

2 KINGS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What do we know about who wrote or put together 1 and 2 Kings? Is this just a summary of the histories recorded by court secretaries in each of the two nations: Israel and Judah? Who wrote the original material? It clearly could not have been written first hand by any one individual since it covers several hundred years of history. If it was edited and published by someone else from materials gathered together at some point, would it be necessary for the original writers and the editor to be "inspired" in order for the material itself to be considered "inspired"? Could we consider written reports produced by writers who chronicled the history of a given king to be "inspired" if they are a correct report of that king's activities? Was there any continuity or connection between the production of the six historical books: 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, and 1&2 Chronicles?

See *1 Kings Teacher's Guide* #1 for a general discussion of the authorship and conditions of writing of these two books which were originally one. *The SDA Bible Commentary* and *Dictionary* also provide excellent introductions to these two books.

"These books are appropriately designated since they are a record of the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel from the time of Solomon until the fall of the Jewish monarchy and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The title *Kings* is a literal translation of the Hebrew (Heb *melek* or pl. *melakim*), and these books appear in the Hebrew division of the Bible known as the 'Former Prophets.'" (*KJV Bible Commentary*)

"First and Second Kings were originally one book in the Hebrew canon, as were the books of Samuel. The translators of the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament of about 150 B.C., joined Samuel and Kings together and divided the resulting book into four parts. When Samuel and Kings were separated later, these four parts became First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings.

"Traditionally, Jeremiah was identified as the author of First and Second Kings. However, contemporary critical scholarship has suggested that the books were the result of a compilation process that began with its initial composition in the late seventh century B.C. and concluded in the middle of the sixth century B.C. The proponents of this view have identified a Deuteronomistic school of writers as the source of the First and Second Kings because of the emphasis in these books on religious orthodoxy (the Law and the temple), the ministry of the prophets, and the central place of the Davidic dynasty...

"Nevertheless, differences in writing style between the books of Jeremiah and Kings, as well as distinctions in the use of the names of Judah's kings make any final determination of the authorship of the books of the Kings uncertain. If due weight is given to the long section dealing with Judah (2 Kin. 18:1–25:26), it may reasonably be said that both books of Kings, except the final appended historical notice (2 Kin. 25:27–30), is the work of an author who lived through the last days of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Perhaps the spiritual reform that followed the recovery of the Book of the Law during Josiah's reign (c. 622 B.C.) provided the necessary impetus for the author to gather up his sources and write an account of Israel's faithfulness to the covenant from the days of David until his own time.

"To compose a work covering nearly four hundred years, the author of the Book of Kings would need excellent source material. Three sources are specifically named: (1) The Book of the Acts of Solomon (11:41), which detailed the events of the Solomonic era; (2) The Book of the Chronicles of

the Kings of Israel (cited seventeen times in 14:19–15:31), which were the court records of the northern kingdom; and (3) The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (mentioned fifteen times in 1 Kin. 14:29–2 Kin. 24:5), which were court records of the southern kingdom. Furthermore, the author might have had biographical accounts of David (1:1–2:11), Elijah, and Elisha (1 Kin. 16:29–2 Kin. 9:37), and access to the Book of Isaiah (compare Is. 36–39 to 2 Kin. 18:13–20:19). Such material was preserved in priestly and prophetic centers in both the northern and southern kingdoms...

“The author’s purpose in writing First and Second Kings was not primarily to provide historical information. Instead, the author wanted to evaluate Israel’s spiritual odyssey that resulted in God’s chastisement (2 Kin. 17:7–23; 24:18–20). As a result, the author devotes considerable attention to evaluating the kings according to the way they responded to the responsibilities detailed in the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. The author notes specifically those who handled such responsibilities well, such as Hezekiah and Josiah. Moreover, the ministry of the prophets as God’s authoritative messengers is highlighted. Particular attention is given to the ministries of Elijah (1 Kin. 17–19; 21; 2 Kin. 2:1–11) and Elisha (2 Kin. 2:12–8:15).

“In the entire account, the author repeatedly underscores the necessity for a genuinely godly walk—one in obedience to God’s law. Particularly in the accounts relating to Elijah, the author contrasts the true worship of the living God with the false religion of the Canaanites (1 Kin. 17; 18). The main difference between the true God and the false gods is that the living God faithfully fulfills His promises (1 Kin. 8:20, 23–26). Hence, the author pays special attention to God’s promises in the Davidic covenant. In that covenant, God had promised to bless Israel (1 Kin. 2:4, 5, 45; 3:6, 14; 6:12, 13; 2 Kin. 8:19). Yet this blessing was tied to obedience: Israel’s only hope for God’s blessing and true success lay in obedience to God’s word (1 Kin. 2:2–4). The failures of the Israelites to walk in God’s ways and their subsequent chastisement can serve as a warning to us. At the same time, the prophets, who stood up for God’s truth in a period of decline, can motivate us to stand for truth and righteousness in our time.” (*Nelson Study Bible*)

“Jewish tradition held that Jeremiah wrote 1 and 2 Kings and Lamentations as well as the prophecy under his name. The points of view of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, are very similar, and because they develop the theological ideas expressed in Deuteronomy, they are often called “the Deuteronomic History” by modern authors. But the author of 1 and 2 Kings is not identified in the books themselves, and his identity cannot be known with certainty...

“Second Kings has a somewhat unusual ending. The book seems to reach its climax with the reign of Josiah (2 Kin. 23:25), but this optimism is clouded by a prophecy of impending judgment (2 Kin. 23:26, 27). Moreover, the narrative stops abruptly with Judah in Babylon, with no theological summary or conclusion. For these reasons, some scholars believe that the main work of writing Kings was done before the time of the Exile. In this theory, the original book of Kings was composed during the reign of King Josiah, and someone living during the Exile updated this history with a brief record of Judah’s final years. But whether one holds to this two-edition hypothesis or to a one-edition (exilic) hypothesis, the book has a unified perspective...

