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1 and 2 Kings Introduction



1 Kings - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an introduction to the books of 1 and 2 Kings, clarifying that they were originally one document written by a single person. Together, they cover the period from the death of David to the end of the nation, focusing on the temple period. Though previously included as a part of the book of Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings now stand as separate books in the Christian Old Testament.

Transcript

In this session, we're going to have an introduction to the book of 1 Kings and actually 2 Kings, because the two, as we mentioned earlier when we were talking about Samuel, the two books of Samuel were originally one book, and the two books of Kings were originally one book. And, as a matter of fact, the two books of Chronicles were originally one book. We have two each of these books.

Largely, we can thank the Septuagint translator for that. The Hebrew Bible originally just had one book that we call the books of Samuel now, one book that we call the books of Kings, and one book that we call the books of Chronicles. These were, in the Septuagint, broken up into what they called the books of kingdoms.

That is, the first and second Samuel were called the first and second books of kingdoms, and first and second Kings were called the third and fourth books of kingdoms. And, they broke them into two parts, mainly for mechanical reasons. The Hebrew text did not have vowels, and so the words didn't take up as much space as the Greek text took, because the Greek text did have vowels, and so the words were longer and took more space.

So, they had to break them up into smaller books. Now, we can talk about the books of kings or the book of kings. We're really talking about one document written by one person and not two books.

But, the books of kings cover the entire period from the death of David at the beginning of first Kings to the death of the nation at the end of second Kings. David was the most glorious king in Israel's history, and so from his death, everything began to decline. Not rapidly, because Solomon's reign still retained a great deal of glory from David's time.

When David died, he left Israel probably as rich as it ever was in any time of its history. When Solomon left power, he had impoverished the nation a great deal. He built some beautiful buildings and had a glorious empire that looked good, but he had done so at great expense and with a lot of slave labor and so forth.

And, a lot of the people were in bad shape economically, so that when Solomon himself died and left his kingdom to his son, Rehoboam, the people complained to Rehoboam about the oppressive nature of Solomon's taxation and of Solomon's civic projects and said, you know, if you just reduce the level of taxation, we'll serve you as we served your father. But, if you don't, we're going to not serve you. And so, it was because Rehoboam did not comply with the people's request that there was a revolt and the kingdom divided into two.

From that point on, essentially the books of Kings tell us the parallel histories of two different kingdoms, one to the north and one to the south, the one in the north called Israel, the one in the south called Judah. And, the death of the nation took place in stages. We could call the division of the kingdom into two as part of its deterioration.

And, that happened in Rehoboam's time. Much later, the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 721 or 722 BC. And, that was the end of the northern kingdom and all that remained was the kingdom of Judah in the south.

And, it remained for another 135 years until 586 BC and then it was taken into captivity in Babylon. And, that was basically the end of the nation. Of course, Judah returned from Babylon later on, but not entirely.

Only a remnant returned. They did rebuild the temple and they rebuilt things, but that's not part of the books of Kings. The books of Kings just take us up to the point where Judah went into captivity.

And, therefore, the nation has been split and then each individual part of the nation has fallen to foreign powers by the end of this document of 2 Kings. The record actually begins with Solomon's reign and his temple building project. And, 2 Kings ends with the burning and destruction of the temple.

So, in a sense, the books of Kings are the history of the temple period, the first temple period. There's 47 chapters and through most of them the temple is standing. It's early in the book around chapter 5 of 1 Kings.

Solomon's making preparations to build the temple and then he builds it in chapters 6 through 8. And, then the temple is standing and central to the life of Judah and much of the time of Israel, too. At least some of the time. And, is there until its destruction in 586.

So, these 47 chapters are mostly covering a time when the temple was standing and when it was a central issue in Jewish life. That is what we call the first temple period.

Later, after the Babylonian exile, in a period that we will read about in later books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel and by the remnant of the Jews that came back from Babylon with him.

And, it stood until AD 70 when it was destroyed also. So, there have been two temples. And, we sometimes refer to the temple of Zerubbabel and its later embellishment by Herod as the second temple period.

