

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

The Age of Kings: What can history, even biblical history, possibly reveal to us about God? What was God up to in the reign of King David and his son Solomon? Why did God destroy ancient Jerusalem and send them into exile for seventy years? What relevance can the age of Old Testament kings possibly have in the life of a twenty-first century believer? Why did God speak prophetically to his people during this period of time? These questions and more will be considered in this class. We will explore together God's redemptive historical work revealed in the pages of scripture and see how the mission of the people of God both then and now has always been the same.

The objective of this class is: to gain an appreciation for the period of the northern & southern monarchies in the OT, and understand the relationship between the redemptive work of God and the events that unfolded during this specific time in history. Careful attention will be given to both the Davidic Covenant as well as the decline and exile of the people of God.

Introduction: This week we explore the transition of the throne from David to his promised son, Solomon, in the lesson bearing the subtitle, *Solomon and the Wisdom of God*. Not unlike other major transitions in the life of God's people, this one is fraught with the potential to derail the covenant community from their divinely appointed mission. We will explore how this was a possibility as well as the steps taken to prevent it from occurring. We will also witness the crucial moment in the history of the people of God in which the temple, the final resting place for the ark of God's presence was built in Jerusalem. This was truly the highlight of both the reign of David and Solomon.

As we begin a new book (1 Kings) we are reminded of the overarching story of scripture. Indeed, each book is not a detached message relating an event that happened in a vacuum. Rather, there are a series of sub-plots (also called meta-narratives) that make up the greater plot or mega-narrative of God's divine revelation. According to Donald Wiseman in his commentary on 1 & 2 Kings, there are a series of themes throughout the book of Kings (1 & 2) that are observable to the reader. These include the following: God in judgment; God as deliverer (hope and restoration); God's promise to David; and prophecy.¹ As was mentioned earlier in this class, the role of the prophet arose simultaneously with the role of king in Israel. In the event that a new divinely sanctioned dynasty was either anointed or confirmed, such a selection was sanctioned by the presence and ministry of the prophet. The role of the prophet will become increasingly apparent throughout the Age of Kings as the covenant community and the house of David rebels against the law and commandments of the Lord. This will be discussed briefly during the study of the ministries of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 8:15 and 2 King 3:14-25), but will be explored in depth next semester when we study the books of the major prophets.

Part One: An Almost Slip – There is a reminder to the student of scripture that one should never take for granted the role of human responsibility in the expansion of God's kingdom. While it is true that the salvation of man and the very means thereof is a work of grace, and our on-going sanctification in this life is a growth in grace, there is an obvious tension in scripture between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We are about to witness this tension now, in the last days of David's life. According to chapter one verses one through four, the king is weakened and no longer possesses the ability to warm himself at night. However, the bigger issue is that his presumptuous son, Adonijah, exalted himself and sought to seize the throne of his father. Now before we mistake Adonijah's crime to be as severe as Absalom's we should state that it was customary in the ancient near east, as it is today in the remaining

¹ Wiseman, Donald J. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 & 2 Kings*. Pgs. 18-23

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monarchies of the world, for a king to declare a crown prince who would become his obvious successor. In some instances, in the period of the kings, we have dual regencies: two kings on the throne of the kingdom at the same time. We have that for a short time even during the early days of the reign of Solomon. However, the difference is two-fold: 1) Solomon was the crown prince, and 2) Solomon was the stated successor of David by God himself (2 Samuel 12:24-25).

The scripture states, *“Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, ‘I will be king.’ And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him”* (1 Kings 1:5). Note the use of “himself” and “him” in the text. It is clear whose kingdom Adonijah was seeking to establish. David did not make the pronouncement nor did the prophet Nathan come to him and encourage him that such self-promotion was the will of God. Instead, he promoted himself, and prepared for his own coronation. Unfortunately, the next verse reveals how weakened the king had become: *“His father (David) had never at any time displeased him (or discouraged him) by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’ He was also a very handsome man, and he was borne next after Absalom”* (1:6).

