

1 & 2 KINGS

Introduction

Author/Title. In the Hebrew these two books were considered one composition. The LXX translation divided the book into its two parts. Jewish tradition names Jeremiah as the author although few accept this today. Whoever the writer was it is clear that he used certain sources to compile his inspired account including "the book of the chronicles of Solomon," (11:41); "the chronicles of the kings of Israel," (14:19); and "the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah," (14:29).

Date. Some have considered the date of the writing to be pre-exilic due to phrases referring to some things continuing in existence "to this day" (cf. 8:8, the poles used to carry the ark can be seen in the sanctuary; conscripted labor, 9:20-21; Israel in rebellion against the house of David, 8:22 et al.). However, the same kind of thing is found in the book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 5:9) which is clearly post-exilic. It is likely therefore that these are statements from the literary source from which the author drew and that the date of composition is subsequent to Jehoiachin's release from prison in 562 B. C. (2 Kings 25:27-30) and yet prior to 538 B. C.

Occasion. Based upon the date of the book it is clear that the book must have been written during the exile. The only likely audience then would have been the exiled body of Jews in Babylon and the surrounding districts.

Purpose. The book of Kings is obviously a highly selective history of the kings of Judah and Israel evaluated in terms of the covenant in order to explain the exile in terms of God's faithfulness to his covenant and ultimately, therefore, to encourage repentance on the part of the exiles. The book clearly does not provide a complete socio-political-economic history of the nation. It repeatedly refers the reader to other sources for other events in the lives of the kings (e.g., 11:41; 14:19, 29; 15:7, 31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27). For example, Omri of Israel was a statesman of no mean stature having to his credit the establishment of a

powerful dynasty, the establishment of the capital city of Samaria in Israel and subjugating the Moabites and yet his reign is relegated a mere 6 verses (1 Kings 16:23-8)! The kings who receive the weight of the attention are those during whose reigns there was either a significant deviation from or affirmation of the covenant. An example of the former notoriety is Ahab to whom six chapters are devoted (1 Kings 17-22). His reign represented a serious threat to covenant fidelity and almost resulted in the extinguishing of David's "lamp" (dynasty) in Judah. On the positive side, both Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20) and Josiah (2 Kings 22-23) receive more than the average amount of ink due to their activities in covenant renewal. These are also the only two kings given unqualified approval in their loyalty to the Lord (2 Kings 18:3; 22:2).

Another minor purpose of the book is to give emphasis to the Davidic line (cf. 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19 and the account of Jehoiachin).

In addition, another sub-theme of the book deals with fulfilled prophecy to teach the lesson that God is in control of history and future history (cf. 2 Sam 7:13 and 1 Kings 8:20; 1 Kings 11:29-39 and 1 Kings 12:15; 1 Kings 13 and 2 Kings 23:16-18). This theme would evidently encourage the exiles.

One final recurring topic in the book is the role of the prophets bring God's case against the nation. Many prophets are mentioned (Ahijah, 11:29-40; 14:5-18; Shemiah, 12:22-24) but primary attention is paid to Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17-19, 2 Kings 1-13). Given the role of the prophet in the theocratic economy of calling back a rebellious king and people the message to the reader would be obvious: Israel's exile was due to her own stubborn breaking of the covenant.

Structure. The structure of the book is basically unremarkable inviting the reader to outline it around the basic historical periods it describes and to the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. The lone exception to this evaluation involves the first twelve chapters of the book dealing with the Solomonic era. This section may be an example of literary inversion which focuses attention upon the middle section describing Solomon's building projects, including particularly the construction and dedication of the Temple, and the thematically significant prayer of dedication. It may be illustrated as follows:

A	Solomon's Succession to the Throne	1:1--2:12
B	Solomon's Throne Threatened, Yet Consolidated	2:13-46
C	Solomon's wisdom	3:1-28
D	Solomon's Reign Characterized	4:1-34
E	Solomon's Building Projects	5:1--9:9
D ₁	Solomon's Reign Characterized	9:10--10:29
C ₁	Solomon's Folly	11:1-13
B ₁	Solomon's Throne Threatened	11:14-43
A ₁	Rehoboam's Succession to the Throne	12:1-24

Message Statement. The message may best be summarized as: *The consistent disobedience of Israel's kings since David caused God to exile His people in faithfulness to the covenant.*

