

Welcome to
St Mark's Bible Stream
The Books of 1 and 2 Kings
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St Mark's Gillingham

These books:

- Are 1 book, 2 scrolls, separated when Septuagint, then Vulgate (Latin translation) Bibles written. Arbitrary break between the 2 books.
- Cover a period of nearly 500 years
- Include the reign of all Kings of Israel and Judah from the end of David's reign to the final exile in Babylon.
- Include the lifetimes of most of the prophets, and include periods covered by other Bible books.

Well known prophets and other Bible books in this time period:

- Chronicles
- Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (all attributed to Solomon)
- *Elijah, Elisha*
- *Amos, Jonah, Hosea*
- *Isaiah*
- *Nahum*
- *Jeremiah*
- *Zephaniah, Habakkuk,*
- *Daniel, Ezekiel* (these two mostly during exile)

At the beginning of the books, Israel is one nation, strong and secure. Jerusalem is the capital.

God has promised David a line which will last forever – can only be fulfilled with the coming of Jesus.

Yet we end up with the people exiled in Babylon, and it is during this time that the book of Kings was most probably written by a prophet, to explain to the people of Israel how and why they had ended up in exile, and still hold out hope for the future of the nation.

1 & 2 Kings is not a history book as we would understand it. There are wars and alliances with the powers around them which are hardly mentioned at all. But references are made to sources used including histories.

The writer regularly refers to some of his sources, including:

- the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel (NOT Chronicles in our Bible);
- the Book of the Acts of Solomon;
- the Book of Jashar (perhaps an ancient national song-book of Israel);
- There were court archives, and popular histories based on them available to the writer - it is believed that there was a Court History of David;
- a collection of stories of Elijah-Elisha were also probably used

David is old, losing his grip. Eldest surviving son Adonijah tries to take the throne, with the support of the army commander Joab and one of the two chief priests, Shimei.

But those close to David tip him off, and David out-manoevres Adonijah and makes a formal declaration that Solomon will now be King and he is publicly anointed.

Chapter 2 – vv1-13

On his death bed, David tells Solomon to walk in God's ways. But he also tells him to deal with the troublemakers Joab and Shimei that David has been merciful to up 'til now.

vv14 - 46

Whether Adonijah was unthinking or deliberate, marrying Abishag (counted as part of David's harem) would support his claim to the throne. This time Solomon is not merciful. The army commander also doesn't get another chance – and Solomon fulfils his father's request.

Shimei also has another chance – but he eventually breaks the restriction and pays the price.

v.1 – Solomon marries an Egyptian princess. He creates a stable kingdom not by force, but by clever alliances. Egypt was often trying to annexe Canaan to secure its trade routes, and always looking for opportunities to take over Israel. An alliance by marriage is the next best thing.

v.2 – Israelite worship was happening in the same places as Canaanite worship had – on hilltops. This encouraged the mixing up of the worship of God, with that of the Canaanite gods – “Syncretism” – causing the fall of all Israel.

Solomon may have sacrificed in good faith, as the tabernacle was here - hence God’s approval, but it was a bad example foreshadowing future issues.

3 vv 4-28

The story of God promising Solomon wisdom, plus fame and fortune.

This is followed by an example - the story of the baby and the two prostitutes – even common people had access to the King for judgement (it is thought these may have been Jebusites, original Canaanite inhabitants of Jerusalem).

Chapter 4

Lots of names and places! Solomon organised the whole kingdom, but his 12 districts (v.7) were not on the lines of the 12 tribes – a cause for trouble.

Vv 20, 21 – a picture of happiness all around – but only relative to most other troubled times. The Kingdom now covers all the land promised to Abraham.

THE TEMPLE

Much of the design reflects pagan temples of the time, but there are key differences which make it unique. Though the temple is not that big (27m x 9m x 13.5m) the craftsmanship and sheer scale are staggering.

This came at immense cost to the people, not Solomon. Note 5v13 – he conscripts Israelite labour – almost slavery for one month in three.

The trade with Hiram King of Tyre was another of Solomon's deals which kept the peace – he seems to have been generous in payment.

