

BOOK OF FIRST KINGS

1. In the books of 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, the Israelites demanded God to give them a human king to lead them so that they might be like the other pagan nations. God gave them King Saul, and later, King David. But both kings failed after each of their 40-year of reign. The number of 40 often represents testing from God.
2. King Saul fought the wars for Israel in the early years of his reign, but in the remaining years of his reign, he spent his time fighting his personal enemy, David. Saul was envious of David's popularity and wanted to destroy him. King Saul's reign ended badly and he took his own life. It is clear that most earthly kings or leaders do not fight battles for their people, but their people have to fight their battles for the kings or leaders instead.
3. King David started well, but he began to accumulate more wives (at least 8 of them were mentioned in the Bible) and countless concubines. Rather than fighting the wars in the frontline, he was enjoying his life as a king. David spent part of his life in adultery with Bathsheba and abused his power to kill Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, so that he might cover up his sin (See 2 Samuel 11:1-12:23). It is obvious that most kings do not use their power to protect their people, but instead, to protect themselves or for their own pleasure.
4. Subsequently, King David fought his rebellious son, Absalom. Due to his pride, he took a population census, which caused 70,000 of his people to die. That is what human kings do. We all yearn for a good leader, whether in our company or for our country, but we are always disappointed. Only one King will satisfy us and fulfil the role of protecting and providing for us. He is King Jesus.
5. In the Hebrew version of the Bible, the books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings were also one book, just as 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel were one book. However, the translation of manuscripts from Hebrew to Greek resulted in the doubling of the number of alphabets because the Hebrew language does not have vowels. Hence, these 2 books were split into 1 Kings and 2 Kings just as the book of Samuel was split.
6. The book of Kings (Hebrew version) was written long after the events took place. It was written by the Prophet Jeremiah to the people of Judah (i.e. the Southern Kingdom of Israel) when they were in exile in Babylon. Jeremiah wrote this book to comfort the people because they wondered why God had abandoned and exiled them.
7. Although the book of Kings looks like a historical book, it is actually holy history, that is, history from God's point of view. The emphasis of the events recorded in the book was of spiritual and moral value, and less of the economic, political or military aspects commonly found in secular history. There were some kings who expanded their territory but these military victories were only mentioned briefly in this book. For example, King Omri had only 7 verses recorded about him in 1 Kings 16:21-28, but King Hezekiah's life was recorded in 3 chapters because he was a godly king.
8. However, it should be noted that the majority of the book of Kings focuses on 2 prophets, namely Elijah and Elisha, rather than the kings and this is especially obvious in the book of 2 Kings.

9. In summary, the books of Kings centre mainly on the spiritual and moral aspect of the kings rather than their secular success in conquering lands, and also mainly about two prophets, namely, Elijah and Elisha. It should be noted that the book was not recorded in chronological order.
10. 1 Kings 1:1-4. The book of 1 Kings begins with the last days of King David and it is a continuation from the book of 2 Samuel which recorded much of David's life. It describes a sad image of David in his old age, seeking for a young girl to lie with him in bed in order to keep him warm.
11. 1 Kings 2:1-10. In his final words to his son, Solomon, he even said, "Kill my enemy, Joab, and the man, Shimej, who cursed me."
12. Why then did the Bible say that David was a man after God's own heart (in 1 Samuel 13:14)? This is because:
 - a) David never went into idolatry and always looked up to God alone.
 - b) David understood the character of God and he repented immediately when he did wrong.
13. 1 Kings 1:5-53. In the later part of King David's life, his fourth son, Adonijah, tried to grab David's throne before he died. In the Jewish culture, the eldest son was not the default successor to the throne. It was the king's decision to choose the heir of his throne. Solomon was not David's eldest son. However Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, reminded David that he had sworn to her that her son, Solomon will reign after him. Eventually, Solomon became king (in 1 Kings 1:34) and later killed Adonijah (in 1 Kings 2:13-24). As we can see, the king was more concerned in protecting his own throne, than caring about the people in his kingdom.
14. King Solomon reigned after David's death and also ruled for 40 years. He was known as the wisest man in history (see 1 Kings 4:30 and 1 Kings 10:23). This was seen demonstrated in the trial when King Solomon judged between 2 women who claimed to be the real mother of a baby (see 1 Kings 3:16-28). Solomon also wrote more than 3000 proverbs and more than 1000 songs. Solomon also had great knowledge in botany, husbandry, fishing and almost everything under the sun.
15. 1 Kings 11:1-9. However, Solomon also had his weaknesses which caused him to turn his heart away from God as in verse 9:
 - a) He loved women. Verse 3 says he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He was wise in many ways, but was also foolish in many ways.
 - b) He loved to accumulate foreign wives. He married Pharaoh's daughter because he wanted to form an alliance with Egypt, which was a more dominant nation at that time. God had explicitly commanded that kings were not to marry foreign wives, but Solomon married many of them against God's Word. These foreign wives brought in their gods and influenced Solomon to build places to worship their idols. Hence the wisest human king turned into a fool.
16. The reigns of the first 3 kings of Israel can be summarized as such:
 - a) Saul led a life full of vengeance and jealousy.
 - b) David had a lot of pride in his life and fell for women. But the most important thing in God's eyes was that he remained faithful to God.

