

Notes on I Kings 1–10

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When the narrative of this book begins, we remember that God had promised David that he would establish his throne forever (II Samuel 7). By this, God would fulfill all of his covenant promises to Israel. We who live under the reign of Christ, know that God is fulfilling these promises by blessing us, but God prepared the way for his coming by Israel's history.

Our world is beset by anxious self interest, competing powers and deadly idols. This book gives us helpful insight into these powers. It also shows that God fulfills his purpose in the midst of, and even through these things. He has much encouragement to give to us who live in the kingdom of God and of his Christ and who await the fulfilment of all God's promises.

Chapters 1–2

Adonijah thought his being the oldest surviving son of David justified his desire to be king, and he believed all Israel wanted him as leader (2:15). He had the support of his family and some key players such as Joab and Abiathar. However, David had made a promise to Bathsheba (which we have not heard of until now) that Solomon would succeed David. Why he had kept this from the nation and why he had to be goaded into action now is a mystery.

The roles of priests and generals, and especially prophets, were significant in all of the action that followed. Adonijah had enlisted Abiathar the priest. King Saul's fall from God's favour had shown that it was fatal to act without priestly assistance. Naturally, Adonijah also needed the army with him and had its leader Joab beside him. But he had no prophet. The old and faithful prophet, Nathan, who had served God and David all his life, now acted for the king.

Nathan knew Solomon was the Lord's beloved (I Sam. 12:24–25) and brought Bathsheba to David to make him keep his word to her. David was reminded of his vow, and of God's faithfulness in redeeming him from the many distresses of his life (1:29). Although frail, and confronted with his family failures, he was stirred into action once more, to fulfil his promise and to prevent the people of God being subjected to one man's private ambitions.

Adonijah's grab for power was thwarted. David provided every credential of kingship that he could for his son Solomon. The population was delighted with a secured succession. Adonijah pleaded for mercy in God's presence.

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David now prepared his son Solomon for kingship. He told him of God's covenant promises that gave him his authority. He told him of the covenant law by which he could ensure his participation in that office. He told him of business necessary to the establishment of his throne, things David had not been able to do himself. Then David died, and Solomon was secure in his father's place.

Adonijah should have known that God ruled Israel and that God was 'king maker'. His continued attempt to gain power was confirmed when, after his father's death, he asked, through Bathsheba, for David's concubine to be his wife (2:22). Adonijah had never been curbed by his father (nor had his older brother, Absalom) when he was young, and now, his ambition destroyed him.

Justice also came to Joab and Shimei, and justice with mercy to Abiathar. In making Zadok priest in his stead, the Zadokites were established as the high priestly family (and remained so until the second century BC). The king and the priesthood were now truly at one, under the word of God which had been brought by the true prophet.

Prayer

Father, you have shown us that both our life and your glory rely on your provision of priesthood to secure our worship, kingship to lead us in paths of righteousness and prophecy to ensure that we continue to heed your word. You have given us all three in your Son. We thank you for the purity of his reign, the sureness of his offering for our sins and the word he speaks to us. Grant that we, heeding your promises and your commands, may participate with eagerness in all your will. Keep your servants from petty self-interest. Keep us from sloth lest we let slip the great things you have promised. We ask this in the name of your Son. Amen.

Chapter 3–4

In the nine chapters beginning here, we are told the story of Solomon. His father's reign had been tempestuous but Solomon's was to be peaceful. David had remarked on his son's wisdom (2:6, 9). This wisdom, or perhaps, canniness, led him to cement ties with Egypt by a marriage. Already, we suspect that Solomon was one step removed from the immediate dependence that his father had on the living God. Perhaps he humoured the people with his maintenance of the 'high places'. (After the building of the temple, the prophets who recorded this history regarded the retention of these shrines as a sign of deficiency in a king.)

'High places' could be places for pagan worship (Num. 22:41) or for the worship of Yahweh (II Chron. 33:17). Moses had commanded that sacrifices be made in the place that God caused his name to dwell (Deut. 12:10–14) It was not a matter of personal choice (Deut. 7:5; 12:3; cf. 12:6–14). While Solomon chose the place where the tabernacle was for his own offerings, he did not seem to be so concerned about the proliferation of places which may not have had any divine sanction.

