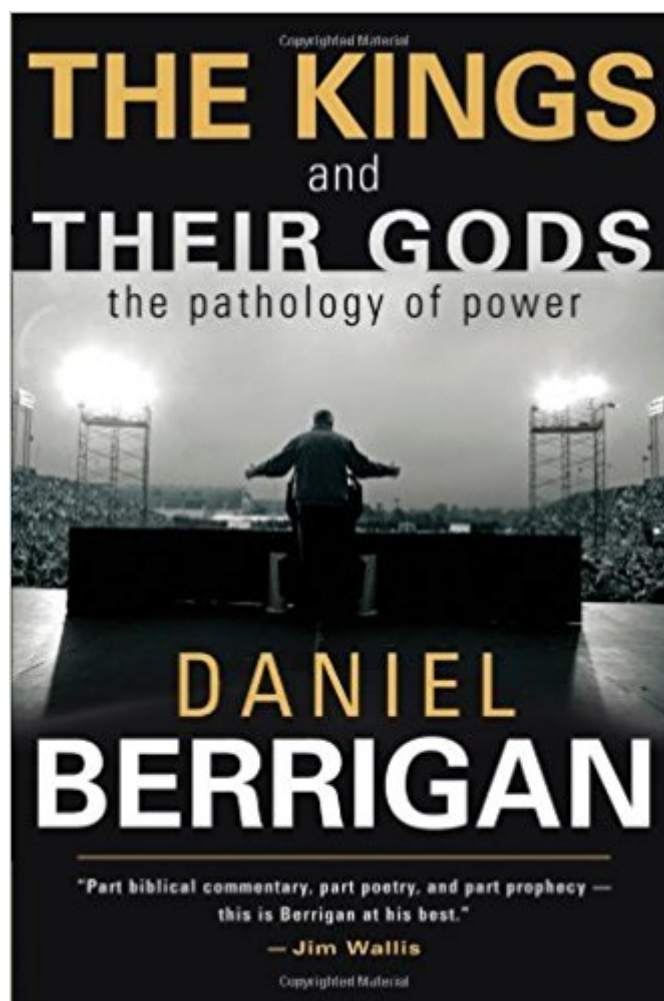


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# The Kings And Their Gods: The Pathology Of Power



## Synopsis

The scenario that confronts us in the biblical text of 1 and 2 Kings is a turbulent one. Daniel Berrigan minces no words in his assessment of that biblical era. Prophets, kings, and the gods they worship -- all are found wanting. Berrigan examines the complex terrain of these two biblical books, opening our eyes to the deep flaws of their oft-praised characters. He shows that this dark time in biblical history is in many ways repeating itself today. The wars of these kings, Berrigan says, are our wars now, and we are fashioning our own gods to approve our misdeeds. These two books of Scripture come to vivid -- and sometimes terrifying -- life when we recognize these undeniable similarities. *The Kings and Their Gods* reveals Berrigan in stunning form. Here this modern-day prophet distills the wisdom gained from his long learning and his remarkable life experiences. The book is both a masterful biblical commentary and a clarion call to action. It balances polemics and poetry, despair and joy. It is truly a midrash for our troubled times -- both an indictment of the horror that is and an invitation to the great goodness that may be.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Jim Wallis • President of Sojourners • author of *The Great Awakening* "Part biblical commentary, part poetry, and part prophecy -- this is Berrigan at his best." Andrew Greeley • priest, popular author, social critic "In this powerful and disturbing meditation on the books of Kings, Father Daniel Berrigan, with all his usual prophetic fervor and scalding wit, compares Israel in the time between David and Isaiah with the United States today. The implications

may keep you awake at night." Joan Chittister • author of *Welcome to the Wisdom of the World* "Daniel Berrigan's *Kings and Their Gods* is not one book but three. The first book in question is scripture's two books of Kings, which most people ignore. The second book is Berrigan's own poetic, piercing interpretation of the books of Kings. The third book is about us • our country, our times, ourselves. In each case, the language is elegant and the narrative is dramatic and chilling. Most of all, Berrigan's interpretation is disturbingly real, frighteningly true. My advice is to read this book with the scripture in one hand and the newspaper in the other. But whatever you do, read it. Once you do, you'll never think of the books of Kings as useless history again. On the contrary, you may think of them all the time." David James Duncan • author of *The Brothers K* "I can think of few men I admire so much, yet am so grateful not to be, as Daniel Berrigan. This man's life has been given to dark witness. Working with his back to the sun, delving in the shadows of earthly power, he has self-abnegatingly pinned tails on the donkeys and elephants of American Empire for half a century. Some find truth via fear of God, some via love for God. Grateful as I am to count myself among the latter, I thank this poet-hero of the former. Father Berrigan's life has been a tireless song of protest against all that Love cannot bear." Eugene H. Peterson • author of *The Message* "Stunning. Irreverent. Incisive. This bold Berrigan midrash on the books of Kings brings the American way into prophetic biblical focus. Won't we ever learn? But with Dan Berrigan among us, we are not without a witness." *Word & World* "A highly readable, winsome, and accessible pastoral offering." *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* "Daniel Berrigan brings his own prophetic life, his gift for poetry, and his knowledge of Scripture to bear on these two ancient history books with an agonizing honesty that calls forth a similar honesty in the reader." *Mennonite Brethren Herald* "Berrigan's skillful use of words and brilliant turns of phrase make this commentary a joy to read. . . . An outstanding work."

