Study 1 Kings Bible Study: The Book of 1 Kings

Starting October 18, 2026

Biblical Survey Series | 60 Minute Study | NIV

When Leadership Loses Its Way

Primary Scriptures: 1 Kings 3:5–14; 8:22–30; 11:1–13; 12:1–19; 18:20–39

New Testament Connections: Matthew 6:33; Matthew 12:42; James 1:5; James 1:22

Recap: Connecting 2 Samuel to 1 Kings

In 2 Samuel, we learned:

- David became king over a united Israel and established Jerusalem as the nation's capital.
- God made a covenant with David, promising that his royal dynasty would continue.
- David experienced great victories but also committed serious sins that affected his family and kingdom.
- Despite his failures, David demonstrated the importance of acknowledging sin and turning back to God.

Second Samuel ends with David still reigning as king, but 1 Kings begins with David nearing the end of his life.

The story now shifts from David to his son Solomon and eventually to the division of Israel into two kingdoms.

An important question emerges: What happens when people experience God's blessings but gradually stop following God's instructions?

Big Idea

1 Kings teaches us that wisdom, wealth, power, and success cannot replace faithfulness to God. When leaders and nations turn away from God, their decisions have consequences that extend far beyond themselves.

Icebreaker

When you think about King Solomon, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Biblical Context

The book of 1 Kings continues the history of Israel's monarchy.

Author: Unknown. Jewish tradition associates the book with Jeremiah, although Scripture does not identify its author.

Historical Period: Approximately 970–850 BC.

Setting: Israel during Solomon's reign and the early years of the divided kingdom.

Key Figures: David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Elijah, Ahab, and Jezebel.

Overview of the Book

Chapters	Major Events
1–2	David's final days and Solomon becoming king
3–4	Solomon receives wisdom from God
5–8	Solomon builds and dedicates the temple
9–11	Solomon's prosperity and spiritual decline
12–14	Israel divides into two kingdoms
15–16	The reigns of various kings
17–19	Elijah confronts idolatry and calls Israel back to God
20–22	Ahab's reign and God's prophetic warnings

One of the most important things to understand about 1 Kings is that the book is not simply concerned with whether a king was politically successful.

The biblical writer consistently evaluates kings according to their faithfulness to God.

Theme 1: Godly Wisdom Begins with Recognizing Our Need for God

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 3:5–14 (NIV)

Biblical Insight

After Solomon becomes king, God appears to him in a dream and invites him to ask for what he desires.

Solomon could have requested wealth, military strength, or a long life. Instead, he acknowledges his inexperience and asks God for wisdom to govern the people.

1 Kings 3:9 (NIV)

"So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong."

God is pleased with Solomon's request and grants him extraordinary wisdom.

Digging Deeper: Understanding Solomon's Request

One important detail is that Solomon does not simply ask to become more intelligent.

The Hebrew expression translated **"discerning heart"** carries the idea of a *listening heart*.

Solomon is asking for the ability to listen carefully, understand situations, distinguish right from wrong, and make decisions that honor God.

In biblical thought, the heart is not merely the center of emotions. It is also associated with understanding, judgment, and moral decisions.

Solomon recognizes that having authority does not automatically mean having the wisdom to exercise it.

This is particularly important because Solomon is assuming responsibility for leading God's people.

His request demonstrates humility and an understanding that leadership requires dependence on God.

Cross Reference

James 1:5 (NIV)

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

Discussion Questions

1. When God told Solomon he could ask for anything, Solomon asked for wisdom to lead His people. Why do you think Solomon chose wisdom over wealth, power, or personal success?

2. Solomon admitted that he lacked the experience necessary to lead God's people. What does his willingness to acknowledge his limitations teach us about humility?

3. God was pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom to govern others rather than simply requesting blessings for himself. What does this teach us about the kind of requests that honor God?

Reflection Questions

4. Solomon asked God for wisdom before facing many of the challenges of being king. Why is it important to seek God's guidance before making decisions rather than waiting until something goes wrong?

5. What is the difference between asking God to give us what we want and asking God for wisdom to make the right decisions?

6. Sometimes we make decisions based on what we want rather than what is wise. How can we learn to recognize the difference?

Theme 2: God's Blessings Should Draw Us Closer to Him

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 8:22–30; 9:1–9 (NIV)

Biblical Insight

One of Solomon's greatest accomplishments was constructing the temple in Jerusalem.

David had desired to build a house for the Lord, but God had appointed Solomon to complete that work.

After seven years of construction, Solomon dedicates the temple to God.

During the dedication, Solomon acknowledges God's greatness and faithfulness.

