

## 12. Solomon's Reign – A Study in Contrasts

The parallel principles of divine judgment and promise that defined the end of David's reign continued during the rule of his son Solomon. Yahweh had sent the sword upon David's house and Solomon would not be exempt from it. At the same time, the Davidic Covenant specified a Davidic seed who would build the Lord's house and Solomon was the first point of fulfillment of that promise. Yahweh chose Solomon to construct the physical house in Jerusalem, and precisely because he and his work prefigured another seed, it was necessary that he accomplish that task in the context of peace and rest.

- By divine design, the full splendor, glory, power and dominion of David's kingdom were manifest in Solomon's reign because of his role in connection with the covenant. The Lord hadn't renounced His judgment upon David's house, but He held the kingdom together during Solomon's lifetime for the sake of His promise to David (Psalm 132; 1 Kings 11:1ff; cf. also 2 Kings 18:28-19:34). To have done otherwise would be to destroy the typological connection between Solomon and the greater Davidic seed appointed to build Yahweh's true house.
- And so, while the temple project stood as the single great episode in Solomon's life and reign, the glory of that pinnacle event was overshadowed by the ever-present cloud of judgment and failure. Both Solomon's personal life and his reign were increasingly characterized by decline and departure from the Lord and His covenant. For all his greatness and the greatness of his accomplishments, like his father before him Solomon's kingship would fall short of the Abrahamic promise.

Even a casual reading of the Solomon narrative shows him to be a study in contrasts: a man of unique wisdom who manifested incredible foolishness; a ruler given a kingdom marked by supernatural peace who yet sought security in natural alliances; a son uniquely beloved by God who gave his attention and affection to false deities. As with every biblical character and narrative, the true significance of these contrasts is easily lost when they are not kept within the broader salvation-historical context. That is, the particulars of Solomon's life and reign find their meaning in his role within God's developing revelation of redemption. It's not that those particulars have no personal or historical relevance, but they are bound up in the larger biblical storyline. Solomon's life and kingship contribute to that storyline, providing a crucial revelatory/prophetic function.

- a. Solomon was the *son of promise* by virtue of the covenant God made with his father. As the son appointed to build the Lord's house in Jerusalem, Solomon prefigured the ultimate Son of David identified in the covenant. This means that the notable features of his life and reign – the features that the biblical text is careful to highlight – must be read in the light of his typological role. So, for instance, Solomon's unique, supernatural wisdom (1 Kings 3:3ff), his intimacy with God (cf. 2 Samuel 12:24-25; 1 Kings 8:22ff) and the unparalleled splendor and glory of his kingdom were *historical* features of his own life, but the nature of the covenant necessitates that they be understood *prophetically* in terms of their ultimate counterparts associated with the One whom Solomon prefigured.

And the most significant of those features – readily demonstrated from the biblical text – was Solomon’s role as the builder of the Lord’s house:

- First and foremost, the Davidic Covenant itself specifically identifies this as the preeminent work of the promised seed (2 Samuel 7:12-13).
- Consistent with that emphasis, more than half of the narrative space devoted to Solomon’s life in the book of Second Chronicles is concerned with the construction and dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 2-7; cf. 1 Kings 5-8). And in both the Kings and Chronicles accounts the sections dealing with the building of the temple are framed by passages connecting Solomon’s labors with the Lord’s fulfillment of His covenant with David (ref. 1 Kings 5:1-5, 8:12-21, 9:1-5; cf. 2 Chronicles 3:1, 7:8-18).
- Beyond the temple episode, the text is careful to associate (directly or indirectly) various aspects of Solomon’s person and reign with the Davidic Covenant. And being the promised Davidic seed, it is impossible to consider Solomon apart from his commission to build Yahweh’s house.