Kings as History: Characteristic of the author is a fondness for recording in detail many features of his nation’s past. This genuine interest in the dates, figures, and institutions of the kingdom of Israel appears in his record of preparations for the temple (1 Kin. 5), its dimensions and decoration (1 Kin. 6), and its furniture and vessels (1 Kin. 7:13–51). The writer gives the length of reigns for monarchs in both kingdoms, and he synchronizes their reigns with each other.

“The author organizes and presents Israel’s experience with kingship in periods in order to provide a clear and meaningful account of his nation’s past. Beginning with an evaluation of the united monarchy under Solomon (1 Kin. 1–11), the author carefully depicts its dissolution (1 Kin. 12:1–24) and the formation of two separate entities, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. He goes on to present the separate history of each realm, until the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. (2 Kin. 17). The alternation between the northern kingdom (usually called Israel) and the southern kingdom (usually called Judah) can be confusing, but it is central to the author’s purpose of presenting a unified

history of all the Israelite tribes.

"In portraying the divided kingdom, the writer points out important differences between the two realms. Kingship in Judah was relatively stable, under the descendants of David, but kingship in Israel was unstable, and there was a succession of dynasties. Twenty kings from nine different families ruled over Israel in the northern kingdom during its existence of about two hundred years. In contrast, twenty kings from one family ruled over the southern kingdom for about three hundred fifty years. The writer concludes his coverage of the northern kingdom with a lengthy commentary on its major shortcomings (2 Kin. 17:7–34).

"To consider Kings as no more than history of the monarchy would strip the book of its theological value, since the author is not a dispassionate observer, merely chronicling his nation's past. Nevertheless, the historical value of his work should not be underestimated. In composing a coherent and meaningful account of his nation's past, the biblical writer has provided an invaluable service to anyone who wants to understand this momentous era in Israelite history." (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

"It appears that certain kings had in their service one who bore the title, recorder (Heb *mazkir*, lit., remembrancer). It is likely that his function was to keep an official record for the king (cf. II Sam 8:16; I Kings 4:3; II Kings 18:18; II Chr 34:8). Parallel accounts in II Chronicles (e.g., cf. I Kings 11:41 and II Chr 9:29) cite the following writers: Nathan the prophet, Ahijah the Shilonite, and Iddo the seer. Other writers cited separately are Shemaiah the prophet (II Chr 12:5), Isaiah the prophet (II Chr 26:22; 32:32), and Jehu the seer (cf. II Chr 19:2; 20:34)...

"Although the writer quotes freely from non-inspired prophetic works, he does not serve only as a compiler. It would be a serious error to assume that his work was merely a collection of extracts, even if he were directed to them by the Holy Spirit. Rather, his references to statements in non-inspired works constitute divine approval of the truth of the facts the author of Kings uses. His inspiration is from above, not from divine direction to earthly sources." (*KJV Bible Commentary*)

"Though the authorship cannot be known with certainty, several suggestions have been made. Some have nominated Ezra as the compiler, while others point to Isaiah as the editor. Compare 2 Kings 18–20 with Isaiah 36–39. A number of scholars say that the writer of 1 and 2 Kings was an unknown prophet or a Jewish captive in Babylon at about 550 B.C. Because Josephus (a prominent Jewish historian of the first century A.D.) ascribes Kings to "the prophets," many have abandoned the search for a specific author. However, the most probable position is that the prophet Jeremiah was author of 1 and 2 Kings. The early Jewish tradition of the Talmud [*Baba Bathra* 15a] states that Jeremiah wrote Kings. This famous prophet preached in Jerusalem before and after its fall, and 2 Kings 24 and 25 appear in Jeremiah 40, 41, 52. Jeremiah could have written all but the contents of the last appendix (2 Kin. 25:27–30), which were probably added by one of his disciples...

"Contemplating the horror of the exile of God's people, the author compiles 1 and 2 Kings to answer the looming question of why both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah had been taken captive. He writes with a prophetic message, showing that this punishment by captivity to foreign pagan nations was the inevitable consequence of the persistent violation of God's covenant with them. Kings was written to move the exiles to reflect on their history and return to the Lord. Perhaps this prophetic perspective is one reason why it was included in the "earlier prophets" in the Hebrew Bible." (*Spirit Filled Life Study Bible*)

"Second Chronicles, of course, records the history of almost the same period as 1 and 2 Kings. The purposes and emphases of these two histories differ significantly. The kings of Judah were of more interest to the author of Chronicles whereas both the Israelite and Judean monarchs occupied the interest of the author of 1 and 2 Kings. The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles emphasize especially the priestly elements in the nation's history, such as the temple and worship, while 1 and 2 Kings give attention to the royal and prophetic elements. In 2 Chronicles the kings of Judah after David are evaluated in reference to David and the worship of Yahweh; in 1 and 2 Kings the rulers of both

kingdoms are evaluated in reference to the Mosaic Law.” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

While Samuel, Nathan, and Gad probably put together 1 and 2 Samuel, Jeremiah is the most likely editor/compiler of 1 and 2 Kings. Those four books however, form a united history of Israel/Judah primarily from the perspective of the kings and prophets who served in those kingdoms. First and 2 Chronicles on the other hand, seem to be the history as recorded by the priests and from their perspective. It was probably put together much later by Ezra. Together these six books give us a view of the events of the histories of both kingdoms that is focused on the spiritual progress of those nations.

