

# 2 Kings

Second Kings is a continuation of the “Tale of Two Kingdoms” begun in First Kings. The twin kingdoms of Israel and Judah pursue a collision course with captivity as the glory of the once United Kingdom becomes increasingly remote. Division leads to decline, and ultimately ends in captivity and deportation. Israel is captured and dispersed by the Assyrians, while Judah is led off to exile in Babylonia. Despite the best efforts of prophets like Elisha to shock the nations back to their religious senses, it is too late. The kingdom divided in First Kings becomes the kingdom dissolved in Second Kings. God’s patience is long; God’s pleading is persistent; but when ignored. God’s love can also be severe.

## INTRODUCTION

The Book of Second Kings continues the drama begun in First Kings—the tragic history of two nations on a collision course with captivity. The author systematically traces the reigning monarchs of Israel and Judah, first by carrying one nation’s history forward, then retracing the same period for the other nation.

Nineteen consecutive evil kings rule in Israel, leading to the captivity by Assyria. The picture is somewhat brighter in Judah, where godly kings occasionally emerge to reform the evils of their predecessors. In the end, however, sin leads to captivity and Judah is marched off to Babylonia.

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Evidently, the majority of First and Second Kings was written before 586 b.c. by a compiler who had access to several historical documents.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 last recorded event in Second Kings is the release of Jehoiachin (25:27–30), which takes place in 560 b.c. Most of First and Second Kings probably was written just prior to 586 b.c., but chapters 24 and 25 were written after Jehoiachin’s release, perhaps about 550 b.c.

Chapters 1–17 cover the 131 years from 853 b.c. (King Ahaziah of Israel) to 722 b.c. (the Assyrian captivity of Israel). Chapters 18–25 cover the 155 years from the beginning of Hezekiah’s reign in 715 b.c. to the release of Jehoiachin in Babylonia in 560 b.c. The united kingdom lasts for 112 years (1043–931 b.c.), the northern kingdom of Israel exists for another 209 years (931–722 b.c.), and the southern kingdom of Judah continues for an additional 136 years (722–586 b.c.). During this 457-year kingdom period, there are great shifts of world power. Egyptian and Assyrian control over Palestine fluctuates; Assyria rises to preeminence, declines, and is finally conquered by Babylonia.