



# **OT Historical Book 2**

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# THE FIRST BOOK OF THE KINGS

## INTRODUCTION

The Septuagint title for this Book is the Third Book of the Kings. It has been labeled the Book of the Monarchy, given that the monarchy is now well entrenched in Israel, and that there is a constant succession of kings. It has also been labeled the Book of the Disruption, given that this Book witnesses the schism of greater Israel into northern Israel (the northern 10 tribes) and southern Judah (Judah and Benjamin).

The authorship of 1 Kings is ascribed by tradition (such as the Talmud, which is a Jewish code of Law) to Jeremiah, who may have used records written by Nathan and Gad (1Cr.29.29). The time period of the text covers approximately 120 years from the death of David to the death of Jehoshaphat -- both kings of Judah. Some of the key words used are “king/s” (310 times), “house” (173 times), and “prophet/s” (50 times). The word “kings” is prominent because we see a steady succession of them from Rehoboam, Abijam, Asa, Jehoshaphat to Jehoram in the southern kingdom of Judah, and Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, to Ahaziah in the northern kingdom of Israel. The word “house” is prominent in that it is used in two senses; one being the house of the Lord in a religious sense, and the other being the house of David in a political sense. The word “prophet” is prominent because various prophets appear throughout, like Ahijah, an unnamed prophet from Judah, Jehu, and especially Elijah.

Key phrases of the Book include “...word of the Lord” (33 times), “...as his father David” (9 times), and “...the sins of Jeroboam” (8 times).

In this Book we witness the establishment and glory of the nation of Israel followed by the disruption of the nation into two kingdoms under two kings. Greater Israel reached the pinnacle of its political and religious life under Solomon, only to see it dissipate under an unrelenting Rehoboam and an uncooperative Jeroboam. For much of the second part of 1 Kings, it is Ahab in the north and Jehoshaphat in the south that feature as the main characters. A clear standard was set up for kings to measure themselves by -- David the godly king and Jeroboam the ungodly king. The story of the divided kingdom will spill over into 2 Kings, leading eventually to all Israel and Judah going into captivity.

The outline of 1 Kings may be summarized as follows:

- I. THE KINGDOM UNITED (Ch's 1-11)
  - A. The Establishment of the Kingdom (Ch's 1-2)
  - B. The glory of the Kingdom (Ch's 3-11)
- II. THE KINGDOM DIVIDED (Ch's 12-22)
  - A. The disruption of the Kingdom
  - B. The decline of the Kingdom (Ch's 13-22)

The Book makes colourful reading as we sit on the edge of our seats and observe and scrutinize an unfolding drama of historic and epic proportions. As we substitute ourselves periodically as characters in the play, we can learn much about human life, human institutions, and a God who is ever drawing His people to Him.

## **I. THE KINGDOM UNITED (Ch's 1-11)**

### **A. The Establishment of the Kingdom (Ch's 1-2)**

#### **1. The aging David and the usurping Adonijah (Ch.1)**

By this time David “was old” (1.1). His physical attributes were beginning to fail to the extent that he could not keep warm. Hence, the young Abishag is found to comfort him. She performs the role of a nurse for David, not the role of a wife (v.4). In the ensuing days she will become an innocent pawn in Adonijah’s grab for the kingship. It is the whole world over – the innocent who get caught up in the power games that other people play.

It is apparent that Adonijah is now David’s oldest son, given the deaths of Amnon (the first born), Chileab (so we think, given that he is never mentioned again after his birth - 2 Sam.3.3), and Absalom (in the historic events of 2 Sam.Ch’s 15-18). The fourth son of David puts it in his own mind that “I will be king” (v.5). He did not bother to consult God on the matter (just in case God said “no”), and he was probably very aware that Solomon was both the Lord’s choice and David’s choice. He calculates that he can mount a preemptive strike and beat Solomon to the punch, and he apparently believes he has the necessary wherewithal to pull it off. The fact that Solomon was not invited to his “promotion to king party” seems to indicate this.