Sometimes scholars talk about second temple Judaism, having different features, different kinds of worship and so forth, than in first temple or in pre-temple in tabernacle Judaism. Judaism went through changes in these different periods of time. And, even the temple innovated some changes from what had been in the tabernacle.

But, apparently God didn't mind. In fact, in the book of Chronicles, we are told that David had received plans for this temple through the Spirit, through inspiration. So, just as Moses had seen a vision, a pattern for the tabernacle when he was up on Mount Sinai, David apparently received divine revelation for the design of the temple, which he then passed down to his son, Solomon.

And, we don't know to what degree Solomon followed. He seems to have followed it pretty much, although he did employ architects and workers from Phoenicia to come and have some kind of role in its design, certainly in its structure. And so, as we saw that the book of 1 Chronicles largely paralleled the books of Samuel, so the book of 2 Chronicles, for the most part, parallels the books of Kings.

Not exactly, but if you look at the back of the sheet I've given you, I've given essentially all the parallel passages between Kings and Chronicles. And, you can see that the first few chapters of Kings are paralleled in 1 Chronicles. So, the parallels are not exact.

It doesn't divide up really between Samuel and Kings quite perfectly between the two books of Chronicles. But, of course, the two books of Chronicles were divided somewhat artificially. It's not as if 1 Chronicles was written separately than 2 Chronicles in order to parallel different books.

Chronicles was all one book, and so its division is a little bit arbitrary. But, it just so happens that as it was divided, most of Kings is paralleled in 2 Chronicles. And, we'll say more about Chronicles.

We've actually had, at another time, an introduction to the books of Chronicles. But, as we go through the books of Kings, we'll try to bring in the additional material that Chronicles gives us about the same period. If you'll notice on the back of the sheet I gave you, there are significant omissions in 2 Chronicles vis-a-vis the books of Kings.

And, there are additions that Chronicles includes that the books of Kings leave out. I haven't listed a complete list of omissions. But, I have mentioned that one of the main

things absent from Chronicles in giving this history that is found and very prominent in Kings is the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

The ministries of Elijah and Elisha are very prominent in the books of Kings. Probably, I'm going to say, more than a third of the chapters of 1 and 2 Kings span the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Two major characters in the books of Kings, absent entirely from the books of Chronicles.

But, as far as additions that Chronicles includes that are not found in the books of Kings, there are some things important. I've listed several of them. And, we will look at those as we're going through Kings.

We'll turn to these passages in Chronicles in the proper place and supplement the information there. But, there's especially interesting is that although 1 Chronicles, when it was paralleling the books of Samuel, left out some of the embarrassing things about David. For example, it left out the sin with Bathsheba.

And, Chronicles didn't include that. But, Chronicles did include some embarrassing things about the good kings. The book of Kings mentions the good kings, but without going into any detail about the things they do wrong.

Like, Asa, who was essentially a good king of Judah. He put a prophet in prison for rebuking him. Hanani, the prophet, rebuked him for his compromises.

And, he put the prophet in prison in 2 Chronicles 16, 7-10. Asa was also, though a good king, struck by God or cursed by God because he did not seek the Lord. But, he sought physicians for an ailment in his feet in 16, verse 12.

Chronicles mentions that, but Kings does not. Kings does mention that he was afflicted in his feet. But, it doesn't mention that he sought physician's aid instead of God's aid.

There's some good things about Jehoshaphat that are found in Chronicles that are not found in the books of Kings. Jehoshaphat was a good king, and we know that from the book of Kings. But, there's somewhat more extensive description of Jehoshaphat's reforms and also of a significant war.

In which Jehoshaphat turned to the Lord when he was overwhelmed by Moabite and Ammonite invaders. And, that was the war where God just told him to send the singers and the musicians out ahead of the troops. And, so the musicians were singing and worshipping God out on the battlefield.

And, God turned the enemy against each other and the enemy killed each other. And, so it's like a supernatural victory. And, that is found only in 2 Chronicles, not in Kings.

That's found in 2 Chronicles, chapter 20. There's a very strange and difficult to explain

detail in 2 Chronicles that's not in Kings. It's in chapter 21, verses 11 through 19.

