

SOLOMON AND ELIJAH

James Leon Holmes

I

I Kings opens with the last days of King David and the appointment of Solomon as his successor. II Kings opens with the passing of Elijah from this world and the anointment of Elisha as his successor. The history recorded between these two scenes marks a watershed in salvation history. That watershed is largely recorded in I Kings and surrounds the two enigmatic personalities whose presence dominates the work: Solomon and Elijah. They are two towering figures whose respective shadows are cast over all of the subsequent Israelite history. Two more different men can hardly be imagined.

Why does the author present both Solomon and Elijah in the same book? Why does I Kings open with the succession of Solomon to David and II Kings with the succession of Elisha to Elijah? The style of the writing is so laconic, so matter of fact, that these questions nearly escape our attention. Yet, the burden of this essay will be to show that these questions are important, that the author intends for us to raise them, and that the answers to them illuminate much of salvation history.

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Israel had experienced more than four hundred years of political history, from Moses to David, before Solomon as-

James Leon Holmes is a practicing attorney in Little Rock, Arkansas. He was, from 1990 until 1992, a tutor at Thomas Aquinas College. This article was originally given as a lecture at the College in 1994.

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cended to the throne, and, so, had seen the problem of succession to leadership arise and be solved many times. There had been enormous differences between the various circumstances in which the problem of succession had arisen. No one had arisen like Moses, who spoke with God face to face, but when Moses died, God appointed Joshua to lead the nation. "And Joshua the Son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him. . . ." (Deut. 34:9) After the holy land had been conquered, Joshua died. "After the death of Joshua the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?' The Lord said, 'Judah shall go up. . . .'" (Judges 1:1-2) Leadership fell to a tribe rather than an individual, but not any tribe, only the tribe specifically designated by God in response to the inquiry of the people of Israel. Still later, "the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the power of those who plundered them." (Judges 2:16) Beginning with Othniel and culminating with Samuel, God raised up judges for the people. "The spirit of the Lord came upon him. . . ." (Judges 3:10; 6:24; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14)

The day came when the people demanded a king so they would be "like all the nations." (I Sam. 8:5, 20) God gave them a king, Saul, whom he selected himself, whom he commanded Samuel to anoint. (I Sam. 9:17, 10:1) "[A]nd the spirit of God came mightily upon him. . . ." (I Sam. 10:10) When Saul fell into apostasy, God selected David as the new king and commanded Samuel to anoint him, "and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward." (I Sam. 16:13)

And so, from Moses to David, with characters as different as Samson and Joshua, the problem of succession to leadership in Israel had been left to God. God selected whom he chose as ruler of Israel and confirmed his selection by sending his Spirit upon the designee.

The first chapter of I Kings sets the stage for the problem of succession, once again, to present itself to the nation. The venerable King David "was old and advanced in years[.]" He appears to be approaching death. Adonijah, David's son by Haggith, is not content to await his father's death. He is not content to await God's selection of a successor. He decides, "I will be king." (I Kings 1:5) His decision marks a threat to Solomon, Solomon's mother, and those friendly to them, such as Nathan.

Then Nathan said to Bathshe'ba the mother of Solomon, "Have you not heard that Adoni'jah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it? Now therefore come, let me give you counsel, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go in at once to King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your maidservant, saying, "Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne"? Why then is Adoni'jah king?' Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words." (I Kings 1:11-14)

Nathan, the prophet, like Adonijah, is not content to await the death of David, nor is he willing to wait until God announces his selection of a successor. He takes the matter of succession into his own hands and those of Bathsheba, a willing co-conspirator. Nathan does not go to David and announce that Adonijah is setting himself up as king of God's people without waiting on the word of the Lord as to whom should be king. He does not seek the word of the Lord. He goes to Bathsheba, not with a prophet's only claim to authority, the word of the Lord, but with the word of Nathan. He and Bathsheba conspire to induce David to make the selection of a successor, a selection that hitherto had been the Lord's and the Lord's alone. They conspire to induce David to select

Solomon as the next king, though there is no indication that the Lord has designated Solomon. The plan works.

Then King David answered, "Call Bathshe'ba to me." So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. And the king swore, saying, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead'; even so will I do this day." (I Kings 1:28-30)

David is outraged, and rightfully so, that Adonijah has selected himself as the new king. Adonijah has no authority to make such a decision. The king swears, "as the Lord lives," but he promptly forgets to inquire of the living Lord as to whom should be the next king. "[W]ho has redeemed my soul out of every adversity. . . ." The living Lord who has redeemed David out of every adversity also is capable of handling Adonijah. He can redeem Bathsheba, Solomon and Nathan from Adonijah, but no one thinks to ask Him. Moses had foreseen the day when Israel would demand a king and had given a specific commandment, "you may indeed set as king over you him whom the Lord your God will choose." (Deut. 17:15)

King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada." So they came before the king. And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon; and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead; and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah." (I Kings 1:32-35)

"I have appointed him. . . ." Previously, God had done the appointing. Now, David does the appointing. Moses had given Israel permission for a king "whom the Lord your God will choose." Now the king is one whom David chooses. "[L]et

Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel. . . ." Previously, God had issued the command to anoint the new leader of Israel. Now, David gives the command to anoint the king of Israel.

Zadok and Nathan do David's bidding. They do not question his authority to issue the command. They do not inquire of the Lord as to whether He has chosen Solomon. Solomon is anointed at Gihon. "And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise." (I Kings 1:40) The effect of the anointment is rejoicing by the people. But the Spirit does not come upon Solomon, as He had come upon David after his anointing, and Saul after his anointing, and the judges after theirs.

And the king also said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted one of my offspring to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it." (I Kings 1:48)

David speaks as though God had raised up Solomon, had given a word to a prophet that Solomon was to be king, and had ordered the prophet to anoint Solomon.

David seems to have forgotten or forgotten in part the promise the Lord had given him through Nathan:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. (II Sam. 7:12)

God's promise to David was that He would raise up one of David's sons to be King after David had died. The promise called upon David to have faith that God would fulfill it, faith and not sight. David was not to see the fulfillment of the promise. Yet, David blesses the Lord for granting that one of his sons should sit on the throne while David still lived, "my own eyes seeing it."

David was the last king who was anointed at the commandment of the Lord and upon whom the Spirit of the Lord had

come. Solomon was the last king of a united Israel, and the first upon whom the Spirit did not come. As we read through the remainder of I Kings, none of Solomon's successors was anointed. In II Kings some of the challengers to the throne of the northern kingdom were anointed, but Joash was the only king in the Davidic line to be anointed, and his anointment was not by command of the Lord. From Moses to David, each leader of Israel had been a man upon whom the Spirit had come. From Solomon afterward, no king of either the northern kingdom or the southern kingdom received the Spirit. The succession of Solomon to the throne of David marks a watershed in the history of God's chosen people.

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When David's time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the Lord may establish his word which he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel.'" (I Kings 2:1-4)

David's quotation of the Lord's promise to him is not quite accurate. God's promise to him was:

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the

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sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever." (II Sam. 7:12-16)

God's promise to David was unconditional—after David lies down with his fathers, God will raise up from David's offspring one whose throne God will establish forever, who will be God's son and God will be his father, one from whom God's steadfast love will never be taken. Nothing in this promise depended on man. Nothing was conditional. When David recounts the promise to Solomon, it is conditional—*if* David's sons are faithful to God, David will not lack a man on the throne of Israel.

Perhaps in his old age, David forgot the terms of God's promise to him. David's entire speech to Solomon, however, suggests that his mind and memory were clear. Perhaps David has recalled the promise and realized that his efforts to fulfill the promise by placing Solomon on the throne while he still lived was premature but believes that God will not remove his sons from the throne so long as they are faithful to Him. If, as it appears, David was anxious to *see* the fulfillment of God's promise to him, he necessarily is disappointed. God's promise, by its terms, was not to be fulfilled until after David's death. As David has recast the promise in his speech to Solomon, its fulfillment depends on the faithfulness of David's sons to God. David cannot know whether his sons will remain faithful to God after his death, so he cannot know whether he has seen the beginning of the fulfillment in Solomon's ascension to the throne. He is still dependent on faith and cannot have sight, but, as recast, his faith must be in his sons' faithfulness rather than God's. If his thoughts ran back to Amnon or Absalom, he cannot have been sanguine, as he went to his death, regarding the prospects that his sons would remain faithful.

The second half of David's speech to Solomon, his last recorded words, is striking in its contrast with the first half.

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Immediately after exhorting Solomon to walk before God in faithfulness with all of his heart and all of his soul, David finishes his life by exhorting Solomon to assassinate Joab and Shimei. Solomon faithfully carries out his father's wish. He has Joab and Shimei executed, but not before the execution of his half-brother, David's son, Adonijah. After David's death, the account of these three executions constitutes the first segment of the history of Solomon's reign. Following the account of these three executions, I Kings 2 closes with this sentence, "So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon." God had promised David, "I will raise up your offspring after you . . . and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." (II Sam. 7:12) I Kings does not say that God established Solomon's throne.

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"At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I shall give you.'" (I Kings 3:5) God rarely appears in dreams in the Bible. He never appeared to David nor to Saul in a dream. Indeed, He had not appeared to anyone in a dream since the patriarchal age, when He appeared in dreams to Abraham, then Jacob, and lastly Joseph. The only other recorded instances of God appearing in dreams are his appearances to Daniel and, in the New Testament, to Joseph. His appearance in a dream signifies a watershed, a new era in salvation history.

In every other instance of God speaking to someone, whether in a dream or otherwise, God states a commandment ("Go from your country . . . to a land that I will show you"), a promise ("your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth"), or a revelation ("the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars were bowing down to me"). Twice God had spoken to David through the prophet Nathan: once to reprove David for the sin involving Bathsheba and Uriah and once to promise that after David's death God would raise up David's offspring

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and establish his throne forever. Solomon had just ascended to the throne, so one would expect that God's appearing would be for the purpose of reiterating the promise to David, but not so. Solomon also had just taken Pharaoh's daughter for a wife, so one would expect that God might speak to warn about taking foreign wives, but, again, not so. God's appearance to Solomon is the only occasion in the entire Scripture in which He appears to someone in order to ask, in effect, what would you like from me? In every other instance of an appearance of God, God appears in order to state His agenda for the person to whom He appears. Here, He has no stated agenda for Solomon. It seems that Solomon is not a part of God's plan, and God appears in a dream as a conspicuous signal that this is so; or, more likely, as a conspicuous signal that His promise of an eternal kingship for David's offspring was not to be fulfilled in Solomon or his successors. The fulfillment of God's promises will not come through the political rulers.

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And Solomon said, "Thou hast shown great and steadfast love to thy servant David my father, because he walked before thee in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward thee . . ." (I Kings 3:6)

Solomon understood wherein his father's greatness lay: in his relationship with the Lord. God had shown "great and steadfast love" for David, who "walked in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart" toward Him. With this preface to Solomon's response to God's invitation to "ask what I shall give you," one would expect Solomon to go on to request a relationship with the Lord like that of his father's. The request one would expect to follow this preface would be a request for God to show great and steadfast love to Solomon or to preserve Solomon in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness in heart.

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Instead, Solomon asks:

And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people whom thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered or counted for multitude. Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this thy great people? (I Kings 3:7-9)

No one in the Scriptures before Solomon had ever asked God for "an understanding mind" or the ability to "discern between good and evil," a remarkable fact in light of the long line of men with whom God has dealt, including such notable persons as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, and David.

One person had, indeed, sought to be wise and to know good and evil: Eve. Eve's circumstance, however, differed significantly from Solomon's. Eve disobeyed an express commandment from God in eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; Solomon, far from disobeying an express commandment, makes his request to God. Eve's disobedience is a mark of pride; Solomon's request is marked by a convincing expression of humility. Eve had immediate access to God in an unfallen state so that she had no need to know good and evil; Solomon had not that immediate communion with God that makes human wisdom superfluous, and he was charged with the responsibility of governing a numerous people in a fallen world.

Even so, recalling that Eve sought to know good and evil sheds light on the significance of Solomon's request to God. Others before Solomon had been charged with the responsibility of governing God's chosen people in the midst of a fallen world, but none of them had asked for wisdom. Solomon's predecessors had sought and received special revelation for important decisions. Moses did not receive wisdom to be a

great lawgiver; he received the laws directly from God. Joshua did not receive the ability to be a great military strategist; God gave him the strategy. Samuel did not receive the ability to select a suitable king; God told him whom to select. Hitherto, the answer to Solomon's question, "who is able to govern this thy great people?" had been "God is the only one who is able to govern this His great people." The question suggests that God will not be governing His people as He had done in the past. Solomon's felt need for wisdom bespeaks a perception that he cannot expect or does not desire special revelation from God in order to govern God's people. If the political order were to be the arena of the fulfillment of God's promises, special revelation, presumably, would be forthcoming to direct the king; God would govern His people. That it evidently will not be forthcoming suggests that in the future God's plans will be accomplished outside the political arena. In that event, Solomon, not God, will govern the people.

