

תורת משה Torat Moshe

Essays in Honor of
Rabbi Moshe Shamah's Eightieth Birthday
and the Jubilee of Sephardic Institute

Edited by Rabbi Dr. Richard Hidary

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☞ The Reign of Solomon: From a Nation United to a Nation Divided

Ronald Benun

Introduction

King Solomon is perhaps the most tragic figure among all the kings of Israel and Judah. His wisdom was legend; his wealth profound. The security of his realm was assured throughout most of his reign. In short, God gave him everything, as He promised to do in a dream early in Solomon's rule — and yet he strayed. Despite beginning with every advantage, he was led after his material pursuits down the path from loyalty to God, to selfish preoccupations, to outright idolatry. Of all the kings whose lives demonstrate the failings of the monarchy, Solomon is most prominent as one who began with such promise, and yet ended in such disappointment.

The study that follows will examine how the Book of Kings portrays Solomon, giving special attention to how subtle intertextuality with narrative accounts of other figures, particularly Joseph and Judah (i.e., the progenitors of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah respectively) reveals harsh criticism of Solomon's rule.

The Birth of Solomon

The story of Solomon begins with the sequence of events that led up to his birth. Perhaps foreshadowing things to come, these events comprise the outstanding moral failings of his father, David. A review of this material sheds light on the characters of

David and Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, and foreshadows some of the subsequent acts of their son.

The conception of Solomon begins with the narrative of the adulterous and ultimately murderous liaison between David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11. Many details of this affair are relevant as points of reference for later comparisons in the narrative of Solomon (2 Kings 2–11). It is thus worthwhile to review the material, closely analyzing how the characters and their deeds are portrayed.

Many commentators view Bathsheba as a powerless victim of a lustful king David. Her washing is interpreted as purification from her menstrual cycle. However, many subtle textual indicators tell a different story. The narrative, set against the backdrop of the nation still at war with Ammon, begins with David arising from his couch (מִשְׁכָּבוֹ) at evening, walking to the roof of his palace, and espying a “very beautiful woman” bathing. A question naturally arises: Why would a woman bathe in sight of other rooftops? Indeed, this is the first of many hints to subtle guile underlying Bathsheba's actions throughout the narratives in which she appears. There is strong reason to suspect that she aimed to catch the king's eye. As for the image of the king, he seems to be at ease, idly walking around the palace and finding time for voyeurism, while his generals fight abroad. This particular criticism of David, currently beneath the surface of the text, rises to a more explicit one later, as we shall see.

David sends messengers to inquire after the woman, and is informed that she is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite¹. Verses four and five then state the following:

- He took her — וַיִּקַּחָהּ
- she came to him — וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו
- he lay with her — וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה

1. Importantly, to recognize the depth of David's betrayal, we should note that Uriah is listed last among David's thirty-seven closest warriors in 2 Samuel 23:39, a position of prominence.

- she had just purified herself from her uncleanness — והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה
- she went back to her house — ותשב אל ביתה
- she conceived and sent word to David — ותהר האשה ותשלח ותגיד לדוד
- And she said “I am pregnant” — ותאמר הרה אנכי

Note the following points:

- If David took her, why add “she came to him”? This is seemingly superfluous unless there is a subtext hinting to her willing participation.
- She has just been “purified of her uncleanness.” This is a literary warning bell that indicates she has crossed the threshold of fertility making it highly probable that she would conceive.
- “She went back home” informs us that there is an attempt to cover up the adulterous liaison.

The narrator then tells us that she conceived and told David, “I am pregnant.” Her words are seemingly superfluous — the narrator already told us that she conceived and sent word to David. Furthermore, they are the **first** and **only** words we hear from Bathsheba.² They comprise the **only** direct quotation in the four verses describing the affair. Are these the words of a docile victim, or are we being prompted to ask why, after being summoned, she didn’t tell the king “I **will get** pregnant”? To answer that she was afraid to object to the powerful king would be insufficient, as the king would certainly want to know that the sexual liaison could very well end in a pregnancy. As we will see in the following verses, David will go very far to cover up the pregnancy, eventually killing Uriah the Hittite, his trusted general and neighbor.

2. The next time we hear her speak is many years later at the end of David’s reign in 1 Kings 1:17 where (with the prophet Nathan’s backing) she tells David he swore by God that Solomon would be king after him.

David sends word to Joab to return Uriah from the battlefield. He asks Uriah how things are going with Joab, with the nation, and with the war. Done making small talk, David tells Uriah to go home and wash his feet, sending gifts after him as he leaves the palace. Uriah, for his part, ignores the instruction, sleeping instead by the palace gate, along with all the king's servants, refusing to go down to his home. The text has made a point of involving enough characters as witnesses to the tryst (the messengers and servants of the king) to allow us to wonder whether Uriah has caught rumor of David's deeds. The inexplicable summons from battle and unusually friendly hospitality of the king would only add to the suspicion.

Finally, what follows in their exchange must be taken as a bitter and harsh rebuke of the king. When David is informed that Uriah did not go home (showing that he put out word to keep tabs on him, continuing to involve others in the cover-up), he asks why, after his journey, Uriah has not returned to his wife. Uriah pointedly responds (v. 11), "The Ark, Israel and Judah sit in tents, and my master Joab and the servants of my master camp out in the field, and I should go home to eat, and drink, and *sleep with my wife*? By your life, I will not do such a thing!" Whether Uriah remains unaware, and this is an irony of the text, or whether Uriah has indeed learned of David's crime, the sharp criticism in these words is biting. David has been in his home, strolling and spying from the roof, while others fight his war and dwell in tents — even the Ark has gone down to battle while David sits at ease. Joab, the leader who actually goes to battle, is referred to as "my master," a subtle way of rejecting David's leadership from afar. While all the men to whom he is loyal are in danger and at war, how can Uriah go home and *sleep with his wife*? The unspoken accusation in this final refusal is that David, of course, has done just that, sleeping with the wife of Uriah while the latter fights for him. As for the language of his refusal, swearing an oath to the king "by your life" is rather surprising language, and a measure of well-earned disrespect may be detected in it.

David tries once more to have Uriah return home, hoping to

be able to pass off his lovechild as the legitimate son of Bathsheba's husband. He commands Uriah to stay in Jerusalem for one more day, promising to send him on the morrow. The next day, David calls him to eat and drink and attempts to lower his defenses through intoxication. Yet in the evening, Uriah goes out to sleep on his couch³ with the other servants of the king, still unwilling to return home.

David gives up and has Uriah deliver his own death sentence to Joab: an instruction to place Uriah in the most dangerous combat zone. Uriah falls in battle, and Joab sends a messenger to David with special instructions about how to avoid the king's wrath over the heavy losses, apparently the product of a tactical error (proximity to a wall well-guarded by archers). Anticipating a scolding from David, complete with reference to historical precedent from the days of Abimelech (Judges 9:50–57), Joab instructs the messenger to soften the blow by adding that Uriah was among the dead. Always a shrewd character, Joab recognizes that David's instructions were intended as a means of "taking care of a problem" by having Uriah killed. David, as Joab predicted, simply relays through the messenger his good wishes for the rest of the battle, remarking that he shouldn't worry too much about his losses, because "such is the way of the sword." Meanwhile, Bathsheba, referred to in a final bit of criticism from the text simply as "the wife of Uriah," learns of her husband's death and mourns him. The time of mourning passes, and David

3. The word משכבו, used to refer to Uriah's resting place where he returned in the evening (בערב), is the same word used to describe the resting place from which David arose to sleep with Bathsheba, also at evening (2 Samuel 11:2). The characters are contrasted: the brave, loyal soldier who is unwilling to compromise his integrity by accepting comforts not granted to his comrades (or, if he is aware, who is unwilling to participate in David's cover-up), sleeps at the palace entrance rather than sleep at his home with Bathsheba. Whether he knows or does not know of her adultery, this contrasts unfavorably with David, who, after rising from his own resting place at evening, has her taken to the palace for adultery while his soldiers fight his battles.

has her brought to the palace as his wife, where she gives birth to their child. The perfunctory mourning and shotgun wedding would conclude the first part of this narrative with the impression that David (and Bathsheba) have gotten away with it, but for the comment of the text that “the matter was evil in the eyes of God.”

The story continues with the arrival of Nathan, the prophet sent by God to rebuke David and inform him of the consequences of his crime. Nathan slyly gets David to condemn himself by relating a parable, the details of which are important:

2 Samuel 12:1–4	
א וישלח יהוה את נתן אל דוד ויבא אליו ויאמר לו שני אנשים היו בעיר אחת עשיר ואחד רש.	¹ and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said, “There were two men in the same city, one rich and one poor.
ב לעשיר היה צאן ובקר הרבה מאד.	² The rich man had very large flocks and herds,
ג ולרש אין כל כי אם כבשה אחת קטנה אשר קנה ויחיה ותגדל עמו ועם בניו יחדו מפתו תאכל ומכסו תשתה ובחיקו תשכב ויהי לו כבת.	³ but the poor man had only one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He tended it and it grew up together with him and his children: it used to share his morsel of bread, drink from his cup, and nestle in his bosom; it was like a daughter to him.
ד ויבא הלך לאיש העשיר ויחמל לקחת מצאנו ומבקרו לעשות לארץ הבא לו ויקח את כבשת האיש הראש ויעשה לאיש הבא אליו.	⁴ One day, a traveler came to the rich man, but he was loath to take anything from his own flocks or herds to prepare a meal for the guest who had come to him; so he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”
ה ויחר אף דוד באיש מאד ויאמר אל נתן חי יהוה כי בן מות האיש העשה זאת.	⁵ David flew into a rage against the man, and said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!
ו ואת הכבשה ישלם ארבעתים עקב אשר עשה את הדבר הזה ועל אשר לא חמל.	⁶ He shall pay for the lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and showed no pity.”

Interestingly, certain elements of the parable are difficult to map onto David's case. If Bathsheba is analogous to the lamb that the poor man cherished, and Uriah is the poor man exploited by the rich man (obviously representing David), then the theft of the lamb would more appropriately be followed by the slaughter of the poor man. And who is the traveler for whom the rich man slaughters the lamb? Commentators have struggled with this, and ultimately, as Maimonides points out, a parable may have relevant core elements as well as less significant details. This would appear to be one of those instances. After all, Nathan had the specific goal of constructing a case similar enough to David's in these core elements to get David to render his own guilty verdict, which would not be possible if the story were too perfectly contrived. What is important, broadly speaking, is that a poor man (Uriah) loved and cherished his only possession, an ewe lamb (Bathsheba), who lived under his care along with his own children, ate of his food, drank of his cup, slept in his bosom (וּבְחִיקוֹ תִשָּׁכַב) and was beloved as a daughter. A rich man (David) living in the same city (Jerusalem) who had many such sheep (his many wives and concubines) thought it a "pity" (וַיִּחַמַּל) to give up one of his own to the anonymous traveler, and so he stole from the poor man, irrevocably (the sheep has been slaughtered, as has Uriah). While it is not certain, it is possible that the "traveler" (הַלֵּךְ) of the story is symbolic of the urge that came across David. The "traveler" occasioned the opportunity for the rich man to feel the need to steal from the poor man in order to satisfy his "guest," and may be an oblique reference to the very beginning of the narrative when David was strolling around on his roof (עַל גַּג בֵּיתוֹ) before looking down and spying the woman whom he felt licensed to take.

David is livid when he hears of this exploitation of the weak by the powerful, saying that the rich man deserves to die, and will surely pay four times the value of the slaughtered sheep as penalty for his "lack of pity" (אֲשֶׁר לֹא חָמַל). There is irony in David's presentation of the man's "lack of pity," after the rich man thought it a "pity" to slaughter one of his own many animals to feed his guest.

And indeed, irony characterizes most of his interaction with Nathan, since David does not know that he is speaking his own verdict: a double irony since David similarly sent an unknowing Uriah with his own death warrant to Joab.

Nathan reveals to David that he is the subject of the story he has just told, and delivers a harsh rebuke along with a warning. God has given David everything: anointed him as king, saved him from Saul, provided him with a palace, provided him with his wives in his bosom (בְּחִיקָךְ, recalling the description of the lamb “sleeping in the poor man’s bosom”), provided him with the houses of Israel and Judah — and would have given him even more (וְאִסְפָּה לְךָ כְּהֵנָה וְכַהֲנָה), were this not enough. So why has David spurned God’s word, doing that which is evil in His eyes: killing Uriah by the sword, taking his wife for David’s own, and having him killed by the sword of Ammon?⁴ For these deeds, the sword would not depart from the house of David; moreover, from within his very house would come retribution, and those close to him would lie with his own wives (וְשָׁכַב עִם נָשֶׁיךָ) before him. Nathan adds that David’s deeds were achieved in secret, but his retribution would occur “before all Israel and before the sun.”

At this point, David admits his fault, saying he has sinned unto God, to which Nathan replies that David himself will not die, presumably because he has recognized his guilt. However, the

4. The redundancy of the charge of killing Uriah is a difficulty here: אֵת אוּרִיָּה הַחֲתִי הָכִיתָ בַּחֶרֶב וְאֵת אִשְׁתּוֹ לָקַחְתָּ לְךָ לְאִשָּׁה וְאֹתוֹ הָרַגְתָּ בַּחֶרֶב בְּנֵי עֲמֹן. First David is directly charged with the murder, then, after further accusing David of taking Uriah’s wife as his own wife (not even mentioning the adultery prior to being wedded!), Nathan repeats the charge of putting Uriah to the sword, this time mentioning the sword of the Ammonites. It serves to emphasize the word “sword,” which recurs in the verse, making the reciprocal nature of the punishment in the next verse clearer — to wit, that “the sword shall not depart from your house.” The doubling of “sword” here also reminds us of David’s excuse, “such is the way of the sword,” even though it was David himself who orchestrated the death of his general by the sword of the enemy.

lovechild of the adulterous affair would surely die. David prays, fasts, and sleeps on the ground (וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶרְצָה) for a week — perhaps a contrast to how he rose from his resting place (מִשְׁכָּבוֹ) to walk about the roof at the outset of the story and went on to lie with Bathsheba (וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה) — but to no avail, and the child dies.

Oddly, and to the surprise of his worried staff, he returns to normal quite suddenly after the death of the child, rising from the ground, washing, changing his clothing, eating and drinking. He explains that while the baby lived, he had hoped for God's mercy, but with its death, there was nothing more he could do. Nevertheless, the scene is strange, and the bewilderment of the servants is intended to match that of the reader. Considering that just a few months ago, David had done everything in his power to pass the baby off as someone else's child, and that this baby was conceived adulterously and not entirely secretly, perhaps there is room to question the sincerity of his mourning. In any case, in the very next words, he “comforts Bathsheba, his wife,” — and goes to her and lies with her again, conceiving another child (וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה). This phrase is interesting for two reasons. First, it is the mirror image of the adulterous liaison that began the narrative, which described Bathsheba going in to *him* and he lay with her (וַתִּבֹּא אֵלָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה). Second, and this explains a key facet of the narrative, *every* use of the term “lie with” (שָׁכַב ... עִם) in Scripture refers to illicit affairs such as incest, adultery, bestiality or otherwise improper sexual behavior, except for the phrase “laid with his fathers” (וַיִּשְׁכַּב ... עִם אֲבֹתָיו) as a euphemism for death (especially among kings and Jacob in Gen. 47:30).⁵

5. Usually, when the Bible wishes to depict a married couple conceiving a child together, the verb יָדַע is used. The term שָׁכַב carries negative connotations without exception. It appears first in Genesis 19, to describe the rape of Lot by his own daughters. In Gen. 19:32–35 the root שָׁכַב appears seven times, all describing this act of incest, with עִם שָׁכַב accounting for three of them. The next occurrence is in Gen. 30 when Leah “hires out” Jacob to lie with her on what should have been Rachel's night with him (indeed, here too, the diction of the Torah using עִמָּה וַיִּשְׁכַּב reveals the impropriety of the exchange, which is

It is a small wonder that the root שכב occurs six times in the part of the narrative concerning David, Uriah and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11), four times in the rebuke of Nathan, death of the first child, and conception of Solomon (2 Sam. 12), and seven times in the ensuing narrative of Amnon, Tamar and Absalom (2 Sam. 13).

It is Bathsheba who names the new son “Solomon,” possibly connoting that the child symbolizes recompense for past deeds, an end to the previous difficult episode, and future security and welfare.⁶ This part of the narrative ends on a more positive note, with God showing favor to Solomon and naming him Jedidiah, the “beloved of God.”

reminiscent of the original deception that led Jacob to marry Leah when he expected Rachel as his wife). The next occurrence is when Potiphar’s wife repeatedly asks Joseph שָׁכַבָה עִמִּי in Gen. 39:7, 12, and 14, a scene which exemplifies the integrity and morality of Joseph even at great personal cost. The rest of the occurrences in the Torah are not narrative, but law, and each and every one of them describes forbidden sexual acts: Exodus 22:15 and 18 describe the seduction of a virgin and bestiality, respectively; Leviticus 15:33 refers to a man who sleeps with a woman in her state of impurity; a series of sexual crimes are described with seven attestations of שכב + עם in Deuteronomy 22:22–29; and the curses of Deut. 27:20–23 describe incest and bestiality with four more usages of the term.

There are no further occurrences of the term before David and Bathsheba. The use of the same negative term to describe their sexual union as adulterers before the murder of Uriah, and as husband and wife afterward, highlight that simply marrying did not suddenly erase the problematic origin of their coupling. Indeed, when Nathan rebukes David, he specifies that David took the wife of Uriah as his own wife, and had him killed by the sword of Ammon — the adultery preceding their marriage is not even mentioned.

It is interesting that only one further usage of שכב עם exists in Scripture (excluding those which occur to describe the death of each king “sleeping with his ancestors”): the direct consequence of their crime, and the next narrative, wherein Amnon begins his rape of Tamar with the words שָׁכַבְתִּי עִמָּי אֶחָדָתִי.

6. See these various meanings of the root שלם at BDB, p. 1022.

The repercussions of David's actions continue, however. In the next narratives, David is repaid measure for measure. They begin with his son Amnon raping his half-sister Tamar, an even more repulsive act of sexual license than his father's. Amnon says, "lie with me, my sister — שִׁכְבִּי עִמִּי אָחוֹתִי," a repulsive phrase highlighting his consciousness of the incest, and overpowers her in spite of her protestations. Afterward, he sends her out of his sight, discarded like a used object. In mourning, Tamar tears her "colorful garment — כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים," described by the text as the customary garb of a virgin princess.⁷ In retribution, David's most beloved son, Absalom, murders Amnon — thus fulfilling the promise of Nathan that the sword would not depart from David's house. Upon learning of the murder, it is David's turn to tear his garments, and to "sleep upon the floor" (וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶרְצָה) in mourning. David exiles Absalom, but his problems are hardly over.

Joab, seeing David in mourning for his exiled child, devises a plot to return Absalom. He sends a wise woman of Tekoa to plea for clemency on behalf of one son who killed another, lest she, a widow, be altogether bereft of sons and her late husband bereft of heirs. As occurred in the case of Nathan's parable, David unwittingly gives his own verdict to a generalized question: if one son is already dead, then would it really be just to take away the living one in the name of fairness? David promises that no harm will come to her son, and she asks whether his judgment can be called fair when he refuses to apply it at home. David, now recognizing the contrivance of the tale, guesses that Joab has put her up to it, and agrees to return Absalom home.

7. There is a recurrent motif within the narrative of the early kings whereby a character's clothing is a symbol of their royalty, and tearing it connotes the loss of royalty. Thus, Saul tears the coat of Samuel and is told that thus will the kingdom be rent from his grasp. David tears Saul's coat, having been anointed as his successor. The text explicitly notes that Tamar's כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים is reserved for virgins of royal birth, which she now rends in mourning. As we shall see, when Solomon's kingdom is divided, the prophet uses a torn garment to signify this to Jeroboam, his successor over the northern kingdom of Israel.

After some time, they are reconciled (again through the mediation of Joab), and all appears well. Yet as Absalom gains popularity, he also grows in ambition and eventually leads a revolt against his own father, driving David out of Jerusalem. At this point, the words of Nathan come to fruition. On the advice of David's wisest counselor prior to his treason, Ahithophel the Gilonite, Absalom sleeps with all of David's remaining concubines and does so on the very roof of the palace from whence David first espied Bathsheba (2 Samuel 16:22). This is intended to harden the rebellion by showing Absalom's total debasement of his father down to adultery with his harem. The text notes that at this time, the advice of Ahithophel was as the word of God Himself; this is a double entendre. The simple meaning, of course, is that his insight and wisdom was unparalleled among men. The counsel to the king is chosen from the cutting edge of the nation's intellectual elite. In this case, however, in advising Absalom's public act of adultery, he was only having Absalom fulfill what God said would occur as relayed to David through Nathan.

The remainder of the narrative is not especially relevant to Solomon. The rebellion fails simply because Absalom ignores Ahithophel's advice and follows another one of David's advisors — the double agent Hushai. Upon seeing his counsel ignored, Ahithophel sets his affairs in order and then strangles himself, no doubt predicting Absalom's imminent demise as a result. Joab, ignoring David's orders, kills Absalom. The rebellion is quelled, and David settles some scores. Yet one matter should not be overlooked: Ahithophel, the most brilliant figure of his generation, has descendants.

2 Samuel 23 lists David's 37 heroes and warriors. We have already observed that the inclusion of Uriah the Hittite at the very end of the list highlights the depths of David's betrayal. Yet also to be found on this list, in verse 34, is one Eliam, son of Ahithophel the Gilonite. The name is important to us for one reason: Bathsheba is the daughter of Eliam; she is Ahithophel's granddaughter! Her father, Eliam, is one of the top warriors in the nation, as was her husband, Uriah.

Does the author wish for us to recognize that Bathsheba, not necessarily a passive object of lust but rather a brilliant and sly instigator thereof, is of cunning parentage? As for her son Solomon, is his fabled unparalleled wisdom a trait inherited from his great-grandfather, Ahithophel, to say nothing of his shrewd mother? The next narrative in Solomon's life highlights her craftiness once more.

The Rise of Solomon

Solomon's rise to power despite being a younger son is largely the product of his older brothers' failures. Amnon is slain for the rape of Tamar; Absalom is killed by Joab for his usurpation of the throne. There is only one more noted contender, Adonijah. How this problem is dealt with tells us much about Solomon and his parents, especially Bathsheba.

1 Kings opens with a short depiction of David in his old age. He is unable to feel warmth even when wrapped in blankets. His advisors propose bringing in a virgin girl to attend to him and "lie in [his] bosom" (וְשָׁכְבָה בְּחִיקָה) to warm him up, employing the language used in reference to Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12. Abishag the Shunammite, the most beautiful virgin girl in all of Israel, is sought and found. She is brought to the king, but he is not intimate with her.

One cannot help but question whether David's lack of "warmth" connotes old age or is a euphemism for impotence, perhaps the aftereffect of his guilt from the adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the role it played in his interactions with his sons and the tragic events that ensued. David never reprimanded Amnon for the rape of Tamar, perhaps due to his own guilt and failings in the Bathsheba affair. His lack of action led to Absalom, Tamar's brother, killing Amnon. Absalom later rebelled and proclaimed himself king, which ultimately led to his death. The picture of David presented in the first chapter of 1 Kings coupled with the dysfunctionality of his family, and the tragic events that

followed make for a sad ending to the life of Israel’s mighty warrior, hero and most idolized king.

The focus of the narrative then immediately shifts to Adonijah, David’s fourth son, who perceives that the time has come to crown a new king. Much like Absalom before him, he undertakes to crown himself; unlike Absalom, he has the support of David’s most powerful and prestigious ministers — Joab, the leader of David’s army, and Abiathar, the high priest. He is described as attractive and as having been “born after Absalom” (1 Kings 1:6), apparently highlighting the similarities between them. The manner of his self-coronation is also reminiscent of Absalom — he has chariots, horsemen and fifty men running before him in a display of his royalty. Moreover, we are told that he has never been rebuked by his father in his life.

Adonijah throws a celebration to which the other royal scions and his supporters from among David’s ministers are invited — but notably, not Solomon. Also not invited is Benaiah, the military leader who apparently was viewed as David’s loyal ally. Neither is Nathan, the prophet whose favor for Solomon has been noted since the latter’s birth when he dubbed him “Jedidiah” (“friend of God” 2 Sam. 12:25). Nathan then informs Bathsheba that Adonijah has crowned himself and advises her to save her and Solomon’s life by reminding David of his promise that her son Solomon would reign. Nathan will then follow-up with confirmation of her words. Here is the text:

1 Kings 1:11–27	
יא וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל בֵּת שֶׁבַע אֵם שְׁלֹמֹה לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ כִּי מֶלֶךְ אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ בֶן חַגִּית וְאֲדֹנִינוּ דָּוִד לֹא יָדָע.	¹¹ Then Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother, “You must have heard that Adonijah son of Haggith has assumed the kingship without the knowledge of our lord David.
יב וְעַתָּה לְכִי אֵינְעִצְךָ נָא עֲצָה וּמִלְטִי אֶת נַפְשְׁךָ וְאֶת נַפֶּשׁ בְּנֶיךָ שְׁלֹמֹה.	¹² Now take my advice, so that you may save your life and the life of your son Solomon.

