IN BUT NOT OF THE WORLD: THE CONFLUENCE OF WISDOM AND TORAH IN THE SOLOMON STORY (1 KINGS 1-11)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 1-11 portrays King Solomon in the most lavish of terms.1 Israel was awed when their monarch adjudicated a seemingly insoluble dispute between two prostitutes (1 Kgs 3:16-28). The number of his official entourage far exceeded that of other kings (1 Kgs 4:1-19; 9:23; see also 1 Sam 14:47-51; 2 Sam 8:15-18; 20:23-26).2 In his time, Israel’s population was beyond counting (1 Kgs 3:8), the country was content and secure (4:20, 25), the realm extended from the Euphrates to Egypt (5:1, 4 [RSV 4:21, 24]), and success in foreign policy was illustrated by the immense tribute received (5:1 [RSV 4:21]; 10:10, 25) as well as by relationships with Hiram King of Tyre and the Queen of Sheba (5:15-25 [RSV 5:1-11]; 9:10-14; 10:1-10). This king built a palace and a temple (1 Kings 6-8), had a fleet (9:26) and a harem of one thousand women (11:3). Given all this, it is virtually predictable that Solomon’s wisdom (1 Kgs 5:9-14 [RSV 4:29-34]; 10:1-10, 23-24; 11:41), wealth (3:13; 5:2-8 [RSV 4:22-28]; 9:26-28; 10:14-22), and fame (10:24) would be judged to be incomparable.

While Solomon’s incredible accomplishments and resultant reputation are not presented solely as a function of his vaunted wisdom, it is arguably the most decisive factor. God offered Solomon wealth and honor only after he requested wisdom (1 Kgs 3:10-13). Thus, it is no accident that just as Moses is conventionally associated with Torah, and David with the Psalms, so Solomon is with wisdom. In addition to the emphasis in 1 Kings 1-11 (see 2 Chr 1:7-13; 9:1-9, 22-23), Solomon is also associated with Proverbs, Qoheleth and the Song of Songs, which is sometimes regarded as a wisdom genre (Prov 1:1; Qoh 1:1; Cant 1:1). Regardless of the variety of wisdom in view, the canonical tradition relates Solomon to it in one way or another.3 In 1 Kings 1-11 it is hardly a stretch to say that virtually all of Solomon’s successes are connected directly or indirectly to his God-given wisdom.

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In turn, Solomon's wisdom makes him Israel's "worldliest" king. That is, 1 Kings 1-11 portrays Solomon as the Israelite king most recognized and admired by the surrounding nations and their leaders. As David is the ideal or messianic king (1 Sam 1:10; 16:1-2; Sam 24 [the "ideal David" is in view in 2 Samuel 21-24]) and Josiah is the reformer king par excellence (2 Kgs 22:1-23:30; see 23:25), Solomon is Israel's wisest, wealthiest, grandest and most famous king. Not surprisingly, scholars have inferred from 1 Kings 1-11 that Israel in the Solomonic era was unprecedentedly urbane and sophisticated. This was nothing short of Israel's "golden age" or "enlightenment." Even if one does not take the account at face historical value, Israel under Solomon seems to have been at its acme in terms of economic strength, political power, and international involvement. Solomon's wisdom carried Israel to the pinnacle of the world's social and political scene.

However, regardless of the king's impressive wisdom and the heights to which he was able to bring Israel as a result of it, a prior question needs to be asked: How should Solomon's wisdom be understood when 1 Kings 1-11 is taken seriously as Scripture? In other words, what are the theological implications of the way the Solomonic reign has been rendered? More specifically, what happens when this passage is regarded not primarily as a source for reconstructing the history of Israel, but as a witness to God's involvement in the life of Israel as the people of God? In my view, it makes a great deal of difference how one approaches this material. Instead of taking a position "outside" the text to make ostensive objective judgments about this ruler's successes and failures, I want to attend to the way Solomon is presented as one whose role is to be evaluated by criteria rooted in the canon's witness to God's will for the king and the people for whom he was responsible.

Some scholars whose goal is historical reconstruction contend that 1 Kings 1-11 functioned to legitimate a king who had introduced a centralized, hierarchical political structure that was both foreign and inimical to what the community had formerly experienced and affirmed as quintessentially Israelite. Put more sharply, Israel's pre-monarchic social structures reflected its genuine beliefs and values, while the monarchy was an aberration. Even if there is a modicum of truth to this assessment—kingship is scarcely an unmixed blessing in the biblical witness (see 1 Samuel 8)—it still does not take seriously enough the theological complexity and nuances of the canonical testimony.