1 Kings 8:27 (NIV)

"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

Although Solomon had built a magnificent temple, he understood that no building could contain God.

Digging Deeper: The Temple and God's Presence

The temple represented an important development in Israel's worship.

During the wilderness journey, God's presence was associated with the tabernacle, a portable place of worship.

Under Solomon, the temple became the permanent central sanctuary for Israel's worship.

However, the temple was never intended to become a substitute for obedience.

In 1 Kings 9, God responds to Solomon and reminds him that the future of his kingdom depends upon faithfulness.

God warns that if Israel turns away and worships other gods, even the temple itself will not protect the nation from judgment.

An important insight: The people could possess a beautiful temple and still have hearts that were far from God.

The presence of religious buildings, ceremonies, and traditions did not guarantee a faithful relationship with Him.

Cross Reference

John 4:23–24 (NIV)

Jesus teaches that true worshipers worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

This reminds us that worship is more than a physical location or outward religious activity.

Discussion Questions

7. Solomon built a magnificent temple for God, but he acknowledged that even the heavens could not contain Him. What does this teach us about the difference between a place of worship and the God we worship?

8. After the temple was completed, God reminded Solomon that Israel still needed to remain obedient. Why do you think God emphasized faithfulness even after such a great religious accomplishment?

9. Israel had a beautiful temple, established worship practices, and a history of God's blessings. Why do you think it was still possible for the people to drift away from God?

Reflection Questions

10. What are some ways people today can become more focused on religious activities and traditions than on developing a genuine relationship with God?

11. How can we make sure that the blessings and accomplishments we experience lead us toward greater gratitude and faithfulness rather than spiritual complacency?

12. Sometimes we become so accustomed to God's blessings that we begin to take them for granted. What are some ways we can remain grateful for blessings that have become a normal part of our lives?

Theme 3: A Divided Heart Can Lead to a Divided Life

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 11:1–13; 12:1–19 (NIV)

Biblical Insight

Solomon began his reign with extraordinary wisdom and God's blessings.

His kingdom experienced tremendous prosperity, and his reputation spread far beyond Israel.

However, as Solomon grew older, he began compromising his commitment to God.

Solomon married many foreign women who worshiped other gods, and Scripture tells us that his wives turned his heart away from the Lord.

1 Kings 11:4 (NIV)

"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been."

Solomon eventually supported the worship of other gods, directly violating God's commands.

Digging Deeper: How Did Solomon Lose His Way?

This is one of the most surprising developments in 1 Kings.

The man who asked God for wisdom eventually made decisions that directly contradicted God's instructions.

Solomon did not lack knowledge. He knew what God required.

His problem was not simply an absence of wisdom but a failure to remain obedient.

This reveals an important distinction:

Knowing what God says is not the same as living according to what God says.

The decline also did not happen in a single moment.

Solomon's compromises accumulated over time until his heart was no longer fully devoted to God.

There is another important connection to Israel's history.

In Deuteronomy 17:16–17, God had warned that Israel's kings should not accumulate excessive horses, wives, or wealth. Yet 1 Kings describes Solomon accumulating all three.

His growing prosperity was accompanied by increasing disobedience.

The Kingdom Divides

Following Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam becomes king.

The people ask Rehoboam to lighten the heavy burdens imposed during Solomon's reign.

Instead of listening to the experienced advisers, Rehoboam follows the advice of younger men who encourage him to respond harshly.

His decision contributes to the division of Israel into two kingdoms.

The Divided Kingdom

Northern Kingdom

Israel

First king: Jeroboam

Ten tribes

Southern Kingdom

Judah

First king: Rehoboam

Judah and Benjamin

Jerusalem remained the capital of Judah. The northern kingdom initially centered its government at Shechem and later established Samaria as its capital.

Cross Reference

James 1:22 (NIV)

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Discussion Questions

13. Solomon was known for his extraordinary wisdom, yet he eventually made decisions that led him away from God. What does his experience teach us about the difference between knowing what is right and actually doing what is right?

14. Solomon's heart gradually turned away from God as he allowed other influences to shape his decisions. Why do you think spiritual compromise often happens gradually rather than all at once?

15. Rehoboam listened to his friends instead of the older advisers who encouraged him to respond with kindness. How can we recognize the difference between people who give us good advice and people who simply agree with us?

Reflection Questions

16. We often hear people say, "When you know better, you do better." But Solomon's life shows us that isn't always true. Why do you think knowing the right thing to do doesn't always lead to doing it?

17. Solomon's story reminds us that even people with great wisdom and spiritual knowledge can make poor choices. What do you think makes the difference between simply knowing God's Word and actually living by it?