<p>יג לְכִי וּבֹאִי אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד וְאָמַרְתְּ אֵלָיו הֲלֹא אֶתָּה אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֹמֶתְךָ לֵאמֹר כִּי שְׁלֹמֹה בְנִי יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב עַל כִּסְאִי וּמִדּוּעַ מֶלֶךְ אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ.</p>	<p>¹³Go immediately to King David and say to him, ‘Did not you, O lord king, swear to your maidservant: “Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit upon my throne”? Then why has Adonijah become king?’</p>
<p>יד הִנֵּה עוֹדָךְ מְדַבֶּרֶת שָׁם עִם הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲנִי אָבוֹא אַחֲרֶיךָ וּמְלֹאֲתִי אֶת דְּבָרֶיךָ.</p>	<p>¹⁴While you are still there talking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words.”</p>
<p>טו וַתָּבֹא בַת שֶׁבַע אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחֲדָרָה וְהַמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן מְאֹד וְאַבִּישָׁג הַשִּׁוּנַמִּית מְשֻׁרֵת אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ.</p>	<p>¹⁵So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber — The king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was waiting on the king —</p>
<p>טז וַתִּקְדּוּ בַת־שֶׁבַע, וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה לָּךְ.</p>	<p>¹⁶ Bathsheba bowed low in homage to the king; and the king asked, “What troubles you?”</p>
<p>יז וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֲדֹנִי אֶתָּה נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְאֹמֶתְךָ כִּי שְׁלֹמֹה בְנִי יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב עַל כִּסְאִי.</p>	<p>¹⁷She answered him, “My lord, you yourself swore to your maidservant by the LORD your God: ‘Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit upon my throne.’</p>
<p>יח וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אֲדֹנִיָּה מֶלֶךְ וְעַתָּה אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא יָדָעָתָּ.</p>	<p>¹⁸Yet now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, know nothing about it.</p>
<p>יט וַיַּזְבֵּחַ שׁוֹר וּמִרְיָא וְצֹאן לָרֹב וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל בְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְאַבְיָתָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְיֹאָב שָׂרֵי הָעֶזְרָא וּלְשֹׁלֹמֹה עַבְדְּךָ לֹא קָרָא.</p>	<p>¹⁹He has prepared a sacrificial feast of a great many oxen, fatlings, and sheep, and he has invited all the king’s sons and Abiathar the priest and Joab commander of the army; but he has not invited your servant Solomon.</p>
<p>כ וְאַתָּה אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ עֵינֶי כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלֶיךָ לְהַגִּיד לָהֶם מִי יֵשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲרָיו.</p>	<p>²⁰And so the eyes of all Israel are upon you, O lord king, to tell them who shall succeed my lord the king on the throne.</p>
<p>כא וְהִנֵּה כַּשֶּׁכֶב אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ עִם אֲבֹתָיו וְהִיֵּיתִי אֲנִי וּבְנֵי שְׁלֹמֹה חֲטָאִים.</p>	<p>²¹Otherwise, when my lord the king lies down with his fathers, my son Solomon and I will be regarded as traitors.”</p>

כב וְהִנֵּה עוֹדָנָה מְדַבֶּרֶת עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנָתַן הַנָּבִיא בָּא.	²² She was still talking to the king when the prophet Nathan arrived.
כג וַיִּגִּדּוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה נָתַן הַנָּבִיא וַיָּבֹא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ עַל אָפָיו אַרְצָה.	²³ They announced to the king, “The prophet Nathan is here,” and he entered the king’s presence. Bowing low to the king with his face to the ground,
כד וַיֹּאמֶר נָתַן אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵתָּה אֲמַרְתָּ אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאִי.	²⁴ Nathan said, “O lord king, you must have said, ‘Adonijah shall succeed me as king and he shall sit upon my throne.’
כה כִּי יָרַד הַיּוֹם וַיַּזְבֵּחַ שׁוֹר וּמְרִיא וְצֹאן לָרֹב וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל בְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְשָׂרֵי הָצָבָא וּלְאַבְיָתָר הַכֹּהֵן וְהַנָּסִים אֲכָלִים וְשׂוֹתִים לִפְנֵי וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְחִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ.	²⁵ For he has gone down today and prepared a sacrificial feast of a great many oxen, fatlings, and sheep. He invited all the king’s sons and the army officers and Abiathar the priest. At this very moment they are eating and drinking with him, and they are shouting, ‘Long live King Adonijah!’
כו וְלִי וְלִי אֲנִי עֲבָדְךָ וְלִצְדָק הַכֹּהֵן וְלִבְנִיָּהוּ בֶן יְהוֹיָדָע וְלִשְׁלֹמֹה עֲבָדְךָ לֹא קָרָא.	²⁶ But he did not invite me your servant, or the priest Zadok, or Benaiah son of Jehoiada, or your servant Solomon.
כז אִם מֵאֵת אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ נָהִיָּה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא הוֹדַעְתָּ, אֵת עַבְדִּיךָ (עֲבָדְךָ) מִי יֹשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא אֲדֹנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲרָיו.	²⁷ Can this decision have come from my lord the king, without your telling your servant who is to succeed to the throne of my lord the king?”

Bathsheba not only follows Nathan’s advice but adds considerable detail to his words. She also deviates from Nathan’s advice to present the facts to David with a rhetorical question — “did you not swear” — to a statement — “you swore.” When Nathan follows up, he presents his case in a rhetorical fashion consistent with his advice to Bathsheba. Furthermore, note that Bathsheba has anticipated many of Nathan’s words along with additional details. Here is a comparison chart with Bathsheba’s additions in boldface:

1 Kings 1:11–27	
1 Kings 1:11–14 Nathan's Instructions to Batsheba	1 Kings 1:15–21 Bathsheba's Speech to David
יג לְכִי וּבֹאִי אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד וְאָמַרְתְּ אֵלָיו הֲלֹא אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַמְתֶּךָ לֵאמֹר כִּי שְׁלֹמֹה בְנִי יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יָשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּאִי	יז וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֲדֹנָי אַתָּה נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְאַמְתֶּךָ כִּי שְׁלֹמֹה בְנִי יִמְלֹךְ אַחֲרָי וְהוּא יָשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּאִי.
וּמִדְּוַע מֶלֶךְ אֲדֹנֶיהוּ.	יח וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה אֲדֹנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ וְעַתָּה אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא יָדָעָתָּ.
	יט וַיַּזְבַּח שׁוֹר וּמְרִיא וְצֹאן לָרֶב וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל בְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּלְאַבְיָתָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְיֹאב שׂוֹר הַצֹּבָא וּלְשֹׁלֹמֹה עֶבֶדְךָ לֹא קָרָא.
	כ וְאַתָּה אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ עֵינֵי כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלֶיךָ לְהַגִּיד לָהֶם מִי יָשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲרָיו.
	כא וְהִיא כֹּשֶׁבֶת אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ עִם אֲבֹתָיו וְהִיטִי אֲנִי וּבְנֵי שְׁלֹמֹה חֲטָאִים.

There are three important observations to be noted about Bathsheba from this story:

1. Her expansion on Nathan's words indicate a total and sophisticated understanding of the political climate and its ramifications to her and her son if Adonijah becomes king.
2. She can articulate the problem as well as the prophet Nathan and, for that matter, as well, if not better than any adviser to the king.
3. Bathsheba does not directly state that she and Solomon will be killed as Nathan warned (1 King 1:12), but rather says my son and I will be "sinners." Translations use "offenders" or "traitors." But Bathsheba's use may be calculated to refer back to David's admission, חָטָאתִי (2 Samuel 12:13) for their adulterous affair.

After Nathan's confirmation of her words (note he includes a

few added details, such as the omission of invitation to the priest Zadok in 1 Kings 1:26), preparations are quickly made to crown Solomon. A coronation ceremony takes place, and the horn's blast and subsequent celebratory music are so loud that the commotion is heard at Adonijah's celebration.⁸ A messenger arrives bearing news of the failure of Adonijah and Joab's plan, and Adonijah flees to grab the altar as sanctuary. Solomon, however, promises that no harm will come to him as long as he behaves admirably.

Thus would the story end were it not for the interventions, first of David and then, more subtly (and yet ultimately more decisively), of Bathsheba. David's deathbed instructions to Solomon begin piously enough, reminding him to follow after the ways of God. David even uses the word תְּשִׁילִי in this instruction, a word which we have seen adjured to leaders of Israel before by the psalmist. The remainder of his instructions, however, consist of scores to be settled. It is here that Solomon's "wisdom" is first alluded to in the text.

1 Kings 2:5–10	
ה וגם אתה ידעת את אשר עשה לי יואב בן צרויה אשר עשה לשני שרי צבאות ישראל לאבנר בן נר ולעמשה בן יתר ויהרגם וישם דמי מלחמה בשלם ויתן דמי מלחמה בחגרתו אשר במתניו ובנעלו אשר ברגליו.	⁵ “Further, you know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of Israel’s forces, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether: he killed them, shedding blood of war in peacetime, staining the girdle of his loins and the sandals on his feet with blood of war.
ו ועשית כהכמתך ולא תורד שיבתו בשלם שאל.	⁶ So act in accordance with your wisdom , and see that his white hair does not go down to Sheol in peace.

8. The text somewhat surprisingly notes that “the earth split,” ותבקע הארץ, from the noise of them. The imagery of the earth splitting is quite unusual. Perhaps it is intended to be evocative of the splitting earth that swallowed up Korah (Numbers 16:31) and his assemblage when he, like Adonijah, attempted to usurp national leadership in defiance of God’s choice.

ז וְלִבִּי בְרִזְלֵי הַגִּלְעָדִי תַעֲשֶׂה חֶסֶד וְהָיִי בְּאַכְלֵי שְׁלֹחֶנְךָ כִּי כֵן קָרְבוּ אֵלַי בְּבִרְחִי מִפָּנֵי אֲבִשָׁלוֹם אַחִיד.	⁷ “But deal graciously with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, for they befriended me when I fled from your brother Absalom; let them be among those that eat at your table.
ח וְהִנֵּה עִמָּךְ שִׁמְעִי בֶן גֵּרָא בֶן הַיְמִינִי מִבְּחָרִים וְהוּא קָלְלָנִי קָלְלָה נְמָרְצָת בְּיוֹם לִכְתִּי מַחֲנִים וְהוּא יָרַד לִקְרָאתִי הַיַּרְדֵּן וְאַשְׁבַּע לוֹ בַּיהוָה לֵאמֹר אִם אֶמְיָתְךָ בְּחָרֵב.	⁸ “You must also deal with Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim. He insulted me outrageously when I was on my way to Mahanaim; but he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD: ‘I will not put you to the sword.’
ט וְעַתָּה אֵל תִּנְקְהוּ כִּי אִישׁ חָכָם אַתָּה וַיֵּדְעַתְּ אֶת אֲשֹׁר תַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ וְהוֹרְדָתָ אֶת שֵׁיבְתוֹ בְּדָם שְׂאוֹל.	⁹ So do not let him go unpunished; for you are a wise man and you will know how to deal with him and send his gray hair down to Sheol in blood.”
י וַיִּשְׁכַּב דָּוִד עִם אֲבֹתָיו וַיִּקְבֹּר בְּעִיר דָּוִד.	¹⁰ So David slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the City of David. ¹¹ The length of David’s reign over Israel was forty years: he reigned seven years in Hebron, and he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹² And Solomon sat upon the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

The repeated instructions not to “let the gray hair” of David’s targets “go down into Sheol” peacefully or bloodlessly (וְלֹא תוֹרִיד שֵׁיבְתוֹ בְּשָׁלָם\וְהוֹרְדָתָ אֶת שֵׁיבְתוֹ בְּדָם שְׂאוֹל) constitute an unusual turn of phrase, used by only one other character in Scripture, as we shall discuss below. In each instance, moreover, Solomon’s “wisdom” is invoked: וַעֲשִׂיתָ כְּחֻמָּתְךָ with regard to Joab, and כִּי אִישׁ חָכָם with regard to Shimei. In the latter case, David appears to be hinting to Solomon that he will need to set up the circumstances under which he can have Shimei killed (as indeed later transpires), due to David’s own earlier oath not to personally kill Shimei.

Yet notably, David says nothing about Adonijah; he is his son,

and of course, he would not instruct Solomon to harm him, let alone kill him. Nor does he mention Abiathar the priest — he, and for that matter, Adonijah, have never shown him direct disloyalty. The crowning of Adonijah, the eldest possible successor, was not an attack on David per se, even if it should have been initiated at his command. He also includes instructions to reward the loyalty of Barzillai.

Solomon does not follow through on any of these instructions until a situation presents itself, partially instigated by the involvement of his mother Bathsheba, when she is approached by Adonijah. He asks her to present a request to Solomon on his behalf as she is his mother, and Solomon won't refuse her. Adonijah requests that Solomon allow him to take Abishag the Shunammite as his wife, ostensibly as a sort of consolation prize after being denied the throne. Of course, there may be an ulterior motive to marry the former king's wife as a first step in claiming the throne.

1 Kings 2:13–25	
יג וַיָּבֹא אֲדֹנִיָּהּ בֶּן חַגִּית אֶל בֵּית שִׁבְעָה אִם שָׁלְמָה וַתֹּאמֶר הַשָּׁלוֹם בְּאָדָה וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁלוֹם.	¹³ Adonijah son of Haggith came to see Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. She said, "Do you come with friendly intent?" "Yes," he replied;
יד וַיֹּאמֶר דָּבָר לִי אֵלֶיךָ וַתֹּאמֶר דָּבָר.	¹⁴ and he continued, "I would like to have a word with you." "Speak up," she said.
טו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵת יָדַעְתָּ כִּי לִי הָיְתָה הַמְּלוּכָה וְעַלִּי שָׁמוּ כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּנִיָּהֶם לְמֶלֶךְ וַתִּסָּב הַמְּלוּכָה וַתְּהִי לְאַחִי כִּי מִיְּהוָה הָיְתָה לוֹ.	¹⁵ Then he said, "You know that the kingship was rightly mine and that all Israel wanted me to reign. But the kingship passed on to my brother; it came to him by the will of the LORD.
טז וְעַתָּה שְׁאַלָה אַחַת אֶנֹכִי שְׁאַל מֵאַתָּה אֶל תִּשְׁבִּי אֵת פְּנֵי וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו דָּבָר.	¹⁶ And now I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me." She said, "Speak up."

יז וַיֹּאמֶר אִמְרֵי נָא לְשִׁלְמָה הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי לֹא יִשְׁיב אֶת פָּנָיו וַיִּתֵּן לִי אֶת אֲבִישָׁג הַשְּׁוֹנַמִּית לְאִשָּׁה.	¹⁷ He replied, "Please ask King Solomon — for he won't refuse you — to give me Abishag the Shunammite as wife."
יח וַתֹּאמֶר בַּת שֹׁבַע טוֹב אֲנֹכִי אֲדַבֵּר עָלֶיךָ אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ.	¹⁸ "Very well," said Bathsheba, "I will speak to the king on your behalf."
יט וַתֵּבֵא בַת שֹׁבַע אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ שִׁלְמָה לְדַבֵּר לוֹ עַל אֲדֹנִיָּהּ וַיָּקָם הַמֶּלֶךְ לִקְרָאתָהּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לָהּ וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל כִּסְאוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁם כֶּסֶף לְאֵם הַמֶּלֶךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב לִימִינוֹ.	¹⁹ So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him about Adonijah. The king rose to greet her and bowed down to her. He sat on his throne; and he had a throne placed for the queen mother, and she sat on his right.
כ וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂאֵלָה אַחַת קְטָנָה אֲנֹכִי שְׂאֵלָת מֵאַתָּה אֵל תִּשָּׁב אֶת פָּנָי וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׂאֵלִי אִמִּי כִּי לֹא אֲשִׁיב אֶת-פָּנָיִךְ.	²⁰ She said, "I have one small request to make of you, do not refuse me." He responded, "Ask, Mother; I shall not refuse you."
כא וַתֹּאמֶר יִתֵּן אֶת אֲבִישָׁג הַשְּׁוֹנַמִּית לְאֲדֹנִיָּהּ אַחִידָהּ לְאִשָּׁה.	²¹ Then she said, "Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to your brother Adonijah as wife."
כב וַיַּעַן הַמֶּלֶךְ שִׁלְמָה וַיֹּאמֶר לְאִמּוֹ וְלִמָּה אַתְּ שְׂאֵלָת אֶת אֲבִישָׁג הַשְּׁוֹנַמִּית לְאֲדֹנִיָּהּ וְ שְׂאֵלִי לוֹ אֶת הַמְּלוּכָה כִּי הוּא אָחִי הַגָּדוֹל מִמֶּנִּי וְלוֹ וּלְאֲבִיתָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְיוֹאָב בֶּן צְרוּיָה.	²² The king replied to his mother, "Why request Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Request the kingship for him! For he is my older brother, and the priest Abiathar and Joab son of Zeruiah are on his side."
כג וַיִּשָּׁבַע הַמֶּלֶךְ שִׁלְמָה בַּיהוָה לֵאמֹר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה לִּי אֱלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסִיף כִּי בִנְפָשׁוֹ דַּבֵּר אֲדֹנִיָּהּ אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה.	²³ Thereupon, King Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, "So may God do to me and even more, if broaching this matter does not cost Adonijah his life!"
כד וַעֲתָה חַי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הֵכִינִי וַיּוֹשִׁיבֵנִי (וַיּוֹשִׁיבֵנִי) עַל כִּסֵּא דָוִד אָבִי וְאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לִּי בֵּית כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר כִּי הַיּוֹם יוֹמָת אֲדֹנִיָּהּ.	²⁴ Now, as the LORD lives, who has established me and set me on the throne of my father David and who has provided him with a house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this very day!"
כה וַיִּשְׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ שִׁלְמָה בֶּנֶד בִּנְיָהוּ בֶן הוֹיָדָע וַיַּפֹּגַע בּוֹ וַיָּמָת.	²⁵ And Solomon instructed Benaiah son of Jehoiada, who struck Adonijah down; and so he died.

Bathsheba's first words are telling. Do you come in peace? The last time we saw or heard from Bathsheba, was when she entered David's chamber to stop Adonijah's coronation. Bathsheba goes to Solomon and slyly asks him to grant her a "**small** request." He sits her in her place of honor as queen-mother and agrees to grant her anything she asks. Nothing would have prepared him for the request to follow, but after being asked not to refuse a "**small** request" and preparing to grant whatever she asked, Solomon is set up to become all the more livid. She repeats Adonijah's "mere" desire to marry the concubine of his father, the previous king — yet another similarity to Absalom (2 Samuel 16:22).

In a rage, Solomon asks why she does not simply ask for him to hand over the entire kingdom. As he remarks to her, Adonijah is the elder brother and has the support of the high priest Abiathar and the famous general Joab. Now, having already emulated Absalom in the past with his failed public coronation, he again seeks the throne by taking the woman who was known to sleep in his father's bosom. Something clicks at this point, and Solomon proceeds to remove any and all obstacles to the security of his reign.

First, he sends Benaiah, his military leader (and, apparently, personal assassin), to kill Adonijah. Then he proceeds to remove Abiathar from office — he has no cause to have him assassinated, nor is it a simple matter for a new king to initiate violence against the most prominent face of the clergy. But he makes sure the clergy is now headed by his own ally, Zadok.

Afterward, Joab, as shrewd as ever, recognizes that his time is coming and that Solomon is solidifying his reign by wiping out the main supporters of Adonijah. He, too, flees to the altar of God, hoping for sanctuary, but on Solomon's orders, Benaiah slays him on the spot. This is the first of David's instructions that Solomon follows, and he does not fail to attribute Joab's execution to his own assassinations of Abner and Amasa, removing their "blood-guilt" from the house of David and establishing his own throne in "peace" forever. However, in the wider context of this series of

assassinations (or in Abiathar's case, demotion), Solomon's true motive is clear.

Nothing is stated regarding Barzillai, whom David instructed Solomon to reward for his loyalty. After all, Solomon is dealing with threats, a process occasioned by Bathsheba's "small request" on behalf of Adonijah — not merely following the deathbed requests of his father.

The final target, Shimei, is placed under house arrest, and executed for violating it after three years — just the sort of pretext Solomon needed to deal with the last potential disloyalty from men of influence. In having him executed by Benaiah, Solomon again declares that his house will be established forever, and indeed, in the last words of the narrative, the text concludes by observing that Solomon's reign was established in his hands. The "wisdom" of Solomon, and the cunning of his mother, are to be credited with this security. With his enthronement concluded and his potential threats removed, the narrative moves on to the events of his reign.

The Dreams of Solomon and Warnings from God

Solomon communicates with God a total of four times. A close reading of each instance reveals some of the differences between what God wants from Solomon and what Solomon perceives as his role. The first interaction occurs after Solomon secures his reign, wipes out his opponents and, as 1 Kings 3 proceeds to tell us, marries the daughter of Egypt's Pharaoh. 1 Kings 3:1 says that Solomon "took the daughter of Pharaoh and brought her to the city of David" (וַיִּקַּח אֶת בִּת פַּרְעֹה וַיְבִיאָהּ אֶל עִיר דָּוִד). This language which, while unexceptional on its own, may echo the language of the text when David "took Bathsheba, and she came to him" (וַיִּקַּח וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו), setting the narrative of Solomon's ultimate failures against the backdrop of his father's great sin.

To be precise, 1 Kings 3:1 states that the daughter of Pharaoh was taken to the City of David until Solomon finished "building his house, the house of God (notably listed after his own palace),

and the surrounding wall of Jerusalem.” This is the first foreshadowing we have of his building projects to come, and it continues the discussion of how Solomon solidified his power as regnant monarch in all possible ways: now he is intermarrying with the regional superpower.

In conclusion to the section describing the rise of Solomon and the securing of his reign, the narrative reminds us that the nation, lacking a central temple, was offering its sacrifices “on high places.” This is portrayed as the exception to an otherwise complete picture, “**Except** (רק) the nation were still sacrificing on the high places” (1 Kings 3:2).

The same note opens the next narrative. Showing Solomon’s positive intentions at the start of his reign, 1 Kings 3:3 opens by stating that Solomon “loved God (וַיֵּאָהֱבָה שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת יְיָ), walking in the laws of David, his father, **except** (רק) he was sacrificing and offering incense on the high places.” Throughout the book of Kings, decentralized cultic worship is a constant complaint of the prophets against the kings of Judah. But in Solomon’s time, in the absence of a Temple, this criticism is a bit strange at first glance. Any king described as good is described as following in the ways of David, and at the same time, the one exception is this “except,” רק, regarding the high places. But why would Solomon be subject to this criticism in the absence of a Temple? The answer emerges from a close reading of the ensuing narrative, Solomon’s first prophetic dream and the concluding verse of the narrative which shows how he reacted to it.

First, the king goes to Gibeon in order to sacrifice, simply because the largest of the “high places” is found there. He offers a thousand burnt-offerings, not the last of Solomon’s over-the-top offerings of huge numbers of animals before God. Since this narrative follows so closely on the heels of the book of Samuel, it is important to remember the associations that this place and its inhabitants have in the time of the early kings. The origins of the Gibeonite presence in Israel is their deceptive treaty made with Israel; their first interactions were as liars (see Joshua 9). They are described again in 2 Samuel 21, a narrative that shows David in a

negative light. Specifically, in time of famine, David inquires after God and is told that the famine is a consequence of the bloody deeds of Saul against the Gibeonites. David calls them in to ask what compensation they would like, and with no further consultation, concedes to their bloody demand: seven living members of the house of Saul to be put to death. The image of the mother of two of these murdered sons defending their corpses from the birds is one of the most pitiable in the book of Samuel; it is difficult to ignore David's culpability in this matter. The famine only ends when he has the bodies buried and honored — the human sacrifice, obviously, is not what God had been waiting for. The impression left by this narrative, so recent to the reader of 1 Kings 3, is the bloodlust of the Gibeonites.

To find Solomon now in Gibeon, using it as a site of worship, does not speak well of the new king. With this setting, God appears to him in a dream. Let us examine its content along with its background and conclusion:

1 Kings 3:1–15	
א וַיִּתְחַתֵּן שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת פָּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקַּח אֶת בֵּת פָּרְעֹה וַיְבִיאָהּ אֵל עִיר דָּוִד עַד כָּלְתָו לִבְנוֹת אֶת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת בֵּית יְהוָה וְאֶת חֹמֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם סָבִיב.	¹ Solomon allied himself by marriage with Pharaoh king of Egypt. He married Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to the City of David [to live there] until he had finished building his palace, and the House of the LORD, and the walls around Jerusalem.
ב רַק הָעָם מִזְבְּחִים בְּבָמוֹת כִּי לֹא נִבְנְהָ בֵּית לַשֵּׁם יְהוָה עַד הַיָּמִים הָהֵם.	² The people, however, continued to offer sacrifices at the open shrines, because up to that time no house had been built for the name of the LORD.
ג וַיֶּאֱהָב שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת יְהוָה לָלֶכֶת בְּחֻקֹּת דָּוִד אָבִיו רַק בְּבָמוֹת הוּא מִזְבֵּחַ וּמִקְטִיר.	³ And Solomon, though he loved the LORD and followed the practices of his father David, also sacrificed and offered at the shrines.

ד וַיֵּלֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ גִּבְעֹנָה לְזִבְחָ שָׁם כִּי הָיָא הַבְּמָה הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲלֵף עֲלוֹת יַעֲלֶה שְׁלָמָה עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַהוּא.	⁴ The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the largest shrine; on that altar Solomon presented a thousand burnt offerings.
ה בַּגִּבְעוֹן נִרְאָה יְהוָה אֶל שְׁלָמָה בַּחֲלוֹם הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים שְׂאֵל מָה אֶתֶּן לָךְ.	⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask, what shall I grant you?”
ו וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלָמָה אֶתָּה עָשִׂיתָ עִם עַבְדְּךָ דָּוִד אָבִי חֶסֶד גָּדוֹל כַּאֲשֶׁר הָלַךְ לִפְנֶיךָ בְּאֵמֶת וּבְצִדְקָה וּבִישׁוּרֵת לֵבָב עִמָּךְ וַתִּשְׁמַר לוֹ אֶת הַחֶסֶד הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה וַתִּתֵּן לוֹ בֶּן יוֹשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּאוֹ כִּי־זֶה הָעַתָּה.	⁶ Solomon said, “You dealt most graciously with Your servant my father David, because he walked before You in faithfulness and righteousness and in integrity of heart. You have continued this great kindness to him by giving him a son to occupy his throne, as is now the case.
ז וְעַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֶתָּה הַמְּלַכְתָּ אֶת עַבְדְּךָ תַּחַת דָּוִד אָבִי וְאֲנֹכִי נָעַר קָטָן לֹא אֵדַע צֵאת וּבֹא.	⁷ And now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David; but I am a young lad, with no experience in leadership.
ח וְעַבְדְּךָ בְּתוֹךְ עַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתָּ עִם רַב אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִמְנָה וְלֹא יִסְפֹּר מְרַב.	⁸ Your servant finds himself in the midst of the people You have chosen, a people too numerous to be numbered or counted.
ט וְנָתַתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לֵב שׁוֹמֵעַ לִשְׁפֹּט אֶת עַמֶּךָ לְהַבִּין בֵּין טוֹב לְרָע כִּי מִי יוֹכַל לִשְׁפֹּט אֶת עַמֶּךָ הַכָּבֵד הַזֶּה.	⁹ Grant, then, Your servant an understanding mind to judge Your people, to distinguish between good and bad; for who can judge this vast people of Yours?”
י וַיִּיטֹב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנָי כִּי שְׂאֵל שְׁלָמָה אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה.	¹⁰ The LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.
יא וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֵלָיו יַעֲן אֲשֶׁר שְׂאֵלְתָּ אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא שְׂאֵלְתָּ לָךְ יָמִים רַבִּים וְלֹא שְׂאֵלְתָּ לָךְ עֹשֶׁר וְלֹא שְׂאֵלְתָּ נָפֶשׁ אֹיְבֶיךָ וְשְׂאֵלְתָּ לָךְ הַבִּין לְשֹׁמֵעַ מִשְׁפָּט.	¹¹ And God said to him, “Because you asked for this — you did not ask for long life, you did not ask for riches, you did not ask for the life of your enemies, but you asked for discernment in dispensing justice —
יב הִנֵּה עָשִׂיתִי כַּדְּבָרֶיךָ הַנֶּה נָתַתִּי לָךְ לֵב חָכָם וְנִבּוֹן אֲשֶׁר כְּמוֹדֶךָ לֹא הָיָה לִפְנֶיךָ וְאַחֲרֶיךָ לֹא יִקּוּם כְּמוֹדֶךָ.	¹² I now do as you have spoken. I grant you a wise and discerning mind; there has never been anyone like you before, nor will anyone like you arise again.