Throughout the process, Adonijah employs some of the methods Absalom had earlier used, such as appointing chariots and horsemen and 50 men to run before him (v.5). He also attracts some key people around him for credibility, such as Joab the army commander and Abiathar the priest (v.7). Yet another conspiracy is growing in David’s old age, having already gone through several in his younger days. As usual, David’s loyal friends hold firm, including the trusty Cherethites and Pelethites, Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the mighty warrior (v.38). They surely must have been thinking; “what fool would try and pull off a rebellion again?” True loyalty never dies as they gradually watch another ambitious, though

gifted, individual make a rush for the throne. Joab foolishly decides to make the gamble of his life as he casts his vote for Adonijah, and Abiathar mistakenly does the same (the day is soon coming when Benaiah will replace Joab and carry out Solomon's order to dispense with Joab (2.29), Adonijah (2.25) and the notorious Shimei (2.46)).

Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba are fully aware of God's will on the matter of succession and therefore see the urgency to approach David for a ruling. They sense the preemptive strike coming and realize this is no time for procrastination. There are times to act, and to act quickly. They adopt a two-pronged strategy designed to get David's immediate attention. First, Bathsheba approaches David on the issue (v's 15-21), and then Nathan quickly follows (v's 22-27). This will undoubtedly have a reinforcing effect and highlight the importance of the issue at hand.

Nathan makes it crystal clear that all Israel is awaiting his ruling (v.27). Since God and man frequently work together, the Lord, for His part, would see to it that David would not die while there was crucial "unfinished business" to attend to. David gets the point, and becomes directly involved in neutralizing a potentially destructive situation. This is David's last major task. One cannot stress too much the need to carefully appoint new leadership in the Church today. Do we appoint an individual because that person has an ambition "to be king" or because God has specifically chosen that individual? One suspects that we have our share of Adonijahs (man appointed) and Solomons (God appointed) even today.

An interesting issue arises here: where does God's sovereignty end and man's initiative meet? One old saying suggests: "without God, man cannot; without man, God will not." There is a fine line between where God's will ends and man's own initiative takes over. The best way to help solve this issue is to bring God into every major plan and decision. If the Lord is involved, we will have more opportunity to see God shape those plans and decisions. For instance, had Joshua consulted God over the matter of the Gibeonites, his plans and decisions would have been very different and more rewarding (See Jos.Ch.9). Though a risky business, God does give authority to man.

There are at least 4 major reasons why God gives His authority to man:

a. To represent His authority.

We are the Lord's ambassadors, and we represent the Lord on earth.

b. To bring submission to God's authority.

The purpose of authority, ultimately, is to bring others into obeying and living by God's word. Authority should point to Jesus in some way, rather than to oneself.

c. To make authority visible.

Authority can have little practical affect if there are no earthly representatives to carry it out. Although it runs the risk of being abused, man has both the honour and the responsibility of installing God's authority on earth.

d. To equip both the leader and the led to serve.

Authority is not an end in itself. It has to be for a purpose. That purpose is to help us serve the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. It does not matter how high one's throne is upon the earth because there is one throne that is always higher - the throne of Jesus.

David moves the necessary mountains and Solomon is anointed king over Israel (v.39). The man-appointed Adonijah suddenly finds there is nothing of substance left to hold on to in the end and takes hold of the horns of the altar (v.50). Ambition and a self-made façade evaporates like mist. Had he taken hold of God with such fervor in the first place he would not have become the subject of runaway pride and ambition.

## **2. David's last advice to Solomon, and Adonijah's intrigue (Ch.2)**

David commences with the exhortation to be strong, to keep the word of the Lord, to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes, so that "you may succeed in all that you do" (2.3) -- which sounds remarkably like Moses' words to Joshua in Jos.1.7-8. Key advice always remains key advice. To live according to God's word is a sure recipe for a rewarding Christian life. This crucial advice, if carried out, is supposed to characterize the life, kingship and ministry of Solomon (which, unfortunately, it won't).

After giving some directives concerning the bloodthirsty Joab (v.5), the cursing Shimei (v.8), and the ever-faithful Barzillai (v.7), David dies. This marks the end of an era that will be spoken about for centuries and millennia to come.

