

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 21: The Books of Kings. Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF THE KINGS

Pre-Introduction:

The title "Kings" predicts the content of I and II Kings because they trace the history of God's covenant people under a human monarchy. To expect their history to be pleasant when they pushed aside a direct relationship with God for a representative relationship through king and prophets is asking the impossible.

These two "King Books" present the splendor of the peak of Hebrew history under Solomon's reign, then follow the slow decline as the glory tarnishes and the monarchy disintegrates.

For one hundred and twenty years the twelve tribes were **united** under the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon (each were on the throne for forty years). With the death of Solomon, the throne of David was threatened. Ten tribes seceded from the throne and set up an independent kingdom in the **North**. This kingdom was called **Israel** and was eventually ruled from Samaria by a number of kings, all of whom were bad (unrighteous).

The tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to Judah and the Davidic throne in Jerusalem, making up the **"Southern kingdom"** known as **Judah**. This nation was ruled by men who were heirs and true successors to the throne of King David and some of those kings were very good. Most however were unrighteous.

In the Biblical account the narrative alternates between the kingdoms of Judah and Israel making it extremely hard to follow. I will provide a chart to help, but since we are doing a survey, we will not be able to solve all the dilemmas that will occur. To make matters worse many of the prophets fall within this same period of history and will be dealt with when we study the Prophetic Books.

Just like the Books of Samuel, I and II Kings were one book in the Hebrew Scriptures, and like Samuel, the first division occurred in the early Greek translation from the Hebrew (the Septuagint). At that time these four books were named *First through Fourth Kingdoms*.

The English titles, as we know them, were taken from the Latin Vulgate using the reference to what they contain, Samuel and Kings.

Author:

The writer(s) of the Books of Kings are anonymous. Jewish tradition assigns their authorship to Jeremiah, but other rabbinical sources attribute the books to various important Old Testament leaders from Jewish history.

Whoever the author was, he used a variety of sources, ranging from official royal and temple documents such as The Book of the Annals of Solomon, I Kings 11; The Book of the Kings of Judah, I Kings 14; to historical accounts and stories of the Prophets.

These two books will introduce us to each king and will add the mention of several prophets as well, especially Elijah and Elisha. The remainder of today's lesson will be taken up with brief

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introduction sketches of the major kings who played substantial roles in this period of Hebrew history.

The dates below are the best estimates of the majority of fine scholars and although not all agree, the differences are not large enough to cause problems in either Biblical or secular history.

THE KING OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Solomon (971 BC. - 931 BC.)

David's son, Solomon, was blessed by God in a number of ways. God personally appeared to him twice, gave him supernatural wisdom, and made him wealthy beyond all imagination. Under his leadership the nation experienced the apex of its peace and prosperity. In fact, some historians consider Israel under Solomon to be one of the richest nations in all of history and Solomon is surely considered one of the richest, perhaps the richest man ever.

Solomon's greatest accomplishment was the building of the Temple in Jerusalem one of the all-time wonders of the world. His fame spread throughout the known world and he is recorded in secular as well as Biblical history.

Solomon made several major mistakes including collecting horses and over taxing his people, but his worst sin was in disobeying God and marrying many women (700 wives, 300 concubines) from surrounding nations. My students always ask, "Why did he marry all those women?" The answer is quite simple. One of the ways for a king to enlarge his kingdom was to marry into the royal families of their neighboring countries (political marriages).

These alliances were disastrous because Solomon allowed the women to bring their idols and religious systems with them and practice them in Israel. In fact, in his old age, Solomon forsook the Lord to serve his wives' idols. Because of this sin of allowing idolatry to be reintroduced into Israel the kingdom was torn apart.

THE KINGS OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

1. **Jeroboam (931 BC. - 910 BC.)** The first king of Israel was Jeroboam, "the son of Nebat who made Israel sin." He helped to lead a rebellion that split the kingdom. His first act when he was proclaimed king was to sever religious ties with Jerusalem. He knew that any contact with the temple, especially the yearly pilgrimages, would weaken his hold politically. He therefore set up a golden calf (sound familiar?) in **Bethel** and another in **Dan** so his people could worship in the north. He even ordained his own priests and devised a separate religious calendar to further divorce his nation from Judah. He actually presented this as worship to the Lord.