For instance, under the rubric of this Festschrift, for many biblical scholars the "loyal opposition" would most readily be identified with those stalwarts of truth and justice who denounce the king, denigrate the royal establishment, with its oppressive, bloated, self-serving bureaucracy, and all the power, wealth and status that are derivative of such social arrangements. The Solomonic kingship becomes then a symbol of any political, social, or ecclesiastical establishment that has lost sight of its mission, operated out of cynical self-interest and against the legitimate claims of common or disenfranchised folk, prostituted social ideals for personal or corporate aggrandizement, and cavalierly used religion to justify itself at the expense of a prophetic, revolutionary, and egalitarian moral agenda.

But seen from a canonical perspective, any "loyal opposition" should be rooted in the Bible's witness to the totality of God's involvements with the community of faith. The biblical testimony brings a corrective word to bear on all human causes and agendas, no matter how noble. Unless the whole witness is taken seriously, the biblical material will inevitably be read ideologically, neutralizing and domesticating the Word of God. We
who treasure the Old Testament as Holy Scripture are not obligated to find in the text analogues to contemporary situations with which we can self-righteously identify or alternately which we can berate from an assumed superior moral vantage point. We must first and foremost hear the text as God’s word to God’s people, trying under the Holy Spirit to appropriate all the elements of a message which has been designed to provide a theologically and ethically decisive word in our present condition of being simultaneously disengaged from and hopelessly entangled in the world.

In this light, it is instructive to approach 1 Kings 1-11 as a witness to how Solomon and Israel were supposed to be in but not of the world. While we can only touch on the high points of the theological implications of this rendering of the Solomon story in the brief scope of this essay, it is to be hoped that the text’s potential for further theological and ethical reflection will be evident.

2. Solomon’s “Early Wisdom” (1 Kings 1-2)

1 Kings 1-2 recounts the last days of David leading up to Solomon’s accession. The palpable tension in the story is a function of two factors. From an internal perspective, characters side with either Adonijah or Solomon as they maneuver to take the place of their father, who has become literally and metaphorically impotent (1 Kgs 1:1-6). From an external perspective, the reader puzzles over which of the king’s sons YHWH wanted to be king. All we know about Solomon up to this point is that the Lord loved him and on the occasion of his birth delivered a message concerning him via Nathan the prophet (2 Sam 12:24-25). But Adonijah was David’s oldest living son and presumably under normal circumstances the heir apparent (2 Sam 3:2-5; 1 Kgs 1:6; 2:22).

The problem is that there is no explicit confirmation that Solomon was YHWH’s choice. David’s recalling that he had promised the throne to Solomon appears to have been prompted by the manipulative strategy of Nathan and Bath-Sheba (1 Kgs 1:11-37). The episode is further complicated by YHWH’s absence, which contrasts greatly to the intimate divine role in the selections of Saul and David (1 Sam 9:15-17; 10:1; 16:1-13). Curiously, Adonijah was the first one who mentioned that his failure to retain the kingship was God’s doing (1 Kgs 2:15), but it is not certain that this is the narrator’s viewpoint.

Perhaps the divine word to David in 2 Sam 7:12-13 is key in that it states that the son who follows David will in fact be one whom YHWH has raised up. Such a promise is not vitiated merely because Solomon’s takeover involved conventional or dubious means. YHWH’s will could be brought about even by questionable practices. This would be akin to YHWH’s word to Rebekah that her younger son would be pre-eminent over the elder, even though no instructions were forthcoming as to how this should come about (Gen 25:23). We discover later that it was a result of Jacob’s and Rebekah’s exploitation and deception (Gen 25:29-34; 27:1-40). Similarly, God’s protection of Jacob’s family and future was made possible by the evil of brothers selling a brother into slavery and by the courageous though highly suspect actions of a Canaanite woman named Tamar (Gen 37:1-36; 38; 45:5; 50:20). Likewise, Solomon fulfilled God’s will by assuming the kingship in David’s stead though neither he nor those who supported him necessarily knew or were concerned to follow God’s will, or used ethical means when they inadvertently accomplished it.10
Solomon is largely passive in the events leading up to his enthronement (1 Kgs 1:11-48). Afterwards, his initial actions focus on his defeated rival Adonijah and men who had been David's antagonists. The way this is recounted is important. Once he proscribes Adonijah's movements (1 Kgs 1:49-53), Solomon receives deathbed instructions from his father. David first invoked the Mosaic Torah (1 Kgs 2:1-4), making his words consonant with those found throughout Deuteronomy and Former Prophets which are grounded in God's promises to and requirements for Israel. Thus, Solomon is enjoined to keep Torah, something for which the ideal David was known (2 Sam 22:21-25; 1 Kgs 3:14; 9:4; 11:4, 33-34, 38). In David's echoing Torah, and therefore speaking as it were in the name of YHWH or Moses, he stresses (along with the narrator?) that Solomon's kingship also is to be governed by Torah (see Deut 17:14-20). The “unconditional” covenant with David's dynastic house (2 Sam 7:1-17) is also subject to the Torah under which Israel was to live (see Josh 1:7-8).

