

FIRST KINGS SECOND KINGS



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Stone ramp leading to an altar on Mount Ebal at Shechem

The books of First and Second Kings tell the history of the chosen people from the time of Solomon until after the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of Judah, and the beginning of the Exile. The books cover a period of over five centuries.

The first section of the books of Kings is 1 Kings 1 through 11. These chapters cover the reign of Solomon, which lasted forty years.

FIRST KINGS 1-2

First Kings opens with the aged David on his deathbed. Adonijah, David's oldest son, assumes he will become king. But Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, has

other ideas. First Kings 1:7-8 tells us who supports whom. Read 1 Kings 1:7-8.

The army commander and the priest of the old tribal religion support Adonijah. Zadok the priest from Jerusalem, Nathan the prophet, and David's men support Solomon.

Bathsheba connives with Nathan, the court prophet, to convince David of his earlier promise to Bathsheba that Solomon would be his successor. David accepts the arguments of Bathsheba and gives orders for the coronation of Solomon.

In Chapter 2 Solomon kills his major opponents. This chapter closes with words as final as the sound of the executioner's

ax: “So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.”

First Kings 1–2 describe the power play for the throne of David before he died. Skim these chapters, and find the answers to the following questions.

a. What phrase in 1:4 indicates that David was becoming senile?

b. Why did Adonijah think that he had a right to become king? (1:6)

c. What did Bathsheba mean by her statement in 1:21?

d. Name the three major supporters of Solomon to succeed David as king. (1:32)

FIRST KINGS 3-7

First Kings 3 through 11 describes the reign of Solomon. The Bible’s presentation of Solomon emphasizes a number of aspects about his rule.

First Kings 3 and 4 focus on Solomon’s wisdom and administrative expertise. God grants Solomon wisdom in response to Solomon’s request. The story about Solomon’s advice to divide a child between two women who both claim to be its mother illustrates his wisdom.

In Chapter 4 we read about Solomon’s administration and the extravagance of his court. This chapter includes a list of his cabinet members in verses 1 through 6, a

list of the provinces in his reorganization of the state in verses 7 through 19, and a list of the needs for his court for a single day in verses 22 through 28. Solomon and his staff consume 10 oxen, 20 cattle, and 100 sheep every day! The end of Chapter 4 lists Solomon’s accomplishments in the area of wisdom. Read 1 Kings 4:24-34.

Chapters 5 through 9 focus on Solomon as the city and temple builder. With the support of Hiram, king of Tyre, Solomon builds a palace and administrative buildings in Jerusalem. The most famous of Solomon’s construction projects is the Jerusalem Temple. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the building of the Temple and its furnishings. The project takes seven years.

1. Read 1 Kings 3:4-13 for the answers to the following questions.

a. For what did Solomon ask in his dream?

b. What is the evidence that Solomon’s request pleased God?

2. Solomon’s Temple was a thing of beauty, but what did it symbolize? (Read 1 Kings 6:13; 8:29.)

FIRST KINGS 8-11

Chapter 8 describes the great celebration Solomon holds to dedicate the Temple. Solomon does not limit his construction projects to the palace and Temple complex. First Kings 9 reports on his construction of the walls of Jerusalem, his rebuilding of numerous cities throughout the land, and the projects he carries out to provide for his new chariot forces. At the close of Chapter

9 Solomon builds a merchant fleet on the Red Sea for trade with foreign countries.

First Kings 10 focuses on Solomon as the great international trader and merchant. Chapter 10 notes the results of that trade. The queen of Sheba visits Solomon, gold and silver flow into Jerusalem, Solomon develops a great military machine and supplies the surrounding nations with horses and chariots.

Not all of Solomon's reign is successful. First Kings 11 tells us something of his problems and troubles. Many of the women in Solomon's life are foreigners and worshipers of pagan gods. They bring foreign worship into Jerusalem.

Solomon's last days were troubled by problems. Skim 1 Kings 11:14-33 for the answers to the following questions.

- a. Who was the first adversary that God raised up against Solomon? (11:14)

- b. Who was the second adversary that God raised up against him? (11:23)

- c. Who was the third adversary that God raised up against the king? (11:26)

FIRST KINGS 12-22

Solomon's empire begins to disintegrate. The Edomites and Arameans revolt. Jeroboam, the head of Solomon's forced labor, leads a rebellion against Solomon. Finally, a prophet named Ahijah rises up to oppose Solomon. Ahijah predicts that Solomon's kingdom will crumble and that ten of the Israelite tribes will withdraw from the Israelite union.