2. What kind of a prophet of God would call fire from God down on the messengers who were sent to call him to see the king? (2 Kings 1:9-17; Compare Luke 9:51-55) Why did the Lord strike these men dead? (Is this what it means to come “in the spirit and power of Elijah?” Luke 1:17) What is implied by the statement, “But before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah?” (Malachi 4:5) Some have suggested that the entire SDA church of the last days is to serve as an “Elijah.” In what way would this be true? (Matthew 17:10-13)

Elijah was obviously a very remarkable prophet who had a profound effect on the nation of Israel. It is likely that the most important thing that he did for the nation was the expansion and enlargement of the schools of the prophets which are only briefly mentioned in Scripture. (See EGW comments) But why would Malachi, some 400 years later make a prophecy about someone of his nature coming before the great and terrible day of the Lord? (See Malachi 4:5) Was it that Elijah called the nation to account in the days of Ahab and Jezebel? Was it that he challenged the “gods” of this world? Was it that he challenged the religious leaders of his day? If John the Baptist was a foretaste of Elijah’s “successor” what was the most important thing he did? Was there any relationship between Elijah’s coming down on the mount of Transfiguration and Jesus’ statement about John in Matthew 17:10-13? Are we still looking for Elijah to come? How will we recognize him?

“This prophecy led many of the Jews of later times to expect a return to earth of Elijah himself (see John 1:21). However, this is a prophecy of someone who was to come in “the spirit and power” of Elijah (Luke 1:17), that is, who would preach a message similar to that of Elijah. Before the first advent of Christ this work was done by John the Baptist (Matt. 17:12, 13; Luke 1:16, 17; see on Mal. 3:1), and before the second advent of Christ a similar work will be done by those who preach the three angels’ messages to the world [See Malachi 4:5]....

“The very work accomplished by Elijah and John the Baptist is needed today. In these days of moral corruption and spiritual blindness there is need of voices that will fearlessly proclaim the coming of the Lord to the people of earth. The call of this hour is for men and women who will order their lives as did John and Elijah of old, and who will call upon others to do the same. There is needed a work of earnest reform, not only without the church, but within it as well. God calls upon all who would love and serve Him to go forth “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (3T 61, 62).” [See Luke 1:17] (*SDA Bible Commentary*)

3. Of all the prophets we have read about, why would God choose to translate Elijah? (2 Kings 2:1-12) Having translated Elijah, why would God leave Elisha to die a slow death? (2 Kings 13:14-21) Having translated Elijah, why would God send him back here to encourage His Son on the Mount of Transfiguration? (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)

Was Elijah better prepared for translation than any other prophet or priest or king in the Old Testament? Was this a reward for all that he suffered through? Is it possible that there is some reason why God needed Elijah in heaven? When it came time for someone to come down to encourage Jesus, Himself, God Incarnate here on earth, why were Elijah and Moses chosen and not Gabriel or some other very influential or persuasive angel? Jesus spoke on a daily, even hourly, basis

with His Father in heaven, often praying all night. Is there anything that Moses and Elijah could possibly have said to Jesus that the Father couldn't have said better?

"Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount and discussed His approaching death at Jerusalem (Luke 9:30, 31). Moses and Elijah may represent O.T. saints. Or, if we take Moses as representing the Law, and Elijah representing the Prophets, then here we see both sections of the O.T. pointing forward to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. A third possibility is that Moses, who went to heaven by way of death, depicts all who will be raised from the dead to enter the Millennium, while Elijah, who was translated to heaven, pictures those who will reach the kingdom by the route of translation.

"The disciples Peter, James, and John may represent NT saints in general. They could also foreshadow the faithful Jewish remnant who will be alive at the Second Advent and will enter the kingdom with Christ." (*Believer's Bible Commentary*)

"Moses and Elijah had been collaborators with Christ. They had shared His longing for the salvation of men. Moses had pleaded for Israel: "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." Ex. 32:32. Elijah had known loneliness of spirit, as for three years and a half of famine he had borne the burden of the nation's hatred and its woe. Alone he had stood for God upon Mount Carmel. Alone he had fled to the desert in anguish and despair. These men, chosen above every angel around the throne, had come to commune with Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering, and to comfort Him with the assurance of the sympathy of heaven. The hope of the world, the salvation of every human being, was the burden of their interview." DA 422.2

"Two glorious figures stand engaged in conversation with him. They are Moses, who talked with God face to face amid the thunder and lightnings of Sinai, and Elijah, that prophet of God who did not see death, but was conducted to Heaven in a chariot of fire. These two, whom God had seen fit to favor above all others who ever lived upon earth, were delegated by the Father to bring the glory of Heaven to his Son, and comfort him, talking with him concerning the completion of his mission, and especially of his sufferings to be endured at Jerusalem." 2SP 328.2-329

There are many questions that we will never be able to answer fully this side of the kingdom. But we have been assured that God will do what is best for all involved. John the Baptist was called the "Elijah" of the New Testament, but God allowed him to fall into the hands of Herod and finally to have his head cut off because of the whims of Herod's illegitimate wife! Each person's life is to say something of significance in God's great plan.

4. Why would God go to all the effort of dividing the Jordan River just so Elijah and Elisha could cross? (2 Kings 2:8,14)

At a time when "gods" were evaluated on the basis of the power they demonstrated in the eyes of men, Yahweh needed to show that He had not lost any of His power! Remember that fifty of the "prophets" from the school at Jericho were watching from the shores as these events took place. In case Elijah's previous miracles had not been adequate to impress people, or perhaps had taken place some time in the past and were losing their impact, God decided to give this one final demonstration of His power working through Elijah and Elisha in order to remind people what kind of God they were dealing with. Considering the actions of the young men from a few miles away only a short time later, even this miracle witnessed by quite a number of the students of the school in Jericho had little impact on many of them. (2 Kings 2:23-25)

Elisha also needed evidence that God's power would be with him in his ministry. The miracle of the dividing of Jordan was the first tangible evidence of that power.

5. Why do you think the young men were so anxious to go and try to find Elijah? (2 Kings 2:15-18)

Remember that these young men had received a message from the Yahweh that Elijah would be taken up from them. But there are always some doubters in the group. (See EGW comments) It is also possible that they knew that when others heard about the story they would raise questions. Thus they wanted to verify as far as possible the miraculous ascension of their former leader.