And, it's a letter from Elijah the prophet that came to a king much later than the time of Elijah's departure from the earth. Elijah was caught up in heaven years earlier than this letter is said to have been sent. And, so the scholars have been very puzzled over this.

And, some think it's an anachronism. Some think it's a fabrication. Some think that Elijah actually sent a letter from heaven.

I think the rabbis believe that. You know, Elijah had gone to heaven and sent a letter down to the king. Some think he had written the letter in his lifetime prophetically to be given to a king who had not yet been born.

And, I suppose another possibility, though maybe a far-fetched one, is that it's a different Elijah. But, there is this one detail in 2 Chronicles that's not found in Kings. Where the prophet Elijah sends a letter to King Jehoram.

Now, Joash, who was a promising young king, actually ended up apostatizing, sadly. And, murdering his cousin Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. Which was not mentioned in Kings.

But, is mentioned by Jesus. When Jesus talked about Zechariah who was killed between the temple and the altar. That was Zechariah who was killed by his cousin King Joash.

Who had earlier been a good king. Also, Uzziah, who was a good king, does not mention in Kings. But, does in Chronicles chapter 26 that Uzziah got leprosy because he tried to unlawfully burn incense.

And so, he came under judgment from God. Now, Hezekiah was a good king. And, in chapter 29 and 30 of 2 Chronicles.

We have details about his reforms, his restoration of the temple. And, elaborate celebration of the Passover, which are left out of Kings. That's included in 2 Chronicles.

And, perhaps one of the most interesting things that Chronicles includes that is left out of Kings. Is a detail about the later years of Manasseh's reign. Because, Manasseh was a wicked king.

In fact, according to the book of Kings, Manasseh was the worst king ever. And, it is because of Manasseh's wickedness that the nation came under judgment when in Babylon. Even though, later kings were not as bad as he was.

And, particularly Josiah was a good king and came afterwards. And, the Bible says that God was pleased with Josiah's reforms. But, not pleased enough to stop the judgment that was coming because of Manasseh's earlier wickedness.

So, Manasseh is a very wicked king as the books of Kings tell us. But, Chronicles tells us

that he was taken into captivity. And, in captivity he came to, he humbled himself.

And, he repented before God. And, he changed. Now, Kings doesn't tell us about this repentance and restoration of Manasseh.

Kings only gives us the story about his wickedness. Because, it was so significant in bringing the downfall of the nation. But, Manasseh had earlier in his life actually caused his sons to be burned to Molech.

But, when he was taken into captivity and he repented and humbled himself. And, God released him. He then reformed.

And, he sought to tear down and eliminate Molech worship and so forth. He tried to, you know, make amends for his evil deeds. And, that is something that chapter 33 of 2 Chronicles verses 10 through 17 records for us.

But, Kings does not. And, there's other things I didn't give you. I didn't mention just verbally just now everything in the list.

There's more things in your list. But, those are things that I've always found somewhat interesting to have in Chronicles that Kings leaves out. There are other interesting things too.

And, even the list I gave you isn't complete. There are smaller, a lot of smaller details that Chronicles includes that are not found in Kings. But, those are some of the larger issues.

Well, what is the purpose of the writing of the books of Kings? I mean, why does someone undertake a project like that? Well, in my opinion, it would appear to me that the book of Kings was written to teach the lesson. That Israel's national fortunes are directly tied to their loyalty and faithfulness or lack thereof to the covenant. The nation of Israel was established when God made a covenant with the slaves who had been brought out of Egypt.

And, they agreed to be faithful to him and he agreed to be faithful to them. And, although they, in the time of David and Solomon, became very great nations that could compete in their own right with any other nation around them for power and for wealth and all of that. Yet, they were still vulnerable to God's providence if they would be unfaithful to him.

And, therefore, the fortunes of the nation of Israel, especially more than any other nation, were tied directly to whether they were keeping God's covenant or not. And, the lesson of the book is that as they broke the covenant, God caused them to decline into destruction of their nation. The book demonstrates how God raises up rulers and judges rulers and brings them down.