However, after emphasizing Torah, David does an abrupt turn-about when broaching the matter of his enemies (1 Kgs 2:5-9). The use of wisdom vocabulary in this context is striking. When David urges Solomon to assassinate Joab, he counsels his son to “act according to your wisdom” (v6; wē’āšātā kēḥōkmātekāl). As for Shimei, David reminds Solomon that "you are a wise man and will know what to do to him" (v 9; ki ʾiš ḥākām ʾattāh wēyāda’tā ‑ēt ṭāʾāser taʾāšēh¬lo). Yet, in spite of this appeal to wisdom, David specifies each course of action. Evidently, Solomon was to use his wisdom to decide the best way to carry out the instructions rather than to decide whether to carry them out. Analogous uses of wisdom are found elsewhere (2 Sam 14:1-21; 16:20-17:23; 20:14-22).

David’s appeal to wisdom in this setting contrasts sharply with the role of wisdom in 2 Samuel 21-24. Sheppard calls attention to the fact that this section separates the previous account, which focuses on the succession to David’s throne, from its continuation in 1 Kings 1-2. Instead of succession, this material centers on David, describing the ideal attributes of Israel’s ruler in terms of righteousness and the fear of God, which is a wisdom motif (see Prov 1:7; 16:12; 29:4,14). The use of wisdom language in 2 Samuel 22 and 23:1-7 enables these texts to exercise a hermeneutical function in interpreting the previous material. Wisdom provides a theological evaluation of Israel’s religious and moral reality, it is not merely an anthropological phenomenon. The ideals of wisdom and the ideals of life under Torah are combined.11 Wisdom and Torah belong together (see Deut 4:1-8, especially v 6).

In light of the combination of wisdom and Torah in 2 Samuel 21-24, David’s apparent appeal to wisdom independently of Torah in 1 Kgs 2:5-9 is put into bold relief. The point is not that David’s enemies should not have been punished. It is rather that there is no effort made to mete out that punishment according to Torah, let alone any attempt to consult the Lord directly or through prophetic or priestly mediators (compare Joshua 7). Regardless of David’s previous admonition about the importance of Torah for Solomon, wisdom that is unqualified by Torah has become decisive when dealing with adversaries. That this use of wisdom is sandwiched between 2 Samuel 21-24, where wisdom and Torah are inextricably related, and 1 Kgs 3:3-9, where wisdom is a gift of God and likewise connected with Torah (as we shall see), should caution us from disguising the role of “Torah-less” wisdom here with translations like “clever” or “crafty”.12 Nor should we too
hastily conclude that the wisdom being referred to by David is neutral just because he first called attention to Torah. Is it only a coincidence that Solomon’s use of wisdom as encouraged by his father led to death and possibly a liturgical violation (murder at the altar), whereas the king’s use of divinely given wisdom led to life and appropriate ritual acts (1 Kgs 2:28, 34, 46; 3:15, 27)? This material has been shaped to show that Torah and Wisdom are to be combined; serious problems arise when that is not the case.

3. Divinely Given Wisdom (1 Kings 3)

Scholars have tended to divide 1 Kings 3 into three components: (1) editorial remarks in vv 1-2; (2) material related on form critical grounds to certain ancient Near Eastern royal texts, or perhaps a dream form which has been reworked (vv 3-15); (3) a folklore element featuring a dispute between prostitutes (vv 16-28). However these genetic issues are resolved, I want to attend to the present canonical shaping to ascertain how to evaluate this phase of Solomon’s kingship. To that end, the role of chap. 3 in 1 Kings 1-11 will also have to be considered.

In light of the introductory statements, it is difficult not to be somewhat ambivalent from the outset about Solomon’s kingship. There is a negative cast in the note that Solomon entered into a marriage alliance with the Pharaoh and brought the latter’s daughter into the royal city (1 Kgs 3:1). Israelites were expressly forbidden to marry foreign women because of the prospect of idolatry. In two key texts where Moses and Joshua respectively warn Israel about the temptation to idolatry (Deut 7:3; Josh 23:12), the very same term as that found here is present: wayyithattën. Further, if the king was not to return to Egypt to acquire horses—as stipulated by the “law of the king” (Deut 17:16)—doing so to acquire a foreign wife was surely a more serious offense. Unfortunately, this first marriage of Solomon after his kingship was “established” (1 Kgs 2:46) adumbrates his later numerous marriages which are given as the main reason for his precipitous collapse (1 Kgs 11:1-8).

It is less clear how one is to assess the information about the cultic activities (1 Kgs 3:2-3), which were being carried out at “high places.” These may refer to pagan worship centers. Perhaps the fact that the temple had not yet been built meant that such practices were at least temporarily licit. Still, it should not escape our notice that the statement, “Now Solomon loved YHWH, walking in the statutes of David his father,” is bracketed by two qualifying sentences beginning with “only” (raq). First we are told that the people were sacrificing (zbh) at the high places, then that Solomon sacrificed and burned incense (qtr) there. When we discover later that Solomon’s many wives were sacrificing (zq) and burning incense (qtr) as well, the repetition of vocabulary recalls this text (1 Kgs 11:8). Of course, Solomon’s harem was being patently pagan. Was Solomon early on also acting implicity as a pagan?

