

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

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| <p><b>The Reign of Solomon, part 7:<br/>Solomon's Response from God<br/>(2 Chronicles 7:11-22)</b></p> |
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## *Solomon's Response from God (7:11-22)*

Having given an account of Solomon's splendid temple assembly, the Chronicler followed the record of Kings (// 1 Kgs 9:1-9) and described God's response to Solomon. Although this section is shorter than others, the opening words indicate that we have come upon another major section in Solomon's life. Solomon **established himself** (1:1), **gave orders to build a temple** (2:1), **began to build** (3:1), and **summoned to Jerusalem** (5:2). At this point, the Chronicler indicated that Solomon **had finished the temple ... and the royal palace** (7:11). Solomon's success in building established him as God's favored king (see *Introduction: 24) Building and Destruction*). With Solomon's building projects completed, this passage looks into Israel's future and speaks directly to the circumstances faced by the Chronicler's post-exilic readers.

## *Comparison with 1 Kgs 9:1-9*

Several insignificant variations appear in 7:11-12a (// 1 Kgs 9:1-2), but three very important differences can be found in 7:12b-19.

First, the Chronicler roughly followed 1 Kgs 9:3 ( // 7:12), but added the expression **and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices**. This addition alluded to words of David (see 1 Chr 22:1) and Solomon (see 2:6). It made it clear that God approved of the hopes David and Solomon had placed in the temple.

Second, the Chronicler added 7:13-15. These verses describe situations in which prayers in and toward the temple will bring about the restoration of God's blessing. They give clear expression to the Chronicler's doctrine of divine judgment and blessing (see *Introduction: 10-27) Divine Blessing and Judgment*).

Third, the Chronicler paraphrased 1 Kgs 9:6 in 2 Chr 7:19 and employed his frequently used term, **forsake** (see *Introduction: 22) Abandoning/Forsaking*). The Chronicler did not repeat the qualification "you and your sons" found in 1 Kgs 9:6.

### *Structure of 7:11-22*

This material divides into four main sections (see figure 23). An historical setting introduces the revelation to Solomon (7:11-12a). Then the divine word appears in three segments. God indicated his acceptance of Solomon's temple (7:12b). Then he explained the implications of this approval of the temple for the nation (7:13-16) and for the Davidic dynasty (7:17-22).

### *Introduction (7:11-12a)*

In these opening verses the Chronicler's variations are slight and have little bearing on interpretation. God's response to Solomon took place after **Solomon had finished the temple and palace** (7:11). We learn from 1 Kgs 7:1 and 9:10 that the palace was not completed until 13 years after the dedication of the temple. Thus God responded to Solomon's dedicatory prayer at least 13 years after the temple was built. Despite this historical distance, both Kings and Chronicles place this event in literary proximity to Solomon's dedicatory prayer. As we will see, God agreed to Solomon's requests on behalf of the temple, but this approval led to significant responsibilities for Solomon and Israel.

### *Divine Approval of the Temple (7:12b)*

Although Solomon's palace has just been mentioned twice (7:11), it now disappears from consideration. God's response to Solomon only concerned the temple. Solomon had asked for many blessings to come to the royal family and the nation through the temple. He looked to the temple as the source of divine help whenever the people strayed or faced hardships (see 6:14-42). At this point, God responded to these requests.

God's response to Solomon was straightforward. He announced to the king he had heard his prayers and had **chosen this place ... as a temple for sacrifices** (7:12b). The Chronicler added this element to the divine response (// 1 Kgs 9:3). It alludes to Solomon's remark to Hiram that because the temple could not contain God, it would have to be **a place to burn sacrifices before him** (2:6). A similar motif appears when David discovered the location of the temple (see 1 Chr 22:1). By alluding to these events God affirmed the Davidic-Solomonic conception of the temple. God would not be bound to the structure; it

could not contain him. Yet, it would be the place where acceptable sacrifices (as symbolic of the whole of worship) could be offered.

With these words from God the Chronicler added vital support for the temple in his own day. God himself ordained it as the place where he was to be approached by his people. This was no mere human belief; it was God's own perspective.