And, one of the things that's prominent in the book of Kings, as I mentioned already, is the ministries of prophets, especially of Elijah and Elisha. In fact, if anything, one gets the impression from Kings that the role of Elijah and Elisha were more important to the security of the nation than anything the kings themselves did. Because, Elijah and Elisha are both referred to as the chariots of Israel, meaning the defense, the power of Israel.

Elisha refers to Elijah that way and Elisha himself is later referred to that way by the king when he's on his deathbed. And, so, it would appear that the prophets play a larger role in the fortunes of the country than the kings do. Because, the prophets are there to bring the kings back to faithfulness to the covenant when the kings typically go astray and they do most of the time.

Now, who wrote the books of Kings? Well, there's a Jewish tradition that Jeremiah did and it seems like that is probably the best theory. It's not unanimously held by scholars that Jeremiah did, of course. Nothing is unanimously held by scholars, but the Jewish tradition makes some sense.

For one thing, he lived at the right time. The author lived long enough to see the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, but apparently did not live long enough to see the return of the exiles. So, it was sometime after the fall, but not after the return of the exiles that this was written.

Jeremiah's life overlapped the decline and the fall of Jerusalem and he lived a little beyond that time. So, he lived at the right time for him to have written it. There are some near parallel or near identical parallel accounts in Jeremiah and in Kings.

Particularly, 2 Kings 24, 18-25, 30. 2 Kings 24, 18-25, 30 are parallel almost verbatim with Jeremiah 52, verses 1-34. In other words, it looks like one of the authors lifted material right out of the other one's book.

It might have been the same author even. Some have thought that if Jeremiah didn't write it, maybe one of his own students did and used Jeremiah's written records, written prophecies as part of his sources and just lifted a passage out of Jeremiah's book into 2 Kings. But, it's as easy to suggest that Jeremiah may have done so himself.

There are other sources of historical information though that the author had. Of course, no author would have lived to see all the events because the span of the events is hundreds of years long. Therefore, he needed historical records to be able to tell of the stories of Kings before his own time.

There are three other historical sources that the author mentions. Only once, he mentions a book called the Book of the Acts of Solomon. He mentions that in 1 Kings 11-41.

But, then there are frequent references to a couple of other books. One is called the

Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. One is the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

This is, of course, after the kingdom was divided. And, there are 17 references to each of these. 17 references to the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and 17 to the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Usually, it is in the setting where it's ending the story of one king. And, as it's closing out his story, it says, Now the rest of the Acts of King So-and-So, are they not found in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah or of Israel if it's an Israeli king? So, we see these books were available to the author as apparently sources or at least confirmatory documents. But, we don't have them today.

The Book of the Acts of Solomon and the two Books of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and of Israel are not the books that we have called chronicles. And, we don't have any surviving manuscripts of these old books that the author of kings had reference to or made reference to. Now, the Book of First Kings, the division between First and Second Kings is somewhat artificial, somewhat mechanical.

But, as it turned out, the Book of First Kings is divided exactly in half. Eleven chapters in the first half, eleven chapters in the second half, and almost the same number of pages in each half. Although, chapters tend to be longer or shorter than each other depending on how they've been divided up.

Yet, the eleven chapters at the beginning of First Kings is almost the same number of pages as the eleven chapters at the end. And, it's a natural division. The first eleven chapters of First Kings are about Solomon's reign.

At the beginning, he is installed and established as a king. At the end, he dies, at the end of chapter eleven. And, he is the last king to reign his entire life over a united kingdom of Israel.

Because, his son didn't reign for very long before the kingdom was divided. And so, only Saul, David, and Solomon really had the privilege of reigning over the whole kingdom of Israel until their death. After that, the kingdom was divided.

But, the first eleven chapters are the reign of Solomon. And, they are dominated fairly heavily with the temple project that he built. A lot of details given about that.

The second half, the last eleven chapters, chapters twelve through twenty-two, are, of course, after the kingdom was divided. And so, like most of Second Kings, it's occupied with giving the parallel histories of two different kingdoms moving back and forth from one to the other. Now, the book of Second Kings has its major division quite late in the book.

Its first section is chapters one through seventeen, which essentially continues the parallel histories of the two, the northern and southern kingdoms. So, the first sixteen chapters are just a continuation of First Kings and the same kind of material as you find in First Kings chapters twelve through twenty-two. This parallel histories of these two kingdoms.

