

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

David's Last Days and Solomon's Accession

1. 1 King David was now a very old man, and though wrapped in bedclothes he could not keep warm. • So his servants said to him, 'Let us find a young girl for my lord the king, to wait on the king and look after him; she will lie close beside you and this will keep my lord the king warm.' • Having searched for a beautiful girl throughout the territory of Israel, they found Abishag of Shunem and brought her to the king. • The girl was very beautiful. She looked after the king and waited on
- 5 him but the king did not have intercourse with her. • Now Adonijah son of Haggith was growing pretentious and saying, 'I shall be king!' Accordingly, he procured a chariot and team with fifty guards to run ahead of him. • Never once in his life had his father crossed him by saying, 'Why are you behaving like that?' He was very handsome too; his mother had given birth to him after Absalom. • He conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with the priest Abiathar, who both rallied to Adonijah's cause; • but neither Zadok the priest, nor Benaiah son of Jehoiada, nor the prophet Nathan, nor Shimei and Rei, nor David's champions, supported Adonijah.
- One day when Adonijah was sacrificing sheep, oxen and fattened calves at the Sliding Stone which is beside the Fuller's Spring, he invited all his brothers, the royal princes, and all the men of Judah in the king's service; • but he did not
- 10 invite the prophet Nathan, or Benaiah, or the champions, or his brother Solomon. • Nathan then said to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, 'Have you not heard that, unknown to our lord David, Adonijah son of Haggith has become king? • Well, this is my advice to you if you want to save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. • Go straight in to King David and say, "My lord king, did you not make your servant this promise on oath: Your son Solomon is to be king after me; he is the one who is to sit on my throne? How is it, then, that Adonijah is king?" • And while you are still there talking to the king, I shall come in after you and confirm what you say.'

David's Last Days and Solomon's Accession

Our two books of Kings carry on without break the story begun in those of Samuel. In the LXX they are known as the four books of Reigns, of which the second is extended by some mss to 1 K 2.11 or 1 K 2.46. Such boundaries are arbitrary; better founded is the universal opinion of critics that the first two chapters of 2 K are by the same masterly pen which gave us most of 2 Sam 9-20. The narrative of Ch.1 in particular is technically the most complex description in the whole OT. It covers a double series of events in eleven different scenes (including two reported by a

messenger) with eight main speakers, all so well interwoven that the reader is not lost for a moment.

The first scene portrays *David* as *old*, cold, bed-ridden (47) and impotent. Later events (2.21) make it clear that *Abishag* (from *Shunem* in Galilee) was meant for his harem. In countries where the king's potency was believed to influence the fertility of the soil, his failure as a man would cast doubt on his competence as king. So, in the Hebrew, David 'did not know' her, and equally he 'did not know' what Adonijah was up to (11 and 18).

David's Last Days and Solomon's Accession (cont.)

1. 15 • So Bathsheba went to the king in his room (he was very old and Abishag of Shunem was in attendance on him). • She knelt, prostrated herself before the king, and the king said, 'What do you want?' • 'My lord,' she replied, 'you swore to your servant by the LORD your God, "Your son Solomon is to be king after me; he is the one who is to sit on my throne."' • And now here is Adonijah king, and you, my lord king, knowing nothing about it! • He has sacrificed quantities of oxen, fattened calves and sheep, and invited all the royal princes, the priest Abiathar, and Joab the army commander; but he has not invited your servant
- 20 Solomon. • Yet you are the man, my lord king, to whom all Israel looks, to tell them who is to succeed my lord the king. • And when my lord the king falls asleep with his ancestors, Solomon and I shall be made to suffer for this.'
- 25 • She was still speaking to the king when the prophet Nathan came in. • The king was told, 'The prophet Nathan is here'; and he came into the king's presence and prostrated himself on his face before the king. • 'My lord king,' said Nathan, 'is this, then, your decree, "Adonijah is to be king after me; he is the one who is to sit on my throne"'? • For he has gone down today and sacrificed quantities of oxen, fattened calves and sheep, and invited all the royal princes,

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The portrait of *Adonijah* reminds us explicitly and implicitly that he is full brother to Absalom. *Handsome*, spoilt and ostentatious (cp. 2 Sam 14.25; 15.1), he was heir apparent but did not wish to wait. Again like Absalom he sent out invitations to a ceremonial banquet at a discreet distance from Jerusalem (see map 3 for the *Fuller's Spring*), which would seal the loyalties of his supporters. Those listed in vv.7 and 8 included the leading men of the state (see 2 Sam 8.15-18). When the list of those *not* included is repeated in v.10, the name of *Solomon* is added as a link to the next scene.

