

PARALLEL GUIDE 24

The Divided Kingdom

Summary: After confusion about David's successor, Solomon gains ascendancy. David dies and the new king murderously purges the court of rivals. Solomon undertakes construction of a palace and the temple. To do this, he divides the kingdom into twelve administrative districts and exacts heavy tribute in labor and goods. Noted for his wisdom, Solomon displeases YHWH by constructing shrines to his foreign wives' gods.

Learning Objectives

- Cite the standard by which the Deuteronomist evaluated the reigns of the kings
- State the main characteristic of "wisdom" literature
- Cite a tactic used by Solomon to secure a religious base for his reign
- State why Jeroboam established the shrines at Dan and Bethel

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. Can you think of a present-day example of a 'conservative' practice resulting in the loss of what it attempted to preserve? Or, can you think of one that succeeds?
2. Can you think of a present-day novel approach which has preserved an older value? Or, can you think of one that has failed to do this?

Preparing for Your Seminar

The purging of any ascendants to the throne is a brutal practice that continues to this day. Yet it is something we all would disavow. How does this square with the practice of changing staff in an institution when the leadership changes? What do you think about this? Has it ever happened to you? What feelings does this evoke? What if you are the person in charge? What would you do to ensure you have the loyalty of those around you?

385

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386

Chapter 24

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

In this chapter we examine the reign of Solomon. We also see the pomp and grandeur of Israel, the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the royal court, the wit of the king and his reputation for wisdom as well as the hints of impending bankruptcy and the price which the common people had to pay in their own sweat and toil to maintain the dreams of their ruler.

We trace briefly the succession of kings in Israel and Judah up to the time when the heroic and mysterious Elijah burst on the scene of the northern kingdom. No attempt will be made to describe in detail the successive reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah. Most are given but little space in the biblical report. The purpose of the biblical editor is not, after all, to provide a complete record of these reigns—for this, official court records are repeatedly referenced. He is trying to show the hand of God reaching out in judgment against an apostate Israel and against a Judah that was but little better. To see this divine-human dialogue through the eyes of the Deuteronomist is our goal, not to commit to memory a series of names and dates.

The Book of Kings

The Deuteronomic history continues without break from the books of Samuel through the books of Kings. **First Kings 1-11** tells of the death of David and the reign of Solomon. In I Kings 12-II Kings 18:12 is the story of the divided kingdom through the fall of Israel in 721 BCE. **Second Kings 18:13-25:26** carries the story of the kingdom of Judah through its fall and the exile of the Jewish leaders to Babylon in 586 BCE. A final note at the end of II Kings tells of the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in 562 BCE and of his gracious treatment by the king of Babylon.

562 BCE, the date of the last recorded event, is the earliest that the books of Kings in their present form could have been compiled. Since no hint of the return from Babylon in 538 BCE is given, it is presumed that the books were compiled before that event.

The books contain material from many sources, some probably contemporaneous with the events they describe. Three of the sources are named by the editor: “The Book of the Acts of Solomon,” “The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel,” and “The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.” These last two should not be confused with the biblical books of I and II Chronicles. The biblical Chronicles were composed late in the history of Judah, probably in the mid-fourth century BCE; they retell much of the story contained in the books of Samuel and Kings from the viewpoint of one concerned with the cult of the post-exilic temple. Occasionally we refer to passages in Chronicles corresponding to those in Kings, but do not examine the books in detail. Other sources have been detected as well. Different scholars have suggested separate sources for the stories of Elijah and Elisha and for the material on Ahab and Isaiah. Finally, the detailed descriptions of Solomon’s temple and other passages show the Deuteronomist’s interest in the Jerusalem temple cult and suggest temple records as another source.

387

None of the Deuteronomist’s sources is now available to us, much as modern scholars, interested in the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, might wish they were. The D source is not interested in writing history in any modern sense. Much time and attention are devoted to the reign of Ahab—because Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, so completely corrupted Israel with Baal worship—but D passes over the reign of Omri with brief notice. (See I Kings 16:25.) Yet non-biblical sources show us that, from the standpoint of a secular historian, Omri’s reign was one of the more significant periods in the history of the northern kingdom.

Rather than history, D presents theological reflection on history already well-known to his readers. Whatever the sources, the stories D tells are submitted to the theological framework provided by the editor. D uses a simple basis for judgment on the reign of a king: the king’s loyalty to the temple cult at Jerusalem. By this standard, Solomon receives a mixed judgment: he built the temple, but he also built temples to the gods of his foreign wives. By the same standard, all of the kings of Israel—the northern kingdom—are condemned—they were all separated from the Jerusalem cult. Even in the kingdom of Judah, only two kings receive unqualified approval: Hezekiah and Josiah. Josiah was the king under whom the “Deuteronomic Code” was discovered and the “Deuteronomic reform” was carried out, establishing Jerusalem as the sole center for the cult. Since D wrote from the standpoint of this reform, obviously Josiah receives praise. Hezekiah had earlier attempted a similar reform and therefore gets the writer’s approval. Another southern king, Asa, receives

qualified approval: he attempted many reforms similar to those of Josiah, but he still allowed the “high places” to remain. The “high places” were local shrines, probably greatly contaminated by Baal worship from long usage by the Canaanites before Israelite occupation took them over. That Asa allowed them to continue was a mark against him in the eyes of the Editor. A few other Judean kings escape complete condemnation, but none is praised.

The fact that the books are so completely dominated by the editor’s theological point of view does not render them unimportant. History is always interpreted, though the point of view of the historian is seldom stated as clearly as that of the Deuteronomist. In reading the books of Kings, we encounter an interpretation of events which sees all that happens to the nation as the result of its faithfulness or unfaithfulness to YHWH. This point of view is similar to that held by the prophets, and studying them in succeeding lessons will help us further evaluate the theological perspective of the Deuteronomist.

