

Introduction to 1 Kings

Where is it in the Bible?

1 Kings is the eleventh book of the Old Testament and the sixth of the historical books in Christian Bibles. It follows 2 Samuel and comes before 2 Kings. In Hebrew Bibles, there is one book of Kings and it follows Samuel as part of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings). Like 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book that was divided when it was translated into Greek. This division was somewhat arbitrary, with the reign of Ahaziah spanning the two books. In spite of this division of the books of Samuel and Kings, the Septuagint recognized the relationship between them by calling them First, Second, Third, and Fourth Kingdoms.

Who wrote it?

According to tradition, the prophet Jeremiah was the author of 1 and 2 Kings. However, many scholars today see them as the conclusion of the Deuteronomistic History that is made up of older traditions which have been collected and edited by an unknown author or authors.

When was it written?

The last event recorded in 1 and 2 Kings is Jehoiachin's release from prison, which occurred in 561 B.C. during the Babylonian captivity. Since the return from exile in 538 B.C. is not mentioned, the assumption is that these books were written during the exile between these two years.

What is it about?

1 Kings tells the story of the end of the reign of David and the succession and reign of Solomon. This was followed by division of the kingdom into Judah and Israel. The second part of 1 Kings recounts the early history of these two kingdoms. The text alternates between the history of the north and south, with the most time given to the reigns of Ahab in Israel. As with the two books of Samuel, this book is best seen as a theological history which shows how God was active and guiding the events which occurred. It explains the failure of the monarchy as the result of unfaithfulness to God. At the same time, God is merciful and seeks to maintain the covenant relationship with the people.

How is it structured?

- I. The Story of King Solomon (1:1-11:43)
 - a. Solomon Becomes King (1:1-2:12)
 - b. Solomon Eliminates the Opposition (2:13-46)
 - c. Solomon's Wisdom (3:1-4:34)
 - d. Solomon Builds the Temple (5:1-9:9)
 - e. Solomon's Wealth (9:1-10:29)
 - f. Solomon's Apostasy and Death (11:1-43)

- II. The Kingdom is Divided (12:1-16:28)
 - a. Jeroboam's Rebellion (12:1-14:20)
 - b. Early Kings of Judah (14:21-15:24)
 - c. Early Kings of Israel (15:25-16:28)
- III. Ahab and Jezebel (16:29-22:53)
 - a. Ahab Becomes King of Israel (16:29-34)
 - b. Elijah Challenges Baal (17:1-19:21)
 - c. Ahab's War with Aram (20:1-43)
 - d. Naboth's Vineyard (21:1-29)
 - e. The Death of Ahab (22:1-40)
- IV. Jehosaphat and Ahaziah (22:41-53)

What are some things to look for?

- **The Ark:** The ark of the covenant was seen frequently in 1 and 2 Samuel. In 1 Kings 8, its placement in the temple is an important part of the dedication of the temple.
- **Chronology and Dating:** There are a number of challenges with regard to dating the events in 1 Kings. There are some internal inconsistencies. For example in 1 Kings 16:23 it says that Omri's reign began in the 31st year of Asa of Judah and lasted 12 years; however, in 1 Kings 16:29, it says that Omri's son Ahab began to reign in the 38th year of Asa, which would mean Omri's reign was only seven years. Also, adding up the total number of years for the Israelite and Judahite monarchies given in 1 and 2 Kings results in too many years to fit into the period from their beginnings to their falls as corroborated by outside sources. Various solutions for these problems have been proposed including overlapping reigns and co-regencies, and differences in the ways the first year of a reign was reckoned.
- **Kingship:** The pattern for what kingship should look like was given in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. One of the requirements was that the king uphold the Mosaic law. All of the kings of Israel and most of the kings of Judah failed in this. Israel had 20 rulers; all of them were seen as apostates. Eight of the twenty rulers of Judah received a positive evaluation from the editors.
- **Prophets:** Beginning with the divided kingdom, prophets take on a more prominent role in the history. One of the functions they have is making or deposing kings. The main prophet in 1 Kings is Elijah, who battles with Ahab and Jezebel.
- **Sources:** There are three sources mentioned by name in 1 Kings: *The Book of the Acts of Solomon*; *The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel*; and *The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah*. These are unknown outside of these references. However, there are references to people and events described in Kings in Assyrian and Babylonian sources.
- **Women:** Women are prominent in 1 Kings, often at important points in the narrative. Bathsheba and Jezebel are obvious examples, but there are also a number of unnamed women who have important roles, including the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24), Jeroboam's wife (1 Kings 14:1-18), and others.