

WHAT
THE **OLD**
TESTAMENT

AUTHORS REALLY
CARED ABOUT

A **SURVEY** of Jesus' Bible

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

E D I T O R

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What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible

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1-2 KINGS

Who?

Little evidence exists for the authorship of 1–2 Kings, though the Jewish Talmud attributed the book to Jeremiah. However, while the accounts of the release of Jehoiachin from the Babylonian prison that end each book are almost identical (2 Kings 25:27–30; Jer. 52:31–34), this event from around 561 B.C. likely happened at least a decade after Jeremiah's death in Egypt.

Because 1–2 Kings overviews more than four-hundred years of royal history in two different kingdoms, no single eye witness put the material together. As such, it is probably best to think of “composition and completion” or “source data and final editing.” The book itself states that the one(s) who finished the book relied on official court records (1 Kings 11:41; 14:19, 29; etc.). Along with these “annals,” other sources must have been drawn from for the Elijah and Elisha narratives and the expanded sections devoted to select kings (e.g., chs. 3–11; 16–22). Finally, the fact that the record of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 2 Kings 18:13–20:19 is recounted almost identically in Isaiah 36:1–39:8 implies a shared source.

This book began as a single volume in the Hebrew but expanded into two parts in the Greek. While sources were used, the final author(s) took liberty in selection and in providing a theological-covenantal perspective on the establishment and destruction of the divided kingdom.

When?

First and Second Kings is a document whose publication suggests both a process and an event. The book could

not have been completed earlier than its last chapter (2 Kings 25 and residency in Babylon around 561 B.C.). The likelihood is that most of the book was composed before the time of Josiah (ca. 640–609 B.C.) but did not achieve its present form until the Judeans were fully settled in Babylonia. Furthermore, a comparison of the Hebrew of 1–2 Kings with the Greek translation suggests there were a number of editions before the final form we have today.

Where?

Because the text makes frequent reference to royal annals, at least the source-data for most of the events recorded in 1–2 Kings were written down before the exile began. It seems likely, however, that the volume was finalized somewhere in Babylon. Additionally, the professional nature of the writing suggests that scribes were utilized in the composition—a fact that implies an urban origin where such scribes would have been centralized.

Why?

While the reasons for writing these books are not specifically stated, a number of fairly obvious reasons are available.

1. To provide a “national history” that covered the monarchical period.
2. To explain to the exilic and post-exilic communities the catastrophic loss of land, temple, and heritage.
3. To allow the prophets to clarify the consequences of covenant failure.
4. To show that hope still existed for God's people, because by Jerusalem's fall the promised royal deliverer in the line of Judah had yet to arise.

CHAPTER
10

1-2 KINGS

Donald Fowler and
Jason S. DeRouchie

Carefully Crafted Verses from 1-2 Kings

“Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27).

“How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

They despised his statutes and his covenant ... They went after false idols and became false ... and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight (2 Kings 17:15, 17-18).

Before [Josiah] there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him (2 Kings 23:25).

THE AUTHOR OF 1-2 KINGS ...

- Stressed the *role of kingship* in the nation’s disobedience, division, and destruction.
- Showed the *importance of Yahweh’s prophets* in Israel’s history.
- Measured *kingdom success* in the light of past covenants.
- Gave *hope for kingdom restoration* beyond exile.

The Author of 1–2 Kings Stressed the *Role of Kingship* in the Nation’s Disobedience, Division, and Destruction

The book of 1–2 Kings overviews the rise and fall, division and destruction of what began as the united nation of Israel. As suggested in the book’s title, this history deals primarily with the office of kingship—specifically the positive or, more commonly, negative influence Israel’s leaders had on the kingdom’s destiny. The book opens with King David “old and advanced in years” (1 Kings 1:1) and in need of a successor, who ultimately was identified as his son Solomon through Bathsheba (1:28–30). Gifted with wisdom, riches, and honor from God, Solomon established Israel in his day as chief among all kingdoms of the ancient world, and all other nations paid him tribute (3:13–14; 4:20–21). In his early years, he built Yahweh a temple in Jerusalem, passionately seeking “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other” (8:60). As he aged, however, his heart became corrupt,

turning away from the Source of his strength to go after the various gods of his many foreign wives (11:1–8). The result was tragic and set the entire nation on a course of destruction: “Since ... you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear

the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant... I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen” (11:11, 13). So it was that one ruler’s failure led to the division of the kingdom in 930 B.C.

