



Week 10 1 and 2 Kings

Every Sunday evening at [Bible Explorer](#) we will explore the question

'What does this book from the Bible mean for us today?'

Introduction

The first book of Kings begins at a point in Israel's history where it is both powerful and influential on the world stage. The books of Samuel have led us through the beginning of Israel's United Kingdom under one person's authority to the height of prosperity and unity under King Solomon.

King Solomon

Renowned for his wisdom – asked in a dream by God to be given whatever he wants he asks for “a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.” Pleased at this response God also gives him what he has not asked for - both riches and honour.

Solomon is thus able to maintain peaceful relations with neighbouring countries and also to establish himself as a great leader enabling him to build both a temple to the Lord (constructed over 7 years) and a palace for himself (constructed over 13 years).

On dedicating the temple to the Lord Solomon's prayer begins:

O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below— you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

The blessing of the people which follows the prayer of dedication ends:

But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.

Solomon has recognised the importance of making God central to the whole of life. It is a two way covenant – God's love for his people and his people's total life commitment to Him in return.

In spite of this understanding Solomon is not without weakness and susceptibility. He has 700 wives and 300 concubines – status symbol of power perhaps – many of whom are foreign and bring with them foreign gods to worship. Furthermore, the heavy price of labour and enforced taxes to enable the building of the temple and palace pave the way for the split in the kingdom that is to come about after his death.



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North and South divided

The north and south divide of Israel into two Kingdoms unsurprisingly leads to the decline and ultimately the fall of Israel leaving the people once more exiles in foreign lands and without a temple to worship God. Ten tribes make up the northern Kingdom – known as Israel – and all the kings are described as bad (“evil in the eyes of the Lord”) although some are worse than others. The southern kingdom – known as Judah – comprised the remaining two tribes and here there is a mixture of bad and good, ranging from very bad (“evil in the eyes of the Lord”) to very good (doing “what was right in the eyes of the Lord”.) In addition to the list of Kings reigning in both kingdoms there was also one queen – particularly brutal in her rise to power as she murdered the whole royal family bar one young prince who was taken and hidden in the temple for safekeeping.

The northern kingdom survives until 721 BC and the southern kingdom until 587 BC. During that time there have been ample warnings from prophets that God will not support their ways as they have broken their covenant with the Lord. Many of these prophets have whole books named after them and will be considered later. However, the lives of two – Elijah and Elisha – are recounted in some detail.

Elijah – fighter, preacher, challenger of the people

Elijah’s most well-known confrontation is with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel when he won victory over them through God. Exhausted from this feat and terrified of Jezebel’s threats to him he flees for his life and just as he is wanting to die God sends an angel to cook a meal for him and restore his strength. God then meets Elijah on Mount Horeb, appearing not in the wind, earthquake or fire but in a gentle whisper. Just as Elijah believes himself to be the only prophet of the Lord left, God assures him of his future provision for his people – those who have not lost sight of their covenant and bowed down to Baal – and Elisha is introduced into the narrative.

Elisha – pastoral ministry

Elisha is anointed by Elijah in a clear indication of succession as prophet. Elisha’s response is to say good-bye to the people he has lived with and in a manner which shows both his commitment to the people and to God he slaughters his team of oxen and cooks the meat over a fire made by burning his ploughing equipment before sharing it amongst everyone. His pastoral concern is subsequently seen when he raises to life the widow’s son; feeding 100 people with a few barley loaves; filling the jars of oil for the widow and healing Naaman of leprosy.



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And today...

Strength comes in unity. But it must be unity that comes from a focus on God. Looking at the Kings listed here their strength and success is measured in terms of what God requires and not what people look for. Many of the Kings were actually highly successful in economic terms (according to other historical records) and may well have been regarded as good for the people in those respects. When we are looking at leaders of nations what are we looking for them to achieve? How might that influence the way we vote at an election? Might that encourage us to put ourselves forward for election to the local authorities or even parliament?

But beware... even the wisest and highly dedicated of people can find themselves sidetracked by earthly pursuits and goals especially once positions of authority have been granted. How can we protect ourselves from such a fall or give counsel to others to help them keep their focus on God?

Are you called as a prophet to speak out to someone in authority who seems to be in danger of falling away from God; to counter the world view of success?

Finally...never give up hope that God's love for his people will shine through. Remember that God can use even seemingly inconsequential people for his purpose. Naaman, commander of the King of Aram's army, had leprosy - it was an unnamed servant girl who's faith enabled him to be healed. Do not imagine yourself to be too insignificant to be part of God's purposes and plans.

Remember, focus on God and do what **you know** to be right in the eyes of the Lord.