The rest of Ch.1 takes place within a single day. The planned banquet was tantamount to a bid for the throne and, since the animals had already been slaughtered (so the Hebrew of v.9), the other side had to act fast. *Nathan*, who knew of God's love for Solomon (2 Sam 12.24), decided to enlist *Bathsheba's* aid. She took no persuading: the eventual fate of Adonijah shows how realistic was the danger referred to in v.12. (The Hebrew word used there for 'save yourself', *malleti*, is cognate with 'Malta', the name

which the Phoenician sailors gave to their port of refuge.) The *oath* ascribed to David in v.13 has not been previously mentioned, but this is no reason for supposing that Nathan invented it. His plan is ingeniously devised and cleverly executed. Particularly skilful are the variations that Bathsheba and Nathan play on the same story.

First, we are reminded of David's weak condition. Then Bathsheba boldly begins by quoting the oath – not '*did you not swear?*' but *you swore* – and strengthens it with the addition of *by the LORD your God*. With the promise she then contrasts the actuality; and the list of those *not* invited to the banquet is now reduced to the one. But David's past ignorance can still be redeemed by the decisive action expected of a king at the end of his reign. Otherwise, by contrast with his peaceful death, she and her son face assassination. Bathsheba plays the wife betrayed, beginning with a personal promise and ending with an appeal for protection.

Nathan, by contrast, is the statesman who has not been kept informed. His opening is even bolder than Bathsheba's

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1. 26 the army commanders, and the priest Abiathar; and they are there now, eating and drinking in his presence and shouting, "Long live King Adonijah!" • He has not, however, invited me your servant, Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, or your servant Solomon. • Can it be that this is done with my lord the king's approval and that you have not told those loyal to you who is to succeed to the throne of my lord the king?

30 • King David then spoke. 'Call Bathsheba to me,' he said. And she came into the king's presence and stood before him. • Then the king swore this oath, 'As the LORD lives, who has delivered me from all adversity, • just as I swore to you by the LORD, God of Israel, that your son Solomon should be king after me and take my place on my throne, so I shall bring it about this very day.' • Bathsheba knelt down, prostrated herself on her face before the king and said, 'May my lord King David live for ever!' • Then King David said, 'Summon Zadok the priest, the prophet Nathan and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.' So they came into the king's presence. • 'Take the royal guard with you,' said the king, 'mount my son Solomon on my own mule and escort him down to Gihon. • There Zadok the priest and the prophet Nathan are to anoint him king of Israel; then sound the trumpet and shout, "Long live King Solomon!" • Then you are to escort him back, and he is then to assume my throne and be king in place of me, for he is the man whom I have appointed as ruler of Israel and of Judah.' • Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king. 'Amen!' he said. 'And may the LORD, God of my lord the king, confirm it! • As the LORD has been with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon and make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord King David!'

35 • Zadok the priest, the prophet Nathan, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and Pelethites then went down; they mounted Solomon on King David's mule and escorted him to Gihon. • Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the Tent and anointed Solomon. They sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, 'Long live King Solomon!' • The people all escorted him back, with pipes playing and loud rejoicing and shouts to split the earth.

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and, where she relied on the oath, he stresses the politics. He quotes (or invents) the *shout* of acclamation (25), and gives an encouragingly fuller list of loyalists (26). Having shocked the king into action, he ends with a more diplomatic version of his opening gambit.

David was thoroughly manipulated by the pair of them. Nathan of course had always known how to handle him, but for Bathsheba this last scene is a splendid ironic reversal of their first encounter so many years before. Then she was a mere pawn, now she is Queen. He, lusty then,

is now impotent. But he can still take command from his *bed* (47).

First, he repeats the oath, with the important variant *by the LORD God of Israel*: it is now a matter of national import. Then he gives orders for the anointing of *Solomon* as joint *king*. It is to take place at the nearer spring *Gihon* just outside the city wall (see map 3), perhaps in continuance of an ancient ritual requiring spring water. The procession has a military guard – and suddenly what had been a list of conspirators becomes a roll of honour (38). *The Tent* (39) was the

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1. 45 • Adonijah and his guests, who had by then finished their meal, all heard the noise. Joab too heard the sound of the trumpet and said, 'What is that noise of uproar in the city?' • While he was still speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. 'Come in,' Adonijah said, 'you are an honest man, so you must be bringing good news.' • 'The truth is,' Jonathan answered, 'our lord King David has made Solomon king. • With him, the king sent Zadok the priest, the prophet Nathan, Benaiah son of Jehoiada and the Cherethites and Pelethites; they mounted him on the king's mule, • and Zadok the priest and the prophet Nathan have anointed him king at Gihon; and they have gone back again with shouts of joy and the city is now in an uproar; that was the noise you heard. • What is more, Solomon is seated on the royal throne. • And further, the king's officers have been to congratulate our lord King David with the words, "May your God make the name of Solomon more glorious than yours, and his throne more exalted than your own!" And the king bowed down on his bed, • and then said, "Blessed be the LORD, God of Israel, for setting one of my own sons on the throne while I am still alive to see it!"'
- 50 • At this, all Adonijah's guests, taking fright, got up and made off in their several directions. • Adonijah, in terror of Solomon, got up and ran off to cling to the horns of the altar. • Solomon was told, 'You should know that Adonijah is terrified of King Solomon and is now clinging to the horns of the altar, saying, "Let King Solomon first swear to me that he will not have his servant executed."'
- 'Should he bear himself honourably,' Solomon answered, 'not one hair of his shall fall to the ground; but if he proves difficult, he shall die.' • King Solomon then sent for him to be brought down from the altar; he came and threw himself prostrate before King Solomon; Solomon said to him, 'Go to your house.' (NJB)

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housing for the Ark (2 Sam 6.17). The people's acclamation is still an important part of the ceremony, a survival from earlier practice, as is the title *ruler* (35) – where n.b. *of Israel and of Judah*.