יג וגם אשר לא שאלת נתתי לך גם עשר גם כבוד אשר לא היה כמוך איש במלכים כל ימיו.	¹³ And I also grant you what you did not ask for — both riches and glory all your life — the like of which no king has ever had.
יד ואם תלך בדרךי לשמר חקי ומצותי כאשר הלך דויד אביך והארכת את ימיו.	¹⁴ And I will further grant you long life, if you will walk in My ways and observe My laws and commandments, as did your father David.”
טו ויקץ שלמה והנה חלום ויבוא ירושלם ויעמד לפני ארון ברית אדני ויעל עלות ויעש שלמים ויעש משתה לכל עבדיו.	¹⁵ Then Solomon awoke: it was a dream! He went to Jerusalem, stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD, and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented offerings of well-being; and he made a banquet for all his courtiers.

This is an important interaction, not least for explaining the source of Solomon’s vaunted wisdom. Solomon requests wisdom from God, concerned that he is a “small boy” (נַעַר קָטָן) lacking basic leadership experience.⁹ It is an admirable request, though considering his deeds thus far — eliminating political opposition, allying with powerful neighbors — Solomon’s humility here is rather exaggerated. Still, God deems the request worthy.

God grants him a לֵב חָכָם וְנָבוֹן, a “wise and discerning heart,” a term reserved for precious few individuals in Scripture. Moreover, God grants him all the material successes he did not ask for, because of the good intentions that motivated his request. However, the final words from God, וְאִם תֵּלֵךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לְשֹׁמֵר חֻקֵּי וּמִצְוֹתַי, employ the warning terminology found concluding covenantal passages such as Leviticus 26:1, the familiar opening formula of conditional blessings/curses.

What is striking is that Solomon, so concerned here with wisdom from God to judge the nation, is never seen consulting with a prophet throughout his reign. This dream foreshadows events to come: God grants his request, and Solomon believes

9. Knowledge of נָבִיא צִאת נְבוּאָה actually has a more specific association with military knowledge; thus is it used with David in 1 Samuel 18:16.

himself to be equipped with all the Divine guidance he needs. At the end, Solomon “awakened, and behold it was a dream” (וַיִּקָּץ (שְׁלֹמֹה וְהָיָה חֲלוֹם)), and what he does next is most telling. He immediately goes to Jerusalem and stands before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and there gives more offerings.

This concludes a narrative that began with him offering a thousand sacrifices in Gibeon. What motivated him to leave the large “high place” and offer in Jerusalem before the Ark instead? It would appear that the earlier critical language of רַק בְּצִמּוֹת, familiar to every successive king of Judah, was justifiably critical of Solomon as well. After he awoke from his first communication with God, Solomon knew where he should have been worshipping: not in Gibeon, a city polluted by its indecent inhabitants, but before the Ark of the Covenant.

Note the repeated use and high concentration of the word שָׁאַל — what Solomon “asked” of God, referred to eight¹⁰ times in this narrative. Interestingly, there are seven occurrences in the preceding narrative regarding Adoniah’s request, thus connecting the two stories. The manipulative and selfish motivation of Adoniah’s requests should color our understanding of Solomon’s request. Is it true that Solomon only wants wisdom and doesn’t care about power and riches? Doesn’t he in fact, already have these things?

Let us analyze God’s response to Solomon “because you didn’t ask for long life, riches and the lives of your enemies.”

- Long life: It can only come from God and in fact, God warns in the concluding words of the dream, only “if you go in my ways...I will lengthen your days.” Long life is conditional and attached to a warning.
- Riches: They are not attached to a condition, but Solomon

10. The use of the covenantal number eight is not insignificant: At this point, Solomon is adhering to the covenant, and his request is pleasing to God. Solomon’s name is the eightieth word from the end, as part of the phrase כִּי שָׁאַל שְׁלֹמֹה (for Solomon asked): his decent request, recognizing his need for wisdom in order to be a good leader for the nation, merits the protection of the covenant.

is already very wealthy. We are informed that he sacrifices 1,000 animals in Gibeon! Furthermore, he has made an alliance with Egypt by making Pharaoh his father-in-law (arguably prohibited in the laws of the king in Deuteronomy to not return the people to Egypt). By allying himself with the most powerful monarch of the region, if not the world, he surely receives many financial benefits. Last but not least, his construction projects display massive wealth, let alone the staggering amount of food that his household is supplied with on a daily basis.

- Lives of his enemies: They are already dead! We just finished reading that he killed all his potential rivals, even his own brother!

God assured Solomon that if from now on, Solomon acts with justice according to the covenant, He will grant him all that he wants without resorting to political machinations and subterfuge. But is Solomon ready to commit to that? The parallels between this and Pharaoh's dreams in Genesis suggest that we look deeper for a proper interpretation of Solomon's dream. God grants Solomon **לֵב חָכָם וְנָבוֹן** אֲשֶׁר כְּמוֹד לֹא הָיָה לְפָנָיִךְ, “a **wise** and **understanding** heart; there has never been anyone like you before.” The words **חָכָם וְנָבוֹן**, attributed to an individual, occur only one other time in Scripture: Genesis 41:39. There, Pharaoh tells Joseph **אֵין נָבוֹן וְחָכָם** כְּמוֹדָךְ. Besides being unique, there is another blatant association — God's words occur in Solomon's **dream**, and Pharaoh's words are said after Joseph interprets his **dream**! We hope that Solomon will be a great leader like Joseph, but we fear that this king who just married the Egyptian princess will end up acting more like a typical selfish monarch.¹¹

11. An important textual feature highlights just how critical proper judgment and leadership of the nation is. The phrase **לְשִׁמֵּעַ לְשֹׁפֵט**, “to understand how to judge/lead,” comprises words 79 and 80 of this text, 1 Kings 3:1–15. Words 130 and 131, on the other hand, are **לְשִׁמֵּעַ מִשְׁפָּט**. The first is when Solomon requests this understanding, and the second is when God acknowledges the pleasing request. It is striking

The next two communications between God and Solomon both concern the eventual house of the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem, the famous Temple of Solomon.

1 Kings 6:11–13	
יֵא וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֶל שְׁלֹמֹה לֵאמֹר.	¹¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Solomon,
יְב הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בֹנֶה אִם תִּלְךָ בְּחֻקָּי וְאֵת מִשְׁפָּטַי תַּעֲשֶׂה וְשִׁמְרָתָ אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי לִלְכֹת בְּהֵם וְהִקְמַתִי אֶת דְּבָרִי אִתָּךְ אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֶל דָּוִד אָבִיךָ.	¹² “With regard to this House you are building — if you follow My laws and observe My rules and faithfully keep My commandments, I will fulfill for you the promise that I gave to your father David:
יְג וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא אֶעְזֹב אֶת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל.	¹³ I will abide among the children of Israel, and I will never forsake My people Israel.”

This short communication (only two verses excluding an introductory verse) follows Solomon’s construction of the Temple, described in 1 Kings 6:1–10. After the introductory verse, like the end of Solomon’s first dream, it uses the conditional language of covenantal warnings. The difference in this communication is that the warning doesn’t end but rather opens the communication and is, in fact, its main objective. It evokes the introductory formula of the blessings and curses in Leviticus 26:3.

ויקרא כו:ג אם בְּחֻקָּי תִלְכוּ וְאֵת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם:
 מלכים א ג:יב אם תִּלְךָ בְּחֻקָּי וְאֵת מִשְׁפָּטַי תַּעֲשֶׂה וְשִׁמְרָתָ אֶת כָּל
 מִצְוֹתַי לִלְכֹת בְּהֵם...

In the last words of the communication, God says that He will dwell within Israel and not abandon His people — the inverse is

that “understanding how to lead,” a phrase mirrored in parallel in each speaker’s words, occupies the main positions of covenantal number symbolism, 80 and 130. This is what a leader adhering to the covenant should occupy himself with. The **exact center** words of the dream (180 words, thus 90 forward and reverse) are אֵת עֲמִדָּה הַזֶּה לְשֹׁפֵט כִּי מִי יִכָּל לְשֹׁפֵט אֵת עֲמִדָּה הַזֶּה again highlighting what pleased God in Solomon’s request.

left ominously implicit. The phrase וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל uniquely duplicates God's words at the close of the Tabernacle program in Exodus 29:45. Note also the first words of the interaction: "This house that you are building..." is language that emphasizes that the Temple is being built at Solomon's discretion and of his volition — not as a reflection of any Divine command. This is emphasized more than once and is part of a general tendency that becomes more explicit in the Latter Prophets to show that the Temple and its worship were always less significant to God than simple loyalty and adherence to His laws. Note also the emphasis on critical words regarding God's laws, מִצְוֹתַי, מִשְׁפָּטַי, מִצְוֹתַי. The word מִצְוֹתַי is at the exact center of the communication.

The next communication makes explicit reference to the dream in Gibeon and follows up also on the second communication also following Solomon's construction projects. Finally, like both, it is a warning to Solomon that the value of his Temple and the presence of God therein will be contingent on Solomon's proper leadership and adherence to God's laws.

1 Kings 9:1–9	
א וַיְהִי כְּכֹלֹת שְׁלֹמֹה לִבְנוֹת אֶת בֵּית יְהוָה וְאֶת בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶת כָּל חֶשֶׁק שְׁלֹמֹה אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ לַעֲשׂוֹת.	¹ When Solomon had finished building the House of the LORD and the royal palace and everything that Solomon had set his heart on constructing,
ב וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל שְׁלֹמֹה שֵׁנִית כַּאֲשֶׁר נִרְאָה אֵלָיו בְּגִבְעוֹן.	² the LORD appeared to Solomon a second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon.
ג וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת תְּפִלָּתְךָ וְאֶת תְּחִנָּתְךָ אֲשֶׁר הִתְחַנַּנְתָּה לִפְנֵי הַקֹּדֶשְׁתִּי אֶת הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתָ, לְשׁוֹם שְׁמִי שָׁם עַד עוֹלָם וְהָיוּ עֵינֵי וְלִבִּי שָׁם כָּל הַיָּמִים.	³ The LORD said to him, "I have heard the prayer and the supplication which you have offered to Me. I consecrate this House which you have built and I set My name there forever. My eyes and My heart shall ever be there.

ד וְאַתָּה אִם תֵּלֵךְ לִפְנֵי כְּאִשְׁרֵי הָלַךְ דָּוִד אָבִיךָ בְּתֵם לֵבָב וּבְיִשְׁר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ חֻקִּי וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי תִשְׁמֹר.	⁴ As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked before Me, wholeheartedly and with uprightness, doing all that I have commanded you [and] keeping My laws and My rules,
ה וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתְּךָ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעֹלָם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי עַל דָּוִד אָבִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ מֵעַל כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל.	⁵ then I will establish your throne of kingship over Israel forever, as I promised your father David, saying, ‘Your line on the throne of Israel shall never end.’
ו אִם שׁוּב תִּשְׁבּוּן אַתֶּם וּבְנֵיכֶם מֵאַחֲרַי וְלֹא תִשְׁמְרוּ מִצְוֹתַי חֻקֹּתַי אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לִפְנֵיכֶם וְהִלַּכְתֶּם וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם.	⁶ [But] if you and your descendants turn away from Me and do not keep the commandments [and] the laws which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them,
ז וְהִכַּרְתִּי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם וְאֶת הַבַּיִת אֲשֶׁר הִקְדַּשְׁתִּי לְשְׁמִי אֲשַׁלַּח מֵעַל פָּנָי וְהָיָה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁלַל וּלְשִׁנִּינָה בְּכָל הָעַמִּים.	⁷ then I will sweep Israel off the land which I gave them; I will reject the House which I have consecrated to My name; and Israel shall become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.
ח וְהָיְתָה הַזֵּה יְהִיָּה עֲלִיוֹן כָּל עֹבֵר עָלָיו יִשֹּׁם וְשָׂרָק וְאָמְרוּ עַל מָה עָשָׂה יְהוָה כֹּכָה לָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּלְבַיִת הַזֶּה.	⁸ And as for this House, once so exalted, everyone passing by it shall be appalled and shall hiss. And when they ask, ‘Why did the LORD do thus to the land and to this House?’
ט וְאָמְרוּ עַל אֲשֶׁר עָזְבוּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיא אֶת אֲבֹתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּחֲזִקוּ בֵּאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ) לָהֶם וַיַּעֲבֹדֵם עַל כֵּן הֵבִיא יְהוָה עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת כָּל הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת.	⁹ they shall be told, ‘It is because they forsook the LORD their God who freed them from the land of Egypt, and they embraced other gods and worshiped them and served them; therefore the LORD has brought all this calamity upon them.’”

Note that in this instance the text begins with an even more explicit statement about the construction of the Temple, listed together with the building of his palace (which took thirteen years compared to the Temple’s seven, an unflattering fact about Solomon placed in intentional juxtaposition by the text in 1 Kings 6:38 and 7:1) and “whatever else he wanted to build.” After all his

building is concluded, God comes to him “a second time, as He had appeared to him in Gibeon.” The fourth verse again uses the *לְךָ אֶם תִּלְךָ* language of conditional blessing; however starting at verse 6, for the first time, God gives Solomon a more explicit warning: if the current generation of Israel or their descendants stray and worship other Gods, they will be wiped off the land, the Temple will be done away with, and Israel will become a “byword” among the nations for the magnitude of its destruction. The language of vv. 6–9 is that of Deuteronomy 28 (see the phrase *לְמַשָּׁל וְלַשְׁנִינָה* as in Deut. 28:37), and the shocked questions and answers of the nations upon seeing the destruction is from Deut. 29:23–27.

God is giving Solomon the clearest warning possible, as the focus of his reign turns more visibly toward increases of material wealth and splendor. After Solomon’s public prayer at the dedication of the Temple, this third communication from God, with its considerable focus on the consequences of disloyalty, should have been a clear warning sign to keep him from straying. Yet tragically, Solomon, with all his discernment, failed to learn from these divine communications despite three increasingly explicit warnings. The center of the third communication is the warning “if you do not guard my laws.” (Indeed, this phrase, so recognizably parallel to the covenantal warnings of Leviticus 26, ends on the eightieth word from the end of the text.)

The fourth and last communication between God and Solomon occurs after Solomon’s downfall is complete. (The text of 1 Kings 11 informs us that Solomon, led astray by his many foreign wives, eventually built idolatrous shrines and served foreign deities.) God informs him that the kingdom will be taken from him in his son’s day, with only Judah remaining for the fallen House of David.

1 Kings 11:11–13	
<p>יא וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְשִׁלְמֹה יֶעֱן אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתָ זֹאת עִמָּךְ וְלֹא שָׁמַרְתָּ בְּרִיתִי וְחֻקֹּתַי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי עֲלֶיךָ קָרַע אֶקְרַע אֶת הַמַּמְלָכָה מֵעֲלֶיךָ וְנָתַתִּיהָ לְעַבְדֶּךָ.</p>	<p>¹¹And the LORD said to Solomon, “Because you are guilty of this — you have not kept My covenant and the laws which I enjoined upon you — I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants.</p>
<p>יב אֲךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂנָּה לְמַעַן דָּוִד אֲבִיךָ מִיַּד בְּנֶךָ אֶקְרַעֶנָּה.</p>	<p>¹²But, for the sake of your father David, I will not do it in your lifetime; I will tear it away from your son.</p>
<p>יג רַק אֶת כָּל הַמַּמְלָכָה לֹא אֶקְרַע שִׁבְט אֶחָד אֶתֶּן לְבְנֶךָ לְמַעַן דָּוִד עַבְדִּי וּלְמַעַן יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתִּי.</p>	<p>¹³However, I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give your son one tribe, for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.”</p>

The four messages from God, beginning after the securing of Solomon’s reign and ending after its irrevocable failure, show a developing concern for the direction of Solomon’s reign. By the end, for all his wisdom, Solomon has failed to heed God’s clear warnings. It is notable that throughout this process, Solomon never consults with a prophet, nor does one ever speak with him. He had numerous divine communications and failed to take from them what he ought to have understood. This is the sad irony of his great wisdom, the subject of the next section of this study.

The Wisdom of Solomon

By far, the most defining characteristic of Solomon, especially as he has been immortalized by both the Bible and later literature and legend, is his fabled wisdom. In our analysis of Psalms 49,¹² we show how the psalmist refers to this wisdom with an ironic tone, implying that *true* wisdom could be found in the psalm as a contrast to the failed “wisdom” that informed Solomon’s decisions as a leader. A close reading of the book of Kings shows that the

12. This analysis will be published in a forthcoming book, *Psalms and the Prophetic Message of Jeremiah*, volume 2.

depiction of Solomon therein is actually full of a similarly subtle critique: Solomon's wisdom, such as it was, is emphasized in ways that make his ultimate folly all the more flagrant.

The first reference to Solomon's "wisdom," as noted above, is in David's deathbed instructions. Solomon was told to act "in accordance with his wisdom," and was expected to know what to do in order to have Shimei executed "because you are a wise man." It should not be shocking to see that in the context of the monarchy, "wisdom" is a value-neutral quality; it is only the moralistic language of the prophets and the wisdom literature that marries wisdom to ethics. In recounting the deeds of clever political operatives, we see little to associate them with ethical behavior. Previous individuals called חָכָם, wise, include the likes of Jonadab, son of Shim'ah, who tutored Amnon on how to rape Tamar in 2 Samuel 12, and Ahithophel, who counseled Absalom to sleep with his father's concubines and attempt to kill him as quickly as possible in 2 Samuel 16–17. Let us further explore the wisdom of Solomon, however, to see what the book of Kings reveals about it.

The next time Solomon's wisdom is mentioned is in the first of Solomon's dreams, examined above, after which it is showcased by the famous trial of two prostitutes, each claiming to be the mother of the same living child. We shall examine this narrative at the end of this section, as there is far more to it than meets the eye.

Solomon is one of few characters in Scripture described as being possessed of both חָכְמָה and תְּבוּנָה, wisdom and discernment. As we note in commenting on Ps. 49 and its allusions to Solomon, a passage in 1 Kings 5 employs the root חָכַם no less than seven times in six verses relating the proverbial "wisdom of Solomon."

1 Kings 5:9–14	
ט וַיִּתֵּן אֱלֹהִים חָכְמָה לְשֹׁלֹמֹה וּתְבוּנָה הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד וְרָחֵב לֵב כְּחוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּם.	"The LORD endowed Solomon with wisdom and discernment in great measure, with understanding as vast as the sands on the seashore.

י וַתֵּרֶב חָכְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה מִחָכְמַת כָּל בְּנֵי קֶדֶם וּמִכָּל חָכְמַת מִצְרַיִם.	¹⁰ Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the Kedemites and than all the wisdom of the Egyptians.
יא וַיְהִי חָכֵם מִכָּל הָאָדָם מֵאֵיתָן הָעֶזְרָחִי וְהִימָן וְכָלְכָל וְדָרְדֵּעַ בְּנֵי מַחֹל וַיְהִי שְׁמוֹ בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם סָבִיב.	¹¹ He was the wisest of all men: [wiser] than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalkol, and Darda the sons of Mahol. His fame spread among all the surrounding nations.
יב וַיִּדְבֹּר שְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים מִשָּׁל וַיְהִי שִׁירוֹ חֲמִשָּׁה וָאֶלֶף.	¹² He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five.
יג וַיִּדְבֹּר עַל הָעֵצִים מִן הָאֶרֶז אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְנוֹן וְעַד הָאִזּוֹב אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא בְּקִיר וַיִּדְבֹּר עַל הַבְּהֵמָה וְעַל הָעוֹף וְעַל הָרֶמֶשׂ וְעַל הַדְּגִים.	¹³ He discoursed about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; and he discoursed about beasts, birds, creeping things, and fishes.
יד וַיָּבֹאוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים לִשְׁמֹעַ אֶת חָכְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה מֵאֵת כָּל מְלָכֵי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת חָכְמָתוֹ.	¹⁴ Men of all peoples came to hear Solomon's wisdom, [sent] by all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

His wisdom is compared favorably with the wise men of Egypt, as well as the ancient wisdom of the east. Moreover, he is said to be wiser than every man, “even Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Kalkol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol.” The first two names are interesting to us because the final Bene Korah Psalm, as well as the final psalm of book three (Pss. 88 and 89, respectively), are associated with them. As we plan to show in a forthcoming book, this serves as a final rebuke in the context of the Bene Korah Psalms: Solomon was wiser than everyone, even these two legendary representatives of wisdom — but he should have heeded them. The other two names, Kalkol and Darda, appear to be puns. Kalkol may be a doubling of the word כָּל, emphasizing that he was wiser than “everyone,” as the verse indicates before listing specific people. It may also relate to the recurring details regarding the huge amounts of food consumed at Solomon’s house, and the officers set overtaxing the people to feed (לְכַלֵּל) his table (e.g., the

twelve ministers introduced by 1 Kings 4:7).¹³ This latter possibility will be reexamined later. Finally, the name Darda may allude to Solomon's knowledge exceeding that of the entire "generation of knowledge," דר דעה.¹⁴

Others recognize the wisdom of Solomon. Hiram of Tyre, hearing of Solomon's plan to build the Temple (with considerable Phoenician involvement), blesses God for giving his ally David a wise son (5:21). The Queen of Sheba comes from afar to confirm the rumor of Solomon's wisdom; she too blesses God for installing a wise king on the throne of Israel, reminding Solomon of his role in providing "justice and righteousness" throughout the land (1 Kings 10:9). Yet her emphasis on these features, like God's own warning, stands out as unique in the narrative of Solomon's reign. Generally speaking, Solomon's wisdom remains unrelated to moral attributes throughout his reign and is employed in service of building projects and expansions of prestige and power. Her words are soon followed by his moral downfall, and it is clear that he did not heed them.

The most famous depiction of Solomon's wisdom in the text is actually the ultimate criticism of his eventual descent into folly. After Solomon asks God for wisdom in a dream, and God grants his wish, that wisdom is put to the test in what becomes the first public display of the new king's extraordinary judgment. 1 Kings

13. וְלִשְׁלֹמֹה שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר נָצָבִים עַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָלכְּלוּ אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְאֵת בֵּיתוֹ חֹדֶשׁ 1 Kings 4:7
בַּשָּׁנָה יִהְיֶה עַל אֶחָד הָאֲחָד לְכָלכֵּל:

14. Rabbinic tradition makes a similar identification. For example, Numbers Rabbah 19:3 writes: *דרדע זה דור המדבר, שהיה בהן דעה, בני מחול שמחל*; as in Tanhuma Huqqath 6; Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 4; and Pesikta Rabbati 14. The other names in the verse are also subjected to exegesis based upon the similarity of the names to words associated with other scriptural figures; see Radak ad locum:

ו"חז"ל דרשו: ויחכם מכל האדם זה אדם הראשון ומה היתה חכמתו של אדם הראשון שקרא מחכמתו שמות לכל הבהמות ולכל עוף השמים מאיתן האזרחי זה אברהם אבינו שנאמר משכיל לאיתן האזרחי הימן זה משה שנאמר בכל ביתי נאמן הוא וכלכל זה יוסף שנאמר ויכלכל יוסף דרדע זה דוד המדבר דוד שיש בהם דעה בני מחול שנמחל להם מעשה העגל

3:16–28 depicts a seemingly irresolvable, “she said-she said” dispute and Solomon’s ingenious solution.

