



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

1 & 2 Kings

1 Kings 1-11

Kings, Kings and more Kings

The Book of Kings reached its final form sometime after the exile into Babylon. The Israelite in bondage under the Babylonians would certainly struggle over their suffering outside of the land, even puzzling over the "why?" questions. Why did God allow Israel to fall to their enemies? Where is YHWH? Why is the temple destroyed?

As Samuel had prophetically warned the people back in 1 Samuel 8, kings would prove to be curse rather than a blessing to the people of God. And yet, the glories and the failures of Israel's kings, point to the need for the King of Kings, Jesus.

Structure of 1 & 2 Kings

A United Kingdom: Solomon	1 Kings 1 - 11
A Divided Kingdom	1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 9
The Fall of the Northern Kingdom: Israel	2 Kings 10 - 17
The Fall of the Southern Kingdom: Judea	2 Kings 18 - 25

1 & 2 Kings serves to explain how a united Israel under King David and Solomon could become internally divided by her own people and utterly decimated by her external foes. As YHWH had warned through the prophets, his blessing was contingent on covenant faithfulness on the part of the King and people of Israel.

A United Kingdom: Solomon 1 Kings 1:1-11

The seeds of Israel's downfall as a nation state under Yahweh begin in the days of glory. The High point of Israel's power and fame on the earth was under Kings David and Solomon.

However, the sins of these very leaders will lead to deep internal divisions. Solomon's apostasy from true worship of Yahweh will lead to severe judgment upon his kingdom.



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A United Kingdom Under Solomon 1-11

The Crisis of Succession 1

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Solomon's Wisdom, Power and Wealth 3 - 4

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The Crisis of Succession (1)

1 Kings 1 tells the story of the transition of power from King David to his son Solomon. David is on his death bed being attended by Abishag the beautiful Shunammite woman. In the meantime, his eldest son Adonijah presumes to ascend to his father's throne saying "I will be King." This creates a crisis of succession.

For it was neither the will of the LORD nor the will of his father David that Adonijah be made king. All of David's loyal men, prophet, priests and mighty men stood firmly with the anointing of Solomon to be king and insured that Solomon would reign in David's place.

And the king said to them... "I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah."... Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise. 1 Kings 1:35, 39-40

The crisis of succession was averted. But, the internal issues created by the crisis must be firmly resolved in order for Solomon's rule to be firmly established.



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The Kingdom of Solomon is Established (2)

The issues of succession related to deeper problems created under David's rule. Understanding the challenge of kingly rule under Yahweh and the political undercurrents of his regime, David gives sage advice to Solomon in order to firmly establish his son's rule.

The first charge from David to Solomon is to be attentive to his vertical relationship with Yahweh. For all of David's sins and failures, here is where he is a model to his son.

² "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, ³ and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, ⁴ that the LORD may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' --1 Kings 2:2-4

Solomon rule would first be established by his faithfulness to the Law of Moses. The covenant that Yahweh made with David in 2 Samuel 7 finds its fulfillment in faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant.

The second charge that David gives to his son is to firmly resolve the internal insurrection within the ranks of the leaders. If David was a model for his son in the first, here he is encouraging his son to learn from his failures. David was weak as a leader in resolving internal rebellion. He encouraged his son to be "wise" in dealing with Joab and Shimei--two rebellious leaders that could divide the house of Israel under Solomon.

Solomon would prove to be shrewd on the second point (2:13-46), he used the occasion of Adonijah's grasp for power to deal with all three of his internal enemies putting them to death. However, Solomon would fail to live up to his father counsel in the first charge. (11:1-43)



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Solomon's Wisdom (3)

With the resolution of the internal divisions and rebellions, the Kingdom of Solomon was firmly established in his hand. The beginning of his rule Solomon walked in his father's council, by "loving the LORD." (3:3)

The First Appearance of YHWH

Yahweh will appear to Solomon twice during his reign. In the first appearance, Yahweh offers to his new king: "Ask what shall I give you." Solomon manifest a quality of humility in asking for "wisdom" rather than some other vain glorious request such as riches, power over enemies or a long life. This pleased the Lord (3:10) and he granted Solomon's request and more.