It is as though the main ingredients of Solomon’s kingship, the good and the bad, are already present in 1 Kgs 3:1-3. Solomon loved YHWH and followed the divine commandments. But that did not prevent his ill-advised marriage and the possibly illicit cultic practices in which he and his people were engaged. Two Solomons, as it were, are put forward in the introduction to 1 Kings 3. The question is: Which one will finally triumph?

The initial answer to that query is encouraging. Solomon went to Gibeon, the “great
high place; to offer a thousand burnt offerings, on which occasion YHWH appeared to him in a dream (1 Kgs 3:4). When invited to ask what God should give him, the king's response could not have been more praiseworthy. Having acknowledged YHWH's loyalty to David, his father's exemplary obedience, and the divine role in his own succession (1 Kgs 3:6-7a), Solomon confessed his sense of inadequacy for the job he faced. He was only a 'little child' (na'ar qāţôn) who did not know how to "go out or come in," that is, he was young and inexperienced (v 7). His task was formidable since Israel was too great to be numbered (v 8). What the king wanted, therefore, was a "listening heart/mind" (lēḇ šōmēa') and the ability to discern good from evil (v 9). God's granting this would enable him to administer justice (liśpōṯ). YHWH gave Solomon the opportunity to ask for anything imaginable and he opted for "wisdom." That was indeed laudable.

God was pleased. Since Solomon did not ask for long life, riches, or the life of his enemies, but instead requested discernment for hearing justice (hāḇīn liṣmōa' mišpāt) God gave the king a "wise and discerning heart/mind" (lēḇ ḥāḵām wēnāḇōn [vv. 11-12]). What God granted Solomon would be unsurpassed (v 12c). In addition, God would include riches and honor precisely because the king had not sought these things (v 13). Most importantly, God had provided Solomon with the gift most needed to rule "this weighty people" (v 9) justly, prudently, and wisely.

That Solomon had without question been endowed with wisdom from God was amply demonstrated in his arbitration of the dispute brought before him by two prostitutes (vv 16-27). With remarkable insight into maternal instincts, the king intuited that the woman who was unwilling to see the living child cut in two had to be the true mother (v 26-27). Predictably, Israel was overwhelmed when it saw that "the wisdom of God was in him to execute justice" (ki ḥokmat 'ēlōhīm bēqirbō la 'ašōt mišpāt [v 28]). With such a wise king on the throne, Israel's prospects were exceedingly enviable.

But there is more to Solomon's wisdom than the fact that God gave it and the king applied it. What is the connection between Solomon's divinely proffered wisdom and the way 1 Kings 3 begins? We need to remember the introductory information about the foreign marriage, the sacrifices and incense at high places, as well as the king's loving YHWH and walking in the statutes of David (vv 1-3). We also must keep in mind that Solomon arrived at Gibeon—the "great high place"—to make a thousand offerings (v 4).

Two references in the context of Solomon's receipt of wisdom are crucial in this connection. One occurs during the dream, when God makes the lengthening of Solomon's days depend on the king's walking in "my ways, keeping my statutes and commandments as David your father did" (v 14). "Walking" (hākā) "statutes" (ṣ iqw t) and the example of David recall 1 Kgs 3:3. In other words, Torah and David's exemplary keeping of Torah precede the story wherein Solomon receives divine wisdom. Wisdom cannot be thought of in this instance apart from Torah, and vice versa. Both wisdom and Torah derive from God. Both are to be used by the king as he rules over Israel. Indeed, using wisdom without Torah has already been illustrated in 1 Kings 2, where destruction is the outcome.

The second reference occurs after Solomon awakes. Before the dream the king offered a thousand sacrifices at Gibeon (v 4). This was consistent with the practices of the people and Solomon already mentioned (vv 2-3). But after receiving wisdom from God, Solomon returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the covenant, offered up burnt offerings and
peace offerings, and celebrated a meal with all his servants (v 15). This is most interesting in view of our having been informed that the people's previous cultic activities were a function of the temple's not yet having been built (v 2). Is Solomon now offering sacrifices in Jerusalem prophetically? Does the narration at this point signal that the combination of Torah and divinely given wisdom eventuates in appropriate cultic practices? Does the meal with his servants serve to ratify and confirm what has just happened? However such questions are answered, it seems clear that 1 Kings 3 depicts Solomon as a king whose behavior is equally informed by the concerns of Torah and wisdom.

According to the present canonical form, Torah cannot be thought of as "special revelation" and wisdom as "general revelation." In 1 Kings 3, Torah and wisdom are tandem resources provided the king by God. As further evidence of this, Kenik has shown how much terminology in the dream sequence evokes traditional language and ideas about Israel's model king. This pericope about God's bestowal of wisdom on Solomon is replete with the language and concepts of Torah.

