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# Lesson 1

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## Background and General Introduction

**T**his study guide concerns the book of 1 Kings and its parallel passages in Chronicles. The next study guide treats 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Because most of the background and general introductory material is common to all four books of Kings and Chronicles, that material is presented in the opening lesson of this manual.

It is important to become thoroughly acquainted with the background and general contents of the four books of Kings and Chronicles before analyzing any of their individual parts. Spend much time in your study of this lesson. It would be best to study the lesson in more than the one unit in order to give more attention to the subjects presented.

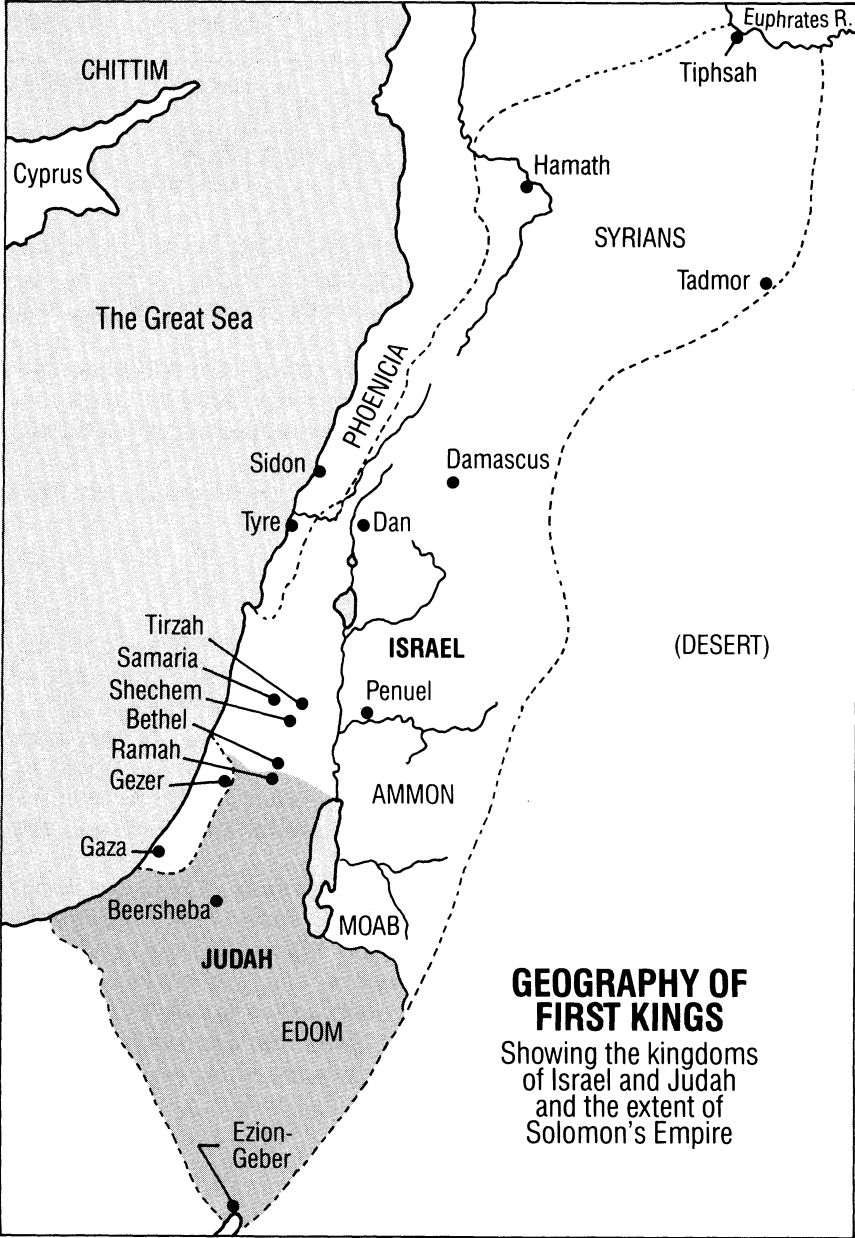
### **I. BACKGROUND**

#### **A. The Four Periods of Israel's History**

As shown in the study manual of 1 and 2 Samuel, the history of Israel as given in the Old Testament falls into four periods, which may be remembered by four words, each beginning with the letter "C": Camp, Commonwealth, Crown, and Captivity. Study the accompanying chart.

1. *The Camp Period* extended from the call of Abraham, the founder of the nation of Israel, to Moses' bringing up the people to the "gate" of Canaan, a period of about 660 years. This history is given in the Pentateuch.