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." (I Kings 3:10-14)

Given Solomon's character and circumstance, the options open to him as items he could have requested of God are long life, riches, honor, the life of his enemies, and understanding to discern good and evil. God is pleased that Solomon has requested understanding to discern good and evil rather than long life, riches, honor, or the life of his enemies. God, therefore, gives him a wise and understanding mind, so that none of

Solomon's predecessors nor his successors could compare to him. This confirms that Solomon is distinct from the likes of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and David, none of whom was wise like Solomon was to be. Nor did any of them need wisdom like Solomon's to be what God had wanted him to be.

The character of God's promises to Solomon also confirms Solomon's distinctiveness. In the past, God's promises had concerned God's covenant with His people and the salvation He would bring to the world: "your descendants shall be as the sand of the sea;" "in you all nations shall be blessed;" "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation;" "He shall build a house for my name, and I shall establish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son." God's promises to Solomon are personal to Solomon: a wise and discerning mind, riches, honor and a long life. Solomon, personally, will be blessed, but he will play no part in the great drama of redemption.

God is pleased, but the odd note in His response to Solomon should not be overlooked. God notes that Solomon could have asked for the life of his enemies, in addition to wisdom, riches, and honor. God will give him wisdom, riches, and honor, but not the life of his enemies. Only a few sentences before, Solomon had taken the lives of his enemies, including his brother, Adonijah. God implicitly condemns Solomon's assassinations by not including "the life of your enemies" in the list of blessings that God would give to him.

"I now do according to your word." Your word, not My word. The perpetual response of the faithful to God would be summarized centuries later by a Jewish maiden, "Be it done to me according to your word," and by her Son, "Not my will but yours be done." God turns this around with Solomon, "I now do according to *your* word." And there is an ominous *if*: "if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." God unconditionally promises a

wise and discerning mind, riches, and honor, but the length of Solomon's life is conditional. Wisdom, riches, and honor will not guarantee a long life. The ways that Solomon will walk as a wise man may not be God's ways. Having wisdom may not mean that Solomon will keep God's statutes and commandments. That Solomon will be wiser than any who has gone before him and wiser than any who will come after him will not suffice to insure the one thing most needful.

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"Then two harlots came to the king, and stood before him. The one woman said, 'Oh, my lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house. . . .'" (I Kings 3:16-17) Thus begins the familiar story of the two harlots, both of whom claimed to be the mother of the same child. The text moves almost immediately from God's promise to Solomon of wisdom, riches, and honor to a demonstration that God kept His promise. The two harlots present Solomon with a seemingly insoluble problem. Both claim to be the child's mother. There are no other witnesses who can break the tie. Solomon discovers the truth with what is, indeed, a stroke of wisdom.

"And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice." (I Kings 3:28) God already has begun to fulfill the promise to give Solomon honor.

One question remains. Why does the narrator make a point of telling us that the two women were harlots? The women and the king in their dialogue never use the word; it is the narrator who gives us this information. Perhaps that the women were harlots is the key to the psychological insight that permits Solomon to distinguish the true mother from the pretender. Whether this is so or not, the narrator highlights the fact that prostitution was practiced in Solomon's Israel; and the king does nothing about it.

While Solomon may have done nothing about the practice of prostitution in his kingdom, the same cannot be said about the royal table and the royal treasury. "Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, who provided food for the king and his household; each man for one month in the year." (I Kings 4:7) The twelve officers and their respective territories are identified. Two of the twelve are Solomon's sons-in-law. We are not told what, if anything, the twelve did for the king's subjects, but they provided for the king's table quite nicely. "Solomon's provision for one day was thirty cors of fine flour, and sixty cors of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep besides harts, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl." (I Kings 4:22-23) Solomon's wealth was not limited to an ample provision of food. "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life." (I Kings 4:21) Solomon's reign was both peaceful and prosperous. "And Judah and Israel dwelt in safety . . . every man under his vine and under his fig tree all the days of Solomon." (I Kings 4:23) Despite the peace, or perhaps in order to insure it, Solomon amassed immense military might. "Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen." (I Kings 4:26) The royal horses, like the royal court, were amply fed. "Barley also and straw for the horses and swift steeds they brought to the place where it was required, each according to his charge." (I Kings 4:28) This is the first of three descriptions of Solomon's wealth, and it shows that God fulfilled his promise to make Solomon rich.

But it does more than that. It shows, in part, that God fulfilled his promise to make Solomon wise, for all this demonstrates a colossal achievement in administrative efficiency and political acumen. A staggering amount of food was brought to and processed by the palace each day, which means an ef-

ficient bureaucracy must have been at work under Solomon's rule, both in the countryside, where the provisions were extracted from the people, and in the palace, where records of receipts must have been kept and this massive amount of food prepared and served. More than that, all of this was extracted without provoking rebellion by the populace, which is a still greater accomplishment of domestic politics. And in the arena of foreign politics, Solomon must have been an extraordinarily able head of state, as he managed to maintain the empire without war either with rival powers or the nations that paid him tribute. All told, Solomon compiled a remarkable record of peace and prosperity that would be the envy of any nation today and most nations of any day. Without doubt, Solomon was a brilliant ruler, both domestically and abroad, and his political accomplishments far surpass those of any other king of Israel.

We are not left to infer that God fulfilled his promise to make Solomon wise, for this portion of the text concludes by so stating in an eloquent encomium to Solomon's wisdom.

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ez'rahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the nations round about. He also uttered three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom. (I Kings 4:29-34)

Solomon's wisdom was not restricted to affairs of state. His brilliance was such that, while directing the empire in unprecedented peace and prosperity, he had the time and ability

to become a philosopher, a musician, and a natural scientist, and he excelled in all of these areas of endeavor. Solomon's wealth was immense but quantifiable. His wisdom, on the other hand, was "without measure" and "like the sand of the seashore." Though his wealth was great, his wisdom was even greater. God fulfilled his promise to make Solomon wiser than all other men.

God also fulfilled His promise to give Solomon honor. His fame spread throughout the world, and men came from all peoples to hear him.

Once more, however, the text contains a loud silence. Solomon spoke of many things: trees as large as the cedar and as small as the hyssop, beasts, birds, reptiles, fish, and, undoubtedly, politics and other practical affairs; but nothing is said about his having talked about God's revelation to his ancestors. The blessed man, according to Psalm 1, delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on that law day and night. The text is silent as to whether Solomon delighted in the law of the Lord and meditated on it. An omission of this sort can hardly be an oversight.

Equally significant is the list of those with whom Solomon is compared. "Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and of all the wisdom of Egypt." Solomon's wisdom is of the same genus and therefore comparable in quantity with the wisdom of those outside the covenant. The only Israelites with whom Solomon is compared are men who played no part in salvation history and whose lives and teachings, therefore, are recorded nowhere in Scripture. Missing from the list are men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and David. Solomon's wisdom is not compared to theirs. Indeed, Scripture nowhere attributes wisdom to them. They are noteworthy, not for wisdom, but for their faithfulness, their obedience, the revelation they received, or their relationship with God. It might be more accurate to say that they were not noteworthy at all, neither for what they did nor for what they were, but their stories are

told because of what God did for them and through them. In any event, Solomon is not compared with them but with the pagan nations surrounding Israel.

Solomon's name in subsequent generations has been associated not only with wealth and wisdom but also, and perhaps especially, with his buildings, particularly the temple. The genesis of the idea for the temple is told in II Samuel 7.

Now when the King dwelt in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies round about, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you."

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When

your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.’” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David. (II Samuel 7:1-17)

As the text makes clear, the idea of building a temple originated with David, not with God. David dwelt in a house of cedar and wanted the ark of God to have a building of comparable quality. Nathan, the prophet to whom David communicated his desire, told David that the Lord would be with him in the project even though Nathan had no direction from the Lord on the matter.

That same night the Lord countermanded the approval for David's building of the temple that had been given by Nathan. The Lord is unequivocal that He had never dwelt in a house and had never instructed any of the judges to build one, and He makes clear also that He does not need David to build one. It was the Lord who took David from the pasture and made him a prince, not David who took the Lord from obscurity and made him great. The Lord, not David, has cut off David's enemies, and the Lord, not David, will make David a great name. The Lord, not David, “will appoint a place for my people” and will give them peace. The Lord who has done and will do all of this also will make David a “house.” In David's mind, living in a cedar house was a great thing, and he wanted that luxury or that honor for the Lord. God quite plainly did not share that view. If He had thought living in a cedar house such a great thing, he already would have instructed one of the judges to build one. He already has done greater deeds

than building a cedar house, and now he announces that He will do still greater deeds. He will make David a “house,” meaning something much greater than a cedar building. The “house” that God will make for David will be an eternal kingdom made from one of David's offspring sometime after David lies down with his fathers. That descendant of David will be God's son, and, though, if he commits iniquity, God will punish him with the rod of men, He will never take His love from him as He did from Saul.

Now, in this context appears the Lord's statement, “He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.” David, and after him Solomon, took this to mean that Solomon should build for the Lord a house of cedar. David, like Solomon, still had in mind a mundane notion that the Lord has taken pains to indicate is not His. As the Lord uses the term, the “house” that will be built to His name is something much greater than a physical building: His “house” will be an eternal kingdom made by David's offspring, who also will be God's son.

One part of this prophecy nearly escapes our attention and so bears repeating:

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. (II Samuel 7:10-11)

What is noteworthy about this sentence is the future tense. “I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place. . . .” God already had given Israel the land of Canaan and had planted them there. Now He is saying He will appoint His people a place and will plant them. The chapter had opened with the statement that God “had given [David] rest from all his enemies[.]” Now, God says, “I will give you rest from all your enemies.” God already had given Israel a physical place and already had given

David rest from his physical enemies. Sometime in the future, after David lies down with his fathers, God will raise up an offspring from David's body who also will be God's son; God will establish this son as David's house, an eternal kingdom; the son will establish the Father's house, which also will be an eternal kingdom; and God will appoint a new "place" for His people, someplace other than and better than the land of Canaan; He will give His people peace; and He will give David rest from His enemies.

David, or rather God, had conquered all of David's physical enemies. David never lost a battle with a physical enemy. He was defeated once, not by an enemy army, but by concupis-
cence; and at the end of his life it appears he was defeated by the desire for vengeance. If God is to give David a "rest from his enemies" other than the rest from his enemies already given, these would seem to be the enemies remaining. If so, the promise that God would appoint a new place for His people in which they would "be disturbed no more" would be a promise of rest of the same sort. Not only is God's notion of a worthy "house" greater than David's, so, too, if this reading of the text holds, is His notion of rest from enemies.

David was awed and humbled at the greatness of the promise God had made to him. (II Samuel 7:18-29) Yet, he did not fully appreciate the greatness of that promise. Nor, in all likelihood, do we. What the text tells us is that God will appoint for his people a place greater than Canaan, that land flowing with milk and honey; that God will give His people peace so that they will be afflicted no more; that David will be given rest from his enemies beyond the rest given at the defeat of the last of his physical enemies; that God makes to David an unconditional promise to be fulfilled sometime after David lies down with his fathers; that God will raise up the seed of David who will be the son of God, who will build a house for God's name, and from whom God will never take His everlasting love.

We are permitted here a glimpse at the grandeur and glory

of God's covenant with David, but the glimpse we are given is of the same glorious reality unveiled more fully in later ages: the unconditional covenant of the house of David that is also the house of God, a spiritual house built of living stones (II Peter 2:5), a house of everlasting love, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," (II Cor. 5:1) a house built on the chief cornerstone who is the seed of David and also the son of God, "in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:28-29)

10

The construction of the temple is recounted in three stages. The first stage recounts the provision Solomon made for labor and materials, as well as the construction of the foundation and the frame. The first stage concludes with the word of the Lord coming to Solomon. The second stage describes the other buildings constructed by Solomon, the interior construction and furnishing of the temple, and the ceremony of consecration of the finished temple to the Lord. The second stage concludes with the Lord appearing to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. After the temple has been completed and consecrated, the text revisits the subject of the provision made for labor and materials.

The first stage of the description of the construction of the temple concludes with this passage:

Now the word of the Lord came to Solomon, "Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my ordinances and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel." (I Kings 6:11-13)

“Concerning this house which you are building. . .” Solomon is building this house, not God, which calls to mind Psalms 127:1, “Unless the Lord build the house, those who build it labor in vain.” God has a comment about the house Solomon is building, but not a comment on architectural plans nor on whether He approves or disapproves of the project. God showed Moses a pattern in heaven for the building of the tabernacle and gave him detailed instructions on how the tabernacle was to be built, but not so the house Solomon is building. God called Bezalel by name to build the tabernacle and filled him with the Spirit of God for that work (Ex. 31:1-2), but no one is filled with the Spirit to build the temple.