1 Kings 3:16–28	
טז אַז תְּבֹאנָה שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים זָנוֹת אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ וַתַּעֲמֹדְנָה לִפְנֵי.	¹⁶ Later two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him.
יז וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה הָאֶחָת בִּי אֲדֹנִי אֲנִי וְהָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת יֹשְׁבֹת בְּבֵית אֶחָד וְאֵלֶּד עָמָה בְּבֵית.	¹⁷ The first woman said, “Please, my lord! This woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house.
יח וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְלִדְתִּי וַתֵּלֶד גַּם הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת וַאֲנִי יְחִידוֹ אֵין זָר אֵתָנוּ בְּבֵית זִוְלָתִי שְׁתֵּי אֲנָחְנוּ בְּבֵית.	¹⁸ On the third day after I was delivered, this woman also gave birth to a child. We were alone; there was no one else with us in the house, just the two of us in the house.
יט וַיָּמָת בֶּן הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת לִילָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עָלָיו.	¹⁹ During the night this woman’s child died, because she lay on it.
כ וַתָּקָם בְּתוֹךְ הַלַּיְלָה וַתִּקַּח אֶת בְּנִי מֵאֲצָלִי וְאֶמְתָּד יִשְׁנָה וַתִּשְׁכַּיְבֵהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ וְאֶת בְּנָהּ הַמֵּת הִשְׁכִּיבָה בְּחִיקִי.	²⁰ She arose in the night and took my son from my side while your maidservant was asleep, and laid him in her bosom; and she laid her dead son in my bosom.
כא וְאָקָם בְּבֹקֶר לְהִינִיק אֶת בְּנִי וְהִנֵּה מֵת וְאֶתְבּוֹנֵן אֵלָיו בְּבֹקֶר וְהִנֵּה לֹא הָיָה בְּנִי אֲשֶׁר יִלְדֵתִי.	²¹ When I arose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, it was not the son I had borne.”
כב וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה הָאֶחָרֶת לֹא כִּי בְנִי הָחַי וּבְנֶךְ הַמֵּת הַזֶּה אִמְרַת לֹא כִּי בְנֶךְ הַמֵּת וּבְנִי הָחַי וַתִּדְּבֹרְנָה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ.	²² The other woman spoke up, “No, the live one is my son, and the dead one is yours!” But the first insisted, “No, the dead boy is yours; mine is the live one!” And they went on arguing before the king.
כג וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ זֹאת אִמְרַת זֶה בְּנִי הָחַי וּבְנֶךְ הַמֵּת וְזֹאת אִמְרַת לֹא כִּי בְנֶךְ הַמֵּת וּבְנִי הָחַי.	²³ Her says, ‘No, the dead boy is yours, mine is the live one.’
כד וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ קָחוּ לִי חֶרֶב וַיָּבֵאוּ הַחֶרֶב לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ.	²⁴ So the king gave the order, “Fetch me a sword.” A sword was brought before the king,

<p>כה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ גְּזְרוּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי לְשְׁנַיִם וְתֵנוּ אֶת הַחֲצִי לְאַחַת וְאֶת הַחֲצִי לְאַחַת.</p>	<p>²⁵and the king said, “Cut the live child in two, and give half to one and half to the other.”</p>
<p>כו וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר בְּנָה הָחַי אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמֶיהָ עַל בְּנָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי תֵּנוּ לָהּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי וְהָמַת אֶל תְּמִיתָהּ וְזֹאת אִמָּרֶת גַּם לִי גַם לָךְ לֹא יִהְיֶה גְזֹר.</p>	<p>²⁶But the woman whose son was the live one pleaded with the king, for she was overcome with compassion for her son. “Please, my lord,” she cried, “give her the live child; only don’t kill it!” The other insisted, “It shall be neither yours nor mine; cut it in two!”</p>
<p>כז וַיַּעַן הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר תֵּנוּ לָהּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי וְהָמַת לֹא תְמִיתָהּ הִיא אִמּוֹ.</p>	<p>²⁷Then the king spoke up. “Give the live child to her,” he said, “and do not put it to death; she is its mother.”</p>
<p>כח וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר שִׁפֵּט הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּירָאוּ מִפְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי רָאוּ כִּי חֲכָמַת אֱלֹהִים בְּקֶרְבוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט.</p>	<p>²⁸When all Israel heard the decision that the king had rendered, they stood in awe of the king; for they saw that he possessed divine wisdom to execute justice.</p>

There is much more to this short, thirteen-verse account than immediately meets the eye. Much of it refers back to the account of David and Bathsheba through links of language. The first woman’s testimony, introduced with “Oh, my lord, I and this woman live in one house,”¹ (**וְאֲנִי וְהָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת יֹשְׁבֹת בְּבַיִת אֶחָד** Kings 3:17), parallels the opening words of the parable of Nathan, which begins “two men lived in one city,” (**שְׁנֵי אָנָשִׁים הָיוּ בְּעִיר אֶחָת** 2 Samuel 12:1). They each give birth three days apart (**וַיֵּלֶד עִמָּה** Kings 3:17–18). Obviously, the birth of a son — actually, two sons, one alive and one dead — is a key element of both narratives. For instance, the end of the first section of the David and Bathsheba narrative, prior to Nathan’s rebuke, concludes **וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ בֶּן** “and she bore him a son” (2 Samuel 11:27) while following the death of that child, the second section concludes with **וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן** Sam. 12:24): namely, Solomon.

According to the first woman, the second woman’s baby died because she lay on it (**וַאֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עָלָיו**). Moreover, according to her account, the bereaved mother “rose in the middle of the night”

(וּתְקַם בְּתוֹךְ הַלַּיְלָה), reminiscent of the opening words giving the setting of David's great sin: 2) דָּוִד מֵעַל מִשְׁכְּבוֹ וַיָּקָם וַיֵּרֶב הָעֶרְב וַיִּקָּם Samuel 11:2).¹⁵ She proceeded to “**take** my son from me as I slept, and **lay** it in her **bosom**, and **lay** her dead son in my **bosom**,” וַתִּקַּח אֶת בְּנִי מֵאֶצְלִי וְאֶתֶּדָּתִי יִשְׁנָה וַתִּשְׁכְּבֵהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ וְאֶת בְּנָהּ הַמֵּת הִשְׁכִּיבָהּ בְּחִיקִי. This language again brings to mind several elements of David and Bathsheba: first, וַיִּקַּח, וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה, when he “**took** her, and she came to him, and he **lay** with her” (2 Sam. 11:4). Second, in Nathan's parable, when the rich man “**took** the lamb of the poor man,” אֶת כֶּבֶשֶׁת הָאִישׁ הָרָאשׁ וַיִּקַּח Sam. 12:4). The latter is a parallel not only of language but also of content: The prostitute who switches her child for that of her housemate, attempting to deprive the other mother of her son by this deception, parallels the man who takes his neighbor's lamb instead of his own. Outside the realm of parable, David, too, attempted to pass off his child as someone else's — the child that eventually would be the dead one. The child who died because of his “**laying with**” another man's wife, וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה, is alluded to by the manner of the baby's death in the prostitute's testimony, אֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עָלָיו — a seemingly irrelevant detail in the first woman's testimony. Finally, the reference to the child “**sleeping in her bosom**” also comes right out of Nathan's parable as well as his *nimshal*: the stolen lamb had slept “**in the poor man's bosom**” (2 Sam. 12:3), and the prophet's rebuke mentions that God had given David wives of his own “**in his bosom**” (2 Sam. 12:8). Thus, taking the sleeping child from out of a victim's bosom mirrors the rich man's theft of the lamb, and David's theft of Uriah's wife.

In the first woman's testimony, she rises in the morning, וַאֲקָם — the opposite of her opponent who “**rose in the night**” וַתִּקָּם בַּבֹּקֶר — to steal her child, and the opposite of David who “**rose**

15. These are examples of seemingly trivial details that beg attention. How does the first woman claim to know why the other woman's child died? This speculative detail does not add anything to the case or Solomon's judgment, but as an additional link to earlier narratives in Samuel — and in Genesis, as we shall later explore — it is far from redundant.

in the evening” 2) וַיְהִי לַעֲתָה הָעֶרֶב וַיָּקָם דָּוִד מֵעַל מִשְׁכְּבוֹ Samuel 11:2) at the outset of the narrative in which he stole Uriah’s wife. Her purpose was to nurse her son, emphasizing her maternal qualities. She found the baby dead but examining it more closely found that it was not the son to whom she had given birth.¹⁶ The other woman denies her account in full, stating only that “my son is the living one, and yours is the dead.” Solomon observes the conundrum, then proposes a solution through a clever subterfuge. Calling for a sword to be brought in (קָחוּ לִי חֶרֶב וַיָּבֹאוּ הַחֶרֶב לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ) he calls for the child to be cut in half and divided “equitably” between the two claimants (גָּזְרוּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי לְשְׁנַיִם וַתָּנוּ אֶת הַחֲצִי לְאַחַת וְאֶת הַחֲצִי לְאַחַת). The true mother (whichever she is) speaks “because mercy burned within her for her son” (כִּי נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמֶיהָ עַל בְּנָהּ), and she begs “O, my lord, give the living child to her, but surely do not kill him” (בִּי אֲדֹנָי תֵּנוּ לָהּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי וְהַמֵּת אֶל תָּמִיתָהוּ). The opening beseeching words, בִּי אֲדֹנָי, which also opened the first woman’s testimony, as well as the unusual turn of phrase regarding her mercy (כִּי נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמֶיהָ עַל בְּנָהּ), are a fascinating point of intertextuality to which we shall return.

The crass acceptance of the verdict by the impostor tips her hand. Solomon commands that the child not be killed, as the true mother had begged, and has the living child returned to her. All the nation hears of Solomon’s brilliant judgment and is awed that “the wisdom of God was within him to do judgment.”

Beneath the surface of this famous judgment lies an extraordinarily harsh assessment of Solomon’s wisdom. The wise and discerning judge who recognizes that a true parent would never allow her child to be cut in two is precisely the king who caused his kingdom to eventually be divided, resulting in the northern and southern kingdoms, never to be reunited. Though he recognizes the maternal instinct of the prostitute who would sooner be deprived of her own child than see any harm come to him, as “parent” to the nation, Solomon ultimately caused precisely the

16. וַאֲתַבּוֹן, “I looked closely,” alliterates with the two repetitions of the word בְּנִי, “my son,” in the verse.

division that the other prostitute accepted as “fair.” It is noteworthy that Solomon is never named in this narrative; he is merely called “the king.” This is because his judgment is a verdict concerning *all* kings; every king should be a proper “parent” to the nation, willing to sacrifice personal happiness for the good of his “children.” In abstract, his judgment was sound, so wise that it was recognized as divinely inspired; in practice, he failed to follow his own wisdom. Like his father before him, Solomon was the unknowing subject of a parable in the text, and for all his wisdom and discernment, provided his own condemnation.

David sent Uriah to Joab naively holding his own death warrant, like a sheep to the slaughter (to borrow an image from Nathan’s parable). However, in an irony of the text, when he pronounces the rich man “worthy of death,” a מָוֶת מֶלֶךְ, (2 Samuel 20:31) he was condemning himself just as unknowingly. Later on, as the “wise woman of Tekoa” brought Joab’s case for the return of Absalom to David, unwittingly setting off a chain of events that would bring about David’s measure-for-measure retribution, David again pronounced a verdict, naïve of the fact that it was his own. This verdict, interestingly enough, was in response to a plea of clemency summarized as: “there were two sons, now there is only one — can it be just to kill the second?” Solomon faces his own version of the same question, and like his father, pronounces a verdict that is really about himself.

The division of the kingdom into the wayward northern kingdom of Israel and the still-troubled southern kingdom of Judah was the ultimate failure of Solomon’s reign. It is what likens him to the impostor, not a real parent to the nation — he would see it split. That a harlot proves more capable than him of not only recognizing this but actualizing it, is a damning criticism: “the king,” — since Solomon’s name is kept out of the narrative, emphasizing that the metaphor can and should be generalized — proves inferior to the truthful harlot.¹⁷ In fact, the use of har-

17. This evokes his ancestor Judah. He slept with what he believed was a prostitute along the way, and was informed, having unknowingly

lots is not just a necessary plot device, but a further criticism, as ultimately Solomon's straying is the consequence of his love for foreign women, much as his father's great failure was the product of unbridled lust.

It is an interesting literary exercise to look more deeply at the details given in this case to try and arrive at a judgment. We find that the text plants equal evidence in favor of each woman's claim, highlighting that this case is fully unsolvable without "wisdom from God" — the חֵכְמָה אֱלֹהִים the people recognized in Solomon, as the narrative concludes. Afterward, we shall find that much of the above analysis is strengthened by structural features of the narrative.

Remember that the narrative is divided into two parts: the two women, called only "the one woman" and "the other woman," present their claims in the first part, while in the second part, women are identified as the real mother and the false mother. *There is no obvious way to identify the women in the first half with their descriptions in the second half.* As we shall see, the subtle clues supporting each side are themselves ambiguous.

impregnated Tamar, the daughter-in-law to whom he had promised his third son, that she had "played the harlot" (Genesis 38:24). He sits in judgment of her, ready to have her burned as punishment (and with her, his own twin sons in her womb, the parents of the monarchy)! Yet, by the end of the narrative, he is forced to admit that "she is more in the right than I am." The subtext of Solomon's judgment similarly shows the moral superiority of a truly compassionate "harlot" to a "king" lacking her better qualities, with names left out of it.

There is much more to say about the way the narrative of Judah and Tamar should be read alongside the failures of Judah's descendants David and Solomon, especially concerning lapses of sexual morality and, later, personal responsibility in a leadership role. While Judah eventually steps forward as a worthy leader among his brothers, despite being neither firstborn, nor second-born, nor thirdborn, he requires the process of development depicted throughout Genesis, with his admission of fault to Tamar a turning point in his character growth. His descendants fail to live up to his example in this regard, as we shall discuss in a later section.

1 Kings 3:16	
טז אז תבאנה שתיים נשים זנות אל המלך ותעמדנה לפניו.	¹⁶ Later two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him.

To begin with, we are told that two women — harlots, at that — came and stood before the king. Is either likely to be more trustworthy than the other? It would be difficult for a “character witness” to say anything that defends or condemns one and not the other. Still, it is noteworthy that members of the lowest social stratum stand before the king himself in judgment. This fact is a mark of what it looks like when true justice prevails.

1 Kings 3:17	
יז ותאמר האשה האחת בי אדני אני והאשה הזאת ישבת בביתי אחד נולד עמה בביתי.	¹⁷ The first woman said, “Please, my lord! This woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house.

The first woman begins with the polite term **בי אדני** — but anyone standing before the king and hoping to make a case would begin with honorifics. Notably, it is the true mother who says **בי אדני** in verse 26, begging the king to give the child to her rival rather than slay it. So perhaps this can be used as a small piece of evidence in favor of the first woman being identifiable with the true mother. On the other hand, it is possible that in the first half of the narrative, when they present their cases, the first woman uses this honorific, but in the second half of the narrative, the woman identified only as “the real mother” who uses it is, in fact, woman #2. In any event, all this verse has told us is that these two women, who live together, gave birth in the same house.

The next verse promises to make our jobs as putative judges a lot harder: no one lives with them, and there were no witnesses to their respective birthings.

1 Kings 3:18–19	
<p>יח וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְלִדְתִּי וַתֵּלֶד גַּם הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת וְאֶנְחֲנוּ יַחְדָּו אֵין זָר אֶתֵּנוּ בְּבֵית זִוְלָתִי שְׁתֵּימָם אֶנְחֲנוּ בְּבֵית. יט וַיָּמָת בֶּן הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת לַלַּיְלָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עָלָיו.</p>	<p>¹⁸On the third day after I was delivered, this woman also gave birth to a child. We were alone; there was no one else with us in the house, just the two of us in the house. ¹⁹During the night this woman's child died, because she lay on it.</p>

Verse 19 includes a speculative statement: the first woman claims that her rival's child died in the night “because she lay upon it.” By her own account, she was asleep when this occurred, so it is either conjecture on her part (if she is an honest plaintiff) or fabrication (if she is the lying mother). Perhaps this is a point against her. On the other hand, as we have observed a certain intertextual significance to the statement אֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עָלָיו referring to prior narratives, perhaps the truth of the metaphor implies the truth of her statement. This extraneous detail could be a point for or against her.

1 Kings 3:20	
<p>כ וַתִּקָּם בְּתוֹךְ הַלַּיְלָה וַתִּקַּח אֶת בְּנִי מֵאֲצִלִּי וְאִמָּתְךָ יֹשְׁנָה וַתִּשְׁכְּבֵהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ וְאֶת בְּנִי הָמָת הִשְׁכִּיבָה בְּחִיקִי.</p>	<p>²⁰She arose in the night and took my son from my side while your maidservant was asleep, and laid him in her bosom; and she laid her dead son in my bosom.</p>

This verse contains the accusation: the other woman took her son as she slept and switched them. As before, the observed intertextual nature of the alleged crime, harking back to the parable of Nathan and David's crime against Uriah, might indicate the truth of this statement. Or maybe not. The text's use of metaphor and verbal linkages is not dependent on the honesty of the character in whose mouth they are placed, after all.

1 Kings 3:21	
<p>כֹּא וְאָקָם בְּבֹקֶר לְהִינִיק אֶת בְּנִי וְהִנֵּה מֵת וְאֶתְבוֹנֵן אֵלָיו בְּבֹקֶר וְהִנֵּה לֹא הִיא בְנִי אֲשֶׁר יָלַדְתִּי.</p>	<p>²¹When I arose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, it was not the son I had borne.”</p>

This verse ends her introductory claim: she got up to nurse her child and saw that it was dead. The nursing detail emphasizes her maternal qualities. Then she looked more closely at it: as a real mother would, perhaps. She can tell it is not “the child I gave birth to.” This is the substance of her claim: the dead child is not the one she birthed.

The other woman’s testimony, given prior to the second half of the trial where they are identified, is limited to a complete denial. “No — my child is the living one, and yours is the dead one!” In the same verse, the counter-rebuttal is given, symmetrically: “No — *your* child is the dead one, and *mine* is the living one!”

It is possible to make a weak argument in favor of woman #2 here. Her rebuttal consists of the flat denial “No, my child is the living one,” stated before “your child is the dead one.” This is consistent with the character of the real mother in the second half of the narrative: her focus is on the living child, her child: “my child is the living one (בְּנִי הַחַי).” She is even willing to let it be someone else’s, but it must be living! On the other hand, the impostor accepts Solomon’s judgment. She views it as fair: no one will have a living child. Her goal at that point of the case is simply for the other woman to be deprived: “your child is dead (בְּנֶךְ הַמֵּת).” This is consistent with the order of claims of woman #1 in the counter-rebuttal: “No — your child is the dead one, and mine is the living one!” Of course, this could be making more of the specific order of claims than justifiable. Perhaps this is simply the natural sequence of argument: “X, not Y” rejected and countered with “Y, not X.”

1 Kings 3:22	
כב וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה הָאֲחֵרֶת לֹא כִּי בְנִי הָחַי וּבְנֶךָ הַמֵּת וְזֹאת אִמְרֶת לֹא כִּי בְנֶךָ הַמֵּת וּבְנִי הָחַי וַתִּדְבְּרֶנָּה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ.	²² The other woman spoke up, “No, the live one is my son, and the dead one is yours!” But the first insisted, “No, the dead boy is yours; mine is the live one!” And they went on arguing before the king.

The above concludes the first half, in which initial claims are presented. In the next verse, Solomon states what we should all be thinking: this case is unsolvable. One says this living child is hers, and the dead one is her rival’s; the other says the reverse.

1 Kings 3:23	
כג וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ זֹאת אִמְרֶת זֶה בְּנִי הָחַי וּבְנֶךָ הַמֵּת וְזֹאת אִמְרֶת לֹא כִּי בְנֶךָ הַמֵּת וּבְנִי הָחַי.	²³ The king said, “One says, ‘This is my son, the live one, and the dead one is yours’; and the other says, ‘No, the dead boy is yours, mine is the live one.’

At this point, like Solomon, we have very little to go on. Solomon, however, uses his understanding of human nature and how a true parent would place mercy above some sick caricature of “fairness.” He has his servants bring him a sword to cut this Gordian knot.

For the duration of the narrative, the women are identified as the real mother and the impostor, rather than simply being “the first woman” and “the other woman.” As noted, we have little to identify these labels from the first and second half appropriately. The honest mother says בִּי אֲדֹנִי, which opened up the claim of woman #1, but perhaps they both speak that way. Notably, when she says, “give her the living child, and surely do not kill him,” she, too, unknowingly gives the verdict: Solomon echoes her words and says, “give her (the real mother) the living child, and surely do not kill him.”

Having looked more closely at the details, we see very small, barely admissible evidence to identify the women in the text. Does

structural analysis shed any light? As it turns out, it is equally ambivalent. The details that emerge from this analysis are predicated on the fact that this narrative is self-contained. Like a psalm, an easily identifiable narrative with clear parameters is subject to the same type of structural analysis. For instance, the trial can be broken down into dialogue and narrative and broken down further into the words of woman #1, woman #2, and Solomon; or Honest Mother, Imposter, and Solomon. Indeed, it is helpful to proceed under the assumption of uncertainty: word counts within the dialogue should be conducted twice, once based on the identification of Honest Mother with woman #1, and once based on her identification with woman #2.

Several fascinating features emerge. Firstly, there are a total of 138 words of dialogue: 98 words (7*14) stated by the two women, and 40 (5*8) said by Solomon.¹⁸ Perhaps the use of a covenantal signifier around Solomon's words owes itself to the fact that, in this case, he is doing justice: fulfilling his role properly in the God-Israel covenant.

Word counts become far more interesting, however. The 138 words of dialogue thus have a midpoint after 69 words. The two central words are the 69th and 70th of dialogue. The introductory claim of woman #1 is exactly 69 words long — precisely half of the dialogue. Her last word and woman #2's first word form the exact numerical center of the dialogue. What's more, woman #1's 69th word at this halfway point of the dialogue is לָלֶדֶתִי, "I gave birth." Woman #2's first word, the 70th word of dialogue and its other center word, is simply לא, "no." The center words of the dialogue encapsulate the entirety of their claims! "I gave birth... to the living child," "No!" (the flat denial of woman #2).

There is both a spiritual and a practical side to Solomon's ultimate failure as a monarch. The straying after idolatry plays the definitive role, of course, but we also must look to the complaints

18. Note that the exact middle of Solomon's 40 words is the phrase, גָּזְרוּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה, such that the words that refer to cutting the child in half also divide the speech in half.

of what became the Israelite rebellion to his son Rehoboam. To a large degree, Solomon's focus on burdensome building projects to his own glory, sending out workmen for a month at a time, inflicting a heavy workload upon them, and all for castles and palaces in Judah alienated the north. The damage to national cohesion was not brought about suddenly and magically as punishment for his spiritual straying. It occurred concurrently as a direct consequence of his misaligned priorities: building castles over building unity. Let us quickly survey this facet of Solomon's reign, which is given a tremendous amount of focus by the book of Kings.

The Works and Wealth of Solomon

The amount of detail devoted to Solomon's construction projects and the wealth that fueled them is staggering. The vast majority of the text concerns either his plans to build the Temple, or the extended descriptions of the Temple, of his house, and of his other palaces. Much of the rest deals with describing his wealth. To begin with, once Solomon's reign is secured, and he marries the daughter of Pharaoh, the text states that he took her to the city of David "until he finished building his house, and the house of God, and the wall surrounding Jerusalem" (1 Kings 3:1).

After his first dream and the ensuing display of Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kings 3, the narrative moves on to describe the administration of his nation. We see eleven princes named with various important functions — scribe, general, etc. — with the last two being in charge of his household and the taxation of the nation, respectively. After that, we are told of *twelve* officials in charge of taxing each district of the nation, all for the purposes of "providing victuals (לְכִלְכֵּל/וֹכֵלֶיךָ) for the king's household" (1 Kings 4:7). After the list of officials, the last verse in 1 Kings 4 (which does not conclude this section) portrays a nation "abundant as the sand upon the sea," eating, drinking and merry. Yet the focus throughout the account has simply been on the officials in charge of supplying food for the palace, while this single statement is unelaborated. Solomon is, as 1 Kings 5:1 states, ruler (מוֹשֵׁל)

of all the kingdoms from the River, to the land of the Philistines, to the border of Egypt, with subjects bringing gifts throughout.

1 Kings 5 continues along the same lines, with a short section describing the tremendous food intake of his household:

1 Kings 5:2–5	
ב וַיְהִי לָהֶם שְׁלֹמֹה לְיוֹם אֶחָד שְׁלֹשִׁים כֹּר סִלַּת וְשֵׁשִׁים כֹּר קֹמַח.	² Solomon's daily provisions consisted of 30 <i>kors</i> of semolina, and 60 <i>kors</i> of [ordinary] flour,
ג עֶשְׂרֵה בָקָר בָּרָאִים וְעֶשְׂרִים בָּקָר רְעִי וַיִּמָּאֶה צֹאן לֶבֶד מֵאִיל וַצְבִּי וַיִּחְמֹר וַיִּבְרָבְרִים אַבּוּסִים.	³ 10 fattened oxen, 20 pasture-fed oxen, and 100 sheep and goats, besides deer and gazelles, roebucks and fatted geese.
ד כִּי הוּא רָדָה בְּכָל עֵבֶר הַנָּהָר מִתִּפְסַח וְעַד עֵזָה בְּכָל מַלְכֵי עֵבֶר הַנָּהָר וְשָׁלוֹם הָיָה לוֹ מִכָּל עֵבְרָיו מִסָּבִיב.	⁴ For he controlled the whole region west of the Euphrates — all the kings west of the Euphrates, from Tiphseh to Gaza — and he had peace on all his borders roundabout.
ה וַיֵּשֶׁב יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְבֶטַח אִישׁ תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְתַחַת תְּאֵנָתוֹ מִדָּן וְעַד בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע כָּל יְמֵי שְׁלֹמֹה.	⁵ All the days of Solomon, Judah and Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba dwelt in safety, everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree.

Again, after telling us the massive quantities of flour and animals consumed by his household in some detail, we are told that Judah and Israel were secure, “a man under his vine,” throughout his reign. The next short passage continues to elaborate his wealth, numbering his massive quantities of horses, and again speaks of officers “feeding the king and all who approached his table.”

1 Kings 5:6–8	
ו וַיְהִי לְשֹׁלֹמֹה אַרְבָּעִים אֲלָף אֲרוֹת סוּסִים לְמָרְכָבוֹ וּשְׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרֵה אֲלָף פָּרָשִׁים.	⁶ Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariotry and 12,000 horsemen.

