

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

2 KINGS

THEME

Author and Title

As the titles of the books indicate, 1–2 Kings describe the period of the monarchy in ancient Israel (970–586 B.C.), excluding most of the reigns of King Saul and King David (which are mainly described in 1–2 Samuel, with the conclusion to David’s reign appearing in [1 Kings 1:1–2:11](#)). Ancient Jewish tradition attributes this account to the prophet Jeremiah, although the books themselves do not specify the author. Internal evidence, however, does establish that the author or authors were deeply influenced by the book of Deuteronomy and sought to provide Israel with an explanation of its past in terms of the theological program outlined in that book. This is clearly signaled, for example, in the opening section of David’s parting speech to Solomon ([1 Kings 2:1–4](#)), where the language closely parallels the following phrases from Deuteronomy: “keep the charge of the LORD your God” ([Deut. 11:1](#)); “walking in his ways” ([Deut. 8:6](#)); “keeping all his statutes and his commandments” ([Deut. 6:2](#)); “that you may prosper in all you do” ([Deut. 29:9](#)); “that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers” ([Deut. 9:5](#)); “with all your heart and with all your soul” ([Deut. 4:29](#)). “Deuteronomistic” language such as this appears again and again in 1–2 Kings, as first Solomon himself ([1 Kings 11](#)), and then almost all the succeeding kings of Israel and Judah, are weighed in relation to the Mosaic law code and found wanting (e.g., Jeroboam, [1 Kings 12:25–33; 14:1–16](#); Ahaz, [2 Kings 16:1–4](#)). For this reason, the authors of 1–2 Kings have often been referred to in recent biblical scholarship as “Deuteronomists.” Beyond this one fact, however, nothing can be said for sure about the authorship of these books. Some have speculated that these “Deuteronomists” were Levites or priests; others, that they were prophets; and still others, that they were the wise men of the Jerusalem court. No one can really know.

Date

In their present form, 1–2 Kings could not have been written before the sixth century B.C., since [2 Kings 25:27–30](#) describes the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in Babylon in 561 and the books must therefore date from some time after that. It is possible (and some scholars certainly believe) that this late exilic or postexilic version of Kings builds on earlier editions dating from before the exile of many

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Judeans to Babylon in 586 B.C., or from the period of the exile itself. There is also evidence that at least some editing of the text took place in the Persian period (539–c. 330 B.C.). Notice, for example, the intriguing references to “the kings of the west” and “the governors of the land” ([1 Kings 10:15](#)). These seem best understood as representing a Persian perspective on the region west of the Euphrates, which was administered on behalf of the Persian emperor by governors (cf. [Ezra 8:36](#); [Neh. 2:7, 9](#)).

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Theme

These two books set out to provide for their readers an explanation of Israel’s later monarchic period in terms of the theological vision outlined in the book of Deuteronomy, so that these readers can move forward in their present times with a solidly grounded faith in the one God who controls both nature and history. The books maintain that it is this good and all-powerful God who oversaw the destruction of his chosen city and temple, and the exile to Babylon, in 586 B.C. because of Israel’s great sinfulness ([2 Kings 17:7–23](#); [24:1–4](#)). Yet there remains hope because God’s chosen royal line has not come to an end ([2 Kings 25:27–30](#)), and God remains ready to forgive those who are repentant ([1 Kings 8:22–61](#)).

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

In the year 609 B.C. the pharaoh of Egypt, Neco II, marched north to support his allies the Assyrians in their conflict with the Babylonians and their allies the Medes. On the way, Neco was opposed by King Josiah of Judah at the city of Megiddo, who was perhaps hoping to establish his independence from an increasingly powerful Egypt or hoping to benefit from being seen to take the Babylonians’ side. Josiah was killed in the ensuing battle, and Judah’s independence was lost. The new king, Jehoahaz, found himself imprisoned in Egypt while his brother Eliakim reigned in Judah as a vassal of Egypt under the name of Jehoiakim.

