

1 KINGS 11

F. SOLOMON TURNS AWAY FROM YAHWEH (11:1-43)

1. Solomon's Wives Turn His Heart (11:1-13)

11:1-10 The narrator's oblique strategy of alluding to the law of the king (Deut. 17:14-20) in regard to Solomon's gold and horses from Egypt (1 Kgs 10:14-29) now becomes more direct. Solomon **loves many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter**. These wives were from the nations about which Yahweh had said, "**You must not intermarry** [יִתְּנָה, *htn*; also in Deut 7:3; Josh 23:13; 1 Kgs 3:1] **with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods**" (see Exod 34:16; Deut 7:1-4). However, only one of the seven "devoted" nations of Deuteronomy 7:1 is mentioned among Solomon's list of wives (i.e., "the Hittites"). Apparently, the author of Kings is creatively applying Deuteronomy 7:1-4 and Joshua 23:11-13 to Solomon's foreign marriages. Before his death, Joshua admonished Israel: "So be very careful to love the LORD your God. But if you turn away [*šûb*] and ally yourselves [דָּבַק, *dābaq*] with the survivors of *these nations that remain among you* and if you *intermarry* [*htn*] *with them* and associate with them, then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you" (Josh 23:11-13). The more general and somewhat ambiguous "these nations that remain among you" allows the author to expand Moses' original declaration beyond the seven nations that were designated for destruction.¹ Solomon violated the injunctions

¹Gary N. Knoppers, "Solomon's Fall and Deuteronomy," pp. 399-401, 409. Hermeneutically, the author of Kings is combining the two passages and applying the underlying principle (i.e., foreign wives will turn Israel

of Moses and Joshua not to intermarry with the people of the land. Moses also charged, “[The king] must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray” (Deut 17:17).

What was suggested before is now made explicit. Beginning with Pharaoh’s daughter (1 Kgs 3:1), Solomon took many wives (**seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines**²), and he **held fast** [*dābaq*] **to them in love**. Four times, the narrator employs a variant of “turned his heart” (נָתַח, *nāṭāh*; vv. 2,3 [NIV “led him astray”], 4,9). The reader hears Solomon at the dedication of the temple pray, “May [the LORD] *turn* [*nāṭāh*] *our hearts* to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers” (see comments on 8:58). Even though Yahweh had **appeared to him twice** (3:1-15; 9:1-9) and had commanded him not **to follow other gods** (9:6-9), **Solomon did not keep the LORD’s command!**

To underscore Solomon’s unfaithfulness, the storyteller deliberately uses language that is pregnant with broader meaning (as in “turn his heart” above). That Solomon “*held fast* [*dābaq*] to them in love” stands out. The verb *dābaq* is used in Deuteronomy to express faithfulness, “holding fast to Yahweh” (10:20; 11:22; 13:4[5]; 30:20). Joshua used the same language: “But you are to hold fast [*dābaq*] to the LORD your God, as you have until now. . . . But if you turn away and ally [*dābaq*] yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you . . .” (Josh 23:8,12).³ Instead of *clinging* to the God of his father David, Solomon *clings* to his foreign wives. Also, **as Solomon grew old . . . his heart was not fully committed** (נִלְוָה, *šālēm*, a form of Solomon’s name, *šʾlōmōh*) recalls Solomon’s prayer at the dedication that “your hearts must be *fully committed* [*šālēm*] to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands” (8:61). In addition, Solomon had described Yahweh as one who keeps covenant with those who (literally) “walk before you with all their heart” (8:23).

Yet, perhaps most difficult to reconcile, **on a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon builds a high place** for Chemosh and one for “Molech”

away from God) to Solomon. In this way, Kings also serves as commentary on Deuteronomy.

²These numbers may be symbolic (cf. S of S 6:8-9).

³Knoppers, “Solomon’s Fall,” p. 401.