Argument

- 1A THE BLESSED RULE OF SOLOMON, A COVENANT-KEEPER 1:1--12:24
 As was noted above under Structure, these twelve chapters form a well designed literary unit. The focus is, of course, upon Solomon who is, for the most part, viewed positively. He is careful to observe the covenant made at Sinai and the covenant made with his father and is thus blessed abundantly. In this respect he is a paradigm of commendable kingship. Even this role model had his weaknesses, however and they are clearly admitted at the end of the section along with the notation of the proper punishment (11:1-43). Thus, even at the pinnacle of the monarchy the seeds of rebellion, and thus exile, were sown.
- 1B Solomon's Succession to the Throne 1:1--2:12
 The book opens with Adonijah's attempted coup and its defeat. On his deathbed David's final words to Solomon involve a charge of loyalty to the covenant of Moses and to justice.
- 2B Solomon's Throne Threatened, Yet Consolidated 2:13-46
 Solomon faithfully and wisely executes his father's orders and God firmly establishes the throne for him.
- 3B Solomon's wisdom 3:1-28
 Solomon's wise request is rewarded by God with the ability to administer the realm and riches and honor. His wisdom is then put on display in the celebrated case of the disputed child.
- 4B Solomon's Reign Characterized 4:1-34
 Solomon's reign is portrayed as almost utopian in its fulfillment of Abrahamic promises. Israel finally rules over the land promised to Abraham and the description of her population is couched in terms reflective of Genesis 15: "The people . . . were as numerous as the sand on the seashore" (4:20). In short, when the people and the king followed the covenant they

received covenant blessings. Likewise when they fail they can expect to receive the discipline of the covenant.

5B Solomon's Building Projects 5:1--9:9

The large central section of the first twelve chapters focuses attention on Solomon's building projects--an activity only made possible by the blessing of peace and prosperity. Solomon's construction of the Temple and his own palace are detailed. The work is completed and realizes its purpose in chapter 8 when the ark is brought into the new structure and it is dedicated to God.

The writer gives much ink to the record of Solomon's prayer which serves as a basis for his theme. Much of Solomon's prayer is a request that God would hear his people and forgive them when they sin. The climactic situation for which Solomon prays is exile (8:44-51). He takes the warnings of Deuteronomy 28 seriously and in advance prays that God would hear the prayers of his people when they find themselves outside of the land of promise. His basis for such a request is the election by God of Israel in the first place. Solomon's theology of blessing and cursing is reinforced by God's answer recorded in chapter 9. Thus, the writer clearly articulates his message here at the heart of the first section: Israel's exile is due to sin and God will hear her if she repents while in the exile.

6B Solomon's Reign Characterized 9:10--10:29

This section balances section D above which describes various aspects of Solomon's rule. His building activities, sacrifices, merchant fleet, wisdom and splendor are all reflected upon as blessings which have issued from his faithfulness to God.

7B Solomon's Folly 11:1-13

In contrast to Solomon's wisdom (Section C) the author describes Solomon's disobedience to the covenant and God's response. For this sin the kingdom will be taken away from Solomon. Just as God had established the kingdom in return for Solomon's obedience He now promises to take it from him for his covenant disloyalty.

8B Solomon's Throne Threatened 11:14-43

Several adversaries were raised up against Solomon by God. Hadad, Rezon and Jeroboam were used to bring pressure upon Solomon for his sin. The sad fact is that even though Solomon realized that his people would sin and that if they repented God would hear them, he, himself, fails in this regard. The author records nothing of Solomon repenting of his sin but only of his divinely thwarted attempt to prevent the consequences (11:40). Again, the seeds of destruction have obviously been sown at the height of the monarchy.

9B Rehoboam's Succession to the Throne 12:1-24

The unspoken subject of this section is actually Solomon. In reality the severing of the kingdom is the final result of his sin: ". . . this turn of events was from the Lord, to fulfill the word the Lord had spoken" (12:15). As the Lord had taken the kingdom from Solomon so he would take the people from the land if they persisted in Solomon's sin.

2A ISRAEL AND JUDAH FROM THE DIVISION TO AHAB/ASA 12:25--16:34

This section deals with the reigns of certain kings down to the days of Ahab and Asa. From there the narrative concentrates on the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Each of the kings are evaluated on the basis of covenant fidelity.

1B The Sin of Jeroboam 1 of Israel 12:25--14:20

Jeroboam is prototypical of the wicked king. Although God chose him as the king of Israel,

his rebellion was flagrantly designed to counterfeit the true worship of God. His apostate system of worship was motivated by unbelief and included a counterfeit person, place, time and object of worship. It was thoroughly heretical so that Jeroboam became the canon of wickedness for the rest of the kings in the northern kingdom. God serves notice that Jeroboam's actions have been displeasing by the visit of the unnamed prophet. Jeroboam, however, persisted in his sin despite the rebuke (13:33-34). Therefore, Ahijah was sent to deliver a prophecy of the downfall of Jeroboam's house which occurred in the reign of Baasha (16:7).

