

I KINGS

Introduction:

Originally the books First and Second Kings were only one book, giving the chronicles of the kingdom of Israel, known by the Hebrews by the first word with which the book opens: *W^ahamelek Daawid*, “now David.”

The division of the books into two was done by the authors of the Septuagint, the translators of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek in the third century B.C.

The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary observes: “In the Septuagint the books are called “the third and fourth of the Kingdoms,” in Vulgate “the third and fourth book of Kings.” Originally the two were one: Bomberg in his printed editions, 1518, 1549, divided them into two.”

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about the title: “The Hebrew title reads, *melakhim*, ‘kings,’ the division into books being based on the Septuagint where the Books of Kings are numbered 3rd and 4th, the Books of Kingdoms (*Basileion*), the Books of Samuel being numbered respectively 1st and 2nd. The separation in the Hebrew into 2 Books of Kings dates to the rabbinic Bible of Daniel Bomberg (Venice, 1516-17), who adds in a footnote, ‘Here the non-Jews (i.e. Christians) begin the 4th Book of Kings.’ The Hebrew Canon treats the 2 Books of Samuel as one book, and the 2 Books of Kings as one. Hence, both the King James Version and the Revised Version (British and American) read incorrectly, ‘The First Book of Kings,’ even the use of the article being superfluous.”

Authorship:

J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Explore the Book*, writes: “They open with the accession of Solomon, and close with the destruction of Jerusalem. At the beginning we see the temple built. At the end we see the temple burnt. The two books together cover a period of about four hundred years. As to their authorship, scholars are in no doubt that “the language of the two books” and their “unity of purpose” point to “a single writer.” ... Jewish tradition says he was Jeremiah the prophet. This tradition cannot be accepted as conclusive, yet neither can it be easily refuted. Indeed there is much in its favor. Or course, Jeremiah would make use of documents already existing (I Kings xi. 41; xiv. 29, etc); and after him redactors would make minor contributions to the eventual completeness of the work: but substantially the work is that of one writer, and that writer was probably the aged Jeremiah.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “That the two books ... are really one is proved by the strongest internal evidence. Not only is there no break between them — the separation at ... 1 Kings 22:53 being so purely arbitrary and artificial that it is actually made haphazard in the middle both of the reign of Ahaziah and of the ministry of Elijah — but the unity of purpose is conspicuous throughout. Together they afford us a continuous and complete history of the kings and kingdoms of the chosen people. And the language of the two books points conclusively to a single writer. While there are no indications of the manner of speech of a later period, no contradictions or confusions such as would arise from different writers, there are many phrases and formulae, tricks of expression, and turns of thought, which show the same hand and mind throughout the entire work, and effectually exclude the idea of a divided authorship.”

Date of writing:

About the date of writing, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The date of the composition of the Kings can be fixed, with much greater facility and certainty than that of many portions of Scripture, from the contents of the Books themselves. It must lie somewhere between B.C. 561 and B.C. 588; that is to say, it must have been in the latter part of the Babylonian captivity. It cannot have been *before* B.C. 561, for that is the year of the accession of Evil-Merodach, whose kindly treatment of Jehoiachin, “in the year that he began to reign,” is the last event mentioned in the history. Assuming that this is not an addition by a later hand, which we have no reason to think is the case, we have thus one limit — a *maximum* of antiquity — fixed with certainty. And it cannot have been after B.C. 538, the date of the return under Zerubbabel, as it is quite inconceivable that the historian should have omitted to notice an event of such profound importance, and one too which had such a direct bearing on the purpose for which the history was penned — which was partly, as we have already remarked, to trace the fulfillment of 2 Samuel 7:12-16, in the fortunes of David’s house — had that event occurred at the time when he wrote. We may safely assign this year, consequently, as the *minimum* date for the composition of the work.”

It is interesting to observe that The Book of Kings does not open with the beginning of the kingdom, which would have been at Saul’s ascension to the throne in about 1053 B.C.

Actually, the first four verses of the first chapter deal with David in the last days of his life, which ought to have been part of Second Samuel.

Outline of the Book of First Kings:

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1. THE LAST DAYS OF DAVID AND SOLOMON'S ACCESSION (1 KGS 1:1 – 2:46)

A. David's old age (1:1-4)

1 When King David was old and well advanced in years, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him.

2 So his servants said to him, "Let us look for a young virgin to attend the king and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our lord the king may keep warm."

3 Then they searched throughout Israel for a beautiful girl and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king.

4 The girl was very beautiful; she took care of the king and waited on him, but the king had no intimate relations with her.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "This court history, commonly called "succession Narrative," continues the account of David's reign from 2 Samuel 9-20. The style is vivid, portraying an intimate knowledge by person involved (possibly Nathan).

It records the history of the struggle for the succession (1:1-55), accentuated by David's physical decline. His failure to name who should follow on the throne was a weakness, especially at a time when it was not clear whether the common ancient Near-Eastern practice of succession by the first-born (or by the "charismatic" divine selection used in the appointment of Saul and David himself) was to apply. His indecision was aggravated by his failure to discipline his family (v.6). The Adonijah incident (vv. 1-27) and the reference to Abishag (v. 3, cf. 2:13-35) are essential elements in the history of Solomon's reign (2:10 – 11:41) which now begins."

The first four verses of the book describe David as an old man who could not keep himself warm. Most Bible scholars take David's age at this point, being "old and well advanced in years" as an exaggeration. David cannot have been more than in his late sixties or early seventies. In our modern Western society, this would be considered to be the time when people begin to enjoy their retirement.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "He cannot have been more than seventy. (He was thirty at his accession; his reign at Hebron lasted seven years and a half; at Jerusalem thirty-three years)." Evidently, the age of the Patriarchs had passed and Jacob's words to Pharaoh: "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers,"¹ no longer applied to the time in which David lived. David may have felt older than he actually was and he behaved accordingly. The tensions of life, first as a fugitive of King Saul and later as king, added to his life as a polygamist may have made him age more rapidly.

The Fausset's Bible Dictionary opens David's biography with: "The youngest of the eight sons of Jesse of Bethlehem (1 Sam 16:11); great grandson of Ruth and Boaz, "a mighty man of wealth" (Ruth 2:1; 4:21, 22). Born, according to the common chronology, 1085 B.C. Began to reign when 30 years of age, but over Judah alone, 1055 B.C. (2 Sam 5:4; 1 Kings 2:11; 1 Chron 29:27), over all Israel, seven years and six months later, 1048 B.C. He died in 1015 B.C., 70 years old." Bible scholars do not agree about the exact

¹ Gen. 47:9

date of David's death. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, for instance puts it at "about 960 B.C." Most agree, however, about his age as being approximately seventy years.

David's physical problem of being unable to feel comfortably warm, while being bedridden, must have been due to his poor blood circulation. When adding blankets did not help, his aids suggested that the warmth of a human body would probably provide the needed comfort. We suppose that this kind of physical warmth could have been provided by any of the members of David's extensive harem. But it was felt that the king needed a young and beautiful virgin for the purpose. It seems better to refrain from comment at this point.

The search committee came up with a young woman named Abishag. Her name adds an interesting feature to the story, since its original meaning suggests "cause of wandering."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia describes her as: "The Shunammite woman who became nurse to King David (1 Kings 1-4; 15; 2:17, 21-22). She was chosen for the service with great care on account of her youth and beauty and physical vigor. She ministered to the king, that is, waited on him as personal attendant and nurse. She also "cherished" him in his feebleness-gave to him through physical contact the advantage of her superabundant vitality. This was a mode of medical treatment recommended by the servants of the king, and it appears to have been not wholly unsuccessful. She had an intimate knowledge of the condition of David, and was present at the interview of Bathsheba with David which resulted in the placing of Solomon on the throne. If that act had been questioned she would have been a most important witness. By reason of this and of her personal charms, she might become a strong helper to any rival of Solomon who should intrigue to supplant him. Adonijah sought Abishag in marriage. On the basis of this and of such other evidence as may supposedly have been in his possession, Solomon put Adonijah to death as an intriguer."

B. Adonijah bids for the throne (1:5-10)

5 *Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, "I will be king." So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him.*

6 *(His father had never interfered with him by asking, "Why do you behave as you do?" He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom.)*

7 *Adonijah conferred with Joab son of Zeruah and with Abiathar the priest, and they gave him their support.*

8 *But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei and Rei and David's special guard did not join Adonijah.*

9 *Adonijah then sacrificed sheep, cattle and fattened calves at the Stone of Zoheleth near En Rogel. He invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah who were royal officials,*

10 *but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the special guard or his brother Solomon.*

Enter Adonijah, who was not David's first son, but the oldest one alive. His assumption that he would be the first one in line of succession to the throne was not unreasonable, but it was merely based on supposition. *Barnes' Notes* observes:

“Adonijah was born while David reigned at Hebron, and was therefore now between thirty-three and forty years of age. He was David’s fourth son, but had probably become the eldest by the death of his three older brothers. He claimed the crown by right of primogeniture (1 Kings 2:15), and secretly to his partisans (compare 1 Kings 1:10) announced his intention of assuming the sovereignty. It was well known to him, and perhaps to the Jews generally, that David intended to make Solomon his successor (1 Kings 1:13).”

Whether, as *Barnes’ Notes* assures us, Adonijah was aware of the fact that Solomon had already been pinpointed as the successor to the throne, is not certain. He may have acted in good faith, assuming that he would be the next king because he was David’s oldest son alive. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “Adonijah, though David’s fourth son (2 Sam 3:4; 1 Chron 3:2), was now the oldest alive; and personal attractions and manners (cf. 1 Sam 9:2) not only recommended him to the leading men about court, but made him the favorite of his father, who, though seeing him assume an entourage becoming only the heir-presumptive to the throne (2 Sam 15:1), said nothing, and his silence was considered by many, as well as by Adonijah, to be equivalent to an expression of consent. It was one of the characteristic weaknesses of David to be dotingly fond of, and culpably indulgent to, his children. To such an excess did David carry his paternal affection, as to be blind to their faults, and never dare rebuke their delinquencies.”

Adonijah was born after David had been crowned king by the people of Judah, while he was still living in Bethlehem. Saul had been killed and the tension between “the house of Saul and the house of David” had not been resolved yet.² Although Adonijah’s assumption was not unreasonable, it was premature. He followed Absalom in the way he made his pretension to the throne known to the public. Absalom, however, had planned to take power by supplanting his father, not by merely succeeding him. We cannot accuse Adonijah of rebelling, as Absalom had done.

David had, apparently, made no provision for any of his children to succeed him. We read in the following verses that Bathsheba reminds David of an oath he had sworn regarding Solomon’s succession, but there is no record in Scripture of such an oath. We may, therefore, assume that Adonijah was unaware of it.

Yet, Adonijah’s pretension to the throne was his own; he had not received his father’s blessing on that point. We do read that David had never interfered with him or asked him any questions about his behavior. But it seems that, as far as that was concerned, Adonijah was not an exception. We don’t read that David had involved himself in the raising of any of his children. The only time David came close to anything that resembled discipline of his family was in the case of Absalom, but that was because Absalom had murdered his half-brother Amnon.³

The fact that David had never questioned Adonijah’s behavior, asking “Why do you behave as you do?” doesn’t tell us what Adonijah did; only that some of what he did may have been questionable. Adonijah concluded from this that he was free to do as he wished.

Adonijah was able to get some support from influential members of David’s council. In Joab, he received the backing of the army, which was of the utmost

² II Sam. 3:1

³ II Sam. 13:28,29

importance, and in Abiathar, at least part of the spiritual leadership of the nation backed him up. Abiathar was not the only high priest, but he seems to have shared the office with Zadok. That fact poses some difficult questions about who was what; questions the Bible doesn't answer.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states about Abiathar: "Abiathar seems to have been at once recognized as David's priest, the medium of consultation with Jehovah through the ephod (1 Sam 22:20-23; 23:6, 9; 30:7-8). He was at the head of the priesthood, along with Zadok (1 Chron 15:11), when David, after his conquests (1 Chron 13:5; compare 2 Sam 6), brought the ark to Jerusalem. The two men are mentioned together as high priests eight times in the narrative of the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam 15:24 ff), and are so mentioned in the last list of David's heads of departments (2 Sam 20:25)."

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Joab's involvement in Adonijah's ambitions for the throne: "Joab's share in this conspiracy, despite his hitherto unwavering fidelity to David, is easily accounted for. He must have known that he was under David's displeasure, and he must have feared, too, that he would be an object of dislike and distrust to a successor trained, as Solomon had been, under David's and Nathan's immediate influence. He could hardly be unconscious that under a new reign his position — unless he took measures to assure it — would be a precarious one. He resolved, therefore, to secure himself by helping Adonijah to his throne. It is also highly probable that Adonijah's ambitious character was much more to his liking than that of the pious and pacific Solomon. Adonijah's physical qualities, again, would no doubt commend him to this rough soldier, who may also have sympathized with him as the eldest son. And there may have been other circumstances (such, e.g., as close personal friendship), of which we know nothing."

The fact that Adonijah organized his own celebration for the ascension to the throne went well beyond anything else he had done before. He must have known that, although his father David had never taken him to account about any of his endeavors in the past, a celebration of succession could not be held without his father's knowledge or blessing. The absence of some of the leading figures of the nation, such as Zadok, Benaiah, Nathan and David's bodyguard, who were evidently purposely not invited, is of significance. That is an indication that Adonijah suspected trouble if he allowed those people to be present at his celebration. It strongly suggests that he anticipated David's disapproval.

The place chosen for the celebration of Adonijah's ascension to the throne is called "the Stone of Zoheleth near En Rogel." The place was supposed to be an ancient Canaanite holy place with a spring of water coming out which served as a water supply to the people of the area. Bible scholars have argued about the supposed location. The name Zoheleth means "serpent stone."

C. Counter-action by Nathan and Bathsheba (1:11-27)

11 Then Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king without our lord David's knowing it?"

12 Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon.

13 Go in to King David and say to him, “My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant: “Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne”? Why then has Adonijah become king?”

14 While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and confirm what you have said.”

15 So Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room, where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him.

16 Bathsheba bowed low and knelt before the king.

“What is it you want?” the king asked.

17 She said to him, “My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the Lord your God: “Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.”

18 But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it.

19 He has sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and has invited all the king’s sons, Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he has not invited Solomon your servant.

20 My lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him.

21 Otherwise, as soon as my lord the king is laid to rest with his fathers, I and my son Solomon will be treated as criminals.”

22 While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived.

23 And they told the king, “Nathan the prophet is here.” So he went before the king and bowed with his face to the ground.

24 Nathan said, “Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you, and that he will sit on your throne?

25 Today he has gone down and sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep. He has invited all the king’s sons, the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest. Right now they are eating and drinking with him and saying, “Long live King Adonijah!”

26 But me your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he did not invite.

27 Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?”

Although Nathan had not been invited to Adonijah’s celebration, he had received word about it and clearly understood what the consequences would be for himself, for Bathsheba and her son Solomon.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The narrative is vivid and, in traditional Hebrew style, involves repetitions (e.g. vv. 19, 25 and 13, 17, 30). Nathan the prophet may have felt responsible for continuing David’s promised dynasty and as concerned as Samuel had been as a “king-maker.” His plot with Bathsheba (vv. 11-14) would agree with her desire to be an influential queen mother (cf. 2:19; 15:13; 2 Kgs 10:13) and with his wish that a co-regent and successor be nominated (v.27). The action follows the usual course of an appeal to the king, and is not necessarily a formal lawsuit, with address (vv. 17-18), presentation of case (vv. 17-19), request for decision (vv. 20-21), confirmation by witness (vv. 22-27) and decision on oath (vv. 29-30).”

We do not read about any oath David may have sworn to Bathsheba concerning Solomon succeeding him as king. We do not read either that Nathan had received a divine revelation about this. But that does not mean that David never made such a promise. As a matter of fact, we can hardly assume that Bathsheba could say this to David if it were not true. David would have denied ever having made the promise.

We do read that God had revealed His particular love for Solomon at his birth. “They named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah”⁴ (“loved by the Lord”).

It is important to note Nathan’s observation that the lives of Solomon and Bathsheba would be in danger if Adonijah succeeded in becoming the next king. Although he does not mention this, Nathan probably knew that he would face execution as well. He knew why he had not been invited to Adonijah’s celebration.

As mentioned above, Nathan believed that, if Adonijah became king, he would have put Solomon and his mother Bathsheba to death. He advises Bathsheba to seek an audience with David and press David to issue a declaration about succession to the throne at the event of his death.

Nathan foresaw the possibility that David would not believe Bathsheba’s report about Adonijah’s declaration as being the new king of Israel. He, therefore, arranged a simple plot: Bathsheba would go and tell David, and as that audience took place, the prophet would come in and confirm that the rumor was true. This would, supposedly, force David to make an official declaration about Solomon’s coronation, which he must have promised to Bathsheba under oath.

Bathsheba enters David’s bedroom, where Abishag was also present, probably keeping the king warm with her own body. The Hebrew text repeats at this point the fact that David was “old,” using the word *zaqen*. We saw already that David could not have been older than his late sixties or early seventies at this time. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “Here the word refers to feebleness rather than age. It is mentioned to explain David’s confinement to his chamber.”

It is understood that David was unaware of Adonijah’s proclamation to be the next king of Israel. But Bathsheba was to act in a way, as if David knew. Her question would be why he had changed his mind after promising her that her son Solomon would be the new king. Lest David would suppose Bathsheba to be exaggerating, Nathan would come in, unannounced, and confirm the rumor.

Bathsheba would act as if Adonijah’s self-coronation was in accordance with David’s wishes. She would insinuate that in agreeing with it, David must not have realized what the consequences would be for herself and her son Solomon; they would be treated as criminals if Solomon declared that he was the rightful pretender to the throne. Most Bible scholars agree that Adonijah would probably have executed Solomon, but that the execution of Bathsheba would not have been a foregone conclusion, although there are incidences in history that confirm this.

The most important part of Bathsheba’s plea would be that the whole nation would be in disarray, because of David’s failure to have made a clear announcement about the succession to the throne. The fact that some would side with Solomon and others with Adonijah could lead to a civil war. A clear announcement by David could

⁴ II Sam. 12:24,25

avoid all this. And since David, evidently had made a declaration in private to Bathsheba, which he had confirmed with an oath, an official announcement would be in order.

It seems inconsistent that Bathsheba would suggest on the one hand that David had let Adonijah make himself king and, on the other hand that he didn't know about it. What she may have intended to say was that David didn't know about Adonijah's celebration.

At Nathan's advice Bathsheba also mentions the involvement of Abiathar and Joab. Nathan may have thought that, if Adonijah succeeded in becoming king, those two leaders might turn against him and have him executed.

Also the special mention that Adonijah had not invited his younger brother Solomon to the celebration of his ascension to the throne was meant to emphasize that Solomon's life, as well as his mother's, would be in danger.

In saying "the eyes of all Israel are on you" Bathsheba presses David to issue an official declaration about succession to the throne for the benefit of the nation as a whole. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The kings of the East have always designated their successor amongst their sons. "Alyattes designated Croesus; Cyrus designated Cambyses, and Darius designated Xerxes." "The Shah of Persia, at the beginning of this century, had sixty sons, all brought up by their mothers, with the hope of succeeding." ... And the kings of Israel claimed and exercised a similar right (2 Chronicles 11:22; 21:3)."

At the moment this conversation between David and Bathsheba goes on, the arrival of the prophet Nathan is announced. While Bathsheba could, evidently, enter unannounced, Nathan had to wait for an audience with the king. The conditions at David's court must have been much less stringent than those at the Persian court where, as Esther states, her life would be in danger if she approached her husband, the king, unannounced.

We do not read that Nathan had to request an audience with David when he came to announce God's judgment upon him after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. At that time we simply read: "The Lord sent Nathan to David."⁵ There may be a suggestion that what happens at this point was not the conveying of God's message by the prophet.

Nathan goes through the ritual greetings in the presence of a king, bowing with his face to the ground. Then he proceeds to ask David if Adonijah's coronation was David's idea. If it was, then why had he, as well as some of the other of the king's counselors, not be informed? He also made sure that David knew that Zadok and Benaiah, as well as he himself had not been invited to the ceremony, suggesting a conspiracy such as Absalom had tried on his father before.

D. David confirms Solomon as his successor (1:28-40)

28 Then King David said, "Call in Bathsheba." So she came into the king's presence and stood before him.

29 The king then took an oath: "As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, 30 I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place."

⁵ II Sam. 12:1

31 Then Bathsheba bowed low with her face to the ground and, kneeling before the king, said, “May my lord King David live forever!”

32 King David said, “Call in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.” When they came before the king,

33 he said to them: “Take your lord’s servants with you and set Solomon my son on my own mule and take him down to Gihon.

34 There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, “Long live King Solomon!”

35 Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah.”

36 Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, “Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so declare it.

37 As the Lord was with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon to make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord King David!”

38 So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites went down and put Solomon on King David’s mule and escorted him to Gihon.

39 Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon. Then they sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, “Long live King Solomon!”

40 And all the people went up after him, playing flutes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound.

Evidently, Bathsheba had left before Nathan came in, because David orders one of his servants, or Nathan himself, to call her back.

When Bathsheba comes back in and Nathan is also present, David swears an oath, confirming Solomon’s succession to the throne. He confirms that Solomon’s succession would be more than a promise fulfilled; he had sworn to that before. In addition to using the simple formula of the oath and using the Name YHWH for God, David adds that God had delivered him out of every trouble, making it, at the same time, a prayer of thanksgiving. The Hebrew text reads literally: “And the king swore and said, As the Lord lives, that has redeemed my soul out of all distress ...”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “This was the common form of oath. See, e.g. ... 1 Kings 2:24; ... Judges 8:19; ... Ruth 3:13; ... 1 Samuel 14:39; 19:6; 20:24; 29:6; and especially ... Jeremiah 4:2; 5:2; ... Hosea 4:15. It is characteristic of David to introduce into the formula some such clause as the following, *that hath redeemed my soul [i.e., life] out of all distress*. Same expression as in ... 2 Samuel 4:9. Similar expressions are found in ... Psalm 25:22, and 34:22. The repeated deliverance out of straits and danger — “out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul” — was one of the most remarkable features of David’s life, and it is no wonder that he repeatedly commemorates it, converting every adjuration into an act of thanksgiving. Similarly, Jacob (... Genesis 48:16.)” David was at that moment still one of the great kings in the world; yet, he could not forget the miracle of God’s deliverance of previous dangers and of making him great in the eyes of man.

We read that Bathsheba “bowed low with her face to the ground.” The Hebrew verse used is *shachah*, which in this case, may simply mean to “bow in homage.” The first time the verb is used in Scripture is in the verse: “Abraham looked up and saw three

men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and *bowed low to the ground.*⁶ Her wish that David would live forever, ought not to be taken literally.

David made immediately good on his promise and calling in Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah he ordered the coronation of Solomon as king over Israel at that very moment. Benaiah was probably the commander of the king's body guard, the Cherethites and the Pelethites. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* states about these: "'The Cherethites and the Pelethites,'" a collective term for David's personal bodyguard (2 Sam 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kings 1:38, 44; 1 Chron 18:17). The words are adjectives in form, but with a substantive meaning, and were used to indicate a certain rank, literally, the executioners and runners. At a later date they were called "the captains" and "the guards" (2 Kings 11:4, 19; cf. 1 Kings 14:27). The NIV renders "Carites" in 2 Kings 11:4, 19."

The fact that Solomon was to ride around on David's personal mule served as proof that he was officially the successor to the throne. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "No subject could use anything that belonged to the prince, without forfeiting his life. As David offered Solomon to ride on his own mule, this was full evidence that he had appointed him his successor."

Barnes' Notes comments on the name of the place Gihon: "Probably the ancient name of the valley called afterward the Tyropoeum, which ran from the present Damascus Gate, by Siloam, into the Kedron vale, having the temple hill, or true Zion, on the left, and on the right the modern Zion or ancient city of the Jebusites."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary adds: "This command to Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah spelled the collapse of Adonijah's plot, for the coronation of the rebel's half-brother Solomon was about to begin. The king gave specific instructions for the ceremony of crowning. David's own mule was to be used, the royal mule, to signify that Solomon was the king's chosen one."

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the mule on which Solomon was to ride around: "The mule would seem to have been a recent importation into Palestine — we never read of them before the time of David — and the Israelites were forbidden to breed them (... Leviticus 19:19). Their use, consequently, was naturally restricted to royal or distinguished personages (... 2 Samuel 13:29)."

Bible scholars have found problems in identifying the place of "Gihon" mentioned in the text.

Benaiah reacted to David's statement by saying: "Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so declare it. As the Lord was with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon to make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord King David!"

Who was Benaiah? *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states: "He earned his position by slaying "two lion-like men of Moab," and "a lion in a pit in a snowy day," and "an Egyptian of great stature, a goodly man (2 Sam 23:21), five cubits high," out of whose hand he plucked the spear like a weaver's beam, "and slew him with his own spear" (1 Chron 11:22-23). Having remained faithful in Adonijah's rebellion (1 Kings 1:8, 10, 32, 38, 44), and having by Solomon's command slain him and Joab, he was promoted to the latter's post as commander in chief (1 Kings 2:25, 34-35; 4:4)."

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments on Benaiah's reaction to David's oath: "Benaiah responded to the utterance of the royal will with the confirmatory "Amen,

⁶ Gen. 18:2

thus saith Jehovah the God of my lord the king;” i.e., may the word of the king become a word of Jehovah his God, who fulfills what He promises (Ps 33:9); and added the pious wish, “May Jehovah be with Solomon, as He was with David, and glorify his throne above the throne of David,” - a wish which was not merely “flattery of his paternal vanity” ... but which had in view the prosperity of the monarchy, and was also fulfilled by God (cf. 1 Kings 3:11 ff.).”

So Solomon is taken to Gihon for the official unction which would make him not only his father’s successor to the throne but the actual king. On this trip, which may have taken a few hours, according to some Bible scholars, he was accompanied by “Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites.”

The anointing was done with the oil that was kept in the tabernacle, which at that time was still standing at Gihon. Some Bible scholars believe that the oil was taken from the tent in Jerusalem where David had brought the ark. The fact that the anointing was done at Gihon seems to plead against this supposition.

Solomon’s anointing differs significantly from the one David received. David was anointed secretly at home, since Saul was still the reigning monarch, who although rejected by God, still occupied the throne. David’s unction by Samuel made him a refugee who had to flee for his life.

The ceremony was evidently done in public in the presence of a large crowd who reacted ecstatically, shouting “Long live King Solomon!” Some translations read: “God save King Solomon!” The Hebrew word used is *chayah*, which can be translated “live” or “survive.” The first time the word is used in Scripture is in the verse: “When Adam *had lived* 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.”⁷ We also find it in the verse: “But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive.”⁸

E. Adonijah’s uprising fails (1:41-53).

41 Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they were finishing their feast. On hearing the sound of the trumpet, Joab asked, “What’s the meaning of all the noise in the city?”

42 Even as he was speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. Adonijah said, “Come in. A worthy man like you must be bringing good news.”

43 “Not at all!” Jonathan answered. “Our lord King David has made Solomon king.

44 The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites, and they have put him on the king’s mule,

45 and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon. From there they have gone up cheering, and the city resounds with it. That’s the noise you hear.

46 Moreover, Solomon has taken his seat on the royal throne.

47 Also, the royal officials have come to congratulate our lord King David, saying, “May your God make Solomon’s name more famous than yours and his throne greater than yours!” And the king bowed in worship on his bed

⁷ Gen. 5:3

⁸ Ex. 1:17 - NKJV

48 and said, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has allowed my eyes to see a successor on my throne today.”“

49 At this, all Adonijah’s guests rose in alarm and dispersed.

50 But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar.

51 Then Solomon was told, “Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and is clinging to the horns of the altar. He says, “Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.”“

52 Solomon replied, “If he shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die.”

53 Then King Solomon sent men, and they brought him down from the altar. And Adonijah came and bowed down to King Solomon, and Solomon said, “Go to your home.”

We assume that the sounding of the trumpets accompanied Solomon’s ride on his father’s donkey through the city of Jerusalem. In this he was followed by a large crowd that shouted and played flutes, making enough noise to draw the attention of Adonijah, who was celebrating his own coronation. But the only one who drew the correct conclusion when hearing the noise was Joab. The Hebrew text reads literally: “Wherefore is this noise the city being in uproar?” The word used is *hamah*, which refers usually to a loud sound and can be rendered “tumult,” or “clamor.” We find it in the verse: “Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.”⁹ *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The original almost implies that Joab’s practiced ear was the first to catch the note of the trumpet. He seems to have been the first to suspect its significance.”

Adonijah must have been too intoxicated by the joy of his own coronation that he suspected no danger. Contrary to Joab’s suspicion, he believes that everything was fine and that his ascension to the throne was assured. So when Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived, Adonijah said, rather flippantly: “A worthy man like you must be bringing good news.” On the other hand, Adonijah may have been uneasy and this reference to Jonathan as a bringer of “good news” may have been an effort to hide his anxiety.

The Hebrew word Jonathan uses is *abal*, which may be rendered “not really.” In some cases the word has a positive connotation as when God tells Abraham that Sarah would give him a son, saying: “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac.”¹⁰

What Jonathan says to Adonijah is that he better end his own celebration because it had been premature and his younger stepbrother Solomon was already sitting on David’s throne. If Adonijah would continue, he would indeed be considered a traitor and forfeit his life. The fact that Jonathan communicated this to Adonijah must mean that he had Adonijah’s safety in mind. Joab had been right in being concerned when hearing the noise, Adonijah had been wrong in thinking nothing could go wrong.

Jonathan seemed to have known all the details of what went on in the royal palace in Jerusalem. He even repeated David’s own words when Solomon ascended the throne: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has allowed my eyes to see a successor on my throne today.” Solomon’s coronation meant, in fact that David had officially abdicated.

⁹ Ps. 46:6

¹⁰ Gen. 17:19

It also meant that Adonijah's life was in danger. He would be considered a rebel and, thinking of what he may have planned to do to Solomon and Bathsheba, as we saw from Bathsheba's fear expressed to David, he imagined that Solomon would do the same to him. So he hurried to the tabernacle and grabbed the horns of the burn offering altar, the brass altar that stood outside the tabernacle.

We don't know where the thought originated that getting hold of the horns of the burn offering altar would protect someone from capital punishment. There is no Old Testament law that regulates or suggests this. There are only two instances in which we read about people doing this. Besides Adonijah, we read about Joab fleeing to the tent and taking hold of the horns of the altar,¹¹ although that would not save his life. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "By "laying hold of the horns the offender thereby placed himself under the protection of the saving and helping grace of God"."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about "the horns of the altar": "The horns (Exod. 27:2) were used for tying the sacrificial victim. To grasp them was to claim the protection of God until the case was judged. This prevented excessive blood-revenge (Exod. 21:13). In the Middle Ages a church was called "a sanctuary."

Solomon exercised his new royal powers as co-regent, was acknowledged by Adonijah as *king* (v.51), and issued a condition pardon, swearing "first (of all)" (RSV; cf. NIV *today*; REB "here and now"; Heb. "like the day") before witnesses and granting amnesty so long as Adonijah behaved honorably as a *worthy man* (v. 52); a "man of worth" (NEB) means more than just "like a gentleman" but one who did no "evil." Otherwise he would be put to death judicially (so *with the sword*, cf. 2:24-25). The order *Go to your home* (v. 53, "house" RSV, REB) was not house-arrest, retirement from public life or banishment (as for Absalom in 2 Sam. 14:24) but an indication of agreement or reconciliation that was not total (otherwise "in peace" would have been added, 2 Kgs 5:19)."

F. David's charge to Solomon (2:1-9)

i. *Walking in the Lord's way (2:1-4)*

1 *When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.*
2 *"I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man,*
3 *and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go,*
4 *and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: "If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel."*

In giving his charge to Solomon, David urges him to follow the Lord according to the written section, referred to as "the Law of Moses." This strongly suggests that the Pentateuch was in existence at that time and that it was not, as some liberal theologians who are of the school of "Higher Criticism" have suggested, compiled by priests upon

¹¹ I Kings 2:28

Israel's return from Babylonian Captivity. The Law of Moses existed as a written document in the days of David and Solomon.

The law of the kingdom is found in Deuteronomy, particularly in Deut. 17:14-20. We will see that Solomon would only pay slight attention to the requirements of the kingdom as spelled out by Moses under God's inspiration. He disregarded the warning about returning to Egypt for the purchase of horses. One of the first things he did was marry Pharaoh's daughter.¹² As far as not taking many wives or accumulating large amounts of silver and gold, Solomon beat them all!

David's charge to Solomon is: "Be strong," "be a man," "be obedient." What David was saying was that Solomon would only be a strong leader if he put himself under God's leadership. God spoke several times personally to Solomon in a dream. But most of the needed guidelines to be observed were to be found in the written Law of Moses, which was at his disposal. Solomon was responsible to acquire a copy of the law from the priests and he ought to read it on a daily basis. Moses had written: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees."¹³ In order to "be strong" and "be a man," one must have his daily devotions.

We may assume that David passed on to his son what he had practiced himself throughout most of his life.

David's concern was not only for Solomon, but also for the kingdom. The existence of the kingdom of Israel would depend on the personal relationship of the king with God. God had said to David: "If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel."

ii. Retribution on Joab (2:5-6)

5 "Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me — what he did to the two commanders of Israel's armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet.

6 Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.

David's problem with Joab was that Joab had been absolutely loyal to David, but that he also had been ruthless and wicked. David ought to have dealt with Joab himself, but since Joab had covered up for some of David's sins and had thus become a partner in David's crimes, David had become, to an extent a partner in Joab's crimes also. Joab knew that David's orders to have Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed had been for the purpose of covering up his adultery with Uriah's wife. Had David gotten rid of Joab, he would have lost the support of his army.

¹² 1 Kings 3:1

¹³ Deut. 17:18,19

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The problem of David’s “legacy of blood” can only be resolved by determining responsibility. If Joab shed innocent blood in peacetime as if it were war (i.e. “blood of war,” v. 5; cf. Deut. 19:1-15; 21:1-9), then it was not justifiable homicide (cf. 2 Sam 2:18-23). He may well have acted out of treachery, involved in a family feud resulting from his murder of Abner (2 Sam. 3:19-30), rather than in self-defense. He murdered Amasa out of jealousy rather than in vengeance for delay or disloyalty to David (2 Sam. 29:8-10).”

David describes Joab’s guilt rather poetically as “that blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet.” *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “He had been told at the time how the blood of Amasa had spurted on to the girdle of Joab, and streamed down into his sandals, and these details, which no doubt made a deep impression upon his mind, are recited here to show how dastardly and treacherous was the deed, and how thoroughly Joab was stained with innocent blood, blood which cried to heaven for vengeance (... Genesis 4:10).”

It remains true, however, that if David had been without guilt because of personal involvement in some of Joab’s crimes, he would have taken care of Joab’s punishment himself. There was something sinister in passing that job on to Solomon.

It is interesting that we read about Solomon’s wisdom, words coming out of David’s mouth, even before we read that Solomon had prayed God for wisdom. It is true that it takes wisdom to recognize one’s need for wisdom.

iii. Kindness to Barzillai (2:7)

7 “But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “Barzillai had supplied David when he was in exile (2 Sam. 17:27-29), and that, as all hospitality, should be repaid. *Show kindness* (NIV; JB “treat kindly”; NEB “show constant friendship with”) denotes loyal deeds done to keep covenant requirements (hence RSV “deal loyally with”). Barzillai’s family (including his son Kimham, 2 Sam. 19:37) had acted as any neighbor should and had *stood by* David (NIV; AV “they came [near] to me”). To *eat at the king’s table* was the equivalent of having a pension, the beneficiary receiving a regular royal allowance of food and clothing, with a house and land to support him and his family (cf. 2 Sam. 9:7; 1 Kgs 18:19; 2 Kgs 25:29-30).”

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states that Barzillai was: “A Gileadite of Rogelim who brought provisions to David and his army to Mahanaim, in their flight from Absalom (2 Sam 17:27-29). When David was returning to Jerusalem after Absalom’s defeat, Barzillai conducted him over Jordan, but being an old man of 80 years of age, he declined David’s invitation to come to live in the capital, and sent instead his son Chimham (2 Sam 19:31-39).”

iv. Retribution on Shimei (2:8-9)

8 “And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he

came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord: “I will not put you to death by the sword.”

9 But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary writes about David’s charge to Solomon regarding Shimei: “There are two leading interpretations of David’s charge to Solomon to “hold him not guiltless” (1 Kings 2:9). The one, attributing superstition to David, takes the view that the king, as a typical Oriental, feared the curse. The most effective way to remove the curse, according to the prevailing mode of thinking, was to remove the one who had uttered it, and thus render it inoperative. The other, more feasible interpretation is that since Shimei, as a Benjamite, stemmed from the neighborhood of the erstwhile king Saul, David feared that this man, once his protective custody was withdrawn, would again strike at the throne. Moreover, before actual penalty was imposed, Solomon gave Shimei a reprieve conditioned on obedience.”

Donald J. Wiseman in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “Shimei, whose ancestor Gera is named in (Gen. 46:21; cf. Judg. 3:15) and whose home town was Bahurim, north of Bethany, had uttered “grievous curses” (AV; NIV *bitter*) against the LORD’s anointed king. This was a capital offence (Exod. 22:28; 1 Kgs 21:10), but David on oath had failed to remove the curse which still threatened. So Solomon was firmly directed to find Shimei “not guiltless” (AV, RSV; cf. NIV *innocent*). Heb. *nqh* means “to exempt from punishment” (cf. REB “not go unpunished”) or “free from oath.” To *bring down ... in blood* is a direct incitement to impose the death penalty (vv. 34-36).”

Shimei had, evidently, not accepted the fact that one of Saul’s children had not inherited the crown after the death of Saul and Jonathan. He considered David to be an illegal rival, as Saul, himself, had considered David to be.

G. David is succeeded by Solomon (2:10-12)

10 Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David.

11 He had reigned forty years over Israel — seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem.

12 So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “*Forty years* may be a general expression for the equivalent of a generation (cf. 2 Sam. 5:4-5). On *rested with his fathers* see 1:21. David’s tomb in Zion (Ophel) was known in Peter’s day (Acts 2:29), but its precise location is uncertain, NEB (following a few MSS) makes verse 11 introduce 12ff, but editorial practice weighs against this, as the statement of the length of reign at various capitals (cf. 16:23) was part of the closing formula.”

When we visited Jerusalem in 1977, we were shown a place which, we were told, was David’s tomb. Whether historically correct or incorrect cannot be established at this distance of time.

About the phrase: “David reigned over Israel ... forty years,” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: “There is no particular chronological problem involved here. David died at the age of seventy, having reigned forty years. He had reigned seven years over

the Hebron area, a small southerly sector, and he had sat upon the throne of all Israel for thirty-three years (1010 B.C. - 971 B.C.).”

H. Solomon exacts retribution (2:13-46)

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “Solomon’s removal of opponents who conspired against him is taken to be the necessary and customary establishment of the Davidic kingdom (v. 12, cf. v. 46). It marks the end of David’s reign (vv. 1-9) and the beginning of that of Solomon. The reprisals are presented as a legal process which required a king to punish rebels (1:12), murderers, political assassins and those who broke solemnly sworn agreements. The proper outcome was foreseen by David, who had left his son to use his own discretion (vv. 6, 9) in making the judicial decisions. Discretion and compassion were also to be exercised (vv. 7, 26-27).”

i. Adonijah 2:13-25

13 *Now Adonijah, the son of Haggith, went to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother. Bathsheba asked him, “Do you come peacefully?” He answered, “Yes, peacefully.”*

14 *Then he added, “I have something to say to you.” “You may say it,” she replied.*

15 *“As you know,” he said, “the kingdom was mine. All Israel looked to me as their king. But things changed, and the kingdom has gone to my brother; for it has come to him from the Lord.*

16 *Now I have one request to make of you. Do not refuse me.” “You may make it,” she said.*

17 *So he continued, “Please ask King Solomon — he will not refuse you — to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife.”*

18 *“Very well,” Bathsheba replied, “I will speak to the king for you.”*

19 *When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king’s mother, and she sat down at his right hand.*

20 *“I have one small request to make of you,” she said. “Do not refuse me.” The king replied, “Make it, my mother; I will not refuse you.”*

21 *So she said, “Let Abishag the Shunammite be given in marriage to your brother Adonijah.”*

22 *King Solomon answered his mother, “Why do you request Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? You might as well request the kingdom for him — after all, he is my older brother — yes, for him and for Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah!”*

23 *Then King Solomon swore by the Lord: “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if Adonijah does not pay with his life for this request!*

24 *And now, as surely as the Lord lives — he who has established me securely on the throne of my father David and has founded a dynasty for me as he promised — Adonijah shall be put to death today!”* **25** *So King Solomon gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he struck down Adonijah and he died.*

Bathsheba’s question “Do you come peacefully?” betrays some measure of anxiety. Adonijah had been pretender to the throne her son Solomon was occupying. Her first impulse was naturally that Adonijah’s request would be related to that issue. And she

was right, although she did not understand the implications of the request that came to her. Solomon did not fail to see through Adonijah's plot. It is more difficult for us to understand the details of such an intrigue, which in the culture of the time, would be interpreted as menacing and subtle.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on Adonijah's request for permission to marry Abishag: "He approached Solomon's mother with a seemingly harmless but really insidious request. He said, in effect, "Let Abishag be given to me." This young girl had attended David in his declining state. The unsuspecting mother saw nothing perverse in this request, but simply an "affair of the heart," and readily agreed. Bathsheba therefore went unto King Solomon. She innocently became a go-between for Adonijah. With great courtesy the king received his mother ... until she placed the request before him. ... The mental acumen of Solomon penetrated the plot. Even though David had not "known" Abishag, she was nevertheless considered an inheritor. With her would go the rights to the throne. Having once failed in an abortive attempt to seize the kingdom, Adonijah now sought in a more subtle way to gain his objective. This time he would not be pardoned."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Foiled in his purpose to mount the throne by direct means, Adonijah and his advisers have recourse to intrigue and subtlety. By the aid of Abishag, he hopes to accomplish what his chariots and horsemen (... 1 Kings 1:5) had failed to effect. And he first addresses himself to the queen mother. Bathsheba was evidently surprised by his visit. Owing to the part he had taken against her son, there would naturally have been but few dealings, if not positive alienation, between them. Her first thought, consequently, is, "What can this coming mean?""

It is interesting to observe how the queen mother was treated by her son, the king. She was received with the utmost respect. When she enters, Solomon gets up from his throne, bows down in courtesy and orders "a throne," that is an appropriate seat to be brought in for his mother to sit on.

Yet, in spite of polite manners and the promise not to refuse Bathsheba's request, made in behalf of Adonijah, it is refused and Solomon, evidently becomes angry because of the way Adonijah had tried to get his foot in the door by using the king's mother. Bathsheba had not understood the consequences of Adonijah's request, but Solomon had.

