

1 Kings

The first half of First Kings traces the life of Solomon. Under his leadership, Israel rises to the peak of her size and glory. Solomon's great accomplishments, including the unsurpassed splendor of the temple which he constructs in Jerusalem, bring him worldwide fame and respect. But Solomon's zeal for God diminishes in his later years, as he turns his heart away from the worship of God in the temple of God. The result: the king with a divided heart leaves behind a divided kingdom. For the next century, the book traces the twin histories of two sets of kings and two nations. Both characterized as disobedient people who are growing indifferent to God's prophets and laws.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of First Kings is that the welfare of Israel and Judah depended upon the covenant faithfulness of the people and their king. Historically, it was written to give an account of the reigns of the kings from Solomon to Jehoshaphat (King of Judah) and Ahaziah (King of Israel). The two books of Kings as a whole trace the monarchy from the point of its greatest prosperity under Solomon to its demise and destruction in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Both First and Second Kings emphasize God's righteous judgment on idolatry and immorality.

Like the two books of Samuel, the two books of Kings were originally one in the Hebrew Bible. The original title was Melechim, "Kings." The Septuagint artificially divided the Book of Kings in the middle of the story of Ahaziah into two books. It called the books of Samuel "First and Second Kingdoms" and the books of Kings "Third and Fourth Kingdoms." The Septuagint may have divided Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into two books each because the Greek required a greater amount of scroll space than did the Hebrew.

AUTHOR

The author of First and Second Kings is unknown, but evidence supports the tradition that Kings was written by the prophet Jeremiah. The author was clearly a prophet and historian. The style of these books is also like that found in Jeremiah. The phrase "to this day" in First Kings 8:8 and 12:19 indicates a time of authorship prior to the Babylonian captivity (586 b.c.).

Evidently, the majority of First and Second Kings was written before 586 b.c. by a compiler who had access to several historical documents. Some of these are mentioned: "the book of the acts of Solomon" (11:41) "the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel" (14:19), and "the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah" (14:29; 15:7). These books may have been a part of the official court records (2 Kings 18:18).

DATE & SETTING

The Book of Kings was written to the remaining kingdom of Judah before and after its Babylonian exile. The majority was compiled by a contemporary of Jeremiah, if not by Jeremiah himself (c. 646–570 b.c.). It is a record of disobedience, idolatry, and ungodliness which serves as an explanation for the Assyrian captivity of Israel (722 b.c.) and the Babylonian captivity of Judah (586 b.c.). First Kings covers the 120 years from the beginning of Solomon's reign in 971 b.c. through Ahaziah's reign ending in 851 b.c. The key date is 931 b.c., the year the kingdom was divided into the northern nation of Israel and the southern nation of Judah.