



1 Kings 6:2

1 KINGS

Background File

Every historian writes with a distinct viewpoint. This perspective guides the historian in selecting materials to include in an account and in identifying the significance of the story. The author of the book of Kings is a historian influenced by the religious viewpoint and language of the book of Deuteronomy. In fact, most modern scholars believe that the long story of the people of Israel in the promised land—recounted in Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel and Kings—is written from this perspective. This story is called the Deuteronomistic History.

What's the Story?

The Deuteronomistic History is primarily the story of a kingdom or monarchy—the united monarchy of David and Solomon, and then the divided monarchy (see Kings of Judah and Israel, p. 545). The northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah) made up the divided monarchy. Israel was destroyed by Assyria in 722 B.C.E. Judah lasted until Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 587 B.C.E. and Jews were driven into exile. The historical account was probably written in its present form in the mid-sixth century, after the northern and southern kingdoms had both fallen. It offers an explanation for the downfall of the kingdoms: the people had more than one sanctuary and more than one God. While there are numerous references to the people's sins, the focus in Kings is on the few rulers who stayed true to God's law and the many kings in both kingdoms who did not.

To cover nearly four hundred years of history, the author of Kings had to be very selective. For example, the biggest and most important battle that Israel fought was at Qarqar in Syria in 853 B.C.E., known to us from Assyrian records. Yet this battle is not even mentioned in Kings, probably because it did not contribute to the point the writer was trying to make.

In Jewish tradition, the two books of Kings are considered to be a single unit, and they have the following outline:

- The death of David and the beginning of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 1–2)
- Solomon's reign (3–11)
- The kings of Israel and Judah, ending with the capture of Samaria (1 Kings 12–2 Kings 17)
- The final kings of Judah, ending with the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18–25)

The first two chapters of Kings may continue a document, begun in 2 Samuel 9–20, that describes how David’s sons struggled to succeed him. Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah lose out in their quest for the throne. Solomon emerges the winner.

The high point and centerpiece of Solomon’s reign, described in the second part of the outline above, is the construction and dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. But this section ends by telling about Solomon’s many wives, his unfaithfulness to God, and his worship of other gods.

The third part of Kings goes back and forth between the northern and the southern kings, beginning with Jeroboam I in the north. The best kings by far after David and Solomon were Hezekiah and Josiah of Judah. The worst king in the north was Ahab, whose wife, Jezebel, is also criticized. The worst king in the south was Manasseh. For more on the third and fourth parts of the historical account, see 2 Kings.

The writer of Kings uses major events and the reigns of kings to mark time. Scholars do not all agree on how this system translates into exact years. In this Bible, the study notes for 1 and 2 Kings use the dates offered by Gershon Galil in *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel & Judah* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

What’s the Message?

The book of Kings continues to discuss two critical issues raised in Deuteronomy: the proposal that sacrificial worship should be conducted only in the temple in Jerusalem, and the belief that Israel should worship only one God. In addition, it explores the promise to David (2 Sam 7) that accompanies Israel through its history.

Clearly, the author of Kings wants to say that what happened to the two kingdoms can be explained by the people’s behavior, as demonstrated especially by their kings. The downfalls of these kingdoms show the power of God’s judgmental word; they do not show God’s weakness. But the writer also underscores the importance of repentance, of turning away from evil and toward God. The overall story line in Kings says only that Israel sinned and was punished. What if Israel in its exile were to cry out to or turn to the LORD? Would they be delivered? Kings leaves us with questions like these, but also assures us that God’s promise to David—and to us all—is still alive.

Kings of Judah and Israel

United Kingdom

Saul 1030-1010 B.C.E. • David 1010-970 B.C.E. • Solomon 970-922 B.C.E.

Divided Kingdom

Judah		Israel	
Rehoboam	922–915	Jeroboam	922–901
Abijah (Abijam)	915–913	Nadab	901–900
		Baasha	900–877
Asa	913–873	Elah	877–876
		Zimri	876
		Omride Era	
		Omri	876–869
Jehoshaphat	873–849	Ahab	869–850
		Ahaziah	850–849
Jehoram	849–843	Jehoram	849–843
Ahaziah	843–842		
		Jehu Dynasty	
		Jehu	843–815
Athaliah	842–837		
Joash	837–800		
		Jehoahaz	815–802
Amaziah	800–783	Jehoash	802–786
Uzziah (Azariah)	783–742	Jeroboam II	786–746
		Assyrian Intervention	
Jotham	742–735	Zechariah	746–745
		Shallum	745
		Menahem	745–737
		Pekahiah	737–736
Ahaz	735–727 or 715	Pekah	736–732
		Hoshea	732–722
Hezekiah	727 or 715–687		
		Fall of Samaria 722	
Manasseh	687–642		
Amon	642–640		
Josiah	640–609		
Jehoahaz	609		
Jehoiachim	609–598		
Jehoiachin	598–597		
First capture of Jerusalem by Babylonians	597		
Zedekiah	597–586		
Destruction of Jerusalem	586		