2. **Ahab (874 BC. - 853 BC.)** Jeroboam was a wicked king, but Ahab was even worse. Ahab was so bad that the Bible calls him the "most wicked king" ever in Israel. With his wife Jezebel he established the worship of Baal, the most perverse idol, and persecuted true followers of the Lord. The story of their confrontation with Elijah is a classic.

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3. Jehu (841 BC. - 814 BC.) Omri created a dynasty that culminated in the reign of terror under Ahab. Jehu, pretending to be a zealous follower of God, ruthlessly exterminated all of Ahab's family and put a temporary end to Baal worship. In reality he was not a righteous man and reverted to the sins of Jeroboam.

4. Jeroboam II (793 BC. - 753 BC.) The only remaining king of importance in Israel was Jeroboam who became a hero when he defeated Syrian oppressors from the north and restored Israel to political power. He was, however, an unjust and immoral leader and his heritage was the decline of the nation.

Following Jeroboam II's death the powerful Assyrians from the east marched west into Israel and engulfed them, carrying the northern ten tribes into captivity.

THE KINGS OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

1. Rehoboam (931 BC. - 913 BC.) Solomon's son, Rehoboam and his son, Abijah were weak and evil kings who perfectly paralleled the reign of Jeroboam in the North, the exception being that the main center of worship was at the Temple in Jerusalem.

2. Asa (911 BC. - 870 BC.) Even though Asa's mother was evil and usurped the power of the throne, Asa deposed her and became a fine and righteous king, the first of eight good kings Judah would experience.

3. Jehoshaphat (873 BC. - 848 BC.) Jehoshaphat followed in the steps of Asa as a good king, but he made one serious mistake. He allowed himself to be drawn into an alliance with Ahab including having his son marry Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah. Not surprisingly she was wicked (like mother, like daughter), introduced idolatry to Judah and almost succeeded in wiping out the line of David. She succeeded in usurping the throne (strong women ran in the family).

4. Jehoash (835 BC. - 796 BC.) God thwarted Athaliah's plot by having one surviving heir, a small boy, rescued and secretly raised by Jehoiada the priest in the Temple. She was overthrown and the boy king (7 years old), Jehoash, was crowned with the priest as his advisor. While Jehoiada lived all went well but when he died Jehoash turned to evil and was eventually assassinated.

5. Uzziah (790 BC.-739 BC.) Uzziah (AKA Azariah) reigned righteously for over fifty years and was very powerful. Unfortunately, at the peak of his rule he allowed his pride to lead him into trying to combine his office of king with that of priest (This was one of Saul's sins). He paid the price as God smote him with leprosy.

6. Ahaz (735 BC.-715 BC.) At the same time Assyria was moving west, engulfing Israel and expanding their kingdom. Ahaz was terrified and made sweeping concessions to them. This plunged Judah into a deep apostasy and they began to fall into a similar fate as that of the tribes to the north.

7. Hezekiah (715 BC.- 686 BC.) In the midst of the final fall of Judah, God gave the nation one of their greatest kings. Under his rule and the guidance of the Prophet Isaiah they resisted Assyria as God gave them a miraculous victory. Hezekiah instituted great religious reforms, giving Judah a strong chance of standing, but the people and his son Manasseh reversed them all.

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8. Manasseh (695 BC.- 642 BC.) Manasseh ruled Judah for over fifty years and was one of their worst kings. He led his people into vile and perverse idolatry and was finally captured by the Assyrians. He repented, was forgiven and restored to his throne by God, but he certainly had greased the rails for Judah to skid into oblivion. His grandson Josiah led the last religious revival in Judah, but it was too little, too late. The people and his associates did not respond and after his death, four wicked kings slowly allowed Judah to come under the power of Babylon. Judah's history ends with the Babylonian Captivity.

