

# 1 KINGS

## THE RISE AND DECLINE OF DAVID'S HOUSE

A 13-LESSON STUDY

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REFORMED EXPOSITORY  
BIBLE STUDY

**ZACHARY GROFF**  
and **PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN**

  
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## REFORMED EXPOSITORY BIBLE STUDIES

*A Companion Series to the Reformed Expository Commentaries*

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*1 Kings: The Rise and Decline of David's House*  
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To Pastor Carl Robbins,  
a modern-day Elijah pronouncing God's Word  
of justice, mercy, and truth.

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## SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God’s Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage’s main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible’s message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken  
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

## INTRODUCING 1 KINGS

Although they have been divided into separate volumes for more than two thousand years, originally 1 Kings and 2 Kings comprised a single book of biblical history. The **main purpose** of 1 Kings is to show what utter folly it is for any kingdom to turn away from the sovereign rule and royal authority of the one true God. The book does this by documenting the rise and fall of Solomon—a tragic tale of spiritual folly, moral failure, and culpable idolatry that divided Israel into two kingdoms to the north and south.

Taken as a whole, however, 1 and 2 Kings have the wider purpose of proving God’s faithfulness to his kingdom. Despite the repeated failures of Israel’s and Judah’s kings to love and serve him, God never gave up on his covenant oath to establish David’s “royal throne over Israel forever” (1 Kings 9:5; see also 2 Sam. 7:16). We see the proof of God’s faithfulness to this kingdom promise at the very end of 2 Kings, when King Jehoiachin gets released from bondage after thirty-seven years in a Babylonian prison (see 2 Kings 25:27–30). The famous house of David may be diminished, but it is still a dynasty, keeping alive the hope that Christ will come as the future king of God’s forever kingdom.

According to tradition, the **author** of Kings is the prophet Jeremiah, a notable writer who was alive during the Babylonian captivity and certainly could have drafted the book’s final chapters. This is merely a tradition, however; the book itself gives no indication of specific authorship. Since the events of 1 and 2 Kings span more than four hundred years of ancient history, it is not unlikely that the book’s eventual author drew from earlier sources—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of course—as he put this manuscript into its final form.

Even if we do not know the author’s name, we do know a good deal, simply through what he wrote, about his priorities and perspective—and

this may be more important. Evidently, he knew and loved the law of God. We know this because he constantly evaluates the kings of Israel and Judah according to God's divine standards for kingship. In telling his story, the author was as much a theologian as a historian. In addition to giving his readers the royal facts (who reigned where, and for how long), he also wanted to interpret what happened to each king according to the character and commandments of God.

Compared to whoever wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles—another two-volume work that covers much of the same historical ground—the author of 1 and 2 Kings took a somewhat more negative view of the kings of Israel and Judah. His ethical evaluations of them are more stringent—presumably because he wanted to maintain high moral standards. But his exposé of their royal folly had a positive purpose: to motivate people to keep their covenant with their God.

The first **audience** for Kings consisted of the Old Testament people of God. More specifically, the book was written for the people of the southern kingdom of Judah—not the northern kingdom of Israel, which had long since been destroyed—who had survived as captives in Babylon. Their historical vantage point allowed them to look back to the glory days of David and Solomon from their lowly vantage point as exiles and refugees. The tragic tale of 1 and 2 Kings helped them understand what had gone wrong and perhaps what to do about it. It also gave them a modicum of hope, especially with King Jehoiachin's survival at the end of 2 Kings.

More broadly, these two volumes of sacred history are for the church at all times, in all places. What Paul said about the story of Moses applies equally to the stories of Solomon and Elijah: "These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11). In addition to many practical lessons that we can apply at the personal level, what we learn from 1 and 2 Kings overall is God's plan for a righteous kingdom.

The immediate literary **context** for Kings is Samuel. In effect, 2 Samuel is the prequel to 1 Kings. That book ends with King David purchasing land for an altar to God and, ultimately, for a temple. First Kings picks up the story with the royal intrigue and palace scandals that took place during David's last days and then continues with his son Solomon's ascension to



the throne and his quest to build the temple that his father planned but never built. This is Israel's golden age.

The historical context for the second half of the book is the division of Solomon's kingdom upon his death and the ensuing civil war. The southern kingdom—known as Judah, whose capital city was in Jerusalem—was comprised of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The northern kingdom—known as Israel, with its capital city in Samaria—was comprised of the other ten tribes of Israel. In effect, 1 Kings is the original “tale of two cities.” Beginning in chapter 12, these two kingdoms and their kings—who run in succession from Rehoboam to Jehoshaphat in the south and from Jeroboam to Ahaziah in the north—form the geographic, political, and moral reference point of everything that happens in the rest of the book.