God’s comments to Solomon “concerning this house you are building” are of a different nature than His instructions to Moses regarding the building of the tabernacle. God’s comments here are intended to remove any misconception Solomon might have about the significance of the temple. That Solomon is building a temple for the Lord does not mean that the word the Lord spoke to David, Solomon’s father, is or will be established with Solomon; nor does it mean that the Lord will dwell with His people Israel. To the extent that Solomon may think so, he is mistaken. The temple ultimately is irrelevant to whether the Lord will establish His word with Solomon and to whether He will dwell with Israel. The one thing most needful is not the building of a physical dwelling-place but walking in the Lord’s statutes, obeying His ordinances and keeping His commandments. If—we have seen previously that the Lord has spoken that enormous word to Solomon—Solomon walks in the Lord’s statutes, obeys His ordinances and keeps His commandments, then the word spoken to David will be established with Solomon.

The conditional nature of the promise to Solomon recalls the first occasion on which the Lord spoke to Solomon. When the Lord had promised Solomon wisdom, riches, and honor, he added, “if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments as your father David walked, then I

will lengthen your days.” (I Kings 3:14) Men may think that wisdom, riches, or honor lead to life, but they do not: only obedience to God leads to life. Men may think that building a magnificent temple for God will cause God to dwell with them, but it will not: only obedience will do that. More specifically, Solomon may be wiser than his father, but that will not mean that God will account him blessed as David. If Solomon wants to be blessed as was his father, he must walk in the Lord’s ways as did David. Solomon may build a “house” in the sense of a physical building as David has desired to do, but that does not mean that God’s promise to David that his offspring would build a “house” for the Lord is fulfilled through Solomon. If Solomon wants to build a “house” for the Lord, he must conform his life to God’s word, for the “house” that is pleasing to God is not made of cedar and gold.

II

The second stage of the account of the building of the temple concludes with the consecration of the temple and God speaking to Solomon once more. The ark of the covenant containing the two stone tablets placed there by Moses is brought into the temple, and the temple is filled with the glory of the Lord. Solomon addresses the assembly, telling them that his reign and his building of the temple mark the fulfillment of God’s promise to David, after which Solomon prays:

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven; and said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to thy servants who walk before thee with all their heart; who hast kept with thy servant David my father what thou didst declare to him; yea, thou didst speak with thy mouth, and with thy hand hast fulfilled it this day.” (I Kings 8:22-24)

Solomon recognizes that the Lord is unique, that there is no other God like Him, in that the Lord is a God of steadfast

love to those who walk before Him with all their heart. He believes, mistakenly as we have seen, that the temple marks the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to David that David's son would build a "house" for the Lord. He next asks that the Lord fulfill the promise to David that "[t]here shall never fail you a man before me to sit upon the throne of Israel, if only your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me." (I Kings 8:25)

Then Solomon prays that God will consecrate the temple, stating at the outset the theme of his petitions:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, hearkening to the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prays before thee this day; that thy eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which thou hast said, 'My name shall be there,' that thou mayest hearken to the prayer which thy servant offers toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive." (I Kings 8:27-30)

Solomon knows that the Lord is a transcendent God who cannot be contained in "heaven and the highest heaven," and he knows that heaven, not the "house" he has built, is God's "dwelling place." The preface to the prayer of consecration properly confesses the limits of what Solomon has accomplished by building a "house" for the Lord. Solomon does not ask God to make the temple His abode but that His eyes be open toward it to hear the prayers of the people and to forgive.

Seven specific petitions follow the preface. The first petition asks for justice between neighbors. The fifth petition asks that the prayers of foreigners be granted when they pray toward the temple so that "all the peoples of the earth may

know thy name and fear thee, as do thy people Israel." (I Kings 8:43) The sixth petition asks that God help His people in battle when they pray toward the temple.

Forgiveness, however, is the theme of Solomon's prayer of consecration. Four of the seven petitions following the preface ask that God forgive His people their sins against Him when they pray toward the temple and acknowledge their sin. The second petition acknowledges that Israel will be defeated by its enemies when the people sin against the Lord. The third petition acknowledges that the Lord will withhold rain when the people sin. The fourth petition acknowledges the Lord will send famine, pestilence, the destruction of crops, plagues and sickness when the people sin. Solomon has an acute sense of the sinfulness of man and the need for forgiveness, as is evident from the seventh petition, which summarizes to some extent the preceding petitions:

"If they sin against thee—for there is no man who does not sin—and thou art angry with them, and dost give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; yet if they lay it to heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to thee in the land of their captors, saying, 'We have sinned, and have acted perversely and wickedly'; if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to thee toward their land, which thou gavest to their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name; then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause and forgive thy people who have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions which they have committed against thee. . . ." (I Kings 8:46-50)

After Solomon had concluded the prayer of consecration, he spoke again to the assembly:

Now as Solomon finished offering all this prayer and supplication to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the

Lord, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven; and he stood, and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying, "Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised; not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he uttered by Moses his servant. The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers; may he not leave us or forsake us; that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his ordinances, which he commanded our fathers. Let these words of mine, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, and may he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel, as each day requires; that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other. Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day." (I Kings 8:54-61)

All in all, it is a remarkable performance by Solomon, clearly the high mark of his life as told in I Kings. The prayer is the prayer of a truly wise man, and it summarizes the covenant relationship between God and His people perhaps as well as any passage in the Old Testament. There is no man who does not sin. Every man needs forgiveness at some time. Forgiveness comes only through genuine repentance with all of one's mind and all of one's heart. In view of the sinful disposition of men, it is necessary that God incline men's hearts to Him, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His ordinances. Prayer is needed so that God will maintain the cause of Israel, not for Israel's sake alone, but that "all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other." The transcendent God who maintains steadfast love with His people is not a local tribal god, one among many, but the God of all creation. He has chosen one people from all the earth, but His election of His people is not for their sake alone but that through them all peoples may come to know Him beside whom there is no other.

God does not leave such a prayer as this without response:

When Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house and all that Solomon desired to build, the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. And the Lord said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication, which you have made before me; I have consecrated this house which you have built, and put my name there for ever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel for ever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'There shall not fail you a man upon the throne of Israel.' But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and the house which I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins; every one passing by it will be astonished, and will hiss; and they will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' Then they will say, 'Because they forsook the Lord their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore the Lord has brought all this evil upon them.'" (I Kings 9:1-9)

This is the third occasion on which God spoke to Solomon. On each occasion God gave Solomon a promise the fulfillment of which was conditional. On each subsequent occasion the promise is more extensively stated than on the previous occasion. On the first occasion, when God appeared to Solomon at Gibeon and promised him wisdom, honor, and riches, He also promised, "And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your

father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” (I Kings 3:14) On the second occasion, the word of the Lord came to Solomon,

“Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my ordinances and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.” (I Kings 6:12-13)

The first promise is for a long life; the second is that God will establish his word with Solomon and will dwell among Israel; and the third promise is that God will establish Solomon’s throne over Israel for ever. Each is conditioned upon Solomon’s walking in God’s ways. The third occasion is the only one of the three at which God explicitly states the consequences of Solomon’s not walking in God’s ways: Israel will be cut off from the land, and the temple will be destroyed.

It is a threat of blood-chilling severity. It is fitting, however, as a response to Solomon’s prayer of consecration, for Solomon’s prayer demonstrated that he knew with whom he was dealing. He knew that the Lord is the only God, that there is no other. He knew that the Lord is a transcendent God who cannot be contained even in the highest heaven. He knew that the Lord had chosen Israel as a priestly nation, as a witness to the other nations. And, so, God warns Solomon of the consequences of failing to live in accordance with his knowledge.

More than that, God’s word to Solomon is a reiteration of the kind of “house” that is ultimately pleasing to Him. He has just filled the temple with His glory, but that does not make the temple the “house” He had promised would be built by David’s seed who would be God’s son and from whom God would never take His steadfast love. The house of God is not built of gold and cedar but of men who serve Him with a whole heart.

After the consecration of the temple and the Lord’s response to Solomon’s prayer, the text returns to subjects first mentioned before the account of the construction of Solomon’s buildings. The third stage of the account of the construction revisits the provisions Solomon made for materials and labor in the construction process, which leads back into another account of Solomon’s wisdom, riches, and honor. Before the account of the construction, the account of Solomon’s wisdom, riches, and honor had led into the first account of Solomon’s provisions for materials and labor.

The account of the construction had begun with the explanation that Solomon had purchased cedar from Hiram king of Tyre for an annual price of twenty thousand cors of wheat and twenty thousand cors of beaten oil. After the consecration, the text relates that Solomon also gave Hiram twenty cities in Galilee. The cities were evidently in bad shape, for Hiram complained, and Solomon substituted one hundred talents of gold for the cities. It is not said whether these cities were outside the prosperity created under Solomon’s regime, or whether Solomon’s regime had impoverished them by the levies required to support the royal court and the royal construction projects.

Before the account of the actual construction of the buildings, the text had related that Solomon “raised a levy of forced labor out of all Israel[.]” (I Kings 5:13) After the consecration, the text relates more specifically who had been enslaved.

All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Per’izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb’usites, who were not of the people of Israel—their descendants who were left after them in the land, whom the people of Israel were unable to destroy utterly—these Solomon made a forced levy of slaves, and so they are to this day. (I Kings 9:20-21)

Prior to the invasion of Canaan under Joshua, God had given Israel permission to spare the lives of the women and children

of some of the peoples whom they were to conquer in cities far from where the Israelites were to dwell.

But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Per'izzites, the Hivites and the Jeb'usites, as the Lord your God has commanded; that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to sin against the Lord your God. (Deut. 20:16-18)

Israel had been commanded to destroy these peoples, so that they would not lead Israel into the idolatry, with its attendant abominations, which was prevalent in Canaan.

However, Israel had not walked in God's ways,

So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel; and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not obeyed my voice, I will not henceforth drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, that by them I may test Israel, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did, or not." So the Lord left those nations, not driving them out at once, and he did not give them into the power of Joshua.

* * *

So the people of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Per'izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites, and they took their daughters to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons; and they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, forgetting the Lord their God, and serving the Ba'als and the Ashe'roth. Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. . . . (Judges 2:20-23, 3:5-8)

Thus, the labor supply for building of the temple was the fruit of Israel's disobedience. The peoples who constituted

the labor supply were idolaters with whom the Israelites had intermarried and by whom the Israelites had been led into idolatry. Their mention in connection with the construction of the temple is an ominous note and may account for the severity of the Lord's warning to Solomon.

The account of the provision for labor and material used in building the temple marks another difference between the building of the temple and the building of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was built from materials given freely and generously by the Israelites (Ex. 35:20-29; 36:2-7), and the labor was freely given by Israelites, by "every one whose heart stirred him to come to do the work." (Ex. 36:2) The house built by Solomon was built from material purchased from a pagan king and by labor coerced from pagan slaves.

As we have noted, the account of the labor and material for the construction of Solomon's buildings leads back into another account of Solomon's wisdom, riches, and honor. The famous visit of the Queen of Sheba follows the explanation of the forced labor almost immediately, and that visit is followed by another account of Solomon's enormous wealth, which included an abundance of gold, silver, cedar, and chariots.

Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year. (I Kings 10:23-25)

13

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women: the daughter of Pharaoh, and Moabite, Ammonite, E'domite, Sido'nian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their

gods"; Solomon clung to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 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. For Solomon went after Ash'toreth the goddess of the Sido'nians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. (I Kings 11:1-8)

Solomon, the son of David, the richest and wisest man in world, the man who built the great temple, the man who had so elegantly summarized the covenant relationship between the Lord and Israel, the man who recognized that the Lord is the only God beside whom there is no other, the man to whom the Lord had given such an explicit and severe warning regarding idolatry, succumbs in the end to this worst sin. The denouement of his story is almost too sad to tell. The gods after whom Solomon went were gods associated with sexual debauchery and its attendant sin, the sacrifice of human children. A fall of such magnitude for such a great man can hardly be imagined. God's response to Solomon's misconduct scarcely needs telling:

And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord commanded. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David

your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away all the kingdom; but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen." (I Kings 11:9-13)

Just as God kept his promise to give Solomon wisdom, riches, and honor, so, too, he keeps this promise. He raises up several adversaries to Solomon, including Jeroboam, the future king of the northern kingdom, which would be comprised of ten of the tribes of Israel. The prophet Ahijah anoints Jeroboam and informs him of God's promise to give him ten tribes over which he would become king.

