

The Ideal United Kingdom (1 Chronicles 9:35 – 2 Chronicles 9:31)

by Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

<p>The Reign of Solomon, part 2: Solomon's Great Wisdom and Wealth (2 Chronicles 1:1-17)</p>

Solomon's Great Wisdom and Wealth (1:1-17)

The Chronicler began his account with a focus on how Solomon gained wisdom and wealth. Omitting the struggles Solomon had in his early career (see 1 Kgs 1:1-2:46a) set the stage for his glorious portrait of the king. This portion of Solomon's reign balances with the closing verses which also focus on his wealth and wisdom (9:13-28; see figure 22).

Structure of 1:1-17

This material divides into two sections consisting of a narrative and a series of reports (see figure 23). The first episode (1:1-13) depicts Solomon calling a religious assembly and obtaining divine promises for wealth and wisdom. The second portion (1:14-17) consists of an assortment of reports which illustrate some of the ways these divine promises became realities.

Solomon Receives Divine Promises (1:1-13)

The Chronicler began his record of Solomon's reign with the king's authority in full swing. He showed no concern with the gradual acquisition of power, but moved directly to the king's first momentous act, an assembly of all Israel at which Solomon received the gift of wisdom from God.

Comparison with 1 Kings 2:46b-3:15

A number of variations between Kings and Chronicles occur in this passage. Some variations result from problems in textual transmission (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). At times, Chronicles simply paraphrases Kings for stylistic reasons. Nevertheless, several significant differences deserve special mention.

First, the Chronicler exalted Solomon with additions and omissions. 1) He omitted the record of Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kgs 3:1-2) and replaced it with the notice that **the Lord his God was with him and made him exceedingly great** (1:1b).

2) 1 Kgs 3:3 is omitted because it mentions that Solomon worshipped at "high places." The text admits that Solomon worshipped at the one **high place** of Gibeon (1:3 // 1 Kgs 3:4), but carefully explains Solomon's actions (1:3b-6). It refers once again to Gibeon as a **high place** (1:13), but immediately comments that the **Tent of Meeting** was there (1:13).

3) The Chronicler diverged from Kings to turn attention away from David to Solomon. He eliminated the extensive description of David's uprightness (1 Kgs 3:6b). Moreover, he shortened 1 Kgs 3:7-8, omitting the reference to Solomon's youth and naiveté (but compare 1 Chr 22:5; 29:1 and 2 Chr 13:7).

4) The Chronicler omitted the warning of 1 Kgs 3:14 (// 1:12), which focused on the conditionality of Solomon's kingship (see also 1 Kgs 11:26-40).

5) The report of Solomon's sacrifices at Jerusalem (1 Kgs 3:15b) does not appear because it raised questions about Solomon's fidelity to the Law of Moses. Earlier in the chapter (see 1:3-6) the Chronicler justified Solomon's sacrifices at Gibeon. For this reason, this material is omitted.

Second, Solomon's time at Gibeon is described as a nationwide religious assembly. He detailed the participants as **all Israel ... commanders ... judges ... all the leaders in Israel ... heads of families ... Solomon and the whole assembly ...** (1:2-6 // 1 Kgs 3:4).

Third, the Chronicler admitted that Solomon sacrificed at Gibeon (1:3 // 1 Kgs 3:4). This admission apparently raised questions about the appropriateness of Solomon's act for readers living after the establishment of the temple in Jerusalem. As a result, the text adds a significant explanation of why Solomon performed sacrifices at Gibeon (1:3b-6).

Fourth, the addition of **and he reigned over Israel** (1:13b) balances with the opening verse of this section and forms an *inclusio* which closes this section of Solomon's reign.

Structure of 1:1-13

These variations formed a symmetrical five step narrative (see figure 23). This story opens and closes with the notice that Solomon had become **exceedingly great** (1:1; 1:13b). Solomon went to Gibeon to worship at the bronze altar (1:2-6). This movement balances with his return to Jerusalem (1:13a). The turning point of the story is Solomon's dialogue with God in Gibeon (1:7-12).

Solomon Reigns over Israel (1:1)

The Chronicler quickly summarized the early phases of the king's reign. The terminology **established himself** (1:1) and similar expressions occur many times in Chronicles (see 2 Chr 11:1; 12:13; 13:21; 17:1; 21:4; 25:11; 27:6). They refer to such accomplishments as building fortifications (see 17:1-2; 27:6; 32:5), forming an army (see 17:1-2; 23:1; 25:11), reforming the nation (see 15:8), and securing the throne against opponents (see 12:13; 13:21; 27:6). Solomon accomplished much at the beginning of his reign.