6. Why would a prophet of God be cursing a group of young people and why did God send the she-bears to “tear them?” (2 Kings 2:23-25) What was the spiritual environment at the time? (2 Kings 1:2-6)

In a land where the king decided that instead of consulting Elijah, who was a few miles away, he would consult Baalzebub, the “god of flies” down at Ekron in the land of the Philistines to determine if he would die as a result of an accident, it was necessary to take pretty stark action to make any impression at all on the populace. These young men had no doubt heard of the miraculous ascension of Elijah and wanted to see a miracle for themselves! But if God gave in to all who called for a miracle for proof of His existence or power, He would never stop performing miracles. In fact, there is plenty of evidence that as the miracles increased there would only be more demand for miracles. So God took a very serious approach to these very irreverent young men. Elisha was just beginning his personal ministry for the people of Israel. He would be traveling about their country for many years in the future. He must have the respect and safety that would allow him to focus on the job God had given him to do and not be constantly distracted by jesting and mischievous youth. God took serious steps to stop such disrespect and at the very beginning of Elisha’s personal ministry people recognized that the same power that had worked with Elijah was in Elisha and he was not to be taken lightly or messed with.

7. Why do you think the heathen “gods” were so attractive to the people of Israel?

Why are people today attracted to the “idols” or “gods” of this world instead of to the One true God? For one thing, the Devil was constantly at work tempting people to try his “gods”. Furthermore, the worship services connected with these pagan “gods” consisted of drunkenness, dancing, and the pursuit of sexual indulgence as a part of religious worship. There was no struggling with the sins of the flesh. There was no effort involved at all. Just feasting, dancing, drunkenness and sexual orgies. The Devil designed the whole program to entice people to turn away from the constant struggle to be more like Yahweh. There was a constant focusing on the “pleasures of sin.” (See Hebrews 11:25)

In such an atmosphere, the temple services must have seemed a bit tedious and even boring by contrast, especially in the minds of the young people. We have the same basic problem in our world today.

8. Who were closer to being “savable”—the people in the times of Elijah and Elisha with all their heathen practices, or the Sadducees and Pharisees in the time of Christ? Which of these groups is more like us? Does this have anything to do with the “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4,5) when Jesus was to come?

It is interesting to notice that in the days of Josiah when the scroll of the law was discovered in the temple and read to the king and to the people there was a tremendous revival. (2 Chr 34:8-28; 2 Kgs 22:3-20) Something similar happened in the days of Ezra. (Nehemiah 8:1-12) What would have happened if someone had stood up and read the law to the Pharisees and Sadducees? Nothing! They had memorized it! It was nothing new or startling to them. And it made no difference to their lives. Unfortunately, we tend to be much more like them than we are like the people in earlier times. Studying the Bible is “boring”! But that doesn’t fully answer our question. Which one of these two groups was more savable? Paul had been a Pharisee and he certainly was saved. But we see no evidence that he was able to convince many of his peers. With all of his knowledge and persuasion

why do you think that was?

9. Didn't the people of Israel have a mind of their own? It seems that whenever the king did evil, the people would do the same, and when the king did what was right they followed that? (See 1 Kings 15:26,34; 16:13; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:31; 13:2,11; 14:24; 15:9,18,24,28; 23:15) See **2 Chronicles Teacher's Guide** #14.

"The establishment of national religious centers in competition with the one in Jerusalem is repeatedly referred to in the books of Kings as the sin of Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:34; 14:16; 15:26, 30; 16:2; 2 Kin. 3:3; 10:29; 13:2; 17:22). Unfortunately, every northern king followed the path first blazed by Jeroboam. None of them tried to institute a thorough reform. Without determined opposition the sin of Jeroboam brought about the deterioration and demise of Israel (2 Kin. 17:22, 23)." (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

"That many of the people of Israel accepted these changes reveals that their hearts were far from the Lord. Their fathers had worshiped a calf before and were punished for it (Ex. 32). Solomon had erected high places and lost most of his kingdom for it (chap. 11). Korah and his followers had tried to usurp the priesthood and lost their lives for it (Num. 16). These innovations by which Jeroboam sought to secure his kingdom only ensured its eventual downfall. Those who had a heart for God fled to Judah (2 Chron. 11:14–16), leaving their brethren to the conveniences—and consequences—of man-made religion. It has been well said that 'Jeroboam did not deserve so good a post [as king], but Israel deserved so bad a prince.'" (*Believer's Bible Commentary*)

We attempt to warn our children about the dangers of "peer pressure". But what happens when an entire society or nation begins going the wrong way? It is often much easier to stand up to pressure from those who are acknowledged as different from us or opposed to our ideas than it is to resist the subtle pressure of being surrounded by "associates," "family" and "friends" who are following a bad path. Here is a case where the entire nation headed down the "rosy path" together until they were beyond the reach of God and He had to allow them to disappear from history into oblivion. Once Israel turned away from God they never turned back. This should be a very serious lesson for us.

10. Why were there so many miracles in the days of Elijah and Elisha? If we had more faith would we see more miracles today? What do you think of a God who would go to such lengths to reach people in such difficult times? Having used all these methods in the Old Testament, why was Jesus so reluctant to use them at key points in His earthly ministry?

There were four periods of significant miracles in the Bible: 1) Creation, 2) the plagues against Egypt and the exodus from Egypt, 3) the days of Elijah and Elisha, and 4) the days of Jesus and his apostles. There were other miracles scattered through the Bible but these are the four great concentrations of miracles. Why do you suppose that was? "A miracle is a signature of God, His sign of confirmation that the proclaimed message is truly His revelation. Miracles do not contradict God's created order; they are real events, although they transcend the normal pattern of cause and effect...[At the time of the plagues in Egypt] the magicians were able to copy each of the first few miracles (v. 22; 8:7; 9:11) until the plague of lice (8:18, 19). This suggests that the miracles gradually increased in difficulty and/or severity. This should teach us that something that appears to be the work of God may really be the work of Satan (2 Thess. 2:8–12). In order to be a genuine work of God, an experience must be associated with the proclamation of truth and must bring glory to God." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

[Miracles are defined as:] "Usually phenomena that cannot be explained by the operation of the known laws of the natural world; also the providential alteration of circumstances, or of the human

attitude and volition, in such a way as to promote good or to restrain evil; from the Latin *miraculum*, an object or event that impresses those who behold it with wonder and astonishment, that transcends their knowledge, understanding, and experience, and for which, in their finite judgment, the laws of nature or change cannot provide an adequate explanation.