But, after chapter seventeen, Second Kings doesn't have that anymore because in chapter seventeen the northern kingdom is destroyed. And, it doesn't exist anymore. And, therefore, the rest of the book is the fate of Judah, the last surviving portion of the kingdom.

And, the northern kingdom's total history lasted for two hundred and fifty-four years. In that time, they had nineteen kings, not one good one. All the kings of Israel to the north were bad kings.

They never got one good one. And, that was over a period of two hundred and fifty-four years. After the northern kingdom fell, the southern kingdom continued for another one hundred and thirty-five years.

They had a total of twenty kings, which, as you can see, means that, on average, the kings of Judah reigned longer than the kings of Israel. Part of that is because the kings of Israel were so wicked they were often taken out in bloody assassinations and coups and things like that. But, that happened in the south, too, somewhat.

Now, of the kings in the south, most of them were bad also. But, there were a few good ones. There's some refreshing stories of kings like Uzziah and Hezekiah and Josiah and Jehoshaphat.

I mean, there's a few kings that were really good kings. But, interestingly, all of them had some negative thing recorded against them before the end of their story. Even Hezekiah and Josiah, who seemed to have been the very best kings that Judah had, each of them had some negative thing reported about them at the end of his life, which is sad.

I mean, but, in an age where almost everyone was wicked, being as good as they were was exceptional and it was refreshing. So, we have 19 bad kings in the north and 20 kings, mostly bad, in the south. And, therefore, it can be a bit depressing.

The story is brightened, however, the enjoyment of the story is enhanced, I believe, by the presence of Elijah and Elisha, the prophets. And, I would say that the book of Kings gives a high place of prominence to prophets. In 1 Kings, we're looking at Elijah, primarily.

And, he's the prominent prophet. In the 2nd chapter of 2 Kings, he is carried up into heaven and he is succeeded in his ministry by his servant, Elisha. And, so, 2 Kings is mostly about Elisha.

Together, these two men's ministries span about 20 chapters. Of the 47 chapters of the book, that's two-fifths of the record of Kings is occupied with these two men's lives. And, when you figure that there's over, you know, almost 400 years covered in the period, that two-fifths of it would be given to two men's lifetimes, would suggest the disproportionate importance of those two men.

They were very significant prophets. A little bit like Moses in their significance. Not quite, but Moses and the prophets, or the law and the prophets, forever afterward to the Jews, were significant to the point where the Messiah was said to be like another Moses, and the forerunner of the Messiah would be like another Elijah.

And, it was Moses and Elijah who appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. In the Gospels. And, these two men, I mean, Elijah obviously held some kind of a role of esteem in the mind of Israel similar to that of Moses.

Different, because Moses was more of, although he was certainly a religious founder, he was also a political founder of the nation. A military deliverer and founder of a political nation, and a giver of laws. Elijah was strictly a prophet, but he was an important prophet.

And, it's interesting that Elijah was not a writing prophet, because men like Jeremiah and Isaiah and Ezekiel and Amos and Hosea and those men, who wrote books, were not actually, apparently, at least the books of Kings don't treat them as being as significant as Elijah and Elisha. And yet, Elijah and Elisha did not write books as far as we know. In addition to these two prophets, there are quite a few other prophets named and unnamed in the books of 1 Kings.

There's Ahijah the prophet. There's a prophet named Jehu. There's a prophet named Micaiah.

And then, Jonah and Isaiah are named in the book as characters, and we know them because they were writing prophets. Of all the prophets mentioned in the books of Kings, only Jonah and Isaiah were writing prophets. And then, there are four other prophets throughout the story that are not named.

They're anonymous. And, there's a prophetess, a female prophet named Huldah. In addition to that, there are a hundred prophets in the Northern Kingdom that are hidden by a man named Obadiah from Queen Jezebel, because she's been out slaughtering the prophets.

There have been a lot of prophets, apparently. If she killed off almost all of them, but a hundred of them got saved in a cave and were hidden there. And, in Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal, we find groups of prophets, sons of the prophets, as they're called.