The great accomplishments at this stage receive emphasis in the explanation added to this verse. To counter any charge of wrongdoing (see 10:4,11), the Chronicler made explicit the reason for Solomon's greatness. Solomon's successes occurred **for the Lord his God was with him and made him exceedingly great** (1:1). When God was "with" someone in the book of Chronicles, he gave help in various struggles (see 13:12; see also *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). The Chronicler often emphasized divine help behind the accomplishments of David. At this point, he applied the same perspective to Solomon. His successes were not the result of human schemes or tyranny. They resulted from God's blessing.

Solomon Goes to Gibeon to Worship (1:2-6)

The core of this material derives from 1 Kgs 3:3-15. Yet, the Chronicler's record differs in several ways. He omitted the reference to Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kgs 3:1-2) and his worship at the high places (1 Kgs 3:3,4) to avoid detracting from Solomon as his ideal.

Beyond this, Solomon invited **all Israel** (1:2), the Chronicler's favorite designation for groups representing the entire nation and groups of national leaders (1:2; see also *Introduction: 1) All Israel*). The organization of these leaders follows patterns already established in David's reign. Solomon included **commanders of thousands** (see 1 Chr 13:1; 29:6), **commanders of hundreds** (see 1 Chr 13:1; 29:6), **judges** (see 17:8,10), **all the leaders in Israel** (see 1 Chr 11:3; 17:6), and **heads of families** (see 1 Chr 15:12; 23:9,24; 24:6,31; 26:21).

Moreover, the Chronicler also designated these supporters as **the whole assembly** (1:3). The term **assembly** (see also 1:5) has the connotation of a religious gathering designed especially for worship. Expanding the record of Kings in this way drew a parallel between this initial event in Solomon's reign and the assemblies of David's reign. Like David before him, the highpoints of Solomon's reign involved assembling of the whole nation in times of worship. These assemblies conveyed the importance of the temple and its services for the post-exilic readers (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*).

The Chronicler's desire to exalt Solomon as an ideal for his readers led him to add a defense of Solomon's worship at Gibeon (1:3b-6). The entire history of Chronicles emphasized the centrality of Jerusalem worship. This message was vital for the Chronicler's post-exilic readers. For this reason, he explained that **God's Tent of Meeting was there** in Gibeon (1:3b). This **Tent of Meeting** was none other than the one **Moses ... had made in the desert** (1:3b; see Ex 40:17-19). When David **brought up the ark** to Jerusalem, he **pitched** [another] **tent for** [the ark] **in Jerusalem** (1:4), but **the bronze altar** for sacrifices (see Ex 31:1-5; 35:30-36:7) remained **in Gibeon** (1:5a). For this reason, it was perfectly acceptable that **Solomon and the assembly inquired ... there** (1:5b).

It is noteworthy that the king and people **inquired of him** at Gibeon (1:5b). The Hebrew of this clause is ambiguous. It may be that Solomon "inquired of it" (i.e. the bronze altar [NAS, NEB]) or "inquired of him" (i.e. the Lord [NIV, NKJ, NRS]). Whatever the case, the Chronicler drew a connection at this point between Solomon and David. Several times he contrasted David with Saul precisely because David inquired of God and Saul did not (see 1 Chr 10:14; 13:4; 14:10,14; see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). This emphasis appears at the beginning of David's reign (see 1 Chr 10:14) much as it does here at the beginning of Solomon's reign.

The text also adds that the bronze altar had been made by **Bezalel** (1:5). **Bezalel** appears only in Exodus and Chronicles (see Ex 31:2; 35:20; 36:1,2; 27:1; 38:22; 1 Chr 2:20; 2 Chr 1:5). He was the chief artisan of Moses' tabernacle. This attention to Bezalel suggests that a subtle typological connection supported the Chronicler's portrait of Solomon. Bezalel fulfilled Moses' plans for the tabernacle much like Solomon fulfilled David's plans for the temple. Bezalel and Solomon were both from the tribe of Judah and endowed with special wisdom for the task of building (see Ex 31:1-3; 35:30-35; 2 Chr 1:5). While the writer of Kings spoke of Solomon's wisdom in general terms (see 1 Kgs 3:16-20), the Chronicler focused on Solomon's wisdom in the building project. Furthermore, the writer of Kings noted Hiram's tribute to Solomon as "a wise son over this great people" (1 Kgs 5:7). In Chronicles, Hiram's compliment included the notice that Solomon is the **son who will build** (2:11-12). These portions of the narrative continue to highlight Solomon as the temple builder.

