

# OpenTheo

## 1 Kings: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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## Transcript

1 Kings, Chapter 1, begins with David being old and cold. The beautiful young Abishag is brought to warm his bed, but David does not have sexual relations with her. This is a very strange note on which to begin a book of the Bible.

David is in bed with Abishag while the nation is in crisis. We might perhaps be reminded of his sin with Bathsheba, when he was on his couch at the beginning while the nation was at war. However, this might also be a way of describing his weakness.

David is apparently lacking in sexual potency. He's not knowing the young beautiful woman who's lying in his bed, and this is related to his political impotency as the husband of the nation. It might remind us also of the concubines who remained like widows after the return of David to Jerusalem.

In the next chapter, another man will try and take this woman Abishag for himself, along with the kingdom. Seeing the weakness of his father, Adonijah, one of David's sons, tries to set himself up as king. And this is all very reminiscent of Absalom.

In 2 Samuel, Chapter 15, verse 1, the description of Absalom is more or less exactly the same as Adonijah here. After this, Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and 50 men to run before him. Adonijah is described in his appearance as being attractive like Absalom.

In 2 Samuel, Chapter 14, verse 25, Adonijah is supported by Joab, who is probably the

real power in the kingdom at this point, and now he is taking sides in a coup against David. He's also supported by Abiathar the priest. He invites key people, the king's sons and the royal officials of Judah, but he does not invite Nathan, Benaiah, or the mighty men, or Solomon.

The key loyalists of David are excluded. And this is indicative of a coup being staged. Certain members of the administration are going to be displaced by others.

Joab in particular has been a troublemaker for a long time. We should also be clear that Solomon has already been appointed as crown prince. Joab, however, seemed to resist the idea of Solomon being king from the very beginning.

Nathan, Bathsheba, and Solomon reappear at this point, once again reminding us of the story of 2 Samuel. There is something of an emergency. A coup is underway, led by the most powerful men in the land, and the king is impotent.

He's lying in bed. Nathan and Bathsheba need to make a shrewd plan to rouse David to action. They need to do this for their own sake.

Adonijah would clearly perceive Bathsheba and Solomon as threats, and also Nathan. David had sworn an oath that Solomon his son should reign after him and sit on his throne. And Bathsheba and Nathan both come in to remind him of this promise in the way that they frame their statements.

Nathan instructs Bathsheba. He emphasises the contrast between David's promise and the reality, and maybe implies guilt on David's part that David has not prevented this from taking place. Bathsheba, however, as she speaks to David, contrasts David's promise with the situation, focusing upon the fact that David does not know it.

David should, as the king and her husband, feel the sting of his lack of knowledge and his seeming inability to implement his word and his promise. Nathan at this point comes in. He feigns ignorance of David's involvement.

He asks whether David had orchestrated the situation. It would be a painful admission on David's part to acknowledge that the situation had risen entirely out of his control and apart from his plan. Adonijah's actions are described four times, and the contrasts are worth noting.

There are increasing references to details, and it's an elaboration in each account, and those greater elaborations are designed to spur David to action, and each time there's an added blow of the details. For instance, comparing the accounts of Bathsheba, followed by the account of Nathan. And now, behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it.

He has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the

sons of the king, Abiath the priest, and Joab the commander of the army. But Solomon your servant he has not invited. In verses 18-19.

In verses 25-26, Nathan gives his account. But he has gone down this day and has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiath the priest. And behold, they are eating and drinking before him, and saying, Long live King Adonijah! But me, your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Ben-Nai the son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he has not invited.

Bathsheba's account would be a blow, and then Nathan's account takes that even further. It adds details that would have made that blow hit harder. There's no reference, however, in either of these accounts to the involvement of the royal officials.

Bathsheba and Nathan are concerned to rouse David to action. They don't want to discourage him, to give him the sense that he cannot actually overcome this coup. And if they mention the royal officials, it might be too discouraging a detail.

It might make him think that Adonijah's coup is a done deal. Both Bathsheba and Nathan are very careful to allude to, or invert the words of David's promise made to Bathsheba concerning Solomon. Both of them underline the promise that David himself has made by taking up its words and moving them around.

The promise hadn't been given to Nathan, but Nathan inverts the promise to refer it to Adonijah to drive home the point. Have you said this? David's response is to reaffirm the promise to Bathsheba, and immediately to set the ball rolling to dispel all uncertainty and establish Solomon as his successor. Adonijah is probably banking upon David's impotence at this point, and now that David has been spurred to action, he will find that his plan soon evaporates.

A public spectacle is needed to counter Adonijah's attempt at the throne. While Adonijah's feast seems to be restricted more to the leadership, especially of Judah, Solomon's anointing is more of a public spectacle, involving the blowing of a trumpet, a procession, an open celebration, loud music, and a triumphal entry into the city. Adonijah and his men hear the noise of the celebration and wonder what is going on.

Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, comes bearing the news of what's happening. Adonijah presumes that it is good news. We might recall a similar episode back in 2 Samuel 18, when Ahimeaz, the son of Zadok, came bearing news of the victory over Absalom's coup from Joab to David.

There might be a sort of ironic inversion here. Jonathan recounts all that David has done in publicly establishing Solomon as king. Once again, there is an elaboration of details in Jonathan's account, much as the news of Adonijah's feast had been developed in the

tellings.

And the force of this account leads Adonijah and his guests to depart in great fear. Adonijah flees for his life to the altar and takes hold of its horns, while his guests slink back to their homes. Grabbing the horns of the altar was like running to a city of refuge in some sense.

Solomon summons him and says that he will be spared if he proves faithful, but if he rebels he will be destroyed. This is Solomon's first action as king. He shows clemency at this point, but he will also be firm in his judgement if Adonijah tries anything.

Solomon's firm hand over his administration marks an immediate contrast between him and David. David, in his elderly state, is not able to run his kingdom. He does not know what's going on.

He is not able to master things or to keep his promises, simply because people are not observing his word. Solomon, however, immediately proves himself to be effective. A question to consider.

Why do you think that the author of the books of Kings decided to begin his story with David weak and impotent in bed? How does beginning with this shape the character of the narrative of this chapter? In 1 Kings 2, the alien king David dies after he has given instructions to Solomon, his successor, concerning the kingdom. The chapter begins with these final instructions, and the rest of the chapter largely concerns the execution, some of them in the form of actual executions. Final discourses are an important part of a few figures' lives in scripture, Jacob, Moses, David and Jesus in particular.

David has already delivered a number of farewell discourses or teachings, his oracle in 2 Samuel 23, his charges to Israel and Solomon at the end of the book of 1 Chronicles. Now this, delivered to Solomon. This is similar to the charge given to Joshua by Moses in Deuteronomy 31, verses 7-8.

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you.

He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. Keeping the law of Moses in all of its aspects, so that the promise of the Davidic covenant will be fulfilled, is an important part of David's teaching here.

The importance of the law is underlined by the way that it is spoken of in detail. Keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commands, his rules and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses. Solomon is supposed to be the model Israelite relative to the law.

He keeps the law and he represents the chief worshipper, faithfulness and loyalty to the law as he keeps it and observes it. He will also be the one most responsible for establishing the public observance, administration and enforcing of the law, for instance in the formation of a central sanctuary, according to Deuteronomy chapter 12. A king who did not perceive himself to be subject to the law of God would be a very dangerous thing.

Many rulers deem themselves to be exceptions and Solomon should not be one of them. The covenant of 2 Samuel chapter 7 is being fulfilled here. It is also reminiscent of the teaching of Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 18 to 20.

Deuteronomy is largely a final exhortation of Moses and much that we see here should remind us of that. David is like Moses. He is the one who receives the covenant and the plans for the house of the Lord.

He is the one who starts the work of the deliverance but does not complete it. Solomon is like Joshua. He is the one who will bring the people into rest.

In the verses that follow David instructs Solomon to deal with some of the dangerous discontents in the land, Joab and Shimei, while blessing the descendants of Barzillai the Gileadite who had assisted him in the rebellion of Absalom. Shimei will be judged and Barzillai will be blessed on account of the parts that they played. Joab has been a powerful compromising presence throughout the 40 years of David's reign.

David couldn't deal with him but now Joab needs to be finally removed for his crimes and treacheries. When David dies, Solomon rises to the throne. The most important things at this stage are establishing who will be part of the administration of Solomon and also for Solomon to demonstrate his power so that he can secure order.

In the early stage of the king's reign there will be threats and attempts to take advantage of his naivety or his weakness. Some will try and see how far they can push him and whether he can be overpowered or whether he will back down when confronted. We might find this chapter rather brutal.

If we do it would be very good to bear in mind the recent history of the nation where David's failure to deal decisively with men like Joab, Amnon, Absalom and Ananias had cost him and the kingdom very, very dearly. Many, many thousands of lives had been lost because certain key figures hadn't been effectively crushed and because David's obvious weakness had left the door wide open for cunning and powerful enemies. And it could have been so much worse.

David's failure to exert the power necessary to establish a firm order made the nation vulnerable to the power of wicked men such as Joab and Absalom. If men like Joab were not dealt with decisively at the very outset, they would continue to be the most powerful

forces in the land. Solomon needs to establish his dominance over the serpents within the kingdom.

Where a firm and unrivaled power is not demonstrated over them, regions can easily collapse into war and be subject to assault from external forces. The pacification of the enemies of the Davidic king is a very important theme in scripture. Enemies, internal or external, must either bow and pay homage or suffer absolute destruction.

The great messianic Psalm 2 is a good example of this. The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed saying, Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord holds them in derision.

Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury saying, As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree. The Lord said to me, You are my son, today I have begotten you.

Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Now therefore, O kings, be wise.

Be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way.

For his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all those who take refuge in him. The Davidic king is praised because he acts shrewdly with the enemies of the people of God.

His wrath is quickly kindled. He won't tolerate the serpents when they are up to their business, but will deal with them decisively and quickly. We see a similar thing in Psalm 110.

The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies.

Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power. In holy garments from the womb of the morning, the Jew of your youth will be yours. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind.

You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses. He will shatter chiefs over the wide earth. He will drink from the brook by the way.

Therefore he will lift up his head. These are the two great messianic psalms in the New Testament. The securing and demonstration of dominance and strong deterrence

against all enemies is a precondition for peace in a fallen world.

The king is like Adam in the garden. If he does not effectively stand against the serpents and protect the bride, the consequences may be catastrophic. The serpents more generally will recognize that he is a soft touch and will prey upon him all the more.

A squeamishness about necessary judgment or an excessive weakness is not a virtue in a king. The king is not to be a man of blood, not to be a man given to violence, or a man who delights in violence, or a man who takes life unjustly. However, he should use violence effectively in the task of justice and in establishing peace that will provide the foundation of his kingdom.

Adonijah is a serpent figure who held the feast for his coup near the serpent stone. He tries to revive his claim upon the throne with cunning by asking for Abishag. Marrying the concubine of the former king was a power move and Adonijah tries to use Bathsheba to get to Solomon.

Solomon is wise enough to what is going on and he proves himself an effective guardian of the nation in executing Adonijah, to whom he had shown mercy at the end of the preceding chapter. Solomon is not precipitous in executing judgment. He waits for people to reveal their true colours, but when they do, he deals with them swiftly and effectively.

He shows mercy to Abiathar the priest after his part in Adonijah's rebellion on account of Abiathar's former service of David. The removal of Abiathar fulfils the prophecy against the house of Eli that was given in 1 Samuel chapter 2. No such mercy is shown to Joab. Joab has revealed his wicked character all too fully during the reign of David.

He was the most dangerous and powerful serpent of all. Furthermore, as long as Joab was not dealt with, blood was on David's house, in whose name Joab had acted. The failure of David to deal with Joab earlier had been a fatal weakness.

Solomon's executing of Joab at the start of his reign removes a bloodthirsty, violent, predatory and unjust man who had opposed Solomon coming to the throne and whose continued power would greatly threaten the peace of the kingdom. Shimei is also shown mercy and judgment. He is placed in a situation of refuge, where his life is spared, but he must remain where he is, on fear of death.

However, like Adonijah, he fails to observe the terms of his pardon, and he must be put to death. Shimei was a man of the house of Saul, so this is another judgment upon Saul's house. In the place of such treacherous and violent men, faithful men like Ben-Niah the son of Jehoiada, Zadok the priest and the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite are exalted.

The result is a nation that is far more secure and much more likely to enjoy peace and justice. The kingdom is established in the hand of Solomon, as he makes clear at the



very beginning of his reign that all opposing elements must either bow or be destroyed, and that while he is just and merciful, he is firm and strong, and that people should not trifle with him. He will not allow the serpents and the men of violence to prey upon the bride.

A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which events and persons in this chapter foreshadow Christ and his story? The kingdom of Solomon is being established, rebellious elements have been pacified and Solomon's power is now unrivalled. Now we are seeing its rise to its full glory.

The chapter begins with a marriage alliance with Egypt. Relations with Egypt had long been an important concern of geopolitics in the land of Canaan. We must consider the strategic situation of the land between Egypt and Mesopotamia and their great powers.

The region within which Israel was situated was often a realm where the leading kingdoms were like pawns of the back rank powers that lay behind them. The various Egyptian dynasties, Assyria, Babylonia, the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks and others were the large empires and the state of affairs in Israel often depended upon relations with them. The Philistines, for instance, formerly acted as vassals of Egypt in the region, maintaining the influence of Egypt over the area.

Now Israel, as a recent rising power in the region, can play that role and also enjoy Egypt's protection. Reading the story of Israel we can often be unmindful of the great geopolitical concerns that lie behind its story. Israel is a small fish in a larger pond, surrounded by many greater powers.

This will become much more prominent of an issue later in Israel and Judah's history when certain of the large powers would overwhelm the land entirely. Much as Israel's temptation within the land would have been treaties and intermarriage with the Canaanites earlier on, given the fragility of their rootedness in it, the temptation of the king would have been marriage treaties with the surrounding nations. An Egyptian queen would have been a particularly great international relations coup for Solomon.

It was shrewd politics on Solomon's part. However, political shrewdness has its limits, especially when people rest in it rather than trusting in the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and there are times when fearing the Lord might call people to forgo the ways of the shrewd politician.

As Israel rises as a kingdom, their attention would naturally move beyond their borders. Where the internal fault lines had once occupied their concern, the international relations would now be much more important to them. However, Israel needed to learn to trust the Lord with these too.

Whether Solomon's taking of an Egyptian queen was an act of significant unbelief is not

entirely clear. This chapter is very positive towards Solomon, and most of what he does is characterised by faithfulness and wisdom. However, it does immediately raise warning signs for us, and it also anticipates many of the ways that Solomon would actually turn away from the ways of the Lord in the future.

Turning back to Egypt for weaponry, getting into entangling alliances with pagan peoples, and serving the gods of his foreign wives all contributed to Solomon's later fall. His taking of an Egyptian wife could potentially have taken a more positive form, however. And perhaps at this point we are to believe that, rather than sinning, Solomon is taking an action that could go in one of a number of different directions, but which necessitates considerable wisdom and care.

Lest we forget, Joseph, the great man of wisdom prior to Solomon, had also taken an Egyptian wife. The two great tribes of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, descended from an Egyptian matriarch. In that case, Joseph had not abandoned the Lord for the ways of Egypt, although it might have seemed likely at some points, especially after he had married an Egyptian woman from a powerful family and had children with her.

As we are told that Solomon loved the Lord, perhaps this is the better way to understand it. At the heart of this chapter is the story of Solomon's request for and receiving of the gift of wisdom. This episode is a contrast to much of the rest of the material of the book, which focuses on public affairs.

This section, however, relates a dream that is of immense importance within the wider story of Solomon. It makes the source of Solomon's wisdom and wealth plain. They aren't merely the result of Solomon's personal efforts.

They come from the hand of the Lord, who has blessed him. This is especially important to remember when we consider the aptness of wisdom for gaining power and wealth. If we didn't know the source of Solomon's wisdom, we might easily suppose that Solomon succeeds through his natural aptitudes.

Another thing to remember are that there are many ways that wisdom can fail. God grants Solomon wisdom, but he also grants him success in his wise labours. The mere possession of wisdom is no guarantee, and as we see in the Book of Ecclesiastes, wisdom, apart from the Lord's blessing, can be attended with great frustration.

This is one of two great dreams that Solomon receives in the course of his reign. While prophets tend to receive visions, kings are often said to receive dreams. The second dream comes after the building of the temple.

Solomon receives this dream in Gibeon, which was the great high place. After the capture of the Ark, there had not been a single central high place. After the restoration of the Ark, as David brought it into Jerusalem and placed it within his tent, the tabernacle

was in Gibeon, and the Ark of the Covenant in David's tent shrine in Jerusalem.

We discover the location of the tabernacle in 1 Chronicles 16, verses 39-40. There were also various high places of worship throughout the land. This was contrary to the instruction of the Lord in Deuteronomy 12, but it was a situation that existed on account of judgment upon the people.

One of Solomon's tasks, as part of the building of the temple, would be the centralisation of Israel's worship as the Lord intended. Solomon's dream is received after he sacrificed immense sacrifices on the bronze altar of the tabernacle at Gibeon. Solomon currently walks in the footsteps of his father David.

