

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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1 Kings

Solomon's kingdom was the pinnacle of Israel's glory. "King Solomon became richer and wiser than any other king on earth" ([1 Kgs 10:23](#)). The Queen of Sheba confirmed the glory of Solomon's kingdom, saying, "Everything I heard in my country about your achievements and wisdom is true! I didn't believe what was said until I arrived here and saw it with my own eyes" ([10:6-7](#)). First Kings celebrates the splendor of Solomon's kingdom. But Solomon's reign also illustrates the dangers of spiritual infidelity, and 1 Kings warns about the results of preoccupation with luxury, fame, self, and security. It is a timeless warning to us all.

Setting

At the height of his power, Solomon administered a kingdom that stretched “from the Euphrates River in the north to the land of the Philistines and the border of Egypt in the south” ([4:21](#)). Solomon’s power and wealth brought him in contact with many surrounding nations—especially the important maritime city-state of Tyre and the age-old empire of Egypt.

The mid-900s BC was an ideal time for Solomon’s kingdom to expand, for the traditional political powers of the area were in decline. The strong Hittite kingdom to the north had broken up into a number of small states. In Mesopotamia, years of struggle with the Arameans and the Hittites had weakened Assyria, which remained weak until the accession of Ashur-dan II (934–912 BC). In the south, Egypt’s presence in Canaan had weakened during the 21st dynasty (1069–945 BC). Egypt would not make an effective military comeback until the rule of the 22nd dynasty pharaoh Shoshenq I (Shishak, 945–924 BC).

Unfortunately, Solomon’s foreign diplomacy involved marriages with the daughters of foreign kings. This was a common way to cement alliances in the ancient Near East, but it was spiritually disastrous, for “in Solomon’s old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the Lord his God” ([11:4](#)).

Tensions that had been smoldering between the northern and southern Hebrew tribes surfaced with Solomon’s death in 931 BC. The resulting schism restructured the kingdom into Israel (the northern ten tribes) and Judah (the remaining two southern tribes). Israel and Judah skirmished repeatedly during the era of the first two northern dynasties and the reigns of Judah’s first three kings (931~874 BC). The hostility subsided when King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah found a common cause against the Arameans (chs [20](#), [22](#)).

The Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judah were increasingly entangled by the expansionist ambitions of their neighbors. They were invaded by Shoshenq I of Egypt in 926 BC, and throughout the 800s BC they faced the constant menace of the Arameans and the rising power of Assyria. During the reigns of the Assyrian kings Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) and Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC), Assyrian troops moved steadily westward to the Mediterranean Sea. At the famous Battle of Qarqar

(853 BC), a coalition of western allies, including Israel’s King Ahab, withstood the Assyrian king Shalmaneser and temporarily sidetracked Assyria’s advance.

During this time, the two Hebrew kingdoms struggled spiritually. Israel stopped worshipping the Lord at Solomon’s Temple, and Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel (931–910 BC), instituted apostate religious practices that led the northern kingdom astray (see [2 Kgs 17:21–23](#)). Judah’s first two kings, Rehoboam and Abijah, lapsed spiritually, while the subsequent two kings, Asa and Jehoshaphat, maintained greater, though not perfect, spiritual fidelity ([1 Kgs 15:11](#); [22:43](#)).

Summary

Beginning with King David's last days, 1 Kings describes the establishment of Solomon's glorious empire (971–931 BC) and the events that subsequently divided the kingdom in two (the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south). The book then traces the varying fortunes of the two kingdoms to about 853 BC, into the reign of Ahaziah in Israel (853–852 BC).

The first eleven chapters center on King Solomon, recounting both his fabulous reign and his later spiritual compromise. Solomon's story begins and ends in controversy. Solomon was David's chosen successor, but his older brother Adonijah attempted to seize the throne (1:1–2:46). Solomon triumphed over Adonijah's rival claim, then used his God-given wisdom to reorganize the government and make it more efficient. He facilitated the kingdom's commercial expansion on land and sea and undertook extensive building projects, including the marvelous Temple and the palace complex. Toward the end of his reign, however, Solomon's spiritual decline (11:1–13) and oppressive administrative measures (e.g., 5:13–18) incited political adversaries both inside and outside the country (11:14–40).

God appeared three times to Solomon, giving us a glimpse of his personal spiritual journey. The first time, early in Solomon's reign, God granted his request for wisdom to rule the kingdom (3:5–15), which resulted in great prosperity and honor (3:16–8:66). After Solomon finished building the Temple and palace, God visited him a second time to remind him that his continued success would depend on spiritual fidelity (9:1–9). However, Solomon's great fame (9:10–10:29) led him into foreign alliances, cemented by customary marriages with the daughters of foreign kings. Solomon's resulting spiritual compromise eventually led him so far as to sponsor the worship of pagan deities (11:1–8). God visited Solomon a third and final time; this time he rebuked Solomon for his failure to honor the covenant. Solomon's unfaithfulness would ultimately cause the kingdom's division after his death (11:9–13).

The second section of the book (12:1–16:26) demonstrates that God's judgment came quickly after Solomon's death. At the beginning of the reign of King Rehoboam, the northern tribes requested relief from forced labor and heavy taxation.