The noise of *the trumpet*, echoing half a mile down the Kidron valley to the lower spring where Adonijah's friends are feasting, strikes the soldierly ear of Joab and suggests trouble. *While he was still speaking* (42) picks up the words of v.22 and underlines the extreme urgency of the day's events. Adonijah in vain optimism quotes the very proverb that David had used similarly in 2 Sam 18.27. Young *Jonathan* makes the longest speech of the chapter, naively emphasising both David's authority and Solomon's

legitimacy. By contrast the sudden panic of his audience is related in a sentence.

Adonijah, deserted, seeks asylum at the sanctuary. *The altar* was doubtless in front of the Tent; its *horns* were the projections at the four corners on which the blood of the sacrifice was smeared, and thus its most sacred part. From there he negotiates with Solomon – through a messenger, to underline the distance between them. *Solomon* has hitherto been in the background, acted upon rather than acting. Now his first words are decisive, but also evasive: a foretaste of his character. Adonijah is to go home, i.e. withdraw from public life; then he may live, provided that (in the words of an earlier English commentator) 'he behaves like a gentleman'.

David's Charge to Solomon

2. 1 As the time of David's death drew near, he gave this charge to his son Solomon:
- 'I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong and show yourself a man.
 - 5 • You know how Joab son of Zeruah treated me and what he did to two commanders-in-chief in Israel, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them both, breaking the peace by bloody acts of war; and with that blood he stained the belt about his waist and the sandals on his feet. • Act as your wisdom prompts you, and do not let his grey hairs go down to the grave in peace. • Show constant friendship to the family of Barzillai of Gilead; let them have their place at your table; they rallied to me when I was a fugitive from your brother Absalom. • Do not forget Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who cursed me bitterly the day I went to Mahanaim. True, he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore by the LORD that I would not put him to death. • But you do not need to let him go unpunished now; you are a wise man and will know how to deal with him; bring down his grey hairs in blood to the grave.'

David's Charge to Solomon

David's testament follows the accepted morality of the time: harm your enemies and benefit your friends. In the case of *Joab*, his two murders are singled out (2 Sam 3.27; 20.10) as the *public* offence he had given to David. *Barzillai* (cp. 2 Sam 17.27+; 19.32+) is placed in the middle for contrast. *Shimei* (cp. 2 Sam 16.5+; 19.19+) had no merits to offset his offence, and David's euphemism of v.6 is made explicit in v.9. The narrator presents David as leaving ultimate responsibility to Solomon's (worldly) wisdom, but the effect is to inculcate both of them.

The character of *David* in the OT is one of the most enigmatic in literature, certainly from the ancient world. That needs explanation. Some part of it may be due to the different sources which have clearly been used in the final work; but we should invoke that only as a last resort. We should, for example, allow for the possibility that David's character changed over time. Such changes are rare before the modern novel, though it can be said that Achilles *learned* humanity during the course of the *Iliad*; and David's career lasted for more than the ten years of the Trojan War. But what is unique about David is that (i) the basic tension in his character is present throughout his life, (ii) that ten-

sion is not a simple one between good and evil, and so (iii) any change can be read either as improvement or as deterioration.

That basic tension is between tough and tender, connected with public/private and exemplified (later) by king/father. But it is present at the very start, in giant-killer/musician (1 Sam 16.18+), at the very end in his charges about Joab and Barzillai, and throughout his life. The tough-public David is seen particularly in the narrative of his rise to power and the extension of his empire, when his methods include every form of unscrupulousness. But against that must be set the David who loves Jonathan, inspires love in Michal, spares Saul when he has him at his mercy and weeps for his death; and who, as king, shows generosity to Mephibosheth and expresses a programmatic revulsion against the violence of his foil Joab (2 Sam 3.39). Throughout all the early period of his life God is with him, and he is uniformly successful and popular.

The first turning point comes with the murder of Uriah, the dirtiest act of David's life. True, he is genuinely penitent; but the consequences will out. Briefly, he loses his moral authority, both as king and as father. As king, he has to be goaded into action by Joab (12.28; 14.1+; 19.5+). As father, he

David's Charge to Solomon (cont.)

