

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we introduce the books of 1 and 2 KINGS. We will learn about its origin, its character as divine revelation and its division. We will also consider the main messages of the books of 1 and 2 Kings.

POINT 1. THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS.

First. The name of the book.

The two books of Kings were originally one book, but when they were translated into the Greek language, they were divided by the translators, because the Greek required one third more space than the Hebrew and the scrolls on which they were written were limited in length. The name of the book *Kings* is self-evident, because these books describe all the 19 kings of the northern kingdom of Israel until its end at Israel's deportation to Assyria and all the 19 kings of the southern kingdom of Judah until its end at Judah's exile to Babylon.

Second. The writer, the date and the place of writing.

How were the books of Kings written?

Because the books relate events from the year of David's death in 972 B.C. to the year of Nebuchadnezzar's death in 561 B.C., a period of 411 years, the writer must have made use of other written sources of information to write these books. At the end of almost every king's government, the writer gives a summary of events, on which he does not want to elaborate, but which the reader could find in either *the book of the annals of the kings of Israel* (1 Ki 14:19) or *the book of the annals of the kings of Judah* (1 Ki 15:7). These two sources mainly contained political history, like the king's acts of government, his military exploits and his building constructions. These books of the annals of the kings were either the official manuscripts or summaries of them and generally available to the educated public during the time the books of Kings were compiled. 1 Kings 11:41 mentions another important source, *the book of the annals of Solomon*. King Solomon reigned from about 972 B.C. to 932 B.C. This book probably contained most of what is found in 1 Kings chapter 1 to 11, Solomon's political history, his wisdom and in particular his famous wise ruling, his building constructions and in particular the construction of the temple and his palace, and his meeting with the queen of Sheba.

When were the books of Kings written?

The year of king David's death was 972 B.C. and the year of king Nebuchadnezzar's death was 561 B.C. This would suggest that the writer wrote the books of Kings during the exile. However, two facts show that the writer probably wrote the books *before the exile* in 586 B.C.

One. The expression "to this day" is used several times and shows that certain conditions continued until the days of the writer of the books of Kings, otherwise he would not have included this information. For example, according to 1 Kings 9:20-21, the descendants of the Canaanite nations, which the Israelites could not exterminate, were made slave-labourers by Solomon and continued to be slaves "until the days" of the writer of the book of Kings. Because they could no longer have been slaves of the Israelites *during or after the exile*, the books of Kings were written before the exile. Two. 1 Kings 8:8 records that the ark of the covenant was still present in the temple when the writer wrote the books of Kings. But the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was made between 250 B.C. and 150 B.C., dropped this information, because *the second temple, built after the exile*, did not have the ark anymore! This means that the writer wrote the books of Kings before the destruction of the first temple, built by Solomon and destroyed in 586 B.C., just before the exile. The fact that 2 Kings 25 was almost certainly a later addition, we conclude that the materials of the books were mainly written before the exile in 586 B.C., even if the materials were compiled in its present form after the death of the writer.

Who was the writer of the books of Kings?

The Bible does not say who wrote these books. He was most probably a member of the prophetic school, because the book is *a record of historical events in the light of the prophecies of the prophets*. Especially the prophets Elijah and Elisha are very prominent in these books. Thus, we conclude that the books of Kings were written by a member of the prophetic school before the exile in 586 BC, by making use of the written materials of the kings' scribes and of the prophets.

POINT 2. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS.

The theme of the book of Kings is *the ideal of theocracy cannot be realised through sinful and weak human kings*. The books of 1 and 2 Kings may be divided as follows:

The first part of the books of Kings consists of 1 Kings 1 to 11.

Its theme is *the united kingdom* of Israel and Judah under king Solomon.

This period is from 972 B.C. to 932 B.C.

This part has 5 sections:

1 Kings 1 to 2 describe events during the first 3 to 4 years of Solomon's reign.

1 Kings 3 to 4 describe Solomon's wisdom, his well-ordered administration, his power, his wealth and his fame.

1 Kings 5 to 8 describe his building of the temple and his palace and Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple.

1 Kings 9 to 10 describe the Lord's second appearance to Solomon, his many activities and the visit of the queen of Sheba.

1 Kings 11 describes Solomon's back-sliding, his opponents and his death.

The second part of the books Kings consists of 1 Kings 12 to 2 kings 17.

Its theme is *the divided kingdoms* of Israel and Judah.

This period is from 932 B.C. to 721 B.C.

