to consolidate his power by defeating his enemies. Omri built the city of Samaria, which then became the capitol of Israel going forward. After the death of Omri, who reigned for 12 years, his son Ahab became king.

The Sins of Ahab (1 Kings 16:29-33)

Up to this point, each of the kings of Israel is said to have done evil in the sight of the Lord, having walked in the sins of Jeroboam. But with Ahab, the text deviates from this standard assessment, and states that Ahab was more evil than all the kings which came before him. Ahab did not just follow after the corrupted worship of Yahweh, but he promoted the worship of Baal in place of the worship of Yahweh.

It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. (1 Kings 16:31-32 NASB)

Baal was the ancient Canaanite god of fertility. The fertility of the land, however, depended not upon the loyalty of the people to Baal, nor the keeping some moral law. Instead, Baal worshippers would practice sexual rites and temple prostitution in the hopes that these actions would excite Baal and he would then engage in sexual relations with his consort, the goddess Asherah. When Baal engaged in sexual relations with Asherah, the earth gave forth a bountiful harvest.

The sexual nature of this cult made it particularly evil in God's sight, for it violated those basic moral and ethic underpinnings of Judaism and attacked the boundaries of familial relationships.⁴ But more than that, the worship of Baal was an attempt to manipulate the gods to the will of the people. However the worship of Yahweh is not an attempt to mold Him to our will, but to conform ourselves to His will⁵.

The Ministry of Elijah

Prediction of Drought (1 Kings 17:1)

Because of the extreme evil of King Ahab, God raised up one of the greatest prophets in the history of Israel. In the beginning of chapter 17 we are introduced to Elijah the Tishbite who proclaims to Ahab that Yahweh, the God of Israel would cause no rain to fall on Israel.

This was a direct insult to the god Baal. First, Ahab was trying to establish Baal as the god of Israel, and by declaring Yahweh as the God of Israel, Elijah was rejecting Ahab's religious agenda. Secondly, Baal was the god of fertility, in control of the bounty of the crops and the fertility of the animals. By preventing rain from falling, Elijah was demonstrating that it was Yahweh, not Baal who controlled the harvest and the fertility of the land.

Elijah's Protection (1 Kings 17:2-24)

Needless to say, this angered Ahab. So, Elijah fled and camped out by the brook Cherith east of the Jordan. There God provided water from the brook and food from ravens. After awhile the brook dried up, so God sent Elijah to Sidon, where he stayed with the widow of Zerphath. In exchange for her hospitality, God provided that her bowl of flour was always full and her jar of oil never became empty.

While staying with the widow, her son became sick and died. Elijah took her son, prayed to the Lord, and the son was revived. Upon seeing this profound miracle, the widow said, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth. (1 Kings 17:24).

⁴ Bullock, 23.

⁵ J.A. Moyer. "Old Testament History." *Expositors Bible Commentary*. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, ed. Victor Books, 1985. Electronic Edition STEP files.

Confrontation with the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18)

After three years of drought, God told Elijah to reveal himself to Ahab. So Elijah appeared to Obadiah. Obadiah was head of the king's household, and was a follower of Yahweh. Obadiah, in fact, had hid over 100 prophets of God when Ahab's wife, Jezebel had called for the death of all the prophets of Yahweh. When Elijah appeared to Obadiah, he became understandably afraid, because Ahab had been seeking Elijah to kill him for years. But Elijah assures Obadiah that he will be safe and that he wants to speak to the king.

Elijah met with Ahab and challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest. This contest would once and for all determine who would be the God of Israel: Yahweh or Baal. Elijah would meet with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel to see which god would respond.

So all of Israel came to Mount Carmel to witness the contest. Each would set up an altar and offer a sacrifice. However, the prophet would not light the fire under the sacrifice, but would pray and ask their god to provide the fire.