The close association between wisdom and Torah is also confirmed by the way 1 Kings 9, a second divine appearance account, is explicitly tied to 1 Kings 3. After the king finished all his building projects, "YHWH appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon" (v 2: wayyĕrâ' YHWH 'el-šĕlômôh šēnîṯ ka'āšer nir'āh 'ĕlāw bĕgîḇôn). In this appearance, God responded to Solomon's temple dedicatory prayer (8:12-61) by emphasizing Torah and the necessity of the king's adhering to it (9:4-9). If Torah is violated, Solomon's kingship will indubitably end in disaster. Wisdom without Torah cannot guarantee Solomon's success.

In the end, Solomon's kingship has to be judged according to the way that he incorporates the contents of two divine appearances, one in which wisdom is given in the "ambience of Mosaic law" (see note 23) and the other in which Torah remains the crucial element in Solomon's carrying out the mandate he has been given. Properly understood, the wisdom which God gives was designed to help Solomon orient his kingship toward Torah, not rely on some administrative competence that is allegedly neutral with respect to God's will as expressed in Torah.

4. THE SCOPE OF SOLOMON'S WISDOM (1 Kgs 5:9-14 [RSV 4:29-34])

As impressive as Solomon's adjudication of the dispute between the prostitutes was, the king's wisdom went far beyond the courtroom, not only in application but in reputation. The sapiential gift which God gave to Solomon consisted of "wisdom" (hokâh), "extraordinary discernment" (tēbûnāh harbēh mē'ōd) and a "broad mind" (rōḥab lēb), either the latter quality or all three qualities were "like the sand on the seashore" (5:9 [RSV 4:29])—the amount of wisdom was equal to the number of Israelites over whom it was to be exercised (3:9; 4:20)! The result was that the monarch's wisdom was greater than that of any other sage, no matter how famous. He was wiser than the eastern and Egyptian wisemen. Even worthies whose possession of wisdom was a matter of general knowledge (Ethan the Ezrahite; Heman, Calcol, Darda, the sons of Mahol) could not match Solomon; thus, his fame was widespread in the surrounding nations (5:10-11 [RSV 4:30-31]). This wisest of sages was responsible for three thousand proverbs (mēšālîm) and one thousand and five songs (šīrîm); he was able to expatiate on any variety of tree,
beasts, birds, reptiles or fish (5:12-13 [RSV 4:32-33]). Naturally, such sagacity eventuated in both royalty and ordinary folk seeking out Solomon to observe this amazing display of wisdom for themselves (5:14 [RSV 4:34]).

How should this summary of Solomon’s magnificent sapiential prowess be understood in the overall presentation? At first glance, it seems without question to be an unqualified positive valuation. But a closer look reveals otherwise. To be sure, it continues to be stressed that Solomon’s wisdom derived from God (5:9, 26 [RSV 4:29; 5:12]). But the context has to be taken into account, for it shifts the emphasis. For one thing, the summary follows chap. 4 (RSV 4:1-20), which, according to Stanley Walters, is an “office-note.” There are four of these in Samuel and one in Kings (1 Sam 7:15-17; 14:47-51; 2 Sam 8:15-18; 20:23-26; 1 Kgs 4:1-19). They are designed to differentiate the period of the judges and the post-Solomonic kings from the time of Israel’s first three kings (Saul, David, Solomon) and the prophet who anointed the first two (Samuel). The various judges and post-Solomonic kings are separated by a rise-and-fall pattern, which is to be contrasted with the divisions that obtain in the Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon stories. In addition, the office-notes serve a hermeneutical function in which an editorial viewpoint is conveyed by signaling a new, theologically significant, beginning in the narrative.

If Walters’s thesis is valid, we should be on the lookout for clues indicating a shift in direction in Solomon’s kingship after 1 Kgs 4:1-19. One may already be evident in 4:20, which at first appears innocuous enough; indeed, it seems to be a straightforward positive assertion. The population was as numerous as the sand by the sea—doubtless an allusion to God’s promise to the ancestors having been fulfilled. Also, the people ate, drank and were happy. It seems impossible to improve on the situation. At the same time, there is a potentially ominous note. Solomon’s rule over “all Israel” (kol yišrá‘el 4:1) is the first datum revealed in the office-note. But this very first verse afterwards—and the last verse of the chapter in the Masoretic versification—refers to a divided Israel: “Judah and Israel.” That is, in spite of the numbers, in spite of the celebration, there is already a hint of the schism that is soon to be triggered by Solomon’s policies (1 Kings 11:1-12).