Solomon "sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established" (v.12). Meanwhile, Adonijah still has lofty ambitions about being king ("You know that the kingdom was mine" - v.15), and embarks on yet another crafty scheme. Some people never learn. He understands political maneuvering, and how to circumvent it. The diabolical plan will employ the services of Solomon's mother so as to give muscle to his request for Abishag as a wife. If any wish should be granted by the king, it would have to be to the queen mother. Why Abishag? Bathsheba did not know that taking a concubine of a former king was as good as making a claim on the kingship. Hence Solomon's outburst; "You might as well request the kingdom for him" (v.22). It is also very likely that Adonijah played on the possible guilt feelings Bathsheba may have had in Solomon, her son, getting the throne and not Adonijah. Guilt can become a real playground for others to manipulate. Solomon had warned Adonijah before (1.53), but now he had crossed the stipulated line and was put to death (2.25). Another of David's sons dies -- which makes the fourth (after Bathsheba's child, Amnon, and Absalom -- again assuming that Chileab somehow died early). David's "fourfold restitution" for the wrong he had done to Uriah had finally come to an end.

Notice Solomon's respect for his mother even though he is the most powerful king on the earth. He "bowed before her" (v.19) and had her sit on a throne next to him. Position and

authority never overrides common decency, respect, manners, and giving honour where it is due (Ro.13.7). It's too bad most people forget all about this when they have reached the top.

Unfortunately, Abiathar the high priest and Joab the army commander chose to cast their lot with Adonijah, a rather foolish and risky venture, and were part of the ploy to play the Abishag card (2.22 and 1.7). When leadership changes, or looks like changing, it's amazing how loyalties can shift. Abiathar is subsequently demoted. Significantly, this action fulfilled "the word of the Lord...concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh" (v.27), for Abiathar was from Phinehas' line, Eli's rebellious son. Zadok, who was from Eleazar's line, would now take over the priesthood. Solomon knew better than to kill a high priest (Saul would never have hesitated – re the priests of Nob). Next, Joab flees to the Tabernacle and holds the horns of the altar (v.28), but his demise will also come as "the Lord will return his blood on his own head" (v.32). Shimei was the next to be dealt with, and he too pays with his own life (v.46). The deaths of Joab and Shimei were as a result of their own actions. They incriminated themselves and, therefore, Solomon was quite justified in the way he dealt with them.

Faithfulness always pays its own dividends. It might be a long time coming, but the dividends and the rewards do come. The faithful ones like Zadok, Benaiah, Barzillai, and the Cherethites and Pelethites are blessed, but the unfaithful ones like Adonijah, Joab, Abiathar, and Shimei miss out on the blessing. The Christian message is still the same -- those who hold fast and faithful to the end will be saved!

### **3. Solomon's request for wisdom (Ch.3)**

Leadership may look a privileged, easy task from afar, but one is soon confronted with its realities when the office is actually attained. The weight of responsibility - knowing that you are the one who is ultimately held accountable, and that all eyes are looking to you for direction - suddenly hit home like a bomb. One really has to be in that position to fully grasp these realities. Having an anointing for leadership is not just about authority and power. In fact, the word "weight" is associated with the meaning of the word "anointing," thereby giving us a hint of the awesome responsibility there is in top leadership. Solomon became acutely aware of the weight of responsibility upon his shoulders. Now that he was king, the challenges presented by the office are glaring and breathtaking; "I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in" (3.7). In such situations, we realize more than ever that we need God's wisdom or we (and probably for many others on the receiving end) are "history."

From this chapter we can ascertain four reasons for Solomon's eventual greatness:

a. Solomon's love for the Lord (3.3).

The king had a heart to serve the Lord. This becomes very apparent in the construction of the Temple (the greatest religious edifice in the history of Israel).

b. Solomon's obedience (3.3).

He was walking in the statutes of his father David. His one early fault is worshipping the Lord on the “high places,” but this was probably because worship was not yet centrally located in Jerusalem.

c. Solomon’s humility (3.7).

Though a great king, Solomon was humble before God.

d. Solomon’s wisdom (3.8f)

The Lord had given to Solomon immense wisdom, of which has not been equaled before or since (v.12).

Solomon could have requested almost anything (v.5), however, he chose those things that would enable him to fulfill his destiny, the task set before him, and the call that God had on his life. What would we ask for in similar circumstances? There are probably certain phases throughout life when the Lord questions; “what is it that you want from life?”

