

# BIBLE CHALLENGE

## A 2 week study of the book 1 Kings

The story so far: We move now to the third King in Israel's history. We began with Saul, whose administration unraveled in the face of his own faithlessness and hubris. He was followed by David, whose reign was marked not only by his sinfulness, but by his confession and his desire to be a man after God's heart. At the conclusion of David's reign, his son Solomon takes the throne. Under Solomon, the nation of Israel would achieve the pinnacle of its power and might. Nearly all of the land God had promised to Abraham would be under Solomon's control. Fabulous wealth would become a hallmark of his reign and the people would be content and live in peace. But it would not remain that way. The king who, at the beginning of his story prays for wisdom, will become the king who will build altars to pagan gods in a fruitless attempt to please his wives.

Monday:

Read 1 Kings 2:1-12

What to look for:

- As 1 Kings begins we have the same trouble as we had back at the beginning of 2 Samuel: The king is getting old and so who will succeed him? David had more than one son with multiple wives. At the end of 2 Samuel and the beginning of 1 Kings there is a conflict between Adonijah, David's oldest living son, and Solomon, David's favorite son and his second child by Bathsheba. Through a series of intrigues, Solomon is positioned to be the next king.
- As David's reign comes to an end, his legacy is mixed. In many ways he was brutal, in his early years he was an outlaw. And even here, on his death bed, his final requests are for the assassination of two of his old enemies. So why is David remembered so fondly? One reason is that, for all his bad behavior, he worshipped God alone. He was unwavering in his worship of the one true God and never took up with any false god, as was Israel's typical behavior. A second reason was, as we noted earlier this week, for all his sin, David was capable of repenting.

Tuesday:

Read 1 Kings 3:1-28

What to look for:

- Note the foreshadowing of disaster to come already showing up at the very beginning of Solomon's reign. The first verse of chapter three indicates that Solomon is already making alliances with

surrounding powers and basing his strength on them, rather than looking to God for the nation's security.

- Given the opportunity to ask for what most rulers would desire – long life, wealth, the death of his enemies – Solomon instead asks for wisdom.
- Vs. 7 – “I am only a little child” would indicate some humility on Solomon's part, as most scholars would put his age at about 20 years old....inexperienced but also not a child.
- The story of Solomon's judgment in the case of the disputing mothers is placed here to show that God has granted Solomon's request for wisdom.
- What does it mean to you to seek God's wisdom? How do you go about seeking it? Solomon's concern seems to be the well-being of his people versus his own desires when he makes his request to the Lord. How does that square with your requests to the Lord?

Wednesday:

Read 1 Kings 6:1, 7:51 - 8:13, 22-30

What to look for:

- Solomon's temple is described in chapters 5-6. To see how he built such a place, check out 5:13. The basic design of the temple echoed the design of the tabernacle (the tent of God's dwelling) that the Israelites had carried with them through their wilderness wanderings, only the temple would be twice as big.
- Note how what happens in 8:10-13 is the same as what happened in Exodus 40:34-35 with the Tabernacle.
- Note in 8:27-30 that Solomon defines the temple as a place for worship rather than as a structure that boxes God in.
- Way back in Genesis God had promised Abraham descendants who would become so numerous as to be a nation, and land on which that nation could dwell, that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through them. After much agony and suffering, false starts and wrong turns look what has happened: The people now have a nation with secure boundaries, wealth, and a temple indicating God's presence among them. All is going well. So, based on past experience, you can probably predict what is coming.

Thursday:

Read 1 Kings 11:1-13

What to look for:

- We are now nearing the end of Solomon's reign. Remember on Monday we noted the seeds of Solomon's downfall were sown at the very beginning when he formed a marriage alliance with the Egyptian pharaoh. Now we discover that Solomon's eye, and his political priorities, have wandered to a host of foreign women.
- Note what the text identifies as the core issue in 11:4 – for all his other faults, David worshipped God alone; Solomon does not.

- In looking at vs. 7-8, to what extent do you think Solomon would be comfortable in contemporary culture where the claim is often made that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere? Solomon's approach seems to have become one of worshipping God at the temple while at the same time building an altar to Molech (whose followers were known to practice child sacrifice)...it's all the same anyway, isn't it?
- Note God's take on religious relativism – vs. 9-13. God is not going to put up with Solomon's infidelity. Since he made a promise to David that his royal line would continue, God will greatly reduce the kingdom in size from twelve tribes to one.

Friday:

Read 1 Kings 11:26-33, 41-43

What to look for:

- Jereboam is a servant of Solomon, but God is going to make him ruler over 10 of the tribes of Israel, leaving Solomon's heir only one tribe. Recall – when the Israelites settled in the land following the wilderness wanderings they settled and claimed land according to tribes, or clans. Ten were named after one of the sons of Jacob, with two of them named after the two sons of Joseph. (Jereboam is told he will receive ten tribes, with one remaining with Solomon. Apparently the tribe of Benjamin – which is on the border between the ten tribes in the north and the one in the south – is still in limbo)
- Note that at the death of Solomon his son, Rehoboam, takes the throne. The two principle leaders for what is about to take place are now set: Jereboam in the north and Rehoboam in the south.