<p>ז וְכָל־כֹּלֵי הַנְּצָבִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶת־ הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה וְאֶת כָּל הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו שֶׁלֹּחַן הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אִישׁ חֲדָשׁוֹ לֹא יַעֲדֶרֶוּ דָבָר.</p>	<p>⁷All those prefects, each during his month, would furnish provisions for King Solomon and for all who were admitted to King Solomon's table; they did not fall short in anything.</p>
<p>ח וְהַשְּׁעָרִים וְהַתְּבֹן לְסוּסִים וְלָרֶכֶשׁ יָבֹאוּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יְהִיָּה שָׁם אִישׁ כְּמִשְׁפָּטוֹ.</p>	<p>⁸They would also, each in his turn, deliver barley and straw for the horses and the swift steeds to the places where they were stationed.</p>

Notably, the laws of the king in Deuteronomy 17 emphasize that, when the nation places a monarch over itself “to be like the other nations” (as occurred in 1 Sam. 8 to initiate the monarchy), he is not to amass horses — the latter being explicitly associated with a return to Egypt. The next prohibitions are an abundance of wives, and Solomon married an *Egyptian* wife nearly immediately, with more to come. Finally, he is prohibited from amassing gold and silver. All of this characterizes Solomon's reign, as many passages confirm his holdings of wealth, detailing the voyages of the navy he built to bring back foreign gold, exotic creatures and rare spices from abroad.

The next short section mentions the wisdom God granted Solomon, 1 Kings 5:9–14. The irony is not yet apparent (much of what we have observed only comes into sharper relief after completing the narrative of Solomon in all its disappointment), but as noted, this account states that he was wiser than everyone — all the wise men of Egypt, Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Calcol and Darda. The next account, occupying the rest of 1 Kings 5, shows us how a foreign leader viewed Solomon's wisdom.

Solomon reveals to Hiram of Tyre his intent to build a Temple to God. Moreover, he plans to outsource much of the project to Sidonian wood-hewers, and use the cedar and cypress wood of Lebanon for his projects. Hiram is, naturally, delighted, blessing God for giving David such a wise son to rule over Israel, and their alliance is solidified when they make a covenant with one another in 1 Kings 5:26.

The text goes on to describe the massive levy of workmen Solomon's designs required of Israel: 70,000 to bear burdens, and 80,000 to quarry rock in the mountains, and 3,300 overseers. Quarrying and transporting stone for the foundations of the house was a task that required the labor of a tremendous percentage of the nation.

All of 1 Kings 6 proceeds to describe the construction of the Temple in great architectural and ornamental detail. Its last verse tells us that this was a seven-year project. On the other hand, the very next verse opening 1 Kings 7 begins to tell us of the construction of Solomon's own palace: a thirteen-year project. The questionable priorities are hinted to by this juxtaposition, and indeed, his palace includes a home for the daughter of Pharaoh, an unfavorable association. Moreover, the lines between projects are somewhat blurred, with elements of its cedar woodwork explicitly described as "like the house of God" (1 Kings 7:12).

From verse 13 to the end of this long, 51-verse chapter, the text returns to describing the construction of the Temple and its vessels. For this purpose, Solomon recruits a workman out of Tyre, also named Hiram — an individual of half Israelite, half Phoenician parentage. Hiram, like Solomon, is said to have חָכְמָה and תְּבוּנָה, wisdom and discernment, in working with brass. What stands out is that until details of this construction leave no doubt that it is the Temple under discussion — vessels and items for ritual use, for example — one might easily wonder which house Hiram was working on. Verse after verse describes construction details before Hiram's role becomes clear. Again, the lines between Solomon's projects are blurry.

A further matter should be pointed out. Solomon's Temple, like his palace, is built of Phoenician wood, with help from a Phoenician king (Hiram), by a coincidentally eponymous half-Phoenician builder. The house of God is largely a Phoenician-Israelite product, like Hiram, the builder. Solomon's reign, in this as in so many other respects, is the culmination of Israel's decision to subject themselves to "a king like all the other nations."

Hiram's description as חָכֵם and נָבוֹן is interesting not only for

its similarity to Solomon but also for its similarity to a much earlier character cast in a similar role. Bezalel, who oversaw the metalwork of the Tabernacle, is introduced by Exodus 35:31 as possessing *הַחֵמָה* and *תְּבוּנָה* for his task as well. Specifically, he is described as follows:

Exodus 35:31	
<p>לא וַיִּמְלֵא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּחָכְמָה בְּתִבְיוֹנָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכָל מְלָאכָה.</p>	<p>³¹He has endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft</p>

This “spirit of God” that fills him with his talents, directed toward the work of the Tabernacle, is noteworthy, as we shall point out in a later section. Only one other character, namely Yosef, is also described as *חָכָם* and *נָבוֹן*, is said to be filled with this “spirit of God” directing his wisdom. Yosef stands as a foil to Solomon in so many ways. Similarly, Bezalel and Hiram’s parallel descriptions are part of the same process of subtly criticizing the accomplishments of Solomon, his projects, the people he surrounds himself with, and everything else about his reign.

With the Temple concluded, the Ark is brought up to reside within its walls. At the ceremony, Solomon makes a grand speech (1 Kings 8:12–21):

1 Kings 8:12–21	
<p>יב אָז אָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה יְהוָה אָמַר לְשֹׁכֵן בְּעֶרְפָּל.</p>	<p>¹²then Solomon declared: “The LORD has chosen To abide in a thick cloud:</p>
<p>יג בָּנֵה בְּנִיתִי בַּיִת זָבֹל לָךְ מְכוֹן לְשִׁבְתֶּךָ עוֹלָמִים.</p>	<p>¹³I have now built for You A stately House, A place where You May dwell forever.”</p>
<p>יד וַיֹּסֶב הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת פָּנָיו וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת כָּל קְהַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל קְהַל יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּד.</p>	<p>¹⁴Then, with the whole congregation of Israel standing, the king faced about and blessed the whole congregation of Israel.</p>

טו וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּפִי אֶת דְּוֹד אָבִי וּבִידּוֹ מָלֵא לְאֹמֶר.	¹⁵ He said: “Praised be the LORD, the God of Israel, who has fulfilled with deeds the promise He made to my father David. For He said,
טז מִן הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת עַמִּי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם לֹא בִּחְרָתִי בְּעִיר מִכָּל שְׁבֻטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבָנוֹת בֵּית לַיהוָה שְׁמִי שָׁם וְאֶבְחַר בְּדָוִד לַיהוָה עַל עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל.	¹⁶ ‘Ever since I brought My people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city among all the tribes of Israel for building a House where My name might abide; but I have chosen David to rule My people Israel.’
יז וַיְהִי עִם לִבִּב דָּוִד אָבִי לְבָנוֹת בֵּית לְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.	¹⁷ Now my father David had intended to build a House for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel.
יח וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל דָּוִד אָבִי וְעַן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם לְבָבְךָ לְבָנוֹת בֵּית לְשְׁמִי הִטִּיבְתָּ כִּי הָיָה עִם לְבָבְךָ.	¹⁸ But the LORD said to my father David, ‘As regards your intention to build a House for My name, you did right to have that intention.
יט רַק אַתָּה לֹא תִבְנֶה הַבַּיִת כִּי אִם בְּנֶךָ הַיָּצֵא מִחֻלְצִיָּךְ הוּא יִבְנֶה הַבַּיִת לְשְׁמִי.	¹⁹ However, you shall not build the House yourself; instead, your son, the issue of your loins, shall build the House for My name.’
כ וַיִּקֶּם יְהוָה אֶת דְּבָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וְאִקָּם תַּחַת דָּוִד אָבִי וְאִשְׁבַּע עַל כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה וְאֶבְנֶה הַבַּיִת לְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.	²⁰ “And the LORD has fulfilled the promise that He made: I have succeeded my father David and have ascended the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised. I have built the House for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel;
כא וְאִשְׁשֵׁם שָׁם מְקוֹם לְאָרוֹן אֲשֶׁר שָׁם בְּרִית יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת עִם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּהוֹצִיאֹו אֶתָּם מִמִּצְרַיִם.	²¹ and I have set a place there for the Ark, containing the covenant which the LORD made with our fathers when He brought them out from the land of Egypt.”

God, he observes, was satisfied to “dwell in fog.” However, as he notes (rather boastfully), “I have built you a royal house, to rest in forever.” Afterward, he turns and faces the congregation and recounts what led up to this momentous occasion. In doing so, he relates how God had rejected David’s offer to build Him a temple, though he inserts some detail not found in 2 Samuel 7. Compare:

2 Samuel 7:4–17	
ד וַיְהִי בַלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֶל נָתָן לֵאמֹר.	⁴ But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan:
ה לך וּאָמַרְתָּ אֶל עַבְדִּי אֶל דָּוִד כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הַאֲתָה תִבְנֶה לִּי בַיִת לְשִׁבְתִּי.	⁵ "Go and say to My servant David: Thus said the LORD: Are you the one to build a house for Me to dwell in?
ו כִּי לֹא יִשְׁבְּתִי בְּבֵית לְמֵיוֹם הַעֲלֵתִי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֶהְיֶה מְתִהֲלֶךְ בְּאַהֲלִי וּבְמִשְׁכָּן.	⁶ From the day that I brought the people of Israel out of Egypt to this day I have not dwelt in a house, but have moved about in Tent and Tabernacle.
ז בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַדֹּבֵר דְּבַרְתִּי אֶת אֶחָד שְׂבָטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי לְרַעוּת אֶת עַמִּי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר לָמָּה לֹא בְּנִיתֶם לִי בַיִת אֲרָזִים.	⁷ As I moved about wherever the Israelites went, did I ever reproach any of the tribal leaders whom I appointed to care for My people Israel: Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?
ח וְעַתָּה כֹּה תֹאמַר לְעַבְדִּי לְדָוִד כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲנִי לְקַחְתִּיד מִן הַנֶּזֶחַ מֵאַחֶר הַצֹּאן לִהְיוֹת נֹגִיד עַל עַמִּי עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל.	⁸ Further, say thus to My servant David: Thus said the LORD of Hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be ruler of My people Israel,
ט וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלַכְתָּ וְאַכְרַתָּה אֶת כָּל אִיְבֶיךָ מִפְּנֵיךְ וְעָשִׂיתִי לְךָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל כְּשֵׁם הַגְּדֹלִים אֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ.	⁹ and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut down all your enemies before you. Moreover, I will give you great renown like that of the greatest men on earth.
י וְשִׁמְתִּי מְקוֹם לְעַמִּי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִטְעַנְתִּיו וְשָׁכַן תִּחְתָּיו וְלֹא יִרְגָז עוֹד וְלֹא יִסִּיפוּ בְנֵי עוֹלָה לְעַנּוֹתוֹ כְּאֲשֶׁר בְּרָאשׁוֹנָה.	¹⁰ I will establish a home for My people Israel and will plant them firm, so that they shall dwell secure and shall tremble no more. Evil men shall not oppress them any more as in the past,
יא וְלָמֶן הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי שְׂפָטִים עַל עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִנֵּיחֹתִי לְךָ מִכָּל אִיְבֶיךָ וְהִגִּיד לְךָ יְהוָה כִּי בֵית יַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ יְהוָה.	¹¹ ever since I appointed chieftains over My people Israel. I will give you safety from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you that He, the LORD, will establish a house for you.

יב כִּי יִמְלָאוּ יָמֶיךָ וְשָׁכַבְתָּ אֶת אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְהִקִּמֹתִי אֶת זָרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּעֶיד וְהִכִּינֹתִי אֶת מַמְלַכְתּוֹ.	¹² When your days are done and you lie with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own issue, and I will establish his kingship.
יג הוּא יִבְנֶה בַּיִת לְשְׁמִי וְכִנֵּנְתִּי אֶת כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ עַד עוֹלָם.	¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish his royal throne forever.
יד אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לוֹ לְאָב וְהוּא יִהְיֶה לִּי לְבֵן אֲשֶׁר בַּעֲוֹנוֹתָי וְהִכָּחֲתִיו בְּשֵׁבֶט אַנְשִׁים וּבִגְגֵי בְנֵי אָדָם.	¹⁴ I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to Me. When he does wrong, I will chastise him with the rod of men and the affliction of mortals;
טו וְחִסְדִּי לֹא יִסּוּר מִמֶּנּוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר הִסְרֹתִי מִעַם שָׁאוּל אֲשֶׁר הִסְרֹתִי מִלְפָּנָי.	¹⁵ but I will never withdraw My favor from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed to make room for you.
טז וְנֶאֱמַן בֵּיתְךָ וּמַמְלַכְתְּךָ עַד עוֹלָם לְפָנֶיךָ כְּסֹאֲךָ יִהְיֶה נָכוֹן עַד עוֹלָם.	¹⁶ Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure before you; your throne shall be established forever.”
יז כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְכָל הַחֲזִיוֹן הַזֶּה כֹּן דִּבֶּר נָתָן אֶל דָּוִד.	¹⁷ Nathan spoke to David in accordance with all these words and all this prophecy.

Certain details have been elided where others have been inserted or reemphasized. God had told David that He had never sought to dwell in any permanent house, never asking one of the leaders (literally: staffs, less plausibly tribes) of Israel to build Him a “house of cedar.” He had recounted His selection of David as a leader, blessed David for his noble intentions, promising to someday provide him with a son who would “build a house to My name” and to be close to this son, preserving the House of David forever. Yet Solomon’s account is subtly but significantly different.

In Solomon’s version, God had told David, “Never did I choose a *city* in all the tribes of Israel to build a house to My name there.” Adding the word “city” changes the entire trajectory of God’s interaction with David. As he goes on from there, God chose David to rule, David wished to build God a Temple, God loved the idea but wanted it to come from David’s son instead. The small change tells us that Solomon’s Temple inauguration

speech serves a few purposes — a couple of them never hinted at by the exchange between David and Nathan. Firstly, as of this dedication, his capital in Jerusalem publicly became the chosen city of God, worthy of Solomon's special attention. Secondly, and on a related note, it seems that Solomon was cognizant that God did not wish to raise up one tribe over all the others, though this is not really the focus of God's words to David. Thirdly, the way he describes the exchange makes Solomon's reign and building projects seem divinely commanded, rather than a tolerated concession. Finally, God's fundamental disinterest in such a house is basically ignored.

Considering that the great burdens of labor placed on the nation for projects in Judah serve as the complaint of those who rebel against his son and propel the nation into schism forever, Solomon's small changes to the story mentioned in this inauguration speech are an ironic foreshadowing of things to come. He did elevate one city and tribe above the rest, and while there is nothing wrong with a nation having a political and spiritual capital — to the contrary, it is expected and mentioned as a positive eventuality throughout the Torah — Solomon's particularly self-centered, materialistic means of magnifying the glory of Jerusalem and himself came at the expense of Israel.

The Foreign Relations of Solomon

With his reign domestically secure, Solomon's first act is to “marry (into) Pharaoh,” that is, marry Pharaoh's daughter to cement an alliance with the regional hegemon. She is the first of many foreign princesses, as 1 Kings 11 makes clear. Solomon does what any “wise king” would do, by the standards of human regents: he becomes a client of someone more powerful. The Deuteronomic code, explicitly concerned with the possibility of entanglements with Egypt, comes to mind. Between his wife and his horses, Solomon is thoroughly entangled. Deuteronomy 17 warns of this association “lest you return to Egypt”; it is a sad reality that the eventual legacy of Solomon's house was the exile in Zedekiah's

time, with much of the nation (including the prophet Jeremiah) leaving for Egypt.

As noted, Solomon is truly the culmination of “a king like all the other nations.” He does what the best Near Eastern potentate would do, and is admired by his counterparts for it. Hiram, pleased with Solomon’s request for a partnership in his monument-building, praises his wisdom. Their alliance brings not only wood and men, but also much gold, along with spices and animals for Solomon’s menagerie (1 Kings 10). This alliance gave Solomon the “fleet of Tarshish” at his disposal, and their ships traveling together enriched each king. Gold and silver flowed, and as 1 Kings 10 concludes, precious stones and metals abounded in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is notably specified; of course, Solomon’s capital saw the benefits of his material pursuits — but what of Israel?

His many marriages to foreign princesses accounted by 1 Kings 11 reflect the admiration for, or at least the desire for an alliance with, every regional leader. And indeed, 1 Kings 10:23–24 relates that Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in wisdom and in wealth and that all the earth sought his wisdom. 1 Kings 5:14 similarly relates how kings of nations sought to bask in his wisdom.

There is one foreign leader who stands out among these. The Queen of Sheba, unique among the nations mentioned for coming from a great distance away, comes to test Solomon with “riddles.” She has heard rumor of his wisdom from afar and comes to confirm it. Though the outcome of their positive encounter is much like that with other kings (they exchange gifts of wealth such as the “gold of Ophir” she brings him), her words are unique. Her admiration of Solomon is explicitly predicated on his wisdom to rule in “justice and righteousness.” As we argued in our commentary on the Bene Qorah Psalms, this task, in which Solomon ultimately failed, is recognized by a foreign leader very shortly before the text relates Solomon’s fall into total decadence. Her words to Solomon echo the warnings of God to Solomon but fall on deaf ears. Instead, he keeps acting in all the ways that are

“wise” by the usual standards of the Iron Age: amassing wealth and power, marrying princesses, and eventually adopting their ways.

At the very center of the text, “your people” — the people of Solomon’s nation whom it is his role to rule justly — are enveloped by אֲשֶׁרִי on each side. The envelopment of psalms by the term אֲשֶׁרִי is a feature we analyzed in a forthcoming commentary.¹⁹ The same authorial technique appears to be employed here, with אֲשֶׁרִי surrounding the center.

There is one final irony in all these foreign relations. For all Solomon’s wisdom, the faith he placed in Pharaoh proved eminently unjustified. His enemy, the Edomite Hadad, flees to Egypt for refuge. Not only is he not handed over, but he also marries the sister of the Egyptian queen consort — protected by the same familial relationships as Solomon. He becomes Solomon’s main military foe. Furthermore, Solomon’s main political foe, Jeroboam, future leader of the schism and ruler of the Northern Kingdom, flees to Egypt to escape Solomon’s vengeful pursuit. Finally, in the days of Solomon’s son, it is once more the ruler of Egypt who turns out to be more foe than friend, with king Shishak invading and seizing Rehoboam’s royal treasury in 1 Kings 14. So much for marrying into Egyptian favor.

The Downfall of Solomon

The marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter is the first of many such entanglements, and this is his ultimate downfall. Shortly after mentioning this marriage, the as-yet uncorrupted Solomon was first described in 1 Kings 3 as “loving God,” and “walking in the ways of his father David,”:

19. See my forthcoming *Psalms and the Prophetic Message of Jeremiah*, and the relevant excursus after the first chapter of volume 1.

1 Kings 3:3	
<p>ג וַיֵּאָהֱב שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת יְהוָה לְלַכֵּת בְּחֻקֹּת דָּוִד אָבִיו וְכָבַד בְּבָמוֹת הָיוֹא מִזְבְּחֵי וּמִקְדָּשָׁיו.</p>	<p>³And Solomon, though he loved the Lord and followed the practices of his father David, also sacrificed and offered at the shrines.</p>

Introducing his downfall, 1 Kings 11 shows how instead of loving God, he came to “love foreign women,” (וְהִמְלִךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אֶהָב נָשִׁים) (נִכְרִיּוֹת רַבּוֹת) and how the ways of his father David were ultimately rejected.

1 Kings 11:1–10	
<p>א וְהִמְלִךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אֶהָב נָשִׁים נִכְרִיּוֹת רַבּוֹת וְאֶת בֵּת פְּרָעָה מוֹאָבִיּוֹת עַמֹּנִיּוֹת אֲדָמִיּוֹת צִדְדִּיּוֹת חִתִּיּוֹת.</p>	<p>¹King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter — Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Phoenician and Hittite women,</p>
<p>ב מִן הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא תִבְּאוּ בָהֶם וְהֵם לֹא יָבֹאוּ בָכֶם אֲכֹן יִטּוּ אֶת לְבָבְכֶם אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם בָּהֶם דָּבַק שְׁלֹמֹה לְאַהֲבָהּ.</p>	<p>²from the nations of which the LORD had said to the Israelites, “None of you shall join them and none of them shall join you, lest they turn your heart away to follow their gods.” Such Solomon clung to and loved.</p>
<p>ג וַיְהִי לוֹ נָשִׁים שְׁרוֹת שֶׁבַע מֵאוֹת וּפְלִגְשִׁים שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּטּוּ נַפְשׁוֹ אֶת לְבוֹ.</p>	<p>³He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned his heart away.</p>
<p>ד וַיְהִי לְעֵת זָקְנֹת שְׁלֹמֹה נָשָׁיו הִטּוּ אֶת לְבָבוֹ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְלֹא הָיָה לְבָבוֹ שָׁלֵם עִם יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו כְּלָבָב דָּוִד אָבִיו.</p>	<p>⁴In his old age, his wives turned away Solomon's heart after other gods, and he was not as wholeheartedly devoted to the LORD his God as his father David had been.</p>
<p>ה וַיִּלֶּךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אַחֲרֵי עֲשֹׁתֶרֶת אֱלֹהֵי צִדְדִּיּוֹם וְאַחֲרֵי מֶלֶכֶם שֶׁקֶץ עַמֹּנִים.</p>	<p>⁵Solomon followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Phoenicians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.</p>
<p>ו וַיַּעַשׂ שְׁלֹמֹה הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וְלֹא מָלָא אַחֲרָיו יְהוָה כְּדָוִד אָבִיו.</p>	<p>⁶Solomon did what was displeasing to the LORD and did not remain loyal to the LORD like his father David.</p>

ז אִזְ יִבְנֶה שְׁלֹמֹה בְּמָה לְכִמּוֹשׁ שֶׁקֶץ מוֹאָב בְּהָר אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם וּלְמֹלֶךְ שֶׁקֶץ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן.	⁷ At that time, Solomon built a shrine for Chemosh the abomination of Moab on the hill near Jerusalem, and one for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites.
ח וְכֵן עָשָׂה לְכָל נַשְׂיֵו הַנִּכְרִיּוֹת מִקְטִירוֹת וּמִזְבְּחוֹת לֵאלֹהֵיהֶן.	⁸ And he did the same for all his foreign wives who offered and sacrificed to their gods.
ט וַיִּתְאַנֶּף יְהוָה בְּשֹׁלֹמֹה כִּי נָטָה לִבּוֹ מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו פַּעַמַּיִם.	⁹ The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice
י וַיְצַוֵּה אֵלָיו עַל הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה לְבַלְתִּי לָקֶת אֲחֵרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְלֹא שִׁמְרָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה.	¹⁰ and had commanded him about this matter, not to follow other gods; he did not obey what the LORD had commanded.

The large offerings to God at the beginning of his reign are replaced by tributes to foreign deities. His love for God is replaced by his love for his foreign wives. What began with marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, ends with further foreign marriages and, ultimately, idolatry.

Following this account, God raises Hadad of Edom as an enemy for Solomon, brought up as noted by the ruler of Egypt. While Solomon described himself as “but a small youth” (נֶעַר קָטָן) in his dream-vision, when his intentions were good and God showed him favor, Hadad is described as having fled the military conquests of Joab as a “small child” (נֶעַר קָטָן) and found refuge and favor with Pharaoh. Edom becomes an incessant enemy of Israel for generations, and throughout the duration of Solomon's reign.

Moreover, the kingdom is torn from Solomon, most of it given to Jeroboam, a man elevated to prominence over all of the house of Joseph (i.e., the core of the Northern Kingdom) by Solomon himself:

1 Kings 11:26–28	
<p>כו וַיִּרְבֹּעַם בֶּן נִבַּט אֶפְרַתִּי מִן הַצִּדְרָה וְשֵׁם אִמּוֹ צְרוּעָה אִשָּׁה אֶלְמָנָה עָבַד לְשִׁלְמָה וַיִּרָם יָד בְּמֶלֶךְ.</p>	<p>²⁶Jeroboam son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, the son of a widow whose name was Zeruah, was in Solomon's service; he raised his hand against the king.</p>
<p>כז וְזֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר הָרִים יָד בְּמֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה בָּנָה אֶת הַמִּלּוֹא סָגַר אֶת פֶּרֶץ עִיר דָּוִד אָבִיו.</p>	<p>²⁷The circumstances under which he raised his hand against the king were as follows: Solomon built the Millo and repaired the breach of the city of his father, David.</p>
<p>כח וְהָאִישׁ יִרְבֹּעַם גִּבּוֹר חָיִל וַיֵּרָא שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת הַנָּעַר כִּי עֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה הוּא וַיִּפְקֹד אוֹתוֹ לְכָל סָבֵל בֵּית יוֹסֵף.</p>	<p>²⁸This Jeroboam was an able man, and when Solomon saw that the young man was a capable worker, he appointed him over all the forced labor of the House of Joseph.</p>

Jeroboam encounters Ahijah of Shiloh,²⁰ a prophet who tears his garment into twelve pieces. This “new garment” is called a שְׁלֵמָה חֲדָשָׁה, appropriately punning with Solomon's own name. The “new Solomon” is torn, as is his kingdom, into twelve, signifying that Jeroboam will be given ten tribes to rule over. As usual, in the accounts of the kings, the tearing of a garment is associated with the removal of royalty. Saul tore Samuel's garment and was told that such would the kingdom be torn from him; David, his successor, tore Saul's garment in what served as a gesture of confirmation, and here Jeroboam is given his part of the kingdom in like manner.²¹

20. It may be significant that Ahijah comes from Shiloh, the site of the previous Sanctuary destruction, to foretell the future split of the kingdom. His name also includes אחי, my brother, a possible indication that the split will be between tribes who were once brothers. The split of the kingdom parallels the split between the brothers and Yosef in Genesis. The phrase יהי בעת ההיא appears only three times in the Bible: 1 Kings 11:26; Genesis 21:22, just after the split between Isaac and Ishmael; and Genesis 38:1, right after the split with Yosef, also involving a torn garment.

