

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 23

I Kings - Overview (I Kings 1-11: Solomon)

I. BACKGROUND

I and II Kings were both originally written as one scroll in the Hebrew. They were divided into two separate books/scrolls when the Hebrew was translated into Greek (This was called the Septuagint, abbreviated LXX. The LXX called I and II Kings the “Third and Fourth book of Kingdoms”). The books of I and II Kings remained as one book in the Hebrew text until the 1400’s.

The authorship of the book is uncertain. The Jewish Talmud, *BaBa Bathra* 15a ascribed authorship to Jeremiah. The Talmud does not always seem to have the most accurate view of authorship. The Talmud often forced authorship upon some known prophet, when it is not clear from the text that such force is appropriate. In support for Jeremiah’s authorship are the portions of the Kings materials repeated in Jeremiah. Specifically, II Kings 24:18-25:30 is repeated in Jeremiah 52. There are difficulties, however, that make it almost impossible for Jeremiah to have been the author. Specifically, parts seem to be written from captivity when Jeremiah would have been in Egypt.

I and II Kings reference a number of different sources for the material put together in the books. A few of the named sources include (1) The Book of Acts of Solomon; (2) The Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel (literally, the “Record of Current Events”); and (3) The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.

II. THE STORY

The text of I and II Kings covers events from the last days of King David around 971 B.C. to the fall of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Harrison in his Introduction to the Old Testament provides a good outline of this material. It is reproduced at the end of this lesson as Appendix A.

The story that is conveyed in I and II Kings is NOT evenly distributed in its material in light of the time involved in the events described. While the story is told along a timeline of the kingship of Israel, the focus of the story is not a focus of the major events of history. In fact, the history presented is very unbalanced where time and attention is given. For example, Omri is

perhaps the biggest ruler of the Northern Kingdom. He made Samaria the capital of the Northern Kingdom. He heavily fortified Samaria. He traded with the Phoenicians extensively. He withstood the Syrian assault for a long time. In spite of all of these acts, he is given six verses in the entire text. Contrast Omri to Hezekia – Hezekia had fewer of the same types of achievements, yet he gets a full three chapters of treatment.

A similar illustration of the unbalanced historical data given in the narrative is a comparison of Jeroboam II who is responsible for the Golden Age in the Northern Kingdom. During Jeroboam's time, things were as good as they ever got. Still, Jeroboam gets only seven verses. We compare his time as the ruler of the Golden Age to the relatively short (time-wise) ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Those comparatively short ministries receive a full one-third of the chapters of the books.

Why the deliberate imbalance? The answer seems fairly clear. The purpose of Kings is not an exhaustive history. Instead, the story of the monarchy of Israel and Judah is used to follow the divine thread of God's work among his people, the prophecy that goes with that work, and the redemption that is always offered into the future. The key to understanding this book is God's Covenant that was announced on Sinai and what would happen when men strayed from that Covenant. **The Covenant in Sinai is held as the standard for the actions by which men and God's people in general are to be judged.**

Critics have argued that the chronologies in Kings are conflicting and useless in dating or understanding the events. In 1951, a Theologian named E. R. Thiele put these criticisms to rest in a book entitled, The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings. This book is still in print after a 1965 revision. It contains a close inspection of the Kings' text and chronologies, and information we have from other archeological sources on dating techniques. It illustrates the veracity of the Bible, rather than providing food for the Bible's critics. Also, reproduced as Appendix B to these lesson notes is a chronology chart that is credited not only to Thiele, but also to subsequent revisions by K. A. Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell. Kitchen and Mitchell did their revisions in the New Bible Dictionary, pages 217 ff.

III. SOLOMON (I KINGS 1-11)

The first main actor in the Books of Kings is Solomon. The story of Solomon in I Kings 1 picks up with the ending of David's reign. In chronology, it occurs right after the book of II Samuel ends.

As David is aging, David's son, Adonijah, sets himself up as King. Adonijah gets a number of chariots, horses and 50 men to run ahead and prepare the people for Adonijah as King. Adonijah gets selected support from a number of people within David's administration. Adonijah gets all of these people and accumulates what he needs to have a big kick-off barbeque/sacrifice to his ascension to the throne.

There is an interesting parenting side note in reference to what Adonijah was doing. We learn from the side note that a child with little direction from his parents becomes a man with little direction in his life. In I Kings 1:6, after describing what actions Adonijah was taking in setting himself up as King, it says "his father had never interfered with him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?'" There is a lesson there for parents. A little guidance goes a long way!

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Bathsheba and Nathan get word that Adonijah is setting himself up as King. Bathsheba is upset because David had always promised her that her son Solomon would be the next King. Nathan gives Bathsheba a plan on approaching David that has a good chance of influencing David's actions. Bathsheba follows Nathan's advice and approaches David. Nathan then comes to David as well. David gets upset and has Solomon declared King at Gihon.