Furthermore, notwithstanding the impressive achievements of Solomon which are rehearsed—the boundaries of the kingdom, the tribute taken, the amount required for one day at court, the vast holdings in horses and, of course, Solomon’s incomparable wisdom (5:1-14 [RSV 4:21-34])—there appear to be cracks in the wall. There is another disquieting mention of “Judah and Israel,” though it is once again found in the context of peace and contentment (5:4-5 [RSV 4:24-25]). Also, even the impressive foreign policy achievements as manifested in the arrangements made with Hiram of Tyre (5:15-25 [RSV 5:1-12]) seem to be qualified by the fact that after arrangements to acquire Tyrian materials and workers for the building of the temple, Solomon raised a levy of forced labor out of all Israel (5:27 [RSV 5:13]). Ironically, this notation follows immediately a verse that underscores God’s gift of wisdom to Solomon (5:26 [RSV 5:13]).

Perhaps we should not be surprised, since already in the office-note Adoniram’s job as head of the forced labor contingent indicates that this was hardly a temporary policy on Solomon’s part (4:6). Even if it is the case that the kind of labor to which Israelites were subjected is to be distinguished from that to which non-Israelites were subjected (see 9:15-22, especially v 22), that does not absolve Solomon entirely. Samuel had warned
early on that Israel’s king would introduce a range of oppressive exactments, including making the people “his slaves” (1 Sam 8:11-18, especially v 17). Besides, had Solomon’s policy regarding Israelite laborers been as benign as some commentators maintain, it would be hard to explain the later reaction of Rehoboam, the king’s successor (1 Kgs 12:4).\footnote{50} For all his wisdom, not everything in Solomon’s life portended a glorious future.\footnote{50}

5. Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1-13)

We already know from 1 Kgs 5:14 (RSV 4:34) that Solomon’s wisdom gave him an international reputation. Thus, a state visit by the Queen of Sheba is merely illustrative of one particular foreign response to the Israelite king’s enviable fame. She came expressly to test Solomon with hard questions, a test he passed with flying colors (10:1-3). Consequently, she is overwhelmed by the king’s abilities and surroundings, and thus effusive in her praise of him (10:4-9). Once more Solomon’s wisdom appears to be cast in a shadowless light.

But that judgment may also be premature. Paying close attention to the Queen’s speech where she gushes over Solomon is instructive. Having affirmed that Solomon was indeed greater than she had been told and that those who stood before him experiencing the benefits of his wisdom were most fortunate, she avers that God’s love for Israel led Him to establish the king on the throne to “execute justice and righteousness” (vv 7-9; mishpāt. uṣēḏqāḥ) This was surely among the most important duties of an Israelite king (see 2 Sam 8:15), so in this instance the Queen of Sheba is echoing a decidedly Israelite sentiment.\footnote{51} However, while she claimed that executing justice and righteousness were among the virtues that most caught her attention, the narrator’s report about what impressed her most placed the accent elsewhere: the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cup-bearers, and the burnt offerings which he made (vv 4-5). There has been a subtle shift from the administration of justice (3:28) to wealth, consumption, exotic goods, ritual and entertainment. Parker points out that none of these accumulations are said to have benefitted Israel in any way—Solomon’s wisdom is edging closer to the service of his own self-aggrandizement.\footnote{12}

The texts preceding the Queen of Sheba account indicate in other ways that neither Solomon’s reliance on wisdom nor his adherence to Torah were what they should have been. For example, in the account that details the building of the temple (1 Kings 6), the construction is, as it were, “interrupted” by the insertion of a text in which YHWH pointedly reminds Solomon to walk in “... my statutes and obey my ordinances and keep all my commandments and walk in them...” (v 12). The sudden appearance of YHWH abuses one of the notion that the building of the temple in and of itself could be considered an act of complete obedience without remainder. Indeed, the Lord’s willingness to dwell among Israel was more a function of obedience than the erection of a sanctuary, even though the deity had commanded that it be built (v 13).

As the narrative unfolds, we realize that the Lord’s abrupt admonition in 6:11-13 was hardly superfluous. It is somewhat disconcerting that Solomon spent thirteen years on his palace and only seven years on the temple (6:38; 7:1). If that fact is not damning, then certainly the reminder that Solomon made a special dwelling for his Egyptian wife is
(7:8); this reference and that in 3:1 do not let us forget for a moment that the king's foreign wife/wives is/are going to be a problem.

It must even be asked whether Solomon's retaining of Hiram, a craftsman from Tyre, raises questions about the king's changing outlook and conduct, Hiram's father was a Tyrian, his mother an Israelite from Naphtali; his "wisdom, understanding, and skill" were in metallurgy (7:13-14). Hiram contributed a great deal to Solomon's building projects (vv 15-46)—no single person was said to have done more. Are Hiram's Tyrian connections a negative? Should a semi-foreigner have been so involved in the building of YHWH's House? Was his wisdom nothing more than technical skill and artistic aptitude?

