

2 KINGS

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

A 13-LESSON STUDY

REFORMED EXPOSITORY
BIBLE STUDY

ZACHARY GROFF
and **PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN**


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REFORMED EXPOSITORY BIBLE STUDIES

A Companion Series to the Reformed Expository Commentaries

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To Dr. Richard D. Phillips,
a faithful herald of our Reformer King.

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God’s Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage’s main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible’s message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

INTRODUCING 2 KINGS

The books of biblical history now known as 1 and 2 Kings once comprised a single volume that recorded the stories of Israel's and Judah's kings, from Solomon to Jehoiachin. For the last two millennia, however, that long volume has been divided in half—right where the prophet Elijah's ministry transitions to that of his protégé, the prophet Elisha. Whereas 1 Kings deals mainly with a united kingdom under David and Solomon, 2 Kings documents the uneasy coexistence and tragic decline of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

The overall intent of 1 and 2 Kings is to demonstrate God's faithfulness to the promise he made to King David—his covenant oath that he would establish this anointed servant's "royal throne over Israel forever" (1 Kings 9:5; see also 2 Sam. 7:16). Humanly speaking, David's royal dynasty often seemed to be in jeopardy, chiefly because of the moral and spiritual failures of most of his successors. The major disappointment in 1 Kings is King Solomon, who—despite his wealth and his wisdom—foolishly took a tragic turn into lusty idolatry. As a result, his kingdom was divided in two—between Israel in the north and Judah in the south. By the end of the story of these kingdoms, we will have witnessed military coups and civil wars, followed by a double catastrophe: Israel's deportation to Assyria and Judah's captivity in Babylon.

Second Kings picks up this story after the death of the evil King Ahab, and its **main purposes** are to display God's mercy and especially his justice as he dealt righteously with his people, and also to document his steadfast commitment to providing a faithful king to rule over Israel. The final proof that God will keep his royal promise comes in its final chapter. Against all odds, after languishing for nearly four decades in Babylonian captivity, King Jehoiachin of Judah gets released from bondage (see 2 Kings 25:27–30).

The famous house of David may have fallen from its former glories, but at least David's rightful heir is still alive. For anyone who believes God's promise of a forever kingdom, Jehoiachin's escape from prison gives hope that the promised king—the Anointed One, the Christ—is still coming.

Although according to tradition the **author** of 1 and 2 Kings is Jeremiah, the “Weeping Prophet,” these books do not specify their human author. But even if we do not know the writer's name, we know that he trusted God's Word, believed God's promise, and loved God's law. We know this because he constantly evaluated the kings of Israel and Judah according to God's divine commands for kings. The author was both a historian who wanted his readers to know the facts (who reigned where, and for how long) *and* a theologian who wanted them to use God's character and commandments to evaluate the actions and fate of each monarch.

Much of this biblical history is also recorded in 1 and 2 Chronicles, which enables us to draw some comparisons. Kings generally takes a more negative view than Chronicles does regarding the rulers of Israel and Judah. But its bad reviews had the positive intention of motivating God's people to be more faithful to his covenant and more confident in his promises.

The original **audience** for Kings was the Old Testament people of God. More specifically, the books were written for the people of Judah (not the people of Israel, which had long before been destroyed) who had somehow survived the Babylonian captivity. These beleaguered believers remembered the glory days of David and Solomon, but their everyday experience constantly reminded them that their status was that of lowly exiles and refugees. Many of the stories in 2 Kings would have served them as cautionary tales about what goes wrong when we forget to love and obey God. If ever they wondered why they had ended up in such dire straits, this book gave the answer that they were being punished both for their sins and for the sins of their leaders. But some of its stories would have also reassured them that God shows mercy in times of need and is faithful to the very end. And these lessons remain relevant for us as the modern-day people of God. We too forget to love and obey him, and thus we need the assurance that God faithfully shows us mercy in Jesus Christ.

Obviously, the immediate **context** for 2 Kings is 1 Kings. That book ends by describing the unrighteous rule of Israel's King Ahaziah, who worshiped idols, did what was evil, and provoked God to righteous anger.

This sequel begins more auspiciously as the prophet Elijah justly denounces Ahaziah and declares that the king will die as the direct consequence of his consultation with demons (see 2 Kings 1:16).