Another context needs to be kept in mind: Deuteronomy, with its instructions for Israel's kings (see Deut. 17:14–20) and the consequences it foretells for rulers who either obey or disobey God. First Kings evaluates its own rulers against the standard of how much each one fulfilled these covenant responsibilities. By this standard alone, each son of David either “did what was evil” (e.g., 1 Kings 11:6) or “did what was right” (e.g., 1 Kings 15:11) in “the sight of the LORD.” By and large, if we want to know what will happen to a king or a kingdom that honors or dishonors God, all we need to do is consult the list of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28. And it is helpful to keep in mind that, although a couple of the southern kings are good (Asa and Jehoshaphat), all the northern kings are evil—every last cursed one of them.

The **key word** in 1 Kings should be obvious from the book's title: *king* or *kingdom*. Various forms of “the LORD God” are also prevalent, occurring more than five hundred times across 1 and 2 Kings, as a reminder of who is really on the throne. There are a few more contenders, however, for this book's **key verse**. David's final instructions in 2:1–4, grounded in the law of Moses, serve as the moral standard for Solomon and his sons. God repeats these instructions, along with additional warnings, when he appears to Solomon in 9:3–9. The rest of the book might well be considered the outworking of these divine and Davidic exhortations.

These blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience do indeed come true as predicted—especially the curses. This is confirmed dramatically by 11:11–13, in which God foretells that the kingdom will be

divided between ten tribes and two tribes as a direct result of Solomon's lawbreaking. Other verses in 1 Kings also mark critical turning points in the biblical narrative: Solomon's wrong turn toward the direction of other gods in 11:4, Israel's rejection of Rehoboam in 12:16 that separated it from Judah forever, and Elijah's prophecy in 17:1 that summoned a multiyear drought to justly punish Israel's idolatry.

Some of the most important **theological themes** of 1 Kings have been alluded to already, including the sovereignty of God, the evil of idolatry, and the faithfulness of God to his covenant. The book also offers valuable teaching about the doctrine of depravity. Without good spiritual leadership, humans go from bad to worse. This is true on the national as well as the personal level, as we learn from both Israel and Judah. No social, military, or economic factor matters nearly as much to a nation's well-being as its obedience or disobedience to God. A political success can still be a spiritual failure. And because God is holy, sin always gets punished in the end.

More positively, God is building a kingdom, and to that end he has promised always to provide a righteous king. The good kings serve the Lord and refuse to bow down to idols (or, even better, they destroy them). But the very best kings still fall short of God's standard. This shows, by way of contrast, what kind of king we need and what kind of king God has enthroned for us in Jesus Christ. We also learn about Christ's kingship by way of comparison: the wisdom of Solomon foreshadows the incarnation of wisdom in Jesus Christ, who is "wisdom from God" (1 Cor. 1:30). Jesus thus correctly described his kingly ministry as "something greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42).

Through the ministries of Nathan, Micaiah, and especially Elijah, 1 Kings also helps us see what kind of prophet we need. The New Testament identifies John the Baptist as "the Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14; cf. Mal. 4:5–6; Luke 1:17)—a prophet who foretells the coming of the Messiah. Elijah's ministry foreshadows the prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ. Like Elijah before him, Jesus will proclaim salvation, pronounce judgment, provide for widows and orphans, and perform miracles, including raising the dead back to life.

The proper worship of God is another key theme throughout 1 Kings. The dedication of the temple in chapter 8 and the burning sacrifice that

Elijah makes in chapter 18 are marvelous examples of zealous, glorious worship. They are also beautiful examples of fervent intercessory prayer (see James 5:16–18), both public and private, for national and personal needs. By contrast, the golden calves that Jeroboam erects at Bethel and Dan are an abomination (1 Kings 12:25–33); so is the bloodthirsty worship that the prophets of Baal perpetrate on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:25–29).

Like all the history books in the Old Testament, 1 Kings contains a wealth of **practical application**—especially concerning the difference between the righteous way and the wrong way to live. The book of Psalms famously begins by distinguishing between the blessed man and the wicked man. Kings shows us what that distinction looks like in the lives of Judah’s and Israel’s rulers. Reading their stories, and taking their lessons to heart, will help us rise to Elijah’s challenge: “If the LORD is God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

More specifically, the stories in 1 Kings call us to live out a more wise relationship with money, sex, and power. These gifts easily become our objects of worship when we start to honor them above God. In a word, they are idols. Even if we resist temptation to idolatry once, the temptations will come again and may grow stronger. If we want to avoid our own royal failures, therefore, we need to do more than start well, the way Solomon did. We also need to finish well—which means doing better and choosing better, not just knowing better.

The antidote to idolatry is the proper and passionate worship of the one true God. If the body truly is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” within us (1 Cor. 6:19), then Solomon’s dedication of the temple at Jerusalem calls us to consecration. Our lives and our churches are dwelling places for the living God, and for this reason they must be kept free from idolatry. The apostle draws this connection when he writes, “What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16).

The Elijah narratives are especially instructive for practical Christianity. His bold prophetic ministry teaches us how to pray, how to worship, how to persevere, how to show mercy, and how to listen to God’s still, small voice.