Ch 7 Solomon also uses the same system to build a palace for himself .

The ark is brought into the temple and it is dedicated. v.8 “still there today” must be a quote from earlier documents, not when Kings written.

The presence of God appearing as a cloud filled the temple just as in the desert during the exodus.

The King praises God for fulfilling His promises and then gives a prayer of dedication, asking God to bless the temple, for it to be a focus for the prayers of all people. This reflects God’s availability to all people and nations.

Everything seems right at this point – the sacrifices, the festivals, the understanding of the Covenant.

God speaks to Solomon again, and promises the line of David conditionally on obedience to God's laws, if the people follow only Yahweh.

vv10-28 we get some of the bigger picture of what has been going on in Solomon's reign. He has built the temple and his palace at tremendous cost – he has given away 20 towns in Galilee.

His building projects include the city walls of Jerusalem and three fortified cities to protect trade routes. He rebuilt and re-purposed towns, and created a merchant navy for trade.

v22 points out that although Solomon has used periodic forced Israelite labour, most of the workforce was the conquered Canaanites who were enslaved.

Queen of Sheba (thought to be the area of Yemen) visits.

She recognises that Yahweh has blessed Israel and given them a great and wise king in Solomon. She brought great riches to Solomon, but clearly there is some trade going on here (v.13)

We then read of the incredible ostentatious wealth of Solomon which is made through trade, taxes and gifts from foreign admirers.

How much of this prosperity trickled down to the ordinary people?

The Downfall. We rarely hear of Solomon as the cause of the downfall of Israel

Solomon has a weakness for women, and would have been an attractive proposition for other powers to be associated with.

He marries women whose people worship evil gods, from people groups whom Yahweh had forbidden Israelites to marry. He allows them to not only keep their gods, but builds shrines for his wives to worship at and even joins them in the worship.

He breaks the covenant spectacularly, and God tells him that the warnings of breaking the covenant will now happen.

We find that despite all that has gone before, it has not been perfect in the world of Solomon. Israel always had enemies which he had to resist one way or another, and he has created his own enemies which so far he has managed to control.

Ahijah the prophet prophesies the future disintegration and tells Jeroboam that he will take over the 10 northern tribes. He receives the same Davidic promise from God that if he is obedient, he will have an enduring dynasty.

Jeroboam has to flee to Egypt. Egypt is always a thorn in the flesh for Israel, taking advantage whenever it can and here we see ready to harbour enemies of Israel, to use them for their own purposes. A weak Israel is good for Egypt.

Solomon has died, and his son Rehoboam takes the throne. Jereboam returns to Israel and represents the northern kingdoms, offering to serve Rehoboam if he reduces the heavy burdens that Solomon had put on the people.

But Rehoboam decides continue the heavy taxation and slave labour. The ten northern tribes go their own way and make Jereboam their king, so Rehoboam remains king of only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the South.

What held together the 12 tribes was not the kingship, but worship of Yahweh, the temple at Jerusalem, the feasts and sacrifices and national memories. Jereboam realises this and makes the terrible choice set up his own gods – a golden calf in shrines in the north and south of the ten tribes.

From here on, the stories move between the southern and northern kingdoms, mostly in chronological order of the kings. The two kingdoms are now weak, often at war with each other and prey to the surrounding powers.

The question now is ... who will follow God?

Many kings get only a few lines, especially if they are idolatrous, so often we quickly get through many years in a very short time.

War between the kingdoms continued on and off for most of the time of Kings.

1 Kings Chs 12-16



We now enter a time where God speaks prominently through prophets – they were there before, but now Kings gives them a voice.

Some are based in Israel in the North e.g. Elijah and Elisha, some in Judah in the south e.g. Isaiah

Ch 13 begins with a prophecy against those altars of Jeroboam, but he takes no notice, and pays the consequences.

Ch 14 another prophet tells Jeroboam's wife that because of his idolatry, his son will die and his family be destroyed.

v.21- Back to Judah and Rehoboam. They do no better than Israel, erecting idols and shrines for prostitution, and pay the price.

Egypt attacks and reaches Jerusalem, ransacks the temple and the palace – all that gold is gone! Only 5 years after Solomon's death.