2. 10 • So David rested with his forefathers and was buried in the city of David, • having reigned over Israel for forty years, seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. (REB)

David's Charge to Solomon (cont.)

totally fails to discipline his sons: Amnon (13.21), Adonijah (1 K 1.6) and above all Absalom. Having been frustratingly indecisive over Absalom's recall from exile, and blindly over-indulgent to his plotting, David is overwhelmed by grief at the death brought about by his own weakness. Yet the crisis of Chs 15-18 marked a second turning point. At the lowest ebb of his outward fortunes he responded, against all expectation, with humble piety, and rose again with his old resolution and a

new maturity. To the cursing Shimei he shows first tolerance (16.12) and then magnanimity (19.22). He is even ready to lose his throne if it is the will of God (15.26). Here at the public crisis of his life the 'tender' David stands out against the 'tough' policy of his advisers. Here – whatever came before or after – we can see king and psalmist as the same man. It is this unconventional mixture which, whether it be seen as strength or weakness, renders David so fascinating a character.

Solomon Disposes of his Enemies

2. 13 Then Adonijah son of Haggith came to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. 'Do you come as a friend?' she asked. 'As a friend,' he answered; • 'I have something to discuss with you.' 'Tell me,' she said. • 'You know', he went on, 'that the throne was mine and that all Israel was looking to me to be king; but I was passed over and the throne has gone to my brother; it was his by the will of the LORD. • Now I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me.' 'What is it?' she said. • He answered, 'Will you ask King Solomon (he will never refuse you) to give me Abishag the Shunammite in marriage?' • 'Very well,' said Bathsheba, 'I shall speak to the king on your behalf.'

- 20 • When Bathsheba went in to King Solomon to speak for Adonijah, the king rose to meet her and do obeisance to her. Then he seated himself on his throne, and a throne was set for the king's mother at his right hand. • She said, 'I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me.' 'What is it, mother?' he replied. 'I will not refuse you.' • 'It is this,' she said, 'that Abishag the Shunammite be given in marriage to your brother Adonijah.' • At that King Solomon answered, 'Why do you ask that Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah? You might as well ask the kingdom for him; he is my elder brother and has both Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah on his side.' • Then he swore by the LORD: 'So help me God,

Solomon Disposes of his Enemies

Adonijah's action in asking for *Abishag* in marriage shows him naive in the extreme, and no match at all for Solomon. Not that it was foolish to approach the king through the queen mother, who controlled the harem *ex officio* and was accorded especial respect by the king (see v.19, where her title in Hebrew is literally 'the great lady'). His request to her is marred by self-pity (15), but she accepts the com-

mission and does her best for him. She presents his case exactly as he had presented it to her, except for two diplomatic additions, the epithet *small* and the words *your brother* (21). The result is an explosion. Solomon treats or pretends to treat the request as evidence of continuing conspiracy (see 2 Sam 16.21-2). Consciously or unconsciously, he had been looking for an excuse to get rid of Adonijah.

Solomon Disposes of his Enemies (cont.)

2. 25 Adonijah must pay for this with his life. • As the LORD lives, who has established me and set me on the throne of David my father and has founded a house for me as he promised, this very day Adonijah must be put to death!’ • King Solomon sent Benaiah son of Jehoiada with orders to strike him down; so Adonijah died.

30 • When news of all this reached Joab, he fled to the Tent of the LORD and laid hold of the horns of the altar; for he had sided with Adonijah, though not with Absalom. • When King Solomon was told that Joab had fled to the Tent of the LORD and was beside the altar, he sent Benaiah son of Jehoiada with orders to strike him down. • Benaiah came to the Tent of the LORD and ordered Joab in the king’s name to come away. But he said, ‘No, I will die here.’ Benaiah reported Joab’s answer to the king, • and the king said, ‘Let him have his way; strike him down and bury him, and so rid me and my father’s house of the guilt for the blood that he wantonly shed. • The LORD will hold him responsible for his own death, because he struck down two innocent men who were better men than he, Abner son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah, and ran them through with the sword, without my father David’s knowledge. • Let the guilt of their blood recoil on Joab and his descendants for all time; but may David and his descendants, his house and his throne, enjoy perpetual prosperity from the LORD.’ • Benaiah son of Jehoiada went up to the altar and struck Joab down and killed him, and he was buried at his house out in the country. • The king appointed Benaiah to command the army in place of Joab.

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Solomon Disposes of his Enemies (cont.)

Joab saw the writing on the wall and sought asylum in his turn. The rule in Exod 21.14 was that, if a man kills another treacherously, he may be taken by force from the altar. That was indeed the formal charge against Joab, which Solomon repeats in v. 32 after David (2.5). But all parties knew that the real charge was personal. So *Benaiah* at first (30) holds back, and Solomon concedes the old warrior an honourable burial.

The fascination of Joab’s portrait in 2 Sam-1 K lies in his relationship with David, of which there are three facets. First is his loyalty – but it is loyalty to David as king i.e. ultimately to the state. Reasons of state lead him in turn to risk the displeasure of the king in 2 Sam Ch.3, to goad him at the end of Ch.12, to circumvent him in Ch.14, to disobey his orders in Ch.18 – and finally to trample on his tenderest feelings in Ch.19. Second, he knows David’s secret wishes (14.1) and can forecast his reactions (11.19+) – again,

until Ch.19. But third, he is always too violent for David: in deed, from 3.39 onwards; in word, in that same fateful Ch.19. The hurt he did to David in that speech, and the hurt David did him in return by the appointment of Amasa (19.13), destroyed their relationship, and left him a hollow man. All that remained to him was the selfish violence with which he struck at Amasa – and through him at David. But David had the last word.