Read I Kings 1-11 I Kings 1:1

David’s Frailty

In his advanced age David apparently has difficulty staying warm. So a beautiful maiden, Abishag the Shunammite, is brought to lie with him and warm him. The emphasis on Abishag’s beauty is important. It is not simply the body temperature of Abishag that is relied on to warm the king. The hope is that he will be sexually aroused by her. The vitality of a king was thought to be a measure of the vitality of a nation—as, indeed, it was, particularly in times of crisis, when the fate of a nation depended on the decisions of its ruler. If King David can be aroused, perhaps he will regain his old vigor and rule the nation firmly again. “But the king knew her not” (v. 4). Here “to know” a woman means to have sexual relations with her. This the now feeble king cannot do.

388

David’s frailty has made him incapable of reigning any longer; the question has become who will his successor be. David has not made this clear during the years of his reign. Eventually Israel and Judah would follow the custom of most monarchies and elevate the eldest son of the king to his place. At this time the monarchy was still a new political form for the nation. Earlier leaders, the judges, Saul and David, had been appointed by YHWH himself. His spirit came upon them and with that his anointing. No other pattern of succession to the royal throne had been firmly established.

In the case of the successor to David a further complication is present. The northern tribes have made their covenant with David himself, not with the tribe of Judah. The personality of the king has bound the tribes together. It cannot be assumed that a successor will be acceptable to the north simply because he is the eldest son of the king. David’s personal influence might suffice to establish a successor whom he has specifically designated, but David has delayed making such a choice.

Still, Adonijah, David’s eldest son, assumes that he is the heir and declares himself king in his father’s place (1:5-10). Second Samuel 3:2-4 lists David’s sons: Amnon the eldest, followed by Chileab, Absalom, and Adonijah. Chileab is not mentioned again; presumably he died as a youth. Amnon and Absalom are both dead by this time. Amnon was killed by Absalom in revenge for the rape of Absalom’s sister, Tamar; Absalom was killed by Joab for his revolt against David. Joab, David’s commander of the troops and lifelong servant, and Abiathar the priest, who has been with David since Saul committed the massacre of the priests at Nob, are supporting Adonijah’s claim (v. 7). Indeed, the editor draws attention to Adonijah’s appropriateness as successor (v. 6) by noting that he was born next after Absalom and by describing him as “a very handsome man”—he is the pattern of handsome leaders like Joseph, Saul, and David. The support of David’s two close advisors and the editorial note suggest that Adonijah is the obvious heir.

There exists another faction within the court: Zadok, the priest (II Sam. 8:17); Benaiah, mentioned as a commander of mercenaries in II Sam. 8:18; Nathan, the prophet; two lesser officials; and David's "mighty men"—his personal troops—do not favor Adonijah (v. 8), though the reason for their opposition is not given. It may be that Nathan's proclamation of YHWH's love for Solomon, made at his birth (II Sam. 12:24-25), has prompted the prophet to join the anti-Adonijah party. It may also be that his membership in that group caused the prophecy to be inserted in the story later. There is no way to tell. At any rate, when Adonijah makes a sacrifice in the presence of all his supporters, including all David's sons except Solomon (and all the royal court except Solomon's supporters), he is claiming the kingdom. His act is understood by them all.

Bathsheba now enters the story. Why Nathan, who denounced David for his affair with Bathsheba, should join forces with her is not stated, but he plots with her to persuade the old king to name Solomon as his heir. Nathan instructs Bathsheba to go to the king and remind David that he promised the kingdom to her son. Nathan will then enter, appearing to offer the voice of an independent witness, to confirm that David did so promise. If he did, we have not been told of it. While this would

389

not be the only instance of the omission from the narrative of an event later referred to—Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites mentioned in II Sam. 21:1-2 is not recounted in the main body of the Saul narrative—it would seem that so important a promise would have been mentioned previously. Is this a trick?

The answer depends on when the story was written. Some scholars claim it was written by Nathan himself. The account of Nathan's confrontation with David over his affair with Bathsheba has elements that suggest that the scene took place in private, away from the ears of David's court attendants. The episodes narrated here concerning Solomon's succession are not likely to have taken place in public either. This suggests that the accounts originate with one of the participants, and Nathan is more likely than Bathsheba. First Chronicles 29:29 mention the "Chronicles of Nathan the prophet" as one of the sources used by the compiler. The use of sources in that book does not reassure us of the editor's reliability, however. It is possible that what seems to be a citation is merely an assumption of the existence of such a source behind the Deuteronomist's books of Samuel and Kings. Even so, the mention would indicate that there was at least a tradition that Nathan wrote chronicles of events in the court of David.

If Nathan is its origin, it is doubtful that the story of Solomon's appointment as king is told to reveal trickery on the part of the author and the king's mother! He would have written it to justify his role in the struggle for the succession. If, however, the story was written—or possibly rewritten—after Solomon's death, the intent might have been to suggest trickery at the outset as an explanation for the unsatisfactory conclusion of his reign. Although some scholars suggest that it might even reflect a northern viewpoint, justifying the north's refusal to continue following the house of David, it is difficult to imagine how such a thoroughly Deuteronomistic work could incorporate such an antithetic story.

Whether trickery or not, Bathsheba's rehearsal is accepted by David. He orders that Zadok, the priest, Nathan, the prophet, and Benaiah go with others of the king's retinue to Gihon and anoint Solomon king, proclaiming it with a trumpet blast (vv. 32-35). This site was within earshot of where Adonijah was holding his own coronation ceremony. David's instructions are carried out, and "all the people" accept Solomon as king (vv. 39-40).