Another key context for 2 Kings is geopolitical. Throughout the centuries covered by this book, both Israel's and Judah's capital cities (Samaria and Jerusalem, respectively) suffered waves of military attacks and deadly sieges from mighty Assyria and brutal Babylon, led by infamous tyrants such as Sennacherib, Sargon II, and Nebuchadnezzar.

As we read the stories of Israel's and Judah's kings, we should also keep a broader biblical context in mind: the mission-critical instructions for the kings of Israel that Deuteronomy lays out (see 17:14–20), as well as the massive consequences for rulers who either obey or disobey God. Each king throughout 2 Kings is evaluated according to how he fulfills (or fails to fulfill) his covenant responsibilities. By this standard, and this standard alone, does the book declare that each son of David “did what was evil” (e.g., 2 Kings 15:18) or “did what was right” (e.g., 2 Kings 22:2) in “the sight of the Lord”—especially with regard to worship. In general, if we want to know what will happen to a king or a kingdom that honors or dishonors God, all we need to do is consult the list of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28–30.

The key word of both 1 and 2 Kings is obvious from the traditional title they jointly bear: *king* or *kingdom*. Various forms of the divine name *Lord God* are also prevalent, occurring more than five hundred times across both books as a constant reminder of who is truly on Israel's throne. The **key verses** for understanding why the Israelites ended up in Assyria in 722 B.C.—as well as the crucial role God's prophets played in it all—come in the middle of 2 Kings 17:

The people of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So, Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day. (vv. 22–23)

God's pronouncement of judgment against the southern kingdom of Judah was equally calamitous: “I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have

removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there” (2 Kings 23:27).

Some of the most important **theological themes** of 2 Kings continue doctrinal discussions that began in 1 Kings concerning the sovereignty of God, the evil of idolatry, and God’s fidelity to his covenant. Both books are equally concerned with the proper worship of God. Second Kings commends two of Judah’s rulers (Joash and Josiah) for repairing the temple that David and Solomon built in 1 Kings and for restoring practices of Scripture reading, sacrifice, prayer, and praise that had languished due to the spiritual neglect of less reverent rulers before them.

The doctrine of sin is pervasive throughout 2 Kings, due to Israel’s repeated apostasy and God’s recurring judgment. Through the ungodly influence of unrighteous rulers, the people of Israel and Judah fall away from the faith of their fathers. Because the condemnation that eventually results for them is so calamitous, the book also provides us with portents of the final judgment.

Like its prequel, 2 Kings reveals our need for the righteous kingship of Jesus Christ and records the providential preservation of his royal line. Although all the kings of Israel (and many kings of Judah) are evil, three notable rulers offer hope for the future by showing us the pattern for a righteous kingdom: the boy king Joash, Josiah the reformer, and Hezekiah, who received miraculous answers to his desperate prayers for deliverance and healing. As these worthy predecessors did, Jesus also prayed for God’s help in the face of death, revived the teaching of God’s law, displayed zeal for God’s house, renewed God’s covenant with his people, and reformed the true worship of God—all requisites of righteous rule.

Second Kings also shows us what kind of *prophet* we need, chiefly through the ministry of Elisha. For some reason, Elisha is less famous than Elijah. Maybe this is because Elijah was the younger man’s mentor or else because he is mentioned more frequently in both the Old and New Testaments (see, for example, Mal. 4:5–6; Matt. 11:14). Yet Elisha was at least as great as his predecessor was. His prophetic words came true repeatedly. Elisha was a wonder worker who raised the dead—not once, but twice—and performed nearly twice as many miracles as Elijah overall. By surpassing Elijah’s own ministry in certain respects, he thus serves as a notable *type* of Christ. If Elijah draws comparisons to John the Baptist (see

Matt. 17:10–13), then it makes sense to connect Elisha and Jesus—as the Gospels indeed do (see Luke 4:25–27). By cleansing lepers, rescuing the poor and needy, giving sight to the blind, forgiving desperate sinners, and raising the dead to everlasting life, Jesus proves to be not only the promised Elijah but also the new and greater Elisha.