- 2B Rehoboam King Of Judah 14:21-31
Among Rehoboam's foolish acts was the restoration of canaanite worship throughout the land. God's response was to remove the blessings which He gave under Solomon. Pathetically, the golden shields of Solomon were carried off to Egypt and replaced by bronze shields. The process of decay in the kingdom spiritually with its attendant military defeat which began under Solomon is now continued and accelerated.
- 3B Abijah of Judah 15:1-8
The simple summary of Abijah is one of spiritual failure. This sin, multiplied countless times, was designed to produce an undeniable conclusion of guilt on the part of the reader.
- 4B Asa of Judah 15:9-24
Asa's actions are a mix of belief and unbelief. Even the few good kings had serious flaws.
- 5B Nadab of Israel 15:25-32
Nadab's only significant contribution to covenant history was his annihilation of the house of Jeroboam in fulfillment of the prophecy of Ahijah.
- 6B Baasha of Israel 15:33--16:7
Ironically, Baasha was the human instrument for the extermination of Jeroboam's house but also experienced the same fate for the same kind of sin (cf. 16:11-13).
- 7B Elah of Israel 16:8-14
The shortness of Elah's life was due to his sin (16:13).
- 8B Zimri of Israel 16:15-20
Although Zimri's reign was no more than a matter of a few days the author is quick to attribute his death to his sins which he committed and "walking in the ways of Jeroboam . . . (16:19)."
- 9B Omri of Israel 16:21-28
For all of Omri's political achievements, nothing is more important than his spiritual influence which is judged as wanting. To the writer of the book, and in reality, little else matters.
- 10B Ahab of Israel 16:29-34
While Ahab's life is discussed more extensively in his interaction with Elijah, a summary is given here in which he is said to have exceeded even the sins of Jeroboam (16:31). While Jeroboam set up a counterfeit worship system in Bethel, Ahab exceeded this sin by encouraging the spiritually seductive worship of Baal. For this reason he becomes the new standard of degeneracy by which wicked kings are measured.

- JORAM/JEHOSHAPHAT 17:1--2K8:15
 The role of the prophet in the theocratic structure was one of restoration. Thus his presence and activity were generally a sign of some covenantal deviation. Whenever the leadership failed to carry out its mission in covenantal faithfulness, God's word could be heard through the mouth of the prophet. The frequency of prophetic ministry therefore serves as a general barometer of the spiritual state of the nation. The large space given to the ministries of Elijah, Elisha and other prophets in the book of Kings (nearly 14 chapters or nearly 30% of the whole corpus) is itself weighty testimony to the serious covenantal corruption of the times.
- 1B Prophetic Ministries During the Reign of Ahab 17:1--22:40
- 1C Elijah and the drought: God's faithfulness to covenant 17:1--18:46
 This section which all concerns the drought includes several episodes. The first involves Elijah's announcement to Ahab that in fulfillment of God's covenantal promise there will be a drought in Israel as a result of sin. The second episode shows that while Israel is unworthy of blessing, God will be gracious to a believing widow in a Gentile land. The final incident in this section involves God's vindication before Ahab. With the slaughtering of his prophets the rain comes. The whole incident serves as a simple application of Deuteronomic principle and also as a focused polemic against baalism.
- 2C Elijah's flight to Horeb: God's faithfulness to His covenant 19:1-21
 The message in this account is at least enigmatic. It may be, however, that while Elijah's fiery personality and negative assessment of Israel call for judgment immediately that God's desire for the nation at this point was to simply continue his mission to His people. Although Elijah saw a windstorm, earthquake and fire, God's voice was not in any of these. His intention at this point was not judgment but to continue His ministry among His people through a successor to Elijah, namely Elisha.
- 3C Ahab's sin/failure to exterminate his enemies 20:1-43
 In this account Ahab's sin once again confronts him through the word of a prophet. As with Nathan's rebuke of David, Ahab is tricked in to pronouncing his own sentence. Because Ahab failed to inquire of the Lord for direction and let his enemy free, God required the life of Ahab in exchange.
- 4C Ahab's violation of social law 21:1-28
 The intent of the author in recounting this story is not simply to substantiate his thesis concerning the culpability of Israel's kings. At the end of this section he is careful to note that although Ahab's wickedness was notorious ("There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord" 21:25), he also repented. And, perhaps more importantly for the purpose of this work, God heard him. The point for the reader seems clear: regardless of spiritual condition God will hear the prayer of the penitent one, even the nation in exile.
- 5C Ahab's death 22:1-40
 Ahab's death is recorded as the fulfillment of the prophecy given against him.
- 2B Jehoshaphat of Judah 22:41-50
 With the exception of failing to remove the high places, Jehoshaphat is compared favorably with David. He is one of the few bright spots in the record.
- 3B Ahaziah of Israel 22:51-53

Ahaziah receives a short epitaph reflecting his evil life and thus demonstrating the need for the prophetic ministry.