Adonijah and His Supporters Accept Solomon

In spite of the support which Adonijah enjoys, the word of David proves sufficient to determine his successor. No suggestion is made of resistance to David's decree. Adonijah's supporters "trembled" and Adonijah "fearing Solomon"—as well he might (vv. 49-50)—clings to the horns of the altar, claiming sanctuary from Solomon lest he seek vengeance. Solomon's reply is ambiguous: "If he proves to be a worthy

man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the ground; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die” (v. 52). Nothing is said of how Adonijah’s worthiness or wickedness is to be determined! When Adonijah comes before Solomon, he is dismissed to go to his home. Nothing is to be done to David’s eldest son while David still lives. David is soon to die (2:1-12). The hand of the Deuteronomist appears plainly in the deathbed words of David to Solomon (vv. 1-4): Solomon is to be obedient to the

390

statutes, the commandments, the ordinances, and the testimonies of YHWH, so that his reign shall prosper. But if David’s further instructions (vv. 5-9) actually came from his mouth, David was more vengeful and deceitful than he has been portrayed up to this point. Joab’s murders of Abner and Amasa are recalled, and his death is sealed by words which disguise their meaning so thinly as to heighten their sinister intent: “Act . . . according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace” (v. 6). Shimei, the man who cursed David from a safe distance when the king was forced to flee Jerusalem and then repented when David returned victorious, is also consigned to a vengeance that David had sworn not to bring upon him (vv. 8-9). Barzillai the Gileadite, an old man who sheltered David when he fled from Jerusalem, is to be rewarded through his sons—they are to be welcomed at Solomon’s table.

Possibly David in his old age allowed these past grievances to rankle more than they had in the years of his vigor, and he truly wanted a lasting benefit to come to the heirs of the old man who had helped him in his time of need. Such preoccupations in the mind of an old man facing death are not unprecedented. It is more likely, however, that this is the editor’s justification of the purge which followed the death of David. Joab and Shimei not only committed offenses during the reign of David, but also sided with Adonijah against Solomon in the contest for succession. David dies. “Then David slept with his ancestors . . .” (v. 10). The formula will become increasingly familiar as we read through the books of Kings. Solomon, already anointed as king while his father was alive, now sits on his throne—his kingdom firmly established (v. 12).

Solomon is not one to leave anything to chance. The problem of Adonijah is yet to reach a final solution (2:13-25). Adonijah was spared at the moment of his fear—the moment when he realized that Solomon had bested him. David is dead and his displeasure at the elimination of his eldest son is no longer a deterrent to Solomon. Of those involved in the rivalry for the throne, Adonijah is the first to die. Adonijah is a son of a king. A pretext must be found for his execution. In an act of such extreme foolishness that it is difficult to believe he actually did what is reported, Adonijah condemns himself to death. He comes to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother, and asks her to intercede for him to her son. He wants Abishag, David’s virginal “concubine,” to be given to him. When Abner took Saul’s concubine, Rizpah, and when Absalom took the ten concubines David left in Jerusalem, they did so to make public their claims to the throne. How then could Adonijah dream that his request would be interpreted as an innocent one? Obviously, Solomon does not understand it innocently. He replies to his mother, when she makes the request on Adonijah’s behalf, “And why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom as well! For he is my elder brother; ask not only for him but also for the priest Abiathar and for Joab the son of Zeruiah!” (v. 22) Solomon’s claim to the throne remains precarious so long as his elder brother and his supporters live. Whether Adonijah really is naive enough to ask for Abishag, or

391

whether Solomon—perhaps with the assistance of his mother—concocts the story, the concubine is used to justify the removal of the potential rival. “So King Solomon sent Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he struck him down, and he died” (v. 25).

Summary

The remainder of chapter 2 tells how Solomon deals with the others who had supported Adonijah. Abiathar, being a priest, is not killed—the memory of the slaughter of the priests of Nob under Saul is still too much alive to risk such a deed. But Joab and Shimei are both killed on the command of the king. Joab claims sanctuary at the altar, but sanctuary seems of avail only to the innocent. Joab had been judged guilty of two murders, those of Abner and Amasa, and he is killed while clinging to the altar. Shimei is placed under what amounts to house arrest, with death as the penalty for leaving the city. When, after three years, he rushes in pursuit of two runaway slaves, he also is killed. Solomon claims piously to have executed justice in the name of YHWH for Shimei's old offense against David, and he invokes YHWH's promise that "the throne of David shall be established before the LORD forever" (v. 45). Perhaps the editor intends that the deed should be understood as just recompense and the words of Solomon taken at face value. In any case, the words of v. 46b are true: "So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon."

The first two verses of chapter 3 note that Solomon has married the daughter of the Egyptian pharaoh, sealing an alliance between the two monarchs. Brief note is made also of the fact that the people are worshipping at the "high places"—the local shrines—because the temple has not yet been built. This shows the Deuteronomist's concern and erroneously suggests that once the temple is completed such practices will cease. In fact, it will not be until Josiah conducts his reform in 621 BCE that such worship is forbidden.

The Wisdom of Solomon

The highly idealized account in which Solomon asks YHWH for the gift of wisdom (3:3-15) uses a device which appears often in folk literature: YHWH, almost like Solomon's fairy godmother, appears in a dream to offer the new king anything he asks. It is hard to believe—though the editor probably intends that we should—that Solomon could come from the bloodbath described in the preceding chapter to speak so guilelessly: "And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in!" (v. 7)

Solomon asks for "an understanding mind" (v. 9), the ability to discern the proper course of action in practical matters, that he may govern God's people rightly. YHWH grants him "a wise and discerning mind" (v. 12).