Solomon sought therefore to kill Jerobo'am; but Jerobo'am arose, and fled into Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. (I Kings 11:40)

David had been unwilling to kill Saul, even in self-defense and even though David had been anointed to succeed Saul, because Saul was the Lord's anointed. Solomon, in contrast, does not scruple to raise his hand to assassinate one whom the Lord has chosen and who has done nothing against him. The unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Jeroboam is Solomon's last recorded act before his death. Solomon's reign thus comes full circle. The first recorded act of Solomon's reign had been the assassination of his rival and brother, Adonijah. Solomon, whose name means peace, begins his reign with the murder of his brother and ends his reign with an attempted murder of the Lord's anointed.

We have noted previously that the text repeats or revisits certain subjects at certain times. While it appears at first glance that the repetition is the product of disorganization, perhaps due to a clumsy editor cutting and pasting together materials from diverse sources, a closer look suggests that the

text is purposefully and carefully organized. The text organizes Solomon's reign into nine sections:

1. Solomon kills adversaries (2:13-2:46)
2. Solomon takes a foreign wife (3:1-2)
3. God appears and speaks to Solomon (3:3-15)
4. Solomon's wisdom, riches and honor (3:16-4:34)
5. Solomon's construction projects (5:1-9:25)
6. Solomon's wisdom, riches and honor (9:26-10:29)
7. Solomon has many foreign wives (11:1-8)
8. God speaks to Solomon (11:9-13)
9. Solomon attempts to kill his adversary (11:14-40)

At the center of the account of Solomon's reign is the section describing his construction projects. Four subjects are discussed before the section on the construction projects, and the same four subjects are discussed after the section on the construction projects. The text is organized into an almost perfect chiasmus, which is to say that the four sections after the construction appear in inverse order to the same four sections before the construction, with one exception. For the chiasmus to be perfect, the eighth section, God speaking to Solomon, would need to be the seventh section, and the seventh section, the foreign wives, would need to be the eighth. As constructed, however, God speaks to Solomon immediately after the two accounts of Solomon's marrying foreign wives. The last occasion on which God speaks to Solomon necessarily must follow the account of the foreign wives, for on that occasion God explicitly comments on Solomon's wives and their leading him into idolatry. The order of the accounts of Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter and God's speaking to Solomon on the first occasion could have been inverse to the present order, unless God's speaking to Solomon the first time implicitly warned against marrying foreign wives. We have commented that the first address of God to Solomon contains an ominous *if*, "And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." In light of the

structure of the text as a whole, it seems fair to conclude that there was a warning implicit in that *if* and that the warning was related to Solomon's marrying an Egyptian woman.

As mentioned above, the center section is the account of Solomon's construction projects. This section, itself, repeats and revisits certain subjects, as does the account of Solomon's reign as a whole. Again, it appears that the text is disorganized, perhaps due to the clumsiness of an editor pasting together diverse sources. Again, however, a closer examination suggests that this section is purposefully and carefully organized. Again, the text is organized into nine sections.

1. Materials and forced labor for construction (5:1-18)
2. Construction of the temple (6:1-10)
3. God speaks to Solomon (6:11-13)
4. Construction of the temple (6:14-37)
5. Construction of Solomon's house (7:1-12)
6. Construction of the temple (7:13-51)
7. Consecration of the temple (8:1-66)
8. God appears and speaks to Solomon (9:1-9)
9. Material and forced labor for construction (9:10-25)

The organization of the center section, regarding Solomon's construction projects, bears a striking resemblance to the organization of the entire account of Solomon's reign. Both have nine sections. Both have God speaking to Solomon in the third and eighth sections. Both would form a perfect chiasmus but for the placement of God's speaking to Solomon. At the center of the work as whole is the account of Solomon's construction projects, and at the center of the account of Solomon's construction projects is the account of the building of Solomon's house. Thus, at the center of the account of the reign of Solomon, who is known as the man who built a house for the Lord, is the building of Solomon's own house.

We have argued that Solomon did not build the "house" that the Lord promised David his seed would build. The structure of the text quietly but emphatically confirms this thesis. The central feature of Solomon's reign is not the build-

ing of a "house" pleasing to God, a "house" comprised of men wholly dedicated to Him; rather, the central feature of Solomon's reign is the building of Solomon's own house.

Solomon misunderstood the nature of the "house" that would be pleasing to God. This misunderstanding is critical to an understanding of Solomon's reign as told in I Kings. The organization of the text, again, confirms this point. In the organization of the account of Solomon's reign as a whole, God speaks to Solomon after the accounts of Solomon's marriages. Both occasions represent a warning, the first implicit and the second explicit. In the organization of the account of Solomon's construction projects, God also speaks to Solomon on two occasions, on both occasions after a section on the temple. On the first of the two occasions, God implicitly warns that Solomon should not misconstrue the nature of the "house" pleasing to Him: "Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in my statutes . . . then I will establish my word with you . . . and will not forsake my people Israel." (I Kings 6:12-13) On the second of the two occasions, after the consecration of the temple, God warns with blood-chilling severity of the consequences of apostasy. The "house" that God wants is a people wholly dedicated to Him and free from idolatry and its attendant abominations. The "house" built by Solomon, meaning by "house" a people or a succession of rulers, was a "house" in which idolatry with its attendant abominations, sexual debauchery and infant sacrifice, were welcome. The "house" built by Solomon reflected the character of his wives, not the character of the Lord.

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The chapters of I Kings that follow the death of Solomon show us the nature of the "house" he built.

"Rehobo'am his son reigned in his stead." (I Kings 11:43) Rehoboam was not, so far as the text indicates, anointed, nor did the Spirit of the Lord come upon him. Nor did he inherit

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his father's natural wisdom. He failed the first test put to him as king. The people of Israel came to him and said:

"Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke upon us, and we will serve you." (I Kings 12:4)

Rehoboam sought advice from the old men, his father's counsellors, who advised him, "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants for ever." (I Kings 12:7) The old men understood the essence of statesmanship. A true statesman is a servant of the people. Rehoboam, however, disregarded the wise counsel of the old men and followed the advice of his friends, who had no experience in statesmanship and no political wisdom.

And the king answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel which the old men had given him, he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." (I Kings 12:13-14)

Rehoboam and his friends see the relationship of the king to the people as a master/slave relationship. Needless to say, the people would not willingly accept a king who proposed, in effect, to enslave them.

And when all Israel saw that the king did not hearken to them, the people answered the king, "What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David." (I Kings 12:16)

The rebellion began in earnest when the people stoned to death Rehoboam's taskmaster over forced labor. "So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day." (I Kings 12:19) Thus, the kingdom was split, with Rehoboam ruling the two southern tribes, and Jeroboam ruling the ten northern tribes.

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The proximate cause of the division of the kingdom was the foolishness of Rehoboam in responding to the request of the people that the yoke imposed by Solomon be lightened, but to see this event as resulting simply from a political miscalculation would be to miss the point the text is making. "So the king did not hearken to the people; for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfill his word, which the Lord spoke by Ahi'jah the Shi'lonite to Jerobo'am the son of Nebat." (I Kings 12:15) God had promised Jeroboam that He would tear ten tribes from Solomon's son and give them to him in punishment for Solomon's idolatry. (I Kings 11:30ff.) Hence, the schism that divided the kingdom is a divine punishment for Solomon's sins.

As in many places in the Holy Scriptures, we are confronted with a mystery, the mystery of the confluence of divine providence and human free will. To explain this mystery is beyond the scope of this essay and the power of this author. We can do no more than note what the text says. Solomon freely and voluntarily sinned. God brings about punishment for Solomon's sins through the free and voluntary actions of Rehoboam and the people of Israel. That punishment was the division of the kingdom, a division that was never overcome and that ultimately had catastrophic consequences for both of the then separated kingdoms. Solomon's shadow is, thus, cast over all the subsequent history of Israel.

The casting of Solomon's shadow is not limited merely to a division of the kingdom. Both kingdoms turn away from the Lord to idolatry.

Now Rehobo'am the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehobo'am was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. His mother's name was Na'amah the Ammonitess. And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they committed, more than all their fathers had done.

For they also built for themselves high places, and pillars, and Ashe'rim on every high hill and under every green tree; and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. (I Kings 14:21-24)

The mention of Rehoboam's mother, Naamah the Ammonitess, in this context is a quiet reference to Solomon's responsibility for the idolatry and debauchery that overcame Judah during Rehoboam's reign. Solomon had instituted the custom, followed by his successors in Judah, of the king's mother serving as queen. He also had married women who were idolaters, one of whom was Naamah the Ammonitess. The Ammonites worshipped Molech, a god to whom children were sacrificed. Hence, Solomon set the stage for his successor to be raised by an idolater and for Bathsheba's successor as queen mother to be an idolater. Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there, the city where Solomon had built the temple of the Lord, has, due to Solomon, become a center for worship of the abominable Molech.

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son, Abijam, about whom we are told only three things: he reigned three years; his mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom; and he walked in all the sins which his father did before him.

Abijam was succeeded by his son, Asa. "His mother's name was Ma'acah the daughter of Abish'alom." (I Kings 15:9) Maacah was the mother both of Abijam and Asa. The suggestion is that during Rehoboam's reign, Asa was born to an incestuous relationship between Abijam and his mother, Rehoboam's wife, Maacah. Maacah is the daughter of Abishalom, a variant spelling of Absalom, Solomon's brother. Hence, it appears that Rehoboam took his cousin for a wife during the reign of Solomon, his father.

Asa, however, followed the Lord. He put away the male cult prostitutes and "removed all the idols that his fathers had

made." (I Kings 15:12) He also deposed Maacah from her position as queen mother because of her idolatry. The high places were not taken away, but "the heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days." (I Kings 15:14) Thus, Asa's reign as king of Judah marked a partial and temporary ascent out of the depths of corruption that into which Judah had fallen during the last years of Solomon's reign and during the reigns of Rehoboam and Abijam.

The northern kingdom, Israel, like Judah, also descended into idolatry after Solomon's death. Ironically, Solomon's building of the temple in Jerusalem was instrumental in causing Israel's apostasy.

And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David: if this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough, Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. And this thing became a sin, for the people went to the one at Bethel and to the other as far as Dan. He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. (I Kings 12:26-31)

Jeroboam perceived the political significance of the temple (and one may assume that if Jeroboam was astute enough to see its political significance, Solomon was as well). So long as the people maintained to their religious allegiance to the Lord and went to Jerusalem to worship in the temple built by Solomon, they also would be tempted to return their political allegiance to Solomon's son who was ruling in Jerusalem. The remedy was to set up alternative places of worship with idols presented to the people as the gods who brought them up out of the land of Egypt. Hence, the existence of the temple

in Jerusalem occasioned, at least in part, the introduction of idolatry in the northern kingdom by Jeroboam.

Had Jeroboam believed the promise God had given him through the prophet Ahijah at his anointing, he would not have felt the necessity of setting up idols in Israel to keep the people from going to Jerusalem to worship. When Ahijah had anointed Jeroboam and told him that God would give him ten tribes, he also said,

And if you will hearken to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. (I Kings 11:38)

God had promised Jeroboam that if he would walk in God's ways, God would build him "a sure house, as I built for David[.]" Jeroboam evidently lacked faith that this promise would be kept, so he took steps to insure by his own methods that he would have "a sure house."

Even after having been warned in dramatic fashion of the consequences of what he was doing (I Kings 13:1ff.), Jeroboam did not repent.

After this thing Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people; any who would, he consecrated to be priests of the high places. And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth. (I Kings 13:33-34)

Jeroboam was succeeded by his son, Nadab, who "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin which he made Israel to sin." (I Kings 15:26)

Ba'asha the son of Ahi'jah, of the house of Is'sachar, conspired against him; and Ba'asha struck him down at Gib'bethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and

all Israel were laying siege to Gib'bethon. So Ba'asha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his stead. And as soon as he was king, he killed all the house of Jerobo'am; he left to the house of Jerobo'am not one that breathed, until he had destroyed it, according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by his servant Ahi'jah the Shi'lonite; it was for the sins of Jerobo'am which he sinned and which he made Israel to sin, and because of the anger to which he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel. (I Kings 15:27-30)

The "sure house" that God had promised Jeroboam if he were faithful, and that Jeroboam evidently had attempted to guarantee by setting up ersatz places of worship, is obliterated in one generation.

Jeroboam's sin and the consequences to which it led set a depressing pattern that is repeated again and again in the northern kingdom. Baasha, who destroyed the house of Jeroboam, walked in the way of Jeroboam and his sin, so God sent word to Baasha, "I will utterly sweep away Ba'asha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jerobo'am the son of Nebat[.]" (I Kings 16:3) Baasha's son, Elah, succeeded Baasha after his death and was killed by Zimri, "who killed all the house of Ba'asha; he did not leave him a single male of his kinsmen or his friends." (I Kings 16:11) Zimri's reign lasted only seven days. Omri, the commander of the army besieged and took the city where Zimri was encamped, so Zimri "went into the citadel of the king's house, and burned the king's house over him with fire, and died." (I Kings 16:18)

As evil as had been the kings of Israel, Omri exceeded them all. "Omri did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did more evil than all who were before him." (I Kings 16:25) Omri died and was succeeded by his son, Ahab, whose evil surpassed even that of Omri.

