

SESSION TEN

SOLOMON'S REIGN OF PEACE

1 Kings 1:1–11:43

I. ORIENTATION TO 1 KINGS

Originally, the books of First and Second Kings formed one undivided book in the original Hebrew version (as was true of First and Second Samuel). The LXX, however, regarded both Samuel and Kings as a unity and made four divisions (I, II, III and IV *Basileiai*, i.e., reigns or dynasties). Thus, the latter two divisions of the LXX represented what we know as I and II Kings. The Hebrew text retained First and Second Kings as one book until AD 1516 with the publication of the Hebrew text by Daniel Bomberg.

The author of Kings is unknown, although some have suggested Jeremiah the prophet.¹ Whoever compiled the Hebrew text that we now have obviously depended upon a number of prior written documents.² This would have included the Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:41), the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, and the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.³ The final compilation would have taken place during or after the exile.⁴

When First and Second Kings are viewed together, the purpose of the books is to trace and evaluate the state of the monarchy from the time of David (with whom the Davidic covenant was made) to the time of the Babylonian captivity (the final collapse of the monarchy). These books are set against the background of Deut 28–29 (the blessings and curses of the covenant agreement), the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7), and the covenant with Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:31–39). Consequently, they show the failure of each successive king to live up to the obligations of the monarchy, resulting in the termination of the northern kingdom of Israel by Assyria (722 BC) and the termination of the southern kingdom of Judah (605 BC). The contents of the books are not just to provide a history of the period from 971 to 568 BC (the latter date being the release of king Jehoiachin in Babylon—2 Kgs 25:27). Rather they evaluate each phase and evidence the reasons for failure in contrast to YHWH's grace to turn the king and nation back to Him by appropriate discipline and the ministry of the prophets. Hence, the basic tone is one of covenant failure throughout the monarchy.

¹Gleason Archer, *Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 289. The Jewish tradition preserved in the Babylonian Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 15a) attributes the books of Kings to Jeremiah (note Jer 52 and 2 Kgs 24–25).

²"These documents were probably official court histories kept by royal scribes (cf. 2 Sam. 8:16; 20:24–25) and very likely parallel the royal annals of the Mesopotamian civilizations of Assyria and Babylonia" (Hill and Walton, *Old Testament Survey*, 203).

³The sources could have included others. See Hill and Walton, 204.

⁴The material seems to reflect the work of one author who witnessed the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:22–26; 25:27–30 may be two historical abstracts appended to the book). Andrew Hill holds that the book was probably composed sometime between the fall of Jerusalem (587/586 BC) and the decree of King Cyrus of Persia (539 BC) (see Hill and Walton, 204).