However, Solomon, the beloved of God, did love God and was extravagant with his worship. God was pleased to reveal himself to him. Solomon was grateful for the covenant made with his father and realised that this was why he had come to the kingship. It appears he had done nothing like his brothers in vying for this position. In meekness, he asked for wisdom for when he had to discern between good and evil. God was pleased to grant his request. Immediately, we are given an example of the practical value of this wisdom. The many rivalries endemic in Israel were tempered

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by the fear they felt for one so discerning and the country settled down under his leadership.

Solomon appointed court officials, including those who would collect the royal levies from various areas for maintaining the king's court. These latter officials had one supervisor. The levied areas roughly followed tribal lines but were expanded to include new territories.

It is not clear whether each person who has a familiar name is the same person of whom that name was used previously, so little can be determined about the influence on Solomon's court from his father's court.

The territory Solomon administered was vast, from the Euphrates to Egypt, and his subjects as numerous 'as the grains of sand by the sea'. This fulfilled the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 22:17). His land was also prosperous and contented and secure. This fulfilled the promise made through Moses (Deut. 8:7–9). Solomon had inherited the promises God had made, not only with his father, but also in all three covenants by which God was bringing Israel to her goal.

Solomon also negotiated settlements with kings on all his borders (4:24). He felt he needed a vast household and cavalry to secure his position, though the latter was expressly forbidden by the law (Deut. 17:16; cf. 20:1). His reign would not have been possible without the breadth of wisdom and knowledge and heart that God had given (or rather, was giving) to Solomon. This also was as wide 'as the grains of sand by the sea' and gave him a wide audience with surrounding peoples.

Prayer

Grant, our Father, that in days of prosperity and peace, when we are permitted to enjoy the fruits of our labour and the benefits of our wisdom, that we will receive all these as the blessings of your covenant and the fulfilling of your promises. Surely, our Father, all that we have flows to us from Jesus Christ who has confirmed your covenant with us by his blood. May the nations be drawn to you and see that it is your grace to us in Christ that has made us what we are. In his name we pray. Amen.

Chapter 5–6

Hiram wanted the friendly relations he had with David to continue (cf. II Sam. 5:11), and was delighted to discover that Solomon was eager for the same. The Gentile king recognised Solomon's wisdom. The biblical writer observed that this wisdom was the gift of God to Solomon. His wisdom still rested in the thought that his present peace and prosperity were the fruit of the covenant made with his father and of the battles his father had won. The heart to build the temple was Solomon's, but some of the skills required were from this foreign nation. Perhaps there is a suggestion that all nations will bring their glory for the building of the holy city (Rev. 21:24–26).

Saul, Jonathan, all Israel and Judah, and Michal, had, each in their own way, loved David (I Sam. 16:21; 18:1, 16, 20, 28; 20:17). Hiram also had been attracted by this man whom God had favoured.

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Forced labour was not to be drawn from Israel (Lev. 25:39), but Solomon made an exception for the workers he sent to Tyre in shifts for this building work. Otherwise, forced labourers were drawn from aliens (I Kin. 9:20–21).

Four hundred and eighty years may be a coded way of saying that 12 generations, each of 40 years (Deut. 1:3) has passed, making this the mid point in Israel's occupation of the promised land. Alternatively, if the figure is accurate, it would indicate an exodus date of 1446 BC, but dates are hard to pin down.

The temple followed the pattern for the tabernacle revealed to Moses but was double in size, and grander, and, of course, fixed. This was the place where the Lord would make his name to dwell (Deut. 26:2)—and so it did, for some 380 years.

A building site with no noise would have been awe-inspiring! (Was Solomon influenced by the need for unhewn stones as for an altar described in Exodus 20:25?) He 'finished' the building then covered it with cedar and added side chambers. God spoke to Solomon to remind him of what worship was all about, that is, hearing and obeying his statutes and receiving God's promises (Lev. 26:11–12). The building was 'finished' but he added more and overlaid the whole house with gold until it was 'finished'. Still, some furnishings and ornamentation were added until seven years had been spent building it. Then, it was 'finished'.