(v. 7).⁴ Reflecting an important theme in the story, at least twelve times in the narrative the storyteller and the king himself reiterate that Solomon built the house for Yahweh (6:1,2,14,38; 8:13,20,27,43, 44,48; 9:1,10). The son of David who *built* the house for Yahweh's Name also *builds* high places for the gods of his foreign wives!⁵

11:11-13 Yahweh speaks again to Solomon (see 3:4-15; 6:12-13; 9:1-9). Because the king had “**not kept my covenant and my decrees,**” Yahweh will **tear the kingdom away from Solomon** and give it to one of his servants. Yet, this would not happen in Solomon's lifetime: “**for the sake of David your father** [v. 12, “**my servant**” in v. 13], **I will not do it during your lifetime.**” Yahweh's judgment on Solomon would be delayed. In the larger story, delayed retribution will characterize Yahweh's interaction with Israel and Judah.⁶ For example, punishment for both Jeroboam and Ahab of Israel will happen during the days of their sons (see 14:1-19; 21:27-29; 2 Kgs 9:14-29; cf. 2 Kings 22-23), and the final judgment will be inflicted on Israel by Assyria (2 Kgs 17:1-23). For the composition of Kings, this has the theological effect of explaining how both Israel and Judah were dispossessed from the land because of the sins and evil influence of earlier kings. But the delay also subtly interjects an underlying theme of grace. Yahweh is patient to administer justice, offering his people the opportunity to *repent/return* (*šûb*). In 1 Kings 13:33, the narrator declares, “Even after this, Jeroboam did not change [“turn from/repent,” *šûb*] his evil ways.” Through Jeremiah, the word of Yahweh to “the house of Israel” makes clear: “If at any

⁴In verses 5 and 33 (also in 2 Kings 23:13), the NIV changes the original Milcom (מִלְכֹם, *milkom*) for Molech of verse 7 (מֹלֶךְ, *molek*), even though Molech in verse 7 is often dismissed as a confusion of Molech with Milcom, the god of the Ammonites (see George C. Heider, “Molech [Deity],” in *ABD*). While the exact nature of these cults is unclear, there is no compelling reason to make this change (see Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, p. 93; Cogan, *1 Kings*, pp. 327-328).

⁵Later, Josiah will tear down Solomon's high places (2 Kings 23:13).

⁶Gary N. Knoppers argues that these “transgenerational punishments” characterize the composition of Kings and contrast with the Chronicler's more cyclical “sequence of punishments and rewards.” From the perspective of Deuteronomy, “it is a mark of divine leniency to impose the punishment due to the father upon the son.” This approach allows the author of Kings to contrast “David's positive precedent in Judah with Jeroboam's negative precedent in Israel” (“Solomon's Fall and Deuteronomy,” pp. 405-409).

time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents [*šûb*] of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned" (Jer 18:7-8). For an exilic audience, *delayed destruction/retribution* offers the possibility of *delayed deliverance*. This hope is reinforced when Yahweh declares that "for the sake of David my servant," one tribe will remain for Solomon's son.

The language in 11:1-13 resonates with the opening scene of Solomon's reign (3:1-15), after he had established his kingdom. Structurally, 3:1-15 and 11:1-13 sport numerous connections that ironically reinforce the failures of Solomon's reign. Pharaoh's daughter is mentioned in 3:1 and 11:1. High places appear in 3:2,3,4, while high places to other gods are built in 11:7. Perhaps most significant, 3:3 says, "Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David." By contrast, in 11:1-2 the narrator says the king **loved many foreign women!** Again, in 3:10 Yahweh was pleased with Solomon's request, and in 3:14 he said, "If you walk in my ways . . . as David your father did, I will give you a long life." The narrator records in 11:6 that "Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord as David his father had done." In both texts, Yahweh speaks to Solomon. At Gibeon, he tells Solomon that his blessings are conditional — if he obeys, "as David your father did, I will give you a long life" (3:14). In 11:11-13, Yahweh announces that since Solomon has disobeyed, "**I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you.**"⁷

The effect of these connections is to call into question Solomon's wisdom. Yahweh promised Solomon "a wise and discerning heart" (3:12), which he demonstrates in the episode of the two prostitutes (3:16-28). Nevertheless, how wise is the king who is portrayed here — marrying foreign women (see Deut 7:1-4) and building high places for their gods? Yahweh has given Solomon wisdom from above, along with both wealth and honor. Exercising free will, Solomon disregards the source of his many blessings and chooses his wives over the God of his father David and his people Israel.

