



1 & 2 Kings

2 Kings 1-8

"Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?"

--2 Kings 1:3

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The Big Picture of 1 & 2 Kings

The Book of Kings reached its final form sometime after the exile into Babylon. The Israelite in bondage under the Babylonians would certainly struggle over their suffering outside of the land, even puzzling over the "why?" questions. Why did God allow Israel to fall to their enemies? Where is YHWH? Why is the temple destroyed?

As Samuel had prophetically warned the people back in 1 Samuel 8 that kings would prove to be a curse rather than a blessing to the people of God. And yet, the glories and the failures of Israel's kings, point to the need for the King of Kings, Jesus.

Structure of 1 & 2 Kings

A United Kingdom: Solomon	1 Kings 1 - 11
A Divided Kingdom	1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 9
The Fall of the Northern Kingdom: Israel	2 Kings 10 - 17
The Fall of the Southern Kingdom: Judea	2 Kings 18 - 25

1 & 2 Kings serves to explain how a united Israel under King David and Solomon could become internally divided by her own people and utterly decimated by her external foes. As YHWH had warned through Moses and the prophets, his blessing was contingent on covenant faithfulness on the part of the King and people of Israel.

A Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 9)

1 Kings ends with the summary statement of King Ahab's son Ahaziah who reigned over Israel in the north "He did evil in the sight of the LORD...he served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done." (1 Ki. 22:52-53) In this section we see the rise to prominence of the Prophetic office in the stories of Elijah and Elisha. As the wickedness of the kings is challenged by the Word of God through the Man of God. 2 Kings begins with Ahaziah on his death bed sending his servants to inquire of Baal-zebub. (2 Ki. 1:2) Elijah intercepts them.



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The Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah

The Kings of Israel and Judah contended with one another, but at times they were at peace. They often faced external threats as a united front. 2 Kings begins with the threat of Moab in the south. (1:1) Israel and Judah would meet this challenge together (3). The greater threat would come from the Assyrians to the North!

So Israel has been in rebellion against the House of David to this day...There was none that followed the House of David but the tribe of Judah only.

--1 Kings 12:19-20



Map showing the Kingdoms of Israel (blue) and Judah (orange), ancient Southern Levant borders and ancient cities. The map shows the region in the 9th century BCE.³⁰

³⁰http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kingdoms_of_Israel_and_Judah_map_830.svg



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Elijah and Elisha: Prophetic Succession (2)

Remember the three prophetic offices: Prophet, Priest and King. Issues of succession were fairly straight forward through family lineage for the priestly and kingly offices (though not without difficulties).

However, the succession of the prophets was accomplished by divine appointment. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah laments that he is the last one of the people of Israel who believes in YHWH and he is even about to take his life. YHWH revealed that he was not the last one, but rather he had a successor to anoint, Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah. Indeed, the LORD reserved 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. God always has a succession plan.

Elisha requests of Elijah the inheritance of an eldest son: a double portion of his inheritance--only it is not land or wealth, but spiritual and prophetic power. (2 Ki. 2:9; cf. 1 Ki. 19:19-21) Elijah's powers were like that of Moses and his staff, Elijah strikes the water with his cloak and it parts (2:8).

Elijah is taken up in to heaven in a whirlwind. As he departs, his cloak falls to the ground. This symbol of prophetic power is then transferred to Elisha. He too strikes the water with the cloak and it parts. (2:14)

Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. --2 Kings 2:15

Indeed, Elisha begins his public ministry with multiple signs of divine presence and authority. The first sign was the healing of the waters of Jericho and the second sign was a prophetic judgment on the 42 boys who mocked the prophet. Don't mock the prophets of YHWH!

*"Where is the LORD,
the God of Elijah?"*

2 Kings 2:14



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The Kings of Israel and Judah are introduced to Elisha (3)

The occasion of the threat of Moab becomes the occasion of again commending the prophet to the kings. Mesha, King of Moab rebelled against Israel. So Jehoram (son of Ahab), King of Israel approaches Jehoshaphat king of Judah in order to contend against Moab as a united people.

The appropriate action would be to consult the prophet of the LORD first in order to discern the LORD's will for the battle. However, Jehoshaphat defers to Jehoram's leadership and tactics and follows him in a circuitous wilderness march into the desert.

The crisis of no water gave rise to a lament:

Then the king of Israel said, "Alas! The LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab." And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no prophet of the LORD here, through whom we may inquire of the LORD?" Then one of the king of Israel's servants answered, "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah." And Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the LORD is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him. --2 Ki. 3:10-12

Better late than never! The water crisis is miraculously resolved by in fulfillment of the Word of YHWH through Elisha (3:17, 20) and the kings prevail in their battle with Moab as prophesied (3:18-19, 21-27).