Kings of surrounding nations typically built a house for their deity, and idol that represented the unity of the nation. Other kings had claimed that God had revealed the plans for the temple. But the institution of this temple would do nothing for Solomon or Israel without the relationship of obedience described here.

The carved cherubim in the most holy place and the engravings of more cherubim and palm trees and flowers on all the walls suggest that in coming to worship God, Israel returned to Eden (Gen. 3:24), a sign of the coming restoration of all things.

In Israel's worship, cherubim guarded the throne of God (Exod. 25:18–22) and God was present between, or on, or above the cherubim.

Prayer

Father, let no secular mind set destroy the awe of your presence. Jesus has been set among us as your temple. What awesome things happened in his flesh: the healings, the teachings, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. By all these things you have caused your name to be remembered in the earth. We cannot deny that you are among us. In him, we have the promise of the restoration of all things. Then let our hearts be attentive, grateful and obedient. May the nations acknowledge that you are among us, and come with their glory, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chapter 7–8

Solomon's palace, a house for his Egyptian wife and rooms of state, took longer to build than the temple and were larger, although they may have been built at the same time as the temple. They were of similar construction to the temple. However, the writer's purpose takes him back to telling us about the temple furnishings.

The wise craftsman (and the timber for this work) came from Tyre although his mother was an Israelite. Descriptions of the furnishings are meagre but sufficient for

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us to know their grandeur and cost and ornamentation. All these, together with David's provisions, were brought into the temple ready for use.

Wisdom to build the tabernacle in the wilderness had come from the Spirit (Exod. 31:3–5).

A new house had been made but not a new ark or copy of the law. God's covenant with his people held centre stage in all this glory, or rather, God himself. Solomon showed by all his sacrifices that whatever God had prescribed he would supply in abundance. God filled what Solomon had made, showing that it pleased him to be among them, and Israel's priests could not serve when he made his presence known.

Solomon remembered the word to his father: 'I have not sought a place for my name to dwell'. God had first sought out and prepared a person who would lead his people into their inheritance and in obedience to his ways. The temple was the result of what was in David's heart. He knew that worship was obedience before sacrifice (Ps. 40:6; Heb. 10:5, 8). Jesus Christ would come as King, purify his people and lead them in true worship. His flesh would be the temple for his people-torn down by man, raised up again by God in full glory (John 2:19–22).

Solomon, in what is possibly his greatest accomplishment, worshipped God and prayed for his nation and for the world, a prayer which Jesus came to answer (Isa. 56:7; Mark 11:17).

'Who can compare with you, Lord, a God who keeps his covenant with true worshippers? Lord, keep your covenant with my father! The universe cannot contain you, but you are here. Hear my prayer, and the prayers of your people always, and forgive their sins!'

Many would pray because of judgements on their sins or on Israel's sins. 'May they be forgiven and restored and taught the right way! Give them what they deserve, according to your right knowledge of all people, so that all may fear you! May the prayers of foreigners also be heard when they come to pray because news of your greatness has moved them! May Israel's armies be heard when they wage war. If, as is probable, they are given over to their enemies, even then, hear them when they repent and cry to you. May these enemies be kind and restore them to their inheritance! Lord, we are your inheritance according to your great deeds through Moses. Finish what you have begun!'

With such a prayer offered and heard, Solomon blessed the people. He confessed in their presence that God had fulfilled all that he had promised through Moses. He called on God to incline their hearts to his law. He asked God to continue his favour to them daily so the nations would know the one true God, and then called Israel to be devoted to God.

Then the worship began. Extraordinary measures were taken to accommodate the sacrifices offered and the people from all Solomon's dominions who wished to be present. These included the dedication of additional holy space and doubling the time for the feast. Being assured of God's forgiveness and of the blessing of fellowship that the sacrifices conveyed to Israel, the people of God returned to their tents with great joy.