Solomon also understood that the matter not only pertained to his older brother, but that there was a team of three: the pretender to the throne, the commander-in-chief of the army and the high priest, who were sticking together in this, trying to save their skin and more.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "Solomon's decision to impose the death penalty is pronounced with a solemn oath in the name of God (Yahweh). It involved his own death ("God do so to me," i.e. kill me) and that of others if he failed to make it a matter of life and death. *God deal with me* ... (NIV) brings out the sense well (NEB's "so help me God"). The oath claimed divine sanction for the judgment and the promise that the dynasty was securely his (v. 24, Heb; cf. NRSV, RSV), for "He has made me a house" by the birth of a son, Rehoboam (cf. 11:43; 14:21), just as God had promised David (v. 4; 1 Chr. 22:9-10)."

ii. Abiathar the Priest (2:26-27)

26 To Abiathar the priest the king said, “Go back to your fields in Anathoth. You deserve to die, but I will not put you to death now, because you carried the ark of the Sovereign Lord before my father David and shared all my father’s hardships.”

27 So Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood of the Lord, fulfilling the word the Lord had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli.

The next one to be dealt with was Abiathar the priest. Abiathar was the only one who had escaped Saul’s massacre of the priests of Nob, after his father Ahimelech had given bread and water to David and his men when David fled from Saul. Saul had ordered the slaughter of all the priests, considering their deed to be an act of rebellion against him.¹⁴ Abiathar’s offence was that he had joined Adonijah in his bid for the throne.

Solomon did not condemn him to death because of the role he had played in support of David and because he had carried the ark. But, as the text explains, his removal from the priesthood was in fulfillment of the prophecy given to the high priest Eli.¹⁵ *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Abiathar was the last descendant of the house of Ithamar. With his deposition the high priesthood reverted to the house of Eleazar, and so another “word of the Lord” had its fulfillment.” Abiathar has shared the priesthood with Zadok.

Whether Solomon was aware of the prophecy given to Eli is not clear. It would probably not have made any difference in his verdict.

iii. Joab (2:28-35)

28 When the news reached Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah though not with Absalom, he fled to the tent of the Lord and took hold of the horns of the altar.

29 King Solomon was told that Joab had fled to the tent of the Lord and was beside the altar. Then Solomon ordered Benaiah son of Jehoiada, “Go, strike him down!”

30 So Benaiah entered the tent of the Lord and said to Joab, “The king says, “Come out!”“ But he answered, “No, I will die here.” Benaiah reported to the king, “This is how Joab answered me.”

31 Then the king commanded Benaiah, “Do as he says. Strike him down and bury him, and so clear me and my father’s house of the guilt of the innocent blood that Joab shed.

32 The Lord will repay him for the blood he shed, because without the knowledge of my father David he attacked two men and killed them with the sword. Both of them — Abner son of Ner, commander of Israel’s army, and Amasa son of Jether, commander of Judah’s army — were better men and more upright than he.

33 May the guilt of their blood rest on the head of Joab and his descendants forever. But on David and his descendants, his house and his throne, may there be the Lord’s peace forever.”

¹⁴ I Sam. 22:11-20

¹⁵ I Sam. 2:27-33

34 So Benaiah son of Jehoiada went up and struck down Joab and killed him, and he was buried on his own land in the desert.

35 The king put Benaiah son of Jehoiada over the army in Joab's position and replaced Abiathar with Zadok the priest.

Joab realized what was in store for him. He was wrong, however, in attributing Solomon's vengeance to the fact that he had joined Adonijah. Evidently, he had no guilty conscience about the actual crimes he had committed in the killing of Abner and Amasa, whom he had considered as rivals.

As we have seen, Joab is the second person identified in Scripture who "took hold of the horns of the altar." Adonijah had done so earlier.¹⁶

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "Joab had *conspired with* (RSV "supported") Adonijah (cf. 1:7) and knew what to expect. The right of asylum in the sanctuary applied only to those involved in accidental death, not intentional homicide (Exod 21:13-14), and LXX interestingly adds a question of Solomon to Joab, asking why he had fled there. Punishment for murder is essential (Deut. 5:17), and Solomon realizes that responsibility for the death rested on Joab himself ("on his head") and not on David and his house (vv. 31-33). ... Joab had murdered two men (v. 33; 2 Sam. 3:27; 20:9-10). Thus his death was to be a divine retribution through judicial punishment. "Repaying blood" was an act of God not involving a blood-feud, so the "guilt of their blood shall recoil upon Joab" (NEB, cf. Gen. 9:5; Ps. 79:10) and not on David's house, even though David's men were to be the instrument of effecting Joab's death."

Benaiah had been one of David's heroes. He had been the commander of David's body guard, the Cherethites and the Pelethites. Solomon ordered Benaiah to execute Joab. But Benaiah hesitated to kill anyone inside the tabernacle, so he ordered Joab to come out. He told Joab: "The king says, "Come out!" We don't read that Solomon had given any such order. The words are evidence of Benaiah's hesitation to kill in the sanctuary. Joab may have hoped that staying inside the tabernacle would save his life. But, at the king's orders, he is killed while holding on to the horns of the altar.

Whether it was against the law to kill someone who was inside the tabernacle and who held on to the horns of the altar is a question difficult to answer. Joab's situation was too exceptional to serve as a model. Joab may have thought that Benaiah's scruples to kill him, while he was holding on to the horns of the altar would give him a chance to cling to life. But Solomon's order ruled this out.

Although Joab was executed as a criminal, he was buried, which supposes some kind of military honor to the former commander-in-chief.

The Hebrew text of v.34 reads literally: "So went up, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness." The Hebrew word used for "house" is *bayith*, which has a variety of meaning, ranging from "house" to "court" to "family." It obviously means here that he was buried on his own property.

Solomon rewarded Benaiah by giving him Joab's position as head of the army of Israel. We also read that Abiathar was replaced with Zadok as high priest. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "The appointment of Zadok was fraught with serious

¹⁶ 1 Kings 1:50

consequences, for from then on, the priesthood was subject to the political maneuvers of the state.”

Zadok had been exercising the function of high priest together with Abiathar. Abiathar, however, had joined Adonijah in his pretension to the throne, which must be the reason Solomon chose Zadok, solving at the same time the strange friction of having two people filling one position. At David’s command Zadok had performed the rite of anointing Solomon as the new king of Israel.¹⁷

iv. Shimei (2:36-46)

36 Then the king sent for Shimei and said to him, “Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and live there, but do not go anywhere else.

37 The day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley, you can be sure you will die; your blood will be on your own head.”

38 Shimei answered the king, “What you say is good. Your servant will do as my lord the king has said.” And Shimei stayed in Jerusalem for a long time.

39 But three years later, two of Shimei’s slaves ran off to Achish son of Maacah, king of Gath, and Shimei was told, “Your slaves are in Gath.”

40 At this, he saddled his donkey and went to Achish at Gath in search of his slaves. So Shimei went away and brought the slaves back from Gath.

41 When Solomon was told that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and had returned,

42 the king summoned Shimei and said to him, “Did I not make you swear by the Lord and warn you, “On the day you leave to go anywhere else, you can be sure you will die”? At that time you said to me, “What you say is good. I will obey.”

43 Why then did you not keep your oath to the Lord and obey the command I gave you?”

44 The king also said to Shimei, “You know in your heart all the wrong you did to my father David. Now the Lord will repay you for your wrongdoing.

45 But King Solomon will be blessed, and David’s throne will remain secure before the Lord forever.”

46 Then the king gave the order to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he went out and struck Shimei down and killed him. The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon’s hands.

Shimei was a member of the same clan as Saul. Evidently, he believed that when Saul and Jonathan died, another member of Saul’s family ought to have inherited the throne. He must have thought that David’s ascension to the throne was not based on divine revelation.

When David fled Jerusalem during Absalom’s rebellion, Shimei met the king and those accompanying David, pelting the group with stones and cursed David, saying: “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a

¹⁷ 1 Kings 1:39

man of blood!”¹⁸ Abishai suggested to David that Shimei be killed for this insult to David’s majesty, but David answered: “It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today.”¹⁹ There is no record that David ever killed anyone of Saul’s family.

David may have forgiven Shimei that day, but he had not forgotten the insult, ordering Solomon to “bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.”²⁰ Evidently Solomon considered that Shimei’s crime was too old to require instant capital punishment and he reduced it from a death sentence to house arrest of some kind.

Shimei had to swear that he would not leave Jerusalem under any pretext. He would forfeit his life if he did. Shimei may have thought that, since Solomon was that lenient, he could allow himself some space to maneuver, and when two of his slaves ran away, he left Jerusalem and broke his oath, thus losing his life. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Shimei ought to have been warned against trifling with Solomon’s forbearance by the punishment already inflicted on Adonijah and Joab.”

The phrase “The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon’s hands” suggests that as long as some members of Saul’s family were still alive, who argued that David’s ascension to the throne of Israel had been illegal, the kingdom had not yet been firmly established in the hands of David’s line of descent.

2. THE REIGN OF SOLOMON (I KGS 3:1 – 11:43)

A. Solomon’s wisdom (3:1 – 4:34)

i. Wisdom given and displayed (3:1-28)

a. A foreword to the reign (3:1-3).

1 Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem.

2 The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the Lord.

3 Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “Solomon became the son-in-law (*hātān*) of the Egyptian king. David might have initiated this diplomatic alliance, the first of several “dynastic marriages” Solomon was to make to increase his power ...

If this anticipates I Kings 9:16-17; 14:25 the pharaoh could have been Shishak (XXI Dynasty). More likely it was Siamūn (978-959) or his successor Psusennes II (959-945). By this time this marriage between an Egyptian king’s daughter and a foreigner is

¹⁸ II Sam. 16:7,8

¹⁹ II Sam. 16:12

²⁰ I Kings 2:9

known. Solomon was already the husband of an Ammonitess and had a son (14:14; cf. 11:42-43).”

Bible scholars do not agree about the spiritual legality of this marriage. Some believe that Solomon acted correctly and that his bride became converted to Israel’s religion. *Barnes’ Notes*, for instance, comments: “The Jews were not forbidden to marry foreign wives, if they became proselytes. As Solomon is not blamed for this marriage either here or in 1 Kings 11, and as the idol temples which he allowed to be built (1 Kings 11:5-7) were in no case dedicated to Egyptian deities, it is to be presumed that his Egyptian wife adopted her husband’s religion.”

The Pulpit Commentary also comments: “A marriage such as this was not without precedent (... Genesis 41:45; ... Exodus 2:21; ... Numbers 12:1; ... Matthew 1:5; ... Ruth 4:13), nor was it condemned by the Law, which only forbade intermarriage with the nations of Canaan (... Exodus 34:16; ... Deuteronomy 7:3), and sanctioned the union of an Israelite with a captive taken in war (... Deuteronomy 21:13; cf. 20:14). “At the same time, it was only when the foreign wives renounced idolatry, that such marriages were in accordance with the spirit of the law” As Solomon at this period of his life faithfully observed the law, as he is never blamed for this marriage, and as there is no trace whatever of the introduction of Egyptian rites into Israel, it is a fair presumption that the Egyptian princess conformed to the religion of her adopted country.”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary, however, states: “God had strictly forbidden his people to form alliances with pagan women, lest they should lead their hearts away from him into idolatry.”

It is true that Scripture does not pronounce any condemnation on this marriage. As a matter of fact there is no comment on it at all, as about Solomon’s multiple marriages later in life.

Solomon’s queen was installed in “the city of David,” which must have been the hill Zion. Some Bible scholars believe it stands for Jerusalem. This seems to have been a temporary measure, since we read that Solomon had not built any palaces yet. Jerusalem was still a city without walls at this time and the construction of the temple had not yet begun.

We read that Solomon loved the Lord and that he brought sacrifices to the Lord. The important question at that time was where those sacrifices ought to be brought. The NIV’s “however” suggests that the “high places” were not the appropriate ones for bringing sacrifices to the Lord.

Commenting on the “however” part, *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The word perhaps signifies “that there was one exception to the flourishing condition of things which the writer has been describing,” though the people are nowhere blamed for sacrificing on the high places, and Solomon’s sacrifice at “the great high place” was full of blessing. The idea rather is that just as he was obliged to bring his Egyptian wife into the city of David, because his palace was not yet finished, so the people were compelled to sacrifice on the high places, because the temple was not yet built, and “the place” where God would put His name had only just been chosen (... 1 Chronicles 22:1).”

b. The gift of wisdom (3:4-15)

4 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

6 Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

7 "Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties.

8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number.

9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

11 So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice,

12 I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

13 Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for — both riches and honor — so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.

14 And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

15 Then Solomon awoke — and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.

At the inauguration of his reign Solomon went to Gibeon to bring sacrifices to the Lord. We are told that this was one of the most important "high places" in the country. *First Chronicles* explains: "The tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses had made in the desert, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time on the high place at Gibeon."²¹

It is difficult for us to understand the importance of the different places of worship. Evidently, parts of the furniture of the old tabernacle had been placed in different locations. Yet, it seems that there was a burnt offering altar in Gibeon and one in Jerusalem. The one in Gibeon was probably the original one that had been in Moses' tabernacle. The altar in Jerusalem may have been the one David erected on the threshing floor of Araunah at the time of the plague that threatened to decimate the population of Jerusalem.²² At that time David had declared: "The house of the Lord God is to be here and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel."²³

²¹ I Chron. 21:29

²² 2 Sam. 24:18-25

²³ I Chron. 22:1

Some Bible scholars believe that the number of sacrifices of one thousand may be symbolic rather than literal.

It was at Gibeon that God spoke to Solomon in a dream and asked him what he wanted as a “coronation gift.”

Solomon’s dream was one of the most important events in his life. The fact that God spoke to him while he was asleep doesn’t detract from the reality of it. The Hebrew word used is *chalowm*. It is the regular word for “dream” used in the Old Testament. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “Hebrew does not differentiate between dream, vision or epiphany. Revelation from God through dreams is well attested among the Hebrews (Gen. 26:24; 28:10-17; Judg. 7:13; I Sam 3; 28:6; Dan. 2:4; 7:1) and in the New Testament (Matt. 1:20; 2:13, 22), as in surrounding nations.”

In his answer to God Solomon refers to the way God had treated his father David with “great kindness.” The Hebrew word used is *checed*, which the KJV renders beautifully with “lovingkindness.” It is the expression of God’s covenant-love. God’s kindness to David resulted in David’s walk before the Lord “in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart.” We could read into this that David’s spiritual qualities were the result of God’s *chesed*. That means that Solomon asks God to do the same work in his heart as He had done in David’s. Solomon practiced here what he would later recommend as a general rule of life: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”²⁴

Solomon calls himself “a little child,” using the Hebrew word *na`ar*, which usually refers to an adolescent. We don’t know how old Solomon was at this point. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “These words are generally understood as indicating Solomon’s humility rather than his age. No doubt, there is some exaggeration in the expression, which manifestly is not to be taken *au pied de la lettre*; at the same time it is questionable whether such words would be used of himself by a young man of twenty, which Solomon is commonly supposed to have been.”

Solomon doesn’t seem to have had much tutoring for the job he was assigned to assume. That, at any age, would make it a difficult task to begin. His request for wisdom was not an indication of faked humility. He needed divine guidance to be able to govern a nation that had the tendency to divide itself into separate groups, as it did after Solomon’s death. The unity between the twelve tribes had never been particularly strong. As a matter of fact there were thirteen tribes, if we consider Joseph to consist of the two tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. This was compensated for by the fact that Levi did not function as a tribe on its own. They had not been allocated to one specific area in the Promised Land. As priests and Levites, her members were spread out over the land.

Solomon asked for “a discerning heart.” The Hebrew word used is *shama`*, which literally means “to hear intelligently,” or “to obey.” We find the same word in the verses: “Then the man and his wife *heard* the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden,”²⁵ and in: “Now if you *obey* me *fully* and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will

²⁴ Prov. 3:5,6

²⁵ Gen. 3:8

be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”²⁶ In some Germanic languages the verb “to obey” is related to “to hear.”²⁷ Hearing, in this context, is equivalent to understanding. Solomon asks God to make him hear His voice and help him to obey.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on God’s reaction to Solomon’s prayer: “God congratulated Solomon because he had requested the highest prize. He had petitioned for the supreme good, the acquisition of wisdom, in comparison with which all other blessings are vain and futile. Many other gifts he might have requested would have been entirely justifiable, but the supplication for wisdom surpassed them all.”

We can define wisdom as correctly applied knowledge. It means knowing what to do with what you know.

In general Solomon became known in history as the epitome of wisdom. “The wisdom of Solomon” has become proverbial. In this Solomon became a type of Jesus Christ in Whom, in Paul’s words, “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”²⁸ Jesus said about Himself: “one greater than Solomon is here.”²⁹ And He has become “our wisdom.”³⁰

We read that God was pleased with Solomon’s request and answered him that he would receive the wisdom he asked for and that he would also be given the things he had not asked for, such as “long life and wealth.”

It is obvious that God’s gift to Solomon was bound up in Solomon’s fellowship with God. He would be wise and have a long life as long as he remained obedient to the Lord. Solomon did not keep his end of the bargain. He became foolish toward the end of his life and he died at the age of sixty, which is not “ripe old age.”

c. An example of Solomon’s God-given wisdom (3:16-28)

16 Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him.

17 One of them said, “My lord, this woman and I live in the same house. I had a baby while she was there with me.

18 The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us.

19 “During the night this woman’s son died because she lay on him.

20 So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast.

21 The next morning, I got up to nurse my son — and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn’t the son I had borne.”

22 The other woman said, “No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.” But the first one insisted, “No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.” And so they argued before the king.

23 The king said, “This one says, “My son is alive and your son is dead,” while that one says, “No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.”“

24 Then the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So they brought a sword for the king.

²⁶ Ex. 19:5,6

²⁷ German: “hören,” “to hear” and “gehörchen,” “to obey.” Dutch: “horen,” “gehoorzamen.”

²⁸ Col. 2:3

²⁹ Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31

³⁰ I Cor. 1:24

25 He then gave an order: “Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.”

26 The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!” But the other said, “Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!”

27 Then the king gave his ruling: “Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.”

28 When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

Most Bible versions describe the two women as “harlots.” The Hebrew word used is *zonowth*, which is derived from a word meaning “to be fed.” It could mean that these ladies were considered to be “professionals.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The Jewish writers ... would understand “hostess,” “innkeeper.” In support of which it is alleged that prostitutes never have children, or if they have are not solicitous about them. The meaning “hostess,” however (as if from *znwth*, to feed), is not to be entertained for a moment, but we may readily admit that these children, though born out of wedlock, were not necessarily the offspring of professed harlots, though the fact that their mothers dwelt together and alone (ver. 17) is certainly suspicious.”

The Hebrew word used in the story in Joshua,³¹ where the two spies stayed at the house of Rahab, is *zanah*, which literally means “to be highly-fed.”

Adam Clarke’s Commentary suggests that the women were not prostitutes, but his opinion may have been influenced by the Victorian spirit of his time. We read: “If these had been harlots, it is not likely they would have dared to appear before Solomon; and if they had been common women, it is not likely they would have had children; nor is it likely that such persons would have been permitted under the reign of David. Though there is no mention of their husbands, it is probable they might have been at this time in other parts, following their necessary occupations; and the settling the present business could not have been delayed till their return; the appeal to justice must be made immediately.”

The whole story would make little sense if these were married women, living together in the same house.

Solomon showed amazing insight in the emotional side of the case. He understood what it meant for a woman to have a child. The exchange of the dead baby for the living one was proof of this. He also realized that there was some “professional jealousy” between the two ladies.

One of the women stands out for her carelessness and emotional detachment. For a mother to roll on her child and not wake up in time to do something about it shows extreme carelessness. To exchange one baby for another also indicates that there had been little or no natural affection. The important thing for one of the women was to have a baby, no matter which.

As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “It is somewhat difficult to account for the pertinacious claim to the child, preferred even before the king by the pretended mother. The most probable explanation is, that having taken the child in the first instance on the spur of the moment, in order to avoid the reproach of having killed her offspring by her

³¹ Josh. 2:1

clumsiness and neglect, she found it difficult to draw back from her false position — which indeed she could not do without owning herself both child stealer and liar — and so she put on a bold face and maintained the imposture even before the monarch himself. That she did not really care for the child is evident from ver. 26.”

Solomon’s verdict, giving each of the women half of the living child, is both profound and amusing. To cut the living child in two would result in two dead children. The fact that the one who was not the mother immediately consented proved a total lack of emotional attachment. That was evidently what the king had counted on. There is no mention of cutting the dead child in two, which would have meant “a perfect balance.”

We read that the mother of the living child “was filled with compassion for her son.” The Hebrew words used are *kamar*, “to be deeply affected with passion,” *racham*, “the womb.” Literally: “Her bowels burned.” She would rather give her child away than to see him killed.

It is interesting to observe that, when Solomon’s decision became public knowledge, the people ascribed it to divine wisdom. Yet, Solomon had used the principle of the natural affection of a mother for her child as the basis of his verdict. Human natural love is a God-given matter. We love because we are created in God’s image and God is love.

ii. Solomon’s wisdom in administration (4:1-14)

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “Solomon’s wisdom is now shown to encompass his administration of state affairs, including his choice of cabinet members (4:1-6) and district governors (vv. 7-19) and his reordering of business to control palace and temple supplies, taxes and labor (vv. 20-28). The historian then summarizes the exceptional quality and breadth of the royal wisdom, which embraces international culture and learning (vv. 29-34).

a. Solomon’s high officials (4:1-6)

1 So King Solomon ruled over all Israel.

2 And these were his chief officials: Azariah son of Zadok — the priest;

3 Elihoreph and Ahijah, sons of Shisha — secretaries; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud — recorder;

4 Benaiah son of Jehoiada — commander in chief; Zadok and Abiathar — priests;

5 Azariah son of Nathan — in charge of the district officers; Zabud son of Nathan — a priest and personal adviser to the king;

6 Ahishar — in charge of the palace; Adoniram son of Abda — in charge of forced labor.

This chapter opens with the statement: “So King Solomon ruled over all Israel.” Initially, David had only ruled over the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, but he ultimately became king over the twelve tribes. Solomon was the only king whose rule included all for the whole duration of his reign. After his death the kingdom was split in two.

The NIV reads: “And these were his chief officials.” The Hebrew word used is *sar*, which generally refers to an official. The same word is used for Pharaoh’s personnel who commended Sarah to Pharaoh when Abraham went to Egypt: “And when

Pharaoh’s officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace.”³²

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “We are here confronted by two questions of considerable difficulty. First, to whom does the *title* “priest” here belong, to Azariah or to Zadok? Second, what are we to understand by the *term*, a spiritual, or a more or less secular *person*?” The commentary continues to state that Luther and other influential interpreters “understand that Azariah, the son of the high priest Zadok, was, together with the sons of Shisha, one of the scribes (ver. 3).”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings* observes: “Every king made personal appointments to his court and army command. Solomon shows continuity with the policy of David by employing Benaiah son of Jehoiada and Adoniram son of Abda and by inclusion of his sons-in-law (Ben-Abinadab, v.11, Ahimaaz, v.15), nephews (Azariah and Zabud) and close supporters. The grandson of Zadok continued that priestly family influence. Though the emphasis may be on his concern for a united kingdom (“all Israel”), as it was under David (2 Sam. 8:11), Solomon’s inclusion of an official in charge of the new districts which broke across traditional tribal areas and of one person in charge of forced labor led to a reorganization which sowed the seed for the rupture between the Northern Kingdom and Judah which was to follow.

Azariah was grandson of Zadok and son of Ahimaaz (1 Chr. 6:9; 2 Sam. 15:29, 36). *Elihoreph* may be an indication that those of foreign birth (Canaanites?) were included (cf. Hurrian personal name E(h)liarip). NEB “in charge of the calendar” is based on changing the text to “over the (autumn) year” (*al-hahôrep*). But the Hebrews, unlike the Assyrian eponyms (*limmu*), never named the new year in this way with the names of officials. Moreover, the beginning of the new year in the autumn is probably unattested.

“Scribe” (*spr*) or *secretary* (NIV) was a professional title ranging from humble writer to Secretary of State. Here the existence of two officials may mean that one covered foreign and one home affairs or, as illustrated in Assyria, that they used different methods or languages when keeping records. NEB “adjutant-general” emphasizes their principal administrative role based on keeping lists (*spr*). *Jehoshaphat*, who had served under David (2 Sam. 8:16; 20:24), continued as recorder (*mazkîr*). As such he was more a chief of protocol than a “remembrancer” or recorder of the past. His status was almost that of a Secretary of State (NEB).

Zadok and Abiathar may be the persons of the same names as in 2 Samuel 8:17; 20:28 and not, as some argue, just taken from David’s list here.

Nathan is a common name, but could be that of the son of David (2 Sam. 5:14-15) rather than the prophet (1:11). The office of superintendent of the district officers (vv. 8-19) or “regional governor” (NEB) was introduced by Solomon to aid his reforms. The “King’s Friend” or *personal adviser to the king* ... was an office last held by Hushai (2 Sam. 15:37; 16:16).

Abiathar was *in charge of the palace* (Heb. “he who is over the house”), i.e. he was “controller of the (royal) household” and estates (NEB). In time this office increases in prestige to that of Prime Minister (1 Kgs 16:9; 18:3; 2 Kgs 10:5; 15:5; 18:18-37).

³² Gen. 12:15

Some Gk MSS add “Elijah, son of Joab over the army.” *Adoniram* may be the same as David’s appointee to the same office (2 Sam 20:24), who even survived to Rehoboam’s time (1 Kgs 12:18, but there read “Adoram”?). For the part played by *forced labor* (Heb. *mas*, as Alalakh *masu*) in focusing opposition to the regime see 1 Kings 5:13-18; 9:15:22.”

b. Solomon’s administrative districts (4:7-19)

7 Solomon also had twelve district governors over all Israel, who supplied provisions for the king and the royal household. Each one had to provide supplies for one month in the year.

8 These are their names: Ben-Hur — in the hill country of Ephraim;

9 Ben-Deker — in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh and Elon Bethhanan;

10 Ben-Hesed — in Arubboth (Socoh and all the land of Hepher were his);

11 Ben-Abinadab — in Naphoth Dor (he was married to Taphath daughter of Solomon);

12 Baana son of Ahilud — in Taanach and Megiddo, and in all of Beth Shan next to Zarethan below Jezreel, from Beth Shan to Abel Meholah across to Jokmeam;

13 Ben-Geber — in Ramoth Gilead (the settlements of Jair son of Manasseh in Gilead were his, as well as the district of Argob in Bashan and its sixty large walled cities with bronze gate bars);

14 Ahinadab son of Iddo — in Mahanaim;

15 Ahimaaz — in Naphtali (he had married Basemath daughter of Solomon);

16 Baana son of Hushai — in Asher and in Aloth;

17 Jehoshaphat son of Paruah — in Issachar;

18 Shimei son of Ela — in Benjamin;

19 Geber son of Uri — in Gilead (the country of Sihon king of the Amorites and the country of Og king of Bashan). He was the only governor over the district.

The division into twelve districts, each with its own governor, was probably more related to the number of months in the calendar year than to the division of the nation into twelve tribes. Each governor was responsible for providing the royal court with supplies for one month of the year.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The new subdivision helped to centralize control of taxation and the levy for labor-service. The system appears to have been a Solomonic development and not dependent on Egyptian influence. Solomon tried to preserve tribal regions as far as possible ... to incorporate adjacent recently occupied old Canaanite areas ... and to make adjustments to bring foreign elements into the kingdom ... The plan was not directed to exploit the roughly equal economic potential of each area, nor deliberately to undermine the independence of tribal families, especially of “the house of Joseph.” The new system developed from earlier practices and was basically to remain unchanged till the end of the divided kingdoms.”

The obvious purpose of this detailed list was probably more to demonstrate the wisdom of Solomon in making practical arrangements for the government of the nation than to impart information for the benefit of future readers. Although “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in

righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work,”³³ there is little in this section that will inspire us to be drawn us into closer fellowship to God. The main lesson for modern Christians may be that, if we surrender our intellect to God, He will be in the details of our daily activities.

c. Provisions for the court (4:20-28)

20 The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.

21 And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon’s subjects all his life.

22 Solomon’s daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal,

23 ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl.

24 For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the River, from Tiphseh to Gaza, and had peace on all sides.

25 During Solomon’s lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.

26 Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses.

27 The district officers, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king’s table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking.

28 They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses.

These verses provide us with a description of the conditions of Israel’s “golden age.” They seem to be the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham after his sacrifice of Isaac: “I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”³⁴

The chapter describes how well-to-do the Israelites were, not how really blessed they were spiritually. The comment of the author of these verses on the condition of the average Israelite is: “they ate, they drank and they were happy.” Nobody went hungry or had any physical needs. The reign of Solomon has often been seen as a foreshadowing of the millennial reign of Christ.

The Scottish writer George MacDonald once asked the question: “Do you believe that God can punish a person by making him rich?” He answered the question by saying that affluence could be one form of God’s punishment. But that is usually not the way we regard prosperity, neither did the Israelites believe this at that time.

Agur son of Jakeh understood the dangers of affluence when he wrote: “Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my

³³ II Tim. 3:16,17

³⁴ Gen. 22:17,18

daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”³⁵

The way the author of these verses describes conditions under Solomon’s reign, however, are not meant as a warning, but as a description of God’s blessing upon Solomon and the wise way in which the king ruled the nation. The material conditions under Solomon’s reign are described as an image of the heavenly spiritual reality that is awaiting us.

The first matter mentioned is the territorial extension of Israel’s domain. It coincides with what God promised to Abraham: “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites.”³⁶ This promise was fulfilled during the reign of Solomon. Although not all the territories were physically occupied by the Israelites, they were subjected to the Israelite throne and paid tribute.

Life at the court was one of extraordinary ease and wealth. Every day was lived as a celebration as if life on earth was an image of heaven to come. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on the king’s table: “The daily consumption of the royal household is now related to show the grandeur and luxury of the court. And it agreed well with the greatness of the kingdom. The lavish provision of Oriental palaces was evidently a subject of wonder and of boasting to the ancients, as the inscriptions and monuments show.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on the provisions for daily life at the court: “The *kōr* (NEB “kor”) is a “measure” (RSV) of capacity. Like the homer, it equaled six bushels (220 liters), i.e. 185 bushels of fine flour (*sālet*, a luxury) and 375 bushels of *meal*, a husked barley (*qāmāh*). Most oxen were *stall-fed* (JB “free-grazing”). The *deer* (AV “harts,” NEB “stags”) and other animals were table luxuries, as were *choice fowl*, variously identified as geese, guinea-fowl, hens or “fattened cuckoos” (JB).”

The statement in v.25: “each man under his own vine and fig tree” is an Old Testament metaphor for a peaceful and happy life. We find the image repeated a few times in the Old Testament.³⁷

The Hebrew text of v.26, which is chapter 5:6 in some manuscripts, reads: “And Solomon had forty-thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen.” The Book of Chronicles has the same number as 1 Kings.³⁸ In this Solomon sinned against the specific instructions given by Moses about the duties and privileges of the kings of Israel, which stated: “The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, “You are not to go back that way again.”³⁹

Solomon’s horses required extra attention, which was also provided by the various district officers who had to come up with certain amounts of straw and barley.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about the stables and horses: “*Four thousand stalls* (“*urôt*), REB “stables,” follows LXX, 2 Chronicles 9:25 (Heb., RSV, REB, “forty”) in keeping with the needs of, 1400 chariots (10:26) using a pair of horses

³⁵ Prov. 30:8,9

³⁶ Gen. 15:18,19

³⁷ Micah 4:4; Zech. 3:10

³⁸ II Chron. 9:25

³⁹ Deut. 17:16

each plus reserves. However, the word has been more fittingly taken to be a “team-yoke.” In 855 Ahab supplied two thousand chariots from the Northern Kingdom. *Twelve thousand horses (paral)*; the Heb. word can stand for either “horse” or “horse and rider.”“

d. Solomon’s wisdom (4:29-34)

29 God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

30 Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.

31 He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite — wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.

32 He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five.

33 He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.

34 Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

For some reason, which I have not been able to discover, this section is missing in my Hebrew text, which skips from 4:30 to 5:1. I have no way to examine the original meaning of certain words used.

It is obvious that, however great Solomon’s insight and understanding may have been, it was not “measureless as the sand on the seashore.” However eloquent the expression may be, it cannot be taken literally. Solomon was not omniscient. His wisdom was more than that of being very bright; it was what God had given him in answer to his prayers. And it cannot have been learned from available study material.

We know very little about five names of philosophers of that time which are given in the text. Some of them may have been authors of certain psalms, such as Ethan and Heman.

Of the three thousand proverbs he wrote, about one third is preserved in The Book of Proverbs. Of the psalms only Psalms 72, 127 and 128 have been ascribed to Solomon, and even that has been doubted by some scholars.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “While this account reflects Solomon’s education as a wise man comparable with those of other contemporary states of his day in literary and scientific attainment, it was no mere rhetoric. The creation of zoological and botanical gardens in the capital city was an achievement boasted by many kings. Their purpose was not only for pleasure but also for practical purposes and the provision of support for palace and temple. Adad-shuma-uşur (c. 1200 BC) did this at Babylon where later Nebuchadnezzar was to construct his famous “Hanging Gardens” c. 600 BC. Other example of walled royal gardens were already attested at Nineveh, where those made by Tiglathpileser I (c. 1100 BC) were kept by Ashurbanipal (600 BC), while at Calash (Nimrud) Ashur-nasir-apli (860 BCs) laid out a garden with at least eighty five named species.

Thus Solomon could well have created parks and gardens (as Eccl. 2:5); their beauty and fragrances are reflected in the Song of Songs (e.g. 1:4; 2:3; 6:2, etc.).

According to Jewish tradition (Josephus ...) Solomon also had gardens nine kilometers south of Jerusalem, outside Bethlehem at Etan (2 Chr. 11:6, Etam, as LXX Ps. 74:15, modern Etham, Khirbet el Hoh), which abounded with parks and streams. In the time of Zedekiah the King's Garden was watered by sluices from Siloam (2 Kgs. 25:4; Neh. 3:15).

The *cedar of Lebanon* was the tallest tree with the greatest spread (cf. 5:6; Ps. 80:10) and the Syrian *hyssop* (*`ezōb*) was the smallest, stunted from its usual height (50-70 cm) by growing in a wall. NEB translates "marjoram."⁴

B. Solomon's building activities (5:1 – 9:9)

i. Organization of materials and workforce (5:1-18; Heb. 5:15-32)

a. The alliance with Hiram of Tyre (5:1-12)

1 When Hiram king of Tyre heard that Solomon had been anointed king to succeed his father David, he sent his envoys to Solomon, because he had always been on friendly terms with David.

2 Solomon sent back this message to Hiram:

3 "You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple for the Name of the Lord his God until the Lord put his enemies under his feet.

4 But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster.

5 I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God, as the Lord told my father David, when he said, "Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name."

6 'so give orders that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me. My men will work with yours, and I will pay you for your men whatever wages you set. You know that we have no one so skilled in felling timber as the Sidonians."

7 When Hiram heard Solomon's message, he was greatly pleased and said, "Praise be to the Lord today, for he has given David a wise son to rule over this great nation."

8 So Hiram sent word to Solomon: "I have received the message you sent me and will do all you want in providing the cedar and pine logs.

9 My men will haul them down from Lebanon to the sea, and I will float them in rafts by sea to the place you specify. There I will separate them and you can take them away. And you are to grant my wish by providing food for my royal household."

10 In this way Hiram kept Solomon supplied with all the cedar and pine logs he wanted,

11 and Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand cors of wheat as food for his household, in addition to twenty thousand baths of pressed olive oil. Solomon continued to do this for Hiram year after year.

12 The Lord gave Solomon wisdom, just as he had promised him. There were peaceful relations between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty.

When David had constructed a palace in Jerusalem, he conceived the idea of building a temple in which the Ark of the Covenant could be placed. We read that he

called the prophet Nathan and said: “Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.”⁴⁰ Nathan approved the idea, but received a message from God that God did not approve of David’s plan. The core of Nathan’s message to David was that not David would build a house for God, but God would build a house for David. The Hebrew word used is *bayith*, which has the double meaning of a house as a dwelling place, as “house” in the sense of “family.” The British royal family, for instance is called “the house of Windsor.”

The message God had given to David by mouth of the prophet Nathan read literally: “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”⁴¹

Solomon interpreted this to mean that he had to build the temple that his father David had had in mind. There is nothing to indicate that he was wrong in this conclusion. He could not have known that the message had two facets, a material one and a spiritual one. It referred to Solomon and to Jesus Christ. Solomon was the son who would be punished “with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men” when he sinned.

The house of David would eventually be established in the birth of his greatest son, Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus is God’s actual temple. This is clear from the story of the cleansing of the temple in John’s Gospel. Speaking about His own body, Jesus said: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”⁴² The Jews understood that Jesus was speaking about the edifice in Jerusalem, but John comments: “But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”⁴³

Hiram initiated the contact with Solomon, congratulating him on his ascension to the throne. Solomon responded to this by requesting help in providing material for the building of the temple. Most Bible scholars believe that this Hiram was the same king who had built David’s palace.⁴⁴ But that would make him a very old man at this time.

Part of Hiram’s friendly approach to Solomon may have been motivated by the fact that he saw a possibility of profiting financially from this relationship.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “*Hiram ruled Tyre c. 969-936 BC (and possibly as co-regent with his father Abi-Baal from c. 980 BC). He was on friendly terms with David (translates Heb. “ahēb, “love” as used of a close-covenant relationship, e.g. Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37). A trade treaty gave Tyre access to inland trade across Israel to Judah, the Red Sea and Transjordan.*”

The Tyre must have had a thriving lumber business. They not only grew the trees on the mountain slopes of their country, but they were also expert timber men and they knew something about seafaring. We read in the next section that Solomon sent a large

⁴⁰ II Sam. 7:2

⁴¹ II Sam. 7:12-16

⁴² John 2:19

⁴³ John 2:21

⁴⁴ II Sam. 5:11

team of Israelite laborers to Tyre for one month at the time, to assist the Tyre lumberjacks in cutting and preparing the logs.

The cedar and pine logs were tied together into rafts that were floated on the water of the Mediterranean from Tyre to Israel, where would be separated on the shore of Joppa. At that point Solomon's men would take over and transport the logs to Jerusalem. We suppose that they were cut into usable boards and beams somewhere outside the city.

For payment Hiram would receive yearly supplies of food (wheat and olive oil) for his own court.

b. An added note on the use of Israel's labor force (5:13-18).

13 King Solomon conscripted laborers from all Israel — thirty thousand men.

14 He sent them off to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand a month, so that they spent one month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor.

15 Solomon had seventy thousand carriers and eighty thousand stonecutters in the hills,

16 as well as thirty-three hundred foremen who supervised the project and directed the workmen.

17 At the king's command they removed from the quarry large blocks of quality stone to provide a foundation of dressed stone for the temple.

18 The craftsmen of Solomon and Hiram and the men of Gebal cut and prepared the timber and stone for the building of the temple.

For the task of getting the logs from Tyre to Jerusalem, Solomon conscripted Israelite men in the same way as men would have been called up for army service in times of war.

Solomon's workforce for the construction of the temple consisted of 30,000 plus 70,000 plus 80,000 plus 3,300 equals 183,300 people.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "Forced slave-labor (*mas `obēd*) totaling 150,000 was mainly drawn from the non-Israelite ("Canaanite") population, since a Hebrew was forbidden to enslave his fellow (1 Kgs 9:11; Lev 25:39)."

But *Barnes' Notes* comments on Solomon's organization of this workforce: "This was, apparently, the first time that the Israelites had been called upon to perform forced labor, though it had been prophesied (1 Sam 8:16). David had bound to forced service "the strangers" (1 Chron 22:2); but hitherto the Israelites had escaped. Solomon now, in connection with his proposed work of building the temple, with the honor of God as an excuse, laid this burden upon them. Out of the 1,300,000 able-bodied Israelites (2 Sam 24:9), a band of 30,000—one in forty-four—was raised, of whom one-third was constantly at work in Lebanon, while two-thirds remained at home, and pursued their usual occupations. This, though a very light form of task work, was felt as a great oppression, and was the chief cause of the revolt of the ten tribes at Solomon's death (1 Kings 12:4)."

We may assume that, even if the day laborers were forced to work, the supervisors were volunteers who were paid for their job.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “It appears that all the able-bodied males, except the members of the royal court, were engaged in some employment concerned with the construction of the Temple.”

The stones were used primarily for the foundation of the temple. But there was also a stone wall, a section of which is still in existence. The first few rows of stone blocks that make out the present “Wailing Wall” are the only remaining parts of what used to be Solomon’s temple.

ii. Building the temple (6:1-38)

a. The date of foundation (6:1)

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord.

In introducing this section, Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The exterior (vv. 2-14), interior (vv. 15-30), entrance (vv. 31-34) and courtyard (v.36) are described in sufficient detail for any sure reconstruction to be made. Some aspects (site, orientation, foundations) are omitted, and there are differences between this and the later free accounts of 2 Chronicles (3 – 4) and Ezekiel 41 – 42) which could be explained by subsequent changes. The LXX variants may not all be equally significant and some comments are added by the historian (vv. 11-13). The details of materials, measurements and decoration might presume an archival report, or they might be drawn from the memory of an observer or from oral instructions given to craftsmen.

The temple was sited on the threshing floor of Araunah bought by David (2 Sam. 24:24), rather than above a Jebusite original sanctuary. The area is now marked by the Dome of the Rock (Haram ash-Sharaf) in Jerusalem. The plan basically follows that of the tabernacle, but at double the size (Exod. 26:15-25; 36:34), and consists of (i) Entrance Hall (Vestibule of Portico, *ulām*) (ii) Sanctuary (Holy Place, main hall, nave, *bēkāl*) and (iii) Inner Shrine (Holy of Holies = Most Holy Place, *dēbîr*).”

The date indicated at which the construction of the temple began has been subject of much controversy among Bible scholars. The LXX has 440 years. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “*In the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of ... Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign.* This introduction, as scholars agree, presents one of the most acute problems in OT chronology. The work proper upon the Temple is said to have begun 480 years after the Exodus. This brings up the thorny problem of the date of the Exodus. There are two main systems of dating this event, one assigning it an early date and the other giving it a later date. To employ round figures for the sake of convenience, the first system dates the departure from Egypt about 1440 B.C., while the second system dates it about 1250 B.C. - 1225 B.C., or nearly two centuries later. The earlier date is in substantial agreement with Gen 15:13; Ex 12:40-41, and Judg. 11:26, where Jephthah indicates that Israel had been in Canaan 300 years.

Solomon ascended the throne about 963 B.C. The fourth year of his reign, in which he began to build the Temple, was probably about 959 B.C. This verse must be

understood to favor the earlier dating of the Exodus. The city of Ramses (Ex 1:11), which the children of Israel are said to have built for Pharaoh, would then be considered a later name for the older city of Zoan or Avaris. The entrance of the patriarchs into Egypt would have been about 1870 B.C., a date which allows for the 400 years in Egypt. The Pharaoh of the Exodus may then be identified with Amenhotep II, who commenced his reign about 1447 B.C. There is evidence that his eldest brother died and did not succeed his father. It seems that, in the light of present knowledge, the early date is to be preferred.”