So, we have a prominent visibility of these prophets in Israel, which were very important,

because almost all countries, if you read their political history, you're going to be reading about the people who held political offices, and you read that here. But, the people who held the political offices in these stories seemed to be mostly kind of morally stupid people, and sometimes stupid in their governing. At least, they seemed stupid to us.

They might have been shrewd. They might have been even efficient, in some cases, as rulers. But, they seemed to be morally very stupid.

And, it was the prophets who were there to rebuke and to correct and to try to salvage the nation from the damage done by the foolish choices of the kings. And so, throughout the book of Kings, we're going to have a lot of attention given to prophets. It makes it very interesting, frankly, much more interesting than a mere political history, to see God's word coming to these kings and evaluating their deeds, either commending them or rebuking them.

Just to see God interacting with a nation through prophets is, I mean, it would be so great, in a sense, to live in a country where that was happening. Although, unfortunately, maybe the reason that God sent prophets is because the nation had such bad rulers. Maybe it's not so good to have to have a nation that needs prophets to tell the rulers to turn around all the time.

But, it'd be great to have a nation where the rulers could actually consult God through prophets and do the right thing all the time if they wished to. I'm not sure if we'd get any rulers that really wished to, but if you got some, like Hezekiah or whatever, it'd be certainly a desirable thing to have the word of the Lord available. Remember, in Samuel's day, it said, when Samuel was a child, before the word of the Lord was coming to him, it says, the word of the Lord was precious or rare in those days.

There was no open vision. Samuel was the first of this order of prophets, and he also established an order of prophets in several towns, which were called the Company of Prophets or the Sons of the Prophets. And they are the ones that we, although a later generation of them in the same institution, are the ones that we find at Gilgal and Jericho and Bethel in the books of Kings.

But generations later than Samuel's time. But Samuel apparently established an order of prophets, and that is what provided guidance for the nation. And not only guidance for the nation, but eventually provided the books that we call the Old Testament.

Because the books of the Old Testament, almost all of them, are written by prophets. And so they're very important in the nation's history and in our own spiritual lives as well. Now we can look at an outline of the book of Kings, the two books of Kings.

I mentioned the first 11 chapters of 1 Kings is concerned with the reign of Solomon. In chapters 1 through 4 of that section, we have Solomon established as the ruler. We have

David still alive, but ailing and dying in the opening of the book of 1 Kings.

He is old, his health has failed. He's only 70, but he seems to have aged prematurely because his body cannot generate heat. He's always cold.

Apparently his consumption or something. And so it begins with how this woman was sought to actually keep his bed warm for him. And actually, although he was a man with many women and plenty of sexual desire, he didn't have any sexual relations with this woman.

She was chosen because she was the most beautiful woman they could find in the kingdom, a young virgin. And she remained a virgin the whole time that she kept his bed warm with him. But the reason that that starts that way is because she becomes an issue later on, when Adonijah, David's oldest surviving son at this time, wants to make himself king after David's death.

He tried before David's death. He apparently tried again after David died. He tried to do so by getting this woman, Abishag, to be his wife.

And of course, as we pointed out when we were going through Samuel, it was kind of an understood thing that the man who had the wives of the previous king was seen as the successor. So it was a political move on his part. So we're introduced to Abishag in connection with David right at the beginning of the book.

And then Adonijah tries to make himself king. This doesn't work out for him. Solomon becomes king instead.

Then David, on his deathbed, tells Solomon to kind of clean up some things that David left untidy. There are some bad people who should have been judged. And he leaves that to Solomon to take care of for him.

And so Solomon does. And eventually Solomon's kingdom is established. By chapter 4, we're reading about how prosperous it was, how extensive his kingdom was, and how wise he was.

Of course, it's in these early chapters also that he is told by God that he could ask for anything he wants and God will give it to him. And God, he asked for wisdom. And so God gave him wisdom greater than any other man of the time, but also gave him wealth, which he did not ask for, greater than any of his contemporaries.

So that's how his kingdom was established, chapters 1 through 4. Then chapters 5 through 9 document a lot of the building projects that Solomon did, the temple being the most important of them. But he also built quite a few other civic works and a lot of buildings that are named and things he did. One of his chief claims to fame was his building projects.