21. There are less-perfect parallels as well: in the account of Tamar, the text relates that “virgin daughters of the king” wore a special colored

1 Kings 11:26–28	
<p>כט וַיְהִי בַעַת הַהִיא וַיֵּרָבֶעַם יֵצֵא מִירוּשָׁלַם וַיִּמָּצֵא אוֹתוֹ אַחִיהַּ הַשִּׁילֹנִי הַנָּבִיא בַדֶּרֶךְ וְהוּא מֵתַכְסֶּה בְּשֻׁלְמָה הַחֲדָשָׁה וּשְׁנֵיהֶם לְבָדִם בַּשָּׂדֶה.</p>	<p>²⁹During that time Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem and the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh met him on the way. He had put on a new robe; and when the two were alone in the open country,</p>
<p>ל וַיִּתְפֹּשׂ אַחִיהַּ בְּשֻׁלְמָה הַחֲדָשָׁה אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּקְרַעְהָ שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר קָרָעִים.</p>	<p>³⁰Ahijah took hold of the new robe he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces.</p>
<p>לא וַיֹּאמֶר לִירְבֶּעַם קַח לָךְ עֲשָׂרָה קָרָעִים כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֲנִי קָרַע אֶת הַמַּמְלָכָה מִיַּד שְׁלֹמֹה וְנָתַתִּי לָךְ אֶת עֲשָׂרָה הַשְּׁבָטִים.</p>	<p>³¹“Take ten pieces,” he said to Jeroboam. “For thus said the LORD, the God of Israel: I am about to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hands, and I will give you ten tribes.</p>
<p>לב וְהַשְּׁבֵט הָאֶחָד יִהְיֶה לוֹ לְמַעַן עֲבָדִי דָוִד וּלְמַעַן יְרוּשָׁלַם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּי בָּהּ מִכָּל שְׁבָטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.</p>	<p>³²But one tribe shall remain his — for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel.</p>
<p>לג יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עֲזָבוּנִי וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לַעֲשֻׁתֹת אֱלֹהֵי צִדְוִי לְכַמּוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי מוֹאָב וּלְמַלְכָם אֱלֹהֵי בְנֵי עַמּוֹן וְלֹא הִלְכוּ בְּדַרְכֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינַי וְחֻקֹּתַי וּמִשְׁפָּטַי כִּדְוֹד אָבִיו.</p>	<p>³³For they have forsaken Me; they have worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Phoenicians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites; they have not walked in My ways, or done what is pleasing to Me, or [kept] My laws and rules, as his father David did.</p>
<p>לד וְלֹא אֶקַּח אֶת כָּל הַמַּמְלָכָה מִיָּדוֹ כִּי נָשִׂיא אֲשַׁתְּנוּ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו לְמַעַן דָּוִד עֲבָדִי אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּי אוֹתוֹ אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַר מִצְוֹתַי וְחֻקֹּתַי.</p>	<p>³⁴However, I will not take the entire kingdom away from him, but will keep him as ruler as long as he lives for the sake of My servant David whom I chose, and who kept My commandments and My laws.</p>

garment, a כתנת פסים, and in losing this status she tears hers. Leaving aside the tearing aspect, the opening verse of kings depicts the end of David’s potency as a monarch by stating that “they covered him with clothes, but he could not be made warm.”

<p>לֹא וְלִקְחֹתִי הַמְּלוּכָה מִיַּד בְּנוֹ וְנָתַתִּיהָ לָּךְ אֶת עֶשְׂרֵת הַשִּׁבְטִים.</p>	<p>³⁵But I will take the kingship out of the hands of his son and give it to you — the ten tribes.</p>
<p>לֹא וְלָבִנוּ אֶתֶּן שִׁבְט אֶחָד לְמַעַן הִיְוֶה נֵיר לְדָוִיד עַבְדִּי כָּל הַיָּמִים לִפְנֵי בִירוּשָׁלַם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתִּי לִי לְשׁוֹם שְׁמִי שָׁם.</p>	<p>³⁶To his son I will give one tribe, so that there may be a lamp for My servant David forever before Me in Jerusalem — the city where I have chosen to establish My name.</p>
<p>לֹא וְאַתָּה אֶקַּח וּמַלְכֶתָּ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁאָלָה נַפְשְׁךָ וְהָיִיתָ מֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל.</p>	<p>³⁷But you have been chosen by Me; reign wherever you wish, and you shall be king over Israel.</p>
<p>לֹא וְהָיָה אִם תִּשְׁמַע אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכֵי וְעָשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי לְשִׁמּוֹר חֻקֹּתַי וּמִצְוֹתַי כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה דָּוִד עַבְדִּי וְהָיִיתִי עִמָּךְ וּבִנִּיתִי לָּךְ בַּיִת נֶאֱמָן כַּאֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתִי לְדָוִד וְנָתַתִּי לָּךְ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.</p>	<p>³⁸If you heed all that I command you, and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, keeping My laws and commandments as My servant David did, then I will be with you and I will build for you a lasting dynasty as I did for David. I hereby give Israel to you;</p>
<p>לֹא וְאֶעֱנֶה אֶת זֶרַע דָּוִד לְמַעַן זֹאת אֲךָ לֹא כָּל הַיָּמִים.</p>	<p>³⁹and I will chastise David's descendants for that [sin], though not forever."</p>

Solomon, like Saul before him, reacts violently to the existence of an anointed rival. Rather than accepting God's decision, he pursues Jeroboam. The latter, however, flees to Egypt, another enemy finding refuge with Solomon's own father-in-law.

The rest of the story needs little analysis. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, son of Naama the Ammonitess, succeeds him. He receives a complaint from the congregation of Israel, led by Jeroboam, who — back from Egypt — apparently had not yet seen fit to rebel. They ask him to lighten the harsh load of his father, belying the impression that Solomon's wealthy rule entailed the same luxury or ease for his northern subjects. Rehoboam ignores the advice of his elders, counselors of his father, who said to "serve them, and they shall serve you." Perhaps ignoring good advice runs in the family. Instead, he trusts foolish youths, "children who had grown up with him," promising to "punish them with scorpions," taxing them harder than his father ever had. The rebellion,

and schism, becomes official. A divided Israel does not reunite for the rest of the history of the two kingdoms.

Solomon and Joseph: Foils in Leadership

Throughout this detailed presentation of the reign of Solomon in all its vainglory, many specific words and details have been highlighted. Often this has been for clear reasons of relevance to the text of Kings; sometimes, however, the reader may have wondered about the immediate relevance. This is because a complete understanding of Solomon's reign and its portrayal by the book of Kings was a prerequisite to this final section: an analysis of the overwhelmingly elaborate linkage between Solomon and Joseph, two "wise and discerning" figures in Israel's national memory whose striking similarities highlight their vast differences. Along the way, we shall also point to foils with David, Solomon's for-bearer whose own mistakes contrast with Joseph, and to qualities of their ancestor Judah, whose own struggles and ultimate successes are relevant to the discussion of where the monarchy failed to live up to expectations.

The surface similarities are legion. Each ruled a powerful nation: Solomon as king of a united Israel, Joseph as the acting regent of Egypt. Each faced a challenge of keeping the nation of Israel together, with Joseph acting decisively to preserve unity among the twelve future tribes, and Solomon causing the schism. The two characters are both famously "wise and discerning," חכם ונבון, and on a related note, each of them has two dreams through which God communicates with them. Indeed, dreams play a large role in both narratives. Each character has an important relationship with Pharaoh, and with Egypt in general. Each of them faces the temptation of foreign women (including Egyptian women for each of them), with Solomon falling victim to his lust while Joseph never flinched in his moral discipline and integrity. On top of these many important connections, specifics of language will be examined within each of the relevant sections below as we explore thematic linkages in more detail.

An Aging Father's Request

Solomon's reign begins with a number of deathbed instructions from his father, two of them employing a particular idiom to refer to death. Only two characters in all the Bible use this expression, to wit, "bringing down" one's "grey hairs into Sheol." One is Jacob (Gen. 42:38, and quoted by Judah in 44:29, 31), who states that if his beloved son Benjamin is taken from him, then his sons will have "brought down my grey hairs into Sheol in suffering":

Genesis 42:38	
<p>לח וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יֵרֵד בְּנִי עִמָּכֶם כִּי אֲחִיו מֵת וְהוּא לְבֶדּוֹ נִשְׁאַר וְקִרְאָהוּ אֶסּוֹן בַּדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכוּ בָּהּ וְהוֹרְדְתֶם אֶת שִׁיבְתִּי בְּיָגוֹן שְׂאוּלָה.</p>	<p>³⁸But he said, "My son must not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he meets with disaster on the journey you are taking, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief."</p>
Genesis 44:29–31	
<p>כט וּלְקַחְתֶּם גַּם אֶת זֶה מֵעִם פְּנֵי וְקִרְהוּ אֶסּוֹן וְהוֹרְדְתֶם אֶת שִׁיבְתִּי בְּרָעָה שְׂאוּלָה.</p>	<p>²⁹If you take this one from me, too, and he meets with disaster, you will send my white head down to Sheol in sorrow."</p>
<p>ל וְעַתָּה כְּבֹאִי אֶל עֲבָדְךָ אָבִי וְהַנֶּעַר אֵינְנוּ אֶתְּנוּ וְנִפְשׁוּ קְשׁוּיָה בְּנִפְשׁוֹ.</p>	<p>³⁰"Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us — since his own life is so bound up with his —</p>
<p>לא וְהִיָּה כִּרְאוֹתָיו כִּי אֵין הַנֶּעַר וּמָת וְהוֹרִידוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ אֶת שִׁיבְתִּי עֲבָדְךָ אָבִינוּ בְּיָגוֹן שְׂאוּלָה.</p>	<p>³¹when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief.</p>

David's twofold use of this idiom in his deathbed instructions to Solomon constitutes the only other appearance of the phrase in the Bible. Twice, he repeats a command not to let the "grey hair" of an enemy, be it Shimei son of Gera (a prominent Benjaminite opponent of his father) or Joab, "go down into Sheol" peacefully/bloodlessly.

1 Kings 2:6/9	
וְעָשִׂיתָ כְּחִכְמָתְךָ וְלֹא תוֹרֵד שֵׂיבְתוֹ בְּשָׁלָם שְׂאֵל.	“So act in accordance with your wisdom, and see that his white hair does not go down to Sheol in peace.
ט וְעָתָה אֵל תִּנָּקְהוּ כִּי אִישׁ חָכָם אַתָּה וְיָדַעְתָּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה לוֹ וְהוֹרַדְתָּ אֶת־שֵׂיבְתוֹ בְּדָם שְׂאֵל.	“So do not let him go unpunished; for you are a wise man and you will know how to deal with him and send his gray hair down to Sheol in blood.”

The fathers of Joseph and Solomon, respectively, each use this phrase prior to a major request in their old age. When Joseph hears these words from the mouth of his brother Judah, a prelude to the latter offering himself in Benjamin’s stead, he is no longer able to contain himself and bursts into tears, revealing his identity to his brothers. Judah’s act of self-sacrifice, offering his own freedom to rescue his half-brother and spare his father further pain before his death, overwhelms Joseph, who recognizes the changes that have come upon his brothers since his cruel treatment at their hands. Thus, the idiom appears at the very climax of the narrative. The idiomatic reference to how Jacob would die, sorrowful in his old age, and Judah’s moving altruism on behalf of Benjamin, leads to reconciliation and unity among the brothers, the forbearers of the tribes of Israel and Judah.

On the other hand, when Solomon hears this idiomatic phrase, it is nothing more than an instruction about how to secure his reign through violence. Indeed, he, the heir of Judah, is being instructed to deal out his father’s vengeance to a prominent Benjaminite opponent, Shimei son of Gera. Executing potential opponents to his reign is not about keeping the nation together — the ultimate aim of all of Joseph’s acts in Egypt. It is about keeping his throne safe, a personal interest. Thus, the use of the same term in the two texts highlight the contrast between Joseph as leader of his family, always seeking unity and reconciliation, and Solomon, engaging in violent political disputes from his first day on the job.

On a related note, Joseph, like Solomon, receives deathbed

instructions from his father, leaving aside his earlier request and usage of the unusual idiom. Jacob's final request to his sons (Gen. 49), including Joseph, extracts from them a promise to return his bones to the land of Israel, to the land Abraham had purchased: Egypt would not be a fitting place for the nation. More personally, he asks this of Joseph alone at the close of Genesis 47. In Genesis 48:21, Joseph receives a blessing from Jacob that God will return him from Egypt back to the land of his fathers. Solomon, for his part, made relations with Egypt a pillar of his foreign policy and economic stewardship, a regression to precisely the sort of entanglement with Egypt that Joseph and later Moses (Deut. 17) played decisive roles in ending and warning against.

Pharaoh and Egypt

Solomon's first act of diplomacy, and the first step toward his ultimate downfall, was marrying into the family of Pharaoh in 1 Kings 3:1. His wisdom is described in 1 Kings 5:10 as "greater... than all the wisdom of Egypt" (וְתָרַב... וּמָכַל חִכְמַת מִצְרַיִם). Moreover, the end of 1 Kings 10 (vv. 28–29) identifies Egypt as the origin of his massive importation of horses, a statement immediately followed by the introduction of Solomon's many wives whom he married "in addition to the daughter of Pharaoh" (1 Kings 11:1). The great concern of Deuteronomy — that a king would cause a return to Egypt through his excessive holdings of Egyptian horses — is ultimately borne out by the end of the monarchy, and it begins with Solomon.

Despite the apparent close relationship between Solomon and Pharaoh, it is the same Pharaoh who ultimately gives shelter to Solomon's enemy, Hadad of Edom, elevating him within the royal court and marrying him off to his sister-in-law (1 Kings 11). Moreover, Jeroboam, Solomon's rival, flees to receive quarter from the ruler of Egypt (identified by the name Shishak). Apparently, Solomon's relations with Egypt amounted to little that was positive. Calling Pharaoh his father-in-law would not protect him from any enemies, and it is just a generation later during the

reign of his son Rehoboam when Shishak of Egypt attacked his erstwhile ally and emptied Judah's treasury.

Joseph's association with Egypt, and ultimately its royalty, could not be more different than Solomon's. Joseph did not seek out Egypt; he was sold into servitude there against his will. Indeed, in his final request to his brothers, like Jacob before him, he extracts the same oath to have his bones brought up out of Egypt, back to the land of Israel. Yet with God's help and his prodigious wisdom — always credited by Joseph to God, whenever it is remarked upon by others — he rises from an imprisoned teenaged foreign slave to grand vizier, effectively equal in power to Pharaoh himself. It is Pharaoh who recognizes his talents and elevates him; Joseph never seeks any of it. Pharaoh desires Joseph as his right-hand man because he observes Joseph's clearly divinely-granted wisdom:

Genesis 41:38–46	
לח וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל עֲבָדָיו הֲנִמְצָא כָזֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ.	³⁸ And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?"
לט וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָךְ אֵת כָּל זֹאת אֵין נָבוֹן וְחָכָם כָּמוֹךָ.	³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you.
מ אַתָּה תִּהְיֶה עַל בֵּיתִי, וְעַל פִּיד יִשָּׁק כָּל עַמִּי רַק הַכִּסֵּא אֶגְדֹּל מִמֶּךָ.	⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you."
מא וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נָתַתִּי אֹתָךְ עַל כָּל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.	⁴¹ Pharaoh further said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt."
מב וַיֹּסֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶת טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל יַד יוֹסֵף וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אוֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי שֵׁשׁ וַיְשֶׂם רֶבֶד הַזָּהָב עַל צַוְאָרוֹ.	⁴² And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck.

<p>מו וַיִּרְכַּב אוֹתוֹ בְּמִרְכָּבַת הַמִּשְׁנָה אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וַיִּקְרָאוּ לְפָנָיו אַבְרָה וְנָתַן אוֹתוֹ עַל כָּל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.</p>	<p>⁴³He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, “Abrek!” Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.</p>
<p>מד וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל יוֹסֵף אֲנִי פַרְעֹה וּבְלִעְדֶּיךָ לֹא יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת יָדוֹ וְאֶת רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.</p>	<p>⁴⁴Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.”</p>
<p>מה וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה שֵׁם יוֹסֵף צִפְנָת פַּעֲנִיחַ וַיִּתֵּן לוֹ אֶת אֲסֵנַת בַּת פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כִּהֵן אֵן לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.</p>	<p>⁴⁵Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-phaera, priest of On. Thus Joseph emerged in charge of the land of Egypt. —</p>
<p>מו וַיֹּסֵף בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה בָּעָמְדוֹ לְפָנָי פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף מִלִּפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיַּעֲבֹר בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.</p>	<p>⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. — Leaving Pharaoh’s presence, Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.</p>

The similarities between Joseph and Solomon that emerge from this passage highlight their differences. Joseph, speaking innocently and without intending his own advancement, had simply recommended that Pharaoh appoint someone wise for the task of organizing a food storage operation. Yet Pharaoh, cognizant of the value of good advisors (something we never see from Solomon, interestingly enough), rhetorically asks whether there is anyone “discerning and wise” (נְבוֹן וְחָכָם) like Joseph, with the “spirit of God” in him. Of course, Joseph is the first and most prominent individual described as “discerning and wise” (נְבוֹן וְחָכָם) prior to Solomon. The “spirit of God” that informs his wisdom, however, is not shared in the description of Solomon. This latter description is applied to both Joseph and, later, the artisan Bezalel — but their counterparts Solomon (a leader and regent, like Joseph) and the Temple artisan Hiram, though “wise and discerning,” are not described to have this same divine direction. As we see the many parallels of language which accumulate between the Kings and Genesis narratives, it shall become more

and more logical to treat this as an intentional omission, a point of contrast between one sort of “wisdom” and another.

Pharaoh promises Joseph nearly limitless power, “only” the throne itself would be beyond him (רק הכסא אגדל ממך). On the other hand, right after the securing of Solomon’s reign and his intermarriage into Pharaoh’s house, the text uses the same language as a caveat: “only” one thing was now lacking in his reign (1 Kings 2:46–3:3):

1 Kings 2:46–3:3	
<p>מו ויצו המלך את בניהו בן יהוידע ויצא ויפגע בו וימת והממלכה נכונה ביד שלמה.</p>	<p>⁴⁶The king gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada and he went out and struck Shimei down; and so he died. Thus the kingdom was secured in Solomon’s hands.</p>
<p>א ויתחתן שלמה את פרעה מלך מצרים וישח את בת פרעה וביאה אל עיר דוד עד כלתו לבנות את ביתו ואת בית יהוה ואת חומת ירושלם סביב.</p>	<p>¹Solomon allied himself by marriage with Pharaoh king of Egypt. He married Pharaoh’s daughter and brought her to the City of David [to live there] until he had finished building his palace, and the House of the LORD, and the walls around Jerusalem.</p>
<p>ב רק העם מזבחים בבמות כי לא נבנה בית לשם יהוה עד היום הזה.</p>	<p>²The people, however, continued to offer sacrifices at the open shrines, because up to that time no house had been built for the name of the LORD.</p>
<p>ג ויאהב שלמה את יהוה ללכת בחקות דוד אביו רק בבמות הוא מזבח ומקטיר.</p>	<p>³And Solomon, though he loved the LORD and followed the practices of his father David, also sacrificed and offered at the shrines.</p>

Pharaoh provides Joseph with a wife: the daughter of Poti-pha, priest of On.²² It is easy to draw the connection to Solomon,

22. It is hard to ignore the similarity of the name Poti-pha (פּוֹטִי פָּרַע) to two powerful individuals who play decisive roles in Joseph’s development and ultimate empowerment: First there is Potiphar, Joseph’s first master, whose wife tried and failed to seduce Joseph and ultimately

who marries Pharaoh's own daughter to enhance his political influence. Yet Joseph never actively pursues any power at all, nor advancement through marriage; Pharaoh simply drops it in his lap because of his authentic, God-given wisdom.

Interestingly, when informing his brothers of his position in Egypt, Joseph tells them that God has set him “as a father to Pharaoh” (Gen. 45:8, אָב לְפַרְעֹה), which makes the familial relationship between Solomon and Pharaoh rather a reversal of that between Joseph and the earlier Pharaoh.

Even in describing the extent of Solomon's reign, Egypt comes up. 1 Kings 5 begins by describing Solomon as the regional מוֹשֵׁל, ruler, over “all the kingdoms” within parameters defined by his border with Egypt:

1 Kings 5:1	
א ויִשְׁלַמָּה הָיָה מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל הַמְּמַלְכוֹת מִן הַנָּהָר אֶרֶץ פִּלְשְׁתִּים וְעַד גְּבוּל מִצְרַיִם מִגִּשְׁשִׁים מִנְחָה וְעֹבְדִים אֶת שְׁלֹמֹה כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו.	¹ Solomon's rule extended over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and the boundary of Egypt. They brought Solomon tribute and were subject to him all his life.

Joseph also describes himself as “ruler in all Egypt,” **וּמֹשֵׁל בְּכָל** in Gen 45:8, when speaking of how God empowered him to save their lives by providing food.²³ As another similarity between the two rulers, Joseph states that God has made him **אֲדֹנָן**, **לְכָל מִצְרַיִם**, “master of *all* of Egypt,” a statement of the scope of his

framed him, leading to his imprisonment and ultimate rise to power from there. Then there is Pharaoh himself.

Upon marriage to the daughter of Poti-phera, Joseph's secure status as a member of the Egyptian power elite is made clear. There is a certain poetic justice presented by the name with its seeming connection to the others: Joseph, who refused to commit adultery with the wife of Potiphar, is now provided a wife by Pharaoh, and she is none other than the daughter of Poti-phera.

23. Note that this fulfills the prediction in the complaint of Joseph's brothers in Gen. 37:8 אִם מִשּׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ.

reign very like the first words of 1 Kings 4, וַיְהִי הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה מֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, “And Solomon was king over *all* of Israel.” Note that with regard to Solomon, this assessment of his reign over a united kingdom of Israel is designed to increase the tragedy of the later-depicted schism he caused. Joseph, contrariwise, causes the reunification of his family, a contrast to the dissolution between the house of Joseph and the house of Judah ushered in by Solomon’s mismanagement.

Joseph winds up in Egypt because, as he tells his brothers, God had planned for him to be in charge of its food supply to save their lives during the famine. Indeed, in their capacity as rulers, Joseph and Solomon are each associated with huge quantities of food.

Joseph’s very rise to premiership is defined by food, as is the imagery and content of all prophetic dreams foretelling or effecting his empowerment. His first pair of dreams foretelling his rise to power include a dream in which he and his brothers were gathering stalks of grain in a field, with their stalks bowing to his. The next pair of dreams in his life are those of Pharaoh’s chief baker and cupbearer, each of them a position associated with Pharaoh’s victuals and each of their dreams involving their respective food responsibilities. Finally, of course, there is Pharaoh’s pair of dreams, foretelling the seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. Ultimately, Joseph’s rise to power is defined by the years of famine and plenty in Egypt, and all the dreams involving it are what propel him to prominence as a man Pharaoh can count on for his wisdom.

Food plays a major role in the descriptions of Solomon as well. 1 Kings 4 describes the many ministers required to tax Israel to provide food for his household, and 1 Kings 5 relates the massive daily intake of his palace. Notably, however, Joseph is placed in the role of provider during a famine — as he tells his brothers, כִּי לְמַחְיָה שָׁלַחַנִּי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם, “For God has sent me before you to preserve life” — while the abundant details concerning food in Solomon’s reign are all about what comes to his palace and supplies his own household. Solomon’s entire reign is defined by

plenty, but it appears that the wealth did not trickle down based on the displeasure of his subjects in the northern kingdom.

Joseph's food-related dreams are a defining characteristic of his rise to power, casting him in the role of leader when his brothers need him the most. Egypt is the locus of all dreams involving Joseph, with food — what he would ultimately provide for his family, and indeed the entire region — defining the content in some way or another. It is notable that Solomon's own first dream from God (like Joseph, he has two) occurs immediately after his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, early in 1 Kings 3.

Dreams

Both characters have their messages from God relayed through dreams, whether their own two dreams (apiece) or the dreams of others (always in pairs, in Joseph's narrative). Joseph's dreams are always symbolic, most of them involving food, one of them involving celestial bodies — the need for interpretation is, in any case, always obvious. Solomon, however, has two dreams in which God appears to him, but the message is more complex than a surface reading would indicate, as discussed above. Little interpretation occurs, and it appears that Solomon never felt the need to either consult with a prophet or contemplate a deeper message.

Joseph, for his part, shares his own pair of dreams with his family, to their great consternation. The brothers, already not keen on their father's favoritism for Joseph, grow to hate him for his expectation of rulership over them. Even Jacob is displeased when Joseph shares his second dream, with its implication that even his parents would come and bow before him. Yet still, he feels compelled to share his prophetic dreams. Later, he becomes an interpreter of dreams for Pharaoh's staff and eventually Pharaoh himself — never is a dream left uninterpreted, nor even its details. Solomon takes the content of his dreams as a given, trusting himself to understand. Yet for all his wisdom, he never heeds the warnings both implicit and explicit, as God states in His final rebuke of Solomon in 1 Kings 11.

Language is shared between the accounts of Pharaoh's dreams, interpreted by Joseph, who is propelled to power by his interpretations, and of Solomon's dreams, which concern Solomon's own rise to power. For instance, alone among biblical figures, Pharaoh and Solomon are said to have "woken up, and behold, it was a dream":

1 Kings 3:15	Genesis 41:7
<p>טו וַיִּקָּץ שְׁלֹמֹה וְהָיָה חֲלוֹם וַיָּבֹא יְרוּשָׁלַם וַיַּעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי אֲרוֹן בְּרִית אֱדֹנָי וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת וַיַּעַשׂ שְׁלָמִים וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה לְכָל עַבְדָּיו.</p>	<p>¹⁵Then Solomon awoke: it was a dream! He went to Jerusalem, stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented offerings of well-being; and he made a banquet for all his courtiers.</p>
	<p>ז וַתִּבְלַעַנָּה הַשָּׁבִלִים הַדִּקּוֹת אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַשָּׁבִלִים הַבְּרִיאֹת וְהַמְּלָאוֹת וַיִּיקָּץ פַּרְעֹה וְהָיָה חֲלוֹם.</p>
	<p>⁷And the thin ears swallowed up the seven solid and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream!</p>

Similarly, the twofold repetition of Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph's dreams, and the dreams of the two employees of Pharaoh, are a feature duplicated by the Kings narrative. Let us pay special attention to Pharaoh's dreams, which are most directly relevant to Solomon as they are messages of warning given to the ruler of a country who proceeds to heed them thanks to Joseph's wisdom — the opposite of what transpires after Solomon's dreams.

