

A misty forest scene at sunrise or sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow through the trees. Sunbeams are visible filtering through the mist. In the foreground, a deer is silhouetted against the light, standing near a body of water. The overall atmosphere is serene and magical.

THE BOOKS OF KINGS

TITLE/AUTHOR

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.

Ancient Jewish tradition attributes this account to the prophet **Jeremiah**, although the books themselves do not specify the author.

COMPOSITION

In their present form, 1–2 Kings could not have been written **before the sixth century B.C.**, since 2 Kings 25:27–30 describes the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in Babylon in 561 and the books must therefore date from some time after that.



BACKGROUND

These two books set out to provide for their readers **an explanation of Israel's later monarchic** 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 **fall of Jerusalem** and the events that immediately followed it came as a devastating blow to the people of Judah. Jerusalem lay in **ruins**; both ordinary houses and the royal palace had been destroyed, and the city's defenses had been pulled down.



BACKGROUND

Most seriously of all, the **temple**—the great symbol of Yahweh’s presence with Israel—had been dismantled. Many had been killed, and many others had been deported to **Babylon** to work in the fields as well as in administration.

The books of Kings must be understood against this **background**. They represent a sustained **response** to such questions, and are designed to provide their readers a **true interpretation** of what happened to Israel in 586 B.C.

PURPOSE

Israel's God is indeed in control of **nature** and **history**; there are no other, more powerful gods anywhere. It is in fact this good and all-powerful God who has himself overseen the destruction of his chosen city and his temple, and the exile to Babylon. The reason for these actions lies in Israel's great **sinfulness**. Israel has not obeyed God or heeded his word through the prophets, from the reign of **Solomon** onward.

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.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

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.



LITERARY ANALYSIS

First and Second Kings are written in the form of **historical narrative**—specifically, a record of **monarchical succession**. The main rhetorical format of this **court history** is the summary of individual kings' careers, consisting of the **name** of each king, what kingdom he **ruled** (Israel or Judah), the **date** of his accession to the throne, the **length** of his reign, his religious and other **policies**, the details of his **death**, and the name of his **successor**.

The authors' main intention is to interpret the history of Israel along **theological lines**, showing what happens when political and spiritual leaders foolishly choose to **worship** false gods instead of wisely choosing to **worship** the one true God.



MAJOR THEMES

Solomon is the dominant character in the first half of 1 Kings, and the prophet Elijah in the second half. The general movement of the book is from **wisdom to folly**, as Solomon's downfall is recapitulated in the choices of his sons and grandsons. The archetype of the **evil king** dominates the book, with the figure of **King David** repeatedly invoked as the royal standard by which his successors are measured and found wanting.

Like 1 Kings, 2 Kings is encyclopedic in its scope, summarizing the careers of nearly **30 kings**.

Far from simply giving the facts, the historian tells what happened with a reporter's eye for the **significant detail**, a storyteller's **flair for the dramatic**, and a pastor's heart for **teaching people the difference between right and wrong**.