2. *The Commonwealth Period* extended from Israel's entrance into Canaan under Joshua to the crowning of their first king, Saul, a period of about 360 years. This history is given in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.



**ISRAEL'S HISTORY BY PERIODS**

1	2	3	4
CAMP	COMMONWEALTH	CROWN	CAPTIVITY
666 YEARS	360 YEARS	460 YEARS	160 YEARS
PENTATEUCH	JOSHUA JUDGES RUTH	1 & 2 { SAMUEL KINGS CHRONICLES	EZRA NEHEMIAH ESTHER

3. *The Crown Period* extended from the crowning of their first king, Saul, to the Babylonian captivity, a period of about 460 years. This history is given in the six books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

4. *The Captivity Period* included the restoration and extended from the Babylonian Captivity to the end of the Old Testament history, a period of about 160 years. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther record this history.

Now let us look more closely at the Crown Period, which is the era covered by Kings and Chronicles.

**B. The Crown Period**

Turn to the chart of Kings and Prophets on pages 102-3, observing that the Crown Period began in 1043 B.C., with the crowning of King Saul, and ended in 586 B.C., with the Babylonian Captivity.

Familiarize yourself with this chart by reading the explanation given thereon, and bear in mind, as you study the books of Kings and Chronicles, the three distinct divisions of the Crown Period, that is, the united kingdom, the divided kingdom, and the surviving kingdom (Judah).

Observe the prominence of the prophets during the kingdom years. The prophets of the first half of the Divided Kingdom period, among whom were Elijah and Elisha, did not write any prophetic books of the Old Testament. They were succeeded in the prophetic office by such great prophets as Isaiah and Jeremiah, known by the books they wrote. Kings and Chronicles furnish a background for the prophetic utterances, and, vice versa, the prophetic books shed much light on Kings and Chronicles. All the prophets were spokesmen for God, proclaiming His will to the covenant nation.

### C. The Books

1. *Titles and place in the canon.* The title “Kings” is appropriate, since the books record events in the careers of the kings of Judah and Israel, from Solomon to the last of the kings (Zedekiah). The title “Chronicles” originated with Jerome, who believed this represented the contents of the books better than the Hebrew title, meaning “The Accounts of the Days.” As will be shown later, Chronicles has a deeper purpose than merely recording the historical events (“chronicles”) of the period. From this standpoint the title may be misleading.

The locations of the books in the canon of Scripture are shown in the following table:

EARLY HEBREW BIBLE	GREEK SEPTUAGINT	ENGLISH BIBLE
	3 KINGDOMS <sup>1</sup>	1 KINGS
	4 KINGDOMS	2 KINGS     ”
	1 CHRONICLES	1 CHRONICLES     ”
	2 CHRONICLES	2 CHRONICLES     ”

One reason for the Greek translation’s breaking up of the Hebrew Bible’s two books Kings and Chronicles into four books was because of the larger scroll space demanded by the translated versions. These splits have been carried over into the English versions of the Bible.

2. *Dates written, and authors.* In view of the unity of Kings, there apparently was only one author for 1 and 2 Kings. Since the latest item of 2 Kings (release of Jehoiachin) took place around 562 B.C., and since no mention is made of the return from Babylon (536 B.C.), 1 and 2 Kings were probably written between 562 and 536 B.C. Tradition has assigned Jeremiah as the author. Most authorities prefer the viewpoint of anonymity and agree that the writer was a Jewish captive in Babylon.

Various evidences point to the fact that Chronicles and Ezra were originally one consecutive history (e.g., compare 2 Chron. 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-3a). The books were written around 450 B.C., and it is likely that the author was Ezra.

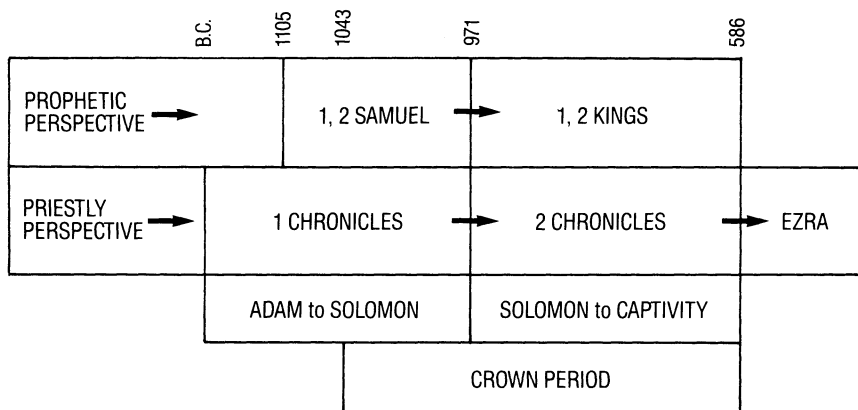
1. 1 and 2 Samuel were called 1 and 2 Kingdoms in the Septuagint.