Solomon’s wisdom becomes immediately apparent in the case of the two harlots (v’s 16-28). The Lord used the situation as something of a “test case” to convince Israel of the quality king they had been given. It would become a standard of reference, a yardstick, and a benchmark, for a long time to come. So wise was Solomon’s ruling that “all Israel heard of the judgment” and “feared the king” (v.28). They saw for themselves that this new king was able to exercise the “wisdom of God” and to “administer justice” (v.28). It would have had the marvelous effect of creating confidence and respect in their leader. If there is something people are crying out for today it is wise leadership with integrity and truth. People are wanting to be treated justly and fairly, not inequitably in some kind of contrived church culture.

Unfortunately, some members of congregations are merely told to “submit to authority” and just accept what they have been ordered to do. But respect can not be earned with flaunting position and authority; it is earned through the carrying-out of humble, wise and caring leadership. Even in secular circles people are tempted to take the law into the own hands because they perceive that their leaders, judges, politicians, educators, and the like are not dispensing proper justice. Crime and misconduct, for instance, occasionally gets away with almost no penalty in some cases. The dispensing of proper justice represents one of the most essential foundations of society. Solomon, very early in his reign, eased everybody’s mind as to the fairness and justice of his rule.

#### **4. Solomon’s greatness (Ch.4)**

We receive an early glimpse into the greatness of Israel during the time of Solomon’s reign. The nation had come a long way since the time of the Judges when, it will be remembered, seemed at its wits end. David laid many of the foundations for this period of glory and greatness in subduing Israel’s enemies. Now it was left to Solomon to consolidate the nation, build on its cohesion, fuse the various national strengths together, and secure its standing as the preeminent nation in the world. Keen administration, the appointment of capable and godly



departmental heads, sound justice, sensible economic management, and the dispensation of fairness and justice, should follow the creation of quality religious institutions. This chapter provides us with such glimpses as follows:

- in Judah and Israel being as numerous as the sand on the seashore (v.20). This was first promised to Abraham!
- in Israel receiving tribute from other nations (v.21).
- in Solomon's provision for his household (v's 22-23).
- in Israel's dominion over everything west of the Euphrates (v.24).
- in that Judah and Israel lived in safety and much prosperity (v.25).
- in the advanced administration evident in Israel (4.1-19, 26-28).
- in the brilliant capabilities of Solomon in whom there was none to be compared (v's 29-34).

## **5. Solomon's Temple (Ch's 5-8)**

Hiram, king of Tyre, had always been friendly to David having once provided timber and labourers for the building of David's house (2Sam.5.11). The forests of Lebanon were rather rich in cypress and cedar (5.8-9), and Hiram made rafts out of the logs and floated them down to Israel. Cedar, for instance, is noted for its fragrance, red colour, inability to be attacked by pests, freedom from knots, and has remarkable lasting qualities. It is no wonder that Solomon should select this quality timber for the house of the Lord. The cedar is still Lebanon's national emblem. The number of workmen involved in this task was an indication of the magnitude of the project at hand -- some 30,000 timber cutters, 70,000 transporters, 80,000 hewers of stone, and 3,300 supervisors. It is difficult to grasp, even now, the magnitude, enormity and significance of this project.

A description of the Temple is given in Ch.6, providing details of the construction of the sanctuary, its dimensions, appearance, wood and gold decoration, details for the most holy place, the two cherubim, and so on. We are told that this construction began 480 years after Israel came out of Egypt (6.1), and so some scholars calculate the date of building the Temple to be around 966BC.

Very subtly, verses 11-12 are interwoven in the middle of the details concerning construction. The "word of the Lord came to Solomon" saying that if Solomon will keep His word and walk in His word that He will fulfill the word given to his father David of a continuing dynasty (2Sam.7.12-16), that He will "dwell among the sons of Israel," and that He will not forsake them. Why is the Lord saying this in the middle of a major construction project of the most glorious Temple ever? He was aiming to restore perspective -- i.e., Solomon is not just to focus on building a magnificent "outer" temple, but to remain focused on building the "inner" temple of his own life! The ultimate success of Israel as a nation was not dependent on maintaining a glorious outward building, but on maintaining the inner "temple of the



Holy Spirit” in individual lives -- in other words, their obedience, their inner worship, their faithfulness, their goodness, and their dedication to the Lord.