However, like Isaac as the son of Abraham, Solomon recognised that his father enjoyed an especial relationship with God, which he did not yet enjoy in the same way. Genesis 26, verses 2-5 describe the character of the Lord's blessing of Isaac on account of Abraham. And the Lord appeared to him and said, Isaac has been blessed chiefly on account of the faithfulness of his father, and Solomon is in a similar position, which he expresses by speaking of the blessings that he is enjoying in a way that traces them back to the Lord's blessing of David his father.

Solomon, however, finding himself in this situation of great blessing given to his father, a man of great spiritual stature, recognises how difficult it is to fill his father's shoes. He no longer has his father to counsel him, as he had once counseled him concerning the establishment of his kingdom in chapter 2. Now he is on his own. He is faced with the immense responsibilities of ruling the Lord's people.

Unless he is equipped for the task and rises to sufficient spiritual stature himself, he will fail to maintain his father's legacy. Consequently, when the Lord asks Solomon what he desires, Solomon requests an understanding mind for the task that the Lord has given to him. He asks to discern between good and evil.

This request is a request for the knowledge of good and evil associated with the forbidden tree in the garden. Adam and Eve wanted to eat of that tree so that they might be like gods, like the angelic authorities in the heavens. The knowledge of good and evil is something that is enjoyed by the mature.

It is something that equips one to rule. The king needs wisdom and this knowledge of good and evil. It is reasonable to assume that the Lord had always desired for Adam and Eve to grow into enjoyment of the knowledge of good and evil, but that they had to learn how to serve before they would be granted the privilege of rule.

Now, however, the king is granted the knowledge of good and evil by the Lord. He will, as Peter Lighthouse notes, wake up from his deep sleep with Lady Wisdom by his side as a helper suitable for his task. He had his dream at Gibeon, in the site of the temple, and

after his dream he goes up to Jerusalem, to the tent where the Ark of the Covenant is.

David, after receiving the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel chapter 7, had done something similar. He had gone in to sit before the Lord. In both cases this seems to be an indication of the Lord's exaltation of the person.

The Lord will elevate Solomon, and Solomon has the real possibility of walking in the footsteps of David and enjoying immense blessings, not merely for the sake of his father David, but also for his own sake. Solomon's wisdom is demonstrated in the episode that follows, with the two prostitutes and the surviving child. David might have made a similar judgment between Mephibosheth and Zeba on his return to the land after the defeat of Absalom's coup.

Solomon exhibits insight into human nature in this judgment. He appreciates the importance of envy and rivalry in such situations. Indeed, the very moment that the true mother concedes the possession of the child to her rival, the false mother calls for the child to be chopped in two.

The false mother values dispossessing her rival of her child over both the child's life and her own possession of it. In Solomon's deep insight into human nature, he shows that he can distinguish with shrewdness between good and evil in situations where it is far from obvious. Peter Lighthouse suggests that there might be something more going on here too.

He observes the similarities with the story of the binding of Isaac and the staying of the knife that is about to kill the child. It is also a story with similarities to the story of the Exodus and the Passover, with the death of the child at night. Beyond this, however, it might be a symbolic presentation of the story of the kingdom as it will play out.

We find a similar symbolic story in chapter 13. There are two prostitutes, two unfaithful women, corresponding to Israel and Judah. They both claim the seed for themselves, but the Lord will finally remove the seed from the woman who cares more about defeating her rival than she does about the life of the seed.

A question to consider. Solomon feels keenly the challenge of walking in the footsteps of a man as great as his father. Many of us are called to follow in the footsteps of persons far greater than we feel that we are.

How can we learn from Solomon's example in this chapter? In 2 Samuel 8, verses 15-18 and in 20, verses 23-26, we find lists of the officials in David's administration. In 1 Kings 4, we find a far more extensive list for the figures in Solomon's administration. Solomon is at the centre of the glorious ordered world of his kingdom.

He is a new Adam in a new and far more expansive garden. It begins with the high officials of the house before moving to the officers over the land. It's a greater list than

that of David, not just for the people in the inner court, but also because the extent reaches out further to include officers over the land.

The story centres upon eating and drinking. This is a realm of rejoicing and thanksgiving. God is blessing his people Israel.

They are flourishing and spreading out of the land. We can see in the list of the officials the continued influence of Zadok, whose son Azariah is in office. Also Nathan, who has two sons in office.

He was a faithful prophet of the Lord to David and now he is rewarded with two sons of his own in office. As a good king, David blesses his faithful servants. Ben-Aniah and Zadok are also blessed at this point.

The priest is the chief steward of the Lord's house, who can instruct the king in the law of the Lord. Alongside the priest you have the secretaries. They keep records and prepare correspondence.

The recorder is probably also a herald. He is someone who communicates the words of the king to the people. The king's friend is the official position of close counsellor.

He is the one who is nearest to the king, who can give him advice and help him to decide on particular courses of action. Then there is someone who has to oversee the king's properties, looking out for his household and all his different possessions. The overseer of the forced labour, Adoniram, was probably a very unpopular figure.

We see in chapter 12 verse 18 that as the first great act of the splitting of the kingdom, the people lynch him. A few more things can be noted in the names of the officials. There are possibly Egyptian figures here.

The secretaries Eli-Horef and Ahijah and Shisha their father are likely of Egyptian origin. It says something about the cosmopolitan character of Solomon's reign at this time. Some of the figures mentioned here would have served in succession rather than serving at the same time, serving in different periods of Solomon's reign.

Twelve officers are placed over the land, each of whom provisions the king's table for a month of the year. Maybe we are supposed to see a connection between the twelve tribes and the months of the year here. Two of Solomon's sons-in-law are among the officers.

The picture is of a well-ordered land. The king's decrees go out to all of the land and the riches from all corners of the land come into the king for his table. It's a well-integrated kingdom.

We should consider that the many kingdoms of this time were fairly loosely bound

together. As you moved out from the capital, you might find that life proceeded with little reference to the king and to the central government authorities. The extent of Solomon's kingdom is also seen in the fact that his rule truly spreads out over the whole of the land and isn't just narrowly focused in the area around the capital.

The officers don't all oversee the same extent of territory, but we are given all of their names. Solomon is building an effective and a good central government. Indeed, Solomon does not just rule over Egypt.

He also rules over the surrounding kingdoms as a suzerain. From Egypt to the Euphrates, people are bringing him tribute from all the kingdoms round about. We might see fulfilments of the promises to Abraham here.

Likewise with the fact that Israel is like the sand by the sea. Israel is eating, drinking and rejoicing and the king at the very heart is leading the feast. We hear a lot about the way that his table is provisioned with the great fair of the kingdom gathered in from all around.

He eats the typical meats, but he also eats deer, gazelles, roebucks and fat and fowl. He's bringing in the different meats that might also represent bringing in the Gentiles. Solomon's reign is associated with spices, different meats, it's associated with different trees, things that are brought in from outside.

Solomon's reign is one in which the glories of the world are coming in to the land of Israel. It's a time of peace and plenty. Solomon rules not just over peoples, but also over nature.

His wisdom, not just the people, is like the sand by the seashore. This is a fulfilment of the promise of Deuteronomy 4, verses 5-8 as the people gather in to hear his wisdom. When they hear all these statutes, they will say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? Solomon's wisdom is described in great detail. It is rooted in his breadth of mind. It isn't just an abstract wisdom, but a wisdom that relates to all areas of reality, natural and human.

His wisdom is compared to that of the Egyptians and the people of the East, also to Ethan the Ezraite who composed Psalm 89, and Heman who composed Psalm 88 and was a Levitical musician. The connection of wisdom with song is perhaps especially interesting. The sort of wisdom in view seems to be a wisdom more seen in poetry and its analogical forms of knowing than in abstract and prosaic reasoning, which separates things out and which we tend to focus upon.

Solomon's wisdom as a poetic wisdom relates to the particularity of things. He knows different types of trees and creatures. People come from all around to hear his wisdom.

He is naming the creation like a new Adam. He has been given the knowledge of good and evil, and we can see his reign over the creation extended. A question to consider.

What distinct features of the biblical vision of wisdom, especially in contrast to modern notions of genius, knowledge or expertise, can we discern in this chapter? In 1 Kings 4, verses 24-25, we were told of Solomon's power over the surrounding region. Solomon doesn't just rule effectively over the entire territory of Israel. He also secures the peace and stability of the wider region.

For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates, from Tifsa to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates. And he had peace on all sides around him. And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.

The hold of the region between the great northern powers and the great southern power of Egypt, a region that was generally unsettled and violent, now knows rest and security. It's achieved through Solomon's might and wisdom. Now in chapter 5 we read of Solomon's relations with one of his most important vassals, Hiram of Tyre.

We can have a very negative view about the military dominance of kingdoms and empires, but scripture's view about the dominance of empires and kingdoms is rather more ambivalent and complicated. In large part this is because it recognises the relationship between strong central sovereignty and the way that that protects realms from the violent contestation of sovereignty that can happen otherwise. Power vacuums are incredibly dangerous things, as many parties will try to fill them.

And if there is no single party that can effectively do so and establish a truly effective dominance, violence can be interminable. A dominant king in Israel discourages the violence of rebels and grants peace to the entire region under his protection. David's weakness towards the end of his reign had invited all sorts of conflict both internally and externally.

But Solomon's power and dominance spreads peace beyond Israel's borders. Israel's vision was not imperial, although you might see some imperial elements to the way that Solomon becomes a king of kings in this chapter, acting as a suzerain to other vassal kingdoms. Israel has clearly defined borders for its territorial ambitions.

It is not acquisitive or predatory like many of the great empires. However its dominance of the region is presented as an exceedingly positive thing. Israel enjoys good relations with the surrounding kingdoms like Tyre.

And rather than suppressing them, it secures their peace in exchange for tribute. In such

a peaceful context, everyone can prosper. People dwell under their own vine or fig tree.

People have their own capital and security, and they can build their own lives within the king's peace. When the land is secure, you can settle down, you can make plans for the future, you can raise a family, build towns, work the land. Nations can extend their trade routes.

Grand construction projects and public works can be undertaken. People can travel large distances in safety. A national culture and identity can develop with a growing realm of shared national life and spectacle.

Neighbouring and even distant peoples can learn from each other. Cultures can thrive. Without the dominance of Solomon as a king over the entire region, the cultural heights that Israel achieved during this period would simply not have been possible.

Solomon's reign was far from perfect, and the problems become more apparent later on. However, if one imagines the experience of an Israelite family during this period, one should get a sense of how remarkable Solomon's golden age must have felt for those who lived through it. In recent memory, the kingdom had experienced a number of violent rebellions and a civil war.

There were wars on various sides. Less than 50 years earlier, vast swathes of the land were controlled by the Philistines and others. The citadel of the chief city of the land had only been captured a few decades previously.

The nation had suffered catastrophic defeats at the battles of Apeck and Gilboa. They had lived through the reign of a tyrant who had killed all of the priests. And before that, the situation had been even worse, with Israel under the thumb of various peoples around them, fighting for their very survival.

But now, finally, there is peace on every side. They know security and prosperity. Riches and resources are flowing into the land from all sides.

They are eating things that they had never tasted before. The life of their towns is thriving, and other people are coming to learn from them and to trade with them. An immense palace and a temple are being built in their capital.

They have a wise and a just king who is admired by people all around. One can imagine that it would have felt little short of miraculous, and the sense of the fulfilment of the Lord's promises would have been very pronounced. This chapter may seem unimportant to the modern reader, but it gives a window into the world of Solomon's reign.

Hiram had been a friend of David, and now he continues this friendship with Solomon his son. 2 Samuel chapter 10 illustrates the way that the transition from one king to another could be a time when foreign relations could break down. No such thing happens with



Solomon and Hiram, however.

Solomon is a just, wise and gracious suzerain, with very positive relations with his vassal Hiram. Hiram does over and above what Solomon requests. There are clearly good relations between them.

He gives Cyprus in addition to Cedar. His own men will transport the wood south. When he presents his terms to Solomon, Solomon is clearly happy to accept them without any dispute.

In verse 12, all of this is traced back to the Lord's gift of wisdom to Solomon. The arrangement between Solomon and Hiram is an important example of the riches of foreign lands being brought into the house of the Lord. Solomon is a mature Adam.

He is a man with the knowledge of good and evil. He is a man who is gathering the manifold treasures from the lands of Havila and elsewhere and bringing them into this new Eden to dress the garden of the Lord. Solomon is a man who names the creation.

He gathers great trees and massive stones, mastering the earth. He is building his own Eden. With peace on all sides, he can finally bring the nation into its long-awaited Sabbath.

And it isn't merely Cedars and Cypresses, but the Gentiles honouring the name of the Lord. The riches of the Gentiles are coming in, and the food of Israel is being given to the nations, so that they can also share in God's good gifts and feast with the people of the Lord. This might remind us of figures such as Melchizedek or Jethro, and anticipate figures such as Cyrus and the Magi.

In each case, the Gentiles are recognising and blessing the people of the Lord. All of this is preparing for the construction of the Temple, which will be the great jewel in the kingdom, the house of rest for the Lord, the one who has given them this peace on every side, and the prosperity that they are currently enjoying. Solomon speaks of the building of the Temple in terms of the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7. He relates the peace that the land enjoys with the blessing and the promise of the Lord, and he desires to build the Temple that will be the great culmination of that peace, the peace that the nation is enjoying in the fulfilment of God's word.

A question to consider. What about the character of wisdom is on display in this chapter? In the 480th year after the Exodus, Solomon began to build the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. That the author of Kings should date the start of the building of the Temple from the Exodus is noteworthy.

In Exodus 15, verse 17, in Moses' song following the Red Sea, he declares, You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The building

of the Temple on the mountain in Jerusalem is in many respects the climax and the completion of the process begun in the Exodus. Within the early chapters of 1 Kings, there are a number of references back to the Exodus, not least in 1 Kings 8, verse 16, where God mentions the Exodus as the starting point of the great period of history that is finally reaching its climax.

Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that my name might be there. But I chose David to be over my people Israel. God's great deliverance of Israel in the Exodus is foundational for the Lord's continuing commitment to them as his people.

The Exodus is also spoken of in connection with the Ark of the Covenant, which bears the two tablets of stone representing the covenant that was made at Sinai. Finally, the Ark of the Covenant, which has moved around for centuries, will have a settled resting place. Since its construction, the tabernacle had functioned as a sort of portable Mount Sinai, an architectural extension of the Theophany that occurred there.

It was also a new Eden and a microcosmic representation of the wider creation. We should note the presence of the creation pattern of Genesis 1 in the plans that are given for it. Solomon's Temple introduces a new stage of history and once again there are echoes of the original creation and of Eden.

Solomon builds the Temple as if it were a new creation. Like Noah, whose name means rest, Solomon's name, peace, has Sabbath connotations. After the wars and the struggles of the years of the judges of Saul and of David his father, Solomon was to preside over a glorious Sabbath rest to the land.

We see this in 1 Kings 5, verses 3-4. You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side.

There is neither adversary nor misfortune. Indeed, the completion of the Temple around the 490th year, 7 times 70, after the Exodus, is suggestive of a great Jubilee. Sinai was connected with Pentecost, which is a mini-Jubilee.

Around seven weeks after the Feast of Firstfruits the trumpet was blown and the Lord declared the release of the captives. The defeat of Jericho was another Jubilee type event. Seven circuits around the city on the seventh day with seven trumpets, followed by the land being returned to the people of the Lord.

The completion of the Temple around the 490th year is another such Jubilee event. It occurs after 70 weeks of years, a significant period in scriptural numerology. In chapter 3 we see another Eden theme as Solomon requests the knowledge of good and evil from

the Lord.

While Adam and Eve grasped at wisdom prematurely, Solomon requests wisdom at the appropriate time and it is given to him by the Lord. Peter Lighthouse draws attention to the various creation and Eden themes in the building of the Temple. The repeated references to the completion of acts of construction in verses 9, 14, 38 and in the next chapter in verses 1 and 40 recall Genesis chapter 2 verses 1 to 3 and the Sabbath of the Lord after his construction of the world.

1 Kings chapter 7 verse 51 plays on Solomon's name and also recalls Sabbath themes when it speaks of all of Solomon's work being completed or Solomoned. There are many details suggestive of a fruitful, verdant and well-watered garden. Pomegranates, open flowers, palm trees, lilies, cedars, olive wood and streams of water that move out.

The two guarding cherubim figures in the inner room, the images of cherubim on the walls and at the doors and also the symbolic representation of cherubim by the two bronze pillars by the vestibule of the Temple should all remind the reader of the cherubim set up as sentries at the entrance of the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3 verse 24. Finally, the building of the Temple, a building with a face, ribs and shoulders which we see in verse 3, 5 to 8 and then in chapter 7 verse 39 all recall the building of Eve from Adam's rib in Genesis chapter 2. The Temple is an architectural representation of the bride that Solomon brings to the Lord. It is also to be, like Eden, a sanctuary where God would be especially present and into which the riches of the nations would come.

