



1 & 2 Kings

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:07

The books of 1 and 2 Kings. Although they're two separate books in our Bibles, they were originally written as one book, telling a unified story that continues on from the book of Samuel that came before it.

So David has unified the tribes of Israel into a kingdom, and God promised that from his line would come a messianic king who would establish God's Kingdom over the nations and fulfill the promises made to Abraham. So the book of Kings tells the story of the long line of kings that came after David, and none of them lived up to that promise. In fact, they run the nation of Israel right into the ground.

The book is designed to have five main movements. The story begins and ends focused on Jerusalem, first with Solomon's reign and the construction of the temple, and then, in this last section, ending with Jerusalem's destruction and Israel's exile to Babylon. And the story leading up to this tragedy is what makes up the center three sections, which explain how Israel split into two rival kingdoms, how God tried to prevent the corruption of Israel by sending the prophets, and how exile became the unavoidable consequence of Israel's sins.

1 Kings 1-11

01:07-02:44

The book opens with two chapters about the kingdom passing from the aging David to his son Solomon. And David's final words to Solomon, they're very similar to those of Moses and Joshua and Samuel to the people. It's a call to remain faithful to the commands of the covenant and to give allegiance to the God of Israel alone. But David's words ring somewhat hollow here because David and Solomon then go on to conspire how they're going to consolidate this new kingdom through a whole series of political assassinations. It's not off to a great start.

Solomon's brightest moment comes when he asks God for wisdom to lead Israel, and he even completes David's dream to make a temple for the God of Israel. Here, the story actually stops and describes the design of this temple in detail. Just like the tabernacle design in the Torah, there's all these gold and jewels and depictions of angels and fruit trees; it is all symbolism echoing back to the garden of Eden. It's the place where Heaven and Earth meet, where God's presence dwells with his people.

But no sooner does Solomon finish the temple than he makes some really horrible choices, and the kingdom falls apart. He starts marrying the daughters of other kings—hundreds of them—for political alliances, and then he adopts their gods and introduces the worship of those gods into Israel. Solomon then accumulates huge amounts of wealth, he builds a huge army, he even institutes slave labor for all of his building projects. Now, if you go back to the Torah and look at God's guidelines for Israel's kings in Deuteronomy 17, Solomon is breaking every one. So by the time that he dies, Solomon resembles Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, more than he does his father David.

1 Kings 12-16

02:44-03:30

The next section of the book opens with Solomon's son Rehoboam acting just like his father. It's a very sad story of greed and lust for power. He tries to increase taxes for slave labor, and under the leadership of Jeroboam, the northern tribes reject this. They rebel and secede and form their own rival kingdom. And so now in the story, you have the southern kingdom, Judah, centered in Jerusalem with kings from the line of David, and now this new northern kingdom called Israel, whose capital will be Samaria eventually.

Jeroboam also goes on to build two new temples to compete with Solomon's temple in the south. He puts a golden calf in each one to represent the God of Israel. The connection to Exodus 32 and the golden calf—it's all quite explicit.

1 Kings 17–2 Kings 8

03:30-06:00

From this point on, the story goes back and forth from north to south, tracing the fate of both kingdoms. Each one had about 20 successive kings, and as the author introduces each king, he evaluates their reign by a few criteria: Did they worship the God of Israel alone or did they promote the worship of other gods? Did they deal with idolatry among the people? And did they remain faithful to the covenant like David, or do they become corrupt and unjust? And according to these criteria, the author finds no good kings in northern Israel, 0 for 20! And then in southern Judah, only 8 out of 20 get a positive rating.

Which connects to another huge purpose in this book, and that's to introduce the role of the prophets, key figures in Israel's history. So in the Bible, prophets were not fortune tellers. Rather, they spoke on behalf of the God of Israel, and they played the role of covenant watchdogs, which means they called out idolatry and injustice among the kings and the people. They were constantly reminding Israel of their calling to be a light to the nations, that they should obey the commands of the Torah. And so the prophets challenged Israel to repent and follow their God.

In these center sections for each king, God then raises up prophets to hold them accountable. The most prominent prophets are the northern ones, Elijah and his disciple Elisha, right here in the center of the book. Elijah was a wild man of a prophet living out in the desert, and his archnemesis was the northern King Ahab and his Canaanite wife, Jezebel. Together, these two had instituted the worship of the Canaanites' god Baal over Israel. And so in a famous story, Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal to a contest to see which god was real. So they both built altars and prayed to their gods, but only the God of Israel answers with fire.

After this, Ahab uses his royal power to murder an Israelite farmer and then steal his family's vineyard. And then Elijah again confronts Ahab's injustice, and he announces the downfall of his house.

Elijah eventually passes the mantle of his prophetic leadership to a young disciple named Elisha, who asks for two times the authority of Elijah. And what's fascinating here is how the author, he's recounted seven miraculous feats for Elijah, and then he offers stories of 14 acts of power from Elisha. Both prophets were clearly remarkable men, and they played the same role, confronting Israel's kings for idolatry and injustice. And ultimately, they were unsuccessful in turning Israel back from apostasy.

2 Kings 9-25

06:01-08:04

In the next section, the Northern Kingdom is rocked by a bloody revolution started by a king named Jehu, who destroys Ahab's family. And although Jehu was at first commissioned by God, his violence just gets out of control. And it creates the spiral of political assassinations and rebellions from which Israel never recovered. Coup follows coup after Jehu, and each king follows other gods, allows horrible injustice—it all leads up to 2 Kings chapter 17. The big bad empire of Assyria swoops down and takes out the Northern Kingdom altogether. And the capital city of Samaria is conquered, and the Israelites are exiled and scattered throughout the ancient world.

Now, chapter 17 is key. The author stops the story and offers this prophetic reflection on what's just happened. He blames the downfall of the Northern

Kingdom on the idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness of Israel and its kings. And so God has allowed them to face the consequences of their decisions.

The final movement of the book tells the story of the lone southern kingdom. And here we meet some very heroic kings like Hezekiah, who trusts God when the armies of Assyria come knocking on Jerusalem's door. Or Josiah, who discovers this lost scroll of the Torah in the temple, so he starts reading it. He's convicted, and he institutes religious reforms to remove idolatry and Canaanite influences from the land. But Judah is just too far gone.

The king right in between these two, Manasseh, he's the worst by far. So he not only introduces the worship of idols statues into the Jerusalem temple, he also institutes child sacrifice. And so God sends prophets to say the time is up; Israel has reached the point of no return.

The final chapters tell the story of the Babylonian Empire coming to invade Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and carry the people and the royal line of David off into exile. And so the story ends, leaving us wondering, "Is God done with Israel? Is he done with the line of David?"

Conclusion

08:05-08:48

Well, the final paragraph zooms about 40 years forward into the exile, and it tells a very odd story. It's about Jehoiachin, a descendant from David who would have been king if he was back in Jerusalem. And the king of Babylon releases him from prison and invites him to eat at the royal table for the rest of his life—and the book ends. So it's not much, but it's a story that gives a glimmer of hope that God has not abandoned the line of David.

So the question now is, how is God going to fulfill his promises to Abraham, to David? How's he going to bless the nations and bring the messianic kingdom? And to answer those questions, you have to read on into the wisdom and the prophetic books. But for now, that's the book of Kings.