

I & II Kings



Bible Study Introduction

Historically, 1 and 2 Kings cover a period of about four hundred years, beginning with the final days of David's reign as king (1 Kings 1:1). Readers will note the splendor of God's temple, an elaborate project centralizing Hebrew worship, which was completed by Solomon, David's son and successor (1 Kings 6–8). From the height of such splendor, majesty, and wisdom, 1 and 2 Kings descends into the pitiful story of how wicked kings committed sinful deeds. These kings set up false idols (1 Kings 12:28) and did "evil above all who were before" them (1 Kings 14:9). The humiliating destruction of God's temple by the Babylonians provides a mournful climax to the story of a favored nation that had lost its spiritual moorings.

While 1 and 2 Kings teach us what can happen to any nation that idolizes itself and turns away from God, keep in mind that the central theme in 1 and 2 Kings is God's rich mercy in Jesus Christ. In spite of His people's disobedience, God remained faithful to the promise He made to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15). He fulfilled this promise in David's greatest descendant, Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1:6–16).

In our Christian Bible, 1 and 2 Kings are included in a section called the Historical Books. There, these two volumes are nestled between 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Other books include the five Books of Moses and also Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Scholars date 1 and 2 Kings to about 560 BC, and although some have suggested that Jeremiah the prophet wrote these two books, most agree that the author is unknown.

Three key phrases are found throughout 1 and 2 Kings. Knowing the meanings of these phrases will help us deepen our understanding of the books. The three phrases are "high places," "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD," and "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD."

- "High places" appears some thirty-six times in 1 and 2 Kings. These were the sacred sites on hills or platforms within cities where the worship of the one true God was blended with the worship of ancient fertility gods and goddesses. Wicked kings tolerated this combined worship; wiser kings did not.
- "Did evil in the sight of the Lord." God's watchful eye does not overlook the prostitution of religion under the guise of tolerance. This phrase appears twenty-four times and always applies to wicked kings.
- "Did what was right in the eyes of the LORD." Scripture notes when a wise king walked in the laws and statutes that God had provided. To this day, God blesses those who "fear, love, and trust" Him and disciplines those who do not.

Lesson I – Chapters 1-4



Solomon, Israel's New King

Israel's new king stood before the people. Innumerable sacrifices of sheep and oxen marked the dedication of Solomon's temple. Priests in ceremonial garb brought the ark of the covenant to its place of honor in the Most Holy Place. When they came out again, the Lord's presence filled the temple with a cloud so thick that the priests could no longer minister inside.

In 587 BC, the Babylonians saw to the destruction of Solomon's magnificent temple. Although it was rebuilt by Herod the Great, Herod's temple was no match for Solomon's. In 19 BC, Herod began a massive renovation and expansion of the temple. This project was completed around AD 63, some fifty-nine years after Herod's death. During Jesus' time on earth, Herod's temple was still undergoing renovation. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19), while standing in this temple. While His listeners thought that He was referring to that temple made by Herod (v. 20), John makes it clear that Jesus was referring to the temple of His body (v. 21). Following His crucifixion, Jesus would raise this temple on the first Easter.

Archeological evidence of Solomon's temple surfaced in 2007. Muslim workers near Jerusalem's Temple Mount found artifacts dating from the eighth to sixth century BC. Fragments unearthed at the site included animal bones, the rim of a storage jar, ceramic bowls, and numerous shards. Some bore designs similar to those of the First Temple period. Finds like these lend further credence to the historicity of biblical accounts.

Adonijah's Revolt

Read 1 Kings 1:1–2:12. The opening verses of 1 Kings quietly usher us back to the final days of King David and recount how God saw to it that Solomon succeeded him as king. You may recall that God called David a man after His own heart. David's desire was to seek God's mercy and forgiveness for his sins. No wonder the writer of 1 and 2 Kings compares all future kings to him.

Now David lies near death. A power struggle develops between David and his son Adonijah. Customarily, the eldest son became king upon his father's death. However, God had other plans. His choice to replace David was Solomon (whose name means "peaceful"). Solomon was David's son by Bathsheba.

1. The stakes are high. We wonder if Adonijah's plot might succeed and God's promise to David be thwarted. What roles do Bathsheba and Nathan play in this high-stakes drama?
2. There is a bit of irony between the self-adulation of Adonijah (1:5–10) and the coronation of Solomon as Israel's true king (vv. 38–48). How did Adonijah's

supporters react when the real coronation occurred within earshot of their celebration (v. 49)?

3. Where does Adonijah flee for mercy, and how does Solomon react (vv. 50–53)?

David's Kingly Advice

Read 1 Kings 2:1–12. On his deathbed, David instructed Solomon on God's expectations for a king. David admonished Solomon to walk in God's ways and to keep His commandments.

4. Think about your own life for a moment. When you walked outside of God's ways, how did God work through friends or family to put you on His path again?
5. Note verse 4. What promise does God attach to His command to remain faithful to His ways?

Solomon's Reign Begins

Read 1 Kings 2:13–46. At David's request, Solomon consolidated his power (vv. 26–46). First, he had to contend with Adonijah again (2:13–25). On the surface, Adonijah's second rebellion seemed innocent enough: asking to marry Abishag the Shunammite, who warmed David in his old age (1:2–4). David did not have sexual relations with her, so why the fuss? The fuss occurred because a new king established his kingdom by taking the former king's harem as his own (2 Samuel 3:7–8; 12:8; 16:21–22).

6. What happened to Adonijah after this coup attempt (vv. 23–25)?

Solomon's Great Wisdom

Read 1 Kings 3:1–4:34. Note the reference to "high places" in verse 3. This passage makes it clear that Solomon worshiped God at places where others worshiped pagan gods. File that note for later consideration.

7. God appeared to Solomon at Gibeon and said, "Ask what I shall give you." Had you been Solomon that day, what would you have requested from God? What did Solomon request?
8. How might the intent of Solomon's request for wisdom (vv. 6–9) illustrate his great love for God at this point in his life?
9. God desires the salvation of all people (1 Timothy 2:3–4). In what way does God use Solomon's wisdom to bring people to Himself (1 Kings 4:34)?

God's Word for Today

Wisdom and wealth. God gave Solomon these two gifts out of His abundant mercy. God desired that Solomon use these gifts to His glory by walking in His ways.

10. What gifts has God given you to use in His kingdom? Share some ways that you are using those gifts.
11. Looking at our lives, we realize how far short we fall of God's expectations. Read Ephesians 1:7–10. What comfort do you find in this verse?

In Closing

- † Consult a Bible atlas for additional information on Jerusalem and Gibeon.
- † Find out more information on Solomon's temple.
- † Read 1 Kings 5:1–9:9 to prepare for the next session.

King David's Wives and Children from 1 & 2 Samuel –