The Chronicler also followed the account of Kings by noting that **a thousand burnt offerings** were offered on the bronze altar at Gibeon (1:6 // 1 Kgs 3:4). The large number of sacrifices may be a hyperbole (For the Chronicler's use of hyperbole see comments on 12:14.), but depicts Solomon's enthusiasm for the worship of God (see 1:6; 5:6; 7:4-5; 24:14; 29:32-35; 35:8-9). The Chronicler's readers must be a people who have the same enthusiasm for worship (see *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*).

Solomon and God Dialogue (1:7-12)

Following 1 Kgs 3:5-15 the text describes Solomon's nocturnal revelation in Gibeon. The basic structure of his account is threefold: God speaks (1:7), Solomon responds (1:8-10), and God speaks again (1:11-12).

God initiated the dialogue with Solomon after sacrifices (1:7). Chronicles twice omits the explicit remark that this event was a dream (see 1 Kgs 3:5,15), but the expression **that night** served as the equivalent (1:7). God's offer to Solomon was without qualification: "**Ask for whatever you want**" (1:7b). Apparently God was very pleased with Solomon and the assembly's worship at Gibeon.

Solomon's well-known response to the divine offer follows Kings for the most part (1:8-10 // 1 Kgs 3:6-9), but two important differences emerge. First, Chronicles omits the reference to David's outstanding life (1 Kgs 3:6b). Apparently, the Chronicler did not consider this the appropriate time to focus on David. Solomon's exemplary qualities are his concern here. Second, a similar explanation holds for the omission of Solomon's self-deprecation in Kings, "But I am only a little child" (1 Kgs 3:7).

Solomon asked for **wisdom and knowledge that [he] may lead** (1:10 // 1 Kgs 3:7,9). Wisdom and the ability to lead are connected elsewhere in Scripture (see Prov 8:15). Solomon's concern was to attain those necessary qualities that would allow him to reign effectively. The terminology **that I may lead** ("to go out and come in" [NAS, NRS, NKJ]) may allude to Nu 27:17 where Moses made the same request for Joshua. If so, the Chronicler compared David and Solomon to Moses and Joshua once again (see 1Chr 22:11-16; 28:20-21). By doing so, the Chronicler endorsed Solomon as the rightful heir of David's kingdom and the one who brought David's vision to fruition.

Beyond this, Solomon described the nation as **this great people of yours** [God] (1:10 // 1 Kgs 3:9). Although this expression is based on the parallel in Kings, it alluded to the emphasis elsewhere on the connection between divine kingship and the human throne of Israel (see *Introduction: 8) Divine Kingship*). Solomon sought only to represent, not usurp divine authority over Israel.

God's response to Solomon in Chronicles is similar to the account of Kings (1:11-12 // 1 Kgs 3:10-14). The Chronicler maintained that Solomon would be incomparable with regard to **wisdom and knowledge ... wealth, riches and honor** (1:12), but he omitted any reference to the conditions of these promises (1 Kgs 3:14) as he had done earlier (see 1 Chr 17:14 // 2 Sam 7:14b). The idea that conditions applied to Solomon was in line with the Chronicler's doctrine of divine judgment and blessing (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*), but he downplayed this matter, as well as Solomon's failures, to highlight the king's ideal character. In so doing, Solomon was an example of the kind of king who received prosperity from God (see *Introduction: 26) Prosperity and Poverty*).

In line with this concern, God's response to Solomon instructed the Chronicler's post-exilic readers about their motivations. Solomon's **heart desire** was not **wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of [his] enemies, nor for a long life** (1:11). Therefore, he would be greatly rewarded. These words drew attention to Solomon's **heart's desire** or inward motivation (see *Introduction: 16 Motivations*). Those who had returned from exile faced the temptation to treat religion as a means of gaining these kinds of things for themselves. Their motivations for re-establishing the kingdom of Israel were not to be their own gain, but the honor of divine kingship in Israel. Only then could they hope to receive the other benefits of security and prosperity that they needed so desperately.

Solomon Returns to Jerusalem (1:13a)

Kings is abbreviated at this point. Kings demonstrates Solomon's wisdom by reporting his establishment of Jerusalem as the place of worship (// 1 Kgs 3:15). The Chronicler, however, had already gone to great lengths to justify Solomon's worship at Gibeon (see 1:3-6) and waited until later to describe Solomon's shift to Jerusalem (see 3:1ff). To balance the travel to Gibeon, he simply noted that **Solomon came from ... Gibeon ... to Jerusalem** (1:13a).