## II. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### A. Contents of Kings and Chronicles

“The story that 1 Kings tells is that of a nation passing from affluence and influence to poverty and paralysis,” according to G. Campbell Morgan.<sup>2</sup> We see here a nation, having rejected Jehovah from being King, attempting to govern itself and failing utterly.

Most of the chapters of Kings and Chronicles relate events of the Crown Period of Israel and Judah. This is shown by the following diagram:



Observe that 1 Kings continues the narrative where 2 Samuel stops, and Ezra continues the narrative where 2 Chronicles stops. Although Kings and Chronicles generally cover the same period, the narratives are written from different perspectives. The differences will be discussed later.

There are great lines of truth common to both Kings and Chronicles. Three of these will be mentioned here: 1. *The two forms of government*. H. J. Carpenter has said, “The divine intention for the nation of Israel was that it should not be a monarchy but a theocracy. The KING of Judah and Israel was Jehovah—unrecognized very often—despised, ignored, rebelled against, but nevertheless, the ever-abiding KING.”

When God chose Israel to be His representative people, delivered them from Egypt and brought them into the land of Canaan, His plan was that He should be not only their GOD, the One

2. G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible* (Westwood, NJ., Revell, 1912), p. 177.

whom they would worship and recognize as their Saviour from death and bondage, but also their KING, the One whom they would implicitly obey. For a time He was given this place by the nation. His authority was unquestioned, and His miracles were gratefully recognized.

During the period covered by the books of Joshua and Judges, however, the people frequently failed to trust and obey their divine King. But whenever the nation transgressed His law, and thereby brought down divine chastisement in the form of invasion or oppression by their enemies, their King miraculously empowered a man to deliver Israel. These men were called judges, and through these men Jehovah continued His personal government of Israel. The climax of disobedience came before the death of Samuel, the last of the judges, when the nation of Israel rebelled against the kingship of God. Read 1 Samuel 8:4-7, and note especially God's words to Samuel: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

At that time God gave the people their desire and allowed them to have human kings, but it was not His first plan for them. As a result, for the next few hundred years the nation reaped turmoil, desolation, and threat of captivity. During this time God spoke to His people through the prophets, offering again to be their King, and reminding them that their troubles stemmed from their request for human kings. (Read Hos. 13:9-11.)

2. *The two thrones.* In the study of the books before us, the thrones on *earth* will be much in view. We shall be told what the various kings who occupied these earthly thrones said, did, and thought. However, the throne in *heaven* is also discerned, and from these books we shall learn much of what the one King who occupies the heavenly throne said, did, and thought. "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool" (Isa. 66:1). "The Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men" (Ps. 11:4).

3. *The two kinds of prophets.* There were in Israel, during the period covered by the books of Kings and Chronicles, two distinct classes of prophets (just as there are today two distinct classes of preachers). There were the true prophets of God: men whom God had called to the office, to whom He gave a message to proclaim to the people, and who faithfully performed the work that God had set them to do, regardless of public opinion, persecution, or ridicule.

Then there were false prophets: men who called themselves prophets of God, who professed to have a message from God but

who spoke only what the people wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear. They were men who refused to preach against sin and exhort the people to turn to God in repentance as their only hope of salvation from ruin. They were those who cried, “Peace, peace,” when there was no peace.

For the names of the true prophets who faithfully delivered God’s messages during this period of Israel’s history, turn to the Chart of Kings and Prophets on pages 102-3. This chart indicates also when these prophets lived and did their work, and who were the kings reigning at the time of their ministry. It will greatly help you to keep this chart before you as you study Kings and Chronicles.