In his better years, Solomon wrote, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). He would have done well to heed his own advice.

Figure 10.1. The Makeup of the Southern and Northern Kingdoms

	Southern Kingdom—Judah	Northern Kingdom—Israel
Size	1(2) tribes	10 tribes
Dynasties and Kings	1 dynasty (of David)/20 kings (only two fully loyal: Hezekiah and Josiah)	10 dynasties/20 kings* (all wicked, esp. Jeroboam I and Ahab)
Capitals	Jerusalem	Samaria
Worship Centers	Jerusalem	Bethel and Dan
Economic Status	Struggling	Wealthy
Destruction	586 B.C. by Babylon	723 B.C. by Assyria

* The total number of northern kings lowers to nineteen and the dynasties to nine if Tibni from 1 Kings 16:21–22 is not included. Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie.



The northern tribes were now called “Israel,” and the southern tribes, “Judah.” The northern coalition initially followed Jeroboam I, the wicked idolater who altered the sacred calendar, built temples throughout the territory, and established special sanctuaries of worship at Bethel and Dan, in direct violation to God’s Word (1 Kings 12:25–33; cf. Deut. 12:2–32). Significantly, the history of the northern kingdom was scathed by ten successive dynasties, military strife, and deep covenant rebellion against the Lord. After Jeroboam I, *each* of the nineteen other northern kings “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 15:34; cf. 2 Kings 17:22). As a

result, in 723 B.C., God ultimately destroyed the northern kingdom by the hand of Assyria and in accordance with the covenant promises made long before (2 Kings 17:6, 21–23; cf. Deut. 28:47–50).



“[King Jeroboam I] made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, ‘You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt’” (1 Kings 12:28). *Jeroboam I's highplace in Dan with a reconstructed altar.*

As for the southern kingdom, while God preserved David’s dynasty throughout all twenty kings and while Judah lasted almost twice as long as Israel, only eight southern kings were said to have done “good,” and only two, Hezekiah and Josiah, were given unqualified praise (2 Kings 18:5–7; 23:25). Not only this, the wickedness of King Manasseh, Hezekiah’s son, was so great that it sealed the south’s destruction, for he led Judah “to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel” (21:9). In God’s words through Jeremiah, “Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah” (Jer. 3:11). As a result, and despite the loyalty of some, Yahweh declared, “I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name

Figure 10.2. Kings at a Glance

Solomon’s Rise, Reign, and Disobedience (1 Kings 1–11)	970–930 B.C.
The Division of the Kingdom (1 Kings 12–14)	930 B.C.
The Demise of the Kingdoms and Fall of Israel (1 Kings 15–2 Kings 17)	930–723 B.C.
The Demise of Judah and Its Fall (2 Kings 18–25)	723–586 B.C.

shall be there” (2 Kings 23:27). This he did progressively, climaxing in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians overran Jerusalem, destroyed Solomon’s temple, and exiled all but the poorest of the poor from the land (chs. 24–25).

From the earliest stages of the Bible, God set forth that human rule would play a central role in his purposes. The book of 1–2 Kings shows how monarchy failed miserably in Israel due to the covenant rebellion of the kings and people. As will be seen, however, hope still appears at the end of the book, taking the reader’s eyes off the problem (human sin) to the only solution (a gracious, faithful God, who would work through his Messianic deliverer). Yahweh had been and would be faithful to his promises, not only to curse, but also to bless, sustaining the Davidic line and all divine pledges associated with it (see 1 Kings 8:25–26).

God wants us to understand that godly leadership is vitally important for people’s stability (1 Kings 2:4; cf. Deut. 17:18–20) and that nothing—not even sin—will thwart his ultimate purposes (1 Kings 8:56; Job 42:2; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11).

The Author of 1–2 Kings Showed the *Importance of Yahweh’s Prophets in Israel’s History*

One of the most surprising characteristics of 1–2 Kings is the frequent reference to prophets. In fact, only in Jeremiah is the word “prophet” used more often. A prophet of Yahweh was a heavenly ambassador, who called Yahweh’s people back to their covenant relationship with the Great King. When the prophet spoke, Yahweh spoke (Deut. 18:18), and because of this, history played out exactly how Yahweh’s prophets said. “And the LORD ... sent [bands of enemies] against Judah to destroy it, *according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by his servants the prophets*” (2 Kings 24:2). In 1–2 Kings, the prophets proclaimed the divine Word, acted with divine power (miracles), and combated wicked kings and disobedient Israelites.