Although the noun "wisdom" does not appear in this story, it is for this virtue that Solomon has been remembered most. Indeed "wisdom" came to be associated so thoroughly with Solomon that he was credited with the writing of the Book of Proverbs, even though that book dates from a much later time. How could this king, who showed wisdom only in the famous story told in vv. 16-28—about the two women who both claimed the same baby—and whose reign was characterized by pomp and circumstance more than sound government of the people, have acquired such a reputation?

"Wisdom"—like narratives, legal codes, genealogies, psalms, and court chronicles—is a literary form which enjoyed popularity in the court circles of the monarchy. Oral traditions are the earliest carriers of the life of a culture. They provide a way of transmitting a people's heritage during the years before prosperity has yielded the leisure required to produce a class of writers. It was during David's later years as king—so most scholars believe—that the individual or school of writers we now call "J" first committed the history and legends of the people to writing. Only a member of the royal court would have had the leisure to do this.

Solomon's court was even more conducive to literary endeavors. David was a shepherd's son, gifted but untutored. Solomon had been raised as a member of the household of an increasingly important monarch. No doubt he had contacts with visiting dignitaries from other nations while still a child; he was to delight in foreign relations as a king. He married an Egyptian and was surely not without some prior exposure to Egyptian culture and tastes.

Throughout the ancient world—and especially in sophisticated Egypt—the proverb had become a particular challenge to the wit and verbal aptness of the educated classes. To state a truth—preferably a profound one—in succinct and memorable form was an exercise in thought and expression greatly esteemed. Riddles and fables also provided entertainment and training in wit as well as giving relatively painless moral instruction. First Kings 4:29-34 portrays Solomon as a master of these literary forms grouped under the title “Wisdom.” Whether or not he was wise, much of the “wisdom literature” of the Old Testament came to be attributed to Solomon just as the Psalms came to be ascribed to David, the shepherd who played the lyre for Saul. “Wisdom” was not native to the Israelites. It flourished in Egypt and probably in the ancient Canaanite centers of culture, but it fits rather strangely into the context of Israelite life. In Israelite expression, whether story or song, God is the chief actor and his deeds in relation to Israel the central plot. In wisdom utterances, practical truths about human affairs occupy center stage, and God is rarely mentioned. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament is examined in a later chapter. In their present form, the wisdom books—Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and, after a fashion, the Song of Solomon, among others—are all post-exilic. The beginnings of the wisdom tradition, however, can be seen in the reign of Solomon; his interest in this literary style and his skill at it won him his reputation for wisdom. Whether his great wisdom was strictly a matter of literary style or whether it also had practical substance is a question we can consider as we examine his reign further.

Summary

The famous story of the psychological trick by which Solomon discovers the true mother in a dispute over an infant is told to illustrate the “wise and discerning mind” of the king (I Kings 3:16-28). It also shows Solomon as judge, available to settle disputes among his people. This is a role which David had allowed to lapse, giving Absalom ammunition against his father (II Sam. 15:1-6).

Chapter 4 lists the officials of Solomon’s court. The land was divided into twelve administrative districts, each with a royal overseer. Each district was responsible

393

for supplying the needs of the king and his household for one month out of each year. That the twelve districts do not coincide with the ancient tribal boundaries suggests an administrative attempt to weaken the tribal loyalties and tie the entire nation closely and directly to the Jerusalem capital. The spread of the kingdom under Solomon was comparatively wide. The petty kingdoms surrounding Israel paid tribute in considerable amounts, and Solomon built garrison cities, staffed by charioteers—the first time chariots were used in Israel’s history—to maintain Israelite control throughout the realm.

The picture presented here is one of complete success. “During Solomon’s lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees” (4:25). The populace is content; peace and prosperity prevail. As to the court itself, no monarch can match Solomon. Besides his magnificence as a ruler of nations, he is supreme in “wisdom.” “People came from all nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon; they came from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom” (4:34).

The presence of a worm in this glorious fruit basket can be seen, however, in the exorbitant demands made on the twelve districts to support such a court, and in the continued presence of Adoniram (the Adoram of II Sam. 20:24) as master of the forced labor battalions. The splendor is real, but it will prove short-lived. At this stage in the story, however, the editor stresses the glory of the house of David during its second term; the decline will be told later.

The Temple of Solomon

Chapter 5 describes the preparations for the building of the temple. The design of the temple was Phoenician

—though with a Canaanite floor plan—and its construction was under Phoenician direction. Solomon makes arrangements with the king of Tyre for building materials and skilled artisans, and specific mention is made of Israelite forced labor conscripted for service in the rock quarries of Lebanon (5:13-17). The construction of the temple is described in chapter 6, and the construction of Solomon’s own house and the buildings that formed the rest of the royal compound in chapter 7. The temple was not a large structure. Although under the terms of Josiah’s reform in 621 BCE it was designated as the place for sacrificial worship in the entire nation, it was initially hardly more than a royal chapel. Even as a national shrine, however, the building did not need to be large. The priests and their assistants were the only ones inside the building—the masses of worshipers remained outside.

In the collection of passages about the dedication of the temple (I Kings 8:1-9:9), we first see the intermingling of the work of the Deuteronomic editor, working before the fall of Jerusalem, with that of the later editor from a time after the Babylonian Exile. The passages are of interest to us also because they make theological statements about the place of the temple in Israel’s relationship with YHWH. Solomon encouraged the breakdown of tribal loyalties when he reorganized the land into twelve administrative districts whose boundaries did not conform to tribal divisions. He built, on the foundations laid by David, a national structure—one which took on the dimensions of a small empire with its subject-states. Yet on the occasion

394

of the dedication of the temple, he resurrects the symbols of the old tribal confederacy: the ark of the covenant and the tent of meeting (8:1-11). David attempted to associate the new capital of Jerusalem with the old Yahwist traditions by bringing the ark to the city. Now Solomon also seeks a secure religious base for his reign. (It is improbable that the old tent of meeting had lasted from the days of the wilderness. The tent Solomon brings to the temple here is undoubtedly the one that David made to house the ark. In the telling of the story, however, it becomes the old symbol. In spite of the improbability of it, the storyteller captures the significance of Solomon’s act by so describing it.)