The prophets of Baal went first. After placing the animal on the altar, the prophets went through their rituals, praying, dancing around the altar, and cutting themselves. But Baal does not respond. Elijah ridicules the prophets, taunting them to shout louder for maybe Baal has gone on vacation or is asleep, or is busy going to the bathroom. But Baal never responds.

Then it is Elijah's turn. He asks that the altar be drenched in water three times so as to make it more difficult for fire to start. Then Elijah prays, "O Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that you are the God of Israel (1 Kings 18:36)." With that, fire comes down from heaven and consumes the sacrifice, the wood, and even the stones on the altar so that there is nothing left. Yahweh has proven that He is the God of Israel.

The people admit that Yahweh is their God, and with Elijah they rise up and slaughter the prophets of Baal. Then Elijah allows the rain to fall on Israel.

Ahab returns to Samaria, and tells Queen Jezebel what happened on Mount Carmel. She becomes furious that the prophets of Baal have been destroyed and she immediately calls for Elijah's life. Elijah, then flees to Mount Horeb to live in exile.

The Death of Ahab

Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21)

A man named Naboth had a vineyard which was adjacent to the king's palace in Samaria. Ahab wanted to purchase the vineyard from Naboth to build a vegetable garden there. However Naboth wouldn't sell, for that was part of his family's inheritance since the time of Joshua. Ahab sulks because Naboth won't sell him the land.

Jezebel is a princess who just can't understand why her husband doesn't just use his power as king to do what he wants. In Sidon, the king's rule is law and the king would not tolerate the insolence of a prophet like Elijah. In Sidon, the king would just take whatever property he wanted. Ahab, in her eyes, was weak. However, Ahab, for as evil as he was, understood that in Israel the king was not above the law. He understood that the prophets and the priests could call him on his disobedience to the law. So he hesitated to take the vineyard.

But Jezebel has no such hesitation. She has Naboth killed and she seizes the land and gives it to Ahab. Elijah gets word of this atrocity and goes and confronts Ahab and Jezebel. He prophesies that Jezebel will die a horrible death and that God will take the kingdom from Ahab.

Ahab, however, repents of his sin, humbling himself before the Lord. As a result, even though Ahab has done such evil, God decides not to take his kingdom from him, but from his son.

Ahab Killed in Battle (1 Kings 22)

The Israelite city of Ramoth-Gilead had been over run by the king of Aram. So Ahab and Jehosaphat, the king of Judah decide to go and recapture the city. But first they inquire of the Lord through the prophet, Micaiah as to how the battle will go. Now Ahab hated Micaiah, because he

always said bad things about Ahab. Again, Micaiah was predicted bad things for Ahab, saying that he would die in battle, but that Ramoth-Gilthead would be delivered. Ahab disregarded the prophecy because Micaiah was always prophesying against him. But sure enough, the battle went just as had been prophesied. And so, Ahab was killed after ruling for 22 years.

The Ministry of Elisha

Confrontation with Ahaziah's army (2 Kings 1)

After the death of Ahab, his son Ahaziah became the king of Israel. However, he fell through the balcony railing and injured himself greatly. Wondering if he was going to die, he sent messengers to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron to ask if he was to die or not. Elijah intercepted Ahaziah's messenger and asked them,

Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' (2 Kings 1:4)

For this reason, Elijah told the messengers that Ahaziah would indeed die. This did not please the king, so he sent 50 troops to kill Elijah. But Elijah called fire down from heaven and the troops were destroyed. Ahaziah sent 50 more men, but with the same result. Finally a third troop of 50 was sent, but their commander had learned the lesson and humbly begged Elijah to go with him to the king. Elijah went, but the message was the same. Ahaziah was to die.

The theme of Kings continues. Those who obey the Lord find success. Those who do evil in the sight of the Lord are destroyed.

The Chariot of Fire (2 Kings 2)

In 1 Kings 19:19, God had told Elijah to anoint Elisha as a prophet to replace him. Now as Elijah nears the time when he will be taken up by God, the focus of Kings seems to be to establish Elisha as Elijah's successor. Elijah and Elisha head from Bethel to Jericho to across the Jordan. As they cross the Jordan, Elijah miraculously opens a path in the water to cross the river.