When we read, study, and apply 1 Kings, it is helpful for us to keep in mind a broad **outline** of its storyline, which basically starts with Solomon and ends with Elijah:

### The United Kingdom

Solomon Is Crowned King after David (1:1–2:46)

Solomon Gains Wisdom and Wealth (3:1–4:34)

Solomon Builds a Temple, a Palace, a Kingdom (5:1–10:29)

Solomon Follows Other Gods and Falls Under Judgment  
(11:1–43)

### A House Divided

Israel Is Torn in Two (12:1–14:20)

The Decline of Israel and Judah (14:21–16:34)

Elijah Prophesies, Prays, and Performs Miracles  
(17:1–19:21)

Ahab's Downfall and Demise (20:1–22:53)

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## LESSON 1

# KINGDOM COMPLETION

1 Kings 1:1–2:46

### THE BIG PICTURE

As the opening scene of 1 Kings comes into view, one might expect to behold a throne room. Instead, the narrator leads the way to the bedside of an aged and dying King David. A transfer of power is imminent, and the sons of David move swiftly into position. Competing claims to the throne of Israel threaten the kingdom's peace even before it has been firmly established. While Prince Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has age, attractiveness, and initiative on his side, Prince Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, has a paternal promise and a prophet's plan to back him up. Whoever fails to secure the throne will find himself in an awkward—if not perilous—position. Even more importantly, the character of King David's enduring legacy is now uncertain. His successor's spiritual values and royal policies will shape the future of David's kingdom. How the new king lives will surely reflect on how his father once reigned. What kind of kingdom will David leave behind? The possible answers to this question correspond to the answers to the perennial question "How should we then live?" By God's Word and before his face, or by man's standard and for his twisted pleasure?

**Read 1 Kings 1:1–2:46.**

## GETTING STARTED

1. Have you ever had the responsibility and privilege of caring for a fellow Christian who was at the twilight of life? Whom would you want at your side when you prepare to pass into glory?
2. What counsel would you give to a handpicked successor for a ministry that you lead, a job that you occupy, or a role that you play in your family or community?

## OBSERVING THE TEXT

3. What characters does the biblical narrative associate with Prince Adonijah, the son of Haggith (1:6–7; 2:22)? Which does it associate with Prince Solomon, the son of Bathsheba (1:32–33)?

### **Kings Demand Total Allegiance, pg. 68**

It is all or nothing with God, as it is for every self-respecting king. It is the character of a king to demand total allegiance. If we follow God only when he gives us what we want, then we are not treating him like a king at all, but only as a servant.

4. What caused King David to “bless . . . the LORD, the God of Israel” (1:48)?
5. For what reasons did King Solomon remove certain men from kingdom service upon his ascension to the throne (2:27, 32, 44)?

## UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. What conflict did King David’s declining health, as described in 1 Kings 1:1–4, precipitate?
7. Why specifically did Bathsheba ask David to certify her son Solomon’s claim to the throne? What three reasons did she give to support this petition (1:17, 20, 21)?

### **Test Cases in Temptation, pg. 59**

Solomon had four enemies to eliminate: Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab, and Shimei. What is important to notice about these men is that they all put their own desire for money, sex, or power ahead of loving obedience to the kingdom of God. Thus the stories of these men give us test cases in temptation.

8. According to Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, who would be able to bring about a peaceful transfer of power from King David to his son Solomon (1:36–37)? What was Benaiah's wish for Solomon?
9. Verses 41–53 show the tables being turned on Adonijah during a feast that he prepared for his friends. How did his conduct and attitude change after this event?
10. According to 1 Kings 2:4 and 2:12, what was the focus of David's last words of counsel to Solomon (2:1–9) and Solomon's initial actions as king of Israel in verses 23–46?
11. Why does 2:26 say that Solomon ultimately spared the life of Abiathar the priest, even though he had allied himself with Adonijah (see 1:7, 25; 2:22)?





15. The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that when saving faith works in the soul, “a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come” (14.2). What do Adonijah’s actions in 1 Kings 1:5, as well as David’s words in 2:2–4, suggest about each man’s faith?

### APPLYING THE TEXT

16. The opening chapters of 1 Kings powerfully illustrate the influence of friends, family members, associates, and counselors on our lives. In what ways do the people in your life direct you to God and his Word to find wisdom and godliness? What kind of counsel do you—or should you—give to those around you when they face conflicts or tough decisions?

#### **The Wrong Person, pg. 10**

When we are angry at the world or angry with God, it is almost always because we have the wrong person on the throne.



## PRAYER PROMPT

God's Word guarantees the rule and reign of Christ our king. However, the hostile world poses us real, present dangers and threats. Even the most faithful of God's servants can, in the words of the psalmist, "almost stumble" or "nearly slip" out of envy of "the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:2–3). Believing "to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word," Christians who seek to be faithful must embrace "the promises of God for this life and that which is to come." Pray confidently for the Lord to establish his kingdom in your heart. Pray, "Your kingdom come" and "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10), in the knowledge that God's promises are sure and that his purposes will stand. Also claim God's promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" (Matt. 16:18) against Christ the only king and head of the church.