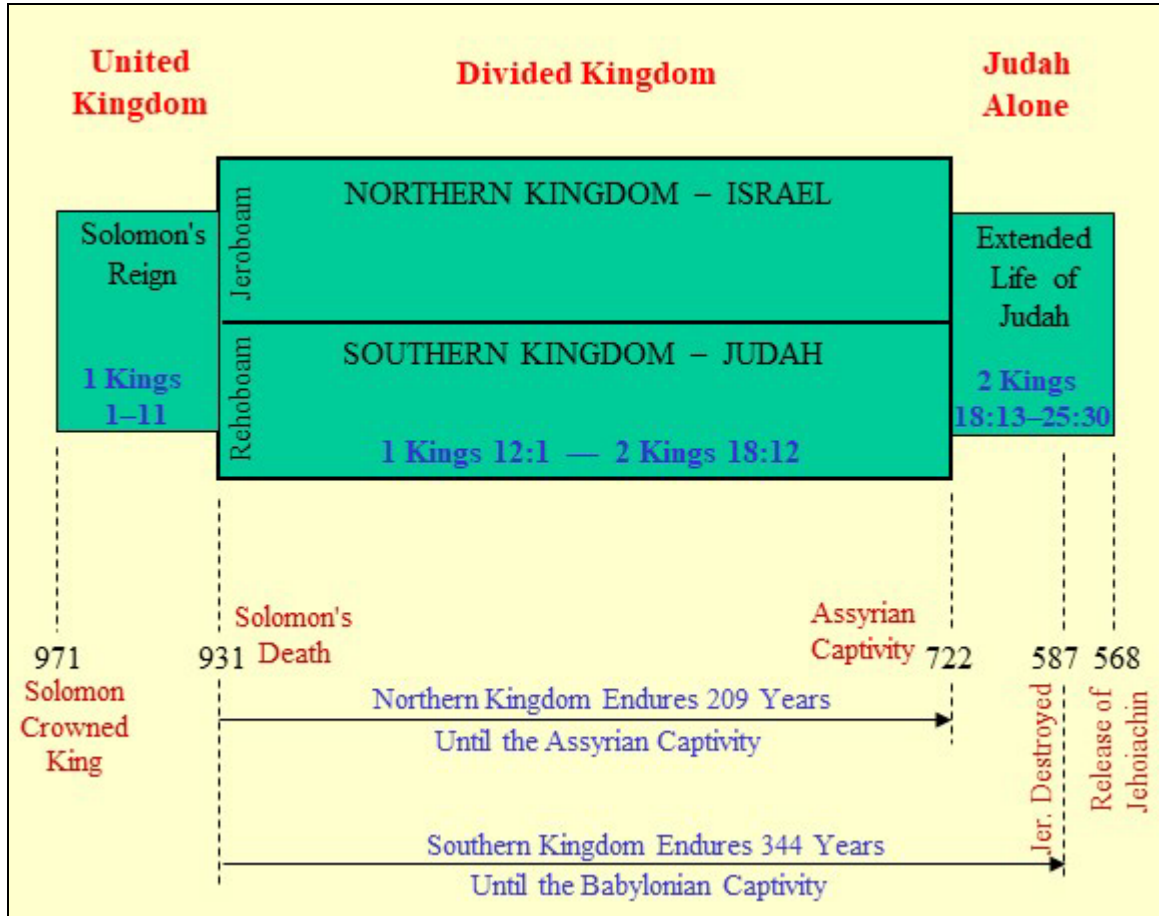
A secondary purpose is related to the continuity of the Davidic line. Hill writes,

Indeed, part of the purpose of the Kings history is the legitimization of the Davidic dynasty through the agency of the prophetic office, because the kingship covenant previously announced by Nathan sanctioned the tribe of Judah and the family of David as rightful heirs to the Hebrew throne (cf. 2 Sam. 7:1-17).⁵

Throughout this long period, God will remain faithful to the nation on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant. However, responsibility for obedience is required in order to experience blessing. Disobedience will bring cursing, and obedience will bring blessing (Deut 28). Two key figures will help shape the course of the nation: the king and the prophets whom God raises up. The King is given the responsibility to use the power of the throne to serve the interests of YHWH. This responsibility is measured by his faithfulness to the Mosaic Law, and God will deal with him in accordance with the principles set forth in the Davidic Covenant (recall 2 Sam 7:14—"when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men"). During the divided kingdom, the prophet becomes a spokesman for God . . . someone to speak a word of righteousness. He raises a cry of alarm against the disobedience of the king and nation, and he calls the people to turn back to the Lord. Even when the kings turn from YHWH, He continues to assert His control during the time of the monarchy through the prophets.

⁵Hill and Walton, 209.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF 1 AND 2 KINGS



III. THE PERIODS OF THE MONARCHY

In 1 Sam 4, the theocracy came to a disastrous conclusion with the ark leaving Shiloh, thus indicating the departure of God's glory from the nation. Shortly following was the call of the nation for a king and hence a monarchy. The monarchy will continue throughout the remainder of the OT (though the Davidic descendants will only serve as "governors" following the Babylonian exile), which can be divided into five distinct periods:

- (1) United Kingdom (1051-931 BC)
 United nation under rule of Saul, David, and Solomon
- (2) Divided Kingdom (931-722 BC)
 The Southern Kingdom is the Davidic line, and the Northern Kingdom is the non-Davidic line which ends in 722 BC with the invasion of the Assyrians.
- (3) Judah Alone (722-605 BC)
- (4) Judah in Exile (605-536 BC)

The Chaldeans attack Judah, and the first deportation takes place in 605 BC. Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed in 587 BC.

