

1 Kings 2:13-46

His Kingdom Shall Know No End

For the modern reader, one of the greatest challenges of ancient literature is transporting ourselves from our day and age to that of the text. This opening story of Solomon, full of palace intrigue and violence, is certainly a good example of this difficulty. There is nothing good here for the modern reader because we have taken certain things for granted. One of the unique traditions of America is the peaceful transition of power. Throughout all of history, the crowning of kings led to the death of anyone who might rival the new monarch. It is not surprising, then, that the reign of Solomon did not begin with peace, but with violence. There is no getting around the fact that Solomon comes off as violent and even unjust.

What is happening here? The opening chapters of 1 Kings explores the death of David and the establishment of Solomon's reign. Chapter 1 is about succession whereas chapter 2 is about the security of the throne. Notice the *inclusio* of verses 12 and 46b which unveil the main purpose. This chapter chronicles how God established the kingdom of Solomon.

It all begins with the first challenge to Solomon's throne in the person of **Adonijah** (vs. 13-25) who was the oldest surviving son of David and, thus, the natural heir to the throne. He is not, however, the promised heir. Throughout Scripture, younger brothers are chosen over the older – Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, David and his brothers. Although he was not the eldest surviving son of David, Solomon was appointed heir over Adonijah, a truth he must either accept or rebel against.

Before David's death, Adonijah led a coup in order to secure for himself the throne. He then surrounded himself with dangerous men who were problems for David. Adonijah, the half-brother Solomon, wants power more than anything and is, therefore, a clear threat to his throne.

Initially, Solomon showed him mercy. So long as he behaved and recognized his rule, Solomon would spare him. Regardless, Adonijah returned later and requested to marry Abishag the Shunammite who had been one of David's concubines. This was a clear affront to Solomon's rule as such a marriage was a claim to the kingdom. Clearly, Adonijah's ambitions had not been subdued. He was back to his old tricks.

He made the request to Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, first, but Solomon wisely realized what was behind the request. Adonijah was not interested in marriage or love, but power and control. To give Abishag to Adonijah was akin to giving his older brother the kingdom. Solomon would have to be a fool to agree with this marriage. As a result, Solomon ordered his execution (vs. 23-25). Although harsh to modern ears, this was the way of power politics. To establish one's throne, one's enemies

had to be subdued. Solomon showed his brother mercy, but he refused to surrender his claim to the throne.

Adonijah is a warning regarding the lust for power. When power is our aim, we will ruin relationships, run over people, and become corrupt. Adonijah was a threat to Solomon's anointed rule and Abishag's rights. Power should never be the ends. When power is the end, we will justify anything as the means.

The second challenge to Solomon's throne was **Abiathar** who had been a priest at Nob and friend of David (vs. 26-27). Abiathar was loyal to David until his death where he sided with Adonijah in his attempt to take the throne for himself. Given his influence in Jewish religion, Solomon had every right to declare him guilty of treason. Solomon initially, as he had done with Adonijah, showed him mercy. However, he forfeited his right to serve as a priest having corrupted the faith by staining it with partisan politics – a real warning to evangelicals today. Despite all of this, Solomon chose a merciful judgment. Instead of executing him, he exiled him to keep him from further polluting the proper exercise of Jewish worship.

We then meet **Joab** (vs. 28-35) whom David warned Solomon about (1 Kings 2:6). He was a violent man who supported Adonijah's attempt to take the throne from Solomon. When the king sought to address Joab, the general fled. He escaped to the altar of God which, he believed, would protect him (Exodus 21:12-14). He rightly assumed that executing him there would be sacrilegious and would have required Solomon to execute the executioner! He is essentially playing a dangerous game of Tag wherein the altar is like "Safety." His strategy, however, was unsuccessful as he was eventually executed by the command of the king.

Joab is a warning against violence. The general cared little about justice or submission to the law. Joab was a law unto himself who both lived and died by the sword. Any nation that tolerates or justifies violence is a nation that has lost its moral compass. We must guard against justifying any form of violence with the proverbial "but." Violence and murder (and no doubt Joab's hands were proverbially stained with the blood of countless victims) violate God's commands as each person is made in the image and likeness of God

The final threat to Solomon's throne was **Shimei** (vs. 36-46) who had cursed David while he was fleeing from Absalom. David had shown him kindness, but among his final wishes was for Solomon to judge Shimei for his actions (1 Kings 2:9). Solomon initially put him under house arrest. Although he was from the tribe of Benjamin (like King Saul), Solomon ordered him to stay in Jerusalem which isolated him from any of his tribal supporters. After three years, however, two of his slaves escaped forcing him to choose between loyalty and greed. He foolishly chose the latter forcing Solomon to execute justice. Interestingly, the slaves fled to Gath which was the home of Goliath. In the end, Shimei proved himself to be a greedy man in the end.

Although there are several clear warnings against human nature (greed, violence, syncretism, etc.), the main point of the passage is to demonstrate how the Lord established the kingdom of Solomon, and, therefore, the house of David. Initially, Solomon addressed internal threats including the corruption of power and religion, violence, and greed. Each threatened his peaceful rule. The problem, however, is that God's patience with Israel ran out like Solomon's patience with these men. Babylon was eventually sent as God's act of judgment against his own people. It is tragic, but necessary.