There remains *Shimei*. His was a more straightforward case. Nevertheless his old curse (2 Sam 16.5+) still had force until Solomon nullified it by returning it *on his own head* and then, for extra assurance, invoking a blessing upon the royal house (44-5).

With the establishment of Solomon securely on the throne the Court History (CH) of David ends. The character of this masterpiece of Hebrew story-telling is best seen by comparing it with its nearest parallels inside and outside the OT. Outside the OT, it is not difficult to find

Solomon Disposes of his Enemies (cont.)

2. 36 • Next the king sent for Shimei and said to him, 'Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and stay there; you are not to leave the city for any other place. • If ever you leave and cross the wadi Kidron, know for certain that you will die. Your blood will be on your own head.' • Shimei replied, 'I accept your sentence; I shall do as your majesty commands.'

40 For a long time Shimei remained in Jerusalem. • But when three years later two of his slaves ran away to Achish son of Maacah, king of Gath, and this was reported to Shimei, • he at once saddled his donkey and went to Achish in search of his slaves; he reached Gath and brought them back. • When King Solomon was informed that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and back, • he sent for him and said, 'Did I not require you to swear by the LORD? Did I not give you this solemn warning: "If ever you leave this city for any other place, know for certain that you will die"? You said, "I accept your sentence; I shall obey" • Why then have you not kept the oath which you swore by the LORD, and the order which I gave you? • Shimei, you know in your heart what mischief you did to my father David; the LORD is now making that mischief recoil on your own head. • But King Solomon is blessed, and the throne of David will be secure before the LORD for all time.' • The king then gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, who went out and struck Shimei down, and he died. Thus Solomon's royal power was securely established. (REB)

Solomon Disposes of his Enemies (cont.)

parallels, both in the ANE and Homer, to structural incidents in the stories of Saul and David (see p.254); but if the author of the CH used them, he did so as Shakespeare used Holinshed. Inside the OT, the closest parallels are the stories of Joseph and Ruth, with which the CH shares many literary and theological characteristics. Like them, it delights in the interplay of character and event, which it conveys chiefly through dialogue. Like them, it makes only implicit moral judgements: 'sin' has its consequences rather than its punishment. God stands behind events as providence, rather than intervening as agent. Like them, the CH shows little interest in the cult – the Ark narratives in 2 Sam 6 and 15 are from a different source. But the CH surpasses them both in the scope and coherence of its structure: by contrast the book of Ruth is a miniature, while the Joseph story is repetitive and disjointed. Moreover the CH is more open in portraying the vices of its leading characters, and it also provides more in

the way of vivid detail – specifically more 'free motifs', i.e. detail unnecessary to the plot. In those senses it is a much more sophisticated production.

It is also more historical, i.e. it uses purportedly historical events as its raw material. Many have, therefore, claimed it as the first great work of Hebrew historiography. If that were taken to mean that every historical event described in it happened as described, it could not be substantiated: even a palace source could not know what passed e.g. between Amnon and Tamar. But its closest parallel outside the OT is indeed the histories of Herodotus. Herodotus is more sophisticated again, and more truly historical (see p.782); but he shares a penchant for palace intrigue, and he also shares an implicit theology, namely (in Greek terms) that *hubris* is overtaken by *nemesis*. The CH may indeed be roughly contemporary with Herodotus, for it is hardly conceivable that a work so critical of David could have seen the light of day before the end of the monarchy.

The Reign of Solomon

I Kings devotes nine chapters to Solomon's reign. Half the space (Chs 5-8) is given to his building of the Temple, a subject of great interest to the deuteronomic historian or DtH (see p.184) whose editorial hand from now on lies heavy on the narrative. We miss both the vivid detail and intricate texture of the CH. Fortunately the DtH preserves fairly accurately his widely varied sources,

contenting himself for the most part with easily recognisable additions (e.g. 3.6, 14) and collocations. His initial approval of Solomon, stemming from the building of the Temple, shows itself in praise of his wisdom and wealth. The king is shown as a peace-loving consolidator of David's work, a shrewd, efficient organiser. But his character never comes alive.

Solomon's Wisdom

3. 1 Solomon allied himself to Pharaoh king of Egypt by marrying his daughter. He brought her to the City of David, until he had finished building his palace and the house of the LORD and the wall round Jerusalem.

5 • The king went to Gibeon to offer a sacrifice, for that was the chief shrine, where he used to offer a thousand whole-offerings on the altar. • That night the LORD appeared to Solomon there in a dream. God said, 'What shall I give you? Tell me.' • He answered, 'You have shown great and constant love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in loyalty, righteousness, and integrity of heart; and you have maintained this great and constant love towards him and now you have given him a son to succeed him on the throne.