Monday:

Read 1 Kings 12:1-12, 16-20, 26-30

What to look for:

- The issue here is the heavy taxes and man power required to support Solomon's court. The people, led by Jereboam, go to the new king, Rehoboam, and ask for tax relief, which he unwisely refuses to provide. That results in Jereboam leading the ten northern tribes to break away from the nation.
- This is a major turning point in the Old Testament story: The kingdom is now divided and will remain that way. The year is 922 BC. Note carefully: From this point on whenever you read the name "Israel" it refers to the ten northern tribes who split off and went their own way. Judah is the name of the one tribe in the south that remains loyal to David's descendants. Jereboam is king over Israel in the north; Rehoboam is king over Judah in the south.
- In verse 25 Jereboam establishes a new capital in the north; Jerusalem is now capital only of Judah, in the south. He also

establishes a new worship pattern to rival the temple in Jerusalem, placing golden calves at the opposite ends of his kingdom.

- Note how the northern kingdom, Israel, gets its start by opposing the king's brutality, but also by embracing idolatry (the worship of false gods). Idolatry will be the central issue and persistent problem in the north. Again and again they will turn away from God, and that pattern gets its start right here under Jereboam.

This would be a good time to take a brief break from the story line and look at three books often attributed to David and Solomon: Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon.

**The story so far:** Returning to the story line we were following before our side trips into the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs: at the end of Solomon's reign he is succeeded by his son Rehoboam, who treats his people harshly through heavy taxes and conscripted labor. The ten northern tribes rebel, led by Jereboam, who establishes a new capital in the north (which continues to go by the name *Israel*) in the city of Samaria, but he also embraces false gods. Rehoboam continues as the king of the south (now called *Judah*), with his capital remaining in Jerusalem.

As we pick up the story, it is now 869 BC, a few generations removed from the division of the kingdom. A new king has come to power in the north (Israel) whose name is Ahab. His wife is Jezebel, and they turn out to be two of the most corrupt characters in all the Old Testament.

Tuesday:

Read 1 Kings 16:29-17:6

What to look for:

- Note 16:30 – the standard of measure the Bible uses in assessing a king's reign was whether he did good or evil in the eyes of the Lord. All the rulers in the northern kingdom of Israel proved to be unfaithful, doing what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Ahab was the worst.
- The "sins of Jereboam" alluded to in 16:31 was idolatry, the worship of false gods. Ahab thought that was a trivial sin.
- Ahab began to serve the false god, Baal. A careful reading of these verses reveals that worshipping Baal likely involved child sacrifice. See the reference in 16:34 to laying the foundation of Jericho at the cost of a firstborn son, and setting up the gates at the cost of a youngest son. In other words the first born son was put into the concrete as they built the foundation, and the youngest son was put under the city gate, as a sacrifice to Baal. This is the religion that Ahab and Jezebel are embracing, and which Elijah will oppose.
- Not since Moses has there been a prophet such as Elijah. His story begins with a series of miracles, the first one taking place in 17:2-6.

Wednesday:

Read 1 Kings 17:7-24

What to look for:

- Two more miracles mark our introduction to Elijah – the food supply for the woman who takes him in does not run out, and when her son dies Elijah returns him to life.
- This woman is not an Israelite, yet she displays the faith and trust that God finds wholly missing in his own people. Facing starvation for herself and her son, still she risks everything to take in Elijah and feed him. Once again God is at work to accomplish his purpose through the one who is least, little, and most unlikely.

Thursday:

Read 1 Kings 18:1-2, 17-40

What to look for:

- "...in the third year" in 18:1 indicates that it has now been three years of drought, 3 years since 17:1 when God said there would be no rain for his people until he commanded it.
- Elijah is going to go one-on-one, or more accurately, one-on-eight hundred fifty against Ahab and Jezebel's stable of Baal prophets.
- Note Elijah's challenge and the people's reaction in vs. 21. The people's attitude seems to be, "What? You want us to choose? You mean one religion is not as good as another as long as you're sincere?"
- Note how in vs. 33 Elijah is making certain the people understand the power of the miracle about to happen: He's dousing the sacrifice with twelve large jars of water. Note in vs. 38 the extent to which God responds: even the stones and the soil are consumed by the fire.
- How do you handle it when your faith leads you into "showdowns" with the culture surrounding you? Do you avoid those times? Confront them? Adapt to them?

Friday:

Read 1 Kings 19:1-21

What to look for:

- Jezebel is upset at what Elijah has done to her prophets. She now puts a price on his head.
- Horeb (vs. 8) is Mt. Sinai.
- God's question in vs. 9b seems to indicate that Elijah has run away when God has other plans for him.
- Though he has just participated in a great victory, Elijah is in emotional crisis. He is discouraged and feeling let-down (19:10).

- The three commands God gives Elijah at the end of the passage amount to commanding him to begin a full scale revolt against Ahab's kingship.
- How do you handle those "down" times when it feels as if obeying God is just too difficult, or when it feels as if God has abandoned you? Note God's answer to Elijah in vs. 18 – "You're not the only one left; I still have seven thousand in Israel." God comes to Elijah in a still small voice, not to condemn his lack of courage, nor to allow him to wallow in self-pity, but to encourage him and call him back to the task.