Elijah and Elisha stopped in Bethel and Jericho to visit a company of prophets, who must have been told by Elijah that he was soon to be taken up by the Lord. This company appears to have been some sort of prophet school where Elijah was training them to become prophets of the Lord.

Before Elijah is taken up he asks Elisha what he can do for him. Elisha says to give him a double portion of his Spirit. This is a term of inheritance. The Israel, the eldest son would typically receive two times the inheritance of the rest of the sons. Elisha was asking to be seen as the eldest son, or the successor of Elijah. Elijah agrees to the request.

Elijah is then surrounded by a chariot of fire from heaven and is caught up in heaven in a whirlwind. Elijah, therefore, doesn't die but is directly taken to heaven while alive. Only one other person in scripture is taken to heaven directly: Enoch (Genesis 5:24)

Comparison of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2, 4)

After Elijah is taken up, Elisha is shown to be the successor to Elijah through a series of events where he performs the same miracles as Elijah. First, to get back across the Jordan River, he miraculously causes the river to part. Then Elisha comes to a widow who is being hounded by creditors. He provides her with a jar that never runs out of oil, as Elijah did with the widow of Zepthath. The widow's son dies, and Elisha raises her from the dead, as Elijah did with the widow of Zepthath. Elisha has clearly received the double portion of Elijah's inheritance.

Elisha and the Arameans

Aram (modern day Syria) was the arch enemy of the nation of Israel in the time of Elijah and Elisha. Nonetheless, both prophets had an extensive ministry to this nation, including being called on by God to anoint the king of Aram. Needless to say, such ministry did not win the favor of the Israelite king.

Healing of the Naaman (2 Kings 5)

The captain of the Aramean army, Naaman, had been suffering from leprosy. Within his household was a slave girl taken captive from Israel. She told Naaman of Elisha and his ability to perform miracles. So Naaman goes to see Elisha, who tells him to wash seven times in the Jordan River. This seems ridiculous to Naaman. Why can't he go wash in the rivers back in Aram? But Naaman's servants convince him that if he has traveled this far, it is not a big deal to just follow through on these instructions. Naaman does go to the Jordan River, and after his seventh dip, he is washed clean. Naaman then proclaims, "Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel."

Aramean Plot Against Elisha (2 Kings 6:8-23)

The king of Aram was preparing to go to war with Israel. Elisha had been warned by the Lord of this attack and told the King of Israel. When Aram saw Israel preparing its army, he was certain that there was a leak amongst his generals. But soon he discovered that Elisha had warned the king of Israel. So the King of Aram sought to have Elisha seized. However, when the Aramean troops arrived at the house of Elisha, he prayed to the Lord, and in their eyes they saw Elisha surrounded by a chariots of fire. He prayed a second time and they became completely blind. Elisha then led them as captives of war to the king of Israel, who offered them up a banquet before sending them home.

The Siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:24-7:20)

After this, Aram did end up going to war with Israel, and was laying siege to the capitol city, Samaria. As in all great sieges, the people of the city soon ran out of food. The famine within the city was so great that the people started resorting to cannibalism. The king of Israel became so concerned about this, that he went to Elisha and was ready to kill him. However, Elisha assured him that the next day the famine would be over.

The next day four lepers decided to surrender to the Arameans, thinking that if they stayed they would die of starvation, so they had nothing to lose. As they walked into the camp of the Arameans, however, they discovered that the army had abandoned their camp. They stayed for awhile, eating the food the army had left behind. Finally they decided it was immoral for them to enjoy the plunder while the city was starving, so they returned to the city and told everyone that the army had fled, thus ending the famine as Elisha had predicted.

The Legacy of Ahab

Rebellion of Jehu (2 Kings 9)

King Ahaziah of Israel did not have a son, so his brother Jehoram became king. Nonetheless, the sins of Ahab demanded that his family would be cut off from the throne. So Elisha sent a company of prophets to a man named Jehu from Ramoth-Gilead to anoint him as the new king of Israel.