Solomon Reigns over Israel (1:13b)

To close the story as it began (see 1:1) the text adds the note that Solomon **reigned over Israel** (1:13b). By repeating this motif, the Chronicler highlighted his chief concern in this passage. Solomon began his reign over the people of God with a religious assembly including all of Israel and brought enormous blessings to the nation.

Solomon Experiences Divine Promises (1:14-17)

Having established the origins of Solomon's blessed kingdom, the Chronicler reported some of the ways these blessings appeared. A shorter version of this material is repeated in 2 Chr 9:25,27-28 to balance this passage in the overarching symmetrical structure of Solomon's reign (see figure 22). This account illustrated the kinds of divine benevolences that were available to the post-exilic kingdom, if they would follow Solomon's example.

Comparison with 1 Kings 10:26-29

For the most part, these verses derive from 1 Kgs 10:26-29. Two minor differences appear between these passages. First, in 1:15 Chronicles reads **and gold**, but the absence of this expression in 1 Kgs 10:27 probably resulted from corruption in textual transmission of Kings (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*).

Second, Chronicles reads **they** for "the king's traders" (1:17 // 1 Kgs 1:29), but this reflects the Chronicler's style, not a substantive change.

Third, the most important point of comparison is the transposition of this entire passage to this context in Chronicles. 1 Kgs 10:26-29 summarizes how much Solomon had gained at the zenith of his kingdom. The Chronicler, however, placed this material immediately after God's promises to Solomon in order to emphasize that these promises were realized as a result of Solomon's devotion to God.

Structure of 1:14-17

This record of Solomon's wealth divides into three segments. Each portion amounts to a brief report (see figure 23). This brief summary of Solomon's wealth presented him as the incomparable king of Israel. God blessed him richly in military strength (1:14), civilian matters (1:15), and international trade (1:16-17).

Military Strength (1:14)

Solomon introduced the use of **chariots** in Israel's military arsenal. He not only accumulated many **chariots ... and horses**, but also housed them in **chariot cities** and in **Jerusalem**. Although no certain identifications of Solomonic stables have been established, archaeological finds in Megiddo, Hazor and Lachish suggest that such stables were plentiful at various times. These stables were broadly distributed to ensure rapid response in times of crisis. The sophistication of Solomon's achievements in this regard is remarkable. Israel had come to the verge of equaling the military strength of some of her more powerful neighboring empires. The Chronicler repeatedly presented military strength as a blessing from God. It was only when Israel's kings relied on their own might that military strength became problematic. In later years, reliance on military might led to apostasy in Israel (see Mic 1:3-7; Amos 2:6-9,14), but at this time Solomon's chariots and horses were a display of divine blessing.

Domestic Prosperity (1:15)

The domestic economic benefits of Solomon's reign appear in two far reaching hyperboles. **Silver and gold** are said to have been **as common in Jerusalem as stones** (1:15). This description of Solomon's ideal Jerusalem may lie in the distant background of New Testament descriptions of the New Jerusalem (see Rev 21:15-21). Moreover, **cedars** became **as plentiful as sycamore trees** (1:15). Sycamore trees grew in such abundance in the foothills that they were considered of little value (see 1 Chr 27:28; Isa 9:10). Cedars were valued much more highly and were usually imported (see 1 Chr 17:1; Isa 2:13; Ez 27:5). Needless to say, the purpose of the Chronicler's exaggerations was to emphasize that Solomon's economic benefit to Israel was incredible. For the Chronicler's use of hyperbole see comments on 12:14.

International Trade (1:16-17)

One of the signs of Solomon's greatness was the degree to which he entered the arena of international trade. Other descriptions of this aspect of his kingdom appear elsewhere (see 1 Kgs 9:26-28; 10:1-13). Here the text mentions some of Solomon's more impressive trading partners: **Egypt ... Kue ... Hittites ... and Arameans** (1:16-17). Israel's central location among the great empires of the middle east made them subject to repeated conquests. During Solomon's reign, however, his kingdom was so strong that he used his geographical position to become an international trader.

Solomon's involvement with other nations offered important guidance to the Chronicler's readers. On several occasions, Chronicles touches on the theme of Israel's economic involvement with foreign nations (see *Introduction: 3) International Relations*). These examples of positive international relations encouraged the post-exilic community to seek such economic successes again.