

Chapter 15: 1–2 Kings

Key Terms

- dynastic succession: royal authority legitimized by heredity; rulers come from the same line of descent
- Deuteronomistic History: Martin Noth proposed that Deuteronomy–2 Kings is a unified work written primarily during the exilic period. This term describes Deuteronomy–2 Kings in Noth's theory, which remains a dominant theory today.
- Historical Books: Old Testament books Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther
- monarchy: system of government in which a single ruler (monarch) has complete authority over the affairs of the nation
- united monarchy: period of time during which Israel and Judah were ruled by the same king
- divided monarchy: period of time during which Israel and Judah were ruled by different kings
- Osiris: the Egyptian god of the underworld

Key Ideas

- Kingship—good and evil.
- The prophetic voice as the royal conscience.
- Worship—Yahwism vs. Baalism.
- Covenant blessings (repentance and restoration) and curses (judgment and exile).

Chapter Summary

The books of First and Second Kings record the history of Israel from the death of David to the fall of Jerusalem and the end of Hebrew national independence. Some scholars argue for a single author/redactor of Kings, while others ascribe the book to the Deuteronomistic school of writing. The authors of this text assert that the book was probably written between the fall of Jerusalem and the decree of Cyrus, perhaps in two stages. Many archeological findings have been unearthed which lend support to the biblical account.

The book surveys the history of Israel from the united empire under Solomon to the split of the monarchy under Rehoboam and records the political and religious occurrences of the divided kingdoms until their end. The Israelite kingdom suffered from great political instability and spiritual apostasy. By comparison, the southern kingdom of Judah enjoyed relative political and spiritual stability and lasted about 150 years longer. The greater success of the southern kingdom is tied to the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty, through which God intended to establish eternal kingship in Israel.

Kings functions as a record of the covenantal failures of the Israelite kings and priests, who led the people into spiritual apostasy. Prophets functioned as divinely appointed messengers to guide the conscience of those in power. Disobedience resulted in the judgment of God on the entire nation. In contrast, obedience invited God's blessing. The narratives reveal the dynamic interaction between God's sovereign stewardship of the covenant and the reality of freedom and accountability in the recipients of the covenant. Kings thus functions as both a word of exhortation and of warning to the audience.

The book is arranged according to chronological sequence, with some concession to the author's thematic interests. The histories of the northern and southern kingdoms are recorded simultaneously, with the interweaving of concurrent narratives. Elijah and Elisha serve important theological functions as they testify to God's covenant faithfulness and uncontested power. The style of the kingship narratives resembles that of other ancient annals in the ANE.

There are several significant themes in the books of Kings. First, the books assess the reign of Solomon, who ushered in the “golden age” of Hebrew history. Though he was the wisest king of Israel, his latter years were marked by political decline and moral and spiritual decay. Kings also addresses the emergence of preclassical and classical prophecy in Israel. Preclassical prophets primarily ministered to the royal family, whereas classical prophets preached both to the royal family and the general public. Kings looks at the issues of dynastic succession, which is how leadership was determined in Judah, and charismatic leadership, which combined with dynastic succession as the way royal leadership was determined in Israel. Finally, Kings recounts the development of the golden calf cult under Jeroboam.