

Introduction to 2 Kings

Where is it in the Bible?

2 Kings is the twelfth book of the Old Testament and the seventh of the historical books in Christian Bibles. It follows 1 Kings and comes before 1 Chronicles. In Hebrew Bibles, there is one book of Kings and it follows Samuel as part of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings). Like 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book that was divided when it was translated into Greek. This division was somewhat arbitrary, with the reign of Ahaziah spanning the two books. In spite of this division of the books of Samuel and Kings, the Septuagint recognized the relationship between them by calling them First, Second, Third, and Fourth Kingdoms.

Who wrote it?

According to tradition, the prophet Jeremiah was the author of 1 and 2 Kings. However, many scholars today see them as the conclusion of the Deuteronomistic History that is made up of older traditions which have been collected and edited by an unknown author or authors.

When was it written?

The last event recorded in 1 and 2 Kings is Jehoiachin's release from prison, which occurred in 561 B.C. during the Babylonian captivity. Since the return from exile in 538 B.C. is not mentioned, the assumption is that these books were written during the exile between these two years.

What is it about?

2 Kings is a continuation of 1 Kings that follows the kingdoms of Israel and Judah to their conquest by the Assyrians and Babylonians, respectively. As with the other books in the Deuteronomistic History, the story is told from the perspective of the laws in Deuteronomy. The fate of Israel and Judah is due to their violation of the covenant in two major areas: turning to idolatry and not worshipping God alone; and worshipping outside of the temple in Jerusalem. The problem is *not* that God has failed to keep the promise made in 2 Samuel 7 to establish the throne of David forever. In fact, with the release of Jehoiachin, this promise is still can still be kept.

How is it structured?

- I. The End of Ahaziah's Reign (1:1-18)
- II. Elisha's Ministry in Israel (2:1-10:36)
 - a. Elisha Succeeds Elijah (2:1-25)
 - b. The War Against Moab (3:1-27)
 - c. Elisha and the Widow (4:1-37)
 - d. Miracles by Elisha (4:38-44)
 - e. Elisha Heals Naaman (5:1-27)
 - f. More Miracles by Elisha (6:1-7)
 - g. Elisha and Syria (6:8-8:15)
- III. Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah (8:16-29)

- IV. Jehu's Revolt and Purge in Israel (9:1-10:36)
- V. Athaliah and Joash of Judah (11:1-12:21)
- VI. The Last Years of Israel (13:1-17:41)
 - a. Jehoahaz and Jehoash of Israel (13:1-25)
 - b. Amaziah of Judah (14:1-22)
 - c. Jeroboam II of Israel (14:23-29)
 - d. Azariah of Judah (15:1-7)
 - e. Five Kings of Israel (15:8-31)
 - f. Jotham and Ahaz of Judah (15:32-16:20)
 - g. Hoshea and the Fall of Israel (17:1-41)
- VII. The Last Years of Judah (18:1-25:30)
 - a. Hezekiah (18:1-20:21)
 - b. Manasseh and Amon (21:1-26)
 - c. Josiah (22:1-23:30)
 - d. The Final Days of Judah (23:31-25:30)

What are some things to look for?

- **Chronology and Dating:** The same types of problems with internal inconsistencies and discrepancies with external sources that were found in 1 Kings are also present in 2 Kings. See the Introduction to 1 Kings for a fuller discussion.
- **Kingship:** The pattern for what kingship should look like was given in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. One of the requirements was that the king uphold the Mosaic law. All of the kings of Israel and most of the kings of Judah failed in this. Israel had 20 rulers; all of them were seen as apostates. Eight of the twenty rulers of Judah received a positive evaluation from the editors. 2 Kings includes the stories of the only two who received unqualified praise: Hezekiah and Josiah.
- **Prophets:** Beginning with the divided kingdom, prophets take on a more prominent role in the history. One of the functions they have is making or deposing kings. In 2 Kings, the most important prophets include Elisha and Isaiah. Others, such as Jeremiah, were active during that period although they are not mentioned in the book.
- **Sources:** There are two sources mentioned by name in 2 Kings: *The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel*; and *The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah*. These are unknown outside of these references. However, there are references to people and events described in Kings in Assyrian and Babylonian sources.