1–2 Kings

INFORMATION FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERS

GOING DEEP:

Author and Title (From ESV Study Bible)

As the titles of the books indicate, 1–2 Kings describe the period of the monarchy in ancient Israel (970–586 B.C.), excluding most of the reigns of King Saul and King David (which are mainly described in 1–2 Samuel, with the conclusion to David’s reign appearing in 1 Kings 1:1–2:11). Ancient Jewish tradition attributes this account to the prophet Jeremiah, although the books themselves do not specify the author. Internal evidence, however, does establish that the author or authors were deeply influenced by the book of Deuteronomy and sought to provide Israel with an explanation of its past in terms of the theological program outlined in that book. This is clearly signaled, for example, in the opening section of David’s parting speech to Solomon (1 Kings 2:1–4), where the language closely parallels the following phrases from Deuteronomy: “keep the charge of the LORD your God” (Deut. 11:1); “walking in his ways” (Deut. 8:6); “keeping all his statutes and his commandments” (Deut. 6:2); “that you may prosper in all you do” (Deut. 29:9); “that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers” (Deut. 9:5); “with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 4:29). “Deuteronomic” language such as this appears again and again in 1–2 Kings, as first Solomon himself (1 Kings 11), and then almost all the succeeding kings of Israel and Judah, are weighed in
relation to the Mosaic law code and found wanting (e.g., Jeroboam, 1 Kings 12:25–33; 14:1–16; Ahaz, 2 Kings 16:1–4).

Theme

These two books set out to provide for their readers an explanation of Israel’s later monarchical period in terms of the theological vision outlined in the book of Deuteronomy, so that these readers can move forward in their present times with a solidly grounded faith in the one God who controls both nature and history. The books maintain that it is this good and all-powerful God who oversaw the destruction of his chosen city and temple, and the exile to Babylon, in 586 B.C. because of Israel’s great sinfulness (2 Kings 17:7–23; 24:1–4). Yet there remains hope because God’s chosen royal line has not come to an end (2 Kings 25:27–30), and God remains ready to forgive those who are repentant (1 Kings 8:22–61).

Key Themes

1. *Yahweh is the only true God.* There is only one living God, and he is the Lord (1 Kings 18:15; 2 Kings 5:15). This Lord is not to be confused with the various so-called gods worshiped in Israel and other nations, for these are simply human creations (1 Kings 12:25–30; 2 Kings 17:16; 19:14–19). They are part of the created order, like the people who worship them; and they are powerless, futile entities (1 Kings 16:13; 18:22–40; 2 Kings 17:15; 18:33–35). The Lord, by contrast, is the incomparable Creator of heaven and earth (1 Kings 8:23; 2 Kings 19:15). He is utterly distinct from the world that he has created (cf. 1 Kings 8:9, 14–21, 27–30, where he is neither truly “in” the ark nor “in” the temple; and 18:26–38, where the antics of the Baal priests apparently imply belief in an intrinsic connection between their actions and divine action, while Elijah’s behavior implies quite the reverse). At the same time, the Lord is powerfully active within his world. It is he, and no one else, who controls nature (1 Kings 17–19; 2 Kings 1:2–17; 4:8–37; 5:1–18; 6:1–7, 27).

his freedom, can override its fulfillment for his own purposes (cf. 1 Kings 21:17–29; 2 Kings 3:15–27, where the ending to the story is somewhat unexpected).

3. **Yahweh demands exclusive worship.** As the only God there is, the Lord demands exclusive worship. He will not take his place alongside the gods, nor is he willing to be displaced by them. He refuses to be confused with any part of the created order. He alone will be worshiped, by Israelite and foreigner alike (1 Kings 8:41–43, 60; 2 Kings 5:15–18; 17:24–41).

4. **The content and place of true worship.** Much of 1–2 Kings is therefore concerned to describe what is illegitimate in terms of worship. The main interest is in the content of this worship, which must neither involve idols or images nor reflect any aspect of the fertility and other cults of “the nations” (1 Kings 11:1–40; 12:25–13:34; 14:22–24; 16:29–33; 2 Kings 16:1–4; 17:7–23; 21:1–9). There is a subsidiary concern about the place of worship, which is ideally the Jerusalem temple, and not the local “high places” (1 Kings 3:2; 5:1–9:9; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 18:4; 23:1–20).