The dedication takes place during the seventh month—the time of the fall celebration, which was also the festival of the new year (v. 2). In the ancient Near East, the new year’s festival was the time when gods, through kings, established the destiny of their nations for the coming year. How much of this way of thinking had entered the religious customs of Israel is difficult to tell. It is so natural to greet the new year with a desire to be done with the failures of the past and to look forward to what lies ahead that it can be assumed that Israel shared such an outlook.

Within the temple, in the windowless cube-shaped room containing large wooden cherubim, the ark is deposited. The cherubim, winged figures, part animal and part human, who guard sacred beings and sacred places in ancient mythology, stand with their wings outstretched over the ark. They guard the spot where YHWH, invisible and incapable of representation, dwells (vv. 6-7). The statement that the poles by which the ark has been carried can be seen from outside the inner sanctuary, “and they are there to this day” (v. 8), shows that the editor of this passage wrote before the destruction of the temple at the fall of Jerusalem.

According to legends of the wilderness days, various relics of those times were preserved in the ark: a jar of manna, the rod of Aaron, and the two stone tablets of the Law. But the Deuteronomist, whose conception of religion is strongly moral, insists that only the stone tables are there (v. 9). Still, whatever is in it, the ark is important because it represents in a concrete way God’s actual presence in the temple. The appearance of a thick cloud—whether supernatural or caused by the burning of incense, or perhaps present only in the imagination of the storyteller—testifies further to this presence of YHWH in his temple (vv. 10-11). How to understand his presence is a matter of some difficulty. For even if Solomon believed that he could build a temple-house for God, the Deuteronomist must insist that YHWH can in no sense be confined: “Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you,” D has Solomon say in his dedicatory prayer, “much less this

house that I have built!” (v. 27) For the Deuteronomist it is only YHWH’s “name” that dwells in the temple (v. 29). Thus, YHWH’s transcendence is maintained; at the same time God can in God’s name manifest his abiding presence among the people.

Nevertheless, the presence of YHWH—however it is understood—accomplishes Solomon’s purpose: to authenticate his reign as the chosen of YHWH. The point is underscored even more heavily in the version of this event in II Chronicles 7. In this account, most of which is taken verbatim from the Kings version, when Solomon

395

finishes his prayer of dedication, “fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.” Verses 12-13 are probably a very old fragment, older than the Deuteronomic reconstruction of the words of Solomon which follow. The Septuagint (LXX) contains a note which says that the verses are from the “Book of Jashar,” a lost work quoted elsewhere in the Old Testament.

In the Ras Shamra tablets discovered at the ancient Canaanite site of Ugarit, there is a parallel to these verses which suggests that for a god to exercise lordship over the other gods, it was necessary for him to have a house from which to rule. It is impossible from this to conclude that Solomon accepted this thinking, but the influence from other nations shown in the architecture of the temple and in its furnishings adds weight to the possibility that he might have felt this way.

The following verses (17-20) address again the problem of David’s failure to build the temple. It is an important issue: shouldn’t the building of the temple have belonged to the golden age of King David? That it came later is to say that that age was somehow incomplete. Here it is said to have been David’s intention to build a temple, but it was YHWH’s decree that it should be built by his son Solomon instead. Earlier Solomon gives a more practical reason for David’s failure to build it: “You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune” (5:3-4). This version has a ring of reality to it, but it is not the final explanation.

In I Chronicles 28:2-3, David speaks to all the officials of the land and says, “Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had planned to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God; and I made preparations for building. But God said to me, ‘You shall not build a house for my name, for you are a warrior and have shed blood.’” In I Chron. 28:11ff., David gives to Solomon the complete plan for the temple and its furnishings. The intent of the Chronicler, who tends to glorify David, is to base the temple worship within the “golden age” of the reign of David; that it was Solomon who built it could not be denied, but David’s failure to do so was connected solely to his vocation as a warrior-king, and all that he could do to ensure its construction, he did do.

I Kings 8:22-53 Solomon’s Prayer

Solomon’s prayer (8:22-40) is very similar in tone to the curses and blessings found in the Book of Deuteronomy. As the *Oxford Annotated Bible* footnote indicates, it is almost certainly the work of the early Deuteronomist rather than Solomon’s actual words.

The many references to captivity in verses 41-53 (particularly vv. 46-50) and the penitential tone of the prayer suggest that this part of Solomon’s prayer is a later addition from a writer who lived during the time of the Babylonian Exile. During

the period of the Exile the awareness of Israel's calling to be a "light to the Gentiles" arose in the writing of the prophet now known only as Second Isaiah; this universalistic note is expressed in vv. 41-43.

Material from the later editor continues in vv. 54-61, his version of Solomon's blessing. Verse 54 describes Solomon as rising from a kneeling posture in order to bless the people. In the version of his prayer that the earlier Deuteronomist has given us, Solomon stood to pray to YHWH (v. 22). In addressing royalty, the custom was for the king to remain seated—the position of dignity and rule—while his visitors stood before him. Priests stood before the altar to address the seated deity. So, in his prayer, Solomon is acting as priest. Verse 54 most probably reflects the more somber and penitential mood of the Exile in picturing Solomon as kneeling—the posture of the defeated enemy, captive before the king.

The conclusion of the chapter comes once again from the Deuteronomist. That writer describes as climax to the dedicatory ceremony the offering of a massive sacrifice. A seven-day feast is held, and on the eighth day, after the joyous festival, the people go away "joyful and in good spirits" (v. 66). The Levitical provisions for sin offerings and guilt offerings, typical of post-exilic penitence, have given to Old Testament sacrificial worship an appearance of grimness which in its earlier years it did not possess. In actuality such occasions were often festive, with much more feasting than usual.