15.1 Rehoboam succeeded by son Abijah – as bad as his father.

v.9 Abijah succeeded by son Asa – who got rid of the shrines and Asherah poles.

After Jereboam it's a mess. His son becomes king of Israel, but after 2 years there is a coup, and new king Baasha kills all of Jereboam's family.

Ch. 16.1 Baasha's son Elah becomes king for 2 years, then he suffers a coup and all of that family is murdered by Zimri who only lasts 7 days! There is then civil war, and Omri wins. He builds the city of Samaria but is another evil King.

16.29 – Ahab succeeds Omri, and is the worst of all the kings of Israel so far. He marries Jezebel from Sidon and supports her worship of Baal.

When foreign gods are introduced, a worship of Yahweh continues alongside.

17.1 Elijah now moves onto the national stage, a solitary figure, though there are many other unmentioned prophets of God at the time.

Elijah tells Ahab because of his idolatry there will be no rain, then has to run and hide. He is fed by ravens, then hides under Jezebel's nose in Sidon with a widow in Zarephath. This is the story of the oil and flour which don't run out, and where Elijah revives the widow's dead son.

Ch 18 The prophet Obadiah makes an appearance, but only as a messenger. An assembly on Mount Carmel of 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. The choice is clear, Yahweh or Baal. Everything is in the favour of the Baal worshippers, but God shows his sovereignty and even brings the rain.

Elijah has to run from Jezebel. He is exhausted and depressed. On Mount Horeb, God shows him that despite His power, God speaks in the still small voice – He is in control.

He tells Elijah there are still 7000 godly people in Israel. Elijah needs to shake off the past and go and anoint some future major players, and to take Elisha as his successor.

Elijah means “The Lord is God”, Elisha means “God saves”

This chapter covers a period of war when Aram (to the north of Israel) attacks and beats Ahab. But Ahab listens to God's (unnamed) prophet and beats the king of Aram twice, because that king is dismissive of Yahweh. However a failure to consult God in dealing with the Arameans leads to a pronouncement of judgement on Ahab and the people of Israel.

Ch 21 Ahab wants Naboth's vineyard, but he won't sell it. So Jezebel arranges to have him killed and Ahab takes the vineyard. Elijah prophesies judgement on Ahab and all his household – dogs will lick up his blood and eat Jezebel.

Although Ahab is described as "vile" at this point, he mourns and fasts, so God stays the judgement until his son is king.

Jehoshaphat becomes king of Judah when Ahab has been on his throne for 2 years. “He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord”, but he still allowed idol worship.

Long chapter about Ahab asking for Jehoshaphat’s help to fight the king of Aram who is resurgent. It’s an interesting story – in summary:

Ahab’s “prophets” tell him he will win, Jehoshaphat wants the opinion of a prophet of Yahweh. The prophet Micaiah tells them they will fail, so Ahab jails him and they go and fight Aram.

They lose, Ahab is killed and dogs lick up his blood. He is succeeded by his son Ahaziah, and Jehoshaphat hands over to his son Jehoram.

Ch 1. King Ahaziah of Israel – he is as bad as Ahab, and when injured tries to consult with prophets of Baal. God uses Elijah to intervene, and Ahaziah dies because he ignored God. His son Joram takes over.

Ch 2. The story of the handover of Elijah's role to Elisha, who asks for a double portion of his spirit (e.g. 4 children – 3 get 1/5 and eldest gets double – 2/5). A chariot of fire appears, and Elijah "went up to heaven in a whirlwind".

Ch 3. New king of Israel Joram got rid of Baal, but still carried on the distorted worship of the calves that Jereboam had set up, so was still described as evil.

There are several chapters now on events that mostly happened during the 12yr reign of Joram, but the stories are about Elisha.

Whereas Elijah prophesied and did miracles with kings, Elisha is much more a prophet for the people. We see that God intervenes not for the king, but for the sake of Israel. Several of these miracles involve, or happen when Elisha is with groups of other prophets (unlike Elijah who is always seen as acting in isolation)

- 1). His first miracle (in Ch 2) purifies a bad water supply.
- 2). Jehoshaphat and Joram band together to fight the Moabites. Elisha prophesies for him, the army is provided for and the Moabites get tricked and lose the battle badly.