Bible Survey Lesson 22: The Book of I Kings, Part II

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF I KINGS

I Kings began as David died and Solomon became King. As Solomon's rule came to an end the nation was split: Ten tribes set up the Kingdom of Israel in the north with a capital in Bethany and temples in Bethany and Dan. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin stayed loyal to the Throne of David becoming Judah with its capital in the City of David, Jerusalem.

Introduction:

God established Solomon as David's successor over the nation of Israel, but Solomon sinned and God "*humbled David's descendants*" (11:39) by allowing another schism.

I Kings includes the reign of Solomon and the first kings of the divided kingdoms while weaving some of the prophets into the story as they become important to the historical narrative.

The moral teachings of this book show us that man is incapable of ruling himself regardless of wisdom, wealth, or wonderful circumstances. Israel really should have kept God on the throne of their nation just as we need to keep Him on the throne of our lives.

I. DEATH BRINGS RICHES AND RUIN (Chapters 1-11)

A. Solomon Fights For the Throne (Chapters 1-2)

1. Solomon's Succession to the Throne (1)

This section completes the story of David begun in I Samuel and continued through II Samuel. David was now near death and the question of succession to the throne became a real and vital one.

As David struggled to live, a power struggle began between: **Adonijah**, David's oldest living son and heir apparent and his backers, General, Joab and the Chief Priest, Abiathar **VS**

Solomon with his supporters Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, Benieal, the captain of David's body guards, and Bathsheba, his mother.

Nathan encouraged David to fulfill his prior commitment to make Solomon king (vv. 11-27). David ordered the anointing of Solomon and when Adonijah heard the shout, "Long live King Solomon," he ran to the Tabernacle and grabbed the horns of the alter, claiming sanctuary. Solomon spared his life but put him under house arrest (vv. 28-53).

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2. Solomon's Kingdom Established (2)

Based on a death-bed warning from David, that only obedience would guarantee his kingdom and that he needed to deal swiftly with ally and foe alike, Solomon did the following:

--Executed Adonijah for asking to marry one of his harem. (Solomon thought he was again trying to usurp the throne.)

-- Replaced Abiathar with Zadok as the High Priest because he sided with Adonijah. Since Abiathar was a descendent of Eli, this continued the judgment on Eli's house promised in I Sam. 2.

--Had Benaiah execute Joab for murdering Abner and Amasa and replaced him as General of Solomon's armies.

The struggle to consolidate the kingdom was concluded with the statement in verse 46, "*The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon's hands.*"

B. Solomon Sits On the Throne (Chapters 3-11)

Next, the book deals with Solomon's reign. Using the supernatural gift of wisdom he received from God he was able to assemble an impressive administration, undertake ambitious building projects, become an important international figure, and lead Israel to its highest point in history.

1. The Wisdom of Solomon (3)

Solomon loved God in much the same way his father did, but he made an early mistake. He married the Pharaoh's daughter (v 1), which was great politically but dangerous spiritually. Because of her he started sacrificing at local shrines rather than only worshipping the Lord and this led him into idolatry (vv. 2 and 3).

God asked Solomon what he most wanted and Solomon chose wisdom so that he might rule his people wisely. God was pleased and granted that request and threw in temporal blessings which made Solomon rich beyond imagination (vv. 4-15).

This wisdom is made evident in his: 1. Settling the dispute between the two prostitutes over a child; 2. His organization and administration of the new kingdom; 3. His learning exceeded that of the famous sages in Egypt in all areas of the arts, education, and the earth sciences.

2. The Temple of Solomon (5-8)

This achievement would be a crowning glory to God and a credit to Solomon, however he made two grave mistakes. (Remember when Samuel told the Israelites the kind of things all kings do). He conscripted the able bodied young men as laborers, and he heavily taxed the people, causing the people, especially the northern tribes, to resent him.

