

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF I KINGS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY

- PART ONE - CHAPTERS 1-6

In many ways I Kings is a continuation of the two books before it but there are some striking contrasts. Each of the books of Samuel covered only a single life span; I Kings covers several centuries and many generations. The earlier books are dominated by the central figures of 2 great men of God, Samuel and David. While David's life particularly included some major mistakes, in general the story is one of inspiring examples of faith. I Kings, on the other hand, is largely about failure with occasional glimpses of godliness, and one outstanding prophet whom God sent to bring His people back to Him. II Samuel begins with Israel divided but finally united by David's wise leadership. I Kings commences with Israel as one strong country but soon through poor leadership it has again fallen apart into 2 kingdoms each of which is followed in the book through its ups and downs. I Kings covers a period of about 100 years, from 950-850BC.

The books of Kings and Chronicles are complementary. They tell the same story but Chronicles provides a more official record while Kings give mainly the human side. Once the kingdom of Israel has divided, Kings emphasise events in Israel and Chronicles those in Judah. It is often good to compare their insights into the same story.

There is no indication in the Bible as to who wrote I Kings. The best guess is that there continued to be a faithful group of prophets like Gad and Nathan who quietly recorded the events of their day. What is sure is that whoever they were, the Holy Spirit as the author inspired and guided their writings so that Jesus Christ and all that He would be in our lives was clearly demonstrated.(II Tim.3:16,17)

CHAPTER ONE describes the last days of King David which are dominated by the struggle over who will be the next king. God's choice was Solomon, David and Bathsheba's second son, but Absalom's half-brother, Adonijah, was plotting to achieve what Absalom had tried but failed to do. As before the people were divided in their loyalty and could again have been fragmented as they had been after the death of Saul if David had not acted decisively by having Solomon proclaimed king even before his death. As always David was not afraid to have his son as a rival. In the same way Jesus foretelling His death, anticipated His other self the Holy Spirit coming to be the King in the hearts of His followers.(Jn.14:16-23) Jesus promised that the works of the Holy Spirit through His disciples would be greater than those of His own lifetime. So it would be with Solomon.

CHAPTER TWO records David's final words to his son before his death. He urged him to have a consistent dependence on God as the secret of his life and reign. At the same time David warned him to deal firmly with those who had rebelled against him and would now threaten the reign of Solomon. This seems at first in contradiction to David's earlier gracious mercy to those who had challenged him. It presents the other side of the character of God, His righteous judgement. Which happened in the life of each individual depended on the heart. In each case, time revealed where the heart stood. One by one Solomon dealt with his brother Adonijah who tried again to undermine him, Abiathar and Joab who had supported Adonijah, and Shimei who defied instructions to stay home. God's forgiveness is dependent on our repentance.

CHAPTER THREE begins with Solomon's first recorded mistake in marrying the daughter of a heathen king, just as his father David had married a king's daughter who did not love the Lord. Despite this the Lord appeared to him and asked him how he wanted to be blessed. Solomon chose wisdom to govern well, just as we too can ask God for wisdom.(James 1:5) The Lord promised

much more beside, because knowing the wisdom of God is the secret of all other blessing. There follows a brilliant example of the wisdom of Solomon in unravelling the mysteries of human behaviour.

CHAPTER FOUR shows Solomon applying his wisdom to the business of government administration, and the benefit which flowed to the people of Israel when they were wisely governed. Equally his wisdom was expressed in proverbs and songs of which the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon were only a small part. It was his wisdom rather than his material possessions which attracted people from far and wide.

CHAPTER FIVE reveals the wisdom of Solomon in negotiating deals for supply of the materials for the building of the temple. He did not abuse his father's friendship with Hiram, a neighbouring king, to get something for nothing. He paid a fair price for what he received just as the Lord would have us be fair in our business dealings with each other, not using Christian fellowship for personal advantage. Solomon also showed wisdom in assembling his work force for the task, not being excessive in what he expected of each man.

CHAPTER SIX describes in some detail the building of the temple. It followed the basic plan of the tabernacle, but of course was much more ornate, and was intended to be permanent. It was also equipped and furnished according to the same pattern as the tabernacle. In the New Testament the temple building is replaced by first Jesus and then us, the Christian church. (Jn.2:21; I Cor.3:16; 6:19) Look carefully at the detail because you will find pictured in it many principles about the Christian life, and the secrets of our relationship with God. David had to die before the temple could be built, just as Jesus had to die before the church could be built.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. If David at times pictures the Lord Jesus, whom does Solomon sometimes picture? Look for as many examples as you can find to illustrate this idea.
2. Compare Solomon's judgements on his enemies with Jesus' warnings about the consequence of wasting our opportunity for forgiveness and service in, for example Matt.25:1-46; Lk.12:22-48; and Lk.18:18-30.
3. What can we learn from Solomon's wise government of Israel about God's government of His church?
4. Solomon wrote three very different books, most of Proverbs, and the books of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. Read at least part of each at this stage to gain a general impression of what they are about. How do they fit into the story of his life?