



Summary of First Kings

Introduction

The books of 1 and 2 Kings describes the period of Israelite history from the end of the reign of David through that of his son Solomon, the periods when Israel was at its strongest, most powerful and most respected by other nations. With the ascension of Solomon's son Rehoboam, the antipathy between the ten northern tribes of Israel and Judah came to the fore once again, resulting in the secession of Israel.

First Kings then tells the story of how the two different kingdoms evolved. In the north there was nothing but apostasy as one bad king followed another and led the people further and further away from God. Initially, Judah fared little better during the period covered by this book although there will be later accounts of good kings who brought the people back to the ways of the Lord.

During Solomon's reign the temple is built, the king acts initially with great wisdom and the wealth and peace in the land is admired by many. However, Solomon went astray and the rot set in, although it would not come to fruition during his lifetime but in that of his son Rehoboam.

In the north Samaria is declared as the new capital and golden calves are set up as icons of worship to rival the temple in Jerusalem. Towards the end of the book there is the account of the wicked pair Ahab and Jezebel, and their encounters with the great prophet Elijah.

Chapter One

As David's death approached his eldest son Adonijah, supported by some of David's men including Joab, declared himself to be king. The prophet Nathan advised Bathsheba to go to David for he was unaware of what Adonijah had done. She and Nathan spoke with the king and he decided that Solomon would be the next king. He gave instructions that Solomon should be anointed as king immediately. When Adonijah hear of this he feared for his life and fled to the

altar of the Lord for protection. He was then summoned to Solomon to give account of what he had done.

Chapter Two

As David's life draws to an end he reminds Solomon of his duty to serve according to God's laws. He also provides instruction as to whom Solomon should honour and those who deserved appropriate punishment. Having ruled for forty years, David's life then came to an end.

Adonijah then requested Bathsheba to seek Solomon's permission for him to have Abishag, the young woman that had served David at the end of his life. She made the request but Solomon believed it was the start of Adonijah's scheme to become king once more, so he had him killed.

The priest Abiathar had supported Adonijah's claim to the throne and therefore Solomon banished him to his home town, never to serve as priest in Jerusalem again. Joab, the other main supporter of Adonijah, fled to the tent of the Lord and sought the protection before the altar. Solomon ordered that he should die anyway and Benaiah did so. Thus Benaiah was appointed as head of the army and Zadok as priest, replacing Abiathar.

Shimei was the final antagonist that David had instructed Solomon to deal with. Solomon instructed Shimei that he must remain within Jerusalem on pain of death. When two of his slaves ran away to Gath Shimei left Jerusalem to go and retrieve them. On his return he paid the penalty for breaking the terms of his confinement. Thus Solomon had dealt with those who may have opposed his kingship following David's death.

Chapter Three

Although a kind of wisdom has already guided Solomon in his treatment of those who were a threat to him, Chapter 3 confirms that in fact he still lacks a truly wise and discerning mind. The new gift of wisdom that he now receives from God allows him to govern more justly, as the story in vv.16-28 illustrates. This is an account of two women both give birth within a few days of each other. One of the babies dies and so its mother swaps it with the living one. Both women ask the king to decide whose child it is. When Solomon determines that the surviving child should be cut in two, half for each woman, the false mother accepts but the true mother says that the child should live and be given to the other woman. Thus Solomon determines the true mother and gives the child back to her.

Chapter Four

The chapter commences with a list of Solomon's government officials. During Solomon's reign the nation knew peace and reached its greatest prosperity. Its borders were extended to those initially promised by God to Abraham.

Solomon's wisdom was renowned throughout Israel and the surrounding nations. In addition he had great knowledge of the natural world.

Chapter Five

Because of his friendship with David, King Hiram of Tyre made a treaty with Solomon, whereby he would supply the timber for the building of the temple in Jerusalem and Solomon would supply food and labour for Hiram.

In the Hebrew text, these 18 verses form part of the same unit as the material on Solomon's rule over the surrounding kingdoms and his immense wisdom. The preparation for the building of the temple is thus part of the discourse about Solomon and the nations, and King Hiram of Tyre is simply one of those who served Solomon all the days of his life, and where Lebanon is part of all the land of Solomon's dominion.

Chapter Six

This chapter describes in detail the building and ornate decor of the temple. The building commenced in the fourth year of Solomon's reign and took seven years to complete.

Chapter Seven

The chapter commences with an account of the building of the palace complex, which included Solomon's own living quarters and those of his Egyptian queen. Attention then returns to the completion of the temple focusing mainly on the detailed work in bronze by Hiram. There is then a summary account of all the items that were made mostly for the altar and of the items that David had dedicated for the temple. Thus the building of the first temple was finally completed.