Solomon allied himself with Hiram, King of Tyre in Phoenicia, to receive building materials (5). Hiram respected Solomon's God as being the true God because he saw how the Lord blessed him.

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The construction of the Temple was a magnificent project taking over seven years and the help of local and foreign craftsmen. For a brief view, read chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 7 primarily describes the finishing of the temple and Solomon's palace. The palace took twice as long to build as the temple and was also magnificent. They became all-time wonders of the world.

Finally, in chapter 8 we have the dedication of the Temple. After the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Holy of Holies, the whole house was filled with a cloud indicating, visually, the presence of the Lord as it did in the wilderness.

Solomon, in his prayer of dedication, made it clear that God could not be restricted to any building since He is the "God of Heaven" and is everywhere.

Solomon called on God to be faithful to His covenant, and called on his people to be faithful and obedient to the Lord. The dedication ceremony ended with a fourteen-day feast of worship and celebration.

3. The Reign of Solomon (9-10)

In response to Solomon's prayer, God appeared to him a second time (9:1-9). He charged Solomon to be obedient and warned that failure to do so would bring an end to his kingdom, exile for his people, and God's rejection of the Temple.

Everything Solomon did turned to gold (God's blessing). He received tons of gold from Hiram in exchange for twenty cities (9: 10-14). His building projects spread from the palace and Temple to fortifying Jerusalem and other royal cities (9:15-24).

Solomon became a world figure. Chapter 10 is the record of his international fame and prowess and includes:

--The Queen of Sheba, who controlled South Arabia and the sea lanes between India and the East, was impressed by Solomon's wisdom, wealth, and fame. She not only honored Solomon but praised his God for blessing him.

--Solomon cornered the gold market (The Temple and its furnishings were plated with it) and he developed a world wide shipping enterprises.

--His army became the mightiest in the world and he controlled trade in horses from Cilicia and chariots from Egypt. He became an international arms dealer and import/export mogul.

It is great to notice that the credit for all this is attributed to God and the wisdom He gave to Solomon.

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4. The Ruin of Solomon (11)

In Deut. 6 and 8 there are strong warnings about forgetting God when prosperous. All the troubles Solomon experienced can be traced to the misuse of his blessings.

His success in land expansion and world trade came at the expense of marrying many foreign women for political reasons. (the land expanded from six thousand to six hundred thousand square miles.) He loved God but as I Kings 11:1 says,

"King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women . . . from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, 'You mustn't intermarry with them because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods!' never-the-less, Solomon held fast to them in love."

The hills of Jerusalem were filled with "high places" built for the worship of foreign idols." Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord and did not obey as David his father had done." (v. 6)

David sinned against the Lord, but never brought idolatry into his home or presented it to the nation. This royal and national sin brought about the division of Israel into two kingdoms and eventually brought those two kingdoms into captivity.

Solomon had everything and above that he had supernatural wisdom (the ability to use all his superior knowledge)- but even wisdom if not subject to the Lord can not save one from his own flesh and foolishness.

By the time Solomon died and Rehoboam succeeded him to the Throne of David, Abijah, a prophet of God, had incited Jeroboam to lead the ten northern tribes in another secession. God's judgment had begun!

II. DIVISION BRINGS APOSTASY (Chapters 12-16)

The remainder of I Kings describes the antagonism between the newly split kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Jeroboam's revolt and the separation of the ten northern tribes fulfilled God's judgment on Solomon.

Israel suffered for two hundred years, through nine evil monarchies, bloodshed, war and political coups.

Judah enjoyed more stability because God preserved the "Throne of David." Not all their kings were righteous, and they were plagued by a war and unrest, but several kings were righteous, especially Asa and his son, who had a long and prosperous careers.

A. The Northern Kingdom (Chapters 12-16)

Chapter 12 presents the water shed event in the history of the Hebrew nation. The kingdom reaches its apex and starts to decline.

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, declined very wise counsel and refused to change his father's policies of forced labor and heavy taxation. This split the kingdom, which was ironic since his name means "one who enlarges his people."