(5) Post-exilic Period (536-430 BC)

Zerubbabel leads a return to Judah in 536 BC following the decree of Cyrus, the Persian king. The OT canon of Scripture closes with Malachi in about 430 BC.

IV. INTRODUCTION TO SOLOMON'S REIGN

The first half of 1 Kings is totally given to the reign of David's son, Solomon. This is quite fitting, for when David was given the promises in 2 Sam 7 (Davidic covenant), the expectation was that his son would succeed him to the throne and that God would establish his kingdom. Furthermore, this very first son to follow David was to have the honor of building the temple as a permanent residence of the ark. So, this very first son is quite significant. What kind of kingdom will he have? What will he be like? Will his kingdom endure? As the story turns out, Solomon will be the first of many in the line of David who fail. His heart is not totally devoted to YHWH. The amazing thing is that Solomon had so much going for him, e.g., he is the wisest and most discerning king to ever sit on the throne of Israel. The question that remains is this: if Solomon's reign was not successful, what reign will be?

Of course, there were many good things about Solomon, and he even becomes a type of the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., his glorious reign of peace). Without doubt, Solomon loved the LORD, but he had a divided heart which marred his glorious reign.

The purpose of chapters 1–11 may be stated this way:

To evaluate the reign of Solomon which is marked by God's blessing, limited only by a divided heart.⁶

V. SOLOMON'S ELECTION

The Davidic covenant only promised that David's son would succeed him. The oldest son, who would normally be the heir-apparent, was not Solomon but Adonijah. David, however, does not choose his successor according to the practice of primogeniture but on the basis of election. Sometime earlier, he had vowed to Bathsheba that her son Solomon would be the next king (1:17,30). This vow seems to be based on revelation that David received from the LORD (1 Chron 22:9). Although Solomon was not the next in line, God chose him as king. Hence Solomon was elected by the LORD in grace. Even Adonijah recognized this, saying, "It was his from the LORD" (1 Kg 2:15). Despite his election by grace, Solomon was placed on the throne under conditions (1 Kg 2:1-4). Obedience was a necessary basis for ruling. Solomon's election demonstrated that his failure was not the result of a wrong choice; he was God's choice!

⁶Elliott Johnson, Class Notes, Dallas Seminary.

VI. BLESSINGS ON SOLOMON

In evaluating his reign, we should notice that Solomon was not only elected to the kingship, but he was blessed in many remarkable ways. Some have argued that Solomon was not really gifted for the kingship, but this does not do justice to the text. Solomon's gifts emerged in a context in which he was given the opportunity to make any request from the LORD. The fact that he asks for wisdom evidences great maturity on his part.

A. Solomon's Request

Solomon's request is for "an understanding heart to judge thy people to discern between good and evil" (3:9). [Hebrew = **לֵב שִׁמְעַת לְשֹׁפֵט**].

Literally, the text says "a heart of hearing to judge" which would imply a *receptive heart*. John Gray comments:

'A receptive (lit. hearing) heart' implies patience to hear a case and understand it fully, the heart (*lēb, lēbāb*) for the ancient Semite being the seat of the understanding. Here again there is a close parallel with Isa 11:3, 'he will not decide by what he hears with his ears'. From the Ras Shamra texts we learn that the root *sāpat* (Ugaritic *ṣpt*) had the primary connotation 'to rule', judgment, the usual sense of the verb in Hebrew, being but one of the essential functions of the ruler.⁷

B. God's Response

The LORD was pleased with Solomon's request, and His response in 3:11-14 is fourfold:

1. God commends Solomon for the maturity of his request
2. God grants his request (3:12)
3. God gives him rewards which he had not asked for (riches and honor)
4. God cautions Solomon to obey that his days may be prolonged

The granting of the request (3:12) sheds further light on Solomon's gifts. This is further clarified in 1 Kg 4:29.

1 Kg 3:12 - "a wise and discerning heart"

1 Kg 4:29 - "Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind"

⁷John Gray, *1 & 2 Kings*, 126.

wisdom = חִכְמָה

very great understanding = וְתִבְיֹנָה הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד

breadth of mind = רֵחַב לֵב

A wise heart or wisdom (חִכְמָה) is a key word to the book of Proverbs. Basically, it means "to have a skill." Thus it came to mean "the capacity to look upon life's situations and discern the proper reaction or proper thing to do in order that life might be lived out skillfully."