Chapter Eight

Solomon gathered all the elders and tribal leaders to witness the Levites bring the Ark of the Covenant and all the associated elements into the temple. When everything was in place the presence of the Lord descended into the temple in a cloud that prevented the priests from ministering and they had to leave.

Solomon then recounts the promises of God he had made to his people and to David, and how the promise was now fulfilled with Solomon as king. Solomon then publically prays thanking God for keeping his promises and asking that he always keep his ear tuned to the prayers and petitions of his people as they make them from his temple, and to act upon them as he deems appropriate.

He prays that the Lord will forgive the transgressions of his people when they come before him in the direction of the temple and acknowledge their sin. He asks God to hear and answer the prayers of Gentiles who also come to the

temple because of the name of the one true God. He asks that God will uphold the cause of his people when he calls them into battle and he prophetically asks God to listen to those whom he has carried away into captivity because of their sin that, if they are truly repentant, he will restore them.

Solomon then turns to the people with a blessing, reminding them of the goodness and faithfulness of God and the trustworthy nature of his promises. He then exhorts them to always seek the Lord and follow his commandments.

The ceremony concluded with mass sacrificial offerings to the Lord and a seven day festival of celebration for all the people. On the eighth day they departed.

Chapter Nine

After Solomon's building programme was complete the Lord appeared to him again as he had done at Gibeon. He stated that he had consecrated the temple that Solomon had built for his name and that he would be attentive to that house and his people for all time, providing they remained obedient. However, there was also a warning that if Solomon or the people went after other gods then they and the temple would be destroyed.

Twenty years after building commenced, Solomon offered King Hiram twenty cities in the region of Galilee as thanks for supplying the building materials and labour. Hiram was displeased when he visited the cities and so Solomon gave him a large amount of gold as well.

As well as the temple and palace in Jerusalem, Solomon built up many other cities for various functions. To do this he conscripted all the non-Israelite people who still lived in the land into slave labour but he placed Israelites in paid positions. In addition, Solomon built ships that were crewed by men from Tyre so that he could trade with other nations, particularly bringing in much gold from the land of Ophir.

Chapter Ten

The Queen of Sheba had heard of Solomon's great wisdom and wealth so she visited him to see if it was actually true. On questioning Solomon she found that it was not only true but that it far surpassed anything she had imagined. She recognised that this was because of the Lord and she praised him.

The trading ships of Hiram brought great quantities of gold to Solomon and he made great shields of gold to be placed in the Forest of Lebanon. He also built an elaborate throne of ivory, the likes of which has never been seen in any kingdom since. Everything Solomon used was made of gold for silver was not even considered due to the amount of Gold that Solomon possessed.

Solomon's fame spread throughout the world and all the other kings came to him. They all brought him gifts thus increasing his immense wealth. With this

he bought chariots and horses from Egypt, selling them on to the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

Chapter Eleven

Solomon had many foreign wives despite it being against the will of God to do so. In his old age they turned his heart away from the Lord and to foreign gods. He even built places of worship to them. Therefore, God was angry with him and he told Solomon that the price would be the loss of the kingdom, but it would not occur in his lifetime for David's sake. Instead, his son would have rule over one tribe while the others would be taken from him.

During his conflict with Edom, David had most males killed by one leader Hadad fled with a group of men to Egypt where he stayed until the time was right for him to return to his own land and to oppose King Solomon. Likewise, a former enemy of David called Rezon built up a group of marauders and he too opposed Solomon. Both these adversaries of the king were raised up by the Lord.

Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, had been a loyal servant of Solomon and was over the slave labour. However, he encountered the prophet Ahijah who showed him that God was going to tear the nation into two, with the house of David retaining a king over Judah but Jeroboam becoming the leader of ten tribes. The reason for this was Solomon's apostasy, for he had turned to the pagan gods of the surrounding nations. God promised Jeroboam that if he kept the commandments of the Lord then he would have an enduring house over all Israel. When Solomon heard this he tried to kill Jeroboam, who promptly fled to Egypt.

After forty years the reign of Solomon came to an end. Following his death then his son Rehoboam succeeded him.

Chapter Twelve

As Moses once led his people out from slavery under the Egyptian pharaoh, so Jeroboam now leads Israel out from 'slavery' under the house of David when Rehoboam refuses to lighten the tax burden on the northern tribes; but 'Jeroboam as Moses' is soon transformed into 'Jeroboam as Aaron' as he fashions golden calves for Israel to worship. Such idolatrous worship will eventually result in disaster for Israel.