Around 604 B.C., however, Jehoiakim switched his allegiance to Babylon. Then, a few years later, he rebelled against the Babylonian king. Consequently, at the end of the year 598 B.C., when the Babylonian army was before the gates of Jerusalem, Egyptian forces were not on hand to help. The city surrendered to the Babylonians in 597 B.C., and the new king, Jehoiachin, was deported to Babylon along with many other leading citizens and much plunder. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, then placed Jehoiachin’s uncle Mattaniah on the throne and gave him the new name of Zedekiah. From early in his reign Zedekiah was involved in discussions with neighboring peoples about the possibility of revolt, and eventually revolt occurred. A new siege of

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Jerusalem by the Babylonians ensued. It was temporarily lifted when the new pharaoh, Apries, sent an army into Palestine, but resumed when the Egyptian army withdrew. After two years of siege, with all supplies of food exhausted, the city eventually fell in 587 or 586 B.C.

The fall of Jerusalem and the events that immediately followed it came as a devastating blow to the people of Judah. Jerusalem lay in ruins; both ordinary houses and the royal palace had been destroyed, and the city's defenses had been pulled down. Most seriously of all, the temple—the great symbol of Yahweh's presence with Israel—had been dismantled. Many had been killed, and many others had been deported to Babylon to work in the fields as well as in administration. Among the deportees were the leaders of the Judean community, who joined King Jehoiachin and the others deported there earlier. The people left in Judah were only the “poorest of the land” ([2 Kings 25:12](#); see [Jer. 39:10](#); [52:16](#)), watched over by a garrison of troops in Jerusalem and initially by a native (non-Davidic) Judean leader named Gedaliah, who based himself in the city of Mizpah, about 7.5 miles (12 km) from the former capital. The pain and grief of the time is well expressed in [Lamentations 1:1](#): “How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave.” What did it all mean? Was Israel's God not in fact in control of nature and history, as Mosaic religion claimed? Were there other, more powerful gods in Babylon who had engineered the Babylonian victory over Israel? If the God of Moses *did* exist, and *was* good and all-powerful, how was it that God's chosen city and temple had been destroyed, and how was it that God's chosen royal line (the line of David) had all but come to its end?

The books of Kings must be understood against this background. They represent a sustained response to such questions, and are designed to provide their readers a true interpretation of what happened to Israel in 586 B.C. Israel's God is indeed in control of nature and history; there are no other, more powerful gods anywhere. It is in fact this good and all-powerful God who has himself overseen the destruction of his chosen city and his temple, and the exile to Babylon. The reason for these actions lies in Israel's great sinfulness. Israel has not obeyed God or heeded his word through the prophets, from the reign of Solomon onward.

Solomon turned away from the true God to worship other gods ([1 Kings 2:12–11:43](#)). Jeroboam son of Nebat led northern Israel into independence from Solomon's son Rehoboam and Judah ([1 Kings 12:1–24](#)) and into institutionalized idolatry, with gods manufactured by Jeroboam ([1 Kings 12:25–33](#)) or introduced from elsewhere ([1 Kings 16:29–2 Kings 10:31](#)), and this ultimately led to exile in Assyria for the northern tribes

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([2 Kings 17](#)). Although the religious situation in Judah was initially no better than that in Israel ([1 Kings 14:22–24](#); [15:3–5](#)), Judah’s story afterward was not one of continuous apostasy. Relatively good kings did rule in the gaps between the wicked kings ([1 Kings 15:9–22:50](#); [2 Kings 12:1–15:38](#)); and toward the end of the monarchy ruled two of the best kings ever (Hezekiah, [2 Kings 18:1–20:21](#); Josiah, [2 Kings 22:1–23:30](#)). Sin gradually accumulated, nevertheless, resulting in exile also for the kingdom of Judah. Yet it is implied that hope remains, for God’s chosen royal line has not in fact come to an utter end ([2 Kings 25:27–30](#)), and God remains God, ever ready to forgive those who repent. The fact that God is “one” thus represents both the ultimate reason for the events of 586 B.C. and the ultimate ground for Israel’s hope of restoration; for if there is only one God, nothing and no one can frustrate his purposes.