Prayer

Father, you have provided for us that we may worship you in spirit and in truth. Though our sins have been many and your judgements been just, one sacrifice, even the body of your Son, has brought to us forgiveness and eternal fellowship with you. You have made your name to be remembered in all places through him. Grant now that nations may come to you through the preaching of his name. Grant that their sins may be forgiven. May we, your people, know your favour forever and be kept in true faith, hope and love, for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chapter 9–10

Solomon had received the wisdom he requested in an earlier appearance of the Lord (3:5). This time, his second request was granted: the temple would be consecrated 'perpetually' and 'forever'. This is where the Lord's name would be known.

This 'forever' required something of Solomon: 'As for you . . .'. He must keep God's commands; then his throne would be secure. If he or his sons turned to idols, both the land and the temple would be lost and the nations would know that the living God had disciplined Israel. God's covenants and promises were not a fate foreseen requiring nothing from his people but the engagement of God's will with the will of sinners, to bring them, by his grace, to the goal that his love had prepared for them.

We now know that neither Solomon nor many of his sons kept the commands of the Lord. What then of God's promise? Could there ever be a place on earth where the Lord had made his name known and where he could be petitioned for mercy? We now know that Christ is the Son of David who kept all the commands of God and in whom there is a 'Yes' to every promise God made (II Cor. 1:19–20). He revisited and recapitulated all of Israel's history. We are grafted into this renewed Israel in Christ and can be assured that in him, there is a place where God's name may be sought and where favour may be obtained. Of course, a warning remains for those who will not abide in Christ (John 15:6).

The time for Solomon's building work required half of the period of his reign. His public works established a civilisation, something made possible by the peace he had inherited and which would set the scene for generations to come. Further supplies of gold were secured by ceding 20 border villages to Hiram of Tyre. These were probably inhabited by Canaanites and were no great prize as Hiram discovered. Other remaining Canaanites were pressed into forced labour leaving Israelites free for government and military positions.

Because Pharaoh of Egypt was Solomon's father in law, Israel's lands were enriched by his conquering Gezer for his daughter. The multiplying of horses was prohibited by Moses (Deut. 17:14–16) but Solomon had secured himself, in part, by political means, and felt that he needed them.

Yet again, we are told that the temple was 'finished', this time, not as a construction, but with the prescribed worship of Israel's great festivals (Exod. 23:14–17). We are also told of the ships that Solomon needed to bring gold to his coffers.

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A different word, *shalam*, is used for 'finished' and it signifies the completing of something or fulfilling of an obligation as in a covenant obligation.

Solomon's riches and wisdom gave him fame as far as Sheba (modern Yemen) and this was linked with 'the name of the Lord' and so, the temple (8:20). The Queen of Sheba visited Jerusalem with more than trade in her mind. She opened up all that was in her heart. Solomon's wisdom, and the riches that she would have recognised as its fruit, left her speechless. She heard of the Lord who loved Israel forever. In other words, Solomon had explained the covenant made with his father and had given glory to God. She saw that what God had done brought delight to Israel's administrators and justice and righteousness to the whole nation.

Copious gifts were exchanged. We are also told here of the exotic imports that Solomon was able to afford, and the amount of gold Israel received and how it was used in enriching his house. The Queen of Sheba left, but she was one of many world dignitaries who came to learn the wisdom and observe the riches of Solomon. He had asked for wisdom and our writer reminds us that God gave it to him. God had also given him riches and some of these are listed.

Later, Israel's prophets were aware of the danger to Israel's soul in the riches that she gathered (Ezek. 16:15), but they also were shown the day when, through the good news of God's salvation, all the glory of the nations would flow in to enrich the people of God (Isa. 60:4–9).

Prayer

Thanks be to you Father that there is a place on earth where your name is known and your mercy is sure. The flesh of your Son, and your holy church joined to him, now proclaim your grace to us. Then let us cling to him and to your word and may our hearts be kept from all idols. Father, if riches increase and settled life is possible, grant that it may be for your service and for the doing of good deeds. Already, you have made us wise through the knowledge of your Son and the gift of your Spirit. May the nations see your glory. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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