

1 & 2 Kings

1. Name and Structure – The two books of Kings were originally one. The division of the two books seems to have little literary value because the break occurs in the middle of the account of King Ahaziah. The books bear the same name as in the Hebrew Scriptures, obviously because the book focuses on the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah. The Hebrew Scriptures are divided into three sections—the law, the prophets, and the writings. The books Joshua-Kings are grouped with the prophets, partly because they record the activity of the prophets and partly because the historical writings make the prophetic case that Israel had rebelled against God and therefore earned the covenant curses pronounced in Deuteronomy.
2. Summary – These books provide a historical account of the period beginning with the passing of the kingdom from David to Solomon (c. 931 B.C.). They then trace the lines and activities of the monarchy, including the division between the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. They conclude with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah in Babylon (561 B.C.).
3. Author and date – Why do author and date matter? They matter to some degree because they tell us something of the perspective from which the author was writing and the kinds of issues that would have been important to the original audience. Though the author is anonymous, many theories of the development of the text of Kings have been proposed. These theories are often highly speculative and do very little to illuminate the text. It appears from what is left out at the end—the return to the land—that the book was completed during the exile. It is also clear that the author/compiler(s) used a wide variety of sources. Annals of the kings of Judah & Israel and the book of the acts of Solomon, for instance, are referenced in several places. While these references do not illuminate authorship, they demonstrate that the writer was being a) selective rather than comprehensive and b) careful to present a historical account.

If we simply add and compare the lengths of reigns of the Northern and Southern kings, we find apparent contradictions. A number of solutions have been proposed. Different people groups and empires in that time had different methods for accounting for fractional years of reign. Furthermore, in a number of cases the reigns overlapped (1 Kings 16:21, for instance), suggesting that other, unrecorded, overlaps took place as well. Even with the ambiguity, these historical notices help order the events and establish the interrelationship between the divided kingdoms, as well as setting Israel's experience in the context of the larger world.

4. Structure of the books (Hendriksen):
 - a. United kingdom under Solomon (1 Kings 1-11)
 - i. kingship and prayer for wisdom (1-4)
 - ii. glory of Solomon's kingdom (5-8)
 - iii. decline due to foreign wives and idolatry (9-11)
 - b. Divided kingdom after Solomon (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17)
 - i. account of kings to Uzziah in Judah and Jereboam II in Israel and the ministry of the prophets (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 14)
 - ii. account of kings to Hezekiah in Judah and Hoshea in Israel and Assyrian exile of Israel (15-17)
 - c. Remaining kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-25)
 - i. Jehovah's blessing on the kingly reformers Hezekiah and Josiah (18-23)
 - ii. Jehovah's curse upon rebellious Judah and Babylonian exile of Judah (23-25)
5. Major themes and events:
 - a. God's faithfulness to his promises – God had promised to dwell in Jerusalem and to perpetuate the kingdom of David's line. These promises appeared to be broken. The writer of Kings shows us that God was still faithful to his promises. First, we see that God promised curses to those who forsook his worship, and we are shown how Israel and Judah forsook revealed worship for their own imaginations and were progressively cursed (2 Kings 21:14-15; 24:2). Second, we are given a hint of hope that God is continuing his work through the Davidic line, because 2 Kings ends with the note that the Davidic king was surviving in exile (2 Kings 25:27-30).
 - b. God's faithfulness to his promises to David and the people of Israel reach their zenith in the reign of Solomon, demonstrating God's power, his wisdom, his peace, and his love. Yet Solomon's failures lead us not to rest our hope in Solomon but to look forward to a greater fulfillment of God's promises of a king who will rule over and bless his people and bring them peace and rest.

Reference:

An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
Survey of the Bible, 4th revised ed., W. Hendriksen, Baker, 1976.