Answering these questions would be all but impossible if we possessed only the text in 1 Kings. But it is difficult to avoid thinking about a similar use of craftsmen when the wilderness tabernacle was under construction (Exod 31:1-11; 35:30-36:2; see also 36:3-38:23). In the Exodus setting, YHWH named Bezalel and endowed him with the necessary gifts, including the "Spirit of God," for a specialized task having to do with the tabernacle (31:1-5). Oholiab and others who were to assist Bezalel were also specifically selected by the Lord (v 6). These craftsmen worked according to explicit divine instructions (v 11).

After the beginning of the desert project had been interrupted by the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:34), Moses prepared the people once more by summoning them for an offering (35:1-29). Then the role of the divinely selected craftsmen was reintroduced (35:30-36:1). It turns out that all the artisans involved in the project received their ability and got their orders directly from the Lord (36:1). God's involvement in this could hardly have been more intimate.

This contingent of divinely elected workers seems to stand in sharpest contrast to the man that Solomon employed. While the Tyrian was possessed at one level of sufficient skill—skill that was indeed rooted in wisdom—there were negative factors at work. He was not fully an Israelite, he was not uniquely called by YHWH, he was not assisted by craftsmen similarly endowed, and he was not said to possess the "Spirit of God." In spite of the fact that Solomon was building the temple at David's and YHWH's behest (2 Sam 7:13-14; 1 Kgs 8:18-19), his use of Hiram appears to throw something of a shadow over the project. Hiram's involvement undercuts the supposition that Solomon's building project was a full-orbed fulfillment of God's will.

These hints of something less than Solomon's complete obedience coupled with the more materialistic emphasis surrounding the Queen of Sheba's visit perhaps call for another appraisal of the king's great temple dedicatory prayer, something which on the surface seems to be unassailable (8:15-53). Throughout the prayer, Solomon entreats the Lord to forgive or heal Israel for any number of transgressions and their concomitant punishments. But in one instance Solomon implores the Lord to reverse the effects of exile (vv 46-53)! This is an ultimate punishment for Israel. Should exile be even a remote consideration for a people whose king was leading according to the twin precepts of wisdom and Torah? The point is not that in the event of exile YHWH would refuse to forgive and restore Israel. Rather, the issue turns on the fact that there might be an exile in the first place, since this was the punishment that Israel was to avoid at all costs. Exile could only mean that Israel had committed sins of such gravity and with such persistence that an unthinkable punishment had become a grim reality. Unfortunately, there has been a series
of clues leading up to the Queen of Sheba’s visit which make us realize that Solomon’s mentioning of exile in his prayer was more than hypothetical. We are doubtless supposed to regard Solomon’s prayer as sincere, but at the same time it is one of those instances where the supplicant revealed more than he realized. Solomon was in effect simultaneously praying for the reversal of the effects of exile and prophesying that it would almost certainly happen.

6. CONCLUSION

Solomon’s reign ended in unmitigated disaster—Israel was split into two and never unified again. This foolish king took many of his wives from the surrounding nations and erected shrines to their gods and goddesses (11:1-8). Such egregious behavior prompted the Lord to denounce Solomon and raise up a series of adversaries against the kingdom (11:11-13, 14-40). One of these, Jeroboam ben Nebat, became king of the northern kingdom Israel after leading a revolt against Solomon’s son Rehoboam, who was the first king of Judah (11:26-40; 12:1-20). Though Solomon’s own death was peaceful (11:41-43), the death of the United Kingdom over which he had ruled and to whose end he had contributed could hardly have been more tragic.

The issue brought to the forefront by this sad story is not which of several possible social systems are to be preferred. To judge the monarchy deficient on the basis of modern political standards is a thorough anachronism. Likewise, attributing the biblical presentation of the monarchy to those who had a stake in suppressing democratic or egalitarian institutions is no less an ideological reading than arguing for the legitimacy of the divine right of kings on the basis of the text. Rather, this account is geared to raise issues having to do with the importance of combining Torah and Wisdom, both given by God, in the person of the king who was responsible for leading God’s people. In 1 Kings 1:1-11, Torah is not to be seen as a “religious” requirement and Wisdom as a “secular” one. They together derive from God and are to be seen as instrumental for guiding those who are elected to carry out God’s mandate in Israel’s life. Solomon’s problem was not that he was a king, but that he was a king who increasingly allowed to slip from his grasp the combination of Torah and Wisdom without which even his best efforts would be doomed to failure. The “wisest” thing Solomon could have done was adhere to Torah.

The “loyal opposition” in 1 Kings 1:11 ought not, then, to be construed as those who considered themselves oppressed by Solomon and then later rebelled against that oppression. From a canonical point of view, we dare not lose sight of the fact that the rebellion in the story was a function of YHWH’s bringing judgment on Solomon’s disobedience, not some romantic notion of the noble aspirations of the downtrodden. Indeed, the one who successfully led the revolt against Rehoboam—fully sanctioned by a prophet speaking in God’s name (11:29-39)—was himself admonished to pay close attention to Torah (v 39). Because he failed as miserably as Solomon at that task (12:25-33), his name became synonymous with inducing Israel to sin (e.g., 15:34).