• 'Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, though I am a mere child, unskilled in leadership. • Here I am in the midst of your people, the people of your choice, too many to be numbered or counted. • Grant your servant, therefore, a heart with skill to listen, so that he may govern your people justly and distinguish good from evil. Otherwise who is equal to the task of governing this great people of yours?'

Solomon's Wisdom

Chs 3-4 contain stories of Solomon's wisdom. Wisdom in the ANE was a technical term (see p.364) with strong connotations of political skill. So we learn first of Solomon's dynastic alliance with *Egypt*. This suited Egypt too, it being weaker than usual: indeed Pharaohs succeeded one another so fast in C10th BC that we do not know which one was meant here. As dowry, his queen brought the important Philistine fortress of Gezer recently captured by Egypt (9.16).

Egypt provides also the background to the first story, that of Solomon's *dream* (3.4-15). Pharaohs regularly cast the stone-cut record of their reigns in the form of a dream which legitimated their accession and announced their policy. That form is closely followed here. In it the Pharaoh goes out to a shrine in the countryside to sleep the night,

and offers a *sacrifice* to win the divine favour (cp. v.4). He then receives the dream in which God speaks of his election even in the womb (cp. *a child*, v.7) and of the special knowledge which has been given him to fulfil his role as king. The dream ends with a formula of recognition (cp.v.15a: if a dream, it must have come from God), after which the king returns to his capital, invites his court to a sacrificial *banquet* and reveals to them the content of his dream (15).

In Solomon's case however the content is not particularly Egyptian. It chiefly represents the Hebrew ideology of kingship. Where other OT texts (esp. 1 Sam 8) make the worst case against monarchy by referring to the bad habits of ANE kings, this makes the best case for it by repudiating those habits. Babylonian kings in particular

Solomon's Wisdom (cont.)

3. 10 • The LORD was well pleased that this was what Solomon had asked for, • and God said, 'Because you have asked for this, and not for long life, or for wealth, or for the lives of your enemies, but have asked for discernment in administering justice, • I grant your request; I give you a heart so wise and so understanding that there has been none like you before your time, nor will there be after you. • What is more, I give you those things for which you did not ask, such wealth and glory as no king of your time can match. • If you conform to my ways and observe my ordinances and commandments, as your father David did, I will also
15 give you long life.' • Then Solomon awoke, and realised it was a dream. Solomon came to Jerusalem and gave a banquet for all his household.

• Two women who were prostitutes approached the king at that time, and as they stood before him • one said, 'My lord, this woman and I share a house, and I gave birth to a child when she was there with me. • On the third day after my baby was born she too gave birth to a child. We were alone; no one else was with us in the house; only the two of us were there. • During the night this woman's
20 child died because she lay on it, • and she got up in the middle of the night, took my baby from my side while I, your servant, was asleep, and laid it on her bosom, putting her dead child on mine. • When I got up in the morning to feed my baby, I found him dead; but when I looked at him closely, I found that it was not the child that I had borne.' • The other woman broke in, 'No, the living child is mine; yours is the dead one,' while the first insisted, 'No, the dead child is yours; mine is the living one.' So they went on arguing before the king.

• The king thought to himself, 'One of them says, "This is my child, the living one; yours is the dead one." The other says, "No, it is your child that is dead and mine that is alive."' • Then he said, 'Fetch me a sword.' When a sword was
25 brought, • the king gave the order: 'Cut the living child in two and give half to one woman and half to the other.' • At this the woman who was the mother of the living child, moved with love for her child, said to the king, 'Oh, sir, let her have the baby! Whatever you do, do not kill it.' The other said, 'Let neither of us have it; cut it in two.' • The king then spoke up: 'Give the living baby to the first woman,' he said; 'do not kill it. She is its mother.' • When Israel heard the judgement which the king had given, they all stood in awe of him; for they saw that he possessed wisdom from God for administering justice. (REB)

Solomon's Wisdom (cont.)

at the start of their reign prayed precisely for the objects listed in v.11 as not prayed for by Solomon. Solomon is portrayed as the ideal king by contrast. But the portrait fails to carry conviction. Ch.2 has just shown him lightly taking *the lives of his enemies*, and later chapters will boast of his *wealth*. Is the DtH being heavily ironical or merely failing to integrate his sources?

The story of the two mothers is the second illustration of Solomon's *wisdom*. It is an old ANE folk-tale, known in many forms

from the C14th BC on. Behind this version lies an Indian one; the *two women* are not *prostitutes* but wives of the same man, giving added point to their rivalry: the mother of the first son achieves higher status. It also explains why they live in the same house and why the false mother wants the child killed (26). The contrast between her chilly words and the warm sentiments of the real mother is well done; so is the slanging match of v.22, where in each exchange the riposte is expressed in a neat chiasmus*.

Solomon's Wisdom (cont.)