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Key Themes

1. *Yahweh is the only true God.* There is only one living God, and he is the Lord ([1 Kings 18:15](#); [2 Kings 5:15](#)). This Lord is not to be confused with the various so-called gods worshiped in Israel and other nations, for these are simply human creations ([1 Kings 12:25–30](#); [2 Kings 17:16](#); [19:14–19](#)). They are part of the created order, like the people who worship them; and they are powerless, futile entities ([1 Kings 16:13](#); [18:22–40](#); [2 Kings 17:15](#); [18:33–35](#)). The Lord, by contrast, is the incomparable Creator of heaven and earth ([1 Kings 8:23](#); [2 Kings 19:15](#)). He is utterly distinct from the world that he has created (cf. [1 Kings 8:9, 14–21, 27–30](#), where he is neither truly “in” the ark nor “in” the temple; and [18:26–38](#), where the antics of the Baal priests apparently imply belief in an intrinsic connection between their actions and divine action, while Elijah’s behavior implies quite the reverse). At the same time, the Lord is powerfully active within his world. It is he, and no one else, who controls nature ([1 Kings 17–19](#); [2 Kings 1:2–17](#); [4:8–37](#); [5:1–18](#); [6:1–7, 27](#)).

2. *Yahweh controls history.* The Lord, and neither an idol god, nor king, nor prophet, controls history ([1 Kings 11:14, 23](#); [14:1–18](#); [22:1–38](#); [2 Kings 5:1–18](#); [10:32–33](#); [18:17–19:37](#)). This is perhaps illustrated most clearly in the way in which prophets function within 1–2 Kings, describing the future before God brings it about ([1 Kings 11:29–39](#); [13:1–32](#); [16:1–4](#); [20:13–34](#); [2 Kings 19:6–7, 20–34](#)). Nothing can hinder the fulfillment of this prophetic word, although God himself, in his freedom, can override its fulfillment for his own purposes (cf. [1 Kings 21:17–29](#); [2 Kings 3:15–27](#), where the ending to the story is somewhat unexpected).

3. *Yahweh demands exclusive worship.* As the only God there is, the Lord demands exclusive worship. He will not take his place alongside the gods, nor is he willing to be displaced by them. He refuses to be confused with any part of the created order.

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He alone will be worshiped, by Israelite and foreigner alike ([1 Kings 8:41–43, 60](#); [2 Kings 5:15–18](#); [17:24–41](#)).

4. *The content and place of true worship.* Much of 1–2 Kings is therefore concerned to describe what is illegitimate in terms of worship. The main interest is in the *content* of this worship, which must neither involve idols or images nor reflect any aspect of the fertility and other cults of “the nations” ([1 Kings 11:1–40](#); [12:25–13:34](#); [14:22–24](#); [16:29–33](#); [2 Kings 16:1–4](#); [17:7–23](#); [21:1–9](#)). There is a subsidiary concern about the *place* of worship, which is ideally the Jerusalem temple, and not the local “high places” ([1 Kings 3:2](#); [5:1–9:9](#); [15:14](#); [22:43](#); [2 Kings 18:4](#); [23:1–20](#)).

5. *The consequences of false worship.* The books of 1–2 Kings also describe the moral wrongs that inevitably accompany false worship. They claim that true worship of God is always bound up with obedience to the law of God, and that the worship of something *other than God* inevitably leads to some kind of mistreatment of fellow mortals in the *eyes of God*; see [1 Kings 21](#), where the kind of abandonment of God envisaged in [Exodus 20](#) leads to wholesale breach of the other commandments described there ([2 Kings 16:1–4](#), esp. v. 3; [2 Kings 21:1–16](#), esp. vv. 6, 16). By the same token, true wisdom is defined in 1–2 Kings in terms of true worship and wholehearted obedience. It cannot be divorced from either (see [1 Kings 1–11](#), where much can be learned about the nature of true wisdom).

