

Studies in 1 Kings

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Introduction



Kings was most likely written after the exile.

The author is anonymous. It was most likely written by a scribe or prophet, some people have suggested that it could have been Jeremiah or Ezra but there is no conclusive proof of who the author is. The author could have written alone, or it could have been a collaborative process.

1 & 2 Kings is one book that needs to be read as a whole, but was divided into two for practical reasons (length of scroll) - we will be continuing our study of 2 Kings next year (God willing).

It covers the years from the death of David until the exile to Babylon (approx 400 years from 970-560 BC)

We need to understand Kings through the framework of the Bible writers, it is not just a story, it is not just history, it is a theological account - it was written with a clear purpose: to show God's perspective on what is happening with His people.

The author picks and chooses the content very carefully so we need to pay attention to what is included in the text and ask ourselves why the author has included the details that we find there.

It is written from the perspective of a people in exile wondering why they are there and questioning how they should move forward. It offers a framework for them to process their situation, move to repentance and have hope for the future.

So as we read it, we need to look at it with a lens that looks back, because there are patterns, types and echoes in Kings that have already been seen in Israel's history that ought to shape how we understand what we read.

At the same time, Kings is part of the big picture of God's salvation plan that finds its fulfilment in Jesus, so we need to see how it points forward to Jesus as the faithful and true king of Israel.



Kingship in Israel:

It is clear that from the beginning God anticipated that His people would have a king.

When He made his covenant with Abraham he mentions that "I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you" (Genesis 17:6) This is echoed in the promise he makes to Jacob (Genesis 35:11). Jacob later prophesies that "The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his." (Genesis 49:10) this anticipates a ruler that is not just ruling over Israel, but over all the nations.

Later prophecy in Numbers also envisions a king who will come from Israel, but will rule over an exalted kingdom and will crush all his enemies under his feet (Numbers 24:7,17,19). This language ties in with the language from Genesis 3:15, where after the fall, God promises that a promised seed will come and crush the head of the serpent.

So with kingship already anticipated, Moses sets out the expectations for a king in **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**. This is an important passage because this is the lens the writer of Kings uses to assess the kingship in Israel and Judah.

“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, “Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,” be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, “You are not to go back that way again.” He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.”

So Moses shows us that the characteristics of a godly king, according to God’s standards are:

- they are an Israelite (this is more than just a descendant of Abraham, it implies that they are committed to the covenant that God has made with his people, which is shown in love for God, and love for neighbour and obedience to God’s commands)
- humility (doesn’t acquire wealth, and doesn’t think better of himself)
- has God’s Word as their priority (they will write it, read it and keep it)

This is then, what God’s people would have been hoping for as they entered the land and settled there, so it is not surprising that during the tumultuous time of the Judges the repeated refrain is “there was no king in Israel”. This was often paired with the phrase “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25), conveying the anticipated hope that they need a king to lead them, and that the king would lead them to godly

obedience (doing what is right in God's eyes rather than what is right in their own eyes).

The books of 1&2 Samuel show us the transition from the time of the judges to the time of the kings, and in 1 Samuel 8 the people ask for a king. Unfortunately they are not seeking a king who will lead them in righteousness and obedience to the LORD according to Deut. 17. Rather, they are wanting someone who is "like all the nations" (1 Sam 8:6), who will lead them in battle and make them look strong in the eyes of the surrounding nations, forgetting that their true king is God. Samuel notes that in wanting this, they have rejected God as their true king (1 Sam 8:7)

The book of Samuel goes on to describe the reigns of the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David.

Saul is a "king like the nations", tall and handsome and strong, but the narrative shows us that when Israel get what they want, it ends in disaster. David is a king who God has set his heart on, and for the most part, David is the kind of king that Deut. 17 describes.

In 2 Samuel 6 & 7 we see David's heart as king -wishing to see God's name honoured and exalted and having a central place in the life and kingdom of Israel. He seeks to fulfil the directive from Deut. 12:1-14, to give the makeshift tabernacle a permanent place and form, desiring to build a temple (or house) for God, making sure that the worship of God remains central to Israel.