As 1 Kings does, 2 Kings also provides a wealth of **practical application**. The book teaches us the difference between the righteous way and the wrong way to live. Our spiritual choices matter—especially since they have eternal consequences. God rewards the righteous and punishes wrongdoers. Rebellion leads to ruination, but those who repent will be restored.

In addition to these general principles, 2 Kings also gives us specific, beautiful examples to follow. From Elisha, we learn to trust God for our daily provision, look to him for protection from danger, and serve him selflessly. Elisha's ministry also teaches us to tremble at God's Word: God says what he means, means what he says, and does what he promises to do. From Joash, we learn to exercise wise and generous stewardship. From Hezekiah, we learn to pray for healing and deliverance. From Josiah, we learn to rediscover the Word of God and become agents of the spiritual transformation it brings. Even when God's way is forgotten, his Word is rejected, and his worship is corrupted, the fervent prayer and faith-filled obedience of men and women who have a passion for reformation can still restore righteousness.

Finally, 2 Kings invites us to share God's missionary heart for the world. Certainly, the book shows us that God is sovereign over all nations; he has as much authority over Sennacherib in Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon as he does over Manasseh and Jeroboam in Judah and Israel. But the healing of Naaman the Syrian also gives us a glimpse of God's gracious good news for all nations.

One of the best ways to begin studying any book of the Bible is by grasping a clear, simple **outline**. This is especially important when studying a book such as 2 Kings, which includes a large cast of minor characters, an abundance of historical information about the family lineage of a long list of kings, and select details pertaining to their public service. Here is one useful way to follow the storyline of 2 Kings:

Elisha Succeeds Elijah

Elijah Prophecies against Ahaziah (1:1–18)

Elijah Taken Up to Glory (2:1–25)
Moab Rebels against Israel (3:1–27)
Elisha Works Miracles (4:1–8:15)

The Road to Assyria

Jehoram and Ahaziah Rule in Judah (8:16–29)
Jehu's Bloody Reign over Israel (9:1–10:36)
Joash Repairs the Temple in Jerusalem (11:1–12:21)
Twelve Kings of Israel and Judah (13:1–16:20)
Israel Falls Captive to Assyria (17:1–41)

The Road to Babylon

Hezekiah's Rescue (18:1–20:21)
The Worst Kings of Judah (21:1–26)
Josiah's Reformation (22:1–23:30)
The Last Free Kings of Judah (23:31–24:20)
Jerusalem Falls Captive to Babylon (25:1–26)

Epilogue: David's Last Son Survives (25:27–30)

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LESSON 1

ELISHA TAKES UP THE MANTLE

2 Kings 1:1–3:27

THE BIG PICTURE

Though the books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings were initially part of a single scroll, the point at which Christian Bibles divide them is appropriate, for it marks a turning point. The opening chapters of 2 Kings portray a divine succession plan, which played out as Elisha quite literally took up the mantle of the prophet Elijah, “the man of God” (1:9). Elijah did not burn out, and his ministry did not flame out; he vigorously served the Lord until the moment he was transported “up to heaven by a whirlwind” (2:1). Without a moment’s interruption, Elisha picked up where his predecessor left off and continued his Spirit-filled ministry to Israel’s kings and commoners alike. Though his miraculous ministry is nothing short of spectacular, the narrative illustrates familiar biblical principles: The Lord is faithful to his people. He will not abandon them to their ignorance and helplessness. He will bless his church with true ministers and spiritual leaders, even in the darkest of times. God’s succession plans are perfect—which we can see from how the transfer of Elijah’s ministerial responsibility and spiritual power to Elisha comes with an expansion of prophetic influence and ability. As one prophet’s historical account progresses to the next, we move closer to the fulfillment of God’s promise of a greater prophet (see Deut. 18:18), upon whom his Spirit would alight in the form of a dove (see Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). Christ, the ultimate prophet, priest, and king of Israel, is coming—for God will not abandon his beloved and chosen people.

Read 2 Kings 1:1–3:27.

GETTING STARTED

1. Second Kings begins with two endings: one of the reign of King Ahaziah and the other of the ministry of the prophet Elijah. What attitudes should Christians have at the end of their lives? What accomplishments might characterize a Christian life well-lived in service to God?
2. Have you ever handed off or inherited a leadership position in a church ministry, workplace, or community organization—or seen such a transition take place? If you have, what lessons did it teach you about how to make a leadership transition as smooth as possible?