Within this world, Solomon is like a glorious new Adam. He is the wise ruler of the world who is able to name the trees and the animals. The story of Solomon in 1 Kings is structured in a way that focuses upon the construction and the completion of this building.

It is the point where the Kingdom reaches its zenith. The Temple is like the Tabernacle in many respects, yet an elevation of it to a new and more glorious level. The Tabernacle was 10 cubits by 30 cubits, with the Holy of Holies being a 10 cubits cube.

The Temple multiplies most of these dimensions by two. It is 20 cubits by 60 cubits with a height of 30 cubits. The inner sanctuary is a 20 cubits cube.

In place of the temporary and the light character of the Tabernacle, the Temple of Solomon is weighty and glorious. All this was received in the pattern that the Lord gave to David. The elevation of the glory of the building can also be seen in such things as the presence of four cherubim instead of two in the inner sanctuary.

We might also see the connections with the Ark of the Covenant in the building itself. Now you have a measured wooden box overlain with gold. It is a sort of an expansion of the glory of the Ark of the Covenant out to include the whole structure of the Temple.

The glory of the Temple will spread out. The entire building now takes on something of the character of the Ark of the Covenant. And the whole city will be affected by the presence of the Temple in its midst.

It will become the Holy City. A question to consider. What might be some of the significance of the words of the Lord to Solomon in verses 11-13? After the seven years of building the Temple in chapter 6, Solomon gives 13 years to building his house in chapter 7 of 1 Kings.

We noted the proximity of the time of the building of the house of the Lord to a sort of jubilee year after the Exodus, 490 years after they were brought out of Egypt. 1 Kings 6-1 gives us this dating. In the 480th year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Zib, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord.

The Temple was built in the first seven years. This takes us up to the 487th year after the Exodus, around the time of the 70 weeks of years after the Exodus. Solomon's palace was then created after the Lord's Temple was completed.

In 1 Kings 9-10 we're told, The building of Solomon's own palace is an essential part of the construction of the wider new complex of the Temple. The point of Solomon's palace is not to compete with the house of the Lord. Rather, it is to express the grace of the Lord in establishing the Davidic king as his son, who rules over his people before him.

The king's palace and other associated royal buildings are temple-like in no small measure because they serve much the same purpose. The temple is the palace of the Lord, the true ruler of Israel. The king's palace is the place from which the Davidic son of the Lord rules under him.

It has similar characteristics to the Temple, both in its construction and in its purpose. The Hall of Judgment, for instance, corresponds to the inner sanctuary, where the throne of the Lord is. Both the palace and the Temple are lined by cedar, yet the palace of Solomon the son is less glorious than that of the Lord his father, as it is not overlaid with gold.

The construction of the Tabernacle had enlisted the skills of Bezalel and Aholiab. The building of the Temple involves the skills of the Tyrian Hiram, who might make us think of the king of the same name, who is also assisting in the construction. The Lord had gifted this Gentile for the building of his house.

This is one of the many ways in which the Lord's house would be for all of the nations. Throughout scripture we see that Gentiles are more advanced than the people of Israel in their mastery of many cultural skills and technologies. Bringing these skills into the service of the Lord is both a glorious movement of God's grace out and a glorious

movement of the riches of the Gentiles in.

The Temple is not just a replication of the Tabernacle, but it is a dramatic variation upon the theme that brings the Tabernacle's elements to a higher degree of glory and adds in various new components. The Temple, like the Tabernacle, is a symbolic realm with a multitude of significant associations, not least those that exist with its predecessor. There are two pillars of bronze, Jachin and Boaz.

They can represent different things, and this is one of the things that we will discover about the Temple. As in the Tabernacle, there are all sorts of symbolic connotations and associations and connections. It is a sort of architectural poetry, where objects constructed according to a divinely stipulated design lead you into a whole network of symbolism.

The pillars of bronze, for instance, correspond to the Temple itself. Moving up the pillars, you are moving up in holiness and glory. They correspond to the priest and the king.

They stand as pillars and guardians of the Lord's house. They correspond to the cherubim guarding the entrance to Eden. They also correspond to the two great cherubim guardians that are now added to the inner sanctuary, just as these pillars have been added to the outside.

With their arboreal and botanic imagery, they correspond to trees and flowers. Like other parts of the Temple, they should remind us of Eden. They correspond to the body and the clothing of the priest, the movement up from the base to the head.

They correspond to the legs of the body. The Temple itself is the trunk and the head of the body, while the two great pillars are symbolically related to the legs, the two great pillars of the human body. All of this bronze work is associated with the outer court, whereas the gold work is associated with the interior of the house.

In the tabernacle, the bronze laver and the bronze altar were associated, one with the land and one with the sea, the instructions for their construction, both related to the third day of creation in the sequence. Now the small bronze laver becomes a great bronze sea, and this is borne aloft on the backs of twelve oxen. The oxen are ordered in a way that corresponds to the camp of Israel, as it is described at the beginning of the Book of Numbers.

There are three facing in each direction of the compass. Out from the bronze sea come water chariots, as it were. The water chariots serve the practical purpose of giving water for washing the sacrifices.

However, they are also symbolically like waters coming down from God. Healing waters would one day descend from the Lord's Temple and give life to the world. The lions and the oxen upon them are the kingly and priestly guardians of the people.

The oxen relate to the priest. If you were to sacrifice for the high priest, you had to sacrifice a bull. The lion, on the other hand, might make us think of the lion of the tribe of Judah.

The tribe that's associated with kingship is associated with the lion. These chariots also represent a sort of ladder of water that someone would ascend to enter into God's presence. Like Jacob's ladder, where the angels were ascending and descending, the cherubim chariots of water are ascending and descending with the rain of God's blessing, with the elevated bronze sea being like the waters above the firmament.

We should also observe the way that this pattern is replicated inside the sanctuary, with a golden table and lampstand, but ten further tables and lampstands on each side. All of this is a sort of ladder by which people can ascend to God's heavenly throne, ascending in glory at each stage. While Hiram makes the bronze items of the courtyard, the construction of the gold items inside the temple is related to Solomon himself.

The ceremonies of the temple, then, are carried out in this deeply symbolic realm that connects many different levels of reality. The temple is like a new Eden. The temple is like the heavens and the earth.

The temple is also like the human body. Or we might also see the temple as corresponding in some ways to Israel. It is a sort of architectural symbol of the nation and the people themselves, a symbol in which God dwells, in representation of his dwelling among his people more generally.

As people performed ceremonies within the temple, it was a symbolic manifestation of the broader realities that were implicated in their acts. In faithfully performing the symbols, Israel was to be directed to the realities, realities that were engaged with truly within the context of these symbols. For instance, we might observe the similarities with the body.

The inner sanctuary is like the heart and the mind, where the Lord must be enthroned and his law treasured and hidden. The outer sanctuary has light and food, as the law of the Lord illumines our understanding and feeds us. The five tables and lampstands on each side might recall the sides of the body and the five fingers on each hand.

Perhaps they also represent the two tables of the law, the law that is a treasure hidden in the heart, the law that gives light, the law that gives food, and then the law that flows out like water into the world. The pillars are like the legs of the body, and the bronze sea is like the organs of generation, from which life can flow out from the body. We can already see some of this flowing out in the way that the outer sanctuary now has one great table and ten smaller tables coming out from it, and one great lampstand and ten smaller ones.

Outside there is one great bronze sea that replaces the bronze laver, and now there are ten water chariots coming out from that. A question to consider. Reading 2 Chronicles 3-4, what further details of the temple construction and furnishings stand out to you? From the time of the battle of Apeck, the religious life of Israel had been divided.

The tabernacle, minus the ark, was at Gibeon, while the Ark of the Covenant was in the tent shrine that David had set up for it. Around the country were various high places of worship. Now, finally, in 1 Kings 8, about a century later, the worship of Israel is going to be unified once more in the Temple of Solomon.

In Deuteronomy chapter 12, the Lord had charged Israel to establish a single central sanctuary when they were in the land. With Solomon's temple, such worship can finally be restored. The construction of the temple was completed in the 8th month.

However, the dedication of the temple occurs in the 7th month, in association with the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Ingathering. The connection with this feast can be seen in verses 2 and 65 of this chapter. The Feast of Tabernacles memorialized Israel's following the Lord out into the wilderness and their dwelling in tents, where the Lord would later dwell in their midst in the tabernacle.

Now that period is definitively over, as the Lord moves out of his tent and into the permanent dwelling of the temple. It's also a harvest feast. It's the Feast of Ingathering.

The dedication of the temple brings to completion the cycle that began with the Exodus. So it is fitting that it occurs in the feast that ends the festal calendar, a feast that is the mirror image of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the first month. As the Feast of Ingathering was one of the three pilgrimage feasts in the year, it was also a convenient time for the dedication, when all of the congregation of Israel should assemble anyway.

Also, as the Feast of Ingathering, it fittingly expresses the full harvest of the riches of which the Exodus was the firstfruits, especially as Gentiles are included. It is an anticipation of the final harvest of all things, the eschatological fullness. In the Prophets we see it as a time associated with the Ingathering of the Gentiles, which is already happening in some measure in the construction and the worship of the temple.

In Deuteronomy 31, verses 9-13, we discover that in every seventh year the Feast of Tabernacles was the time when the Book of the Law would be read before the entire congregation in a sort of covenant renewal ceremony. It is likely that this was one of the things that occurred in the context of the dedication of the temple. Solomon assembles the entire congregation of Israel for this event.

The Ark is brought to the temple from its former residence in the tent shrine in the city of David, called Zion. The city of David or Zion is here the citadel, it is the Jebusite stronghold that had been taken by David in 2 Samuel chapter 5. The term Zion is one

that is used with different reference in scripture. Often it is used to refer to Jerusalem as a whole.

Mount Zion is often spoken of as the mount of the Lord's dwelling. So here the Ark is being brought up from what was currently called Zion to what would later be referred to as Zion. While the mishandling of the moving of the Ark had resulted in tragedy back in 2 Samuel, as Uzzah had been struck down by the Lord, here it is successful.

The Ark is empty apart from the two tablets of stone of the covenant. It doesn't contain any relics such as Aaron's budding rod or the jar of the manna which are both mentioned in Hebrews chapter 9 verse 4. The Ark is not a box containing God but it houses a copy of the covenant. The Ark is the footstool of the Lord's throne.

It doesn't guarantee or contain his presence. Israel needed to beware of trusting the Ark as if it were a sort of talisman. The Lord's acceptance of the temple as a site for his dwelling is also not something to be taken for granted.

The temple was always in danger of functioning as a sort of an architectural idol, as if it were a device for controlling and summoning God. Perhaps the greatest challenge to such an attitude can be found in Jeremiah chapter 7 verses 1 to 14. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, If you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered, only to go on doing all these abominations. Has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.

Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you you did not answer. Therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.

In 1 Kings 8, the Lord accepts the temple as a place for his dwelling. The Lord enters the building in the glory cloud in a manner that is reminiscent of the Lord's entering of the tabernacle in Exodus 40, verses 34-35. The Lord having entered the temple, Solomon blesses the people and blesses the Lord.



In his blessings and his subsequent prayer, Solomon communicates the fact that the Lord cannot be contained by such a building, nor even the heavens and the highest heavens. The Lord's dwelling in the house is true in an analogical fashion. It is a dwelling that is real, but which needs to be understood in terms of the Lord's transcendence.

The Lord is really present in, but not enclosed by the temple. The Lord dwells in thick darkness. His dwelling is mysterious and impenetrable.

The temple retains something of this character. Solomon as the king represents the entire people. They will be blessed and judged on account of his actions.

He is the chief worshipper. While the priests are stewards of the Lord's house, who perform gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the people with the authorisation of the Lord, Solomon is the pre-eminent man of the nation. He establishes the temple as a site of worship, as one acting on behalf of the nation.

He also leads the people in their worship and in their prayer. Here he recalls the promises of the Davidic covenant, promises that have been brought to pass in the establishment and dedication of the temple. The Lord has fulfilled his promise to David, as Solomon has built the temple as promised.

With the establishment of the Davidic king, there can also be the establishment of Jerusalem as the city of the Lord's dwelling. Whereas the worship of Israel had formerly focused upon the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant becomes rather less important now. The focus now is upon the temple and the city as the place where the Lord is enthroned.

In many respects, the footstool of the Lord is not just the Ark of the Covenant now, but the whole temple building, which is covered with gold inside, much as the Ark is. And now holiness migrates further out to include the whole city. The city becomes the holy city, and the Davidic king is now brought in to dwell in the realm of the Lord's own habitation, in the larger temple complex.

The temple is a new and more glorious Eden in many ways, with a building with lots of arboreal and botanic imagery and elements, with cherubim, with water flowing out, and a new Adam acting in the name of his heavenly father. The heart of the chapter is devoted to Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple, within which are several petitions. He begins by praising the Lord for his incomparability and for his keeping of his covenant, praying that the promise of the Lord concerning David's throne would be established.

In scripture, many things that are attributed to God are attributed to him in an analogical way, or in a manner accommodated to creaturely understanding. While he has spoken of the Lord dwelling in the temple, he is very well aware that this is only the case after a

manner of speaking. Throughout his prayer, for instance, although the temple has earlier been spoken of as a dwelling place for the Lord, he speaks of the Lord hearing and answering from heaven.

While the Lord is not contained by the temple, nor does he dwell in it in a full sense, the temple is a place where the name of the Lord dwells. Solomon speaks as follows in verses 27-29. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built.

Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant, and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, My name shall be there, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. The temple is a site of the Lord's dwelling, in his personal and purposive presence. He acts from and identifies himself with the temple as a location in a unique way, much as formerly with the tabernacle.

The temple is a sort of a face to which people can turn to address the Lord. Just as your face does not contain your personal presence, but manifests and communicates it, and is the realm to which others can turn to address you, so the temple is a sort of face of the Lord to which all can turn. Throughout his prayer, Solomon focuses upon the temple's relationship to prayer.

It is where the Lord manifests his purposive and personal presence, and it is to here that people should turn to address him, to the place where he reveals himself. Jesus, of course, is the great temple of God, and many of the ways that Solomon speaks of the temple can inform our understanding of Christ, in whom God is personally present, known and addressed. Solomon's prayer makes clear that the temple is principally a house of prayer.

It is not a sort of a cult technology for controlling God through sacrifice. It is not an idol for manipulating God. It is not a talisman that guarantees that God is on your side.

No, it is a divinely established building where the name of the Lord dwells, which orients and facilitates our personal address to him. The sacrifices serve a similar purpose. They are a sort of symbolically enacted mode of prayer.

In Isaiah 56, verses 6-7, in a passage that our Lord later takes up in the Gospels, the temple is termed a house of prayer. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

As Peter Lighthouse observes, 2 Chronicles 6, verse 13, makes the connection between the temple and its sacrifices and prayer evident in the symbolism of the platform upon which Solomon kneels to pray. Solomon had built a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the court, and he stood on it. Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of all of the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven.

The dimensions of this bronze platform are precisely the same as the dimensions of the bronze altar of the Mosaic tabernacle in Exodus chapter 27, verse 1. Sacrifice is a mode of prayer, and prayer is a mode of sacrifice. Temple worship is not just going through the motions of ritual and sacrifice, but a sincere addressing of the self to God through symbolic means. In his prayer with seven key petitions, Solomon lists a number of potential occasions for such prayers.

Verses 31 to 32, judgment in the case of a man who takes an oath. Verses 33 to 34, a need for deliverance in a situation of defeat and or of exile. In verses 35 to 36, in a situation of drought.

In verses 37 to 40, in a situation of famine, blight or siege. In verses 41 to 43, when a foreigner prays towards the temple. In verses 44 to 45, if they are sent out to battle.

And in verses 46 to 50, if they are sent into exile. Commentators generally note the way that a number of these petitions relate to curses of the covenant, listed in Deuteronomy chapter 28, specifically the second, third, fourth and seventh petitions, relating to defeat or exile, to drought, to famine, blight or siege, and to exile, respectively. While the covenant curses in Deuteronomy are spoken of in ways that hold out limited hope of forgiveness, here Solomon prays that the temple will be a place towards which Israel and others can address the Lord, and where the Lord will make his presence manifest through blessing and forgiveness, a forgiveness that speaks mercy into his judgments.

Lighthouse also suggests that the petitions of Solomon's prayer loosely anticipate the subsequent history of the nation. The judgment concerning the man who takes the oath before the altar relates to Solomon's own reign. The defeat by enemies relates to the period of the split of the kingdom.

The drought relates to the days of Elijah. The famine, siege and plagues relate to the siege and famine of Samaria. The prayer of the foreigner relates to the time of the fall of the northern kingdom.

The prayer when sent out into battle relates to the last days of Judah, and the prayer from exile relates to the exile of Judah that followed that. There is a special attention given to the figure of the foreigner here. The temple is not merely for Israel, but for all peoples.

It is a house toward which the foreigners should turn, not just Jews. God will hear them, and their inclusion among those who turn to him will be a sign of the fulfillment of the Lord's promise. Solomon began by blessing the people and the Lord, and now he concludes in much the same way.