The conclusion reached by the Deuteronomist (9:1-9) is not so happy. Solomon has referred in his prayer to the everlasting covenant with the house of David (8:25). In YHWH's response to the prayer, given in 9:1-9, that covenant is affirmed—but with a qualification. Verses 6-9 warn that if the king turns aside from YHWH's commandments to serve other gods and worship them, then:

- 1) Israel will be cut off from the land,
- 2) the "house" which YHWH has consecrated will be cast out of YHWH's sight— a reference to either the temple or the "house of David" or both—and
- 3) the temple will be a heap of ruins.

This had become the state of affairs at the time of the Exile.

Solomon's twenty-year building program is complete, but it has nearly bankrupted the realm. Its cost is indicated in the fact that Solomon has to pay Hiram of Tyre by giving him twenty cities in the far northern area of Galilee.

There is a weak attempt to minimize the earlier statement that Solomon, like his father, David, before him, has pressed his own people into forced labor. In 9:22, it is claimed that the labor conscripts are members of nations subject to Solomon's empire. "But of the Israelites Solomon made no slaves; they were his soldiers, they were his officials, his commanders, his captains, the commanders of his chariotry and cavalry."

At this point Solomon's reign extends even to the seaport of Eziongeber on the Gulf of Aqaba. The king is able to build a fleet of ships for the purposes of foreign trade. He is said to have chosen to hire Phoenician crews in order to trade with Ophir. The

location of Ophir is not certain, but it seems to have been either in southwestern Arabia or in present-day Somalia on the northeast coast of Africa. Both of these could have had port facilities on the Red Sea.

The Queen of Sheba pays Solomon a visit, probably also on a trade mission. Sheba's location is not known precisely, but it may have been on the lower Arabian peninsula. The queen, whose name has come to be a synonym for haughtiness, is suitably impressed with the splendor of Solomon's court and humbled by his "wisdom."

Chapter 10 contains further descriptions of the wealth of Solomon's kingdom and of the exotic trade in which he engages. One of the adornments he has made is worthy of note. The king has manufactured three hundred shields of beaten gold, and he has them placed in one of the public houses in the royal compound. These symbols of power will later be stolen by an Egyptian king on a raid for plunder. It is a raid that the once powerful Israelites will not be able to prevent. **Reread Chapter 11**

The Decline of Solomon

The present arrangement of the stories about Solomon suggests that for the first part of his reign, when he was acting according to his character as the wise and discerning king, all went well for Israel. The "golden age" of the nation began under David and reached its highest point under Solomon. It was not until Solomon was old and senile that he was led astray (v. 4). This is almost certainly a rewriting of history. Solomon began his reign with a bloodbath, proceeded to dismantle the ancient tribal structure, imposed unbearable burdens on the people for the support of the royal court, and was never reluctant to absorb the manners of foreign nations.

Artificial though it may be, this division of the story into a good beginning and a bad end does follow the pattern of the stories of Saul and of David. For each a turning point is reached, after which all is in decline. For Saul, it was his failure to obey the demands of the cherem by sparing Agag. For David, it was his lust for Bathsheba with the resulting murder of Uriah. And for Solomon, it is portrayed as his accumulation of foreign wives.

Solomon builds shrines for the gods of his wives. This shows that he has turned from YHWH and must be chastised: "I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of your father David I will not do it in your lifetime; I will tear it out of the hand of your son" (11:11-12). Still, in accord with the "royal theology," the punishment will not completely annul the everlasting covenant: "I will not tear away the entire kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen" (v. 13). This state of affairs comes about after Solomon's death when the northern tribes secede under Solomon's servant Jeroboam, leaving only the tribe of Judah to Solomon's son Rehoboam.

The nations which David had defeated begin to assert greater independence as Solomon's reign begins to go into decline (11:14-41). Hadad the Edomite was taken as a child to Egypt where his father's household took refuge after David's general Joab defeated Edom. With Solomon's rise to the throne, Hadad returns to Edom

to harass Solomon from there. Similarly Rezon, who fled from David and went to Damascus in Syria, has begun to harass Solomon from his exile.

The greater adversary, however, is to come from Solomon's own court: Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Solomon had put Jeroboam, an Ephraimite from the North, in charge of the forced labor crews who were part of the construction force at Jerusalem. One day, when he is leaving Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah performs a symbolic act, the meaning of which has already been stated as a message to Solomon himself in 11:11-13. Ahijah tears his garment into twelve pieces and gives Jeroboam ten of them. By this act he symbolizes the tearing of the kingdom from Solomon and the division of the nation, with ten tribes—those of the north—

becoming a separate kingdom under Jeroboam (12:29-31). Solomon hears of the prophecy—we are not told how—and Jeroboam flees to Egypt (v. 40).

Although the logic of the Deuteronomist's theology demands that the kingdom be taken from Solomon himself, the events show that it was Rehoboam, Solomon's son, under whom the kingdom divided. Thus vv. 34-36 state that Solomon is allowed to remain ruler "for the sake of David my servant whom I chose," and that it will be from his son's hand that the kingdom is taken. YHWH's action is to take place in order that the descendants of David may be afflicted—"but not forever" (v. 39). The "everlasting covenant" with David is never to be totally broken. A similar covenant is offered to the house of Jeroboam: "If you will listen to all that I command you . . . I will be with you, and will build you an enduring house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you" (v. 38). The reader, of course, knows that Jeroboam will not "listen to all" that YHWH commands—at least not as the Deuteronomist understands the divine command. His "sin"—that of building rival sanctuaries to the temple in Jerusalem—is the abomination that contaminates the entire history of the northern kingdom, so that, for the Deuteronomist, Jeroboam's name will become almost synonymous with evil.