The Truthful Prediction of the Future

The author of 1–2 Kings believed Yahweh was in control of history, working out in the present what he planned long ago. In God’s words through Isaiah (2 Kings 19:25): “Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass.”

In the time of the divided kingdom, there were numerous prophetic deceivers that were more concerned with pleasing kings than speaking for Yahweh. A clear example is found in 1 Kings 22, when Ahab gathered four hundred prophets, all of whom affirmed that he should go into battle.

Figure 10.3. The Kings of the Divided Kingdom					
Kings of Judah (Southern Kingdom)			Kings of Israel (Northern Kingdom)		
1.	Rehoboam	930–913 B.C.	1.	Jeroboam I	930–909 B.C. I
2.	Abijah	913–910	2.	Nadab	909–908
3.	Asa	910–869	3.	Baasha	908–886 II
			4.	Elah	886–885
			5.	Zimri	885 III
			6.	(Tibni)	885–880 IV
			7.	Omri	885–874 V
4.	Jehoshaphat	872–848*	8.	Ahab	874–853
5.	Jehoram I	853–841*	9.	Ahaziah	853–852
6.	Ahaziah I	841	10.	J(eh)oram II	852–841
7.	Athaliah†	841–835	11.	Jehu	841–814 VI
8.	J(eh)oash I	835–796	12.	Jehoahaz	814–798
9.	Amaziah	796–767	13.	J(eh)oash II	798–782
10.	Azariah II (Uzziah)	792–740*	14.	Jeroboam II	793–753*
			15.	Zechariah	753
			16.	Shallum	752 VII
11.	Jotham	750–732*	17.	Menahem	752–742 VIII
			18.	Pekahiah	742–740
12.	Ahaz	735–715*	19.	Pekah	752–732* IX
13.	Hezekiah	729–686*	20.	Hoshea	732–723 X
14.	Manasseh	696–642*	Exile of Israel by Assyria, 723 B.C.		
15.	Amon	642–640	* Date includes a coregency or overlapping reign.		
16.	Josiah	640–609	† Originally the wife of Jehoram I, Athaliah became sole ruler of Judah after the death of her son Ahaziah I.		
17.	Jehoahaz	609	Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie. Most dates are from Edwin R. Thiele, <i>The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings</i> (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994), 10; the only change is the start date of Hezekiah's reign (729, not 715), based on the clear reading of the Hebrew Masoretic text and the arguments of Leslie McFall, "Did Thiele Overlook Hezekiah's Coregency?" <i>BSac</i> 146 (1989): 393–404.		
18.	Jehoiakim	609–598			
19.	Jehoiachin	598–597			
20.	Zedekiah	597–586			
Exile of Judah by Babylon, 586 B.C.					



When asked to get a second opinion, Ahab stated, “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil” (1 Kings 22:8). Significantly, it was the words of Micaiah that came true, and it meant Ahab’s demise (22:17, 19–23).

In 1–2 Kings, what Yahweh’s prophets proclaimed consistently occurred, whether it was the division of the empire (1 Kings 11:30–39), the punishment of idolatry (13:2), the ending of dynasties (14:10–11), the covenant

curse of drought (17:1), the death of individuals (21:23), victory or defeat in battle (20:13–14, 28; 22:17, 19–23), the healing of diseases (2 Kings 5:10), or the provision of food (7:1). The accuracy of the prophetic predictions was supposed to validate that they were from God and thus motivate the people to return to Yahweh (see Deut. 18:21–22). Sadly, few in Israel listened to the prophetic voice.

The Performing of Miracles

The book of 1–2 Kings never records any monarch performing miracles, but it testifies to many prophets doing extraordinary ones, most significantly Elijah and Elisha. Some of the accounts include more mundane events, like multiplying oil in a jar (1 Kings 17:8–16; 2 Kings 4:1–7), finding a lost ax head (2 Kings 6:5), or protecting fellow prophets from eating a poisoned meal (13:14–19). Other times, however, the miracles are more grandiose, as when Elijah raised a widow’s son from the dead (1 Kings 17:17–24), when Elisha did the same for a Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4:18–37), or when Elisha’s decaying bones revived a dead man who had been thrown into the same grave (13:20–21).