“As to purpose or result, a miracle may be defined in terms of the Greek words thus translated in the NT: (1) *dunamis*, “an act of power,” (2) *semeion*, “a sign” (Luke 23:8; John 2:11; etc.). With these Greek terms is often associated the word *teras*, “wonder” (Matt. 24:24; Acts 2:22; etc.). The same miracle would be a wonder by virtue of the awe it inspired in those who witnessed it, an act of power because it was a manifestation of divine power, and a sign in the sense that it was designed to impress truth upon human minds.” (*SDA Encyclopedia*)

But there are many, even among Christians, who question where there are any “miracles”. We see this demonstrated all the time in the popular press where movies and other media portray “miracles” in some way that is explainable by unusual events. This leads the Anchor Bible Dictionary to say the following after a long discussion of the subtle differences in the Bible between “miracles” and unusual but natural events:

“The key in determining whether an event is miraculous or not lies in the degree of power and magnitude of the event as it is expressed in the text; it is not the quality of the phenomenon which decides the question but rather the manner of its formulation. The decisive factor is a literary one: the expression of excitement and wonder in the face of an incident and the amount of words devoted to its description. The definition of miracle in the Bible, then, is a literary definition: an extraordinary occurrence, attributable to God’s hand (which at times disrupts the order of creation), and which leaves a marked impression in the text; the criteria for determining what is to be considered a miracle are literary in character.” (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*)

Once again we are confronted with the problem of the supernatural. The scientific world would love to eliminate any mention of the “supernatural”. But there are many “events” in the Bible which cannot be explained in any way without the supernatural. This should not be a surprise to us who believe that the purpose of the Bible is primarily to tell us about God. He is Supernatural!

It is interesting to think about why there were these specific times in the Bible when there were many more “miracles” than at other times. As I have suggested before, it seems that miracles occurred more often at times when there was very little faith. This is in direct contradiction to the ideas propagated by many religious groups that seem to suggest that if we had more faith God would perform more “miracles.”

11. Why do we have all these stories? Why didn’t God just give us a well-worded, brief theological summary statement about Himself? How can God expect us to get anything of real spiritual significance out of these accounts in Kings and Chronicles? Or do you see these stories as giving enough detail, so we can recognize that these are “real” people, living in “real” situations who had to struggle with life’s issues just as we do, and therefore it may provide insights to us about how God relates to people?

These are the books that provide the historical backbone of the Biblical record. The writings of David, Solomon, and all of the prophets are set in the context of these historical books. They help us to understand the context in which the writings occurred. The single most important key to understanding anything that is written is to understand the context in which it was written. Without their context many written passages seem puzzling and lose their meaning. One only needs to come across an old letter written from a friend to understand that problem! Often when we have forgotten what the context was in which the letter was written, it seems almost a mystery. Thus it is essential that we have these historical books to help us to understand what was happening in sacred history so we can understand even the non-historical books.

12. What is the purpose of the story of Elisha's death, and the sudden resurrection of the corpse thrown into that cave where Elisha was buried? (2 Kings 13:20,21) Can you picture this whole story in your imagination? Compare the story of the water being stirred at the pool of Bethsaida. (John 5:1-18)

"The strange miracle which occurred at Elisha's tomb must have been an astonishment to the friends of the resurrected man. The plundering Moabites must have been a surprise to the burial party, but what about a dead friend who suddenly stood up alive and well? The purpose of the miracle was (1) to confirm that God was the God of the living, and (2) to seal the witness of Elisha with the divine imprimatur." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

"The physical bodies of Christ and His three great prophetic predecessors are given special attention in Scripture. Moses' body was buried by God (Deut. 34:5, 6). Elijah's body ascended into heaven (2 Kin. 2:11). Elisha's body retained power after death (2 Kin. 13:21); and Christ's glorified body was physical, yet heavenly (Luke 24:30, 31)." (*Woman's Study Bible*)

"Shortly thereafter **Elisha died**. Elisha's ministry spanned at least 56 years (including his years of serving as Elijah's servant) since he was called by Elijah during Ahab's reign (which ended in 853 B.C.) and Elisha died in Jehoash's reign (which began in 798 B.C.). The prophet was probably **buried** as most of the early Israelites were in a cave or tomb (v. 21) hewn out of a rock, after his body was wrapped in linen cloths.

"Some time later some men were laying another **man's body** to rest near Elisha's tomb. They were surprised by a group of **Moabite raiders** who were apparently going to rob whomever they met. To flee quickly, the Israelite pallbearers removed the stone in front of **Elisha's tomb**, **threw** the corpse of their friend in the **tomb**, and retreated. **When the new corpse touched Elisha's he came to life and stood up on his feet**. Evidently the men who placed the body in Elisha's tomb observed this. Doubtless they told their story far and wide, and it probably reached the ears of Jehoash for whom this miracle seems to have been intended primarily. Such a sign of the power of God working even through His prophet's corpse may have both encouraged the king as he anticipated his battles with the Arameans and rebuked him for his lack of faith." (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

"This incident probably had a profound effect upon those who witnessed the miracle and upon those to whom it was later related. It was a time of distress and annoyance. The Moabites were making forays into the land and snatching away the new harvests. It was a time when men might well inquire, Where is the God of Elisha? Where are the miracles of the past? The resuscitation of the corpse gave evidence that the God of Israel was not dead. He was ready to work miracles even now. If men would heed the messages of the departed prophet, God would once more grant victory over the intruder and restore security to the land." (*SDA Bible Commentary*)

13. We read that the King of Moab sacrificed his firstborn son on the wall of the city to try to stop the battle from completely destroying his kingdom. What relation was there between this barbaric practice and the end of the battle? (2 Kings 3:26,27) How many others worshiped Molech by offering their sons or daughters? (Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Kings 11:5-8; 2 Kings 16:3; 17:17,31; 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:1-3; 33:1,6; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:4-6; 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20,21,36; 23:37,39; compare Amos 5:25-27 as quoted from the Septuagint in Acts 7:42,43; Molech was often worshiped just outside Jerusalem in the valley of Hinnom.)