6. *Yahweh as just and gracious Lawgiver.* As the Giver of the law, which defines true worship and right thinking and behavior generally, the Lord is also the one who executes justice on wrongdoers. The world of 1–2 Kings is a moral world in which wrongdoing is punished, whether the sinner be king (Solomon in [1 Kings 11:9–13](#); Jeroboam in [1 Kings 14:1–18](#)), or prophet (the unnamed Judean in [1 Kings 13:7–25](#); the disobedient man in [1 Kings 20:35–43](#)), or ordinary Israelite (Gehazi in [2 Kings 5:19–27](#); the Israelite officer in [2 Kings 7:17–20](#)). It is not a vending-machine world, however, in which every coin of sin that is inserted results in individually packaged retribution. There is no neat correlation between sin and judgment in Kings, even though people are told that they must obey God if they are to be blessed by him (e.g., Solomon in [1 Kings 2:1–4](#); Jeroboam in [1 Kings 11:38](#)). This is largely because of the compassionate character of the Judge, who does not desire final judgment to fall on his creatures ([2 Kings 13:23](#); [14:27](#)) and who often delays or mitigates such judgment ([1 Kings 21:25–29](#); [2 Kings 22:15–20](#)). God’s grace is to be found everywhere in 1–2 Kings ([1 Kings 11:9–13](#); [15:1–5](#); [2 Kings 8:19](#)), confounding expectations that the reader might have formed on the basis of an oversimplified understanding of law. Sin can, nevertheless, accumulate to such an extent that judgment falls, not only on individuals but on whole

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cultures, sweeping the relatively innocent away with the guilty ([2 Kings 17:1–23; 23:29–25:26](#)).

7. *Yahweh as promise-giver.* Israel's God is not only a lawgiver, however, but also a promise-giver. In 1–2 Kings it is a promise usually to be found at the heart of the Lord's gracious behavior toward his people. The two most important divine promises referred to are those given to the patriarchs on the one hand, and to David on the other.

The *patriarchal promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*—descendants and everlasting possession of the land of Canaan—clearly influences God's treatment of his people at various points in the story ([2 Kings 13:23](#), and implicitly in [1 Kings 4:20–21, 24; 18:36](#)). That promise also lies in the background of Solomon's prayer in [1 Kings 8:22–53](#), as Solomon looks forward to the possibility of forgiveness after judgment. The future-oriented aspect of the promise in this passage is interesting because it is a promise in clear tension with the story's ending in [2 Kings 25](#), where disobedience has led to expulsion from the land and exile in a foreign empire. It seems that the true fulfillment of the promise is thought still to be in the future, even though it has also played its part in the past.

The *promise given to David*, that he should have an eternal dynasty, shares in the same kind of tension, and indeed appears in 1–2 Kings in a curiously paradoxical form. In much of the narrative it provides an explanation for why the Davidic dynasty survives when other dynasties do not, *in spite of* the disobedience of David's successors ([1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19](#)). It is viewed, in other words, as unconditional in one aspect. Judah's fate is not to be the same as Israel's and Jerusalem's fate is to be different from Samaria's, because God has promised David a "lamp," a descendant who will always sit on his throne. So when Solomon sins, the Davidic line does not lose the throne entirely, but retains "one tribe" ([1 Kings 11:36](#)) in the meantime, with the prospect of restoring its dominion at some time in the future ([1 Kings 11:39](#)). When Abijam sins, likewise, his son still retains the Judean throne ([1 Kings 15:4](#)).