Theme 4: God Continues to Call His People Back to Him

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 17:1–6; 18:20–39; 19:9–18 (NIV)

Biblical Insight

Following the division of Israel, the northern kingdom experiences a succession of kings who lead the people further into idolatry.

One of the most notorious is King Ahab, whose wife Jezebel actively promotes the worship of Baal.

God raises up the prophet Elijah to confront the spiritual condition of the nation.

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

He confronts the people with a direct question.

1 Kings 18:21 (NIV)

"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

The people initially remain silent.

After the prophets of Baal fail to receive an answer from their god, Elijah prays, and the Lord answers by sending fire.

The people acknowledge that the Lord is God.

Digging Deeper: The Meaning of Mount Carmel

The confrontation on Mount Carmel was more than a contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

It addressed a fundamental question: **Who is truly God, and who deserves Israel's worship?**

Baal was associated with storms, rain, and agricultural fertility.

This makes the drought announced by Elijah particularly significant.

The God of Israel demonstrates authority over the very forces that Baal's worshipers believed their god controlled.

Another important detail appears in 1 Kings 18:30.

Before Elijah prays, he repairs the altar of the Lord that had been torn down.

He then uses twelve stones, representing the tribes of Israel.

Even though the nation had divided politically, Elijah's actions recalled Israel's identity as God's covenant people.

The nation had become divided, but God's covenant call to His people had not changed.

Elijah's Discouragement

In chapter 19, Elijah becomes afraid and discouraged following Jezebel's threats.

Despite witnessing God's power on Mount Carmel, he struggles with fear and isolation.

God meets Elijah in his distress, provides for his physical needs, and gives him renewed direction.

God also reveals that Elijah is not alone. There are still seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed to Baal.

This reminds us that even when circumstances appear hopeless, God continues working in ways we may not recognize.

Cross Reference

Romans 11:2–5 (NIV)

Paul refers to Elijah's experience and God's preservation of a **faithful remnant**, showing that God has not abandoned His people.

Discussion Questions

18. Elijah asked the people how long they would continue wavering between the Lord and Baal. What does his question reveal about the spiritual condition of Israel?

19. After witnessing God's power on Mount Carmel, Elijah still became discouraged and afraid. What does his experience teach us about the challenges even faithful believers can face?

20. Elijah believed he was the only faithful prophet remaining, but God revealed that thousands had not bowed to Baal. What does this teach us about the danger of judging a situation only by what we can see?

Reflection Questions

21. Elijah challenged the people of Israel to stop wavering between God and Baal. Why do you think people sometimes struggle to fully commit to following God, even when they know what is right?

22. God performed a great miracle on Mount Carmel, yet Elijah still became discouraged and afraid. Why do you think we sometimes struggle to trust God in our present circumstances, even after witnessing His power and faithfulness in the past?

New Testament Connection: Someone Greater Than Solomon

Scripture: Matthew 12:42 (NIV)

Jesus refers to Solomon's wisdom and declares that someone greater than Solomon is present.

Solomon was renowned for his wisdom, wealth, and accomplishments. Yet his life also revealed the limitations of human leadership.

Jesus represents something greater.

Where Solomon eventually compromised, Jesus remained obedient to the Father.

Where Israel's kings repeatedly failed, Jesus is the faithful King whose kingdom will never end.

The story of 1 Kings ultimately reminds us that God's people need more than a wise earthly ruler. They need a King whose righteousness and faithfulness are perfect.

Discussion Question

23. Throughout 1 Kings, we see that even the most gifted and successful leaders had weaknesses and failures. What does this teach us about why our ultimate trust should be placed in God rather than people?

Bringing It All Together

Four Important Lessons from 1 Kings

1. **Wisdom begins with dependence on God.** Solomon's early humility reminds us that we need God's guidance.
2. **Blessings do not replace obedience.** Solomon's temple and prosperity could not substitute for a faithful heart.
3. **Our decisions have consequences beyond ourselves.** Solomon's compromises and Rehoboam's decisions affected an entire nation.
4. **God remains faithful even when people turn away.** Through prophets like Elijah, God continued calling His people back to Him.

Closing Reflection

When you look at the entire book of 1 Kings, what stands out most to you about the relationship between God's faithfulness and the choices people make?

Closing Thought

The book begins with a united kingdom enjoying God's blessings and ends with a divided nation struggling with idolatry, disobedience, and poor leadership.

Yet through it all, God continues to speak, correct, provide, and preserve His people.

The central lesson of 1 Kings is not simply that people can lose their way, but that God continues calling His people to return to Him.