

1 Kings and 2 Kings

Traditionally referred to as **THE** Book of Kings.

Authorship attributed traditionally to Jeremiah the prophet.

The Book of Kings is part of the ‘**narrative literature**’ contained in the Holy Bible. Essentially, it is composed of a series of stories of the lives of the Kings of the Northern and Southern Kingdom (their achievements, sins and exploits) and of the faithlessness of the people over whom they reigned.

Its plot is concerned with the attempts that Israel makes (or more often fails to make) under its monarchy to live as the People of God in the Promised Land. God had first promised to give this land as an inheritance to Abraham, then through Moses to His people in bondage in Egypt. Joshua received the people from Moses and brought them into the Land of promise through many victorious conquests. They enjoyed periods of intermittent peace and conflict as they struggled to remain faithful under God-appointed leaders called 'Judges' to the worship of the God who gave them possession of their land. Looking to the surrounding nations for a model of government, the People of God rebelled against the Divinely established order and demanded of God a King (other than God) to rule over them as many other nations had. Their request was reluctantly granted by the Lord.

The Book of Kings is also a form of **didactic literature**. This means that the people (especially the Kings) in these stories are offered to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as a display of **TYPES** of people in their relationship to God. The events and experiences in the lives of these Kings and those over whom they exercised their influence are not dissimilar to those we face in our own contemporary day and age. Their temperaments, personality traits and dispositions/attitudes towards God, holiness and sin are identical to those we may possess/exhibit at certain times in our walk with God. The Holy Spirit invites us to ‘read our own lives into the lives’ of these biblical figures in order to better understand ourselves and the effects of the various decisions we make on our path to Heaven.

The Primary Readership:

Jeremiah wrote primarily for his people who had been taken into captivity. They sorely needed help, and God sent them His word through Jeremiah (whom God had previously used to forewarn them against provoking the Lord's anger by refusing to repent of their evil deeds). The Holy Spirit inspired Jeremiah to write this work to:

- 1) Explain to the people why their exile had taken place.**
- 2) To urge them to guard against the dangers incurred while they were in captivity and**
- 3) To give them hope for the future (They will return again to the Promised Land and the Messiah will yet come from the House of David).**

A Secondary Readership:

Jeremiah also seems to have been explicitly directing his work at the schools of the prophets, which he designates as the ‘sons of the prophets’ (1 Kings Ch 2:3,5,15; Ch 4:1,38, Ch 6:1). This suggests that the Holy Spirit had in mind a special group of readers within his larger readership, namely the prophets of God. We know that there were other prophets among the people during their captivity to Babylon (Ezekiel, Daniel) and after the exile (Haggai, Malachi, Zechariah, Zephaniah). This Book was written to offer hope and strength for the people of God and those servants of God who were entrusted to look after His people.

1) **The reasons for the exile / captivity**

- a) **Idolatry:** widespread and rampant- the most provocative of Israel's sins to God. We who know the Lord can give to other things the allegiance that belongs to Him alone. When we do so we are guilty of idolatry.
- b) **Refusal to heed the word of God** (2 Kings 17: 13-15)
- c) **God's faithfulness:** They were in captivity because God was faithful to His promises (Deut 30: 17-18)

The danger posed by captivity:

The Book of Kings was intended to deal with a challenge that the exiles in Babylon were currently facing, in that they were tempted to synthesise or blend their faith in God with the religious beliefs and practices of Babylon. The seductive allure of Babylon's charms and her political pressure were intense. On the other hand, those captives who were thoughtful and discerning had to know that they had lost everything (including their freedom) and had been taken away to Babylon precisely because of their failure to stand against idolatry (worshiping other gods instead of or *alongside* God)

3) Hope for the future:

The captives in Babylon were in desperate need of hope. In addition to losing everything they held near and dear, they found themselves in a crisis of faith. On the one hand, God had made them glorious promises including that Judah was the nation from which the Messiah would come and that King David was to be His ancestor. When he appeared, the Messiah would be promised to come into His glorious Temple. On the other hand, the nation of Judah and the House of David were captive in faraway Babylon and the Temple was destroyed. It seemed that all was lost. Jeremiah wrote to his people not only to explain why the captivity had taken place, but also to assure them that God was not finished with them. The same faithful God that caused them to go into captivity now gave them hope:

(2 Kings 25:27-30)

“²⁷ Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh *day* of the month, *that* Evil-Merodach^[d] king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, **released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison.** ²⁸ **He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who *were* with him in Babylon.** ²⁹ **So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life.** ³⁰ **And as for his provisions, *there was* a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.”**

We might be inclined to read this as nothing more than a historical note of little significance- but it had to be much more than that to the captives. Their King, a descendant of David, was being sustained and nurtured in Babylon. Then the promise of the Messiah was not lost! In sustaining the King, was was sustaining His promise in the eyes and hearts of His people!