In 2 Samuel 7, God reveals to David His own plan for His people and for David, He makes some promises to David which build on the promises that He made to Abraham in Genesis and indicates that the kingship in Israel will be built on David's line, and that the son who will follow David will "build a house for [His] name" and that his kingdom would be "established forever" (2 Sam 6:13)

We know that David wasn't perfect, but the Bible makes it clear that his dependence on God through the good and bad times in his life and his willingness to repent when he was rebuked lead the prophets and Bible writers to describe him as God's "servant", who "kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes." (1 Kings 14:8) This makes him the standard for righteous kingship from then on.

The Book of Kings begins as David's life is ending, and given the promises given in 2 Samuel 7, there are high hopes for the future.



Study 1: A House for a King

Read: 1 Kings 2:1-5

1- As some of David's final words to Solomon, how does David want Solomon's kingship to be defined?

2- How does Solomon respond to his father's exhortation?

Read: 1 Kings 3:2-14

3- Why does Solomon ask for wisdom?

4- Why do you think God is pleased by this request?

5- What does this show about God's priorities and the priorities of the anointed king?

6- How is the wisdom Solomon is asking for different from intelligence? (Ref. Proverbs 1:7)

In 1 Kings 2:4 and 3:14, both David and the LORD use the word "if" and tell him that God's blessing will be dependent on his obedience to God's word.

7- How is wisdom related to obedience?

8- How is obedience related to dependence?

9- If God's blessing is related to the king's obedience, what do we expect the outcome will eventually be?

10- What does this point to the need for?

Read: 1 Kings 5:3-5, 7, 12

11- What is the connection between wisdom and building the temple?

Read: 1 Kings 6:1-2, 14-22, 37-38; 8:1-11, 55-58

These verses are just a few highlights from the 4 chapters that the writer of Kings dedicates to the description of the temple.

12- Why do you think the writer of Kings dedicates so much time to the building and fitting out of the temple?

13- What is the role of the temple in the life of the people of Israel?

(Extra question) How does what happened at the dedication of the temple correspond to the dedication of the tabernacle in Ex 40:16-17, 34-35?

14- What is the relationship between rest, the king, and the temple?

In 1 Kings 8:20 & 56, Solomon announces that God has fulfilled his promises to both Moses and to David.

15- Is what Israel experiences under Solomon the final fulfilment of God's promises or is there more to come? (2 Samuel 7:12-16)

Read: John 2:13-22

16- When Jesus connects himself with the temple, what is he declaring?

Read 1 Peter 2:1-10


17- How does Jesus build a new and better temple?

Personal reflection:

◆ Solomon prayed that if God's people and foreigners who called on God's name were to look to the temple and pray to God, that God would hear their prayers. Do we turn to Jesus, the new and better temple, and pray to Him first in everything?

◆ As "living stones", part of the new and better temple built on Jesus, how do we live lives that reflect that Jesus' name dwells in us?

◆ What is the role of obedience in our lives, if Jesus as our king and representative lived a life of perfect obedience on our behalf?

 **Give thanks** that by his personal obedience and faithfulness as the true King, Jesus brings every blessing from God, and because of his role as the true temple we can enter into relationship with God and rest in Him!



Study 2: The Wisdom and Folly of Solomon

Read: 1 Kings 4:20-34, 10:1-9

1- What is the kingdom of Israel like under the rule of Solomon?

2- What attracts the people from the nations, including the Queen of Sheba to Israel?

3- What is the purpose of describing Solomon's wisdom and wealth in this way?

(Extra question) How is what is described a picture of the fulfillment of God's promises? (See Gen. 15:18, 22:15-18, 32:12; Ex. 23:31; Deut. 11:24, 12:10-11)

Read: 1 Kings 3:16-28

4- What is the purpose of Solomon's wisdom? (See also 3:9)

5- Solomon probably made many very wise decisions, why would the writer of Kings use this particular situation to highlight Solomon's "wisdom to administer justice"?

6- Is there anything in this story that the writer of Kings might be using to alert the readers to a possible problem?

Read: 1 Kings 10:23-29

In the light of Deuteronomy 17:14-20, it is evident that the writer of Kings, through the description of God's generous gifts of wisdom and wealth to Solomon, is weaving some hints that there might be some underlying problems in Israel and in Solomon's heart.

7- What are the positive aspects of his kingship?

- What are causes for concern?

Read: 1 Kings 11:1-13

8- What becomes the biggest cause for concern in Solomon's life? How does the wisest man become a fool?

9- How does this affect the whole nation?

10- How does God show mercy in his judgment on Solomon?

11- What does this mean for the fulfilment of God's promises?