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all that were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jerobo'am the

son of Nebat, he took for wife Jez'ebel the daughter of Ethba'al king of the Sido'nians, and went and served Ba'al, and worshipped him. He erected an altar for Ba'al in the house of Ba'al, which he built in Samar'ia. And Ahab made an Ashe'rah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. (I Kings 16:30-33)

We saw that the central point of the account of the reign of Solomon in I Kings was the building of a house. Literally the central section of the account is the building of Solomon's house. The key to understanding the point of the account is the misunderstanding as to the kind of "house" that God had promised would be built by a son of David. As we see from the quotations from the text in this chapter, the notion of a "house" continues to be central to the story even after Solomon's death. The word *house* appears forty-two times in I Kings chapters 12 through 16. The last instance is the reference to the building of the "house of Ba'al" by Ahab. Solomon, who desired to build a house for the Lord, set in motion a chain of events leading to the building of the house of Baal.

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"Now Eli'jah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.'" (I Kings 17:1) Thus, abruptly and without introduction, we meet Elijah, the prophet whose presence will dominate the last chapters of I Kings and the opening scenes of II Kings. From the first chapter of Exodus through the first chapter of I Kings, the account of Israelite history had been dominated by political rulers, first Moses, then Joshua, then the judges, and then the kings. A thousand years of history are told in these chapters. Prophets do appear in these pages. From Moses through David, the political rulers had

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also been prophets. Other prophets also had appeared in the stories, but never as central characters: they had appeared as characters who were adjunct to the central characters, the political rulers. Naaman appeared, for example, in relation to David, not David in relation to Naaman. Elijah marks a change. He is the central character in the story. Ahab appears in relation to Elijah, not Elijah in relation to Ahab.

Thus, it seems that the story of Elijah is out of place, appearing as it does in the book of Kings, one of a series of books telling the stories of the rulers of Israel. But the story of Elijah is not out of place. Elijah is presented in the text as a ruler, but as a ruler whose authority exceeds that of the holders of the political offices. He is a ruler who commands the dew and the rain, something that not even the great Solomon, at the zenith of his power and with all of his wisdom, could do. Human power and human wisdom, no matter how great cannot command the dew and the rain. Only God can do that. Hence, Elijah is presented in the text as representing God on earth. The locus of divine power on earth is Elijah.

Prophets had arisen before, but none like Elijah. Rulers had arisen before, but none like Elijah. The prophets before Elijah had been messengers, men who received the word of the Lord and passed it on. None of them had been the locus of divine power. Before Elijah, the political rulers of Israel, along with the priests, had been God's representatives on earth. Elijah is neither a political ruler nor a priest. He has no connection either to Jerusalem or to the temple. From Moses until David, the political rulers of Israel had received the word of the Lord either directly or indirectly, and had carried out that word. Moses and Joshua, on occasion, had commanded nature. No political ruler after Joshua commanded nature. David was the last political ruler of Israel upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came. He was the last political ruler before Elijah who received divine guidance for the carrying out of his plans. Elijah is the first person to represent God on earth without being a political ruler or a priest. He is the

first prophet who is not also a political ruler but who still exercises ruling power.

Solomon was the first ruler who was not also a prophet. Elijah is the first prophet who is also a ruler. Together, they represent a watershed in the divine economy. I Kings marks the beginning of the transition from the kingdom of God as the political kingdom of Israel to the kingdom of God as a universal kingdom the rulership of which is executed apart from and even against the political rulers of Israel.

We have noted that Elijah appears in the narrative abruptly and without introduction. He is the first dominant figure in the Old Testament whose genealogy is unstated. We may infer that his office, his power, his authority is not dependent in any way on his ancestry, unlike the line of David whose descent from Judah is essential, and unlike the temple priests whose descent from Aaron is essential. All we are told about Elijah is that he is a Tishbite of Tishbe in Gilead, an area east of Jordan, outside the promised land, settled by the tribe of Gad. Elijah's home is not in the land of Canaan promised first to Abraham, subsequently to Jacob, and then to the Israelites. He is not of the royal lineage nor of the priestly tribe.

In addition to his place of origin, which tells more about who this prophet is not than who he is, we also are told his name, Elijah, which means, The Lord is my God. When the Lord made the covenant with Abram, he changed his name to Abraham, promised to establish his covenant with Abraham's descendants, promised to give them the land and promised, "I will be their God." (Gen. 17:1-8) God told Moses to tell the Israelites, "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God." (Ex. 6:7) Elijah's name signifies that the promise to Abraham and the promise to Moses is fulfilled in Elijah. Elijah represents the fulfillment of God's promise.

The only other information we are given about Elijah

comes from Elijah, himself, speaking to Ahab. "As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand. . . ." (I Kings 17:1) Although he speaks to Ahab, Elijah stands before the Lord. If Elijah has any power, any right to exercise ruling authority, any claim to command the dew and the rain, it comes from this, that he stands before the Lord.

18

And the word of the Lord came to him, "Depart from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, that is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." So he went and did according to the word of the Lord; he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. (I Kings 17:2-7)

Immediately after Elijah is presented as a ruler, as one who commands the dew and the rain, he is presented also as one under authority. The word of the Lord comes to him and he obeys.

Elijah is told not only his destination, the brook Cherith, but also the direction it lay. Cherith is near Tishbe, so Elijah undoubtedly knew which direction it was. He knew it was east of the Jordan, as did the Hebrew readers of the story. Later, Elijah will be given other destinations, but this is the only occasion when we are told not only Elijah's destination but also its direction. Here, we are told the direction three times—"turn eastward . . . east of the Jordan . . . east of the Jordan." The garden of Eden was in the east. (Gen. 2:8) The cherubim were placed "at the east of the garden of Eden." (Gen. 3:23) Cain went away to the land of Nod, east of Eden. (Gen. 4:16) The tower of Babel was built as men "migrated from the east." (Gen. 11:2) Lot separated from Abram and journeyed east. (Gen. 13:11) The wind that brought the

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locusts to Egypt during the plagues was an east wind. (Ex. 10:13) The wind that drove back the water of the Red Sea so the Israelites could pass through on dry land was an east wind. (Ex. 14:21) During the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness, the tribe of Judah camped on the east side of the tabernacle (Num. 2:3), as did Moses and Aaron. (Num. 3:38) The triple repetition that Elijah was go to the east indicates that the events with which we are concerned are significant events in salvation history.

The author previously had recorded the provisions for bread and meat for Solomon's royal table, and now he does the same for Elijah. Solomon had twelve officers over Israel, each of whom had to bring in from the country provision for one month per year in sufficient amount to provide thirty cors of flour, sixty cors of meal, ten fat oxen, twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, besides harts, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl. (I Kings 4:7, 22-3) Elijah has bread and meat brought to him each morning and each evening. Solomon's bread and meat came from taxes imposed on the people. God provides the bread and meat for Elijah.

The author is not content, however, with telling us merely that God provided meat and bread for Elijah. He wants us to know more specifically that God commanded ravens to feed Elijah, and that ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. The Mosaic law declared that the raven was unclean, an abomination (Lev. 11:13-5), and further that flesh that touched an unclean thing was not to be eaten. (Lev. 7:19) It appears that the author of I Kings is specifically calling to our attention that God supernaturally provided food for Elijah in a manner prohibited by the law.

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Then the word of the Lord came to him, "Arise, go to Zar'ephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Be-

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hold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” (I Kings 17:8-9)

Elijah obeys and finds a widow at the gate of the city gathering sticks for a fire with which to prepare a last meal for herself and her son before both of them succumb to the famine and die. Elijah asks the widow for a drink of water and also to prepare him some food before preparing food for her son and herself, and he promises that if she will do so her food will not be spent until rain comes to give relief from the famine. She does as Elijah asks, and in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken to Elijah, the food is not spent.

This is the second instance in which God makes miraculous provision for Elijah to be fed. The first time was through ravens, unclean animals, in Israelite territory but east of the Jordan outside the Promised Land. This time provision is made by a gentile woman outside of Israelite territory. The widow lives in a city that belonged to Sidon, which is the kingdom from which Jezebel, the idolatrous wife of Ahab, came. The Sidonians worshipped Baal, one of the false gods most responsible for Israel’s apostasy. During the time of Solomon, Sidon was ruled by Hiram, who supplied timber for the temple in return for twenty thousand cors of wheat and twenty thousand cors of beaten oil.

The first time Elijah was fed bread and meat. This time he is fed cake, which we are told is made from meal and oil. Elijah not only is provided meal and oil, he also through the word of the Lord provides meal and oil for the duration of the famine to the widow and her son. We have seen that the text first records that enormous amounts of grain and meat were brought daily to Solomon’s royal table and then records that the feat was duplicated supernaturally for Elijah through the work of the ravens. Now we see that the text first records that Solomon provided enormous amounts of grain and oil to Sidon in return for timber for the temple and then records that the feat was duplicated supernaturally for Elijah in return

for the widow’s providing for him before cooking for her son and herself.

Solomon’s arrangement with Hiram was strictly a commercial transaction operating on the natural level. In addition to the miraculous aspect, Elijah’s arrangement with the widow has another noteworthy characteristic: it required on the widow’s part either faith or charity. Either she had to believe Elijah’s promise, made in the name of the Lord the God of Israel, or she had to love Elijah enough to give of her last bit of food to him even if it meant that she and her son would have to do without. Solomon took foreign women into his house, and those foreign women led him away from faith in the Lord. Elijah is taken into the house of a foreign woman, and he leads her to faith in the Lord.

Thereafter, notwithstanding the faith of the widow and the miraculous provision of meal and oil, the woman’s son dies.

And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!” (I Kings 17:18)

The widow is a sinner. She understands the death of her son not as a sign that the Lord the God of Israel is unable to preserve the life of her son but that the Lord has taken the life of her son as punishment for her sin. The death of her son is not an occasion for disbelief in the Lord but for contrition for her sin. She sees that the Lord is holy, that His presence is incompatible with the presence of sin.

Elijah does not disagree with the widow’s assessment of the cause of her son’s death. Instead of arguing with her, he takes the son upstairs to his private room, stretches himself upon the child three times and prays three times that the child’s soul will come into him again. The Lord answered Elijah’s prayers, the soul of the child came into him again, and Elijah delivered the living child to his mother.

We recall that Solomon also had restored a son to a distraught mother who, like the widow, was a sinner. Solomon had restored the harlot’s son by an act of wisdom. Elijah re-

stored the widow's son by an act of God. When Solomon restored the harlot's son to her, "all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice." (I Kings 3:28) When Elijah restored the widow's son to her, she said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." (I Kings 17:24)

Here in a nutshell is the difference between Solomon and Elijah. Solomon was divinely gifted with wisdom so that men stood in awe of him. Elijah was a man of God such that through him men came to see that the word of the Lord is truth.

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After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." So Eli'jah went to show himself to Ahab. (I Kings 18:1-2)

The stage seems set for a dramatic confrontation between two powers of two different orders, Ahab, the king of Israel, and Elijah, the one by whose word the rain has been withheld from Israel for three years. Still, the author delays in presenting the confrontation to us. He first presents what appears to be a lengthy aside in which Ahab's household manager, Obadiah, takes center stage. The lengthy aside serves an artistic purpose by building up to the confrontation between Ahab and Elijah so that the sense of anticipation is increased, but it also gives the reader important information that further increases the tension of the meeting that is about to occur. The famine caused by Elijah is severe, so severe that Ahab and Obadiah began to scour the country looking for water lest all the animals die. Obadiah "revered the Lord greatly" and hid a hundred prophets by fifties when Jezebel "cut off the prophets of the Lord." (I Kings 18:3-4) Indirectly, we

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are told that being a prophet of the Lord in Israel was a hazardous occupation: the regime had made a concerted effort to "cut off" the prophets of the Lord, so Elijah is placing his life in danger by showing himself to Ahab. That the famine, which was caused by Elijah, is as severe as it is is still more reason to believe that Elijah's showing himself to Ahab will be fraught with danger. Obadiah, himself, tells Elijah that Ahab has searched for him in every nation and kingdom, a search, the narrative suggests, that was not motivated by a concern to insure Elijah's well-being.