Chapter Thirteen

Jeroboam stands at the altar of his new temple in Bethel as Solomon had stood at his altar in Jerusalem, ready to dedicate it to his gods; but since this temple has no legitimacy, he does not get a chance to speak. For at that time a prophet came from Judah and prophesied that a future king Josiah would bring down the false priesthood and this altar. Jeroboam's hand withered as he tried

to have the prophet seized but it was restored when Jeroboam pleaded with the prophet, who refused to accept any gift or hospitality from the king.

When an elderly prophet in Bethel heard of this prophet from Judah he went to meet him on the road and invited him to return to Bethel to dine with him. However, the Judæan prophet said he was forbidden by God to return. The elderly prophet then lied that he had been instructed by the Lord to bring him back and when he did so he was then informed of the trick and that the Lord would punish him for disobeying the initial command. The prophet from Judah was killed by a lion on his way and the elderly prophet then retrieved the body, burying it in his own tomb, and instructing his sons to bury him also with his brother prophet when the time came.

Jeroboam, however, did not heed the warning he had been given, continued his wicked ways and thus his house was destined to be destroyed.

Chapter Fourteen

Jeroboam's son Abijah became ill and so the king instructed his wife to disguise herself and seek the advice of Ahijah the prophet regarding their son. Even though Ahijah was now elderly and blind he had been told by the Lord that the king's wife was coming to him and he instructed him to tell her that the house of Jeroboam would be extinguished because of the king's sin in leading the nation into apostasy. The king died and another son Nadab succeeded him.

It was not enough that Rehoboam's foolishness had led to the split of the nation. He also led Judah into apostasy and civil war with the north. During his reign King Shishak of Egypt took away all the treasures and gold shields from the temple, which Rehoboam replaced with bronze replicas. After seventeen years of his evil rule, Rehoboam also died and he was succeeded by Abijam.

Chapter Fifteen

Abijam ruled over Judah following the wicked ways of his father Rehoboam and the wars with Jeroboam in the north continued. The way of life in Judah then changed as Asa took up the kingship from his father Abijam who followed the ways of the Lord but did not remove the high places that had been set up.

The war between the north and south continued, with King Baasha of Israel laying siege to Asa in Judah. Asa then sent what remained of the treasures of the temple and place to the king of Aram, then an ally of Israel, requesting that he make war with Israel and so he did, bringing relief to Judah.

The wicked son of Jeroboam Nadab had succeeded him as king but as he lay siege on the Philistine city of Gibbethon Baasha killed him and took the throne for himself. He then killed all the remaining descendants of Jeroboam, fulfilling the word of the Lord. Baasha's reign continued the wickedness in Israel.

Chapter Sixteen

This chapter is an account of one evil king after another and the fate they met because of their behaviour. Israel moved further and further away from the ways of the Lord as they followed the ways of these kings.

Having come to the throne of Israel by killing King Nadab and all the descendants of Jeroboam, God sent the prophet Jehu to instruct him that his descendants will face the same fate. When he died he was replaced by his son Elah but his reign was short lived for he was murdered by one of his servants called Zimri, who took the throne for himself.

Zimri's reign was extremely brief, lasting just one week. When Israel heard he had killed Elah they sent the leader of their army Omri to besiege Tirzah. Zimri realised his fate was sealed so he set fire to the king's house and died there.

There was now division within the northern tribes with half supporting Tibni and the other half supporting Omri. Tibni was killed and Omri became the sole king. Omri established Samaria as the new capital city in the north and became the worst king so far. He was succeeded by his son, the infamous King Ahab.

Ahab took Jezebel as his foreign queen and established Baal worship throughout Samaria and his kingdom, making him an even more evil king than his father Omri. During his reign Hiel rebuilt Jericho, fulfilling a prophecy made by Joshua when the city was first conquered many generations before.

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter 17 provides the context – a divinely ordained drought – in which the climactic demonstration of the truth about God and the 'gods' will take place in 1 Kings 18:16-40. This passage teaches that it is the Lord, not Baal or any other so called god, who controls both life and death, both fertility and infertility.

This is exemplified in two amazing miracles that the Lord then performs through Elijah. He is instructed to travel to Zarephath where he meets a widow. When Elijah asks her to bring him some water and a little food, she replies that she has nothing cooked and all she has is enough for one last meal for her son and herself, and then they will die because of the drought. However, Elijah persuades her to bring the food and drink to him. When she does so, the little amount of meal and oil she has continues to provide for them throughout the drought.