Understanding (תִּבְיֹנָה) refers to "discrimination in judgment," being etymologically related to the preposition *bēn* (between). Hence, the idea is "to distinguish and choose between things."

Breadth of mind is literally "breadth of heart" but obviously looks at the mind. The word is often used of the spaciousness of the land. This probably has some relation to Solomon's capacity to relate wisdom and understanding to so many different areas of life and to comprehend so many different things in nature (cf. 1 Kg 4:30-34).

These chapters (1–11) are marked by several statements about Solomon's wisdom and about the riches, fame, and honor that God graciously gave him. With this wisdom, God equipped him for administering the nation and for accomplishing great achievements. In this, Solomon was unsurpassed, and this is crucial to understanding the significance of these chapters. Solomon was marked out with every gracious provision to succeed, and yet he failed. The summary statement about Solomon (10:23-24) which is placed just before chapter 11 regarding his downfall is intentional. The reader is supposed to see the contrast:

10:23-24 — "So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And all the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart."

Ch 11 — "his wives turned his heart away . . . did what was evil in the sight of the LORD"

To have wisdom like Solomon had was a glorious blessing, but wisdom is no guarantee against decay. Solomon's request was good . . . the choice of wisdom . . . but the "will to obey" might be considered a better choice.

VII. SOLOMON'S DOWNFALL: THE KING WITH A DIVIDED HEART

To read 1 Kgs 11 concerning Solomon's sad departure is nearly heartbreaking. Vs 4 is quite descriptive:

"For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been."

However, the problem was not limited to the time when he was old. It seems to have culminated when he was old, but it was latently present much earlier:

"Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statues of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high place" (3:3).

All of this material on Solomon's downfall must be seen against the backdrop of Deut 17, for Solomon is making serious mistakes in spite of the Word of God. The text makes it very clear that Solomon foolishly took to himself a multitude of wives and concubines (11:3; cf. Deut 17:17), and many of these wives were foreign women in violation of the Law (Ex 34:12-16; Deut 7:1-5). Thus, he was a divided man in his faithfulness to YHWH regarding marriage.

Solomon also was a divided man in worship. He loved YHWH . . . he even built the Temple and praised YHWH before the whole nation (ch 8). However, he worshipped at the high places (3:3) and even worshipped the gods of his wives (11:5-6).

He was a divided man in his foreign policy. Notice the brief comment in 3:1 regarding the marriage alliance that Solomon formed with Pharaoh King of Egypt. This was using wisdom, but it was wisdom apart from obedience.

He was a divided man in his building program. Notice the insertion of the material regarding Solomon's own house which is included in the section on the Temple. Vs 6:38 is a clear contrast with 7:1: he was seven years in building the Temple but thirteen in building his own house.

Dr. Waltke has commented, "Solomon stamped the inner image of his spiritual life upon the outward history of Israel; his divided heart left a kingdom divided in many ways."⁸ Politically, the kingdom is left divided between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Religiously, the people are torn between worship at the Temple and the high places. Socially, a wealthy class has emerged in contrast to an impoverished class (Solomon is well-fed but the people are heavily taxed; cf. 1 Sam 8:10-13 in which the nation was warned of the excessive demands that a king would make on the social life).

VIII. SOLOMON AND THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

To really appreciate just how crucial chapters 1–11 are, one needs to study the revelation from YHWH that Solomon receives. For the most part, this is very closely tied in with the Davidic covenant.

Direct Revelation	Mediated Revelation
3:3-14	1:29-30
6:11-13	2:1-4
9:1-9	2:15
11:11-13	5:5

As Solomon comes to the throne, there is a yearning by his subjects that the promises to David regarding the throne and kingdom of his seed will be fulfilled with Solomon. In their hearts they would be asking, "Will this be the one whose kingdom is fully blessed and enduring?" Notice the comment in 1:47 by David's servants:

"May your God make the name of Solomon better than your name and his throne greater than your throne" (cf. 1:37).

⁸Bruce K. Waltke, Class Notes, Dallas Seminary.