The more important truth revealed in this verse is that the building of the temple is the fulfillment of God’s promise and one of the main reasons God had chosen Israel and Canaan to reveal Himself in this world. In a way the dating corresponds to Paul’s statement about the Incarnation: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son...”⁴⁵

b. The structure (6:2-10)

2 *The temple that King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty high.*

3 *The portico at the front of the main hall of the temple extended the width of the temple, that is twenty cubits, and projected ten cubits from the front of the temple.*

4 *He made narrow clerestory windows in the temple.*

5 *Against the walls of the main hall and inner sanctuary he built a structure around the building, in which there were side rooms.*

6 *The lowest floor was five cubits wide, the middle floor six cubits and the third floor seven. He made offset ledges around the outside of the temple so that nothing would be inserted into the temple walls.*

7 *In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.*

8 *The entrance to the lowest floor was on the south side of the temple; a stairway led up to the middle level and from there to the third.*

9 *So he built the temple and completed it, roofing it with beams and cedar planks.*

10 *And he built the side rooms all along the temple. The height of each was five cubits, and they were attached to the temple by beams of cedar.*

It may be helpful to put the measurements given in the text in modern dimensions, to give a clearer indication of the size of the building. *The New Living Translation* reads: “The Temple that King Solomon built for the Lord was 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high. The entry room at the front of the Temple was 30 feet wide, running across the entire width of the Temple. It projected outward 15 feet from the front of the Temple. Solomon also made narrow recessed windows throughout the Temple.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, describes the measurements as follows: “The temple is called “the house” (*bêt, byt*) throughout the narrative, or “temple of the LORD” (Yahweh, 6:1), as in a later ostrakon from Arad (*byt (l) yhw*). The interior measurement is thirty meters long by ten meters wide by fifteen meters high, according to the large or royal cubit (c. 50 cm). The Portico entrance was open and equaled the width

⁴⁵ Gal. 4:4 - NKJV

of the temple and projected (*rōhab*) *ten cubits* (RSV “ten cubits deep”) in front of the *main hall* (*hēkāl*). The latter is a loan word, Babylonian *ekallu*, used of any very large structure, palace of temple, or part of it such as a wing (cf. v. 17).

The three technical terms usually translated windows have yet to be understood (MT *hallōnē šequpîm `āṭumîm*). This could describe the form or narrow clerestory windows placed high up to both side walls (cf. RSV), like “embrasures” (NEB, REB) in a mediaeval castle, wider on the inside, narrowing to a slit on the outside. But such openings are not taken as a typical Syrian Assyrian architectural feature of the elaborate portico in front of a main building (*bît bilâni*) with side rooms, columns (cf. Assy. *ṭimmu*) threshold with lintel and doorposts (Assyr. *askuppatu*), windows and a balcony.

The side-rooms were a structure, i.e. on a platform. They were probably curved inside like flying buttresses (Heb. *šla’ôt*, “ribs”; Akkad. *šillu*, “arch,” hence NEB “arcades”) to give access. This may explain how they were ranged against the wall with floor space between the outer wall and the “rib,” increasing at each upper level. The joints rested on offset ledges or “rebatelements” (REB; vv. 9-10, *migrā’ôt*, “diminishings”) all around the outside wall of the main temple, thus avoiding making holes in the sanctuary wall (v. 7). The total floor space of this storage area – 3,060 cubits, used for “treasury” offerings paid in kind – was twice that of the worship area within the temple itself.”

Although the construction of this huge building cannot have been carried out without making any noise at all, the normal loud sounds of constructing would not be heard. The stones were all prepared and cut at the right sizes at the quarry from which they were taken.

Although some spiritual implications may be drawn from this procedure, we must be careful not to over-spiritualize. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “But why is this so particularly marked? Is it not because the temple was a type of the kingdom of God; and the souls of men are to be prepared here for that place of blessedness? There, there is no preaching, exhortations, repentance, fears, cries, nor prayers; the stones must be all squared and fitted here for their place in the New Jerusalem; and, being living stones, must be built up a holy temple for a habitation of God through the Spirit.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary adds: “The discovery of the great quarry under Bezetha has shown that these immense stones were excavated, hewn, and fully prepared on the spot, whence they were conveyed on trucks or on rollers down the gently-inclined plane to the site chosen for the temple.” The same commentary quotes a short couplet: “No workman’s steel, no ponderous axes rang. Like some tall “palm the noiseless fabric sprang.”

c. A reminder of God’s promise (6:11-13)

11 *The word of the Lord came to Solomon:*

12 *“As for this temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, carry out my regulations and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father.*

13 *And I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel.”*

Although God had told David: “I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling,”⁴⁶ He said to Solomon that He would make His presence known in the temple Solomon intended to build. But this would be conditional upon Solomon’s obedience. God’s promises are rarely self-fulfilling; they are qualified by human faith and obedience. It was the presence of the Lord that made Israel God’s chosen nation.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “A fresh element is here introduced into the promise, arising out of the erection of the temple. God had pledged His presence to the tabernacle (... Exodus 25:8; 29:45; cf. ... Leviticus 26:11). And the temple was reared to be His dwelling place (... 1 Kings 8:13; ... 2 Chronicles 6:2). He now assures the royal builder that he will occupy it. “*Jehovah Shammah*” (Ezekiel 48:35). The covenant relation shall be more firmly established.”

As *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes, this message to Solomon was meant “to warn him against the pride and presumption of supposing that, after the erection of so magnificent a temple, he and his people would always be sure of the presence and favor of God. The condition on which that blessing could alone be expected was expressly stated. The dwelling of God among the children of Israel refers to those symbols of His presence in the temple which were the visible tokens of His spiritual relation to that people.”

God’s presence in the temple would make Jerusalem the spiritual capital of the world.

d. The interior woodwork (6:14-18).

14 So Solomon built the temple and completed it.

15 He lined its interior walls with cedar boards, paneling them from the floor of the temple to the ceiling, and covered the floor of the temple with planks of pine.

16 He partitioned off twenty cubits at the rear of the temple with cedar boards from floor to ceiling to form within the temple an inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place.

17 The main hall in front of this room was forty cubits long.

18 The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with gourds and open flowers. Everything was cedar; no stone was to be seen.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The practice of covering stone walls with a lining of wood, which in turn was ornamented with gold or color (... Jeremiah 22:14), seems to have had its origin in Phoenicia..., and may have been suggested to Solomon by his Zidonian workmen (Cf. 2 Chronicles 2:14).”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The technical terms are not yet fully understood and the repetitive and explanatory phrases could well be the historian’s comment when the temple has been destroyed. The *planks of pine* (v. 15, NRSV “cedar,” see 5:6) may have formed an arched (*ṣal”ôṭ*) or vaulted roof (ceiling follows LXX reading *qôrôṭ*, “wall”).

The *inner sanctuary* (‘shrine,” REB) is defined here as *the Most Holy Place* (“innermost part,” REB), “partitioned” (NEB) or screened off from the main hall (*hêkal*). The word for the inner shrine (*dêbîr*) is used only in the description of the temple

⁴⁶ II Sam. 7:6

building and may relate to the “back” part (Heb. H *dābār*, “turn the back”; Akkad. *dabāru*) rather to “oracle” (Heb. I *dabār*, “to speak,” as AV, RSV).”

e. The inner sanctuary (6:19-28)

19 *He prepared the inner sanctuary within the temple to set the ark of the covenant of the Lord there.*

20 *The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high. He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and he also overlaid the altar of cedar.*

21 *Solomon covered the inside of the temple with pure gold, and he extended gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, which was overlaid with gold.*

22 *So he overlaid the whole interior with gold. He also overlaid with gold the altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary.*

23 *In the inner sanctuary he made a pair of cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high.*

24 *One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long, and the other wing five cubits — ten cubits from wing tip to wing tip.*

25 *The second cherub also measured ten cubits, for the two cherubim were identical in size and shape.*

26 *The height of each cherub was ten cubits.*

27 *He placed the cherubim inside the innermost room of the temple, with their wings spread out. The wing of one cherub touched one wall, while the wing of the other touched the other wall, and their wings touched each other in the middle of the room.*

28 *He overlaid the cherubim with gold.*

The Hebrew word used in these verses to describe the Holy of Holies is *debiyr*, which the KJV renders with “oracle.” Evidently, the word has changed meaning over the years. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it: “An authoritative or wise utterance,” or “a person of great authority or wisdom.” In the context of this text, it obviously stands for “a place,” not “a word.”

When Moses built the tabernacle, God had shown him the model. We read in Exodus that God told him: “Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.”⁴⁷ The author of Hebrews refers to this, saying: “Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘see to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’”⁴⁸

God had shown David a similar blueprint of the temple to be built. In *First Chronicles*, we read that David passed on these instructions to Solomon: “Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its inner rooms and the place of atonement. He gave him the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the Lord and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things. All this,” David said, “I have in writing from the hand of the Lord upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ex. 25:9

⁴⁸ Heb. 8:5

⁴⁹ I Chron. 28:11,12,19

f. The carvings and the doors (6:29-38).

29 *On the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer rooms, he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers.*

30 *He also covered the floors of both the inner and outer rooms of the temple with gold.*

31 *For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood with five-sided jambs.*

32 *And on the two olive wood doors he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid the cherubim and palm trees with beaten gold.*

33 *In the same way he made four-sided jambs of olive wood for the entrance to the main hall.*

34 *He also made two pine doors, each having two leaves that turned in sockets.*

35 *He carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers on them and overlaid them with gold hammered evenly over the carvings.*

36 *And he built the inner courtyard of three courses of dressed stone and one course of trimmed cedar beams.*

37 *The foundation of the temple of the Lord was laid in the fourth year, in the month of Ziv.*

38 *In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it.*

It seems that in designing the detailed ornamentation of the walls and doors of the temple, Solomon used creativity and went beyond anything David had imagined. Some Bible scholars believe that the cherubim, palm trees and flowers may have been reminders of the paradise. This would then suggest that man's fellowship with God, that had been broken when Adam and Eve fell into sin, was being restored in the temple service.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "While we are ignorant of the precise form and of the arrangement of these ornamental carvings, we are not wholly in the dark as to their symbolism. For everything in the temple, we may be sure, had a meaning. Let us inquire, then, into the significance of the cherubim, the palms and the flowers.

1. *The Cherubim* have been regarded by some as symbols of the invisible Godhead, by others as "representations of the heavenly spirits which surround the Lord of glory and set forth psychical life at its highest stage" ...; but it seems best to view them as symbols of all animal life, including the highest and perhaps not excluding the thought of Him who is the source and spring of life, "the living creatures"⁵⁰ (cf. ch. 12:28). Hence they are spoken of as *chayote* (... Ezekiel 1:5, 13, 15, etc.) "the living things" (compare *ta zoa*, ... Revelation 4:6, 8, 9), and even as *hachayaah* "the life" (... Ezekiel 10:14, 15, etc.) The cherubim consequently speak of the great animal kingdom before its Creator. "Creaturely being reaches its highest degree in those which have an *anima*, and among these, the lion, the bull, the eagle, and the man are the highest and most complete" These shapes, accordingly, were not inappropriate or unmeaning in a temple raised by the creature to the glory of the Creator.

⁵⁰ *The Pulpit Commentary* uses Latin here, which I translated.

2. Just as the cherubim speak of animal, so do the *Palms* of vegetable life. They are “the princes of the vegetable kingdom” (one Bible scholar states). “Amongst trees there is none so lofty and towering, none which has such a fair majestic growth, which is so evergreen, and which affords so grateful a shade and such noble fruits — fruits which are said to be the food of the blessed in paradise — as the palm” ... , who also adds that it is said to have as many excellent properties as there are days in the year, and cites (another Bible scholar) as designating it the “noblest of plants forms to which the nations have always accorded the mead of beauty.” Judaea, he further remarks, is the fatherland of the palm, so much so that the palm in later days became the symbol of Palestine (as on the well-known coin with the legend *Judaea capta*). The palms, therefore, tell of the vegetable world, and of Him who fashioned its noble and graceful forms.

3. And very similar was the testimony of the *Flowers*. “Flowers and bloom have been, from ancient times to our own, the usual symbols of life’s fullness So then by the flower work, as well as by the cherubim and the palm trees, was the dwelling of Jehovah, which was adorned therewith, designated as an *abode of life*” On the earthly dwelling place of the Eternal, that is to say, were everywhere portrayed the various tokens of His Almighty power and goodness. And the significance of each is the same. “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.” [They were graven] *within and without*. These words, here and in ver. 30, are generally taken to mean “in the oracle and in the house.” But it is worthy of consideration whether they do not rather signify, “in the house and in the porch.” The latter was overlaid with gold (... 2 Chronicles 3:4). It is doubtful whether *w-lachiytsown on the outside*, can be applied to any part of the interior, and here its application would be to the *oracle*”

The work of building the temple and finishing it in all of its details took seven years, which was about half the time Solomon needed for the building of his own palace!

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “These verses give the dates of the commencement of the house and of its completion, a period spanning seven years, from the fourth to the eleventh year of Solomon’s reign. This was a comparatively short time for a building of such magnificent structure. It should be remembered that: (1) much of the preparation had been completed even before Solomon’s time; (2) the building though highly ornate was comparatively small; (3) a huge personnel was employed in the task. The present writer sees no censure implied in the statement that it took Solomon thirteen years to build his own house, but simply a matter of fact.”

iii. Building his palace (7:1-12)

1 It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace.

2 He built the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon a hundred cubits long, fifty wide and thirty high, with four rows of cedar columns supporting trimmed cedar beams.

3 It was roofed with cedar above the beams that rested on the columns — forty-five beams, fifteen to a row.

4 Its windows were placed high in sets of three, facing each other.

5 All the doorways had rectangular frames; they were in the front part in sets of three, facing each other.

6 He made a colonnade fifty cubits long and thirty wide. In front of it was a portico, and in front of that were pillars and an overhanging roof.

7 He built the throne hall, the Hall of Justice, where he was to judge, and he covered it with cedar from floor to ceiling.

8 And the palace in which he was to live, set farther back, was similar in design. Solomon also made a palace like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had married.

9 All these structures, from the outside to the great courtyard and from foundation to eaves, were made of blocks of high-grade stone cut to size and trimmed with a saw on their inner and outer faces.

10 The foundations were laid with large stones of good quality, some measuring ten cubits and some eight.

11 Above were high-grade stones, cut to size, and cedar beams.

12 The great courtyard was surrounded by a wall of three courses of dressed stone and one course of trimmed cedar beams, as was the inner courtyard of the temple of the Lord with its portico.

Although the building of Solomon's palace took almost twice the time it took for the building of the temple, Solomon at least observed the right priorities. The prophet could not reproach the king that he neglected the Lord in order to attend to his own business first.

God's reprimand to the people who had returned from Babylonian captivity was not heard here. We read what the prophet Haggai reproached the people of his time: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.' "Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"⁵¹

This section forms an interruption of the account of the building of the temple. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The much longer period occupied in the erection of the royal palace is easily accounted for. In the first place, the buildings were much larger, and the undertaking altogether was a much more extensive one (ver. 2). Then, though seven years only were consumed in the actual building of the temple, yet preparations for the work had been made, both by David and Solomon, for a long time beforehand. Lastly, a special force of laborers would appear to have been employed on the temple, while it is probable that they wrought at the palaces in greatly diminished numbers. So that the longer period spent over his own house does not argue selfishness or worldliness on Solomon's part. On the contrary, it speaks well for his piety that he built the temple first and urged on that sacred work with so much vigor. The thirteen years date from the completion of the seven years of ... 1 Kings 6:38. That is to say, the building of the temple and palace together occupied twenty years, as is expressly stated in ... 1 Kings 9:10."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on the building of Solomon's own palace: 'since the temple is the main focus of the historian's account, less space is devoted to the complex of royal secular buildings for administrative and judicial purposes. All these were within a large courtyard to which general reference is made (vv. 9-12). This section is not in 2 Chronicles and is placed elsewhere by LXX and Josephus Yet the work on these buildings took almost twice as long as the smaller temple

⁵¹ Hag. 1:2-4

construction, perhaps undertaken concurrently, in seven years (vv. 6-38), giving a total of twenty years.

The Pillared Hall (called the *Palace of the Forest of Lebanon*) was used as an audience chamber or throne hall and at forty-six meters by twenty-three meters by thirteen and a half meters was larger than the temple. It also served as a state treasury, displaying selected precious objects received as tribute (cf. 10:16-17). It was most essentially an armory which, in the ancient Near East, occupied separate guarded quarters.

The building was named after the *four rows of cedar columns* which made it appear forest like. Two rows may have been against the walls (cf. LXX reads “three rows”) and two down the center, allowing for the broad doorways. The roof rested “upon forty-five pillars, fifteen in each row” (RSV) and could have served as the support for the floor of an upper room. This is more likely than that the trimmed beams (*kērūtôt* ‘sawn things’) were an architectural feature (e.g. in “capitals”).”

iv. The temple furnishings (7:13-51)

a. Hiram of Tyre (7:13-14)

***13 King Solomon sent to Tyre and brought Hiram,
14 whose mother was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali and whose father was a man of Tyre and a craftsman in bronze. Hiram was highly skilled and experienced in all kinds of bronze work. He came to King Solomon and did all the work assigned to him.***

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “It is made clear that non-Israelite skills were used in the decoration of God’s house. This was considered as another expression of practically-inspired wisdom shown in “understanding and knowledge” comparable with that used in the construction of the tabernacle (tent) shrine (cf. Exod. 31:3-5).

Architects are sometimes named in ancient building texts. Hiram... cf. vv. 40-41: 2 Chr. 2:13) may have been given with reference to his mother and connection with Israel to bring this into a “nationalistic” picture. The link with the Naphtali/Dan border (as 2 Chr. 2:14) should have been through his mother’s first marriage.”

The Hebrew text of v.13 reads literally: “He was a widow’s son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man a worker in Tyre.” The Hebrew word translated “worker” is *choresh*, which is usually used to indicate a Levite. The only other place in Scripture where this word is used is in: “Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, *who forged* all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.”⁵² Most Bible scholars believe he was a half-bred Israelite.

Since Hiram’s expertise was in bronze, he may have only been involved in the fabrication of the bronze, or brass articles used in the temple, not in the whole construction of the building.

⁵² Gen. 4:22

b. The Jakin and Boaz pillars (7:15-22)

15 He cast two bronze pillars, each eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits around, by line.

16 He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars; each capital was five cubits high.

17 A network of interwoven chains festooned the capitals on top of the pillars, seven for each capital.

18 He made pomegranates in two rows encircling each network to decorate the capitals on top of the pillars. He did the same for each capital.

19 The capitals on top of the pillars in the portico were in the shape of lilies, four cubits high.

20 On the capitals of both pillars, above the bowl-shaped part next to the network, were the two hundred pomegranates in rows all around.

21 He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple. The pillar to the south he named Jakin and the one to the north Boaz.

22 The capitals on top were in the shape of lilies. And so the work on the pillars was completed.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Brass is a compound of copper and zinc; but *nechosheth*] originally and strictly signifies a pure metal (... Deuteronomy 8:9; 33:25, etc.; ... Job 28:2). There were copper mines in Palestine, and the art of working this metal was known at a very remote period (... Genesis 4:22.) In later times the word sometimes denoted brass *chalkós*, or copper-bronze a mixture of copper and tin). Cf. ... Jeremiah 6:28. From ... 2 Chronicles 2:14 we learn that Hiram was ‘skilful to work in gold and in silver in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber,’ etc. From the mention of brass only in this passage, and in ver. 45, it has been somewhat hastily concluded that “the work that he personally did for Solomon” was “limited to works in brass.” It is, perhaps, safer to say that brass only is mentioned here, because the following section treats exclusively of the brazen ornaments, etc., of the sanctuary. It would almost seem, however ..., as if he was not employed to make the vessels of gold. Nor does this supposition really contradict the statement made below, viz., that he wrought all Solomon’s work.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “The two *bronze pillars* (cf. vv. 41-42) may have been hollow (RSV gives a width of four fingers = 7.5 cm). The measurements, 8.1 m high and 5.4 m circumference (1.9 m diameter) agree with Jeremiah 52:2 and may include the original capitals (vv. 16-20; cf. vv. 41-42).

The *interwoven chains* were of “filigree work” (JB), “nets of checker work” (NRSV), or “and of ornamental network” (REB) and were draped seven to each capital (MT. *šib”â*, reads “nets,” *šēb”âkim*, by RSV). Some MSS read “pomegranates” (*rimmônîm*), other “pillars” (*ammûdim*), set in strings of a hundred (Jer. 52:25) above the globular or bowl shaped projection (RSV, Heb. *beṭen*, “belly”). An ivory pomegranate with the inscription “belonging to the House of YHWH,” perhaps the head of a staff used in the temple at this time, has survived.

The top of the pillar had the working of a *lily* (Heb. *šûšan* of Egypt *ssn*, “lotus flower”) possibly taken as a symbol of life.

The location of the pillars is debated. They could have been free-standing, as in a number of Phoenician and other examples. They may have supported the projecting roof. The pillars to the right (south) and left were respectively named Jakin and Boaz (v.21) but their purpose and significance is yet unknown. They seem too tall to be refillable cressets or light standards symbolic of the pillar of fire and cloud demonstrating God's presence. Other suggestions include one that here we have comments by the craftsmen that "it is firm" or (*yākin*) 'solid' and "it is strong" (lit. "with strength," *bəoz*). This seems unlikely, as are parallels within mythology and standing stones (fertility symbols). Some take the names as the first word of statements the "*He (God) will establish the throne of David and his kingdom forever*" and "*in the strength of the LORD shall the king rejoice,*" denoting the position of Davidic dynasty."

c. "The Bronze Sea" (7:23-26)

23 He made the Sea of cast metal, circular in shape, measuring ten cubits from rim to rim and five cubits high. It took a line of thirty cubits to measure around it.

24 Below the rim, gourds encircled it — ten to a cubit. The gourds were cast in two rows in one piece with the Sea.

25 The Sea stood on twelve bulls, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. The Sea rested on top of them, and their hindquarters were toward the center.

26 It was a handbreadth in thickness, and its rim was like the rim of a cup, like a lily blossom. It held two thousand baths.

The Hebrew word used for the utensil described in these verses is *yam*, which in most cases refers to a large body of water, as in: "God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called 'seas.'"⁵³ *The New Living Translation* gives the measurements as: "The walls of the Sea were about three inches thick, and its rim flared out like a cup and resembled a water lily blossom. It could hold about 11,000 gallons of water." In Second Chronicles we read that there were also ten smaller basins that were used for washings.⁵⁴

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "The huge basin or reservoir was one of the great Hebrew technical works, corresponding in modern metallurgy to the casting of the large church bell. It was viewed as a large expanse and volume of water (Heb. *yām*, 'sea' is only used figuratively here, v.23) and corresponded with the bronze basin in the tabernacle (Exod. 30:17-21). It was used by priests for cleansing their hands and feet and perhaps also to supply water to the standing basins for the rinsing of offerings (2 Chr. 4:10)."

The basin was decorated with a rim of "gourds," which probably stands for buds, in the sense of a not fully-grown flower. The Hebrew word used is *peqa*, which literally means: "to burst open." The word is only used here as an architectural term of an ornament. The only other place in Scripture where the same word is found is in the verse: "The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with gourds and open flowers."⁵⁵

⁵³ Gen. 1:10

⁵⁴ See II Chron. 4:6.

⁵⁵ I Kings 6:18

The Pulpit Commentary observe: “The “brass,” of which the laver was composed, had been taken by David from the cities of Hadadezer (... 1 Chronicles 18:8; ... 1 Samuel 8:8, LXX.”

d. The mobile stands (7:27-39).

27 *He also made ten movable stands of bronze; each was four cubits long, four wide and three high.*

28 *This is how the stands were made: They had side panels attached to uprights.*

29 *On the panels between the uprights were lions, bulls and cherubim — and on the uprights as well. Above and below the lions and bulls were wreaths of hammered work.*

30 *Each stand had four bronze wheels with bronze axles, and each had a basin resting on four supports, cast with wreaths on each side.*

31 *On the inside of the stand there was an opening that had a circular frame one cubit deep. This opening was round, and with its basework it measured a cubit and a half. Around its opening there was engraving. The panels of the stands were square, not round.*

32 *The four wheels were under the panels, and the axles of the wheels were attached to the stand. The diameter of each wheel was a cubit and a half.*

33 *The wheels were made like chariot wheels; the axles, rims, spokes and hubs were all of cast metal.*

34 *Each stand had four handles, one on each corner, projecting from the stand.*

35 *At the top of the stand there was a circular band half a cubit deep. The supports and panels were attached to the top of the stand.*

36 *He engraved cherubim, lions and palm trees on the surfaces of the supports and on the panels, in every available space, with wreaths all around.*

37 *This is the way he made the ten stands. They were all cast in the same molds and were identical in size and shape.*

38 *He then made ten bronze basins, each holding forty baths and measuring four cubits across, one basin to go on each of the ten stands.*

39 *He placed five of the stands on the south side of the temple and five on the north. He placed the Sea on the south side, at the southeast corner of the temple.*

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “Rare Hebrew terms are used in the description, and the detail of the cast metal structures is obscure. A circular framework supported the basin, and the struts and panels (vv. 28-29), “beveled” (RSV) rather than *hammered work* (NIV), were engraved with *wreaths* and chains, possibly the familiar Levantine guilloche or spiral patterns (as NEB) and other designs set *in every available space* (v.36), which may mean that they were spaced out rather than places “wherever there was a blank space” (NEB).

The wheel structure was elaborately made (vv. 30, 32) with axle-trees (rather than just axles) fixed to the stand as “hand-shaped” sockets (Heb. *yādôt*, “hands”; cf. NEB “wheel forks”“

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The description of both the bases and the layers which they supported (vers. 27-39) is extremely obscure. We know, however, that the

bases (as the name implies) were simply stands or pediments for the lavers, they were rectangular, or box shaped, six feet square and four and a half feet high.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary explains about the structures that supported the washbasins: “The description of their structure shows that they were elegantly fitted up, and skillfully adapted to their purpose. They stood, not on the axles, but on four rests attached to the axles, so that the figured sides were considerably raised above the wheels. They were all exactly alike in form and size. The lavers which were borne upon them were vessels capable each of holding 300 gallons of water, upwards of a ton weight. The whole, when full of water, would be no less than two tons Jewish writers say that the water was changed daily, so as to be always pure, and that ablution in this water was indispensable to every one; because none were allowed to enter until this ceremony was performed.”

e. Summary of bronze work (7:40-47).

40 He also made the basins and shovels and sprinkling bowls. So Hiram finished all the work he had undertaken for King Solomon in the temple of the Lord:

41 the two pillars; the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars; the two sets of network decorating the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars;

42 the four hundred pomegranates for the two sets of network (two rows of pomegranates for each network, decorating the bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars);

43 the ten stands with their ten basins;

44 the Sea and the twelve bulls under it;

45 the pots, shovels and sprinkling bowls. All these objects that Hiram made for King Solomon for the temple of the Lord were of burnished bronze.

46 The king had them cast in clay molds in the plain of the Jordan between Succoth and Zarethan.

47 Solomon left all these things unweighed, because there were so many; the weight of the bronze was not determined.

Not much can be commented on this recapitulation of the inventory of Hiram’s work on the objects meant for use by the priests in the temple. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings* writes: “The manufacture of all these articles by the *cire perdue* or lost wax process was done east of Jordan between *Succoth* (Deir “Allah, north of the River Jabbok) and *Zarethan* (Tell es Sa’lidiyeh, west of Succoth, Josh. 3:16), where excavation shows much copper slag and the clay is suitable for digging moulds (cf. “in the foundry,” NEB) and there was ample water nearby. The firing of large wax shaped cores and filling them with the molten metal was a technique long employed in Egypt and Mesopotamia but required great skill to effect. That their weight was not counted is a common oriental way of emphasizing the large scale and value of the work which was such that it was later worth transporting to Babylon (Jer. 52:17).”

f. The list of gold articles (7:48-51)

48 Solomon also made all the furnishings that were in the Lord's temple: the golden altar; the golden table on which was the bread of the Presence;

49 the lampstands of pure gold (five on the right and five on the left, in front of the inner sanctuary); the gold floral work and lamps and tongs;

50 the pure gold basins, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, dishes and censers; and the gold sockets for the doors of the innermost room, the Most Holy Place, and also for the doors of the main hall of the temple.

51 When all the work King Solomon had done for the temple of the Lord was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated — the silver and gold and the furnishings — and he placed them in the treasuries of the Lord's temple.

The articles of furniture mentioned in this section all belonged to the first room of the tabernacle, the holies. The ark, which would be placed in the holy of holies, was still in existence and could not be copied. Whether the other originals, made by Moses, still existed or not, is not clear. Solomon's furnishings were probably modeled upon the original pieces, but they may have been larger. One obvious difference is that, instead of one golden lampstand, ten were made for the temple.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about the furniture Solomon placed in the temple: "The candelabra were arranged down the length of the main sanctuary to give light on these tables (Exod. 25:31-40). Golden door fittings, such as the *sockets* (AV "hinges") are mentioned in Assyrian texts. The ladles (NIV *dishes*, but *kappôt* are tongs, lit" palms of the hands") were long-handled spoons in the form of cupped hands of which examples in metal, wood and ivory have been found in excavations.

Solomon added to his own gifts to the temple (1 Chr. 29:3) from the spoils of war already dedicated by David to God (2 Sam. 8:10-12). This resulted directly from the Hebrew concept of "holy war" whereby a share of any spoils was dedicated as "the Lord's part" (e.g. Num. 11:25-47)."

v. The dedication of the temple (8:1 – 9:9)

a. The introduction of the ark (8:1-13)

1 Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the Lord's covenant from Zion, the City of David.

2 All the men of Israel came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month.

3 When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark,

4 and they brought up the ark of the Lord and the Tent of Meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests and Levites carried them up,

5 and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.

6 The priests then brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

7 The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and overshadowed the ark and its carrying poles.

8 These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the Holy Place in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the Holy Place; and they are still there today.

9 There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

10 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord.

11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.

12 Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud;

13 I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "The center of 1 King's record of Solomon's reign is the building and dedication of the great temple in Jerusalem, into which the ark was carried to mark continuity with the Tent of Meeting which was the previous symbol of the divine presence (vv. 1-13). The ceremony was marked with prayer (vv. 14-61) and sacrifice, as well as a fellowship meal in which all the people participated (vv. 62-66). In this way the Covenant of God (lodged in the ark) was linked both with the temple as precursor of the synagogue and church and with David's dynasty."

Bible scholars have argued about the precise date of the dedication of the temple without coming to a definite conclusion.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "The precise date of the dedication is a matter of dispute and uncertainty. We know that it took place in the seventh month of the year, but of what year we cannot be so sure. Was it the same year in the *eighth* month of which (... 1 Kings 6:38) the house was finished? Was the dedication, that is to say, one month anterior to the completion of the house and its appointments? Or are we to understand "the seventh month" to mean the Ethanim of the following year? Are we to assign the dedication, that is, to a date eleven months after completion? Or, finally, are we to believe with the Vat. LXX. *meta eikosi ety* (the LXX. text is here, however, in great confusion), that the temple was not dedicated until the palaces were also built (see ... 1 Kings 9:1-9); are we to hold, *i.e.*, that though finished and ready for use, it remained unused for a period of thirteen years? These are questions which we cannot perhaps answer with absolute certainty, but, to my mind, every consideration is in favor of the date first mentioned, *i.e.*, the seventh month of the eleventh year of Solomon's reign."

The temple would not really be "the house of the LORD" until the ark, the symbol of God's presence was moved into it. The transportation of the ark, therefore, was required before there could be any official dedication. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about this event: "To unite the nation a solemn assembly (*qhl* – hence the tradition association of Solomon with Qoheleth [Ecclesiastes]) was call to witness (v.3) and mark their agreement to the new location of the national shrine. David had moved the

ark from Obed Edom's house to newly captured Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:1-12; 15:24-29) and now it moved on from Zion on the south hill of Jerusalem to the "citadel" (JB "city," cf. 2:10) to the new city extension to the north. The whole city would from now on be referred to as Zion (2 Kgs 19:31; Ps. 9:11).

The date is given as September/October (*Ethanim* by the old local calendar, i.e. Bab. Tishri) and the *festival* would be the Feast of Tabernacles (Ingathering of harvest; Deut. 16:13-15) which normally lasted a week (11th – 21st day). As an additional week's festival was added ... some conclude that this must have been one year after the completion of the building (6:38, the eighth month, i.e. Bul) ... The *priests* carried the ark and probably the *Levites* (from the country cities) the Tent, apart from furnishings, for the former alone would enter the inner sanctuary."

The text mentions that the only articles inside the ark were the two stone tablets of the law. Evidently Aaron's rod and the jug with the manna, which had been with the ark before were no longer in existence. The author of Hebrews records that both the jar of manna and Aaron's staff were in or with the ark. We read: "This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant."⁵⁶ The staff would not have fitted inside the ark and God's original instructions to Moses were: "Put back Aaron's staff in front of the Testimony, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious."⁵⁷ The two stone tablets were placed inside according to Ex. 25:21.

The moving of the ark into the temple was a very solemn affair, accompanied by the bringing of so many sacrifices that the number of them was not counted. Solomon's ceremony lacked the spontaneous enthusiasm displayed when David brought down the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to Zion. We read about that event: "When those who were carrying the ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets."⁵⁸ No one could accuse Solomon of a lack of pomp and ceremony.

It has been questioned why the priests were assigned and not the Levites whose task is normally was to carry it. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The men who were summoned to Jerusalem (ver. 1) were all present, of their own accord, to witness the removal, and the *priests took up the ark*. In the parallel account in ... 2 Chronicles 5:4, we read that "*the Levites took up the ark*." But there is no contradiction, as has been too readily supposed. For ver. 7 of the Chronicles, "*the priests brought in the ark*," etc., confirms the statement of the text. And the explanation is suggested in ver. 5 of the same chapter, "These did the priests, the Levites (so the Heb.) bring up." Same expression in ... Joshua 3:3. All the priests were Levites — (one Bible scholar) translates, "the Levitical priests" — and this somewhat singular expression is no doubt used to remind us that such was the case. Nor need it cause us any surprise to find the priests employed in this service. It is true that the ark was given into the charge of the Kohathite Levites (... Numbers 3:30, 31); and it was their duty to bear it (... Numbers 4:15; 7:9; 10:21; cf. ... 1 Chronicles 15:2, 11, 12). But the real care and supervision of the ark always belonged to the sons of Aaron. It was their office, e.g., to put on or take off the covering of the ark and of the vessels, which the Levites were forbidden directly to touch (... Numbers 4:5-

⁵⁶ Heb. 9:4

⁵⁷ Num. 17:10

⁵⁸ II Sam. 6:13-15

15). It was quite in accordance with the *spirit* of these provisions that Solomon now entrusted the carriage of the ark to the superior order. But more than that, Solomon was not without precedent to justify his choice, indeed, we may see in his selection of the priests a minute mark of truth, amounting almost to an undesigned coincidence. For we find that on occasions of extraordinary solemnity — at the crossing of the Jordan, *e.g.* (... Joshua 3:6, 15, 17), and at the siege of Jericho (... Joshua 6:6), the *priests* had borne the ark (cf. ... 1 Samuel 4:4; ... 1 Chronicles 15:11, 12). It was no doubt these familiar precedents guided Solomon, or the ecclesiastical authorities, in their selection of the priests on this occasion. A ‘settled place,’ a “house of cedars” (... 2 Samuel 7:7), “having now been found for the ark” to abide in, after it had “dwelt in curtains” for 500 years, it was taking its last journey, and in order to mark this journey as exceptional, in order to show both the ark and the house the greater reverence, it was determined that it should be borne for the last time by the priests. (One Bible scholar) suggests that the ark may have been uncovered, but this is very improbable. Why, we may ask, were coverings provided, and their use prescribed (... Numbers 4:5-15), if they were to be arbitrarily dispensed with? He also adds that Levites were not allowed to enter the most holy place. But neither, it may be added, was this lawful for the priests. Levites and priests might enter that day, because the house was not then dedicated. The cloud (ver. 10) claimed it for God.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on the placing of the ark in the inner sanctuary: “The positioning between the cherubim (cf. 6:23-28, Exod. 25:15, 20) means that the ends of *the poles* of the ark were visible only from just outside the inner sanctuary (*Most Holy Place*, v. 8), either because the drawn curtain was hung inset from the opening or, less likely, because the poles pressed against the curtain as placed east-west. *There today*, i.e. before the ark and the covenant tables were lost in the destruction of 587 BC. The absence of reference to Aaron’s rod and the urn of manna (cf. Num. 17:10; Exod. 16:33; Heb. 9:4), originally lying alongside the ark (cf. Exod. 25:16; 40:20), could be explained by their earlier removal with other items “laid up” with the ark (1 Sam. 6:3-5).”

Once the ark had been placed inside the temple at its proper place the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord and no one could stand in His presence. When Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord, God had answered: “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”⁵⁹

Once the ark was placed in the Holy of Holies, the cloud of God’s presence filled the place, making it impossible for the priests to remain inside the temple.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: “*The cloud filled the house of the Lord.* The cloud was the visible symbol of the divine presence, and its occupation of the sanctuary was a testimony of God’s gracious acceptance of the temple as of the tabernacle (Ex 40:34). The dazzling brightness, or rather, perhaps, the dense portentous darkness, of the clouds, struck the minds of the priests, as it formerly had done Moses, with such astonishment and terror (Exod. 40:35; Lev 16:213; Deut. 4:24), that they could not remain, because the cloud was the emblem of Him who made darkness His secret place (Ps 18:11), who is invisible to mortal eyes, and “past finding out.” Thus, the

⁵⁹ Ex. 33:19, 20

temple became the place where the divine glory was revealed, and the King of Israel established his royal residence.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “*The glory of the LORD* always marks his presence just as at Sinai (Exod. 24:15-17) and later in the tabernacle when the cloud (Heb. “*ārâpel*”; Exod. 20:21; Deut. 4:11), a thick cloud whether of darkness or light, signifies that God was now possessing his house. It was not present all the time (Isa. 6:3-4; cf. the transfiguration of Jesus, Mark 9:7; 2 Pet. 1:7). The poetic fragment of verse of verse 13 has been taken by some to come from the book of the Song (*šîr*) possible reference to “The Book of Jashar” (*yâšār*, Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18) and the RSV, NEB and Gk. Add “The LORD who has set the sun in the heavens” after *the dark cloud* (v. 12, RSV “thick darkness”) which shrouds God (Exod. 24:15; Deut. 4:11; Ps. 18:10-11) had *filled the temple of the LORD*. This is no evidence for sun worship, as some suggest.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes about the cloud: “It had rested upon the tabernacle on the day that it was dedicated (... Exodus 40:34), had accompanied it in its journeys (*ib.* ver. 38), and had apparently been specially displayed at certain junctures in the history of Israel (... Numbers 12:5, 10; 16:42; ... Deuteronomy 31:15). It was thus the acknowledged symbol of God’s presence, and as such was a visible sign that He now accepted the temple, as He had formerly accepted the tabernacle, as His shrine and dwelling place.”

Evidently, the cloud that represented the presence of the Lord was a dark cloud. We gather this from Solomon’s comment: “The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud.” The Hebrew word used for “dark cloud” is *baa`araphel*, which literally means: “thick darkness.” The same words are used in the verse: “The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached *the thick darkness* where God was.”⁶⁰ The expression seems to contradict John’s statement: “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” But John is not referring to physical darkness, but to a spiritual condition. The darkness in this story is the darkness into which man cannot penetrate. It is the darkness that makes God invisible to the human eye. The darkness is more in us than that it is about God.

God had told Moses that He would speak to him from between the two cherubs that were at the cover of the ark. We read: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”⁶¹ And in Numbers we read: “When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony.”⁶²

The Hebrew word for “the atonement cover” is *kapporeth*. In the LXX the Greek word used to render the Hebrew is *apolutrosis*, which literally means “ransom.” The same Greek word is used by Paul in Romans where he writes: “[you] are justified freely by his grace through the *redemption* that came by Christ Jesus.”⁶³ That identifies the atonement cover with Jesus Christ.

⁶⁰ Ex. 20:21

⁶¹ Ex. 25:22

⁶² Num. 7:89

⁶³ Rom. 3:24

The glory of God dwelled in all its fullness in Jesus Christ as He lived on earth as a human being. As the Apostle Paul states: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”⁶⁴

Solomon began his prayer of dedication of the temple by saying: “The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever.”

God would not “dwell forever” in the temple of Jerusalem, but He lives forever in the body of Him who is God’s temple. That is why Jesus could say, speaking about His body: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”⁶⁵

b. Solomon’s prayer of dedication (8:22-61)

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven

23 and said: “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below — you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

24 You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it — as it is today.

25 “Now Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, “You shall never fail to have a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons are careful in all they do to walk before me as you have done.”

26 And now, O God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true.

27 “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!

28 Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, O Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day.

29 May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, “My Name shall be there,” so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.

30 Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

31 “When a man wrongs his neighbor and is required to take an oath and he comes and swears the oath before your altar in this temple,

32 then hear from heaven and act. Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty and bringing down on his own head what he has done. Declare the innocent not guilty, and so establish his innocence.

33 “When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to you and confess your name, praying and making supplication to you in this temple,

34 then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to their fathers.

⁶⁴ Col. 2:9

⁶⁵ See John 2:19-21.

35 *“When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them,*

36 *then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.*

37 *“When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come,*

38 *and when a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel — each one aware of the afflictions of his own heart, and spreading out his hands toward this temple—*

39 *then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men),*

40 *so that they will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our fathers.*

41 *“As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name—*

42 *for men will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm — when he comes and prays toward this temple,*

43 *then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.*

44 *“When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to the Lord toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name,*

45 *then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause.*

46 *“When they sin against you — for there is no one who does not sin — and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to his own land, far away or near;*

47 *and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their conquerors and say, “We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly”;*

48 *and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name;*

49 *then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause.*

50 *And forgive your people, who have sinned against you; forgive all the offenses they have committed against you, and cause their conquerors to show them mercy;*

51 *for they are your people and your inheritance, whom you brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace.*

52 *“May your eyes be open to your servant’s plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you.*

53 *For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, O Sovereign Lord, brought our fathers out of Egypt.”*

54 *When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the Lord, he rose from before the altar of the Lord, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven.*

55 *He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:*

56 *“Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.*

57 *May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us.*

58 *May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers.*

59 *And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day’s need,*

60 *so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other.*

61 *But your hearts must be fully committed to the Lord our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.”*

Solomon’s prayer, as recorded here is one of the greatest prayers in all of the Old and New Testament, probably only surpassed by Jesus’ prayer for His disciples and the church in John 17.

It is difficult to comprehend how a person who could pray a prayer like this could end up as Solomon would at the end of his life, turning to idol worship.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, commenting on Solomon’s prayer, states: “Effective prayer is based on three facts about God:

(i) His incomparability (Exod. 15:11; Deut. 4:59; Ps. 86:2-10).

(ii) His trustworthiness to fulfill his covenant, never failing to keep his word (v. 24; Deut. 7:9), or to show his covenant of love (*hesed*, cf. 3:6). For the promise of verse 25, cf. 2 Samuel 7:5-16. The answer to prayer depends also on the obedience of the person who prays (v. 25, cf. 9:4-9; 2 Chr. 7:14, 17).

(iii) His transcendence (vv. 27-30). God is both up there and down here. Where he is (his Name; Deut. 12:5), there is the answer (cf. Matt. 18:19-20), and God’s temple will not limit or localize his activity.”

Wiseman continues: “Three different words for prayer are used here:

(i) *Prayer (tēpillâ)*; intercession and prayer (vv. 19-30, 33, 35, 38, 42, 44-45, 48-49).

(ii) *Plea for mercy (tehinnâ)* earnest prayer for help (vv. 45, 52), “entreaty” (JB; REB v.52), ‘supplication’ (AV. REB).