## **B. Contrasts of Kings and Chronicles**

The relationship of Chronicles to Kings is similar to the relationship of the gospel of John to the Synoptic Gospels: While identical events are recorded in both, the later books do more in the way of interpretation and reflection. For example, Kings narrates the political and royal fortunes of the nation, whereas Chronicles looks at these in the light of the sacred and ecclesiastical. The following tabulation shows other contrasts:

<b>KINGS</b>	<b>CHRONICLES</b>
1. prophetic perspective (e.g., judgments)	priestly perspective (e.g., hopes)
2. wars very prominent	Temple very prominent
3. the fortunes of the thrones	continuity of the Davidic line
4. record of both Israel and Judah	record primarily of Judah
5. morality	redemption

## **C. Purposes of Kings and Chronicles**

In view of their contents, it may be said that the main purpose of these books is not simply to record the facts of Hebrew history but to reveal the hand of God in the affairs of men. According to Charles C. Cook, the books show how “the rise and splendor, and the decline and fall of the kingdom . . . were the results, respectively, of the piety and faithfulness, or the sin and idolatry of the various kings and their subjects. For this reason, much that would be of merely secular interest is omitted or summarized, while in-



cidents that deal particularly with the divine purpose, and the moral and religious conditions of rulers and people, are narrated at length.”

#### **D. Importance of the Study of Kings and Chronicles**

The study of these books is important because what they teach is contemporary and vital. Consider these points:

1. *Early history of an important nation.* This is the early history of an important nation—God’s chosen people. The nation of Israel is in God’s thought and purposes a key nation in the history of mankind. Israel’s past, present, and future are most notable (cf. Rom. 9-11). In the past this nation was chosen by God to be His representative people: to receive, preserve, and pass on His communications to man. Through this nation we have our Bible. Through this nation our Lord and Saviour came when He took upon himself human form and dwelt among men. At present the Israelites, though scattered throughout the world, remain distinct among the people where they dwell; they are a constant witness of the truth and accuracy of the prophecies of Scripture. According to God’s Word, this people has yet a great future upon the earth.

2. *A basic philosophy of history.* We may derive from Israel’s history a basic philosophy of history. In God’s dealings with this nation, we have a picture of His dealings with all nations and with all individuals, as far as the great principles of His activities are concerned. The books afford an inspired commentary on the affairs and destinies of men and nations under the ultimate and supreme Head, the Lord Himself.

In this part of Israel’s history is repeatedly illustrated the truth stated in Daniel 4:25, 34-35: “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will . . . whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: . . . and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.”

From the time of Adam until the present, all of God’s dealings with men have been to induce them to trust Him and to prove their trust by obeying Him. God has given only one message to man from the beginning. The whole Bible is one message: *trust God*. Trust God for salvation. Trust God in the face of any danger or temptation. Trust God to supply every need. Trust God always, and trust God only, for the man who puts his trust in God shall never be ashamed. In Kings and Chronicles we continually see the wisdom of trusting and obeying God—and the disastrous results of failing to do so.

3. *Many spiritual lessons for Christian living.* In these books are recorded many prayers, warnings, and exhortations. Much is made of the Lord's mercy and of the help He offers His people. The justice of the Lord's judgments is made clear. The beauties of worship and praise appear again and again. Requirements for successful leadership are spelled out minutely. In your study of Kings and Chronicles be always alert to how the message applies to you personally. Remember, "the whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us well-prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, *The Living Bible*).

### **E. Composition of the Books**

In writing these books, the authors advantageously used the literary methods of selectivity (choosing what to include and what to exclude), condensation, and expansion. What the authors included, what they chose not to include, and the manner in which the books were written should be of interest to us. Let us look at Kings and Chronicles separately.

1. *Kings.* In these books the author seeks to give a rather comprehensive history of the leadership of all the tribes during this era. In 1 Kings 1-11 the narrative runs smoothly because only one kingdom (all the tribes of the united or undivided kingdom) is involved. From 1 Kings 12 to 2 Kings 17, however, with the two kingdoms (Israel—north, and Judah—south) existing side by side, the account reads with more difficulty, because the author has chosen to shift the narrative from the one kingdom to the other, in order to give simultaneous pictures. Then at 2 Kings 18 to the end, there is a return to the smooth flow again, since only the one surviving kingdom (Judah) is involved.

2. *Chronicles.* These books are more selective than Kings, illustrated in the fact that the northern kingdom of Israel is hardly mentioned. The author makes prominent the unbroken (though at times slender) thread of the covenant promise from the earliest days and through the Davidic dynasty, represented by the house of Judah (cf. 1 Chron. 28:4). Hence the inclusion of:

(a) The genealogies (1 Chron. 1-9), where the Davidic line, the descendants of Levi, and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin are of chief interest

(b) The high points of Judah's history up to the captivity

(c) The prominent place given the Temple, priesthood, and other worship items

## F. The Setting of Kings and Chronicles

Just as the study of Judges is made easier by an acquaintance with the names of the various judges, so you will find it helpful in this early stage of your study of Kings and Chronicles to learn the names of the kings. Study the lists on pages 101 and 104, where the nineteen kings (plus one queen) of Judah and nineteen kings of Israel are listed chronologically. Some names appear in both groups but represent different men. Note the words “good” and “evil” designated for each king. It was part of the biblical writer’s aim to issue a verdict on the character of the leadership of the kings. Keep these lists before you as you read Kings and Chronicles.