- 3). A destitute widow gets a constant replenishing of oil so she can sell it and pay off her debts.
- 4). Elisha prophesies for a childless woman and she gives birth a year later. A few years later the boy dies. Elisha (with some trouble) brings him back to life.
- 5). In a time of famine Elisha makes safe a meal made with poisonous gourds.
- 6). Twenty bread rolls feed 100 men (and we can assume their families too).

- 7). Naaman commander of the Aramean army gets leprosy. Elisha tells him to wash 7 times in the Jordan. He is persuaded to overcome his pride and do it, so is healed.
He commits himself to God and asks for forgiveness in advance, for when he has to join his King at their idol worship, which Elisha grants.

8). Ch 6- An iron axe head (vv valuable) is lost in the river, Elisha makes it float.

9). v8 - The Arameans are raiding deep into Israel and try to trap Joram's army but Elisha keeps warning the king of where they are and the king of the Arameans is frustrated. He sends a force to capture Elisha but he prays for them to be blinded, and leads them to capture. He tells Joram not to kill them, but to wine and dine them, resulting in an end to the raids.

10). The Arameans attack again, and the city of Samaria is under siege with terrible famine. King Joram blames God and tries to kill Elisha, but he tells the king that tomorrow food will be cheap and plentiful. That night the Arameans hear what they think is reinforcements for Israel and leave everything and run.

We move back now to the intrigue and mayhem of the various kings. Elisha carries out God's instructions to Elijah to anoint successors to each kingdom.

Jehu takes over Israel, kills king Joram, and all of Ahab's family, descendants and associates. He has Jezebel thrown out of a window. She dies and dogs eat her body as prophesied by Elijah.

Jehu pretends to encourage Baal worship, but uses it to get all the prophets of Baal together and has them killed. He destroys the temple of Baal, and it says "people have used it for a latrine to this day"

However, he still allowed the worship of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel.

In Judah, we have the rise of a wicked queen. Athaliah is a daughter of Ahab, and she takes control by killing all but one of David's descendants, the baby Joash, who is hidden from her. She reigns for 6 years and encourages Baal worship in Judah.

The High Priest has been protecting Joash, but with the support of the royal bodyguard he anoints him king, to the joy of the people. Athaliah is killed. The High Priest makes a covenant between God, Joash and the people that they would be the Lord's people.

Joash reigns 40 years; he repairs the temple but doesn't remove the "high places" where sacrifices and incense were still burnt.

He then gives all the temple gold and precious objects to the king of Aram to save Jerusalem being attacked. He is assassinated by his officials.

This is a time of dominance of Aram – Syria. They control most of Israel and Judah, and seems to be the typical arrangement where the dominated country paid tribute to the victors, until they were overthrown.

We have another evil king in Israel, Jehoash, and during his reign Elisha dies aged about 80 after a time of illness. Even this evil king recognises that Elisha means more to the survival of Israel than all the army and chariots.

Ch 14 – back in Judah, Amaziah reigns and “did right in the eyes of the Lord”, but again the high places were still left in use. He did well in fighting the nations around him and Judah prospered, but stupidly then picked a fight with Israel and totally lost to Jehoash.

Jereboam II becomes king of Israel – he carries on badly like the previous kings, but God has compassion on the people, and he is successful in restoring the land to Israel, even Damascus, and bringing prosperity to the people.

However, it is during his reign that Amos and Hosea prophesied against extremes of wealth and poverty and exploitation of the weak.

N.B. there is a reference to a prophecy of Jonah in v.25.

Ch 15 - In Judah we have Azariah (also known as Uzziah) as king for 52 years, and like his father he is a good king but the High places are not removed. He suffers from leprosy – a punishment from God recounted in Chronicles, so for much of his reign his son Jotham acted in his place.

Back in Israel, we have a series of short-lived kings, assassinations and wanton bloodshed. Israel becomes a puppet of Assyria who have invaded Israel and the wealth of the country goes to Assyria.