Ultimately, the only way for David's throne to be eternal is for the eternal Son of God, the Son of David, one wiser than Solomon, to establish his Kingdom. What sets Christ's Kingdom apart from the kingdoms of Solomon and David is that Jesus conquers the corruption and evil of man, not with violence and the state, but by defeating death and sin. Jesus does what Solomon could not. As we explore the reign of Solomon, let us look to Jesus who is a true and better King.

1 Kings 3:1-15

Where is the One Who is Wise?

There's a difference between intelligence and wisdom. At a Bible school, a football player nicknamed "Meathead" took a New Testament course where there was no homework, reading, or tests before the final. For 25 years, the professor asked a single question for the final, "Describe the Missionary Journeys of Paul." Hoping for an easy "A," He spent all semester studying Paul's missionary journeys in preparation.

When the final exam was given, he was stunned to find a different question, "Critique the Sermon on the Mount that was preached by Jesus." The shock was felt across the room. One young man threw his test on the professor's desk empty of any content. One by one, each left empty test on the professor's desk, except for Meathead who wrote for hours.

That afternoon, the professor had two stacks of tests. On his right was a tall stack of blank tests, all with the grade of "F." On his left was a single test with a giant "A+" at the top. It was Meathead's whose opening line read, "Who am I to criticize the Sermon on the Mount? Instead, let me tell you about the missionary journeys of Paul." And so he did!

Meathead had discovered wisdom.

First Kings 3 is perhaps the best-known narrative in the life of Solomon. It is here Solomon receives wisdom from the Lord. If the previous chapter had not made it clear enough, the opening verses remind us of the need for political leaders to possess wisdom in abundance. This is **Wisdom Announced** (vs. 1-3). In a pithy summary, we are given insight into the burdens and cares of civic leadership. To begin, Solomon needed *political leadership* as demonstrated in his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. Political marriages were common in the ancient world – something Egypt at their apotheosis rarely practiced. This marriage showed both the power of Solomon and the faithfulness of the Lord. It is striking to discover that Pharaoh is forced to give his daughter to the nation whom they used to enslave. Regardless, through this alliance, Israel announced itself on the world stage.

Likewise, civic leaders like Solomon need *economic wisdom*. In connection with his marriage is a reference to both his palace and the temple. Both demonstrate Israel's political and economic strength. To build these magnificent buildings required an abundance of gold, lumber, and other materials which required the overwhelming financial blessings of God.

Finally, Solomon needed *religious wisdom*. Although there is debate regarding the reference to "high places" (a term that suggests idolatry) the text wants us to see this as a positive. Despite not initially having a temple, Israel, under the leadership of Solomon, worshipped the Lord in contrast to Saul.

This leads to **Wisdom Asked** (vs. 4-15). In this recognizable story, Solomon is invited by the Lord to ask anything, and it would be given to him. Although we may have requested financial freedom, great health, or an abundance in other ways, Solomon requests unrivaled wisdom (vs. 8-9). The language he uses (“discern between good and evil”) echoes the Garden of Eden where our first parents foolishly chose destruction over intimacy. Pleased, the Lord delivers on his promises in abundance leading to Solomon becoming the wisest of leaders in the history of Israel.

The chapter concludes with **Wisdom Applied** (vs. 16-28) wherein Solomon authenticates his divine wisdom. Two prostitutes are brought to him following the death of one of their children. The robbed mother responded by switching her deceased baby with her colleague’s. Without the aid of DNA, Solomon must determine who the real mother is. The king wisely understood human nature knowing that every mother was willing to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their child. One may recall Afghani mothers giving their babies to American soldiers as they left the country. Though tragic, it is consistent with a mother’s love.

Knowing this Solomon threatened to sever the child in half. The false mother agreed to the terms due to bitterness and envy. In contrast, the real mother offered to surrender her baby for the sake of their life. That singular, and natural, act was enough for Solomon. Clearly, Solomon was a wise king who ruled with divine wisdom and knowledge. At this point in the narrative, he is the hero Israel had been waiting for.

Taken together, there are a few points of application worth considering. First, we ought to **SEEK WISDOM**. It is worth noting we are never given details regarding Solomon’s education. No doubt he benefited from a royal education that set him apart from the average ancient Hebrew, but the text highlights wisdom. In Scripture, knowledge and wisdom are not synonyms though they are often associated together. Education does not make one wise. Likewise, some of the least educated people are wise. Instead, we are invited to seek wisdom like Solomon which begins with one’s devotion to God.

Secondly, we are invited to **SAVOR WISDOM**. How can we find wisdom if we do not know where to search? My advice is to look at Solomon. His journey toward wisdom began with faith which was deep and abiding. He genuinely loved the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. A faith limited by our conveniences or bound by our prejudices is a faith that will never produce wisdom. Divine wisdom begins with the Divine. Find wisdom, therefore, in Scripture, the gospel, and in fellow believers. Ultimately, if you seek wisdom, you will find it in the one who is greater than Solomon.