The final verses of the chapter (41-43) are cast in the formula with which the editor closes the account of each king's reign. The rest of the acts of the king can be read, if one is interested, in the official record—in this case, "the book of the acts of Solomon." The length of the king's reign, the fact of his death, and the name of his successor are given, and then the story moves on to the reign of the next king.

Read I Kings 12-16

Rehoboam succeeds his father, Solomon, and he goes to the northern shrine city of Shechem to be made king over Israel. Once again the tenuous tie between the northern tribes and Judah is shown. Rehoboam has become king over Judah with no apparent difficulty, but he has to go to Shechem, the site of the ancient covenant ceremony which established the confederacy in the days of the original settlement of the land, to be made king over Israel.

Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt to escape the wrath of Solomon, is recalled by his tribe. The northern tribes seem willing to accept the principle of succession by the eldest son. They offer the monarchy to Rehoboam. They insist on certain conditions: "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of

your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you" (12:4). Rehoboam's old counselors advise him to do as the Israelites have requested, but Rehoboam chooses to follow the arrogant advice of his younger friends. He answers the Israelites with an assertion that his virility—we might say "machismo"—greatly exceeds that of his father—"My little finger is thicker than my father's loins" (v. 10)—and with the promise that his severity will be correspondingly greater: "My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions" (v. 11). The cause of Rehoboam's foolish response is laid at YHWH's feet: "because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat" (v. 15). The narrator cannot imagine that anything as important as the split between the northern and southern kingdoms could occur for merely political reasons or because of the foolishness of one imprudent individual. It must be the work of YHWH. The secession inevitably occurs, and it is voiced in the cry which Sheba had uttered against David when he offended the northern tribes on his return from the campaign against Absalom: "What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David" (v. 16).

In a move that politically can be described at best as ill-advised and at worst incendiary, Rehoboam sends

Adoram, “who was taskmaster over the forced labor,” to represent him to the people. Adoram is killed by the Israelites, and Rehoboam flees back to Jerusalem. Jeroboam is called and made king over Israel. The ten tribes of the north have been taken from the son of Solomon and given to Jeroboam. Only Judah is left to the house of David. And this state of affairs prevails “to this day” (v. 19), indicating that this account was written before 722 BCE, when the northern kingdom was finally destroyed with the fall of Samaria.

Rehoboam assembles an army to oppose the secession, but through a prophet YHWH instructs him not to do so. “Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me” (v. 24).

The question of the royal succession has been settled for Judah. Intrigue had threatened to cloud the issue in the case of Solomon, but this was probably because of David’s vagueness about which of his sons was to be his heir. Solomon apparently did not repeat that mistake, for there is no question about Rehoboam’s claim to the throne of David.

Jeroboam faces no such certainty about his own situation as king over Israel. He has been chosen by God—according to the prophecy of Ahijah—and has been acclaimed by the people. This was the old style of making a king, the style that prevailed before the “everlasting covenant” with David superseded it. The weakness of this old style was that a prophet could at any time announce a new choice by YHWH, or the people could withdraw their support of the king. To guard against the possibility that the people might be lured away from his support (vv. 26-27), Jeroboam builds sanctuaries in the north for the cultic ceremonies.

400

He has two golden calves made, one each for Bethel and Dan, ancient shrines of the northern tribes. The Deuteronomist, writing from the perspective of the Jerusalem temple cult, regards this act as the supreme abomination. In D’s view Jeroboam is guilty not only of rebellion against the house of David—this may have been in accord with YHWH’s will to punish that dynasty—he is guilty also of apostasy from YHWH!

It has been pointed out that the Exodus account of the making of the golden calf by the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai contains an attempt to associate Jeroboam’s later act with the outrageous apostasy of the people at the very “mountain of God.” The commentary on the Exodus passage drew attention to the fact that Jeroboam’s use of the calf imagery may have been no more objectionable to Yahwism than was the ark: in both cases a mount or a seat for YHWH was provided. YHWH sat invisible upon the calf in the one case and on the ark between the cherubim in the other. It is true, however, that the story of Jeroboam comes from the same time and place as the second commandment of the decalogue, and in its present form it depicts Jeroboam as idolatrous. In the I Kings account of the golden calves, Jeroboam is quoted as echoing the cry of Aaron: “Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (v. 28). Certainly Jeroboam could not have been so foolishly and grossly idolatrous in speaking to people fully aware of the Yahwist tradition. He probably said, in reference to the place where YHWH was to appear, “Behold your God. . . .” Nevertheless, he is condemned here for attempting to represent YHWH in such a way that he could manipulate God. For the southern historian, however, all this is missed in the horror that a king would set up a rival shrine in opposition to the very house of YHWH at Jerusalem.

Not only does Jeroboam designate Dan in the north and Bethel—actually on the pilgrim’s way to Jerusalem—as national shrines, “contaminating” them with the golden calves, but according to this account he also constructs shrines at “high places” and staffs them with priests who are not of the tribe of Levi (v. 31). Moreover, a fall festival is instituted, rivaling the one held in Jerusalem (vv. 32-33). In these ways, Jeroboam seeks to keep his people at home, safe from the temptation to renew their allegiance to the house of David through participation in the Jerusalem cult.

In evaluating the religious changes which Jeroboam initiated, it is important to remember that the northern tribes were the ones most fully associated with the old idea of a confederation of tribes under the covenant

with YHWH. The “royal theology” with its roots in the Davidic kingdom centered the idea of the nation in the person of the king and in the capital city of Jerusalem. The idea of “confederation” had no significance in the “royal theology,” the origins of which were to be found solely in Jerusalem and related directly only to the one tribe of Judah. In emphasizing ancient tribal sanctuaries, Jeroboam was not doing a new thing, but was recalling the northern tribes to their ancient traditions. Actually, the “novelty” existed in the south. The northern kingdom was essentially conservative, harking back to the tribal traditions—including the dependence of the king on prophetic and popular support, as opposed to the hereditary succession with its divine sanction in the “everlasting covenant” with the house of David.