And as Obadi'ah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him; and Obadi'ah recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?" And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" (I Kings 18:7-8)

Obadiah calls Elijah his lord, but Elijah disagrees: Ahab is actually Obadiah's lord. The dialogue that follows confirms that Elijah's statement is the more accurate one. Elijah gives Obadiah a command, i.e., that he tell Ahab Elijah is here, but Obadiah is unwilling to obey for fear that obedience will cost him his life. If he obeys, he fears, Elijah will be gone when he returns, and Ahab will kill him. Obadiah prefaces his objection to Elijah's command with the oath, "As the Lord your God lives," not "as the Lord my God lives," or "as the Lord our God lives." Later in the narrative, Elijah challenges the people, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?" (I Kings 18:21) Obadiah, who "revered the Lord greatly," but who served Ahab and would not obey Elijah for fear that he would be killed, who referred to the Lord in dialogue with Elijah as "your God," represents the people of Israel limping along with two different opinions. Obadiah lacked the faith of the widow of Zarephath, who was willing to obey Elijah when he told her to use her last oil and meal to feed him. Obadiah finally did as Elijah said after Elijah swore by "the Lord of hosts" that he would show himself to Ahab.

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The long anticipated confrontation finally occurs.

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed the Ba'als. (I Kings 18:17-18)

Ahab's greeting starts like Obadiah's, "Is it you," but it ends differently, "you troubler of Israel." Ahab, unlike Obadiah and the people, is not limping along between two different opinions. Ahab is unequivocal in his view of Elijah: Elijah is the "troubler of Israel." Elijah returns the accusation, "I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house." The disagreement is not a disagreement about who has done what; it is a disagreement about what it means to trouble Israel and hence a disagreement about what it means for Israel to be untroubled. Ahab's view is that causing a three-year drought and a severe famine constitutes troubling Israel. A prosperous Israel is an untroubled Israel. Ahab's view is that of almost any political ruler of almost any political entity. Elijah's response indicates that Israel is not to be confused with just any political entity. The essence of Israel is its covenant relationship with the Lord. Causing Israel to forsake the commandments of the Lord and follow the Baals constitutes troubling Israel. A faithful Israel is an untroubled Israel.

Ahab sees only at the level of the material and the political. Elijah's insight transcends rather than contradicts that of Ahab. Elijah sees that the root of the troubles of Israel is neither political nor material but theological. Hence, the meeting of Elijah and Ahab cannot be the decisive confrontation. The dramatic build-up to the confrontation between Elijah and Ahab turns out to have been a build-up to an anti-climax. Elijah directs Ahab to gather all Israel at Mount Carmel, where the decisive confrontation will occur between Elijah as the prophet of the

Lord and the prophets of Baal, or more precisely, between the Lord and Baal.

So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel, and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let two bulls be given to us; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; and I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, and put no fire to it. And you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken." (I Kings 18:20-24)

Elijah does not preach to the people, nor does he offer to debate the prophets of Baal. He simply lays down a challenge: the God who answers by fire, he is God. The challenge is accepted. The prophets of Baal prepare their bull and call upon their god from morning until after noon, with no response.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me"; and all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down; Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Israel shall be your name"; and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt offering, and on the wood." And he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and filled the trench also with water. (I Kings 18:30-35)

When the Lord made the covenant with the nation of Israel on Mount Sinai, Moses had "built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel." (Ex. 24:4) The altar Elijah builds is a repeat of the altar built by Moses. The altar built by Elijah signifies that the essence of Israel lies in its covenant relationship with the Lord. The covenant is with twelve tribes, not just the ten northern tribes, and not just the two southern tribes. Moreover, the center of that covenant relationship in Elijah's day is not in the temple built by Solomon but in Elijah.

And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O Lord, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back." (I Kings 18:36-37)

Elijah's prayer has two components. It opens and closes with a prayer for the Lord to let the people know that He is God. The center of the prayer is a petition for the Lord to show the people that Elijah is His servant and has done these things at His word. Elijah has reason to be concerned that the Lord show that he has done these things by the word of the Lord. The Mosaic Law required that sacrifices be brought to be offered at the tabernacle (Lev. 17:1-9, Deut. 12:1-8), which now was in the temple in Jerusalem. Any man who violated this law was to be "cut off from among his people." (Lev. 17:4) The seriousness of offering sacrifice outside the tabernacle can be seen from the fact that, when the two and one-half tribes east of the Jordan built an altar by the Jordan, the remainder of Israel gathered to make war against them and desisted only after receiving assurances that the altar was not for the offering of sacrifices or burnt offerings. (Joshua 22:10-31)

Elijah has a second and even more serious cause for concern that the people know that he has done these things at

the word of the Lord. Elijah is not of the priestly lineage, yet he is offering sacrifice to the Lord, a priestly duty. The text calls particular attention to the fact that Elijah is not a priest. When his prayer is quoted, he is identified as "Elijah the prophet." (I Kings 18:36) This is the only place in the text where he is identified as "Elijah the prophet." He is not "Elijah the priest." During the sojourn of the nation in the wilderness, Korah and well-known men, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, asserted that they were as entitled to offer sacrifice as Aaron and his sons. Korah and the other leaders of the rebellion were swallowed by the earth, and the men who were not priests but who offered incense were consumed by fire. The censers of the burnt men "were hammered out as a covering for the altar, to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no one who is not a priest, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the Lord." (Numbers 16:39-40)

Elijah's prayer is answered. "Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." (I Kings 18:38) The Lord has signified, in a remarkable way, that Elijah has done all these things at His command. The consumption of the offering, the altar, and the water by the fire of the Lord is an astonishing miracle, but the Lord could have signified His approval of Elijah's actions with some other remarkable miracle. This particular manner of signifying His approval has an antecedent. At the conclusion of the consecration of Aaron and his sons, "fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat upon the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces." (Lev. 9:24) The Lord shows His approval of Elijah's sacrifice in the same manner in which He showed His approval of the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests, with one exception: the altar built by Elijah is consumed by the fire of the Lord along with the sacrifice. Elijah is permitted, indeed commanded, to exercise priestly

duties on this one occasion, but the altar is not preserved for him to offer sacrifice again, nor is he the founder of a line of priests.

The other component of Elijah's prayer also is answered. "And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.'" (I Kings 18:39) Elijah asked the Lord to let the people know that He is God, and now they know.

"And Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.' And they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there." (I Kings 18:40) The dramatic confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal closes with Elijah performing the duties of a king: he enforces the law. He is identified in the passage as "Elijah the prophet." He performs priestly duties. He also performs the duties of a king. He is a prophet, a priest, and a king.

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Though the confrontation toward which the story has been building is complete, the scene is not quite concluded.

And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he bowed himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees. And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again seven times." And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising out of the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'" And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. (I Kings 18:41-46)

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The drought announced by Elijah when he appeared abruptly in the text at the beginning of Chapter 17 is over. Rain has returned to the land of Canaan. Elijah's announcement that there would be "neither dew nor rain these years" had followed immediately after a description of the depths of idolatry into which Omri and his son Ahab had fallen, including building "the house of Baal" in Samaria. The rain had been withheld because of the idolatry in the land and was sent again because the people recognized that the Lord is God and because the prophets of Baal had been executed.

The law had established a direct causal relation between the sin of idolatry and the withholding of rain.

You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no graven image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land, to bow down to them; for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.

If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. (Lev. 26:1-4)

Conversely, if the people are unfaithful to the covenant, "I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like brass; and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit." (Lev. 26:19-20) Moses had reiterated this causal link in his farewell address in Deuteronomy:

And if you will obey my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be full. Take heed lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve gods and worship them, and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and

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he shut up the heavens, so that there be no rain, and the land yield no fruit, and you perish quickly off the good land which the Lord gives you. (Deut. 11:13-17)

A third passage that should be noted here is from Solomon's prayer dedicating the temple.

When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because [the people] have sinned against thee, if they pray toward this place, and acknowledge thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them, then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, thy people Israel, when thou dost teach them the good way in which they should walk; and grant rain upon thy land, which thou has given to thy people as an inheritance. (I Kings 8:35-36)

The passage from Solomon's prayer of dedication is remarkably similar to the passages from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, yet it differs from them in subtle but significant ways. Moses had taught the people that the specific sin of idolatry would cause drought and famine. Solomon sees drought as a consequence of sin but not specifically of the sin of idolatry. Solomon foresees that the heavens will be shut up and the rain withheld because of the people's sin, and he prays that they will be forgiven, a note that is omitted in the parallel passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Solomon's prayer that God forgive his people and grant them rain seems answered when the rain is sent after the people acknowledge, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." (I Kings 18:39) While it appears at first glance that Solomon's prayer is answered here, a closer reading indicates that the contrary is true. Solomon prayed that the people be forgiven "if they pray toward this place, and acknowledge thy name, and turn from their sin. . . ." (I Kings 8:35) Solomon had prayed that forgiveness would be granted and the rain returned upon three conditions, only two of which are fulfilled at Mount Carmel. The people acknowledged the Lord's name, and, their participation in the execution of the prophets of Baal suggests, they turned from their sin. However, they

did not pray toward the temple. Prayer toward the temple, notwithstanding Solomon's prayer, proves to be irrelevant to whether God will forgive his people.

And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. (I Kings 18:45-46)

With the clouds, the wind, and the rain, comes the hand of the Lord on Elijah. Looking back, we recall that the Lord's presence was with the Israelites during the Exodus from Egypt in a cloud. The wind blew back the Red Sea. Looking forward, we note that when Elijah appears on the mount of transfiguration with Moses, the Father speaks from a cloud saying of Jesus, "This is my beloved son, listen to him." This same Jesus declared that one must be born of the water and the spirit to enter the kingdom of God; and when he completed his baptism, he sat down at the right hand of the Father. We can do no more that suggest a possibility as to the significance of these elements of the present text. Our suggestion is that, like the crossing of the Red Sea, the event here represents a foreshadowing of Christian baptism. Elijah has just made a public profession of faith and rejected Satan in a most dramatic way. Now he is baptized with water: the cloud represents the Father; the wind represents the Spirit; and the hand of the Lord on Elijah is Jesus.

Ahab told Jez'ebel all that Eli'jah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jez'ebel sent a messenger to Eli'jah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. (I Kings 19:1-3)

Heretofore, the text had been silent with respect to Elijah's personal characteristics. Nothing had been said of his appearance, personality, character, thoughts or emotions. We do not know whether he is tall or short, ruddy or fair, rich or poor, wise or foolish, happy or sad, calm or anxious. Now that silence is broken: Elijah is afraid. Elijah is a man of like nature with ourselves. To the extent he has appeared superhuman, that appearance reflects the Lord's grace, not Elijah's natural qualities.

In his fear, Elijah has fled the northern portion of the northern kingdom to Beer-sheba, the southernmost city of the southern kingdom, where he leaves his servant.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers." And he lay down and slept under a broom tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came again a second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you." And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. (I Kings 19:4-8)

After crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites came to the wilderness. After passing through the rain, Elijah goes to the wilderness. When the Israelites arrived at the wilderness,

the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:2-4)

When Elijah arrived at the wilderness, he, like his fathers, said that it was better that he die than to go on. God provided food

and water to the people of Israel through the ministry of angels. God provided food and water to Elijah through the ministry of an angel. The people of Israel went on to Horeb the mount of God. Elijah went on to Horeb the mount of God. From the end of the celebration of the feast of unleavened bread commemorating the Exodus from Egypt (the twenty-first day of the second month) until the date the people arrived at Horeb (the third day of the third month) is forty days.¹ Elijah was in the wilderness forty days before he arrived at Horeb.

Again, the events involving Elijah, like the events in Exodus, foreshadow the events of the life of Jesus. After his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days. There, he was tempted. There, angels ministered to him.

And there he came to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him,

¹ This calculation is based on the dates given in John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Zondervan 1992), pp. 259 and 281. According to Sailhamer, the people arrived at Sinai on the forty-eighth day after the original passover. God commanded that the Israelites celebrate the commemoration of the passover seven days, from the fourteenth day of the first month until the twenty-first day of the first month. The first month of the Hebrew year has thirty days, which means there are nine days from the end of the feast to the end of the first month. The second month has twenty-nine days. Sailhamer says that the people arrived at Sinai on the third day of the third month. Thus, from the end of the feast of unleavened bread until the last day the people were in the wilderness before arriving at Sinai is forty days. Our calculation of forty days is based on the time between the end of the Jewish feast of unleavened bread until the anniversary of the arrival at Sinai. Since the people did not celebrate the seven days in Egypt, the time between their leaving Egypt and arriving at Sinai actually was longer than forty days. Sailhamer calculates the time the people actually spent in the wilderness before arriving at Sinai, not the time from the end of the feast until the anniversary of the arrival. The people, according to Sailhamer, spent forty-seven days in the wilderness, arriving at Sinai on the forty-eighth day. Moses ascended the mountain on the forty-ninth day. The covenant was made on the fiftieth day.