Finally, we are invited to **SHARE WISDOM**. Throughout the early chapters of Proverbs, Solomon speaks as a father to a son. It concludes with a final poem from a father to his son regarding the ideal wife (Proverbs 31). In other words, divine wisdom is not to be privatized but shared. This is the beauty of the local church and of the Kingdom of God. If we walk in humility, we will grow in wisdom ... together.

1 Kings 5-7

A Theology of Presence

Not to insult your intelligence, but parental investment is good for children. For some reason we needed studies to prove what we've always known. When a father sips imaginary tea with his daughter, he's doing more than pretending. When a mother watches her son do something dangerous without freaking out, she's doing more than adding gray hair to her head. Presence is essential to well-being.

The same is true for our spiritual lives. No matter how often we try it, a theology of absence never works. This is why the first post-Christian generation has deep issues of anxiety, loneliness, depression, and shame. We have isolated ourselves from our Creator-Redeemer.

The preparation and building of the Jewish temple is the climax of the Old Testament narrative. Ever since the Fall in Genesis 3, the Bible has been anticipating this moment. God was coming down to dwell with his people permanently.

The story begins with the preparation of the Temple (5:1-12) where Solomon signs a trade deal with Hiram, the king of Tyre, who provides the necessary materials. The narrator then focuses on the Temple's design. It was so glorious that the 2nd temple, built by Zerubbabel following the Babylonian captivity, paled in comparison (see Haggai 3:2; see also Psalm 96:6). One unique aspect of the Jewish Temple was its connection to the Garden of Eden. Both were orientated toward the east. The Garden imagery of the Temple was purposeful including the presence of a tree (in the form of a menorah) at its heart. There were also countless flowers and trees carved into the wood and gold throughout. Finally (though countless other parallels could be drawn), cherubim were prominently placed.

What was the significance of the Temple? Behind its construction was a Theology of Presence. The fundamental story of Scripture is how God dwells with his people. Every religion reverses the order of things suggesting worshipers can ascend to the heavens and dwell with God (think of the Tower of Babel). This is done through ritual, journeys, mysticism, or strict rule keeping. Only Christianity has the Holy One descending to dwell with the unholy; the Creator with his creation; the Shepherd with his sheep; God with the godless; the Redeemer with the unredeemed.

The fundamental question of the Bible is, how can a holy and righteous God dwell with an unholy, wicked people? The answer is in both Reconciliation (through atonement) and Purity. After Adam and Eve rebelled against God, he responded through atonement.

The Temple represents the permanent residence of God among his people. It is the culmination of the Abrahamic promise. God described it in Exodus 29:45, “I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God.”

The Temple, like the tabernacle before it, however, was always a temporary solution. Once Babylon destroyed Solomon’s Temple and sent the Jews into captivity, the sense of absence became very real. Through the prophets, God promised he would never leave nor forsake his people. It wasn’t until the birth of Jesus that the theology of presence was given its true climax.

Jesus is the true and better temple. In 20 BC, Herod the Great undertook a massive renovation of Zerubbabel’s Temple which took 46 years to complete (see John 2:20). Herod’s Temple, by all accounts, was marvelous (see Mark 13:1).

Yet, its beauty was a façade. Like the religion of Israel, it looked good on the outside but was corrupt on the inside. Jesus, however, claimed for himself to be the true temple. Following the cleansing of the Temple, Jesus said, “So the Jews said to him, ‘What sign do you show us for doing these things?’”¹⁹ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ ...²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²²When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken” (John 2:18-22).

This follows an astounding statement by John, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The word for “dwelt” is the Greek word “tabernacle.” Jesus is the true and better temple.

The benefits of Christ as the True and Better Temple are immense. God is not to be found in a temple made of hands, but in a Savior who rescues sinners. We pray directly to God without the aid of priests and rituals. We do not repeatedly offer sacrifices due to our constantly sinning. Rather, we have a true and better Lamb of God who takes away our sins forever.

A three-year-old girl went to her pediatrician with the flu. As the doctor examined her ears, he asked, “Will I find Big Bird in here?” Apprehensively, Katie replied, “No.” Then, before examining her throat, he asked, “will I find the Cookie Monster in here?” Again, “No.” Finally, listening to her heart he asked, “Will I find Barney in here?” With innocent conviction she looked him directly in the eye and said, “No, Jesus is in my heart. Barney is on my underwear!”

Martin Luther said something similar, “Should anyone knock at my heart and say, ‘Who lives here?’ I should reply, ‘Not Martin Luther, but The Lord Jesus Christ.’”

1 Kings 8:1-11

The Temple: Atonement

Imagine a scenario where little Johnny, a rambunctious young man, is sent outside to play by his exhausted mother. An hour later, she discovers that he failed to clean his room as she had asked. She hollers for the boy to come inside to clean his room, but as he approaches the front door, she realizes little Johnny is covered in mud. What does the mother do? She can either send Johnny upstairs to his room or, first, hose him down. The answer is obvious. Only a fool would ignore the mud.

The same is true regarding our redemption and spiritual well-being. The fundamental question of the Bible is, how can humans stand in the presence of a holy God? There are only two options: religion or grace. Given that this climactic chapter is about how the God of glory manages to dwell among his people, the means of that achievement is addressed first. God can only dwell with us when we are cleansed by means of atonement.