Daniel Berrigan (1921-2016) was a renowned peace activist, Jesuit priest, prolific author, and poet-in-residence at Fordham University in New York City. His other books include *Daniel: Under the Siege of the Divine*, *Uncommon Prayer: A Book of Psalms*, and a volume edited by John Dear entitled *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings*, part of the *Modern Spiritual Masters Series*.

This is another entry in Father Daniel Berrigan's series of books analyzing various books of the Bible. Like the others, it takes as its theme the application of these texts to modern life--and in

particular a critique of the contemporary American proclivity toward war and violence. Rather than the simplistic view of the texts presented in popular media (and simpler biblical commentary), Father Berrigan digs deep into the biblical stories and works to unearth the moral, the reason the story was included in the first place, and the application of the history for our own society. To use one example, the story of Solomon's decision between two women who both claimed an infant as theirs is well known--he ruled the baby should be cut in half, and then declared the woman who objected to be the mother. This is usually cited as an example of Solomonic justice--showing how wise King Solomon was. Father Berrigan agrees that this was an example of wisdom, but goes much further. First, the women were not royalty, high court officers, etc. Rather, they were two ordinary citizens. Thus, the story is a moral lesson that real justice is not only for the rich, but must also be available to ordinary citizens. Second, he notes that this is the ONLY time in the history of Solomon presented in the Bible that he is shown dealing with ordinary people, and that this episode occurred early in his rule. As time went on, he lost touch with ordinary people, and turned to making war. Father Berrigan thus uses this as an example of power corrupting even wise men. Father Berrigan's underlying point is that we should not too readily consider the Old Testament days as especially violent, amoral, or cruel. After all, he points out, the U.S. today is making war on a far grander scale, with less moral justification, on the ordinary people of Afghanistan (which we had just invaded as Father Berrigan is writing) and Iraq (which we were threatening at the time), with a degree of slaughter which was unthinkable in biblical times. As another reviewer pointed out, this is not an "easy read." Do not expect facile morals, or grade school level of writing. But for a serious reader, who has an interest in the Bible, or in morality and ethics more generally, I highly recommend this powerful book.

I have to be in a scholarly mood to read this one.

A totally different way of looking at the Books of Kings; some of it was a little over my head, but eventually, it all fell into place and made sense. Excellent example of why the world needed a Savior like Jesus and still does in these turbulent times!

Daniel Berrigan offers an excellent commentary on these two books of Hebrew scripture. His exegesis is flawless as he invokes the biblical prophets, especially Isaiah, against the all-consuming power of the Kings. His powerful closing makes the case for non-violence over our too frequent wars. Highly recommend.

A modern prophet writes with devastating precision on how our rulers malign, deform and attempt to redefine God to fit their own base needs.

Good

This book is not for everyone. I couldn't follow the author's expressions and ideas. His vocabulary was way beyond me.

The Kings and Their Gods is Daniel Berrigan's poetic commentary on the First and Second Book of Kings. Berrigan diagrams each chapter, though not verse by verse. It is more like getting an overview of the stories that you are told during Sunday school, only with a different perspective and an edge that could rub some people the wrong way. Berrigan confronts the characters in Kings that are usually the subject of glory and hero worship. He does not see David as a man after God's own heart. He views David as a warmonger and schemer. Solomon gets the same treatment. His exegesis is completely opposite of mainstream Christianity, which presents these two men as pillars of faith in God. Not Berrigan. He sees a David with bloody hands and vendettas, a Solomon that is a cruel taskmaster, and an Elijah that is arrogant. The surprising part is that it all sounds true. I was constantly grabbing my Bible and flipping through Kings I and II, reading the text in a different light. Berrigan then draws a comparison to our leaders today, who despite our advancement in technology, behave exactly the same as the kings of the Bible, calling upon deities to help them win wars. The only problem with this book is that it is at times too poetic. I often lost track of what Berrigan was trying to get across. There are instances when the author seems to get lost inside his own mind. Add in the fact that I had to have a dictionary handy while reading (which may be a positive, since I expanded my vocabulary immensely), and it can be a tough read. But it is one of the most interesting books I have ever read.

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