“What are you doing here, Eli’jah?” He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” (I Kings 19:9-11)

Elijah fears for his life, which explains why he has fled from the presence of Jezebel. That, however, does not explain why he has fled to Horeb, rather than to some other place. The Lord asks what Elijah is doing here, why has he fled specifically to Horeb. Elijah explains. His peril is more than a personal threat; it represents a crisis of the covenant. The people have forsaken the covenant, thrown down the Lord’s altars, and slain the Lord’s prophets. Elijah is alone in his faithfulness to the covenant. Now, Jezebel has targeted him specifically. If she is successful, there will be no one remaining who is faithful to the covenant. It appears to Elijah that, despite the demonstration of the Lord’s power at Carmel, the Lord’s covenant with His people is on the verge of eradication. Hence, he has fled to Horeb, the mountain where the Lord made his covenant with the people, in search of confirmation that the covenant made there will not be utterly eradicated.

Jerusalem, the site the temple built by Solomon, lay between Jezreel and Beersheba, and the major north/south route for travel from Jezreel to Beersheba would have gone through it. It seems likely, therefore, that Elijah passed near the temple during his flight from Jezebel’s wrath. The text is silent as to whether Elijah visited the temple. Either he did not visit the temple, or his having done so is of no import. Now that Elijah has told the Lord of his fear that the covenant is on the verge of eradication, the opportunity is presented for the Lord to highlight the temple’s significance. He does not mention it. The author of I Kings, having described the building of the temple and its dedication by Solomon only a few chapters earlier, is silent about it in the context of the crisis of the covenant. This silence surely is significant.

And [the Lord] said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. (I Kings 19:11-13)

When the Lord had spoken to the people of Israel at Sinai and made his covenant with them, His coming was accompanied by thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, a very loud trumpet blast, smoke, and fire, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. (Ex. 19:16-19) Signs of this sort, the signs of the coming of the Lord to make his covenant, are manifested to Elijah. But these, as spectacular as they are, are mere signs of His coming and not Himself. Here, the Lord not only manifests those signs but also reveals Himself to Elijah. We are reminded that a crisis of the covenant had occurred even at its inception. When Moses was on the mountain receiving the ten commandments, the people were below succumbing to idolatry. The crisis was averted only by the intercession of Moses, who pleaded with the Lord not to destroy the people and to go on with them into the land of Canaan. The crisis culminated with Moses requesting that the Lord show him His glory, and the Lord granting that request. The Lord passed by Moses standing on a rock on the mountain and proclaimed His mercy. (Ex. 33:13-34:9) The present crisis of the covenant culminates in the Lord revealing His presence to Elijah, as he had done for Moses at the culmination of the first crisis. The signs of the making of the covenant and of the averting of its first crisis are re-presented to Elijah.

The Lord was not in the wind that rent the mountains and broke the rocks, nor the earthquake, nor the fire; but when Elijah heard “a still small voice,” he knew the Lord was there.

The Lord had shown the people demonstrations of His power appropriate to the coming of a great and powerful King, and he does the same for Elijah; but for Elijah he does more. He speaks with the intimacy of a father to his son in "a still small voice." The making of the covenant was a public event involving a great king and his subjects, but the relation of a father to his son is greater than the relation of a king to his subjects, and even before the making of the covenant the Lord had revealed that He would be not only a king but a father. The Mosaic covenant was not an end unto itself but was intended to be transcended. It is transcended here. Elijah recognizes the voice of his father.

"And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave." (I Kings 19:13) The Lord had told Moses, "man shall not see me and live." (Ex. 33:20) Elijah is careful to cover his face with his mantle.

And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, "What are you doing here Eli'jah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (I Kings 19:13-14)

The Lord asks the same question He had asked when Elijah first came to the mountain, and Elijah gives the same answer. Elijah has come to the mountain where the covenant was made to ask whether the end of the covenant is at hand. The stage is set for the Lord to answer that question.

And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Haz'ael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Eli'sha the son of Shaphat of A'bel-meho'lah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And him who escapes from the sword of Haz'ael shall Jehu slay; and him who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Eli'sha slay. Yet I will leave seven

thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Ba'al, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (I Kings 19:15-18)

The answer, in brief, is that it is not within the power of earthly rulers to put an end to the covenant. On the contrary, the Lord will put an end to the reign of the earthly rulers who seek the life of Elijah. Jehu will overthrow the house of Ahab and Jezebel. The followers of Ahab and Jezebel will be destroyed by those whom the Lord will raise up to execute His justice. The work of Elijah will continue through his successor, Elisha; but the work of Ahab and Jezebel will not continue. Elijah will not be killed, but those who seek his life will be. Those who seek the life of Elijah have precipitated a crisis, a crisis for themselves and their rule, not a crisis for the Lord and his covenant. The Lord had told Moses, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him." (Deut. 18:18-19) Elijah was a prophet like Moses, a prophet to whom the Lord spoke face to face on Mount Horeb. He has spoken what the Lord has commanded him. Ahab, Jezebel, and their followers have not given heed to the words Elijah spoke in the Lord's name, and the Lord himself will require it of them.

So he departed from there, and found Eli'sha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing, with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Eli'jah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Eli'jah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" And he returned from following him, and took the yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Eli'jah, and ministered to him. (I Kings 19:19-21)

Elijah believes the word that has been given him. He goes to Abelmeholah, the home of Elisha, which is within the kingdom of Israel only twenty miles from Jezreel, Ahab's capital city. That is to say, he places himself within the reach of Jezebel, trusting that she cannot destroy him and, with him, the covenant between the Lord and His people. He finds Elisha, and he casts on Elisha his mantle, the mantle with which he had covered his face in the presence of the Lord.

Elisha's response confirms the Lord's word that Elijah is not alone in his faithfulness. Elisha slaughters his oxen, boils them with the yokes, and feeds the people. Elisha demonstrates the total and irrevocable nature of his commitment to follow Elijah by destroying his means of subsistence. Elisha is not limping along with two different opinions. He undoubtedly is aware of the hostility of Jezebel toward Elijah. Unlike Obadiah, he is willing to risk his life for Elijah and to do so irrevocably. Elisha is a man of faith who will continue the work of Elijah. The end of the covenant is not at hand.

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The history recorded in the following chapters demonstrates the central truth of the Lord's answer to Elijah on Mount Horeb: the Lord's covenant is not within the power of earthly rulers; rather, the earthly rulers are within the power of the Lord.

Chapter 20 opens with Syria threatening with vastly superior forces to overrun Israel. Ahab "mustered all the people of Israel, seven thousand." (I Kings 20:15) Seven thousand, the number of the faithful whom the Lord will leave to himself, is the number of all Israel. Twice in Chapter 20 the Lord miraculously defeats the Syrians for Israel. The second time he does so in response to a claim by the Syrians that He is a God of the hills and cannot defeat them in the plain. The second time the Lord not only defeats the Syrians but also delivers the king of Syria, Benhadad, into Ahab's hand. Benhadad

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purchases his life from Ahab in return for territorial and economic concessions. This segment of the narrative concludes with an unidentified prophet telling Ahab the consequences of his refusal to consummate the Lord's victory over those who had challenged His sovereignty: "Thus says the Lord, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.'" (I Kings 20:42)

The next segment of the narrative tells the story of the murder of Naboth the Jezreelite and the stealing of his vineyard. Jezebel and Elijah had been absent in the preceding section, but both return to prominence in this section. Ahab returned to the palace sulking after Naboth refused to sell him his vineyard, which was the inheritance of Naboth's fathers. "And Jezebel his wife said to him, 'Do you now govern Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.'" (I Kings 21:7) Jezebel arranges the murder of Naboth, and Ahab takes possession of Naboth's vineyard. God sends Elijah to Ahab.

Ahab said to Eli'jah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon you; I will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel; and I will make your house like the house of Jerobo'am the son of Nebat, and like the house of Ba'asha the son of Ahi'jah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. And of Jez'ebel the Lord also said, 'The dogs shall eat Jez'ebel within the bounds of Jezreel.' Any one belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat; and any one of his who dies in the open country the birds of the air shall eat." (I Kings 21:20-24)

Jezebel had asked Ahab, "Do you now govern Israel?" Elijah presents the Lord's answer: "Ahab does not govern Israel, I do; if you violate my laws, I will require it of you." The pre-

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ceding segment concluded with a death sentence pronounced on Ahab. This segment concludes with a death sentence pronounced on Ahab, Jezebel, and their entire posterity. Their entire line will be destroyed. Ahab's penitential response will delay but not set aside execution of the sentence.

The third segment concludes with the death of Ahab. Ahab and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, decide to make war on Syria to re-take Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat is not satisfied with Ahab's court prophets and insists that a real prophet of the Lord be consulted. Micaiah then prophesies that Ahab will be killed in the battle. Ahab disguises himself so that the Syrians cannot target him. He is killed by an arrow shot at random. Ahab tried to nullify the word of the Lord spoken through Micaiah, but he was unable to do so. Ahab is powerless to escape from the death sentence pronounced by the Lord.

I Kings concludes with the announcement that Ahab was succeeded by his son, Ahaziah, who, like his father and mother, served Baal and provoked the Lord to anger. II Kings opens with Ahaziah in bed having been injured in a fall. He sends messengers to inquire of Baalzebub as to whether he will live. The messengers are intercepted by Elijah, who sends them back to Ahaziah with the word that, because he consulted Baalzebub instead of the Lord, he will die.

Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty men with his fifty. He went up to Eli'jah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" (II Kings 1:9)

Ahaziah sends a military contingent to Elijah, apparently to bring Elijah back by force if he is unwilling to come voluntarily. The captain issues Elijah a command in the name of the king. Ahaziah and his captain still have not learned the proper answer to Jezebel's question, "Do you now govern in Israel?" They both believe Ahaziah governs, that he can issue commands to Elijah and enforce them with military power.

But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. (II Kings 1:10)

Ahaziah cannot issue commands to Elijah, nor can he enforce his will against Elijah with military power. Again, earthly rulers have no power over the Lord's covenant; rather, earthly rulers are within the power of the Lord. We noted at the beginning of the discussion of Elijah that he was presented as a ruler: he commanded the rain and the dew. Since that opening scene, he has exercised other royal power. He executed the law against the prophets of Baal; and he pronounced judgment on the house of Ahab. Here, he is confronted with the military power of the king of Israel. As a superior ruler, he defeats that military power with superior force.

Ahaziah then sends a second captain of fifty men with his fifty. The second captain also issues a command to Elijah in the name of the king, "O man of God, this is the king's order, 'Come down quickly!'" (II Kings 1:11) The second captain is more insistent than the first, but he and his fifty meet the same fate as the first captain and his fifty.

The two groups of fifty correspond to the two groups of fifty prophets hidden by Obadiah from Jezebel when she cut off the prophets of the Lord. Jezebel's persecution of the Lord's prophets is avenged.

Ahaziah still does not learn the lesson and sends another captain of fifty men with his fifty. While the lesson is lost on Ahaziah, it is not lost on his captain, who, instead of issuing commands to Elijah, begs for his life and the lives of his men. Elijah, at the direction of the angel of the Lord, spares the captain's life and goes to meet Ahaziah. There, he personally pronounces the death sentence on Ahaziah, who then "died according to the word of the Lord which Eli'jah had spoken." (II Kings 1:17)

Elijah had once fled in fear from Jezebel, who had sworn by the gods to kill him. He had feared that Jezebel would kill

him and by killing him destroy the covenant. The Lord had assured Elijah on Mount Sinai that no earthly power could destroy the covenant, and He had given Elisha to Elijah as a tangible sign that the covenant would continue. Since then, the Lord has demonstrated that the earthly kings are subject to His power. In the first segment of the narrative, He pronounced a death sentence on Ahab. In the second segment, He pronounced a death sentence on Ahab, Jezebel, and their entire line. In the third segment, He executed the death sentence on Ahab notwithstanding Ahab's plans to avoid it. In this segment, He pronounces a death sentence on Ahab's son, defeats the king's military force sent to capture Elijah, and executes the death sentence that had been pronounced. Elijah, as the Lord's vicar on earth, is the true ruler of Israel. As a king, he has issued commands, enforced the law, pronounced judgment, and defeated a rival military power. Only one kingly prerogative remains for Elijah to exercise. Only one thing remains to complete the demonstration of the truth, revealed by the Lord to Elijah on Mount Sinai, that he need not fear that Jezebel or any earthly power could destroy him and, with him, the covenant.

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"Now when the Lord was about to take Eli'jah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Eli'jah and Eli'sha were on their way from Gilgal." (II Kings 2:1) As he did with Elijah's dramatic confrontation with Ahab, the author states what is about to happen but then postpones the description of the actual climactic event, prefacing the climax with a narration of conversations designed to heighten the anticipation of the great moment when Elijah is taken up.