Along with always fulfilling the prophetic word, Yahweh confirmed the

Jesus compared Nazareth’s hostility at his own prophetic role to the northern kingdom’s sinful unresponsiveness during the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:24–27).

truthfulness of his prophets by enabling them to perform feats contrary to the laws of nature. Prophetic miracles helped prove that Yahweh was indeed over all and knew all. This fact is evident in the words of the widow after Elijah raised her son from death: “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). Similarly, in the prophetic confrontation on Mount Carmel, after Elijah prayed and Yahweh brought fire out of heaven, consuming “the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust” and licking “up the water that was in the trench,” the onlookers turned from Baal and declared, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God” (18:38–39). The miracle substantiated the message and the messenger, just as Elijah prayed it would: “Let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word” (18:36).

The Confrontation of Israel and Judah’s Kings

As Yahweh’s mouthpieces, prophets were called to urge people, “Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in

accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers” (2 Kings 17:13). Sadly, though consistently warned by the prophets, the people “would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who *did not believe* in the LORD their God” (17:14).



“Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, ‘... If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him’” (1 Kings 18:20–21). *Left: Mount Carmel's western heights overlooking the Mediterranean Sea—the region where Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal; Right: a statue at Muhraqa of Elijah's triumph.*

While non-Yahweh prophets abounded in the ancient world, there appears no exact parallel to the way Yahweh's prophets confronted kings in order to preserve and maintain a people's relationship with their god. In the earliest stage of Israelite kingship, the prophet Samuel confronted Saul for various violations of God's instructions (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:11–14; 15:13–35), and then the prophet Nathan addressed David with the dreaded, “You are the man!” (2 Sam. 12:7), following the king's sin with Bathsheba. In 1–2 Kings, this ministry of rebuke and judgment continued, creating the following prophetic pattern:

*Yahweh's king or people rebelled → Yahweh raised up a prophet
→ the prophet announced Yahweh's judgment → the prophet's words came true*

Significantly, in 1–2 Kings it is usually the most covenantally wicked kings who received the most extended discussion. After Solomon, the two receiving greatest focus are Jeroboam I and Ahab.

The first prophetic confrontation in 1–2 Kings occurred when the prophet Ahijah dramatically announced to Jeroboam I that mighty Solomon’s kingdom would be divided and part of it given to him (1 Kings 11:29–39). It was also Ahijah who later predicted that Jeroboam and his family would be destroyed due to their iniquity (14:7–11), and just as the prophet declared, so it happened (15:29). Similarly, God had sent an unnamed prophet to Jeroboam I, who predicted nearly two hundred years in advance that a king named Josiah, one of the two wholly righteous kings of Judah, would burn the bones of Jeroboam’s apostate priests of Bethel (13:1–3). When Jeroboam tried to arrest the nameless prophet, the king’s hand “dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself” (13:4). Ultimately, 2 Kings 23:15–16 records that the prophet’s words came true.

After King Solomon, the monarch receiving most space in the text is Ahab. He was gifted with success through the ministry of a nameless prophet, who twice revealed to him how God would give him victory over the invading Syrian (i.e., Aramean) army (1 Kings 20). However, because after his victory he released the Syrian king on whom Yahweh had declared a war of judgment (a crime similar to Saul’s failure to kill Agag, the Amalekite, in 1 Sam. 15), the same prophet announced that Ahab would die, life for life (1 Kings 20:35–43). Later, the prophet Micaiah prophesied similarly (22:17), and then the narrator wrote of the battle: “A certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate” (22:34). Thus the northern kingdom’s greatest warrior died, less the victim of a “random” arrow than of the prophetic word that God used to guide the arrow to its divinely ordained destination.

The powerful story of Ahab’s demise gives us confidence that God can be trusted to deal with wicked leaders ... in his time and in his way. The kingdoms of mighty overseers like Hitler and Stalin are long gone, while God’s kingdom continues to grow and prosper. “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Rom. 12:19).

The Confrontation of Other Nations’ Kings

Central in the worldview of the author of 1–2 Kings is the conviction that Israel’s God is Lord over all the kings of all nations. Yahweh raised up Hadad of Edom and Rezon of Damascus to serve as “adversaries” to the disobedient Solomon (1 Kings 11:14, 23). Through a prophet’s words, Yahweh also guided Ahab to defeat the arrogant Ben-Hadad of Damascus (20:13–14, 28). Most dramatically, however, Yahweh’s wrath was poured out on Sennacherib, the “great king” of Assyria, thus showing how God responds to royal arrogance that rejects

his kingship over all. Through his messengers, Sennacherib declared, “Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?” (2 Kings 18:35). In response, King Hezekiah of Judah pled for Yahweh to save and to show himself supreme (19:19). Through his prophet Isaiah, Yahweh then declared (19:22, 28): “Whom have you mocked and reviled? ... Against the Holy One of Israel! ... Because you have raged against me ..., I will turn you back on the way by which you came.” During the night, the Angel of Yahweh destroyed 185,000 in the camp of Assyria, and Sennacherib fled home, only to die there by the sword of his own sons (19:35–37).