In the opening two verses, all of Israel and her leaders are assembled to witness the consecration of the Temple. The timing is significant. The writer wants us to know that this consecration service took place “at the feast in the month of Ethanim, which is the 7th month.” That is known as the Feast of Tabernacles which was one of three festivals in which Jews were encouraged to travel to Jerusalem. They would build booths and live in them for seven days to commemorate their journey through the wilderness and the conquering of the Promised Land and how God provided for them along the way.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a time of recommitment and renewal by remembrance. Solomon rightly saw the construction of the Temple as the fulfillment of God’s promises to his people. So, he utilizes this national holiday to call on Israel to be spiritually renewed.

Being assembled, the Ark of the Covenant was transferred into the “inner sanctuary.” Borrowing from the previous relocation effort, we can assume that the sacrifices offered during the parade took place every six steps. This, obviously, slowed the process down and required many sacrifices – so many that “they could not be counted or numbered” (1 Kings 8:5; 2 Chronicles 5:6).

The parade concluded when the priests brought the Ark into the Holy of Holies. The emphasis is on the “cherubim,” which are unique beings not to be confused with angels. They appear over sixty times throughout Scripture with the duties of guarding sacred space and upholding the sacred throne. Because the Jews were barred from making any images of God, they understood that he sat upon his throne carried by the cherubim (see Psalm 99:1). Thus, when the High Priest entered the Inner Sanctuary, they didn’t see God or any depiction of him, but the presence of the cherubim was a reminder that he was there.

What is most significant for our purposes is what the presence of the Ark sets up for Israel. God now dwells with his people, as made clear in verses 10-11. By implication, the Jews could go directly toward God. The problem, however, was that man was stained with sin and therefore was unworthy to be near God. That's what the cherubim are there for. What was required was a Mediator and Atonement.

With the Ark of the Covenant in place, the people watch in awe as the heavy glory of God descended to rest in the inner sanctuary. The scene is so intense that even the priests, guarded by countless sacrifices and sanctified for the work they were doing, cannot be present. The presence of God is heavy indeed.

This is the climax of the Old Testament. It does not get better than this. This is what Abraham hoped for. This is what Moses worked for. This is what Joshua conquered for. This is what David prepared for. On this special day, the Jews watched as God tabernacled among them, and they beheld his glory.

This is the beauty of Christ. He embodies all of this. He is the presence of God who now sits atop the Cherubim. He is the Mediator between us and God. He is the High Priest who intercedes on our behalf. He is the atoning lamb that makes reconciliation possible.

1 Kings 8:10-11

Don't Misunderestimate Glory

It is no secret that language evolves, and the meaning of words can change over time. In January 2008, Senator Barack Obama used the word “enormity” in a speech which meant “shockingly evil” or even “an immoral act” and turned it into a word that meant “largeness.” Now, we use the word in the latter sense. President Thomas Jefferson coined the term “belittle” while President Bush unintentionally seemed to make up words. My favorite would be, “misunderestimate.”

The meaning of words matters especially as it relates to the truths of Scripture and the nature of God. However, Christians often use words, inspired by the Bible, without clarity on its meanings. The word “glory” comes to mind and it lies at the center of the consecration of the temple. What does it really mean that God’s glory descended into the Temple?

The first meaning of “glory” is tied to **Essence**. One of the challenges of human language is its limitations when it comes to the indescribable. Scripture itself understands this struggle and provides ample ways of speaking of God. For the most part, we are limited to describing God’s attributes. God is love, sovereign, jealous, providential, creator, and just.

The Bible does, however, provide words that get closer to who God is. “Glory” is one of them. The word has two basic meanings. The first is “heavy” or “weighty.” When the priest Eli fell back on his chair and broke his neck, the text tells us he was “heavy” (1 Samuel 4:18). Likewise, Absalom’s hair is described as long and heavy (2 Samuel 14:26). Both examples use the word “glory.”

Scripture doesn’t want us to associate God with “heaviness,” as if he were an obese God like Eglon, the king of Moab. Rather, heaviness in the ancient world was associated with one’s reputation. It describes one’s honor. For example, Isaiah suggests God created us “for my glory” (Isaiah 43:7). Here, we think of God’s reputation. He is holy, righteous, jealous, honorable, eternal, divine, omnipotent, and good.

The second meaning of glory is “bright.” In Revelation 21:23, we discover the New Jerusalem will lack a sun because “the glory of God gives it light.” Likewise, “the glory of the Lord shone around” the angels who visited the shepherds at the nativity. The “brightness” of God’s glory is more than headlights on a rural street. Perhaps walking outside on a bright sunny day after watching a movie in a dark theater gets closer to what the Bible describes. God’s “brightness” hints at his beautiful, splendor, majesty, and awe.

Another meaning of “glory” is **Expression**. One of the beautiful aspects of God’s glory is that not only is it intrinsic, but it is also extrinsic. That is to say, God *is* glorious, but that he also shares his glory. He shares his glory in a variety of ways. The first is creation which both demonstrates and

reflects his glory. “The heavens declare” writes Psalm 19:1, “the glory of God.” The God of beauty creates beauty. The creation of God reflects the glory of God.