Following Solomon's death the kingdom that Saul founded, that David established,

and that Solomon ruled separates into independent states. The two kingdoms are Judah in the south and Israel in the north. First Kings 12 tells the story of the division of the United Kingdom. The rest of First Kings and 2 Kings 1-17 narrate the history of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

According to 1 Kings 12 the ten northern tribes secede when Solomon's son, Rehoboam, refuses to lighten the heavy tax burden or to change the labor policies of Solomon. Jeroboam, who led the earlier revolt against Solomon, becomes the first king in the north.

The writer of the history of the Divided Kingdom does not give a full account of events that take place under the various kings. The writer gives a summary of the reigns, and then he often refers to other sources of information. The writer mentions one such source in 1 Kings 14:19 where he states, "Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred and how he reigned, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel." Unfortunately, the royal chronicles that writer mentions no longer exist.

The writer of First and Second Kings follows a pattern in telling us about the reigns of the various kings. He completes one king's rule, and then he traces the reign of the king or kings who ruled in the other kingdom at the same time. The writer tells us when each king begins his reign and a few facts about each reign. The writer then refers to further material on each king and makes a statement about the king's death and successor.

For the Judean, or southern kings, the writer also tells us the names of their mothers since the queen mother seems to function as first lady. And he also compares each Judean king's rule with that of David.

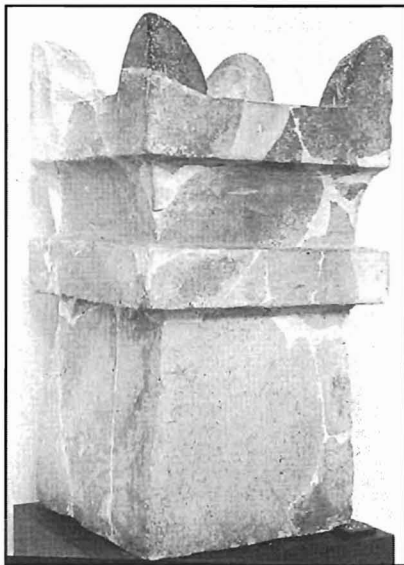
The writer condemns the Israelite, or northern kings, for separating from Judah and for continuing to worship at shrines built by Jeroboam. He never compliments any of the northern kings. This attitude probably comes from the fact that the information was edited from a southern perspective.

In some places the writer expands the accounts of various kings. This expansion usually occurs when the events concern prophets, Temple activities, or major wars.

First Kings 17 through 2 Kings 9 contains narratives about the prophets Elijah and Elisha. They are independent prophets who have bands of followers, and who try to preserve true religion and ethics threatened with extinction. These stories about Elijah and Elisha demonstrate the need for such prophets if the true worship of Yahweh is to survive in the north.

This need for survival is especially important during the reign of King Ahab and his Phoenician wife, Jezebel. During their reign, Elijah carries out a contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. In Chapter 18, we read the story of this contest.

In Chapter 21 King Ahab seizes the vineyard of Naboth in order to turn it into a royal vegetable garden. Elijah opposes this illegal act.



Horned incense altar

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1. The sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, are remembered again and again in the Bible. Read 1 Kings 12:25-33; then list his sins below.

a. (12:28-30)

b. (12:31)

c. (12:31)

d. (12:32-33)

e. (12:32-33)

2. The confrontation between Elijah, the prophet of the Lord, and the prophets of Baal is recorded in 1 Kings 18. Read verses 20-24 to find the answers to the questions below.

a. What was the test on Mount Carmel supposed to prove?

b. What evidence indicates that the worship of Baal was more popular than the worship of the Lord?

c. How were the people watching to know whether Baal or the Lord was God?

SECOND KINGS

The writer of the books of Kings wants to show that events took place in Israel and Judah according to the predictions of the prophets. Second Kings 9, in the account of the death of Queen Jezebel, gives an example of this attitude. Read 2 Kings 9:36-37.

Second Kings 17 reports the final days of the Northern Kingdom. To understand how the states of Israel and Judah fall, we need to know a little about their geographic location.

In ancient times, the land of Canaan formed a bridge joining the continents of Africa and Asia. In Africa, to the south of Canaan, was the rich and populous state of Egypt. To the north were the powerful countries of Assyria and Babylonia. When those countries were weak, Israel and Judah became fairly strong. But when Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia were strong, each could dominate the surrounding regions including Canaan. When both Egypt and Assyria or Babylonia were strong, Israel and Judah served as buffer states and a battleground between the two.