Genesis 41:26/32	
<p>כו שִׁבְעַת פָּרוֹת הַטֹּבוֹת שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים הָיָה וְשִׁבְעַת הַשָּׁבִלִים הַטֹּבוֹת שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים הָיָה חֲלוֹם אֶחָד הוּא.</p>	<p>²⁶The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years; it is the same dream.</p>
<p>לב וְעַל הַשָּׁנוֹת הַחֲלוֹם אֵל־ פָּרַעַה פָּעַמִּים כִּי נִכּוֹן הַדָּבָר מֵעַם הָאֱלֹהִים וּמִמָּהֵר הָאֱלֹהִים לַעֲשֹׂתוֹ.</p>	<p>³²As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out.</p>

Joseph recognizes that the duplicate dreams share a message — a singular warning of famine to come — and that their duplication adds urgency to the message.

1 Kings 9:2/11:9	
ב וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל שְׁלֹמֹה שֵׁנִית כְּאֲשֶׁר נִרְאָה אֵלָיו בְּגִבְעוֹן.	² the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time , as He had appeared to him at Gibeon.
ט וַיִּתְאַנֵּף יְהוָה בְּשֹׁלֹמֹה כִּי נָטָה לִבּוֹ מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו פַּעַמַּיִם.	⁹ The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice

God appears to Solomon “as He did in Gibeon” a second time, confirming earlier warnings, and ultimately is angered that Solomon ignores his duplicated warnings. Solomon failed to do what Pharaoh or Joseph had done: consult with someone truly wise as Pharaoh did, or act on God’s warnings as Joseph counseled and ultimately implemented.

In Solomon’s first dream, he asks God for a wise heart “to judge (or “lead”) Your nation,” (לֵב שִׁמְעַ לְשַׁפֵּט אֶת עַמְּךָ) which is truly the purpose of a good king, as the Queen of Sheba later reminds him. He requires this wisdom because he claims to see himself as just a “small lad,” נֶעַר קָטָן. Similarly, Joseph is introduced to Pharaoh as a נֶעַר עִבְרִי, a Hebrew lad, who was imprisoned with the royal cupbearer in Potiphar’s prison, immediately before his “discernment and wisdom” is revealed. The request “finds favor in the eyes of God” (1 Kings 3:10 begins בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנָי). Similarly, when Joseph counsels Pharaoh to store grain so that the famine will not lead to death from hunger, Genesis 41:37 begins with the same turn of phrase: it found favor in the eyes of Pharaoh, וַיִּטֵּב הַדְּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה.

Ultimately, while Solomon and Joseph each receive warnings and messages from God in their dreams, it is only Joseph who heeds these messages, and in doing so, feeds all of Egypt and the

nearby lands throughout the famine. Solomon merely uses the ‘wisdom’ given him to maximize his power and wealth, feeding his own household, and ignoring the warnings in his dreams to follow in his father’s footsteps in fealty to God. Wisdom, too, is a consistent theme of each narrative.

Wisdom

The most salient points about the wisdom of the two characters are fairly obvious ones that have been made in conjunction with other themes. Both characters are described in the rare terminology combining תבונה and חכמה:

Genesis 41:38–39	
לח ויאמר פרעה אל עבדיו הנמצא כזה איש אשר רוח אלהים בו.	³⁸ And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, “Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?”
לט ויאמר פרעה אל יוסף אחרי הודיע אלהים אותך את כל זאת אין נבון וחכם כמוך.	³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “ Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. ”

1 Kings 3:12	
יב הנה עשיתי כדברך הנה נתתי לך לב חכם ונבון אשר כמוך לא היה לפניך ואחריך לא יקום כמוך.	¹² I now do as you have spoken. I grant you a wise and discerning mind; there has never been anyone like you before, nor will anyone like you arise again.

The similarity and contrast go even beyond the common words. Not only are both characters described with the rare combination of wisdom and discernment, Pharaoh recognizes that Joseph’s wisdom, far exceeding anyone else’s, is a direct result of what God has granted him, and Solomon, too, is told that God is granting him wisdom unmatched by anyone. To even further link

the two characters, later Solomon’s wisdom is described as greater than “all the wisdom of Egypt” in 1 Kings 5:10:

1 Kings 5:10	
יִתְרֹב חֲכָמָה שְׁלֹמֹה מִחֲכָמַת כָּל בְּנֵי קֶדֶם וּמִכָּל חֲכָמַת מִצְרָיִם.	¹⁰ Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the Kedemites and than all the wisdom of the Egyptians.

Joseph is, of course, recognized by Pharaoh as the wisest and most discerning mind in all of Egypt. As noted, however, Pharaoh recognizes that it is “the spirit of God” (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים) that informs Joseph’s wisdom, and on this matter, we repeat another contrast between the “wisdom of Solomon,” directed by whatever he felt would help achieve his glory, and wisdom directed by Divine inspiration. Solomon’s chief builder, Hiram, the half-Tyrian sculptor who shares a name with the Tyrian regent who supplies most of the material that comprises the Temple, along with much of the Sidonian and Tyrian labor, is called “wise and discerning” in all matters concerning bronze:

1 Kings 7:14	
יֵד בֶּן אִשָּׁה אֶלְמָנָה הוּא מִמְטָה נִפְתָּלִי וְאָבִיו אִישׁ צִרִי חֲרָשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וַיְמַלֵּא אֶת הַחֲכָמָה וְאֶת הַתְּבוּנָה וְאֶת הַדַּעַת לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל מְלָאכָה בְּנְחָשֶׁת וַיָּבֹא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת כָּל מְלָאכָתּוֹ.	¹⁴ He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father had been a Tyrian, a coppersmith. He was endowed with skill, ability, and talent for executing all work in bronze. He came to King Solomon and executed all his work.

The extended description of Hiram and his works and his association with Solomon’s Phoenician counterpart form part of an undercurrent of the Temple’s description that adds elements of alien character and royal grandiosity to the crowning achievement of King Solomon’s reign. Phoenicians introduced Baal-worship, the perpetual abomination of Israel (especially the post-schism

Northern Kingdom) and offense to God, yet here the Temple of God is portrayed as a largely Phoenician design.

For all that, Hiram’s “wisdom and discernment” concerning his metalwork evokes another builder of a sanctified house of worship: Bezalel, the builder of the desert Tabernacle, which later sat at Shiloh before its destruction by Philistines. Unlike the Temple, this was a mobile house of worship, austere by comparison and not to the glory of any ruler or leader. Every tribe played a role in donating its components, and while it sat at the center of the encampment, it was not uniquely affiliated with any tribe. Its mobility highlighted that His worship was not confined to any single territory. Bezalel, its chief artisan, is the first artisan (and the only named individual apart from Joseph in the Torah) described as “wise and discerning” (after which God further commands him, Oholiab, and “all other men” of wisdom).

Exodus 35:31	
<p>לא וַיִּמְלֵא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּחָכְמָה בְּתַבּוּנָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכָל מְלָאכָה.</p>	<p>³¹He has endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft</p>

The parallel descriptions of the builders of the two national houses of worship are certainly not coincidental. Hiram, like Bezalel, was “filled...with wisdom and discernment and skill to do all work...,” albeit with further detail restricting his skill to brass. But the important distinction is in the omission: Like Joseph, Bezalel’s wisdom is associated with the “spirit of God,” רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים. Like Solomon, Hiram’s is not. This makes all the difference. Ultimately, Solomon’s building of the Temple is categorized under the catch-all “whatever it pleased Solomon to build” (1 Kings 9:1), the verse that introduces God’s third and final warning before Solomon’s downfall. Repeatedly, God states that He had never asked for a Temple. Ultimately, a careful read of Kings and the personality of Solomon portrayed therein leads to the conclusion that the Temple was a monument to the king’s own

glory, like all his other buildings. Thus, it is another instance of his wisdom directed toward mere royal ambitions, not Divinely inspired goals.

Joseph, for his part, also supervises an important building project. As Genesis 41:34–48 relates, his counsel to Pharaoh, fully heeded, was to confiscate a fifth of Egypt’s land for grain cultivation during the years of plenty, and to store up the grain in cities during the years of famine. Being placed in charge of this monumental project was the task that made Joseph Pharaoh’s right-hand man and effective ruler of Egypt. Yet his building was never to his own glory — it was to feed Egypt and ultimately all the nearby hungry suffering amid the famine. It was, importantly, what kept Israel alive.

Provision of Food

This brings us to the next similarity and contrast between the two rulers. All of the Joseph narrative revolves around food: his dreams involving stalks of grain; the dreams of the chief baker and cupbearer whose food-based dreams Joseph interprets; Pharaoh’s dreams of grain and cows that foretell abundance and famine; Joseph’s leadership of the food-storage project that saves everyone and elevates him to preeminence; and Joseph’s provision of food for his family free of charge, as well as use of their food-sacks and his drinking vessel to implement his plan to reveal himself and finally reunite them.

Solomon, too, is often described in relation to great quantities of food. That is, an entire section (1 Kings 4’s second half) is dedicated to listing the officers set in charge of taxing the nation, each tribe providing a month of his personal household’s victuals. 1 Kings 5 proceeds to list his great wealth, and begins with the enormous quantities of food consumed daily at the palace:

1 Kings 5:2–3	
ב וַיְהִי לָחֶם שְׁלֹמֹה לְיוֹם אֶחָד שְׁלֹשִׁים כֹּר סֶלֶת וְשֵׁשִׁים כֹּר קֶמַח.	² Solomon's daily provisions consisted of 30 <i>kors</i> of semolina, and 60 <i>kors</i> of [ordinary] flour,
ג עֶשְׂרֵה בָקָר בְּרָאִים וְעֶשְׂרִים בָּקָר רְעִי וּמֵאָה צֹאן לְבַד מֵאֵיל וְצִבִּי וַיְחַמּוּר וּבְרֻבִּים אֲבוּסִים.	³ 10 fattened oxen, 20 pasture-fed oxen, and 100 sheep and goats, besides deer and gazelles, roebucks and fattened geese.

Interestingly, in 1 Kings 9, there is mention of grain-cities, and what's more, they are described in immediate juxtaposition to Pharaoh's military conquests on Solomon's behalf:

1 Kings 5:2–3	
טו זֶה דְּבַר הַמַּס אֲשֶׁר הִעֲלָה הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה לִבְנוֹת אֶת בֵּית יְהוָה וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת הַמְּלֹא וְאֶת חֹמֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאֶת חָצֹר וְאֶת מִגְדוֹ וְאֶת גֶּזֶר.	¹⁵ This was the purpose of the forced labor which Solomon imposed: It was to build the House of the LORD, his own palace, the Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and [to fortify] Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer.
טז פָּרַעַה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם עָלָה וַיִּלְכֹּד אֶת גֶּזֶר וַיִּשְׂרֹפָהּ בָּאֵשׁ וְאֶת הַכְּנַעֲנִי הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּעִיר הָרֶג וַיִּתְּנָה שְׁלֹחִים לְבָתוֹ אֵשֶׁת שְׁלֹמֹה.	¹⁶ Pharaoh king of Egypt had come up and captured Gezer; he destroyed it by fire, killed the Canaanites who dwelt in the town, and gave it as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife.)
יז וַיְבִן שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת גֶּזֶר וְאֶת בֵּית חֹרֵן תְּחֹתָיו.	¹⁷ So Solomon fortified Gezer, lower Beth-horon,
יח וְאֶת בְּעֵלְתָּ תַמָּר וְאֶת תַּמָּר (תְּדַמֵּר) בְּמִדְבַּר בָּאֲרָץ.	¹⁸ Baalith, and Tamar in the wilderness, in the land [of Judah],
יט וְאֶת כָּל עָרֵי הַמִּסְכָּנוֹת אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לְשְׁלֹמֹה וְאֶת עָרֵי הָרֶכֶב וְאֶת עָרֵי הַפָּרָשִׁים וְאֶת חֵשֶׁק שְׁלֹמֹה אֲשֶׁר חֵשֶׁק לְבָנוֹת בִּירוּשָׁלַם וּבְלִבְנוֹן וּבְכָל אֶרֶץ מְמִשְׁלָתוֹ.	¹⁹ and all of Solomon's garrison towns, chariot towns, and cavalry towns — everything that Solomon set his heart on building in Jerusalem and in the Lebanon, and throughout the territory that he ruled.

The main difference between Joseph and Solomon throughout these descriptions is obvious. Solomon taxes his people and

indulges in huge quantities of food at his palace. Joseph's designs are all about feeding people, selflessly getting them through a crisis. While Egypt thrived as a result of his counsel, which made it the breadbasket of a region in famine, nothing he did was for his own glory or pleasure. Specific language bears this out, and also supports the assumption that the wording in Kings is intended to connect to that in Genesis. For instance, Joseph is described as "feeding" his family, the ancestors of the tribes of Israel (including Judah):

Genesis 47:12	
יב וַיַּכְלִל יוֹסֵף אֶת אָבִיו וְאֶת אָחָיו וְאֶת כָּל בֵּית אָבִיו לֶחֶם לְפִי הַטָּף.	¹² Joseph sustained his father, and his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, down to the little ones.

By way of contrast, Solomon's tax-collectors and officers are charged with "feeding" the king (1 Kings 4:7, 5:7).

1 Kings 4:7, 5:7	
ז וְלְשִׁלְמֹה שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר נֹצְבִים עַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּכְלִלוּ אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ חֹדֶשׁ בְּשָׁנָה יְהִיָּה עַל אֶחָד (הָאֶחָד) לְכָל־כָּל.	⁷ Solomon had twelve prefects governing all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household; each had to provide food for one month in the year.
ז וַיַּכְלִלוּ הַנֹּצְבִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה וְאֶת כָּל הַקָּרֹב אֵלָיו שֶׁלֶחֶן הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אִישׁ חֹדֶשׁוֹ לֹא יַעֲדֹרוּ דָּבָר.	⁷ All those prefects, each during his month, would furnish provisions for King Solomon and for all who were admitted to King Solomon's table; they did not fall short in anything.

Very shortly after the latter verse comes the famous description of Solomon's surpassing wisdom. It, too, refers back to Joseph:

1 Kings 5:9–14	
ט וַיִּתֵּן אֱלֹהִים חָכְמָה לְשֹׁלֹמֹה וַתִּבְנוּנָה הָרַבָּה מֵאֵד וְרַחֲב לֵב כַּחוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּם.	⁹ The LORD endowed Solomon with wisdom and discernment in great measure, with understanding as vast as the sands on the seashore.
י וַתִּרְבֶּה חָכְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה מִחָכְמַת כָּל בְּנֵי קֵדָם וּמִכָּל חָכְמַת מִצְרַיִם.	¹⁰ Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the Kedemites and than all the wisdom of the Egyptians.
יא וַיְהִי חָכֵם מִכָּל הָאָדָם מֵאֵתָן הָאֶזְרָחִי וְהִימָן וְכַלְכַּל וְדָרְדַּע בְּנֵי מַחֹל וַיְהִי שְׁמוֹ בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם סָבִיב.	¹¹ He was the wisest of all men: [wiser] than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalkol, and Darda the sons of Mahol. His fame spread among all the surrounding nations.
יב וַיִּדְבֹּר שְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים מִשָּׁל וַיְהִי שִׁירוֹ חֲמִשָּׁה וְאַלְף.	¹² He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five.
יג וַיִּדְבֹּר עַל הָעֵצִים מִן הָאֶרֶז אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְנוֹן וְעַד הָאֲזוֹב אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא בְּקִיר וַיִּדְבֹּר עַל הַבְּהֵמָה וְעַל הָעוֹף וְעַל הָרֶמֶשׂ וְעַל הַדְּגָיִם.	¹³ He discoursed about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; and he discoursed about beasts, birds, creeping things, and fishes.
יד וַיָּבֹאוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים לְשָׁמֹעַ אֶת חָכְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה מֵאֵת כָּל מַלְכֵי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת חָכְמָתוֹ.	¹⁴ Men of all peoples came to hear Solomon's wisdom, [sent] by all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

The “wisdom and discernment,” חָכְמָה וַתִּבְנוּנָה, has been addressed at length. What is more interesting to us now is the second part of v. 9: after stating that he had “very much” (הָרַבָּה) discernment, the text proceeds to his “breadth of heart,” the heart being the seat of the intellect, which was “like the sand upon the seashore” (כַּחוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּם). This rare turn of phrase is another link between Joseph and Solomon, as the food which Joseph has stored in Egypt — the true fruit of his wisdom — is “like the sand upon the sea” (Gen. 41:49).

Genesis 41:49	
מט וַיַּצְבֵּר יוֹסֵף בָּר כָּחֹל הַיָּם הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד עַד כִּי חָדַל לְסַפֵּר כִּי אֵין מִסְפָּר.	⁴⁹ So Joseph collected produce in very large quantity, like the sands of the sea , until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

Perhaps this supports the early rabbinic commentators who associated Calcol, an individual whose wisdom was exceeded by Solomon, with Joseph, who “fed” (וַיַּכְלִיל יוֹסֵף) his family and had stored up food “like the sand upon the sea.”²⁴ Of course, the entire passage depicting Solomon as wiser than everyone else is manifestly ironic, as the end of his reign makes clear.²⁵ Thus, the association of Joseph and Calcol, if accurate, amplifies the role of Joseph as a foil to Solomon.

Integrity at Personal Cost; Self-Sacrifice for Unity

This section will complicate the constellation of linked narratives in Genesis, Samuel and Kings somewhat. Not only Joseph and Solomon but also Judah and David shall enter the discussion. This is because the narratives of Solomon and David often draw on that of Judah, the latter serving in Genesis as a type of מעשה אבות סימן לבנים (“the actions of the ancestors are a sign for their descendants”). In other words, Judah, the father of the monarchy, is depicted with certain qualities, struggles, flaws and ultimate triumphs, against which his descendants are measured. By the same token, Joseph, the ultimate “wise and discerning” leader of impeccable moral integrity, the ultimate unifier of Israel, is contrasted with David and Solomon by many details in the narratives depicting their worst failures.

We shall summarize the narratives of Joseph and Judah with special focus on the account of Joseph’s ability to withstand the

24. See Pesikta d’Rav Kahana 4:3 and Rashi to 1 Kings 5:11.
25. This pattern continues in the next generation with Rehoboam, another stranger to good council (1 Kings 12:8).

temptation of Potiphar's wife, allowing himself to be framed and imprisoned by Potiphar rather than betray the latter's trust by succumbing to the advances of his wife. Within the text of Genesis, this story comes immediately after Judah's encounter with Tamar (Gen. 38), with his early straying but ultimate admission of fault and thus moral redemption. Genesis 39 shows Joseph to be a truly morally flawless leader, juxtaposed to the more complex character of Judah.²⁶

The two stories form part of a sequence: starting with Gen. 37, Jacob's favoritism, most amply demonstrated by giving him a *כִּתְנֵת פָּסִים* (usually understood as a colorful coat) appears to elevate Joseph over the other brothers as their eventual leader. His dreams, which he feels compelled to share, confirm this. Then the narrative has Joseph nearly killed, with Reuben, the firstborn and the naturally expected leader, failing to save him — Reuben has a consistent record of failure as a leader. Shimon and Levi, prominent for the massacre of the city of Shechem in retribution for the rape of their sister Dinah, and later denied blessing by Jacob for their violence, have already proven themselves unworthy leaders. It is thus a rather natural tendency of the text to show Judah coming to the partial rescue of Joseph, stopping his brothers from allowing him to die, but instead suggesting that they profit by his sale instead. This is, to be sure, an inauspicious start for a future leader, but it is Judah and no one else who steps forward to that limited extent and at a crucial moment, setting the stage for him to grow into a better model for leadership. As for what the brothers tell Jacob, having stripped from him his *כִּתְנֵת פָּסִים*, they dip it in blood to fake his mauling by a wild animal.

We should recognize echoes of these details in the aftermath of David and Bathsheba's affair: there, Tamar is said to wear a *כִּתְנֵת פָּסִים*, explained as the garb reserved for virginal daughters of the king. Thus, in 2 Samuel 13, this garment is associated with royalty.

26. See further Rabbi Moshe Shamah, *Recalling the Covenant: A Contemporary Commentary on the Five Books of the Torah* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2011), 179ff.

Tamar’s tearing it after her rape signals to Absalom that something horrible has occurred. He proceeds, to murder Amnon, their half-brother and her rapist, in a fashion that certainly brings to mind the vengeful subterfuge of Shimon and Levi: he lets down Amnon’s guard by throwing a celebration.²⁷ This merely scratches the surface of notable links between the extended David and Bathsheba narrative, and those involving Joseph and Judah.

The next narrative, forming Genesis 38, focuses on Judah’s further development. It begins with him separating from the rest of the family immediately after the sale of Joseph (וַיִּהְיֶה בָּעֵת הַהוּא וַיָּרֶד) — perhaps he is ashamed by his own treatment of his brother, or disgusted with the whole family. In any event, we are immediately told that he crosses a critical line for the family of Jacob, “taking” a Canaanite woman (Gen. 28:2):

Genesis 38:2	
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא רָאָה יְהוּדָה בֵּת אִישׁ כְּנַעֲנִי וַיִּשְׁמָו שׁוּעַ וַיִּקְחָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ.	² There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and cohabited with her.

Recall the lengths to which Abraham went to ensure his servant would not bring a Canaanite woman for Isaac and the way the Canaanite wives of Esau dismayed Isaac and Rebecca. (Indeed, this reality immediately introduces Rebecca’s decision to aid Jacob in deceiving Isaac to receive the blessings due his successor.) With these realities in mind, Judah “taking” a Canaanite woman further confirms his separation from the family. Interestingly, it does not say he marries her, but rather says he “took her, and went in unto her,” followed by her conception of three children in sequence. This language is interesting to us because of the David

27. Shimon and Levi also ensure the town of Shechem is weakened by circumcision, but the similarities are clear enough to leave little doubt that Absalom is modeled on them without requiring that the narratives be precise clones of one another.

and Bathsheba story,²⁸ which mimics this language and draws on certain similarities between David and his ancestor. What's more, this unnamed woman is the daughter of a man named Shuwa', שׁוּוּא', making her sole identification as his daughter — בַּת שׁוּוּא' — extraordinarily similar to the name בַּת שָׁבַע, "Bathsheba." Again, this suggests that names in the David and Bathsheba narrative are among the details crafted to relate to Genesis 38.²⁹

As the story proceeds, Judah marries off his eldest to a woman named Tamar — another obvious and important link to the family of David. Er, the son, dies having displeased God. Afterwards, his selfish brother, Onan, required by custom to perform levirate marriage and redeem his brother's lineage, marries Tamar but intentionally avoids impregnating her through coitus interruptus. Thus, God punishes him with death as well. Onan's crime is refusing, in his selfishness, to allow his child to be considered the child of another, even his own brother — this despite allowing himself sexual gratification with Tamar.³⁰

Tamar is blameless in all this. Yet Judah, apparently superstitious, fears to give his third and final son to her as a husband and tells her to return home until he is older. Interestingly, his name is Shelah — his very name in the text indicates in Hebrew that he "belongs to her." He is born when Judah is in a place called "Kezib," a name built of a root that means "lies." Every proper noun in the text is significant. Judah's failure to provide the husband he promised to Tamar, like his son's refusal to provide his brother with heirs, is singled out by the text as unjust.³¹

Eventually, recognizing that Judah has no intention to give

28. See above section "The Birth of Solomon."

29. See Ricky Novick, *Hakirah*.

30. This is an interesting detail considering the literary reversal that occurs when David attempts to pass off his child with Bathsheba as that of another, Uriah.

31. Interestingly, the only other biblical narrative in which levirate marriage plays a major role is that of Ruth — Boaz gains the right to marry her only by the permission of her late husband's nearest of kin. Their marriage, of course, begets David generations later.

her to his third son, she dresses as a prostitute with a veil. Judah encounters her on the road and sleeps with her — an indulgence that doesn't paint him in a particularly positive light — and gives her his identifying staff and seal as promise of future payment. She, meanwhile, puts back on her "garments of widowhood." He has no idea who he has just slept with, but he is later told that his daughter-in-law, technically still engaged to his third son, has "played the harlot" and is pregnant. He presides over her judgment, ordering her burnt (unwittingly condemning his own twin sons). Yet she displays for him his collateral, the staff and seal, and he admits that "she is more in the right than I," because he refused her his son. This act of taking responsibility is a turning point for Judah as an emerging leader, and he never again sleeps with her. Since his Canaanite wife has died earlier in the narrative, and a point is made of how he avoids further intimacy with Tamar, it would appear that Judah is also now past the stage in which he strays after inappropriate sexual liaisons.

There are more notable parallels to David and Bathsheba in this account. Tamar puts back on her "garments of widowhood" (אַלְמָנוּתָהּ), and she is never intimate with Judah again. Their union would be inappropriate as it is a type of incest, though they are not blood relatives. The same incest is avoided by David after his son Absalom sleeps with his concubines on the roof, and they are consigned to a life of "living widowhood," אַלְמָנוּת חַיִּית. Of course, the revolt of Absalom is a consequence of the David and Bathsheba narrative, and it all begins with the rape of Absalom's sister, the other Tamar. The stories are bundled up inextricably.

The portrayal of a form of incest in the ancestry of the monarchy should not be overlooked. While most Near Eastern monarchs had elaborate bloodlines eventually showing them to be the offspring of some deity, those of Israel are portrayed as coming from the most humble possible origins. David's ancestry on the side of his great-grandfather Bo'az goes back to Judah and Tamar with their problematic relationship. On his great-grandmother Ruth's side, he is Moabite — which goes back to the even more disturbing incest of Lot and his daughters in Genesis 19. Less

dramatically, both sides involve some degree of questionable adherence to the norms of levirate marriage. This is part of an objective found throughout biblical narratives concerning leadership and heredity.

When Samuel chooses David, the youngest of his brothers, from a family with this history, it goes to show that there is nothing special about bloodlines; David was chosen on his merits and potential alone. Like Saul before him, identified as the youngest member of an unimportant Benjaminite tribe, with Benjamin the smallest and youngest of the twelve, his selection belies any notion of superior birth. This is, in fact, a consistent feature of the Bible: the sons of great leaders rarely justify a belief in hereditary talent, and from the patriarchs of Genesis onward, the firstborn son rarely proves himself the worthiest. Small wonder that the birth-right of the twin sons of Judah, Zerah and Peres, is intentionally muddled, like that of Jacob and Esau before them. Small wonder that Jacob intentionally blesses Ephraim over his elder brother, to Joseph's surprise and worry. (Who more than Joseph has experienced the perils of the possible resultant sibling rivalry?) A major goal of many biblical succession narratives is that of polemicizing against assumptions about worthiness conferred by birth.