King Jehoram had been wounded in a battle against Aram and was recuperating in the city of Jezreel. King Ahaziah of Judah had come to visit Jehoram in Jezreel, when Jehu arrived outside the city with an army. Both kings went out to meet Jehu and ask him if he had come in peace. Jehu's response was "what peace, so long as Jezebel continues in her evil." It seems that Jezebel was still calling the shots in Israel, and now with her daughter having married King Ahaziah of Judah, she had strong influence in Judah as well.

Jehu then shot both the kings with arrows, killing them. Jehu then went to Samaria and had Jezebel killed as well. Ahab's family had been destroyed by Jehu in accordance with Elisha's prophecy.

Conspiracy of Queen Athaliah (2 Kings 11)

Not all of Ahab's family was destroyed by Jehu, however, for Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, had been given to King Ahaziah of Judah as a wife. With her influence, she led Judah into the worship of Baal as well. Now with the death of Ahaziah by Jehu, Athaliah seized the throne by having all the royal family in Judah hunted down and killed. Athaliah ruled as queen in Judah for seven years.

Reform & Revival

The Reforms of Joash (2 Kings 12)

However, a young princess grabbed the infant prince, Joash, and hid him in the temple of the Lord. There he was raised by the priest Jehoida. After seven years Jehoida plotted with the army and they killed Athaliah and put Joash on the throne. Joash ruled Judah for 40 years.

Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, although he did not remove the altars from the high places. He did levy a tax to have the temple restored, for it had fallen into disrepair over the years. There was a brief scandal where the priests had not used the money earmarked for the temple repairs to actually fix the temple. But Joash confronted the priests and the temple was repaired.

The Reforms of Jehu (2 Kings 10:18-33)

Jehu then proceeded to clean Israel of the idolatry of Baal, slaughtering the worshipers of Baal and destroying the sacred pillars and temples to Baal. Because of this, God preserved Jehu's family in the royal line of Israel for four generations. However, Jehu never abandoned the sin of Jeroboam and the cult of the golden calf continued. Because of this, Aram continued to invade and steal territory from Israel.

The Success of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-27)

During the dynasty of Jehu, Israel suffered under the oppression of Aram for many years. But the Lord was not ready to destroy Israel yet, so he sent his prophet Jonah to King Jeroboam III of Israel and told him that the Lord under him the Lord would restore the nation's borders.

Although Jeroboam II continued in the sins of his name sake, he was able to throw off the oppression of Aram and the borders of Israel expanded northward and Israel had a short lived time of peace and prosperity. Aram had been losing power and this was before the rise of Assyria. So Jeroboam II reigned in peace for 41 years.

Conclusion

The book of Kings is an historical and spiritual explanation of the downfall of the Jewish kingdoms. Under the kings, the nations were led through a slow but steady decline as they fell away from the worship of the true God. There were moments where kings would arise to reclaim the glory of Solomon, but the trend would soon continue. The prophets were there to warn and hold the kings accountable. They served as the mouthpieces of God, proclaiming that the true God of Israel was Yahweh and that there was no God but Yahweh.

Today, in our pluralistic society there is great pressure on Christians to meld our faith into a generic spirituality. Christianity is acceptable to our society so long as it agrees that it is just one of many paths to God. But if we accept such a premise, we become like the kings of Israel and fall into the sin of Jeroboam, who mixed the worship of Yahweh with the religions of his neighbors. We must remember as King Solomon proclaimed at the building of the temple, and as Elijah proved on Mt. Carmel: there is not God but Yahweh. Furthermore, we must remember what Jesus said of himself:

No one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6b)

Bibliography

Austel, Hermann J. "1 & 2 Kings." *Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998.

Constable, Thomas. "1 & 2 Kings." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, ed. (Victor Books, 1997). Electronic edition STEP file.

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2002.