4. 21 • Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the river Euphrates to Philistia and as far as the frontier of Egypt; they paid tribute and were subject to him all
25 his life. • All through his reign the people of Judah and Israel lived in peace,
29 everyone from Dan to Beersheba under his own vine and his own fig tree. • God
gave Solomon deep wisdom and insight, and understanding as wide as the sand on
the seashore, • so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed that of all the men of the east
and of all Egypt. • He propounded three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered
33 a thousand and five. • He discoursed of trees, from the cedar of Lebanon down to the
marjoram that grows out of the wall, of beasts and birds, of reptiles and fish.
• People of all races came to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and he received
gifts from all the kings in the world who had heard of his wisdom. (REB)

Solomon's Wisdom (cont.)

The extent of empire claimed for Solomon (4.21) is the same as that for David, i.e. it stopped short of both *the Euphrates* and *Philistia*. But his reign is presented, unlike David's, as a time of peace for what are unusually called *Judah and Israel*. Peace and prosperity are regular motifs in the praise of ANE kings.

And the repute of Solomon's wisdom is finally said to have extended into the very countries of the ANE where there

had for centuries been a famous tradition of Wisdom. In that tradition he himself is said to have composed *proverbs* (some of which would have used the nature lore of v.33) and *songs*. Much of Hebrew Wisdom literature, though written after his time, was traditionally ascribed to him, e.g. the first section of the book of Proverbs, with the whole of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, and the Wisdom of Solomon from the Apocrypha.

Solomon's Buildings

5. 1 When Hiram king of Tyre heard that Solomon had been anointed king in his father's place, he sent envoys to him, because he had always been friendly with David. • Solomon sent this message to Hiram: • 'You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God, because of the armed nations surrounding him, until the LORD made them subject to him. • But now on every side the LORD my God has given me peace; there is no one to oppose me, I fear
5 no attack. • So I propose to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, following the promise given by the LORD to my father David: "Your son whom I shall set on the throne in your place will build the house for my name." • If therefore you will now give orders that cedars be felled and brought from Lebanon, my men will work with yours, and I shall pay you for your men whatever sum you fix; for, as you know, we have none so skilled at felling trees as your Sidonians.' • Hiram was greatly pleased to receive Solomon's message, and said, 'Blessed be the LORD today who has given David a wise son to rule over this great people.'

Solomon's Buildings

Solomon's building programme follows immediately the section on his wisdom. The author makes an explicit link by inserting the epithet *wise* in the acces-

sion-greeting formula of 5.7. Building programmes were part of what was expected of ANE kings, and the numerous inscriptions recording them

Solomon's Buildings (cont.)

5. 8 • He sent Solomon this reply: 'I have received your message. In this matter of timber, both cedar and pine, I shall do all you wish. • My men will bring down the logs from Lebanon to the sea and I shall make them up into rafts to be floated to the place you appoint; I shall have them broken up there and you can remove them. You, for your part, will meet my wishes if you provide the food for my household.'
- 10 • So Hiram kept Solomon supplied with all the cedar and pine that he wanted, • and Solomon supplied Hiram with twenty thousand kor of wheat as food for his household and twenty kor of oil of pounded olives; Solomon gave this yearly to Hiram. • The LORD bestowed wisdom on Solomon as he had promised him; there was peace between Hiram and Solomon and they concluded a treaty.
- 15 • King Solomon raised a forced levy from the whole of Israel amounting to thirty thousand men. • He sent them to Lebanon in monthly relays of ten thousand, so that the men spent one month in Lebanon and two at home; Adoniram was superintendent of the levy. • Solomon had also seventy thousand hauliers and eighty thousand quarrymen, • apart from the three thousand three hundred foremen in charge of the work who superintended the labourers. • By the king's orders they quarried huge, costly blocks for laying the foundation of the LORD's house in hewn stone. • The builders supplied by Solomon and Hiram, together with the Gebalites, shaped the blocks and prepared both timber and stone for the building of the house.

Solomon's Buildings (cont.)

often ascribe them to the royal wisdom.

Israel has always been poor in timber, whereas the *cedars of Lebanon* had been renowned throughout the ANE for 1,000 years before Solomon. So when *Hiram* exchanged greetings with David's successor (cp. 2 Sam 5.11), Solomon lost no time in making a deal. Hiram was king of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, the two leading cities of Phoenicia; *Gebal* or *Byblos* (18) was a third. The Phoenician craftsmen were responsible for the skilled work of *felling* the timber, transporting it by sea and preparing it on site; also for the dressing of the *stone*, *quarried* in Jerusalem itself. The quarrying and the unskilled work was done by a *levy* of Israelites. *Forced* labour was common in the large ANE monarchies, but had not been used in Israel before; it proved most unpopular (12.4).

The outstanding feature of Solomon's building programme is the royal complex of palace and temple. Though something entirely new in Israel, this had long been

a regular feature, in concept and design, of ANE monarchies. Palace and temple were architecturally and functionally linked, with the former much larger than the latter. The linkage symbolised the royal status as representing the national god, divinely appointed as head of both state and cult. The architects of the new complex in Jerusalem were presumably Phoenician like the craftsmen [7.13+].