Unfortunately, we will see later in the Prophets that the Temple came to be seen in almost all-important, cultish terms. The “outer” temple was seen to be the “be-all” and “end-all” of everything, and personal devotion and living a godly life, failed. Ultimately, it would be for the collapse of the “inner” temple of people’s lives that all Israel will eventually go into captivity (a story to examine later). What kind of attention do we devote to our “inner” temple? Will playing religious games save us and save the day?

Solomon also built a palace for himself (7.1) which was also very impressive. It seems that the palace and the Temple became one great complex, for Ch.7 intermingles construction of the palace with that of the Temple. Verses 1-12 describe the building of his palace, and 13-51 the construction of Temple furnishings. It reminds us that our physical life and our spiritual life are connected. Like Bezalel, who was a skilled craftsman in the construction of the desert Tabernacle, Hiram was a very skilled artisan “filled with wisdom and understanding” (v.14) for doing any work with bronze.

The elders, heads of tribes, and leaders of households are invited in Ch.8 to witness the coming of the Ark of the Covenant from David’s Tabernacle into the Most Holy Place of Solomon’s temple. This must have been a breathtaking and awe-inspiring moment. After the priests brought the Ark into the inner sanctuary, they “could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” (8.11). This sounds remarkably like Exodus Ch.40 when Moses’ Tabernacle was completed and the glory of the Lord entered. Despite the splendour of the Temple, with all its cedar, silver and gold, it remained nothing without the presence of God. The same truth still holds today as even the most majestic of Church buildings and the most lofty of man’s ideas amount to nothing in the end unless God’s presence is there.

Of special note is Solomon’s prayer of dedication in 8.22-61. In dedicating the Temple, Solomon focuses on God’s obligations and Israel’s obligations. It is poignant that all the features contained within this prayer will actually play out in years to come.

#### **a. God’s obligations:**

- the wicked be condemned, and the righteous justified (8.32).
- when God’s people are defeated by an enemy because of their sinful ways, and repent, God will forgive them and restore them (v’s 33-34).
- when there is no rain because of their sin and they repent, God will forgive their sin and send rain (v’s 35-36).
- when there is famine, pestilence, or siege and the people pray and repent, God will hear their voice, forgive them, and act on their behalf (v’s 37-40).

- when a foreigner comes and prays, the Lord will answer his prayer so that he will fear the Lord (v's 41-43).
- when Israel goes out to battle, the Lord will hear their prayer and grant their victory (v's 44-45).
- when the people go into captivity and return to the Lord, pray, and repent, God will hear their prayer, forgive them, and restore them (v's 46-53).

Notice the emphasis on “sin,” “repent,” “return” and “forgive.” In this way, Israel will know that there is always a way back to God. He is never beyond reach. The penitent can always find God again and be restored in fellowship with him. People need to know this; that they are never beyond redemption, and that they are never too late. We will find Nehemiah, e.g., praying out such prayers in Neh.Ch.1. Nevertheless, the consequences of sin – famine, pestilence, defeat, captivity, etc – may still play out.

In short, we may conclude that:

- (1) it is better not to willfully sin in the first place
- (2) only sincere prayer and genuine repentance can intercept the effects of sin
- (3) God will forgive the genuinely repentant and restore them.

#### **b. Israel's obligations:**

- a heart wholly devoted to the Lord.
- walk in His word.
- keep His commandments (8.61).

Hence, the necessity to walk not according to the lusts of the flesh, but according to the word of the Lord. This is the mark of a true spirit-filled person.

The remainder of Ch.8 concerns the dedication of the Temple. The number of sacrifices are awesome; 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. The dedication and the feast which accompanied it lasted 14 days, and the people “went to their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had shown” (v.66). This is how Israel was meant to be for all times -- victorious, at peace, tranquil, God at the centre of their lives, dedicated to His word, fruitful, living a holy life, and full of joy. The same recipe still applies to believers and the New Testament Church. Despite all of life's challenges, believers are meant to live a joy-filled life with fruitfulness in their wake.

### **6. Solomon's options (Ch.9)**

After the 20 years it took to build the two houses (7 years to build the Temple and 13 to build Solomon's palace - 6.38-7.1), the Lord appears to Solomon a second time (not counting