(iii) *Cry (rînnâ)*; ringing cry for joy or sorrow, petition (vv. 28, 52).”

Evidently, when Solomon uttered the words about God dwelling in darkness, he was facing the sanctuary. When he prayed, he turned to the mass of people filling the temple square and blessed them, praying the prayer that is recorded in the following verses. While blessing the people he must have stood, but when praying he kneeled, because we read that, after his prayer “he rose from before the altar of the Lord, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice.”⁶⁶

⁶⁶ 1 Kings 8:54-55

In his blessing he referred to what God had said to David about the building of the temple. The reference is interesting, because it reveals that God is more interested in people than in buildings. But the truth goes deeper than that. There is a reference to what Solomon could not have understood at this point, which is that God's real temple would be the body of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The blessing was in both cases addressed to God. The Hebrew king was not authorized to bless the people — that was the prerogative of the priests (... Numbers 6:23; cf. ... Leviticus 9:22), and he is only said to bless here as felicitating, as wishing them a blessing."

Solomon states that the building of a temple for YHWH was something that David wanted to do. As if it was not really God's idea. Yet, God had actually spoken to Moses about a place where He would reveal Himself. The people had to seek the will of God regarding that place. When Israel was traveling from Egypt to the Promised Land, God had said to Moses: "You are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go."⁶⁷

David had concluded that it would be the threshing floor of Araunah, since that was the place where God heard his prayer during the plague that destroyed part of Israel's population at the time of the plebiscite. David had said: "The house of the Lord God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel."⁶⁸

David had given detailed instructions to Solomon as to the building and the place. We read: "David made extensive preparations before his death."⁶⁹ He had also prepared a large amount of gold and silver from his own possessions to be used in the building of the house.⁷⁰ The first and foremost purpose of the temple was to provide a place for the ark in which the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments had been laid.

In his prayer of dedication Solomon refers to God's promises to David, the first of which was that the throne of Israel would always be occupied by one of David's sons. Solomon realized that he was the first fulfillment of that promise. The fulfillment would not be automatic but would depend on the obedience of David's sons and of the nation of Israel. Solomon's sins toward the end of his life canceled the promise at least in part. The kingdom would be split into two nations and David's sons would only rule over Judah and Benjamin, the southern part of the country, which was the smaller of the two.

The Babylonian Captivity would end the rule of the house of David. Jeremiah would prophecy about the house of David and Jehoiakin, the last representative: "O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Lord says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."⁷¹ "Ultimately, Jesus Christ would be David's Son to occupy the throne. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah, he said: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."⁷²

⁶⁷ Deut. 12:5

⁶⁸ I Chron. 22:1

⁶⁹ I Chron. 22:5

⁷⁰ I Chron. 22:14

⁷¹ Jer. 22:29, 30

⁷² Luke 1:32, 33

After the introductory words of his prayer, Solomon expresses an amazing understanding about the greatness of God, saying: “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”⁷³ If even heaven is too small to contain God, how much more a building on earth of a few hundred square feet!

It is nigh to impossible for us to understand the essence of a spiritual being. The only spirit we can observe is the one living in a human body. But human bodies are created and God is the Creator, not a creation. God is Spirit, as Jesus states.⁷⁴ Being a spirit means that God is not subject to any physical dimensions; He is infinitely great, filling the universe and, at the same time, small enough to dwell in a human heart and body.

Commenting on the words: “May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day,” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Not so much to watch over it as to see the worship and prayer offered there.”

God had promised that His Name would be there, meaning that He would spiritually be present as the Almighty with all His divine attributes. This would mean that, if prayers, praises and supplications were addressed to Him at that place, God would hear and answer them.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “Within each of the seven parts of the prayer is a sevenfold reference or key phrase relating to the temple’s place as God’s “house of prayer” (Isa. 16:7; Luke 19:46) and to the answer needed.”

In the first request for God to hear the prayers of the people at the temple, Solomon uses the word “forgive,” implying the sinful nature of those praying. And a sinful nature will demonstrate itself in sinful acts. That is later expressed in his statement: “there is no one who does not sin” (v. 46).

The first of the seven points Solomon mentions in his prayer is about a person who is forced to swear a false oath, forcing him into a condition of disadvantage. Or it could be that the person in question did commit the sinful act, which cannot be proven to be his fault, and falsely swear his innocence. Or that a person is accused of a crime which he has not committed.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments: “The first case is one of doubtfulness; where a man has sustained an injury, and charges it on a suspected person, though not able to bring direct evidence of the fact, the accused is permitted to come before the altar of God and purge himself by his personal oath. Solomon prays that God may not permit a false oath to be taken, but that he will discover the truth, so that the wicked shall be condemned, and the righteous justified.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The king implores the covenant-keeping God to watch over the covenants of words made in the now consecrated sanctuary, and to protect their sanctity by punishing the false swearer. There were cases in which the Mosaic law provided that an oath should be administered to suspected persons (... Exodus 22:11; ... Leviticus 5:1, 4, etc.) And there were other cases in which men of their own accord, for “an end of all strife,” would make oath. Now every oath, whatever its form (... Matthew 23:16-22), is in reality an affirmation “by the God of truth” (... Isaiah 65:16); it is an appeal to the knowledge and power and justice of the Most High (...

⁷³ I Kings 8:27

⁷⁴ John 24:4

Leviticus 19:12; ... Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20; ... Isaiah 48:1; ... Jeremiah 12:16; 44:26). A false oath, consequently, dishonored the Divine name, and polluted the sanctuary dedicated to that name, and if it went unpunished, contradicted the principles and provisions of the dispensation of temporal punishments, and so encouraged falsehood and impiety. God is here entreated, consequently, to take cognizance of the oaths sworn before His altar (ver. 31), and to be a swift witness against the false swearers (... Malachi 3:5). It is, perhaps, because of the direct dishonor which perjury offers to the Divine name that, as [one Bible scholar] suggests, this prayer stands first among the seven, thus corresponding to the "Hallowed be Thy name" in the Lord's prayer, and to the third among the ten commandments."

The second request pertains to the whole nation. Although no particularly sin is mentioned, the reference is probably to idolatry. As punishment God would not only allow them to be defeated in war but also permit them to be taken into captivity and relocated into enemy territory. This would mean the loss of the Promised Land for God's people.

God had promised His people that, if they would obey Him: "You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you."⁷⁵ But in case of disobedience, we read: "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth."⁷⁶

The prayer could also pertain to individuals who were taken as prisoners of war.

The third prayer request concerned the weather in Palestine. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states: "As compared with Egypt, Palestine was a land of rain (Deut 11:10-11), but for six months no rain falls so that "rain in harvest" and "thunder" were marvelous phenomena, and out of time and place (Prov 26:1; 1 Sam 12:16-18). The early rain begins gradually, the latter end of October or beginning of November. Generally from the W. or S.W. (Luke 12:54); the wind then changes to the N. or E. At no period in the winter, from the end of October to the end of March, does rain entirely cease. In January and February snow falls, but lies only a short time. "The early rain" means the first autumnal showers which prepare the arid soil for the seed; "the latter rain" the later spring showers, especially in March, which bring forward the crop toward harvest (James 5:7; Prov 16:15). Showers fall occasionally in April and May."

God would occasionally withhold the seasonal shower to teach the people a lesson as they had disobeyed Him. God's blessing was seen in the normality of the land's weather pattern. Isaiah prophesied: "He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows."⁷⁷

When rain was withheld the people were supposed to pray and do soul searching. But at certain periods of Israel's history, they would turn to their idols instead of to God. Jeremiah chided them, saying: "Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is you, O Lord our God. Therefore our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Lev. 26:7

⁷⁶ Deut. 28:25

⁷⁷ Isa. 30:23

⁷⁸ Jer. 14:22

Amos reminded the people that God spoke to them through abnormalities in weather, saying: “I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the Lord.”⁷⁹

And Zechariah advised: “Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime; it is the Lord who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone.”⁸⁰

Solomon connects good weather at the right season with people’s righteous living. Commenting on vv. 37-40, Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “Other natural disasters: Famine (Deut. 32:24; Lev. 26:19-20) and plague (Deut. 28:21-22; 32:24; Lev. 26:25) are taken to be another sign of divine displeasure even though the fault of ruler or people. As verse 37 shows, there were many “natural” causes: (a) The *blight* (*šidapôn*) due to the scorching east wind (Deut. 28:22; Hag. 2:17). This is usually taken as a plant disease called “paleness” or “the green disease.” The word is also used of jaundice. (b) The *mildew* (*yēraqûn*) caused by rain too abundant or at the wrong time. These are also taken to be “blight either black or red” (REB). (c) Attacks by flying insects on growing crops, e.g. *locusts* (“*arbeh*). (d) Crawling insects such as the “caterpillar” (RSV; *hasîl*, cf. NIV *grasshoppers*, so Deut. 28:38, 42). Some take this as another stage in the life-cycle of the locust ... Man-made curses include famine due to siege (Deut. 28:52) *in any of their cities* (LXX; MT “in the land, in the gates” may denote “in the country or in town”). For disaster harsh and prolonged see also Deuteronomy 28:19-61; 32:23-25 and for *disease* severe and lingering see Deuteronomy 28:22.”

In vv. 41-43 Solomon reveals that he understood something of God’s purpose for His people Israel, that they should be, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”⁸¹ They were to be a bridge between God and the nations of the world. The testimony of their life ought to be such that others would observe that they were different and that they would conclude that this difference was caused by their relationship with God, the Creator of heaven and earth. This would draw some to Jerusalem as it did the queen of Sheba⁸² and in later times the Ethiopian eunuch.⁸³

In praying this prayer Solomon indicated that he believed that the temple in Jerusalem would be the only place on earth where God revealed Himself. In this he was right, because as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: ‘salvation is from the Jews.’⁸⁴ The fact that the temple in Jerusalem bore the Name of YHWH means more than merely that the building would be called “the house of the Lord.” Solomon asked that God would reveal His presence to all who came to pray to Him at the temple in Jerusalem. Some present-day Jews believe that God’s presence is still among the stones that are left from Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem and that form “the Wailing Wall.” That is the reason they say their prayers at the wall.

In vv. 46-51 Solomon prays for those who would be too far away from Jerusalem in order to come and pray there. He envisions a war situation in which people would pray

⁷⁹ Amos 4:7-8

⁸⁰ Zech. 10:1

⁸¹ Ex. 19:6

⁸² I Kings 10:1-10

⁸³ Acts 8:26-28

⁸⁴ John 4:22

before going into battle. For some who have fought in a war, it would be easy to understand what Solomon was speaking about. Many people who were in a war situation and did not know whether they would survive or not, have turned to God to pray, even if they were otherwise not praying people. General Patton's prayer during World War II is a classic example: "Lord, this is Patton speaking!"

Solomon prays for those who would be defeated and be taken to a foreign country as prisoners of war. He asks that, when they prayed, facing into the direction of the temple in Jerusalem, God would hear their prayers. We read that this is what Daniel did. He had an "upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem."⁸⁵ That was the place where he said his prayers three times a day.

In vv. 46-51 Solomon prays for the nation as a whole. Although the national sin is not specified it relates undoubtedly to idolatry. At the same time Solomon inserts a reference to the sinful nature of the individual, "there is no one who does not sin," although that does not necessarily pertain to idol worship. The nation's sin thus becomes the sum of the collective sin of each individual.

The story of Daniel illustrates well what Solomon prays for here. Daniel's prayer was probably the main reason a remnant of Israel would return to the land. He confessed the national sin as if it was his own. On the basis of Jeremiah's prophecy about the return of the people after a captivity of seventy years, Daniel began to intercede.⁸⁶ It is quite probable that without Daniel's prayer Israel's captivity would never have ended and God's promise would not have been fulfilled.

Solomon's prayer was answered in the return of the remnant from the Babylonian Captivity, although not completely, since there would then no longer be a temple to return to. The Jews who returned had to rebuild the temple. It was Cyrus, the Persian, who was used by God to fulfill Solomon's prayer.

Like Moses in the desert, Solomon reminds God of the fact that He was the One who delivered His people from their slavery in Egypt. The exodus had happened about a millennium earlier, but Israel kept the memory alive by the yearly celebration of the Passover. At least they were supposed to. There are some indications that the celebration had been neglected until the time of King Josiah.

Commenting on the last part of Solomon's prayer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Here Solomon seems to have exercised the prophetic gift of insight into the future. Peering down the long corridors of time, he seemingly foresaw the Babylonian captivity centuries ahead. It is significant that the builder of the Temple was given a vision of its eventual downfall, which occurred in 586/585 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed both city and Temple. Not merely is the captivity of the nation thus foreshadowed, but also its subsequent restoration."

The Pulpit Commentary states: "In Chronicles (ch. 6:41, 42) the prayer ends somewhat differently. "Now therefore arise, O Lord God," etc. — words which are found in substance in ... Psalm 132:8-10. These two verses look like an addition, and were probably inserted by the chronicler to form a connecting link with ... 1 Kings 7:1-3 (Bahr). The LXX has an extremely curious addition, said to be taken from the "Book of the Song."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Dan. 6:10

⁸⁶ Dan. 9:1-19

Solomon had been kneeling while saying this prayer. When he finished praying he rose to his feet and pronounced a blessing upon the people.

As Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes, “The “Blessing of Solomon’s is not strictly a blessing but a prayer for the continuing close relationship between God and his people. If taken as a blessing, this is not always an act exclusive to priests (v. 14, cf. Num. 6:23).”

It is true that Solomon’s “blessing” is actually a prayer for God to bless. “May the Lord our God be with us” and “May he never leave us nor forsake us,” are actually part of the prayer. Also the fact that Solomon includes himself indicates that he prays more than he blesses.

V.61 is an admonition to the people to obey God’s law, which is the primary condition for all blessing to be received.

c. Solomon’s feast (8:62-66)

62 Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord.

63 Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to the Lord: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the Lord.

64 On that same day the king consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the Lord, and there he offered burnt offerings, grain offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar before the Lord was too small to hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings.

65 So Solomon observed the festival at that time, and all Israel with him — a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. They celebrated it before the Lord our God for seven days and seven days more, fourteen days in all.

66 On the following day he sent the people away. They blessed the king and then went home, joyful and glad in heart for all the good things the Lord had done for his servant David and his people Israel.

The sacrifices brought were extravagant as far as numbers of animals slaughtered is concerned. It is obvious that this ceremony of dedication must have taken more than one day. It would have been impossible for all the animals, 22000 head of cattle and 100000 sheep and goats, to be slaughtered and sacrificed in one day and to find a place to do it all in such a short time, even though a large area was dedicated especially for the ceremony.

It is also clear that not all sacrifices were brought by the king himself. As v. 63 indicates, “the king and all the Israelites” were involved in the dedication of the temple of the Lord.

Barnes’ Notes observes: “These numbers have been thought incredible, but they are not impossible. At least 100,000, or 120,000 men (1 Kings 8:65) were assembled; and as they all offered sacrifice with the king (1 Kings 8:62), the number of victims must have been enormous. Part of the flesh of so many victims would be eaten; but much of the meat may have been privately burned (Lev 19:6), the object of the sacrifice being the glory of God, and not the convenience of the people. Profusion was a usual feature of the sacrifices of antiquity.”

As v.65 indicates, the celebration lasted two weeks in all. It could be that the people made no effort to cease the celebration and that King Solomon had to decide at the end of two weeks that it should end and so he sent the people home. They had come from long distances, as far as the borders of Egypt. Hamath was the northern border of Palestine.

d. The LORD appears to Solomon again (9:1-9)

1 When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do,

2 the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon.

3 The Lord said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

4 "As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws,

5 I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, "You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel."

6 "But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them,

7 then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

8 And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, "Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this temple?"

9 People will answer, "Because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them — that is why the Lord brought all this disaster on them.""

Bible scholars have argued about the dates at which God appeared to Solomon and the way in which Solomon received the revelations. In some instances it is clearly stated that God appeared in a dream.⁸⁷ II Chronicles states that God spoke to Solomon after the completion of all his building plans.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary introduces this section with the observation: "Comparison of this passage with 2 Chron 7:12-22 reveals some interesting variations in the terms on which revival was conditioned: "And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me." God held up the example of David, a godly father, as a bright and shining standard for the monarch. It is deeply significant that no great moral scandal is connected with the name or reign of Solomon, yet he never attained to the high spiritual character of his father, and at best died under the displeasure of the Lord. The promise is therefore to be viewed as conditional."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "An empty temple would be meaningless. Solomon is told again that the continued presence of God with his people will depend on obedience to his requirements and trust in his promises. The promise made to David and reaffirmed to his son at *Gibeon* (3:4-11) refers back to Solomon's

⁸⁷ I Kings 3:5

prayer and plea (v. 3, 8:25-30). The LORD God answers the “dedication” of the temple to him by Solomon (8:10-14) by the statement *I have consecrated this temple* (v. 3, *qdš*). Only God can make a person or place holy. He *put his Name* and reputation there (cf. 8:10-13). That God’s Name “will be fixed on it” (v. 3, NEB) answers 8:29.

The reference to what David did (15:5, 11) will be a yardstick judging future kings in a dynasty which will be named by David, not Solomon. The rest of Kings will be preoccupied with the blessing which follows obedience and the curses enacted after any failure to obey. The reference point will be to God’s revealed word and the language is that of Deuteronomy.”

God’s promise to David had been: “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.”⁸⁸ That promise has a double meaning. It would ultimately be fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah. The angel Gabriel told Mary: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”⁸⁹ But it was also a conditional promise to the earthly pretenders to the throne of Israel. Jeremiah prophesied about the last king to sit on David’s throne: “This is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David.”⁹⁰

So God’s promise to David and Solomon, although it was conditional as far as the physical kingdom of Israel was concerned, is fulfilled in Jesus’ reign over the kingdom that is not of this world.⁹¹

God called the temple Solomon had built “imposing.” The reference is, evidently, to the architecture of the building. But what made the building a temple was the presence of God’s Spirit. When the Spirit of the Lord left the house of the Lord, all that would be left of the temple was a dead body. And dead bodies tend to decompose. Ezekiel saw that process happen and described it in the first several chapters of his book.⁹²

In the same way Jesus looked at the temple in Jerusalem and said to His disciples: “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”⁹³

C. Solomon’s other activities (9:10 – 11:43)

i. A summary (9:10-28)

a. A further agreement with Hiram (9:10-14)

10 At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built these two buildings — the temple of the Lord and the royal palace—

⁸⁸ II Sam. 7:12-14

⁸⁹ Luke 1:32-33

⁹⁰ Jer. 36:30

⁹¹ John 18:36

⁹² Ezek. 9-11

⁹³ Matt. 24:2

11 King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and pine and gold he wanted.

12 But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them.

13 “What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?” he asked. And he called them the Land of Cabul, a name they have to this day.

14 Now Hiram had sent to the king 120 talents of gold.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, remarks about Solomon’s building program: “Solomon’s work outside Jerusalem required additional resources. These he now sought by (i) a further agreement with Hiram (vv. 10-14), (ii) the extended use of forced labor (vv. 15-25), and (iii) the profits from maritime expeditions (vv. 26-28). In carrying out the work (vv. 15-19), Solomon seems to have run into debt after the earlier commercial contract (5:1-11) expired with the completion of the temple and the royal palaces.

To pay for the *gold* (cf. v. 14; no gold is mentioned in the earlier transaction) Solomon mortgaged *twenty* ‘settlements’ (rather than *towns*, for “*irîm* is used of any group of habitations from a hamlet to a metropolis). As with eighteenth-century BC contracts from Alalakh in Syria, the “exchange” of villages was used to adjust a border, here that to the north-west with Phoenicia. The border villages may have been fortified for defense purposes and seem to have been redeemed later (2 Chr. 8:2), perhaps following successful trade (v. 14) or tribute brought from Sheba (cf. 10:10).”

Of the twenty years mentioned in v.10, seven had been used for the building of the temple and thirteen for the construction of Solomon’s own two palaces.

In payment for the wood and gold Hiram had provided for Solomon’s building programs, he was given twenty towns in Galilee. The area became later known as “Galilee of the Gentiles.”⁹⁴ When Hiram came personally to Galilee to receive this payment, he expressed his displeasure to Solomon about the condition of the area.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the transaction: “It is easy to see why this particular region was surrendered to Hiram.

(1) It was near his country (2 Samuel 24:7);

(2) The people were Phoenicians, allied to Hiram, but strangers to Solomon, both in race and religion;

(3) Solomon could not with propriety alienate any part of Immanuel’s land, or convey to a foreigner the dominion over the people of the Lord. Leviticus 25:23 forbade the alienation of the land; Deuteronomy 17:15 the rule of a stranger.

His disappointment is amply accounted for by the fact that the country assigned him was a hungry and mountainous, and therefore comparatively useless, tract. The region lay on the summit of a broad mountain ridge.”

b. The use of forced labor (9:15-23)

15 Here is the account of the forced labor King Solomon conscripted to build the Lord’s temple, his own palace, the supporting terraces, the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer.

⁹⁴ Isa. 9:1

16 (Pharaoh king of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. He had set it on fire. He killed its Canaanite inhabitants and then gave it as a wedding gift to his daughter, Solomon's wife.

17 And Solomon rebuilt Gezer.) He built up Lower Beth Horon,

18 Baalath, and Tadmor in the desert, within his land,

19 as well as all his store cities and the towns for his chariots and for his horses—whatever he desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon and throughout all the territory he ruled.

20 All the people left from the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (these peoples were not Israelites),

21 that is, their descendants remaining in the land, whom the Israelites could not exterminate—these Solomon conscripted for his slave labor force, as it is to this day.

22 But Solomon did not make slaves of any of the Israelites; they were his fighting men, his government officials, his officers, his captains, and the commanders of his chariots and charioteers.

23 They were also the chief officials in charge of Solomon's projects-550 officials supervising the men who did the work.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: ‘Solomon fortified strategic cities to guard the main approaches to his kingdom. The list runs north to south. All show archaeological evidence of identical construction work of the Solomonic period, casemate-type walls and similar ‘six-roomed’ gate towers.’

God's orders to Israel had been to expel or exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan, but several of the tribes did not carry out or complete the charge given to them. We read, for instance: “The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites.”⁹⁵ And: “Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land.”⁹⁶ And again: “Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them. Neither did Zebulun drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron or Nahalol, who remained among them; but they did subject them to forced labor. Nor did Asher drive out those living in Acco or Sidon or Ahlab or Aczib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob, and because of this the people of Asher lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. Neither did Naphtali drive out those living in Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath; but the Naphtalites too lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, and those living in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath became forced laborers for them.”⁹⁷

That was the condition Solomon inherited and he decided to take advantage of the situation by using the survivors of old Canaan to force them into labor.

No Israelite could be enslaved and forced to labor without pay. The only slavery allowed among the Israelites was when someone was in debt and sold himself for a certain period to his creditor to pay off his indebtedness.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “There is no reason to believe that the system of forced labor differs from that employed in 5:13-16, where two forms

⁹⁵ Judg. 1:21

⁹⁶ Judg. 1:27

⁹⁷ Judg. 1:29-33

were used: (i) The short-term, but unpopular, conscription of Israelite (Hebrew) citizens. No Israelite could be used as true *slaves*. (ii) Canaanites (cf. v. 16) and Gergashites omitted from the traditional seven groups here (cf. Exod. 3:8; Deut. 7:1; 20:17). Captains (*šališ*) were originally the armor-bearers or “third-man” in the chariot, cf. 2 Kings 7:2. The number 550 is again a multiple of eleven (possibly representative of the tribes less Judah).”

Although Solomon did not force any Israelite into slavery, he did conscript them for service. They were, evidently drafted for the army, as well as for other non-military services. Solomon did that for which Samuel had warned the people when they made known that they wanted a king. He had told them: “This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.”⁹⁸ But that warning had not dissuaded the people from insisting that they did no longer want to be a theocracy, but a nation like all their neighbors.⁹⁹

c. Further construction (9:24)

24 After Pharaoh’s daughter had come up from the City of David to the palace Solomon had built for her, he constructed the supporting terraces.

The way the NIV reads the text, the Hebrew word *Millo* is translated “terraces.” That translation does not indicate any relationship between Solomon’s first wife’s move into “the City of David” and the construction work. But, as *Barnes’ Notes* states, there must have been a close connection between the two events. We read: “Solomon was not satisfied that Pharaoh’s daughter should remain in the palace of David, which was on Mount Zion, in the immediate vicinity of the temple, because he regarded the whole vicinity of the temple as made holy by the presence of the ark of God. His own palace was on the other (western) hill, probably directly opposite to the temple, the valley of the Tyropoeum running between them.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The completion of the palaces rendered it no longer necessary or proper that Solomon’s daughter should dwell in a separate house. The chronicler tells us that she had dwelt in David’s palace on Mount Zion, and that Solomon was constrained to remove her, because he looked upon all the precinct as now consecrated (... 2 Chronicles 8:11).”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “This verse continues the reference back to 3:1-4. The supporting terraces or *Millo* (Heb., i.e. “Fill”) may have been a construction either forming the extension of the stepped terrace and city wall on the east flank of the palace, or a fill bridging the depression between Zion and Ophel (cf. v. 15; 2 Sam. 5:9; 1 Kgs 11:27; 2 Kgs 12:20). However, the use of the word *ml*” elsewhere may indicate a platform or terrace inside the encircling acropolis walls, perhaps as an aid to defense.”

⁹⁸ I Sam. 8:11-13

⁹⁹ I Sam. 8:5

d. Temple worship and sacrifice (9:25)

25 Three times a year Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he had built for the Lord, burning incense before the Lord along with them, and so fulfilled the temple obligations.

Solomon obeyed the command given in the law that stated: “Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord.”¹⁰⁰ The prescribed feasts at which the men were required to appear at the tabernacle or temple were Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles.

It has been debated whether Solomon entered the temple himself and brought the sacrifices, or whether the priests carried out the service in behalf of the king. Some Bible scholars believe that Solomon personally performed the rituals and that this became only forbidden at a later date. But there is no basis for this supposition.

e. Solomon’s sea-trade (9:26-28)

26 King Solomon also built ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath in Edom, on the shore of the Red Sea.

27 And Hiram sent his men — sailors who knew the sea — to serve in the fleet with Solomon’s men. They sailed to Ophir and brought back 420 talents of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon.

Solomon’s maritime efforts were made in connection with Tyre. We read in 2 Chronicles: “Then Solomon went to Ezion Geber and Elath on the coast of Edom. And Hiram sent him ships commanded by his own officers, men who knew the sea. These, with Solomon’s men, sailed to Ophir and brought back four hundred and fifty talents of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon.”¹⁰¹

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The fleet of ships “*onî*, AV “navy”) was built and manned by experienced Phoenician ship-wrights as was Sennacherib’s Assyrian fleet operating in the Persian Gulf.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests about the location of Ophir: “This is generally conceded to have been in southwestern Arabia, but some scholars, on the basis of the cargo mentioned in 1 Kings 10:22, locate it in India.” There is an obvious discrepancy between the amount of gold mentioned in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, our text mentioning 420 talents and Chronicles 450. As *The Pulpit Commentary* points out, the Hebrew symbols of 5 and 2 look rather similar and can be easily confused by copiers.

ii. The Queen of Sheba’s visit (10:1-11)

10 When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions.

¹⁰⁰ Ex. 23:17

¹⁰¹ II Chron. 8:17, 18

2 Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan — with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones — she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.

3 Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her.

4 When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built,

5 the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.

6 She said to the king, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true.

7 But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard.

8 How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!

9 Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness.”

10 And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

11 (Hiram’s ships brought gold from Ophir; and from there they brought great cargoes of almugwood and precious stones.

12 The king used the almugwood to make supports for the temple of the Lord and for the royal palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. So much almugwood has never been imported or seen since that day.)

13 King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

There are two interesting questions answered in this section: First is the fact that the position of women at that time was such that a female could rise to the highest level in society. The second question, which is not answered in these verses, is the location of Sheba. The emperor of Abyssinia, present-day Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, considered himself to be the offspring of King Solomon and the union he had with the Queen of Sheba at her visit to Jerusalem. Whether there is any historic value in that claim will remain an open question.

The queen’s visit must have been impressive even in the environment Solomon had created in Jerusalem and Israel. She came “with a very great caravan — with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones,” which even impressed King Solomon.

And the reason that drew her to come was not merely the rumor of Solomon’s fame but his relationship with the Lord. She must have experienced some spiritual hunger that she hoped would be satisfied by her visit.

She was obviously a very intelligent woman and her questions must have been deep and difficult to answer. It is regrettable that we are not given any examples of what she asked and of the answers she received.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “The queen of Sheba has been identified as the ruler of the Sabaeans (Job 1:15), who inhabited Arabia Felix, or the greater part of the territory of the Yemen. In Biblical times it was considered royal sport for rulers with a reputation to test each other’s abilities. The primary purpose of the queen’s visit was to find out whether Solomon’s pretensions to wisdom were equaled by his performance. All claims that she came from Ethiopia should be regarded as purely legendary. In conformity with ancient (and present) diplomatic protocol, the queen presented to the ruler of Israel costly gifts. Her curiosity was in no way disappointed. The actual wisdom of Solomon fully matched his pre-established reputation. The Sabean people over whom the queen ruled were governed by priest-kings (Ps 72:10). No doubt the queen took back to her native land glowing reports of Solomon’s wisdom.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes about the queen’s visit: “The Talmud, among the wild and foolish fictions with which that collection abounds relates many stories of Solomon, whom the blind admiration of his countrymen has made to play as romantic a part as their Arabian and Persian neighbors have assigned in their well-known tales, to the most renowned of the caliphs. Of a prince so greatly loved and admired as Solomon was by his contemporaries, both at home and abroad, it is natural to suppose that many anecdotes, illustrative of the brilliancy and acuteness of his mind, would be circulated in his day, and be fondly transmitted from father to son as memorials of a great monarch, in whose reign they could boast of having lived; but whether the stories ascribed to him in this strange miscellany refer to events which actually occurred, and which became afterward a part of the traditional legends of the country, or whether they are pure inventions of the Rabbis, it is now impossible to determine.

Out of this immense mass of stories and anecdotes the following is selected as bearing upon the illustration of this passage, and furnishing a sample of “the hard questions with which the queen of Sheba proved” Solomon. The legend informs us that the queen having exhausted her whole collection of “questions,” which she had studiously made of the most difficult kind, but which the quick and penetrating mind of Solomon easily unraveled, determined on making her last and greatest effort, by which she persuaded herself she would bring to a standstill the hitherto invincible powers of the monarch. She formed a small bunch of the rarest and most beautiful exotic flowers, such as were growing in the pleasant gardens of the palace, and with the names and the hues of which she knew the royal student of nature to be well acquainted. In the construction of this artificial bouquet, she had exhausted all the resources of art to render it a perfect imitation of natural beauty, and, carefully concealing from all but her immediate attendants the secret of its origin, she arranged and brought it out in such a manner that it was impossible to judge by the eye whether it was a production of nature or of art. It remained only to choose a proper time, when the king might be taken by surprise, for the trial of her ingenious stratagem; and fixing therefore on the hour when Solomon was seated amid a circle of his courtiers at the gate of his palace, in the course of his daily administration of justice, she presented herself abruptly before him, and holding up her bouquet at such a distance that no scent, had there been any, could have been perceived, she challenged him to tell her whether it was natural or artificial.”

From the things that aroused her admiration, the palace and the way Solomon lived his daily life, and the temple, we conclude that Solomon was well into the second decade of his reign when the queen's visit occurred.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on the queen's visit: "The history now includes an example of both Solomon's wisdom and wealth as it was viewed internationally. Both were the fulfillment of the divine promise of 3:13. The detail is sufficient for this to be no mere legend marked by exaggeration and can in a measure be paralleled in contemporary ancient texts. The visit was no "wisdom contest" between rulers of great powers; for such is unattested at this time, but is based on a trade mission, since Solomon now controlled the "Red Sea" and the caravan routed from east Arabia through Ezion Geber.

The Assyrians record encounters with queens ruling Sheba (Saba) in south-west Arabia (modern Yemen) down to the eighth century and thereafter with the priest-kings. The continuation of the account of the wisdom of Solomon is clearly related to his divine given abilities and "with reference to (Heb.) *the name of the LORD* (v.1), i.e. the temple (8:20). His wisdom is also expressed as the mastery of all learning and wit as well as military and civilian administration, in common with all ancient Near Eastern views of wisdom and prosperity.

The *queen* is unnamed, it not being customary to do so other than by place and origin. The *hard* ("enigmatic," REB) *questions* (*hidôt*) were not just "riddles," as in Judges 14:12, but included difficult diplomatic and ethical questions. According to Josephus, Hiram had made similar approaches. The test was not an academic exercise but to see if he would be a trustworthy business partner and a reliable ally capable of giving help.

Later Jewish tradition interpreted she came to ... him (*hô*" "el" as implying sexual relations in a love affair ("all she had on her heart," v.2; and "all she desired," v. 13) which resulted in the birth of Nebuchadnezzar (Rashi) or Menelik I, founder of Ethiopia, but since the parentage of both rulers is known, that is legendary.

It was customary for a visitor to bring gifts to a royal audience. The quantities involved here could well imply a trade mission, cf. vv. 10, 13. The *caravan* (*hayil*) denotes a company of men (better RSV "retinue," as NIV at v. 13). *Camels* were used as burden bearers in Arabia from the early third millennium onward (cf. Gen 12:16) and carried spices (*besamîm*, "sweet smelling things"). Such luxuries would have included balsam (Song 1:1) and frankincense traded through her territory.

Solomon's display of his own wealth and trust in riches will be condemned, as it can lead to trust in things other than God alone (cf. Prov. 11:28). The historian includes it as a by-product of wisdom, but later rejects it when vanity is involved (as in Hezekiah's display to Babylonian visitors, 2 Kgs 20:13).

The scale of sumptuous entertainment (*the food*), and the *seating* (*môsab*) which would be according to rank (NEB "courtiers sitting around him"), as well as the accommodation for his officials may be in mind. The *attending servants* (*mesaretim*) "in their livery" (NEB) were not waiters but officials, nor were the *cupbearers* part of the drinking service but officers of high rank (as the *rab shakeb* of 2 Kgs 18:19). The burnt offerings (*olatô*) would have been numerically impressive (cf. 8:62; 9:25), though some think the reference may be the "ascent" (NIV) ... or the stairway leading up to the temple

(REB, 2 Chr. 9:4). This walkway might later have been that known as the “Solomon’s Colonnade” (John 10:23; Acts 3:11).

The queen is “left breathless” (MT, cf. NIV *overwhelmed*), and acknowledges (vv. 6-7) Solomon’s *achievements*, wisdom (Matt. 12:42) and wealth (*tôb*, “good”; others interpret this as “prosperity,” AV, RSV, Neb reading *tûb*).”

The queen’s reaction to seeing the exhibit of Solomon’s wealth and to hearing his wisdom was her exclamation: “Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the queen’s words of admiration: “From this mention of the name of Jehovah, taken in connection with ... Matthew 12:42, it has been concluded that the queen became a convert to the faith of Israel. But this inference is unwarranted. Polytheism permitted, and, indeed, encouraged, a full recognition of the gods many of the different races and regions. ... Observe, too, it is “Jehovah, thy God.” And it is very significant that all her gifts and treasures were for the king; none were offerings to the temple.”

Her admiration was not limited to Solomon’s riches, but also to his manner of ruling his country, which she qualified with “justice and righteousness.”

Her gift is given special mention, particularly because of the amount of spices she donated. Solomon had enough gold and jewels himself to last the kingdom more than the king’s lifetime. *The Living Bible* renders v.10 in modern terms: “Then she gave the king a gift of \$3,500,000 in gold, along with a huge quantity of spices and precious gems; in fact, it was the largest single gift of spices King Solomon had ever received.”

Solomon returned her generosity with a substantial gift of his own. And, interestingly, the queen was given the opportunity to ask what she wanted in the way of gifts. This would be unusual in terms of court etiquettes in modern times. Evidently, Solomon was expected not only to be wealthy, but also generous.

The following verses explain how Solomon could allow himself to be so generous.

In a psalm, probably written for Solomon’s coronation, we read: “Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long.”¹⁰² This prophetic wish came true at the queen’s visit.

The account of the queen’s visit is followed by a mention of Hiram’s role in contributing to Solomon’s wealth by ways of international trade. The Phoenician ships brought in an enormous amount of gold, wood and precious stones. The kind of wood imported is called “almugwood.” It is not quite clear what kind of wood this was. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* writes: “Probably cypress wood, or what the translators render ligna brasilica; the Arabic translates it colored wood, and subjoins a paraphrase, for that wood was by nature painted with various colors. Perhaps the Arabic comes the nearest to the truth; wood shaded of different colors, such as the rose wood and such like, which are brought to us from various parts of the East Indies. The whole passage as it stands in the Arabic is this: “And the ships of Hiram brought gold from the land of Hind (India), and they carried also much colored wood, (but this wood is naturally painted of various colors,) and very precious jewels. And Solomon put some of that same painted wood which was brought to him in the house of the Lord and in his own house; and with

¹⁰² Ps. 72:15

it he adorned them.” And for inlaying and veneering nothing can be finer than this wood.”

iii. Solomon’s wealth (10:14-29)

14 The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, 15 not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land.

16 King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred bekas of gold went into each shield.

17 He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

18 Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with fine gold.

19 The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them.

20 Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom.

21 All King Solomon’s goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon’s days.

22 The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons.

23 King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.

24 The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.

25 Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift — articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.

26 Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem.

27 The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore — fig trees in the foothills.

28 Solomon’s horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue.

29 They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.

The Living Bible renders v. 14: “Each year Solomon received gold worth a quarter of a billion dollars.” By any standard, this made Solomon the richest monarch of his time, if not of all times.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary explains about the source of Solomon’s annual revenue: “The sources whence this was derived are not mentioned; nor was it the full amount of his revenue; because this was “besides that he had of the merchant-men, and of the traffic of the spice-merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia,

and of the governors of the country.” The great encouragement he gave to commerce was the means of enriching his royal exchequer. By the fortifications which he erected in various parts of his kingdom, and particularly at such places as Thapsacus, one of the passages of the Euphrates, and at Tadmor, in the Syrian desert, he gave complete security to the caravan trade from the depredations of the Arab marauders; and it was reasonable that, in return for this protection, he should exact a certain toll or duty for the importation of foreign goods. A considerable revenue, too, would arise from the use of the store cities and khans he built; and it is not improbable that those cities were emporia where the caravan merchants unloaded their bales of spices and other commodities, and sold them to the king’s factors, who, according to the modern practice in the East, retailed them in the Western markets at a profit. “The revenue derived from the tributary kings, and from the governors of the country,” must have consisted in the tribute which all inferior magistrates periodically bring to their sovereigns in the East, in the shape of presents of the produce of their respective provinces.”

The Pulpit Commentary sees in the mention of 666 a reference to “the mark of the beast” as it is found in Revelation.¹⁰³ That seems a little far-fetched. The commentary attributes Solomon’s eventual decline to this implied reference to his “worldliness,” overlooking the fact that God had promised this kind of riches to him, primarily because he had not asked for it.¹⁰⁴

The gold shields were for ceremonial uses. There would be no purpose to make such shield for use in war. They would be heavier than any other kind made of common material and therefore more cumbersome in battle. We may assume that Solomon used these shields when he went to the temple to worship, since his son Rehoboam would later use bronze shields for that purpose. We read in Rehoboam’s story that, when Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem, he took those shields as booty and Rehoboam replaced them with bronze ones that he probably had polished well, so they would shine like the gold ones he had lost.¹⁰⁵

About the royal throne, Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “As was common in fine furniture, ivory was inlaid and covered with fine gold (or “Gold from Uphaz,” Dan. 10:5) affixed by bitumen. The throne set on top of steps was an architectural convention used also in later Babylonian six-staged tower with a temple on top of zigurrat and in altars (Ezek. 41:13-17). There is no sure evidence that this had cosmic significance.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary writes about Solomon’s throne: “Solomon’s throne was of special proportions. It was approached by means of six steps, flanked with twelve lions, six on either side, presumably representing the twelve tribes. The throne was a symbol of justice, ruler ship, and judgment.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “It is somewhat doubtful whether there were twelve or fourteen lions in all. Most commentators assume that there were fourteen, and the text will certainly bear that construction. But it is altogether more likely that there were twelve; that is to say, that the two lions on the topmost step are the two mentioned in the preceding verse as ‘standing beside the stays,’ otherwise there would have been four lions on that step. And we all know that twelve had a significance such as could not

¹⁰³ Rev. 13:18

¹⁰⁴ I Kings 3:13

¹⁰⁵ I Kings 14:25-28

attach to any other number It would signify that all the tribes had an interest in the royal house (cf. ... 1 Kings 12:16; ... 2 Samuel 20:1); and a right of approach to the throne (cf. ... 1 Kings 18:31). The lion, a familiar emblem of sovereignty among many nations, had an especial appropriateness in this case, as being the symbol of the tribe of Judah (... Genesis 49:9; cf. ... Numbers 23:24; 24:9). We are to see in them partly ‘symbols of the ruler’s authority’... and partly, perhaps, they represented the twelve tribes as guardians of the throne. “The king mounted between figures of lions to his seat on the throne, and sat between figures of lions upon it.”

Among the list of animals imported we find “apes and baboons” (NIV). The Hebrew text reads literally: “apes and peacocks.” The Hebrew words used are *qowph*, (apes) and *tukkiy*, which may refer to a peacock, but the derivation is uncertain.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the “ivory” and “baboons” that was imported, stating: “Heb. tooth of elephants, LXX. *odontev elephantinoi*. It is noteworthy that the name for elephant used here is derived from the Sanskrit ..., and an argument has been drawn hence in favor of placing Ophir in India, and of identifying the Tarshish fleet with the navy of Ophir. But such conclusions are extremely precarious. The name may have first come to the Jews from India, in which case it would be retained, from whatever quarter the commodity was subsequently derived. ... And apes [*pwqis* in like manner identified by [one Bible scholar], *al.*, with the Sanskrit *kapi*. Another scholar says “the terms by which these articles (ivory, apes, and peacocks) are designated in the Hebrew Scriptures are identical with the Tamil names by which some of them are called in Ceylon to the present day”], and peacocks. [So the ancients interpret the original word, though some of the moderns would understand “parrots.” But the root *ykt* appears in several Aryan tongues (cf. *tawv*, from *tarwv*, and *pavo*) as indicating the peacock ... which originally came from India. Whether it was also found in Africa is uncertain.”

No reason is given as to why apes and exotic birds were imported. The main reason may have been that they were exotic. It has been suggested that the animal’s brain was used as food.

Evidently, Solomon felt the need to display his extraordinary fortune and importation of exotic animals and items was part of that process.

Not only his wealth, but also his extraordinary wisdom drew the attention of “the whole world.” That term probably describes most of the countries around the Mediterranean and eastward as far as India. Not only the queen of Sheba came, but heads of other countries must have sought to have audiences with Solomon also.

In accumulating horses and chariots, Solomon transgressed against the law, which forbade this. Moses had stated regulations the future kings of Israel would have to observe. Among those were: “The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, “You are not to go back that way again.” He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.”¹⁰⁶

His disregard for the law may be due to the fact that he had not obtained a copy of the written law and consequently did not read it regularly as the king was required to do. Moses had also said: “When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the

¹⁰⁶ Deut. 17:16,17

Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left.”¹⁰⁷ Solomon may have considered himself, in a way, above the law.

All utensils used in the palace were made of gold. We read that silver, which is normally considered a precious metal, was not valued.