God also expresses his glory in judgment. It is striking we often cry for justice but are shocked to discover that God is gloriously just. Isn't it good when evil is punished, the righteous are rescued, and justice wins? In Exodus 14:4, God declares he would harden Pharaoh's heart in judgment to “get glory over Pharaoh and all his host” (see also Ezekiel 28:22).

God also shares his glory in redemption. Salvation is not an entitlement, but the result of God's glorious grace being made known among sinners (see Romans 9:22-23). The same is applied to our sanctification. The growth of a believer reflects our glorious God. Jesus stated in John 15:8, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

Finally, glory is **Experienced**. If God is not only glorious in his being, but shares his glory with his creation, then our response to God's glory must be to return it. How do we do that? The first way is through our worship. Worship is to ascribe to God what he already is.

This is why the 1st Commandment is so important. Idolatry is to glorify what is not glorious. It is the chief of sins. The idols of America (food, sex, power, entertainment, money, and influence) are not glorious. We are called to glorify God with our worship (see Psalm 66:2; 115:1). This is how saints persevere through suffering, triumph over persecution, and conquer the world without raising a sword. We live to extol the God of our salvation. We return to him what he has shared with us.

Finally, we glorify God by our walk. When our walk does not match our worship, we sin. If the focus of our worship is the resurrected Savior, then so should our lives. We should glorify God in all that we do. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Our lives should be God-focused, not self-focused. This is contrary to the American creed. John Calvin wrote, “We never truly glory in God until we have utterly discarded our own glory.” This applies to your place of employment, home, our choice of entertainment, and in our relationships.

Perhaps it is best to give Scripture the final word. Meditate on the final passage.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,¹² saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?”¹⁴I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

- ¹⁵ “Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.
- ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.
- ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:9-17)

1 Kings 8:22-53

The Components of Prayer

Studies show that technology designed to connect us has made communication more difficult. A 2021 study revealed a 1/3 of adults have fallen out with someone after misreading a text message. One humorous example of digital miscommunication is of a mother who texted her son, “Your aunt just passed away. LOL.” “Mom,” asked the son, “why is that funny!?” “It’s not funny,” she exclaimed. “Why would you even ask?” “LOL” he explained, “means ‘laugh out loud.’” “Oh no!” I thought it meant ‘lots of love.’”

We all know that communication is important to healthy relationships. Our spiritual journey is no different. No amount of technology can replace prayer and scripture reading and in this pivotal scene, Solomon demonstrates how to pray and what components should be included.

First, biblical prayer involves **Adoration** (vs. 22-24). Solomon highlights three truths about God. First, he is unique. Remember that Israel was established among polytheist paganism. Although each culture expressed their religion their own way, paganism was largely uniform. The gods were chaotic and often as wicked as those who worshipped them. Each god was powerful but limited in his power. Gods controlled the wind, the waves, and the womb, but could not control all three. Solomon declares that the God of Israel was unlike any other.

Secondly, God is faithful. The consistent message of Scripture is that God’s love is perfecting and steadfast as opposed to fickle and emotional. Solomon was aware of the flaws of his father but celebrates the faithfulness of YHWH. The history of Israel is a frustrating one. God proves faithful, while Israel proves unfaithful (see Deuteronomy 7:7-9).

Finally, Solomon highlighted God’s presence. The entire premise of 1 Kings 8 regards God dwelling with his people. He has declared and made them holy. He has come down to permanently dwell with them and he invites them in. Prayer draws us into intimacy with our Maker. The thought itself should draw us to adoration and worship.

The second component of biblical prayer is **Supplication** (vs. 25-30). If we’re honest, our prayer life is dominated by supplication, not adoration. Requestion-only prayer turns God into a type of genie or ATM machine, but that doesn’t mean supplication is wrong since our Father welcomes the needs of his children. The problem comes when our prayers are exclusively requests or limited by personal wants.

Solomon’s first request is for protection (vs. 24-26). He asks that God would continue to honor the Davidic Covenant. Remember, he just established that God keeps his covenants and shows

“steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart” (vs. 23). He is not doubting God’s grace but reaffirming it. He is acknowledging his and his ancestors’ failures. God’s protection of the Davidic line is good for Israel.

Solomon also requests attention from God (vs. 27-30). He recognizes God cannot be contained to a room inside the Temple, yet, what the presence of God demonstrates is that YHWH listens to the cries of his children. When they approach him, Solomon asks that God always be ready to stoop to listen to them.

The third component of biblical prayer is **Intercession** (vs. 31-45). Solomon details seven scenarios for when the Hebrew people would cry out to God for grace. It is worth noting that Solomon intercedes before these actions are committed thus admitting “we’re weak and will fail. Despite that, show us mercy.”

The final component of biblical prayer modeled by Solomon is **Redemption** (vs. 46-53). Solomon addresses the ultimate punishment against Israel: expulsion from the Promised Land. Exile from the land was exile from God’s presence. Remember that 1-2 Kings was written to an exiled people recounting the story of the Jewish monarchs. They were in exile because of their rebellion. Solomon interceded on their behalf while pleading with the reader to repent with the assurance that God would hear their prayer & deliver them.

Solomon shared the same pattern of grace we see throughout Scripture. First justice requires the judgment of sin (vs. 46). Despite deserving judgment, however, God welcomes repentance. Such repentance, according to Solomon, involves turning one’s heart away from sin, repenting of our wrongdoing, and pleading for grace. In that moment of repentance, Solomon assures us, God extends grace (see vs. 49-50). God is always ready to forgive any and every sinner that repents.