There are three things of significance in the above verse: 1) David did not discourage Adonijah from exalting himself though he must have been aware of his actions; 2) Adonijah was very handsome – remember the differentiation between David and Saul and David and Eliab and the statement of God to Samuel: *“God sees not as man sees; man, looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.”* 3) Adonijah was born after Absalom. This would imply that he was next in line to the throne given the right of primogeniture since the brothers who were born before him had already died.²

2 Kings 1:11 states, *“Then, Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, ‘Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our Lord does not know it? Now, therefore, come let me give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon.’”* The guest list of Adonijah’s coronation party is revelatory, not for the people it included, but for the people it excluded. The people not invited were: David, the king, Nathan, the prophet, Solomon, the crown prince, Zadok, the priest, and all of David’s mighty men. The people who were invited were Joab (the selfish murderer) and Abiathar, the priest who was a descendant of Eli whom the Lord had forsaken from the priesthood. It quickly became apparent that Adonijah’s kingdom was Satan’s attempt to create a counterfeit of the one covenantally promised by God through the mouth of the prophet Nathan.

After seeking David’s blessing, Nathan and Bathsheba facilitated the coronation of Solomon as king and successor to his father David. 1 Kings 1:38-41 states, *“So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule and brought him to Gihon. There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then, they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.”* God’s man had become king. The attempt of the enemy to thwart Solomon’s

² According to 1 Chronicles 3:1-2, Amnon was the firstborn, but he was killed by his brother, Absalom. Between Amnon and Absalom was Daniel. We do not know what happened to Daniel since he is not mentioned other than this place in scripture. Perhaps he had a different heart being the son of Abigail (David’s wife taken while in exile from the throne) and was willing to submit to the Lord for a named successor to his father. After Absalom was born Adonijah. So, it is obvious that Adonijah felt justified in exalting himself because of a perceived right of birth. This was customary in other nations, but the king of God’s people was not to be the same as the king of other nations.

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ascension to the throne and thereby likely preventing the construction of the temple in Jerusalem from being built had been averted. The covenant making, covenant keeping God is victorious.

Part Two: Solomon's Sole Request – After the death of David and the establishment of his throne, King Solomon is purportedly influenced by the cultural expectations of his generation regarding the proper technique for engaging in international diplomacy. We have some indication that David, his father, did the same since the mother of Absalom was the daughter of the king of the Arameans. Bearing in mind that foreign marriages were forbidden in Israel, and would later become the reason for turning the hearts of the people of God against pure worship, such behavior suggests the extent to which even wise kings at the height of Israel's golden age could not escape being influenced by the cultural forces of their generation. Solomon marries the daughter of the king of Egypt. Later we will see how Solomon's love for strange women becomes a snare to him spiritually. In 1 Kings 11:1-2 we read, *"Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, 'You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn your heart away after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love."* His love for his idolatrous wives eventually became the first of many flirtatious encounters between the house of David and spiritual ruin.

Nonetheless, early in the reign of king Solomon we read the following, *"Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, 'Ask what I shall give you.' And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David, my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, Oh Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"* (1 Kings 3:3-9) God's reply to Solomon was to grant him wisdom, *"...a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you..."* God also promised Solomon wealth, surpassing the great men of the earth. If Solomon remained faithful to obey the commands of the Lord, then he would also, *"... lengthen your days..."*

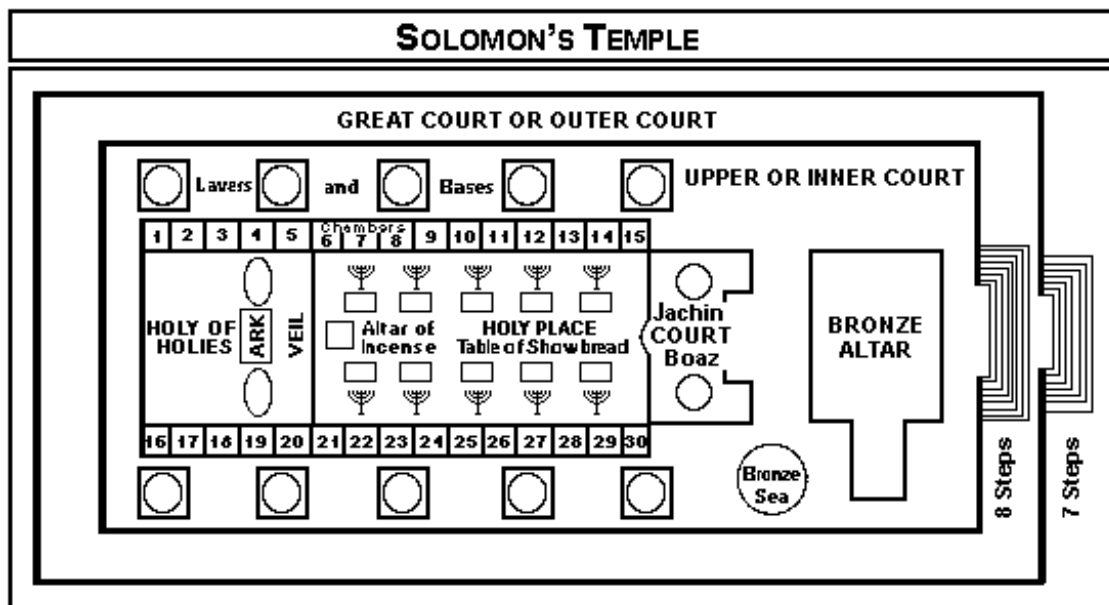
Reflected in the request of young Solomon is an awareness of his own need for divine aid. This is the purest most simple portrayal in the Old Testament of a vassal king who looks to the High King (YAHWEH) for wisdom and direction. However, even this king with wisdom unsurpassed by any before and after pales in comparison with one of his descendants. Christ told the Jewish leaders of his day, *"The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold something greater than Solomon is here"* (Matt. 12:42).