The background here is the promise to David recorded in [2 Samuel 7](#), where the sins of David's descendants are to be punished by the "rod of men" rather than by the kind of divine rejection Saul experienced ([2 Sam. 7:14–16](#)). This promise makes the ultimate difference between Davidic kings and those of other royal houses throughout much of the books of Kings, and makes the Judean dynasty unshakable even while the dynasties of the northern kingdom are like reeds "shaken in the water" ([1 Kings 14:15](#)). This dynasty survives *in spite of* the *disobedience* of David's successors. At other times, however, the continuance of the dynasty is made *dependent on* the *obedience* of David's successors ([1 Kings 2:4; 8:25; 9:4–5](#)). The promise is treated as conditional. As the books

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progress, it seems that this latter view prevails, as accumulating sin puts the promise in its unconditional aspect under great stress and in the end brings down God's judgment on Judah just as severely as on Israel ([2 Kings 16:1-4; 21:1-15; 23:31-25:26](#)).

Yet Jehoiachin lives ([2 Kings 25:27-30](#)). The authors of Kings did not need to record this fact. They could have allowed Jehoiachin to dwell in obscurity with Zedekiah ([2 Kings 24:18-25:7](#)), who effectively ends up as the eunuch in Babylon that the prophet Isaiah had foreseen ([2 Kings 20:18](#))—a mutilated man deprived of the heirs who might later claim the throne. The significance of this postscript on Jehoiachin appears clearer in an earlier section of 2 Kings. After the reign of two relatively righteous kings (Asha and Jehoshaphat), Judah found herself with two kings who share with King Ahab's children both their names (Jehoram, Ahaziah) and their attraction to idolatry ([2 Kings 8:16-29](#)). Yet God had promised David an ever-burning "lamp" in Jerusalem ([2 Kings 8:19](#); cf. [1 Kings 11:36; 15:4](#)), an everlasting dynasty. Therefore, although Ahab's dynasty comes to an end in [2 Kings 9-10](#), David's dynasty does not. Although Ahaziah dies and his mother Athaliah tries to wipe out the entire royal family ([2 Kings 11:1](#)), one royal prince remains to carry on the family line ([2 Kings 11:2](#)). Against all the odds, Joash survives six years of his grandmother's rule to emerge once again as king in a land purified of the worship of foreign gods ([2 Kings 11:3-20](#)).

Later, Jehoiachin reappears in the narrative of 1-2 Kings in a manner strikingly reminiscent of this reappearance of Joash after that earlier destruction of "all the royal family" ([2 Kings 11:1](#)). Like Joash, he unexpectedly survives in the midst of carnage; and like Joash during Athaliah's reign, he represents the potential for the continuation of the Davidic line at a later time. All is not yet necessarily lost. The destruction of the family of the last king of Judah (Zedekiah) does not mean that no Davidic descendant is left. [Second Kings 25:27-30](#) hints that the unconditional aspects of the Davidic promise may still, even after awful judgment has fallen, remain in force. Similarly, the prayer of Solomon in [1 Kings 8:22-53](#) looks beyond the disaster of exile, grounding its hope for the restoration of Israel to its land in God's gracious and unconditional election of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see also [1 Kings 18:36-37; 2 Kings 13:23; 14:27](#)). Solomon's prayer had also refused to accept that God's words about the rejection of people, city, and temple (e.g., [2 Kings 21:14; 23:27](#)) were his final words. The words in [2 Kings 25:27-30](#) express the hope that God may indeed be found to be, in the end as in the beginning, a God of grace and not only of commandment, and that a Son of David will one day appear to introduce his righteous rule on the earth.

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History of Salvation Summary

God's purpose in establishing Israel had been to bring blessing to the world through the people's covenant faithfulness. He instituted the Davidic dynasty to lead the people in their faithfulness. The history of Israel, as told by 1–2 Kings, is full of tragedies: the rupture of the kingdom so that the north was in rebellion against David's house; the failures of so many kings, north and south, to live faithfully and to lead wisely; and the deportations of the north and then of the south. And yet God will not fail in his purpose: Kings ends with kindness shown to David's heir ([2 Kings 25:27–30](#)), which leaves the hope that the Davidic line will continue, leading to the ultimate heir, the Messiah, and the hope that a chastened Israel may itself be restored and may fulfill its calling for the world. (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the [Overview of the Bible](#). See also [History of Salvation in the Old Testament: Preparing the Way for Christ](#).)