This part has 8 sections:

1 Kings 12 to 14 describe the division of the kingdom by Rehoboam of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel.

1 Kings 15 to 16 describe the reforms of Asa of Judah, the destruction of king Jeroboam and king Baasha, and the idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel.

1 Kings 17 to 19 describe the words and acts of *the prophet* Elijah.

1 Kings 20 to 2 Kings 1 describe the wars of Ahab against the Arameans.

2 Kings 2 to 7 describe the words and acts of *the prophet* Elisha.

2 Kings 8 to 10 describe the destruction of the whole family of Ahab.

2 Kings 11 to 14 describe the failure of Athaliah to destroy the royal line of Judah and the death of the prophet Elisha.

2 Kings 15 to 17 describe the kings of Judah who lived in the times of *the prophets* Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah and the deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C.

The third part of the books of Kings consists of 2 Kings 18 to 25.

Its theme is *the continuation of the kingdom of Judah* after the fall of Israel.

This period is from 721 B.C. to 586 B.C.

This part has 5 sections:

2 Kings 18 to 20 describe the confrontation between king Hezekiah and the Assyrians.

2 Kings 21 describes the wickedness of king Manasseh.

2 Kings 22 to 23 describe the reforms of king Josiah.

2 Kings 24 describes the first and second invasions and deportations of Judeans to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. and 597 B.C.

2 Kings 25 describes the third invasion and final deportation of Judah to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., the total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the flight of the remainder of Judeans to Egypt and finally the release of king Jehoiachin after the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 561 B.C.

POINT 3. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS.

First. The books of Kings are prophetic.

One. The books of Kings describe the history of the kings of Israel and Judah in the light of the prophets.

Just like the book of Joshua introduces the period of the judges of Israel, the books of Samuel introduce the period of the kings of Israel. The purpose of the historical books of Kings is *to describe the history of the kings of Israel and Judah in the light of the prophets*. "History" in the Bible has a holy character: It is history set apart from secular history, because God is the Maker of history in the Bible. The history in the Bible is God's special revelation of himself and his thoughts within human history. The history in the Bible is prophecy through the words spoken by the prophets and the events happening with people and nations. That is why the Jews called the historical books Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings *the early prophets*. Certain events in the historical books in the Bible point to a deeper meaning, to events that would be fulfilled in the future. For example, the crossing of the Jordan and taking possession of the Promised Land in the book of Joshua point to the resurrection of the body and entering heaven. All the kings in the historical books in the Bible point to the need for a coming King, who would rule the whole world in complete justice and righteousness. The books of Kings describe the need for the Messiah-King who would do what no earthly king or government can ever do.

Two. The books of Kings describe the relationship between the kings and the prophets.

The task of the prophets shows that the kings in Israel and Judah do not have absolute power as do the kings in other nations. Every king stands under God by way of the ministry of the prophets. Throughout the historical books in the Bible, the prophets speak and act on behalf of God. In the books of Kings, we read about great prophets, like Elijah, Elisha and Isaiah. The prophets are mediators of revelations from God, especially explaining God's will and God's laws in the first place to the kings of Israel and Judah and only in the second place to their subjects. The prophets in Israel are the necessary counter-balance for the kings in Israel. On the one hand, the prophets oppose and condemn the wilfulness,

arrogance, tyranny, corruption and idolatry of the kings. On the other hand, the prophets announce and explain God's plan of salvation to the kings and their subjects.

The main role, which the prophets played in the historical books of the Bible, should never be under-estimated. The prophets were absolutely necessary to help the kings to stay on the right path, both in their relationship to God and in their task as kings. This fact proves that the ideal of theocracy, that is, the ideal of the direct rule of God through earthly kings, could not be realised through sinful and weak human beings. The Bible clearly shows that the prophets and the kings and the priests of Israel needed one another. *The prophets* spoke by God's authority. Their task was to reveal and explain God's will to the kings, the priests and the people. *The kings* ruled by God's grace. Their task was to rule the people in justice and righteousness, that is, in accordance to God's Word, and to combat corruption and spiritual idolatry. *The priests* served by God's direction. Their task was to worship and serve God and teach the people to worship and serve God according to the law of God.

Three. The books of Kings show that the ideal of theocracy must be realised through the future Messiah-King.

The Bible teaches that all people have sinned and fall short of the glorious perfection of God. The books of Kings show that the prophets, the kings and the priests of Israel were far from being perfect. The books of Kings also show that there were false prophets, wicked kings and corrupt priests in Israel. Therefore, the historical books clearly teach that imperfect and corrupt human beings cannot ultimately serve as prophets, kings or priests. They show that the sinful people in the world need a Saviour from sin. They show that the imperfect people of the world need a Prophet, King and Priest who is completely sinless and absolutely perfect!