There is not much evidence of what happened here. Some have speculated about what the results of this unusual action were:

"The sacrifice of his own son by the king of Moab so enthused the Moabite troops by its example of dedication, and so horrified the armies of Israel and Judah, that the Moabites were able to repel the Israelite siege." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

“The Moabite king’s desperate sacrifice of his **son** is often paralleled in the literature of the ancient Near East. This verse provides an instance where the Bible supplements the information from secular history (i.e., the Moabite Stone). The Israelites left the scene with disgust at what they saw.” (*King James Version Study Bible*)

“This grisly act was meant to induce the god Chemosh to deliver the Moabites from certain defeat. Child sacrifice was expressly forbidden in Israel (Ex. 34:20; Deut. 18:10); nevertheless, two later kings of Judah (Ahaz and Manasseh) apparently practiced it (16:3; 21:6).” (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

“To Mesha, the defeat in battle was a sign that his god Chemosh was angry with Moab. As a result, Mesha offered his own son in a sacrifice to please his god. **Great indignation against Israel** may mean that Mesha’s action was so repulsive that the Israelites broke off their attack, or that the battle suddenly went against Israel. Another possibility is that the Israelites ceased their assault because God was displeased with them in some way.” (*Spirit Filled Life Study Bible*)

“In cases of great extremity, it was customary in various heathen nations, to offer *human* sacrifices, and even their own *children*. This was frequent among the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Scythians, Gauls, Africans, and others; and was the natural fruit of a religious system, which had for the objects of its worship cruel and merciless divinities. The king of Moab, in this case, sacrificed his son to obtain the favor of Chemosh, *his god*, who, being a devil, delighted in blood and murder, and the destruction of mankind. The dearer anything was to them, the more acceptable those idolaters thought the sacrifice, and therefore burnt their children in the fire to their honor. Ge 22:2, 13. Dt 12:31. Jg 11:31, 39. Ps 106:37, 38. Ezk 16:20. Mi 6:7.” (*The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*)

“Defeat in battle was regarded by pagan Near Eastern warriors as a sign that their gods were angry with them. To propitiate his god, Chemosh (1 Kings 11:7, 33; 2 Kings 23:13), Mesha offered **his firstborn son**, the heir to his throne, **as a human sacrifice on top of the city wall**. He was fighting with all his might. It was not Israel’s intent to annihilate the Moabites; they only wanted to keep their neighbors from rebelling against their sovereignty to keep them under their control. So offensive to the allies was Mesha’s act of sacrificing his son that **they withdrew and returned** home. Israel had won the battle even though they had not destroyed Kir Hareseth or captured Mesha.

“Some say **the fury against Israel**, which **was great**, may refer to God’s anger. More likely it refers to Judah’s anger against Israel for invading Moab in a battle that resulted in their seeing such a repulsive act.

“A remarkable archeological discovery, the Moabite Stone, contains Mesha’s own record of this battle and other battles with Israel. On this stone the Moabite king claimed to have been delivered from the Israelites by his god Chemosh on this day. Though it is true that he was not captured at Kir Hareseth and the Israelites withdrew, Israel and her allies were the real victors in this campaign.

“The account of this battle provides further proof of the sovereignty of Yahweh and of the complete vanity of idols and idolatry. But even with so many proofs Israel continued to spurn the Lord and foolishly worshiped pagan deities.” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

“The account ends on a strange note; the helpless king of Moab offered his own son as a burnt offering, and Judah and Edom became so indignant against Israel (Jehoram) that they withdrew from the battle and went home. They should not have allied with Jehoram to begin with. It was the faithful prophet of God, not the wicked king, who saved the nation.” (*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*)

14. Look at the description of the people in 2 Kings 17:7-23. How could God’s people possibly have fallen so far? What else could God do with such people? They: 1. worshiped other gods, 2. followed the

customs of the Canaanites, 3. built pagan places of worship in all their towns, on top of every hill and in every shady place, 4. put up Asherah poles, 5. burned incense on all the pagan altars, 6. disobeyed the Lord's command not to worship idols, 7. worshiped the stars, 8. served Baal, 9. sacrificed their sons and daughters as burnt offerings to pagan gods, 10. consulted mediums and fortunetellers, 11. devoted themselves completely to doing what is wrong in the Lord's sight. What could God do to make an impression on such people? "They worshiped worthless idols and became worthless themselves" (vs. 15). Compare Psalms 115:1-8; Hosea 9:10; Jeremiah 2:5,17,19; 7:6; Ezekiel 5, 16, 20 and 2 Chronicles 36:15,16.

This summary passage is a clear and devastating denunciation against the sins of the northern kingdom of Israel. What else could God do with or for them? They had committed every sin and violated every covenant that God had given them since the days of Moses. God had clearly told them what the result would be and now it was to take place.

15. How do you explain what happened to the people who were imported into "Samaria" to take the place of the Israelites who were exported? (2 Kings 17:24-41) These are the ancestors of the Samaritans. Notice how they tried to mix different religions, even offering their children as sacrifices (vs. 31).