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Jeroboam led the ten tribes to secede and when Rehoboam attempted to stop them, a prophetic word from God stopped him.

I. Jeroboam Builds A Kingdom (12)

King Jeroboam built his military headquarters in Shechem located in the center of his new kingdom, Israel. He knew, though, that his political success depended on breaking religious ties with the Temple in Jerusalem, while keeping a semblance or illusion of the "worship of the Lord."

He set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan and encouraged the building of "high places" throughout the land with non-Levitical priests. He also moved the primary feast day from the seventh month (Feast of Tabernacles) to the eighth month.

He instituted this worship by saying, *"Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt."* He seemed to think these calves were just a visual representation to aid worship (as did Aaron), but the writer treats them as they are . . . pagan idols like the sacred calves of the Egyptians and the Canaanites.

2. Jeroboam Gets the Message (13-14)

God used an unnamed prophet to deliver a message of judgment to the shrine at Bethel. He predicted that Josiah (a king of Judah) would destroy the site. This prophecy came true when that righteous king instituted religious reform in Judah (621 BC.).

Chapter 13 relates the story of Jeroboam's wife consulting a prophet to find out her husband's fate, which is recorded in Chapter 14.

B. The Southern Kingdom (Chapters 14-15)

1. Rehoboam Follows Suit (14)

Rehoboam squanders his Davidic heritage through spiritual apostasy as well. He was as wicked as Jeroboam, instituting his own "high places" and bringing male prostitution and idol worship into Judah.

Judah was preserved only because of God's promise to David, but Rehoboam's (Judah's) punishment was inflicted at the hand of Shishak, an Egyptian ruler. An account of these events is inscribed on the wall of the temple recently excavated in Karnak. Rehoboam survived by paying him off with Solomon's earlier accumulated gold.

2. Asa, The Righteous King (15)

Asa and his son Jehoshaphat are the only righteous kings mentioned in I Kings and he *"did right in the sight of the Lord."* *Their sixty six years reign included many religious reforms, but they did not remove the "high places"* (w. 9-15). Their reign is presented in detail in the Book of Chronicles.

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III. DECLINE BRINGS PROPHETS (Chapters 17-22)

Ahab and Jezebel ruled for twenty-two years. Together they tried to make Israel a pagan nation devoted to Baal and Asheroth, erecting the idol, Baal in Samaria, and building an Asheroth in Bethel and Dan.

Even though Ahab was politically successful he was, in God's eyes, "The most evil king in Hebrew history." Ahab's wickedness brought him into direct confrontation with God through the Prophet Elijah.

A. Elijah--Prophet of Power (Chapters 17-22)

The insertion of the story of Elijah breaks into the narrative of the kings and shows us that, after David, Saul, and Solomon, the real movers and shakers in Israel's history were not the kings, but the prophets.

Elijah was brought in by God to deal with Israel's greatest religious crisis, the reign of Ahab and Jezebel.

1. Ahab Defies God (17-19)

An early indication of Ahab's character and his relationship to his wife, Jezebel, is presented in the story of Naboth's vineyard introduced here but given in detail later.

However, what brought the Prophet Elijah into the picture was Ahab's embracing of the religion of Baal (the God of rain or storm) and its perverted forms of worship. Elijah first came to deliver God's message of judgment that a drought would come to the land and last until Elijah returned sometime in the future.

The drought lasted three years, the nation was starving and Elijah was nowhere to be found. After years of suffering Ahab found Elijah and blamed him for the drought. Elijah replied that Ahab and the worship of Baal was the problem and proposed a contest to settle on the identity of the "Real Lord." The contest would pit Baal, Asheroth, Ahab and Jezebel against The Lord God and Elijah. Since Baal was the "god of rain and storm", including lightning, he should have the advantage.

It's a great story in chapter 18, with the false prophets praying, shouting and trying to get their dead idol's attention while Elijah sat on the sidelines and goaded them on. Of course, when Elijah got his turn, all he did was speak to God and the sacrifice was consumed, altar and all. This episode ends with Elijah and the people executing the false prophets and then, just to rub it in, God sent a great rainstorm.