⁷See Frisch, "Structure and Its Significance," 11-12; Walsh, *1 Kings*, pp. 136, 138.

2. Yahweh Raises Up Adversaries against Solomon (11:14-40)

11:14-25 One consequence of Solomon's apostasy is that Yahweh raises up adversaries⁸ against him. In 5:4[18], Solomon boasted to Hiram, "The LORD my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no *adversary* or disaster." The kingdom of מְלֹכָה (*šālôm*), promised by Yahweh (2 Sam 7:10-11), is broken by Solomon's unwise choices. Ironically, the three adversaries, Hadad the Edomite, Rezon, and Jeroboam, structurally parallel the three adversaries Solomon removed in the beginning to *establish* his reign (2:13-46).⁹ Also, Hadad the Edomite conjures up images of Moses, and the description of Rezon calls to mind King David.

Like Moses, Hadad is taken in by Pharaoh and becomes a member of his family (cf. Exod 2:1-10). Later he goes to Pharaoh and requests, "**Let me go, that I may return to my country**" (cf., e.g., Exod 5:1). Like David, Rezon flees from his king and leads a band of brigands (cf. 1 Samuel 22-30). Later he becomes king in Damascus (cf. 2 Sam 2:4) and is an adversary to Israel **as long as Solomon lives**.¹⁰ These allusions reinforce with an exclamation point the claim of the text. Yahweh was behind Solomon's troubles. As he was with Moses and David, he is with Hadad the Edomite and Rezon. Hadad, from Edom in the south, and Rezon, from Damascus in the north, plague Solomon's idyllic reign.¹¹

11:26-40 Also, **Jeroboam son of Nebat rebels against the king**. Following the formula for introducing the kings of Judah, Jeroboam's mother is mentioned (see, e.g., 14:21). Yet, he is (literally) "a servant of Solomon who raised his hand" against the king. As Saul and David before him, he is described as a **man of standing** (1 Sam 9:1; 16:18), whom Solomon placed **in charge of the whole**

⁸Adversary in Hebrew is שָׂטָן (*šāṭān*). Only later does its range of meaning broaden to encompass the evil one, Satan (see Job 1:6-2:7).

⁹Parker, "Repetition as a Structuring Device," 21-22.

¹⁰This phrase is (literally) "all the days of Solomon." That Rezon may have been a threat to Solomon from early in his reign is not inconsistent with an apostasy in his old age. While Solomon's heart was turned to other gods when he was old (11:4), the seeds for his departure were apparently sown from near the beginning of his reign. The phrase could also mean "the rest of his life" (Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, pp. 96-97; Cogan, *1 Kings*, p. 334).

¹¹Walsh, *1 Kings*, pp. 140-141; see Frisch, "The Exodus Motif," 12-13.

labor force [*sēbel*] **of the house of Joseph.** The fact that Jeroboam is placed over the “labor force” (לְסָבֵל, *sēbel*; from *sābal*, “carry/bear”) of Ephraim and Manasseh will resurface when, after the death of Solomon, the kingdom is rent because of the oppressive policies of the house of David (see comments on 5:10-18; 12:1-24).