Rehoboam rebuffed their request and antagonized them, so the northern tribes rebelled and established the kingdom of Israel in the north, with Jeroboam I as king. Rehoboam remained on the throne of Judah, now a separate kingdom, in the south (12:1–24). During the following era, Israel's first two dynasties (Jeroboam I to Tibni) spiritually degraded the northern kingdom, while the kings of Judah degraded the southern kingdom. Political instability marked the northern kingdom, with royal assassinations, contests for power, and the establishment of Israel's notorious third dynasty, founded by King Omri, who was one of the most powerful and evil kings of Israel (16:25–26).

The final section of 1 Kings is primarily devoted to the reign of Omri's son Ahab (16:29–22:40). Israel had begun worshiping the Canaanite storm-god Baal, so the Lord commissioned Elijah to confront Ahab and to demonstrate the Lord's power, showing that he alone is God (17:1–18:46). Elijah then fled from the wrath of Queen Jezebel, but God reclaimed and recommissioned him, with Elisha as his successor (19:1–21).

On the political front, King Ahab faced repeated challenges from the Aramean king Ben-hadad, against whom Ahab fought three campaigns (20:1–25, 26–43; 22:1–40), the last of which cost Ahab his life. Between the second and third campaigns, Ahab, aided by his ruthless wife Jezebel, murdered an innocent man named Naboth and confiscated his property (21:1–29).

God's prophets figured prominently in the events of Ahab's reign. In Ahab's first two campaigns against the Arameans, an unnamed prophet first counseled the king (20:22) and then rebuked him (20:35–43). The prophet Elijah later censured Ahab's seizure of Naboth's vineyard (21:1–29). Then, before Ahab's third battle against the Arameans, the prophet Micaiah warned of Ahab's impending death (22:5–28).

The book of 1 Kings closes with a brief word concerning the character and reign of Judah's King Jehoshaphat (22:41–50) and introduces Ahab's successor, Ahaziah (22:51–53), whose story begins 2 Kings.

Authorship and Composition

The books of 1–2 Kings reflect the coherent perspective of a single unknown author, whom Jewish tradition identifies as Jeremiah (*Baba Batra* 15a). The author witnessed firsthand the fall of Jerusalem and was well acquainted with sources that enabled him to compose a rich history of Solomon's reign and the divided monarchy. Available to the author were official archives of the palace and Temple and records kept in various prophetic centers. He skillfully weaved these sources into a unified presentation, displaying a central concern regarding his people's repeated failure to honor their covenant relationship with God.

It is uncertain whether the author was still alive and wrote the final appendix concerning Jehoiachin's release (561 BC; [2 Kgs 25:27–30](#); cp. [Jer 52:31–34](#)). If not, these verses were appended by someone well acquainted with 1–2 Kings and of a kindred spirit with the primary author.

The books of 1–2 Kings cover essentially the same time period as 2 Chronicles. Accordingly, there are numerous parallel passages with similar wording. But the authors had different purposes in writing, and these differences can be highlighted by comparing the various parallel passages.

Date

Because 2 Kings records the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC ([2 Kgs 24:18-25:21](#)), the composition of 1-2 Kings must have been completed afterward.

The dating of the reigns of various kings and the chronological arrangement of 1-2 Kings remain somewhat problematic, but the general dating of the period seems clear. The basic period for 1 Kings stretches from around 973 BC (including approximately the last two years of David's reign in Jerusalem, [2 Sam 5:4-5](#)) to around 853 BC, during the reigns of Jehoshaphat of Judah (872-848 BC) and Ahaziah of Israel (853-852 BC). Second Kings picks up where 1 Kings left off (originally, 1-2 Kings was one book). The final appendix to 2 Kings ([2 Kgs 25:27-30](#)) was written shortly after the death of Nebuchadnezzar II in 562 BC.

Chronology

The dates for the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah are determined by comparing biblical data with information from other sources from the period, including historical annals and records of astronomical phenomena. The data frequently highlights the practice of co-regency, whereby a reigning king designated his son as both heir apparent and co-ruler. This practice was common in both Israel and Judah. Hence, the dating of the various kings is not necessarily sequential, but contains a certain extent of overlap. While ascertaining precise dates across the monarchical period is complex, the remarkable harmony between the records of Assyria, Babylon, Aram, Egypt, and Israel highlights the historical reliability of the biblical records.

Meaning and Message

The primary concern of 1 Kings is Israel's spiritual condition: How well did Israel's rulers and people keep God's covenants? God's special covenant with David had conditions for blessing Israel's king and his kingdom ([2 Sam 7:12-16](#); [Ps 89:20-37](#)). God's three appearances to Solomon highlight the potential for a successful and meaningful spiritual life, as well as the tragic consequences of spiritual infidelity and relying upon expediency. Each succeeding king is evaluated by his faithfulness to God—by his success or failure in keeping God's covenants.

The book of 1 Kings emphasizes the role of God's prophets in advising, admonishing, and warning the kings. While particular attention is devoted to Elijah's ministry ([1 Kgs 17:1-19:21](#); [21:1-29](#)), God also works through other prophets to claim his people's loyalty.

The spiritual odysseys of Israel's kings and prophets challenge all of God's people to faithful devotion and service. Israel's frequent preference for what is tangible and expedient reminds us to "keep away from anything that might take God's place in [our] hearts" ([1 Jn 5:21](#)). Like the prophets of old, God's servants today are to proclaim the necessity of worshiping God alone.