This most dramatic divine act portrays Yahweh’s response to royal arrogance that rejects his supreme kingship. In the New Testament, Herod Agrippa I’s failure to glorify God brought a similar fate (Acts 12:21–23). Death is the only result for those who persist in dishonoring God (Rom. 3:23; 6:23).

The Author of 1–2 Kings Measured *Kingdom Success* in the Light of Past Covenants

The Evaluation of the Kings of Israel and Judah

This book uses a formulaic, annalistic pattern for recording and evaluating all the kings in the northern and southern kingdoms. It approaches the kingdoms chronologically and in parallel, using the following recurrent pattern:

1. Notice of when the king came to reign (in Israel or Judah) in relation to another king
2. Statement about how long the king reigned and in what capital
3. The name of the king’s mother (for Judean kings only)
4. The king’s religious policy:
 - *Israel*: Did he practice the “sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat,” maximizing idolatry and rebellion and minimizing God’s presence in Jerusalem (e.g., 1 Kings 16:25–26)?
 - *Judah*: Was he faithful to Yahweh “like David,” and did he remove “the high places,” thus calling attention to God’s presence in Jerusalem (e.g., 1 Kings 15:1–6)?
5. A source for further information about the king
6. Information about the king’s death, burial, and succession



“As for Hezekiah, the Judean, I besieged forty-six of his fortified walled cities and surrounding smaller towns, which were without number.... I conquered (them).... He himself, I locked up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage.” (*The Prism of Sennacherib* [from the Oriental Institute, USA; translation from COS 2:303; cf. *ANET*, 288]). *What Sennacherib failed to record was the devastating loss Yahweh struck upon him after he defied Yahweh, who is “God alone”* (2 Kings 19:19).

As is clear from the “religious policy” statements above, one of the author’s main goals in the book was to evaluate each monarch as “good” or “evil,” depending on his *covenantal commitment to Yahweh*. Interestingly, this ethical evaluation of each king is one of the Bible’s most distinctive historical qualities. In the ancient world, kings guarded carefully what was written of them, resulting in historical records being turned into royal propaganda. In contrast, the writer of 1–2 Kings produced a history whose primary purpose was to proclaim not the greatness of earthly kings but the greatness of Yahweh over all. That is, 1–2 Kings is distinctly theological, addressing how each king responded, whether rightly or wrongly, to Yahweh and his purposes.

Yahweh is the main subject and/or object of every biblical narrative. That is, Bible stories are primarily about God, not humans. Our first interpretive question should always be, “What does this story tell me about God?”

The Covenantal History of 1–2 Kings

First and Second Kings provides a *covenantal evaluation* of the kings of Israel and Judah. In order to do so, the book spends much time building connections with previous covenants.

Echoes of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants

For example, 1–2 Kings opens by showing how Israel had become a massive nation (*progeny/heirs*) (1 Kings 4:20; cf. Gen. 22:17a), living in their *land* (1 Kings 4:21; cf. Gen. 15:18), ruled by *kings* (1 Kings 1:1; 4:1; etc.; cf. Gen. 17:6, 16), and *blessing* their neighbors (1 Kings 4:34; 10:1–13; Gen. 12:3). These are all echoes of the Abrahamic covenant.

Similarly, the narrator recorded that the dynastic promises Yahweh gave to David were renewed with Solomon, giving explicit stress that Israel’s kings must “pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul” (1 Kings 2:4; cf. 8:25–26; 9:4–5; 2 Sam. 7:5–16). Furthermore, Yahweh’s preservation of the Davidic line after Solomon’s failure was said to be “for the sake of David” (1 Kings 11:13, 32; 2 Kings 8:19; 19:34), and the kings of Judah are consistently judged on whether they followed God “like David” (2 Kings 14:3; cf. 1 Kings 11:4, 6, 33, 38; 14:8; 15:3, 11; 2 Kings 16:2; 18:3; 22:2). Finally, as will be highlighted more fully at the end of this chapter, the book ends by drawing attention to God’s preservation of the Davidic line, thus grounding Israel’s future hope in the kingdom promises made to David (2 Kings 25:27–30; cf. 1 Kings 11:39).