This event occurs close to where Adonijah is having his kick-off barbeque. Adonijah hears the ruckus and noise associated with the declaration of Solomon as King, and is curious as to the noises' cause. Word then comes to Adonijah that while he is having his barbeque, the whole kingship has been handed over to Solomon, complete with the public's recognition of Solomon as King and the parties, shouts, and cries that go along with the coronation. Adonijah looks up to find that the guests he had invited to his own kick-off party are dispersing into the shadows quickly. Adonijah himself is scared of being killed as a traitor and appeals to the mercy of Solomon. Solomon says that as long as Adonijah behaves, he does not need to worry. Solomon then sends Adonijah home.

The text then gives us the death of David. Prior to David dying, David gives the direction to Solomon that seemed to have been missing during the rearing of Adonijah. David's parting words to Solomon include the following, "Be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go." (I Kings 2:2-3). David also gives his final advice to Solomon about certain individuals and how they need to be treated after David's death. David then dies.

After the death of David, Adonijah goes to Bathsheba with an apparent scheme for rescuing part of the kingdom (if not all of it) from Solomon. Adonijah beguiles Bathsheba into asking Solomon to give Abishag the Shunnamite to Adonijah as a wife. Abishag was a young woman who had been given to King David to tend him in his old age. The text is clear that David had never had intimate relations with her; however, it would seem that she had the public appearance of being one of David's wives. For Adonijah to ask for Abishag was tantamount to asking for a share of the kingship in the eyes of the people. Bathsheba seemed naive to this ruse and approached Solomon with the request. Solomon saw the request for what it was, and this results in the death not only of Adonijah, but also of those who conspired with Adonijah to take the kingship, save Abiathar the priest.

Solomon subsequently weds the daughter of Pharaoh. Following the marriage, God appears to Solomon in a dream asking Solomon what God might be able to give Solomon. Solomon asks God for wisdom, or more specifically, "a discerning heart to govern the people and distinguish right from wrong." (I Kings 3:9) This request is worthy of applause. This ranks up there with the prayer of Jabez as far as what we should be asking for – for ourselves and our children.

Out of appreciation for Solomon's request, God says that by not asking for riches, honor, or for a long life, God will in fact give Solomon wisdom like no one has had before. But God will also give Solomon riches, honor and a long life "as long as you walk in the ways of your father David."

The text then proceeds to show us how well Solomon used the wisdom God gave him. A story that has echoed for thousands of years is given when two prostitutes approach Solomon, both claiming an infant child is their own. Solomon orders the child to be divided into two, with one-half to go to one of the prostitutes and the other half to the second. While one prostitute is willing to let that occur, the other prostitute cries out, "no.' no.' no'." Solomon then discerns that the woman who would not let the baby be killed must surely be the mother. From this account, even pagans today will talk of "splitting the baby."

Stories of Solomon's wisdom go far and wide. The people of Israel enjoy his kingship. Solomon is often associated with the Golden Age of the United Kingdom Israel/Judah. We see this association in how the Bible references the people. The text says, "they ate, they drank, and they were happy." (I Kings 4:20).

Solomon becomes a man of incredible wealth, the land becomes safe, and its borders spread far and wide. Solomon has great wisdom. He also has knowledge, artistic awareness and ability. Solomon becomes what we would term a “renaissance man.”

The text contains some interesting information and insight into the life of Solomon, and Solomon’s life seems to reach its peak. I would suggest that Solomon’s life reached its peak when he finished building the Temple to the Lord. He built that Temple 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. I find this a turning point because while God will inhabit that Temple and God’s glory comes to rest in Jerusalem at that Temple, Solomon himself seems to take a different turn. The key verses to examine are I Kings 6:38 and 7:1. In 6:38 we read, “Solomon had spent 7 years building the Temple of God.” The very next line explains that after building the Lord’s house, Solomon began to build his own house. While Solomon spent 7 years building the Temple, the text says in 7:1, “It took Solomon 13 years, however, to complete the construction of his palace.” Why did it take Solomon longer? Perhaps it is because he made his own home larger than the Lord’s home. Solomon’s home was 150 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Do we see a turning of Solomon’s heart and priorities?

Both in God’s indwelling of the Temple and at other times, God repeatedly warned Solomon of the need for Solomon to follow the ways of King David. Solomon does not seem to do so. Solomon is a man who loves great extravagance, which we never saw in his father David. Solomon has shields made of gold (worthless in battle), a throne with gold put over the ivory (as if ivory was not luxurious enough), acquisitions of all sorts of spices, apes, baboons, fancy and exotic woods and other valuable imports. And, last but not least in the extravagance area, we see Solomon with 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Solomon lives this life of extravagance and seems to turn himself slowly but surely away from the ways of God and to the ways of excess. Solomon’s wives turn him away religiously. They inspire, cajole, or somehow lead him into worshipping foreign gods. This is evil in the eyes of God. God is very clear to Solomon that he will tear the kingdom from Solomon and rip it in two. God says that out of respect for King David, he will wait and do it after the death of Solomon. As Solomon’s life comes to an end, we see the kingdom being torn. We will pick up there with the next lesson.