- 4B Elijah's Last Prophecy And The Transfer of Prophetic Mantel 2K1:1--2:18
 Although the author has just given a short evaluation of the life of Ahaziah, this incident involving his interaction with the prophet is included because it best demonstrates Ahaziah's insolence in regard to the word of God.

This section also includes the transfer of the power and office of Elijah to Elisha. God is faithful to his people in providing them with a constant and steadfast voice of truth. The miracles of the men are nearly identical.

- 5B Elisha's Ministry During The Reign of Joram 2:19--8:15
 Unlike Jeremiah's proportionately negative message Elisha's ministry during this time seems to be one of restoration and deliverance. He first deliver's Israel and Judah's armies from both thirst and foreign armies. He then provides for a needy widow, the Shunammite and some prophets. The next one to receive deliverance (this time from disease) is the Gentile, Naaman. Then a needy prophet requires Elisha's services to locate a lost instrument. Elisha's attention is next turned to his deliverance of Israel from Aramean raiders and also Ben-Hadad. The final story in this section involves the restoration of the Shunammite's land to her. Elisha's ministry then has also a positive note to it. Besides his rebuke of sin, he also powerfully displays the healing hand of God in his ministry. The message for the reader would be obvious.

- 4A ISRAEL AND JUDAH FROM JORAM/JEHORAM TO THE EXILE OF JUDAH 8:16--17:41
 With the completion of the stories of the prophets the writer returns to his previous pattern of tracing the reigns of the kings including only the spiritually salient points.

- 1B Jehoram of Judah 8:16-24
 Jehoram's wickedness is compared with Ahab of Israel. The most striking feature of his kingdom was the loss of control over Edom, that renowned enemy of Israel. Considering the historically poor relations between the two countries, such a step downward on the geopolitical scale was momentous.

- 2B Ahaziah of Judah 8:25-29
 Ahaziah's short reign is negatively compared to Ahab's reign, a striking assessment for kings of Judah.

- 3B Jehu's Revolt and Reign 9:1--10:35
 The fact that Jehu's reign is a bright spot in Israel is sad commentary on the spiritual/political situation of the 9th century B.C. Jehu did fulfill the desires of the Lord in his destruction of Ahab's house (9:36) and of the ministers of Baal (10:28), but he failed to turn away from the sins of Jeroboam (worship of golden calves at Dan and Bethel, 10:29). Jehu's accomplishment was at best a step back from a greater to a lesser degree of apostasy.

- 4B Joash of Judah 11:1--12:21
 Although Joash contributed to a certain amount of revival, the author of Kings notes that much of what he did in restoration of the temple was nullified by his unbelief. When Hazael of Syria came to attack Jerusalem, Joash stripped the temple and gave the sacred objects to the enemy as tribute.

- 5B Jehoahaz of Israel 13:1-9

Although Jehoahaz followed the sins of his fathers he did seek the Lord when under foreign pressure. The text states that God delivered him because of his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not because of any righteousness on the part of the people (13:23). The nation at this point is clearly deserving of punishment. The only reason God would not destroy them completely was not because of their faithfulness but because of His faithfulness.

- 6B Jehoash of Israel 13:10-25
 Jehoash's story is a sad one because of the lost opportunity which the nation experienced. He was limited only by his unbelief.
- 7B Amaziah of Judah 14:1-22
 Amaziah's reign was characterized by moderate spiritual sensitivity. He was careful to order many of his actions by the covenant and God gave him victory over the nation's prototypical "near" enemy, Edom. Unfortunately, he was defeated militarily by Israel and imprisoned by Jehoash. The writer is atypically silent in his comment on the reason for Amaziah's defeat.
- 8B Jeroboam II of Israel 14:23-29
 The suffering of the people was so great under Jeroboam II that God gave them a deliverer. Consequently the nation enjoyed greater prosperity under Jeroboam II than any other king since David and Solomon. The writer of Kings, true to his theme, mentions nothing of this prosperity.
- 9B Azariah of Judah 15:1-7
 Azariah's reign is notable only for its moderate obedience.
- 10B Zechariah of Israel 15:8-12
 Zechariah continued in the sins of Jeroboam I.
- 11B Shallum of Israel 15:13-16
 Shallum is remembered only for his cruelty.
- 12B Menahem of Israel 15:17-22
 Menahem, like so many before him, continued in the sins of Jeroboam and, unlike them, was forced to make the first installment of the final judgment at the hands of the king of Assyria.
- 13B Pekahiah of Israel 15:23-26
 Pekahiah's two years introduce nothing new in the apostate government of Israel.
- 14B Pekah of Israel 15:27-31
 Although Pekah's invasion of Judah was very politically significant the author here records only that he contributed to the exile by his sin. Tiglath-Pileser gobbled up more of Israel under Pekah's rule as a portent of things to come. Unfortunately, just like the Babylonian nobles of a few centuries later, none of the leadership in Israel could read handwriting on the wall either.
- 15B Jotham of Judah 15:32-38
 Jotham is credited with sufficient righteousness and was able to evidence an apparent blessing of God--the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, thus fulfilling his responsibility of protecting the nation.
- 16B Ahaz of Judah 16:1-20