Given the centrality of the temple, it is not surprising that the passages addressing it are rich in content having salvation-historical and typological import:

- 1) David had gathered the building materials for the temple largely from the wealth of the Gentile nations, and this same theme is continued in the construction narrative. Both biblical accounts record Solomon’s request of Hiram to provide him with cedar trees for the temple’s wooden planks and beams (1 Kings 5:1ff; 2 Chronicles 2:1ff), and First Kings (9:15ff) notes his conscription of non-Israelites to do much of the labor. Using the wealth of the nations to build Yahweh’s sanctuary originated with the first tabernacle and was repeated in both of the Jerusalem temples. Ironically, the second temple reached its pinnacle of scope and splendor through the efforts of the Idumean ruler Herod the Great, a descendent of Esau.
- 2) The narrative’s description of the temple and its furnishings also highlights the fact that it represented a superlative expression of the Mosaic tabernacle. In keeping with Yahweh’s demand to Moses that His sanctuary be built according to His prescription, Solomon replicated the aspects and features of the tabernacle, but on a much grander scale.

For instance, the relative dimensions of the structure were preserved but the overall size was doubled. Thus the cubic space of the Holy of Holies was enlarged eight-fold as the dimensions in each direction were doubled from ten cubits to twenty (cf. 1 Kings 6:2, 20 with Exodus 26). Likewise, the ark of Yahweh’s presence was still overshadowed by two golden cherubim with their wings extended toward each other, but now they filled the entire inner sanctuary from wall to wall and floor to ceiling (6:23-28).

By maintaining continuity with the Mosaic tabernacle and its features while also embellishing and aggrandizing those features, Solomon made it clear that He regarded the temple as the fulfillment of what the portable tabernacle had signified and anticipated. *It wasn't a new sanctuary as such, but the earthly consummation of the previous sanctuary.* Solomon's temple was the realization of the Davidic Covenant's pledge of a permanent house for Yahweh, but it also fulfilled the Lord's promise of a central sanctuary. Both of these promises had their historical and covenantal presupposition in the Mosaic tabernacle.

- 3) Finally, Solomon's consecration of the temple and his prayer of petition and blessing have great typological significance. Reminiscent of his father's actions in bringing the ark to Jerusalem, when the temple construction was complete Solomon presided over the transfer of the ark from its tent in the City of David to its new residence in the permanent sanctuary on Mount Zion. As David before him, Solomon marked this solemn processional with sacrifices to the Lord (ref. 2 Samuel 6:12-18), but, in his case, more sacrifices than could be numbered (8:5).

Also like his father, Solomon concluded the holy ritual of bringing the ark into the Holy of Holies with a priestly benediction upon the sons of Israel (cf. 2 Samuel 6:18 with 1 Kings 8:6-14). He then interceded for the people before the Lord with a long prayer of praise and petition. The fact that this prayer is recorded almost identically in Kings and Chronicles indicates its importance to the larger storyline, and yet many regard it merely as a case study in intercessory prayer or a proof-text for a supposed cause-and-effect relationship between corporate repentance and divine blessing. The latter is behind the use of 2 Chronicles 7:14 as the theme verse for the National Day of Prayer – a day devoted to nationwide penitence in prayer with the goal that God would “hear from heaven” and “heal” America.

But once again, the key to this marvelous prayer is keeping it within its salvation-historical context. Far from articulating a universal spiritual maxim that any nation can apply to its own circumstance, Solomon was speaking from the vantage point of his status as the Davidic seed appointed to build Yahweh's house. Set in the context of his dedication of that sanctuary, Solomon's prayer makes a significant contribution to the developing concept of sacred space. For, viewed from the standpoint of the overall trajectory and goal of salvation history (of which they're a part), Solomon's actions reflect back on God's ancient promise to restore all things to Himself. In that sense, his prayer presupposed and drew upon everything that had gone before it – not merely the Davidic Covenant, but the Mosaic, Abrahamic and Adamic foundations of that covenant.

- Thus Solomon opened his dedicatory prayer with praise to Yahweh for His faithfulness in fulfilling His promise to David (8:23-24).