4 Highlights from the Book of Kings

1) King Ahab and Queen Jezebel's reign

“Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who *were* before him. ³¹ And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. ³² Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. ³³ And Ahab made a wooden image.^[a] Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.” (1 Kings 16:30-33)

2) *King Hezekiah's reign*

“Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. ² He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem.. ³ **And he did *what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.***⁴ **He removed the high places and broke the *sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image***^[b] **and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.**^[c] ⁵ **He trusted in the Lord** God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. ⁶ **For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments,** which the Lord had commanded Moses. ⁷ **The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went.”** (2 Kings 18: 1-6)

3) King Manasseh's reign

a) His sins

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hephzibah. ² And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, **according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.** ³ For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image,^[a] as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven^[b] and served them. ⁴ He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, “In Jerusalem I will put My name.” ⁵ And he built altars for all the host of heaven **in the two courts of the house of the Lord.** ⁶ Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums.” (2 Kings 21:1-6)

“He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. ⁷ He even set a carved image of Asherah^[c] that he had made, in the house of which the Lord had said to David and to Solomon his son, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; ⁸ and I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers—only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them.” ⁹ But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.” (2 Kings 21:7-9)

b) His repentance

¹⁰ And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. ¹¹ Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks,^[b] bound him with bronze *fetters*, and carried him off to Babylon. ¹² Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, ¹³ and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord *was* God.¹⁴ ... **He took away** the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem; and he **cast *them* out** of the city. ¹⁶ **He also repaired** the altar of the Lord, **sacrificed** peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and **commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.** ¹⁷ Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, *but* only to the Lord their God. (2 Chronicles 33:10-17)

King Josiah's reign

¹⁹ Now Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord^[f] to anger; ²⁰ He executed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars ...²¹ Then the king commanded all the people, saying, “Keep the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” ²² **Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah.** ²³ But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was held before the Lord in Jerusalem.

Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord. ²⁵ **Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him. (2 Kings 23: 19-25)**

Themes in the Book of Kings:

- 1) God is indeed God- He will not be confused with the various gods of the other nations, who are creations of human intellect and hands.
- 2) God is to be exclusively worshiped- As the only God there is, the Lord demands exclusive worship. God is not prepared to be displaced by other gods nor to take a place *alongside* other gods.

- 3) God is the Universal Legislator and Judge- God is the giver of the law that defines true worship, right thinking and behaviour generally. He alone is the One who executes judgement upon wrongdoers and rewards the obedient and loyal.

- 4) God is Faithful- The promise of the Lord to David and his descendants is a faithful promise, despite the unfaithfulness of His people.

5) The Word of God is living- God's inspired words may concern events, people and personalities of the past, but they are for our discernment, strength, protection, hope and guidance in the present (even as they were to Jeremiah's audience)

6) God's salvation is victorious over Satan. The Devil tried to destroy the lineage of David and the people of God from whom the Messiah was destined to come. He failed miserably. He tries to do the same in our lives by attempting to corrupt our hearts with his impure ways to lead us into the slavery (captivity) of sin (Babylonian captivity). So long as we are living repentant lives, desiring to be with the Lord, he will fail yet again at the hands of our victorious Saviour King Jesus!

Overview of King Solomon's reign

1) Solomon's anointing as King (1 Kings 1:33)

2) David's last words to Solomon (1 Kings 2:1-4) Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: ² "I go the way of all the earth; **be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man.** ³ And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, **that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn;** ⁴ **that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,'** He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

3) Solomon requests the gift of wisdom (1 Kings 3:14-15) “the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “**Ask! What shall I give you?** And Solomon said...O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I *am* a little child; I do not know *how* to go out or come in. ⁸ And Your servant *is* in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen... Therefore **give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil...**” The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. ¹¹ Then God said to him: “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice...see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. ¹³ And **I have also given you what you have not asked:** both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days”.

4) Solomon's wise judgement (1 Kings 3: 16-28) "And the king said, "The one says, 'This *is* my son, who lives, and your son *is* the dead one'; and the other says, 'No! But your son *is* the dead one, and my son *is* the living one.'" ²⁴ Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword before the king. ²⁵ And the king said, "**Divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other.**" Then the woman whose son *was* living spoke to the king, for she yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, "O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!" But the other said, "Let him be neither mine nor yours, *but* divide *him*." So the king answered and said, "**Give the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him; she *is* his mother.**"

5) Solomon's rich resources-natural and human (1 Kings 4: 1-34)

6) Solomon builds the Temple (1 Kings 6: 1-38)

7) Solomon prayer as he dedicates the Temple and God's response (1 Kings 6:22-53)

Solomon prays a series of short petitions for God:

- a) To keep His promise to David (vv.23-26)
- b) To maintain His constant Presence in the Temple and to accept the prayers of His worshippers (vv.27-30)
- c) To punish those who swear falsely (vv.31-32)
- d) To send rain during droughts (vv.35-36)
- e) To keep Israel in other calamities (vv. 37-40)
- f) To hear the prayer of strangers (vv.41-43)
- g) To give Israel victory in Battle (vv. 44-45)

h) To have mercy and forgiveness during captivity (vv.46-51)

i) To answer both the King and His people

8) God appears to Solomon a second time (1 Kings 9:1-9)

9) The Queen of Sheba visits King Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13)

“Then she said to the king: “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom.⁷ However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard.⁸ **Happy *are* your men and happy *are* these your servants, who stand continually before you *and* hear your wisdom!”**

10) Solomon's foreign women lead him astray (1 Kings 11:1-13)
“But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites...— from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon **clung to these in love. ... his wives turned away his heart.** ⁴ For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as *was* the heart of his father David. ⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶ Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as *did* his father David. ⁷ ... So the Lord became **angry** with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, **who had appeared to him twice,** ¹⁰ and had **commanded him concerning this thing**, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded.”

11) God raises up enemies against Solomon (1 Kings 11: 14-25)
Solomon's reign was characterised by incredible national and international peace and stability. However, sin caused Solomon and His people to forfeit the Lord's gift of peace. “**Now the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon**, Hadad the Edomite; he *was* a descendant of the king in Edom.” For it is true what is written: “When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7)

12) Solomon dies (1 Kings 11:26-43)