While the frame stories of Hadad the Edomite and Rezon say that God raised them up as adversaries, reinforcing this idea with allusions to Moses and David, with Jeroboam the narrator introduces a prophetic voice that sanctions rebellion as judgment on Solomon. Through the word of **Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh**, Yahweh initiates insurrection against his anointed. **Wearing a new cloak** (סָלְמָה, *śalmāh*), Ahijah meets Jeroboam **on the way** (דֶּרֶק, *derek*¹²) and **tears it into twelve pieces**, offering the future king ten pieces. Ahijah speaks for Yahweh: **“I am going to tear** [עָרָה, *qāra*] **the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes.**” The symbolism here is difficult to miss. Saul *tore* (*qāra*¹³) Samuel's robe, which symbolized the kingdom that was *torn* from him and given to one of his neighbors (1 Sam 15:27-28). So, as Ahijah's *śalmāh* (“robe”) is *torn*, so will Solomon (*ślōmōh*) be rent, his kingdom *torn* from his hand.

“But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem” Solomon would retain one tribe.¹⁴ Yahweh will do this **“because they have forsaken** [אָזַב, *‘āzab*] **me and worshiped other gods.**” This calls to mind Solomon's prayer that Yahweh not leave (*‘āzab*) them, and Yahweh's promise not to abandon (*‘āzab*) them, if Solomon follows his decrees (8:57; 6:13; cf. 9:9). The change to plural (**“they have forsaken me”**¹⁵) suggests that Solomon has led Israel away from God:

¹²In the story of Jeroboam, *derek* will play an important thematic role.

¹³Occurring six times in verses 11-31, *qāra* (“tear”) functions as a key word, in part, to connect the dynastic prophesies of Samuel and Ahijah.

¹⁴In this symbolic act, the numbers do not add up. Only eleven pieces of the cloak are allocated. Most suggest that the ambiguous role that Benjamin plays in the larger narrative is a plausible solution. In 12:21-23, Judah and Benjamin follow Rehoboam. Yet, when Jeroboam establishes a high place in Bethel, a city of Benjamin, he is exercising political control over Benjamin (12:28-33; cf. Josh 18:21-22). From another angle, the tribe of Simeon apparently assimilated with Judah. Their inheritance was within the territory of Judah (Josh 19:1; cf. 21:9; Judg 1:3), perhaps accounting for the missing piece (cf. Cogan, *2 Kings*, pp. 340, 355).

¹⁵While some ancient versions have the singular “he has forsaken me”

“They have not walked in my ways, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my statutes and laws as David, Solomon’s father, did.” Once more, the language is from Deuteronomy (e.g., 5:33–6:2; 10:12–13). Solomon and Israel have broken covenant with Yahweh.

Again, **“for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who observed my commands and statutes,”** Solomon’s son will receive one tribe – **“so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name.”** “For David and for Jerusalem” echoes themes in the preceding account, in particular the promises to Moses and David (Deuteronomy 12, 2 Samuel 7). Jeroboam will become king in Israel. Solomon’s son will retain one tribe for the sake of David – and for the unconditional promise of Yahweh that David’s throne would “endure forever before me” (2 Sam 7:16).

And Yahweh’s promise to Jeroboam is the same as his promise to David (2 Samuel 7). He will build Jeroboam an **“enduring house”** (NIV “dynasty”) as he **built for David**. However, the promise to Jeroboam is conditional. The new king of Israel must **“do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands.”** As Yahweh *was with* Moses (Exod 3:12), Joshua (Josh 1:5), Gideon (Judg 6:16), and David (2 Sam 7:9), he promises Jeroboam, **“I will be with you.”**

Yahweh will **humble David’s descendants because of this, but not forever**. Perhaps the most important words in this drama, especially for an audience in exile, are **but not forever**. To David, Yahweh promised, “When [his son] does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul” (2 Sam 7:14–15). The oath to David may still prove to be unconditional. The God of Israel has *torn* the kingdom from Solomon as he did from Saul, but Yahweh’s love will remain with the descendants of David. There may yet be grace – hope for the return for which Solomon prayed (8:33–34).

As Moses fled from Pharaoh to Midian (Exod 2:15), Jeroboam, ironically, flees to **Shishak** (Shoshenq I) in Egypt. The king of Israel tries **to kill Jeroboam**, but the divinely sanctioned insurgent remains in Egypt until Solomon’s death (see 12:2).

(see NIV text note), the more difficult plural in the Hebrew text (MT) is preferred.