2 Kings 17:24-28: ²⁴ The emperor of Assyria took people from the cities of Babylon, Cuth, Ivvah, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and settled them in the cities of Samaria, in place of the exiled Israelites. They took possession of these cities and lived there. ²⁵When they first settled there, they did not worship the LORD, and so he sent lions, which killed some of them. ²⁶The emperor of Assyria was told that the people he had settled in the cities of Samaria did not know the law of the god of that land, and so the god had sent lions, which were killing them. ²⁷So the emperor commanded: "Send back one of the priests we brought as prisoners; make him go back and live there, in order to teach the people the law of the god of that land." ²⁸So an Israelite priest who had been deported from Samaria went and lived in Bethel, where he taught the people how to worship the LORD." (*GNB*)

In ancient times it was believed by many that "gods" had their own "territories". When you were in the "territory" of a certain "god" you were expected to give reverence and respect to that "god". This is illustrated by the story of Naaman:

2 Kings 5:16-18: ¹⁶ "Elisha answered, 'By the living LORD, whom I serve, I swear that I will not accept a gift.'

"Naaman insisted that he accept it, but he would not. ¹⁷So Naaman said, "If you won't accept my gift, then let me have two mule-loads of earth to take home with me, because from now on I will not offer sacrifices or burnt offerings to any god except the LORD. ¹⁸So I hope that the LORD will forgive me when I accompany my king to the temple of Rimmon, the god of Syria, and worship him. Surely the LORD will forgive me!" (*GNB*)

A footnote adds: "It was then believed that a god could be worshiped only on his own land".

So the Samaritans wanted a priest from the "land" to teach them how to worship the "god" of the land! As a result they soon mixed their pagan religions with pieces of Yahweh worship. This made the truth and the true worship of Yahweh even more confusing.

16. Compare 2 Kings 19 and Isaiah 37—who borrowed from whom? If we cannot believe in prophets who borrow, which of these books are we going to throw out? How do you think Kings and Chronicles were actually written?

See #1 above. Clearly the writer of 2 Kings was not an eye witness of what he wrote. He had to put together his entire "history" from the writings of others. It should not be surprising then that he

chose to use this historical portion from the writings of Isaiah. He made no claim to originality here. He did not specifically mention Isaiah as the author of this portion but he mentions the names of several others. The people who read God's word certainly realized perfectly well what had taken place here and had no questions about it.

17. Is 2 Kings 19:35 an example of what God would have done to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan if Israel had allowed Him?

2 Kings 19:35: "That night an angel of the Lord went to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 soldiers. At dawn the next day, there they lay, all dead!"(GNB)

Surely no one would question God's ability to carry out such a feat. There has been a lot of discussion by those who question the supernatural aspects of Scripture as to what happened here:

"Sennacherib's records make no mention of this event, but the Assyrians typically recorded only their victories. The ancient historian Herodotus recorded that the Assyrian camp was overrun by mice, driving the army away from Jerusalem and suggesting that the Assyrians attributed the deaths to a plague associated with rats. Sennacherib fought another five campaigns but never returned to Judah." (*Woman's Study Bible*)

"The angel of the LORD [None other than Jehovah Himself (cf. Gen 22:15–16; Num 22:22–35; Judges 2:1–5; 6:21–23], He is often thought to be the Second Person of the Trinity in a preincarnate form) killed 185,000 Assyrians that very night. The Greek historian, Herodotus, records the tradition that mice ate the Assyrians' bowstrings and leather shield handles. Many modern scholars, therefore, attribute the death of the Assyrians to the bubonic plague, but this is doubtful. It was clearly the miraculous judgment of God, regardless of the way He caused the deaths." (*King James Version Study Bible*)

"Sennacherib's inscription boasts of all his mighty victories, but is silent concerning his defeat by the 'angel of the LORD.' Defeats and failures were invariably ignored when chronicles were being compiled by the heathen Near Eastern nations." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

Critical scholars have many different things to say about this story. They cannot believe that 185,000 people were involved. Thus they try to imagine ways in which to explain how an error could have crept in. Some say it was only 185 men and the Hebrew symbol for the number 1000 was a mistake. Others suggest that various kinds of plagues could have been involved. And, of course, many while recognizing the basic facts of the story (since they are mostly corroborated by the Assyrian's own records), believe that the Biblical version of the story must have been written some time later by some of Isaiah's disciples, and later embellished further by later generations so that we cannot be sure exactly what happened. This is a typical example of the attempts made by those who question all of the supernatural events in Scripture to explain away those events.

18. What do you think of Isaiah changing his statement about King Hezekiah's death? Does this make Isaiah a false prophet? (2 Kings 20:1-11) Did Isaiah change his mind, or did God change His mind? What was the result?

"Healing by Miracle or Medicine? DIVINE HEALING. This story of Hezekiah's miraculous healing begins with his being informed by the prophet Isaiah that he will die of his illness. He immediately begins to pray and seek God earnestly, not accepting the fate of death. God's addition of 15 years to his life suggests that prayer in the face of terminal illness is never inappropriate. But

Isaiah also directs Hezekiah to apply a poultice of figs to his boil. Some scholars point to the figs as a medical prescription, and attribute the healing power to the poultice. The Bible does not condemn resorting to medical remedies; but, in this case, to think that such a poultice, by itself, could cure a terminal illness seems absurd. God is the Author of all healing benefit, however; and the application of the poultice appears to suggest that human medical aid is never inappropriate either. God alone can heal: He does so by miracle means, by natural means, and by human means. None should be demeaned as unworthy. However, this text clearly shows that Hezekiah's deliverance from death came from God, not man. (See James 5:14-16.)" (*Spirit Filled Life Study Bible*)