The Lord had promised all of these blessings through Moses long ago, and now Israel is experiencing their fulfillment. The Lord's good promises have not fallen to the ground. The Lord has been present with his people to bless them, and Solomon prays that this will continue into the future.

He recognizes the need for the Lord to preserve them in faithfulness. May he not leave us or forsake us, that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers. He prays that his prayer of dedication will always be before the Lord, as a sort of a memorial of the temple as a house of prayer, so that the Lord will always hear such petitions.

He also charges Israel to guard their hearts in faithfulness. The chapter concludes with the consecration of the temple courtyard, from which Solomon offers an abundance of sacrifices that could not be accommodated by the bronze altar itself. Israel celebrates a glorious feast of tabernacles together, before being sent home with very great rejoicing.

A question to consider, how might the temple help us to think about the incarnation? 1 Kings chapter 9 follows Solomon's prayer of dedication, and could be read as, in part, God's response to it. There was an earlier dream in chapter 3, when Solomon received the gift of wisdom, and now he is given a second dream, in which the Lord answers the prayer that he made in the preceding chapter. Solomon's prayer had been that the Lord would make the temple that Solomon had built his dwelling place, and the Lord says that he will place his name there, also his eyes and his heart, consecrating the temple as his own.

Placing his name there was a form of identification with the temple, it was his own, and a site of his honour and his glory. As the place of his eyes and his heart, perhaps the Lord expresses his relationship to the house in an even fuller way than Solomon requested. The Lord judges with his eyes, and the presence of his heart in the house implies a more intimate form of identification.

These are conditional promises that Solomon is given. He and his sons must walk faithfully before the Lord. If they do, David will never lack a man on the throne of Israel.

If they do not, however, they will be cut off from the land. Israel will become a proverb and a byword among the peoples, and the temple a heap of ruins. The temple will be cast out of the Lord's sight.

It is a sort of bridal house, and the sin of Israel could lead to a kind of divorce. The judgment upon the temple would be a symbolic judgment upon the people as the bride of the Lord. Israel always lived their life in the sight of the nations, and if they were so severely judged by the Lord, the other nations were supposed to draw a lesson about the Lord's justice from the curse of the covenant falling upon his people.

In verses 8 and 9, everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house? Then they will say, Because they abandoned the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods and worshipped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this disaster on them. Solomon, as we have already seen, is like a new Adam, in a far more glorious and extensive Eden.

He is no longer just like a young child. He is the grown son, ruling in the name of his father. He is sending out into the world and gathering from surrounding lands, like the lands that surrounded the Garden of Eden.

He is getting gold from the land of Ophir, perhaps associated with the land of Havilah. He is sending out vessels out upon the seas. He needs to be faithful, however, lest he be expelled.

As Peter Lighthouse notes, the description of Solomon's great works in this chapter should make us think of Ecclesiastes 2, verses 4-9. Solomon is constructing a new Eden. And much as in the case of the first Eden, the success of this endeavor will depend greatly upon whether or not Solomon will be faithful.

His creation is finished in much the same way as the Lord's was finished on the seventh day of creation. And now Solomon and the people are entering into a great Sabbath. The building of the two houses took twenty years, the temple which took seven years, and then the palace of Solomon which took thirteen years.

In light of 1 Kings 6, verse 1, we know that this was the 500th year after the Exodus. This is a great jubilee, ten times fifty years. However, at this point some clouds start to appear on what had once been a gloriously blue sky.

The relationship with Hiram of Tyre that had been so wonderful back in chapter 5 is now weakened. Solomon seemingly gives Hiram substandard cities in reward for his assistance and his provision of materials in the building of the temple. Rather than giving him the handsome reward that he ought to have done, strengthening the bond between their lands, Solomon gives him a poor gift in return for his generous assistance.

Maybe paying more to his dominance over Hiram as his vassal, rather than upon a healthy relationship as a friend. We should almost certainly also be troubled by Solomon's willingness to treat Israelite territory as something to be given to a Gentile

king in payment for something. The land is not Solomon's to dispose of.

It is the inheritance of the Lord and should not be alienated from his sons. In this great jubilee, there is an unsettling reversal of jubilee themes. The land is being alienated from the people.

The conquest of the land had never fully been achieved. Canaanites remained in it. However, Solomon subjected remaining Canaanites to forced service.

In a somewhat ironic event, Pharaoh destroyed the Canaanites of Giza, a city that the Israelites had failed to capture back in Judges 1.29. And then he gives it as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife. Israel was originally a people dwelling alone and not counting itself among the nations, as they were described in one of the oracles of Balaam. Under Solomon, they are becoming increasingly cosmopolitan, and with that there is the insistent temptation to become more like the surrounding peoples and nations.

Towards the end of this chapter, we see Solomon's failure to maintain the distinctiveness of Israel. He is starting to develop characteristics reminiscent of Pharaoh. He is developing a large body of forced labour and building store cities with them.

The last time that we saw this was back in Exodus 1.11, when Pharaoh was subjecting the children of Israel to harsh labour. Solomon is also accumulating troubling quantities of gold, considering that the Lord had warned the king not to accumulate excessive quantities of silver and gold back in Deuteronomy 17.17. He is also assembling great numbers of chariots, another thing which the Lord had warned about. However, while these threatening clouds are starting to gather, much else is encouraging.

We hardly ever read of seafaring in the Old Testament. The sea is associated with the Gentiles and Israel is associated with the land. However, now Israel is learning the ways of the sea from surrounding Gentiles.

They are developing skills from more technologically and culturally advanced peoples. They are venturing forth onto the sea and as a result the influence of Israel is growing, as is their affluence. A question to consider.

There are a number of different Gentiles in this chapter with different sorts of relationships with Solomon. Hiram, the remaining Canaanites in the land, and Pharaoh. What are the differences between these figures and the ways that Solomon relates to them? In what ways does he fail to relate to them appropriately? The rise of Solomon's glorious kingdom reminds us of the Garden of Eden and of its glories.

Solomon builds a magnificent garden palace for the Lord, overlaid with gold and filled and surrounded with images of palms, pomegranates, cherubim, lilies, springs of water and other such imagery. Solomon, as a new Adam, dwells alongside his Heavenly Father in his house near the Lord's own house within the temple complex. The gold from the

outlying lands is being brought in on fleets of ships.

There is peace on all sides and the land and its people are entering into a great Sabbath rest. Now at the zenith of Solomon's glory, the woman is brought to the new Adam. The Queen of Sheba inspects the glorious labours of Solomon.

Many historians identify Sheba with the land of the Sabaeans in South Arabia, around the area of modern-day Yemen. The Queen of Sheba had heard of all of Solomon's wealth and his wisdom, all of his fame, and she comes to test him with riddles, wanting to see whether his wisdom was all that it had been rumoured to be. Perhaps we should imagine something similar to what we see in Judges 14, when Samson tested the Philistines at his wedding feast with his riddle.

The fame of Solomon is concerning the name of the Lord. It is a fame that redounds to the Lord's glory. Solomon, insofar as he is faithfully serving the Lord and ruling as the Lord's son, displays the glory of God himself to the nations around about.

The Queen of Sheba arrives in Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with riches, exotic spices and treasures. The arrival of Sheba is also a fulfilment of the Lord's promises concerning the fame that Israel would gain among the nations, being famed for the Lord's blessings and for the wisdom that he has given them. What really amazes the Queen of Sheba the most is the glorious order and splendour of Solomon's feasts and his court, and the extravagance of his sacrifices.

The author of the books of the kings has already highlighted the importance of the attention that Solomon gave to good order. Solomon's kingdom is glorious in its wealth, but also has the dignity of wise order. Solomon is not just a powerful potentate.

He is a great man, a man with unrivalled breadth of mind, who surrounds himself with majesty, whose court is one of splendour and dignity. He is a refined and civilised man, a man with an eye for the details, a man who is learned and wise. Such great spectacles are one of the ways in which rulers, whether ancient or modern, could maintain their power.

Or inspiring spectacle, the architectural grandeur of great public buildings, beautiful works of art, costly and magnificent clothing, the pomp and the circumstance of state occasions, bountiful feasts, courtly manors, grand processions, and all these sorts of things, are each of them ways that rulers capture and hold the gaze and admiration of their peoples and their neighbours. Royalty almost always has an element of theatre and pageantry to it, and Solomon's kingdom was exemplary in this regard. Sheba responds to Solomon's glory with delight and wonder.

She had heard the rumours of Solomon's greatness, but they did not do justice to the reality. She recognises that the glory of Solomon is a glory that had been given to him by

the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord. The visit of Sheba is an example of the riches of the Gentiles coming into Zion.

Her visit seems to be recalled in texts such as Isaiah chapter 60, verses 4-14. Lift up your eyes all around and see, they all gather together, they come to you. Your son shall come from afar, and your daughter shall be carried on the hip.

Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nation shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Epha. All those from Sheba shall come, they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.

All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Neboath shall minister to you. They shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house. Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? For the coastland shall hope for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from afar, their silver and gold with them.

For the name of the Lord your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because He has made you beautiful. Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their king shall minister to you. For in my wrath I struck you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you.

Your gates shall be opened continually, day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish, those nations shall be utterly laid waste. The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the Cyprus, the plain, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet. They shall call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. In this chapter the age of Solomon is described quite literally as a sort of golden age.

It's a high water mark of the fortunes of the people, and they will look back on this in the future, and see it as a glorious anticipation of the time when the riches of the Gentiles will come flooding into Zion. Treasures and resources are being brought into Jerusalem as gifts, tribute, and through trade, exploration, and labour. Solomon constructs a remarkable throne with ivory and gold, imposing with lion guardians and steps.

Hearing of his wisdom and wealth, people from all over the earth come to Solomon with presents. Solomon starts to develop a large standing army of chariots and horsemen. He becomes an arms trader in the region, acting as a go-between for his father-in-law Pharaoh, and exporting them to Syrians and others.



In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 14 to 20, the Lord had given instructions concerning the appropriate behaviour of the king when Israel was established in the land. When you come to the land that the Lord your God has given you, and you possess it and dwell in it, and then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me, you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you.

You may not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother, only he must not acquire many horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, you shall never return that way again. And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests, and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

In chapters 10-11 of 1 Kings, Solomon disobeys these instructions. In chapter 10 verses 14-27, there is a mind-boggling accumulation of silver and gold by Solomon. In verses 28-29, we discover that not only was Solomon returning to Egypt for horses and chariots, he was also establishing Israel as Egypt's chief trading partner and avenue to the various other nations in the region.

Indeed, while he built a war machine for Israel, he was also helping to export chariots and horses to the Syrians, who would later turn against Israel. Solomon's wisdom isn't forsaking him here, he is a shrewd political mind, and such a mind would readily see the advantage in such trading and alliances and in developing such a strong military. However, these were actions that, while wise by human wisdom, rejected the instruction of the Lord, and as a result, they would come to nothing.

A question to consider, what might we learn from such a chapter about the dangers of wisdom? Solomon is at the centre of a great new Eden. He is gathering riches from all around the world, he has built the temple with all of its garden imagery, he has established himself as the great power within the region, the Queen of Sheba, like Eve, has been brought to him, and his kingdom is glorious and well-ordered throughout. However, much as in the Garden of Eden, when everything is at its height, a great fall occurs.

He breaks the commandments that were given to the king in Deuteronomy 17. In each respect, he accumulates gold, he turns to Egypt for horses and chariots, and his political entanglement with Pharaoh and the Egyptians is far more extensive than mere horse

trading. He seeks to forge multiple alliances with people round about by marrying many foreign women, most notable among them the daughter of Pharaoh.

Solomon's love of his foreign wives, the real politic of international relations, and his policy of multiculturalism, turns his heart away from the Lord. Rather than relying upon the Lord, he relied upon his shrewdness in playing the compromising game of regional politics with the idolatrous nations around him. One can imagine that to keep the nations that he had married into happy, he would be expected to provide shrines for the worship of their favoured gods.

If he does not do this, then they will be displeased and will think that the women that they have given to Solomon as wives and concubines have been despised. Here as elsewhere, political expediency takes priority over faithfulness to the Lord. The Lord had explicitly warned Israel against unfaithful covenants with the surrounding nations and intermarriage with them.

In Deuteronomy 7, verses 1-4, when the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods.

Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. Again in Exodus 23, verses 32-33, You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me.

For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you. Exodus 34, verses 11-16, Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.

Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their asherim, for you shall worship no other god. For the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous god, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.

And when they hoar after their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters hoar after their gods, and make your sons hoar after their gods. In scripture there is often a close association between marriage and faithfulness to the Lord. The danger of

idolatry is the danger of false intermarriage, or the danger of adultery.

There is also the danger of giving your heart and your strength to the wrong person. In marriage a man gives his heart to a woman, gives his heart and his strength and his abilities, and if he gives it to the wrong woman he will be led astray. Much of the Book of Proverbs, ironically, is about the question of to whom do you give your heart.

The young man must decide for whom to leave his father and mother. He should give his heart to the wise wife, to the woman who shows the character of lady wisdom herself, not to lady folly or to the adulterous woman. If he gives his heart to the right woman he will be built up and glorified, but if he makes the wrong choice he will be destroyed.

In the case of Solomon he made the wrong choice. Peter Lightheart observes the way that the author of Kings presents this as a compromise of Solomon's own identity. The word used for wholly devoted puns on Solomon's name, as does the word for the mantle that a hija tears apart.

Solomon himself is only truly Solomon when he is wholly devoted to the Lord, and his sin leads to him being torn apart in various ways. Solomon was so involved with Egypt that he himself became like Pharaoh. The startling transformation can be seen in the stories of Hadad the Edomite and Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

The story of Hadad the Edomite is told in a manner that is powerfully reminiscent of the story of Moses. As an infant, much of Moses' life was threatened by Pharaoh's slaughter of the Hebrew boys. Hadad's life was placed in peril when Joab killed every male in Edom, and some of Hadad's family servants fled with Hadad to Egypt.

Pharaoh treated Hadad well, giving him food and land and his own sister-in-law as a wife. Like Moses, Hadad turned his back on the privileges of the Egyptian court and sought to return to his own people, asking Pharaoh, again in a manner reminiscent of Moses, to let him depart. Rezon's story should also be familiar to us.

Like David, he flees from his lord. He gathers a band of men around him like David did in the cave of Bedolom, and then he becomes king in Damascus, like David became king in Hebron over Judah. Like Pharaoh, Solomon was committed to the non-stop construction of vast building projects, establishing a standing labour force in order to do so.

Amos Frisch observes some of the parallels. He writes, In a similar fashion, we find vis-à-vis Solomon, Solomon rebuilt and all the store cities that Solomon had, and the cities for his chariots and the cities for his horsemen, in 1 Kings 9, 17-19. He notes that the term for burden appears within the narrative of Solomon, when he gave Jeroboam the son of Nebat charge over all the forced labour of the house of Joseph.

Indeed, later in the narrative, the people talk about the heavy yoke and the hard service that Solomon had placed upon them, in 12, 4. All of this is languished with troubling

echoes of Pharaoh's treatment of the Hebrews, in Exodus 1, 11-14. And by this point, then, the rich cluster of Eden themes in the opening chapters of the book has thoroughly curdled. In 11, 9-13, God confronted Solomon concerning his sin, much as he had confronted Adam in Genesis.

The kingdom would be torn away from him, much as Adam was thrust out of the garden. It is against this background that the figure of Jeroboam first comes into the frame. Jeroboam was an officer over Solomon's labour force.

The prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam that the Lord was going to tear the kingdom from Solomon's hands, leaving only two tribes to him. Jeroboam rebelled against Solomon, who sought to kill him. Jeroboam, like Hadad before him, flees to Egypt for refuge, where he remains until the death of Solomon.

Once again, we see themes reminiscent of Moses and the Exodus here, but they have been twisted, distorted and inverted. Jeroboam should also be a character who reminds us of David. In such characters, the Lord is establishing mirrors in which Solomon and Israel can reflect upon their sins and how they are compromised by them.

The character of Jeroboam is a sort of parody of Israel. Like David, he is a valiant warrior who rises in the service of the royal administration. He meets a prophet who tells him that he will be king, such as Samuel told David that he would be king.

The tearing of the cloak, representing the tearing of the kingdom, should remind us of Samuel's symbolic action to Saul. Like Saul with David, Solomon tries to kill Jeroboam when he finds that he has been set apart as his successor. Indeed, even the promises that are given to Jeroboam might remind us of the promises that are given to David.

However, the Lord has purposes still for David's house. He will not entirely extinguish it. He will leave to David one tribe, and when the time comes, he will restore the kingdom.

A question to consider. The theme of the self is a prominent one throughout this chapter. Whether in the way that sin fractures and undermines identities, leading us to transform into our opposites, or the way that giving our hearts to the wrong thing or to the wrong persons can tear us apart, how might the lessons of this chapter be related to other teachings of Scripture regarding the effects of sin and of grace upon the self? In 1 Kings chapter 12 we see the ramifications of the unfaithfulness of Solomon.

