

# 6

## The reign of Solomon

(2 Chron. 1:1–9:31)

**H**aving already emphasised the joint nature of the David–Solomon rule as a picture of the ideal kingship to which the post-exilic community can look forward (see especially 1 Chron. 29), the Chronicler now presents the chief events of Solomon’s reign. The material is divided into two main parts: part one is concerned with Solomon’s task of building the temple (1:1–7:22) while the second part considers his position as an international monarch (8:1–9:31). It is structured in such a way that the building and dedication of the temple are seen as the central concern (3:1–7:22) with Solomon’s wisdom, wealth and worldwide renown forming a frame around his whole reign (1:1–2:18; 8:17–9:28).

### **The introduction to Solomon’s reign (1:1-17)**

After a brief introduction to his reign (v. 1), the chapter recounts Solomon’s sacrifices at Gibeon and God’s revelation to him (vv. 2-13) and closes by describing his wealth and commercial enterprises (vv. 14-17). Further words concerning Solomon’s wisdom and wealth occur at 9:22-28.

### *Solomon worships at Gibeon (1:1-6)*

1:1. Now Solomon the son of David strengthened himself over his kingdom, and Yahweh his God was with him and made him exceedingly great. 2. And Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds

and to the judges and to every chief of all Israel, the heads of the fathers. 3. Then Solomon and all the assembly with him, went to the high place which was at Gibeon; for God's tent of meeting was there, which Moses the servant of Yahweh had made in the wilderness. 4. However, David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim to the place David had prepared for it; for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem. 5. Furthermore, the bronze altar, which Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, was there before the tabernacle of Yahweh, and Solomon and the assembly sought it. 6. And Solomon went up there to the bronze altar before Yahweh which was at the tent of meeting, and offered one thousand burnt offerings on it.

David had urged his son to 'be strong' (1 Chron. 28:10, 20), and the Chronicler uses the same verb but in an intensive reflexive form to indicate that Solomon was firmly in charge of his kingdom ('strengthened himself,' v. 1). It becomes one of the Chronicler's favourite verbal forms especially when indicating how a king gains authority after a difficult period (2 Chron. 12:13; 13:21; 15:8; etc.). Its use here is perhaps a veiled recognition of the troubles that surrounded the succession (1 Kings 1-2). Yahweh, who is as much Solomon's God as David's, is with him, as his father had assured him, and had made him 'exceedingly great' (see 1 Chron. 14:2; 22:11-12, 16; 28:20; 29:2-3, 25).

As 'all Israel' rallied to David, so Solomon is able to summon 'all Israel' as represented by the army commanders, judges and family heads (see 1 Chron. 11:1, 4, 10; 27:1; 28:1). For the term 'chief' or 'leader' (*nāšî*, v. 2), see 1 Chron. 2:10; 4:38; 2 Chron. 5:2. Meeting with God was as centrally important for Solomon as for David. While Kings makes no mention of the whole assembly accompanying him to Gibeon, the Chronicler indicates that this was no private affair, but an important event witnessed by 'all the assembly' (1 Kings 3:4-15; see 1 Chron. 13:2, 4; 29:1, 20). It is emphasised that Gibeon, unlike other 'high places', was to be seen as a legitimate site for the worship of Yahweh, as the original Mosaic tabernacle was there as well as the bronze altar. In addition, Zadok the priest had been appointed to officiate at the altar (1 Chron. 16:39-40; 21:29). Moses' special status as 'the servant of Yahweh', the reference to Bezalel the skilled craftsman who made the altar

(v. 5; Exod. 31:2; 38:1-2; 1 Chron. 2:19-20), and especially the additional unique expression 'God's tent of meeting' (which could also be translated 'the tent for meeting God,' v. 3), all add further weight to the legitimacy of the location. Though a semi-permanent building seems to have been erected at Shiloh, which was later destroyed, this did not mean that the original tabernacle had been replaced or ruined (1 Sam. 1:9; 3:3; Jer. 7:12, 14; 26:9).

It was 'there' at Gibeon, in Yahweh's presence, 'at the tent of meeting', 'on the bronze altar' that Solomon sacrificed his thousand animals as burnt offerings – the build-up of phrases again indicates that this was an acceptable high place (v. 6; see 1 Chron. 16:1-2 where David offered sacrifices before the ark in Jerusalem). The addition of one of the Chronicler's favourite verbs, 'seek' (*dāraś*), in reference to inquiring of Yahweh, indicates that Solomon follows David's example and not that of Saul (1 Chron. 10:14; 13:3; 14:10, 14). There is also a reminder, however, that David had pitched a tent in Jerusalem to house the ark he had brought from Kiriath-jearim (v. 4; 1 Chron. 13:1-17:1). This anomalous, unsatisfactory situation would be rectified by Solomon, so that meeting with God and the offering of sacrifices would take place in association with the ark. Solomon would complete what had begun under David. All would be brought together with the construction of the temple in Jerusalem.

### *God's revelation to Solomon (1:7-13)*

1:7. In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, 'Ask what I shall give you'. 8. Then Solomon said to God, 'You have shown great steadfast love to my father David and have made me king in his place. 9. Now, Yahweh God, let your word to my father David be confirmed; for you have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth. 10. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of yours?' 11. And God said to Solomon, 'Because this was in your heart and you did not ask for riches, wealth and honour, or the life of those who hate you, nor have you even asked for long life, but you have asked for yourself wisdom and knowledge, that you may judge my people, over whom I have made you king, 12. wisdom and knowledge have been granted to you. And I will give you

riches and wealth and honour, which was not so to the kings who were before you, and after you it will not be so. 13. Then Solomon went from the high place which was at Gibeon, from the tent of meeting, to Jerusalem and he reigned over Israel.