"What would I do with the remainder of my life if God told me that I had just 15 years to live? What did Hezekiah do with those years? The Bible does not say, for the last event recorded of his reign was the destruction of Sennacherib's army in 701 B.C. (which probably occurred less than a year after his sickness). It has been suggested that one reason why God prolonged his life was that he had no male heir to the throne (2 Kings 21:1 states that Manasseh was only twelve when he began to reign). However, it is probable that Manasseh was a coregent with his father for nearly ten years, because otherwise it would be impossible to fit the 55 years of his reign into this period of Judah's history, working back from the fixed dates of the Babylonian Captivity." (*Believer's Bible Commentary*)

"The king's appeal in prayer was effective with God. Before Isaiah had left the palace on his way home the LORD gave him a second message: to return to the king with word announcing a postponement of his death. Hezekiah had behaved like a true son of David in the way he reacted to God's first message. Hezekiah's prayer (what he said) and his tears (how he felt about what he said) moved God to heal him. Isaiah announced that in three days the king would be well enough to worship God in the temple. God promised to add 15 years to Hezekiah's life (from 701 to 686). The Lord also promised to deliver Hezekiah and Jerusalem from Sennacherib's siege and to defend Jerusalem for His own sake and for David's sake (cf. 19:34)." (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

God always hears our prayers and even knows what we are going to say before we pray them. Thus it should be apparent that God's foreknowledge means that He knew exactly what Hezekiah was going to pray and how He Himself would respond. But perhaps for the benefit of the onlooking universe, God allowed this exchange to take place. This led to Hezekiah's next test, the only recorded failure in his life when the ambassador's from Babylonia saw everything in his capital. It is hard to know how these additional years affected Hezekiah's son Manasseh, but it is hard for us to imagine how he could have been more wicked or destructive to God's cause.

19. Why did Hezekiah show all his wealth to the Babylonians? (2 Kings 20:13-15) What do you think Hezekiah said to the emissaries as he was showing them around? Don't you think he probably said, "Look at how the Lord has blessed me?" In 2 Chronicles 32:31 it suggests that God allowed the Babylonian emissaries to come as a test for Hezekiah. How many of our messages to the world sound like "look how God has blessed us?" The really good news is that God is so gracious that He blesses even us!

This is the one failure in Hezekiah's life recorded in sacred history. We wonder if Isaiah might have had something to say to Hezekiah before the Babylonian visitors arrived. In any case, Hezekiah's response to God's reprimand seems very selfish to us. Maybe Hezekiah was doing what was normally done by kings in his day, but it was the wrong thing to do in this case. Why couldn't he have talked to them about his wonderful God who had the power to turn the sun dial backwards? He must have said something about it at least. How different would history have been if Hezekiah had done the right thing on this occasion?

20. Look at the story of Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20). After living such a wicked life, including putting Isaiah into a hollow log and sawing him in half (See the Pseudepigraphical book of *The Martyrdom of Isaiah*; Compare Hebrews 11:37; 4BC 1137; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 381,382)

notice the apparently genuine repentance that he showed at the end of his life. But did this repentance reverse all the effects of those years of sinning? (2 Chronicles 33:10-25) What do you think Isaiah will think and say when he sees Manasseh in the kingdom before he has a chance to learn the “rest of the story?” Will Isaiah walk up to Manasseh and not be able to remember anything that took place and say, “I am so happy to see you, we were such good friends all our lives?” Or will Isaiah walk up to Manasseh and say, “I remember all that you did to me, but I just have one question: “Has God forgiven you? If so, I’ll be glad to have you as my neighbor?” Or would it be safe to live next door to Manasseh if he had only been forgiven and not been really changed? See 2 Chronicles Teacher’s Guide #16.

It is hard to imagine how the son of such an apparently good king could have turned out to be such an awful king as was king Manasseh. Isaiah was some kind of relative to him since they were both a part of the royal family. But Isaiah probably spoke out about some aspect of his profligate life in his younger years or did something else that offended the king and he as king felt that he had the right and the authority to destroy Isaiah whenever he chose.

In the earth made new, there will no doubt be many surprises. Since Isaiah died in the early years of king Manasseh, it would have been impossible for him to know all that happened later. So it will no doubt come as something of a shock when Isaiah first discovers that Manasseh is there. It will be most interesting to see how each of them respond and how God will be involved. It does however provide an excellent opportunity to think about one’s theories of what heaven will be like. Will everyone have forgotten? Will all memory of evil or sin be removed? Some think so. But there is no reason for God to suffer through all of the great controversy and then destroy all of the evidence. It is the record of that evidence that will prevent anyone from making the same mistake again. I don’t know how Isaiah and Manasseh will get together, but if they are both savable and in the kingdom, it will be one more proof that God is the wonderful and gracious Friend that we believe He is.

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EG White Comments:

“The schools of the prophets, established by Samuel, had fallen into decay during the years of Israel's apostasy. Elijah re-established these schools, making provision for young men to gain an education that would lead them to magnify the law and make it honorable. Three of these schools, one at Gilgal, one at Bethel, and one at Jericho, are mentioned in the record. Just before Elijah was taken to heaven, he and Elisha visited these centers of training. The lessons that the prophet of God had given them on former visits, he now repeated. Especially did he instruct them concerning their high privilege of loyally maintaining their allegiance to the God of heaven. He also impressed upon their minds the importance of letting simplicity mark every feature of their education. Only in this way could they receive the mold of heaven and go forth to work in the ways of the Lord.” PK 224.3-225; 2 BC 1036

“There was a school of the prophets at Gilgal, and also at Bethel and at Jericho. Elijah wished to visit these important places before he was parted from them. His spirit was cheered as, by the direction of God, he was permitted to see the schools of the prophets and the work that was going on in those institutions,--an education which was to keep the wonderful works of God continually before the students, and which magnified the law of God, and made it honorable. The education was of that order which would preserve the souls of all who would be obedient to the law of God. While idolatry was prevailing to an alarming extent, Elijah could see the word of the Lord verified, ‘I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which . . . have not bowed unto Baal.’” YI, April 28, 1898 par. 6