God had declared that judgment would come upon his son in 1 Kings chapter 11 verses 11-13. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, Since this has been your practice, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the

sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen. Rehoboam was to be made king at Shechem. This was the place where Joseph was sent before he was sold into slavery.

In Genesis chapter 37 Judah had led the brothers in that plot to sell Joseph into slavery. And here we see Judah, as it were, reducing Joseph, the northern tribes, to slavery once more. Shechem is also the site where Levi and Simeon performed their massacre in chapter 34 of Genesis.

Abimelech had crowned himself king at Shechem in Judges chapter 9. Comparisons with Abimelech, the violent son of Gideon who came to no good, might be rather ominous for the reign of Rehoboam. Shechem was also one of the first places that Abram visited in the land before he went to set an altar near Bethel. Jeroboam takes a similar route in this chapter as Peter Lighthouse points out.

Jeroboam comes out of Egypt. He leads the assembly of Israel in asking Rehoboam to let his people go. To diminish the burdens placed upon them.

In verse 4, Jeroboam sounds very similar to Moses and Aaron in the story of Exodus, which puts Rehoboam in the position of pharaoh. Solomon had associated with Egypt. He had a marriage treaty with Egypt.

He bought and sold horses from Egypt. And he became like pharaoh in a great many respects. And now his people are wanting someone to let them go.

He has become a new pharaoh. Even though he was supposed to complete the story of the Exodus, bring people into rest in the land, he has turned back to Egypt and brought them into a new sort of slavery. Rehoboam's response to the delegation from Israel is to ask for time to consult.

He first consults with the old men who had formerly counselled Solomon. They advised him to serve the people so that they would serve him. He must put their interests ahead of his own.

And if he did this, he would find that they would naturally follow him. The danger was always that the heart of the king would be lifted up over the people as his brothers, and that he would lord it over them. This was one of the warnings given in Deuteronomy chapter 17.

It was important that the king not build up wealth and power and all these other marks of status that would cause him to lift up his heart over his people. Similar warnings were given by Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 8, concerning the behaviour of the king that they would set over them. If they were not careful, they would be fighting his battles rather than him fighting theirs.

The faithful king was to be characterised by humility. He would act in the name of the Lord with the Lord's authority, but in a way that served and built up the people. Rehoboam heard the advice of the old men who had counselled Solomon, but ultimately took the advice of the men who had grown up with him.

He was 41 when he began to reign, as we discover in chapter 14 verse 21, so these were not young men, they were in middle age. He behaves like Pharaoh, increasing their load on account of their complaint. Rehoboam sees kingship as a sort of phallic contest.

He suggests that his harshness is proof that his is bigger than his father's waist. Rehoboam talks tough, but when he sends the chief of the forced labour, Adoram, to the northern tribes, he is stoned, and Rehoboam has to flee south to Jerusalem. Rehoboam's bravado proves counterproductive.

He ends up losing most of the power that he sought to gain. Rather than successfully intimidating Israel, he ends up losing his rule. All of this, we discover, was determined by the Lord, to fulfil the word that was given to Ahijah in the preceding chapter.

However, Rehoboam and the men of Judah were forbidden to fight against the Israelites. They were supposed to recognise that they were brothers. Solomon's sin had been similar to the sin of Adam in Genesis, the sin in the garden.

And following that sin, there was the story of Cain and Abel. Israel comes to the brink of a very ugly repetition of this sin, as Rehoboam responded to the Lord's rejection of his rule by seeking to initiate a sanguinary war between brothers, gathering men to fight against the northern tribes. Although the people were saved from such a disaster by the word of Shemaiah, the prophet of the Lord, the brother nations were divided, and Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, became the ruler of the northern kingdom.

While Rehoboam is like Pharaoh, Jeroboam might initially seem like an amalgam of characters such as Joseph, Moses, Israel and David. In chapter 11, he is the one who is a descendant of Joseph, who rises to prominence and service. He is appointed as the successor to an unfaithful king by a prophet of the Lord.

He flees to Egypt. He returns to Israel after Solomon is dead. All of this most reminds us of the story of David, but also has echoes of the story of Moses and of Joseph.

If Jeroboam repeats themes of the story of Moses in the Exodus, calling for his people to be let go, in Power in the North, Jeroboam proceeds to repeat the great sin of the Exodus. In order to establish a distinct cult in the North, he wants to prevent his people from defecting to Rehoboam. And so he establishes two golden calves, declaring that they were the gods who brought Israel out of Egypt.

This is repeating the sin of Aaron and the people in chapter 32 of Exodus. He copies and he doubles the sin of Aaron and the people. And like Aaron, he builds an altar next to the

calf at Bethel and declares a feast.

He also installs a non-Levitical priesthood. Reminders of Aaron and his sin can also be seen in the fact that Jeroboam has two sons, sons named Nadab and Abijah. We see this in chapter 14 verses 1 and 20.

The two sons of Aaron killed by the Lord for their profane fire in Leviticus chapter 10 were called Nadab and Abihu. Once again, the distorted Exodus themes serve to reveal just how bad Israel's situation has become. A question to consider, how might Jeroboam, Rehoboam, Israel and Judah have responded more faithfully to the breach that the Lord established in the kingdom? 1 Kings chapter 13 is an extremely strange story, one of the strangest stories in the whole of scripture.

This is a good sign that we should pay closer attention. There are several details that invite questions on various levels of analysis, not least when we consider parallels with other parts of the book. Peculiar details are usually things that should invite us to pay closer attention.

In addition to this, we see structures within the text that show that it is not just a random story. There is great design in the way that this is laid out. Although we may not be able to understand the full meaning of the text, we can get a sense of the fact that there is a deep message that it bears, if only we had the eyes to see it.

Much has been written about this chapter, but many of the commentators are not particularly helpful. Peter Lightheart's comments on this chapter are particularly probing and illuminating, and present one of the more promising ways to understand it. I will be leaning heavily upon some of his observations in what follows.

Chapter 13 needs to be related to the section that precedes it, about Jeroboam's establishment of idolatrous worship. However, while chapter 13 needs to be read in the light of what has happened before, there is a suddenness to the beginning of the narrative. The coming of the man of God from Judah is sudden and surprising, like the coming of Elijah later on in the book.

To understand a text like this, we need to first pay attention to a number of the features. There is the characterization of the figures. Most are not named in the narrative.

After verse 1, Jeroboam is not spoken of by name. He is the king. Then there's the man of God, the prophet.

The locations from which they come are the things that are most prominent in the characterization. The man of God is from Judah. The old prophet is someone who lives in Bethel.

The second thing to notice are the key literary connections. There's the tearing of the

garment of the kingdom from Solomon, and then the tearing of Jeroboam's altar. There's the hand by which Jeroboam took the kingdom in chapter 11, and then that becomes withered in this chapter.

There are human bones mentioned at the beginning of the narrative, and human bones mentioned at the end. Later on in the story of the kings, this narrative is hearkened back to in 2 Kings 23, verse 15-18, as the prophecy of the man of God is fulfilled. Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, that altar with the high place he pulled down and burned, reducing it to dust.

He also burned the Asherah, and as Jeziel turned, he saw the tombs there on the mount, and he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of the Lord that the man of God proclaimed, who had predicted these things. Then he said, What is that monument that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah, and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel. And he said, Let him be.

Let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria. We should also observe themes and motifs that are explored elsewhere in the books of the kings.

There's lying prophecy, there's a lion killing a disobedient prophet, something we see again in 1 Kings chapter 20. The end of the chapter that speaks of Jeroboam's failure to learn from this thing might suggest that there was some symbolic character to the events, that what occurred was a sign. Literary structure is also important in understanding such texts.

The literary structure of biblical passages can be like the shape of puzzle pieces, that help us to see where they fit together. Here for instance we can see that there are two confrontations, there's one at the beginning and another at the end. The man of God confronts the king, and then the old prophet confronts the man of God at the end.

There are two temptations, there's the king's unsuccessful temptation, and the old prophet's successful one. There are also four scenes, and here we see a more elaborate structure emerging. The first one is Jeroboam confronted by the man of God, the second is the old prophet hearing of and then tempting the man of God, and then the third is the old prophet confronting the man of God, and then the fulfilment of the judgement upon the man of God, and finally there is the old prophet hearing about the death of the man of God and bringing him back.

Scenes 1 and 3, and 2 and 4 are parallel to each other. James Mead observes this in detail. Scene 1 begins with Jeroboam standing by the altar in verse 1, and then in verse 20 you have the old prophet and the man of God sitting at the table, calling against the



altar in verse 2, calling against the man of God in verse 21, thus says the Lord, followed by the message in verse 2, thus says the Lord, followed by a message in verse 21.

A sign, the altar will be torn down in verse 4, a sign, the man of God will not be buried with his ancestors in verse 22. The altar torn down in verse 5, the man of God's body being thrown by the way in verse 24, threefold repetition of by the way in verses 9 to 10, and then threefold repetition of by the way in verses 24 to 25. The parallels between scenes 2 and 4 are even more arresting perhaps.

It begins in verse 11, the old prophet who lives in Bethel, and then in verse 25 in the town where the old prophet lived. The old prophet hears about the man of God in verse 11, and then again in verse 26. He instructs his sons, saddle for me the donkey, so they saddled the donkey in verse 13, and then again in verse 27.

The old prophet goes and finds the man of God in verse 14, and then again in verse 28. The old man persuades the man of God to return in verse 15 and following, and then he brings back the corpse of the man of God in verse 29. The old man gives a speech to the man of God in verses 15 to 18, and then a speech to his sons in verses 31 to 32.

There are other noteworthy details, such as the significance of the donkey and the lion. The man of God is instructed to refrain from eating, and fails to do so, whereas the lion as the agent of judgment, in a miraculous way, does not eat. The donkey, while seemingly incidental, actually plays a rather large part in the story.

The old prophet saddles him to bring back the man of God, then the old prophet lends him to the man of God, then the donkey stands beside the body, and then the body of the man of God is brought back upon the donkey. We might well wonder what the donkey represents. Similar questions could be asked about the lion.

The story begins with a word of prophecy accompanied by a sign. A Davidic king will desecrate the altar. The sign of the altar splitting and the ashes being poured out is a sign given to confirm that message.

The breaking of the altar might also remind us of the breaking of the tablets, a judgment in response to the sin of Aaron and the people concerning the golden calf. Now there is another golden calf, and another significant breaking of a stone object in judgment. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, has characteristics that might remind us of Moses and Aaron.

In response to the pharaonic rule of Rehoboam and Solomon, his father, who had placed the people of Israel under harsh labor, he asks for them to be let go. He has characteristics of Joseph and Moses and David in various ways as he goes down to Egypt before returning to the land. However, he follows the sin of Aaron, he establishes these golden calves for the people, and then he also calls his sons Nadab and Abijah,

reminding us of the unfaithful sons of Aaron that were killed by the Lord, Nadab and Abijah.

Jeroboam's hand is withered by the Lord as he reaches out to instruct his men to seize the prophet, yet he is immediately healed by the Lord as he entreats the prophet to pray for him. When we consider the characterization of the man of God and the prophet, we begin to see that the places that they are associated with are the most important things about them. The man of God is associated with Judah, and the old prophet is associated with Bethel and the Northern Kingdom.

This, I believe, helps us to understand some of the other details. The two men stand for the two kingdoms. Lying prophets are found throughout the books of the kings.

In chapter 18 verse 19, there are 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who are gathered to Mount Carmel. In chapter 22, there are 400 lying prophets of Ahab. Despite being explicitly warned by Micaiah that the prophets were lying to him, Ahab follows the lying prophets to his doom, Jehoshaphat the king of the Southern Kingdom of Judah following him into battle.

In the man of God from Judah then, we might have a sign of the Southern Kingdom and its duty. They must speak against the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom, without being seduced to follow the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who causes Israel to sin. Although they may resist the way of Jeroboam in various respects, they may end up being seduced by the lying prophets of the North, suffering judgment as a result.

Judah must not follow the lead of Israel. If they do, they will be judged. However, the possibility of salvation for the Northern Kingdom may be held out as they associate themselves with the Southern Kingdom of Judah, even in their judgment.

James Walsh writes, The wish of the old prophet that he be buried with the man of God, suggests the reunion of the brotherhood of the people in the grave of exile. This story then is a sign of the history that will follow, a divinely given sign of the destinies of these two unfaithful peoples, as they will work out in the rest of the books of the kings. A question to consider, what role do you think the donkey and the lion play in this story? In 1 Kings chapter 14 we see God's judgment upon Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Jeroboam had set Israel off on the path of idolatry in chapter 12. He had established the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. Their purpose was in large part political.

They were designed to avoid the prospect of Israel rejoining with Judah as they went down to worship in the temple in Jerusalem. Jeroboam was still worshipping the Lord, but he was worshipping the Lord with idols, directly breaking the second commandment. He was repeating the sins of Aaron.

There were several similarities between Jeroboam and Aaron. In chapter 12 Jeroboam

was like Moses and Aaron confronting Pharaoh concerning the oppression of the people. But then he ends up building golden calves.

He is confronted by the man of God in chapter 13 and the altar is split in two, like Moses split the tablets of stone in chapter 32 of Exodus. Now in this chapter we discover that he has two sons named Nadab and Abijah, much as Aaron had two sons who were condemned to death by the Lord, Nadab and Abihu. Severe judgment comes upon Jeroboam and his house in this chapter on account of his sin.

We should recognize the similarity here with the judgment that comes upon the house of Eli and upon the house of Saul. As Jeroboam's son Abijah falls ill, he sends his wife to speak to Ahijah the prophet, the same prophet that had declared that he would have the kingdom from David. He sends her with ten loaves, perhaps representing the ten tribes that are in his hand.

Now, however, the message is not a good one. There will be a great judgment upon his house and upon the nation. Jeroboam's wife's visit to Ahijah the prophet might remind us of the visit of Saul to the witch of Endor, back in 1 Samuel.

That had been on the eve of judgment upon the house of Saul and now this is the eve of judgment upon the house of Jeroboam. There is an inverted Passover here as well, a reverse story of Israel. Israel will be stricken like a reed by the water and returned to the land from which Abraham was first called, on the far side of the Euphrates.

There's a sort of reversal of both the Passover, the Red Sea, and then a return to the land from which they first came. Both as the wife of Jeroboam comes to Ahijah and as she enters her own house and her son dies, the importance of the door is prominent. The door is associated with birth, it's also associated with death.

The association between the death of the firstborn and the doorway is clearly a Passover theme. There is a sort of inverse Passover here, it's the righteous son that dies, to spare him from the harsher judgment that will come upon others. Israel is already doomed to exile at this point, from the very beginning of its life as an independent kingdom.

Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, sets the course for Israel and Israel never truly departs from it. Jeroboam's wife is condemned to become the silent herald of her own son's death, seemingly fatalistically resigned to her doom. There is no repentance, pleading with God for forgiveness or a quest for mercy here.

Throughout this chapter it's as if the history of Israel and Judah is thrown into reverse. Israel will be uprooted from the land and scattered beyond the river Euphrates. Jeroboam, who had begun with Exodus themes, will experience a great reversal of the Exodus, as Israel once again finds itself in captivity.

The Red Sea crossing will be undone, the calling from beyond the Euphrates would be

undone also. While the previous chapter had given signs of hope, Jeroboam's hand was restored to him after he entreated the Lord. In this chapter no such requests are made.

1 Kings 14 concludes with the account of the king of Egypt invading Jerusalem and plundering it, much as Israel had once plundered the Egyptians. The glorious treasures of the house of the Lord and the king's house were all removed. To replace the dazzling golden shields of Solomon, Jeroboam had bronze shields constructed in their place, a very clear sign of the decline of the kingdom.

In many respects the fall of Solomon occurred as he heeded the voice and the influence of the serpent Pharaoh, an influence probably exercised in large measure through his wife, Pharaoh's daughter. Like Adam broke the law concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Solomon broke the key commandments that were given to the king in Deuteronomy chapter 17. And the result of his sin was grim.

His son Rehoboam lost the rule of the kingdom of Israel to Jeroboam, and brother was set at war against brother. And the wily serpent Pharaoh, who had been harbouring and arming the future enemies of Solomon all along, shrewdly pursuing a policy of regional division and conquest and manipulation, ended up devouring the very riches for which Solomon had so compromised himself. Yet for all the failures of the house of David, unlike the kings in the north, the dynasty of David continued, and while the later kings of Israel all walked in the path of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin, apostasy never had the final word in the history of Judah.

A question to consider, what lessons might we learn about forgiveness and repentance from the contrasting histories of Israel and Judah? First Kings chapter 15 and 16 cover a considerable amount of time, the whole length of the reign of Asa, the period covered by 2 Chronicles chapter 13-16. However, while the reigns of both Abijah or Abijam and Asa are described and narrated in these chapters, unlike in 2 Chronicles, much of the material relates to the kings of Israel. During the reigns of Abijah and Asa in Judah, Israel suffers a crippling defeat at the hands of Abijah or Abijam, a defeat which First Kings does not relate, a continuing war with Judah, mostly a cold war but intermittently coming into direct conflict, a war with the Syrians, civil war, 4 different dynasties and a number of different kings.