Rather, Solomon faced the task of presiding over an institution that in many significant ways compared to similar “worldly” institutions of the surrounding nations. At times, Israel wanted just such an institution (1 Sam 8:5). Though problematic and potentially destructive from God’s point of view (8:7-18), such an institution could be “sanctified” for Israel’s
purposes. In Solomon’s case, this meant combining Torah and Wisdom in the execution of his office. Torah and Wisdom would enable Solomon and Israel to be in but not of the world. Their monarchical institutions paralleled those of the pagan world in a thousand details. The difference—if a difference was to be maintained—would be the combination of Torah and Wisdom. The more Solomon moved away from these divine gifts, the more he became a king like all the other nations had. Apart from Torah and Wisdom, Solomon became increasingly of the world over against which he had been selected—and Israel had been elected—to be an alternative. With Torah and Wisdom, Solomon—and Israel—could have walked that fine line between being in but not of the world. Without them, the results were as disastrous as they were predictable. It soon became all but impossible to distinguish between Israel and any other nation. Institutional structures per se were not the issue. The will of God as expressed in Torah and Wisdom was.

NOTES
2. The list of David’s ‘mighty men’ might be an exception to this, although these are not officers per se but members of an elite military force (2 Sam 23:8-39).
6. The historical problems notwithstanding, Brueggemann argues that the canonical witness ‘remembers’ rather than ‘invents’ the connection between Solomon and wisdom; further,
Solomon is more than one historical figure; he is a symbol of a “sociocultural mutation.” See W. A. Brueggemann, “The Social Significance of Solomon as a Patron of Wisdom,” in The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East (John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue, eds.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 119-120.

7. For the distinction between the Bible as a source and a witness or testimony see Brevard S. Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), pp. 97-106.

8. It seems to me that many of the otherwise instructive insights of Brueggemann are clouded by his taking a stance over against the text. When he says that the canonical reading in the end has it right, he refers to the canonical “memory” of the connection between Solomon and wisdom rather than the manner in which the canon renders Solomon theologically. See “Solomon as Patron,” pp. 71-132.


13. McCarver argues that wisdom such as is reflected in 1 Kings 2 derives from sources used by the Deuteronomist in which wisdom did not have as positive an assessment as the Deuteronomistic variety. See P. Kyle McCarter Jr., “The Sage in the Deuteronomistic History,” in The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East (John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue, eds.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 290. This does not in my view take seriously enough the intra-canonical debate about the use and misuse of wisdom, or how wisdom was to be related to other Israelite theological traditions. The juxtaposition of wisdom geared to facilitate social control and that which was a gift of God is more than a literary phenomenon in which two disparate sources were laid side by side.


16. The commingling of the good and bad features of Solomon’s reign throughout the narrative undercuts, in my judgment, efforts by scholars to decide when the pro-Solomonic traditions end and the anti-Solomonic ones begin. The text seems to have been edited in a much more subtle manner.


18. For the argument that the account of Solomon’s receiving wisdom and displaying it in the matter of the two prostitutes are temporally connected, see I. Rabinowitz, ‘Az Followed by Imperfect Verb-Form in Preterite Contexts: A Redactional Device in Biblical Hebrew,” Vetus
23. According to Kenik, “...the Dtr composed the dream of Solomon by adapting traditional elements pertinent to the topic of kingship and by combining these traditional elements so as to portray kingship in Israel within the ambience of Mosaic law.” Design, p. 4. In chaps. 4 and following she shows how much Deuteronomistic language ("Torah language") is to be found in the dream sequence.
24. Deurlo is incorrect, in my opinion, to view the second appearance as confirming wisdom. The language of the second appearance is unmistakably oriented to Torah. See “The King’s Wisdom,” p. 14.
26. See the translation of “sons of the east” as “sons of aforetime” (see Isa 19:11) by Mendenhall, “Shady Side,” pp. 322-323.
27. Walters’s thesis is put forward in a privately published manuscript entitled The Book of Reversals (Courice, Ontario, Canada: Manthano, 1990), pp. 13-17. His nomenclature for this phenomenon is less important than what it signals in the text. I am indebted to Professor Walters for granting me access to his work.
28. On the extent of the territory, see Parker, “Solomon as Philosopher,” p. 79.
30. Nelson argues that Judah’s apparent exemption from the district taxation system (4:7-19 Isv 9 in MT contains no reference to Judah) is another indication that Solomon’s policies were far from being even-handed. See Kings, p.42.
35. An example of the difference between a strictly “historical” and “canonical” rendering of the text may be observed in 11:25, where we learn that Rezon had been an adversary “...all the days of Solomon...” Though that was the case historically according to the writer, Rezon’s mischief is tied explicitly to YHWH’s instigation when Solomon went astray and connected to his final days as king.