Next study the accompanying chart entitled *The Setting of Kings and Chronicles*:

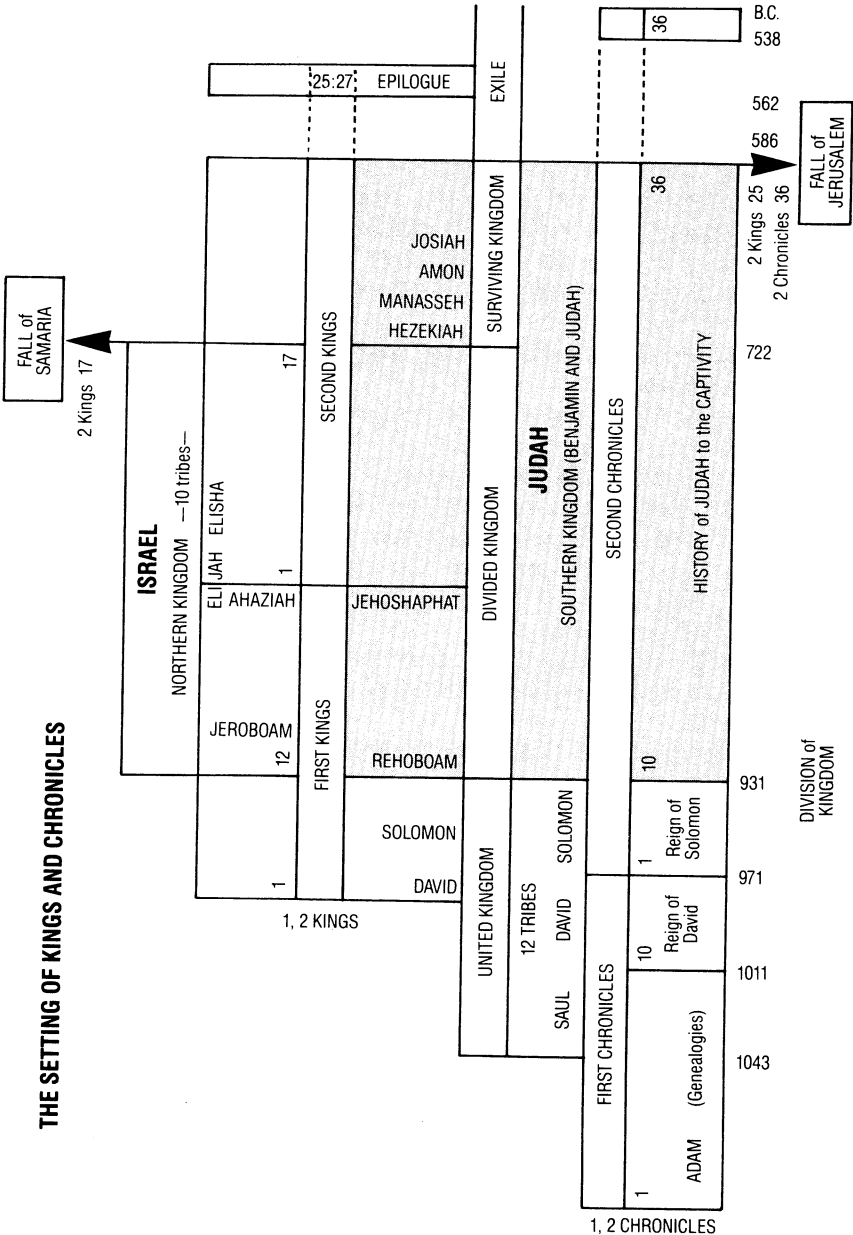
1. Note the key historical *events* of this period:  
1043 B.C. First king  
931 B.C. Division of the kingdom  
722 B.C. Fall of Samaria (northern kingdom)  
586 B.C. Fall of Jerusalem (southern kingdom)
  2. Note where 1 Kings picks up the narrative. Note also that 2 Kings concludes at the fall of Jerusalem, but that it includes a brief epilogue (25:27) of a later date.
  3. Note that 2 Kings picks up the narrative from 1 Kings at an uneventful junction. This confirms the approach to 1 and 2 Kings as *one* narrative.
  4. Note that Elijah and Elisha are prominent characters in Kings. Look at the folded chart of Kings and Prophets and note that almost all of the prophets who lived after Elijah and Elisha were authors of prophetic books of the Bible. Why was the prophet’s work so important for the kingdoms?
- 
- 

5. What three periods of kingdom history are covered by Kings?
- 

6. Note the coverage of the books of Chronicles. Compare this with that of Kings. Does 2 Chronicles begin at an eventful junction?