Moving on to the next narrative in Genesis, we see what has been happening to Joseph since the story left off to focus on Judah. Joseph, like Judah, comes into contact with a woman. Unlike Judah, however, he never strays for a moment. Joseph's integrity is unimpeachable, and the content of his response to Potiphar's wife as he rebuffs her advances is just as remarkable.

The narrative bouncing between Joseph and Judah sets us up to understand that they are the twin streams of possible leadership from among all their brothers, and part of the drama of Genesis is in seeing the development of each. Eventually, of course, the names Judah and Joseph come to be associated not only with individual people but with the leadership of the southern and northern kingdoms. This narrative, however, portrays the earliest origins of those kingdoms.

The story begins with Joseph's purchase by Potiphar, an

important officer of Pharaoh’s — captain of the guard. Within Potiphar’s household, Joseph is quickly elevated for his competence and success; as the text states, God is with Joseph in all that he does. Potiphar’s trust in Joseph is absolute, and he knows that Joseph would not take the slightest bit of Potiphar’s property from him “save the food he ate.” Moreover, as the text relates to us in introducing Joseph’s next trial, Joseph was a good-looking man.

Genesis 39:6	
וַיַּעַזֵּב כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ בְּיַד יוֹסֵף וְלֹא יָדַע אֶתֹּו מִזֹּאמָּה כִּי אִם הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר הוּא אוֹכֵל וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יָפֶה תָאֵר וַיְפֶה מְרָאֶה.	⁶ He left all that he had in Joseph’s hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well built and handsome.

It is not long before Potiphar’s wife sets her eyes upon Joseph, saying, “lie with me.” As we have noted in our analysis of David and Bathsheba, this turn of phrase (שָׁכַב+עִם) is used exclusively to refer to illicit affairs, incest, rape, bestiality or otherwise immoral sexual behavior in Scripture. It is used with regard to David and Bathsheba, as well as Amnon and Tamar.

Genesis 39:7	
ז וַיְהִי אַחֵר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתִּשָּׂא אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָיו אֶת עֵינֶיהָ אֶל יוֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁכָבָה עִמִּי.	⁷ After a time, his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said, “Lie with me.”

What is particularly interesting is Joseph’s response. It reveals his unbending integrity, but it is of special relevance because of the related narrative of David and Bathsheba. “How can I do this (evil) deed,” emphasizes Joseph’s respect for the unbreakable bond of marriage. Joseph’s refusal, along with his referring loyally to “my master,” are tropes from his prominent stand on principle that resonate later in Uriah’s refusal to “go home and lie with my wife” when “my master Joab” and the Ark lie in tents. Compare Genesis 39:8–9:

Genesis 39:8–9	
ח וַיִּמָּאֵן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָיִי הֵן אֲדֹנָיִי לֹא יַדַּע אֵתִי מִה בְּבֵית וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי.	⁸ But he refused. He said to his master's wife , "Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands.
ט אֵינְנִי גָדוֹל בְּבֵית הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא הִשְׁדָּךְ מִמֶּנִּי מֵאוּמָה כִּי אִם אוֹתָךְ בְּאֶשֶׁר אַתְּ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה הַרְעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי לֵאלֹהִים.	⁹ He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin before God?"

2 Samuel 11:11	
יֵא וַיֹּאמֶר אֲוִרְיָה אֶל דָּוִד הָאָרוֹן וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִהוּדָה יֹשְׁבִים בְּסֻכּוֹת וְאֲדֹנָיִי יוֹאָב וְעַבְדֵי אֲדֹנָיִי עַל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה חֲנִים וְאֲנִי אָבוֹא אֶל בֵּיתִי לֶאֱכֹל וּלְשִׁתּוֹת וּלְשָׁכַב עִם אִשְׁתִּי חַיֶּךְ וְחַי נַפְשְׁךָ אִם אֶעֱשֶׂה אֵת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה.	¹¹ Uriah answered David, "The Ark and Israel and Judah are located at Succoth, and my master Joab and Your Majesty's men are camped in the open; how can I go home and eat and drink and sleep with my wife? As you live, by your very life, I will not do this!"

Ultimately, Joseph's refusal lands him in trouble. When they are alone in the house, she makes another pass at him, grabbing him by his garment. He flees, leaving the garment in her hand, and she turns vengeful. She accuses him of attempting to rape her, using his garment — the very proof of his integrity — as "proof" that he had disrobed to have his way with her and then fled when she screamed.

Genesis 39:10–18	
י וַיְהִי כַּדְּבָרָה אֶל יוֹסֵף יוֹם יוֹם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁכַב אִצְלָהּ לְהִיּוֹת עִמָּה.	¹⁰ And much as she coaxed Joseph day after day, he did not yield to her request to lie beside her, to be with her.
יֵא וַיְהִי כִּהְיוֹם הַזֶּה וַיָּבֹא הַבֵּיתָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכְתּוֹ וְאִין אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבֵּית שָׁם בְּבֵית.	¹¹ One such day, he came into the house to do his work. None of the household being there inside,

יב וַתִּתְפָּשֶׂהוּ בְּבִגְדוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׂכָבָה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנֶס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה.	¹² she caught hold of him by his garment and said, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and got away and fled outside.
יג וַיְהִי כִּרְאוּתָהּ כִּי עָזַב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנֶס הַחוּצָה.	¹³ When she saw that he had left it in her hand and had fled outside,
יד וַתִּקְרָא לְאֲנָשֵׁי בֵּיתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֵאמֹר רְאוּ הֵבִיא לָנוּ אִישׁ עֶבְרִי לְצַחֵק בָּנוּ בָּא אֵלַי לְשָׂכַב עִמִּי וָאֶקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל.	¹⁴ she called out to her servants and said to them, "Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! This one came to lie with me; but I screamed loud.
טו וַיְהִי כְשָׁמְעוֹ כִּי הִרִימֹתִי קוֹלִי וָאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֵצְלִי וַיָּנֶס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה.	¹⁵ And when he heard me screaming at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and got away and fled outside."
טז וַתִּנָּח בְּגָדוֹ אֵצְלָהּ עַד בּוֹא אֲדֹנָיו אֶל בֵּיתוֹ.	¹⁶ She kept his garment beside her, until his master came home.
יז וַתִּדְבֹּר אֵלָיו כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר בָּא אֵלַי הָעֶבֶד הָעֶבְרִי אֲשֶׁר הֵבֵאתָ לָנוּ לְצַחֵק בִּי.	¹⁷ Then she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me;
יח וַיְהִי כִּהְרִימִי קוֹלִי וָאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֵצְלִי וַיָּנֶס הַחוּצָה.	¹⁸ but when I screamed at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and fled outside."

Joseph's unimpeachable character in this narrative serves as a foil to later leaders of Israel. His description as *יָפֶה תֹּאֵר וִיפָה מְרֹאֶה* is similar to the descriptions of, in turn, Bathsheba and Tamar. His principled objection to sleeping with the wife of another, or to betraying the trust of his master, is paralleled by Uriah's language to David, itself a literary condemnation of the latter. Joseph is the master of his desires, and, what's more, actually suffers imprisonment rather than compromise his morality. David, on the other hand, kills to take a woman he wants, with all that ensues as a result. Solomon, for his part, while he is not seen killing anyone to pursue his lust, is clearly depicted as a king of almost insatiable appetite for women, with seven hundred wives (princesses, foreign entanglements all) and three hundred concubines. Can one

imagine Solomon, who was led by these wives to outright idolatry, resisting the advances of Potiphar's wife in Joseph's position?

Though he suffers for his ethical conduct, being placed in prison ultimately leads Joseph into the halls of power. Serving as the dream interpreter for Pharaoh's two offending ministers, predicting the rehabilitation of one (the cupbearer) and the execution of the other (the chief baker), Joseph is eventually remembered by the former when Pharaoh needs a dream explained. In turn, it is his interpretation that leads Pharaoh to place him in charge of saving Egypt from the oncoming famine.

This is what places Joseph in a position for us to see both he and Judah at their best: selfless leaders who willingly put themselves through immense suffering for the sake of their families. When the brothers come before Joseph in his role as viceregent hoping to procure food, he immediately recognizes them but forestalls revealing himself until he has achieved his designs to reunite the family permanently.

First, he gauges the family dynamics of the half-brothers who, after all, had sold him into slavery with great cruelty years before. He sees that Benjamin is not among them, and perhaps he worries about whether his younger brother is, like him, despised by the sons of Leah. At the same time, he recalls his dreams all those years ago (v. 9), foretelling how they would bow before him, and he begins to implement a plan to test and, ultimately, reunite them. Speaking harshly to his brothers, he accuses them of being spies, causing them to give their true identities to him: brothers, ten of twelve, who have come merely to procure food. Taking his opportunity, he tells them that they must confirm their claim by bringing Benjamin before him, and one must stay as a hostage. In the meantime, he would provide them with food.

Upon hearing this condition, the brothers are distraught. They speak aloud their belief that they are being punished for their treatment of their brother (Joseph), and refusal to hear his pleas for mercy. They do not know that he can understand them, because he has intentionally been using an interpreter. Joseph turns and hides his face from them, weeping at his recognition

of their repentance. He then binds Shimon in front of them and holds him as his captive until their return.

The selection of Shimon is probably not random. Before Joseph's sale, Reuben had already lost his birthright by lying with Bilhah, and so it is possible that Joseph is holding the brother whom he expects to be the current leader (while the events in Shechem have already occurred, Jacob does not explicitly deny Shimon and Levi blessings until before his death). Alternatively, as Reuben prevented Joseph from being killed outright, despite his absence and failure to save him during the sale, perhaps Joseph is holding the oldest brother on the scene responsible for their murderous plot and, ultimately his sale.

Either way, the sons return to Jacob with Joseph's demand, additionally terrified to learn that the money with which they had purchased grain had reappeared in their sacks. Initially, Jacob will hear none of their request to endanger Benjamin, with him already deprived of Joseph and Shimon. Reuben, serving in his role as a foil to real leadership despite being eldest, tells Jacob to send Benjamin, and if anything occurs to him, he could "slay my own two sons" — as though murdering his grandchildren would comfort Jacob. As the food runs out, however, Jacob recognizes the need to send them back. Judah offers himself as a personal guarantor for Benjamin, a better argument than that of Reuben and one that Jacob accepts. He advises that they bring a gift for "the man," and double the money to make up for the mysterious return of their payment after the last trip, praying that God would lead "the man" to mercy toward Shimon and Benjamin — "and if I am bereft, I am bereft."³²

32. It is well beyond the scope of this commentary to review the many, many allusions to the Joseph narrative found in the scroll of Esther, but here are a few relevant points. Jacob fears sending his sons to a mighty ruler in violation of the explicit conditions he laid out (bringing Benjamin), and especially having not received payment for the last purchase of food. Esther (of Benjaminite descent) similarly fears going before Ahasuerus unsummoned, where the penalty of the land is death if the ruler does not extend his mercy to the violator. Jacob finally

When they return to Egypt with Benjamin, apologetic for the apparent mix-up regarding their payment and offering the money they have brought, Joseph's steward dismisses their concerns. They begin their apology with the words בִּי אָדֹנָי, to which we shall return shortly. He is far friendlier, telling them that God had caused their money to be returned to them, freeing Shimon and bringing them to Joseph's house for a meal. An element of Joseph's dreams is fulfilled as they bow low before him, presenting their gifts. Joseph, too, is now kind and generous with them, inquiring about the welfare of their father — a question which he no doubt wondered about all these years. After saying he is well, they again prostrate before him.

We then see a particularly painful and bittersweet moment for Joseph as he interacts with Benjamin, his long-lost younger brother, the only one born to the same mother and the only one uninvolved in his sale. As he lays eyes on him for the first time since childhood and wishes God's grace upon him, he rushes out to cry, compassion for his brother overpowering him. The language used to describe this feeling is כִּי נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו אֶל אָחָיו, to which, again, we shall return shortly.

At the meal, he seats them according to age, shocking them — they are left to wonder how he knows their ages without asking. He gives a far larger portion to Benjamin, as well. He then implements the final part of his plan to test their repentance and readiness to be reunited as a family. Instructing his servants to return them with as much food as they can carry, as well as their payments once more, he adds that his silver drinking vessel should be placed in Benjamin's sack. Afterward, as they are leaving, his steward overtakes them and rebukes them for requiting Joseph's generosity with theft, stealing the vessel out of which he drinks and, in fact, performs divination. Certain that none has

realizes the necessity of the deed, and hopes the man will be merciful, concluding with כִּאֲשֶׁר שָׁכַלְתִּי שְׁכַלְתִּי — “and if I am bereft, I am bereft.” This is alluded to by Esther's final, fatalistic words in Esther 4: וְכִאֲשֶׁר יָבִדְתִּי אָבִדְתִּי אָבִדְתִּי — “and if I die, I die.”

taken anything — reminiscent of how Jacob's mistaken certainty that no one had stolen Laban's idols — they tell him to search their sacks, and kill the offending member of the party, taking the rest into servitude. The steward insists on enslaving only the offending member. The reader is to understand that the impending enslavement of one brother will be, of course, a symmetry to their sale of Joseph.

As occurred with Jacob, the curse they pronounce on whoever has the stolen object in their possession unwittingly rebounds on them, as it is of course in Benjamin's sack through no fault of his own — rather like his mother was cursed by an unwitting Jacob as Laban's idols were in her own saddle baggage. The tension mounts as the steward searches each sack, from oldest to youngest, and we can imagine the horror as he pulls it accusingly out of the last sack, the worst of all possible scenarios just when they were certain a mistake would be revealed after all.³³ As the steward takes Benjamin back to Joseph, they tear their clothing in mourning, and a certain ironic symmetry with what they had put Joseph through when they took his *כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים* is maintained; moreover, the same description is found to depict Jacob's mourning for Joseph in Genesis 37:34 (*וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שָׁמְלֵתוֹ*). They come before Joseph to plea on Benjamin's behalf, and from this point on, Judah is the clear leader, with the text describing the interaction as "Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house" (Gen. 44:14).

As they fall before him, Joseph scolds them, asking whether they had thought they could deceive "a man such as I," capable of divination. His earlier arranging them by age intensifies the fear of the brothers and their acknowledgment of his unnatural abilities. Joseph's self-description as a diviner here is a pointed rebuke to the brothers who years earlier scoffed at him and his dreams, which have now been fulfilled by their bowing to him. Judah, speaking for all of them, does not even attempt to plead innocence, and instead falls upon Joseph's mercy, asking him to accept

33. The seating in age order in the previous scene sets up this search for the drinking vessel in age order.

them all as servants rather than just Benjamin. Joseph rebuffs this offer, portraying himself as too just to punish the innocent: *חֲלִילָה לִי מַעֲשׂוֹת זֹאת*, “far be it from me to do this!” mirroring the language Abraham had used in Gen. 18:25 when protesting God’s intention to ‘sweep away the wicked along with the innocent’ in Sodom (*חֲלִילָה לָּךְ מַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדָבָר הַזֶּה*, “far be it from you to do such a thing”). He tells them to go in peace to their father.

This sets the stage for Judah’s shining moment. He “approaches” Joseph (*וַיֵּצֵא אֶלָּיו יְהוּדָה*), also the verb used to introduce Abraham’s pleas on behalf of Sodom (Gen. 18:23), and begins his final gambit, offering himself as a replacement for Benjamin. He begins his plea with the words *בִּי אֲדֹנָי*, as the brothers used before with Joseph’s steward. He then begs Joseph not to be angered if he speaks (*וְאַל יִחַר אַפֶּךָ בְּעַבְדְּךָ*), another echo of Abraham’s plea (Gen. 18:30, 32), and begins to appeal to Joseph’s mercy. He concludes by begging Joseph to take him instead of Benjamin, for his father’s soul is bound up with Benjamin’s, and Benjamin is the last son of Jacob’s wife, and the first one is lost to him, and if Judah returns without Benjamin, he will bring his father down to the grave in sorrow.

This act of selfless sacrifice from Judah on behalf of their brother breaks all emotional barriers for Joseph. He sends out every servant from before him, and tearfully reveals his identity. He reassures them not to fear any vengeance from him because it was God’s will that he be sent to Egypt, to eventually sustain their lives (and indeed, everyone else’s) through his role as Pharaoh’s vizier.

The rest of the story needs little discussion. The family is reunited, and Joseph continues to ensure their unity through various means, especially around the time of Jacob’s death. Jacob blesses most of the sons, emphasizing special leadership roles for Joseph and Judah, as is consistent with the nation’s actual history. The most important broad themes, however, are those which we have emphasized: the development of Judah as a leader, Joseph’s unflinching integrity even at great personal cost, and their similar ability to offer tremendous self-sacrifice on behalf of the family for which they feel responsible.

Judah's act of self-sacrifice, which moves Joseph to tears and embrace of his brothers as fully penitent and able to unify as a family once more, is clear in the text. Joseph's self-sacrifice, however, is even more dramatic. Commentators have often wondered why, as a powerful leader in Egypt, he never sent word to his family that he was alive. He obviously cared to learn that his father was still alive, as he asked the brothers twice. The reason for this is evident in his elaborate designs and reveals the measure of Joseph's self-sacrifice.

The entirety of his scheme — hiding his identity, using a translator to hide his knowledge of their language, making the brothers fear for Shimon and finally for Benjamin — allowed him to see the extent of their repentance. By the end, with Judah's noble display of literally loving his brother more than himself, and having heard them attribute their suffering to wronging Joseph, and seeing the lengths to which they will go to protect Benjamin, Joseph is able to provide for his family as a now tightly-joined unit, one which will not be broken by times of hardship or external interests. He has them brought to Egypt to keep them all together, and he and Jacob both know that it is a temporary sojourn which shall end in a return to the Promised Land. But only a united nation, the descendants of a united family, could maintain the necessary cohesion to remain one people. For this critical goal, Joseph sacrifices a relationship with his family for many long years.

With that in mind, it is time for one final look at Solomon's judgment of the two prostitutes, each claiming that a living baby is their own. The narrative flow is the same: the king, Solomon or Pharaoh, has a dream. The dream includes a warning of things to come. He "awakens, and behold, it was a dream" (וַיִּקָּץ וְהִנֵּה חֲלוֹם (פְּרָעָה וְהִנֵּה חֲלוֹם). Also, after a dream (that of Solomon and those of Pharaoh's two ministers) the ruler (Solomon and Pharaoh) "has a feast for all his servants": וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה לְכָל עֲבָדָיו, in the exact wording of both Gen. 40:20 and 1 Kings 3:15. In Pharaoh's case, the occasion is his birthday, three days after the dreams of the cupbearer and chief baker, which each contained imagery connoting three days before a verdict.

Immediately after the “feast for all the servants,” each ruler’s great “wisdom and discernment” is revealed, whether that ruler is Joseph (who is “like Pharaoh,” כִּי כְמוֹדֵךְ פַּרְעֹה in Judah’s plea) or Solomon. In both cases, the wisdom of the ruler becomes known as a result of a situation in which one party lives and the other dies, i.e., the two babies and the two servants.

The first claimant begins, as did Judah, with the phrase בִּי אֲדֹנִי — an uncommon introduction to pleas. Four of the seven biblical occurrences of בִּי אֲדֹנִי appear in these two contexts: two in the Judah-Joseph interactions and two in the Solomonic judgment. One of the mothers begins to tell her side, and it is peppered with details that contain strong intertextual linkages to Joseph’s narratives.

For instance, she gave birth, and three days later, the second woman did, with her baby dying that night: וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְלִדְתִּי (1 Kings 3:18). The language is evocative of how, three days after the dreams of Pharaoh’s imprisoned ministers, he celebrates his own birth — וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יוֹם הַלֵּדָת (Gen. 40:20) — with one of the two ministers dying, as did one of the two babies. Her plea also mentions that they lived “alone in the house” — אֵין זָר אֶתֵּנוּ בְּבַיִת (1 Kings 3:18b) — a description which, while explaining the unsolvable nature of the case, also brings to mind Joseph’s integrity in the face of sexual temptation with the wife of Potiphar, when they were alone: וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת שָׁם בְּבַיִת (Gen. 39:11).

As she continues to relate, the other woman’s child died: וַיָּמָת בֶּן הָאִשָּׁה. One recalls that the child of David and Bathsheba died, הַבֶּן הַיְלֹד לָךְ מוֹת יָמוּת, language which shall again echo later in this case, along with more direct references to David and Bathsheba. She surmises that the baby died “because she laid on it,” אֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עָלָיו — a seemingly irrelevant detail, and her own conjecture since she was asleep and away at the time. To us, as we recognize that the baby is symbolic of the nation which Solomon failed to “parent,” the implication may be a reference to how Solomon’s fatal flaw of “lying with” many women was at the heart of the kingdom’s collapse and schism. This is a flaw also found in David, obviously: וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד מַלְאָכִים וַיִּקְחֶהָ וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה, among other examples

in the David and Bathsheba account. Even their ancestor Judah was shown to have this weakness, but at the end of the Judah and Tamar account, he is seen to grow beyond it as he develops. Joseph, of course, can never be associated with such criticism: he steadfastly allowed himself to be imprisoned rather than obey the wife of Potiphar as she entreated him, שְׁכַבָה עִמִּי.

The first woman's account proceeds to accuse the second woman of switching the babies in the night, and we have discussed how these elements evoke the crimes of Solomon's predecessor, David, with regard to the murder of Uriah's and the taking of his wife. She begins with וַתִּקַּח אֶת בְּנִי מֵאֶצְלִי — her baby was stolen unknowingly from her. Similarly, וַיִּקַּח אֶת כְּבִשְׁת׃ הָאִישׁ evokes the (stolen) lamb in Nathan's parable relates how David stole Bathsheba from Uriah without his knowledge, like the rich man who steals the poor man's lamb without his awareness. Her description of this theft of a loved one in conjunction with death in 1 Kings 3:20, וַיִּחְיֶהוּ תִשְׁכַּב וַתְּהִי לוֹ, evokes, וַתִּשְׁכַּבְהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ וְאֵת בְּנָהּ הַמֵּת הִשְׁכִּיבָהּ בְּחִיקָהּ the (stolen) lamb “slept in his bosom and was like a daughter unto him” (Nathan's parallel in 2 Samuel 12:3), leaving the poor man with nothing but a dead lamb that was likened to his child.

Solomon's judgment, a maneuver used to discern which claimant is the real mother, refers to killing the remaining child by sword:

1 Kings 3:24–25	
כִּד וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ קָחוּ לִי חֶרֶב וַיָּבֵאוּ הַחֶרֶב לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ.	²⁴ So the king gave the order, “Fetch me a sword.” A sword was brought before the king,
כֹּה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ גְּזְרוּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי לְשְׁנַיִם וְתִנּוּ אֶת הַחֶצִי לְאַחַת וְאֶת הַחֶצִי לְאַחַת.	²⁵ and the king said, “Cut the live child in two, and give half to one and half to the other.”

The language recalls the rebuke of Nathan that David had put Uriah to death “by the sword... by the sword of the children of Ammon.” (אֶת אוּרִיָּה הַחַתִּי הִכִּיתָ בְּחֶרֶב... וְאֹתוֹ הִרְגִּיתָ בְּחֶרֶב בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן). The

subterfuge is successful, as the real mother is revealed through her mercy and love for her child.

Here is the crucial point of the narrative and the ultimate contrast between Joseph and Solomon. Because of her mercy for her child — *כִּי נִקְמְרוּ רַחֲמֶיהָ עַל בְּנָהּ* — the true mother is revealed. She is willing to accept a verdict which has her living in a house with another woman raising her child for herself. She is facing a life of pain, seeing a child grow up as someone else's, but not her own — sacrificing her own maternal desire to keep her child alive and, literally, “in one piece.” Joseph, too, suffered long years in Egypt, sacrificing his relationship with his family, his brother Benjamin, or his beloved father, in order to eventually bring his family together under his judgment. Knowing his destiny from his prophetic dreams, he faced it not as one who wished to rule over others, but as a suffering, lonely man without a family. He accepted this fate because he saw the importance of the negation of his own desires for the sake of his family's survival and unity, its ability to stay in **one piece**. He is the original figure, and the only other in Scripture, whose mercy burned within him: *כִּי נִקְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו אֶל אֶחָיו*.

Solomon, though wise and discerning enough to see the mark of a true parent in his judgment, never lived up to the lofty standards of Joseph, nor his ancestor Judah, willing to give up everything to preserve the lives and unity of the people for whom they felt responsible. Solomon, unlike Judah or especially Joseph, was not a leader, and his own verdict condemned him as such.

Conclusion

In this study, we have shown how careful analysis of the extensive narrative in 1 Kings 1–11 reveals a subtle but devastating criticism of King Solomon's rule. With the text's repeated affirmations of Solomon's great wisdom and its descriptions of his abundant wealth and the triumphant building of the Temple in Jerusalem, this point can be missed easily, especially when individual passages or episodes are studied in isolation from one another.

However, when the narrative is read as a continuous whole, from Solomon's early family history to his rise and fall from power, and with appropriate sensitivity to the intertextual links with other closely related biblical passages, the highly critical nature of the portrait becomes clear. Indeed, we have seen how links to narrative accounts of other leading figures, particularly Joseph and (to a certain extent) Judah, who were willing to sacrifice everything to preserve the lives and unity of the people for whom they felt responsible, serve to highlight Solomon's manifest failures as a leader. Perhaps most important is the subtle identification of Solomon as "a king like all the other nations" (Deut. 17:14). Although the criticism is veiled at times, it is no exaggeration to state that he is portrayed as systematically violating almost all of the rules pertaining to monarchy in Deuteronomy 17, from amassing horses and increasing entanglements with Egypt, to the amassing of silver, and gold, and the acquisition of many wives, who ultimately "lead his heart astray." In the end, for all his wisdom, Solomon failed to heed God's clear warnings, delivered to him in a series of direct communications. This is the sad irony of his great wisdom, which makes his ultimate folly all the more tragic.