This is, perhaps, the main point of the text. The purpose of the spiritual disciplines is to draw us into intimacy with our redeemer. Whether we are reading Scripture, praying, fasting, meditating, or worshipping, our focus should be on the God of the gospel. Spiritual health begins and ends at the cross of Jesus. The climax of Solomon’s prayer was not for physical health or personal prosperity, but that God might demonstrate his love by saving sinners.

In northeast Portland, Oregon, hope takes the form of a horse chestnut tree. It grows on the corner of Morris Street and 7th Avenue, and its branches are full of wishes. The property owner wrote out a few wishes and hung them on the tree before leaving town in 2013. When she returned, the entire tree was covered in wishes. After that, the owner posted instructions to the tree on a wooden clipboard. The note read, “This is a wishing tree. Please find a blank tag. Write your wish for you, a loved one, the neighborhood, etc.” Some wishes posted on the tree include, “I wish for everlasting love,” “I wish for everyone to have what they need,” “I wish my dad was nice,” and “I wish to find my purpose and love for life again.”

One can understand the sentiment. No doubt we’ve all made wishes before blowing out birthday candles or throwing a penny in a fountain. Prayer to a faceless, unknown entity won’t get you far. We have the ear of God almighty, Maker of the Heaven and Earth. Do not neglect to go to him.

1 Kings 8:54-66

Come and See. Go and Tell.

All of us have seminal moments that shape the rest of our life. I immediately think of the day I met my wife or when I talked to an ambassador of what would become my alma mater while still in high school. A single moment; a single conversation; a single experience can be enough to shape the rest of our lives.

The consecration of Solomon's Temple is such a moment for the Israelites. Their experience here is to shape the rest of their life. This generation of Hebrews experienced the presence of God. What a seminal moment for them.

Having encountered God, Solomon directs our attention to **rest** (vs. 54-56) which is the deep longing of the human soul and a major theme of Scripture. First introduced in Creation, humans are exiled from rest the minute sin enters the story. We are searching for rest, but all we find is chaos, stress, violence, and fear. One thinker described themselves as neither an early bird nor as a night owl. They were more like "a permanently exhausted pigeon."

The Mosaic code introduced Sabbath Law whereby Israel where to practice rest. But rest is more than a command. After all, how many of us experience fatigue despite hours of sleep? Rest cannot be secured by law or by pills. This is why the Bible describes Sabbath Promise (see Exodus 33:14; Joshua 1:13, 22:4). Solomon sees the consecration of the temple and, with it, the presence of God as the fulfillment of that promise. When God is with his people, there is rest. People who come near to God find rest.

The problem is Rest didn't last long. Israel walked away from God, and thus, chose sin over righteousness. This is what happens when you walk away from the presence of God (see Psalm 22:2, 55:6). This is the universal problem. And it needs a universal solution. The answer the Bible gives is Christ. Jesus encourages us to surrender all our weariness and burdens promising to give us rest (Matthew 11:28-30). The principle we see with Solomon remains the same for us today. As we draw near our Savior, we find rest for our weary souls. Tim Keller assured us prior to his death that "If the resurrection is true, then everything's going to be alright."

Solomon then draws the reader to consider **righteousness** (vs. 57-61). One cannot encounter the living God without being changed. Righteousness is not about rule keeping but honoring an intimate relationship. When I married my wife, I didn't need a list of rules. Love was reason enough to treat her with respect, to be sensitive to her needs, and to put up with her parents.¹ Love sanctifies and purifies.

¹ Tongue in cheek.

When we move away from intimacy with God, we will surrender to sin. The closer we are to God, the more we will grow in righteousness. The farther away we are from God, the deeper into sin we sink. Solomon reminded Israel that God's people reflect God's image. Our love for God should draw us to grow in love. Notice the emphasis on relationship. Resting in Christ stirs the righteousness of Christ.

The New Testament repeats the same. When our identity is in Christ, we grow in righteousness and love (see 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Paul exhorts Timothy to "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, [and] gentleness" (1 Timothy 6:11).

Solomon then directs our attention, again, to the theme of **redemption** (vs. 62-66). The passage ends with a series of offerings mirroring the opening scene. That means that the chapter opens and concludes with atonement. It's the blood of the lamb that draws us to the Lord and maintains that relationship.

Thousands of animals were sacrificed. The numbers are hardly believable. What matters is the extent of their dedication. They offer all the best to the Lord. The blood of such animals was supposed to be costly and to be a striking reminder of the depth of their sin. The context of these events is the Feast of Booths. This was a time of remembrance of God's deliverance from Egypt. Solomon sees the consecration of the Temple as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises made when he delivered them. Finally, God has given them rest. Finally, God has made his people righteous. Finally, God was permanently dwelling with his people.

On February 8, 2023, Asbury students remained in the chapel following the morning chapel service for prayer. Worship continued until February 24, 2023. The Asbury Revival was an incredible moment, one we have been crying out for and continue to cry out for. It was so impactful that school officials had to both encourage the outpouring while continuing to function as a school. If it were up to the students, clearly, they would have wanted to stay. Who would want to leave the presence of God? Truth is, encountering God should draw us to the rest of the world.