Read: Luke 11:31/ Matthew 12:42

12- What does Jesus mean when he says “something greater than Solomon is here”?


Personal reflection:

- ◆ Is there anything we can learn from reading about Solomon’s life?

- ◆ What makes something an idol?

- ◆ How can we deal with idols in our own lives?

- ◆ Where do we find wisdom? (1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Colossians 2:1-3)

 **Give thanks** that Jesus is our true wisdom and that God’s promises are fulfilled in Him!



Study 3: God's Word Ignored

After the death of Solomon, God enacts his judgement and the kingdom is torn from Rehoboam (Solomon's son) and Jeroboam (Solomon's servant) becomes the ruler of the ten Northern tribes (known as Israel) according to God's word to Solomon (1 Kings 11:11-13). Rehoboam is left ruling one tribe (known as Judah). Jeroboam was given a word from God through the prophet Ahijah and was given a similar promise to the one God gave to David and Solomon *"If you do whatever I command you and walk in obedience to me and do what is right in my eyes by obeying my decrees and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you."* (1 Kings 11:38) But due to what he sees as a political move to stop people going back to Jerusalem and possibly back to Rehoboam, he builds an alternate system of worship by installing golden calves (red alert: flashback to Exodus 32), and making up festivals "devised from his own heart", and appointing anyone he wanted to be priests, mimicking the true worship of the LORD in Jerusalem. Jeroboam is doing what is at the heart of sin: failing to trust in God's word and deciding for himself what is right and wrong. The same prophet who gave him the promise then condemns him saying *"You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have aroused my anger and turned your back on me."* (1 Kings 14:9) He then becomes the standard for evil that all the other kings are measured by. The worship cult set up by Jeroboam lacks the most important elements of the worship in Jerusalem: God's presence and His Word (symbolised by the tablets of the 10 commandments in the Ark of the covenant in the centre of the most holy place).

Read: 1 Kings 13:1-10

As you read, highlight or underline each occurrence of "the word of the LORD"

1- What does the man of God do and say?

2- How does Jeroboam respond to the man of God?

3- What should have been his response to being rebuked? And to being healed?

Read: 1 Kings 13:11-19

4- If we think about the old prophet's family, are there any indications that things are not right here? (ie. how do his sons know what happened at the idolatrous altar?)

5- How clear was the man of God about the instructions he had received from the LORD?

6- After resisting the king and remaining faithful to the word of the LORD, how much convincing did the man of God need to go with the lying prophet?

7- What does this tell us about the danger of false teaching?

8- How do the lying prophet's actions here mirror Jeroboam's actions in Israel?

Read: 1 Kings 13:20-25

9- What is the irony that we see unfold?

10- What does the unusual behaviour of the lion indicate?

11- What does the death of the man of God show about the seriousness of disobedience to the word of the LORD?

Read: 1 Kings 13:26-34

12- What is the response of the old prophet to the death of the man of God?

13- What is the response of Jeroboam to the death of the man of God?

14- How is what happens in this chapter a picture of what is going on in Israel and Judah?

15- What is the warning for Israel?

16- What is the warning for Judah?


Read Galatians 1:6-9

17- What does Paul say about listening to false teaching?

Personal reflection:

- ◆ How important is the word of the LORD to you?

- ◆ How can we encourage one another to remain faithful to God's word?

 **Give thanks** for the truth of God's word, and for our faithful King who plants his word in our hearts and enables us to walk in the truth!



Study 4: According to the Word of the Lord

Read: 1 Kings 16:29-17:1

Approximately 100 years have passed, and things in Israel have not improved.

1- What is going on in Israel at this time?

2- In 17:1 Elijah is introduced, what do his words tell us about him?

3- Knowing that Baal is the “deity” of storms, rain and fertility, allegedly responsible for agricultural abundance, why would God send a drought to Israel? (See also Deuteronomy 11:13-17)

Read: 1 Kings 17:2-7

4- How does God sustain Elijah? Does this remind you of anything? (Exodus 16, Matthew 14:13-21)

5- What does this show about God and about Elijah?

Read: 1 Kings 17:8-16

6- Why is it surprising where God sends Elijah after the brook dries up?

7- What does this show about God's purposes?

8- How does the widow respond to Elijah? (v. 15)

9- How does the widow view the death of her son?

10- How does Elijah respond?

11- What is the woman's reaction to the resurrection of her son? Why might this be surprising?