Echoes of the Mosaic (Old) Covenant

These points noted, it is the Mosaic (old) covenant that appears to provide the primary lens for understanding the portrait of destruction of the united and divided kingdoms in 1–2 Kings. This connection is set forth first in the early chapters where David charges Solomon to reign *under Yahweh's leadership*: “Keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn” (1 Kings 2:3). These words echo the chief responsibility of every king as laid out in Deuteronomy 17—namely that he be a *man of the book*, not replacing Yahweh but representing Yahweh before the people and showing the people what it means to have God as the Lord of your life (Deut. 17:18–19): “And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law.... And he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes.” *By including this allusion, the author of 1–2 Kings invites the reader to interpret the monarchic history in the light of Deuteronomy and the other covenant materials.*

This same invitation is developed in Solomon's prayer of temple dedication, which is filled with allusions to the Mosaic covenant (1 Kings 8), and in the account of Josiah's finding the lost Book of the Law/Covenant and, in response, leading the nation in covenant renewal and reform (2 Kings 22–23). With the *Shema* in mind (Deut. 6:4–5), the narrator closed the account of Josiah by noting, “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses” (2 Kings 23:25; cf. 18:5–6).

One final way the books emphasizes a connection with the Mosaic covenant is through its allusions to the breaking of the “forbidden four”—those prohibitions found in Deuteronomy 17:14–17 that stressed that the king must not

- Be a *foreigner*;
- Acquire large numbers of horses (*militarism*);
- Take many wives (*marriage alliances*, the common way to form international bonds);
- Accumulate large amounts of gold and silver (*materialism*).



“Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up and captured Gezer and burned it with fire, and had killed the Canaanites who lived in the city, and he had given it as dowry to his daughter, Solomon’s wife; so Solomon rebuilt Gezer” (1 Kings 9:16–17). *A chambered Solomonic gate at Gezer (photo by Daniel Frese).*

Although the first warning was never violated, 1–2 Kings discloses how often the rulers of the united and divided kingdoms sought power, influence, and wealth, only to their own demise. For example, while the book does not record any battles Solomon fought, it does tell us that he had fourteen-hundred chariots along with twelve-thousand horsemen (1 Kings 10:26). We also learn that it was Solomon’s numerous diplomatic marriages that led him away from Yahweh (11:1–8) and that the king abused his God-given

wealth (3:13) by forcing the Israelites into work gangs to erect his expansive building projects (9:15–23; cf. 1 Sam. 8:16–17), which included religious structures for his wives’ gods (1 Kings 11:7–8).

The same tale reoccurs with the northern king Ahab, who is known from extra-biblical texts to have been a preeminent militarist but whose successes *and* failures the Bible strikingly and appropriately attributes to Yahweh (20:13; 22:16–17, 19–23). Ahab’s diplomatic marriage with the Phoenician princess Jezebel brought about his ruin, for Jezebel, arguably

The Monolith Inscription of Shalmaneser III describes a great battle fought at Qarqar (in modern day Syria) in 853 B.C. between Assyria and an anti-Assyrian coalition. We are told the latter included Ahab of Israel, who contributed ten-thousand infantry and two-thousand chariots, the largest number in the alliance and one equal to that of Assyria itself! Though Ahab’s kingdom was apparently great of strength, the Bible stresses that Yahweh alone gave the king victory *and* defeat (1 Kings 20:13; 22:16–17, 19–23)!

the most notorious woman in the Hebrew Bible, led this northern king to turn from Yahweh (16:31), incited the murder of nearly all Yahweh prophets (18:4), persecuted Elijah to the point of despair (19:14), and had innocent people murdered out of greed (21:1–16). As for wealth, whereas Solomon had an ivory throne (10:22), Ahab had an ivory palace (22:39), but he remained discontent, even murdering Naboth in order to acquire his vineyard (21:1–16).

Power, influence, and wealth continue to be temptations today, and the record in 1–2 Kings should give due warning to all readers.

Ironically, right after Solomon’s death, his kingdom was divided (1 Kings 12:16–20), and only five years later, King Shishak of Egypt invaded Judah and claimed the bulk of Solomon’s treasures (14:25–28). Similarly, all that remains of Omride ivory are scattered artifacts from Samaria.

Royal power, influence, and luxury, so impressive and noteworthy, are as fleeting as those who possess them (Pss. 37:14–15; 49:16–17; 146:3–4; 1 Tim. 6:7).