And of course, the temple that he built was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And it is described in chapters, it and the other projects, chapters 5 through 9. Then there's a chapter devoted to how wise Solomon was and how impressed, especially the Queen of Sheba and everyone else was, chapter 10. And then chapter 11 talks about how Solomon fell away from the Lord due to his taking too many wives from foreign nations and accommodating their religions more than he should in Jerusalem, building temples for their gods and goddesses and so forth.

And thus they turned his heart away from God, the Bible says. And then he becomes a bad guy. Solomon becomes a bad guy and God sends a prophet to tell him he's going to lose the kingdom altogether, or at least 10 of the tribes.

And it becomes clear that sort of a foreman on one of his work crews, a guy named Jeroboam, is going to be the man who will succeed him to rule those 10 tribes. So Solomon tries to kill him, but he escapes to Egypt and stays there until after Solomon's death. And at the end of chapter 11, we see Solomon dies.

So then we have from 1 Kings 12 through 2 Kings 17, we have the divided kingdom, you could call it. That's the second major section of these books. We have the reign of Solomon, first 11 chapters, then we have the divided kingdom.

And it begins in chapter 12 with the revolt of the 10 tribes against Rehoboam. And then the rise of idolatry in the northern kingdom as Jeroboam becomes the first king of the northern kingdom. And he sets up gold calves at Dan and Bethel to be sort of alternative places of worship so that his people will not go down to Jerusalem, which was ruled by Rehoboam.

He didn't want them going back to Judah and rejoining under the house of David. And so he built alternative shrines with these gold calves. And that was the beginning of idolatry at that time in the northern kingdom.

Then we have in chapter 13 of this section, a prophet, an unnamed prophet. He comes and he gives a really striking prophecy. He prophesies Josiah's reign by name hundreds of years in advance of Josiah's birth.

And he gives a specific prediction of what something Josiah would do, which Josiah later did. And he curses an altar, a pagan altar that Jeroboam had set up. And there's this strange story about the older prophet who hears about him and deceives him.

That's all in that chapter. It's a strange story. We'll look at it, of course, in more detail later.

And then in chapters 14 through 16, we basically have a succession of kings of the northern and southern kingdoms up until you get to Ahab. And Ahab is significant enough to detain the story for the rest of first kings. From chapter 14 to the end of the

book, it's the reign of Ahab, pretty much.

I mean, he dies at the end of chapter 22. So, Ahab is significant, but he's significant because he's evil. He's significantly evil.

He marries Jezebel, who's a princess from Phoenicia and a worshiper of Baal. And she's a nasty lady and a dominating lady. And he was an easy man to dominate.

He was a bad king, but partly because he was a weak, spineless king. And he probably worshipped Baal himself, probably happily enough. But he probably would not have enforced Baal worship on the country like his wife did.

But she actually conducted a purge of all of Yahweh's prophets and brought prophets of Baal into the staff of the kingdom, of the monarchs. And so they were taking their counsel from prophets of Baal. And she was seeking to outlaw the worship of Yahweh in Israel.

So she was a very significant threat to the faith in God in Israel in her time. And that's why so much time is given, so many chapters are given to that. And it is in that context that Elijah the prophet appears.

And he comes and he declares there's going to be a drought until he says otherwise. And then he runs and hides because Jezebel's a dangerous lady. And she has basically a warrant out for his arrest and a price on his head.

And so we have in chapter 17, Elijah and his ministry continues until the death of Ahab in chapter 22. So 1 Kings chapters 17 through 22 are focused on the ministry of Elijah the prophet. And also another prophet named Micaiah is significant in the final chapter of Ahab's life.

So that gets us to the end of 1 Kings. But the divided kingdom continues to be considered through the next several chapters at the beginning of 2 Kings. And at the beginning of 2 Kings, King Ahaziah of Israel is denounced by Elijah the prophet.

And that king dies. And then that's basically Elijah's last action. And he is in chapter 2 taken up into heaven, apparently alive in a whirlwind.