In the eighth century B.C., Assyria expanded its territory in every direction. This expansion finally brought Assyria into contact with Israel. In Israel the shadow of the Assyrians caused panic. Many Israelite kings were killed in revolts and rebellions. Israel tried to make peace with Assyria, but later tried to fight Assyria with Egypt's help. Eventually, in 722 B.C. the capital city of Samaria fell and many members of the ten northern tribes were taken into exile. Many of these exiles were never heard of again, thus forming the basis for the legend of the ten lost tribes of Israel.

Second Kings 18 through 25 tells the story of the surviving state of Judah until Babylonia destroys it in 586 B.C. The writer praises and discusses in detail two Judean kings. These kings are Hezekiah, whose career the writer notes in Chapters 18 through 20, and Josiah, whose reign the writer discusses in Chapters 22 through 24. Both kings try to reform Judean religion and limit worship to the one Temple in Jerusalem. Josiah carries out this reform on the basis of a law book found in the Temple. This book was probably a form of the Book of Deuteronomy.

Throughout most of her last 150 years, Judah was ruled alternately by Assyria and

Egypt. She was caught up in international struggles. Finally the new kingdom of Babylonia under King Nebuchadnezzar captured and destroyed Jerusalem.

Second Kings 24 and 25 tell about this destruction. The Babylonians burn the city and Temple and deport thousands of Judeans to Babylon. They take the Judean king into captivity. Here the Book of Second Kings ends. But the writer leaves the reader with a glimmer of hope in the story of the Judean king's release from prison.

1. Second Kings reports the destruction and exile of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, and Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Skim 2 Kings 17:1-8 for the answers to the questions below.

a. What nation destroyed Samaria, and who was its king?

b. Why did the Assyrians decide to invade and besiege Samaria?

c. What did the Assyrians do with the Israelites?

d. Why did the Lord allow these events to happen to Israel?

2. Now read 2 Kings 25:8-11, and answer these questions.

a. What king destroyed Jerusalem, and over what nation did he rule?

b. What did Nebuchadnezzar do with the captives?

3. Read 2 Kings 23:26-27. Why did the Lord allow these events to happen to Judah?

SUMMARY

Six major events in Israel's history, which are discussed in First and Second Kings, are listed here.

- (1) The death of King David and Solomon's coronation (1 Kings 1)
- (2) The accomplishments of Solomon and the disintegration of his empire (1 Kings 2–11)
- (3) The division of the kingdom (1 Kings 12)
- (4) The stories of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 9)
- (5) The destruction of Samaria, the capital of Israel (2 Kings 17)
- (6) Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Judah and the beginning of the Babylonian Exile (2 Kings 24–25)

We can see that the books of Kings conclude at a turning point in the Old Testament history.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the last days of David as they unfold in 1 Kings 1–2. What statements suggest that he was becoming senile? What

passages reflect that a spark of his old fire still remained? What can we anticipate from these events about the future of the Israelites?

2. In doing the workbook questions for this lesson, you saw that God punished both King Solomon and King Ahab for worshiping other gods. In addition, the reforms of King Josiah were largely an attempt to eliminate such idol worship. In our modern culture, what is the equivalent of worshiping idols? Can we expect punishment for worshiping other gods? Why or why not?

3. The marriage of King Ahab of Israel to the Phoenician Jezebel, who worshiped idols, illustrates the influence of a dominant person in a marriage. Consider the influences of Jezebel on Ahab. (Read 1 Kings 16:29-34; 19:1-2; and 21:1-29.) What does this example suggest about marrying outside the faith? How should the realities of such a marriage be handled by one partner who is a committed believer?

4. Josiah instituted reforms after he discovered the "book of the law." Second Kings 23 lists the reforms. Soon after Josiah's death, Nebuchadnezzar marched into Jerusalem, and a decade later he destroyed the city. Thirty-five years after Josiah's reforms, the people of Judah were in exile in Babylon. Why do you think Josiah's reforms had no lasting effect?

DAILY READINGS FOR FIRST AND SECOND CHRONICLES

- Day 1: 1 Chronicles 11:1-10
Day 2: 1 Chronicles 14:1-17
Day 3: 1 Chronicles 22:1-13
Day 4: 1 Chronicles 29:20-30
Day 5: 2 Chronicles 1:1-13
Day 6: 2 Chronicles 6:1-11
Day 7: 2 Chronicles 36:17-23