OBSERVING THE TEXT

3. Whom (or what) did King Ahaziah consult after he “fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria” (1:2)?

4. Before he departed into heaven, where did Elijah go with Elisha (2:1–2, 4, 6)?

5. Which kingdom “rebelled against Israel” and its king in 1:1 and 3:5? Which neighboring kings united in an alliance with King Jehoram of Israel to put down the rebellion (3:9)?

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. What challenge did the prophet Elijah send to King Ahaziah in 1:3, 6, and 16? Why do you think the historical record repeats Elijah’s message to the idolatrous king three times?

7. What physical posture did “the third captain of fifty” assume before Elijah (1:13)? What did his posture and entreaty demonstrate about his character (1:15)?

8. Who interacted with Elisha at Bethel, Jericho, and the Jordan River (2:3, 5, 15)?
9. What did Elisha request from Elijah (2:9)? What did Elijah set as a condition for this request to be fulfilled (2:10)?
10. List the miracles in this lesson's reading that involved water (2:13–15, 19–22; 3:16–25). Which miracle demonstrated the power of Elisha's prophetic office the most effectively and before the most people?
11. Who called for a "prophet of the LORD" and received Elisha's assistance in 2 Kings 3:11–19?

Prophetic Discipleship, pg. 20

The mentoring relationship that Elijah and Elisha shared is one of the clearest biblical examples of God's master plan for building his church. . . . Through relationships of personal ministry, one generation kindles the faith of the next. Everyone who wants to build the kingdom of God should be a discipler, or a disciple, and eventually both.

THEOLOGY CONNECTIONS

14. Scottish Presbyterian minister Alexander Henderson preached before the Westminster Assembly, “No man is to envy those worthies whom the Lord has honored to be instrumental in this great work. The Lord does what, and by whom he will. . . . Again, no man ought to offer the fat of the sacrifice, or the principal praise of the day, unto the instruments.”¹ Whom did Elisha call on, and thus glorify, when he “struck the water” with the mantle that had fallen from Elijah (2 Kings 2:14)? In contrast, what preoccupied “the sons of the prophets” from Jericho in 2 Kings 2:15–18?
15. Answer 181 of the Westminster Larger Catechism teaches that “the sinfulness of man, and his distance from God by reason thereof, being so great, as that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator; and there being none in heaven or earth appointed to, or fit for, that glorious work but Christ alone, we are to pray in no other name but his only.” What person served as God’s appointed mediator between the sinful King Jehoram of Israel and the prophet Elisha in the wilderness (2 Kings 3:14)? What was his relationship to Jesus Christ?

1. Alexander Henderson, thanksgiving sermon, London, UK, July 18, 1644, available in *Sermons Preached before the English Houses of Parliament by the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly of Divines, 1643–1645*, ed. Chris Coldwell (Naphtali Press, 2011), 124.

18. As Elisha went about the early days of ministering as God's prophet in Israel, he almost immediately faced intimidation and threats. The incident that 2:23–24 describes, involving a gang of young men, is one example of how faithful believers often find themselves the target of vicious mockery and scorn. How does the divinely arranged destruction of this gang serve as both a warning and a comfort to those who seek to live godly lives in a world hostile to Christian modesty and faithfulness?

PRAYER PROMPT

God's power and goodness undergirded the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. There is no alternative explanation for the force and variety of their miracles. All around the world, however, people go looking for miracles in all the wrong places. Whether for physical healing, social connection, personal happiness, or material riches, men and women long for a miracle worker to swoop in and satisfy their cravings. Some people travel vast distances to visit shrines or to meet with gurus who make promises they cannot keep. Whatever our circumstances, mankind's ultimate need is to be saved from the spiritual reality of sin, and Jesus Christ alone is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). For all those who are not in communion with him, "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). Rather than looking for a miracle elsewhere, pray in the blessed name of Christ, our Mediator, for all the things you require for faith and godliness. Ask him to reveal himself to your friends, neighbors, and family members who have confused notions of spirituality and don't know what it means to be delivered from distress. Above all, pray that God would be glorified by his servants, his church, and his creation.