The son of the widow then fell ill and died. The widow blamed Elijah for bringing this disaster so he took the child to his room and pray to God, who answered him by restoring the boy's life. When he was returned to his mother alive her faith in Elijah and God was evident.

Chapter Eighteen

In Chapter 17 Elijah has lived privately, first in the Transjordanian wilderness and then in a Sidonian home. Now he reappears in public. The drought is to end, but it must become clear beforehand, not only to the widow of Zarephath but also to all Israel, who is God.

Elijah is commanded by God to go to Ahab. On his way he meets a servant of the Lord called Obadiah who, although he worked for Ahab, had also saved the lives of one hundred of the Lord's prophets from death at the hands of Jezebel. Elijah told Obadiah to go to Ahab and say that Elijah was there to meet with him but Obadiah was afraid that Elijah would again disappear and Ahab would take out his anger on Obadiah. Elijah reassured him that he would meet with Ahab and he did so.

Elijah challenged Ahab to a test to see whether it was the Lord or Baal who was the true God. He had Ahab send for all the people to meet at Mount Carmel where eight hundred and fifty priests of Baal and Asherah were also gathered. They were to lay out wood and cut a bull to lay on the wood but were not to burn it. They then called upon Baal all day in a frenzy to show himself by burning the offering to himself but nothing happened.

Elijah then too set up an offering of a bull to the Lord. He placed its pieces on the wood he had prepared and then had the people drench it with water. When he cried out to the Lord fire reigned down, consumed the offering and evaporated all the water. The people then realised that Yahweh was the only Lord, Baal was a non-entity. So Elijah had the priests of Baal arrested and they were killed for their idolatry.

Elijah then informed Ahab that the drought was about to end. Elijah went up Mount Carmel again and prayed to the Lord. Slowly, a cloud appeared followed by heavy rain. Ahab raced back to Jezreel but Elijah got there before him.

Chapter Nineteen

Elijah has won a mighty battle on the mountain, but a still more formidable opponent than Ahab awaits him in the form of Queen Jezebel. Victory now becomes defeat as Elijah retreats, both physically and mentally, and ultimately arrives not at Mount Carmel but at another mountain to confront not Baal but the Lord himself, whom Elijah serves but whose ways he only partly understands and accepts. The chapter concludes by introducing how Elisha became Elijah's disciple.

Chapter Twenty

After Elijah's recruitment of Elisha, one expects to read of his anointing of Hazael as king over Syria and of Jehu as king over Israel. Instead, one finds a story in which a different prophet appears and in which probably a different

king of Syria, Ben-hadad, loses a war with Ahab. The message of Chapter 19 is thus underlined: Elijah is not the only servant of God left, in spite of what he has claimed; and the quiet ways of God must take their course for a while before the events spoken of in 1 Kings 19:17 come to pass.

Ahab's reign was marked by repeated conflict with Ben-hadad of Syria. Ben-hadad's poor military organisation accounted for his failed siege of Samaria, and Ahab defeated him again the next spring at Aphek. Ahab lost his life, however, attempting to retake Ramoth-gilead from Ben-hadad at the eastern edge of his kingdom.

Chapter Twenty One

An apparently reinvigorated Elijah appears again in Jezreel to denounce a new and heinous crime, i.e. the killing of Naboth on the orders of Jezebel so that Ahab might acquire his vineyard, and to foretell the destruction of Ahab's family for all its sins.

Chapter Twenty Two

King Jehoshaphat of Judah joins Ahab in his campaign to restore Ramoth-gilead to Israel from the hands of the Aramæans. When Jehoshaphat first asks to hear what the Lord has to say of this campaign, Ahab has four hundred of his prophets prophesy good things about the outcome but Jehoshaphat wants to hear from a true prophet and so Micaiah is called. He reveals the truth that Ahab will not survive the battle and so Ahab has him put in prison.

The scheming Ahab dressed as an ordinary soldier but said that Jehoshaphat should go into battle in his royal robes. Therefore, it was Jehoshaphat that became the initial target for the Aramæans but they soon realised it was not Ahab and stopped pursuing him. Meanwhile, an archer fired his arrow into the midst of battle and managed to hit Ahab who died later that day from his wounds and was taken back to Samaria to be buried.

The chapter then turns to a fuller account of the reign of Jehoshaphat in Judah. He was a good king and overturned some of the apostate ways that still existed in his lands. He built a fleet of merchant ships but they never set sail, floundering in their home harbour. He did at least make peace with Israel.

The chapter concludes with a brief account of Ahab's son Ahaziah becoming king and how he continued in the wicked ways of his father and mother.