The *palace* (7.1-12) was much bigger than the Temple, so it is not surprising that it took twice as long to build; but it is given far less space by the author. The *House of the Forest of Lebanon* was perhaps used for ceremonial occasions; the *Hall of Justice* was for business, with the *Colonnade* serving as a waiting room. Verse 12 distinguishes the wall round the Temple from the one which enclosed the whole palace-temple complex. All the walls were built on the same principle: they rested on rough-hewn megaliths; then came *three courses of dressed*

Solomon's Buildings (cont.)

6. 1 • It was in the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the second month of that year, the month of Ziv, that he began to build the house of the LORD. • The house which King Solomon built for the LORD was sixty cubits long by twenty cubits broad, and its height was thirty cubits. • The vestibule in front of the sanctuary was twenty cubits long, spanning the whole breadth of the house, while it projected ten cubits in front of the house. • He prepared an inner shrine in the farthest recesses of the house to receive the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD. • This inner shrine was twenty cubits square and it stood twenty cubits high; he overlaid it with red gold and made an altar of cedar. • In the inner shrine he carved two cherubim of wild olive wood, each ten cubits high. • Each wing of the cherubim was five cubits long, and from wingtip to wingtip was ten cubits. • He put the cherubim within the inner shrine and their wings were spread, so that a wing of one cherub touched the wall on one side and a wing of the other touched the wall on the other side, and their other wings met in the middle; • he overlaid the cherubim with gold.
- 19
- 23
- 27
- 37 • In the fourth year of Solomon's reign, in the month of Ziv, the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid; • and in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its details according to the specification. It had taken seven years to build. (REB)
7. 1 • As regards his palace, Solomon spent thirteen years on it before the building was completed. • He built the House of the Forest of Lebanon, a hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high, on four rows of cedar-wood pillars, • with lengths of cedar wood laid horizontally on the pillars. The upper part was panelled with cedar right down to the tie-beams on forty-five pillars, fifteen in each row. • He also made the Hall of the Throne where he used to dispense justice, that is, the Hall of Justice; it was panelled in cedar from floor to beams. • His own living quarters, in the other court and inwards from the Hall, were of the same construction. And there was a house similar to this Hall for Pharaoh's daughter whom he had taken in marriage.
- 7
- 10 • All these buildings were of special stones cut to measure, trimmed on the inner and outer sides with the saw, from the foundations to the coping – • the foundations were of special stones, huge stones, of ten and eight cubits, • and, above these, special stones, cut to measure, and cedar wood – • and, on the outside, the great court had three courses of dressed stone round it and one course of cedar beams; so also had the inner court of the Temple of the LORD and the vestibule of the Temple. (NJB)

Solomon's Buildings (cont.)

masonry and *one of cedar*. When the buildings continued on up, the walls were probably topped with brick.

Unfortunately the long and detailed description of the Temple (Ch.6) and its furnishings [7.15-50] is not clear enough

to enable a confident reconstruction. But its basic design conformed to a pattern which was common not only in the Levant but also in principle in Egypt and even Greece. It was a rectangular building consisting of three successive rooms,

Solomon's Buildings (cont.)

8. 6 • The priests brought in the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner shrine of the house, the Most Holy Place, beneath the wings of the cherubim. • The cherubim, whose wings were spread over the place of the Ark, formed a canopy above the Ark and its poles. • The poles projected, and their ends were visible from the Holy Place immediately in front of the inner shrine, but from nowhere else outside; they are there to this day. • There was nothing inside the Ark but the two stone tablets which Moses had deposited there at Horeb, when the LORD made the covenant with the Israelites after they left Egypt.
9. 15 • This is the record of the forced labour which King Solomon conscripted to build the house of the LORD, his own palace, the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. • Gezer had been attacked and captured by Pharaoh king of Egypt, who had burnt it to the ground, put its Canaanite inhabitants to death, and given it as a marriage gift to his daughter, Solomon's wife. • Solomon rebuilt it. (REB)

Solomon's Buildings (cont.)

each extending across its whole width: first the *vestibule* (6.3) or portico, then the *sanctuary*, finally the *inner shrine* (6.19f, also called the most *the Most Holy Place* in 8.6). A *cubit* is just under half a metre. The whole temple was therefore small; but it has to be remembered that sacrifices and other rituals were conducted outside it. The cherubs (Hebrew plural *cherubim*) were winged creatures, used in Phoenicia as supporting decorations for a royal throne; here they are for the protection of the Ark (8.6).

Nothing has been rediscovered of

Solomon's buildings on what is known today as the Temple Mount, but they are presented as overshadowing the City of David, in location, size and magnificence. The city walls now include both hills (see map 3). The fortifications of *Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer* are impressive, though some scholars date them later than Solomon. In any case, his reign was not a military success, as Ch.11 shows, nor could a small country, whose only natural resources were in agriculture, really afford such a lavish building programme. Solomon's 'glory' could not last.