*Divine Instructions and Assurances to the Nation (7:13-16)*

Having established the acceptance of the temple in principle, God elaborated on how the temple was to serve the nation of Israel. As noted above, 7:13-15 is unique to the Chronicler's record. While Kings focuses entirely on the responsibilities of the king and his descendants toward the temple, this material gives attention to the responsibilities of the people in general. More than any other portion of this section, these verses spoke directly to the post-exilic community.

God began with specific instructions to the nation as it faced future hardships (7:13-14). There will be times of **no rain**, **locusts**, and **plague** (7:13). In his prayer, Solomon anticipated that **drought** (6:26-27), **locusts** (6:28-31), and **plague** (6:28-31) along with other difficulties would come upon Israel. Here God portrayed himself as the active agent of these national trials ("**I shut ... command**" [7:13]).

What were the Israelites to do when God chastised them? They were to turn to the invocable power of God in the temple (7:14a). The specific terms of this human responsibility deserve comment. First, the identity of the nation is emphasized. Israel is called **my people** (7:14a). This terminology recalled Solomon's repeated use of "**your people**" in his dedicatory prayer (6:14-42). Throughout the Old Testament this terminology reflected the special covenantal bond between God and Israel (see Ex 3:7,10; Lev 26:12; 1 Chr 17:6,7,9,10; Jer 31:33; Hos 1:9; 2:23). The nation is also **called by my name** (7:14a). Once again, the covenantal character of the language is evident (see Dt 11:17; Isa 43:7; Jer 14:9; Dan 9:18-19). These instructions were not for the nations of the earth, but for those who were joined by covenant to God. All modern uses of this passage must recognize this limitation.

Second, these instructions employ four terms to indicate the intensity and sincerity with which the covenant people must yearn for help from God. Reliance on external performances of temple rituals had led the nation of Israel into false confidence (see Isa 1:10-15; Jer 7:1-15; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 3:9-12). These instructions make it clear that the people must go far beyond outward ritualism in four ways.

1) The people must **humble themselves** (7:14a). For the Chronicler this meant they were to recognize sin and acknowledge their utter dependence on God (see *Introduction: 18 Humility*).

2) The wayward were to **pray** (7:14). This generic term is often associated as it is here with calling on God for help in times of need (see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*)

3) The people of Israel were to “**seek my face**” (7:14) The Chronicler used the expression "to seek" many times with the connotations of worship and pursuit of God's favor (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*).

4) The covenant people must **turn from their wicked ways** (7:14b). Devotion to God must demonstrate itself in changed lives. The Chronicler referred to the concept of repentance or "turning" from sin and toward God on a number of occasions (see *Introduction: 22) Repentance*).

The response from God to such sincere devotion would be as expected. He promised that he would **hear from heaven and will forgive** (7:14b). This language recalls similar repeated phrases in Solomon's prayer (see 6:14-42). Moreover, God promised to **heal their land** (7:14). In situations where the sins of the people brought disaster to the land and its natural inhabitants, sincere repentance would bring healing.

These instructions and assurances spoke plainly to the Chronicler's post-exilic readers. They found themselves in difficult circumstances and in need of divine favor. God's instructions here showed them the way to national blessing.

After the instructions and assurances (7:13-14) the Chronicler added a more generalized commitment from God (7:15). The word **now** (7:15) often introduces a conclusion or summary. God repeated that he had **chosen** the temple and **consecrated** or devoted it to special use (7:16; see 7:12b). Rituals of consecration appear frequently in Chronicles as examples of proper worship which the post-exilic readers were to imitate in their day (see *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*). This special use of the temple was designated in language already familiar to the Chronicler's readers. The temple would be the place where God's **Name may be there forever** (7:16). In a remarkable aside, God explained himself more fully. The presence of the Name in the temple meant that God's **eyes** (see 6:20,40), and his **heart** (see Ps 33:11; Jer 31:20; 32:41; Hos 11:8) would be in the temple. It would be the place of his attention and compassion (see *Introduction: 11) Name of God*).