- c) Solomon led a life filled with pomp, power and possessions, no different from the pharaohs who were showy. He accumulated many horses, chariots and women, which were against God's commands. In Deuteronomy 17:16-17, God had explicitly instructed kings not to multiply horses and wives to show off their power because God wants the kings to rely on Him.
17. What was King Solomon's greatest achievement?
- a) To the Jews, it was not that he wrote many proverbs or songs but that he built the first temple.
 - b) Previously, God was worshipped by His people in a tabernacle (which was a tent for religious use), for 480 years as God is contented to have His presence in a tent. He is not concerned with the external or appearance of a building.
 - c) King Solomon built the first physical temple during his reign in this book of 1 Kings. This temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and a second temple was built by Zerubbabel and Ezra (See Ezra 3) when the people returned from exile. This same second temple was later rebuilt by King Herod and it was then subsequently destroyed in AD 70 after Jesus died.
18. 1 Kings Chapters 5 and 6. How was this first temple described in these 2 chapters?
- a) It consisted of the same furniture and ornaments as in the Tabernacle built by Moses.
 - b) However, it was a more expensive and grand construction with gold plating, golden vessels and elaborate carvings.
 - c) The temple was glorious in its decorations of cherubim and palm trees, and was a symbol of the Garden of Eden where God's presence was glorious. This was to reflect God's glory in the New Heaven and New Earth that is to come.
 - d) Solomon took 7 years to build the temple while heavily taxing his people and putting them under forced labour. However, he took 13 years to build his own house. This is typical of Christians who give some of our possessions to God but keep most for ourselves.
19. 1 Kings 11:43-12:15. Before his death, King Solomon foolishly chose his son, Rehoboam, to succeed him as king.
- a) King Rehoboam was known to be a foolish king and his folly led to the division of the Kingdom of Israel into the Northern Kingdom (which comprised 10 tribes) and Southern Kingdom (which comprised only 2 tribes, namely, Benjamin and Judah).
 - b) Subsequently, there are two lines of kings that are being described in parallel in the books of Kings, one from the Northern Kingdom and one from the Southern Kingdom.
20. 1 Kings 12:16-33. In the Northern Kingdom (also called Israel), King Jeroboam was the first king.
- a) He had rebelled against King Rehoboam because of the heavy taxes imposed on the people and 10 tribes of Israel followed him to form the Northern Kingdom. He also did not want his people to go to the Southern Kingdom to worship and sacrifice in the temple and so, he built 2 golden calves in the North as alternative to the worship of God in the temple in Jerusalem. Calves were

- symbols of fertility and prosperity. Hence King Jeroboam led the Northern Kingdom astray.
- b) Following that, all the kings of the Northern Kingdom did evil in the sight of God because they worshipped the golden calves. The Northern Kingdom spiralled down in their spiritual state very quickly. In 722 BC, they were sent into exile by God through the captivity by the Assyrians.
21. In the Southern Kingdom, the people worshipped in the temple as well as in the high places, which were shrines they set up on mountain tops, pillars or trees.
- a) As such, the people worshipped God, as well as idols.
- b) In 586 BC, the Southern Kingdom was completely destroyed by Babylon after three attacks and the people were taken as captives to Babylon in three batches.
- c) It is interesting to note that their forefather, Abraham, came from Ur of the Chaldeans, which was in Babylon (Genesis 15:7) and in 586 BC, the Jews were taken as captives back to where their forefather came from.
22. There were a total of 20 kings in the Northern Kingdom and 20 kings in the South Kingdom.
- a) Northern Kingdom had 9 dynasties because the kings killed and succeeded one another. They were all idol worshippers and did evil in the eyes of God.
- b) The 20 kings in the Southern Kingdom were from the line of King David. They lived longer and the people were exiled much later than those in the Northern Kingdom. Some sources calculated that the good kings lived, on average, for 33 years, whereas the bad kings lived, on average, for about only 11 years. Out of the 20 kings:
- i. There were 2 good kings, namely, King Hezekiah and King Josiah
- ii. 6 of them were neither good nor bad.
- iii. The remaining 12 kings were idol worshippers and did evil in the eyes of God.
23. 1 Kings 21:1-16. Towards the end of the book of 1 Kings, King Ahab (a king of the North), killed a man with the help of his wife Jezebel because he wanted his land. He took advantage of his people, instead of protecting them. This is also true of many modern leaders due to their sinful heart.
24. 1 Kings 21:17-27. King Ahab was an infamous king (for his evil deeds), but he repented when the prophet Elijah warned him of his sin. God relented and did not punish him, but delayed punishment to his next generation. This shows that God desires a humble heart that is willing to repent and return to Him. God does not look for brilliant people but people who know they did wrong and are willing to say, "God, I am sorry".
25. 1 Kings 22:41-50. The book of 1 Kings ends with King Jehoshaphat of the Southern Kingdom, who was a good king, compromising with the king of the North. The Southern Kingdom was so used to idolatry that it was no different from the Northern Kingdom by then. Thereafter, the Southern Kingdom (Judah) also spiralled downwards very quickly, till 140 years later, when God executed judgment on Judah and Jerusalem and exiled them to Babylon.

What lessons can we draw from the Book of 1 Kings?

1. There were 40 kings that ruled over the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in parallel and all of them failed God and their people. (Note that the number 40 usually represents a test from God.)
2. Our hearts yearn for a king or a leader whom we can look up to or follow. Earthly leaders, celebrities or famous figures often fail us but we still long for a good king.
3. Only Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, our everlasting King can bless our heart and satisfy our soul for all eternity