- As the Lord had “kept covenant” by seeing to it that David’s son built Him a house in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7:13), so Solomon petitioned Him to show the same faithfulness with regard to His promise to build *David’s* house (1 Kings 8:25-26).
- Solomon’s opening praise and petition emphasize the temporal aspects of the Davidic Covenant, but verses 8:27-30 show that he also recognized that the covenant and its promises transcended their earthly expressions: *The house he had built for Yahweh was nothing more than a material representation of His true dwelling place.* Solomon understood that, as the covenant looked to a Davidic son beyond himself, so the sanctuary God had appointed that son to build transcended the physical temple in Jerusalem.
- The majority of Solomon’s prayer was concerned with the interplay between repentance and deliverance/restoration (ref. 8:30-53). Essentially, Solomon was petitioning Yahweh to deal with His covenant people in accordance with *righteous mercy*, and this petition has great importance when viewed in relation to the Davidic Covenant and the dedication of the temple:

*Here the covenant son of David was standing as intercessor before Yahweh in the place where He had determined to meet with His people and pleading with Him to forgive and restore them to Himself as they turned to Him in humble, penitent faith.*

The salvation-historical significance of Solomon’s petition is all the more profound in that he extended its reach beyond the people of Israel to the nations of the earth (vv. 41-43). Solomon sought for all mankind the same merciful reception at the Lord’s sanctuary that he sought for Israel. He prayed that the Lord would forgive and receive all who came to Him in repentant and dependent faith.

*In Solomon’s prophetic conception, Yahweh’s house – built by the son of David – was to be a place of forgiveness, cleansing and refuge for all the nations (cf. Isaiah 56:1-8 with 11:10 and Zechariah 6:9-15; also John 2:13-21, 4:19-24 with 1 Peter 2:4-6).*

- After he finished praying Solomon stood and blessed the people in the name of the Lord. *Notably, he blessed them by proclaiming the blessedness of their covenant God:* Israel’s blessing consisted in the fact that God had chosen them to be His people and given them His great and manifold promises, none of which He had failed to keep. Yahweh’s *hesed* – not Israel’s strength or even its faithfulness – had secured the nation’s peace and rest (8:54-56).

With his thoughts fixed upon the Lord's history of unwavering faithfulness to His people, Solomon held the sons of Israel up to Him with the confident hope that He would continue to be with them, thereby leading them to know, love and serve Him. *In that way they would fulfill their calling as Abraham's offspring*: Israel's faithful devotion would cause all the people of the earth to know that Yahweh is the one true God (vv. 57-59).

- 4) The Lord responded to Solomon's intercession and benediction by reaffirming His covenant with David, specifically as it involved the two-fold promise of a *house*: He would put His name forever in the house built for Him by the Davidic seed (cf. 1 Kings 9:1-3; 8:28-29), and He would likewise establish the house He promised to David (cf. 9:4-5; 8:25-26).

At the same time, Yahweh made it clear that His faithfulness to these two houses was contingent upon the faithfulness of the Davidic kingship: Should Solomon or his regal sons depart from Him to follow other gods, He would surely cut off David's dynasty and kingdom and reject the Jerusalem sanctuary (9:6-9). *Here again the tension between judgment and promise comes to the forefront*: Immediately after pledging Himself to an unending commitment to His house (v. 3) the Lord promised to reject it if David's seed turned away from Him.

On the one hand, the decline in David's house had already begun and was to be escalated in Solomon; the Davidic kingship would indeed depart from Yahweh and His threatened punishment would be realized in the destruction of the temple and Israel's captivity. On the other hand, the Lord would uphold His promise of everlasting commitment to His house. The resolution of this apparent contradiction finds a clue in Solomon's previous observation (8:27): *The destruction of the Jerusalem temple didn't mean the overthrow of the promise, for Yahweh's commitment was to His true sanctuary – the spiritual reality of sacred space that the physical sanctuary only symbolized* (ref. Exodus 25:1-9).

- b. And so, even as Solomon's work and prayer indicated his status as the son of the promise, Yahweh's response reinforced his share in the judgment pronounced on David's house. The retributive sword that was introduced during David's reign was being wielded against Solomon's house and kingdom (ref. 1 Kings 2:13-34).
- c. Most importantly, Solomon's failures pointed to the need for another Davidic son to fulfill the covenant promise. Though Solomon was the initial referent of the promise, he, too, ruled according to the "procedure of the king," exploiting his subjects (12:1-4) and seeking his own well-being and personal ends in disregard of Yahweh (11:1-40). Moreover, by multiplying his wealth, horses and wives Solomon violated the regal ideal set forth by Moses (cf. 10:26-11:3; Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Like David, Solomon only anticipated the promised King of Israel.