The Living Bible reads v. 29: “An Egyptian chariot delivered to Jerusalem cost \$400, and the horses were valued at \$150 each. Many of these were then resold to the Hittite and Syrian kings.”

iv. Splendor outmatched by failure (11:1-43)

a. Solomon’s wives (11:1-8).

1 King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter — Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites.

2 They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, “You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.” Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love.

3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

4 As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

5 He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites.

6 So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.

7 On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites.

8 He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

We may say without any hesitation that Solomon’s “wisdom” went to his head. He no longer considered that it was God-given. That made his wisdom into a parody of what God intended it to be. He also made love and marriage into a caricature. Real love expresses itself in a willingness to give one’s life for another. Solomon’s love life amounted to a form of sexual desire that knew no bounds. He may not even have known the name of all the women he slept with. If he had a different sexual partner every night it must have taken him about three years to “know” them all. “Know” is used here in the Biblical sense of the word!

His sexual liberty led to a decline of his theological principles. Or it probably was the other way around. In forfeiting an intimate relationship with God through the reading of the law, his personal morality declined. He may have experienced his exercise of idolatry as “liberating.”

It must be said that David had not given his son a model to live by as far as married life was concerned. He was the child of David’s marriage to Bathsheba which

¹⁰⁷ Deut. 17:18-20

had started as an illegal relationship. But David's harem consisted of "only" fifteen wives. Solomon managed to marry three hundred wives and keeping seven hundred concubines on the side. And this was the man who probably wrote "The Song of Songs." We hope he did that earlier in life.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "Large harems were not unknown. David had fifteen wives (1 Chr. 3:1-9), some of whom Solomon inherited; Jeroboam had eighteen wives and sixty concubines (2 Chr. 11:21) and other contemporary kings had more than Solomon. The large number resulted from political alliances, sealed by marriage, with neighboring states: Moab, Ammon and Edom to the east; Sidon, through treaty with Hiram (5:1), and Syria ("Hittites" and Arameans, 10:22) to the north. LXX adds "Arameans" here, since David had such a wife (2 Sam. 3:3). These are cited as examples; *besides* (v.1) could be "for example" or "as well as" (Heb. *wè"et*). The reader would be aware that though polygamy was allowed (Deut. 21:15) it was rarely practiced. To *intermarry* (v.2) with foreigners was strictly forbidden (Deut. 7:1-4). This was due to the danger of being led astray and spiritually turned *after other gods* (v. 4, and the example in Num. 25:1-15). Strong sexual desire would be aroused ("followed after") despite Solomon's prayer (8:23); loyalties would be divided (v. 6) and the king would not be in perfect whole-hearted relationship with God, i.e. "at peace with" (Heb. *salem*) him."

The main problem of Solomon's excesses, as exemplified in his marriages is well stated by *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, which comments: "Although the three sins of this monarch, taken separately or even weighed together, may not be nearly as glaring as the one great sin of his father, yet, they were sins that drew his heart away from the living God. Furthermore, there is no written indication that he ever repented of them."

It is not sure that Solomon ever personally committed idolatry by sacrificing to "other gods." But the fact that he allowed idolatry to be practiced by members of his family was in itself a sin.

We are told that his permissiveness began as he "grew old." We don't know exactly at what age he died, since we don't know how old he was when he inherited the throne. The fact that he called himself "a little child,"¹⁰⁸ suggests that he may not have been older than in his teens, or early twenties. Since he ruled forty years, he must have been about sixty years of age when he died. That is not necessarily an age at which mental decline sets in.

Solomon's relationship with God in his "old age" is compared to David's. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "David is henceforward taken as the standard by which a king will be evaluated as "doing the right" (v. 12; 3:14; 9:4; 14:8; 15:3). Similarly Solomon is the first to be classified in that he did evil in the eyes of the LORD by personally following other gods."

The idols involved in Solomon's sin were "Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites." The worship of Ashtoreth was accompanied by prostitution, which was carried out in a most detestable manner. In the worship of Chemosh, human beings were being sacrificed, probably mainly small infants. The same was the case in the worship of Molech or Moloch. We read in the biography of Manasseh that "he sacrificed his own son in the fire" in his worship of Moloch.¹⁰⁹ The idol statue of Moloch was made in the form of a human being with a

¹⁰⁸ 1 Kings 3:7

¹⁰⁹ II Kings 21:6

large open mouth in which a fire burned and where children were thrown in as a means of sacrifice. Some of the infant sacrifices to the idols of Solomon's wives may have been of his own offspring.

It is difficult to imagine how someone, who had heard the voice of God speaking to him twice, could stoop to the point of committing such dastardly sins.

b. Divine judgment foretold (11:9-13).

9 The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.

10 Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command.

11 So the Lord said to Solomon, 'since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.

12 Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

13 Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

We don't read that God had given a personal warning to Solomon about the sin of idolatry. Solomon was supposed to know the law. The first of the Ten Commandments reads: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments."¹¹⁰

God would "punish the children for the sin of the fathers" in that Solomon's son Rehoboam would only inherit a small part of the twelve tribes, Judah and Benjamin.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: "Solomon's sun, which had risen in such splendor, was now about to set behind the darkest clouds. However, David was still to have a lamp in Israel (cf. v. 36). Not yet would the kingdom be totally taken away."

Barnes' Notes observes: "His lapse into deadly sin was no doubt gradual. Partly from ostentation, partly from that sensualism which is the most common failing of Oriental monarchs, he established a harem on a grand and extraordinary scale. To gratify 'strange women,' i.e., foreigners, admitted either from worldly policy, or for variety's sake, he built magnificent temples to their false gods, right over against Jerusalem, as manifest rivals to "the temple." He thus became the author of a syncretism, which sought to blend together the worship of Yahweh and the worship of idols - a syncretism which possessed fatal attractions for the Jewish nation. Finally, he appears himself to have frequented the idol temples (1 Kings 11:5,10), and to have taken part in those fearful impurities which constituted the worst horror of the idolatrous systems, thus practically apostatizing, though theoretically he never ceased to hold that Yahweh was the true God."

¹¹⁰ Ex. 20:3-6

Solomon's attitude shows that tolerance can lead to guilt. He may not have personally committed idolatry, but the fact that he allowed his foreign wives to carry out their pagan traditions made him as guilty as they were. God considered Solomon's attitude to be the same as an act of idolatry committed. Had Solomon loved the Lord with all his heart, as David had done, he would never have allowed his wives to commit these acts. In our present-day marriage relationships the practice of common worship is the best guarantee of a happy and lasting marriage. It remains true that the family that prays together stays together. What counts for a relationship of two is also value for one of one thousand.

c. Political causes of the break-up of the united kingdom (11:14-40).

14 Then the Lord raised up against Solomon an adversary, Hadad the Edomite, from the royal line of Edom.

15 Earlier when David was fighting with Edom, Joab the commander of the army, who had gone up to bury the dead, had struck down all the men in Edom.

16 Joab and all the Israelites stayed there for six months, until they had destroyed all the men in Edom.

17 But Hadad, still only a boy, fled to Egypt with some Edomite officials who had served his father.

18 They set out from Midian and went to Paran. Then taking men from Paran with them, they went to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave Hadad a house and land and provided him with food.

19 Pharaoh was so pleased with Hadad that he gave him a sister of his own wife, Queen Tahpenes, in marriage.

20 The sister of Tahpenes bore him a son named Genubath, whom Tahpenes brought up in the royal palace. There Genubath lived with Pharaoh's own children.

21 While he was in Egypt, Hadad heard that David rested with his fathers and that Joab the commander of the army was also dead. Then Hadad said to Pharaoh, "Let me go, that I may return to my own country."

22 "What have you lacked here that you want to go back to your own country?" Pharaoh asked. "Nothing," Hadad replied, "but do let me go!"

23 And God raised up against Solomon another adversary, Rezon son of Eliada, who had fled from his master, Hadadezer king of Zobah.

24 He gathered men around him and became the leader of a band of rebels when David destroyed the forces [of Zobah]; the rebels went to Damascus, where they settled and took control.

25 Rezon was Israel's adversary as long as Solomon lived, adding to the trouble caused by Hadad. So Rezon ruled in Aram and was hostile toward Israel.

26 Also, Jeroboam son of Nebat rebelled against the king. He was one of Solomon's officials, an Ephraimite from Zeredah, and his mother was a widow named Zeruah.

27 Here is the account of how he rebelled against the king: Solomon had built the supporting terraces and had filled in the gap in the wall of the city of David his father.

28 Now Jeroboam was a man of standing, and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work, he put him in charge of the whole labor force of the house of Joseph.

29 About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country,

30 and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces.

31 Then he said to Jeroboam, “Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘see, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes.

32 But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe.

33 I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molech the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in my ways, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my statutes and laws as David, Solomon’s father, did.

34 “ “But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon’s hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who observed my commands and statutes.

35 I will take the kingdom from his son’s hands and give you ten tribes.

36 I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name.

37 However, as for you, I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel.

38 If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you.

39 I will humble David’s descendants because of this, but not forever.”“

40 Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon’s death.

God announced judgment to Solomon as punishment for his attitude toward idolatry. This was given as a warning, which meant that there was still a possibility for Solomon to change and repent. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes correctly: “Was not this another warning from the Lord? And might not Solomon have yet recovered himself? Was there not mercy in this message which he might have sought and found?”

There were three persons, mentioned by name in this chapter, who raised opposition to Solomon’s reign: Hadad, Rezon, and Jeroboam. Jeroboam being the most important of the three, since he was the only one who became king of Israel. Hadad and Rezon were both non-Israelites.

The first opposition came from the side of Edom. In the days of David, Joab had practically exterminated the people of Edom, but Hadad, one of the pretenders to the throne of Edom, had been able to flee to Egypt and save his life.

Although Israel and Edom were related nations, both being descendants from the same patriarch Isaac, they never entertained brotherly relationships. Jacob and Esau reconciled with each other toward the end of their lives, but their descendants lived on as opponents.

Hadad's opposition to Solomon was quite understandable in the light of David's effort to exterminate all of Edom.

He had this in common with Solomon that both married one of Pharaoh's daughters. The Pharaohs may, however, not have been the same person. Hadad had probably married his Egyptian princess before Solomon was born.

We are not told what form Hadad's opposition to Solomon took. He may have stirred up the antagonism against Israel among some other survivors of David raids against his nation.

The second opponent to Solomon's reign was Hezon, King of Zobah. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* writes about him: "When David conquered Zobah, Rezon renounced his allegiance to Hadadezer and became powerful as an independent chief, capturing Damascus and setting up as king. Along with Hadad, the noted Edomite patriot, he became a thorn in the side of Solomon, the one making himself obnoxious in the South, the other in the North, of the kingdom of Israel, both being animated with a bitter hatred of the common foe."

The most formidable opponent to Solomon, however, was Jeroboam. Being an Israelite, he had been one of Solomon's most valued workers.

We could say that Jeroboam's rebellion against Solomon was divinely inspired. The Scriptures describe Jeroboam as "a man of standing." The Hebrew word used is *gibbowr*, which has the primary meaning of "powerful." The word is used in Genesis for the Nephilim,¹¹¹ which may mean "giants." It is also used to describe Nimrod, "a mighty warrior before the Lord."¹¹² In the context of this story it probably refers to Jeroboam as a very capable person. Solomon had noticed his abilities and assigned him to be his representative over the ten northern tribes.

Jeroboam's rebellion began after his encounter with the prophet Ahijah, who took the new cloak Jeroboam was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces, giving ten pieces to Jeroboam as a symbol of his becoming king over the tribes he had been administrating in Solomon's name.

There is an interesting counterpart to this story in the tearing of Samuel's cloak by King Saul. We read: "As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors — to one better than you.'¹¹³ Saul's tearing of Samuel's cloak had not been intentional. Evidently, the quality of clothing in Solomon's time was better than during the reign of Saul.

Although Jeroboam received the greater part of Israel from the hand of God, he never acted as if God had appointed him to the position. His fear that the Israelites of his territory would return to the house of David because of the temple worship in Jerusalem is an indication of this.¹¹⁴

Solomon must have heard about Jeroboam's divine call and he tried to kill him, which made Jeroboam flee to Egypt.

We read that the house of David would remain the ruling family over "one tribe" which was the tribe of Judah. In reality the division of the twelve tribes would be 10-2.

¹¹¹ Gen. 6:4

¹¹² Gen. 10:8

¹¹³ I Sam. 15:27, 28

¹¹⁴ See I Kings 12:26-30.

The territory of Judah also included the tribe of Benjamin. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “I will give one tribe to thy son - i.e., the large and populous tribe of Judah, including the small tribe of Benjamin, which was contiguous, and, in fact, divided with it the possession of Jerusalem. Josephus ... expressly mentions “two tribes.” There were left to Rehoboam the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi (2 Chron 11:12-13), and multitudes of Israelites, who, after the schism of the kingdom, established their residence within the territory of Judah, to enjoy the privileges of the true religion (1 Kings 12:17). These are all reckoned as one tribe. Respecting Solomon’s multiplication of wives, it may be observed that the sin was his own. “His heart was turned away after other gods;” but the apostasy was personal, not national. The people at large were not involved in its guilt, and therefore did not forfeit the tenure of the land of Canaan. But Solomon was punished; as the kingdom was taken from his family - not wholly, indeed (a small remnant being reserved, from regard to David and to Jerusalem, the place which Yahweh had chosen), nor in his lifetime, although the latter period of his reign was disturbed by foreign adversaries in the remote parts of his kingdom-empire.”

d. The closing formula (11:41-43)

41 As for the other events of Solomon’s reign — all he did and the wisdom he displayed — are they not written in the book of the annals of Solomon?

42 Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years.

43 Then he rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “This is the first use of this formula in its expanded form to end a reign ... His successor is introduced in 14:21.”

We learn from 2 Chron 9:29-30 more about “the book of the annals of Solomon.” We read: “As for the other events of Solomon’s reign, from beginning to end, are they not written in the records of Nathan the prophet, in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam son of Nebat?”

Putting a direct statement in the way of a question is a typical Hebrew idiom.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the mention of Rehoboam as Solomon’s son: “so far as appears his only son. Solomon hath but one son, and he no miracle of wisdom.” Many a poor man hath a houseful of children by one wife, whilst this great king hath but one son by many housefuls of wives. It is worth remembering in this connection that Psalm 127, which speaks of children as God’s reward (ver. 3), is with good reason ascribed to Solomon.”

According to Josephus, Solomon’s reign lasted eighty years! *Adam Clarke* comments: “Josephus says fourscore years, which is sufficiently absurd. Calmet supposes him to have been eighteen years old when he came to the throne, and that he died A.M. 3029, aged fifty-eight years; and, when we consider the excess in which he lived, and the criminal passions which he must have indulged among his thousand wives, and their idolatrous and impure worship, this life was as long as could be reasonably expected.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: “The actual time of Solomon’s reign was forty-two years, though part of this must be reckoned as the time of his co-regency with David.”

3. THE HISTORY OF THE DIVIDED KINGDOM (I Kgs 12:1 – 2 Kgs. 10:36)

A. The division of the kingdom (12:1-14:20)

i. Rehoboam (12:1-24)

a. Rehoboam's action (12:1-5)

*1 Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king.
2 When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt.
3 So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him:
4 "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you."
5 Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me." So the people went away.*

The most interesting piece of information we gather from these verses is the way Solomon's reign was viewed by those who lived through it. Solomon had asked for God's wisdom in order to be a king who ruled "under God." And, evidently, the early years of his reign made him a popular monarch. But at one point the glory went to his head and he began to consider his God-given wisdom as a product of his own effort and intelligence.

God had promised him riches, which he received as long as his intimate fellowship lasted. When he began to act as if God was no longer needed in his daily life, and his income began to diminish, he increased taxes and changed service into "harsh labor" and "a heavy yoke."

Apparently, all twelve tribes of Israel originally intended to crown Rehoboam as their king. Ahijah's prophecy to Jeroboam must not have been popular knowledge at this point.

Another point of interest is that royal succession was not an automatic and generally accepted principle. Solomon's successor would be elected by popular choice. Rehoboam would have been wise if he had "run for the office."

No reason is given for Rehoboam's choice of Shechem as the place of his coronation. Shechem had played an important role in ancient history. It was the place where God first revealed to Abraham that this was the land God wanted him to dwell in.¹¹⁵ Shechem was centrally located, which may have made it an easy place for the whole nation to gather.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "After taking, or being called to, the throne of Judah in Jerusalem or Hebron, Rehoboam sought endorsement by the northern tribes, who were already restive under Solomon's harsh rule. He chose Shechem

¹¹⁵ Gen. 12:6

... as a religious center associated with the patriarchs (Gen. 12:6; 33:18-20) and with the divine covenant which all tribes reaffirmed through Joshua (Josh. 24). *All* the representatives of the tribes of Israel over whom David had been elected king (2 Sam. 5:3) were present. The timing of Jeroboam's intervention is not clear. He may have returned after hearing of the assembly while he "remained" in Egypt ... and did not arrive until after Rehoboam's rejection of the elders' advice ... Others imply that Jeroboam had already "returned" ... from Egypt. Not for the first time Egypt sought to exploit division in Palestine."

When the whole nation gathered for the planned coronation, Jeroboam was called as representative to make known to the new king what the wishes of the people were. There was more involved than this chapter reveals about the discontent that existed among some of Israel's tribes, which led to the split-up of the kingdom into two separate nations.

As we noted earlier, it was not that God wished Israel to be divided; it was the result of Solomon's careless attitude toward the end of his life regarding idolatry. God allowed the sinful tendencies of human nature, such as lack of neighborly love and a sense of self-importance, to flourish without restriction.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Jealousy on the part of Ephraim of the powerful tribe of Judah had undoubtedly something to do with the revolution of which we now read. The discontent occasioned by Solomon's levies and the headstrong folly of Rehoboam were the immediate causes, but influences much deeper and of longer standing were also at work. The tribe of Ephraim had clearly never thoroughly acquiesced in the superiority which its rival, the tribe of Judah, by furnishing to the nation its sovereigns, its seat of government, and its sanctuary, had attained. During the two former reigns the envy of Ephraim had been held in check, but it was there, and it only needed an occasion, such as Rehoboam afforded it, to blaze forth. That proud tribe could not forget the glowing words in which both Jacob (... Genesis 49:22-26, "the strength of my head") and Moses (... Deuteronomy 33:18-17) had foretold their future eminence. They remembered, too, that their position — in the very centre of the land was also the richest in all natural advantages. Compared with their picturesque and fertile possessions, the territory of Judah was as a stony wilderness.

And for a long time they had enjoyed a certain superiority in the nation. In the time of Joshua we find them fully conscious of their strength and numbers (... Joshua 17:14), and the leader himself admits their power (ver. 17). When the tabernacle was first set up, it was at Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim (... Joshua 18:1), and there the ark remained for more than three hundred years. And the pre-eminence of Ephraim amongst the northern tribes is curiously evidenced by the way in which it twice resented (... Judges 8:1; 12:1) campaigns undertaken without its sanction and cooperation. It and its sister tribe of Manasseh had furnished, down to the time of David, the leaders and commanders of the people — Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, and Samuel — and when the kingdom was established it was from the allied tribe of Benjamin that the first monarch was selected. "It was natural that, with such an inheritance of glory, Ephraim always chafed under any rival supremacy" It was natural, too, that for seven years it should refuse allegiance to a prince of the rival house of Judah. Even when, at the end of that time, the elders of Israel recognized David as "king over Israel" (... 2 Samuel 5:8), the fires of jealousy, as the revolt of Sheba and the curses of Shimei alike show, were not

wholly extinguished. And the transference of the sanctuary, as well as the scepter, to Judah — for Jerusalem, whilst mainly in the territory of Benjamin, was also on the border of Judah — would occasion fresh heart burnings. It has been supposed by some that Psalm 78, was penned as a warning to Ephraim against rebellion, and to reconcile them to their loss of place and power; that, if so, it was not effectual, and that the jealousy endured at a much later date ... Isaiah 11:13 shows. There had probably been an attempt on the part of Jeroboam the Ephraimite to stir up his and the neighboring tribes against the ascendancy of Judah in the person of Solomon. That first attempt proved abortive. But now that their magnificent king was dead, now that the reins of government were held by his weak and foolish son, the men of Ephraim resolved unless they could wrest from him very great concessions, to brook the rule of Judah no longer and to have a king of their own house.”

That was a lengthy quotation from *The Pulpit Commentary*, but I felt it would give a clearer understanding of the existing tensions that are not easily read in the pages of Scripture.

The conditions presented to Rehoboam by mouth of Jeroboam were certainly not unreasonable. Solomon had drafted free Israelites into services that, although no official slavery, made them less free than they wanted to be. And when Solomon’s prosperity declined as did his wholehearted dedication to the Lord, he levied heavy duties on the nation to support his lifestyle. That caused the people to present their conditions to Solomon’s son.

b. Right and wrong advice (12:6-15).

6 Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. “How would you advise me to answer these people?” he asked.

7 They replied, “If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.”

8 But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him.

9 He asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, “Lighten the yoke your father put on us”?”

10 The young men who had grown up with him replied, “Tell these people who have said to you, “Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter”-tell them, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist.

11 My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.”“

12 Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, “Come back to me in three days.”

13 The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, 14 he followed the advice of the young men and said, “My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.”

15 So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the Lord, to fulfill the word the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

His request for “three days” to contemplate their demands sounds reasonable enough. Had he listened to the advice of the ones who used to advise Solomon, he would have remained king over the whole nation.

Although Rehoboam inherited his father’s throne, it is evident that he did not inherit his father’s wisdom. We do not read that he ever prayed for wisdom as his father had done. He may not have felt that he needed to ask God for it, because he had enough of his own wisdom to make decisions. Solomon had said: “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.”¹¹⁶ Rehoboam may have heard his father say this, but he must have considered those words “older generation talk.”

He did, however, take advice from his own peers, who told him to tell the people: “My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist.” This does not make much sense in English, unless we understand that “little finger” is probably an idiom for the male organ, which makes it an extremely vulgar expression. Actually, the word “finger” is not in the original Hebrew text, which reinforces the idea that there is vulgarity involved.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “Not only did Rehoboam threaten the people with heavier burdens than they had known before, but he indicated that he was about to treat them as a nation of slaves. It should be said in favor of Rehoboam that his treatment of those who remained faithful to the Davidic house was much more moderate than the speech suggests.”

The threat to change from whips to scorpions as symbolic of Rehoboam’s intended reign of Israel is in itself rather ridiculous. What Rehoboam was saying was that he would not only reign over them as a tyrant, but that he would distinguish himself by being a most cruel tyrant. Power went to his head before he even had the power.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about Rehoboam’s reaction to the wise counsel given to him: “‘If ... you will be a servant ... they will always be your servants.’” Authority and power exercised in service elicits loyalty. Jesus as Messiah the servant supremely illustrates this (Mark 10:43-45; Rom. 12:1). If Rehoboam had responded by showing a right understanding of authority, which aims to serve people and make them willing to serve together, the outcome could have been far different and the breakup of that unity which should characterize God’s people might never have happened. His indecision shows him unaware that immediate action (*today*) often influences life for “all the days” (Heb. *always*). Was Rehoboam’s concern for his own position? The elders’ request was for “good words” or favorable terms, i.e. for leniency, not independence.”

c. Israel breaks away (12:16-20).

16 When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: “What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse’s son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!” So the Israelites went home.

17 But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

18 King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem.

¹¹⁶ Prov. 3:7

**19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.
20 When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David.**

Rehoboam's attitude in this crucial matter is marked by stupidity and a lack of a sense of reality. When "Israel" heard the king's answer, they announced that they would break away from the union with Judah. "Israel" stands here for the ten tribes that would make up the northern kingdom.

In sending Adoniram as his representative, Rehoboam indicated that he regarded the people virtually as his slaves. Adoniram was "in charge of forced labor." The poor man paid for his mission with his life.

The fact that even King Rehoboam had to flee the scene in order to save his own life indicates how violently the people reacted to the announcement made.

The Hebrew text of v.16 reads literally: "The people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: see now to your own house, David."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "This cry — the *Marseillaise* of Israel — probably had its origin at a time when the people dwelt in tents, viz., in the march through the desert (see ... Joshua 22:4; ... Numbers 1:52; 9:18; 16:26)."

Donald J. Wiseman, in 1 and 2 Kings, comments: "Rehoboam's indecision and ambivalence is shown in that he takes varied measures to recover the situation. He first tried diplomacy (v.18), then resorts to force (vv. 21-24). Adoniram (Heb. Adoram, cf. 4:6; 5:14) was a poor choice, for he was renowned for strictly applying forced labor (*mas `ôbêd*), whereas Jeroboam represented lesser levy duties (*sêbel*). Perhaps a bargain between two kinds of state was envisaged."

The phrase 'so Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day' indicates that the book of I Kings was written before the fall of Samaria (721/722 B.C.).

The ten tribes must have felt that a break with the house of David brought with it the necessity to appoint someone else to take the throne in the northern part of the country. So they turned to Jeroboam, Solomon's foremost enemy.

Barnes' Notes comment: "The first act of the Israelites, on learning what had occurred at Shechem, was to bring together the great "congregation" of the people (compare Judg 20:1), in order that, regularly and in solemn form, the crown might be declared vacant, and a king elected in the room of the monarch whose authority had been thrown off. The congregation selected Jeroboam. The rank, the talent, and the known energy of the late exile, his natural hostility to the house of Solomon, his Ephraimitic descent, his acquaintance with the art of fortification, and the friendly relations subsisting between him and the great Egyptian king, pointed him out as the most suitable man for the vacant post. If, according to the Septuagint, Shishak had not only protected him against Solomon, but also given him an Egyptian princess, sister to his own queen, in marriage, his position must have been such that no other Israelite could have borne comparison with him. Again, the prophecy of Ahijah would have been remembered by the more religious part of the nation, and would have secured to Jeroboam their adhesion; so that every motive, whether of policy or of religion, would have united to recommend the son of Nebat to the suffrages of his countrymen."

The question about the legality of the Northern tribes' action can be answered in the positive by the fact that Jeroboam had received God's call by mouth of the prophet Ahijah, who had symbolically torn his cloak into twelve pieces and given ten to Jeroboam. The fact that another prophet, Shemaiah, told Rehoboam that Jeroboam's rebellion was "God's doing" is further proof of it. But that didn't make the severance less painful and regrettable.

d. Rehoboam's plan for war averted (12:21-24).

21 When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered the whole house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin — a hundred and eighty thousand fighting men — to make war against the house of Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon.

22 But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God:

23 'say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah, to the whole house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people,

24 "This is what the Lord says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing." "So they obeyed the word of the Lord and went home again, as the Lord had ordered.

Rehoboam's immediate reaction to the revolt of the north was to mobilize his army and reclaim the whole kingdom for the house of David. This was understandable and it seemed the right thing to do. Since Jeroboam was known to be a rebel under Solomon's reign, he was considered to be the same under the new king.

It is most amazing that Rehoboam accepted without any question, Shemaiah's prophecy as the Word of God.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "It is at first sight somewhat surprising that Benjamin, so long the rival of Judah, and which had so long resisted the rule of David, should on this occasion have detached itself from the leadership of Ephraim, its near and powerful neighbor, and a tribe, too, with which it had a sort of hereditary connection. That a sort of jealousy existed at one time between the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, consequent, no doubt, on the transference of the scepter from the house of Saul to that of David, is very evident. A thousand men of Benjamin constituted the following of the rebel Shimei, (... 2 Samuel 19:17). The rising of Sheba the Benjamite, again (... 2 Samuel 20:1), proves that the enmity and discontent were not even then subdued. But when the ten tribes fell away, Benjamin seems never to have faltered in its allegiance. The change is easily accounted for. It was the glory of Benjamin that Jerusalem, the joy of the whole earth, the civil and religious capital of the nation, was largely within its border. "The city of the Jebusite" was in the lot of Benjamin (... Joshua 18:28). But it was also on the boundary line of Judah. This fact had, no doubt, brought the two tribes into close contact, and had given them interests in common, in fact had "riveted them together as by a cramp" ... and now Benjamin could not fail to see that separation from Judah would mean the loss of Jerusalem (which would be largely peopled by the men of Judah, David's tribe, and would be practically in their hands), while adherence to Ephraim would not prevent the establishment of another sanctuary further north. The traditions of fifty years, consequently, and the common interest in the capital, prevailed over hereditary ties and ancient feuds, and decided Benjamin to cast in its lot with Judah; the

more so, as the heads of this tribe may have felt, after once furnishing Israel with its king, as jealous of Ephraim as they had once been of Judah. It must not be forgotten, however, that some portions of Benjamin, including Bethel, Gilgal, and Jericho, were incorporated in the northern kingdom . . . , an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men [the LXX. has *ekaton kai eikosi*=120,000, but the larger number need create no astonishment. At the time of David's census, the men of Judah numbered — if the figures can be depended on — 500,000, while Abijah could muster some 18 years afterwards an army of 400,000 (. . . 2 Chronicles 13:3)], which were warriors [lit., making war], to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. [It is characteristic of Rehoboam that he proposes forthwith to subdue the rebellious tribes by force. Probably he had no idea to what extent the tribes would prove disloyal.]”⁶⁶

ii. Jeroboam (12:25 – 14:20)

a. Jeroboam's sin (12:25-33)

25 Then Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built up Peniel.

26 Jeroboam thought to himself, “The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David.

27 If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.”

28 After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

29 One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan.

30 And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there.

31 Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites.

32 He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made.

33 On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings.

In thinking that the kingdom would revert back to the house of David, that is to the reign of Rehoboam, Jeroboam indicated that he did not believe the prophetic word given to him by Ahijah.

He also saw in the temple worship service nothing but a religious ceremony that had more political than spiritual value; it served mainly to enhance the power of the king at Jerusalem. He did not believe that it was the presence of God that gave it its

significance. The importance of religion was not an objective reality to Jeroboam; it was merely something in the mind of the people.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “Jeroboam’s sin of making a rival capital was compounded by his disbelief in God’s promise to him made through Ahijah (11:38). His decision was deliberate, after *seeking advice* (v. 28) or “after giving thought to the matter” (NEB, cf. NRSV “took counsel”), and defensive. The two bull-calves represented fertility symbols to which the power of God was attributed, despite their ineffectual nature as idols having been shown already by Aaron (Exod. 32:4-8). ... The aim was to divert worship by the Israelites far from Jerusalem and to mark the borders of the new kingdom. Jeroboam himself may not have initially intended any anti-Yahwehism.”

New religious practices required a new priesthood. As we saw earlier, many Levites had left the northern kingdom and moved to Judah to perform their temple duties. In creating his own priest-cast, Jeroboam also broke with God’s revealed will regarding the priesthood as belonging to the tribe of Levi.

As if that was not enough, the king also invented his own religious feasts. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “His object in changing the month from the seventh to the eighth, and yet keeping the day of the month, is not clear. Perhaps it was on account of the later vintage of the more northern regions. ... The expression “he offered upon the altar” ... shows that Jeroboam himself officiated as priest, and offered this sacrifice at Bethel, not at Dan; where it is possible that the priests descended from Jonathan, the son of Gershom and grandson of Moses, undertook the services.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “We may perhaps see in Jeroboam’s ministering in person, not only the design to invest the new ordinance with exceptional interest and splendor, but also the idea of encouraging his new priests to enter on their unauthorized functions without fear. The history, or even the traditions, of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10.) and of Korah and his company (... Numbers 16:40), and the threatenings of the law (... Numbers 18:7, 22, cf. ... 2 Chronicles 26:20), may well have made them hesitate. To allay their fears the king undertakes to offer the first of the sacrifices. And that their fears of a Divine interposition were not groundless the sequel shows.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, continues about Jeroboam’s sin: “The sin of Jeroboam and his “way of life” to which the historian often refers (15:30, 34 and twenty other times in the books of Kings; cf. Hos., Amos) is clearly describes as:

- (i) Breaking up the unity of God’s people, both physically (vv. 25-26) and spiritually (vv. 26-27)
- (ii) Creating man-made idols to be worshipped as national gods (vv. 28-30).
- (iii) Increasing the role of Israelite sanctuaries. ... For building up shrines cf. 1 Kings 13:32; 2 Kings 17:29, and for detestable practices cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-13.
- (iv) Diverting worship from the LORD and his house in Jerusalem where his presence was attested and declared.
- (v) Possibly taking on himself the role of priest (vv. 32-33; cf. 2 Chr. 26:16-21).
- (vi) Introducing non-levitical priests taken from “every class of the people” (v. 31, NEB) against Deuteronomy 18:1-8. This action led to the evacuation of true priests (2 Chr. 11:13-14) and the introduction of priests from Canaanite shrines in the country (1 Kgs 13:33-34).

(vii) Reorganizing the religious calendar and festivals (vv. 32-33). The Feast of Tabernacles was put a month early (cf. Lev. 23:24) to forestall that at Jerusalem. There is no sure evidence that this was to link it with the common New Year Festival ... at which a new king was inaugurated. It may have been a new institution and not simply to adjust the calendar to the solar year Nor is it likely that Jerusalem itself made the change of timing.

Each of these actions defied and broke God-given requirements in the law and implied that civil matters were considered more important than religious principle and practice. Such expediency directly forfeited God's promise (11:38) and brought upon the sinner punishment that was self-inflicted yet divinely allowed."

b. Jeroboam and the prophets (13:1 – 14:18)

Although Donald J. Wiseman, in 1 and 2 Kings does not divide these verses into sections, we will do so for clarity's sake.

(1) Prophecy against the altar 13:1-3

1 By the word of the Lord a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering.

2 He cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord: "O altar, altar! This is what the Lord says: "A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.""

3 That same day the man of God gave a sign: "This is the sign the Lord has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: "This is one of the most remarkable instances in the OT of prophecy demonstrating God's omniscience. This forecast is on a level with the Isaianic prophecy regarding Cyrus (Isa 45:1 ff.). Because this forecast is so remarkable, 'liberal' Biblical critics have sought to reduce it to an ad hoc status. However, to regard this as a historical insertion, coming to pass after the day of King Josiah, is utterly to fail to understand the true genius of prophecy. For the remarkable fulfillment of this prediction see 2 Kings 23:15-20."

If prophecy about future events had no genuine significance, we would have to conclude that God had no knowledge of time, which He created. For us, who live within the limitations of time, it is very difficult to understand how a person, in this case God, could live outside time and look at past, present and future as one single event. We may discover more about this mystery when we enter eternity ourselves.

If Jeroboam had any trouble believing in prophecy, he was given enough proof of its validity when the altar on which he was bringing his sacrifices, broke immediately into pieces as the prophet spoke. Yet, he did not accept that fact as proof of the truth of this prophecy.

As indicated above, King Josiah would in fact destroy the altar, while sparing the grave of the prophet who foretold about it. We read: "Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones. Even the altar

at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin — even that altar and high place he demolished. He burned the high place and ground it to powder, and burned the Asherah pole also. Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the word of the Lord proclaimed by the man of God who foretold these things. The king asked, ‘What is that tombstone I see?’ The men of the city said, ‘It marks the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and pronounced against the altar of Bethel the very things you have done to it.’ “Leave it alone,’ he said. ‘Don’t let anyone disturb his bones.’ So they spared his bones and those of the prophet who had come from Samaria.”¹¹⁷

(2) Jeroboam’s hand sick and healed 13:4-6

4 When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, ‘seize him!’ But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back.

5 Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the Lord.

6 Then the king said to the man of God, “Intercede with the Lord your God and pray for me that my hand may be restored.” So the man of God interceded with the Lord, and the king’s hand was restored and became as it was before.

Jeroboam’s reaction to the prophet’s announcement indicates that he did not believe that the words of the prophet against the altar were, in fact, a divine message.

Interestingly, King Jeroboam was not the person addressed; the prophecy was given to the altar, which did crack immediately, spilling the ashes and, probably, the carcass of the animal being burned on it.

Although Jeroboam saw the miracle happen, he gave orders for the prophet to be arrested, angrily stretching out his hand to the man who had prophesied. That was when the second miracle happened; the king could not pull back his hand. The NIV reads that the hand ‘shriveled.’ The Hebrew word used is *yabesh*, which can mean: “to dry up.” But the word also has a suggestion of being ashamed. Bible scholars have tried to find the medical reason for this, but that is not important for understanding the punishment.

The result of the sign for Jeroboam was that God had his attention and he pleaded with the prophet to pray for his hand to be healed, which prayer was instantly answered.

(3) The king’s invitation refused 13:7-10

7 The king said to the man of God, “Come home with me and have something to eat, and I will give you a gift.”

8 But the man of God answered the king, “Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here.

9 For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: “You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.”“

10 So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel.

¹¹⁷ II Kings 23:14-18

Having seen both miracles happen as the result of the prophet's announcement, King Jeroboam changed the order for the prophet's arrest into an invitation for a friendly audience at the royal palace. 1 Kings 13:7

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: "Jeroboam was artful, invited the prophet to the royal table, not to do him honor, or show his gratitude for the restoration of his hand, but to win, by his courtesy and liberal hospitality, a person whom he could not crush by his power."

Adam Clarke's Commentary interprets this as an offer to the prophet to enter into Jeroboam's service and receive a salary.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "Jeroboam could not possibly have done less, after the signal service the man of God had rendered him, than invite him to his palace. Eastern courtesy alone ... would require him to offer hospitality to his benefactor. And he could scarcely hope that any hospitality would either neutralize the impression which the recent miracles had made, or win over to his side one who had a direct commission from the Most High to oppose him. ... A feeling of gratitude may have prompted the invitation, while the king at the same time was very sensible of the advantages which would accrue to himself if it were accepted."

Although the royal invitation would have meant honor to the prophet, he refused it because of the direct divine orders he had received not to eat or drink in Israel or to return by the way he came. That order would be challenged twice, with disastrous results the second time.

(4) The prophet's invitation accepted 13:11-22

11 Now there was a certain old prophet living in Bethel, whose sons came and told him all that the man of God had done there that day. They also told their father what he had said to the king.

12 Their father asked them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him which road the man of God from Judah had taken.

13 So he said to his sons, 'saddle the donkey for me.' And when they had saddled the donkey for him, he mounted it

14 and rode after the man of God. He found him sitting under an oak tree and asked, Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" "I am," he replied.

15 So the prophet said to him, "Come home with me and eat."

16 The man of God said, "I cannot turn back and go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place.

17 I have been told by the word of the Lord: "You must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.""

18 The old prophet answered, "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the Lord: "Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water."" (But he was lying to him.)

19 So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house.

20 While they were sitting at the table, the word of the Lord came to the old prophet who had brought him back.

21 He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, “This is what the Lord says: “You have defied the word of the Lord and have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you.

22 You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.”“

This is one of the most remarkable sections in the book of 1 Kings. It deals with clear demonstrations of divine revelation in the words of a prophet, but also with using prophecy as a form of deception. The latter is what makes these verses rather puzzling.

May we see in the fact that the two prophets involved in the story remain anonymous an indication of God’s grace, who did not want to give us their identity?

One of my former veteran missionary colleagues, Walter Post, once gave me an outline of a sermon preached on this section. Referring to the prophet of Bethel, it read: “When God calls: - Do nothing less! – Do nothing more! – Do nothing else!”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “It is at first somewhat surprising to find one of the prophetic order residing here, at the very seat and stronghold of the apostasy, especially after what we read in ... 2 Chronicles 11:13-16, that the priests and Levites, and it would seem all devout worshippers of the Lord God of Israel, had left the country, and had gone over to Rehoboam. For we cannot suppose that a sense of duty had kept this prophet at his post The fact that he remained, not only in the kingdom, but at its ecclesiastical capital; that he stood by without protest when the schism was being effected, and that, though not present himself at the sacrifice, he permitted his sons to be there, is a sufficient index to his character. It is quite possible that strong political sympathies had warped his judgment, and that he had persuaded himself that the policy of Jeroboam was necessitated by the division of the kingdom, which he knew to be from the Lord, and which one of his own order had foretold. Or it may be that, despite his better judgment, he had gone with his tribe and the majority of the nation, and now felt it difficult to withdraw from a false position. Or, finally, he may have taken the side of Jeroboam because of the greater honors and rewards that prince had to bestow ... The sons of the prophet are not to be confounded with ‘the sons (i.e., disciples) of the prophets’ (... 2 Kings 2:3, 4); not merely because ‘the latter would scarcely have witnessed the golden calf worship.’”

In spite of *The Pulpit Commentary*’s surprise about the presence of a prophet in the northern kingdom, we must conclude that, if that man really had the spiritual gift of prophecy, he certainly did not have the spirit of truth in his heart.

No reason is given for the testing of the Judean prophet’s obedience. God permitted it, but He did not intend that man’s fall and death because of disobedience. That was, obviously, the work of the enemy.

We are given no background information about “the old prophet in Bethel,” who learned about what happened from his sons.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes correctly: “If this was a true prophet, he was a bad man, and in effecting the malevolent design he had in view, an emissary of Satan, Gods true prophets were holy men (2 Peter 1:21). But it appears that the prophetic gift, or at least occasional communications of that gift, were imparted to some who did not possess that character - of which Balaam presents a notable example. This seems to have been the case with this old prophet. He deceived the prophet of Judah

with a lie, uttered in the name of God, He may have been employed to announce communications from heaven; but his heart was not perfect toward God. He was unfaithful: he dwelt in a city of idolaters, and did not testify against their sin. He could not therefore be enlisted by Yahweh in the solemn service of reproofing Israel.”

The Judean prophet believed the man’s lie that “an angel said to [him] by the word of the Lord: ‘Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.’”

John’s advice to the New Testament church would have helped this prophet to stay clear from the pit into which he fell. We read: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”¹¹⁸

The story is told in quite some detail as to how the old prophet ordered his sons to saddle his donkey and how he traveled to find the one who had pronounced God’s judgment to Jeroboam. It could be that the man from Bethel spoke the truth when he said that he had received a message from an angel. As the Apostle Paul states: “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”¹¹⁹

So the deceived prophet went home with the false prophet from Bethel, evidently without first checking in his own spirit if the word was in fact the Word of God.

One important lesson to draw from this is that we must not accept without question the “guidance” other people say they received regarding God’s will for our life. If we keep our fellowship with the Lord clean, we may believe that He will show us personally what His will for us is. God may use others to guide us, but our obedience must be to the will of God, not to the wishes of man.

As the two were eating together, the Spirit of God spoke through the false prophet. That is obvious from the fact that what he prophesied really happened. The prophecy does not predict immediate death, but that the prophet’s body would not be buried in his family’s tomb. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “For a body to be unburied was a curse, hence the emphasis on detail of the place of burial. It was a disgrace to be buried away from the family among strangers.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The desire, common in a greater or less degree to all mankind, to rest after death amongst kindred dust, was especially strong in the Jew. It is evidenced by the common euphemism ‘he was gathered unto his fathers,’ and by the provisions of Abraham (... Genesis 23:4), Jacob (... Genesis 47:29; 49:29-31), and Joseph (... Genesis 1:25). See also the words of Barzillai (... 2 Samuel 19:37; and compare ... 2 Samuel 2:32). This denunciation did not necessarily imply a violent death ... or even a speedy death, but it prepared the man of God for some untimely end.”

(5) The first prophet killed 13:23-32

23 When the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his donkey for him.

24 As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him, and his body was thrown down on the road, with both the donkey and the lion standing beside it.

25 Some people who passed by saw the body thrown down there, with the lion standing beside the body, and they went and reported it in the city where the old prophet lived.