APPENDIX "A"

I. The Reign of Solomon, ch. 1-11

- A. The death of David and choice of Solomon, 1:1--2:11
- B. The establishment of Solomon's kingship, 2:12--3:25
 - 1. Elimination of enemies, 2:12-46
 - 2. Solomon's marriage, 3:1-2
 - 3. Solomon's prayer, 3:3-15
 - 4. Solomon's judicial decision, 3:16-28
- C. The organization of the kingdom, 4:1-34
- D. The building of the Temple, 5:1--7:51
- E. The dedication of the Temple, 8:1-66
- F. Activities during the Solomonic period, 9:1--11:43
 - 1. The divine Covenant with Solomon, 9:1-9
 - 2. Miscellaneous details, 9:10-28
 - 3. The visit of the Queen of Sheba, 10:1-13
 - 4. The wealth of Solomon, 10:14-29
 - 5. Solomon's apostasy and final years, 11:1-43

II. The Divided Monarchy, 1 Kgs. 12-2 Kgs. 17

- A. The division of the kingdom, 12:1--14:20
 - 1. The obstinacy of Rehoboam, 12:1-19
 - 2. The establishment of Jeroboam, 12:20-33
 - 3. Prophecies against Jeroboam, 13:1--14:20
 - a. A "man of God" against calf-worship, 13:1-34
 - b. Ahijah's prediction of destruction of the dynasty, 14:1-20
- B. Various kings, 1 Kgs. 14:21--2 Kgs. 10:36
 - 1. Rehoboam in Judah, 14:21-31
 - 2. Abijam and Asa in Judah, 15:1-24
 - 3. Nadab in Israel, 15:25-32
 - 4. Baasha in Israel, 15:33-16:7
 - 5. Elah in Israel, 16:8-14
 - 6. Zimri in Israel, 16:15-22
 - 7. Omri in Israel, 16:23-28
 - 8. Ahab in Israel, 16:29--22:40
 - 9. Jehoshaphat in Judah, 22:41-51
 - 10. Ahaziah in Israel, 1 Kgs. 22:52--2 Kgs. 2:25
 - 11. Jehoram in Israel, 3:1--8:15
 - 12. Jehoram in Judah, 8:16-24
 - 13. Ahaziah in Judah, 8:25-29
 - 14. Jehu in Israel, 9:1--10:36

- C. Hostilities between the two kingdoms. 11:1-- 17:41
1. Athaliah and Joash in Judah, 11:1--12:21
 2. Subjugation of Israel by Syria (Jehoahaz), 13:1-9
 3. The campaigns of Jehoash, 13:10-25
 4. Amaziah in Judah, 14:1-22
 5. Jeroboam II in Israel, 14:23-29
 6. Uzziah in Judah, 15:1-7
 7. Deterioration in Israel, 15:8-26
 - a. Zechariah, 15:8-12
 - b. Shallum, 15:13-16
 - c. Menahem, 15:17-22
 - d. Pekahiah, 15:23-26
 8. Pekah in Israel; the first captivity, 15:27-31
 9. Jotham in Judah, 15:32-38
 10. Ahaz in Judah, 16:1-20
 11. Ahaz' appeal to Tiglathpileser III against Israel and Syria; the fall of the northern kingdom under Hoshea, 17:1-41

III. The Southern Kingdom to the Exile, ch. 18-25

- A. The reign of Hezekiah, 18:1--20:21
- B. The reign of Manasseh, 21:1-18
- C. The reign of Amon, 21:19-26
- D. Josiah and the reformation, 22:1--23:30
- E. Jehoahaz; the first captivity, 23:31-35
- F. Jehoiakim, 23:36--24:7
- G. Jehoiachin, 24:8-17
- H. Zedediah and Gedaliah, 24:18--25:26
- I. The last days of Jehoiachin. 25:27-30

APPENDIX “B”

Israel	Judah
Jeroboam I 931/30-910/09	Rehoboam 931/ 30-913
Nadab 910/ 09-909/ 08	Abijam 913-911/10
Baasha 909/08-886/85	Asa 911/10-870/69
Elah 886/85-885/84	
Zimri 855/84	
Tibni 885/84-880	
Omri 885/84-874/73	
Ahab 874/73-853 (Co-regent from 873/72)	Jehoshaphat 870/69-848
Ahuziah 853/852	
Joram 852/841	Jehoram 848/841 (Co-regent from 853)
Jehu 841-814/13	Athaliah 841-535
Jehoahaz 814/13-798	Joash 835-796
Jehoash 798-782/81	Amaziah 796-767
Jeroboam II 782/81-753 (Co-regent from 793/92)	Azariah (Uzziah) 767-740/39 (Co-regent from 791/90)
Zachariah 753-752	
Shallum 752	
Menahem 752-742/41	
Pekahiah 742/41-740/39	Jotham 740/39-732/31 (Co-regent from 750)
Pekah	

740/39-732/31
(Counted his years
from 752)

Hoshea
732/31-723/22
Fall of Samaria
722

Ahaz
732/31-716/15
(Co-regent from 744/43;
senior partner from 735)
Hezekiah
716/15-687/86
(Co-regent from 729)
Manasseh
687/86-642/41
(Co-regent from 696/95)
Amon
642/41-640/39
Josiah
640/39-609
Jehoahaz
609
Jehoiakim
609-597
Jehoiachin
597
Zedekiah
597-587