5. **The consequences of false worship.** The books of 1–2 Kings also describe the moral wrongs that inevitably accompany false worship. They claim that true worship of God is always bound up with obedience to the law of God, and that the worship of something other than God inevitably leads to some kind of mistreatment of fellow mortals in the eyes of God; see 1 Kings 21, where the kind of abandonment of God envisaged in Exodus 20 leads to wholesale breach of the other commandments described there (2 Kings 16:1–4, esp. v. 3; 2 Kings 21:1–16, esp. vv. 6, 16). By the same token, true wisdom is defined in 1–2 Kings in terms of true worship and wholehearted obedience. It cannot be divorced from either (see 1 Kings 1–11, where much can be learned about the nature of true wisdom).

6. **Yahweh as just and gracious Lawgiver.** As the Giver of the law, which defines true worship and right thinking and behavior generally, the Lord is also the one who executes justice on wrongdoers. The world of 1–2 Kings is a moral world in which wrongdoing is punished, whether the sinner be king (Solomon in 1 Kings 11:9–13; Jeroboam in 1 Kings 14:1–18), or prophet (the unnamed Judean in 1 Kings 13:7–25; the disobedient man in 1 Kings 20:35–43), or ordinary Israelite (Gehazi in 2 Kings 5:19–27; the Israelite officer in 2 Kings 7:17–20). It is not a vending-machine world, however, in which every coin of sin that is inserted results in individually packaged retribution. There is no neat correlation between sin and judgment in Kings, even though people are told that they must obey God if they are to be blessed by him (e.g., Solomon in 1 Kings 2:1–4; Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11:38). This is largely because of the compassionate character of the Judge, who does not desire final judgment
to fall on his creatures (2 Kings 13:23; 14:27) and who often delays or mitigates such judgment (1 Kings 21:25–29; 2 Kings 22:15–20). God’s grace is to be found everywhere in 1–2 Kings (1 Kings 11:9–13; 15:1–5; 2 Kings 8:19), confounding expectations that the reader might have formed on the basis of an oversimplified understanding of law. Sin can, nevertheless, accumulate to such an extent that judgment falls, not only on individuals but on whole cultures, sweeping the relatively innocent away with the guilty (2 Kings 17:1–23; 23:29–25:26).

7. Yahweh as promise-giver. Israel’s God is not only a lawgiver, however, but also a promise-giver. In 1–2 Kings it is a promise usually to be found at the heart of the Lord’s gracious behavior toward his people. The two most important divine promises referred to are those given to the patriarchs on the one hand, and to David on the other.

The patriarchal promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—descendants and everlasting possession of the land of Canaan—clearly influences God’s treatment of his people at various points in the story (2 Kings 13:23, and implicitly in 1 Kings 4:20–21, 24; 18:36). That promise also lies in the background of Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8:22–53, as Solomon looks forward to the possibility of forgiveness after judgment. The future-oriented aspect of the promise in this passage is interesting because it is a promise in clear tension with the story’s ending in 2 Kings 25, where disobedience has led to expulsion from the land and exile in a foreign empire. It seems that the true fulfillment of the promise is thought still to be in the future, even though it has also played its part in the past.

The promise given to David, that he should have an eternal dynasty, shares in the same kind of tension, and indeed appears in 1–2 Kings in a curiously paradoxical form. In much of the narrative it provides an explanation for why the Davidic dynasty survives when other dynasties do not, in spite of the disobedience of David’s successors (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19). It is viewed, in other words, as unconditional in one aspect. Judah’s fate is not to be the same as Israel’s and Jerusalem’s fate is to be different from Samaria’s, because God has promised David a “lamp,” a descendant who will always sit on his throne. So when Solomon sins, the Davidic line does not lose the throne entirely, but retains “one tribe” (1 Kings 11:36) in the meantime, with the prospect of restoring its dominion at some time in the future (1 Kings 11:39). When Abijam sins, likewise, his son still retains the Judean throne (1 Kings 15:4).