#### *Divine Instructions and Warnings to the Monarchy (7:17-22)*

The divine address to the nation was followed by an address to Solomon and his descendants. It is evident that Solomon is addressed in 7:17-18. The passage begins with the contrastive **as for you** (7:17). This pronoun is singular in Hebrew and referred to the recipient of the dream, namely Solomon. As mentioned above, the Chronicler paraphrased 1 Kgs 9:6 (// 7:19) and omitted "you and your children" (1 Kgs 9:6). In 7:19, however, the pronoun **you** is plural in Hebrew. Therefore, the meaning here is the same as in Kings.

Solomon was addressed in 7:17-18, but he and his descendants were the focus of 7:19-22. In his dedicatory prayer, Solomon prayed on behalf of the temple as a source of help for the nation (see 2 Chr 6:24,25). Moreover, he prayed for the future of the Davidic dynasty (see 6:16,17). At this point God addressed the latter requests from Solomon.

These observations suggest that this portion of God's response to Solomon divides into two parts: instructions and assurances to Solomon (7:17-18) and warnings to the dynasty (7:19-22).

God assured Solomon that his dynasty would be established in the future, but under certain conditions (7:17). The expression, "**if you walk before me as your father David**" appears elsewhere in Chronicles (7:17; see 17:3; 28:1; 29:2; 34:2) and surfaces many other places (see 1 Kgs 3:14; 9:4; 11:4,6,11; Ps 89:30-45; 132:12). The covenant with David was never properly conceived of as unconditional. Unfortunately, false prophets in Israel often neglected these conditions, but they were always in effect (see Jer 14:13-14; Ezek 13:1-23). Once again, the standard of devotion is David, a man well-known for his failures, but also a man whose heart was committed to his God. Loyalty, not perfection, was the condition of the covenant (see *Introduction: 13) Covenant*; see also *Introduction: 16) Motivations*).

If Solomon kept the covenant, he could be assured of something (7:18). Here, the Chronicler diverged from 1 Kgs 9:5 in two significant ways. He substituted the word **I covenanted** for "I spoke." The specific language of covenant heightened the status of the word to David. It was an inviolable covenantal guarantee. But what was guaranteed? 1 Kgs 9:5 reads "you shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel." Apparently, the Chronicler wanted to clarify that this promise did not mean Israel's kings would never lose their thrones. The Chronicler substituted the more generic expression, "**you shall never fail to have a man to rule over Israel**" (7:18b; see Mic 5:1-5). These words guaranteed that despite the fact that a king may not always sit on the throne of Jerusalem (as in the post-exilic period), the nation should look for the rightful heir of David and follow his leadership. In the Chronicler's day this man was none other than Zerubbabel and/or his descendants (see 1 Chr 3:19-24; Ezr 2:2; 3:2,8).

The guarantee for the continuation of the Davidic line raised the question of the responsibilities of future generations (7:19-22). The conditionality of the covenant took center stage and the severe consequences of apostasy were set forth. The focus here was on descendants of Solomon who may **serve other gods and worship them** (7:19). The results of such flagrant apostasy will be astonishing.

First, God will **uproot Israel** from his land (7:20). Exile will be their punishment (see 2 Chr 6:24,25).

Second, not even the temple will protect the people from the wrath of their God. It may be the place of God's **Name** (7:20; see *Introduction: 11) Name of God*), but God declared he **will reject this temple** (7:20). Although false prophets and popular opinion were

to the contrary generations later (see Jer 7:4,8-10; Mic 3:11), God's intention was clear. The temple may have been **imposing** in Solomon's day (7:21), but flagrant apostasy could turn it into **a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples** (7:20). This passage alludes to Deut 28:37 (see Jer 24:9) where the people will be scorned as they are taken to exile.

Against whom will the ridicule come? God declared that he would be exalted by the surrounding nations as they recognize that his wrath brought Israel's disaster. All will know that exile occurred **because they have forsaken the Lord ... who brought them out of Egypt** (7:22). Israel owed its very existence to her God. To turn from him to other gods violated their sacred debt of gratitude and made exile just (see *Introduction: 22*) *Abandoning/Forsaking*).

Unfortunately, as the Chronicler's history will illustrate, God's warning did not keep the nation from turning from him. Exile and scorn came to Israel just as God had warned. Nevertheless, the Chronicler's post-exilic readers were in a fresh situation in which this warning needed to be heard again. Even in their day, the threat of divine punishment could only be avoided through fidelity to God.