

Book of 2 Kings

Title

See introduction from 1 Kings.

The books of Kings were originally one book in the Hebrew text and formed a two volume corpus with the present books of Samuel.

Therefore, 2 Kings is actually the fourth book in the series on the history of the Hebrew kings as presently arranged.

It also serves as the final account of the demise of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

The narrative of this volume concentrates on the miraculous ministry of the prophet Elisha.

Events parallel the prophetic ministries of Amos and Hosea in Israel and eight prophets of Judah, including Isaiah and Jeremiah.

The book also cover the reign of Amaziah (853 BC), to (Zedekiah (586 B.C.), in Judah.

Included are the accounts of the Assyrian conquest of the northern tribes and the deportation of Judah in the Babylonian captivity.

Historical Setting

Anyone wishing to indulge in hours of true drama that makes fiction seem tame should begin with 1 Samuel and read straight through to the end of 2 Kings.

Those four books narrate the rise and fall of the monarchy in Israel.

From its establishment under the prophet Samuel to its demise with the deportation of the last two tribes into captivity.

It is a sad, often violent story made bearable only by the unconditional promise of God to King David that his throne would never lack for one of his descendants (Acts 2:29-30).

That final seed of David will one day sit upon that throne, the Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth (Matt. 1:1; 12:23; 21:15; 22:42).

After Solomon's reign, the 10 northern tribes of Israel united under Jeroboam (not a descendant of David), while the two southern tribes (Benjamin and Judah), were ruled by Solomon's son, Rehoboam.

Jeroboam introduced Baal worship in the north, and it remained.

Because the northern tribes would not remove idols from the land, God removed the tribes from the land.

The Assyrians invaded in 722 B.C. and took control of the north, taking many of the Israelites captive.

All of Israel's 20 kings (who ruled the northern 10 tribes) were evil.

Judah's 20 kings (who ruled over the southern two tribes), all descendants of the Davidic dynasty, fared a bit better.

Eight were considered righteous, notably Hezekiah (16:20; 18:1 – 20:21) and Josiah (21:26 – 23:30).

Both destroyed idols and called Judah back to the worship of the LORD.

But their efforts were not enough.

The final three kings of Judah were all wicked and saw Babylon carry captives away from Judah in three waves.

During the concluding wave (in 586 B.C.), the temple was burned and Judah was destroyed.

Not surprisingly, most of the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament were active during the time of 2 Kings.

They condemned the idolatry, immorality, social injustice, and ungodly alliances perpetuated by Israel's ungodly kings and called those rulers and the people to return to God.

The story of Elijah's ministry begins in the last pages of 1 Kings and concludes in 2 Kings with Elisha's succession.

These books were written sometime between 586 and 536 B.C.

In Kings we see the gloomy picture of the decline of both the northern and southern kingdoms (Israel and Judah), during their final days of independence.

However, the major religious revivals under Hezekiah and Josiah are also recounted.

Israel again is depicted as the starting point of God's dealing with the Gentile nations.

Israel's spiritual disobedience and idolatry are viewed against the backdrop of the rising fortunes of Assyria in the eighth century B.C. and Babylon in the sixth century B.C.

The northern kingdom finally fell to the Assyrians (in 722 B.C.), and the southern kingdom fell to the Babylonians (in 605 B.C.), with the final destruction of Jerusalem coming (in 586 B.C.).

Authorship

The author of 2 Kings is not known with certainty, although Jewish tradition claims it was Jeremiah.

He certainly had every quality necessary to be the author of this material.

He was both a prophet and a priest.

He had direct access to Judah's last kings and was an eyewitness of her final destruction.

For a detailed discussion of authorship, see introduction to 1 Kings.

The story of Israel as a nation began when the descendants of Jacob were redeemed from captivity in Egypt and introduced to their Redeemer, the God of Abraham, in the Sinai desert.

The story of Israel concludes at the end of 2 Kings with the nation back in captivity.

From the Exodus to the Exile, it took nearly 900 years for Israel's unfaithfulness to bear its bitter fruit, undeserved captivity in Egypt, followed by fully deserved captivity by the Assyrian and Babylonians empires.

Yet all was not lost.

Though the prophets, God continued to emphasize that Israel, remained His chosen people, the apple of His eye (Jer. 31:35-37; Zech. 2:8).

Amos reported that the tabernacle (house), of David would be restored (Amos 9:11).

Where Israel's sin abounded, God's grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20).

2 Kings was originally the concluding half on one volume and was finalized sometime after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

The first 17 chapters capture events in the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah; the final eight chapters focus on Judah alone.

A special feature of the books of the Kings is the correlation of historical facts with theological truths.

This is no mere history as an end in itself but is the story of the living God who acts in the affairs of men and nations.

Here is the record for all to read, of God's providential care of His people.