The background here is the promise to David recorded in 2 Samuel 7, where the sins of David’s descendants are to be punished by the “rod of men” rather than by
the kind of divine rejection Saul experienced (2 Sam. 7:14–16). This promise makes the ultimate difference between Davidic kings and those of other royal houses throughout much of the books of Kings, and makes the Judean dynasty unshakable even while the dynasties of the northern kingdom are like reeds “shaken in the water” (1 Kings 14:15). This dynasty survives in spite of the disobedience of David’s successors. At other times, however, the continuance of the dynasty is made dependent on the obedience of David’s successors (1 Kings 2:4; 8:25; 9:4–5). The promise is treated as conditional. As the books progress, it seems that this latter view prevails, as accumulating sin puts the promise in its unconditional aspect under great stress and in the end brings down God’s judgment on Judah just as severely as on Israel (2 Kings 16:1–4; 21:1–15; 23:31–25:26).

Yet Jehoiachin lives (2 Kings 25:27–30). The authors of Kings did not need to record this fact. They could have allowed Jehoiachin to dwell in obscurity with Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:18–25:7), who effectively ends up as the eunuch in Babylon that the prophet Isaiah had foreseen (2 Kings 20:18)—a mutilated man deprived of the heirs who might later claim the throne. The significance of this postscript on Jehoiachin appears clearer in an earlier section of 2 Kings. After the reign of two relatively righteous kings (Asa and Jehoshaphat), Judah found herself with two kings who share with King Ahab’s children both their names (Jehoram, Ahaziah) and their attraction to idolatry (2 Kings 8:16–29). Yet God had promised David an ever-burning “lamp” in Jerusalem (2 Kings 8:19; cf. 1 Kings 11:36; 15:4), an everlasting dynasty. Therefore, although Ahab’s dynasty comes to an end in 2 Kings 9–10, David’s dynasty does not. Although Ahaziah dies and his mother Athaliah tries to wipe out the entire royal family (2 Kings 11:1), one royal prince remains to carry on the family line (2 Kings 11:2). Against all the odds, Joash survives six years of his grandmother’s rule to emerge once again as king in a land purified of the worship of foreign gods (2 Kings 11:3–20).

Later, Jehoiachin reappears in the narrative of 1–2 Kings in a manner strikingly reminiscent of this reappearance of Joash after that earlier destruction of “all the royal family” (2 Kings 11:1). Like Joash, he unexpectedly survives in the midst of carnage; and like Joash during Athaliah’s reign, he represents the potential for the continuation of the Davidic line at a later time. All is not yet necessarily lost. The destruction of the family of the last king of Judah (Zedekiah) does not mean that no Davidic descendant is left. Second Kings 25:27–30 hints that the unconditional aspects of the Davidic promise may still, even after awful judgment has fallen, remain in force. Similarly, the prayer of Solomon in 1 Kings 8:22–53 looks beyond the disaster of exile, grounding its hope for the restoration of Israel to its land in
God’s gracious and unconditional election of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see also 1 Kings 18:36–37; 2 Kings 13:23; 14:27). Solomon’s prayer had also refused to accept that God’s words about the rejection of people, city, and temple (e.g., 2 Kings 21:14; 23:27) were his final words. The words in 2 Kings 25:27–30 express the hope that God may indeed be found to be, in the end as in the beginning, a God of grace and not only of commandment, and that a Son of David will one day appear to introduce his righteous rule on the earth.

History of Salvation Summary

God’s purpose in establishing Israel had been to bring blessing to the world through the people’s covenant faithfulness. He instituted the Davidic dynasty to lead the people in their faithfulness. The history of Israel, as told by 1–2 Kings, is full of tragedies: the rupture of the kingdom so that the north was in rebellion against David’s house; the failures of so many kings, north and south, to live faithfully and to lead wisely; and the deportations of the north and then of the south. And yet God will not fail in his purpose: Kings ends with kindness shown to David’s heir (2 Kings 25:27–30), which leaves the hope that the Davidic line will continue, leading to the ultimate heir, the Messiah, and the hope that a chastened Israel may itself be restored and may fulfill its calling for the world. (For an explanation of the “History of Salvation,” see the Overview of the Bible. See also History of Salvation in the Old Testament: Preparing the Way for Christ.)

