

1 & 2 Kings (June 4)

Reading 1 & 2 Kings

Wind sweeps the paving stones. It whistles through the branches of the sacred grove, swirls about the altar's steps, and flicks the garments of the visitors and the priests. One priest calls on Yahweh. Another calls on Baal and makes his offering before the image of a bull, graven on an upright stone. Women gather about an Asherah pole, invoking the goddess's blessings. When the sacrifices are complete, all retire from the windy heights to enjoy the meat of the sacrifices at the local temple hall.

"High places" are mentioned more than 100 times in the Old Testament, most often in 1 and 2 Kings. These sacred sites, which often stood on hilltops but could be on platforms in towns, were long-standing places of sacrifice. Israel's people and earliest rulers properly worshiped at such places before Solomon built the temple. However, after Solomon built the temple, worship at the high places increasingly became a mixture of devotion to both Yahweh and false gods. People neglected the Lord's word and the temple in Jerusalem, committing themselves to false worship at their local high places. Wicked kings and false prophets tolerated or supported such false worship, yet some faithful kings and prophets called people back to true worship at the one temple.

Title

1 and 2 Kings (like 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Chronicles) are actually one literary work, called in Hebrew tradition simply "Kings." The division between 1 and 2 Kings has been made at an appropriate but somewhat arbitrary place, shortly after the deaths of Ahab of the northern kingdom and Jehoshaphat of the southern kingdom.

Theme: Kingship and Covenant

1 and 2 Kings contains no explicit statement of purpose or theme. Reflection on its content, however, reveals that the author has selected and arranged his material in a manner that provides a sequel to the history found in 1 and 2 Samuel – a history of kingship regulated by covenant. In general, 1 and 2 Kings describes the history of the kings of Israel and Judah in light of God's covenants. The guiding thesis of the book is that the welfare of Israel and her kings depended on their obedience to their obligations as defined in the Mosaic covenant.

The kings who receive the most attention in 1 and 2 Kings are those during whose reigns there was either notable deviation from or adherence to the covenant. Ahab son of Omri and Manasseh are examples of the former; their reigns are given extensive treatment because of their wickedness and serious threat to covenant fidelity and continuity. In contrast, Hezekiah and Josiah are given extensive treatment because of their involvement in covenant renewal. These are the only two kings given unqualified approval by the writer for their loyalty to the Lord.

The history of the kingdom of Israel is not presented as a chain of chance occurrences but as the unfolding of Israel's historical destiny under the guidance of an omniscient and omnipotent God – Israel's covenant God.

Blessings for Readers

As you read 1 and 2 Kings, take note of how intimately the Lord is involved in the lives of Israel's leaders, punishing their sins and forgiving them when they repent. Also note how the leaders set examples for the people, making their decisions even more important.

Consider your spiritual and political leaders. Pray that the Lord would guide them to make wise decisions and that he would deliver them from evil. Likewise, consider your own plans and conduct and the effect they may have on the future of your family, congregation, and community. Through the blessings and promises extended to the kings of Israel and Judah, the Lord will equip you for leadership and service among his people and assure you of his forgiveness in Christ the King.