This should be contrasted with the stability of the dynasty of David. The stability of the Davidic dynasty arises not from the faithfulness of the dynasty but rather from the faithfulness of God. Although there are faithful kings in Judah in a way that there are not in Israel, Israel's kings are pretty well universally wicked.

A nation of Judah is spared the sort of judgment that Israel receives in God's mercy because of God's covenant with David. As we read in verse 4, Abijah or Abijam is the son of Meaca, the daughter of Abishalom, who seems to be Absalom, as we see in 2 Chronicles 11.20. It is possible that she was the granddaughter of Absalom rather than

his daughter. The one daughter of Absalom that we read of in 2 Samuel is called Tamar.

Perhaps Meaca was born to one of Absalom's sons before they died. A few verses later we are told that Asa was the son of Meaca. While some have suggested that this is evidence of incest within the house of David, it seems more likely to me that Meaca is being foregrounded as the woman of greatest influence in both the court of Abijah and of Asa his son.

She is the queen mother figure and she mediates the influence of Absalom. Asa's removal of her from her influence then is a very important step in delivering Judah from its idolatry and unfaithfulness. The portrayal of Abijah here is a much less positive one than we find in 2 Chronicles 13, where his victory over Jeroboam and his appeal to the faithfulness of Judah over against the unfaithfulness of Israel is narrated.

This suggests a more complicated picture. In 1 Kings 14, 7-11 we read of the prophecy of Ahijah the Shalanite. And have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back.

Therefore, behold, I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will burn up the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung, until it is all gone. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat, and anyone who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens shall eat, for the Lord has spoken it. This prophecy is fulfilled as Beasha cuts off Jeroboam and his house.

There is a frustration of growth in the Northern Kingdom. One king cuts off another, one dynasty cuts off another. However, despite this moving from dynasty to dynasty, there is a continuation of the same rebellion of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Israel still walks in the fundamental idolatry that he has set up. Abijah the son of Jeroboam died in chapter 14. Now his brother Nadab is cut off.

The characters of Abijah and Nadab might remind us of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who were cut off as a result of their offering of strange fire to the Lord. Jeroboam takes on negative characteristics of Aaron in a number of different ways, and his sons suffer the same fate as the two judged sons of Aaron. While they are cut off, David is not cut off.

David was committed to the Lord even despite his sin concerning Uriah, and so his descendants are preserved. Perhaps we can see this as a fulfilment of the pattern of Deuteronomy chapter 5 verses 9-10. I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The generations following the righteous David are preserved, while the unfaithful lines of people like Jeroboam are cut off after only a few generations. The line of the rebellious is cut off before it can grow to its full potential and evil, whereas the line of the righteous is preserved. Even when one generation falls away, the next may turn back to the Lord.

Moving from the stories of Jeroboam and Rehoboam and Solomon and David that preceded, the story of the kingdom now increasingly takes on the form of the story of the judges, moving from one to another, with few isolated incidents being related, and large periods of time being covered. There is alternation between the two kingdoms, and various synchronisations that help us to see when one king arose relative to the history of the other kingdom. The overall impression given is of two wayward siblings caught in an ongoing rivalry.

A question to consider, what lessons should we draw from the obliteration of Jeroboam's house? What lessons might faithful people in Israel have drawn? 1 Kings chapter 16 covers a period of great unrest in the kingdom of Israel. In less than 20 years, Beasha dies, his son Elah takes his place, Elah is killed by Zimri, and Beasha's dynasty falls with him. Zimri's reign never gets off the ground, Amri and Tibni fight a civil war over the throne, with Amri prevailing.

Amri dies and Ahab his son takes his place. The reign of the wicked Amri dynasty will be a defining period for the nation of Israel. Once again we see the great contrast between the southern dynasty of David, and the unrest of the northern kingdom and its dynasties.

Over the entire history of Judah and Israel, the word of God stands in judgement. Prophets deliver the word of God to kings, declaring his assessment of their behaviour, and the fate of their dynasties. Here it is Jehu, the son of Hanani, who brings the word of the Lord against Beasha, as his father, if it is the same Hanani, would deliver the word of the Lord to the southern king Asa, as we read in 2 Chronicles chapter 16.

Jehu also seems to deliver another prophetic word, many years later, to Jehoshaphat, in 2 Chronicles chapter 19 verse 2. The Lord declares the fate of Beasha and his house in a manner quite reminiscent of the fate of Jeroboam and his house, in 1 Kings chapter 14 verses 7-11. Go tell Jeroboam, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Because I exalted you from among the people, and made you leader over my people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you. And yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments, and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes.

But you have done evil above all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back. Therefore, behold, I will bring harm upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free, in Israel, And will burn up the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung, until it is all gone. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam

who dies in the city, the dog shall eat, and anyone who dies in the open country, the birds of the heaven shall eat, for the Lord has spoken it.

The similarities between that judgment and the judgment declared upon the house of Beasha are very easy to note. There are other similarities between the two. Both Jeroboam and Beasha rule for just over 20 years, followed by a son who reigns for only a couple of years, before that son falls to a conspiracy.

Both kings have their entire house wiped out. Indeed, the initial fall of both their kingdoms is associated with Gibbathon. We see this of Nadab the son of Jeroboam in 1 Kings chapter 15 verse 27, and we see it of Elah the son of Beasha in this chapter.

We might be forgiven for a pronounced sense of *deja vu*. Israel's history is replaying the same tragic pattern twice in a row. More generally, even though they come from short lines of kings that have killed their predecessor dynasties, the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel still take on the character of the first king of their nation, Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

When people repeat Jeroboam's sins, they will receive Jeroboam's punishment. The nation does not abandon the way of Jeroboam, even as they kill his sons in the dynasties that succeed them. Chief among the sins of the northern kingdom is the sin of idolatry.

Beasha is judged by the Lord for provoking him to anger by walking in the way of Jeroboam and causing Israel to sin. Indeed, he is also judged for his destruction of the house of Jeroboam, which might surprise us as he was raised up to fulfil the word of the Lord in bringing about just that destruction. Now, however, the same fate that he inflicted on Jeroboam's house is inflicted upon his house.

Military commanders had previously been dangerous figures in Israel. Commanders of the army like Abner and Joab had exerted disproportionate power, especially during periods when the country was largely at war. Now it is one of the leading commanders of Ela, the son of Beasha, a man who commands half of his chariots, who rises up against him, possibly with the assistance of Arza.

There seem to be factions in Ela's military, as no sooner does Zimri rise up than Omri, the commander of the army, is elevated by his men. Zimri only reigns for seven days, ending up committing a grim suicide by burning himself alive in the house. Despite his short reign, he is still spoken of as continuing in the way of Jeroboam.

As Lysa Rae Beale notes, the dynastic line of Israel is not a genealogical line, but a line of sin. They all continue in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. Israel is divided between Omri and Tibnai for about four years.

Omri ends up prevailing. His house becomes the dominant house, which as Beale notes, becomes synonymous with Israel among the surrounding nations like Assyria, even after

his dynasty fell. During Omri's reign, he establishes a new capital for the kingdom.

He buys the territory of Samaria, a strategic defensive hill. Omri's sin exceeds that of his predecessors. As Peter Lighthouse notes, Omri is a sort of false David.

He is an army commander who fights against the Philistines. He follows a suicidal king and becomes a king after a civil war. His reign is divided between two capitals.

He establishes the new capital of the kingdom. He buys a key tract of land from Shema, much as David buys the threshing floor of Ornan for the temple. His son Ahab is even worse.

Ahab comes to the throne of Israel near the end of the reign of Asa in Judah. The reign of Ahab, the son of Omri, is a watershed. Ahab exceeds Jeroboam.

His reign involves a sort of re-canonization of the land. His wife Jezebel, the Sidonian princess, spread the worship of the Canaanite deities, Baal and Asherah. In Ahab, the northern kingdom reaches its height of wickedness, much as the kingdom reached its peak under Solomon.

Solomon's foreign wives, leading to idolatry, are also like Ahab and his marriage to Jezebel. If Omri is a false David, then his son Ahab is a false Solomon. Such similarities invite comparisons.

This would be a lesson to Judah and the house of David. They should learn from their twin nation, to consider the troubling resemblances between them and the nation to their north, and to mend their ways accordingly. Hiel's rebuilding of Jericho at this time is symptomatic and symbolic of what the reign of Ahab represented.

Rebuilding the first Canaanite city to be conquered in the land, whose destruction was a testament to the removal of the land from the possession of the idolatrous Canaanites by the Lord, is an indication of re-canonization. And centuries on, there is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joshua. In Joshua chapter 6, verse 26, Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, Cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho.

At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates. Some have suggested that the two sons were founding or consecrating sacrifices, human sacrifices offered for the sake of the city. A question to consider.

Beasha is judged for destroying Jeroboam's house, the very action that the Lord had raised him up to perform. What lessons about morality and providence might we learn from reflection upon this detail? In 1 Kings chapter 17, we are introduced to the character of Elijah, who bursts suddenly into the narrative in a very unexpected way.



Elijah and his successor Elisha are at the heart of the books of the kings, and their joint mission is very important for understanding the destiny of the kingdom, and also for considering something about the character of prophecy.

Elijah begins by announcing a drought. The interesting thing here is that there is no mention of the word of the Lord coming to him. Rather, Elijah himself swears by the Lord that there will be no rain in the next few years, except by his, Elijah's, word.

Looking closely, it seems that Elijah is taking something of an initiative here. This isn't just God's word that's come to him. Rather, the drought is initiated by Elijah's own zeal.

Of course, this should not be understood as Elijah bringing anything about by his own power. It is God who shuts up the heavens and prevents the rain so that there is the drought. However, God seems to do this in response to the prayer of Elijah.

James chapter 5 verses 17 to 18 make this more explicit. In Elijah, then, we see something of the initiative that the faithful prophet can exert. In his zeal and his fervency, the faithful prophet Elijah can call God to act, and God acts.

In bringing a drought, God is fulfilling his curse that he gives in Deuteronomy chapter 28 verses 22 to 24. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven, dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

The power of a prophet like Elijah seems to involve acting with a certain initiative given by the Spirit of God. This is not a blank check, of course, but the prophet is entrusted with divine power to act on God's behalf. Why a drought? It seems to me that Elijah is not just a prophet, but a prophet of God.

The answer to this is found in the fact that Baal was, among other things, the god of the rain. And so the judgment of no rain is a judgment not just upon Israel for its unfaithfulness, but a judgment upon Baal, the rain god. Both the judgment and Elijah himself are reminiscent of the Exodus and of Moses.

Now, of course, since Elijah is not merely a messenger, but one who initiates this judgment, he becomes public enemy number one. Ahab, the king of Israel, will want to seek him out and destroy him. And so, according to the commandment of the Lord, he flees to the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan, where he will be sustained by the Lord for a long period of time.

He is fed by ravens. This is a miraculous provision that shows God's power over birds and animals. They would not usually provide for a human being in that sort of way.

And during this period of time, Elijah is cut off from the rest of the land. He's cocooned, as it were, within this one particular wadi. While the rest of the nation is desperately searching for this prophet that brought this judgment upon them, he is safe and secure

within this bubble of protection.

Now, if we're attentive, we should notice something here. What other story in scripture do we associate with God's power over animals and birds? What other story in scripture might we think of when we think about ravens coming to a person? What other story involves a great judgment involving rain or the lack of it? It's the story of Noah. Noah, when the judgment comes upon the whole earth, is saved within his cocoon, his bubble of the ark.

And the same thing happens in the story of Elijah. Elijah is saved from the drought within the cocoon or the bubble of the brook Cherith. In the story of Noah, he sent out a raven, but it just flew round and round because it found nowhere to rest because the land had not yet dried up.

In this story, the ravens keep coming back until the water dries up. Rabbi David Foreman, who points out a number of these things, also observes that Tishbe, the place that Elijah comes from, is the consonants used for the word in Genesis 8, verse 7, which refers to the drying up of the land, the verse concerning the raven. In the case of Tishbe, those consonants are found in reverse order.

The ravens coming in the morning and in the evening might remind us of the morning and evening sacrifices. The ravens might also make us think of the Gentiles. The raven is an unclean bird, but it is the means of feeding and sustaining Elijah in the wilderness.

As a prophet, much of Elijah's ministry will be either in the wilderness or in Gentile lands. Like Moses, he is someone who has his ministry outside of the land or on the borders of the land. He never fully enters in.

When the brook dries up, the Lord sends him to Zarephath, a place of Sidon. When he arrives in Zarephath, he meets a widow who is gathering sticks, and he asks for water, and he asks for a morsel of bread from her. In many respects, he is asking her to play the role of the ravens, what they have done for him in Cherith, he wants her to do for him in Zarephath.

But the woman herself is in dire straits. She and her son are on their last rations and about to die. Nonetheless, Elijah still asks her to prepare a little cake for him.

As she gives the first fruits of her last remaining flour and oil to him, she and her son will be saved. If God has formed a bubble of protection or a cocoon around Elijah, by serving him, by playing the role of the raven, the woman and her son will be preserved. And they are preserved for many days.

The jar of oil does not run out, and the flour does not run out. However, the son of the woman becomes ill. While the jar of oil is not running out, and the flour is not running out, his spirit runs out.

There is no breath left in him. Rabbi David Foreman compares this to the raven or the dove that might be going round and round, and without anywhere to land, running out of strength. And the widow speaks in an accusatory way to Elijah.

What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son. The cocoon belongs to Elijah, not to the widow and her son. They are, as it were, clinging on outside, being preserved as long as they are serving Elijah.

But they are not being preserved in quite the same way as Elijah is. Elijah takes the son of the woman, and he takes the son into his own place, into his own cocoon, and he identifies with the son in a powerful way. He lays the son upon his own bed.

He cries out to the Lord for the life of the son, praying this time not for the judgment upon a people, but for deliverance of someone. And he stretches himself out upon the child three times, his body pressed against the body of the child, so that the child might be identified with him, so that the protection that he enjoys might extend to that child also. And the Lord responds to the fervent prayer of Elijah, and the child is raised up.

He then takes the child from the upper chamber of the house, and delivers him to his mother, declaring that he lives. And the woman's response is perhaps a bit surprising. Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.

Elijah taking the young child into the upper room is like Noah taking the dove into the ark. And as he takes that young child down to his mother, it is a sign of the end of the judgment. When the dove could leave the ark and survive outside of the ark, it was the great sign that the world was being restored.

And a similar thing is happening here. Rain is going to come in the next chapter. In a couple of verses time, Elijah is going to be sent on a mission to proclaim it.

The prophet, who had been kept in a miraculous cocoon of life while there was death all around, is now spreading life out, and there is hope for a new beginning. A question to consider. What lessons might the Lord have been teaching Elijah through these experiences? Chapter 17 of 1 Kings began with the word of Elijah the prophet, declaring that there would be a drought until his word ended it.

In chapter 18 it begins with the word of the Lord, declaring the end of the drought. The Lord himself calls time upon the judgment that Elijah has zealously initiated against Israel. In the previous chapter he was like Noah in the ark, cocooned and protected, the ravens bringing him food, and then later on the widow of Zarephath feeding him with her jug of oil and her jar of flour.

So Elijah goes to present himself to Ahab. However, Elijah, as one who has been given

power to perform miracles by God, doesn't just want to give up in his zeal, he wants a showdown. And so, with no evidence that he has given word to do so by the Lord, he initiates a showdown with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel.

Once again, this is not an example of going against the word of the Lord. Rather it's taking the initiative with an authority that has been granted to him by the Lord, as a miracle worker and prophet. The famine at this point was wiping out human and animal life in the land, and Ahab and his servant Obadiah had to go throughout the land, dividing the land between them to find some grass for their horses to survive.

We saw allusions to Noah in the preceding chapter, and there are allusions that continue into this chapter. While Elijah is all on his lonesome in his cocoon that's protected by the Lord, being served by the animals, Obadiah is out there in the judgment of the drought itself, trying to protect the servants of the Lord, the prophets, and also the horses. This contrast isn't exactly a favorable one for Elijah.

Elijah, whose name means, My God is the Lord, is greatly driven by zeal for the Lord. He is like the son who wants to avenge his father that has been bad-mouthed by one of his schoolmates. While there might be a praiseworthy commitment to his father, and a concern for his father's name, such zeal can easily be driven by a person's own pride.

Elijah has notions that he is all alone, and wants to call down the heavens from above to judge the earth. And yet it's clear by the case of Obadiah, whose name means servant of the Lord, that that is not in fact the case. There are other prophets of the Lord that are being preserved by him, and many of the Lord's creatures are also being threatened by the drought that Elijah has brought upon the land.

Elijah is a heroic prophet, but as we will see in the next chapter, his zeal needs to be broken down to size. The Lord has to challenge him in his particular way. Ahab and Obadiah searching throughout the land for grass might remind us of the raven and the dove that are circling round trying to find somewhere to land after the flood.