The Mighty Works of YHWH through Elisha (4:1-8:15)

Elisha's ministry in the LORD was renowned. He ministered not only to the people of Israel and Judah, to kings and the lowly. He also had a ministry to foreign kings and people. This section culminates in Elisha prophesying to the future King of Syria with tears!



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*And he said to him, "Say now to her, 'See, you have taken all this trouble for us; what is to be done for you? Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?'" She answered, "I dwell among my own people." And he said, "What then is to be done for her?" Gehazi answered, "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old."
--2 Kings 4:13-14*

Behold, I know there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel!

--Naaman the Syrian 2 Kings 5:15

The Widow's Oil (4:1-7)

The story of the widow's oil that did not run out reveals the prophet's and more importantly YHWH's concern for the poor and those who have no advocate. YHWH is the god of the widow and the fatherless.

The Shunammite's son (4:8-37)

The healing of the Shunammite woman's son underscores the prophet's gift of healing. It also sets the precedent of Israelite hospitality to the prophet. This would be reemphasized by Jesus with respect to his own disciples. To show hospitality to a prophet is to welcome the blessing of God into your home. Because she opened her home, YHWH opened her womb.

Death in the pot (4:38-41)

YHWH can make that which is harmful, innocuous. Through Elisha he restored the waters of Jericho (2:19-22), in this story he does the same with a poison stew!

Feeding a multitude (4:42-44)

Elisha multiplies barley and grain for a starving group of a hundred men. Jesus would repeat this sign only with 5000! (Matt. 14:13-21)

Naaman the Syrian is healed (5:1-27)

The healing of the leprosy of Naaman demonstrates the care and concern that YHWH has for all who would seek his mercy and blessing--even Gentiles. The healing again demonstrates the sovereignty of YHWH over all the gods and nations. The story demonstrates the key to unlock the power of God is often in heeding the voice of the YHWH through the prophet and the lowly (Naaman's servants 5:13). It also teaches the opposite lesson in the call NOT to "run after" the offer of the rich (Elisha's servant, Gehazi, see 5:20-27)

In humbling himself, Naaman is healed. In seeking to aggrandize himself, Gehazi is stricken.



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The floating Axe-head (6:1-7)

The story of the floating Axe-head reveals the expanding number of prophets under Elisha's guidance along with his care for their concerns.

The Syrians entrapped (6:8-23)

The Syrian King grew impatient with Elisha's inside knowledge of his movements and tactics, so he went to war against the prophet. However, a war against a prophet is a battle against the army of God.

Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

--2 Ki. 6:17

The army of Syria was struck with blindness, led to the gates of Samaria, and shown the hospitality of a King. This provided a temporary peace from Syrian raids, but not for long.

The Siege of Samaria (6:24-7:20)

The Syrians besieged Samaria causing a great famine. The result was tremendous inflation of prices for items that would not normally be eaten (a donkey's head and dove's dung). The people even resorted to cannibalism of their own children.

In a bizarre pseudo-repentance, the King of Israel vested in sackcloth somehow believes that murdering the prophet of YHWH will end the LORD's judgment on Samaria and Israel. He should have looked to his own sin rather than blame the messenger of YHWH. The prophet's courage and the Word of YHWH that prevails.

Elisha prophesied that the inflation would be reversed and the siege would end. The king's captain disbelieved the Word of the Lord--and was trampled at the gate for his disbelief as the crowds plundered the bounty of the Syrian army. (7:16-20)

"If the LORD himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?"

--2 Kings 7:2



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The Shunammite regains her land (8:1-6)

The story returns to the provision of the prophet to the Shunammite who had been hospitable. Their responsiveness to the prophets warning of famine led to their 7 year sojourn and salvation in Philistia. Their return would not be a punishment, the prophet's influence on their behalf would prevail in the king's court.

Elisha appoints the King of Syria (8:7-15)

In the final story in this narrative series, Elisha completes the task left unfulfilled by his predecessor Elijah (see 1 Ki. 19:15) This is a bitter task. Essentially, Elisha's job is to appoint the successor to Israel's most prominent enemy the King of Syria, Ben-hadad. His successor, Hazael, would be the instrument that YHWH would use to bring ultimate judgment on the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Elisha would offer this prophesy with tears:

And he fixed his gaze and stared at him, until he was embarrassed. And the man of God wept. ¹² And Hazael said, "Why does my lord weep?" He answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel. You will set on fire their fortresses, and you will kill their young men with the sword and dash in pieces their little ones and rip open their pregnant women." ¹³ And Hazael said, "What is your servant, who is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?" Elisha answered, "The LORD has shown me that you are to be king over Syria." --2 Kings 8:11-13

Hazael would return to Ben-Hadad to announce the prophet's word to him and then murder him in his bed.