

Surveying the Text: Kings

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INTRODUCTION:

We begin by noting that our books entitled 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book, just as we saw with the Book of Samuel. The reason for this is plain enough—the break happened with the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, and the Hebrews didn't write down their vowels until 600 A.D. The Greek scrolls, in other words, were packed with vowels and were a lot bigger.

THE TEXT:

“And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word” (1 Kings 18:21).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

These are glorious words. In this famous showdown on Mt. Carmel, the prophet Elijah won a great victory over the corrupt religion that had been introduced by Jezebel, wife of Ahab. It was a great victory, and nothing should be taken away from Elijah with regard to his faith in this cataclysmic moment. But after he had killed the priests of Baal, and he had prayed an end to the three-year drought, Jezebel threatened him, and so he ran. (Incidentally, for those interested in such things, it is possible that Jezebel was Dido's great-aunt.) Elijah ran far from her and hid in a cave (1 Kings 19:9). God asked him, “What are you doing here?” Elijah complained to the Lord, who then told him to stand on the mount “before the Lord.” God then caused an enormous wind to pass by, and then an earthquake, and after that a fire. But God was not in any of the three. Finally God came to his despondent prophet in a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). What this means in its fullness we will consider shortly.

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK:

The book of Kings is grouped into seven chapters (Dorsey). We find these chapters:

The Life of Solomon (1 Kings 3-11)

 The First Seven Kings of the North (1 Kings 12-16)

 The Life of Elijah (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 1)

 Elisha in the Omride Dynasty (2 Kings 2-8:6)

 Elisha and Jehu (2 Kings 8:7-13:25)

 The Last Seven Kings of the North (2 Kings 14-17)

The Last Seven Kings of the South (2 Kings 18-25)

We also see that many of these seven chapters themselves divide easily into seven pieces. Whether seven kings, or seven episodes in Elijah's ministry, or 14 episodes in Elisha's

first chapter (a double portion?), the number seven is much in evidence.

The Solomon chapter is purposefully ironic—the heart of the chapter is the dedication of the Temple, but it begins with his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, and ends with his marriages to foreign women. The second chapter tells the story of the northern kingdom of Israel's first seven kings (while weaving in the narrative of three kings in Judah). The next chapter is the ministry of the great Elijah, and the center of his chapter is the story of Naboth's vineyard. The first chapter about Elisha is the center of all seven chapters of the entire book of Kings, and so we will return to that in a moment. The fifth chapter of the book is about Elisha again, only this time we see his political interactions with the house of Jehu. Note that Elisha gets two chapters (again, a double portion?). The next to last chapter of the book chronicles the decline of the northern kingdom from the reign of Jeroboam II to the collapse of the kingdom. It is striking how the historian creates a sense of hopelessness here by means of the "silence of the prophets." The people are just left to themselves. The last chapter has to tell the story of the last seven kings while dealing with the fact that there were eight kings, starting from Hezekiah. This is done by dividing it in two, telling a seven-part story of Hezekiah, and then in the second part giving the narrative of the last seven kings.

A DOUBLE PORTION:

The miracles of Elijah were amazing, and they were from God. They were the wind, the earthquake and the fire. Elijah proclaimed a drought and there was a drought. Elijah prayed up a cloud the size of a man's fist, and then soaked the land with it. Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to a battle on the mountain, built an altar, soaked his sacrifice with water, and then called down fire from heaven. This was a prophet's prophet.

And Elisha was the still small voice. He followed Elijah up to the moment when Elijah was caught up into heaven in a whirlwind. He saw the fiery chariot, and he saw Elijah taken away. Elijah was a very great man, one of the few who never experienced death. Elijah was one of two who visited with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. Elijah was the precursor to the greatest man from the old covenant era, John the Baptist. John dressed like Elijah and ate like Elijah, and ministered like Elijah.

But Elisha was the one who asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, and his request was *granted* (2 Kings 2:9-10). And what did Elisha do with it? The center of the book of Kings gives us the answer. His miracles were generally private, and were given over to helping the poor and afflicted. True and undefiled religion is this.

14 EPISODES:

The fourteen stories (twice as many as were told about Elijah) are divided into two groups of seven. Each group of seven concludes with a miracle story about the Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4:8-37). The first time Elisha raises her son from the dead. At the end of

the second cycle, she tells the king that same story (2 Kings 8:1-6).

Overwhelmingly, Elisha helps out widows, or impoverished students in the schools of the prophets. He heals the stew, he multiplies loaves of barley, and he multiplies the widow's oil. Most of his miracles are off-Broadway. But after Elisha got a "double portion," we were rubbing our hands together, a row of tornadoes made up of killer bees. Like the disciples, we sometimes do not know what spirit we are of (Luke 9:55) and want to copy some of *Elijah's* thunderbolts. Nobody wants to be Elisha, prophet of the widow's pantry.

WITH HIM ALSO:

The greatness of God fits easily within the confined space of a humble heart. God in His majesty works in and through every humble deed. Those who gave cups of cold water in the name of Jesus will discover at the last day that they have not lost their reward (Mark 9:41).

"For thus saith the high and lofty One That inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Is. 57:15).



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