As an example of Solomon's wisdom, the reader is told a story of two prostitutes who come to the king with a seemingly impenetrable dilemma. Both women were claiming a child as their own and looking to Solomon to arbitrate. His seemingly ruthless suggestion to split the baby in two with a sword serves to reveal the true mother, as she renounces the child to save its life. Solomon then gives her the child and all marvel at his wisdom.

Solomon's Power and Wealth (4)

Chapter 4 serves to reveal the strength and blessing of Yahweh on Solomon's kingdom. Twelve officers rotated in provisioning the King's house.

Israel is said to be as "many as the sand by the sea". Indeed, everything that Yahweh had promised Abraham were now reaching fulfillment in Solomon's kingdom--blessing, greatness, international influence, and land. (cf. Gen 12)

And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

--1 Kings 4:34

And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

--1 Kings 3:28



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The House of the Lord (5-8)

When David purposed to build a temple for the Lord, he was told by Yahweh through Nathan the prophet that it would be his son who would build the house. Yahweh made a covenant with David saying:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.^[a] Your throne shall be established forever.” --2 Samuel 7:12-16

Now the word of the LORD came to Solomon, “Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel.”
--1Kings 6:11-13

The building project was elaborate and would require resources and expertise from a far to complete. Solomon called upon his father's favorite Gentile craftsman, Hiram king of Tyre to become his primary source of the cedar and other specialized workmanship which would form much of the temple and its furniture. He also developed an extensive workforce of laborers from within Israel.

The construction project took 7 years to complete. (6:38) The descriptions of the temple are elaborate and designed to show forth the glory of God.

However, in the middle of the descriptions of the temple construction (7:1-12), we read of the construction of Solomon's own glorious home, throne and a house for his Egyptian wife. Here we begin to see that the blessing of God can be taken for granted and give way to hubris.



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Once the Temple was completed, the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the Holy of Holies. Yahweh remained faithful to his word and filled the house with his Glory:

And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. --1 Kings 8:10-11

Solomon blessed the Lord and the people. (8:15-21) He then offered a seven fold prayer of dedication to the Lord. The emphasis in his prayer is that the Temple would be a place for individuals and the nations of the world to "come" and commune with the one true God of heaven. Solomon petitioned that whoever would come to the temple of the Lord with a spirit of repentance and petition that the LORD would "hear" and "forgive".

There has never been a more elaborate dedication and celebration to Yahweh as Solomon's feast. 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were offered before the Lord. It was a joyous and blessed occasion for all!

On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people. --1 Kings 8:66

Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant and to the plea of your people Israel, giving ear to them whenever they call to you. --1 Kings 8:52

The Downfall of Solomon (9-11)

The Lord appeared to Solomon a second time. He reminds Solomon that he has fulfilled everything that Solomon has asked of the Lord. Now the Lord renews and confirms the covenant by charging Solomon to remain faithful to the stipulations. If Solomon walks in YHWH's ways, "then I will establish your royal throne forever" (9:5)

However, if the king turns from the command of the Lord and worships and serves other gods, then "I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them, and the house I have consecrated for my



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"Only he [the King] must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold."

-Deut. 17:16-17

name I will cast out of my sight...this house will become a heap of ruins." (9:6-9) This warning will prove to be all to prescient. Solomon's own words from his dedication prayer will also condemn him: "for there is no one who does not sin" (8:46)--including him.

One of the main sections from the Law of Moses which applies to the King is Deuteronomy 17:16-17.

Solomon will depart from every one of these specific commands from the Law of Moses. He begins to hoard gold (10:14ff), he trades horses with Egypt (10:26ff) and he takes foreign wives (11:1 ff).

This last would prove to be his downfall in his relationship with the LORD. The foreign wives would lead him to build idolatrous temples and his heart would turn to their false gods: "his wives turned his heart after other gods..." (11:4)

The consequences of Solomon's sins will play out in the rest of the book of Kings. The Lord in his anger (11:9) would remove his hand of protection from Solomon's kingdom by raising up adversaries from the North and the South and even within his own nation. The prophet Ahijah prophesied to one of Solomon's adversaries, Jeroboam:

*And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes³² (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel),³³ because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did.
--1 Kings 11:31-33*