Part Three: God with Man – In the grand scheme of scripture the consistent desire expressed through the terms of the covenant of grace is that God might be our God and dwell among us. From Genesis chapter two, when God and man walked in the garden in the cool of the day and had unimpeded fellowship, to the heavenly dream of Jacob at Bethel (Beit-El) envisioning the house of God, to the

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sanctuary in the wilderness, the intent of each of these is for God's presence to find a resting place amidst his people. You might even say that the various trials, and tragedies of the life of David were all for the sake of bringing about this momentous occasion wherein, God's people, in full occupation of the land of promise, at rest from enemies without and within can focus their energy and wealth on the construction of the house of God. The construction of the temple is for the people of God, the culmination of God's covenantal promises, yet even at this great height it remains a model, a shadow of that which is to come.

The temple took seven years to construct and was made from perfectly hewn stone that was prepared off-site and moved by a considerable force of manpower to the site at Jerusalem. Below is a diagram of the temple when completed:



There are a few changes that were made to the temple Solomon built that were different from the furnishings of the sanctuary. The basic elements of the temple furnishings remained the same, but new ones were made, and there were some variations in quantity. The molten sea, which sat upon twelve oxen was an embellishment of the grand basin in the tabernacle. Likewise, the altar for burnt offerings and the altar of incense were new construction. There were seven golden candlesticks and seven tables for the showbread in the temple, whereas there were only one of each in the tabernacle. However, the most significant change is not in the furnishings of the temple, but the role of the temple in the life of God's people. When Solomon prayed dedicating the temple he stated the following, *"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, Oh Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea*

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of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive” (1 Kings 8:27-30).

The most significant change between the tabernacle and the temple, was the role the temple now played (and will continue to play until the first advent of Christ) in the life of God’s people. There is an understanding expressed here by the king, that the temple represents a mediatorial function in the life of the covenant community. Years later, when Judah is taken away into Babylonian captivity, the people of God are instructed per this prayer of King Solomon, to pray in the direction of the temple. The relationship between the temple of God and the people of God takes on a crucial role from this point forward.

Conclusion: It cannot go without saying that a development occurs in the faith and religion of the people of Israel, the OT church with the construction of the Solomonic temple. The ark of God’s presence, which has always played an important part in the worship of ancient Israel, now took on a new role, resting in a permanent location. Some would take for granted that the resting place of the ark of the presence would not and could not be impacted by the disobedience or spiritual apathy on the part of the people of God. By the end of the age of kings, this notion would be proven false.

The above understanding of the role of the temple of God in the life of the people of God was the context for the statement of Christ wherein he taught about his own mediatorial role in the life of God’s people. In **John 2:18-19;21** we read, *“So the Jews said to him, ‘What sign do you show us for doing these things?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ ...he was speaking about the temple of his body.”* In the same vein that the church of the OT directed their prayers to the temple because it was the physical, tangible representation of the presence of God among his people, so the prayers of the church of the NT are directed to Christ, prayed by virtue of his atonement and in his name. He is, *God with us*. He is the physical, tangible embodiment of the presence of God among his people.