While the birds were looking for dry ground, here Ahab and Obadiah are searching for grass, something that can give life to the animals. And their concern for the animals here should also make us think of the story of Noah. Obadiah, as a courageous person, has hidden 100 prophets, 50 to a cave, and he's fed them with bread and water.

This should, as Rabbi David Foreman observes, remind us of the ravens of the preceding chapter. Just as the ravens were ministers of God to the need of Elijah, so Obadiah is a minister of God to the needs of these 100 prophets. Elijah makes himself discoverable, and Obadiah is clearly afraid of him.

He believes it's quite likely that Elijah will just go his way and leave him to suffer the consequences. He's a faithful servant of the Lord, a servant in one of the most difficult

situations of all, in the house of Ahab himself. However, this maverick miracle worker and prophet Elijah does not necessarily seem to care for anyone beyond himself.

He's gone the last few years bringing great judgement upon the land, existing in his own cocoon, and while Obadiah has been struggling to protect the prophets and to feed the horses and to do all these other things, Elijah has been nowhere to be seen. He is not sure that he can trust Elijah at this point. But Elijah assures him, and Ahab goes and meets Elijah, and as he meets him he greets him as, You traveller of Israel.

Elijah throws the accusation back. It is Ahab in fact who is the traveller of Israel, through his idolatry. It was not in fact Elijah that brought the drought upon the land, so much as Ahab by his idolatry bringing the curse of the covenant upon the people.

We might also, as Rabbi David Foreman notes, see in these words, traveller of Israel, a reference back to a previous event. It's the story of Achan. Achan is the one other character in scripture who is referred to in this particular way, as a traveller of Israel.

And he's referred to in that way after he has taken some of the devoted things from the destruction of Jericho. Why might that be significant? What happens immediately before Elijah comes on the scene? Hael rebuilds the city of Jericho. As part of the re-canonisation of Israel, this is the climactic sign.

They're rebuilding that place that was supposed to be a memorial to God's destruction of the pagans that pre-existed them in the land. This is an Achan-like sin, if Achan took of the devoted things in the city of Jericho. In rebuilding Jericho, Hael and Ahab are also taking of devoted things.

If the story of Noah and the Ark ended up on Mount Ararat, the story of Elijah and the drought ends up on Mount Carmel. Elijah arranges this, seemingly on his own initiative, as a grand showdown with the prophets of Baal. He gathers together the prophets of Baal and Asherah, and he sets up a test designed to prove, once and for all, that the Lord is the true God.

As with the drought, this is a challenge to the great god Baal. Baal is supposed to be the god of the storm, the god who brings thunder and lightning, the god who brings rain. He can't bring rain, the land has been in drought for many years, and now he will be tested again.

Can he answer by fire? The prophets of Baal end up making a fool of themselves, and Elijah treats them as objects of ridicule. He speaks of Baal, their great deity. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.

They challenge the honour of the Lord, and he is going to challenge the honour of their god. As they are whipped up into an ever greater frenzy to try and get Baal to respond,

they make a humiliating spectacle of themselves. Like Noah built an altar for burnt offerings on Mount Ararat, Elijah re-establishes the altar of the Lord on Mount Carmel for his sacrifice of the burnt offering.

And he makes things hard for himself. He pours out twelve jars full of water upon the burnt offering, and the water fills the trench around the altar of twelve stones too. Then Elijah calls upon the Lord, and the Lord answers his prayer, and fire comes down from the Lord and consumes the burnt offering, the wood and the stones and the dust, and licks up the water in the trench too.

Perhaps we might see this as a climactic symbol of the whole drought. You have the twelve stones representing Israel, and you have the twelve jars of water, the rains that pour upon the nation over the course of the year, and the trench is the rivers that irrigate it. The bull represents the whole congregation, and the fire of the Lord comes down and consumes everything.

What was once well watered has become as dry as a bone. Elijah wants to end the drought with a bang, and the response of the people is encouraging. They respond with a declaration of the Lord's sovereignty, the Lord he is God, the Lord he is God, and then they kill the prophets of Baal.

It seems as if the victory of Elijah has been achieved, that in his zeal he has effected the reformation of the nation. Yet he will soon find himself most disappointed, as no such reformation is forthcoming. Elijah then instructs Ahab to leave, because the rain is about to come.

And when Ahab leaves to eat and drink, Elijah goes to the top of Mount Carmel with his servant, and he prays. Once again, we have things that might remind us of the story of Noah and the raven and the dove. Like Noah sent up the birds, Elijah sends up his servant to look for rain, to scan the horizon to see if any cloud is to be seen.

Much as the sending of the birds occurred over periods of seven days, Elijah's servant is sent seven times, until finally he returns with the news that he has seen a cloud like a man's hand. Ahab is instructed to prepare his chariot and to make haste. The heavens grow black, and there is a tremendous rainstorm.

Ahab rides his chariot to Jezreel, but by the power of the Lord, Elijah runs ahead of him. Perhaps we are supposed to see something of the pursuit of the Israelites by the chariots of Pharaoh in this particular event. A question to consider.

Elijah is a zealous prophet of the Lord who wants a great public showdown with the enemies of the Lord, that will prove once and for all that the Lord is God. Obadiah, by contrast, is a faithful servant of the Lord, who is a deep operative within the court of Ahab. His work is not served by great showdowns, but to require secrecy and care.

What might the relationship between the characters of Obadiah and Elijah have to teach us today about different forms of service in a hostile society? In 1 Kings chapter 19, right after Elijah's apparent moment of great victory over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, he is driven out. He is plunged into despondency and he wishes for death. The richness of scriptural meaning can often be seen through the interplay of the melody of a given narrative and the various counter melodies that play off against it in a way that produces rich harmony.

Most people are only reading the text at the level of the melody of the narrative, and they don't consider what counter melodies might be present in a text and what they might mean. For instance, in 1 Kings chapter 17 and the story of Elijah declaring the drought, the counter melody is primarily the story of Noah, which is played in a transformed way in the background. When the melody of the surface narrative of the chapter is read alongside it, a remarkable harmony emerges, a harmony which will likely change the way that we hear and understand the melody.

A similar thing happens here in chapter 19, and the counter melody that we hear here is quite surprising. If we had been listening carefully, it won't have been the first time that we have heard it. Back in chapter 17, we met a Gentile widow and her son.

Their supplies were on the point of running out, and the woman was gathering sticks and preparing for her son to die. This might remind us of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis chapter 21 verses 14 to 21. So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder along with the child, and sent her away.

And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water and the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bow shot.

For she said, Let me not look on the death of the child. And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.

Up, lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation. Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy, and he grew up.

He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. In Elijah's story, Elijah visited the widow of Zarephath, much as the angels had visited Abraham and Lot.

The widow and her son were blessed for their hospitality, and Elijah, by making them provide for him, saved their lives. However, the widow's son died, and Elijah had to take up the son to the upper room, laying him out before the Lord and praying that the Lord would raise him up. It is a sort of binding of Isaac, in reverse.

In chapter 19, however, Elijah finds himself in a rather different sort of position. Jezebel, the wife of his master Ahab, the king, seeks to kill him, and he has to flee. He comes to Beersheba, and he leaves his servant there, literally the lad.

This is the same language that is used of Ishmael. He then wanders in the wilderness and gives up on life and wishes for death. He sits down under a broom tree, as Ishmael was placed under the bush.

The broom tree is associated with the territory of Kedar. In Psalm 20, Kedar was one of Ishmael's sons. He is provided with water, as Hagar was in the wilderness.

He is raised up from the point of death, as was Ishmael. He is provided for by the angel. He is given a cake and a vessel of water, which is exactly what he requested from the widow of Zarephath.

However, now, in many ways, he is in their position. He is identified with the Hagar and the Ishmael characters. While he might have expected, after the events of Carmel, to be the victor, to be the champion, in fact, he is more like Ishmael and Hagar, expelled from the land.

He travels for 40 days and 40 nights, and he comes to a cave and lodges there. This might remind us of Lot. That's where Lot ends up after the destruction of Sodom.

In chapter 17, Elijah was more like the messenger angels, declaring the judgment. But now he finds himself more in the position of Lot, after the destruction of the city of Sodom. This was not what his great victory was supposed to look like.

His story is also a bit like Moses. He is pursued by the king on his chariot, threatened by the falling waters, which occurs after the great demonstration of God's power against the false gods in the previous chapter. And now he flees into the wilderness, travelling 40 days and 40 nights, much as Moses went 40 days and 40 nights on the Mount of Sinai.

He meets with God at Sinai, and he intercedes against Israel. Moses interceded for Israel in chapter 32-34 of Exodus, and it seems that Elijah is both taking up the pattern of Moses, and in certain respects inverting it as well. He is a man of zeal, like the characters of Moses and Phinehas.

Both of those men were zealous for the Lord, but both of those men enacted that zeal in a way that protected people from the full force of the Lord's wrath. In Moses' case, in chapter 32-34 of Exodus, he told the Lord not to be angry against his people, and



enacted the anger of the Lord against his people himself. He breaks the tablets of the covenant.

He destroys the golden calf, grinding it down to dust, which he scatters on the waters and makes the Israelites drink it. He rallies the Levites to himself and kills 3,000 in judgment for their sin. All of this, however, is designed to prevent the full wrath of the Lord breaking out against the people.

He enacts zeal so that the Lord won't have to. Phinehas does the same thing. He stops the plague against the people with his act of zeal.

He kills Cosbi and Zimri in order that the whole people might not suffer God's wrath. Elijah, however, who speaks of his zeal for the Lord as the motivating factor for his actions, is working very differently. Rather than being a man of zeal who saves the people, in many respects he is a man of zeal who seeks the destruction of the people.

The story of Noah played in the background of the story of Moses interceding for Israel as well. He was not prepared to be the only one left. He was committed to gather the people to himself, to identify with them, so that the Lord would not destroy them.

There might be some irony to be seen in the fact that Elijah has ended up in a cave, which is exactly where Obadiah hid the prophets in the preceding chapter. The Lord is determined that Elijah will not be the only one left. He has determined to save a larger remnant.

Elijah was preserved in his cocoon for a while, but the Lord wants to use him to save more people. He brought the widow of Zarephath and her son into Elijah's cocoon of protection, and now he's going to use Elijah to spearhead a movement of judgment, but also of protection for his people. He appears to Elijah on the mountain in ways that might remind us of the theophany of Exodus 19-20, with wind, earthquake and fire.

In his zeal, Elijah has focused upon these sorts of elements, these great dramatic judgments of God. He has looked for this great drought upon the people, and then he has also looked for fire to come down from heaven. But God's presence is found primarily in the sound of the low voice.

God's purpose in the history of Israel and Judah will be achieved not so much through dramatic displays of strength and natural power, but through the persistent voice of the prophets. The Lord charges Elijah to anoint successors. Hazael, the king of Syria, Jehu, the son of Nimshi, as king over Israel, and Elisha, the son of Shaphat, as prophet in his place.

Elijah will only anoint one of these people in this chapter itself, Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who will replace him. In many ways, the Lord might be preparing to bench Elijah here. Elijah's zeal is remarkable.

He is truly a man of God, but he also has a few lessons to learn about the way that God deals with the world. The Lord had passed by Elijah earlier in the story when he was at Mount Sinai, and now he passes by Elisha and casts his cloak upon Elisha, the same cloak that he had covered himself with when the Lord had passed by him. Elisha is ploughing with twelve oxen, representing Israel, we must presume.

He will be the one that places Israel under the yoke of the Lord once more. He will plough the land and plant the seed. In time, Elisha will later replay many of the key miracles of Elijah in a significantly different form.

A question to consider, what lessons about zeal might we learn from the story of Elijah? From 1 Kings chapter 20 to the end of the book, there are a series of chapters presenting an indictment of Ahab and his sins in various contexts. And in this chapter, chapter 20, we have interactions between Ben-Hadad and the Arameans and Ahab and Israel. Esau made a covenant with Ben-Hadad earlier in chapter 15.

The Ben-Hadad there was a contemporary of Beasha, and there had been intermittent conflict between the Arameans or the Syrians and Israel from that time on. The Ben-Hadad in this chapter is most likely a different one. Ben-Hadad may have been a throne name, and there are probably three Ben-Hadads in scripture.

In this chapter, there are two different attacks by the Arameans or the Syrians. At this time, the Assyrians were rising in power, and the Syrians or the Arameans, who were in the region of Damascus to Israel's east, were being pressured from them and pushed towards Israel. The Arameans or the Syrians were forming a regional alliance.

They had 32 kings, and they wanted to make Ahab's kingdom of Israel a tributary kingdom also, presumably to assist in the anti-Assyrian cause. At the beginning, they have much greater power than Israel, which enables Ben-Hadad to come with these extravagant demands. He comes against Samaria.

He does not seem to be surrounding Samaria at this point. He's demanding silver and gold, and then the best wives and children of Ahab. And Ahab initially accepts.

He has no power to resist. He doesn't have the power to stand up against a command even as brazen as that of giving over his best wives and children. However, Ben-Hadad comes back with even greater demands, that they should be able to go through his house and the houses of his servants and ransack them for anything that they wanted.

And so he sends out messengers to the elders of the land, who counsel him to resist the demand. When he refuses, Ben-Hadad declares that he will destroy Samaria. And Ahab warns him not to be overly confident.

Don't boast in your victory before you've achieved it. The Lord sends a prophet to Ahab. The Arameans will be given into his hand.

And this will be a means by which he and Israel will know that God is the Lord. The prophet instructs him to begin the battle and that his forces must be led by the servants of the governors of the districts. This is not a crack force.

These would seem to be weaker men that he is sending out. And he sends out 232 of them, perhaps connected with the 32 kings that are associated with Ben-Hadad. They are followed by 7,000, which might remind us of the word of the Lord to Elijah concerning the remnant in the preceding chapter.

Ben-Hadad is drunk and overly confident. He doesn't actually appreciate his weakness. The Syrians are defeated and driven off.

But the Syrians will regroup and return to fight them again on the plain in the spring. And the prophet instructs Ahab to prepare for that return. In the spring the Syrians return and they fight Israel in Aphek on the plain.

This is the same place where Israel had lost the great battle to the Philistines a number of centuries earlier. The Arameans believe that by changing the ground of the battle they will have a better chance. That the Lord will not be able to act on behalf of his people as effectively in the valley as he has in the hills.

Ben-Hadad has also changed the leaders. So he is no longer leading the men with the 32 kings, but with chosen commanders. The army is being consolidated under his leadership.

It might also seem that he's not just gathering the army, he's gathering the wider group of the people. He musters the Syrians, not just the army. Once again a man of God comes to Ahab.

There is a close parallel between these two events. The first attack of the Syrians and then the second attack of the Syrians in the spring. In both cases the Syrians attack, a prophet visits Ahab, Ahab wins the battle.

Then Ben-Hadad is advised by his servants and then Ben-Hadad takes action accordingly. This is a battle that the Lord himself is going to win. And he's going to win this battle against the Syrians because they have taken up the battle against him.

They have dishonoured his name by claiming that he just rules over the hills, rather than being the ruler and creator of all things. Neither the battle nor the enemy then are ultimately Ahab's. Ahab has to recognise that the Lord will give him the victory, because the enemy is the enemy of the Lord, and he is being called to play the part of a servant of the Lord in bringing the victory about.

There is a remarkable victory won over the Syrians. Even though Israel was completely outnumbered, they end up crushing the Syrians and a large number of the Syrians who

take refuge in the city are destroyed as the walls of the city come down on them and Israel overcomes them. As all of this happens on the seventh day, it shouldn't be hard to see a reminder of the story of Jericho.

The city of Jericho was rebuilt as part of Ahab's re-canonisation of the land back at the end of chapter 16. But now there is a new defeat of a type of Jericho and the Lord overcomes the Syrians. Ben-Hadad flees and holds himself up in an inner chamber in the city.

At his servants' council, he comes to terms with Ahab. The story begins with Ben-Hadad very much in power and it ends with Ahab in the position of power. They forge a new covenant between them, with Ahab now the overlord in the relationship.

He will receive back cities that had been taken from his father. It is likely that father here is not referring to his literal father Amrei, but to his royal predecessor, most likely Be'asha. He is now the overlord.

However, like Saul wrongly spared Agag, Ahab should not have spared Ben-Hadad. The battle, we must remember, belonged to the Lord. As a result, Ahab did not have the right to choose whether to spare Ben-Hadad or not.

Ben-Hadad should have been put to death. Like Achan took devoted things and Saul took the devoted person of Agag, he is taking another devoted person. The passage ends with a peculiar account.

One of the sons of the prophets instructs another man to strike him, and when the other man fails to do so, even at the explicit command of the Lord, he is struck down by a lion. This should recall to us the story of the man of God from Judah and the old man of Bethel in chapter 13. It is also, once again, a parable for the nation.

It's a parable for the king of Israel. As in chapter 13, the king is not usually named. Rather, he is spoken of as the king of Israel or the king.

This might be one of the details that heightens the sense of the symbolic character of what is taking place. This is an enacted parable. The second person who is instructed to strike him does indeed strike him.