The Covenant Failure of the Kings of Israel and Judah

As has been shown, the concept of covenant permeates 1–2 Kings, and it is only in this context that the national demise and destruction can be understood. Solomon’s failure was seen as a breach of “covenant” (1 Kings 11:11), as was the people’s rebellion at the time of Ahab (19:10). The exile itself is said to have been caused because Israel “transgressed [the LORD’s] *covenant*, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded” (2



“The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria... because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded” (2 Kings 18:11–12). *Assyrian King Sennacherib’s Lachish Siege Reliefs (from the British Museum): Left: Assyrian sling throwers and archers attack Lachish, one of Judah’s southwestern border stations; Center: an Assyrian siege-engine protected by archers pushes up an incline while some Israelite defenders fight from a tower and others carry their goods from the town; Right: King Sennacherib seated on this throne receives booty taken from Lachish while the Israelite exiles kneel before him in homage; an inscription before the king reads, “Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, sat upon a nîmedu-throne and passed in review the booty (taken) from Lachish (La-ki-su)” (ANET, 288).*

Kings 18:12). What massive reversal occurred from the beginning of Solomon's reign to the destruction of the twin kingdoms! By the end of the book, most kings have been rebellious, the people's numbers have been greatly reduced, most of those living have been exiled from their land, and the blessings have been removed. There is a covenantal crisis at stake with respect to the earlier promises. However, there is no question as to which of the parties was guilty of covenant violation. It was the north and south's sustained failure to follow Yahweh, initiated mostly by their leaders, that brought about their expulsion from the land.

The Author of 1–2 Kings Gave Hope for Kingdom Restoration Beyond Exile

By the end of the book, the tragedy of the nation's *tôrâ* violation seems complete with the loss of land, leadership, temple, and freedom. Upon the mention of Judah's exile (2 Kings 25:21), the book concludes with two contrastive episodes that together capture the overall message of the book. The first highlights the negative influence of the royal family (i.e., David's descendants) on the people's experience of exile (25:22–26); the second stresses Yahweh's unrelenting faithfulness to keep his kingdom promises made to David (25:27–30).

We are told that, after the destruction of Jerusalem when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon appointed Gedaliah to be governor of all Judeans left in the land, a group of radicals, led by a member of the “royal family,” assassinated the governor and his party. As a result, all those remaining in the land fled to Egypt, out of fear of the Babylonians (25:22–26). Back to Egypt! This is alarming, for Egypt was the place of past slavery—the place from which God had rescued his people. Not only this, Yahweh had declared through Moses, “You shall never return that way again” (Deut. 17:16), and Jeremiah had warned, “If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow close after you to Egypt, and there you shall die” (Jer. 42:15–16; cf. Deut. 28:68). Nevertheless, David's own family was leading the way back to the grave. This was the story of Israel's destruction.

However, God's kingdom story was not over! Indeed, out of the depths, God would act to fulfill his past promises, originally given to Moses (Deut. 30:1–10) and reaffirmed to David (2 Sam. 7:12–16). The final episode of 1–2

The darkness of Israel's exilic situation in Egypt and elsewhere, especially in the north, sets the stage for portraying the age of restoration as a new exodus, this time not from physical oppression alone but from the spiritual bondage that brought it about (Jer. 16:14–16; Ezek. 20:34–38; Isa. 11:11, 16; 12:1–5)!



“[King Nebuchadnezzar] burned the house of the LORD and the king’s house and all the houses of Jerusalem” (2 Kings 25:9). *The coming of night over Jerusalem.*