Nevertheless, the full realization of the Davidic covenant could only come by obedience. David makes this clear to Solomon before his own death (1 Kg 2:3-4). Following Solomon's request for wisdom, the Lord Himself confirms this necessity of obedience for the full realization of the promises:

"And if you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father, David walked, then I will prolong your days" (3:14).

While Solomon is engaged in the construction of the Temple, the Lord again instructs Solomon about the essentiality of obedience for blessing (6:11-13). In this instance, two promises are held out if Solomon obeys:

- (1) Personal - *"I will carry out My word with you which I spoke to David your father."*
- (2) National - *"I will dwell among the sons of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel."*

As Solomon completes the Temple and has the dedication ceremony, he offers a lengthy prayer which seems to be patterned after the revelation God had given him in 6:11-13 and is very related to the Davidic covenant.

8:12-21 — A review of the Davidic covenant and praise to God for allowing Solomon to build the Temple

8:22-26 — Personal: Prays that the promise (not to lack a man on the throne if there is obedience) will be confirmed with him.

8:27-53 — National: Prays for the welfare of the nation in hopes they will obtain blessing.

Solomon clearly understands the necessity of obedience for the realization of the Davidic promises (8:25), and he even exhorts the nation in this regard:

"Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments" (8:61).

What a contrast this exhortation makes with the commentary on Solomon's life:

" . . . and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been" (11:4).

In response to Solomon's prayer, the LORD appears again to Solomon and further clarifies Solomon's relation to the Davidic covenant (9:1-9):

9:4 — The condition: Obedience!

9:5 — Promise for Solomon: "then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David . . ."

9:6-9 — Promise Regarding Solomon's sons: if disobedience, then

- (1) Israel will be cut off from the land
- (2) the Temple will be destroyed
- (3) Israel will be disgraced among the Gentile nations (v 7)

Thus, the Davidic covenant is clearly reasoned out with Solomon, and further revelation is made how this will affect future "sons" in David's line. Thus the Davidic covenant is not limited to the life of Solomon

as the seed of David. This covenant will be applicable to each succeeding king. Therefore, as the rest of the book of 1–2 Kings is examined, the question remains: What king will be faithful such that his kingdom is forever established? Each king, like Solomon, is evaluated and subsequently disapproved, until the time comes when Jesus is born as a son in the line of David. At the end of His ministry when He enters Jerusalem, a large number of the people are looking to Jesus to be the one who brings in the kingdom that was anticipated by the Davidic covenant:

"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest" (Mk 11:9-10).

Clearly, they recognize that the Davidic covenant has not yet been fulfilled, and they are aware that the kingdom has not yet been established either.

As the section concludes (in ch 11), Solomon has obviously failed in spite of every clear revelation that had been made to him. Consequently, the division of the kingdom that took place after Solomon's death was not accidental but rather a divine judgment for disobedience (1 Kgs 11:11-13). Both the king and the kingdom had grievously sinned.

The section on Solomon closes with one last divine revelation from YHWH, not to Solomon, however, but to Jeroboam (11:31-39):

vv 31-37 — The judgment that is falling on Solomon's kingdom

vv 38-39 — The principle by which God will now begin to deal with the Northern Kingdom:

- (1) The condition of obedience (38a)
- (2) Promise: "I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you" (38b)
- (3) Limitation: David's descendants now afflicted, but "not always" (39)

Thus, as Solomon's reign concludes, we see that he has failed to fully obey and hence has jeopardized the realization of the Davidic covenant. Consequently, his kingdom will be divided, but the Davidic covenant will continue, and each successive king will be evaluated in that light. The warning of 9:6-9 regarding continued disobedience (which is an extension of Deut 28–29) will become an actuality when Judah is carried away into exile in Babylon.

IX. APPENDIX: THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

The Abrahamic covenant established Israel as mediators of blessing and the knowledge of YHWH to the Gentile nations (cf. Ex 19). Solomon brings this out and is very concerned about this. Notice the statements in his prayer: 8:41-43 and 8:59-60. Israel is to obey and be blessed "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else."

There is some realization of this in Solomon's reign as revealed in 10:1-13 (the queen of Sheba) and in 10:23-24. This is a taste of what the nation of Israel should have been!