The text suggests, and scholars concur, that the consecration of the Temple, coinciding with the Feast of Tabernacles lasted for 14 days. We can sympathize with the sentiment. Who would want to leave the presence of God. But eventually, Solomon had to send them home. Here we are, sojourners among exiles. Let it be that having encountered God in Christ, we experience the same as the Israelites – Rest, Righteousness, and Redemption.

1 Kings 9:1-28

Looks Can Be Deceiving

In virtually every sport, the most dangerous part of the game for a team follows success. Whether a player makes a powerful dunk, strikes out two batters in six pitches, take a comfortable lead entering the fourth quarter, dribbled past five players and scored a cracking goal, or ran for ninety yards for a first and goal, success runs the risk of exposure. When players and teams celebrate or grow complacent, they run the danger of being exposed.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. 1 Kings 8 is, without a doubt, an incredible moment in Israel's history. It is also the climax of Solomon's leadership. He sits enthroned at a beautiful palace overlooking a glorious Temple. Israel is well led, and their God is dwelling in their midst. If Solomon is not careful, he will take his eyes off the proverbial ball.

The chapter opens with Solomon given another choice. God appears to the king a second time. At the first encounter, Solomon asked for wisdom and was then crowned as king. Now, God appears again following another monumental event. The Temple and Palace are complete. God knows that though Solomon seems to be doing well, he is vulnerable. God begins by assuring Solomon that he has heard his prayers from chapter 8 and will dwell with his people.

Starting in verse 4, however, we discover there is a catch. Although we like to think of love as unconditional (and it is), most relationships are conditional. If I run a business, my relationship with customers is conditional. If they do not pay or if I do not deliver, then our relationship will suffer. If I'm an employee and I fail to do my job, then my relationship with the staff and leadership will change. Even in marriage, unconditional love is built on the condition of selflessness. After all, selfish love is an oxymoron. That is why it is unconditional. When one party violates the marriage vows, for example, then the marriage is seriously harmed. This is the warning God gives Solomon. Aware of his vulnerabilities, he offers a clear warning.

Solomon is first asked to choose **loyalty** (vs. 4-5). The Lord begins by calling Solomon to obey him. The blessing that follows in vs. 5 is conditioned on Solomon's obedience. Solomon must choose faithfulness. This is followed by choosing love (vs. 6-7) Faithfulness and loyalty are undergirded by love. Think of all the things you do simply because you love someone. Even if you would otherwise not be interested in them, you go because you love them. Love undergirds loyalty.

Unlike the first encounter, we are not told what Solomon's answer is. For the rest of the Solomon narrative, his answer is given by what he does, not by what he says. Initially, we are given the impression that Solomon, the wisest of wise kings, chose wisely. Consider the evidence in verses 10-28.

First, he demonstrates his political shrewdness (vs. 10-14). At the 1980 NBA draft, the Celtics made a deal with the Golden State Warriors. The Celtics gave their 2 first round picks in the draft (the #1, #13 picks) to the Warriors who then gave the Celtics their #3 pick and their center Robert Parish. The Celtics chose Kevin McHale out of Minnesota. In a single trade, the Celtics recruited 2/3 of their "Big Three" as they would join Larry Bird to win the five NBA titles in 1981, 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987. The Warriors chose Joe Barry Carroll and Ricky Brown (who?).

What Solomon managed to make a favorable deal with the King of Tyre. Tyre had supplied Solomon with supplies for the palace and temple including 120 talents of gold. In exchange, Tyre received 20 cities in Galilee. Sounds like a good deal until Hiram surveyed the land.

Solomon also extended his military power. Security is a top priority for any political leader. He expanded the wall of Jerusalem, strengthened Hazor and Megiddo (vs. 15), rebuilt Gezer which Pharaoh had destroyed (vs. 16), and added chariots and horsemen to his army (vs. 19). Most surprising, Solomon added a Jewish navy (vs. 26-28). Historically, Jews associated the sea with chaos and death, but under Solomon, Israel took to the seas.

Finally, Solomon looks to be religiously faithful (vs. 25-28). In the ancient world, religion and politics were often overlapped. The king's religious fidelity would be reflected in the religious practices of his people. Solomon is seen marching to the Temple to offer burnt and peace offerings as a worshiper, not as a priest or even as a king.

If we were to look at the work of Solomon, one would conclude that things were going well. Solomon wisely chose both loyalty and love. But the author is warning the reader. Read below the surface. There are hints that things are beginning to unravel. See, for example, 1 Kings 3:1 where Solomon marries an Egyptian princess. She is always introduced as "Pharaoh's daughter," and never "Solomon's wife." (see also 1 Kings 7:8, 9:24). He also enslaved Gentiles in clear violation of Scripture (see 1 Kings 5:13, 9:15). Furthermore, he spent more time and wealth building his own palace than he did the Temple (1 Kings 6:38-7:1). Although everything looked fine on the outside, Solomon was slowly turning away from the Lord. He started off well but did not finish well. The writer is warning us.