¹¹⁸ 1 John 1:4

¹¹⁹ II Cor. 11:14

26 When the prophet who had brought him back from his journey heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God who defied the word of the Lord. The Lord has given him over to the lion, which has mauled him and killed him, as the word of the Lord had warned him."

27 The prophet said to his sons, "saddle the donkey for me," and they did so.

28 Then he went out and found the body thrown down on the road, with the donkey and the lion standing beside it. The lion had neither eaten the body nor mauled the donkey.

29 So the prophet picked up the body of the man of God, laid it on the donkey, and brought it back to his own city to mourn for him and bury him.

30 Then he laid the body in his own tomb, and they mourned over him and said, "Oh, my brother!"

31 After burying him, he said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in the grave where the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones.

32 For the message he declared by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel and against all the shrines on the high places in the towns of Samaria will certainly come true."

It is not clear whether the prophet who had prophesied against the altar had traveled by donkey or on foot. We get the impression that the man from Bethel made the animal available for him. The Hebrew text does not have the possessive pronoun "his."

What followed next is another unusual feature in the story. A lion will attack for food. The fact that the lion merely killed the prophet and didn't even touch the donkey, and that the donkey stayed with the body and the lion is remarkable. But that is the scene that is depicted for us. We may assume that passengers would keep a safe distance.

When the old prophet heard the news he had his asked his sons to saddle his donkey and went to the scene of the killing to retrieve the body and give it a decent burial in his own town. His mourning over the body must have been partly caused by his own sense of guilt. He had deceived the prophet and caused him to disobey, which brought about his death.

As his last wish and testament he determined that he wanted to be buried in the same grave with the slain prophet at the time of his own death.

(6) No change in worship 13:33, 34

33 Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways, but once more appointed priests for the high places from all sorts of people. Anyone who wanted to become a priest he consecrated for the high places.

34 This was the sin of the house of Jeroboam that led to its downfall and to its destruction from the face of the earth.

The last two verses of the chapter do not reveal whether Jeroboam was informed about what happened to the prophet who had denounced his sin. We only learn that the king broke with God's revelation of Himself and continued "his evil ways," which in this

case meant that he determined how God ought to be worshipped instead of seeking God's will.

Jesus says: "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."¹²⁰ But there was no truth in Jeroboam's heart because God's Spirit was not in him. To present our "worship" before God without first seeking His revelation is like Cain's sacrifice. A "take it or leave it" attitude is an indication of the fact that we have no idea who God is. Jeroboam would find out, but then it would be too late.

(1) Abijah's sickness 14:1-4

*1 At that time Abijah son of Jeroboam became ill,
2 and Jeroboam said to his wife, "Go, disguise yourself, so you won't be recognized as the wife of Jeroboam. Then go to Shiloh. Ahijah the prophet is there — the one who told me I would be king over this people.
3 Take ten loaves of bread with you, some cakes and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what will happen to the boy."
4 So Jeroboam's wife did what he said and went to Ahijah's house in Shiloh. Now Ahijah could not see; his sight was gone because of his age.*

(2) The prophet forewarned 14:5, 6

*5 But the Lord had told Ahijah, "Jeroboam's wife is coming to ask you about her son, for he is ill, and you are to give her such and such an answer. When she arrives, she will pretend to be someone else."
6 So when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why this pretense? I have been sent to you with bad news.*

(3) Ahijah's prophecy 14:7-16

*7 Go, tell Jeroboam that this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "I raised you up from among the people and made you a leader over my people Israel.
8 I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes.
9 You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back.
10 " "Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in Israel — slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone.
11 Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country. The Lord has spoken!"
12 "As for you, go back home. When you set foot in your city, the boy will die.*

¹²⁰ John 4:24

13 All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord, the God of Israel, has found anything good.

14 “The Lord will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam. This is the day! What? Yes, even now.

15 And the Lord will strike Israel, so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their forefathers and scatter them beyond the River, because they provoked the Lord to anger by making Asherah poles.

16 And he will give Israel up because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit.”

(4) Abijah’s death 14:17, 18

17 Then Jeroboam’s wife got up and left and went to Tirzah. As soon as she stepped over the threshold of the house, the boy died.

18 They buried him, and all Israel mourned for him, as the Lord had said through his servant the prophet Ahijah.

B. The history of individual reigns (14:21 - 16:20)

i. Rehoboam of Judah (14:21-31)

a. Summary of reign (14:21-24).

21 Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his Name. His mother’s name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite.

22 Judah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than their fathers had done.

23 They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree.

24 There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “From now on *Judah* is used as the name of the Southern Kingdom with *Israel* for the Northern Kingdom. No synchronistic detail is appropriate as Jeroboam was never acknowledged as the rightful contemporary king of Israel. Other details of his reign and family are given in 2 Chronicles 11 – 12. Seventeen years = 930-913 BC. Jerusalem’s title as *the city the LORD had chosen ... in which to put his Name* is characteristic of Deuteronomy (12:21-26) and 1 Kings (8:16, 44; 11:13; cf. 9:3; 2 Chr. 12:13; Ps. 132:13). The mother’s name is only given for rulers of Judah ... Naamah was a daughter of Solomon through treaty-marriage with an Ammonitess (11:1); a LXX supplementary text makes her a daughter of Hanun son of Nahash (cf. 2 Sam. 10:2).”

Rehoboam's reign was relatively short, compared to that of his father, who reigned forty years. Solomon was, obviously, not yet twenty years of age when Rehoboam was born.

The idolatry, which had been introduced by Solomon's foreign wives, began to shoot its roots deeper in the ground during Rehoboam's reign. We do not read that Rehoboam practiced it himself, but he must not have taken any measures against it either.

Israel's idolatry was imported from Assyria. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* writes about this idol: "Like so much else in Canaanite religion, the name and worship of Asherah were borrowed from Assyria. She was the wife of the war-god Asir whose name was identified with that of the city of Assur with the result that he became the national god of Assyria. Since Asirtu was merely the feminine form of Asir, 'the superintendent' or 'leader,' it is probable that it was originally an epithet of Istar (Ashtoreth) of Nineveh. In the West, however, Asherah and Ashtoreth came to be distinguished from one another, Asherah being exclusively the goddess of fertility, whereas Ashtoreth passed into a moon-goddess."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "For the first three years the nation remained steadfast in the faith, and the kingdom was greatly strengthened and consolidated. The defection commenced when Rehoboam began to feel himself secure (... 2 Chronicles 12:1). It is to be observed, however, that the historian says 'Judah' (not Rehoboam) 'did evil,' etc. It is probable that a considerable section of the people approved of the idolatrous practices introduced in the preceding reign, and that Rehoboam was unable to repress them. It was his misfortune to have to reap the bitter fruits of Solomon's unfaithfulness], *and they provoked him to jealousy* [Heb. *made him jealous*. Same word in ... Exodus 20:5; 34:14; ... Numbers 5:14. The words of the covenant proclaimed the Lord a 'jealous God.' This is of course anthropomorphic language. The nation was regarded as the bride of Jehovah, and God is said to be made jealous, because idolatry was unfaithfulness to Him. The worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, it must be remembered, involved unutterable *immoralities*, hence the special fitness of the word, which is only used of idolatry of one kind or other."

Since Asherah was connected to the concept of fertility, her worship involved ritual sexual practices, such as homosexual ones, that were strictly forbidden in the Mosaic Law.¹²¹

b. Shishak's invasion (14:25-28)

25 In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem.

26 He carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made.

27 So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace.

28 Whenever the king went to the Lord's temple, the guards bore the shields, and afterward they returned them to the guardroom.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "This is the only reference to a political event in Rehoboam's reign which was taken as a sign of divine punishment and

¹²¹ Lev. 18:22

let to a temporary reformation (2 Chr. 12:2-12). Sheshonq I (Shishak) had founded the Egyptian (Libyan) Dynasty XXII (941-924 BC) and his raid into Palestine in this year (925 BC) is well attested on the Amon temple reliefs at Thebes (Karnak). From the one hundred and fifty place-names recorded there, his aim seems to have been to reassert Egyptian control over the main trade routes throughout Palestine and the Negeb. His force of 12,200 chariots and sixty divisions (60,000) of cavalry swept through the fortified areas of Judah exacting tribute, including a major payment from the temple treasure, made in vain to save Jerusalem itself (v. 26, 2 Chr. 12). As the Egyptians raided Israelite territory and set up a stele in Megiddo it may be that another aim was to maintain a hold over Jeroboam. It is significant that the Egyptians did not claim the capture of Jerusalem and a year later Shishak was dead.

The substitution of bronze for Solomon's gold shields (v. 27, cf. 10:16-17) shows the economic decline of Judah at this time. Yet the temple panoply and ritual was maintained."

Rehoboam's substitution of gold with bronze may have been more than an indication of economic decline; it also shows a tendency to maintain a front of affluence where no substance exists to back it up. It seems that Rehoboam continued the tendency, began by his father Solomon, to keep up the outer appearance, even when there was no longer any spiritual content.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary observes correctly: 'sin makes the gold become dim, changes the most fine gold, and turns it into brass.'

The Pulpit Commentary states: "He changed his father's religion, as his shields, from gold to brass." Actually, his father had already introduced the change, although not in terms of exchanging one kind of metal for another.

One wonders how much the population knew about the attempted deception. The well-polished brass may have fooled the people into thinking that the shields were gold. Nobody may have been allowed to come close enough to check. They must have been aware, of course, of the fact that the Egyptian king had taken the original ones.

c. The concluding formula for Rehoboam's reign (14:29-31).

29 As for the other events of Rehoboam's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?

30 There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

31 And Rehoboam rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite. And Abijah his son succeeded him as king.

For a fuller account of Rehoboam's achievements, we are referred to "the Book of Annals of the kings of Judah." Most Bible commentators believe this to be the Biblical books of First and Second Chronicles.

It seems strange that the name of the mother is given at the end instead of at the beginning, where it is normally found. We do not know which one of Solomon's one thousand wives Naamah was. It was, evidently, not the Egyptian princess, which was the first woman he married. She is called an Ammonite. According to the law, the Ammonites were to be considered as enemies of Israel. We read: "No Ammonite or

Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you.”¹²²

We are given no specifics about the “continual warfare” between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Rehoboam had attempted to regain the northern tribes when they declared themselves independent and had been told by the prophet Shemaiah not to attack.¹²³ But evidently there had been frequent border skirmishes that seem to have brought about no change in the existing condition.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: “The former was prohibited from entering on an aggressive war; but as the two kingdoms kept up a jealous rivalry, he might be forced into vigilant measures of defense, and frequent skirmishes would take place on the borders.”

ii. Abijah of Judah (15:1-8)

1 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijah became king of Judah,

2 and he reigned in Jerusalem three years. His mother’s name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom.

3 He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been.

4 Nevertheless, for David’s sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him and by making Jerusalem strong.

5 For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord’s commands all the days of his life — except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.

6 There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam throughout [Abijah’s] lifetime.

7 As for the other events of Abijah’s reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.

8 And Abijah rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. And Asa his son succeeded him as king.

The meaning of the name Abijah is “My father is Yah,” from Yahweh. Abijah did not live up to the meaning of his name. In some manuscripts of Second Chronicles his name is given as Abijam. That change may reflect his lack of spiritual consecration to God.

In the record of Rehoboam’s reign we do not read that he personally committed idolatry. His permissiveness that allowed it to go on during his reign was held against him. It seems that Abijah was more personally involved in the idolatrous practices of the population. Second Chronicles gives us greater details about the war incidents between the southern and northern kingdoms.¹²⁴

¹²² Deut. 23:3,4

¹²³ I Kings 2:22-24

¹²⁴ See II Chron. 16:3-20.

We are told that Abijah reigned for three years. Most Bible scholars take this as a Hebrew calculation of a period that actually covered only a little more than two years. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* gives this as 913 B.C. - 911 B.C.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about him: “He is censured for his religious corruption and divided loyalty to the LORD God yet, for David’s sake and in response to his faith, he was allowed a spectacular victory over the encircling Israelites whom he had challenged, for being ever more apostate than he (2 Chr. 13:3-20). His position and power was increased in Jerusalem (v. 4), and by the annexation of Bethel, Jeshanah and Ephraim (Ophrah) and their environs in the hill-country, he pushed the boundaries northwards. This is an instance of God blessing the unworthy for the sake of the worthy.”

There is an interesting reference to “a lamp” that refers to an earlier expression in connection with the ascension to the throne by Rehoboam. We read there: “I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name.”¹²⁵ The “lamp” in this case refers to a male descendant who would continue the name of David in the kingdom of Judah.

What God did for Judah was done for David’s sake. Those who were the object of God’s blessing were not worthy of it because of their personal testimony. We could say that, in the same way in our present day, God gives us His blessing “for Christ’s sake.” It is not our personal worth, but His that allows God to keep His hand upon our lives.

Jesus used the image of the lamp in connection with our testimony. He said in *The Sermon on the Mount*: “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”¹²⁶

In the physical sense of the word, David could not see the light of this lamp. He was no longer alive on earth. Whether this means that souls in heaven are aware of what happens on earth is a conclusion we have to be careful not to draw too easily.

God’s testimony about David is very impressive. Yet, it is made clear that David was not perfect or sinless. The reference to his sin with Bathsheba makes this plain. It was the fact that David believed in God’s forgiveness on the basis of the Old Testament sacrifices that made God treat him as if his heart was white as snow. If that was the case for the Old Testament believers, how much more for us, who have the perfect Lamb of God who bore our sins!

V.6 reads in the NIV: “There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam throughout [Abijah’s] lifetime.” Abijah’s name is between parentheses because the Hebrew text has Rehoboam’s name, which doesn’t seem to make much sense in the record of Abijah’s life. A footnote in the NIV reads: “Most Hebrew manuscripts; some Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac Abijam (that is, Abijah).” Some Bible scholars believe that the repetition is intentional. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes, however: “Several manuscripts have, ‘between Abijam and Jeroboam.’ This seems to be the correct reading in this connection.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: ‘such repetitions are quite in accordance with Eastern usage, and Rehoboam here stands for the house of Rehoboam, or the cause and kingdom which Rehoboam represented. The object of mentioning his name can hardly be ‘to remind the reader that Abijam inherited this war from his father,’ for it was only on

¹²⁵ I Kings 11:36

¹²⁶ Matt. 5:16

Rehoboam's death that the slumbering hostility blazed out into actual war. That there was warfare between Abijam and Jeroboam we know not only from ver. 7, but from ... 2 Chronicles 13:3-20 also." Most Bible scholars believe that this is a copying error.

iii. Asa of Judah (15:9-24).

a. Summary of reign (15:9-15).

9 In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa became king of Judah, 10 and he reigned in Jerusalem forty-one years. His grandmother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom.

11 Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done.

12 He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his fathers had made.

13 He even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down and burned it in the Kidron Valley.

14 Although he did not remove the high places, Asa's heart was fully committed to the Lord all his life.

15 He brought into the temple of the Lord the silver and gold and the articles that he and his father had dedicated.

The testimony about Asa's reign is a refreshing change from the negative comments the Scriptures have given about the previous kings, including Solomon. His "heart was fully committed to the Lord all his life." In the record of Second Chronicles about him we read: "Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God." And "He commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws and commands."¹²⁷

His reign was also one of the longer ones in Judah's history, which was probably the Lord's blessing in response to his faithful dedication and his effort to bring Judah's population back to the worship of Yahweh.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Asa and his reign: "He used a time of peace to begin religious reforms and to oust abuses and pagan trends. By God's help he defeated an Egyptian threat. Alas, despite his lifelong commitment (v.14) and the encouragement given by Azariah's prophetic words (2 Chr. 15:1-7), he moved away into distrust by renewing an alliance with the Arameans of Damascus. This single step would eventually lead to the downfall of Israel and Judah."

One thing lacking in Asa's understanding of God's will was the fact that he did not consider the place of worship of God to be the important issue. Although he removed the symbols of idolatry, he did not regard the temple in Jerusalem as the only place where God ought to be worshipped as He had indicated. As far as that was concerned he did not have David's vision.

The NIV reads that Maacah was his grandmother. The Hebrew text of v.10 reads however: "And his mother's name was Maacah, daughter of Abishalom." The problem is

¹²⁷ II Chron. 14:2, 4, 5

that the Hebrew word *bath* can be used in a rather open-ended form for parental relationships.

The question can be asked why, all of a sudden, the king's grandmother would be mentioned instead of his mother. The reason may be in the fact that she was one of the important influences in introducing idolatry in the nation.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about her: 'she must have been a woman of strong personality. Unfortunately, her influence was cast upon the side of idolatry. She maintained her position in the palace, however, till the reign of her grandson Asa. Possibly she acted as regent during his minority. Ultimately, she was degraded by him for an act of peculiar infamy.'

We learn from Asa's reformation that the idolatry practiced by the people had strong sexual overtones. Male prostitution, which had been considered despicable in Israel, was practiced openly in the worship of the different idols. Asherah was the goddess of fertility, which was the reason her worship was accompanied by overt sexual practices.

We read that Asa dedicated certain gold and silver items to the Lord. But we are not told where those items came from. *Barnes' Notes* informs us: "Asa's dedications may have been made from the spoils of Zerah the Ethiopian, who attacked him in his eleventh year (2 Chron 14:9, etc.). They were not deposited in the temple until his fifteenth year (2 Chron 15:10,18)."

b. The renewed war with Israel (15:16-22).

16 There was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel throughout their reigns.

17 Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah.

18 Asa then took all the silver and gold that was left in the treasuries of the Lord's temple and of his own palace. He entrusted it to his officials and sent them to Ben-Hadad son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, the king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus.

19 "Let there be a treaty between me and you," he said, "as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me."

20 Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his forces against the towns of Israel. He conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maacah and all Kinnereth in addition to Naphtali.

21 When Baasha heard this, he stopped building Ramah and withdrew to Tirzah.

22 Then King Asa issued an order to all Judah — no one was exempt — and they carried away from Ramah the stones and timber Baasha had been using there. With them King Asa built up Geba in Benjamin, and also Mizpah.

The war between the northern tribes and the southern ones, which had begun during the reign of Asa's father, continued during his time in power. But the confrontation seems to have been more serious and more involved than had been the case previously. Baasha, the king of the northern tribes, "fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “This statement probably refers to the reconquest of the three cities which Abijah had taken from Jeroboam (... 2 Chronicles 13:19), as Ramah could hardly have been rebuilt whilst Bethel remained in the hands of Judah.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “This was a reaction to Israel’s blockade of the north route from Jerusalem (cf. 9:17). They had penetrated as far south as Ramah ... Asa counted on his existing treaty-relations (of which Kings gives no detail) and possibly the queen mother’s Aramaean origin to invoke help from Ben-Hadad I of Damascus. It is noteworthy that the Chronicler rebukes Asa for trusting in this treaty relationship rather than the LORD and for this suppression of those who opposed his policy (2 Chr. 16:7-10). This is not mentioned here, as the stress is on the good and right Asa did as David’s successor.”

Asa tried to pay off Ben-Hadad, by sending him a substantial gift, asking him to break his covenant with King Baasha of Israel. Ironically, in order to do this, he had to take back all the treasures he had dedicated to the Lord. It is obvious that Asa did not demonstrate any faith in the Lord’s protection over Judah in this matter.

When Ben-Hadad was attacked by Damascus, he stopped the fortifications of Ramah. That was what Asa had hoped would happen. Asa conscripted all Israelite males to carry away all the material Ben-Hadad had been using and take it for the fortification of Geba and Mizpah.

c. The concluding formula for Asa’s reign (15:23-24).

23 As for all the other events of Asa’s reign, all his achievements, all he did and the cities he built, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? In his old age, however, his feet became diseased.

24 Then Asa rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the city of his father David. And Jehoshaphat his son succeeded him as king.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, states: “The closing statement of Asa’s reign includes the unusual note on his poor physical condition which 2 Chronicles 16:12 associates with his reliance on physicians rather than the LORD. The Old Testament usually commends the use of medical practitioners and prayer. The ailment is specifically stated to be in his feet (*et*, v.13) and is commonly interpreted as gout (podagra), described by the Babylonian Talmud as ‘like a needle in the raw flesh.’ But gout was uncommon in Palestine and ancient Egypt and it is more likely, in view of Asa’s age, the severity of the disease and death within two years, to have been a peripheral obstructive vascular disease with ensuing gangrene. Some interpret ‘feet’ as used euphemistically here for sexual organs (cf. ‘he covered his feet,’ AV Judg. 3:24) and find a reference to a venereal disease such as tertiary syphilis. But this has not yet been identified in the Old Testament period.”

iv. Nadab of Israel (15:25-32)

25 Nadab son of Jeroboam became king of Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years.

26 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, walking in the ways of his father and in his sin, which he had caused Israel to commit.

27 Baasha son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar plotted against him, and he struck him down at Gibbethon, a Philistine town, while Nadab and all Israel were besieging it.

28 Baasha killed Nadab in the third year of Asa king of Judah and succeeded him as king.

29 As soon as he began to reign, he killed Jeroboam's whole family. He did not leave Jeroboam anyone that breathed, but destroyed them all, according to the word of the Lord given through his servant Ahijah the Shilonite—

30 because of the sins Jeroboam had committed and had caused Israel to commit, and because he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger.

31 As for the other events of Nadab's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

32 There was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel throughout their reigns.

Our attention is drawn back to the northern kingdom. The historian reverts to the period before the reign of Baasha whom we met in the previous verses. Nadab was the last of the house of Jeroboam to occupy Israel's throne. His reign lasted only two years and he met his end by assassination.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, seems to take a rather positive view of Baasha and his actions. We read: "*Baasha* is here given his family name and place of place of origin (Issachar in south-west Galilee) to distinguish his father Ahijah from the person of the same name in Shiloh (v.29). ... Baasha's reign is introduced here to explain Nadab's death at his hand, which is interpreted as fulfillment of Ahijah's prophecy (14:10-16). That involved the extermination of Jeroboam's house. The justification for killing *anyone that breathed* in the regime now terminated seems terrible, but was a common practice of the time. David was expected to do this of Saul's house, but refrained. The purpose was initially to avoid any focus for reprisals or a blood feud after the coup (cf. 16:11; 1 Kgs 10:1-7; 11:1). It may here be related to the thoroughness of divine punishment (Deut. 9:14; 25:19) to prevent the deliberate spread of sin (v. 30). The command to the Israelites entering the land was for total destruction of those who opposed God (Deut. 7:2). Here that is taken as applying to fellow Hebrews who opposed God, and this required special prophetic sanction (v. 29). The contamination of sin must be prevented."

It could be argued that Dr. Wiseman confuses what was predicted prophetically with what met with God's approval. It seems more logical to interpret Baasha's actions as criminal acts, committed for the purpose of grabbing power, rather than a desire to obey the will of God. David's example, mentioned above, was more according to the divine purpose than Baasha's.

v. Baasha of Israel (15:33 – 16:7)

33 In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha son of Ahijah became king of all Israel in Tirzah, and he reigned twenty-four years.

34 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, walking in the ways of Jeroboam and in his sin, which he had caused Israel to commit.

16:1 - Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha:
2 "I lifted you up from the dust and made you leader of my people Israel, but you walked in the ways of Jeroboam and caused my people Israel to sin and to provoke me to anger by their sins.
3 So I am about to consume Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat.
4 Dogs will eat those belonging to Baasha who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country."
5 As for the other events of Baasha's reign, what he did and his achievements, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel? Baasha rested with his fathers and was buried in Tirzah. And Elah his son succeeded him as king.
7 Moreover, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Jehu son of Hanani to Baasha and his house, because of all the evil he had done in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger by the things he did, and becoming like the house of Jeroboam — and also because he destroyed it.

The fact that one dynasty replaced another in rapid succession on the throne of Israel, does not seem to be God's perfect plan for the nation. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states appropriately: "Nadab (910-909), the wicked son of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, came to the throne. It must be remembered that while some eight dynasties were succeeding each other in northern Israel, to the south of Judah but one dynasty, the Davidic house, held sway."

The Pulpit Commentary observes correctly: "Baasha owed his elevation to his own abilities or to his unscrupulous daring."

The Fausset's Bible Dictionary comments: "Though Baasha thus fulfilled the word of Jehovah by Ahijah, yet as not this but his own bloody minded ambition was his motive; he should be punished (Hos 1:4). His following Jeroboam's sins showed that his destruction of Jeroboam's house was not from zeal for God."

The Scripture's verdict over Baasha's reign is: 'He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.' The same formula is used to describe several of the kings of the northern kingdom. We read the same about Zimri, who assassinated Baasha and usurped the throne, about Omri and about Ahaziah.

The Lord sent Baasha a prophetic warning by means of the prophet Jehu. This Jehu is not to be confused with the Jehu who would later become king over Israel.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Baasha's reign: "God raises to leadership from the dust, as he sometimes does the poor (1 Sam. 2:8; Ps. 113:7, cf. Ps. 40:2) and Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14:7) and later Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:5). It is taken by some to refer to a divine (charismatic) appointment."

vi. Elah of Israel (16:8-14)

8 In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah son of Baasha became king of Israel, and he reigned in Tirzah two years.
9 Zimri, one of his officials, who had command of half his chariots, plotted against him. Elah was in Tirzah at the time, getting drunk in the home of Arza, the man in charge of the palace at Tirzah.

10 Zimri came in, struck him down and killed him in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah. Then he succeeded him as king.

11 As soon as he began to reign and was seated on the throne, he killed off Baasha's whole family. He did not spare a single male, whether relative or friend.

12 So Zimri destroyed the whole family of Baasha, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken against Baasha through the prophet Jehu—

13 because of all the sins Baasha and his son Elah had committed and had caused Israel to commit, so that they provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger by their worthless idols.

14 As for the other events of Elah's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

The text states that Elah reigned for two years. This is according to the Hebrew way of reckoning. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Elah's reign (886 B.C. - 885 B.C.), a brief and unhappy one, lasted just one year and ended in a violent death. Zimri, one of the captains of Elah's own guard, conspired against him and slew him."

The forty-one-year long reign of Asa is used as a time-measure for several of the kings of the northern kingdom. The fact that Elah was assassinated while he was drunk, among other features, does not speak well of his moral behavior.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "several points present themselves for notice here. (1) The example of Jeroboam has clearly had its full influence on the nation. 'The Lord's anointed' is no longer held in reverence, as in the days of David (1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 26:9, 16; 2 Samuel 1:14), nor is it accounted a sin to grasp at the crown.

(2) Zimri only does what Baasha had done before him. That prince was 'hoist with his own petard.'

(3) Elah would seem to have been a dissolute and pusillanimous prince. His place was clearly with his army at Gibbethon (ver. 15; cf. Jos. 8:12. 4). And as clearly it was not in the house of one of his subjects, even the attendant of his palace. 'An Oriental monarch... is precluded by etiquette from accepting the hospitality of his subjects' — [one Bible scholar], who further remarks that the low tastes which we here find Elah indulging 'had probably been formed before his father was exalted out of the dust.' As probably they were inherited direct from his father. Anyhow, they led to his destruction. It is clear that Elah's want of character, like Nadab's, suggested the conspiracy of Zimri.

(4) It is extremely probable, though not absolutely certain, as [the above-mentioned scholar] affirms, that Arza was one of the conspirators, and that the wretched prince had been decoyed to his house and made drunk, with a view to his murder there."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Zimri's regicide: "The total extinction of the family (cf. 15:25) was planned so as to leave neither male nor 'kinfolk' (AV), that is, male relatives (as NIV) who would have to moral obligation to act in blood revenge (*go'elim*)."

As noted earlier, although this murderous act had been prophetically predicted, it does not mean that it was God's perfect will for the nation of Israel.

vii. Zimri of Israel (16:15-20)

15 In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri reigned in Tirzah seven days. The army was encamped near Gibbethon, a Philistine town.

16 When the Israelites in the camp heard that Zimri had plotted against the king and murdered him, they proclaimed Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that very day there in the camp.

17 Then Omri and all the Israelites with him withdrew from Gibbethon and laid siege to Tirzah.

18 When Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the royal palace and set the palace on fire around him. So he died,

19 because of the sins he had committed, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord and walking in the ways of Jeroboam and in the sin he had committed and had caused Israel to commit.

20 As for the other events of Zimri's reign, and the rebellion he carried out, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

Zimri's reign over the northern kingdom is the shortest of all in the Biblical record and it may be the shortest of any king who ever ruled on earth.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Zimri's murders: "Zimri went a step farther than Baasha had gone. He was not content with extirpating the royal family, but put to death the partisans of the house, all who would be likely to sympathize with Elah or to resent his murder."

The name Zimri, which probably means "wild sheep," or "wild goat," became proverbial. When Jehu, who would later occupy the throne, encountered Queen Jezebel, we read: "When Jezebel heard about it, she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, 'Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?'"¹²⁸

Zimri became also the first king in the Bible who committed suicide.

C. The house of Omri (16:21 – 22:40)

i. Omri of Israel (16:21-28)

21 Then the people of Israel were split into two factions; half supported Tibni son of Ginath for king, and the other half supported Omri.

22 But Omri's followers proved stronger than those of Tibni son of Ginath. So Tibni died and Omri became king.

23 In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned twelve years, six of them in Tirzah.

24 He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver and built a city on the hill, calling it Samaria, after Shemer, the name of the former owner of the hill.

25 But Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him.

26 He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat and in his sin, which he had

¹²⁸ II Kings 9:30,31

caused Israel to commit, so that they provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger by their worthless idols.

27 As for the other events of Omri's reign, what he did and the things he achieved, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

28 Omri rested with his fathers and was buried in Samaria. And Ahab his son succeeded him as king.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "Civil war ... followed Zimri's death. *Tibni* received sufficient popular support to oppose Omri despite the latter's acceptance by the army. Tibni must have held out against Omri for three to four years (cf. vv. 15, 29) and have been counted as an official ruler of Israel, since the latter did not become king until three years after the death of Zimri. The text does not say that Tibni was ever actually made king. There is no evidence that this was a clash between popular democracy and a formally established dynasty, nor that the record of Tibni's 'death' refers to his being divested of royal authority rather than is physical demise."

Whether the friction between Tibni and Omri can be labeled a "civil war" is a difficult question to answer. We only read that popular opinion was divided as to who ought to occupy the throne after Zimri's death. The fact that the army supported Omri must have been a decisive feature. A king who has no army has no power to enforce his rule. David had been aware of this, which was the reason he kept on Joab as commander, although he wanted to rid himself several times of this unscrupulous general. On his deathbed he ordered Solomon to deal with Joab and execute the capital punishment which he had been unable carry out.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The only thing that is certain is that, the hereditary principle being overthrown, the crown appeared to be the legitimate prize of the strongest; and Tibni, who may have occupied a position of importance, or have had, somehow, a considerable following, resolved that Omri should not wear it without a fierce contest."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states: "Omri did not come into possession of the throne of Israel immediately but rather was obliged to contend for it. According to Josephus ... Tibni was slain by his opponents. But this meaning is not necessarily contained in the words so Tibni died.' It is to be taken that the latter met his death in the fierce engagements that followed the schism, five years later." The Bible does, indeed, not explain how Tibni's life ended.

The act for which Omri would be remembered in history was his purchase of the hill of Samaria, and the building of a city which became the capital of the northern kingdom.

Our text reads that Omri called the hill Samaria, after Shemer, the name of the former owner of the hill." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, however, states: 'shemer may be an ancient clan name. The fact, however, that the mountain was called Shomeron when Omri bought it makes one doubt that the city of Samaria was named after Shemer; the passage is questionable. The real etymology of Samaria roots it in 'watch mountain.'"

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about Omri's exploits: "Excavations at Samaria ... show that Omri was the first builder on the one-hundred-meter-high hill. This site was a good choice, for it was to withstand several sieges (cf. 20:1-11; 2 Kgs

6:24-25; 18:9-10). Omri's plan could have been to gain (a) a personal possession he could bequeath; (b) an independent Canaanite center (cf. 16:32, Baal worship); (c) a communications center west of the hill ridge and so more open to trade with Tyre and Sidon than Tirzah, which faced east; and (d) an independent new capital for the Northern Kingdom as David had at Jerusalem to rally his supporters in the south.

'He outdid all his predecessors in wickedness' (NEB). Apart from a passing reference to his other achievements (v. 27), described as the mighty (warlike) acts (RSV) 'he shewed' (AV), his major contributions to the history of Israel as one of its most distinguished ruler are outside the purpose of this history. These include the unification of the Northern Kingdom, peace with Judah, effective control over north Moab where 'he humbled ... and occupied the land of Medaba' and built fortresses at Ataroth and Yahez according to the Moabite (Mesha') inscription of c. 830 BC ... Omri's dynasty lasted more than forty years. His strong government and administration earned recognition by the Assyrians, who for the next one and a half centuries still referred to Israel as 'the house/dynasty of Omri.'"

ii. Ahab of Israel (16:29-34)

29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years.

30 Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.

31 He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.

32 He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria.

33 Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.

34 In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua son of Nun.

The Pulpit Commentary introduces Ahab's reign with the following comment: "With the accession of Ahab a new main section of our history begins — the section which has its close in the destruction of the house of Omri by Jehu, as related in 2 Kings 10. And this reign is recorded at unusual length; in fact, it occupies nearly all the remaining portion of this volume, whereas the reigns of preceding kings have in several instances been dismissed in a few verses. It owes this distinction to the ministry of the great prophet Elijah by which it was marked, and, indeed, was profoundly influenced; but this ministry, it must be remembered, was necessitated by the critical circumstances of the time. It may be that 'every age thinks itself a crisis,' but no one can fail to see that this was one of the veritable turning points of Jewish history. One of the real 'decisive battles of the world' — that between the Lord and Baal — was then fought out. No wonder that our historian felt constrained to chronicle at length the transactions of a reign so pregnant both with good and evil for the people of the Lord and for the faith with which they had been put in trust. Indeed, the same guiding principle which led him to devote so many of

his pages to the reign of Solomon, when the theocratic kingdom was at its highest, impelled him to linger over the reign of Ahab when religion was at its lowest ebb. The secular historian, too often like the sundial which ‘counts no hours save those serene,’ draws a veil over the time of his country’s decadence, or touches its misfortunes with a light hand. It is only in the inspired records that we have an impartial register both of the glory and shame of a commonwealth.”

Ahab completely turned his back on the true worship of Yahweh and dedicated his whole religious life to Baal idolatry and all its consequences. His marriage to Jezebel played a very important role in this.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel and subsequent idolatry: “This marriage was doubtless mainly a political maneuver, based on the ancient treaty of peace made between Israel and Zidon under the leadership of Solomon. And Ahab may have thought that he was partially justified in this union. However, the cruel, licentious worship of Baal so permeated the worship of Tyre and Sidon that its infiltration into Israel through Jezebel was inevitable. The term Baal, the Hebrew word for ‘lord’ and ‘master,’ was employed more or less indiscriminately for a number of national gods. The Baal of Tyre, however, was Melkarth, the Tyrians’ chief god. Jezebel played the role of chief priestess of the Tyrian Baal. Melkarth was the kind of god that required the burning of innocent children as oblations upon his altar. One of the underlying reasons why Baal was worshiped was that he was believed to be lord of the land. To induce him to send rain upon the earth, fertility cult practices were engaged in and sacrifices were offered. Perhaps there was some excuse for Jezebel, who was born and reared as a heathen princess, to follow such a religion. But there was absolutely no justification for Ahab’s letting his wife introduce this heinous religion into the life of Israel.”

Ahab went well beyond “the sins of Jeroboam” in making the Baal worship the official religion of the Northern Kingdom. When Jeroboam installed the altars at Dan and Bethel, he still referred to them as places where Yahweh was worshipped. His sin was, at least initially, that he disobeyed the revelation of God’s will as to where He ought to be worshipped. Ahab completely moved away from the worship of Yahweh and replaced the God of Israel with the god of Sidon. This meant that he turned from the Creator of the universe, from the God of Israel, to one of God’s fallen angels: Satan.

The chapter ends with the mention of the rebuilding of Jericho, the first Canaanite city that was captured when Israel began to conquest of the Promised Land. When that happened, we read: “At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: ‘Cursed before the Lord is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: ‘At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates.’”¹²⁹

Joshua’s five-hundred-year-old curse was fulfilled in the rebuilding of the wall of that city. Bible scholars disagree about the way this fulfillment occurred. Some believe that Hiel lost his oldest boy through sickness as he began the reconstruction and that, at the completion of the wall, his youngest son also died a natural death. Others interpret this to mean that the children were sacrificed and that their bodies were entombed in the wall. There is some archeological evidence of the latter. In some cases bones of little children have been found encapsulated in ancient city walls.

¹²⁹ Josh. 6:26

Halley's Bible Handbook states: "The ruins of Jericho show that it was inhabited continuously from pre-Abrahamic times to about 1400 B. C. with no signs of habitation from then to the 9th century B. C. time of Ahab, the ruins were very small. In this stratum a large house was uncovered, which may have been the house of Hiel ... A jar with the remains of a child was found in the masonry of a gate; and two such jars in the walls of a house."

Such archeological finds indicate the horror of the kind of idolatry practiced during Ahab's reign.

iii. Elijah and the prophets against Ahab (17:1 – 22:40)

a. God keeps Elijah safe (17:1-16)

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

2 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah:

3 "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan.

4 You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there."

5 So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

7 Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

8 Then the word of the Lord came to him:

9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?"

11 As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

12 "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread — only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it — and die."

13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'"

15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

James mentions that Elijah actually took the initiative by prayer that the Lord would send an extended drought to Israel in order to get the attention of Ahab and the people, in order to bring the nation back to God. We read: "Elijah was a man just like us.

He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”¹³⁰

Elijah’s announcement to King Ahab was not only an act of faith, it was also heroic. It could have cost him his life. The king could easily have arrested him and condemn him to death. Ahab must have been taken aback, which prevented him from handling the matter at the spur of the moment, or he may not have believed the prophet.

Elijah uses strong language: “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve...” Elijah emphasized that Ahab did not serve the God of Israel, although he was the king of Israel. He did not reign as king under God, which was his actual status.

As the drought set in and the crops failed, famine took over in the land and the whole nation began to suffer, Elijah himself included. But God made a special provision for his servant. Elijah is told to go east of the Jordan River and hide in a ravine. There would be a brook to provide him with water to drink and a flock of birds would come and feed him twice a day with bread and meat.

David would testify toward the end of his life: “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.”¹³¹

But the brook did dry up also and Elijah was told to go to Zarephath and stay there with a certain widow. God said to him: “I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.” Yet, as Elijah arrives at her place, it seems that she didn’t know anything about the Lord’s provision. She would find out, however.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary observes: “The place he is sent to, to Zarephath, or Sarepta, a city of Sidon, out of the borders of the land of Israel, v. 9. Our Savior takes notice of this as an early and ancient indication of the favor of God designed for the poor Gentiles, in the fullness of time, Luke 4:25,26. Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, and some, it is likely, that would have bidden him welcome to their houses; yet he is sent to honor and bless with his presence a city of Sidon, a Gentile city, and so becomes (says another theologian) the first prophet of the Gentiles. Israel had corrupted themselves with the idolatries of the nations and become worse than they; justly therefore is the casting off of them the riches of the world. Elijah was hated and driven out by his countrymen; therefore, lo, he turns to the Gentiles, as the apostles were afterwards ordered to do, Acts 18:6. But why to a city of Sidon? Perhaps because the worship of Baal, which was now the crying sin of Israel, came lately thence with Jezebel, who was a Sidonian (ch. 16:31); therefore thither he shall go, that thence may be fetched the destroyer of that idolatry, ‘Even out of Sidon have I called my prophet, my reformer.’ Jezebel was Elijah’s greatest enemy; yet, to show her the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding-place for him even in her country. Christ never went among the Gentiles except once into the coast of Sidon, Matt 15:21.”

Elijah met the widow as he approached the city, even before entering it. He finds her outside the city gate, gathering wood for a fire. He calls to her and asks her for a drink of water. As she goes to get it, he adds: “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on the encounter: “Elijah was visiting enemy territory and showing the power of God in an area where Baal was worshipped, though ineffective through drought. He illustrates how a prophet can be

¹³⁰ James 5:17, 18

¹³¹ Ps. 37:25

accepted outside his own country (Luke 4:25-26). Elijah challenges a seemingly poor woman to help as she gathered mere stubble or *sticks* ('twigs,' *qss*) to respond to a stranger's request. But he was sent by God. His request for 'a bit of food' (v. 11) evoked the reply that she had no ready food, for a *cake of bread* (v. 13) needed baking on charcoal and she had 'nothing baked' (RSV, rather than *bread* or 'sustenance,' NEB). Similarly she had only a handful of 'barley-flour' (Heb. 'meal') in a large pottery jar (cf. 18:33; Judg. 7:16) and very little oil in a small portable flask (*sappahat*, NEB; RSV 'cruise,' NIV, NRSV *jug*) to prepare something to eat."

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Elijah's request to the widow for a drink of water: "It is clear that the water supply of Phoenicia had not entirely failed. 'The fresh streams of Lebanon would retain their life giving power long after the scantier springs of Palestine had been dried up.'"

In the woman's answer to Elijah, she uses the introductory words: "As surely as the Lord your God lives," (Yahweh Elohim). Considering the fact that she was not Jewish, that is a remarkable statement. It is true that she used the words "your God," but, although some Bible scholars put a good deal of emphasis on this, it does not exclude the possibility that she believed in God, at least as the Creator. The terms would be very strange in the mouth of an idol worshipper.

It is difficult for us to imagine the state of mind of a person who believes that she and her son will die of starvation, after having finished the last supply of food in the house. Even if she had no personal faith in the God of Israel, the fact that someone, who was obviously a Jew, would ask her for food and a drink, must have struck her as more than a mere coincidence.

Sharing her bread and water with this stranger would merely mean that she and her son would die a few days sooner; so what difference would that make! Such thoughts of despair may have crossed her mind.

In answer to that desperate condition, she hears, what Elijah calls "what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'" That divine promise must have made her believe that it was worth trying. In utterly desperate situations, one little thread of hope may be enough to cling to.

Her faith was justified by the fact that the flour and the oil did not diminish. Every time, after she had taken what was needed to bake bread, the same amount reappeared in the jars. Corrie ten Boom recounts a similar miracle happening in the Nazi concentration camp where she found herself with her sister Betty. They had a bottle of liquid vitamins, which they distributed to the women in their barracks. Corry testifies that the Lord replenished what was taken every day.

The miracle was sufficient proof for the widow in Zarephath to know that Elijah was God's prophet.

b. The raising of the widow's son (17:17-24).

17 Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.

18 She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

19 "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.

20 Then he cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"

21 Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

22 The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.

23 Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

Faith must be tested. The woman knew already that Elijah was a "man of God" by the fact that the food supply in her house kept on being replenished miraculously. Yet, it seems that this fact had not led her into a personal relationship with the God of Israel. Maybe Elijah's faith needed some testing also.

The widow's son became ill and died. The cause of death is not mentioned, but it cannot have been starvation.

Bible scholars have debated whether the boy had really died or had only lost consciousness. The Hebrew text reads literally: "there was no breath left in him."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "The boy was certainly dead according to the mother (v. 18), the prophet (v. 20) and observers of the time interval before treatment." Although, among some primitive tribes, such as we worked with in Papua, Indonesia, people are considered dead when they lose consciousness, there is no reason to believe that such was the case among the Israelites or their neighbors.