And Elisha, his servant, becomes his successor. And the ministry of Elisha becomes the focus of chapters 2 through 8. Now in these chapters where they focus on the mysteries of Elijah and Elisha, very little attention is given to the politics, to the kings. I mean, these kings, especially Ahab, they figure in the story significantly.

But there's a lot of other activities of Elijah and Elisha that don't have anything to do with the royalty. Just things they're doing with other people and other places and so forth and how God is using them. And so that's the case in chapters 2 through 8. Now, Elisha

doesn't die until chapter 13.

But after chapter 8, he kind of fades from view until it mentions his final words and his death in chapter 13. But chapters 2 through 8 are a focus on the ministry of Elisha. Significantly, in chapters 9 through 10, we have an uprising against the house of Omri, against Ahab, and his seed by one of his generals named Jehu.

Actually, Elijah, the prophet, sent one of the lesser prophets to go anoint Jehu when he was still a military leader and say, you're the new king of Israel. And Jehu rose to that happily and he went and he killed Jezebel. Ahab was already dead, but Jezebel was still there.

And killed Ahab's son, who was the king, and also killed everyone he could get his hands on that was royalty. Unfortunately, even some of the royalty of Judah, at least some of the royal family of Judah, happened to be unlucky enough to be visiting the king of Israel. And they got themselves killed by Jehu.

And then Jehu killed all the prophets of Baal. Jehu's rebellion and purge was very bloody. And it occupies 2 Kings chapters 9 and 10.

Then we have the interesting story in chapter 11 of Athaliah, who is the daughter of Jezebel and has married into the royal family of Judah. Now Jezebel is the queen of the northern kingdom, but her daughter Athaliah marries into the kingdom of Judah, and to Jehoshaphat's son. And she takes advantage of the crisis in the north and Jehu's purge, and she kills all her own grandchildren, slaughters them all so that she can make herself queen and she have no rivals to the throne.

And so she took power and reigned for a while, and then she was overthrown and killed. Then in chapters 12 through 16, we really just have a series of kings in Israel and Judah, all bad ones, except for a few good ones in the north, a few good ones in Judah. And then in chapter 17, we have the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria.

So that's the end of that second division of the books of Kings, the divided kingdom. And then chapters 18 through 25, the remainder of 2 Kings, is about the surviving kingdom of Judah. And some of it is very uplifting because it starts out by talking about Hezekiah's reign, which is a godly reign that occupies three chapters, 18, 19, and 20.

And it's a positive thing. Then there's the wicked reign of his son Manasseh, and Manasseh's son Ammon covered in chapter 21. Then in chapter 22 through chapter 23, verse 30, we have Josiah and his reforms.

And he was a good king like Hezekiah, and he was actually ignorant of the law until he started a project of cleaning up and refurbishing the temple, which had fallen into poor repair. And in the course of the project, Hilkiyah, the priest, discovered some scrolls in one of the chambers of the temple, apparently. They didn't know what they were.

It turned out to be the book of Deuteronomy, but they hadn't seen the law, apparently, for generations. They didn't even know what it was. When the priest found the book of Deuteronomy, he didn't even know what he'd found.

And when he began to read it, he realized that this was something important. And so he took it to Josiah, and Josiah read it and realized that Judah was under the curse of God because of their idolatry. And so he repented for the nation and set about to bring about sweeping reforms where he wiped out virtually all the idolatry in Judah.

And that was something that the Bible says God was very pleased with, but it does say it was too little too late. It was actually very sweeping and very thorough, but it was not something that won the people's hearts. A good ruler can make good laws and can ban and banish all kinds of bad behavior, but if the people aren't with him, then as soon as he's gone, they're going to go back to their old ways again.

And that's pretty much what happened when Josiah died. The reform was sincere on his part, but shallow in terms of the national conscience and did not bring about permanent righteousness in the nation, unfortunately. And then in chapter 23, verse 31 through chapter 24, we have the last several rulers of Judah who are all evil, and then that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple and the exile of the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, which is in chapter 25.

And just the last few verses of chapter 25 are an epilogue sort of summarizing the spiritual significance of all of this. And so that's how the book is outlined. That's how it's divided into parts.