

1 & 2 Kings

by Mark Glanville

The books of 1 & 2 Kings tell the story of the demise of Israel, explaining why Israel was sent into exile. These books focus upon the unfaithfulness (and occasional faithfulness) of its rulers. All the while, God's heroic prophets, who speak the words of God, call God's people back to the covenant, addressing kings at the risk of their life.

Israel is divided into two kingdoms: in the North there is Israel, in the South is Judah. Each king is given a theological evaluation: either, "he did good in the eyes of the Lord," or, "he did evil the sight of the Lord." 100% of the Northern kings were rotters, in the South it was 50-50. In Judah, David's lineage continues right through until the exile. In the North, however, kings get bumped off regularly, and the dynasties come and go. The most life-threatening job title in the land seems to have been: 'king of Israel'!

The books open with a lengthy description reign of Solomon, the son of David, who reigns over a united Israel. Solomon's

story is disturbing to read, not least the description of his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. A reader may well wonder why on earth Solomon's reign is recorded in the way it is! In fact the writer is setting up Solomon and the whole line of kings for failure. Solomon is a kind of Pharaoh, this time within Israel. He accumulates for himself great wealth at the expense of his sisters and brothers.



Also, making pacts with foreign rulers and their kings is a part of his international relations strategy. Solomon's son, Rehoboam follows in his father's footsteps, conscripting labourers from within Israel. And so, the Northern tribes rebel

and become a nation all of their own. Now, Israel is divided, Judah and Israel, and the narrative oscillates.

Crucial in 1 Kings is the building of the temple (1 Kings 6-9), by which means Yahweh dwells among God's people. The temple is the sign of Yahweh's presence that brings blessing, a sign that God is yet

dwelling among the people and their king. When Israel is finally exiled from the land, the tabernacle, which was God's prior dwelling place in the wilderness wanderings, becomes an important symbol of God's forgiveness and willingness to abide with his people even outside of the land.

The most tender and personal moments in these books are found in the extensive stories of two prophets, Elijah and Elisha. These prophets spoke the words of God in Israel, in the North, calling the people back to the torah, admonishing kings. Their shrewdness, bravery, and deep wrestling with God is inspirational. Each have personal and vocational crisis and God meets them in both creative contemplation and also in miraculous ways.

In the context of the whole bible, these tragic rulers leave us yearning for a good king, God's righteous king, who will lead with gentleness and self-sacrifice. How will Israel ever live into its mandate to be a light to the nations, until a righteous king comes?