401

History was to demonstrate that the conservatism of Israel was not to succeed. The factors which promoted its failure were many, but most of them related to Israel’s location on the major routes of both trade and conquest. Exposure to foreign ideas and customs diluted Yahwist traditions: even here, the “use of the symbol of the bull, the cult-animal of the Canaanite Baal, indicates syncretism between the worship of YHWH and the Canaanite nature cult . . .” (John Gray, *I and II Kings*, p. 315). The rejection of the Jerusalem throne and its attendant cult may not fully explain the downfall of the north, but it is true that the diffusion of loyalties among many tribal centers and the lack of a firm succession policy did not help hold the kingdom together.

Once again, the issue is raised: what kinds of changes are necessary and permissible to preserve religious heritage in the face of changing circumstances? Paradoxically, the rigid conservatism of the north ended in such a degree of syncretism with foreign ways that all was lost in change. Would the deliberate change to the “royal theology” with its basis in the “everlasting covenant” be more successful?

I Kings 13-16

In chapter 13, a Deuteronomic writer long after the time of Jeroboam tells a story of a prophet from the south who comes to Jeroboam predicting the coming of King Josiah in Judah and his destruction of the Israelite shrines. Josiah’s reform would strip away the high places and center all sacrificial worship in the Jerusalem temple. The Deuteronomic point of view is seen throughout the narrative of the kings, but the prophecy in chapter 13 seems to be more than an interpretation of history—it is most likely a fictional story inserted to make a theological point.

Quite different is the prophecy in chapter 14. Jeroboam sends his wife to the prophet Ahijah—the one whose torn garment earlier predicted the leadership of Jeroboam over the ten tribes of the north. The wife, who is not named here, is to obtain an oracle about the future of the king’s sick son, Abijah. The prophet predicts the death of the child and the loss of the throne by the house of Jeroboam. The prophetic oracle goes on, predicting the scattering of Israel “beyond the Euphrates”—a reference to the later conquest of Israel by Assyria. In this passage the interpretative hand of the Deuteronomist is as clearly at work as it was in chapter 13, but the event itself is certainly based in fact. The prophetic utterance against the ruling house, predicting its fall and the rise of a new king, was a common feature of political life in the north. Jeroboam’s sick child does die, as prophesied, and the story of the reign of Jeroboam ends with the customary closing formula. Jeroboam’s son Nadab succeeds him (14:17-20).

The scene now shifts to the southern kingdom. The editor moves back and forth between the two kingdoms, dating the reign of a king in one by reference to the then reigning king of the other. At this point, Rehoboam is king in Judah. His rule is no better than was Jeroboam’s in the north. High places, foreign images, and even male cult prostitution contaminate his reign. A raid by King Shishak of Egypt is recounted, probably to make the point that Rehoboam’s sins are being punished. The gold shields Solomon made and stored in the royal compound are stolen by Shishak. Rehoboam replaces them with shields of bronze. The glory of Solomon is fading.

Shishak's raid also points out that the political scene within which Judah and Israel lived was changing. For a relatively brief period, the great empires of the Euphrates and the Nile had been in a state of weakness. As long as they were weak, states as small as Israel and Judah could survive. Shishak's raid demonstrates that that time was passing.

Two more Judean kings reign during the time that Jeroboam was king in the north. Abijam is dismissed as an evil king who is preserved alive only because of YHWH's love for his ancestor, David. Asa is one of three kings of Judah who receive praise from the Deuteronomist, though his praise is qualified. Asa is favorably remembered for having purged Judah of most idolatry, even deposing his own mother from the role of "queen mother" because she made an image to a foreign god. His only shortcoming is that he does not abolish the "high places."

Warfare between the two kingdoms continued throughout the reign of Jeroboam of Israel as well as under his son Nadab and the man who overthrows Nadab, Baasha. Baasha lays Judah under siege and Asa calls on Ben-hadad, king of Syria in Damascus, to assist him. In the face of this alliance between Judah to the south and Syria to the north, Baasha must relent and withdraw his siege.

When we return to the story of the north, we find the short reign of Nadab ended by the revolt under Baasha—thereby fulfilling the prophet Ahijah's prediction that the house of Jeroboam would fall. A succession of revolts and palace coups follows: Baasha receives the prophetic curse upon his house; his son succeeds him, but is killed by his commander, Zimri; Zimri, who has no prophetic claim to the throne, is king only seven days before being killed himself by Omri; Omri is victorious in a civil war fought over who should be king. The reign of Omri is long and successful; this we know from contemporary non-Judean records. But the Deuteronomist, who is interested primarily in religious matters, dismisses it with his customary judgment—"Omri did what was evil in the sight of YHWH"—and records only Omri's building of the city of Samaria, from then on the capital of the northern kingdom. Omri's son Ahab succeeds him, while Asa is still king in Judah. Ahab surpasses his predecessors in evil—in the eyes of the Deuteronomist. He presumes to marry the Sidonian princess, Jezebel. Probably her name has collected an aura of evil, cunning, and depravity. She unquestionably dominates Ahab. He builds her a temple to Baal in Samaria, and Baal worship is now to become, with royal approval, an open rival to Yahwism.

The accounts of the kings, taken from the court chronicles of Israel and Judah, are at this point interrupted. In I Kings 17-II Kings 10 are the stories of the northern prophets Elijah and Elisha. It is to those stories that we now turn.