Literary Features

First and Second Kings are written in the form of historical narrative—specifically, a record of monarchical succession. The main rhetorical format of this court history is the summary of individual kings' careers, consisting of the name of each king, what kingdom he ruled (Israel or Judah), the date of his accession to the throne, the length of his reign, his religious and other policies, the details of his death, and the name of his successor. Yet the authors are as much theologians as historians. It is not their intention to provide every historical detail, and on occasion they direct readers who want more information to consult other sources. The authors' main intention is to interpret the history of Israel along theological lines, showing what happens when political and spiritual leaders foolishly choose to worship false gods instead of wisely choosing to worship the one true God.

Solomon is the dominant character in the first half of 1 Kings, and the prophet Elijah in the second half. These two "close-ups" are balanced by a host of brief vignettes, chiefly of kings. The book is also unified by the choice that each king (along with the nation itself) must make between following God and worshipping idols. The general movement of the book is from wisdom to folly, as Solomon's downfall is recapitulated in the choices of his sons and grandsons. The archetype of the evil king dominates the book, with the figure of King David repeatedly invoked as the royal standard by which his successors are measured and found wanting. Subgenres that appear intermittently in 1 Kings are the farewell address, the list of government officials, the building description, the dedicatory prayer, the inventory, the curse, the miracle story, the bet, and the taunt.

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Like 1 Kings, 2 Kings is encyclopedic in its scope, summarizing the careers of nearly 30 kings. The extensive portrait of the life of the prophet Elisha is an exception to this “broadstroke” format. The general shape of 2 Kings is tragic, depicting how a great nation falls into ruin. Some of the episodes in the book are narratives in their own right, and they fall into a number of subgenres, including confrontation story, medical case, ascension story, succession story, recovery story, battle story, hero story, miracle story, resurrection narrative, murder story, revenge narrative, prayer, prophecy, reformation story, and captivity narrative. Far from simply giving the facts, the historian tells what happened with a reporter’s eye for the significant detail, a storyteller’s flair for the dramatic, and a pastor’s heart for teaching people the difference between right and wrong. The principle of organization is chiefly chronological, covering some 300 years of royal history. Despite the abundance of kings whose careers are summarized, a repeated cycle unifies the book, consisting of reformation, deformation, and decline.

2 Kings Outline

- I. The Death of Ahaziah ([1:1–18](#))
- II. Elisha and Israel ([2:1–10:36](#))
 - A. Elijah gives way to Elisha ([2:1–25](#))
 - B. Elisha and the conquest of Moab ([3:1–27](#))
 - C. Elisha’s miracles ([4:1–44](#))
 - D. A Syrian is healed ([5:1–27](#))
 - E. Elisha and Syria ([6:1–23](#))
 - F. The siege of Samaria ([6:24–7:20](#))
 - G. The Shunammite’s land restored ([8:1–6](#))
 - H. Hazael murders Ben-hadad ([8:7–15](#))
 - I. Jehoram and Ahaziah ([8:16–29](#))
 - J. The end of Ahab’s house ([9:1–10:17](#))
 - K. Jehu destroys Baal worship ([10:18–36](#))
- III. Joash ([11:1–12:21](#))
- IV. Jehoahaz and Jehoash ([13:1–25](#))
- V. Amaziah, Jeroboam II, and Azariah ([14:1–15:7](#))
- VI. Israel’s Last Days ([15:8–31](#))

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- VII. Jotham and Ahaz ([15:32–16:20](#))
- VIII. The End of Israel ([17:1–41](#))
- IX. Hezekiah ([18:1–20:21](#))
- X. Manasseh and Amon ([21:1–26](#))
- XI. Josiah ([22:1–23:30](#))
- XII. The End of Judah ([23:31–25:30](#))¹

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 585-590, 645). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.