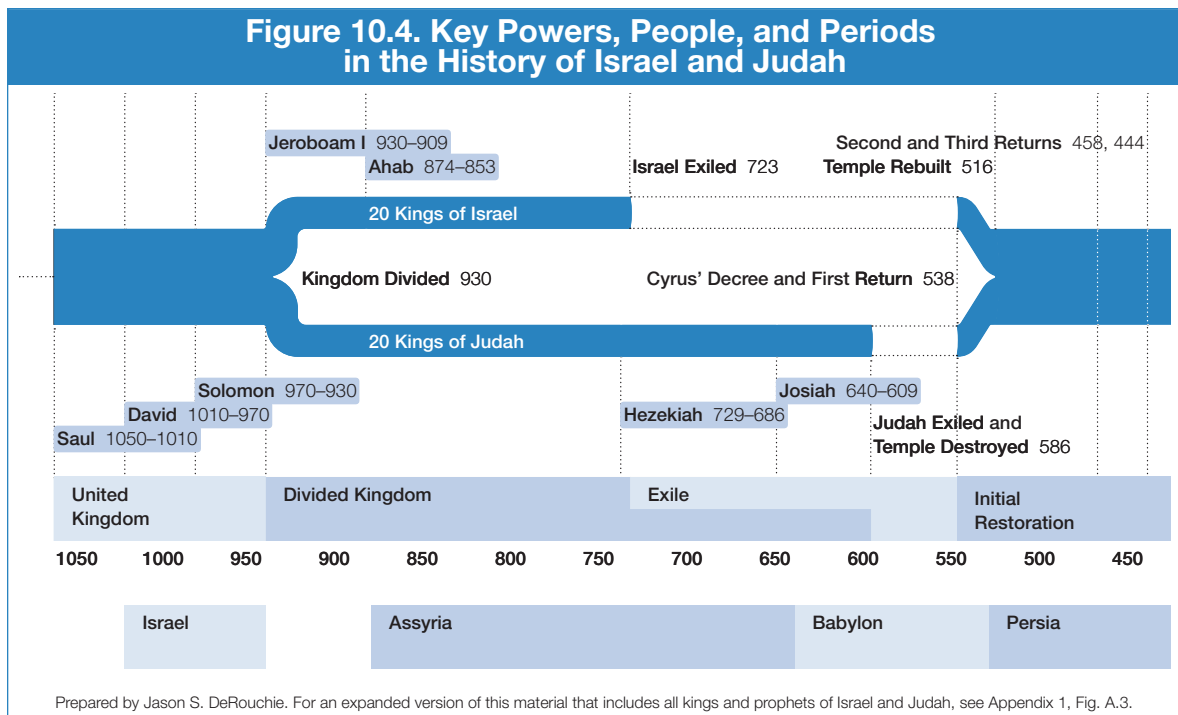
Kings highlights again that not all of David’s relatives are dead. Indeed, in his thirty-seventh year of exile, King Jehoiachin, Judah’s last Davidic monarch, was released from the Babylonian prison and given a place of honor above all other “kings who were with him in Babylon,” an honor that included daily dining with the great king and a regular allowance, all the remaining days of his life (2 Kings 25:27–30). Earlier Yahweh had declared that, although he would “afflict the offspring of David,” he would not do so forever (1 Kings 11:39)! God’s promises never fail, and the very presence of Jehoiachin meant that hope remained for the day when the greater “Son of David” would rise to power!

Conclusion

Filled with numerous names, places, and events over a four-hundred-year period, 1–2 Kings provides Yahweh’s perspective on the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and temporarily brings to an end the narrative history begun in Genesis and the story of Israel’s covenant rebellion detailed in the Former Prophets. The book’s portrait of Yahweh captures the heart of its message: Israel’s God is transcendent yet relational, gracious yet just, always faithful to his Word, both to curse and to bless, and ever committed to preserve the throne of David.

Did the narrator close the book with a hint to a sequel? Certainly the final form of the canon suggests such. Grounded in Yahweh’s promise through Moses of future restoration after curse (Deut. 30:1–10), Solomon had pled for God to forgive and restore the repentant remnant after exile (1 Kings 8:46–53). Furthermore, the prophets anticipated this restoration to include a new covenant (Jer. 31:27–37), a new Jerusalem (31:38–40), a new temple, and a restored priesthood (Ezek. 40–48), all of which are applied in various ways by the New Testament authors (e.g., Luke 22:20; Rev. 3:12; 11:19; 20:6; 21:2, 22). The point here is that Yahweh promised that the history of Israel—a redeemed, faithful Israel—would continue into the future.

You will recall that after an extended commentary section in the Latter Prophets and Former Writings, the Old Testament in its Hebrew ordering ends with a series of books that detail the history of the remnant during the period of initial restoration (Daniel through 1–2 Chronicles). In these Latter Writings, however, the history is revitalized, filled with life and longing for the consummate kingdom of God. Clearly, Yahweh was not through with his chosen people at the end of 1–2 Kings, and the rest of the Bible details the continued covenantal story.



KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS FOR REVIEW

Solomon	Elijah and Elisha
Divided kingdom makeup	Religious policies
723 B.C.	Book of the Law/Covenant
586 B.C.	Chief responsibility of a king
Jeroboam I and Ahab	Forbidden four
Hezekiah and Josiah	Hope of restoration
Prophet	Message of 1–2 Kings
Prophetic functions	

KEY RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

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