Thus, *the historical books in the Bible are prophetic: they point forward to the need for the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ*, who would be completely sinless and absolutely perfect, and who would become *the Final Prophet, the Greatest King and the Highest Priest* in the history of all people in this world. The apostle Paul explains this in Galatians chapters 3 and 4. The whole purpose of the Old Testament was "to lead us to Jesus Christ" (Gal 3:24-25). And Jesus Christ would fulfil the covenant of grace that God made with Abraham, when God said that in one of his descendants he would bless all the families on earth (Gen 22:18). That descendant of Abraham is Jesus Christ (Gal 3:14-18,29).

Second. The books of Kings contain warning examples.

The books of Kings warn people from setting their hearts on evil things (1 Cor 10:6,11).

The first warning. Do not put God out of your heart and life!

King Solomon was the wisest person who lived on earth, until Jesus Christ came, because Jesus Christ is called: "one greater than Solomon" (Mt 12:42). 1 Kings 4:29-34 says that God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight and understanding. His wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than any other man. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life and taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom. Much of Solomon's wisdom is recorded in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Read them and you will also learn much wisdom!

But king Solomon did not remain the wisest person. It is very sad to read in 1 Kings 11:4, "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been." Because the heart of king Solomon had turned away from the Lord to worship idols, the Lord turned away from him. Because king Solomon had put God out of his heart and life, God tore ten tribes away from him and gave them to king Jeroboam. One very wise thing God taught Solomon was in Proverbs 23:26, "My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways". It is sad that the wise king Solomon did not follow his own wisdom!

Nothing destroys your personal life more than turning your heart away from the God of the Bible! Nothing destroys the life of your nation more than shutting Jesus Christ out of your heart. When people take the sun out of the sky, there will be no grass, no flowers and no orchards! Likewise, when people take the God of the Bible out of their heart and life, there will be no justice, no holiness and no love!

The second warning. Listen to the words of God spoken through the prophets!

In 1 Kings 12:26 to 13:6, we read about the idols of Jeroboam. According to Deuteronomy 12:8-14 and 16:15-17, it was the custom for all people in Israel to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to worship the Lord at the temple. After the division of the kingdom, king Jeroboam was afraid that when his northern ten tribes travelled to Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah, his people might rebel against him. So he made two idols, golden calves, and placed them in convenient places, Bethel in the south and Dan in the north of his kingdom, so that the people would not have to go to Jerusalem. Over twenty times, he is described as "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to commit sin." As a king, he opposed the worship of the God of the Bible and introduced his own god into his country and nation. A prophet from Judah (1 Ki 13:1) came and stood in front of Jeroboam at the altar of Bethel and said that in the future God would raise a king named Josiah who would sacrifice the false priests of Jeroboam on their own altars and desecrate the altars by burning human bones on them. As a sign that this would happen, the altar at Bethel would split apart and its ashes would pour to the ground. Jeroboam stretched out his hand towards the prophet and cried, "Seize him!" Immediately his outstretched hand shrivelled up so that he could not pull it back and the altar was split and it poured its ashes out. Later, the prophet Ahijah sent Jeroboam's wife to tell him that, because of his wickedness and

idolatry, the Lord was going to cut off from his family every male person. And he was going to give his northern kingdom of Israel up, uproot it from the land Canaan and scatter them beyond the River Euphrates.

The words of God spoken by his prophets always come out! First, Jeroboam's successor, Nadab killed Jeroboam's whole family and did not leave him a single soul (1 Ki 15:29-30). Second, 200 years later, the Assyrians deported all the people of Israel and scattered them in the countries of the East, from where they never returned (2 Ki 17:22-23). Third, 300 years later, king Josiah slaughtered all the priests of northern Israel on their own altars, burned human bones taken from the graves on them and demolished the altar at Bethel and all other idolatrous high places (2 Ki 23).

The God of the Bible warns us to listen to the words of the prophets in the Bible! 2 Peter 1:19-21 says, "We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but man spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

The books of Kings are historical books that were written in prophetic light. The God of the Bible wants us to follow the good examples of the kings that believed in him and to avoid the bad examples of the kings that disobeyed him.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read 1 and 2 Chronicles. Next week we will introduce the book of Chronicles.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".