



1 Kings

In 1 Kings, the story of David continues onwards from where it ended in 2 Samuel. The book opens with David, in his old age, about to die, and the attempt to establish the kingly succession after his death. Despite the fact that Solomon was a younger son through the efforts of his mother Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan, he was named as King. The first half of 1 Kings relates Solomon's glorious and wealthy reign, but the second half of the book tells a very different story. Shortly after Solomon's death the Northern ten tribes, often called Israel or Ephraim, rebelled against the Davidic dynasty and became a separate kingdom. The rest of 1 Kings tells the story of the divided kingdom alternating between the north and south, but with a greater emphasis on the north and especially on the relationship between Ahab and Jezebel (King and Queen of Israel) and the prophet Elijah.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 2 ¼ hours
Short of time? Just read 1.1-2.12; 9.10-10.29; 12.1-14.20; 17.1-19.21



Genre

Theological History



Anything tricky?

1 Kings tells the story of how God's people split apart into two separate kingdoms. Unfortunately, their Kings had very similar names so it can often be hard to keep clear about whether the north or the south is being discussed.



Inspiring quotes

When David's time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying: ²"I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, ³ and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.

(1 Kings 2.1-3)

¹¹He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

(1 Kings 19.11-12)



About the Author

Jewish tradition attributes the authorship of 1 Kings to Jeremiah but there is no evidence for this or, indeed, for any other author within the book itself. In style and theology it is very similar to Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 2 Kings, and so it is often thought to form a collection of writings which scholars call the 'Deuteronomistic histories'.

What do we know about him?

Next to nothing.

This name implies (and intends to imply)

a theological connection with the book of Deuteronomy, since the outlook of all these books seems very similar. It is suggested that the author or, more likely, authors of these histories were influenced by Deuteronomy and told Israel's history from that perspective. The key feature here is that Deuteronomy stresses that God's people will only stay in the land if they remain faithful. Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of how God's people failed to be faithful and so, eventually, went into exile from the land right at the end of 2 Kings.



About the times

No one really knows when these books were written. It is thought that they reached their final form in the 6th century bc, in other words shortly after the Judeans went into exile and were finalised then in order to explain why the exile had happened at all. It is clear, however, that these final documents were drawn together from already existing source, many of which would have been written at or shortly after the event described.

What were people feeling?

The books, therefore, have more than one audience – those who read the first annals of the history and those who read the final text once it was pulled together. Since it is hard to know anything about the first audience we will concentrate on the second.

If it is right that these histories are written to explain why the exile happened then it is clear that the people would have been feeling hurt, despairing and lost. For a sense of what people were feeling then have a look at the book of Lamentations, which provides an accurate insight into their emotions.

Other books set around this time

1 and 2 Samuel, and 2 Kings



What kind of Book is it?

This is a history book but it falls into the category of what you might call theological history – history with a purpose. It is not telling the events solely so that you can know what happened but so that you can understand why they happened. Many of the historical books of the Bible are like this.



How is it structured?

- 1.1-2.12 Solomon becomes King
- 2.13-11.43 The glorious story of Solomon's success
- 12.1-16.28 The split of the Kingdoms and the beginning of their separate life
- 16.29-22.53 The confrontation between Elijah and Ahab and Jezebel



Look out for...

Obviously, one of key features of 2 Kings is the account of how the two kingdoms split apart. As you read look out for any explanations that the author might be seeking to offer about why the split took place.

One of the major conflicts of the book is between those faithful to God (especially Elijah) and those faithful to Baal or Asherah (especially Jezebel). Watch out for this and reflect on why it might be that the worship of other Gods was so attractive.

There are many significant women in 1 Kings whose actions often change the course of history for good or ill. Look out for them as you read.



What could this mean for me?

1 Kings is keen to tell the story of the consequences, long into the future, of the actions of powerful people. Reflect on this theme and ask yourself what the authors of this book might want to say to those in power today.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Talk about the women in the story – who is your favourite woman from 1 Kings and why?
- Discuss Rehoboam in chapter 12, what do you think about the way he responded to the people from the northern tribes? Can we learn anything today from this on how to handle difficult occasions and decisions?
- Prophets are important in 1 Kings – from what you know of them in this book what do you think the major features of a prophet were?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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