After 10 years 2 more evil kings come and go in quick succession. Tiglath-Pileser invades again and takes control of large parts of Israel, deporting the inhabitants to Assyria.

In Judah, godly king Jotham takes over from king Uzziah (Isaiah is now on the scene). He is succeeded by Ahaz – he is vile, unlike his father and grandfather. He even burnt his own son alive as a sacrifice to Baal.

Aram and Israel attack Judah and Ahaz calls on Assyria for help and ransacks the temple to pay for it. He then proceeds to dismantle and re-arrange parts of the temple.

Back in Israel... in Ch 15, Hoshea has taken the throne by assassination. He reigns for 9 years as a vassal to Assyria.

He stopped paying tribute and tried to get help from Egypt, but Shalmaneser king of Assyria invaded and besieged Samaria for 3 years. The people and their king are captured and transported all over the Assyrian empire.

This is the end of the nation of Israel.

Shalmaneser repopulates the land with other conquered peoples with their various religions which carried on with the traditional worship of Yahweh. This resulted in the mixed-up religion of the Samaritans in Jesus' time.

The rest of the chapter explains why this has all happened to Israel.

Judah now has Hezekiah as king – the best. He even removes the “high places” and destroys the bronze snake which has been worshipped.

But the Assyrians want to do the same to Judah as they did to Israel. (see Isaiah Ch.36, Micah Ch.1). The army commanders use scare tactics on the people, challenge Hezekiah and boast that God cannot save Judah.

Hezekiah consults with Isaiah, and the Assyrians withdraw to fight on another front, but return with king Sennacherib and lay siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah prays again and Isaiah receives a major prophecy of destruction for Sennacherib. The Assyrian siege army are struck with a massive plague, and have to return to Nineveh.

Hezekiah becomes ill, but prays earnestly and God allows him another 15yrs and promises deliverance from Assyria.

Babylon is a rising power and makes overtures to Hezekiah who stupidly shows off his wealth to its emissaries. Isaiah prophesies the fall of Judah to Babylon.

Hezekiah dies, and Manasseh succeeds him. He reinstates all the Baal and Asherah worship, and puts altars to worship the stars in the Temple. He practised sorcery and even sacrificed his own son. The prophets speak of the awful destruction of Jerusalem and all Judah.

His son Amon comes to the throne, he is also evil and is assassinated after 2 years. The people rise up, kill the plotters and Amon's son Josiah is made king.

Josiah was only 8, but followed Yahweh. He had the temple renovated and they found “the book of the law” – Deuteronomy? Josiah realises how bad his predecessors had been, and is distraught. He consult a prophetess, who tells him of the coming destruction of all Judah, but because of his humility before God, he will die in peace before it happens.

Ch 23. Josiah then systematically does a thorough job of destroying and desecrating all the places of idol worship, even the golden calf at Bethel. The list of what he does shows just how idolatry was interwoven with, and superseded worship of Yahweh. Child sacrifice was widespread.

Josiah foolishly fights with a passing Egyptian force and is killed.

The encounter with Egypt put Judah under their thumb. Josiah's elder son was imprisoned in Egypt and his brother Jehoiakim was installed to pay a high tribute to the Pharaoh. The king and people reverted to idolatry despite all that Josiah had done.

Ch 24. The end of Judah is messy. Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar defeats Egypt so that it then controls Judah, but king Jehoiakin rebels and is attacked by Babylonian-supported forces. Jehoiakin has to surrender Jerusalem, and all the leadership are exiled together with 7000 fighting men and 1000 craftsmen.

Is this when Daniel and friends are taken to Babylon?

THE END.

After 9 years Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar, who lays siege to Jerusalem for 2 years. Starvation causes the king and army to break out, but they are caught.

A month later the Babylonians ransacked then destroyed the temple, palace and every important building. They exiled the rest of the inhabitants except the poorest. The high ranking priests, advisers and commanders were executed.

The book of Kings ends oddly with this story – v.27

Ex-king Jehoiachin (a descendant of king David) is released from prison in Babylon after 37 years, and the new king of Babylon gives him a seat of honour and an allowance for the rest of his life.