He wounds the prophet, and the prophet places a bandage over his eye and disguises his identity. When the king passes, he gives a story to the king of how he was instructed to guard a prisoner, and while he busied himself with other affairs, he found that the prisoner was gone. He was now either to forfeit his life or to pay a talent of silver in ransom.

The king of Israel confirms the judgment upon the man, and then the man uncovers his identity, and he is revealed to be one of the prophets. He declares that the man who has

really committed this sin is the king himself. He had been entrusted with Ben-Hadad.

Ben-Hadad was not ultimately his prisoner, but the Lord's, and he was responsible for letting the man go. As a result of his failure, his life and his people would be forfeit. Ahab responds, not with repentance, not even by seeking to see if there was another opportunity, if there was some ransom he could pay, like the one talent of silver that was required of the hand of the man in the parable.

No, he returns to his house vexed and sullen, still resistant to the word of the Lord. A question to consider. How should Ahab have known that he did not have the right to treat Ben-Hadad as he wished, but should rather have treated him as a prisoner who belonged to the Lord? The story of Naboth and his vineyard in 1 Kings chapter 21 is a further indictment of the reign of Ahab and the Umayyad dynasty.

The story begins with Naboth, who owns a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of King Ahab, and Ahab seeing the vineyard wants it for himself to make a vegetable garden of it. Yet when he requests the vineyard from Naboth, offering him another vineyard in exchange or money even, Naboth refuses, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers. Here he seems to be referring to the fact that the land was not supposed to be alienated from the people to whom it had been given.

Although productive land could be sold for a few years, it had to be returned at the time of the Jubilee, and to sell the land, unless you were in absolute poverty, was a denigration both of the gift of the Lord and of one's ancestors. In 1 Samuel chapter 8 verse 14, Samuel had warned against the behaviour of the king. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants.

Yet in this passage Ahab requests the vineyard of Naboth. His request is fairly polite. It is certainly a gentler request than he reports to his wife when he goes back sullen and angry.

Ahab's request, as reported to Jezebel, is a lot harsher. It does not contain the two reasons, because it's near his house, and that he wants to make a vegetable garden of it, and the language that is used is not as cushioned with politeness. Ahab also shares Naboth's response differently.

I will not give you my vineyard, a far more direct refusal, without any indication that there are religious qualms underlying his resistance. Ahab's being vexed and sullen recalls his response to the message of the prophet at the end of the preceding chapter. In his mood he goes into a sort of sulk and won't eat any food, and Jezebel, his wife, tries to change his mood by promising that she will get the vineyard of Naboth.

She writes letters in Ahab's name to the elders and the leaders of Naboth's city. Within the letters she instructs the elders and the leaders to call a fast and to place Naboth at

the head of the people, and then to put two people alongside him to accuse him of cursing God and the king, so that he can be stoned to death. It is always important to pay attention to the way that things are reported for a second time, for instance when an instruction or command is given, and then the enactment of that instruction or command, or when a particular event occurs, and then it is recalled later on or reported to someone else.

We saw this earlier on in the way that Ahab reported his interaction with Naboth to Jezebel. Ahab wanted to appear tougher, and he wanted Naboth to appear more resistant and stubborn, than either of them had actually been in the interaction itself. Here the command-response pattern of Jezebel's instructions and the leaders of the people's actions follow a pattern that we would usually associate with divine commands and human responses, but here it is the command of the queen that is being observed to the letter.

This suggests that whatever corruption exists in Ahab and his court, it extends throughout his kingdom too. In addition, the rottenness of rule extends to the local authorities as well. When Naboth is stoned and Jezebel hears, Jezebel goes to Ahab and tells him to arise and take possession of the vineyard.

The language of arising and taking possession recalls the initial conquest of the land under Joshua. And the fact that it is a vineyard that is taken is not accidental. Israel is compared to a vineyard in places such as Isaiah chapter 5 or Psalm 80.

Nor for that matter is it accidental that Ahab wants to turn it into a vegetable garden. In Deuteronomy chapter 11 verse 10 we read, For the land that you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it, like a garden of vegetables. Ahab is seeking to re-canonize and also to Egyptianize the land.

He is becoming like a new pharaoh. We should also observe the ways in which patterns of the fall are at play here as well. The vineyard connects with the garden.

The language of a garden is found here and not many other places in scripture. There are Garden of Eden themes here. The wife is trying to get her husband to eat.

There is a seeing that something is good and taking it. Later after taking the fruit, Ahab will be confronted in the garden by Elijah the messenger of the Lord and then he and his dynasty will be expelled from rule. Jezebel is a far more active character than Eve though.

Although Eve gives the fruit to Adam, Jezebel is a great deal more active in this whole process. Ahab comes across as sulky and weak, while Jezebel is a conniver and a schemer and one who is a very active and able manipulator. She is a sort of fusion of the

characters of the woman and the serpent together.

She is the dragon lady who has pursued the prophets of the Lord and consumed many of them and she is a woman who is very gifted at getting men to do her evil work for her. In the Gospels we have a similar situation where Herodias, the wife of Herod Antipas, is able to manipulate him to kill John the Baptist. Jezebel is an archetypal female villain, a woman who uses her influence over men to incite them to wicked actions.

An inverse of Jezebel of course is Queen Esther who uses her influence to save her whole people. We should notice other similarities here. There is another story in the history of the kings of Israel which involves a king spending time in bed, a king looking out and seeing something near to his palace that belongs to someone else that he wants to take, the sending of messages to evil men who will assist to kill a righteous man who is providing an obstacle to the will of the king, all followed by a confrontation by a prophet of the Lord and repentance.

The other story of course is the story of David and Bathsheba. Naboth's vineyard, among other things, stands for the nation of Israel itself. And Naboth himself might have some significance in this picture.

Naboth's name itself might be related to the word for prophecies. In the story he is the one who presents the claim of the Lord upon the land to Ahab who is wanting it for his personal possession and his re-canonisation project. Jezebel killing the prophets of the Lord to enable her husband to paganise the land is pretty much exactly how things had been happening to that point.

However, like the blood of Abel, the blood of Naboth calls out from the land and the Lord sends Elijah to confront Ahab. There will be blood for blood. In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick up his blood and Jezebel shall be eaten by the dogs within the walls of Jezreel.

The two previous great dynasties of Israel, Jeroboam's dynasty and Baash's dynasty, had both been destroyed by the Lord, their houses completely wiped out. The same is going to happen for Ahab and Jezebel this time is included in the judgement. She incited Ahab.

Ahab was the worst of all the kings of Israel but he would never have reached such levels of wickedness had it not been for the Sidonian queen Jezebel. In many respects it's the weakness of Ahab that stands out. For much of his reign it's Jezebel who's really calling the shots.

He may have the power but Jezebel is the one that's directing it. However, this chapter ends with a remarkable surprise. Ahab has already been confronted by the Lord.

On a number of occasions he has been given several opportunities to repent. But on this occasion he actually does repent and the Lord refrains from bringing the disaster that he

has promised upon Ahab himself, saying that he will bring it upon his son instead. In the Lord's announcement of this to Elijah, we might see something of a challenge to the Prophet's excessive zeal.

Like Jonah with his message to Nineveh, Elijah seems to want to have the punishment of the Lord meted out against his enemies. The idea that the enemies might repent and not receive punishment for their sins immediately seems unfair to him. However, although the Lord is gracious with Ahab, the punishment ultimately falls.

In 2 Kings 9, verses 21-26 we read He answered, We read side by side behind Ahab his father how the Lord made this pronouncement against him. A question to consider. Where does Jesus use an allegory of Israel as the vineyard? What parallels might we see with the story of Naboth? Throughout the books of the Kings, the prophets are central actors.

Whether or not kings respond in the appropriate way to the message of the prophets is an important part of the story throughout. This has been an especially prominent theme in the story of Ahab. He and his wife Jezebel have killed prophets of the Lord.

Elijah has had a number of run-ins with them. In chapter 20 a prophet declared judgment upon him after his failure to judge Ben-Hadad. In the previous story of Naboth's vineyard, he had been responsible for the death of Naboth, a man whose name recalls the term for prophecies.

At the end of that chapter, Elijah had declared the doom of his house. Now in chapter 22, the last chapter of 1 Kings, we find a story in which prophets are prominent once more. After three years of peace between Syria and Israel, Ahab is angry because Syria has not kept up their end of the treaty.

Ben-Hadad had promised to restore to Ahab all of the cities that had been taken from his father, presumably Be'asha, not his actual father but one of his predecessors on the throne. However, Ramoth-Gilead in the Transjordan on the border between Israel and Syria had not been restored to Israel. It's an important strategic city.

It's also on a trade route. And the city should have been returned to Israel after chapter 20, according to the agreement with Ben-Hadad. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, has come to Israel and he has allied with Ahab.

In verse 4 he declares, Jehoshaphat fighting alongside Ahab and identifying himself with Ahab is a concerning development. Jehoshaphat is a righteous man, as he's described later in this chapter, but Ahab seems to be playing the dominant role in this alliance. And Jehoshaphat's alliance with him is an over-identification with an unfaithful ruler and kingdom.

Jehoshaphat's father Asa had paid the Syrians to turn against Israel. This is something for



which the Lord had judged him. And now his son Jehoshaphat is helping Israel to fight against the enemies that he had raised up against them.

The concerning prospect here is the possibility of a kingdom united under Ahab in idolatry. One of the blessings of division is that it provides a firebreak for sin. As long as Israel and Judah are separated, the idolatry of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and his successors such as Ahab cannot spread to the southern kingdom so easily.

However, in the reign of Jehoshaphat and his son, there will be a much closer identification between the two kingdoms until Jehu comes on the scene in judgment. Jehoshaphat is a righteous king and before he is prepared to take any action he wants to call for the prophets. 400 prophets are gathered together.

The gathering together of prophets might remind us of chapter 18 verse 20. The same language is used there which is not common elsewhere. And we also see another 400 prophets there.

The 400 prophets of Asherah and we see the 450 prophets of Baal. In chapter 18 we have one true prophet facing off against 400 false ones at Mount Carmel. Elijah against the prophets of Baal.

But now these caught prophets are the false prophets of the Lord and they are going to be standing against Micaiah who is the true prophet of the Lord. When Jehoshaphat hears the word of Zedekiah, he either recognizes that something is off or he wants to find some confirming word from some other prophet. The fact that the 400 prophets are speaking the exact same word together suggests to him that either they need some confirmation in a secondary witness or the prophecy is a flattering one and a false one.

When the prophet Micaiah is mentioned, despite the fact that he tends to bring negative words, he insists on summoning him. That he is fairly easy to summon suggests that he might be near at hand in the king's prison to which he will be returned later on. Whereas the prophets of chapter 18 were false prophets of Baal, these are false prophets who seem to be speaking in the name of the Lord.

This is a much more subtle form of falsehood and takes a lot of wisdom to discern. We might recall the story of chapter 13 with the false prophet of Bethel who leads astray the man of God from Judah. Now there is another man from Judah, Jehoshaphat, who is in danger of being led astray by the false prophets of the king of Samaria.

As he is summoned to the king, Micaiah is requested to give a flattering word, to say what he ought to say, and yet he insists he will speak only in the name of the Lord. When he does give an answer to the king, his answer is originally a mimicking of the other prophets. In verse 15, He repeats the words of the court prophets but Ahab charges him not to lie.

Perhaps he is speaking in a sarcastic manner, or perhaps Ahab himself knows that his court prophets are flatterers rather than speakers of the truth, and that Micaiah, as a righteous prophet of the Lord, would not willingly engage in such flattery, so must purposefully be lying to him. When Micaiah gives his full answer, he predicts the defeat of Israel, and then he declares a vision of a higher court. There is a parallel between two scenes, Jehoshaphat and Ahab in their rule, and the Lord in his rule.

There is an earthly court with its kings, and then there is a higher heavenly court with its king. In verse 10, The vision here is of the divine council. On a number of occasions in scripture we have visions or accounts of the Lord sitting on his throne, surrounded by his various ministers, his angels and other heavenly beings, and also prophets, who by visions are also part of this assembly.

We might have some sense of the divine council in such expressions such as let us in Genesis 1, verse 26, or the let us go down in the story of the Tower of Babel. We might also get some sense of the divine council in places such as Job 1, with the sons of God presenting themselves before the Lord, or in Isaiah 6 and the vision of Isaiah the prophet, or in Revelation and the various scenes of the throne room, or in places like Zechariah and the vision of the dispute between the angel of the Lord and Satan. Here the Lord seeks someone to entice Ahab to his doom, and after a number come forward, a spirit, or perhaps the spirit, comes forward and says that he will entice Ahab.

He will be a lying spirit in the mouths of all of his prophets. The Lord sends the spirit, and with him deception to Ahab. The Lord sends the deception, but he also declares that he is sending the deception, in the prophecy of Micaiah, concerning the truth of which Ahab has some sense.

In 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, verses 9 to 12, we read, The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan, with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. Those verses suggest that people's susceptibility to lies arises in part from their hatred of the truth, if you do not love the truth, you will easily be taken in by lies.

Throughout the book of Proverbs, we find a similar theme. Those who love to be flattered, those who will not be humble and start with the fear of the Lord, are people who are ripe for being deceived. Deep down, they want to be deceived, they want to be told things that flatter them and make them feel good, things that confirm them in their current way.

They will, like Ahab with his court prophets, gather people around them who confirm them, and refuse to listen to people like Micaiah who oppose them, or suggest that they

might have to change in some respect that they do not want to. Many of the speakers of our own age are false prophets, people who seek the praise of men by telling them what they want to hear. Such people will never be short of an appreciative following, and it is worth noting the way that people will seek after false prophets, even though they know that they are not people who are committed to the truth.

They want to be confirmed in their way, and they will gravitate towards the flatterer, even though they know that the flatterer is not telling them the truth. True servants of God must follow the example of Micaiah, speaking the truth of the Lord even if it leads to persecution, while also recognizing the judgment of the Lord in the deception that he has spread among his people, deception that exposes those who truly love the truth from those who have no appetite for it, and want to believe the lie. Zedekiah, the leader of the false prophets, strikes Micaiah on the cheek.

Micaiah has humiliated him, declaring his prophecies to be false, and he asks, If the spirit of the Lord is really deceiving, then how did he get into your mouth? Micaiah answers, We might recall the hiding of Ben-Hadad in chapter 20 here. Ahab is angry, and he puts Micaiah into prison, with the instruction that he be fed meager rations until he returns in peace, proving his prophecy wrong. Yet Ahab does have some sense of concern, and so he determines that he will disguise himself.

While he instructs Jehoshaphat to wear his robes, Jehoshaphat will be the target, while Ahab will not be easy to find. The king of Syria seeks to kill the king of Israel, and isn't especially concerned about everyone else, and so they pursue Jehoshaphat, thinking him to be Ahab. Yet when Jehoshaphat cries out, it becomes apparent to them that he is not in fact Ahab, and they turn off from the pursuit.

Elsewhere in 2 Chronicles we are told that he cried out in prayer to the Lord. Ahab was foolish to believe that he could escape the judgment of the Lord. A certain man draws his bow at random, and unerringly the arrow finds its target, a weakness in the armor of Ahab.

The king is propped up in the chariot, and he gradually bleeds out. Then, according to the prophecy of Micaiah, all of Israel are sent back to their homes, and they return in peace. The king dies, he is brought to Samaria, and then the dogs lick the blood off the chariot by the pool of Samaria, reminding us of the prophecy of Elijah in the preceding chapter.

The prostitutes also wash themselves in the water. Whether they are doing this because they usually washed in that pool, or for superstitious reasons about the blood of a king giving some particular power, the important point is that Ahab's end is a humiliating one. After a summary account of the reign of Ahab, we are told about Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, is a faithful king. He follows in the footsteps of his father

Asa, although he fails to remove the high places, and he makes peace with the king of Israel, seemingly on more favorable terms to Israel than to Judah. Like Solomon before him, he has power over the kingdom of Edom, and as a result has access to the port of Ezion-Geba.

He constructs ships of Tarshish. Presumably we are to understand by this, ships according to the design of Tarshish, perhaps with the help of the Phoenicians. However, the ships will not be in the Mediterranean, but going down the Gulf of Aqaba, perhaps down to Africa or parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

Various suggestions have been put forward for the intended destination of this fleet of ships. We don't know where Ophir was. Some have speculated that it was India.

While Solomon's fleet of ships was amazingly successful, Jehoshaphat's fleet fails. They are wrecked at Ezion-Geba. Like Solomon, Jehoshaphat is someone who enjoys a great period of peace.

He follows after a faithful king and walks in his ways. He builds ships and sends his men for gold. His kingdom is extended and he has various cosmopolitan dealings with other kings.

However, in inviting such comparisons with Solomon, what we see more than anything else is how the House of David has declined over the years. Their former glory has been much diminished. Even though there is still faithfulness to be found in the House of David, the kingdom has greatly declined from the zenith of its golden age under Solomon.

Alongside the tarnishing of the glory of the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom continues in its way of wickedness, continuing in the path of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin. Ahaziah the son of Ahab and Jezebel continues in their way and brings Israel along with him. A question to consider.

How can we develop a love of truth that saves us from deception?