12- By saying that different things happen "according to the word of the LORD" what is the writer of Kings trying to help the reader see?

Read: Luke 4:14-30


13- What is Jesus saying about himself and his hearers when he brings up this story?

14- Why does Jesus' audience react the way they do?

Personal reflection:

◆ How are we participating in God's purpose to include all the nations in his family?

◆ In what ways do you need to grow in dependence on God?

 **Give thanks** that God is faithful to His word, that he brings and sustains life and that He raised his one and only Son to bring us life!



Study 5: On the Mountain

Read: 1 Kings 18:1-2, 17-46

1- Who does King Ahab accuse of causing trouble, and why would he do this?

2- What is the big problem in Israel, and who/what is really causing the trouble?

3- What things strike you as you read this narrative?

4- What do you think of Elijah's behaviour in v.27?

5- What does the passage show us about God versus Baal?

6- After the confrontation on Mt. Carmel which King Ahab witnesses, and the arrival of rain after a 3½ year drought, how would Elijah be hoping/expecting that Ahab and his wife Jezebel would respond?

Read: 1 Kings 19:1-4

7- How do Ahab and Jezebel respond?

8- What is Elijah's response to this?

Read: 1 Kings 19:5-8

Elijah is clearly exhausted/ anxious/ afraid/ depressed/ overwhelmed and alone.

9- What does God do for him in this state?

10- What does this show us about God's character?

Read: 1 Kings 19:9-18

11- Can you identify any similarities between Elijah's experience on Mt Horeb (Mt Sinai) and Moses' experience in the same place? (Exodus 33:21-22, 34:28) What is different?

12- Why might the writer of Kings want us to make this connection?

13- The writer of Kings highlights that Elijah brings the same complaint to God twice (v. 10 & 14), what does this show about Elijah's state of mind?

14- Is what he saying true?

15- How does God respond?

16- How does God's word encourage Elijah?

15- How does the way God responds to Elijah encourage you?

Note: the same God who was present with Elijah (in power on Mt Carmel and in glory, strength and gentleness on Mt Sinai) is now present with all his people by His Holy Spirit!

Both Moses and Elijah appear together on another mountain....

Read: Matthew 17:1-8

16- What does this mountain experience confirm about Jesus?


17- What should be the response to this? (v.5)

Personal reflection:

- ◆ What does it take for us to trust God?

- ◆ How has God/ God's Word sustained you during difficult seasons?

- ◆ How can we encourage one another during tough times? (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)?

 **Give thanks** that God is the true and powerful God, that He is compassionate, gracious and kind, and that his Word gives encouragement as well as rebuke!



Study 6: Justice and Mercy

Read: 1 Kings 21:1-16

1- If we understand a vineyard as a picture of God's people planted in His land, enjoying his presence, how does the image of what Ahab wants to do in v.2 help us understand how God sees what is going on in Israel at this time? (especially in the light of Deuteronomy 11:10)

2- Why is it right for Naboth to **not** want to sell his vineyard and wrong for Ahab to want to take it? (See Numbers 36:7)

3- What do we learn about the character and motivations of Ahab and Jezebel?

4- What is going on in Israel now compared with during the time of Solomon? (See 1 Kings 4:25)

5- What does this show about the current kingship in Israel? (See 1 Samuel 8:10-18 especially v.14)

6- Can you identify any patterns or images in this story that are seen in other parts of the Bible? How does this help us understand the passage better or give us a bigger picture?

Read: 1 Kings 21:17-29

7- Elijah pronounces God's judgement on Ahab. The words of v.24 have been seen previously in 14:11 & 16:4, what does the language about "in the city" and "in the country" indicate about God's judgement?

8- How does Ahab respond?

9- What does God say about Ahab response and what does this show about the way he wants people to respond to His word?

10- What do we learn about God's justice and mercy?

11- How might this shape our response to injustice?

Read: Revelation 19:11-21

Note any images in this passage that remind you of what we have read in 1 Kings.

12- What encouragement do we get from about the justice that God's true King will ultimately bring, especially when we feel that people are getting away with injustice?

13- How does knowing that God will bring judgement to the world motivate you to share the gospel?



Personal reflection: After a brief dip into 1 Kings,

- ◆ What has stood out to you?
- ◆ Is there anything you would like to find out more about?
- ◆ What has challenged you?
- ◆ What has encouraged you?

 **Give thanks!**