The mother took the death of her son to be a personal punishment for her sin. Whether this means that the birth of her son had been the result of an illegitimate relationship, or whether she just felt convicted by sins she had committed in her everyday life, cannot be determined. She believed that the death of her son was God's punishment for her. Actually, she blamed Elijah for her son's death, saying: "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

In answer to her bitter accusations, Elijah asks the mother to give him her son's body, which he takes to his bedroom. In praying for the boy, Elijah used the same word "to slay" that the mother had used, but applying it to what God had done. But his following act indicates that he did not believe that the boy's death was God's final word. In praying for the boy, he stretched himself out upon the dead boy's body, as if to share his own life with the boy. He had to do this three times, before anything happened. Persistence in prayer is a necessity.

In answer to this prayer, the boy's life came back to him. The Hebrew text reads literally: "and the soul of the child returned to him again, and he revived." The Hebrew word used is *chayah*, which simply means "to live." The first time the verb is used in Scripture is in: "When Adam *had lived* 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image."¹³²

¹³² Gen. 5:3

When the boy had come back to life, Elijah took him in his arms and brought him back to his mother. This suggests that the boy must have been rather young, probably not yet a teenager.

For the mother, this resurrection of her dead child was the final proof that, not only Elijah was a true servant of the God of Israel, but also that the God of Israel was the true God. She already had had some proof of this in the replenishing of her daily food supplies, but the miracle of life was greater than the miracle of sustenance.

c. Confrontation and vindication (18:1-46).

1 After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land."

2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria, 3 and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord.

4 While Jezebel was killing off the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.)

5 Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals."

6 So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

7 As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?"

8 "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"

9 "What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?"

10 As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you.

11 But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.'

12 I don't know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the Lord since my youth.

13 Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord? I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water.

14 And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!"

15 Elijah said, "As the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today."

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

18 "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals.

19 Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And

bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

20 So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.

21 Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.

22 Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.

23 Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it.

24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire — he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

25 Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire."

26 So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "shout louder!" he said. "surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened."

28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.

29 Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was in ruins.

31 Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel."

32 With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed.

33 He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."

34 "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time.

35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.

37 Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord-he is God! The Lord-he is God!"

40 Then Elijah commanded them, 'seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!'" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

41 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."

42 So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

43 "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."

44 The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea".- So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"

45 Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.

46 The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

This is one of the great chapters in the book of I Kings. It may be one of the most important ones in all of the Old Testament.

Elijah had not predicted how long the drought in Israel would last. When the Lord spoke again to Elijah to present himself to King Ahab, the drought had already lasted three years. According to James, the exact period was "three and a half years."¹³³

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "This most dramatic story marks the turning point when the worship of the LORD is almost wiped out by the opposition. A single prophet challenges the whole state to return to God."

The Lord had promised the people of Israel to give them grass for their cattle, under the condition that they would obey His command. We read: 'so if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today — to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul — then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.'¹³⁴

The fact that the king of Israel had to go around the country, looking for grass, is the most ridiculous scene imaginable. It emphasized what happens when the living God, the Creator of the universe is being replaced by idols. Idols cannot create anything, not even grass!

Elijah is told by the Lord to present himself to King Ahab. In order to obtain an audience, Elijah finds Obadiah, who was, what we may call, the king's prime minister. Although he was working for a king who was the greatest idolater the nation had ever had, Obadiah was himself a devout believer. We read that he had saved a group of one hundred prophets of the Lord and had kept them out of the murderous clutches of Queen Jezebel.

¹³³ James 5:17

¹³⁴ Deut. 11:13-15

Elijah finds Obadiah as the latter was in search of some grass to keep the king's animals alive.

Obadiah's excuse for not announcing to Ahab that Elijah wants an audience sounds strange to us. He sees his life in danger, because Elijah had been the main object of Jezebel's search. She and her husband considered him to be the sole person responsible for the drought. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "This search for Elijah shows that Ahab regarded him as the author of the drought, and did not recognize it as sent by God."

Obadiah knew how intense had been the effort to locate Elijah and he considered the fact that the prophet had never been found to be a divine miracle. He was afraid that another of those miracles could cost him his own life. He believed that, as he was on his way to find the king, the Lord would again miraculously hide his prophet and that could cost him his head.

God had never made Elijah invisible; He had only kept him hidden where Ahab and Jezebel could not find him.

It is only when Elijah swears with an oath that he will not disappear, but will meet the king, that Obadiah is willing to go and tell Ahab. Obadiah's hiding the one hundred prophets had been much more dangerous than taking Elijah's message to the king.

When Ahab sees Elijah, he calls him "you troubler of Israel." The Hebrew word used is *'akar*, which in some case can refer to destruction, as in the warning Joshua gave to the people of Israel about the spoils of Jericho at the invasion of the land: "But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own *destruction* by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it."¹³⁵

Donald J. Wisheart, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Ahab's accusation to Elijah that he is the "troubler" of Israel: "Elijah was accused of being the troubler of Israel ('*akar* is 'taboo, cast out from [social] intercourse') because he was thought to have brought the drought (cf. 17:1), and incurred the wrath of Baals (v. 18, plural). This was a crime against the state worthy of death (like that of Achan, Josh 6:18; 7:25; and Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:24-29).

Elijah's reply is that Israel's trouble is not the dearth of rain but lack of faithfulness to God's covenant."

At this point it is Elijah who gives the commands to the king. As representative of the God under whose authority Ahab ruled the nation, the prophet orders the king to call a gathering of all the prophets of Baal and Asherah. The expression "who eat at Jezebel's table" probably means that the eight hundred fifty prophets were supported by the queen. Although she was the main one responsible for the country's idolatry, Ahab, as the king, bore the ultimate responsibility.

The meeting was to take place on Mount Carmel. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on the location chosen by Elijah for the confrontation: "Mount Carmel. A mountain range of surpassing beauty, consisting of many peaks intersected by hundreds of larger and smaller ravines. It extends about thirteen miles in a southeasterly direction, and at its western end drops off sharply into the Mediterranean, near Haifa. On one of the promontories Elijah chose to stage the 'battle of the gods,' between the gods of the heathen Phoenicians, represented by the Baalim, and the living God, Jehovah. It is

¹³⁵ Josh. 6:18

probable that the prophet selected this spot first for its natural geographic prominence, but also because it was debated ground between Israel and Phoenicia, and because the Canaanites believed Mount Carmel was the especial dwelling place of the gods. If this interpretation be correct, Elijah, like saints before and after him, dared to do battle with ‘the spirit of wickedness in high places’ even from the heights of Carmel itself. So confident was he of the outcome that he made it as difficult as possible for himself and for his cause to win, yet defied Baal to be the victor.”

We are not told how much time elapsed between Elijah’s private meeting with King Ahab and the gathering on Mount Carmel. It must have taken several weeks to organize a large meeting like that, where not only the Baal priests, but most of the people of the kingdom gathered.

Elijah took charge of the procedures, challenging the people to a decision. He received no answer to his question “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”

The Hebrew text reads literally: “How long halt you between two opinions?” The Hebrew verb used is *pacach*, which literally means “to hop,” or “to limp.” In some context it can mean “to pass over” as in “The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will *pass over* you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”¹³⁶ But it can also mean “to be lame,” as in the context of the verse: “Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became *crippled*. His name was Mephibosheth.”¹³⁷

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on Elijah’s challenge to the people: “After gathering the people of Israel together, Elijah issued his challenge to them. How long halt ye between two opinions? (AV). Rather, How long go ye hobbling between the two forks of the road? Whichever translation one takes, the meaning is crystal clear. The issue was before them. A clear decision must be made. If Baal was to be god, Jehovah must be renounced. If Jehovah was to reign as God, Baal and all his worship must be forever abandoned. Many in Israel were probably tempted to compromise. Elijah, with whom no compromise was possible, saw clearly the radical character of the two issues and called for a definite decision. Such men always enjoy the blessings of God despite temporary unpopularity with the masses.”

Bible scholars have argued about the lack of response by the people. They remained mute. *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “The people were mute. They could not but feel the logical force of Elijah’s argument; but they were not prepared at once to act upon it. They wished to unite the worship of Yahweh with that of Baal-to avoid breaking with the past and completely rejecting the old national worship, yet at the same time to have the enjoyment of the new rites, which were certainly sensuous, and probably impure.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: “The controversy, therefore, did not consist in a direct opposition between the worship of Yahweh and that of Baal; for the latter party, like the pagan in general, tolerated the worship of other deities along with their own favorite idols; but, as [one Bible scholar] states it ... ‘the persecution was directed against those who, like Elijah, bore powerful testimony against

¹³⁶ Ex. 12:13

¹³⁷ II Sam. 4:4

the union of what was irreconcilable, who loudly maintained that Yahweh identified with Baal was no longer Yahweh. The proposal which Elijah made from this point of view, that they should see whether Yahweh was God, or Baal, the priests of Baal, from their point of view, understood to be, whether Yahweh-Baal was God, or Yahweh in perfect exclusiveness. The question that he put before making his proposal plainly implies, that in the popular opinion these heterogeneous religious elements were blended in one' (cf. Hos 2:11)."

The Pulpit Commentary states about the people's silence: "Not only were they awed by the presence of the king and the priests of Baal on the one side, and of Elijah on the other, but they were 'convicted by their own consciences,' and so were speechless (... Matthew 22:12)." It seems to have been more that the people thought it easier to "go with the flow" than to take a stand.

Elijah's statement that he was the only prophet of Yahweh left in the nation was not literally true. Obadiah had informed him that he had hidden one hundred of the Lord's prophets. It was true, however, that Elijah stood alone as the LORD's representative and Baal was represented by four hundred fifty prophets.

Elijah's proposal that each group bring its own sacrifice, the Baal worshippers to Baal and he to Yahweh, but that they do not light their own fire, is accepted by the public. Whether the Baal priests felt comfortable with that proposal, we do not learn. But they could hardly have rejected it openly.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Elijah's proposal: "Either two separate adjacent altars, one to Baal (whether Baal of Carmel, Malquart or Shamen cannot be known), or just one to the LORD (Yahweh) which was repaired (v. 30). Elijah allowed choice of altars and bullocks to be sacrificed to avoid risk of any accusation of fraud. The people agreed (v. 24). The test was to be God-sent fire. The people believed Baal to represent the sun-god also and in their epics thought he rode the thunderclouds and sent lightning (as did the Hebrews the LORD, Pss 18:14; 104:3-4). Elijah's action as a priest offering sacrifice is not unusual. The Baalites 'danced wildly' round the altar (the same word as in the challenge, v.21; Heb *psh* denotes a circumambulation of the altar, cf. 'Baal of the Dance') as an act of devotion similar to that undertaken by pilgrims round the Ka'ba at Mecca. This was no rain-making ceremony."

The prayers of the Baal priests for Baal to send fire must have lasted for several hours. We do not learn at what time in the morning they began, but by noon no answer from the idol had been received. Elijah kept his calm for the first several hours, but at noon he began to have enough and started to taunt the priests by making a mockery of their prayers and their idol. In describing Baal, Elijah uses the word Elohim, which is normally only used for the Supreme Being. He describes Baal, however, as a mere human being, who would be able to be distracted by being in deep thought, being away from home, or being asleep. In one of David's psalms we read about Yahweh: "He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."¹³⁸ If Baal was the god the priests had made him out to be, he would not be able to slumber or sleep. If he were traveling, he would not be like Yahweh, the Omnipresent One. One of the most sarcastic words Elijah used is *siyg* "a withdrawal," which Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, interprets as "gone aside to

¹³⁸ Ps. 121:3,4

answer the call of nature,” which is the interpretation given to it by the Targum. Baal could not answer, because he was using the restroom!

The Baal priests respond to this by shouting louder and inflicting injuries upon their bodies by cutting themselves. None of their desperate prayers evoked any supernatural reaction and no fire came down from heaven to light their sacrifice.

When they finally cease their performance, either because of exhaustion or because Elijah steps in, saying their time is up, Elijah draws the attention of the people by saying “Come to me.”

Evidently, there still was an altar that had been dedicated to the Lord, but it was in ruin. This probably means that the stones of the old altar were still lying around, but they were scattered. Elijah gathered them in a way that seems to have symbolized the restoration of the nation of Israel. Describing Elijah’s action, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: “Confidently, with calm assurance, the prophet now proceeded to call upon the one true God of Israel. To build his altar, he selected twelve stones - one for each of the tribes of Israel. Though politically and socially divided, in the mind of God they were still one people, with one Lord and one Messianic expectation. Therefore, Elijah erected the altar with just twelve stones, as a testimony unto and against them. Round about the altar he next constructed a trench large enough to hold two measures, that is two bushels of seed.”

The writer describes in minute detail Elijah’s rebuilding of the altar. Elijah uses twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel. He refers to the name Israel, as the one given to Jacob. At Jacob’s struggle at Peniel, the angel had told him: “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” “Jacob” meant “heel grabber.” We read about the birth of Isaac and Rebekah’s twins: “After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob.¹³⁹ The name acquired the meaning of ‘supplanter.’” When Jacob stole his father’s blessing as the oldest son, we read: “Esau said, ‘Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!’”¹⁴⁰

The nation had been like Jacob, not only cheating in their worship of God, but cheating themselves in leaving, what Jeremiah called: “the spring of living water.”¹⁴¹

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Elijah’s rebuilding of the altar: “The twelve stones represented the true Israel (as at Gilgal, Josh 4:2-5) and the twelve tribes restored to united worship.”

The Pulpit Commentary writes: “It has been ... suggested that this altar may have dated from the time when there was no house built unto the name of the Lord. But it is just as likely that it had been restored, if not raised, by some of the ‘seven thousand who had not bowed their knees unto Baal,’ or by some of the faithful remaining in Israel after the calf-worship and the hostility between the two kingdoms had made worship at Jerusalem an impossibility. Anyhow we can hardly be mistaken in holding that this was one of the ‘altars’ (... 1 Kings 19:10), thrown down’ by command of Ahab or Jezebel. Elijah’s repairing it was an act of profound significance. It showed him as the restorer of the law and the true religion.”

¹³⁹ Gen. 25:26

¹⁴⁰ Gen. 27:36

¹⁴¹ Jer. 2:13

The same Commentary states about the number of stones used: “This number, too, was full of significance. Not only would it carry back their thoughts to the giving of the law (... Exodus 24:4; 28:21), and to their fathers’ entrance into the promised land (... Joshua 4:3,9), but it would remind them of the essential unity of the people, notwithstanding the division of the kingdom. The act was thus a protest against the schism.”

After building the altar, Elijah filled the trench around it with water. The NIV calls the trench “large enough to hold two seahs of seed.” In a footnote it is stated: “That is, probably about 13 quarts (about 15 liters).” It must have taken some effort to come up with about three buckets of water. Quoting another source, Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “In pouring the water Elijah was just ‘loading the dice against himself’ ... as a guarantee against fraud.”

So the sacrifice, the wood and the stones were saturated with water, as proof that no fire could have been hidden anywhere. If this sacrifice was to be consumed a miracle was needed to light it. We are not told where the water came from. Different Bible scholars have come up with different suggestions, but it would be well outside the scope of this study to go into that. It is not necessary to see a miracle in the volume of water obtained for the purpose of ruling out fraud.

“The time of the sacrifice” obviously refers to the evening sacrifice. *Barnes’ Notes* sets the time at “probably ‘the ninth hour,’ or three o’clock. Thus there might still remain about five hours of light, during which the other events of the day were accomplished.” That would be the time when, centuries later, Jesus would die on the cross.

Elijah opens his prayer with the words: “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “Two things are to be noticed here: first, that this formula had only once before been used, and that by God Himself, before the giving of law, at the burning bush. It was when God revealed Himself in flaming fire that He had proclaimed Himself the God of Abraham, etc. Secondly, that the variation ‘Israel’ is made designedly (cf. ver. 31), not only to proclaim the Lord as the ‘God of Israel’ (cf. ... 1 Kings 17:1), but also to suggest that the name and privileges of Israel belonged to all the sons of Jacob.”

The first point made in the appellation is that not Baal, but *Yahweh Elohim*, “Lord God” is the God of Israel. The second is that Elijah is God’s prophet and the priests of Baal are imposters and servants of Satan. Elijah asks God to show Himself by lighting the sacrifice. Although those words are not used here, they are implied in the agreement that was made between Elijah and the priests of Baal. Elijah also asks that God will do a work of grace in the hearts of the people. Only the Holy Spirit can bring about conviction of sin. Jesus said to the disciples about the Holy Spirit: “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”¹⁴²

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about this prayer: “The simple prayer (cf. v.24) contrasts with the long Baalistic ravings. He asks not just for a miraculous demonstration that Yahweh is God but for the conversion of Israel. He reminds God of his previous interventions, using ‘Jacob’ for Israel possibly as a term of rebuke for the latter’s apostasy. ... The people’s acknowledgment (v. 39) is itself an answer to prayer (cf. vv. 21, 24).”

¹⁴² John 16:8

The fire that fell, not only lit the wood of the sacrifice, it burned everything, including the twelve stones that had been used, the stones symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel. This reminds us of the statement in the Book of Hebrews: ‘so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”¹⁴³

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Not lightning, but supernatural light and heat emanating from God Himself. (Cf. ... Leviticus 9:24; ... 1 Chronicles 21:26; ... 2 Chronicles 7:1. Hebrews 12:29) fell, and consumed [Heb. ate up, devoured] the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust.”

The people’s reacting to this is that they shout: “Yahweh is Elohim, Yahweh is Elohim,” thus denying supremacy to Baal. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The people’s acknowledgment (v. 39) is itself an answer to prayer (cf. vv. 21, 24).”

It seems that, as the people shout their worship to YHWH, the priests of Baal make efforts to escape, fearing for their lives. Elijah orders them to be captured and he sees to it that they are immediately executed. If this appears to us as harsh and unusual punishment, we must remember that the worship of Baal required human sacrifices. These priests had been murderers of infants, some of them thrown alive in the open mouth of Baal’s burning fire. Their execution was the only way to wipe clean the slate of the nation.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “Elijah’s slaying of the prophets of Baal has been a point of contention for critics. Let it be remembered that this killing was in reprisal for the slaying of Jehovah’s prophets by Jezebel, and that death was the penalty prescribed by God for worshipping idols (Deut 13:13-15).” Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The slaughter of the Baal prophets was not an act of wanton cruelty but the necessary retribution, ordered by Elijah as the ‘new Moses’ on behalf of God, against false prophets as decreed in Deuteronomy (11:5, 13-18; 17:2-5) following the action of Moses and Phinehas (Num. 25:1-13).”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “It is almost certain, from their resorting to the Kishon for this purpose, that it was not quite dry at the time. Their blood would mingle with its waters, and the flood which the ‘great rain’ would presently produce (cf. ... Judges 5:21) would carry their corpses down to the sea.”

At this point we learn that King Ahab had been present at the whole ceremony at which the prophets of Baal had prayed in vain for fire and had witnessed God’s answer to Elijah’s prayer. The king, as well as the people, had received proof that YHWH was Elohim. It does not seem that this changed his heart as it did not change Jezebel’s.

Adam Clarke sees evidence in this that the slaying of the Baal priests was at the king’s consent. But that seems to be a hasty conclusion.

Elijah advises the king to “eat and drink” and then hurry home to escape the heavy rain that might obstruct his travel. Some see in this proof that there was a celebration, following the sacrifice, but Scripture does not indicate this. *Barnes’ Notes* states: “Ahab had descended the hill-side with Elijah, and witnessed the slaughter of the priests. Elijah now bade him ascend the hill again, and partake of the feast which was already prepared, and which always followed upon a sacrifice.”

The Pulpit Commentary disagrees, stating: “It is a mistake, however ... to suppose that he was bidden to ‘eat of the feast which always followed a sacrifice,’ for this was a

¹⁴³ Heb. 12:28,29

whole burnt offering and had been entirely consumed (ver. 38). It is probable that the attendants of the king had spread a tent for him upon the plateau, and had brought food for the day along with them.”

While Ahab ate and then departed, Elijah climbed Mount Carmel to pray for rain. As we observed before, in connection with James’ statement that the drought had come in answer to Elijah’s prayer,¹⁴⁴ the prophet did not take it for granted that rain would come without his prayer. *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “Either the wind, which in the East usually heralds rain, had begun to rise, and sighed through the forests of Carmel-or perhaps the sound was simply in the prophet’s ears, a mysterious intimation to him that the drought was to end, and rain to come that day.” But it seems doubtful that there were any indications of a change in weather. If that were the case, Elijah would not have felt such need to pray for it and he would certainly not have sent his servant to go and look for clouds to form. Elijah’s word to Ahab must have been a word of faith.

Elijah’s earnestness and intensity of prayer seems to indicate that there were no outward signs of any rain coming. He climbed to the top of Mount Carmel. His attitude in prayer was one of complete surrender. He knelt down and prayed with his head between his legs. We are not told how long he prayed before sending his servant to a place on the mountain from which he could see the Mediterranean and look for clouds. At this point Elijah’s faith is put to the test, almost more severely than before. He repeated his prayer seven times and seven times the servant was sent to look for cloud formations. After the seventh time, he sees “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” Normally this would not have been much of an indication of rain. But after a cloudless blue sky and a scorching sun had burnt the land for three and a half years, this was the most hopeful sign Elijah could get that his prayers were being answered again.

Evidently, Ahab was still around. The king must not have been in a hurry to depart, not believing that rain would keep him from traveling. So, Elijah sends his servant to the king, telling him to hurry home before getting drenched.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary describes, rather poetically, what happened: “The cloud ‘as small as a man’s hand’ rapidly increased till the heavens were covered with blackness. Lightning darted, serpent-like, and thunders rolled in the deep ravines of Carmel as the earth, long parched, awaited the welcome rain.”

Quoting another source, *The Pulpit Commentary* writes: “After heavy rain ... the Kishon, which ‘collects the whole drainage of this large basin’ ..., the Great Plain, soon becomes an impassable swamp (Judg. 5:21), ‘I can tell you from experience that in wet seasons it (the Wady) is extremely muddy, and then the Kishon causes great tribulation to the muleteers. Rarely indeed do they get over it without some of their animals sticking fast in its oozy bottom.’”

At this point Elijah displays such unbelievable energy that it seems impossible that it was merely generated by his own physique. Scripture states clearly: “The power of the Lord came upon Elijah.” This made him run down the mountain, ahead of the king’s chariot, drawn by horses. It takes more than human energy to outrun a horse, let alone a chariot drawn by several royal horses. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “Elijah was able to run twenty-seven kilometers to Ahab’s summer palace at Jezreel ... due to the ‘hand’ (RSV; NIV power of the LORD) which may not necessarily be so much supernatural power here (but cf. v. 12; 19:3; 2 Kgs 2:16) as due to a strong motivation.

¹⁴⁴ See James 5:17, 18.

Alternatively, *all the way* (cf. RSV) to the ‘entering in’ to *Jezreel* might mean he went to the point where the road turns off to Jezreel.” It seems, however, that the mention of “the power of the Lord” is reason enough to believe that it was a supernatural strength that allowed Elijah to outrun Ahab’s horses.

d. Elijah encourage (19:1-18)

Elijah flees to Horeb (19:1-8)

1 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,

4 while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."

6 He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."

8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

When Ahab gets home, he reports in detail what he witnessed and how Elijah had all the priests of Baal executed. Although he had been impressed by the fact that Elijah’s prayer had achieved what the Baal priests had failed to do, that is light the fire on the altar supernaturally, the facts left Jezebel untouched. She had dedicated her soul to Baal and nothing could bring her back from the clutches of Satan to which she had surrendered. So she sends a message to Elijah, telling him that he will be killed as he had killed her prophets.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “We can readily understand with what a sense of humiliation and shame the weak and excited king, who must have been awed and impressed by the strange portent he had witnessed, would recount the day’s proceedings to his imperious and headstrong consort, and with what intense mortification and rage she must have heard of the triumph of the proscribed religion and of the defeat and death of the priests of Baal. One might almost have expected that the testimony of an eyewitness, and that her husband, to the greatness and completeness of Elijah’s victory; that his unprejudiced, and indeed unwilling, account of the sacrifices, of the descent of the heavenly fire, of the cries it wrung from the people, etc., would have brought conviction to her mind and taught her how useless it was to kick against the pricks. But there are eyes so blinded (... 2 Corinthians 4:4) and hearts so steeled against the truth that no evidence can reach them, and this fierce persecutor of the prophets had long been given over to a reprobate mind. She listens to his story, but her one thought is of revenge.”

We are not told how Jezebel's message reached Elijah and why, instead of sending a message she didn't send some servants to capture Elijah and bring him to her to carry out her threat. Ahab's influence may have kept her from doing so. All Elijah receives is a threat. Some Bible scholars see in Jezebel's threat a proof that she was unable to do anything and that the sending of her message to Elijah gratified her impotent rage by threatening him with death the next day.

We could say that Jezebel could not touch Elijah because God protected him. That fact, however, escaped the prophet. He had faced, single-handedly the whole nation of Israel, without fear for his life. But the threat of this woman was more than he could deal with.

After acting in behalf of the Almighty in trying to bring back the nation to its relationship with God and His covenant, he experience demonic pressure that hit him unexpectedly.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes correctly: "The Bible typically exposes the weakness of a man of God, for Elijah exhibited symptoms of manic depression, wishing for death, together with loss of appetite, and inability to manage and with excessive self-pity."

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Elijah's reaction to Jezebel's message: "It is evident that for the moment Elijah had lost faith in God, otherwise he would certainly have waited for the 'word of the Lord,' which had hitherto invariably guided his movements (... 1 Kings 17:2, 8; 18:1). No doubt other emotions besides that of fear were struggling in his breast, and prominent among these was the feeling of profound disappointment and mortification. It is clear that he had hoped that the 'day of Carmel' would turn the heart of the entire nation back again (... 1 Kings 18:37), and the great shout of ver. 39, and the subsequent execution, at his command, of the men who had deceived and depraved the people, might well justify the most sanguine expectations. We can readily imagine, consequently, how, especially after the excitement and fatigues of that day, the threatening and defiant message of the queen would seem the death blow of his hopes, and how, utterly dispirited and broken down, he lost all trust, all faith, and, while fleeing for his life, 'requested for himself that he might die.'"

Although is it easy to find a psychological explanation for Elijah's emotional condition after the extreme emotional tensions to which he had been exposed, it seems difficult to accept that such reactions would occur in a person, who the day before had demonstrated such faith in God's power. A study could be made of the interplay between faith in the supernatural and one's emotions. But such is beyond the limitations of this study. We may observe, however, that deep spiritual involvement can deeply affect our human emotional condition to the point that we react with physical exhaustion. Elijah's outrunning Ahab's horses may also have had something to do with his extreme fatigue.

Elijah fled to Beersheba in Judah. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Elijah fled from the Northern Kingdom into the more friendly kingdom of Jehoshaphat. He went not merely to Judah proper but even 'to the end of civilization' - to Beersheba."

It seems that Elijah suffered from a clinical depression, which made him desire to die. He sought complete solitude to be able to sort out his conflicting emotions. He left his servant behind and traveled alone one day's journey into the desert of Judah.

His physical condition must not have helped his emotional health; he had not eaten anything for several days and was near physical collapse. God's prescription for his

suffering prophet was food and rest. After having prayed God to take his life, he falls asleep and is awakened by an angel who provides him with fresh-baked bread and water. Having eaten and drunk, he falls asleep again and is woken up a second time, going through the same motions of eating and drinking. The angel tells him that he has a long road ahead of him. He travels all the way into the desert to Mount Horeb where God had given the law to Moses when Israel journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land. At this historical place, Elijah meets the Lord.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about Elijah's travel: "Horeb ... lay about four hundred kilometers south of Beersheba. The forty days and forty nights marks a long time and identifies Elijah as a second Moses (Exod. 24:28; 34:28; Deut. 9:8-10), just as it did Christ (Matt. 4:2)."

It seems doubtful that Elijah made the long journey to Horeb without any stops or interruptions. It is more likely that he rested on the road but those stops are not mentioned. *Barnes' Notes* comments: "The old commentators generally understood this to mean that Elijah had no other food at all, and compared this long fast with that of Moses and that of our Lord... But the words do not exclude the notion of the prophet's having obtained such nourishment from roots and fruits as the desert offers to a wanderer, though these alone would not have sustained him."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: "He at whose prayer God moved the elements, now hid from the rage of a woman. However, he was not destined to spend the rest of his days as a fugitive, hunted by Jezebel and Ahab. Baal had been defeated; Jehovah was upon the throne. And God had not yet finished with Elijah; he still had work for him to do."

The Lord appears to Elijah (19:9-18)

9 There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

11 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

14 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

15 The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram."

16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.

17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.

18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel — all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

Being at the same place where Moses had encountered the Lord, Elijah hears the voice of God, asking him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "The cave (as Heb.) may well have been the specific 'cleft of the of the rock' where God appeared to Moses (AV, Exod. 33:22) rather than the 'cave-region' generally." Obviously, the question is not meant for the omniscient God to be informed about something He didn't know. As God asked Adam after he committed his first sin: "Where are you?"¹⁴⁵ to make Adam realize what he had done. So here the same question is asked of Elijah. God had not sent Elijah on this journey; it had been Elijah's panicky reaction to Jezebel's threat. God wanted His prophet to realize that he was outside the will of the Lord. Elijah no longer believed his life to be in God's hand. That is a very dangerous condition for any believer to be in. What Elijah needed was a new experience of the Lord.

When God speaks to him, Elijah answers as if God was not omniscient and had to be informed about what had happened to him. Elijah had to be brought back to reality. So God orders him to go outside and see the Lord "pass by." The Hebrew word used is *'abar*, which is the same word used for the Passover. We find it in the verse in which God says to Moses: "On that same night I will *pass through* Egypt and strike down every firstborn — both men and animals — and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord."¹⁴⁶

So Elijah goes out and stands on the rock and is exposed to three, rather violent kinds of weather: a hurricane, an earthquake and a fire. In none of these is Elijah conscious of the Lord's presence. Then comes "a gentle whisper." The Hebrew reads literally: "a still small voice." It is in this that Elijah recognizes the Lord's presence and he covers his face with his cloak. The prophet of thunder and lightning meets God in His silence.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "'The small voice' (AV) was a gentle whisper (cf. Heb. 'a thin [fine] subdued sound'), rather than 'a low murmuring sound' (NEB); 'stillness' is not incompatible with the words for 'sound, voice' ('a sound of sheer silence,' NRSV) and the word 'thin' (*daqqa*). The soft voice of God speaking to the conscience, illuminating the mind and stirring resolve in individual and nation may follow and is often preferable to the loud roaring and thunder of cosmic events at Sinai and Carmel. Elijah realized that he, like Moses, could not look at God and live (Exod. 33:20-22, cf. Gen. 32:30), so he covered his face."

When Elijah becomes conscious of God's presence, he does not completely return to reality. He tells God: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." Literally in Hebrew: "I have been very zealous for *Yahweh Elohim Tsabaa 'owt*." It was to Yahweh Elohim Tsabaa'owt he was saying this!

¹⁴⁵ Gen. 3:9

¹⁴⁶ Ex. 12:12

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Elijah's reaction to God's speaking to him: "What are we to understand from this repetition of the former answer? Has the lesson of this theophany been lost upon him? Has he failed to grasp its significance? It is probable that he only partially understood its meaning, and it certainly looks as if he still felt himself an injured and disappointed man; as if the recollection of the way in which his work had been frustrated still rankled in his soul. But though the words are the same, it is possible, and indeed probable, that the tone was entirely different; that instead of speaking, as he had spoken before, querulously and almost defiantly, he now, catching his inspiration from the still small voice, speaks with bated breath and profound self-humiliation. The facts are the same. He repeats them, because they and they alone explain why he is there, and because he cannot see as yet how they are to be remedied. But he is now conscious of a misgiving as to the wisdom and piety of his course. He feels he has acted hastily and faithlessly, and has wanted to do God's work in his own rough way. He will go back, if it be God's will; he will be content to wait God's time, and to follow His leading. The commission which is straightway given him almost proves that he had experienced a change. It implies that he is now fitted for his high ministry."

God's healing of Elijah's emotional condition comes in the form of a new charge. First of all, God tells him that he is "in the wrong desert." He is told to "go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus." And Elijah is given a multiple task to perform. He is told to anoint Hazael king over Aram and Jehu as king over Israel in the place of Ahab. And finally, he is to anoint Elisha as his eventual successor as prophet. God also tells him that he is wrong in assuming that he was the only person left in Israel to worship God. There was a company of seven thousand who had not bowed down to Baal and kissed the idol image. As far as his death was concerned, he would, like Moses, be taken up in glory in a supernatural way.

Some of these tasks would eventually not be performed by Elijah, but by Elisha, his replacement.

e. The call of Elisha (19:19-21).

19 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

20 Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-by," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"

21 So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

Elisha's call is one of the strangest in all of sacred history. We do not read about any verbal communication. Elijah simply takes his cloak and puts it on Elisha's shoulders. What happened here symbolically would happen again as Elijah was taken up in heaven. As a chariot of fire would take Elijah away, his cloak would fall off. We read

that Elisha “picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah” and put it on to take up the ministry that Elijah had left behind.¹⁴⁷

The scene reminds us of the one who, when called by Jesus to follow Him, said: “‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’”¹⁴⁸

Elijah’s answer to Elisha’s reaction to his call sounds strange to us: “*What have I done to you?*” Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings* comments: “What have I done to (prevent) you? (cf. NEB) could mean, ‘Go back, but remember what I have done to you.’ It might be a rebuke at any delay in following (Matt. 8:21; cf. Luke 5:11, 28). Burning the wooden yokes, rather than boiling the yoke of oxen (as RSV), marked a break with his past life. The farewell feast celebrated his new role in becoming the aide (NIV *attendant*; AV ‘servant’) to Elijah.”

f. Ahab’s wars (20:1-34).

1. Now Ben-Hadad king of Aram mustered his entire army. Accompanied by thirty-two kings with their horses and chariots, he went up and besieged Samaria and attacked it.

2 He sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel, saying, "This is what Ben-Hadad says:

3 ‘Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine.’”

4 The king of Israel answered, "Just as you say, my lord the king. I and all I have are yours."

5 The messengers came again and said, "This is what Ben-Hadad says: ‘I sent to demand your silver and gold, your wives and your children.

6 But about this time tomorrow I am going to send my officials to search your palace and the houses of your officials. They will seize everything you value and carry it away.’”

7 The king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, ‘see how this man is looking for trouble! When he sent for my wives and my children, my silver and my gold, I did not refuse him."

8 The elders and the people all answered, "Don’t listen to him or agree to his demands."

9 So he replied to Ben-Hadad’s messengers, "Tell my lord the king, ‘Your servant will do all you demanded the first time, but this demand I cannot meet.’” They left and took the answer back to Ben-Hadad.

10 Then Ben-Hadad sent another message to Ahab: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if enough dust remains in Samaria to give each of my men a handful."

11 The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: ‘One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.’”

12 Ben-Hadad heard this message while he and the kings were drinking in their tents, and he ordered his men: "Prepare to attack." So they prepared to attack the city.

¹⁴⁷ II Kings 2:13

¹⁴⁸ Luke 9:61,62

13 Meanwhile a prophet came to Ahab king of Israel and announced, "This is what the Lord says: 'Do you see this vast army? I will give it into your hand today, and then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

14 "But who will do this?" asked Ahab. The prophet replied, "This is what the Lord says: 'The young officers of the provincial commanders will do it.'" "And who will start the battle?" he asked. The prophet answered, "You will."

15 So Ahab summoned the young officers of the provincial commanders, 232 men. Then he assembled the rest of the Israelites, 7,000 in all.

16 They set out at noon while Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings allied with him were in their tents getting drunk.

17 The young officers of the provincial commanders went out first. Now Ben-Hadad had dispatched scouts, who reported, "Men are advancing from Samaria."

18 He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if they have come out for war, take them alive."

19 The young officers of the provincial commanders marched out of the city with the army behind them

20 and each one struck down his opponent. At that, the Arameans fled, with the Israelites in pursuit. But Ben-Hadad king of Aram escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen.

21 The king of Israel advanced and overpowered the horses and chariots and inflicted heavy losses on the Arameans.

22 Afterward, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, 'strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again.'

23 Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they.

24 Do this: Remove all the kings from their commands and replace them with other officers.

25 You must also raise an army like the one you lost — horse for horse and chariot for chariot — so we can fight Israel on the plains. Then surely we will be stronger than they." He agreed with them and acted accordingly.

26 The next spring Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

27 When the Israelites were also mustered and given provisions, they marched out to meet them. The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats, while the Arameans covered the countryside.

28 The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the Lord says: 'Because the Arameans think the Lord is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the Lord.'"

29 For seven days they camped opposite each other, and on the seventh day the battle was joined. The Israelites inflicted a hundred thousand casualties on the Aramean foot soldiers in one day.

30 The rest of them escaped to the city of Aphek, where the wall collapsed on twenty-seven thousand of them. And Ben-Hadad fled to the city and hid in an inner room.

31 His officials said to him, "Look, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful. Let us go to the king of Israel with sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads. Perhaps he will spare your life."

32 Wearing sackcloth around their waists and ropes around their heads, they went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says: 'Please let me live.'" The king answered, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

33 The men took this as a good sign and were quick to pick up his word. "Yes, your brother Ben-Hadad!" they said. "Go and get him," the king said. When Ben-Hadad came out, Ahab had him come up into his chariot.

34 "I will return the cities my father took from your father," Ben-Hadad offered. "You may set up your own market areas in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." [Ahab said,] "On the basis of a treaty I will set you free." So he made a treaty with him, and let him go.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, introduces this section with: "The history turns from that of Elijah to recount two wars in the campaign between Aram and Israel at Samaria (20:1-21) and Aphek (vv. 22-34). Both accounts underline that this was the final opportunity for Ahab to show whether he would obey God's word through his prophet, and both stress the danger of punishment and reverse if the LORD's command was not carried out to the full. These narratives prepare for the death of Ahab and the abandonment of a rebellious Israel."

Barnes' Notes comments on the political conditions of that period: "Damascus had in the reign of this Ben-Hadad become the center of an important monarchy, which may not improbably have extended from the Euphrates to the northern border of Israel. The Assyrian inscriptions show that this country was about the period in question parceled out into a multitude of petty kingdoms, the chief tribes who possessed it being the Hittites, the Hamathites, and the Syrians of Damascus."

About Ben-Hadad's army, the commentary states: "The Assyrian inscriptions show us how very important an army of the service the chariot force was reckoned by the Syrians. A king, who has been identified with this Ben-Hadad, brought into the field against Assyria nearly four thousand chariots."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "The object of this expedition was clearly to humble and to plunder the kingdom of Samaria. It would almost appear, from the animus of the Syrian king and the studied offensiveness of his messages, as if Ahab or Israel must have given him dire offence. But Ben-Hadad was clearly a vain and overbearing and tyrannical prince, and the only crime of Israel may have been that it was independent of him, or had refused to do him homage.

Nothing reveals Ben-hadad's object more clearly than the mention of Ahab's wives. When we consider how jealously the seraglio of an Eastern prince is guarded, and how the surrender of the harem is a virtual surrender of the throne (... 2 Samuel 16:21, 22 ...), and certainly a surrender of all manhood and self-respect, we see that his aim was to wound Ahab in his tenderest point, to humble him to the lowest depths of degradation, and possibly to force a quarrel upon him."

There is in the relay of messages between Ben-Hadad and Ahab some terminology that seems excessively meek and humiliating to us. It may be that Ahab said this, while he had no intention to allow Ben-Hadad to plunder him as he threatened to do.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about Ben-Hadad's claims: "His claim that Ahab was his vassal is shown by Ahab addressing him as 'my lord the king,' which follows common ancient Near Eastern terminology, so the attack could imply that Ahab had rebelled against him. Similarly '*all I have are yours*' (v. 4) were normally words used by a subordinate and were employed by Ahab formally to avoid the plundering of his capital.

The Aramean reply is more specific and was a statement designed to instigate war rather than to imply discontent with a merely verbal submission. *To search your palaces and houses* implies handing over the whole city (cf. REB 'ransack')."

The elders Ahab consulted were probably the members of his advisory council. We find such a council consulted by Rehoboam as he ascended his father's throne.¹⁴⁹ Ahab's elders advise him to disregard Ben-Hadad's threat and simply ignore the demand. So Ahab sent Ben-Hadad's delegation back with the answer that he cannot accept the second demand, which would amount to a complete surrender of his nation.

There may also be doubt about Ahab's willingness to surrender to Ben-Hadad's intent to take his harem and all his possessions. Much of this language must be considered to be cultural politeness. The words: "this man is looking for trouble!" sound like the understatement of the year.

When Ben-Hadad declared that he would reduce the whole city of Samaria to a handful of dust, Ahab answers more confidently that he should not count his chicks before they hatch. "One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off" sounds like a proverb.

Ben-Hadad seems to have been overly confident that he could crush Ahab and his kingdom. We see him in his army headquarters getting drunk as he orders the attack. The Hebrew word used is *shathah*, "to imbibe." It is the same word used for Noah about whom we read: "When he *drank* some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent."¹⁵⁰

In the Israeli camp Ahab receives a message from the Lord by means of an unidentified prophet, who tells him that the whole Aramean army would be defeated by the Israelites. Ahab asks the prophet who will lead the attack and he receives the answer: "The young officers of the provincial commanders will do it."

The purpose of this prophetic message was to prove to Ahab that God was in control. This was a fact that Ahab had failed to recognize most of his life.

It seems that Ahab had been waiting to be attacked and that fear of the Aramean army had ruled out any thought of taking the initiative by attacking. As Ahab had been overly afraid, Ben-Hadad had been overly confident to the point that he was getting drunk in the middle of the day. The Aramean king did not plan to participate personally in the attack. He simply gave the orders while celebrating a victory that he had not yet won.

In obedience to the prophetic message he had received, Ahab readies the youngest of his army officers. The Hebrew word used is *na`ar*, which is used elsewhere of an adolescent. Jeremiah used the word when God called him to a prophetic ministry. He told the Lord: "I do not know how to speak; I am only *a child*."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ I Kings 12:6

¹⁵⁰ Gen. 9:21

¹⁵¹ Jer. 1:6

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The agency by which the victory was won was purposely weak and feeble ..., in order that the work might be seen to be of God (cf. ... Judges 7:2; ... 1 Corinthians 1:27, 29). And this consideration makes against the supposition that the attacking body was composed of tried and skillful warriors.”

We could ask how such young people could be part of Ahab’s army. They were probably teenagers who had been in training to become part of the military as they grew up. They would, under normal circumstances, never be used to lead the attack against a powerful and well organized military force such as Ben-Hadad’s army must have been.

Paul’s words, used by the above quoted commentary, apply well to the condition described: “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”¹⁵²

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The plan had elements of surprise in timing (*noon*, vv. 12, 16), approach and tactics using a select group of 232 young (unmarried?) commanders (Heb. *nèarim*). Also the use of men in the initial attack selected by the provincial or ‘district-officers’ (NEB) responsible for both fiscal and military affairs, was unusual. They appeared to engage in individual combat (cf. David and Goliath) on the initiation of Ahab himself (v. 14). They may well have been mistaken initially for a delegation seeking terms of peace.”

Ben-Hadad’s scouts report to their king that they see a group approaching. What he seems to be saying is that his troops should not attack but capture them and bring them to him. Even though they might be a delegation sent to negotiate surrender. He had no idea that their coming might be an attack. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “We may trace in these words, possibly the influence of wine, but certainly the exasperation which Ahab’s last message had occasioned the king. So incensed is he that he will not respect the rights of ambassadors, and he is afraid lest belligerents should be slain before he can arraign them before him. Possibly he meant that they should be tortured or slain before his face.”