The initial conversation occurs while Elijah and Elisha are in route between Gilgal and Bethel, the place named "house of God" by Jacob after he had a dream there in which he saw angels ascending and descending from heaven on a ladder. Eli-

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jah asks Elisha to stay behind while he goes on, "for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel," but Elisha, swearing by the life of the Lord and the life of Elijah, refuses to leave him, unlike the servant who was willing to stay at Beersheba while Elijah went on to meet the Lord at Mount Horeb. The conversation is repeated at Bethel, which was conquered in the second victory of Israel's invasion of Canaan, and occurs a third time at Jericho, the first city conquered by Israel when the Lord gave Israel the land of Canaan. Bethel was the site of one of the calves of gold set up by Jeroboam for Israel to worship. Jericho was re-built during the time of Ahab in defiance of a curse placed on it when it was destroyed by Joshua. Bethel and Jericho had once been idolatrous cities and were so once again. At Bethel and at Jericho, the sons of the prophets came out and said to Elisha, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master from over you?" And Elisha replied, "Yes, I know it; hold your peace." The Lord had revealed that Elijah would be taken from over Elisha today.

From Jericho, Elijah and Elisha go on to the Jordan, accompanied by fifty men of the sons of the prophets, who stand some distance from them as Elijah and Elisha stand by the river. Elijah and Elisha are standing on the west bank of the Jordan, inside the land of Canaan. They have travelled in reverse the initial victories of Israel in conquering the land. They are poised to leave Canaan, the land of the covenant.

"Then Eli'jah took his mantle, and rolled it up, and struck the water, and the water was parted to one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry land." (II Kings 2:8) As the Red Sea was parted so Israel could cross on dry land when leaving Egypt, and as the Jordan was parted so Israel could cross on dry land when entering Canaan, now the Jordan is parted so Elijah and Elisha can cross on dry land when leaving Canaan. Once more, Elijah re-enacts the significant events of the covenant. Crossing the Jordan is his exodus. Canaan takes the place of Egypt. Elijah's mantle, with which he wrapped his face in the presence of the Lord on

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Mount Horeb, takes the place of the east wind that separated the Red Sea, and the ark of the covenant, which separated the Jordan for Joshua and the people.

The text has recorded previous occasions when Elijah passed through the water. The first occasion was after Elijah announced that there would be neither rain nor dew except by his word, when he hid himself east of the Jordan. The second occasion was after Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, and he ran to Jezreel in the rain. This is the third time the text has Elijah passing through the water. Elijah is thus given a three-fold baptism, a baptism marked by an ascent from the human to the divine. When he crossed the Jordan at the beginning of his prophetic vocation, he did so by his own power. When he ran through the rain from Carmel to Jezreel, the hand of the Lord was on him. Now the Lord separates the Jordan so he can pass through on dry land. The consummation of Elijah's three-fold baptism, marked by the ascent from the human to the divine, is the penultimate moment of the drama.

When they had crossed, Eli'jah said to Eli'sha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Eli'sha said, "I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit." And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Eli'jah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Eli'sha saw it and cried, "My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. (II Kings 2:9-12)

This final scene of Elijah's life on earth is so full of meaning as to be an embarrassment of riches for the commentator. Its most immediate significance is that it brings to a conclusion the demonstration of the truth revealed to Elijah on Mount Horeb, that no earthly ruler had power over him and the covenant. Jezebel had taken an oath to kill Elijah.

Elijah had feared that he would be killed, and that his death would bring the covenant to an ignominious end. The segments of the narrative that followed the Lord's pronouncement on Sinai demonstrated that earthly rulers cannot control the Lord's representative or the Lord's covenant; rather, the Lord is sovereign over the earthly rulers. They cannot bring His covenant to an end; He will bring their reign to an end. Elijah's assumption into heaven seals the demonstration. Elijah is conclusively beyond Jezebel's power.

The meaning of the passage also relates to the account of the reign of Solomon. Solomon's outstanding accomplishment was to build a great and glorious house for the Lord, who had previously dwelt on earth in a tent. A tent is a temporary dwelling-place. The house built by Solomon of cedar overlaid with gold was designed as a permanent dwelling-place. The assumption of Elijah into heaven is a comment on Solomon's most famous project. This earth is not a permanent dwelling-place for man, much less for God. The Lord's ultimate plan is not that He descend to a dwelling on earth but He elevate man to a dwelling in heaven.

Solomon's misapprehension was inherited, at least in part, from his father, David, who was the first to conceive the idea of building the Lord a house of cedar. We commented at length on the Lord's response to David's proposal and noted in that commentary the following portion of the Lord's statement to David:

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. (II Samuel 7:10-11)

In its original context this passage had been an enigma. God had already appointed the land of Canaan for Israel and had already given David rest from his enemies, so it was unclear as to what this could mean. Elijah's assumption into heaven

illuminates this otherwise enigmatic passage. Elijah's exodus from Canaan is simultaneously an entrance into the promised land of this passage, the place where God's people will be disturbed no more and no longer afflicted by violent men. Canaan is not the permanent dwelling-place for God's people, which is why He needs for Himself no permanent dwelling there.

Elijah's exodus here is the fourth time the text locates him outside Canaan. On each previous occasion he was fed supernaturally: the first time by ravens; the second time by a woman; the third time by an angel. As with the baptismal passages, these passages are marked by an ascent, an ascent from the animal to the human to the angelic. With Elijah's assumption into heaven, this ascent is complete. Henceforth, he will be fed, not by animals, not by humans, nor by angels, but by God. He will dine at God's ineffable banquet.

We note here that, before Elijah went up in a whirlwind, as he and Elisha were walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. A chariot with horses represented the most advanced military technology of that day. The question is, why is a military weapon used to separate Elisha from Elijah? Our suggestion is that the text is recalling Adam's expulsion from the garden, which God planted in the east, and "the flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." (Gen. 3:24) It is given to Elijah to partake of the tree of life, but not to Elisha.

Elisha is left behind. Before the chariot of fire and the horses of fire separated them, Elijah had asked him, "what shall I do for you, before I am taken from you." As God had said to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give you," so God's representative on earth now makes the same offer to Elisha. Solomon had asked for wisdom; Elisha asks to inherit a double portion of Elijah's spirit. The double portion is the inheritance due to the oldest son. (Deut. 22:17) Elijah, who had commanded the rain, passed judgment on the King and Queen of Israel, caused fire to come down from heaven, talked to God

face to face, and separated the water of the river Jordan and walked through on dry land, says that Elisha has asked a hard thing. Elijah recognizes that Elisha has asked for something that is not within his power to give, in contrast to David, who failed to recognize that Bathsheba's request for him to make Solomon king was a request for something that was not David's to give.

Though a hard thing, Elijah tells Elisha, "if you see me as I am taken from you, it shall be so for you." The connection between what Elisha sees and inheriting a double portion of Elijah's spirit is not immediately evident. It will help make the connection to look forward in the text to the one other occasion when chariots and horses of fire appear. In the sixth chapter of II Kings the king of Syria sent horses and chariots of fire and a great army by night to surround Elisha in Dothan. Elisha's servant arose early in the morning, saw they were surrounded, and was afraid.

Then Eli'sha prayed, and said, "O Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Eli'sha. (II Kings 6:17)

We learn from this passage that man cannot see the chariots and horses of fire, in contrast to the chariots of iron and horses of flesh, until his eyes have been opened. We also learn from this passage that only the Lord can open a man's eyes so he can see the chariots and horses of fire. This suggests that Elijah was telling Elisha that if the Lord opens his eyes to see the kind of reality to which the chariots and horses of fire belong, that will signify that the Lord has granted to Elisha a double share of Elijah's spirit. Much later, the apostle John will see "a lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." (Rev. 5:6) St. Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, will see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:55-56) St.

Paul will say that "beholding the glory of the Lord . . . comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (II Cor. 3:18) These later scriptures confirm the inference than can be made from the two passages in II Kings: receiving the Spirit is a prerequisite to having one's eyes opened to see.

"Eli'sha saw it and he cried, 'My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!'" (II Kings 2:12) Elisha saw it, so he must have inherited a double portion of Elijah's spirit. He is Elijah's firstborn son. He cried, "My father, my father!" Elijah is the first significant personality in the Old Testament who seems not to have married. Yet, he has a son, a son in the spirit, not in the flesh. Elijah and Elisha are related as a spiritual family. Both see the spiritual reality of which the chariots and horses of fire are a part. These chariots and horses are the military forces of Israel, which by implication must be a spiritual Israel.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces. And he took up the mantle of Eli'jah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle of Eli'jah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Eli'jah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other; and Eli'sha went over.

Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him over against them, they said, "The spirit of Eli'jah rests on Eli'sha." And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. (II Kings 2:12-15)

The mantle with which Elijah had wrapped his face in the presence of the Lord is left for Elisha, who uses it, as did Elijah, to part the water. The sons of the prophets who had stayed on the west bank of the Jordan recognized that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha. They bowed before Elisha, meaning that the spirit of Elijah was a divine presence; or that the spirit of Elijah made Elisha a king; or both. Elijah's final act as a king was to transmit his authority to the rightful successor. The rightful

successor is the one whom God chose, the one on whom the Spirit came. God has ceased choosing the political rulers of a united Israel, and He has ceased sending His Spirit on them, as He did from Moses to David. The torch has passed from the political rulers to the prophets, from kings with chariots of iron and horses of flesh to kings with chariots and horses of fire, from Israel in the flesh to Israel in the Spirit.

Elijah's work is continued by Elisha. On Mount Horeb the Lord had told Elijah, "you shall anoint Haz'ael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel." (I Kings 19:15-16) Elisha anointed Hazael in the eighth chapter of II Kings, and he sent one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu in the ninth chapter. What is done in the spirit of Elijah is done by Elijah.

In many respects the reign of Solomon represents the apex of Old Testament Israel. The territory of the kingdom was expanded. Peace and prosperity prevailed. The king was wiser than any other man. All these things were good. Indeed, they were gifts from God, who had promised the land to Israel, and had promised it would be a land flowing with milk and honey. The wisdom for which Solomon was acclaimed likewise represented the fulfillment of a promise from God.

At the same time, the reign of Solomon marks the end of a united Israel occupying the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel's greatest hour also was its worst. The elements of greatness in Solomon's Israel, including Solomon's architectural achievements, were the same as the elements of greatness in any great nation. Israel had asked for a king "like all the nations." (I Sam. 8:5, 20) The reign of Solomon represents the ultimate fulfillment of the people's desire. Israel, however, was never intended to be "like all the nations." It was never intended to be another among the great nations. Unlike other nations, Israel was to be defined, not by its mil-

itary prowess, the extent of its territory, its prosperity, or its architecture, but by its relationship with God. Solomon's dazzling success was part and parcel of a blindness toward the reality that transcends the arena in which Solomon's success was wrought.

Solomon's greatest achievement was the construction of his house and the house of God. Therein lies the key to his ultimate failure. It was not due to poverty that God had dwelt in a tent; it was to signify that He has no permanent dwelling-place here, and neither does His people. The other gods could have permanent dwelling-places here, for this world is their home. This world is the most for which their people can hope. The building of the temple indicates that despite his beautiful prayer at the dedication of the temple Solomon could not distinguish adequately between the Lord and the pagan gods, nor between the hope of the people of God and that of other peoples, which is to say that Solomon's mistake was fundamentally the same as that of Ahab and Jezebel.

Elijah points to a different kind of Israel, an Israel who is not like the nations, an Israel in which God does not descend to live with the people, but the people ascend to live with God. Elijah re-enacts the great moments of the covenant, but his life neither reaffirms the Old Covenant nor commences a new one. His life cannot be said simply to reaffirm the Old Covenant, for the Old Covenant was inseparable from the laws of cleanliness and the laws of priestly sacrifice, while Elijah, at the command of God, violated both of these aspects of the old law. He ate food that had been rendered unclean by contact with ravens, and he, who was not of the priestly lineage, made a sacrifice to the Lord. The Lord commanded him to perform each of these actions, but each on only one occasion. A commandment to violate the law on one occasion does not commence a new covenant, but it does demonstrate the mutability of the old one. God had promised Israel the land of Canaan. Elijah's assumption into heaven shows that the Lord had a greater gift in mind for His people. Elijah did

not bring that greater gift to God's people. He was a witness that the greater gift would someday be given.

The Apocalypse of John describes two men whom God describes as "my two witnesses," both of whom are prophets. (Rev. 11:3)

And if any one would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; if any one would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed. They have power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. (Rev. 11:5-6)

The two men who fit this description are Moses and Elijah. Each had enemies who were consumed by supernatural fire. Elijah shut the sky, so that no rain fell for three years. Moses turned waters into blood and smote the earth with plagues. Each was a prophet, a priest, and a king. Each witnessed God's glory on Mount Sinai. Each would witness God's glory again on the mount of transfiguration. Neither would get Israel into the promised land where Israel would be afflicted by violent men no more. Neither was the savior of Israel.

Moses and Elijah were the two great figures in the Old Testament to perform the duties of a prophet, a priest, and a king. They were witnesses to a third who would come and who would be the consummate prophet, the consummate priest, and the consummate king. They were witnesses to David's son, who would be God's son, who would build God's house, whose throne would be established forever. They were witnesses to the Savior.