In my hometown, there is a dangerous road that GPS kept sending semi-trucks down. They would become inevitably stuck and had to be rescued. There is now a giant sign that reads, "Sharp turns on KY 845. Trucks use alternative route. GPS routing not advised." Most know where the story of Solomon goes. Despite all his accomplishments and achievements, he failed to finish well. The signs were there, but he was blinded by success to see them. Chapter 9 begins that slow process of decline. We are being warned.

1 Kings 10:14-11:43

Finishing Well

Most agree that the 2022 Kentucky Derby was one of the best races of recent memory. Not only did the underdog (underhorse?) win but managed to rise from the back of the pack to finish first. Hardly anyone noticed Rich Strike until the finish line. Life is similar. How we start the race matters less than how we finish that matters – a lesson the first three kings of Israel teach us.

In the final week of the 1980 presidential campaign, President Jimmy Carter debated Governor Ronald Reagan. The race was still close, but the most memorable moment of the debate came from a simple question from the governor. “Are you better off today than you were four years ago?” President Carter answered, “no” sealing his defeat. If you were in ancient Israel under Solomon, no doubt you’d say yes. Life improved under Solomon and the people were at peace. From a distance, Solomon was an incredible success.

Yet, the Bible portrays Solomon as one who abandoned the faith and, thus, foolishly led Israel down a path that led to its division and demise. The greatest enigma of Solomon’s life was how the wisest of men could be such a fool. Wisdom is no protection from human frailty, and the temptations of Solomon are the same for us.

Solomon’s demise began with small compromises which slowly opened the door to full-fledged rebellion. It is rare suddenly abandons their faith or ruin their life. It is often gradual and, before long, you discover you have abandoned the truth of the gospel.

Solomon’s decline begins with the temptation of **riches** (10:14-29). The writer details the financial and economic achievements of Israel under Solomon. On the one hand, we see these as evidence of God’s special grace. Notice, however, these descriptions benefit Solomon and do not credit the Lord. The writer explains that the wealth was coming “to Solomon ... from the business of the merchants, and from all the kings of the west and from the governors of the land (vs. 14-15).

Consider the evidence. Solomon strengthened his army in looks and power (the shields, for example, were made of gold, vs. 16-17). He made his palace more formidable, he decorated his throne in ivory and gold (vs. 18), and included six ascending steps surrounded by a lions (vs. 19-20). Finally, he expanded his military power (vs. 26-29), much of which violated the Mosaic Law by importing chariots and horses from Egypt.

The criticism is not Solomon’s wealth, but how it consumed him. One can be righteous and wealthy, but often the pursuit of wealth drowns righteousness. Solomon foolishly fell for this temptation. Early in his leadership, Israel benefited from his wise leadership, but now only he is.

Solomon was also guilty of **revelry** (11:1-3). Not only did greed consume his heart, but so did lust. Most of his marriages were likely political in nature. Peace was a matter of a strong military and political alliances. Such alliances often came through marriages and Solomon had it in abundance. Foolishly, Solomon assumed he was securing peace when he was assuring his kingdom's demise. History is littered with men ruining their lives due to a lack of self-control. His lust led him astray and, as a result, Israel suffered.

Finally, Solomon's rebellion played out in false **reverence** (11:4-8). As Solomon surrendered to greed and lust, his reverence for the Lord declined. The writer explains, "For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father" (vs. 4).

This resulted in the Lord **rebuking** the king (vs. 9-13). God does not ignore sin including those of an anointing king. In his judgment, God split Solomon's kingdom shortly after his death with his son reigning in the southern kingdom.

God's rebuke led to **retribution** (vs. 14-40). Although the division of Israel was the ultimate judgment, additional retribution came in the form of political and military enemies both externally and internally. The first external enemy was Hadad the Edomite (vs. 14-22) who attacked from the South. The second was Rezon the son of Eliada (vs. 23-25) who was the king of Damascus and attacked from the South. Internally, Jeroboam of the tribe of Ephraim (vs. 26-40) became Solomon's greatest adversary. He worked within the administration, but rose to become the first king of the northern kingdom.

Ultimately, sin has consequences. No pill can protect us, and no army can guard us against it. Solomon started so well, but he failed to finish.

Regardless, the story of Solomon ends with the hope of **Repentance** (vs. 41-43). Before GPS and smart phones, I made a wrong turn in Louisville. I was convinced by my mental map that if I kept going straight, I'd still hit the interstate or a highway I was familiar with. Twenty minutes later, I discovered I was twenty minutes farther away from where I needed to go. It is not progressive or enlightened to keep going in the wrong decision. It requires turning around. It requires repentance.

Repentance sounds easy, but it will be the hardest thing you do in this life. Christ is asking us to leave behind what ruins us in favor of loyal love. Anything worth pursuing requires hard work and hard decisions. The good news is that Christ is willing to carry away our sin and liberate us from it. But we must believe in him and walk away from our sin.

"Can you believe what's come of the world?" It's tempting to constantly ask such a question about the world, but the conclusion of Solomon's life forces us to look at ourselves. "Can you believe what's come of the church?" Maybe you've held on to a pattern of behavior that is slowly corroding your life. Crucify it today. Abandon it today. Walk away from it today and be healed. Learn from Solomon. It isn't enough to start off well, we must finish well too.