Even after this great exhibition of God's power, Jezebel was not impressed and put a price on Elijah's head, sending him into hiding in the mountains, Mt. Sinai (Horeb) in fact. God took care of his needs: gave him rest, food and a visual display of His power that renewed his faith. After all, if Jezebel chose to go head to head with God, who wins?

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Elijah, who thought he was all alone, found that there were 7,000 who had not bowed down to Baal. God sent him to anoint three of those, Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha, who eventually brought the downfall of Ahab's house. The calling of Elisha was the beginning of a large school of prophets who would greatly affect the rest of Israel's history.

2. Ahab Refuses God (20-21)

Chapter 20 seems to relate a continued attempt of God to convince Ahab that He is the one true Lord. We've already seen his display of power against Baal, now God allows Ahab several miraculous victories in battles against the Arameans, but he still did not respond and repent.

The end of Ahab's power and the death of his wife Jezebel and son Joram came as a direct result of God's anger kindled by a seemingly small event involving a small vineyard owner, Naboth.

Chapter 21 tells how Ahab saw Naboth's fine little vineyard which bordered on his own estate and wanted it. Naboth refused to give it to him. Actually, the Law would not allow him to give it away outside his family (Lev. 25, Num. 27 and 36).

When Ahab couldn't have what he wanted, he threw a tantrum. His wife, who really seemed to rule the land anyway, forged a letter using Ahab's official seal which accused Naboth of treason and blasphemy. He was executed for those crimes, of which he was innocent, and Jezebel grabbed the land for Ahab.

God, ever the advocate for the underdog, was really upset. He sent Elijah, Ahab's favorite prophet, to predict that Ahab, Jezebel and their son would be devoured by dogs on the spot of that very same vineyard. And they were, Jezebel and Joram immediately and Ahab later.

B. Micaiah--Prophet of Death (Chapter 22)

1. Ahab Meets the Assyrians and Arameans

A monument erected by the Assyrian King, Shalmaneser III, describes the battles against the Jewish King, Ahab in 853 B.C. The results were bloody but ended in an eventual stalemate. When Assyria retreated, the Arameans struck from the east, hoping to defeat the weakened army of Israel.

Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, joined Ahab to defend the Promised Land. Ahab's alleged prophets predicted a rousing victory, but Jehoshaphat, who was a righteous man, insisted they call on a "True Prophet of the Lord" for a second opinion.

2. Micaiah Meets Ahab

Micaiah had to be released from one of Ahab's prisons to meet with the two kings. He predicted that, not only would Israel's army lose, but Ahab would be killed. Of course, Ahab and his "false prophets" ridiculed him. Micaiah tried to convince Ahab that God had sent lying spirits to his "prophets" to mislead him, but he went to battle against this good advice.

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Ahab, knowing that armies tried to pick off the king first to demoralize their troops, went into battle in disguise. God found him anyway and an enemy arrow struck him. His bloody body attracted dogs and he was devoured, as prophesied.

The Book of I Kings ends with Judah under the rule of righteous Jehoshaphat who continued major religious reforms and purification started by his father, Asa.

Meanwhile the unrighteous Ahaziah also followed in his father's footsteps and continued leading Israel in the worship of Baal.

Lessons from I Kings:

1. I Kings warns against forgetting God when we are prosperous. In fact, Scripture teaches that we need to be more careful of our walk in good times than in bad.

2. Seeking wisdom is no guarantee that we will act wisely. Walking wisely comes from an active relationship with God, not from knowing how to apply facts to our lives.

3. People who operate in obedience to God make the best leaders. We need to seek to be obedient, righteous people for the benefit of those we lead. We also need to seek out righteous obedient people to follow.

4. God is sovereign and a God of grace and mercy. God will fulfill his ultimate purpose despite or without us, but He wants to shed his grace and mercy upon us for our maturity.

See Background Information - Three Empires: Lesson 23