But as it turns out the approaching officers were not a delegation but an attacking army. As they approached the Aramean camp they killed everyone in their way. The surprise was so complete that it threw the whole enemy army into panic, which made them flee for their lives. Ahab won a complete victory, capturing the chariots and horses left behind in the panic.

The battle for Aphek (20:22-34).

22 *Afterward, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, ‘strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again.’*

23 *Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, “Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they.*

24 *Do this: Remove all the kings from their commands and replace them with other officers.*

¹⁵² I Cor. 1:27

25 *You must also raise an army like the one you lost — horse for horse and chariot for chariot — so we can fight Israel on the plains. Then surely we will be stronger than they." He agreed with them and acted accordingly.*

26 *The next spring Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.*

27 *When the Israelites were also mustered and given provisions, they marched out to meet them. The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats, while the Arameans covered the countryside.*

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31 *His officials said to him, "Look, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful. Let us go to the king of Israel with sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads. Perhaps he will spare your life."*

32 *Wearing sackcloth around their waists and ropes around their heads, they went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says: 'Please let me live.'" The king answered, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."*

33 *The men took this as a good sign and were quick to pick up his word. "Yes, your brother Ben-Hadad!" they said. "Go and get him," the king said. When Ben-Hadad came out, Ahab had him come up into his chariot.*

34 *"I will return the cities my father took from your father," Ben-Hadad offered. "You may set up your own market areas in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." [Ahab said,] "On the basis of a treaty I will set you free." So he made a treaty with him, and let him go.*

The easy victory may have given Ahab the undue confidence that his future was secure and there would be no need to make defense plans for the next year. So God sends him another prophetic word.

We must remember that the king had not recognized God's hand in the deliverance he had received. It is therefore amazing to see how God keeps on communicating with him. This is proof of God's grace for the nation of Israel.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "At times of success God warns of undue self-confidence. Practical steps must be taken ahead of time against an expected counter-attack. ... The Arameans believed that Yahweh, like their own gods, was limited geographically and viewed him as they did any other god. ... They thought that the previous action in hilly terrain precluded the use of chariots, so now they chose to fight in the plain with a change of commanders (v. 24) which, though not immediately successful, was to prove so later at Qarqar. The commanders chosen were the experienced provincial officers. (Assur. *pahāt*) rather than lower rank officers (NIV, NEB) or 'commanders' (RSV, cf. NRSV 'servants,' REB 'ministers') who would themselves raise the replacement troops. The place of battle was either Aphek east of Lake Galilee ... on the

route from Damascus to Israel near the junction of Yarmuk and Jordan rivers, or the Afek in the Esdraelon Valley near Endor. If the former, serious entry into Israel was prevented.”

The concept the Arameans had of Yahweh was that He was like one of their local deities. They did not recognize Him as the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. That is in itself an amazing fact. It seems that most people in the olden days had some idea that the world in which they lived had not come about by a “big bang.” Even the Stone Age tribal people with which we worked in Indonesia had a concept of a creator. What the Arameans could not imagine was that the Israelites did not worship any local idols. They therefore believed that Israel’s God was like one of theirs, a god who had only local authority. They believed Yahweh to be a “mountain god,” one who would have no power in valleys or plains. At the advice of his officers, Ben-Hadad replaced his army of mountain trained people with a group that would be able to fight in the plains. It was like a modern replacement of light artillery with tanks and canons.

There is nothing that triggers the ire of God more than when people compare him to idols with limited geographical power. When people tried to limit Him like that, God told Isaiah: “To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?”¹⁵³ The Creator of heaven and earth, of mountains and valleys would show the Arameans who He was!

Wars seemed to have been seasonal events at that time. We read about David: “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.”¹⁵⁴

The NIV describes the time as “the next spring.” The Hebrew text uses the expression: “the turn of the year.” There is a touch of humor in the comparison between the Aramean army as an overwhelming military force and the Israeli one as “two small flocks of goats.” That must have been the way the Israelites saw themselves, when looking at the enemy forces. It must have caused them to panic.

The same anonymous prophet comes to King Ahab and tells him that God will give him the victory over this enemy. This was done to prove to this king, who had no place for God in his life, that if God is for us, it doesn’t matter who is against us.

For a whole week the two armies faced each other without any military activity taking place. Ben-Hadad may have refrained from doing anything in order to gain a psychological victory before winning a military one. But the tactic worked against him. When God gave the sign of attack to Israel they massacred the Arameans, killing one hundred thousand infantry in one day. That made the Arameans flee, including their king.

Some Bible scholars have questioned the number of the slain, thinking that it is meant to be symbolic rather than literal. *The Pulpit Commentary* writes: “This prodigious slaughter may well create surprise. That two comparatively small companies should be able, physically, to slay, with the rude weapons of that age, 100,000 warriors, fighting for

¹⁵³ Isa. 40:12,18, 22

¹⁵⁴ II Sam. 11:1

their lives, seems hardly credible. It is probable, therefore, that the numbers here, as elsewhere, have been exaggerated in the course of transcription.”

Ben-Hadad’s fear for his own life paints a pathetic picture of this man who earlier had given his military orders while being drunk at midday.

The Aramean army fled to Aphek, where the wall of the city collapses. *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “We may suppose a terrific earthquake during the siege of the place, while the Syrians were manning the defenses in full force, which threw down the wall where they were most thickly crowded upon it, and buried them in its ruins.”

If it was an earthquake that caused the collapse of the city wall, that would be another indication to King Ahab of God’s intervention. King Ben-Hadad may have had a clearer concept of divine opposition than Ahab had. He must have realized that the god he had supposed to be a mountain deity, was a much more powerful adversary than he had realized. This bragging creature fled and hid in the room of a house, fearing for his life.

His own officials took pity on him and advised him, not only to surrender, but to do it in such a demonstrative manner that he would arouse the pity of the king of Israel. They suggest presenting themselves to Ahab in sackcloth with ropes around their necks, throwing themselves upon the mercy of the king of Israel. The Hebrew word used to describe the merciful attitude of the kings of Israel is *hesed*, which is more often used to describe God’s mercy. The King James Version often renders it with “lovingkindness.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “In Oriental warfare, the victory was not complete until the leader, in this instance Ben-Hadad, was executed. The servants of Ben-Hadad advised him to throw himself upon the mercy of Ahab. It should be noted that the mercy of the kings of Israel was greater than that of the kings of the enemy nations surrounding them. So they girded sackcloth on their loins. Sackcloth and ropes were signs of penitential submission. Flattered by the Syrians’ compliance, Ahab consented to let Ben-Hadad live. He is my brother. These words imply a disposition to enter into a covenant.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Compare with this abject petition for life the arrogant insolence of vers. 6, 10. The tables are indeed turned.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “Was the reputation of the Israelites really more merciful? The word used of them (*hesed*) is a characteristic of God’s loyal covenantal love (‘loving-kindness,’ AV ‘mercy’). At least it was worth a try, and the royal party emerged clothed in goat’s hair (sackcloth) as a sign of mourning and a rope around the head as a symbol of submission, not a sign of a porter (*sanda*) or supplication ... but rather that they were ready to be led off as prisoners. The pleas to be spared was taken up by the men ‘watching for an omen’ (RSV) who took the reference by Ahab to Ben-Hadad as *brother* (v. 33, that is ally, equal or treaty partner) as a hopeful sign confirmed by the prisoner being taken up into the royal chariot (33).”

In dealing with Ben-Hadad Ahab showed himself completely incapable of dealing with the conflict between Israel and Syria. Instead of accepting Ben-Hadad’s surrender as a victory of Israel over an enemy, he sees it as an opportunity entering into a pact with an ally. Had Israel lost the conflict and surrendered to Syria, Ben-Hadad would have treated Ahab as a prisoner of war. But Ahab invites the defeated king into his chariot. Ben-Hadad takes full advantage of the situation.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary sees more diplomacy in Ahab's dealing than there probably was. We read: "Instead of seizing the opportunity to crush Syria once for all, Ahab permitted Ben-Hadad, under the terms of this agreement, to depart in peace. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away. No doubt Ahab spared Syria so that it might serve as a buffer between Israel and the rising power of Assyria."

In an effort to make Ahab happy so that he would maintain his benevolent attitude to Ben-Hadad, who had considered his life to be in danger, the Syrian king presents proposals that would be advantageous to Israel in her trade with Syria. First of all, he promises the return of some Israeli cities Syria had captured in the past. Then he offers the opportunity for Israel to market her products in the Syrian capital.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "We cannot be quite certain that the cities here referred to are those enumerated in ... 1 Kings 15:20, as taken by Ben-hadad's armies from Baasha. For Baasha was not the father, nor even was he the 'ancestor' ... of Ahab, but belonged to a different dynasty. At the same time it is quite conceivable that a prince in Ben-hadad's position, in his ignorance or forgetfulness of the history of Israel, might use the word 'father' improperly, or even in the sense of 'predecessor.' [Some Bible scholars] however, think that we have a reference to some war in the reign of Omri (cf. ... 1 Kings 16:27), which is not recorded in Scripture. And the words which follow make this extremely probable, inasmuch as in Baasha's days Samaria had no existence."

Barnes' Notes add: "Ben-Hadad, secure of his life, suggests terms of peace as the price of his freedom. He will restore to Ahab the Israelite cities taken from Omri by his father, among which Ramoth Gilead was probably the most important (1 Kings 22:3); and he will allow Ahab the privilege of making for himself 'streets,' or rather squares, in Damascus, a privilege which his own father had possessed with respect to Samaria. Commercial advantages, rather than any other, were probably sought by this arrangement."

In accepting Ben-Hadad's terms, instead of setting his own as the victor ought to have done over the defeated, Ahab shows again his poor judgment, as well as his complete lack of relating his rule over Israel to the nation's relationship with God.

g. A prophet rebukes Ahab (20:35-43)

35 *By the word of the Lord one of the sons of the prophets said to his companion, 'strike me with your weapon,' but the man refused.*

36 *So the prophet said, "Because you have not obeyed the Lord, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you." And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him.*

37 *The prophet found another man and said, 'strike me, please.' So the man struck him and wounded him.*

38 *Then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king. He disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes.*

39 *As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him, "Your servant went into the thick of the battle, and someone came to me with a captive and said, 'Guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life, or you must pay a talent of silver.'*

40 *While your servant was busy here and there, the man disappeared." "That is your sentence," the king of Israel said. "You have pronounced it yourself."*

41 Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets.

42 He said to the king, "This is what the Lord says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.'"

43 Sullen and angry, the king of Israel went to his palace in Samaria.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "An acted parable is used to lead Ahab to realize his inconsistency and guilt in going against God's express will and postponing judgment on Ben-Hadad. This was to cost Israel dearly in death and destruction (cf. 2 Kgs 10:32) and lead to the final fall of the Northern Kingdom. The literary device of the story to bring conviction or error can be compared with Samuel's condemnation of Saul (1 Sam. 13:14-30), and Nathan of David (2 Sam. 12:1-13). It is the responsibility of a prophet to direct one who errs to the right interpretation of events and so lead to self-judgment. Here we are reminded that not even a king is above the law but is subject to divine-justice (v.42)."

The section begins with a rather strange introduction in which a man is punished for what we would consider an act of kindness. Evidently, the young man, who was "a prophet-in-training," received a prophetic word by one of his fellow students. We must assume that the one who received the prophetic command failed to check in his spirit whether the command was really a divine order. He lost his life, not because he was kind, but because he did not do what he knew he ought to have done.

It is not clear why the prophet who had to convey his message to King Ahab actually had to sustain some physical injury. It could be that, in case Ahab would have asked question and had begun to investigate, he would have found out that the prophet had faked his condition, which would make the content of his message doubtful.

The important part, of course, is that fact that God had told him what to do and how to do it. The injury was needed to suggest that the prophet had been involved in a war and had been wounded.

The fact that the prophet disguised himself suggests that Ahab knew him. That would mean that this man had conveyed divine messages to the king before.

When Ahab passes by, the prophet calls him and tells him the fictitious story of having been put in charge of a prisoner of war, who escaped during his watch. As punishment for his neglect he would either have to be executed or pay a stiff fine for his life, amounting to "a talent of silver." TLB renders this as \$2000, which would have been an impossible sum for a common soldier to pay.

Ahab responds by saying that the man pronounced his own sentence; not specifying whether that would be death or pay. In responding, Ahab condemned himself, because he had disobeyed God's orders by letting Ben-Hadad go free. It was Ahab's disobedience and neglect that would eventually lead to the fall and annihilation of the Northern Kingdom in the deportation of Israel to Assyria from which she would never return.

The king's reaction was that he returned to his palace 'sullen and angry.' The Hebrew words used are *car*, "peevish" and *za`eph*, "angry," or "displeased."

h. Naboth's vineyard (21:1-29)

The clash between king and commoner (21:1-6)

1 Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

2 Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth."

3 But Naboth replied, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

4 So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.

5 His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?"

6 He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

Naboth's vineyard was probably part of a parental heritage that had been in the family ever since Israel had conquered Canaan. Such properties could never be sold permanently. If sold, the land would return to the original owner in the Year of Jubilee. The law stated: "If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. You are to buy from your countryman on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And he is to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. When the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what he is really selling you is the number of crops. Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the Lord your God."¹⁵⁵ As king of Israel, Ahab was supposed to be familiar with the Mosaic Law, but, considering his godless behavior in other matters, he may not have bothered reading it daily, as he was supposed to do. Moses had stated about the duties of the king regarding the law: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel."¹⁵⁶

Evidently, Ahab had made it clear to Naboth that his purchase of the vineyard would make it a permanent royal property, not one that would eventually return to Naboth's family.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about Ahab's reaction to Naboth's refusal to sell: "The reaction of Ahab shows his real character. *Sulking* (NIV, Vulg;

¹⁵⁵ Lev. 25:14-17

¹⁵⁶ Deut. 17:18-20

‘sullen,’ NRSV, REB) implies that the full Heb. phrase was ‘turned his face (to the wall)’ (2 Kgs 20:2).”

We may agree, at least in part, with Queen Jezebel’s observation that Ahab’s behavior, in reaction to Naboth’s refusal, was childish. Royalty comes with an obligation to be able to control that kind of emotions.

Jezebel’s plot (21:7-14)

7 Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him.

9 In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people.

10 But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

11 So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them.

12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people.

13 Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death.

14 Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

Jezebel’s concept of royal power was devoid of any kind of moral restrictions. She was evil to the core and had no qualms about lying and murdering in order to obtain what she wanted. So she sent letters to the elders and nobles of Naboth’s city with instructions as to how to falsely condemn Naboth and put him to death. The fact that those dignitaries obeyed the queen’s orders without any opposition suggests that, either they feared for their lives in case they would disobey, or that their concept of morality was not what the title “noble” ought to have implied.

Jezebel orders them to employ ‘scoundrels’ to give false testimonies. The fact that they obeyed made them scoundrels themselves. The word ‘scoundrel’ is the translation of the Hebrew ‘sons of Belial,’ meaning ‘sons of Satan.’”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “As an unscrupulous double-dealer she enforced her own Phoenician concept of despotic kingship by turning the public legal proceedings to her own ends. She involved Ahab by the use of his seal on directives to the local magistrates (v. 8). The use of the king’s royal dynastic, administrative or even personal seal to gain his authority would require Ahab’s collusion.”

The suggestion that the council proclaim a day of fasting makes the whole deal a godless mockery. Fasting suggests invoking God’s Name and seeking His will. Jezebel had no qualms using God for the achievement of her own evil purposes. She had no idea whose Name she was invoking.

The elders of Naboth's city obeyed Jezebel's instructions. They proclaimed a fast, meaning that they organized an event in which God was supposed to be invoked and worshipped. And then they accused Naboth of blaspheming the Name of God.

The Hebrew word *barak* literally means "to kneel." It can be used in the opposite sense of blessing or cursing, depending on the context. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, explains: "The Heb. word 'blessed' is here taken to be a euphemism for *cursed* (as in Job 1:11; 2:5, 9; Ps. 10:3) to avoid anyone reading or hearing an impious expression. NEB mg. 'cursing' assumes this (cf. Heb. 'blessed,' lit. 'bidding farewell to') to be a greeting at departure implying that Naboth was saying farewell to God and king"

So Naboth was taken to court, was falsely accused, sentenced and executed by stoning. This made the elders of the city guilty of the same crime as the queen. As suggested above, they probably did this in fear of their own lives. It is fear of death that makes people obey Satan and sin.¹⁵⁷ Having carried out Jezebel's orders, they sent word to the queen that Naboth is dead.

Without making any objections to the crime committed, Ahab goes to Naboth's vineyard and takes possession of it. This makes him a murderer and a thief as a partner in Jezebel's crime. He confiscated the vineyard without making any payment.

Elijah prophesies the death of Ahab's house (21:17-24)

17 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite:

18 "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it.

19 Say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood — yes, yours!'"

20 Ahab said to Elijah, 'so you have found me, my enemy!'" "I have found you," he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord.

21 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel — slave or free.

22 I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin.'

23 "And also concerning Jezebel the Lord says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'

24 "Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country."

In giving His instructions to Elijah, God uses a detailed description of Ahab as king of Israel. Elijah would find Ahab in Naboth's vineyard. In typical Hebrew fashion the accusation is put in the form of a question: "Have you murdered and seized?"

As Elijah speaks it is God who is speaking. Naboth's stoning had taken place outside the city. Ahab would die at the place where Naboth was murdered. And the dogs that had licked Naboth's blood would lick Ahab's.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Heb. 2:14

Ahab greets Elijah with the words ‘so you have found me, my enemy!’ Ahab’s enemy was not Elijah but God. Everyone who sins declares himself to be God’s enemy.

It was not Elijah who would bring disaster upon Ahab, but God Himself. God pronounces the death sentence upon him.

Ahab was not only guilty of Naboth’s murder; he had led the whole nation of Israel into sin by introducing Baal worship. The punishment would affect all of Ahab’s house. God had declared in the Ten Commandments: “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.”¹⁵⁸ That sentence pertained particularly to those who worshipped idols, because they would allow evil spirits to enter into their family. The demons would remain in the younger generations when parents and grandparents passed away.

The verdict upon Jezebel is the same as Ahab’s. Dogs would lick her blood outside the walls also. Jezebel died by being thrown out of the window of her palace by her own servants. And dogs would not only lick her blood, they would devour most of her body. Only her head, hands and feet were left to be buried.¹⁵⁹

Ahab’s repentance (21:27-29).

27 When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.

28 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite:

29 "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."

Ahab’s repentance seems to have been genuine. Even though he was the king, he went around in sackcloth and he fasted. We read that he “went around meekly.” According to Josephus this meant that he went barefooted. This made the Lord change His mind about the punishment Elijah had announced to him. But the repentance of the father did not save his son. Ahaziah would not only follow in the sins he had seen his father commit, but he also suffered physically by a fall which crippled him for the rest of his life.

In spite of this repentance, Ahab went down in Israel’s history as the king “who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord.” His repentance did not wipe clean his past slate.

i. Ahab’s final war against Aram (22:1-38).

Ahab consults the prophets (22:1-7).

1 For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel.

2 But in the third year Jehoshaphat king of Judah went down to see the king of Israel.

3 The king of Israel had said to his officials, "Don't you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and yet we are doing nothing to retake it from the king of Aram?"

¹⁵⁸ Ex. 20:5

¹⁵⁹ See II Kings 9:32-37.

4 So he asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."

5 But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "First seek the counsel of the Lord."

6 So the king of Israel brought together the prophets — about four hundred men — and asked them, 'shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?' "Go," they answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

7 But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?"

The chapter opens with the statement that there was a three-year lull between Aram and Israel, during which no military confrontations occurred. One of the prized pieces of archeological finds is the Black Obelisk or the Moabite Stone, on which there is an inscription about the wars between Israel and Aram. *Haley's Handbook of the Bible* states: "It reads: 'I, Mesha, king of Moab, made this monument to Chemosh (god of Moab), to commemorate deliverance from Israel. My father reigned over Moab 30 yrs., and I reigned after my father. Omri, king of Israel, oppressed Moab many days, and his son (Ahab) after him. But I warred against the kings of Israel, and drove him out, and took his cities, Medeba, Ataroth, Nebo, and Jahaz, which he built while he waged war against me. I destroyed his cities, and devoted the spoil to Chemosh, and the women and girls to Ashtar. I built Qorhah with prisoners from Israel.'"

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "Three years of peace (v.1) may have been that of the preparation for Qarqar which required Ahab to protect Israel's southern flank. To do this he took the opportunity of a treaty with Jehoshaphat, his son-in-law, to enforce the terms imposed on Ben-Hadad at the treaty of Aphek (20:34), following which Ramoth Gilead belonged to Israel (v. 3) but had not been returned."

According to *Barnes' Notes*, the three years were not completely three. The Hebrew counting of years must have been the same as their concept of "three days and three nights." We read in *Barnes' Notes*: "These must be counted from the close of the second campaign of Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 20:34). They were not full years, as is evident from the next verse. Probably the first year is that of Ben-Hadad's dismissal after his defeat; the second is a year of actual peace; while the third is that in which Jehoshaphat paid his visit, and the Ramoth-Gilead expedition took place. The pause, here noticed, in the war between Israel and Syria was perhaps the result of a common danger. It was probably in the year following Ben-Hadad's dismissal by Ahab, that the first great Assyrian expedition took place into these parts. Shalmaneser II relates that on his first invasion of southern Syria, he was met by the combined forces of Ben-Hadad, Ahab, the king of Hamath, the kings of the Hittites, and others, who gave him battle, but suffered a defeat."

During Jehoshaphat's visit Ahab brings up the matter of Ben-Hadad's failure to fulfill his promise of returning Ramoth Gilead to Israel. The king of Judah offers his cooperation in terms of providing troops and armament. But he suggests consulting the Lord before finalizing the plans.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "It seems likely that Jehoshaphat went down to Samaria by Ahab's invitation, and that the latter then had this campaign in view. The chronicler says that Ahab 'incited,' or 'stirred him up' (same word as in ... 1 Kings

21:25) to go with him to battle. Ahab was unable to contend single-handed, and without Divine assistance — which he could not now look for — against Syria; and saw no means of compelling the execution of the treaty which Ben-Hadad had made with him (... 1 Kings 20:34), and which he appears to have shamelessly broken, except by the help of Jehoshaphat, whose military organization at this time must have been great, and, indeed, complete (... 2 Chronicles 17:10-19). It is in favor of this view that Ahab entertained him and his large retinue with such profuse hospitality. The chronicler, who dwells on the number of sheep and oxen slain for the feast, intimates that it was this generous reception ‘persuaded’ Jehoshaphat to join in the war.”

In contrast to Ahab’s godless reign over Israel, the Biblical testimony about Jehoshaphat is quite favorable. We read about him: “he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.”¹⁶⁰ So Jehoshaphat suggests consulting the Lord before making final decisions. Ahab could not refuse this, although he had not given it a thought.

The king of Israel calls upon a group of about four hundred prophets, who were to give him the Lord’s answer. The question arises where such a number of prophets of Yahweh could be found in the Northern Kingdom. The question has made Bible scholars search for answers, which led some to suppose that these were prophets connected to the calves of Bethel and Dan. *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “In all probability the prophets attached to the worship of the calves; not real prophets of Yahweh. This seems evident both from Jehoshaphat’s dissatisfaction (1 Kings 22:7), and from the strong antagonism apparent between the true Yahweh-prophet Micaiah, and these self-styled ‘prophets of the Lord’ (1 Kings 22:22-25).”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The *four-hundred* ‘nationalistic prophets’ were perhaps centered on Bethel (12:28-29). Their numbers are no exaggeration (1 Kings 18:19). They were uncritically loyal to the king of Israel and their unity must have aroused suspicion since they aimed to please the king rather than proclaim the truth (Amos 7:10-13). The ground of their verdict that the Lord would give victory would be the success of earlier campaigns (20:13, 28).”

Micaiah prophesies against Ahab (22:7-28)

7 *But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?"*

8 *The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." "The king should not say that," Jehoshaphat replied.*

9 *So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, "Bring Micaiah son of Imlah at once."*

10 *Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them.*

11 *Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns and he declared, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'"*

¹⁶⁰ 1 Kings 22:43

12 All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

13 The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, as one man the other prophets are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably."

14 But Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me."

15 When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" "Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

16 The king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?"

17 Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'"

18 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?"

19 Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.

20 And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that.

21 Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.'

22 "'By what means?' the Lord asked. "'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. "'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the "'Go and do it.'

23 'so now the "'Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you."

24 Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the spirit from the "'go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked.

25 Micaiah replied, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room."

26 The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son

27 and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.'"

28 Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the "'the Lord has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!"

It is obvious from Jehoshaphat's reaction to the message of this large group of prophets, that he did not consider them to know or proclaim the will of God concerning the matter. So he asks for "a prophet of the Lord." He receives the answer that there is one prophet, whom Ahab disliked because he knew that his prophecies originated from the God whom he refused to serve. His objection against Micah was "he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad." Ahab had obviously hardened his heart to the point where the Word of God had become offensive to him.

We could wonder why only Micaiah is mentioned in this context. Elijah would certainly have qualified as one who would have one who spoke the Word of God.

As Micaiah arrives he finds the two kings ‘sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria.’ They are surrounded by the large group of prophets who kept on prophesying, probably chanting their messages in a repetitive way, while being in a trance.

The story of Micaiah’s arrival and initial performance is a strange one, as is Ahab’s reaction to the prophet’s first message. Before Micaiah arrives, one of Ahab’s servants advises him to be sure to pronounce messages that are pleasing to the king. Evidently, truth was irrelevant and the mind of the Lord about human affairs was not considered to be important.

Micaiah dismisses that suggestion, saying that he will only prophesy what God gives him to say.

It is interesting to observe that Ahab recognized immediately that Micaiah’s first pronouncement was not a divinely inspired prophecy. Evidently, the king understood more about God than he wanted to admit. He must have realized that his godless lifestyle could not count on the Lord’s blessing.

When Micaiah in his first message tells the king that he will be successful and victorious, Ahab knew that this was not God’s message. He recognized the prophecy as being false. This means that he knew the words of the other four hundred prophets to be false also.

Most Bible scholars believe that Micaiah repeated the false prophets’ words in a tone of voice that made them sound unbelievable, thus ridiculing their prediction. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “As Ahab’s inquiry is the echo of the question of ver. 6, so is Micaiah’s response identical with the answer of the prophets. He simply echoes their words, of which, perhaps, he has been informed by the eunuch. There was an exquisite propriety in this. The question was insincere; the reply was ironical (cf. ... 1 Kings 18:27). Ahab is answered ‘according to the multitude of his idols’ (... Ezekiel 14:4). He wishes to be deceived, and he is deceived. No doubt Micaiah’s mocking tone showed that his words were ironical; but Ahab’s hollow tone had already proved to Micaiah that he was insincere; that he did not care to know the will of the Lord, and wanted prophets who would speak to him smooth things and prophesy deceits (... Isaiah 30:10).”

Whether it was Micaiah’s tone of voice or facial expression, Ahab knew the truth, which he hadn’t wanted to know. And when Micaiah prophesied that the king’s campaign would be victorious he knew that it would not be. Ahab didn’t need false prophets to deceive him; he deceived himself.

Ahab’s answer to Micaiah “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?” begs the question how many times had Ahab wanted to know the will of the Lord.

When pressed for the truth, Micaiah answers by quoting Moses, saying: “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd.” When Moses was about to die, he said to the Lord: “May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Num. 27:16,17

Jesus must have thought about these words when He looked upon the people of His time. We read: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”¹⁶²

To confirm that his message was the Word of the Lord, Micaiah describes a vision he had received in which he witnessed a scene in heaven in which various spirits were consulted for the purpose of causing Ahab to believe false prophecies. The scene is depicted in terms of human experience. The Omniscient God is presented as someone who needs input by others in order to make up His mind about what actions to take. That is obviously not a picture of a heavenly reality.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “Many are concerned that the use of a lying spirit (the spirit of v. 21 sent to entice, NIV, NRSV; cf. JB ‘trick’ or ‘deceive,’ cf. Jer. 20:7) is contrary to God’s moral nature. There is no evidence to equate it here with Satan the opposer of God’s will and father of all lies, or with a general spirit of revelation ... It is rather a personified spirit of prophecy (Zech. 13:2; I John 4:6), for even false prophets may be governed by supernatural spiritual forces rather than merely human reason. It represents the power of a lie in the mouth of someone opposed to the truth and speaking for his own ends (Jer. 14:14; 23:16, 26; Ezek. 13:2-3, 17). Such a use of a lying spirit in the person of Satan is consistent with Scripture (Job 1:6-12; John 8:44). The Lord in truth decrees not only good but evil (v. 23, *disaster*; Isa. 45:7). The prediction of Ahab’s end had already been made by Elijah, and this use of false prophecy would emphasize that God controls everything including the final judgment on unbelief. God had given Ahab up (cf. Rom. 1:24-28) yet still was giving an opportunity for him to use his freewill and repent. Ahab’s delusion can but lead on to further backsliding and destruction and so reproves him (Jer. 2:19).”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on Micaiah’s words: “For one brief moment the curtain of eternity was lifted and Ahab was given a glimpse behind the scene. There Jehovah sits in majesty, the unseen Lord of history. The message of doom previously spoken by the prophet Elijah was about to be fulfilled. Both the Testaments teach that evil and good spirits are under the authority of God. The method by which Ahab was to be deceived was through the spirit of deception about to take possession of the prophets. Ahab would listen to their counsel, giving no heed to the true prophet Micaiah, that the purpose of God might be fulfilled. The sending of the evil spirit is to be regarded as done by the permissive will of God instead of by his direct will. Let it be remembered that Ahab had had ample chance to know truth through Elijah, but had stubbornly resisted it.”

Micaiah’s words evoked the anger of the other prophets who had predicted Ahab’s success in battle. One of them, Zedekiah, came and slapped Micaiah in his face. The Hebrew text reads literally: ‘smote him on the cheek.’ This was considered to be one of the greatest insults one person could do to another. It was about this kind of affront that Jesus said: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”¹⁶³

Zedekiah’s words sound strange to us: “Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?” What he meant is clear, however. Zedekiah believed that God’s spirit spoke through him and not through Micaiah.

¹⁶² Matt. 9:36

¹⁶³ Matt. 5:39

Micaiah predicts that Zedekiah will come to a point where he is afraid of his very life and hides from those who would try to kill him. We do not learn what this prophecy refers to or how it was fulfilled. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* suggests: "Hearing of the tragical result of the battle, he no doubt went into a secret place to hide himself from the resentment of Jezebel, and the Israelitish courtiers; and there it is probable he perished; but how, when, or where, is not mentioned." *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "When was this prediction fulfilled? Probably when the news of the defeat reached Samaria, or on the day after Ahab's death. Jezebel would almost certainly take summary vengeance upon the false prophets who were responsible for her husband's death and the reverses of the army. Or if she did not, the prophets had good reason to fear that she would, and would hide accordingly."

Ahab responds to Micaiah's prophecy by ordering his arrest and imprisonment. He is put on a meager diet of bread and water, enough to keep him alive till his safe return from the battle. Micaiah's answer: "If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me" is no indication of his doubt about divine inspiration, but a confirmation that what he had said was, in fact, God's message to Ahab.

The battle of Ramoth Gilead (22:29-38).

29 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead.

30 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

31 Now the king of Aram had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, "Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel."

32 When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, 'surely this is the king of Israel.'" So they turned to attack him, but when Jehoshaphat cried out,

33 the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel and stopped pursuing him.

34 But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. The king told his chariot driver, "Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded."

35 All day long the battle raged, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot, and that evening he died.

36 As the sun was setting, a cry spread through the army: "Every man to his town; everyone to his land!"

37 So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him there.

38 They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared.

Ahab must have believed Micaiah's prophecy, at least to the point where he took precautions to disguise himself. He suggested that Jehoshaphat dress in his royal outfit, but he would go in the uniform of a common soldier. He also must have realized that he would be the primary target of the enemy army. Ahab was correct in his

assumption, because the king of Aram had instructed his commanders to make the king of Israel their primary target and kill him.

Some Bible scholars believe that Ahab had been informed about the command the king of Aram had given, but that seems highly unlikely, unless he had spies in the enemy camp.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “For Ahab to enter the battle in disguise is one thing, but to suggest to Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robe, which would make him the main enemy target, seems to be a cowardly thing to do. But Jehoshaphat did not object. We can hardly doubt that Jehoshaphat at least would have been well content to abandon the expedition. After the solicitude he had manifested for the sanction of one of the prophets of Jehovah, and after that the one who had been consulted had predicted the defeat of the army, the king of Judah must have had misgivings. But it is not difficult to understand why, notwithstanding his fears, he did not draw back. For, in the first place, he had committed himself to the war by the rash and positive promise of ver. 4. In the next place, he was Ahab’s guest, and had been sumptuously entertained by him, and it would therefore require some moral courage to extricate himself from the toils in which he was entangled. Moreover he would have subjected himself to the imputation of cowardice had he deserted his ally because of a prophecy which threatened the latter with death. The people around him, again, including perhaps his own retinue, were possessed with the spirit of battle, and treated the prophecy of Micaiah with contempt, and it would be difficult for him to swim alone against the current. It is probable; too, that he discounted the portentous words of Micaiah on account of the longstanding quarrel between him and Ahab. And, finally, we must remember that his own interests were threatened by Syria, and he may well have feared trouble from that quarter in case this war was abandoned.”

In the ensuing battle King Jehoshaphat did, in fact, become the prime target of the attack because of the royal outfit he wore. But the enemy commanders had given specific orders to aim for the king of Israel, not the king of Judah. So when they realized that Jehoshaphat was not Ahab, they drew away from him.

The arrow that killed the king of Israel was shot “at random.” The Hebrew word used is *tom*, which can mean “in innocence.” That, of course, cannot be the meaning in this context. When someone shoots an arrow in a war, it is meant to kill someone. The meaning is that the shooter was not aiming at anyone in particular; he just hoped that his arrow would wound some enemy. Well, it did; it killed the king of Israel. But the shooter never knew that he was the one who won the war.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “The Hebrew for at a venture means in his simplicity, i.e., without taking specific aim. The mathematical probability that the arrow would find its right target was extremely low. Yet directed by the judgment of the Lord, it found its mark.”

Although Ahab was wearing an armor that protected most of his body, the arrow found its way at the only place where it could hurt: between the joints. Ahab was killed with “a stray bullet.” It was the Lord’s doing!

There is something heroic in Ahab’s attitude in that he remained standing in his chariot. He did tell the driver of his chariot to take him out of the frontline, but he did not withdraw from the battle. The Hebrew text reads literally: “The king was stayed up in his chariot.” The NIV’s “propped up,” which is also what the NKJV uses, seems a good

rendering. Normally he would have lain down, but something kept him standing, although it was not his own strength. Yet, he was slowly bleeding to death and by the evening he breathed his last. *Barnes' Notes* observes: "The king's wound made it impossible for him to remain standing without help; he therefore had himself supported in his chariot by attendants, in order that his soldiers might not lose heart, as they would be sure to do, if they knew of his peril. Ahab must not be denied the credit of right princely fortitude on this occasion."

Verse 36 states that, as by the evening the death of the king became known "a cry spread through the army: 'Every man to his town; everyone to his land!'" "Everyone to his own land" suggests that the enemy army learned that Israel's king was dead and they must have concluded, as the Israelites did, that this ended the war. It probably meant that Ramoth remained in Aramean hands.

As the king's body was taken back to Samaria for burial, the chariot in which he bled to death was taken to a pool to be washed.

There are some differences in the renderings of v.38. Some translations read that the king's armor was washed in the pool; others that prostitutes bathed in that pool. The problem is the Hebrew word *zonowth*, which can mean either. In some case is it euphemistically used for a prostitute, as in the case where two women appeared before King Solomon, arguing about the death of a baby.¹⁶⁴

j. Closing notice of Ahab's reign (22:39-40).

39 As for the other events of Ahab's reign, including all he did, the palace he built and inlaid with ivory, and the cities he fortified, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

40 Ahab rested with his fathers. And Ahaziah his son succeeded him as king.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "Ahab *built* (v.39, could be 'rebuilt' or 'fortified') a new palace and made extensive changes ... at Samaria as well as at Megiddo ... where he built storehouses formerly designated 'Solomon's stables.' He was also responsible for doubling the size of Hazor. All this, with the revival of Jericho (16:34), betokens a period of high prosperity.

The 'house of ivory' (MT; AV, NEB 'ivory house') was not one palace *inlaid with ivory* but, as elsewhere at this time ... noteworthy for its precious objects, furniture and fittings inlaid with ivories carved in Phoenician, Egyptian and local style motifs. This was a mark of great opulence, but there are no known instances of ivory paneling of whole rooms or exteriors.

That *Arab rested with his fathers* (v. 40) is not an error by the historian, though it is normally used of those who met a peaceful death. The phrase is used of all kings of Israel other than those who died by assassination."

¹⁶⁴ I Kings 3:16

D. Further history of reigns (I Kgs 22:41 – 2 Kgs 10:36)

i. Jehoshaphat of Judah (I Kgs 22:41-50)

41 Jehoshaphat son of Asa became king of Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel.

42 Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-five years. His mother's name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi.

43 In everything he walked in the ways of his father Asa and did not stray from them; he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. The high places, however, were not removed, and the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

44 Jehoshaphat was also at peace with the king of Israel.

45 As for the other events of Jehoshaphat's reign, the things he achieved and his military exploits, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?

46 He rid the land of the rest of the male shrine prostitutes who remained there even after the reign of his father Asa.

47 There was then no king in Edom; a deputy ruled.

48 Now Jehoshaphat built a fleet of trading ships to go to Ophir for gold, but they never set sail — they were wrecked at Ezion Geber.

49 At that time Ahaziah son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "Let my men sail with your men," but Jehoshaphat refused.

50 Then Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the city of David his father. And Jehoram his son succeeded him.

With this section we return to the kingdom of Judah and the reign of Jehoshaphat. If we want a fuller account of Jehoshaphat's reign we have to turn to the book of Second Chronicles, where four chapters are dedicated to him.¹⁶⁵ Here we are just given a short vignette of his years in office. He succeeded his father Asa, who ruled over Judah for forty-one years. Asa had been faithful to the Lord and Jehoshaphat followed his father in his dedication to Yahweh.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia writes about Jehoshaphat's alliance with the Northern Kingdom: "In contrast to the former kings of Judah, Jehoshaphat saw greater benefit in an alliance with Israel than in civil war. Accordingly, the old feud between the two kingdoms (1 Kings 14:30; 15:6) was dropped, and Jehoshaphat made peace with Israel (22:44). The political union was cemented by the marriage of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel."

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Jehoshaphat's reign: "One great feature of his reign was this: that the hostility which had lasted, even if it sometimes slumbered, between the two kingdoms for seventy years, from the date of their separation to the time of Asa's death, gave way to peace and even alliance. Judah now recognized the division of the kingdom as an accomplished fact, and no longer treated Israel, even theoretically, as in rebellion."

Although Jehoshaphat personally followed the Lord, the people as a whole did not rededicate themselves to the service of Yahweh. David's vision of a central place of worship, which materialized in the building of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, did not

¹⁶⁵ See II Chr. 17-20.

dominate his time in office. The people, who had gotten used to building altars at different places, even in the service of Yahweh, did not cease to do so under Asa's or Jehoshaphat's reign.

But Jehoshaphat did take action against the immoral rites that accompanied the idol worship to which the nation had dedicated itself in earlier years. We read: "He rid the land of the rest of the male shrine prostitutes who remained there even after the reign of his father Asa."

Referring to 1 Kings 14:24, Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about these places of male prostitution: "*Male shrine-prostitutes* attempts to translate 'those set apart as holy' (Heb. *gedesim*, plural), which is used of both sexes and taken to be a reference back to Canaanite ritual prostitution."

Jehoshaphat's efforts to construct a commercial fleet failed. The Hebrew text seems a little difficult to translate. It reads literally: "Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish they went for gold: but not to go Ophir for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, explains: "The ships of Tarshish (AV, NIV mg., 'merchantmen' NEB, fleet of trading-ships NIV) were ocean-going traders sailing as far as Ophir That they were 'broken up' (MT, AV) does not necessarily imply that they were wrecked (NIV). They were constructed to implement a trade-pact with Ahaziah who had access to Phoenician skills but, according to a prophecy of Eliezar, they were never used (cf. 2 Chr. 20:35-37)."

Barnes' Notes observes: "2 Chron 20:35-36, explains that the two kings conjointly built the fleet with which the Ophir trade (1 Kings 9:28 note) was to be re-opened. Ahaziah had thus an interest in the ships; and when they were wrecked, attributing, as it would seem, the calamity to the unskillfulness of his ally's mariners, he proposed that the fleet should be manned in part by Israelite sailors-men probably accustomed to the sea, perhaps trained at Tyre. This proposal Jehoshaphat refused, either offended at the reflection on his subjects' skill, or accepting the wreck of the ships, which Eliezer had prophesied, as a proof that God was against the entire undertaking."

The Pulpit Commentary adds: "We are told in ... 2 Chronicles 20:37 that the ships were broken, according to a prophecy of Eliezer, the son of Dodavah, because Jehoshaphat had joined himself with Ahaziah. The explanation is that the fleet had been built by the two kings conjointly, and manned by the subjects of Jehoshaphat exclusively; and that, after the disaster, Ahaziah proposed either to repair the injured vessels, or to construct a second fleet, which should then be partly manned by sailors of the northern kingdom, 'men probably accustomed to the sea, perhaps trained at Tyre' This proposal was declined by the king of Judah, not so much on account of the 'reflection on his subjects' skill contained in it,' as because of the prophecy of Eliezer, and the evidently judicial disaster which had befallen the fleet already built."

This section ends with the death of Jehoshaphat and his burial in Jerusalem. He is succeeded by his son Jehoram.

ii. Ahaziah of Israel (1 Kgs 22:51- 53)

51 Ahaziah son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years.

52 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, because he walked in the ways of his father and mother and in the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin.

53 He served and worshiped Baal and provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger, just as his father had done.

Here we return to the Northern Kingdom, where Ahaziah becomes king after his father Ahab died because of his injuries sustained to the war with Ben-Hadad.

Wiseman's outline takes this section into the book of Second Kings. In this study we limit ourselves to the end of First Kings.

The length of Ahaziah's reign is given as "two years." But that does not correspond to our calculation of twenty-four months. *Barnes' Notes* states: "According to our reckoning, not much more than a twelve-month year." It must be like the Hebrew counting of days, in which a few minutes of one day is calculated as a whole day.

The name Ahaziah means "whom Yahweh holds." Evidently, Ahaziah did not live up to the meaning of his name. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: "A good name does not insure a good character. Ahaziah, the 'God-sustained,' served Baal and worshipped him, and provoked to anger Yahweh, the God of Israel, Just as his father before him had done. He appears to have been weak and unfortunate, and calamities in quick succession pursued him."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The powerful influence of Jezebel, even after Ahab's death, is hinted at here. It was to her that *idolatry* owed its position in Israel, *and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat* [the calf worship and idolatry existed side by side], *who made Israel to sin.*"

Jezebel's evil influence sealed the doom of the Northern Kingdom. Israel would never recover from the idolatry that was introduced during the reign of Ahab. Israel would be taken into captivity by Assyria and never return.