



2 Kings

The odd feature about 2 Kings is that, unlike the other historical books, it begins right in the middle of a story. With all the others, the previous book ends in one way or another (the death of Saul; the glory of David's kingship etc...), but between 1 and 2 Kings there is simply a pause for breath before it continues once more. The first two chapters continue the tale of Elijah's ministry before turning to his successor, Elisha. After that, the book tells of the fall of Ahab's family (known to historians as the Omride dynasty) before turning its attention to the all of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), to the Assyrian Empire; and the subsequent fall of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) to the Babylonian Empire. The end of 2 Kings marks the beginning of the exile of Judah which lasted until 538 bc.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 2 ¼ hours
Short of time? Just read 2.1–2.25; 4.1–6.7;
 17.1–18.12; 23.31–25.30



Anything tricky?

The story of the fall of both Kingdoms – North then South – is a story told with the intention of establishing who is to blame for their fall. You will have to decide as you read if you feel the judgment is fair.

2 Kings 17-25 tells the story of the fall of the two kingdoms in quick succession, but it is helpful to know that nearly 150 years separated the two events – the Northern kingdom fell in 722 bc and the Southern Kingdom in 597-586 bc.



Genre

Theological History



Inspiring quotes

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."
(2 Kings 2.9)

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.
(2 Kings 2.11)

Before him [Josiah] 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 did any like him arise after him.
(2 Kings 23.25)



About the Author

Jewish tradition attributes the authorship of 2 Kings to Jeremiah but there is no evidence for this or, indeed, for any other author within the book itself. In style and theology it is very similar to Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, and so it is often thought to form a collection of writings which scholars call the 'Deuteronomistic histories'.

What do we know about him?

Next to nothing.

This name implies (and intends to imply)

a theological connection with the book of Deuteronomy, since the outlook of all these books seems very similar. It is suggested that the author or, more likely, authors of these histories were influenced by Deuteronomy and told Israel's history from that perspective. The key feature here is that Deuteronomy stresses that God's people will only stay in the land if they remain faithful. Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of how God's people failed to be faithful and so, eventually, went into exile from the land right at the end of 2 Kings.



About the times

No one really knows when these books were written. It is thought that they reached their final form in the sixth century bc, in other words shortly after the Judeans went into exile and were finalised then in order to explain why the exile had happened at all. It is clear, however, that these final documents were drawn together from already existing sources, many of which would have been written at or shortly after the event described.

What were people feeling?

The books, therefore, have more than one audience – those who read the first annals of the history and those who read the final text once it was pulled together. Since it is hard to know anything about the first audience we will concentrate on the second.

If it is right that these histories are written to explain why the exile happened then it is clear that the people would have been feeling hurt, despairing and lost. For a sense of what people were feeling then have a look at the book of Lamentations which provides an accurate insight into their emotions.

More than any other of the historical books, 2 Kings communicates the bewilderment and loss that was felt when the kingdoms fell.

Other books set around this time

1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 Kings



What kind of Book is it?

This is a history book but it falls into the category of what you might call theological history – history with a purpose. It is not telling the events solely so that you can know what happened but so that you can understand why they happened. Many of the historical books of the Bible are like this.



How is it structured?

- 1.1–8.29 Elisha followed Elijah's example as a prophet
- 9.1–10.36 Jehu anointed as King and overthrew the house of Ahab
- 11.1–12.21 Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel usurped the throne of Judah
- 13.1–17.41 The downfall of the Northern Kingdom (Israel)
- 18.1–25.30 The downfall of the Southern Kingdom (Judah)



Look out for...

Prophecy and prophets are important in all of the historical books but especially so in 2 Kings. Look out for their words and how they were fulfilled as you read.

The authors of 2 Kings are by now explicitly telling the story of the demise of the two kingdoms – notice in particular who they think is responsible and why.

King Josiah was an especially important king because he restored the law to Judah – at least temporarily. Pay particular attention to his reforms and ask yourself why these were so important.



What could this mean for me?

2 Kings tells the story of what distracted Israel and Judah from their life with God – our world and life is very different but reflect as you read on what the equivalent of Baal and idol worship is in our world.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- What do you think caused the downfall of the Northern and Southern kingdoms? You might like to take your discussion wider and discuss what causes great nations to fail generally and then to reflect on what might cause our nation to fall.
- Did any characters in 2 Kings stand out to you as being more likeable than others?
- Israel and Judah were tempted time and time again to worship Baal instead of God, what is our equivalent of Baal today? What most tempts us away from a life with God?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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