

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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2 Kings

The book of 2 Kings is filled with leaders who did not learn from the past. By virtue of their spiritual failure, these kings brought doom upon themselves and their nation. However, there are also sparkling examples of people who put God and his word first and enjoyed the blessings God promised. Reading the accounts of the kings' lives inspires us to avoid their mistakes and to enjoy the blessings that God promises to those who love and serve him.

Setting

The book of 2 Kings continues the story of Israel's divided monarchy, picking up where 1 Kings ends, with Ahaziah reigning over the northern kingdom of Israel and Jehoshaphat ruling in the southern kingdom of Judah. The account traces the fortunes of the two kingdoms to their respective ends—the northern kingdom in 722 BC, the southern kingdom in 586 BC.

Summary

The book of 2 Kings is structured around the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah. Four different periods are covered: (1) the closing years of the northern kingdom's third dynasty (853–841 BC, [1:1-9:37](#)), (2) the era of the northern kingdom's fourth dynasty (841–752 BC, [10:1-15:12](#)), (3) the period of the northern kingdom's decline and fall (752–722 BC, [15:13-17:41](#)), and (4) the final era of the southern kingdom (722–586 BC, [18:1-25:30](#)).

The book begins with an accident that caused the death of King Ahaziah of Israel ([1:1-18](#)) and with the closing event of Elijah's life, when God took him into heaven ([2:1-12](#)). The prophetic mantle passed to Elisha, whose miracles and advice occupy the next several chapters ([2:12-8:15](#); see [9:1-10](#)).

The reigns of kings Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah ([8:16-29](#)) bring the account to the pivotal year of 841 BC, when Jehu killed kings Joram and Ahaziah. Jehu also executed Jezebel, the surviving members of Ahab's family, and the officials who worshiped Baal ([9:11-10:29](#)). So Jehu's twenty-eight-year reign began ([10:30-36](#)). At the same time Athaliah ([11:1-20](#)) usurped the throne of Judah and reigned for six years until those loyal to David's line installed young Joash as king ([12:1-21](#)).

The twin kingdoms enjoyed prosperity for a time ([14:23-15:7](#)), but the northern kingdom continued to do evil and entered its decline: Zechariah's assassination ([15:8-12](#)) was followed by the short reigns of Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea ([15:13-17:2](#)). Hoshea, Israel's last king (732–722 BC), foolishly placed his confidence in Egypt and rebelled against Assyria, bringing about the capture of Samaria and the end of the northern kingdom in 722 BC ([17:3-6](#)). The author then evaluates the reasons for Israel's fall and gives an account of Samaria's repopulation ([17:7-41](#)).

The final section of 2 Kings ([18:1-25:30](#)) deals with the fortunes of Judah. Hezekiah is remembered for trusting the Lord while under pressure ([18:5-6](#); see [18:13-20:11](#)), and Josiah earns praise for his devotion to the law of the Lord ([23:19](#); see [22:8-23:25](#)). However, even these two kings made critical mistakes ([20:12-19](#); [23:29-30](#); see [2 Chr 35:20-25](#)).

Following Josiah's death, the final kings of Judah did what was evil in the Lord's sight, and the southern kingdom was ravaged and finally destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon ([2](#)

[Kgs 23:31-25:21](#)). God's prophesied judgment had come (see [Jer 38:17-23](#)), and the glorious kingdom of Israel passed into the realm of memory.

The book of 2 Kings closes with two appended notes. The first deals with events in Judah after the fall of Jerusalem ([2 Kgs 25:22-26](#)). The second describes the later release of Jehoiachin in Babylon ([25:27-30](#)).

Authorship and Date

The book of 2 Kings is a continuation of 1 Kings, written by the same author, whose precise identity is unknown. He was well acquainted with sources that enabled him to compose a detailed history of Israel's divided monarchy, and he had insight to evaluate the reasons for successes and failures on the basis of the people's response to the Mosaic covenant. His intimate acquaintance with Judah's later history indicates that he may have lived in or near Jerusalem and may have been an eyewitness to many of the events that brought about the city's fall. Whether he was still alive to write the final appendix about Jehoiachin's release (561 BC, [25:25-30](#)) is uncertain. If not, these verses were added by someone well acquainted with 2 Kings and of a kindred spirit with the primary writer. One tradition holds that the single author of 1-2 Kings was Jeremiah and that he was taken to Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's return from a campaign in Egypt (around 568 BC) and lived there well into his nineties.

Based on information in the closing chapters, the final composition of 2 Kings most likely took place shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, with the final appendix to the book added shortly after Nebuchadnezzar II's death in 562 BC.

Chronology

Second Kings is filled with chronological information about the kings of Israel and Judah, but none of this information gives us absolute dates. We obtain absolute dates by comparing Israel's records with the records of surrounding nations (Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt) and with astronomical calculations. Remarkable harmony is found among the records, which serves as evidence that Israel's accounts are historically accurate and precise.

Meaning and Message

Each king of the divided monarchy is evaluated on the basis of his faithfulness (or lack thereof) to God. They either “did what was pleasing in the Lord’s sight” or “did what was evil in the Lord’s sight.”

The kings of Israel were consistently evil. They “followed the example of Jeroboam son of Nebat, continuing the sins that Jeroboam had led Israel to commit” ([13:2, 11; 14:24; 15:9; 17:2](#)). Many of the kings of Judah receive similar censure (see e.g., [8:18](#)). Manasseh, in particular, is condemned for his rampant idolatry and apostasy ([21:2-9](#)), and his example is followed by several kings after him ([21:20; 23:32, 37; 24:9, 19](#)).

Several kings of Judah are commended, however, for doing “what was pleasing in the Lord’s sight” ([12:2; 14:3; 15:3, 34; 18:3; 22:2](#)). Such men were concerned for the upkeep and repair of the Temple ([12:6-16; 22:3-7](#)) and for obedience to the precepts of God’s word ([18:6; 22:8-13; 23:1-3](#)). Hezekiah and Josiah receive special commendation: Hezekiah for his trust in the Lord and his honoring of God’s word ([18:5-6](#)), and Josiah for his high regard for the law of Moses ([23:25](#)). The implication is clear. God’s people are to live in accord with the high standards of God’s word so that they may do what is “pleasing in God’s sight” (cp. [Ps 119:9-11, 111; 2 Tim 3:16-17](#)).

The prominence given to the final days of the great prophet Elijah ([1:3-17; 2:1-11](#)) and to Elisha’s spectacular ministry ([2:12-25; 3:11-19; 4:1-7:2; 8:1-2](#)) emphasizes the need to proclaim God’s words to others ([Acts 20:18-21; 2 Tim 2:15; 4:2](#)) so that they may come into covenant relationship with the Lord ([2 Cor 3:4-6](#)).

Finally, the failures of even the good kings remind God’s people to steadfastly be faithful to the Lord and serve him. Then their lives can be filled with good ([Ps 84:11; Rom 14:7-8](#)), and when they stand before God for judgment ([Rom 14:10-11; 2 Cor 5:10](#)), he will reward and praise them ([2 Tim 4:7-8; Rev 2:10](#); see [Matt 25:23](#)).