Chronicles abbreviates the account in 1 Kings 3:5-15 of God's appearance to Solomon and the promises made in response to his prayer (vv. 7-12). The phrase 'in that night' (v. 7) implies that the revelation was by means of a dream, as Kings makes clear. In Solomon's reply to God's generous offer, the king begins by acknowledging God's great faithfulness or 'enduring love' toward his father (v. 8). God had kept His promise by enabling Solomon to reign in his father's place. In the light of the enormity of the task, he asks for wisdom and knowledge to govern – the old word 'judge' (*šāpa!*) being used in this sense here (v. 10). The phrase 'go out and come in' has military overtones (1 Chron. 11:2), but can be used more generally for those in a leadership position (Deut. 31:2). The David–Solomon era had brought about the fulfilment of the promises to the patriarchs, with God's people as numerous as the 'dust of the earth' (v. 9; see Gen. 13:16; 28:14).

Because Solomon had got his priorities right, God not only granted him his request but promised him the things he did not ask for! The king's main task was to judge or govern God's people (vv. 10-11) and to that end wisdom and knowledge were essential, while the trappings of status in the form of riches, wealth and honour unsurpassed by any other king before or after, would set Solomon apart as the ideal monarch reigning over God's people on God's behalf (see Ps. 72).

### *Solomon's wealth (1:14-17)*

1:14. And Solomon amassed chariots and horsemen. He had one thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, and he situated them in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem. 15. And the king made silver and gold in Jerusalem as plentiful as stones, and he made cedars as plentiful as the sycamore in the Shephelah. 16. And Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt; and from Kue, the king's traders procured them from Kue at a price. 17. And they went up and brought out a chariot from Egypt for six hundred *shekels* of silver and a horse for one hundred and fifty, and thus by their hand they brought out to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

The details concerning Solomon's wealth and commercial ventures are also found in 1 Kings 10:26-29 but whereas in Kings they appear toward the end of the account of his reign and immediately before the compiler's critical remarks, in Chronicles they are placed at the beginning to indicate that God was true to his promise and that Solomon had ample means to build the temple. As was customary in powerful states like Assyria, Solomon had the chariots and horses placed in strategic locations throughout the country as well as in Jerusalem (v. 14). Wealth poured into the capital (v. 15), no doubt through tribute money and the commercial activities that are described in the final verses (vv. 16-17). The sycamore-fig trees were common along the coastal plain ('Shephelah' verse 15) and produced fruit that only the poor ate, but the wood was useful as was that from the more expensive and impressive cedars that grew in abundance in Lebanon. The king's traders imported and exported horses from Egypt and as far away as Kue, probably the ancient name for Cilicia, one of the small neo-Hittite states which lay in what is now an area of northern Syria and southern Turkey.

## Application

The Chronicler's account would have certainly encouraged those in the post-exilic community to be united ('all Israel') in the service of God, to be wholehearted ('of one heart and mind') in worship as they offered their sacrifices at the temple, to give themselves to prayer on the basis of God's promises to David and to look expectantly to the fulfilment of those promises. As it has been emphasised in 1 Chronicles, God uses the prayers of His people to fulfil His purposes, even when the odds seem stacked against any realisation of them. We are to pray for wisdom in testing circumstances, without doubting God's ability to answer our requests (James 1:1-8). Solomon is but a shadowy picture of David's greater Son. Psalms 68 and 72 speak of the future Messiah in terms of prosperity and international acclaim. Through Jesus, the promise of an innumerable company of people from all nations and people groups truly fulfils the promises to the patriarchs (Rev. 7:9).

## Solomon's temple (2:1[1:18]–7:22)

This section begins with Solomon's preparations to build (ch. 2), followed by an account of the actual building of the temple (ch. 3), the production of the temple furnishings (ch. 4), the bringing of the ark to the temple (ch. 5), Solomon's address to the people and prayer of dedication (ch. 6) and finally God's reply (ch. 7). There are many parallels with the Kings account (1 Kings 5–8) but Chronicles uses all the material at his disposal to present his own distinctive message. This meant that he also leaves out what he did not deem necessary or significant, knowing that people had the Kings account on which to fall back for further details.

### *Preparations for building (2:1-18[1:18–2:17])*

There is a chiasmic arrangement of the material. At the core is the correspondence between Solomon and Hiram in which Solomon writes to Hiram (2:3-10[2-9]) and Hiram replies to Solomon (2:11-16[10-15]). This is encompassed by references to the conscription of labour (v. 2[1] and vv. 17-18[16-17]). Balancing this chapter concerning Solomon's relations with Tyre is the passage toward the end of the Chronicler's account of Solomon's reign that deals further with international recognition (8:17–9:21). The English text makes the final verse of chapter one in the Hebrew Bible (1:18) the first verse of chapter two which has the advantage of providing a suitable introduction to the new chapter. It does mean, however, that the Hebrew verse numbers for chapter 2 are one less than the English.

2:1.[1:18] Now Solomon intended to build a house for the name of Yahweh and a house for his kingdom. 2:[2:1] So Solomon counted seventy thousand men to bear burdens and eighty thousand men to quarry in the mountain and three thousand six hundred supervisors over them.

3:[2] Then Solomon sent to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying: 'As you have dealt with David my father and sent him cedars to build him a house to dwell in, 4:[3] – here I am building a house for the name of Yahweh my God to dedicate it to him and to burn fragrant incense before him, and for the row of continuity, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening for the sabbaths and for the new moons and for the appointed