Study this chart closely. If you master this visual aid, you will be helped immeasurably in your studies of Kings and Chronicles. One danger to guard against in the study of any history is to fail to

THE SETTING OF KINGS AND CHRONICLES



see the forest because of the host of trees. When you study Kings and Chronicles, keep before you this larger outline of the books as you analyze the smaller parts.

(Note: An exhaustive study of the setting of Kings and Chronicles would include a study of the prophetic books covering these years. Such a study is beyond the scope of this manual.)

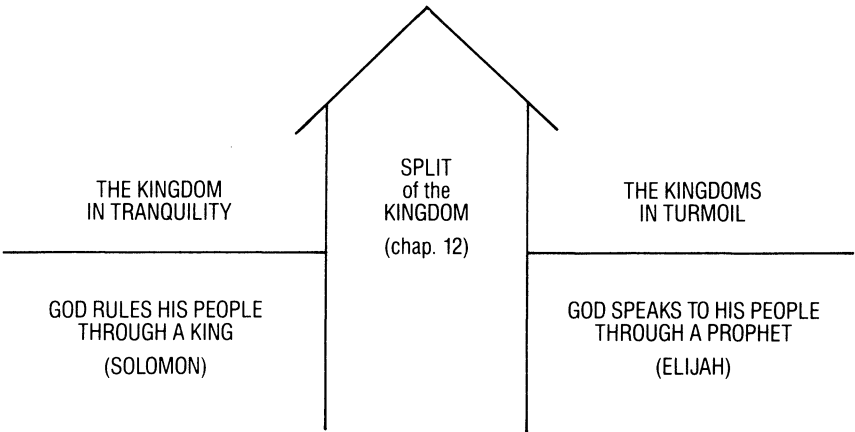
**G. Plan of This Study Guide**

The lessons of this study guide are organized around the outline of the first book of Kings. (The study guide that follows this one in the series covers 2 Kings.) Inasmuch as parts of Chronicles cover the same period, we shall at all times read and consider the parallel accounts of events given in Chronicles. Occasionally studies also will be made in passages unique to Chronicles.

Most of this study guide will emphasize the three things made prominent by the book of 1 Kings, which are:

- 1. The ministry of Solomon the king
- 2. The split of the kingdom
- 3. The ministry of Elijah the prophet

The accompanying diagram, anticipating the more complete survey chart of the next section, illustrates the above plan.



**H. Survey of 1 Kings**

Read 1 Kings 22:37-53 and 2 Kings 1:1-4, and observe how the narrative of 1 Kings continues into 2 Kings without any significant break, indicating that the two books are virtually one unit.

Read all of 1 Kings at one sitting if possible. Record on the accompanying chart a segment title for each of the chapters (or parts of chapters) shown.

After you have finished this survey reading, answer these questions:

1. What impressed you about the book?

---

2. What appeared to be some of the highlights?

---

3. How much action?

---

How much description?

---

How much conversation?

---

4. Main characters?

---

Now study the accompanying survey chart, observing the following:

1. The book has twenty-two chapters; half of these concern the united kingdom and the other half concern the divided kingdom.

2. Observe where these events are recorded: David's death; the Temple chapters; Solomon's death; split of the northern tribes from Judah; the call and ministry of Elijah.

3. What do you consider to be key chapters in 1 Kings?

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4. Consider 9:4-5 as key verses for this book. In further studies you may find other verses that would serve as key verses. Note the title given to 1 Kings, as shown on the survey chart: "A Kingdom Divided Against Itself."

5. The book of 1 Kings covers about 130 years (971-841 B.C.). The first eleven chapters cover Solomon's reign of 40 years, and by adding the number of years that each of the other four kings in Judah reigned (see 14:21; 15:1-2; 15:8-10; 22:41-42), we arrive at the approximate time covered by the entire book.

6. Be sure to have a fair picture of the narrative of 1 Kings before you read the following section (The Story of 1 Kings), which summarizes its main contents.