

practice false worship.) Two of the kings were described in superlative terms. Hezekiah led a great revival and trusted the Lord when under attack by the Assyrians. Yet ultimately his heart was divided and he sought a treaty with the Babylonians because he doubted God's sufficiency. Josiah led the people in covenant renewal and of him it was written: "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses" (2 Kgs 23:25). The blessings to Josiah were great but he failed when he took international affairs into his own hands and was struck down at the age of 39. The "recipe" for Israel's exaltation was clear but most kings rejected God's law and none obeyed completely. Israel needed a king greater than David, greater than Solomon, Hezekiah, or Josiah.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE EXILE

The primary purpose of 1–2 Kings (as distinctly opposed, for instance, to Israel's history in 1–2 Chronicles) is to explain to the Israelites in exile why they were there. In this way, the book really is a "theodicy"—a defense of God's actions of "evil." The explanation is quite simple: the Israelites were unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant and therefore God gave them all that he promised in that same covenant. The fault did not lie with God but with the nation. Furthermore, the book powerfully reveals just how patient God was, waiting generation after generation and enduring centuries of idolatry and disloyalty.

GOING FURTHER

Re-read 1–2 Kings and look for the themes mentioned above.

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

The chief message of the prophets God sent before the exile was a call to return to the covenant. Thus harsh words of judgment comprise the majority of Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah as well as large sections of Isaiah and Joel. Read Isa 1, Jer 1-3, Hos 1-3, Amos 3-4, and Micah 1-2 in light of the Mosaic Covenant.

DESCENT INTO EXILE (1-2 KINGS)

PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read 1–2 Kings. If time is limited, read especially: 1 Kgs 4, 8, 11–14, 18; 2 Kgs 9–11, 17–25. As you read, think about the purposes of the author. Why did he write what he did? What did he want his readers to understand?

OUTLINE OF 1-2 KINGS

- I. Solomon leads the nation in building the temple and abandoning true worship (1 Kgs 1–11).
- II. Jeroboam leads the northern kingdom in building idolatrous high places (1 Kgs 12–13).
- III. The kings of Israel and Judah lead the people in unfaithfulness to the covenant (1 Kgs 14–16).
- IV. Elijah and Elisha confront Ahab's family and allies in order to restore the nations to covenant loyalty (1 Kgs 17–2 Kgs 10).
- V. The kings of Israel and Judah lead the people in unfaithfulness that merits exile (2 Kgs 11–17).
- VI. The kings of Judah lead the nation in faltering faithfulness until the exile (2 Kgs 18–25).

1-2 KINGS IN LIGHT OF THE COVENANTS

With regard to the **Abrahamic Covenant**, 1–2 Kings shows the potential of Israel blessing the nations through the reign of Solomon. God intended for the nations to marvel at Israel's wisdom as they did when the wise men traveled to hear Solomon's wisdom (1 Kgs 4:29–34). God intended to bless the nations with peace, and all the kingdoms under Solomon's expansive rule enjoyed peace (1 Kgs 4:24). Though it was limited and short-lived because of Solomon's sin, 1–2 Kings provides a glimpse of what it will look like when God fulfills his promise made to Abraham.

With regard to the **Mosaic Covenant**, 1–2 Kings shows the result of the failure to keep the law. The kings were commanded in Deut 17 to abide by the law and to trust God wholeheartedly by not multiplying horses (for military strength), not multiplying wives

(for international alliances), and not multiplying wealth (for solving one's own problems). Solomon leads off the book by violating every one of those prohibitions (1 Kgs 10:26–11:8). Just as each king thereafter failed to obey God's Word, so the nation followed suit. The result was that the prophesied curses came to pass, culminating ultimately in exile.

With regard to the **Davidic Covenant**, 1-2 Kings shows that despite the nation's lack of loyalty to the Mosaic Covenant, God was faithful to keep his promise to David. Unlike the northern kingdom, which had one coup after another for a total of eight dynasties, the Davidic house always produced an heir and was never overthrown. Some kings were assassinated, but they were always replaced by the next son in line. One time all the children of the king were slain, but God preserved one infant (Joash) who recovered the throne from Athaliah. Though the book makes clear God's faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant in sending the people into exile, it also ends with notice that God was preserving the Davidic line for a future restoration to the throne (2 Kgs 25:27-30).

THE GLORY OF THE KINGDOM

From Genesis 1, God's intention was to create a *good* world that the creature made in the image of God would rule over as God's representative, doing God's will for his glory. With the Fall, God set about restoring the groaning creation through the seed of Abraham. David is an imperfect model of a righteous king whose trust in God brings victories over those opposed to God. This leads to the establishment of a glorious kingdom under Solomon's rule. Blessed by God, this kingdom has the potential of blessing the world. It does so as long as Solomon leads the nation in covenant obedience. The glory of this kingdom includes God's presence dwelling with his people (like the Garden of Eden; 1 Kgs 8:11), abundant wealth and prosperity (1 Kgs 4:20-28), and a powerful witness to the nations (1 Kgs 4:29-34). This glorious kingdom does not last because of Solomon's disobedience. The need for the nation is thus clear: Israel needs a king who will be faithful to the end.

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

The split of the nation into the ten tribes of the north (Israel) and the one tribe of the south (Judah) was God's punishment on Solomon for covenant unfaithfulness. Yet it was also divine mercy in preserving the Davidic house according to God's promise. When kings in the north were unfaithful, the entire house was wiped out. When kings of Judah were unfaithful, they were attacked, became ill, or were assassinated. Yet "for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him" (1 Kgs 15:4).

THE EXILE OF THE NORTHERN TRIBES

The northern kingdom is a powerful testimony to God's longsuffering. Not one of the 20 kings was faithful to the covenant and yet God patiently waited for repentance for 200 years. The Lord not only waited but he also sent prophets: Nathan, Ahijah, the unnamed man of God (1 Kgs 13), Jehu, Obadiah, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25), Amos, and Hosea. In the chapter that explains why the northern tribes were deported, it addresses this specifically: "The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: 'Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.' But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the LORD their God. They rejected his decrees and the covenant" (2 Kgs 17:13-15). The result was that "the LORD removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets" (2 Kgs 17:23).

RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED KINGS

All of the kings of Israel were guilty of covenant unfaithfulness, as all led the nation in idolatrous worship of the golden calves of Dan and Bethel. In Judah, 8 of the 20 kings received some positive comment, but they all failed in important respects. (Most of these failed to remove the high places and the people continued to