1 Kings Outline

I. The Reign of King Solomon (1:1–11:43)  
   A. Solomon becomes king (1:1–2:46)  
   B. More on Solomon and wisdom (3:1–28)  
   C. Solomon’s rule over Israel (4:1–20)  
   D. Solomon and the nations (4:21–34)  
   E. Preparations for building the temple (5:1–18)  
   F. Solomon builds the temple and his palace (6:1–7:51)  
   G. The ark brought to the temple (8:1–21)  
   H. Solomon’s prayer (8:22–53)  
      I. The temple narrative ended (8:54–9:9)  
   J. Glory under a cloud (9:10–10:29)  
   K. Solomon’s apostasy, opponents, and death (11:1–43)

II. The Kingdom Is Divided (12:1–14:31)  
   A. The kingdom torn away (12:1–33)  
   B. The man of God from Judah (13:1–34)
C. The end of Jeroboam (14:1–20)
D. The end of Rehoboam (14:21–31)
III. Abijam and Asa (15:1–24)
IV. From Nadab to Ahab (15:25–16:34)
V. Elijah and Ahab (17:1–22:40)
   A. Elijah and the drought (17:1–24)
   B. Elijah and the prophets of Baal (18:1–46)
   C. Elijah and the Lord (19:1–21)
   D. Ahab’s war against Syria (20:1–43)
   E. Naboth’s vineyard (21:1–29)
   F. Ahab killed in battle (22:1–40)
VI. Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah (22:41–53)

FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

BIBLE STUDY FOCUS – “GOD’S PROMISES”

MAIN TEXT: 1 Kings 18:20-40

Instructions for Small Group Time:

Option 1: Send the main text to small group members so they can read it ahead of time.

Option 2: Read the text together when you meet

Basic Bible Study Practices:

1. As people read the text, ask them to pay attention to key words
2. As people read the text have them highlight key words, people, and places
3. As people read the text have them pay attention to repetition of key terms, ideas, and people
4. If people are given the opportunity to read the text ahead of small group time, have them read it at least twice so they become familiar with its contents.
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1 Kings 18 describes dark times in the land of Israel. Not only there was a famine, but Ahab, one of Israel’s most wicked kings, oppressed God’s people, including his prophets. In fact, Ahab and his wife Jezebel tried to exterminate all of God’s prophets. But God had other plans. Enter, Elijah. Elijah is sent to confront Ahab and Jezebel and their false prophets in the name of the Lord.

Elijah was commissioned by God to come before Ahab. When encouraged not to, he said, “Elijah said, “As the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today.” 1 Kings 18:15
What does this verse communicate about Elijah’s disposition toward God?
Would you have the confidence to confront a wicked king if God personally told you to do so?

Read 1 Kings 18:18-39:
Who are the major players in this plot?
What role does Elijah play in this scenario? Is he being cocky when challenging Baal’s prophets, or is he simply mocking their gods? (v. 27)
Who is the god Baal? Why are the people of God worshipping him? See Judges 6:32 and 1 Chronicles 8:33 in their contexts

Read verses 36-37 - At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

Analyze Elijah’s prayer. What’s unique about it? What’s it’s focus (hint: “hearts”)
Notice that Elijah asks God to “answer” him…what does faith have to do with prayer?

Verse 39 says – “When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”
Why did it take a miraculous event for God’s people to recognize his power and authority?
Are we any different than the Israelites during Elijah’s time who doubted the power of God?
Extra Resources

The Gospel Project
Overview of 1-2 Kings: https://youtu.be/bVFW3wbi9pk

Information on Baal - (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baal-ancient-deity)

Sermons on 1 Kings 18:
https://youtu.be/YqE7ASLnh4I - by Al Mohler
https://youtu.be/iClzW8qf51Q - by Adrian Rogers

Social Media Sharables:

Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."
1 Kings 18:37

How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.
1 Kings 18:21