Ahaz of Judah was a wicked king who not only sinned but worked hard at it. His most egregious error was the reconstitution of worship at Jerusalem based upon the pagan worship from Damascus.

- 17B Hoshea of Israel 17:1-6
Hoshea's sin culminated generations of wickedness and resulted in the exile of Israel.
- 18B Commentary on the exile of Israel 17:7-41
True to his theme, the author spills much ink on the reason for the exile: covenant disloyalty. Through repetition he underscores the point that the sin of Israel was flagrant and deliberate. He also records the sad story of Samaritan syncretism. When God punished the people for failing to honor him they simply added YHWH to their pantheon.
- 5A JUDAH FROM HEZEKIAH TO THE BABYLONIAN EXILE 18:1--25:30
Without her apostate sister to the north Judah was left to decide her own fate for the next 140 years. Inauspiciously, the nation to the south learned little from the outcome of the one to the north and eventually suffered the same fate.
- 1B Hezekiah of Judah 18:1--20:21
Hezekiah's story is proof that God still hears and answers the prayers of his people. Military victory as described in Deuteronomy was experienced by Hezekiah when he waged the battle on his knees. He soon stood up however and forgot God. Isaiah's response indicates that Hezekiah's actions evidenced a proud and self-sufficient heart--just the opposite characteristic he had displayed with Sennacherib. Isaiah notes that this spirit will eventually lead to the exile of Judah (20:16).
- 2B Manasseh of Judah 21:1-18
While Isaiah prophesied that "some" of Hezekiah's descendants would be carried off, the prophecy given to Manasseh is much more severe indicating a full scale destruction and exile. The sins of Manasseh are clearly catalogued along with the condemning reminder of the covenantal promise: "I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law . . ." (21:8). Manasseh set a new precedent of paganism, which, when persisted in led to the certain exile in Babylon.
- 3B Amon of Judah 21:19-26
Amon continued in the ways of his father.
- 4B Josiah of Judah 22:1--23:30
Of all the events of Josiah's life and death, the focus in this book concerns his covenant renewal. Josiah's work of retrieving the nation from apostasy was unprecedented. "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did . . ." (23:25). Nevertheless, the work of Josiah was only superficially accepted by the people who returned to their old ways upon his death. Thus, even the godly Josiah could not prevent tidal wave of God's judgment which had been building for generations.
- 5B Jehoahaz of Judah 23:31-35
The author notes that Jehoahaz predictably "did evil" in his short three month reign.
- 6B Jehoiakim of Judah 23:36--24:7
Jehoiakim's rebellion was equivalent to the proverbial straw which finally precipitated the exile.

- 7B Jehoiachin of Judah 24:8-17
Jehoiachin only reigned three months. There is no negative assessment of his short reign however which may have contributed to his preservation by Nebuchadnezzar.
- 8B Zedekiah of Judah 24:18-20
Zedekiah's only mention here is negative, "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord" (24:19).
- 9B The Fall of Jerusalem 24:20--25:26
In the fall of the city special mention is made of the punishment of Zedekiah and of the ruin of the Temple. The monarchy and the temple, the two most prominent symbols of the theocracy are overcome by the Babylonian army. The remnant left in the land remains incorrigibly rebellious, however, demonstrating their spiritual sensitivity by assassinating Nebuchadnezzar's proxy, Gedaliah. Thus, the experience of the exile by itself, did not necessarily produce a repentant heart in the people.
- 10B Jehoiachin's Elevation in Babylon 25:27-30
This last note of God's providential preservation of the Davidic monarchy is one of the kindnesses of God which should lead the nation to repentance. Though the people have forgotten Him and shown no sign of repentance, God is faithful to his covenants with Abraham and David.

Outline

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